

Winchester Master Plan

Phase I Report on Housing Neighborhoods Town Center Economic Development



Winchester Planning Board
Master Plan Steering Committee

April 8, 2010

Winchester Master Plan Phase I Draft Report

on

**Housing
Neighborhoods
Town Center
Economic Development**

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Winchester, Massachusetts
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- **Winchester Planning Board** – Lance Grenzeback, Betsy Cregger, Peter Van Aken, Maureen Meister, Drew Bottaro, and Mary McKenna
- **Board of Selectmen** – James Johnson III
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- **Precinct 8** – Alice Lepore

Larissa Brown and Angela Ruppe of the Boston planning and architectural firm of **Goody, Clancy and Associates** served as consultants to the Master Plan Steering Committee, providing research on development trends and issues and technical advice on strategies.

The committee drew heavily on the advice and expertise of the **Town Planner**, Betsy Ware; the **Town Engineering Department**, represented by Beth Rudolph; the **Conservation Commission**, represented by Stephen Parkhurst; the **Housing Partnership Board**, represented by John Suhrbier and Allan Rodgers; the **Winchester Historical Commission**, represented by John Clemson; and the **Design Review Committee**.

The committee hosted a townwide workshop, held neighborhood meetings by precinct, and convened working sessions with representatives of Winchester's businesses and nonprofit institutions. Information about the work of the committee was distributed through newsletters, a webpage on the town's web site, and briefings by committee members to town boards, commissions, and community groups.

Copies of this *Phase I Report*, which was prepared by the Master Plan Steering Committee, and the *Technical and Resource Report to the Winchester Master Plan Steering Committee*, which was prepared by Goody, Clancy and Associates, are available through the Winchester Planning Board web page at www.winchester.us.

SUMMARY

Winchester's last master plan was completed in 1953. The plan focused on development of the West Side of town. Today, we are in a new cycle of development. We are redeveloping Winchester, rebuilding it in place. The redevelopment is changing our neighborhoods, our downtown, our commercial areas, and our open spaces. And with these changes, the redevelopment is changing both the look and feel of the town.

This Master Plan Phase I Report begins a comprehensive look at how Winchester is changing and sets out initial recommendations on where the town should be going. The Phase I Report focuses on housing, neighborhoods, the town center, and economic development—issues of critical concern during this time of economic crisis and for the long-term viability of the town. Subsequent phases of the Master Plan will address transportation and circulation; open space and recreation; historic and cultural resources; natural resources; municipal facilities; services and infrastructure; and governance of development.

The Master Plan Phase I Report is the product of a broad-based, three-year effort by town boards, committees, and Town Meeting members from each of the town's precincts, but it is not intended to provide a detailed blueprint for the future. Rather it is intended to provide strategic direction for those who will make decisions about the redevelopment of Winchester.

Winchester today is substantially built out. We expect that Winchester's overall land use and development pattern will remain much the same for the next several decades. However, there will be steady pressure for redevelopment of existing buildings and open space, resulting in an increase in building density and population. The redevelopment will be driven by increases in the number of households, housing market pressure due to Winchester's accessible location and excellent school system, and the need for additional tax revenue from development to pay for schools and public services.

The Master Plan vision is that Winchester will continue to be a mature suburban community, proud of its rich history and its enduring identity as a town of beautiful and historic residential neighborhoods. Winchester will be a valued place to live, work, study, shop, and play. It will offer an excellent quality of life, an exceptional school system, a vibrant town center, a network of parks and conservation areas that reach every neighborhood, and a welcoming, inclusive, and civic-minded community—all linked by easy train, transit, car, and bike access to Boston and the metropolitan region.

To realize this vision, Winchester must guide and shape its redevelopment. The recommended objectives and strategies are:

- **Housing** – Winchester must address the need for single-family and multi-unit housing that is affordable to households with modest incomes and available to people with a range of physical abilities. To do this, the town should:
 - Plan for and promote the development of multi-unit and mixed-use housing in a way that satisfies the town’s needs for housing, addresses state housing requirements, and is compatible with surrounding neighborhoods;
 - Adopt a community housing bylaw to encourage the creation of housing that is affordable (as defined by state statute) to households with moderate incomes, especially those who live and work in the town, seniors, and younger adults; and
 - Encourage continued investment in housing and other properties by revising and reorganizing the town’s zoning bylaw and subdivision regulations to make it less costly and easier to comply with town regulations.
- **Neighborhoods** – Winchester must maintain the character of its neighborhoods, which are the building blocks of the community. To do this, the town should:
 - Define Winchester’s neighborhoods and create advisory guidelines for new construction and additions to maintain the character of neighborhoods and streets;
 - Redefine the town’s zoning districts and tailor development regulations to more closely match existing neighborhoods;
 - Create pedestrian, traffic, and streetscape plans to enhance neighborhoods;
 - Encourage formation of local historic districts and neighborhood conservation districts to protect and preserve the character of historic neighborhoods; and
 - Propose a “large house” site plan and design review for replacement homes that substantially exceed the residential gross floor area of the houses that they replace, to resolve debates over design, layout, and compatibility with neighborhood character.
- **Town Center** – Winchester must maintain the town center’s vibrancy by supporting local business owners, encouraging the diversification of businesses, and bringing more residential housing into the town center to take advantage of the higher density of development that can be supported by commuter rail and transit services. To do this, the town should:
 - Create a town center business development council to advocate for downtown business, commercial, and residential physical and economic development, both short- and long-term;

- Work with town center interests to hire a part-time economic development specialist and develop a business recruitment and retention plan to enhance the economic viability of businesses in the downtown;
 - Develop a parking management plan, including feasibility studies for structured parking, to address parking demand;
 - Plan for mixed-use redevelopment in the town center to provide lively ground-floor retail and service space with upper-story residential and office uses;
 - Revise existing zoning bylaws and develop new overlay zoning districts to enable and guide development in the town center; and
 - Explore formation of local historic districts for appropriate areas of the town center.
- **Economic Development** – Winchester must expand its commercial tax base, leveraging Winchester’s and the Greater Boston region’s strengths in education, healthcare, technology, and finance. To do this, the town should:
 - Create opportunities to reuse obsolete commercial, industrial, and institutional properties to increase property tax revenue;
 - Explore formation of a limited-purpose economic development and industrial corporation to assemble and redevelop sites or facilitate work with private developers who can assemble and redevelop sites; and
 - Support home-based businesses and develop new incubator office space to increase tax revenues.

INTRODUCTION

Winchester's last master plan was completed in 1953.¹ The plan focused on new development. It was concerned with meeting the demand for post-World War II housing by mapping out new lots on the West Side to double the number of houses in the town; locating a new school, a new fire station, and new playgrounds to serve the new neighborhoods; and laying out Johnson Road to connect Winchester to Lexington.

The 1950s master plan vision for Winchester has been realized. The West Side of town has been built out—that cycle of Winchester's development is over.

Today, we are in a new cycle of development. We are redeveloping Winchester, rebuilding it in place. We are tearing down older and smaller houses and replacing them with larger houses. We are subdividing large lots, building two and three houses where one once stood, and increasing the density of our neighborhoods. We are recycling old commercial and industrial space into housing, hospital facilities, and office space, and we are redesigning our playing fields and open spaces to squeeze as much use as possible out of them.

The redevelopment that is underway today is changing our neighborhoods, our downtown, the North Main Street and Washington Street commercial corridors, and our open spaces. And with these changes, the redevelopment is changing both the look and feel of the town.

The redevelopment is also slowly but surely changing tax revenues, the cost of providing public services, the demands on town facilities and infrastructure, and the town's long-term capital investment needs.

This Master Plan Phase I Report begins a comprehensive look at how Winchester is changing and sets out initial recommendations on where the town should be going. The Phase I Report focuses on development trends, issues, and strategies for housing, neighborhoods, the town center, and economic development—issues of critical concern during this time of economic crisis and for the long-term viability of the town.

¹ Massachusetts General Law, Chapter 41, Section 81D requires the town to make a master plan as a statement—though text, maps, illustrations, or other forms of communication—that provides a basis for decision-making regarding the long-term physical development of the town. The plan is to be internally consistent in its policies, forecasts, and standards. It is to identify goals and policies for the future growth and development of the town through an interactive public process that determines community values and goals, and identifies patterns of development that will be consistent with these goals. The master plan is to address a land use plan, housing, economic development, natural resources, open space, services, circulation (transportation), and implementation. It is the responsibility of the Planning Board—which is charged with making careful studies of the resources, possibilities, and needs of the town, including the proper housing of its people—to make and approve the master plan and to update it periodically.

Subsequent phases of the Master Plan will address:

- Transportation and circulation;
- Open space and recreation;
- Historic and cultural resources;
- Natural resources and environment;
- Municipal facilities, services and infrastructure;, and
- Governance of development.

The Master Plan Phase I Report is the product of a broad-based, three-year effort, but it is not intended to provide a detailed blueprint for the future. Rather it is intended to provide strategic direction for those who will make decisions about the redevelopment of Winchester:

- For Town Meeting members and voters, it is a benchmark against which to judge proposals for rezoning, spending, and capital construction;
- For town boards and committees, it is a framework to help guide short- and long-term program and project decisions and a framework to help shape strategies for the long-term use of town-owned land and facilities;
- For neighborhoods and home owners, it is a mechanism to steer development before it occurs and help protect and enhance property values;
- For merchants and business owners, it is a platform to improve the economic vitality of the town center and other commercial areas; and
- For developers, it is a foundation for higher-quality, lower-risk, and more expeditious development because it will clarify where development is needed and lead to more internally consistent zoning bylaws and subdivision regulations governing development.

The report begins with an overview of demographic and other trends influencing Winchester's development, followed by a vision statement of how the Planning Board believes the community should develop by 2030. The vision statement builds on work by **Envision Winchester** in 2002-2004 and the subsequent **Strategic Plan for Winchester** issued by the Board of Selectmen.

The body of the report summarizes the committee's recommended strategies for housing, neighborhoods, the town center, and economic development. The final section of the report outlines roles and responsibilities for implementing the strategies.

TRENDS

Land Use and Development

Winchester has changed as much in the last 50 years as in the preceding hundred years. Figures 1 through 4 show the extent of building development in Winchester in 1850, 1900, 1950, and 2005.

Winchester today is substantially built out. Approximately 65 percent of the town's 6.3 square miles (4,100 acres) is occupied by residential property; 20 percent by open space, town forests, ponds and lakes; 10 percent by schools, town buildings, playgrounds and roads; and 5 percent by commercial, office, and light-industrial buildings. Only a few dozen acres remain undeveloped, most of which are in environmentally sensitive areas that will be difficult and expensive to develop.

We expect that Winchester's overall land use and development pattern will remain much the same for the next several decades. However, there will be steady pressure for redevelopment of existing buildings and open space, resulting in an increase in building density and population. The redevelopment will be driven by changes in the number and size of households, housing market pressure due to Winchester's accessible location and excellent school system, and the need for additional tax revenue from development to pay for schools and public services.

Demographics

The population of Winchester today is 22,284, 43 percent higher than the 1950 population of 15,570, but 4 percent less than the 1974 peak population of 23,240. Figure 5 plots the growth of Winchester's population from 1850 to 2008.² The children of the post-World War II baby boom account for most of the surge in population in the 1960s and early 1970s. In 1964, children under 17 years of age made up nearly 40 percent of Winchester's population; today they make up about 25 percent of the population.

² Town of Winchester, Town Census data.

Figure 1. Residential Housing in Winchester, 1850

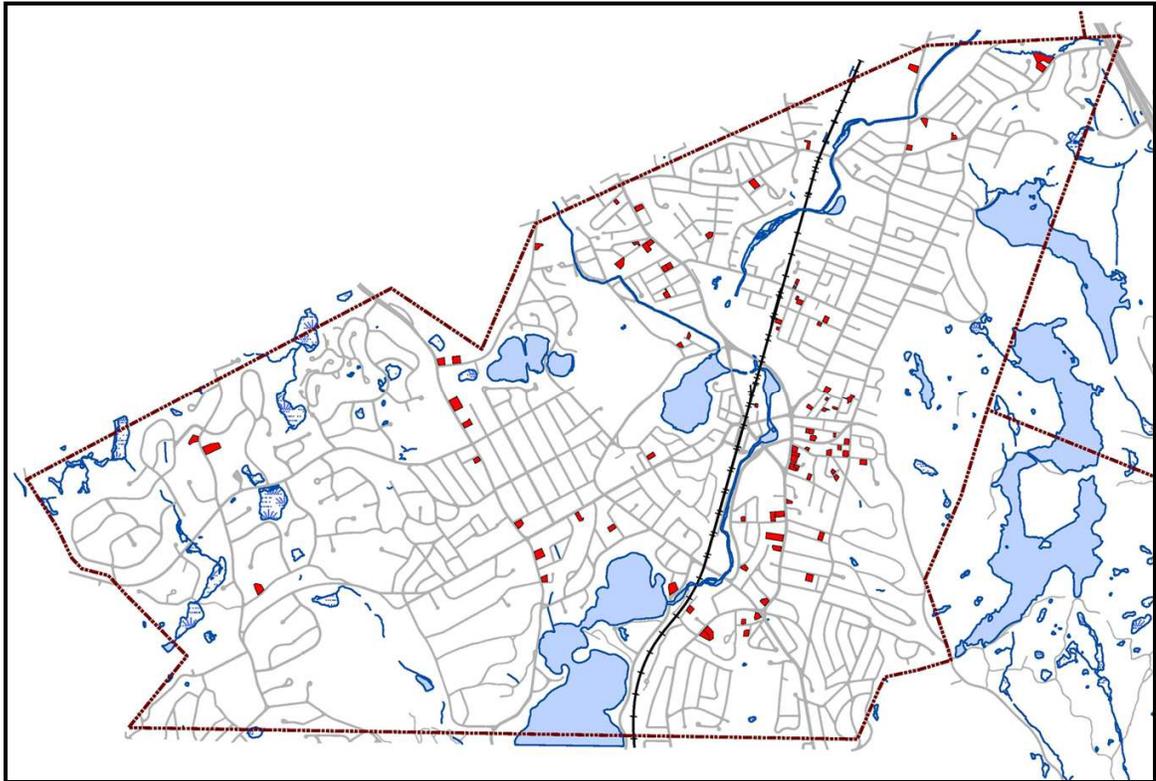


Figure 2. Residential Housing in Winchester, 1900

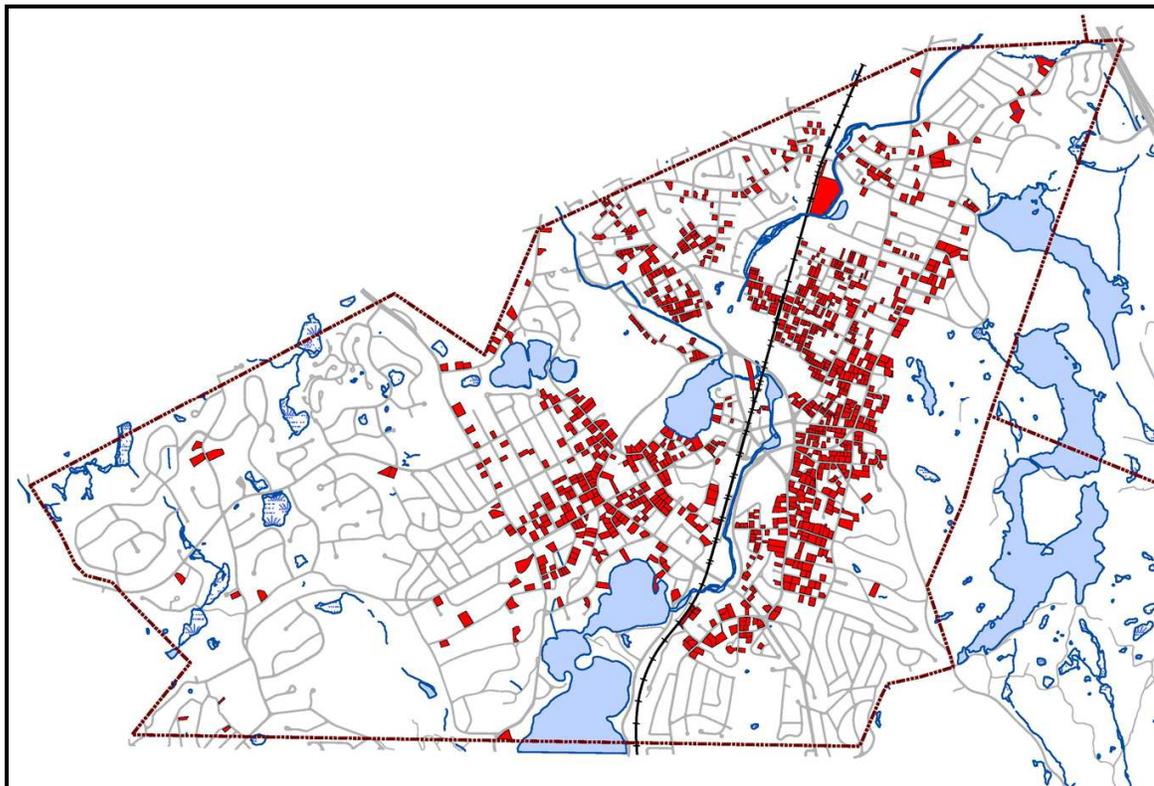


Figure 3. Residential Housing in Winchester, 1950

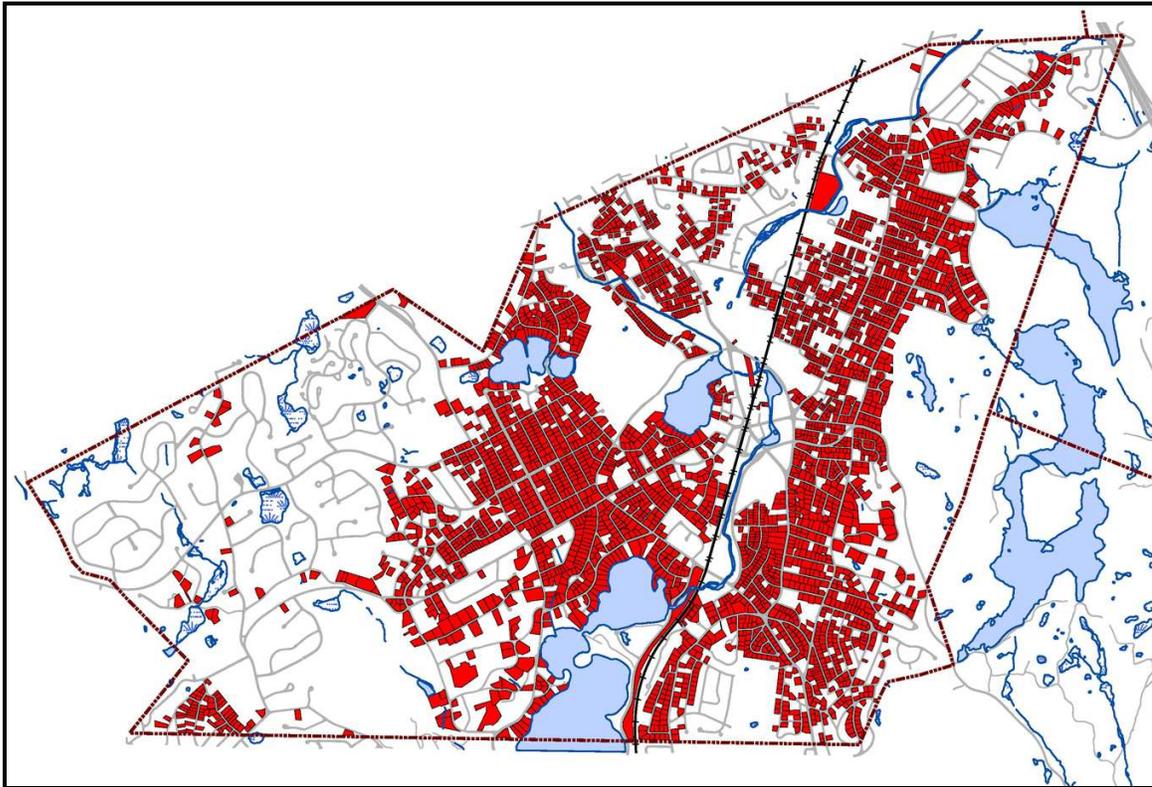


Figure 4. Residential Housing in Winchester, 2005

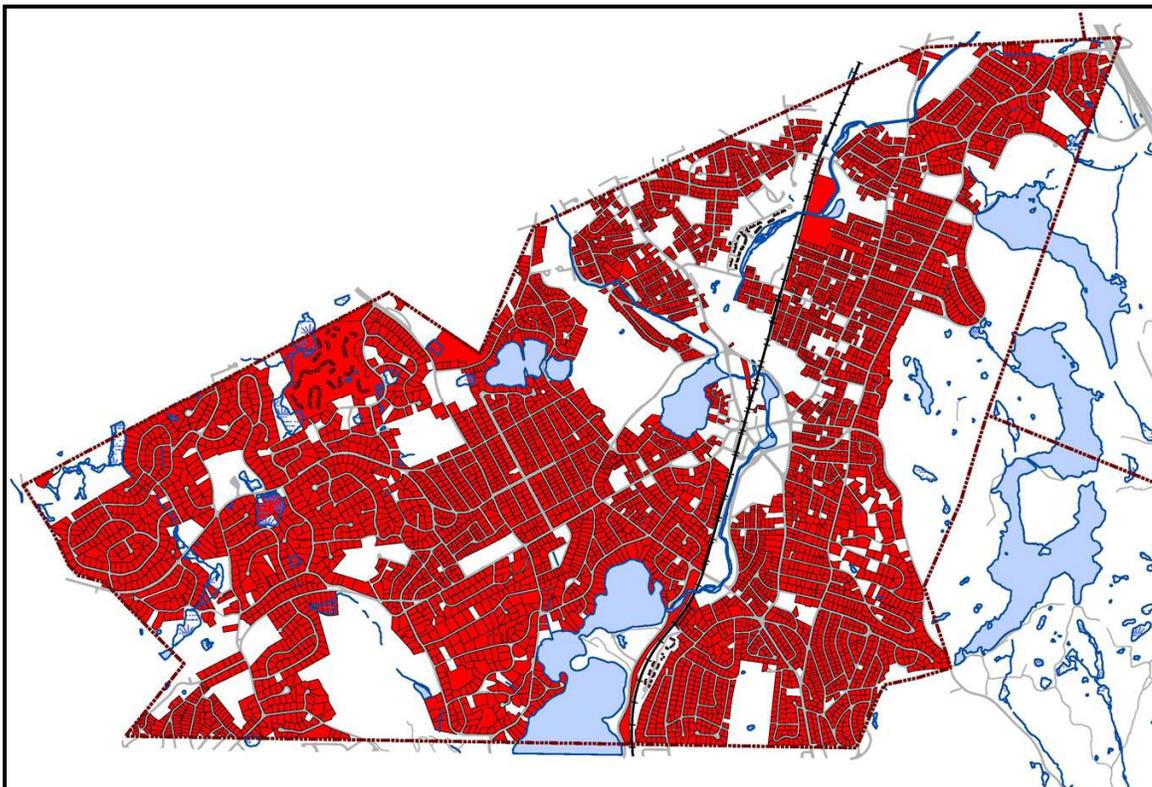
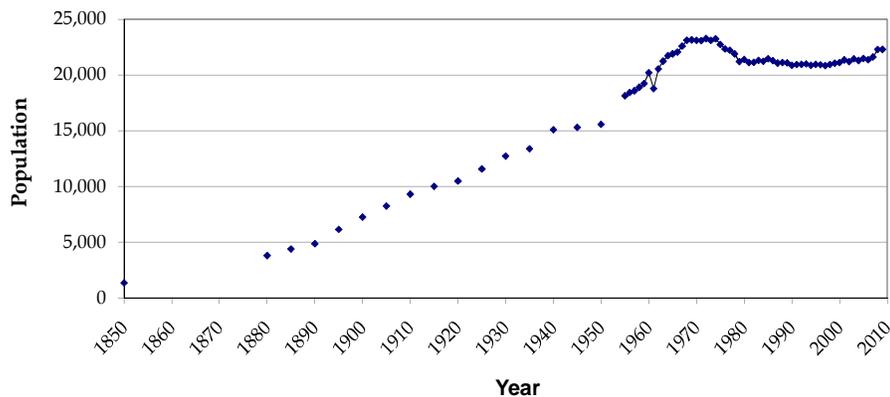


Figure 5. Population of Winchester, 1850 to 2009

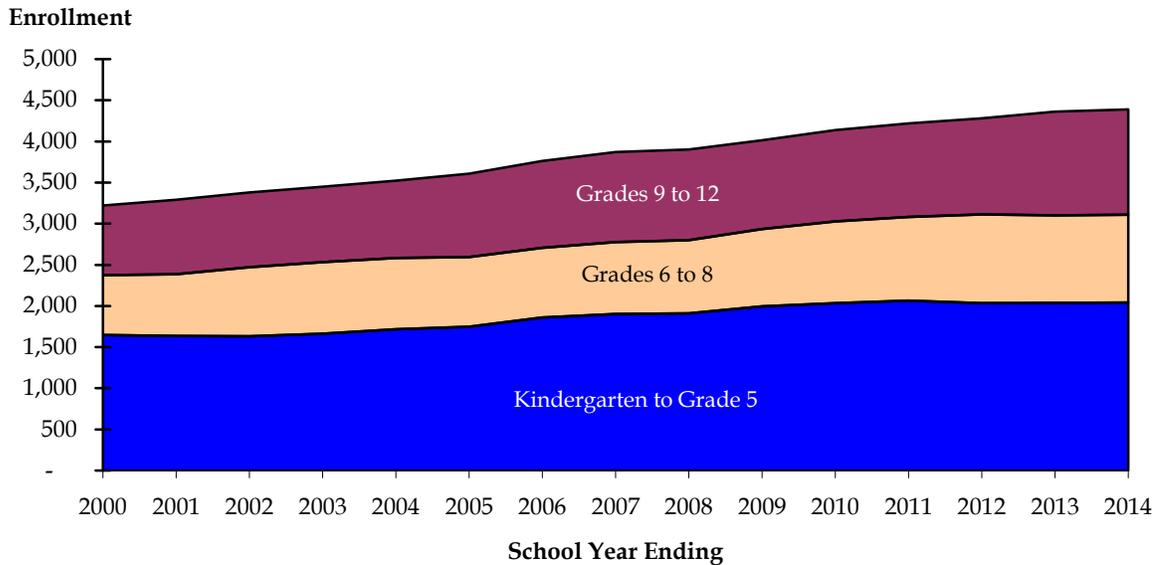
Source: Town of Winchester, Town Census data.

Winchester's population declined during the 1980s and early 1990s as birth rates dropped and the baby-boom children left for college and jobs outside Winchester. The town's population bottomed out in 1997 at about 20,800. Since then, the population has been increasing slowly to its current level of 22,284.

If the population continues to grow at the average rate of the past 20 years—about $\frac{1}{4}$ percent per year—then the population of Winchester in 2030 could approach 23,200, about the same level as the 1974 population. If the population were to grow at the higher average rate of the past 10 years—about $\frac{1}{2}$ percent per year—then the population of Winchester in 2030 could approach 24,300. For the purposes of this Master Plan, we assume that the Winchester's population will grow at the more conservative rate, adding at least 1,000 residents, or about 4 percent more population, by 2030.

One useful indicator of Winchester's future population is the growth in the town's school enrollment, shown in Figure 6. Winchester has one of the most successful public school systems in Massachusetts, and the schools have acted as a magnet for families with school-age children. During the school year ending in 2000, 3,221 students were enrolled in the school system; by 2008, there were 3,902 students; and the School Department projects that by the school year ending 2014, about 4,390 students will be attending Winchester schools. Enrollment in the schools has grown at an average annual rate of 2.5 percent since 2000, faster than the town's overall annual population growth rate of about 0.5 percent.

Figure 6. Winchester Public School Enrollments, 2000 to 2008, and Projections to 2014



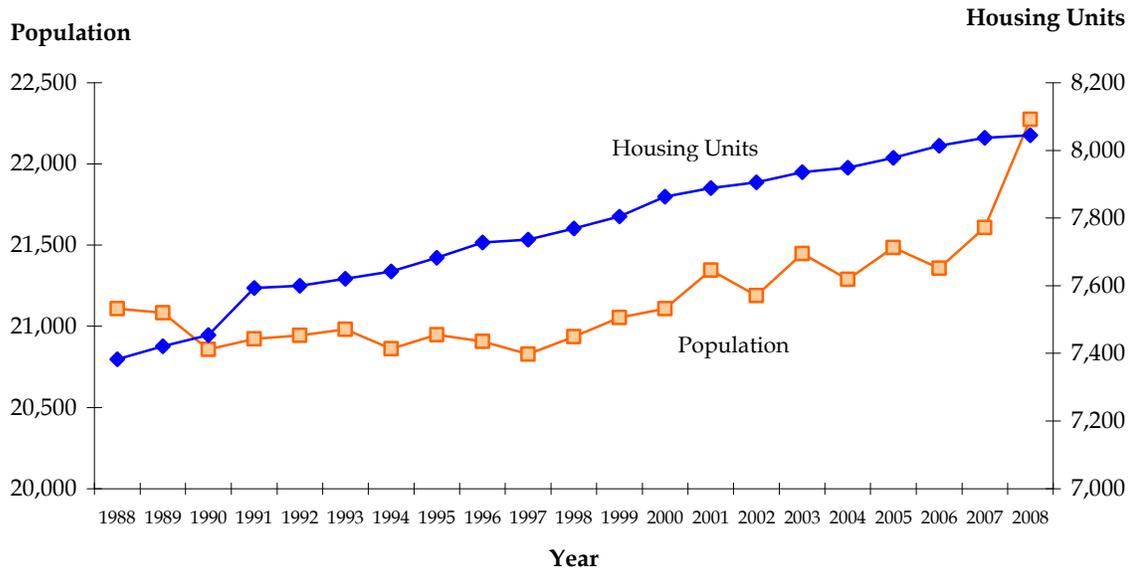
Source: Winchester Public Schools data.

Housing

The number of housing units in Winchester—counting single-family homes, two- and three-family-house units, apartments, and condominium units—has been growing faster and more steadily than the population, as shown in Figure 7. Over the past 20 years, the number of housing units has increased by 9 percent, from 7,382 units in 1988 to 8,045 units in 2008, while the population increased by only 5.5 percent.³

³ In 2008, Winchester had 5,593 single-family homes, 1,197 condominium units, 786 two-family units, 283 market-rate apartments, 123 Housing Authority apartments, and 63 three-family units. Single-family homes, condominiums, and apartments are counted as one housing unit. Two-family houses are counted as two housing units, and three-family houses are counted as three housing units.

Figure 7. Winchester Housing Units and Population, 1988 to 2008

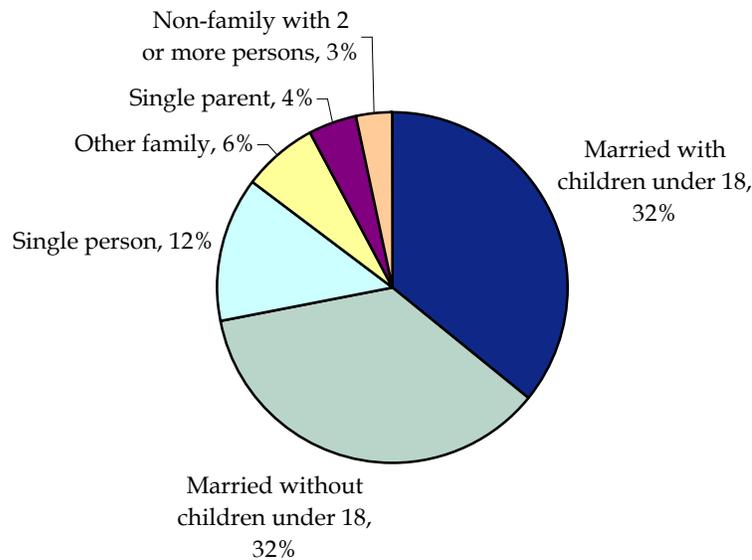


Source: Town of Winchester Census and Assessors data.

The increase in housing units reflects growth in the number of households in Winchester. A large portion of the town’s population is now in smaller households.⁴ Winchester has more single-person households, single-parent households, and “empty-nester” households than in the past. The average number of people living in a household in Winchester has dropped from about 2.86 in the late 1980s to about 2.70 in recent years.

The composition of Winchester households in 2007 is shown in Figure 8. Twelve percent of all Winchester households are now single-person households, and 32 percent of households are married couples without children.

⁴ According to the Bureau of the Census, a household consists of all the people who occupy a housing unit. A house, an apartment or other group of rooms, or a single room, is regarded as a housing unit when it is occupied or intended for occupancy as separate living quarters; that is, when the occupants do not live and eat with any other persons in the structure and there is direct access from the outside or through a common hall. A household includes the related family members and all the unrelated people, if any, such as lodgers, foster children, wards, or employees who share the housing unit. A person living alone in a housing unit, or a group of unrelated people sharing a housing unit such as partners or roomers, is also counted as a household. The Census count of households excludes group quarters.

Figure 8. Winchester Household Composition, 2007

Source: Claritas data, 2007.

This trend is consistent with national experience. During the past 40 years, the number of households has grown 1.6 percent per year, considerably faster than the population, which has grown at 1.1 percent per year. As a result, the average size of households nationally has declined from 3.2 persons in 1970 to 2.6 persons in 2007 (compared to Winchester's 2.7 persons).⁵ One- and two-person households now account for 60 percent of households nationally, compared to 47 percent in 1970. Households with four or more persons are 25 percent of all households today, down from 35 percent in 1970. With one in five Americans over the age of 64 by 2020, the trend toward smaller households is expected to continue nationally and in Winchester.

The increase in the number of households—along with the modest increase in population—has been one of the major factors creating the demand for more housing in Winchester. However, the demand today is for a different mix of housing types than the town needed in the 1950s. In the 1950s, the town needed more large single-family houses. Today, there is still a demand for large single-family houses, but there is also a growing demand for smaller single-family houses, townhouses, condominiums, and apartments to serve the increased number of smaller households.

⁵ See <http://www.census.gov/population/socdemo/hh-fam/cps2007/tabAVG1.xls>.

Metropolitan Development

Along with the excellent reputation of its schools, Winchester's favorable geographic location within the Boston metropolitan area and its attractive built and natural environments will continue to attract residents. Winchester grew steadily in the late 1800s and early 1900s because it had good railroad access to Boston. Winchester grew rapidly again after World War II because it had good automobile access to Boston and Cambridge as well as to the emerging high-tech businesses that located along Route 128. It has equally good or better rail and highway access today, ensuring that the town's geographic location and accessibility will continue to attract residents.

The recession has slowed the growth of the Metropolitan Boston economy, but with its base of world-class universities as well as its highly educated population and skilled workforce, regional economists expect the Boston area to fare reasonably well over the next 20 years as a knowledge-based economy. Nationally and globally, population growth and economic output are concentrating in mega-regions such as the Boston-New York-Washington corridor. These urban mega-regions, of which there are about 40 competing regions around the world, are becoming the economic engines of the global and national economies. Not all communities within the Northeast mega-region or the Metropolitan Boston region will benefit from the emergence of new knowledge-based and creative industries, but Winchester should do well because of its access to Boston and Cambridge and the town's well-educated workforce.

We expect that traffic congestion and long-term rising fuel costs, coupled with increased commuter rail service and an extended Green Line, will continue to make Winchester attractive to people commuting to jobs in Boston, Cambridge, and the surrounding suburbs.⁶ This will sustain the market demand for housing in Winchester and keep property values high, but it will also add pressure for higher-density development, which will occur by subdividing large lots and building new houses, converting commercial property to residential use, and building townhouses, condominiums, and apartment buildings.

Town Revenues

The final factor driving redevelopment is the town's own need for more tax revenue. The town is under increasing fiscal pressure. The cost of town services—primarily the personnel and benefit costs for school, police, fire, public works, and administrative departments—has outpaced revenue growth. Our personnel and benefit costs are in the middle of the range for comparable communities and consistent with private sector costs, but increases in tax revenue from existing properties are limited by Proposition 2½, and

⁶ When funds become available, the state plans to extend the Green Line from Lechmere Station in Cambridge through Somerville and Medford to a new terminus at Mystic Valley Parkway/Route 16 near Boston Avenue. No parking garage is planned for the Mystic Valley station. Access will be by foot, bicycle, bus, and automobile drop-off.

state aid has been cut back. To balance its budget, the town has been eliminating some services and charging user fees for everything from use of the transfer station to participation in school sports.

The major source of new income in the foreseeable future will be from redevelopment of existing properties and from new development on the small number of remaining undeveloped parcels in the town. With few other options to generate revenue, budget pressure may force the town to seek out and accept redevelopment that it might not otherwise desire. The alternative of further cutting town services and funding for schools to balance the annual town budget will undermine the very factors that sustain Winchester's property values and revenues.

In summary, Winchester is changing and will continue to change, but with better long-term planning, it has the ability to direct and shape when, where, and how this change occurs. The next section is a vision statement of how the Master Plan Steering Committee believes the community should develop by 2030. The subsequent sections summarize the committee's recommended strategies for shaping housing, neighborhoods, the town center, and economic development to realize this vision.

VISION FOR WINCHESTER IN 2030

The Master Plan Steering Committee’s vision is that Winchester continues to be a mature suburban community, proud of its rich history and its enduring identity as a town of beautiful and historic residential neighborhoods.

Winchester in 2030 offers an excellent quality of life, an exceptional school system, a vibrant town center, a network of parks and conservation areas that reaches every neighborhood, and a welcoming, inclusive, and civic-minded community—all linked by easy train, transit, car, and bike access to Boston and the metropolitan region.

Winchester is a valued place to live, work, study, shop, and play. It provides excellent municipal services and infrastructure through efficient, cost-effective management. And it ensures a high quality of life for its citizens through sound planning that protects the town’s historic character while welcoming changes that enhance economic opportunities for the future.



Homes and Neighborhoods. Winchester is a residential community with a majority of single-family homes. New development and redevelopment that is compatible with the town’s beautiful and cohesive neighborhoods, the town center, and other commercial areas, enhances the diversity and affordability of housing, so that families, seniors, singles, and younger people can all call Winchester their hometown.



Education. Winchester’s school system is one of the best in the state. It provides students with an outstanding education in a nurturing yet challenging environment that fosters academic achievement, healthy social and emotional development, enthusiasm for education, and a life-long love for learning. The town supports a preschool through grade 12 program, holds down class size, and strengthens its academic programs.



Municipal Services. Efficient management allows Winchester to offer high-quality community services to all residents. Prudent financial management ensures revenues adequate for maintenance and capital improvements. The town invests in its municipal facilities, public library, roads, and water and sewer systems. It addresses critical issues such as stormwater management, flooding, and energy conservation.



Community. Winchester is a community of residents and people who work and visit here. The sense of a caring and connected community is an important element of the town's character. The town provides an environment that enables citizens of all ages, cultures, and backgrounds to gather for conversation, communication, recreation, education, and entertainment. Multiculturalism is embraced, helping to educate our children and creating an atmosphere of respect and acceptance that enriches all in our community.



Culture. Winchester offers a wealth of cultural programs that offer enrichment for children and adult residents. The town makes its facilities and parks available for arts programs. It encourages cultural organizations and facilities that enrich the town such as the Winchester Community Music School, the Griffin Museum of Photography, Kidstock and Ballet Arts Center, the Next Door Theater, and the Winchester Historical Society's Sanborn House.



Historic Preservation. Winchester protects the impressive architectural and landscape heritage that bears witness to its past as a town of large family farms, water-driven mills, felt- and leather-making industries, summer estates, both affluent and affordable neighborhoods, and a distinctive town center. As the town moves into the mid-21st century, it welcomes changes that are compatible with its historic character.



Parks and Natural Resources. Framed by the Middlesex Fells and the Mystic Lakes, Winchester enhances the green network of permanently protected parks and open spaces designed by Herbert Kellaway, a protégé of Frederick Law Olmsted. The town conserves natural resources and provides land for recreation, conservation, and wildlife habitat. Winchester's tree-lined streets bring green space into every neighborhood. The town renews and revitalizes its parks, parkways, waterways and recreational areas, and promotes environmental quality and sustainability.



Businesses. Retailers, service firms, and businesses serve the needs of community and provide jobs for residents. The town supports development that is compatible with the town’s overall character and enhances the tax base. Winchester maintains its economic vitality by fostering business retention and diversification, providing cost-effective services, enhancing the attractiveness of its business areas, and facilitating and encouraging investment in its commercial areas.



Downtown. Winchester’s town center is the focus of the town’s business, cultural, government, public transportation, and social activities. It draws in residents and visitors who enjoy the sense of a traditional village center with its pedestrian-scale buildings, tree-lined streets, and green open spaces along the Aberjona River. It is linked by pedestrian and bike paths to the town’s neighborhood shops and commercial areas. Restaurants, cultural activities, and civic events draw an increasing number of residents and visitors to the center on evenings and weekends.



Accessibility. Winchester provides a community attitude and a physical environment that enable people with a range of physical disabilities, including those associated with an aging population, to participate fully in the community. This includes the availability of housing, the ability to visit people and places, employment opportunities, and integration into community activities. Existing barriers are eliminated and new facilities are designed so as not to introduce new barriers.



Transportation. The town advocates for frequent, high-quality commuter rail, transit, and bus services, ensuring that Winchester residents have access to the regional job market, and Winchester businesses have access to the regional labor market. Winchester enhances mobility and accessibility through effective traffic management, enforcement, and parking strategies. Winchester neighborhoods and the town center are pedestrian-friendly. Safe bicycling and walking trails connect town destinations and open spaces.

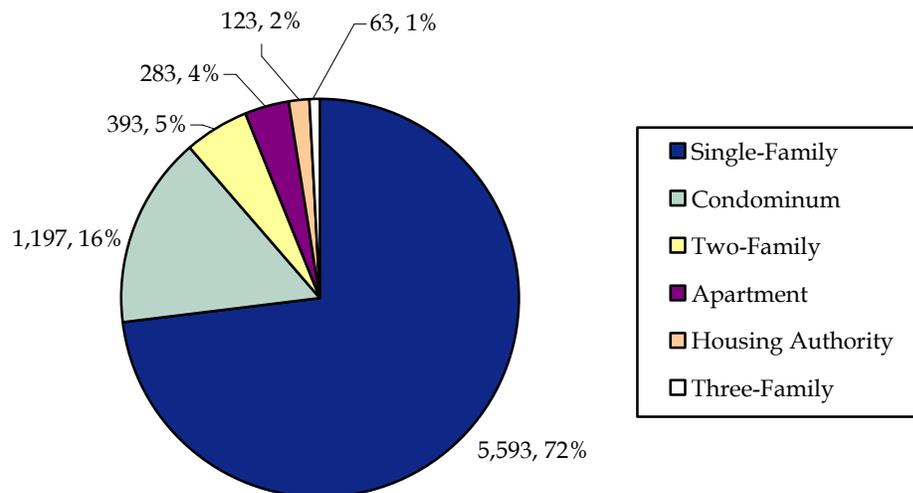
To realize this vision, Winchester must guide and shape its redevelopment. The next sections examine the ongoing changes in Winchester’s housing, neighborhoods, town center, and economic development, recommending objectives and strategies to direct Winchester’s redevelopment.

HOUSING

Issues

Most Winchester residents own and live in single-family homes. In 2008, Winchester had 8,045 housing units—72 percent in single-family homes; 16 percent in condominiums; 5 percent in two-family houses; 4 percent in apartments; and 2 percent in Housing Authority buildings; and 1 percent in three-family houses. The distribution of housing units by building type is shown in Figure 9.

Figure 9. Winchester Housing Units by Building Type, 2008



Source: Town of Winchester, Assessors data.

Half of Winchester’s existing housing was built before 1945; the other half after World War II. Much of the post-war housing development took place on open agricultural and forest land on the West Side of town. With the recent approvals of housing projects at the Wright-Locke Farm, the Winning Farm, and the Pansy Patch, the last of the large open tracts of land are being developed. Outside these developments, most new housing is being created by subdividing large existing housing lots into two or three smaller lots and building new homes on those lots; demolishing and replacing older, often smaller, houses with new homes; and constructing multi-unit condominiums.

The shortage of buildable lots, along with the quality of the school system, the attractive physical character of the town, and Winchester’s accessible location within the Metropolitan Boston area, have contributed to a dramatic increase in the price of housing in

the town over the past decade. The median sales price for single-family homes, listed in Table 1, increased 157 percent between 1999 and 2009—from \$276,750 to \$710,000. The median sales price for all housing units increased 120 percent—from \$272,500 to \$600,000.

Table 1. Winchester Median Housing Sales Prices
1989 to 2009

Year	Months	One-Family	Condo	All Sales
2009	January-December	\$710,000	\$360,000	\$600,000
2008	January-December	\$725,688	\$380,000	\$636,000
2007	January-December	\$675,250	\$351,250	\$590,000
2006	January-December	\$724,900	\$380,000	\$634,500
2005	January-December	\$735,500	\$330,900	\$610,000
2004	January-December	\$685,000	\$384,085	\$615,000
2003	January-December	\$687,000	\$363,250	\$599,900
2002	January-December	\$585,000	\$296,000	\$535,000
2001	January-December	\$562,250	\$275,000	\$482,500
2000	January-December	\$489,450	\$275,000	\$399,000
1999	January-December	\$411,000	\$255,000	\$370,000
1998	January-December	\$372,500	\$219,950	\$320,000
1997	January-December	\$347,500	\$189,500	\$330,000
1996	January-December	\$310,000	\$178,250	\$282,500
1995	January-December	\$323,500	\$180,000	\$287,250
1994	January-December	\$287,000	\$171,250	\$265,000
1993	January-December	\$272,500	\$155,000	\$254,625
1992	January-December	\$280,000	\$177,565	\$262,750
1991	January-December	\$245,750	\$192,750	\$234,000
1990	January-December	\$270,000	\$180,250	\$250,000
1989	January-December	\$276,750	\$231,500	\$272,500

Source: The Warren Group, Town Stats, April 2010.

The high prices and the mix of housing types—predominantly single-family—have effectively closed the Winchester housing market to young families and people working in Winchester unless they are wealthy or hold high-paying jobs. Even many of Winchester’s current residents could not afford to buy their homes today. In 2005, the median household income in the town was \$110,098, enough to buy a single-family house priced at about

\$500,000; however, the median single-family home price in 2005 was \$726,675, the 10th highest in the state.⁷ Real estate brokers report that long-term residents are relocating to other towns because they cannot find smaller, affordable, single-floor units within Winchester.

Unwilling to spend more than one-third of their annual gross income on housing, potential homebuyers—especially young working families—have been leaving the Greater Boston region. Projections for the next decade show that the region as a whole will lose working-age households (18-64), especially households in the 35-44 age group, because of the high cost of housing. This means that there will be fewer workers available to replace those who are retiring and fewer still to fill new job opportunities that are created in the region.⁸

While not Winchester's problem to solve alone, the out-migration of working-age households means that it will be more difficult for the town to attract and retain teachers, policemen, and firemen; for major employers such as the Winchester Hospital to attract and retain nurses and technicians; and for local businesses to hire managers and staff. As the labor pool shrinks, the town will have to pay more to attract and retain workers who remain in the region. This will push up the cost of town services and property tax rates. Over time, this cycle—of increasing costs followed by higher property taxes to pay the increased costs—will drive out lower- and even moderate-income residents, creating a more economically stratified community that is affordable only to the wealthy.

The recession has driven down the price of housing nationally and in the Greater Boston region. However, housing prices in Winchester have remained relatively high, dropping only a few percent, because of the market demand created by the town's location and the quality of its schools. As the recession eases, we expect that housing prices in Winchester will increase again, albeit more slowly than in recent years.

High prices today and rising prices in the future will make it more difficult for Winchester to offer a range of housing types at a reasonable range of housing prices. It will be especially difficult to create housing that can be afforded by households earning between 80 and 110 percent of the Boston area median income. For a family of four, this means an annual household income between \$66,000 and \$91,000.

It is estimated that 13 to 14 percent of housing units in Winchester may be economically affordable to families in this income range, but under Massachusetts General Law Chapter 40B, towns are encouraged to ensure that 10 percent of housing units are available to households earning less than 80 percent of the median income of their area. Today only 1.9 percent of Winchester's housing units qualify as "affordable" under the state statute—far short of the 10 percent guideline. The Winchester Board of Selectmen and the

⁷ *Greater Boston Housing Report Card 2005*, Center for Urban and Regional Policy at Northeastern University. (The average of median prices reported by the Warren Group for the years 2004, 2005, and 2006 was \$780,000.)

⁸ Barry Bluestone et al., *The Greater Boston Housing Report Card 2008*, prepared for the Boston Foundation by the Center for Urban and Regional Policy at Northeastern University, October 2008.

Winchester Housing Partnership Board, by negotiating with developers on a case-by-case basis, have succeeded in creating housing units that meet the state guideline, but the numbers have been small and progress has been slow because the town is largely built out and development costs are high.

If Winchester does not make progress toward the Chapter 40B goal, the town could be open to provisions in Chapter 40B that allow developers who provide affordable housing units as part of their developments to override town building-density limits and other zoning requirements.⁹ The town could also lose points in competitions for state discretionary grants for which it might otherwise qualify.

To date, developers have responded to the strong market demand and the high prices in Winchester by building denser housing and providing some affordable units. The new townhouses at the Pansy Patch on Cambridge Street, the townhouses and age-restricted condominiums at the Wright-Locke Farm, and the senior-living units at the Winning Farm will make a contribution to the town's overall housing needs and an important contribution to the State's Chapter 40B goal. As the recession eases, we expect that developers will propose similar projects in Winchester because it is a stable, high-value, and profitable housing market.

But Winchester has no comprehensive vision today of how much multi-unit housing is needed, where it should be located, or how development of multi-unit housing should be managed. The 1953 master plan focused on single-family housing, and successive zoning bylaws have been largely silent on multi-unit housing. The town currently has no strategies in place to shape the development of multi-unit housing, ensuring that it serves residents across a range of incomes and physical abilities, is located and designed appropriately in neighborhoods, and has adequate parking, transportation access, and utilities.

Objectives

For Winchester to be a welcoming community and home to residents of all ages, incomes, and ethnic and cultural backgrounds—not an economically stratified community—it must address the need for single-family and multi-unit housing that is affordable to households with modest incomes and available to people with a range of physical abilities. This

⁹ The recent and ultimately unsuccessful proposal by Avalon Bay Communities, a large national developer, to build 250 rental units on the Wright-Locke Farm property, illustrates the issue facing the town. A project of this scale would have increased the town's affordable housing inventory under Chapter 40B from 1.9 percent to about 4 percent, but it would also have meant accepting a project that was judged to be out of scale and incompatible with the design and density of the surrounding neighborhoods, and one that would have cost the town more in town services than it would have returned in property tax revenue. An alternative approach would be to create housing through a negotiated or "friendly" Chapter 40B process, in which the town and a developer work on a cooperative basis to plan a specific housing development.

objective must be balanced against the need for increased revenues to pay for town services and the need to maintain the character of neighborhoods.

Strategies

To address Winchester's housing needs, the town should:

- **Plan for and promote the development of multi-unit and mixed-use housing.** The town should identify areas where multi-unit and mixed-use housing is appropriate and where property can be assembled to build such housing. Candidate areas might include the town center, Main Street between Skillings Road and Swanton Street, and Cambridge Street between Wildwood Street and the Woburn line. The town should work with property owners and neighbors to explore options for redevelopment of suitable properties in these areas. The town will not be in a position to purchase and directly control the redevelopment of these properties, as it did with the Wright-Locke Farm, but it can ensure that plans, guidelines, and standards are in place that will influence any future redevelopment of these properties in a way that satisfies the town's needs for housing, addresses state housing guidelines, and is compatible with surrounding neighborhoods.
- **Adopt a community housing bylaw.** The town should adopt a community housing bylaw. The purpose of the bylaw would be to encourage the creation of housing that is affordable to households with moderate incomes, especially those who live and work in Winchester, seniors, and younger adults. The bylaw would apply to multiple-unit housing development projects above a specified size and require that a percentage of the units be affordable (as defined by state statute) to moderate-income households that earn up to 100 percent of the median income for the Boston metropolitan area. Without such a community housing policy in place, the town will continue to realize only minimal increases in the number of affordable housing units. The town will also lag in eligibility for grants and other available revenues and have little control over the location and design of multi-family housing projects advanced by developers under Chapter 40B.

A community housing bylaw will make it easier to work proactively with developers to achieve types of housing and mixed-use development that the town needs and will accept. The provisions of the bylaw will spell out Winchester's requirements and approval process, avoiding the lengthy, expensive, and usually contentious negotiations that occur now. Community housing bylaws have been adopted in more than 100 Massachusetts communities. The bylaws allow these towns to approach developers for multi-unit and mixed-use projects that the towns want, rather than reacting to proposals as Winchester does today.

In conjunction with a community housing bylaw, Winchester should update its own affordable housing plan, incorporating the community housing bylaw and following the State's planned production guidelines and fair housing principles were feasible.

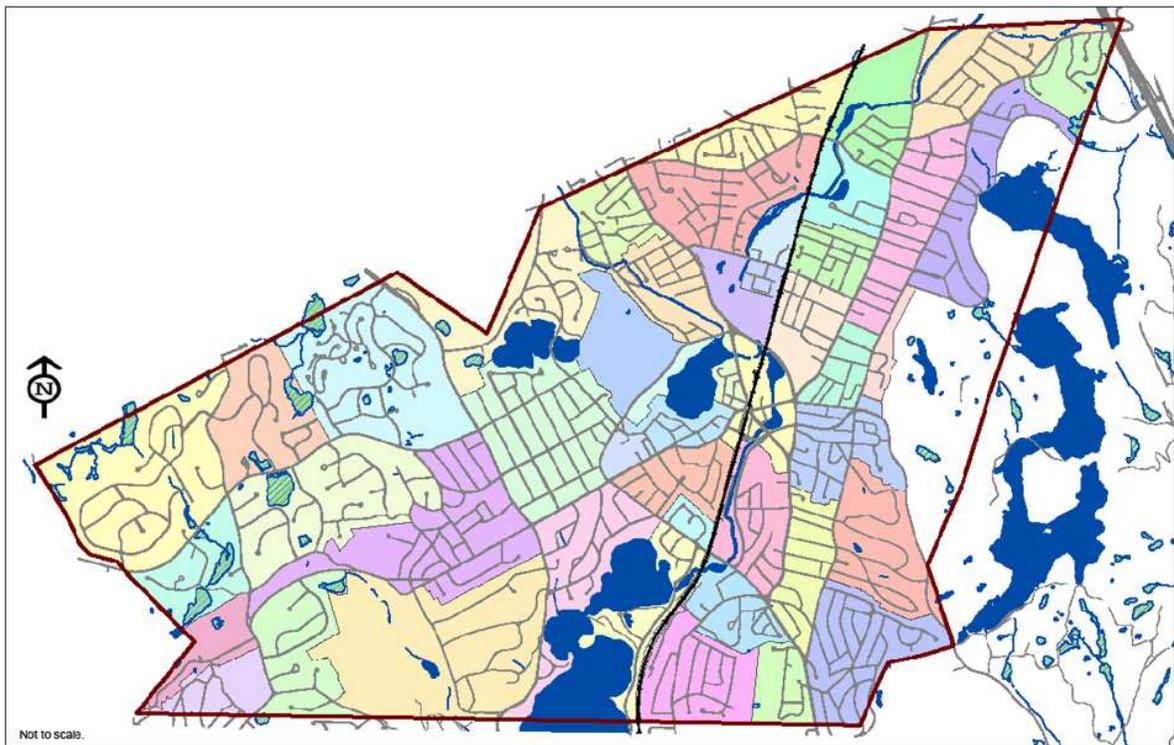
- **Encourage continued investment in housing and other properties by revising and reorganizing the town’s zoning bylaw and subdivision regulations to make it less costly and easier to comply with town regulations.** Winchester’s zoning bylaws and subdivision regulations governing housing and other developments have been amended many times over decades. The individual amendments have usually been clear and logical, but the accretion of amendments has resulted in a body of zoning bylaws and regulations that are excessively complex, poorly organized, threaded with inconsistencies, and often written in outdated and sometimes ambiguous language. This patchwork of existing regulations makes it difficult for residents to understand what they can do with their own properties and for developers to understand what is expected of them when they propose development projects. The town should rewrite the existing zoning bylaws and subdivision regulations, making them consistent with the goals of the Master Plan, clarifying definitions, adding necessary cross-references, and providing explanatory and illustrative graphics as appropriate.

NEIGHBORHOODS

Issues

Winchester is a community of neighborhoods. The types, ages, and architectural styles of the homes and commercial buildings in its neighborhoods tell the story of Winchester's evolution from the rural district of Waterfield, to an early 19th century industrial village on the Middlesex Canal, to a prosperous Victorian commuter rail suburb of wealthy families from Boston, to a felt- and leather-making industrial town, and to a post-World War II residential suburb. The town is distinguished by houses that represent the range of Victorian styles of the 19th century, a large number of Arts and Crafts houses, Colonial Revival houses, and houses reflecting the International Style. A substantial number of these houses were designed by architects, and many of the houses were featured in national publications. Winchester's neighborhoods are mapped in Figure 10.

Figure 10. Winchester Neighborhoods



Source: Town of Winchester.

Winchester's existing neighborhoods are being redeveloped to accommodate growth. In neighborhoods with smaller and older homes, the value of the land is often greater than the value of the house, inducing some developers and buyers to tear down existing houses and build new ones that often reflect contemporary tastes and construction practices.

The new homes are larger on average than most of the biggest homes in Winchester's late-19th century neighborhoods. In individual cases, the new homes may be many times larger than the homes that they replace. And where a large lot can be subdivided into two or three lots, the original house is often moved and additional houses constructed alongside, increasing the density of the neighborhood.

Demolition and reconstruction are occurring across all Winchester neighborhoods, but they are increasingly concentrated in the town's post-World War II neighborhoods, where the greater size, height, and footprint of the new houses contrast sharply with the smaller size of the capes, ranches, split-levels, bungalows, and occasional contemporary-design houses around them. For some, this represents a normal and desirable renewal and replenishment of Winchester's housing stock, which helps sustain and increase property tax revenue for the town. But for many, this is "mansionization" and represents a threat to the history, character, and coherent visual appearance of neighborhoods.

Winchester has no strategies in place today to manage the transformation of its neighborhoods. This is critical because the look and feel of a neighborhood—the relative consistency of architectural styles, the placement of buildings in relation to each other and the street, the layout of streets, sidewalks and public spaces, and their landscaping—contribute directly to the value of houses and land in a neighborhood. New development that is grossly out of scale, character, and context can reduce both the sense of place and property values in a neighborhood.

Objectives

Winchester should maintain the character of its neighborhoods. Winchester's neighborhoods are the building blocks of the community, providing people with a sense of place and belonging. The town must be proactive in managing the character of its neighborhoods and the evolution of its neighborhoods as Winchester redevelops. This objective must be balanced against the need for renewal and replenishment of the town's housing stock to ensure that property values are adequate to sustain the town's revenues and services.

Strategies

To address the needs of Winchester's neighborhoods, the town should:

- **Define Winchester's neighborhoods and create advisory guidelines for new construction and additions.** A 2005 study for the Planning Board identified Winchester neighborhoods and some of the distinctive physical characteristics of each neighborhood. This work should be expanded and advisory guidelines should be developed so that homeowners and developers can readily understand the character of the neighborhoods and streets. Special attention should be given to what constitutes a harmonious relationship among houses, a balance of scale between houses and the street, appropriate treatment of landscaping, and effective reduction of impervious

surfaces to improve stormwater management. The guidelines also should provide advice on how to design additions and renovations to existing houses without impinging negatively upon the character of the neighborhood and street.

- **Redefine the town’s zoning districts and tailor development regulations more closely to existing neighborhoods.** The town should redefine its zoning districts and tailor its development regulations to more closely match existing neighborhoods. The town’s zoning bylaw regulates use, lot size, setbacks, building height, and parking. It was enacted in the early 1900s to separate noxious industrial land uses from residential areas and to preserve the quality of life and property values in single- and two-family-home neighborhoods. Individual zoning districts defined in the 1930s and modified in the 1950s often encompassed many small neighborhoods. The zoning districts were effective in the 1950s in accommodating new development on the West Side of town, but they are less effective today in managing the redevelopment of existing neighborhoods all across the town.

The town should explore the development and adoption of form-based zoning bylaws that focus public discussion and review more on the size, form, and placement of buildings and parking, and less on simple separation of land uses (residential versus commercial) and density of development (housing units per acre). The revised zoning bylaws should allow for and encourage the renovation of existing housing, but constrain extreme changes, making the transformation of the character of neighborhoods and streets more gradual.

The town should also explore adoption of guidelines similar to the national “LEED” Neighborhood Development Rating System, that would establish a methodology to create sustainable new development, redevelopment, renovation, and preservation within neighborhoods and the town center. Examples of this methodology might be adoption of regulations for more energy-efficient buildings, encouragement of the use of recycled building materials, provisions for installation of recycled or alternative materials for infrastructure improvements, promotion of residential and commercial growth in areas served by public transportation, and adoption of policies pertaining to alternatives energy sources for home and vehicular use.

- **Create pedestrian, traffic, and streetscape plans as part of neighborhood plans.** In consultation with the neighborhoods, Winchester should develop a townwide plan for pedestrian-ways and bikeways, the replacement of street trees, and the refurbishing of street furniture (e.g., signs, benches, light poles, traffic control boxes, etc.). This should be done in parallel with a townwide study that looks at traffic calming, traffic management, walkability, safe paths to schools, and mobility for persons with physical disabilities.
- **Encourage formation of local historic districts and neighborhood conservation districts.** Chapter 40C of Massachusetts General Law allows residents and property owners to establish and administer local historic districts. Local historic district bylaws may include design guidelines and a review process governing the exteriors of existing structures, newly proposed structures, and demolitions that are visible from a public

way as a means of protecting and preserving the character of historic buildings and neighborhoods. The creation of local historic districts requires a vote of the selectmen, a survey and study, state review, and approval by a two-thirds vote at Town Meeting. Neighborhood conservation districts are developed in a similar manner, but are created by home rule. The objective of a neighborhood conservation district is to preserve neighborhood character, particularly the overall size, scale, and massing of a specific geographic area. Neighborhood conservation districts are generally less restrictive than local historic districts.

- **Propose a “large house” site plan and design review for replacement homes that substantially exceed the residential gross floor area (including garages) of the houses that they replace.** Winchester should amend its zoning bylaw to require that proposals for very large replacement houses undergo site plan and design review. The town currently requires commercial projects exceeding 15,000 square feet in floor area to undergo site plan review, but a similar process is not required for very large residential construction projects (for example, houses that will be twice the gross square footage of the houses they will replace). Most of the replacement homes built since 2000 in Winchester are significantly larger than the homes that were demolished.

Site plan and design review of large houses cannot directly control the maximum floor area of new or expanded single-family houses; however, the requirement will create a process where debates over design and compatibility with neighborhood character can be heard, and where possible and appropriate, resolved. The emphasis should be less on style, which will necessarily change over time, and more on how new structures relate to surrounding neighborhood buildings and landscapes.

TOWN CENTER

Issues

Winchester has a compact and successful town center that functions as the heart of the community and is consistently identified as one of Winchester's most important assets. It is the town's retail, service, and government center, offering a combination of independent, locally owned clothing boutiques, toy stores, banks, restaurants, and bookstores along with regional and national chain stores. It is the crossroads of the town and the main transfer point to commuter rail and bus services. It is the focal point for the farmers' market, concerts on the Common, and holiday events. The town center is also home to the public library, the Jenks Senior Center, and the Griffin Museum of Photography, a unique cultural organization that attracts residents and many out-of-town visitors.

The town center's architecture of one- to three-story brick buildings, churches, tree-lined streets, open green spaces along the Aberjona River, and water features such as the Mill Pond and the waterfall evoke Winchester's history and create a distinct sense of place. That sense of a traditional village center was enhanced by streetscape improvements made in the 1980s, and along with the area's pedestrian scale, makes it an attractive destination for Winchester residents.

Although the town center has a strong appeal and regularly attracts many people, merchants would like to recruit new businesses and increase the number of shoppers, creating enough attractions and activity to compete more effectively with larger retail areas in adjacent towns and stores at the Burlington Mall. Of special interest is increasing night and weekend activity, especially by encouraging development of more residential housing in the town center. Merchants and downtown property owners cite as key problems:

- **Parking.** Parking in the center is free for shoppers and visitors, but the parking areas are not signed and managed to make them easily visible and accessible. Shoppers often cannot reliably predict when and where they will find open parking spaces and may divert to larger retail malls with more plentiful parking.
- **Pedestrian circulation.** Winchester's town center is highly walkable, but the sidewalks and pathways are neither consistently linked nor designed to draw foot traffic from shopping area to shopping area within the center and along Main Street.
- **Business recruitment and marketing.** Business recruitment and marketing of town-center businesses is largely ad hoc and driven by individual businesses and real estate firms, few of which have the time and financial resources to develop sustained and broad-reaching marketing campaigns.
- **Small lots and fragmented ownership.** Many of the downtown properties are small lots, owned and managed by local and out-of-town individuals, businesses, and real estate developers. The lot sizes and fragmented ownership make it difficult to assemble

properties for redevelopment and build consensus on improvement projects. In contrast to centrally owned and managed retail malls, businesses in the center are generally slower to respond to market changes and are highly risk adverse.

- **Flood risk.** The Aberjona River, the Mill Pond, and greenways that border them are aesthetically pleasing and a unifying element for the center, but the continued economic risk from flooding impedes investment and redevelopment.

Objectives

Winchester should maintain the town center's vibrancy by supporting local business owners and encouraging the diversification of businesses. It also should bring more residential housing into the town center to take advantage of the higher density of development that can be supported by commuter rail and transit services. This will increase property values and tax revenue to the town and generate more spending at local businesses.

Strategies

To address Winchester's town center needs, the town should:

- **Create a town center business development council.** The town should establish a Winchester business development council charged with advocacy for town center business, commercial, and residential physical and economic development, both short- and long-term.
- **Work with town center interests to hire a part-time economic development specialist and develop a business recruitment and retention plan.** The town and the town center interests should co-fund a part-time economic development specialist and devise a business recruitment and retention plan. The plan should be based on targeted market studies that identify the types of businesses that would prosper in Winchester. The plan should cover the town center as well as the commercial sections of Main Street between the town center and Swanton Street. A core objective should be to enhance the economic viability of businesses in the downtown as a means of increasing downtown property values and commercial property tax revenues to the town.
- **Develop a parking management plan that includes feasibility studies for structured parking.** The town should work with business owners and the MBTA to develop a parking management plan and parking development fund for the town center. Working through a parking advisory committee, the plan should consider the mix of short- and long-term spaces, designated employee parking areas, metered parking, the introduction of shared parking, enforcement, and uniform signage identifying parking areas. The parking plan also should address parking and storage for bicycles. The work should include feasibility studies for parking decks and should identify potential funding sources for parking projects, including public-private partnerships.

- **Plan for mixed-use redevelopment in the town center that provides lively ground-floor retail and service space with upper-story residential and office uses.** The town should work with merchants, property owners, and town boards and commissions to identify desirable development sites and illustrate development concepts. The plans should focus on opportunities to encourage the development of condominiums and apartments that are located above ground-floor retail space. Downtown residents typically spend about three times as much money on local goods and services as office workers. Downtown residents also provide a base of patrons for evening restaurant and retail businesses as well as for cultural activities.
- **Revise existing zoning bylaws and develop new overlay zoning districts to enable and guide development in the town center.** The town should consider allowing mixed-use development by right in the town center, revising existing zoning bylaws and developing new overlay zoning districts to enable and guide development that is compatible with the historic fabric of the center.
- **Explore formation of local historic districts for appropriate areas of the town center.** The town center is listed in National Historic Register and retains many excellent examples of 19th century commercial architecture.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Issues

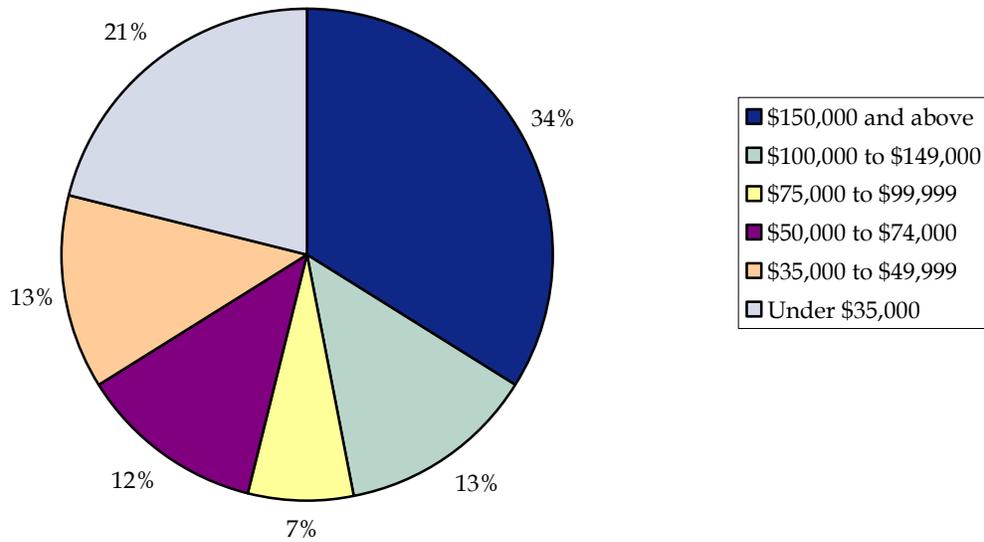
Winchester depends heavily on property tax revenue to fund its schools, police, fire and social services, and to maintain its road, water, and sewer systems. Property taxes provide about 70 percent of the town's total revenue. State aid, which has declined over the last dozen years, accounts for about 8 percent of annual revenues. Fees for various municipal services, including water and sewer services, make up most of the balance.

Ninety-five percent of Winchester's property tax revenue comes from residential properties, and of the residential tax revenue, about 85 percent comes from taxes on single-family homes. In 2007, Winchester homeowners paid the state's 14th highest single-family tax bill. The average tax bill was about \$7,800, equivalent to 7 percent of average annual household income. This was in the middle of the range of neighboring towns, which had tax rates equivalent to 5 and 6 percent of household income in Medford and Woburn, 8 percent in Lexington and Wellesley, and almost 9 percent in Belmont.

Less than three percent of all taxable properties in Winchester are commercial or industrial. Compared to neighboring and other towns across the state, the percentage of revenue coming from residential properties in Winchester is high, and the percentage from commercial and industrial property is low.

Winchester could raise its residential property taxes to support its schools and public services. It is an affluent community. The median household income in 2007 was \$112,000, 50 percent higher than the county average and 80 percent higher than the state average. But Winchester cannot raise its residential property taxes without harming a good portion of its moderate- and lower-income households. These include working households as well as elderly households on fixed incomes. As shown in Figure 11, half of Winchester households have annual incomes over \$100,000, but nearly a quarter have annual incomes under \$50,000. Three percent of all residents and three percent of Winchester children live in households with incomes below the poverty level.

Figure 11. Winchester Household Income, 2007



Source: Claritas data, 2007.

To avoid raising its property taxes faster than the 2½ percent cap mandated by Proposition 2½, Winchester must rely on “new-growth” revenue, the result of expansion and new construction. New-growth revenue for Winchester has grown at about 1.6 percent annually over the last decade, derived primarily from residential redevelopment. However, this rate is significantly below the statewide average, which has been running over 2 percent.

With almost no undeveloped land remaining, Winchester must look for new-growth revenue from reinvestment by its existing retail, commercial, industrial, and not-for-profit businesses and from assembly of land and rezoning initiatives that can attract new businesses. The largest employers in Winchester today are the Winchester Hospital (2,000 jobs), Winchester Health Care Management (1,500 jobs), Winchester Schools (350 jobs), the Town of Winchester (250 jobs), and Mahoney’s (200 jobs). Health care and education will continue to be growth industries in the Boston area, and so provide a good foundation for attracting additional investment in these and related businesses.

Objectives

Winchester should work to expand its commercial tax base, leveraging Winchester’s and the Greater Boston region’s strengths in education, healthcare, technology, and finance. This objective must be balanced against the equally important objectives of maintaining the character of Winchester’s neighborhoods and protecting its open spaces and natural environment.

Strategies

To address the economic development and revenue needs of the town, Winchester should:

- **Create opportunities to reuse obsolete commercial, industrial, and institutional properties.** Winchester has a number of underutilized properties in the industrial area along Cross Street and scattered along North Main Street and Washington Street. The town should work with the property owners to explore rezoning and design of overlay districts that would make it economically attractive to reinvest in these properties. The objective should be to increase property tax revenue for the town through direct tax revenues or payments-in-lieu-of-taxes.
- **Explore formation of a limited-purpose economic development and industrial corporation.** An economic development corporation or a similar quasi-public development organization could be used to assemble and redevelop commercial and industrial sites or facilitate work with private developers who can assemble and redevelop these sites. Redevelopment of existing commercial and industrial properties is often complicated by the need to test for and remove contaminated soils. Industrial redevelopment can take advantage of low-cost state and federal financing for this work, but these grants and loans often trigger a prolonged environmental permitting process. The town could use a development corporation, created by home rule legislation, to issue temporary bonds to acquire property and roll over interest-only notes for several years while the property is in permitting, remediation, and construction. This can catalyze development that might otherwise not occur. The core objective should be to increase long-term property values and tax revenues. The corporation should not have the power to take land by eminent domain.
- **Support home-based businesses and incubator office space.** Six percent of Winchester residents are employed in home-based jobs. The number of knowledge-based jobs and industries in the Boston area is expected to grow significantly in coming decades, leveraging the region's strengths in education, healthcare, technology, and finance. Winchester should take advantage of this, ensuring that local regulations support home-based businesses and encourage the development of incubator office space in the downtown to serve companies that grow from home-based into office-based businesses. The objectives should be to increase property tax revenue for the town through development of new office space and increase business revenues to local merchants selling to downtown office workers.

IMPLEMENTATION

The following tables summarize the recommended objectives, strategies, and actions; identify the responsible parties; and set out a time frame for implementation.

Housing

Objective	Strategies	Actions	Responsible Parties	Time
Provide market-rate, multi-unit housing, and workforce housing that is affordable to households across a wide range of incomes.	Plan for and promote the development of multi-unit and mixed-use housing projects.	Identify areas where multi-unit and mixed-use housing is appropriate and where property could be assembled to build such housing.	Planning Board, Historical Commission, Design Review Committee, Town Meeting	1 year
		Work with property owners to explore options for the future redevelopment for these sites, including historic preservation tax incentives.	Planning Board, Board of Selectmen	2-5 years
	Adopt a community housing bylaw.	Develop a community housing bylaw and review with interested parties.	Housing Partnership Board, Zoning Board of Appeals, Planning Board, Board of Selectmen, Town Meeting	1 year
	Encourage continued investment in housing and commercial development by revising and reorganizing the town’s zoning bylaw and subdivision regulations to make it less costly and easier to comply with town regulations.	Reorganize and update the town’s zoning bylaws and subdivision regulations.	Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals, Board of Selectmen, Town Meeting	1-3 years

Neighborhoods

Objective	Recommendations	Actions	Responsible Parties	Time
Sustain and maintain the physical character of Winchester’s neighborhoods.	Define Winchester’s neighborhoods and create guidelines for new construction and additions.	Develop advisory guidelines for redevelopment and additions for each neighborhood.	Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals, Historical Commission, Design Review Committee	2 years
	Redefine the town’s zoning districts and tailor development regulations more closely to existing neighborhoods.	Tailor zoning districts and development regulations to individual neighborhoods.	Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals, Historical Commission, Design Review Committee, Town Meeting	2-5 years
		Consider form-based zoning bylaws and LEED guidelines.	Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals, Design Review Committee, Town Meeting	5 years
	Create pedestrian, bicycle and auto traffic, and streetscape plans as part of neighborhood plans.	Establish transportation committee charged with developing transportation and neighborhood plans.	Board of Selectmen, Planning Board, Conservation Commission	2-5 years
	Encourage formation of local historic districts and neighborhood conservation districts.	Identify candidate districts and property owners, appoint study committee, and seek Town Meeting approval.	Neighborhoods, Historical Commission, Planning Board, Town Meeting	2-3 years
	Propose a “large house” site plan and design review for replacement homes that substantially exceed the residential gross floor area of the houses that they replace.	Amend the zoning bylaw to require that proposals for large replacement houses undergo a site plan review.	Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals, Design Review Committee, Town Meeting	2 years

Town Center

Objective	Recommendations	Actions	Responsible Parties	Time
Maintain the town center’s vibrancy by supporting local business owners and encouraging the diversification of businesses.	Create a town center advocacy group.	Establish a “Winchester Business Development Council.”	Planning Board, Town Manager, Board of Selectmen, town center merchants and property owners	1-2 years
	Develop a business recruitment and retention plan.	Hire a part-time economic development specialist.	Town center merchants and property owners, Chamber of Commerce, Board of Selectmen, Planning Board, Town Manager	2 years
	Develop a parking management plan that includes feasibility studies for structured parking.	Form advisory committee, hire consultants as needed, and formulate a plan.	Board of Selectmen, Town Manager, Planning Board, town center merchants and property owners, Chamber of Commerce	1-3 years
	Plan for mixed-use redevelopment in the town center to provide ground-floor retail and service space with upper-story residential and office uses.	Illustrate desirable development sites and plans; identify private developers who can serve as partners for new projects in key town center redevelopment areas.	Planning Board, town center merchants and land owners, Board of Selectmen	2-5 years
	Revise existing zoning bylaws and develop new overlay zoning districts to enable and guide development in the town center.	Analyze desirable development sites and plans to identify and draft appropriate new zoning.	Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals, Town Meeting	1-5 years
	Explore formation of local historic districts for portions of town center.	Identify candidate districts and property owners, appoint study committee, and seek Town Meeting approval.	Town center building and land owners, Historical Commission, Planning Board, Town Meeting	3-5 years

Economic Development

Objectives	Recommendations	Actions	Responsible Parties	Time
Work to expand Winchester’s commercial tax base, leveraging Winchester’s and the Greater Boston region’s strengths in education, healthcare, technology, and finance.	Create opportunities to reuse obsolete commercial, industrial, and institutional properties.	Work with the property owners to explore rezoning and design of overlay districts that would make it economically attractive to reinvest in commercial properties.	Planning Board, Board of Selectmen	2-5 years
		Explore formation of a limited-purpose economic development and industrial corporation to assemble and redevelop sites or facilitate work with private developers who can assemble and redevelop sites.	Board of Selectmen, Town Meeting	5 years
	Support home-based businesses and incubator office space.	Enact regulations that support home-based businesses and encourage the development of incubator office space in the town center.	Planning Board, Board of Selectmen, Town Meeting	2 years