

A Framework for Newton's Planning

Newton Framework Planning Committee, April, 2001

City of Newton, Massachusetts
David B. Cohen, Mayor

Newton Framework Planning Committee

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**Prepared with the support of the Newton Department of Planning and Development
Michael J. Kruse, Director**

CITY OF NEWTON IN BOARD OF ALDERMEN
April 2, 2001 #423-00(2)

BE IT RESOLVED: The Board of Aldermen commends members of the Framework Plan Committee and particularly its Chairman Phil Herr for the extraordinary time, skill, and dedicated service given to produce the overall *Framework for Planning Report*;

And

Further, the Board of Aldermen urges His Honor the Mayor to direct the Planning and Development Department to complete a Land Use/Transportation Plan that will reflect the *Framework for Planning* report.

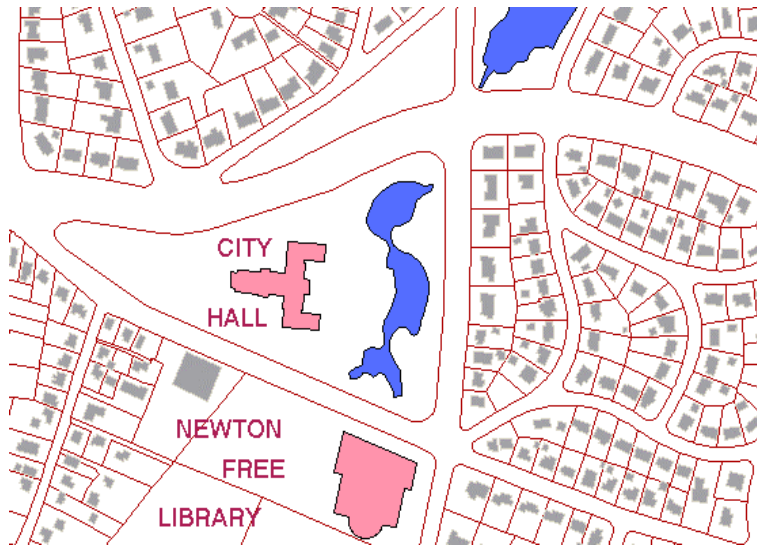
Voted 21 yeas 0 nays 2 absent.

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The following *Framework for Newton's Planning* is the product of more than two years of efforts by the Framework Planning Committee and others, most recently including substantial contributions by members of the Board of Aldermen's Zoning and Planning Committee.



City Hall, Newton Free Library, and Bullough's Pond.

A FRAMEWORK FOR NEWTON'S PLANNING

■ **FRAMEWORK PLANNING BACKGROUND**

❖ **ORIGINS AND THE PLANNING PROCESS**

The Framework Planning Committee was appointed in the fall of 1998 by Mayor David Cohen, who asked its members "...to identify consensus values for a planning framework..." to guide later, more detailed studies.¹ The intention was for the Committee's work to be an important step towards preparation of a comprehensive plan for

¹ Appointment letter to members from Mayor David B. Cohen, October 16, 1998.

the City. "Comprehensive plans" integrate policy and an outline of intended actions across a broad range of topics. Sometimes such plans are adopted by legislative bodies, but they rarely have the force of law. Comprehensive plans should be serious statements of intention, but are not regulations or final commitments to action.

Both the Newton Charter and a Massachusetts statute mandate that a comprehensive plan shall be prepared for the City and from time to time be revised². In 1979 a *Comprehensive Plan* containing Land Use, Housing, and Open Space elements was prepared by the Newton Planning Department. Its goals and policies were adopted by the Board of Aldermen the same year, and the materials were republished in 1984. Since then a great deal of planning has been done in the City, but in each case the planning either covered a less than comprehensive topical range or the planning was for only a sub-area of the City. The Framework Committee's work is the first since 1979 to address planning comprehensively across the entire community.

The Framework Committee members were chosen to reflect a diversity of views from across the City and the interests within it, enabling the search for consensus within the Committee to be an informative prelude to testing those shared values more widely. On that basis, the Committee appropriately began with brainstorming among its members to systematically surface their own perspectives. That was quickly followed with a structured review of the City's planning legacy, contained in summaries of nearly sixty planning documents prepared by or for the City since 1957. The outline for the Committee's work product emerged from that planning legacy, member's perspectives, and the input of many with whom the Committee met.

² See the *Newton Charter* Section 7-2 "Comprehensive Plan" and *Massachusetts General Laws* Chapter 41 Section 81-D "Master or Study Plan."

Based on that outline, City staff assembled background information, and topical work groups of the Framework Committee began drafting statements of values. In April 1999 a Citywide Workshop drew broad participation and provided a great deal of public guidance. Over the following year that guidance helped shape refinement of both the topical outline and the work group statements. In April 2000 a second Citywide workshop was held, again sparking helpful dialogue, and this time prompting a series of later discussions with individual City agencies and staff, neighborhood groups, and interest groups, leading to further refinements to the emerging document. In August, 2000 the Committee transmitted the draft *Framework* to the Mayor, and in January, 2001 the Mayor in turn transmitted it to the Board of Aldermen.

❖ NEXT STEPS

The next steps in comprehensive planning for Newton are proposed to pursue adding depth to each of the chapters or topics of the emerging *Framework*, initially focussing on four topics.

An open space and recreation plan, an historic preservation plan, and integrated planning for land use and transportation have been singled out for initial in-depth attention. Work on an open space and recreation plan has already begun, having been given high priority in the *Framework* because Newton's most recent (1995) Open Space and Recreation Plan no longer satisfies requirements for certain State and Federal aid programs. A committee of citizens and officials has been formed to participate in that process. Preparation of an Historic Preservation Plan would directly reflect another priority identified in this *Framework*. Land use and transportation have proven central to virtually every other topical area, and have an urgency for action, leading to those two elements being suggested for immediate joint consideration. Upon completion of substantial studies on those four topics and further development of the remaining ones the resulting plan will be brought before the Board of Aldermen and the Planning and Development Board for approval as the City's Comprehensive

Plan under both Newton's Charter and Massachusetts Statute. A new citizen-based committee is to be formed to give guidance to that process through its further research and study, public outreach, and framing of implementation approaches, much as the Framework Planning Committee has done.

Undertaking that further work requires a clear sense of direction. An affirming vote of the Board of Aldermen provides just such guidance.

■ COMMUNITY BACKGROUND

❖ NEWTON'S HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

The area that is now Newton was settled in 1630 as a district of Watertown, and was subsequently annexed by Cambridge in 1636. Newton was incorporated as a separate municipality in 1688. The interior land within the City's boundaries remained primarily agricultural in its early days. Beginning in 1688 at Upper Falls, Newton became home to several mills along its riverbanks. The mills provided the backdrop to the industry in Newton that slowly evolved towards manufacturing of products such as plastics, paints, and confections. The introduction of railroad depots in the early 1800's along the Boston and Worcester Railroad line in Newton Corner, Newtonville, West Newton and Auburndale heralded the development of commercial districts. By the mid-1900's, Newton's mills and manufacturing industry gave way to a shift towards light industry and services. Since then, corporations have filled former factories and industrial sites with offices. Restaurants and stores, the computer and biotech industries and other services have served as replacements for older uses.

Residential patterns and character initially reflected local employment. The manufacturing industry encouraged a growing community of workers to make their homes in the area, a pattern still reflected by the pockets of two-family homes that were developed to

provide affordable housing for workers. In later years, however, the historical development of Newton's residential character was largely shaped by the introduction of the Worcester Turnpike (Route 9) and the Boston to Worcester Railroad. The construction of the Worcester Turnpike, completed in 1809, broadened Newton's commercial opportunities, but perhaps more importantly it brought people to Newton on their way to Boston. The importance to commerce of the completion of the first 10-mile leg of the Boston–Worcester Railroad in 1834 to West Newton was dwarfed by the railroad's role in expanding Newton's accessibility both as a residential community and a summer haven for affluent Bostonians.

For the next 60 years, frequent commuter rail service to Boston was instrumental in establishing Newton as a desirable residential suburb, with most of the new houses being constructed close to railroad depots. Streetcars, nearly ubiquitous in early 20th Century Newton, facilitated further spreading of residential development. The later introduction of the automobile enabled the eventual dispersion of housing throughout all corners of the community, but the village structure, a legacy of the manufacturing and railroad commuter villages, remains to this day.

❖ ORGANIZATIONAL BACKGROUND

Newton's public processes are structured with broad community involvement. Hundreds of citizens are made a direct part of that process through positions on more than sixty City boards, commissions and committees, and many other residents are involved through the City's wealth of civic organizations. Despite that, both the formal structure of governance and the particulars of its execution are regularly questioned as citizens and various interests seek both a stronger voice for themselves and better informed and more expeditious public action.

Voters in Newton elect a Mayor for a four year term and 24 Aldermen and eight School Committee members for two year terms.

Although few residents could even approximately map them, the City's eight wards are key building blocks in the system, with three Aldermen and one School Committee member elected from each of them. All except one alderman per ward are elected by citywide vote. That structure assures representatives from all parts of the City, but the dominance of Citywide voting tempers any focus on ward-level interests.

❖ CITYWIDE PROCESS

Members of the City's many boards, such as Planning & Development, Zoning Board of Appeals, Housing Authority, and Economic Development Commission are typically appointed by the Mayor, with a few statutory or *ex officio* exceptions. In addition, there are dozens of local and citywide interest groups outside of City government, such as the Newton-Needham Chamber of Commerce, the Newton Bicycle and Pedestrian Task Force, League of Women Voters, and the Green Decade Coalition.

A number of groups privately support community functions, including the Newton Pride Committee, Newton 2000, Newton Free Library Foundation, Newton Schools Foundation, Newton Conservators, ward and citywide Democratic and Republican committees, and many others. More than a dozen non-profit organizations work on housing and related services for Newton. Nine environmental groups are listed on the Newton Community Web Page, with geographic focus ranging from the Bullough's Pond Association to the Foundation for Global Community.

The Board of Aldermen, the largest City legislative body in Massachusetts, operates through a committee structure. The Zoning and Planning Committee, which considers zoning amendments, and the Land Use Committee, which considers special permit applications, are critical for planning. Aldermen play an unusual dual role as both zoning legislators and special permit decision-makers under rules they have created.

Newton citizens employ the traditional vehicles for citizen communication with local government – elections, public hearings, and meetings, as well as written and oral correspondence. However, the City government is working towards new ways of ensuring a public decision-making process that is equitable, open, accountable, and efficient, through the organization of neighborhood meetings, blue-ribbon committees, and information sessions that attempt to capture the diversity of Newton’s communities and interests.

Community cable television is actively used as a vehicle not only for bringing conversations with the Mayor and meetings of the Aldermen and School Committee into residents' homes, but also for coverage of a broad variety of other civic discussions and activities. The Newton web page both provides Newton organizations with a vehicle for communication and a means for Newton residents to keep informed about City activities.

❖ NEIGHBORHOODS AND THE CITY

Thirteen neighborhoods have Neighborhood Advisory Committees, the most active being those in neighborhoods to which federal CDBG funds are targeted: Newton Corner, Nonantum, and West Newton. Newton Highlands has an elected neighborhood council. There are Historic District Commissions serving Chestnut Hill and Newton Upper Falls.

In addition there are about 30 other neighborhood organizations listed in “*A Guide to Newton's Resources*,” and more that aren't listed. The Newton Neighborhood Network assists in coordinating their efforts. The City's fifteen elementary school districts and the Parent-Teacher organizations related to them are another important framework for neighborhood dialogue. Still more local *ad hoc* groups commonly form and play important roles in response to specific development issues.

❖ LAND USE AND DEVELOPMENT

One of the principal channels through which Newton citizens participate in decisions about the City’s development is the land use special permit process. Most major development proposals in Newton are subject to approval or disapproval by the Board of Aldermen acting on special permits, with discretion guided by broad criteria in the Zoning Ordinance.

Newton goes beyond mandates of law to support public input into the decision-making process. Increasingly, informal neighborhood meetings are held on proposals, sponsored by a public official, a neighborhood association, or the developer. Those meetings help ensure that those interested are well informed on projects and proposals, as well as providing greater opportunities for citizen or technical input.

Other land-use related processes follow a similar pattern of mandated benchmarks for citizen input and informal, local mechanisms of participation. These include the Aldermen’s Zoning and Planning Committee’s consideration of zoning amendments, and the Aldermen’s Land Use Committee’s consideration of special permits, the Conservation Commission, Historical Commission and two historic district commissions, and the Zoning Board of Appeals.

Occasionally businesses, developers, and homeowners express frustration with the imprecise nature of design, planning and development standards and their application by the City. Efforts such as those that produced this plan have diminished those concerns.

In sum, the spirit of community collaboration is very strong in Newton, as it has been for many years, and the avenues for citizen involvement are many and diverse. Many residents find that Newton's government is appropriately responsive, open, and committed to a variety of forms of citizen participation, but some

feel that it could be more so. For that reason, it is important to seek clarity about where we agree and where more dialogue is needed. That is the purpose of the Framework planning effort.

■ SPECIAL QUALITIES OF THE CITY WE SEEK

American communities generally have a great deal in common both in the qualities that they have and in the qualities that they seek, but even more importantly no two communities are quite alike in what they have and seek. Convenience of location, good schools, safety, good public services, fair taxes, responsive government, social stability, and parks and open space are all examples of almost universally sought community qualities. In planning for Newton's future it is important that those and other common values be well addressed, just as they largely have been in the past.

However, planning should also reflect the following additional group of qualities which, while not unique to Newton, are given special importance in this community. The importance given to this group of qualities distinguishes Newton from any other community in this region. For that reason, they deserve special attention in our planning. This document isn't structured around them, but the guidance of one or more of these qualities is reflected on virtually every page.

❖ A CITY OF DIVERSE NEIGHBORHOODS AND VILLAGES.[]

Newton is structured as a community made up of relatively small-scaled neighborhoods and villages. No one of those neighborhoods or villages is dominant over the others, and no two are quite alike. That structure of socially and physically coherent sub-areas of the City tied together as a community without losing the identities of the smaller areas is an important quality of the City as it is, and a quality that is valued as important to preserve. Maintaining that quality requires concerted effort, since economic and social change threaten

to erode the broad variations of village and neighborhood character.

❖ A DIVERSITY OF RESIDENTS.

Newton enjoys a rich diversity in race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, and economic status among its residents. That richness stands in sharp contrast with the stereotype of homogenous suburbs and is not just accepted, but rather it is welcomed and sought through many means, including ones in the chapters that follow.

❖ A "GARDEN CITY."

Newton is aptly named "The Garden City." That quality which we now enjoy exists thanks in large part to the efforts of those who preceded us in this place. We now are the stewards of what they began. From the magnificent century-old beeches gracing many of our streets to the bulbs distributed by Newton Pride, meriting the "Garden City" title is an important City value.

❖ THE PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE.

Standards are set high in Newton for our community efforts. Having a "good" school system, or library, or recycling program, or housing effort isn't good enough. We can't often look elsewhere for exemplars, since our intentions go beyond common achievement.

❖ AN UNCOMPROMISING COMMITMENT TO EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT.

While only a minority of Newton's households have school-age children, assuring an exemplary standard of education is a foundation value for the entire community, perhaps the single clearest element of the City's identity, and a central component of the City's attractiveness as a place in which to live.

❖ **A SHARING COMMUNITY.**

Newton has its rules and mandates and its share of disputes and accusations, but with striking frequency Newton acts as a community through agreement and shared effort. To an unusual degree, City government is shared with, if not dominated by, volunteer participants. The Newton Free Library is a monument to community-based effort, not tax imposition. Even in difficult development decisions, community concurrence is often more telling than prescriptive regulation.

The City sometimes strays from this participatory consensus-seeking style, but the promotion of a light hand of government and strong community involvement is a key value found throughout this report and throughout this community. Maintaining and deepening the spirit of partnership between the City's government and its citizens is of vital importance to the community.

❖ **RESPONSIBLE MEMBERSHIP IN LARGER COMMUNITIES.**

We understand and respect that Newton is a part of many larger communities, towards which the City and its residents should act with responsibility. That is reflected in myriad ways: through explicitly regional actions, such as the school system's strong participation in the METCO program; through service to global causes, such as energy resource conservation; and through more passive means, such as gracious acceptance that state fiscal formulas are often less generous to Newton than to other communities having less financial strength.

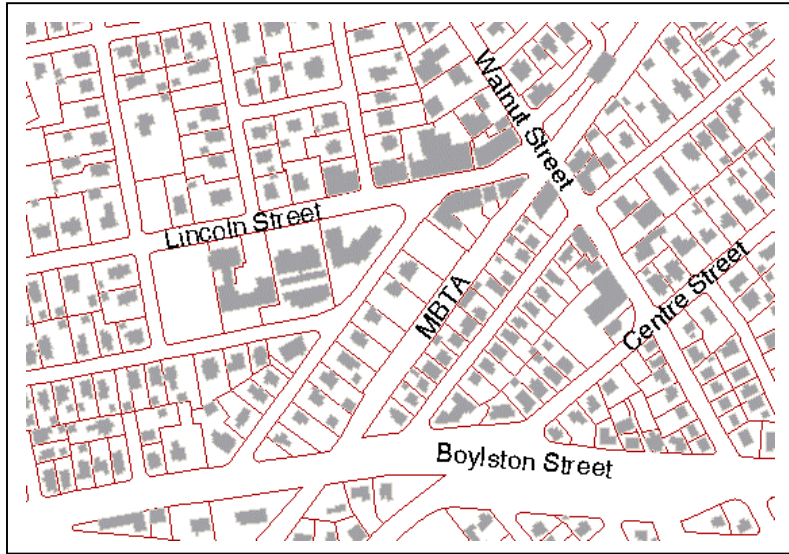
❖ **STABLE RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOODS.**

Newton is and long has been largely made up of cohesive residential neighborhoods, dominantly made up of single and two-family homes. Maintaining neighborhood character in the face of pressures for major land use change, building of disruptive scale, or intrusion of damaging impacts from outside is an important resident value and expectation that the City seeks to serve. Reconciling that expectation with other objectives the City also seeks is one of the central challenges of planning for Newton's future.

❖ **ADHERENCE TO CORE VALUES OVER TIME.**

The physical city may change over time, but the basic set of core values that now characterize this community, such as those above, appear to have remained stable over long periods of time. That stability of core values is an important quality of this community. Newton should for many decades continue to reflect the fundamental values that now shape our community choices.

Each of these qualities can certainly be found in other communities, but in this combination they are uniquely expressive of Newton. In the topical chapters that follow, they are both directly reflected and implicitly underlie the topical statements about values and approaches.



Newton Highlands village center and the Route 9 corridor, a context illustrating many of the topics in the following discussion.

GUIDING LAND USE

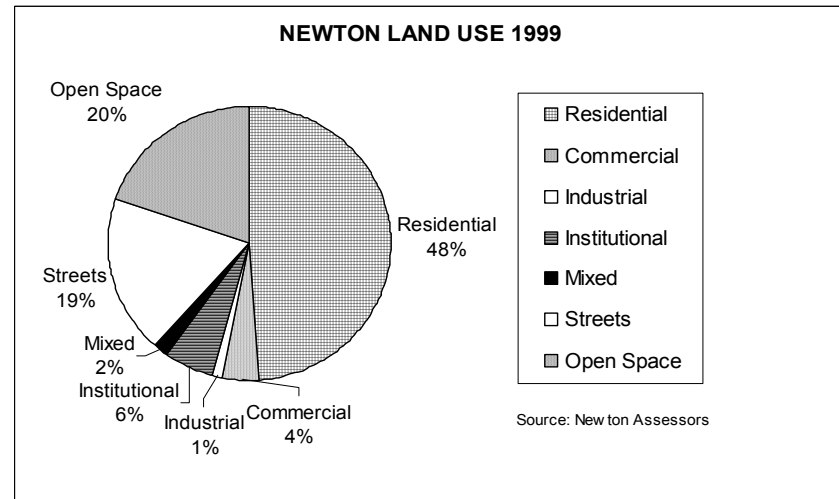
■ LAND USE BACKGROUND

Land use reflects history. Newton's initial use of land for farming was joined in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with manufacturing industries along the Charles River in Upper and Lower Falls and Nonantum where there was water-power. To house the mill workers, two and three-family homes were built near the mills.

When commuter railroad lines and their depots were built in the late 1800's, industrial tycoons, who now had easy access to Boston, built large mansions on West Newton Hill and Chestnut Hill. Newton's

essential structure as a dominantly residential city of villages was thus formed, only marginally changing in the following years in response to shifting transportation, economics, and demography.

Currently about 80% of Newton's 18 square miles of land is in some developed use, only 20% remaining open, and only half of that open land being publicly owned and thus assured of protection. According to 1999 data, half of Newton's land area is in residential use. Though its impacts make it seem to be more, only about 5% of the City's land area is in commercial or industrial use, 4% commercial; 1% industrial. Only 6% is in public or private institutional use, but almost 20% of the City's land area is committed to streets. Although concrete data is not in hand, it appears that the City's land use pattern has changed little over many years, except for the gradual diminishment of open space, and common increases in development intensity as new development replaces older fabric.



■ LAND USE VALUES AND APPROACHES

A number of principles guide our land use values and approaches. Just as with our schools and recycling programs, we seek to set a standard of excellence in managing our land use. Doing that should build on our structure as a community of villages. We recognize change, but seek to maintain a stable balance among land uses. Transitions between uses and densities are a subject of special concern, as is serving diversity along a variety of dimensions.

❖ SEEKING EXCELLENCE IN LAND USE.

We have been given a legacy of excellence in the City's current land use that deserves equal excellence in managing future change. That calls for going beyond the ordinary conventions of suburban land use planning and striving to set a higher standard in preserving and enhancing Newton's attributes, balance, and aesthetics.

In the past, there has often been creative leadership in land use in Newton. The Oak Hill development plan was an important post World War II land use innovation. The so-called "10% Ordinance" was the first real zoning for inclusion of affordable housing in New England. Negotiations with Sylvania resulted in a Supreme Judicial Court affirmation of interweaving contracts and regulation that set a widely relied upon land use precedent. The creative neighborhood-based preservation of the Commonwealth Country Club has been nationally recognized. That tradition of innovation and excellence deserves renewal.

- The basic location, scale, and intensity of development needs to be shaped to reflect a "balancing" of interests, and we should aspire to regulatory and program excellence in achieving that. Housing affordability, good jobs, environmental contribution, and access without damaging neighborhood quality of life are all achieved if made part of the basic expectations from change, not just something to be sought through compensatory mitigation.

Success calls for a strong ethic of development that is caring about and therefore contributory towards the community within which it occurs, supported by innovative regulatory and institutional approaches.

- The gradually increasing density of residential, commercial, and institutional development has a range of impacts. Significant among adverse impacts are the continuing loss of open space and the effects of traffic. Those impacts should not be accepted as the inevitable consequence of change and development. Instead, every land use decision should require creative mitigation or avoidance of those and other adverse impacts.
- Particular attention must be devoted to traffic impacts. While congestion and safety impacts are routinely considered in land use decisions, the more significant issue today is neighborhood impacts from spillover traffic seeking alternative routes and parking, exacerbated by regional, flow-through traffic and parking. Land use decisions must incorporate parking, public transportation, private van use, and traffic circulation strategies that minimize spillover traffic.
- Just as Newton's land use outcomes should be exemplary, Newton's land management process also should be exemplary, seeking a spirit of partnership among the City's government, community residents, and those proposing change. The management process should actively promote informed exchange among all those parties, using a variety of processes reasonably related to scale of impacts. It should provide clarity and predictability for both those who develop and those who are impacted by development. It should avoid excessive burdens of time and effort for both applicants and neighbors. Finally, it should provide fairness and equity in outcomes.
- Encouraging development of long-range plans by major complexes should be explored as a possible way to help achieve

excellence in managing land use. Developments that proceed by increments over time rather all in a single project include educational institutions, hospitals, malls, and commercial parks as well as large-scale City-owned properties such as school campuses and public works facilities. They might be given incentives to prepare long-range development plans as a means of building creative dialogue with neighbors and the City about mutual interests, including traffic, open space, and City services. Such plans could provide a more predictable and less divisive decision environment for both the development planners and their neighbors.

❖ **A COMMUNITY OF NEIGHBORHOODS AND VILLAGES.**

Maintaining Newton as a community of diverse neighborhoods and villages is essential to the special character and sense of community that are among our primary planning values. Managing the location and densities of business and residences, the pattern of circulation in all its modes, the location of public facilities, and the protection of both open space and cultural resources should all serve to protect and reinforce that pattern.

- The contrast of village centers versus more outlying areas should be reflected in allowable compactness of development, promoting pedestrian access to a variety of business, institutional, and residential destinations within those village centers, and promoting mutually reinforcing activities within them.
- In a City no longer growing in population, village business areas need not sprawl outward, damaging their basic structure; so should not be allowed to do so. As a corollary, efforts must be made to reconcile means of access and parking consistent with the spatial needs of a village center pattern.

- Having open space corridors and reserves linking and buffering villages is a still-attainable objective that is important to pursue.
- The welcome variation in character among neighborhoods and villages in many cases is owed in important part to the rich variety of the existing buildings within them. That variety should be supported with preservation of the best that exists and the encouragement of compatible new development that is still true to its own time. In other cases, neighborhood character derives in important part from consistency in the physical character of development within it. That consistency, too, should be supported.
- Rich diversity also comes from the singular flavor given by many local businesses. City development and fiscal programs should encourage the preservation and enhancement of village businesses, particularly locally owned ones.
- Those facilities and institutions that provide a social and functional focus for neighborhood or village coherence and exchange should be embraced, encouraged, preserved, or even expanded. Often they are public, such as neighborhood schools and libraries, while others are non-profit, such as clubs, and occasionally they are local-serving businesses.

❖ **A STABLE BALANCE OF USES.**

The current balance among categories of land use – residential, business, and public – provides a sound fiscal circumstance for the City, a fine residential quality of life, good availability of services, and virtual balance between the number of jobs located within the City and the number of workers resident here. As noted earlier, that balance has apparently changed little over recent decades.

- Accommodating the inevitable and generally beneficial dynamics of change should be accomplished without major

departure from the current balance in the extent of broad categories of land use, whether through rezoning or otherwise. Exceptions should be supported only when shown to provide benefit not only to the interests directly involved but also to the quality of life in the City at large in the long term.

- We must re-commit our “Garden City” to preservation, maintenance, and acquisition of open space. Land use decisions must incorporate a commitment to open space. The “balance” of privately owned but still open land versus that which is urbanized is clearly at risk in a mature, desirable, and bounded community such as Newton.
- We need to deploy a creative array of tools to assure that the process of “development” has integral to it a commitment to efforts at balancing building with stronger stewardship for the remaining land that is not developed. Tools deserving consideration include clustering, negotiating limited development coupled with open space preservation, or use of tax strategies for protecting open space. They and others can help protect the balance that is so central to this community truly remaining “The Garden City” in fact, and not just in name.
- Consistent with the density, intensity, open space, and other land use objectives stated here, Newton should encourage a wide range of uses which can provide skilled employment opportunities and significant tax base support, such as biotechnology and telecommunications uses.

❖ **TRANSITIONS OVER SPACE AND TIME.**

Economic, technological, and social change are encouraging land use patterns towards greater diversity of use, both within our village centers and throughout the City. This *Framework* not only recognizes that but draws benefit from it. Large-scale single-use districts, advocated in the mid-twentieth century, can beneficially

give way to greater diversity of use of one kind in our village centers, and of quite a different kind in our quiet residential neighborhoods where information technology is transforming patterns of work. Those changes heighten concern over the impacts of uses upon one another when intermixed at the fine grain now emerging.

- Rezoning or special permits that would create wide disparities between adjacent and newly permitted densities should be supported only in special cases where that disparity has a basis in light of a relationship to a village center, public transport, or similar consideration; and is justified by benefit to the larger community, such as through contribution to housing needs; and then only after full assurance of careful mitigation of impacts upon nearby areas.
- Intensive development must integrate transitional strategies when in proximity to low density uses. Zoning strategies might include transition area building height limitations, intensity of use restrictions, clustering, open space, and buffering, supplementing the protections that should be provided through careful performance-based controls over traffic, noise, air quality, and light pollution.
- Business, manufacturing and mixed use zoning districts which abut residential neighborhoods but in which land is currently largely used for less intensive uses should be studied and considered for less intensive zoning.
- We need to recognize the importance of protecting the character and ambience of residential areas in light of both pressures and opportunities brought by new technology and work patterns that are resulting in the growth of home-based work. City policy and regulations concerning home-based work deserve reconsideration in light of the reality of this contemporary era and both the enormous personal, social, and economic potentials

of low-impact home-based work and the importance of maintaining neighborhood ambience.

❖ **SERVING A DIVERSE COMMUNITY.**

We celebrate the diversity both between our villages, with their differences of character and role, and within those villages, with their diversity of uses, people, and organizations. On some subjects, however, that diversity makes finding consensus difficult, and land use is among those subjects. In part that difficulty arises because with rare exceptions, we as individuals have diverse and conflicting feelings within ourselves about the same subjects.

We feel strongly that people should walk or use public transport, but for our own travel we largely rely upon our cars. That reliance has profound consequence for land use, supporting exactly the type of development that we least want near us: large scale, region-oriented. On the other hand, we resist residential densities high enough to make pedestrian-scaled communities or even convenient public transportation really work. We object to large-scale business and retailing locating in our own villages, but we patronize and work in them elsewhere. We want Newton taxes to remain affordable to a wide range of households, but we commonly have concerns over the business development that can help in achieving that.

Reconciling those internal conflicts won't be achieved through easy rhetoric or any one or two actions. However, it can be achieved, as it has in some other communities, through careful and respectful dialogue. Actually doing that will be a key ingredient in developing a land use element for the comprehensive plan that is expected to follow this framework. In the interim, the following are appropriate directions for guiding land use in light of those diverse values.

It is vital that development contribute to the special sense of place that marks or is sought for each of Newton's villages, neighborhoods and other areas. Newton is structured around real *places*, not just

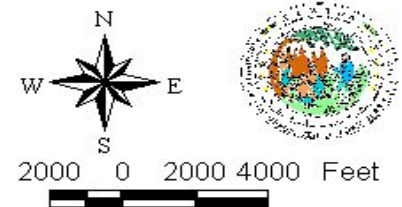
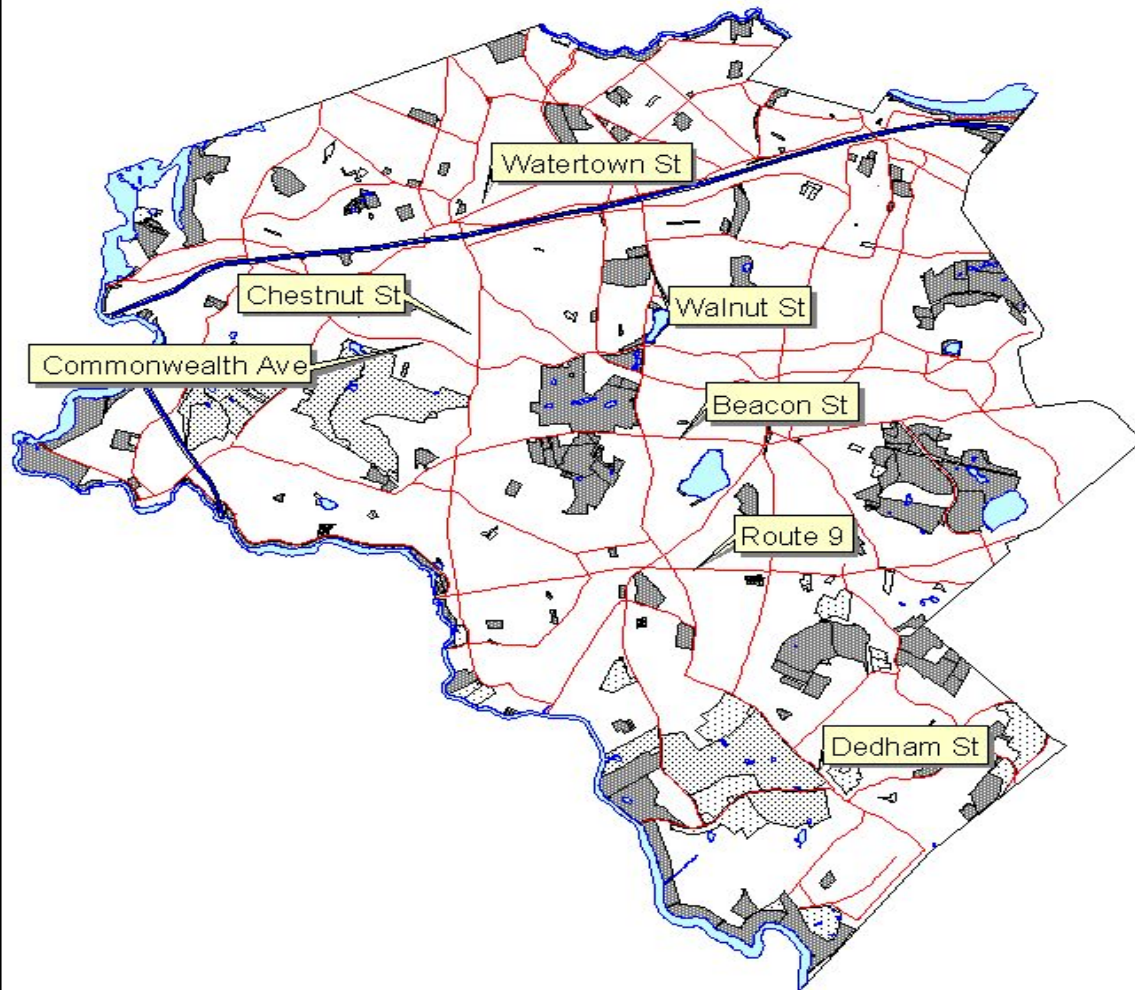
locations on a map. Real places are made up of elements that are interrelated, contributing to a comprehensible whole through some form of coherence, whether of space, design, function, social ties, or ideally all of those. Development becomes destructive when it fails to contribute to that inter-relatedness. On the other hand, good development can contribute to making places out of locations.

- Placemaking begins with interconnections: reasons for people to move among the elements of the place, and strong provisions for them to do so. No amount of skillful architecture and camouflaging with landscaping can make acceptable a stand-alone destination development unrelated to and inaccessible from its surroundings.
- Appropriate scale is an inescapable necessity for development to become an acceptable element of our places. Excessive scale is a near-universal quality of that development in Newton to which objection is commonly voiced. Development can be large (Newton Free Library) or even high-density (Newton-Wellesley Hospital) and still have appropriate scale if sited, designed, and operated with care.
- In an era when homogeneity of function and character is turning our metropolitan areas into a miasma of anonymous locations, Newton is blessed with villages each of which stands distinct from any other place in Newton or elsewhere. Another test of the development we want is that it contributes to that powerful character of place, and not to the anonymity which threatens to erode it.
- Large-scale development places large burdens on Newton's utility and traffic infrastructure, and has the capacity to overwhelm neighborhood and community-centered activities. Policy, backed by clear regulation, should assure that any future development will be compatible in scale, design, and impact with an appropriate context.

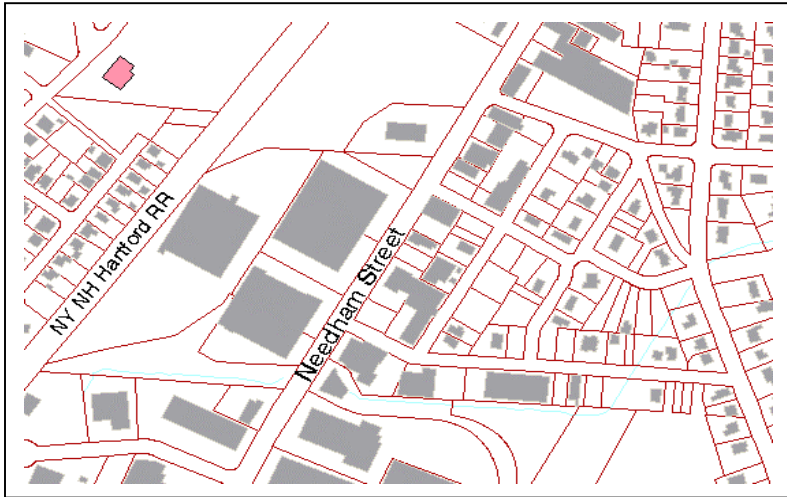
- Newton’s office inventory ranges from small professional and service offices scattered throughout the City and largely serving Newton residents, to large office buildings and complexes that are regional in nature. Any further expansion of large-scale region-serving offices should be guided through careful zoning rules to prevent adverse impact either on the City’s utility and transportation infrastructure or on its residential neighborhoods.
- Development or redevelopment of region-serving complexes, regardless of use or location, should reflect Newton’s village qualities, and where feasible, should even be integrated with those villages. Development and redevelopment should not result in more isolated stand-alone buildings that fail to join with their context in contributing to a sense of place. Such complexes should be designed to relate to adjacent village and residential uses, in contrast to the site-from-site buffered isolation too often produced in the past.
- Development of large-scale region-serving retailing is of special concern because of its traffic, safety, utility, and other impacts. However, identifying actions that the City should take to address that concern has been the most divisive topic the Committee has addressed. There is wide agreement within the Committee that new retail developments of more than some size, perhaps 20,000 square feet floor area, should not be allowed until adoption of new controls assures consistency of retail development with the intentions expressed above regarding village integration, relational siting, and impact avoidance or mitigation. Further, there is wide agreement on giving such controls high priority for prompt action by the City³.

³ A significant minority of the Framework Committee supported the following viewpoint. The development of new high density, stand-alone complexes and/or so-called “big box” retailing is inherently incompatible with the qualities of community that the City is pursuing, and therefore should be prohibited, while redevelopment of existing complexes should be encouraged to embrace the village integration and relational siting suggested here.

Land Use City of Newton



MAP DATE: May 10 2002



The Needham Street corridor, where debate has brought Newton's economic development policy into prominent discussion.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

■ ECONOMIC BACKGROUND

Newton has a balanced and stable local economy. It provides about 47,000 jobs within the City, just about equaling the number of resident workers. Despite occupying only about 5% of the City's land base, commercial and industrial uses pay nearly 25% of the City's tax levy, enough to, by themselves, support all \$22 million in FY99 City expenditures for police and fire services. Jobs and taxes are the usual concerns for economic development, with tax revenues and the service excellence they support being the more prominent concern in our highly accessible metropolitan context.

Approximately 3,700 firms are located within the City. The resident unemployment rate commonly is about half that found statewide (e.g. 1.7% in 1998 versus 3.3% statewide).

Newton's economy, like that of the United States, has evolved from agriculture to manufacturing, and now towards the service sector. In 1988, 36% of Newton's employment was in services; but by 1998 services had risen to 52%. Manufacturing employment declined from approximately 14% to 6% over the same period. In 1993, the service sector accounted for 50% of firms in Newton, while manufacturing represented only 3%. The shift toward the service sector, however, has also left the City susceptible to the impacts of corporate downsizing and restructuring, which has reached deeply into the managerial - professional ranks locally and in the region.

Other important sectors of Newton's economy in 1998 were wholesale and retail trade (25% of employment); construction (4%), transportation (2%), and the "FIRE" sector (finance, insurance and real estate) (6%). The majority of the 26 major employers (businesses or operations with 250 or more employees) in the City are in the service and/or "FIRE" sectors.

❖ GROWTH CONSIDERATIONS

Newton offers business an educated, able labor pool, a solid and extensive infrastructure network, and a diverse consumer market base. At least equally important, Newton's economic development is closely linked to that of the Greater Boston area, positioning the City to benefit from the projected economic growth and stability of the Greater Boston area. This could mean expansion toward newer industries, such as biotechnology and health care, as well as the establishment of increased international business links.

On the other hand, Newton's economic development prospects are tempered by the increasingly manifest concern by citizens over the impacts of such development on the residential nature of the city and the quality of life it offers. Newton residents are highly sensitive to development impacts, particularly traffic and parking, heightened by experience with traffic passing through the City destined elsewhere. In addition, the scarcity and consequent cost of developable land

relative to other similarly located suburbs can be a limiting factor in the expansion of the City's economic base, especially for large operations.

❖ **RETAIL AND THE VILLAGES**

While employment in retail trade declined slightly in the mid-1990s, it remains a significant sector of the City's economy (22% of employment within the City in 1998). In recent years, Newton's retail sector has grown and stabilized in tandem with the strong national economy. Despite national and local trends in this sector, Newton stands out from area communities because of its many vibrant and distinct "village" centers, which have served as historic focal points for local retail needs. These village centers also represent a potential for future retail development inasmuch as there is a growing trend toward specialized, small-scale retail. Newton residents are quite vocal in their appreciation of the convenience of shopping locally, lending further support for the potential for village scaled retail development.

The City, through its entitlement programs, has sought to use its capacity to forge different types of partnerships and programs between the public sector and local business people to encourage the recruitment, retention, and development of local businesses.

❖ **EMERGING TECHNOLOGY**

New technology such as telecommunications and shifts in economic sector dominance from manufacturing to services bring new considerations into Newton's economic development considerations.

The new technology sometimes relies upon new infrastructure: what rail, water, and sewer were to manufacturing now broadband communications and "telecom hotels" are to the new industries. Understanding and providing the new infrastructure can be as instrumental in development as sewerage capacity once was.

A growing share of business activity has far smaller impact on its surroundings than was historically the case. Factories and office or R&D buildings are far different in their impacts. Separation of business types into single-use districts is now a choice that can be made or not, rather than an obvious mandate.

The new businesses are highly adaptable in terms of their spatial accommodations. When office space is scarce or expensive then office activities easily and commonly move into structures built for other uses, even into our neighbor's homes.

Communications technology has for many business activities transformed old rules. Sometimes communications can substitute for travel: goods can be sold without customers coming to the premises, and office meetings can be held without workers leaving their homes. A new real estate offering in some places is the "zero commute-time" live/work space, made attractive by increasingly burdensome commuting and made feasible for some by telecommunications.

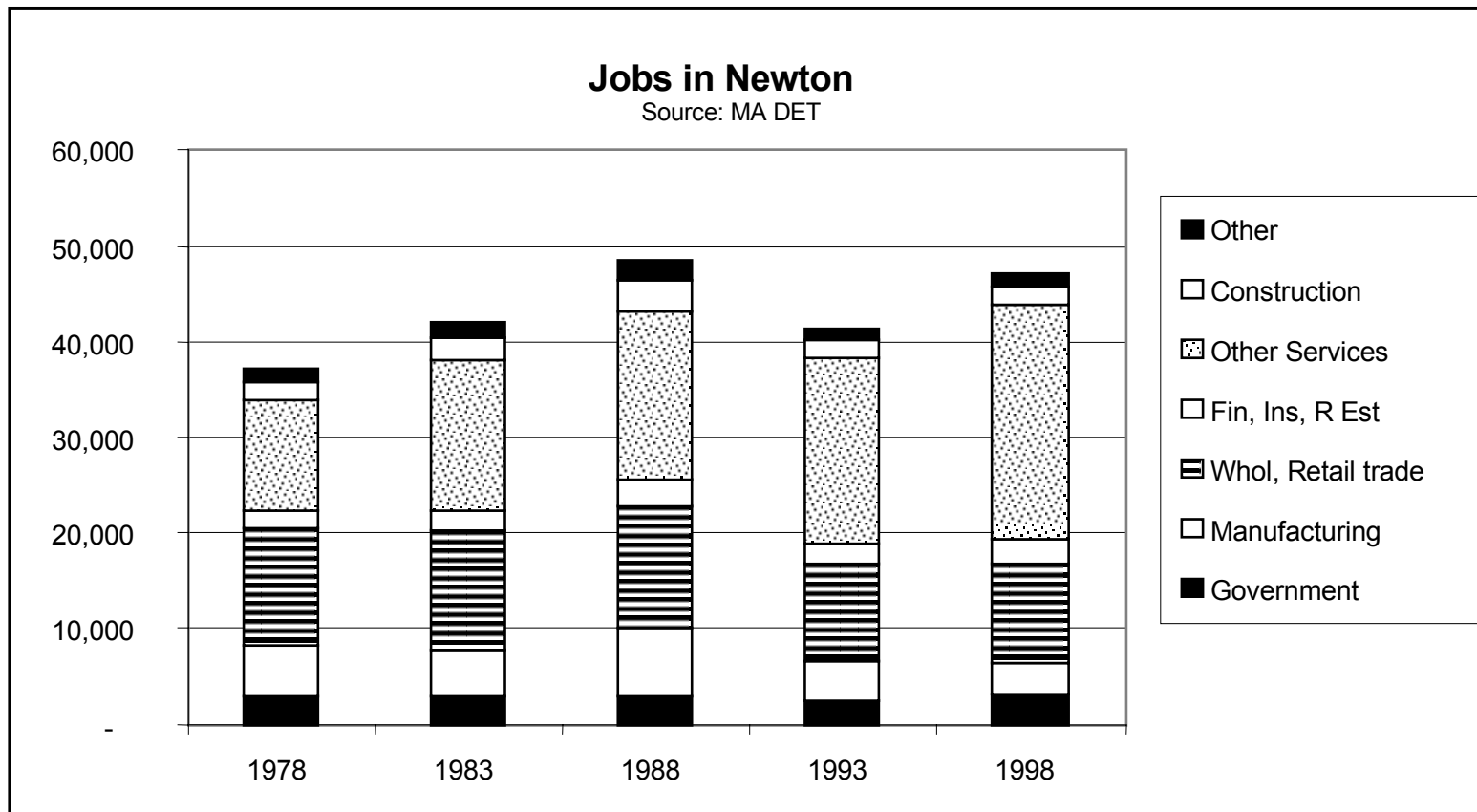
❖ **NEWTON'S ECONOMIC STRUCTURE**

Newton is both "balanced" and "stable," as evidenced by several indicators.

- The number of jobs within the City is almost the same as the number of residents in the labor force: 47,000 of each.
- Although population has been slowly declining, the resident labor force has remained remarkably stable in size (45,000 workers in 1980, 47,000 workers in 1998).
- Jobs have grown modestly over that period (41,000 jobs in 1980, 47,000 in 1998), more than keeping pace with growth in the labor force.

– Being part of a tightly interrelated metropolitan area, jobs in Newton are more a regional resource than a local one. Three quarters of Newton’s resident workers hold jobs outside the City, and three-quarters of the jobs in Newton are held by non-residents.

– Non-residential properties carried slightly less than 25% of the tax levy in the year 2000, virtually unchanged since 1980.



■ ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT VALUES AND APPROACHES

There are a number of important reasons for concern regarding economic development, even given Newton's apparent jobs balance and stability.

- New jobs are continually needed since the apparent stability is the result of a very dynamic homeostatic balance. About 10% of all jobs in virtually any community are lost over the course of a year through businesses relocation, closing, or reducing in size. Inevitable job and related tax losses need to be offset with new, relocating, or growing enterprises.
- A rich choice of nearby service and retail opportunities is a valued part of the quality of life for Newton residents. A large share of Newton's jobs are providing those valued services.
- The population diversity we seek can be supported in part through location of suitable jobs nearby, ideally within walking distance, for both the household's primary wage earners and for others holding part-time or second jobs. Particularly important are well-paying jobs in manufacturing and research and development, as well as part-time jobs for retired seniors or those reentering the workforce.
- Jobs are more regional than local but the property taxes of their workplaces are local, and are important to a high level of services. Further, the richness of cultural activities in Newton benefits measurably from leadership and financial support from local business.

These, then, are our fundamental values for economic development. Economic development, done appropriately, contributes positively to Newton. "Appropriate economic development:"

- Is correctly located;
- Produces minimal negative impacts;
- Creates benefits we desire;
- Reflects new technology and changing work patterns;
- Is achieved through a predictable process.

❖ CORRECT LOCATION.

● WHERE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT *SHOULD NOT* BE:

Commercial uses should generally not be allowed to expand beyond their current zoning districts and locations, as discussed in the Land Use chapter. That means we must find ways to enhance village retail without further expanding it into residential areas.

● WHERE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT *SHOULD* BE:

Good use should be made of existing buildings and infrastructure when pursuing opportunities for economic development:

- We should encourage and provide incentives for the preservation and reuse of the existing historic commercial and industrial sites and housing stock throughout the City, both for business and, where not preempting business opportunities, for housing, including low and moderate income housing.
- We should explore facilitating a mix of uses - residential and retail - in more areas of the City, since such mixing has served us well in business districts. Possibilities include housing over businesses in village centers where that can be done without displacing businesses that are dependent upon those locations and their rent structure.

❖ **MINIMAL NEGATIVE IMPACTS.**

Newton need not bring in development that needs a great deal of impact mitigation.

- In light of the City's stable economy and Triple A bond rating, the need for further economic development must be balanced with care that increased traffic congestion and other impacts from such development not bring damage to residential neighborhoods. We must not allow economic development to negatively affect the aesthetic appeal and beauty of the City. Newton's residential character needs to be maintained through sensitive management of development height, mass, and scale in transition areas – those areas of the City where residential zones abut commercial, industrial and business zones
- The need for economic development should also be balanced with environmental concerns. We should promote land management practices and development procedures that protect the environment and assure that future operations will also be environmentally benign.

❖ **BENEFITS WE DESIRE.**

We should think *positively* about economic development and *selectively* about economic development projects. We should define the benefits we seek and set them forth as City policy when reviewing development projects.

- Industry such as light manufacturing is an important component of Newton's economy because it is a source of well paying jobs.
- Multi-family housing, particularly near public transit and village centers, creates multiple economic and social benefits.
- Existing businesses need the support other businesses bring

through customers they attract to the area and purchases they and their employees make.

- In a very real way, our villages' commercial centers are our *community* centers as much as are our schools, libraries, and religious institutions.
- We seek to maintain a reasonable representation and choice of necessary, secondary, and tertiary consumer goods and services *within* our City.
- The economic development we seek should relate well to the service and employment interests of our population.

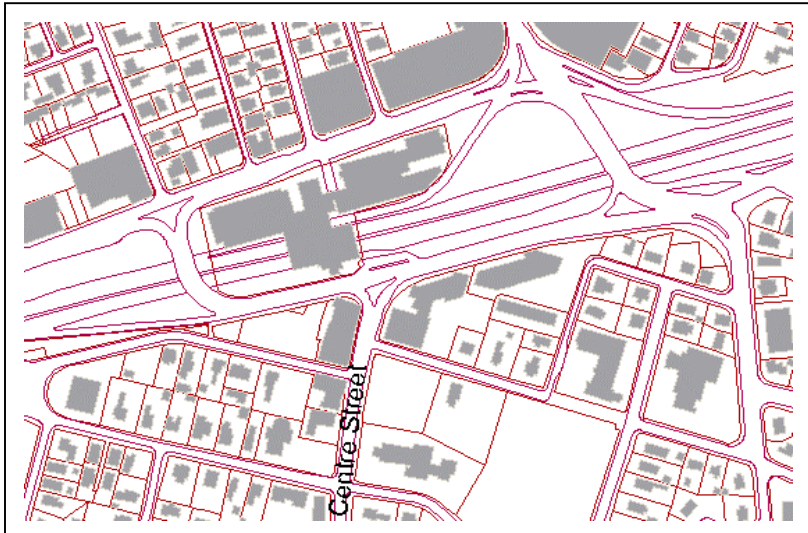
❖ **NEW TECHNOLOGY AND CHANGING WORK PATTERNS.**

New technologies and work patterns provide new opportunities for economic development and present new challenges to traditional ways of conceptualizing and regulating land use districts.

- We should systematically explore the potential impacts of those changes upon the City and its residents to assure that neither economic opportunities nor qualities of the residential environment are lost through failure of the City to act appropriately with regard to infrastructure and regulation.
- We should also systematically explore appropriate policy for residential neighborhoods in light of profound change in contemporary concepts of workplace and residence, the inevitability of expansion in near-invisible home-based work, the likely growth in worker frustration about commuting time, and shifting family role expectations, especially for women.

❖ **A PREDICTABLE PROCESS.**

- In all cases, development standards should be predictable and understandable. If we know what we want, we should let those who are planning development know what that is.
- We should make clear that contrary to the impression some have gained, the City is not hostile to business, but rather understands and supports the contribution that business makes through our interdependent relationship, and seeks avenues for strengthening the qualities of that relationship



A convergence of modes: Turnpike, express buses, other T buses, Nexus and cabs, but walking is a challenge and bicycling harder than that.

TRANSPORTATION: FROM FEET TO STREET

■ TRANSPORTATION BACKGROUND

On the doorstep of Boston, on the Charles River, on the railroad line to the West, and now at the junction of Interstate highways 90 and 95, Newton's accessibility has contributed greatly to its desirability and success as a community.

Success and convenience have a price: traffic congestion in village centers and infiltration of commuters' cars into residential areas in Newton Corner, Newtonville, West Newton, Auburndale, Newton Centre, Newton Highlands, Chestnut Hill and Waban. Traffic congestion is an issue on commuter routes to and from Boston, Cambridge and the high technology belt, along the Massachusetts

Turnpike (I-90), Route 128 (I-95), Boylston Street (Route 9), Washington Street (Route 16), Commonwealth Avenue (Route 30), and on Centre, Needham and other streets.

Jurisdiction over transportation is complex. In addition to the City, the State Highway Department, the Turnpike Authority, the Metropolitan District Commission, and the MBTA all play roles. Even within the City itself, transportation decision-making is complex. The Board of Aldermen, Traffic Engineer, Traffic Council, Police, Public Works and Planning departments each have a role. Even actions seen by many as solutions, such as facilities to promote use of bicycles, have engendered strong opposition in certain areas. The reconstruction of Needham Street has been studied and debated for over a decade. Newton has had a bicycle/pedestrian task force working on facilities proposals for the past five years.

One thing that is evident is the large number of changes made over the past thirty years. Before becoming a limited-access highway in the 1950s, Route 128 ran over what now are local Newton streets. The Turnpike Extension from Route 128 to Boston in the 1960's reused part of the Boston & Albany Railroad right-of-way to replace Route 9 as the primary auto route to Boston from the west.

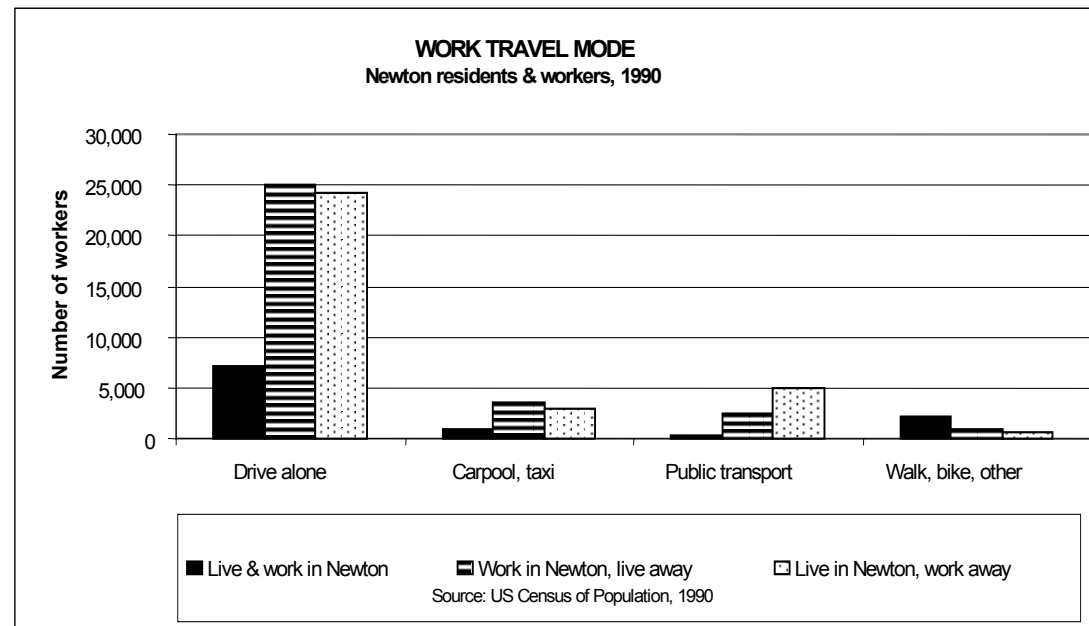
Public transport has also undergone major change. In the 1960's the MBTA Green Line "D" took over the "Highland" Rail Line through Newton to its terminus at Riverside, the Green Line "A" branch to Watertown was replaced by buses, and express buses took advantage of the new Turnpike extension.

Public transportation to Boston is excellent during popular hours from the three commuter rail stations, eight Green Line stops, or the express buses. For other parts of the City, other route destinations, or other hours, service is more limited or non-existent. It is difficult to travel via public transportation from Newton to communities other than Boston. Only the northern third of the City and the Walnut-

Elliot Street and Centre-Parker-Dedham Street corridors are well served with local buses. Many other areas are now served by the City-sponsored Nexus bus system, created in 1997. Nexus routes and frequency are necessarily limited, so ridership is also limited. While usage has increased recently, it is still well short of projections, and funding is severely limited.

That contextual reality can't be unilaterally changed by Newton, but neither should the City fail to do what it can to join with others in addressing that concern regionally. Neither should the City fail to do what it can within the City, given that reality.

No future transportation facility or service change of significance comparable to that of prior decades is currently projected, so growing travel demand is likely to be met with only marginally changing infrastructure. The largest planned transportation change impacting Newton is widening of a portion of Route 128 (I-95) between Routes 9 and 24. The history of Newton has been that of steadily improving accessibility, making it a commuter city. Continuation of such improvement no longer seems likely, with profoundly adverse consequence for Newton as we have known it.



■ TRANSPORTATION VALUES AND APPROACHES

Some look forward to a time when communications technology will deeply reduce our dependence on transportation to carry out our lives. Others look back wistfully at the time when dependence on travel by foot or horse reinforced our attachment to and identity with places. Despite both views, our present circumstance is one in which auto-based mobility shapes the nature of our society and metropolitan regions, and our dependence on that mobility is extreme. Accordingly, planning for transportation is at the heart of planning for the City.

❖ MOBILITY

We intend to serve the mobility needs of our entire community: to reach the array of places that contribute to our lives: work, shopping, school, recreation, health and other services, social and cultural opportunities, and our supportive network of friends and family.

- We seek to be a community in which mobility needs of those who don't drive are sensitively accommodated. For many of our residents, mobility depends on some means other than driving for themselves, since they are too young or too old or otherwise unable to drive, or cannot afford a car of their own. Even in a city such as Newton, those "auto-disadvantaged" make up about 30% of the population.
- We seek to serve mobility needs while making efficient use of resources. Driving alone by auto is a wonderful luxury, certain to remain central to the functioning of cities such as Newton for decades to come. However, such travel is not an efficient use of space, energy, other natural resources, or public funds. By aggressively promoting alternatives to single passenger auto vehicle trips, we can significantly improve our efficiency while serving, not limiting, mobility.

- We seek to achieve that mobility while avoiding adverse impacts on the quality of life in our City. The noise, disturbance, degraded air quality, and safety risks associated with auto traffic can erode the ambiance of the City that is being so carefully built and guarded, unless both land use and its associated traffic are skillfully managed.

❖ SUPPORTING AN ARRAY OF MODES

One key to serving all three values -- mobility for all, efficient use of resources, and avoidance of adverse impacts -- is to encourage use of the full range of available travel modes, not sacrificing some to the service of others.

Many modes of transportation exist in Newton, from walking to jogging to driving to cycling. We need to ensure that the city is hospitable to all of them. We need to consider the accommodation of all modes not only in our planning for transportation but also in the way that we as individuals use them.

- PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION usage can help to lower the number of vehicles on our roads by increasing the usage and availability of public transportation. There are steps the City can take to support its growth.
 - Work with businesses to create incentives for their employees to take public transportation.
 - Help enhance public information about schedules and routes.
 - Explore how the important service provided by Newton's local bus system, Nexus, can be assured over a long term in which outside funding can't be depended upon.

- VAN AND CARPOOLING, especially if supported through traffic management associations and similar groups that assist commuters through arranging for carpools, can serve as a clearinghouse and reduce the number of vehicles on the road.
- BICYCLING, which helps to broaden mobility and reduce auto use, needs facility support:
 - We seek to develop and maintain bicycle paths and lanes where feasible.
 - We seek to install bike racks around the city villages and by the public transportation stops.
- WALKING also needs and deserves facility support, often taken for granted but deserving careful attention.
 - All streets should have sidewalks or paths on at least one side, except where outweighed by low traffic levels and a “rustic” neighborhood character to be protected. At a minimum, there should not be breaks in the sidewalk system within blocks where sidewalks exist.
 - Good surface maintenance (including public and private snowplowing) and well designed and appropriately located access ramps should assure reasonable access for the whole range of walkers, including those with disabilities, those with baby carriages, and many others.
- A CLIMATE OF CIVILITY is important to promote in our moving through an increasingly congested world with many opportunities for conflict within and between travel modes.

❖ LINKING TO TRANSPORTATION

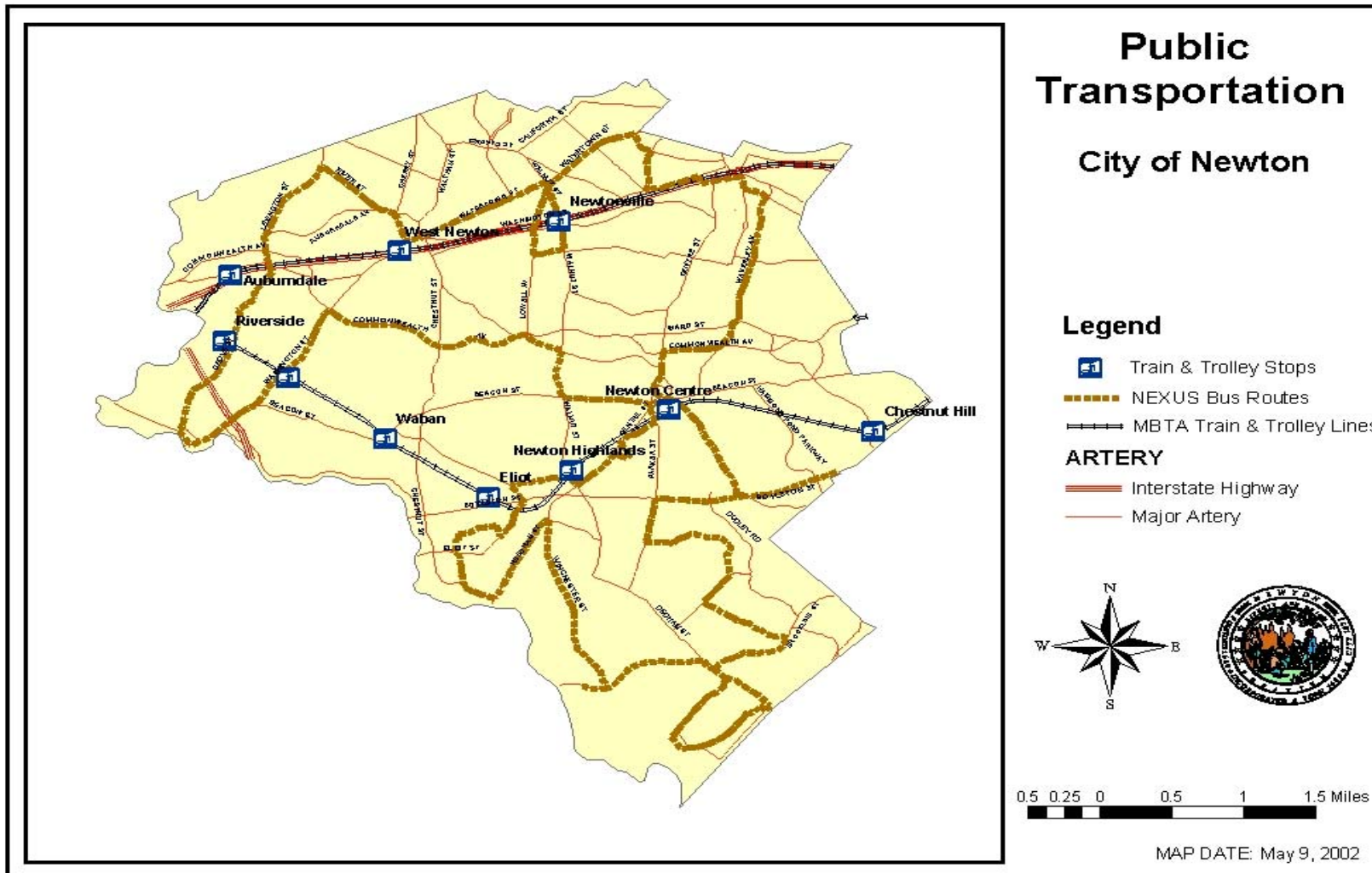
Despite all of the planning and documents that could be prepared on transportation, efforts will be less than effective if we do not adequately address the issue of access to transportation. Due to the way that our village centers and public transportation were developed, there is extremely limited parking near the various T stops and commuter rail stations.

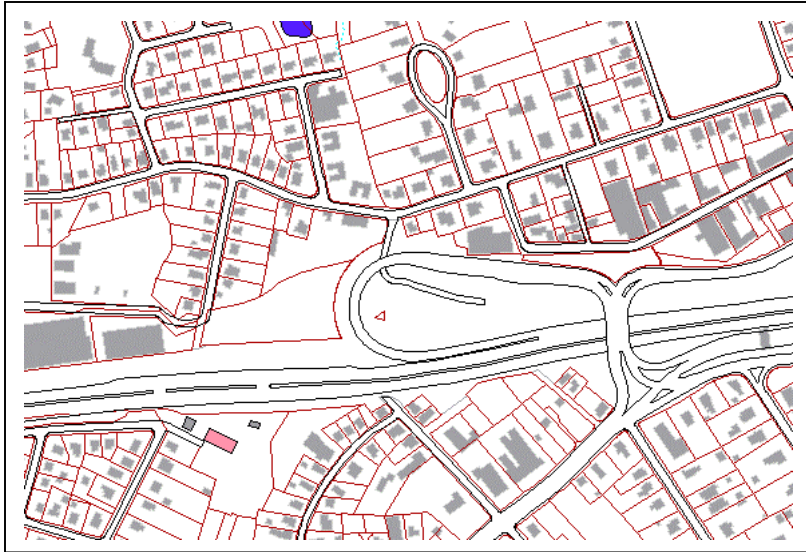
- For rail transit and express busses to be effectively utilized, riders need to get from their homes or work places to them.
 - One method is for patrons to drive. For that, parking facilities need to be provided so that commuters (both our own residents and those from neighboring communities) have the ability to access public transit and not congest our side streets with vehicles.
 - Another method is by a local feeder bus system, such as Nexus, with appropriately designed routes, stops, and schedules.
- To maintain and increase the economic health of our village centers, we intend to ensure that shoppers have access to adequate parking facilities, and for those facilities to be located and designed so not to make access more difficult for those arriving by other means, such as walking, bus, or bike.

❖ PLANNING AND ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

The treatment of transportation and mobility issues is singular in City government. No other topic of such size and importance is as lacking in any central institutional focus for planning, design, and administration. Consequently, multiple departments are working on similar if not the same issues and other issues may be missed by them all.

- The City needs to take a strategic approach incorporating all facets of mobility. Options include coordination among an array of departments, or perhaps transportation and mobility responsibilities within various departments should be transferred to one department to provide a focus for the planning process.
- In connection with the development of a strategic approach, we need transportation planning expertise, bringing all aspects of transportation together in an efficient manner, whether through staff addition or consultant services.
- Because of the salience of transportation concerns and the interdependence of actions on one aspect of transportation, such as commuter access, with others, such as neighborhood parking, a comprehensive transportation plan could be a key cornerstone to achieving improvements in mobility and traffic, and important in resolving land use concerns, as well. Such a plan should go beyond engineering solutions to congested locations. It should address:
 - Serving the mobility needs of all elements of the population;
 - Assuring that transportation needs are met without damage to the quality of life for residents of the City;
 - Taking full advantage of regional resources to address what inherently are regional concerns, and at the same time recognizing the responsibility of this City to shoulder its share of regional demands.





A recent housing accomplishment in the face of complexity: Women's Institute Crescent Street housing site.

HOUSING A DIVERSE COMMUNITY

■ HOUSING BACKGROUND

Newton's housing resources include:

- About 31,000 existing units having a wide diversity in design and type but offering few housing opportunities for any other than comfortably affluent households;
- A housing stock that now changes only slowly, in a City and region whose demographics are undergoing rapid change, resulting in a city of mostly large homes serving mostly small households;

- Annual entitlement commitments of federal funds for housing and related programs, something rare among suburban communities;
- An array of public and non-profit organizations working to broaden housing opportunities;
- A City whose citizens and government are committed to protecting the City's diversity and to serving housing needs.

❖ EXISTING HOUSING STOCK.

Currently, approximately two-thirds of Newton's 31,000 housing units are owner-occupied. Newton's housing is aging, the consequence of relatively little new construction. More than half of the existing housing stock was more than 50 years old in 1990 (see "Housing Age" chart, page 5). Newton's housing is expensive (see "Single Family House Value" chart, page 5). In 1998 only 11% of the single-family houses in Newton were valued at less than \$200,000, whereas more than 25% were valued in excess of \$400,000.

Housing types and costs vary widely among the City's villages and neighborhoods. Waban Village has the highest percentage of single family houses and the most economically stratified housing while Nonantum and Newton Corner have broader diversity. In general, the condition of the housing stock is good, even in the three neighborhoods - Nonantum, West Newton and Newton Corner - targeted for use of CDBG funding and programs.

❖ HOUSING CHANGE

Reflecting regional trends, the value of single family houses in Newton has risen dramatically. *Banker and Tradesman* reported that the median sales price of a single-family house in Newton was \$277,000 in December 1996 and \$412,000 in November 1999.

Nearly 9,000 Newton residents live in rental housing, and it, too, is expensive. The U.S. Census counted approximately 6,000 low-to-moderate income households in Newton in 1990, but there are only 1,600 rental units in the City committed to serving that income range. City studies indicate that about 2,900 households having incomes below 50% of area median pay over 30% of their income for housing, and half of those households pay more than 50% of their income for housing.

In the last 40 years, about 1,500 units of housing for low and moderate income residents have been developed in Newton through both new construction and rehabilitation of existing units, totaling about 5% of the housing stock. Such units are programmed to be affordable to households with incomes under 50% of regional median income (“low income”) or 80% of regional income (“moderate income”), with residents spending no more than 30% of their income on housing. Recently nearly 100 units formerly restricted to serve that population have been converted to much higher “market” price levels as a result of expiring legal restrictions on their rental or sales price.

The mix of housing structural types has been gradually shifting over time. Based on US Census data, single-family homes declined from 68% of Newton’s housing stock in 1960 to 57% in 1990. In 1996 through 1999 (the most recent data available) only 44% of the new units authorized on building permits were single-family. The share of Newton’s housing units in structures of five or more units grew from 7% in 1960 to 18% in 1990. Only 14% of the units created 1996-1999 were in that category, the big increase being in structures having two to five dwelling units.

❖ FINANCIAL AND INSTITUTIONAL RESOURCES

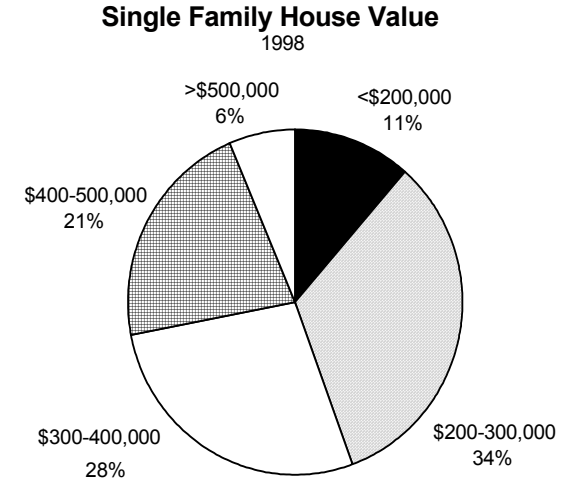
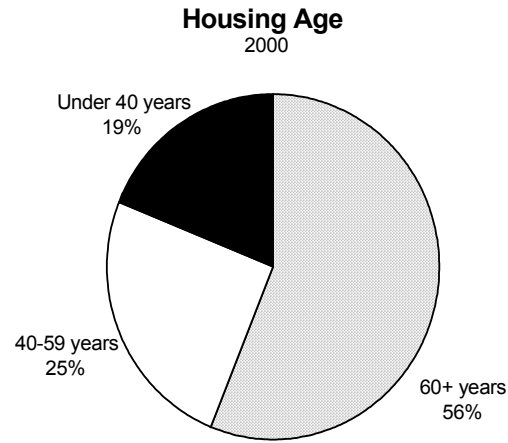
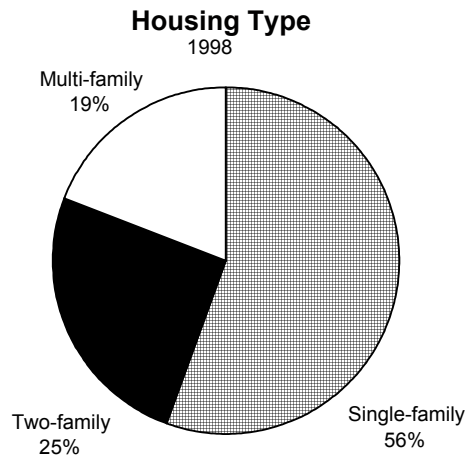
Newton is served by a rich array of organizations that are addressing housing needs. The Housing and Community Development Division of Newton’s Department of Planning and Development provides

staff and structure for a variety of housing-related efforts. The Newton Housing Authority manages an inventory of more than 600 housing units under state or federal programs, and administers rental assistance serving hundreds of households in privately owned units. The Newton Housing Rehabilitation Fund (NRF) commits federal and State funding for housing rehabilitation. The Newton Housing Partnership provides policy and project review input. The Planning and Development Board acts on approval of grants and loans from federal and state funded but city-controlled sources.

Outside of City government, there are a number of Newton-based non-profit organizations that conceive of, find financing for, develop, and manage affordable housing efforts. Through their diversity, those organizations bring sensitivity to and advocacy for a wide variety of housing-related concerns more effectively than would a more centralized approach, but decentralization also creates needs for coordination and cooperative approaches.

Unfortunately, financial resources for housing in Newton are not as robust as organizational ones. The City annually receives federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds, and gains funding under a variety of other federal programs, as well, but the amounts have grown smaller over time. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts has greatly reduced funding to assist in development of rental housing, and provides only modest support for ownership units, such as through “soft second” mortgages.

The City itself provides no funding for housing efforts, but has harnessed some of the resource its real estate values create to serve housing needs. Newton’s first-in-Massachusetts inclusionary housing zoning, variously called the “10% Ordinance” or the “20% Ordinance,” has required “internal” subsidies for housing developments being allowed higher density through special permits. More than 400 affordable housing units have been created through that mechanism, but almost half of those units are no longer restricted to being affordable, those limits having expired.



■ HOUSING VALUES AND APPROACHES

❖ PROTECTING THE CITY'S DIVERSITY.

Supporting diversity is one of our primary goals. To accomplish that, we need to undertake a program of positive actions that will assure fair and equal housing opportunities for a population that is at least as diverse as the present population in age, race, household type, life-style, cultural heritage and economic status. That diversity should not only be welcomed but should also be actively sought, and that diverse population should find suitable housing at affordable costs. That means:

- It should be possible for persons like our own children to live here.
- Housing stock should match the economic diversity of the population.

- Housing should provide for the needs of groups such as the elderly and people with physical or mental disabilities.
- Achievement of housing diversity should come through both support for the siting and construction of housing that contributes to the diversity of housing opportunities, and through creative utilization of the existing housing stock.
- The share of housing that is affordable by regional norms should grow no less in Newton than statewide. At minimum, there should be no net loss of affordable or subsidized housing in the City.

❖ THE BREADTH OF DIVERSITY

- Diversity should be sought both between and within the City's villages and neighborhoods. Housing efforts should explicitly include broadening of opportunities in all parts of the community.

- Housing affordability in Newton is a problem not only for low-income residents, but for many others, as well, and housing efforts must recognize that.
 - We urgently need to address the loss of moderate-income housing that is occurring through the actions of the market, through expiration of earlier instituted price constraints, and through physical change in existing properties.
 - In particular, we need to address and discourage the displacement of existing affordable housing to make room for more expensive housing.
 - We need to seek affordability in all forms of housing being developed in the City, not just in relatively large multi-family developments.
 - We need to address the declining amount of rental housing available in the City to serve those for whom it is appropriate, with no net loss of rental housing as a target.
 - While addressing broad affordability needs, we need to also address the needs of special populations, including a large and rapidly growing elderly population, those with disabilities, and those who need supportive services as well as housing, such as those needing or transitioning from emergency shelters.
 - Accommodating lifestyle diversity is also important, and supporting co-housing and cooperative housing can help to achieve that.
- Retaining the physical, aesthetic and economic diversity of the existing housing stock is a key means of accomplishing our intentions. That means:

- Encouraging, promoting, and assisting with the preservation and continued residential use of existing housing.
- Encouraging and assisting in the maintenance, upgrading, and restoration of existing housing units, and addressing such issues as lead paint risks, wheelchair accessibility, and energy efficiency.
- Where appropriate, assisting the maintenance of conditions meeting building and health code requirements.
- Supporting siting of affordable housing in all neighborhoods of the City.

❖ **UTILIZING EXISTING HOUSING STOCK**

Because the City’s future housing stock will largely be housing that already exists, that existing stock needs to be addressed as the primary vehicle for meeting housing objectives. That means:

- Modifications to existing housing that serves housing goals, such as creating accessory apartments, should be given inducements to serve those goals.
- “Affordability” restrictions attached to housing units because of subsidy or other programs need to remain in place as long as legally and economically feasible.

❖ **FINDING FINANCIAL RESOURCES.**

Accomplishing housing objectives in an era of shrinking federal and state housing resources will require creative approaches.

- We need to use local resources to leverage as much federal and state assistance as possible.

- We need to also seek a broad range of locally-supported sources of funding in addition to federal and state programs to support housing costs, including local businesses and financial institutions, through efforts such as “linkage” programs, as well as the City’s own fiscal resources through programs such as the Community Preservation Act.
- We should also join others as policy advocates in urging state and federal government support for the housing needs facing Newton and virtually all other communities.

❖ **COPING WITH A DYNAMIC MARKET**

To achieve housing objectives in a market requiring quick response for effectiveness, the City’s housing-related procedures need to be as refined as possible.

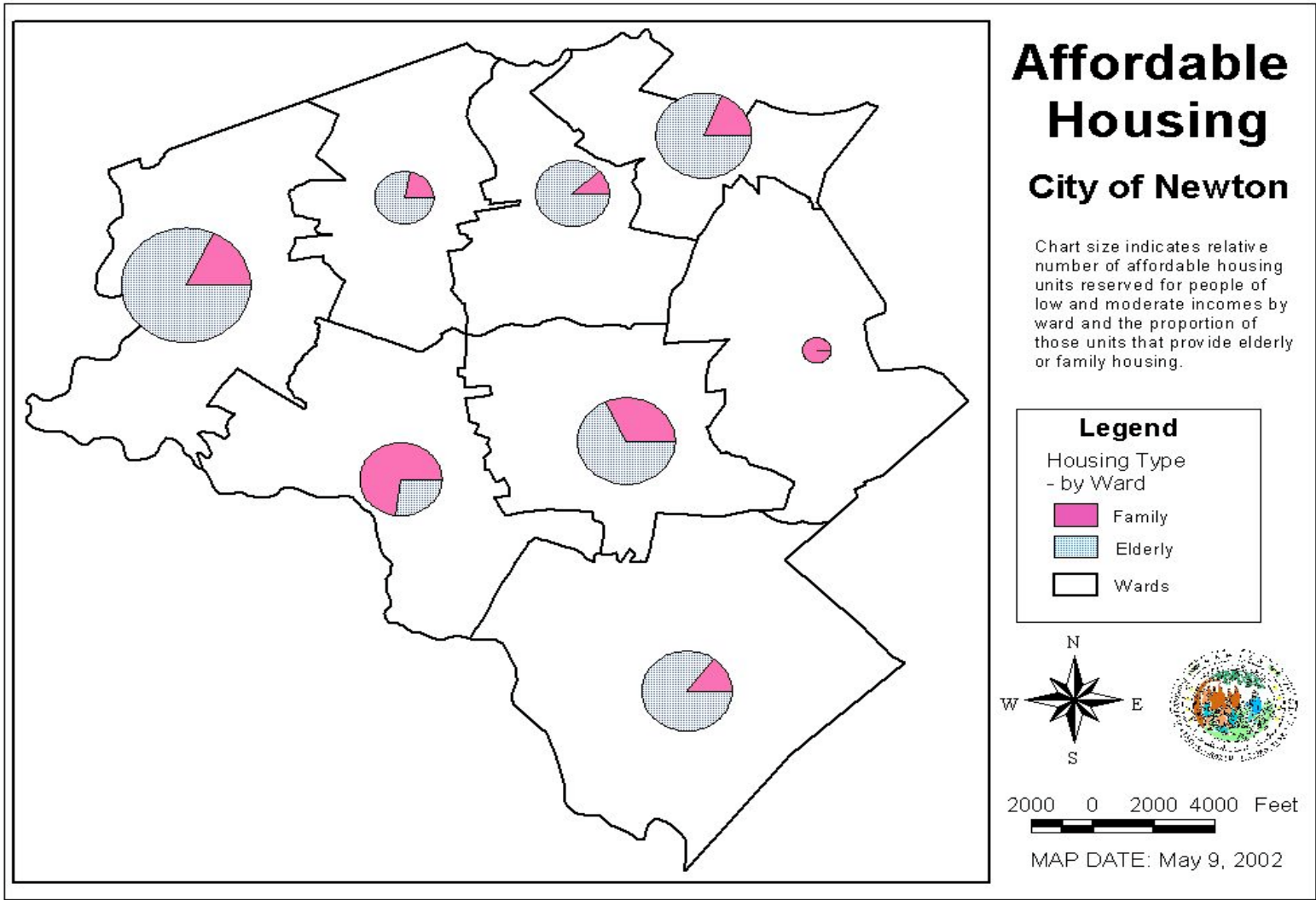
- Permitting processes for new housing proposals need to be expedited wherever possible, not by compromising City review responsibilities, but by streamlining procedures.
- Every disposition of publicly owned property should be publicly reviewed and evaluated for affordable housing before being committed for any other purpose.
- For small projects meeting pre-approved criteria, such as limits on subsidy per unit and consistency with programmatic objectives, individual review by the Housing Partnership and the Planning and Development Board might be expedited or eliminated.
- The Newton Community Development Authority or some other entity might be given the authority to acquire interests in property without prior Aldermanic approval, subject to appropriate procedural oversight.

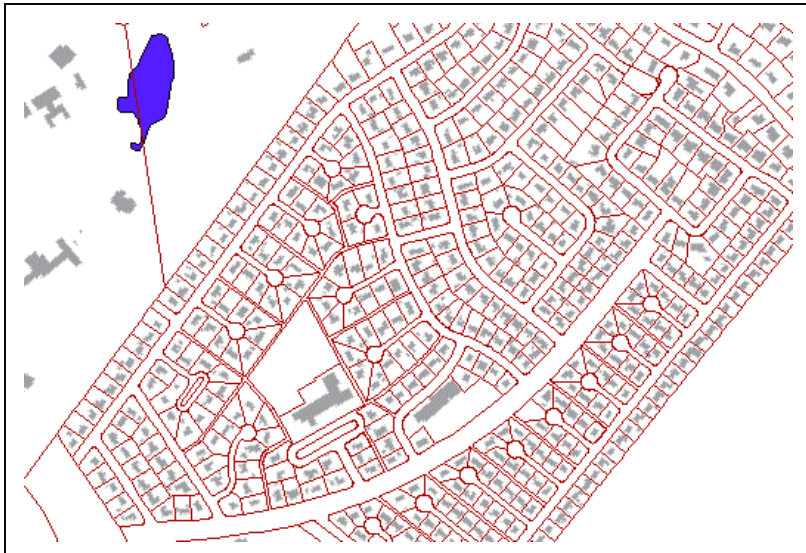
- Means of improving the capacity of the City’s network of small non-profit housing providers should be explored.
- Consideration should be given to reducing or waiving construction-related permit fees for non-profit housing producers.

❖ **HELPFUL ZONING**

Zoning should be designed (and revised as necessary) to both protect existing housing stock and to facilitate needed housing development at affordable costs.

- The densities allowed by zoning should be close to existing conditions so as to avoid inviting displacement of housing stock that serves important housing needs of the City.
- Allowing higher density through density bonuses or allowing multifamily where otherwise not allowed can, in appropriate circumstances, be a means for serving housing goals where such increases in development intensity are consistent with the land use principles outlined in this *Framework*.
- Revising zoning to actively support a mix of uses within a building, a parcel, or a vicinity can promote housing affordability, a broader variety of living circumstances, and when housing occurs together with retailing, a more active 24-hour vicinity.
- Revising zoning to allow housing at locations now restricted to business uses deserves careful exploration as a means of broadening housing opportunities.





Newly historic Oak Hill Park: a rich example of the complexities of Newton's historic legacy.

SOCIAL and CULTURAL CONCERNS

■ SOCIAL AND CULTURAL BACKGROUND

Newton has a proud, long history of cultural and social diversity, which is exemplified by its demographic make-up, a variety of social institutions, and by the array of public and private efforts to preserve and promote the historical resources and architectural heritage of the City. Newton's residents enjoy the fruits of Newton's historical settlement patterns, which have resulted in thirteen vibrant and pedestrian-scaled village centers set within verdant and architecturally distinct residential neighborhoods. Newton's population scale and density are high but nearly stable over three decades. At 81,000 residents, Newton's population was the eleventh

highest in Massachusetts in 1998. Newton's small-town structure and mood belie its suburban role in the Boston region.

❖ DIVERSITY

The diversity that Newton treasures is changing, broadening ethnically, narrowing economically. A 1996 survey documented village economic diversity at that point, showing that the median household income in Newton's ten zip code areas ranged from \$49,000 to \$97,000, but the range has probably narrowed since then, as housing prices truncate the range of households able to find residence here. Not surprisingly, racial data collected by the US Census in 1990 showed that only less than 5% of the population was Asian, 2% Hispanic and 2% Black, figures almost certainly lower than at present. At the same time, however, Newton is home to over 57 ethnic groups. More than fifty different languages are spoken by students in the Newton Public Schools. The U.S. Census (1990) indicated that the predominant groups of single ancestry then were Irish, Italian, Russian, and English, in that order. The 2000 Census will document large change in that order.

While Newton is generally affluent, its pockets of manufacturing along the Charles River originally supported working-class neighborhoods, many of which continue to be populated by families that have lived here for generations. Protecting that neighborhood stability is a challenge in the midst of regional economic prosperity.

Newton's social environment is also affected by diversity in family structure. In 1990, families headed by single parents comprised 10% of families with children, and 26% of Newton's households were categorized as elderly. The trend to an aging population has been growing in recent decades and will continue as "baby boomers" age, and has social implications for the City's housing and service programs.

❖ SOCIAL FABRIC

Newton has much civic pride and works hard to preserve its “livability” through its decentralized village and neighborhood life, political representation, and strong support for the arts, cultural and recreational programs and social organizations. The village and neighborhood fabric is the social and political backdrop for relationships in the City. Residents work together on local projects, support their schools and elect aldermen and School Committee members from each of the City’s eight Wards. Most residents live within walking distance of a village commercial center, giving a sense of familiarity and belonging to its residents. As a result, residents have created numerous neighborhood organizations that are also organized under an umbrella organization, the Newton Neighborhood Network.

❖ HISTORIC PRESERVATION

The City’s civic pride and cultural resources are well reflected in its historic preservation efforts. In the period from 1886 to 1939, the number of homes in Newton doubled. During those years what has been called “the finest and most comprehensive collection of late nineteenth and early twentieth century suburban residential architecture” in the Boston area was built in Newton. Today there are 1,500 buildings in the City identified as being “historic.” To preserve the historical integrity of the community, the City has adopted a Landmark Ordinance and a demolition delay ordinance that prevents demolition of historically significant structures for a one-year period, and the Historical Commission works with owners on strategies to preserve them. The City has also created the Upper Falls and Chestnut Hill local historic districts, each of which has its own Commission that is charged with the administration of local petitions. The Jackson Homestead Museum is also a guiding force in creating and maintaining awareness of Newton’s history and preserving its historical resources.

Newton is also beginning to grapple with preservation issues surrounding the housing and building stock that is currently turning fifty years old, specifically in areas such as Oak Hill Park and Auburndale. Many homes and structures in these areas were built in the post-World War II economic boom, and they thus represent an important period in the City’s history. Although these post-World War II houses are considered “modern”, the City is beginning to evaluate the need to acknowledge their historic importance.

❖ RELIGION

Newton’s 25 churches and synagogues provide social and educational activities as well as places of worship. Since the 1960s, Newton’s population has been divided equally among Catholic, Protestant and Jewish faiths. Today there are many smaller religious denominations that exist, as well. Many of Newton’s congregations allow congregations of other religious faiths to share their facilities. A strong Newton Clergy Association fosters this spirit of civic involvement and cooperation.

❖ CULTURE

Newtonians provide strong support for the arts in Newton and in the region. In the late 19th century, Newton’s riverbank in Auburndale was home to the famous Norumbega Park which provided many recreational and social opportunities, including a showcase for big-name swing band music during the 1940s. Today Newton is home to a major university, a number of other colleges and similar institutions, two symphonies, a myriad of music programs for children, the Jackson Homestead Museum, a weekly Farmer’s Market during the summer, weekly outdoor ethnic festivals, concerts and a multitude of other cultural activities.

❖ SOCIAL SERVICES

Newton's residents and businesses support a wide range of community non-profit social service programs, many of which are for youth and the elderly. The *Guide to Newton Resources* lists over 150 civic and social service organizations that are active in the City. Residents have also championed and pioneered many social causes. The City government created a Child Care Commission, a Recycling Committee and a Bicycle Task Force, and it has also instituted a smoke-free environment in restaurants. Finally, Newton was the recipient of the U.S. Conference of Mayors' and Heinz Foundation awards for being the first City in Massachusetts to administer a mandatory curbside recycling program.

■ SOCIAL AND CULTURAL VALUES AND APPROACHES

❖ GENERAL

- We are committed to maintaining the racial, religious, and economic diversity of Newton's population, and working to ensure that this diversity is reflected in Newton's governmental and volunteer organizations.
- We intend to protect citizens' rights to live in a clean, safe environment.

❖ CULTURAL & CIVIC

- Our intentions include each of the following.
 - Encourage public involvement and shared commitment to community life by providing space, technical assistance, easily accessible public information, and continued funding for public events such as parades and citywide festivals and the creation of new shared cultural events.

- Maintain a high level of cultural activity and civic participation.
- Maintain and enhance the high level of human services programs and outreach available for all ages and needs, such as children, teens, elderly, and people in crisis.
- Continue to support and expand services to seniors such as the Senior Center.
- Promote activities linking seniors with other age groups through intergenerational efforts such as the use of seniors as resources for the schools.

- A civic center is a persistent wish of many, serving a variety of interests including facilitation of many of the items cited above.
- Similarly, some see a need for a central vehicle for supporting connections among the cultural and civic activities in the City.

❖ HISTORIC PRESERVATION

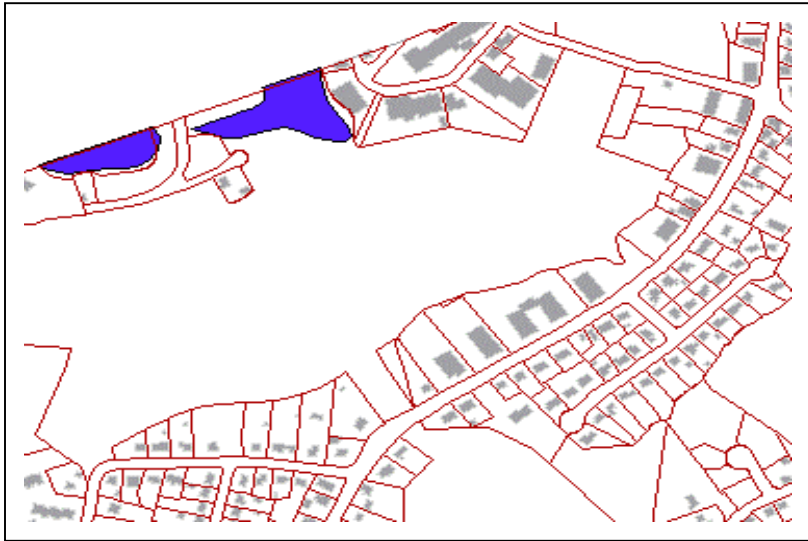
- Adopt a citywide Preservation Plan. Despite the significant efforts and initiatives taken by the City, Newton does not have a citywide Historic Preservation Plan. Such a plan would help inform and educate citizens and others about the City's values and strategies regarding its historic resources, as well as attempts to preserve certain structures, sites and districts. A preservation plan would identify and evaluate historic resources in the city and suggest preservation strategies to protect these resources. The Plan should be created with public input that would allow for open discussions of what citizens value about their neighborhoods and how they might protect their local historic resources. A Plan would also identify and specify how cultural landscapes could be protected.

- Identify, preserve and maintain significant historic and cultural resources that serve as visible reminders of the City's cultural and architectural history.

There is a need in Newton to identify significant historic and cultural resources that are unique by virtue of their exceptional historic or architectural history.

- Promote a community-wide appreciation of the importance of historic and cultural resources as community assets. Pursue education about Newton's cultural and historic assets through events and activities such as school programs, local forums for citizens, and publicity measures to create a higher profile for local historic assets (i.e. the Jackson Homestead).
- Offer homeowners support for alternatives to demolition that can help them achieve their goal of updating their historic homes without adding to the already great number of demolition requests that come before the Newton Historical Commission.
 - Promote understanding that these homes and structures are part of the long history of Newton and that they form part of a legacy that all of us should try to protect for future generations.
 - Provide information regarding sources of financial assistance for historic resource restoration.
 - Provide technical assistance to help owners understand their alternatives.
 - Establish an awards program to recognize outstanding efforts in preservation.

- Ensure the preservation of the character of the City's neighborhoods and villages. Local centers and villages are an essential part of Newton's character and historic resources are an important part of our villages. Therefore:
 - Every effort should be made to keep villages pedestrian-friendly.
 - Historic buildings should be retained and reused for retail or residential use whenever possible.
 - New construction should be of a scale that is compatible with existing structures.
- Promote the preservation and reuse of the existing historic housing stock and historic and commercial and industrial sites throughout the City
 - Make copies available of the many good case studies that can serve as examples for the reuse of historic public and private buildings.
 - Assure that the preservation plan identifies buildings that would be most suitable for reuse.
 - Municipal services, whenever appropriate and possible, should be housed in existing buildings.
- Ensure that review process and agency actions within the City are coordinated so that those projects involving historic resources can be carefully and fairly evaluated. The City's Inspectional Services Department needs to coordinate closely with the appropriate Historical Commission agencies so that the Commissions can sign off early in the process.



City land under study at Flowed Meadow: a potential site for public facilities?

PUBLIC FACILITIES AND SERVICES

■ PUBLIC FACILITIES AND SERVICES BACKGROUND

The City of Newton offers more than forty public services throughout the city, which aim at meeting not only the basic needs of the general population (i.e. police, education, trash collection, street lighting), but also the more tailored requirements of specific sectors of the community, such as the elderly, children and adolescents (i.e. senior center, outdoor recreation facilities, elderly health services). With the exception of activities and programs offered from City Hall or the Newton Free Library, City services and facilities are physically decentralized throughout the City to ensure accessibility and equity in their distribution. The quality and breadth of public services and facilities in Newton are high: some, as diverse as

schools and recycling, have received wide recognition for their excellence and innovation.

❖ EDUCATION AND SCHOOLS

Newton's rich history in education is one of its social and cultural assets. In the 19th century, the City became a national hotbed of progressive education and innovation. By 1812 Seth Davis founded the Davis Academy which broke new ground in teaching methods and curriculum. Horace Mann, "father of American public school education," opened his teachers' training program in Newton in 1844 and was soon followed by Nathaniel Allen. Newton residents have continued to make education a strong social value and a community priority since that time.

Sixty-percent of the City's budget is committed to providing the highest standard of excellence in public education. More than 11,000 pupils are currently served through twenty-one public schools. There are also approximately 17 private and parochial schools in Newton serving approximately 16% of Newton's school-aged population. Newton hosts about 400 Boston students enrolled in the Newton schools through the METCO program. Newton is also home to a number of institutions of higher education, with Boston College being the largest. Seventy-two per cent of the adult Newton population has some education beyond a high school diploma. Currently, more than eighty percent of students graduating from Newton schools go on to college.

A cornerstone of Newton's public facilities roster is the City's school system and infrastructure. There are 15 elementary schools, 4 middle schools and 2 high schools servicing the City. Recently, public investment in the school infrastructure has helped place 1,548 interactive computers throughout the City's school buildings. All of the middle schools have been given classroom access to the Internet; and a wide-area network has been established to connect city schools via satellite dish. Television production equipment has been

purchased, which allows two-way live broadcasting between the middle and high schools.

Planning is currently underway for the expansion and upgrading of high school facilities to address capacity needs, program needs, and building deterioration and obsolescence.

❖ PUBLIC SAFETY

Newton was ranked “Safest City in America” in 1998 for cities of its size. We have a nationally accredited Police Department that meets 346 standards set by the Commission on Accreditation, a distinction earned by only four other Massachusetts police departments. The City’s Fire Department has an A-2 Insurance Service Organization rating, which results in the lowest attainable property insurance rates. Furthermore, the Fire Department offers enhanced emergency medical support services 24 hours per day, seven days per week.

❖ RECYCLING

Newton’s recycling program received an Excellence in Recycling award from MassPIRG and the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection. In Fiscal Year 1998, more than 40% of residential solid waste was recycled at savings to the City of \$639,000. The percentage recycled has been increasing each year.

❖ USE OF SURPLUS PUBLIC BUILDINGS

Responding to falling enrollments and fiscal constraints, in the past the City also set precedents in the recycling and rehabilitation of public surplus buildings, though at the cost of losing some important functional contributors to neighborhood cohesion. There are at least a dozen major public building reuse projects in Newton, such as the Brigham House (a former library that will be re-used as a community center) and the Claflin School (a former elementary school that was converted into seventeen artists’ dwelling units, three of which are

administered by the Newton Housing Authority). About six other public schools have also been converted to housing use. The City’s Senior Center, once the Newtonville village library, now serves almost 3,000 seniors annually and offers a wide variety of programs, including hot lunches, legal services, aerobics, medical screenings, and community meetings.

❖ RECREATION

Newton also provides its residents with an array of active and passive recreational facilities ranging from boating and bocce to indoor sports facilities (Newton North Indoor Recreation Center). The City also sponsors cultural activities and services. The year-round Newton Arts in the Park program won the National Dorothy Mullen National Arts and Humanities Award from the National Parks and Recreation Association for creating programs that enrich the community.

❖ LIBRARIES

The Newton Free Library is the busiest public library in Massachusetts (600,000 visits per year) and it has a circulation of over 1,300,000 individual materials. The City’s library system includes the Central building on Homer and Walnut Streets, as well as four other branch libraries (Auburndale, Newton Corner, Nonantum and Waban). A series of programs and services are provided within the Library System, such as cultural and educational programs, literacy programs, technology training, children’s programs and an extensive array of reference services and resources.

While Newton’s public facilities and services are generally acclaimed both within and outside of the City, area residents and public officials recognize the need to closely monitor quality and breadth, as well as consider ways to continually improve and strengthen the services. As greater attention is given to environmental issues and “smart” growth, Newtonians are

increasingly demanding higher environmental standards in the provision and maintenance of their public services. Similarly, another prominent concern within the community is ensuring that the services and facilities are accessible to all residents, in particular senior citizens, children, adolescents and the disabled. In this respect, there are on-going efforts to coordinate Nexus bus routes and schedules with the more popular public facilities, as well as with the needs and schedules of residents.

■ PUBLIC FACILITIES VALUES AND APPROACHES

❖ GENERAL

- All public facilities, properties, streets and infrastructure should be maintained at a high level of quality, cleanliness and energy efficiency so as to ensure a healthy and beautiful City environment. This can only be accomplished through a continuous, planned program of preventive maintenance and timely repair.
- Assure that all City facilities are accessible to all citizens, including those with disabilities.
- Reduce to the greatest possible degree pollutants that may emanate from public facilities and infrastructure. Protection of the environment, both inside and outside, should be a very high priority whose status is constantly monitored.
- Expansion of institutional uses should be sensitive to neighborhoods and available infrastructure.

❖ EDUCATION AND SCHOOLS

- We are committed to the highest standard of excellence in public education. Educational priorities include safety, equitable

distribution of resources, providing current educational tools and technologies appropriate to grade level, maintaining and upgrading facilities to meet changing program requirements, and providing excellent teachers and administrators.

- Maintain all schools at a safe, serviceable level.
- Increase the capacity of the high schools to accommodate the projected growth in students beyond present capacity and to accommodate programmatic needs.
- When economically feasible, the City should maintain ownership of all school buildings. If they become underutilized, lease space but do not sell any site.

❖ PLANNING FOR COMMUNITY SPACES

There is need for a thoughtful Citywide plan to develop and maintain community facilities to house programs for youth, elderly and general meeting space for civic functions.

- That plan should consider creative use of existing space in schools and other public buildings off-hours that can be used for civic purposes at minimal cost.
- That plan should also consider the establishment of an intergenerational, multicultural community center. Despite the significant number of private clubs and community centers, many citizens do not have access to them. A careful study is warranted to determine the demand for and financial feasibility of building and operating such a facility.
- That plan should also explore if, how, and for what purposes the War Memorial auditorium can be upgraded to enhance its usefulness to the community. In particular, ways should be examined to enhance the acoustical characteristics of the hall.

- Planning for community facilities should reflect the important role such facilities can play as a key elements in providing a focus, an identity, and a functional asset for a village or neighborhood in addition to whatever its role may be in Citywide provision of services.

❖ **RECREATIONAL FACILITIES**

Newton’s recreational facilities and programs are of exceptional value to the City, and we are committed to their care, maintenance and upgrading.

- Recreational facilities should be well maintained, safe and accessible to assure equitable access.
- Recreational programming should be targeted to all age groups, sexes and income levels.
- A code of conduct for volunteer coaches should be established and disseminated to contribute to a context supporting good sportsmanship.
- We should examine the feasibility of building or acquiring a municipal ice rink.

❖ **MUNICIPAL SERVICES**

- Ensure the continued efficient delivery of clean, potable drinking water to all parts of the City.
- Examine the desirability of establishing a municipal electrical system to negotiate with suppliers and oversee the quality of service delivery.

❖ **OTHER SERVICES**

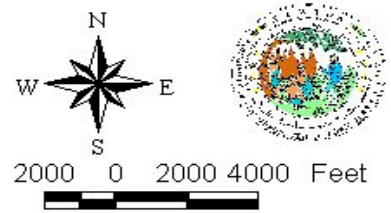
Other services are discussed in other Chapters, including 4 Transportation, 5 Housing, 6 Social and Cultural, and 8 Natural Environment.

Selected City Facilities City of Newton

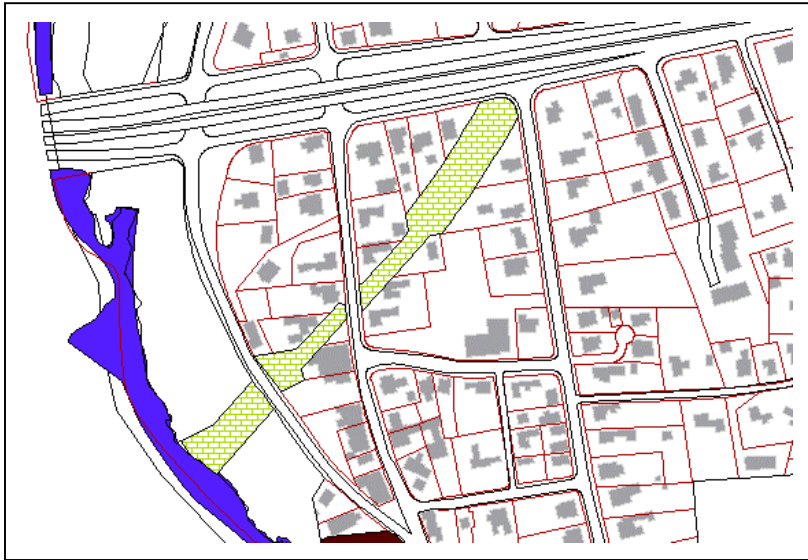


Legend

- City Facilities
- Major Streets



MAP DATE: May 10 2002



The Sudbury Aqueduct and Charles riverfront at Echo Bridge: key assets at the urban/environmental edge.

PROTECTING THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

■ NATURAL ENVIRONMENT BACKGROUND

The name “Garden City” certainly reflects Newton’s tree-lined streets, parks and open land, and its adjacency to the Charles River and other waterbodies, but that name can mean more. Environmental sensitivity and efforts in the City go well beyond those features to include less visible concerns and achievements, as well. Environmental sustainability at both local and global scales is addressed seriously by efforts within the City, and so too is the value of open space as a social resource, often providing a neighborhood focus and a setting for social interaction.

❖ RESOURCE BASE

The area of what now is Newton lay under water just 350-400 million years ago. The last glacier receded from this area only about 14,000 years ago. At this point the City’s surface ranges from a few feet above sea level to more than 300 feet elevation, contains 14 lakes and 14 miles of Charles River frontage, and has a rich variety of forms of surface geology including drumlins, eskers, outwash plains, nearly 300 acres of wetlands, and numerous slopes of 15% or more.

Newton’s environmental interdependence with the rest of the region is underscored by considering water resources. All of Newton’s drinking water is provided by the Massachusetts Water Resource Authority (MWRA), which also receives, treats, and discharges all of Newton’s collected sewage. The Charles River, critical to this City, is a regional resource managed through efforts of a variety of regional and state agencies, as well as an array of other communities that abut the river as it winds from Hopkinton to the Boston Harbor.

Newton has 985 acres of city-owned open space: 545 acres under the jurisdiction of the Parks and Recreation Department, 216 under the Conservation Commission, 84 acres under the School Department and 140 acres unassigned. The Metropolitan District Commission (MDC) owns another 268 acres of land, mostly along the Charles River. The Sudbury Aqueduct, aside from being a vital element of the metropolitan public water system, provides a swath of open space through this City. In addition to public lands, there are 1035 acres privately held for open space, half of which is land for three golf courses.

❖ ORGANIZATIONAL RESOURCES

There are a number of groups in Newton promoting a better environment. The City of Newton works with the Charles River

Watershed Association (CRWA) and the MDC to protect the river and to develop public access along and to the river. However, recent improvements to Auburndale Park abutting the River have focused largely on active recreational uses, while erosion of the shorelines and uncontrolled growth of non-native plant species such as loosestrife have resulted in a deterioration of the public's ability to enjoy access to the river. Other large water bodies in the city include Crystal Lake, Bullough's Pond, and Hammond Pond.

Newton Pride works to beautify the "Garden City" by planting trees and flowers across the city and by encouraging residents to buy and plant their own bulbs and trees.

The Conservation Commission is charged with protecting natural and water resources and regulating development near them. The Newton Conservators actively support stewardship of passive open space areas. The Green Decade Coalition/ Newton sponsors and promotes speakers on many environmental topics including sustainable development and integrated pest management. They have initiated Earth Day programs in the City since their founding in 1989. The Recycling Committee promotes recycling programs including Hazardous Waste Day and organizes volunteers for the Recycling Center. The Charles River Watershed Association is a very active and successful non-profit organization established to protect the Charles River and to protect, improve and expand the natural resources and recreational opportunities of the watershed. One of its more successful programs is the harvesting of water chestnuts, which choke other vegetation and wildlife out of the River.

❖ PROGRAMS

The city is working--in cooperation with the MWRA--to make significant investments in upgrading and maintaining its old and deteriorating sewer and water systems. Most of the sanitary and storm sewer lines in the city allow large amounts of preventable

leakage of ground water to seep into the lines. The result is upsetting the natural water balance in the watershed, and costs for the city in excess sewerage charges.

The city recycled 44 percent of all of its waste in FY99, close to its 50% goal. Almost all of its paper product purchases contain some recycled material content. Many recyclable materials as well as yard wastes and white goods (refrigerators, air conditioners, and stoves) are collected regularly at curbside. Other recyclable materials such as paints, household cleaning products, automobile batteries, and scrap metal are accepted at the Rumford Avenue Recycling Center. The City encourages the composting of yard and vegetable wastes and has in the past offered residents moderately priced compost bins. There are also several local auto-related businesses and recycling companies that accept used motor oil and car batteries.

Air quality is also a local environmental concern. Part of the initial hopes for the Nexus bus system was air quality benefits through reducing single-person auto trips. Nexus was once estimated to reduce such trips by 75,000 miles per year, with reductions of 735 kg/year of carbon dioxide, 99 kg/year of nitrous oxide and 735 kg/year of volatile organic compounds. In addition to encouraging use of public transportation, the City is trying to increase bicycle ridership. With each special permit that is approved, the Board of Aldermen has required petitioners to provide bicycle racks on site where appropriate. The Bicycle and Pedestrian Task Force is developing a bicycle pathway plan with consultant assistance. For several years the City has had a "smoke-free" policy in all public places including restaurants, now judged to actually contribute to an increase in patronage. In its most recent new environmental initiative, Newton this spring became only the 47th community in the nation to become a partner in the Department of Energy's Million Solar Roofs Initiative.

■ ENVIRONMENTAL VALUES AND APPROACHES

❖ PRESERVE AND MAINTAIN OPEN SPACE.

Newton's open space resources play a vital role in both the natural and built environment of Newton. We intend to provide funds to acquire, preserve, and maintain an adequate amount, variety, and distribution of both passive and active use open space that recognizes the specific needs of individual neighborhoods as well as the City in its entirety. For that purpose, we intend to institute programs such as these.

- Provide appropriate funding for open spaces, both passive and active, to maintain and enhance the quality of such areas. Improvements to signage, appropriate parking, linkage between unconnected parcels, sitting areas and nature trails will enhance the value of these parcels.
- Identify key private open space areas and develop a strategy to acquire or otherwise seek control of these spaces through public and private funding sources.
- Explore long-term zoning and tax strategies to preserve private open spaces such as golf courses and educational facilities.
- Evaluate the benefits of establishing a dedicated revenue source for purchase of priority open space and for maintaining existing lands.
- Provide legal safeguards to protect the open space associated with schools.

❖ PROTECT THE CHARLES RIVER AND OTHER WATER BODIES.

- Provide resources to enhance the quality of the Charles River

and all other bodies of water in the City. Provide resources to enhance the quality of appropriate access to the river, lakes and ponds, which is adequate to maintain their integrity for future generations.

- Foster regulations to reduce pollutants flowing into the Charles River and all other water resources. (See also IPM policy enforcement below)

❖ REDUCE INTRODUCTION OF POLLUTANTS INTO THE ENVIRONMENT.

- In order to begin to reduce air pollution and reduce our impact on global warming, increase energy conservation, encourage reduction in the use of personal automobiles and employ other methods such as:
 - Encourage energy conservation and the use of renewable energy in heating, air conditioning, and lighting buildings;
 - Working with utilities, create incentives for purchase of energy-efficient equipment for public and private use.
- Set annual goals to increase the percentage of recycling, re-using, composting, source-reduction and sharing in the City. Develop new programs to reduce solid waste and consumption such as:
 - Use a combination of financial incentives and requirements to provide maximum possible recycling of solid waste by municipal collection,
 - Encourage and educate residents to recycle, and explore how to facilitate schools, institutions and businesses joining in the spirit of the City's 50% goal, currently set only for residential areas,

- Investigate innovative successful programs in other cities.
- Initiate regular household hazardous disposal waste program.
- Review existing waste oil recycling programs and revise as necessary,
- Create programs to reduce winter salt use on private and City property,
- Review all dry cleaning plants in the City for safe chemical use program.
- Implement and enforce Newton's Integrated Pest Management Program (IPM) on public property and encourage similar programs on private property to prevent negative health impacts on citizens (especially children) from pesticide and herbicide use. Initiate Pollution Prevention programs.
- Have municipal actions serve as an exemplar for others, such as:
 - Increasing energy conservation and the use of renewable energy for City buildings,
 - Modifying City procurement procedures to buy products and services that reduce waste and use more products that include post consumer waste in their products.
 - Monitoring energy efficient practices in all City-owned buildings,
 - Phasing in alternate fuel vehicles for City owned vehicles.
 - Replacing/reducing grass on appropriate City-owned islands and other City open space with ground cover, eliminating

need for fossil fueled mowers.

❖ **MAINTAIN AND EXPAND TREE RESOURCES.**

Trees represent a community resource that benefits all citizens in Newton. Trees are beneficial in cleaning air, absorbing CO₂, conserving energy, reducing storm water runoff, absorbing sound, controlling soil erosion, adding value to real estate, attracting business, and beautifying our surroundings. With momentum already established by the Newton 2000 initiative, maintaining and expanding Newton's tree resources is an important priority of long-term planning. Some specific ways to fulfill this objective are:

- Implement and enforce the tree preservation ordinance adopted to encourage and require preservation of trees on private land subject to development or building replacement. Where preservation is not feasible, affected trees are to be replaced on site or elsewhere.
- Create a tree replacement fund to plant trees on public property. This fund would serve as a repository of moneys from private donations and contributions from developers where on-site replacement of trees was determined to be unfeasible.
- Explore feasibility of burying utility lines (electric, cable) during road improvements and sewer/water pipe replacement to reduce damage to existing trees during pruning operations.
- Enact zoning changes to encourage additional tree and shrub plantings in public and commercial parking spaces.
- Conduct a study and develop guidelines promoting better care of existing stock and selection of tree species for replanting.

❖ **ENCOURAGE ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY ACTIVITIES**

- Develop new programs to support community agriculture, expand farmer's market activities, and establish incentives for village and individual residents to initiate vegetable gardens.
- Develop and maintain City incentives to businesses located in Newton and doing business in Newton to increase and enhance their eco-friendly practices.

❖ **PROTECT REGIONAL RESOURCES**

- Important issues concerning wetlands, transportation, air quality, and water resources/quality require a broad, regional perspective. This recognizes that adjacent communities are experiencing similar environmental issues and that all municipalities would benefit from an interchange of ideas and approaches. Moreover, some environmental problems cannot be addressed solely at the local level requiring communication and negotiation with other local governments within our watershed. To effect this interchange, establish a process and mechanism for the City's continuous examination and response to our role within the regional resource base. Possible ideas to accomplish this are:
 - Establish an entity to review issues that transcend municipal boundaries and to recommend ways of improving dialogue with other communities facing similar environmental challenges.
 - Become a more active partner with environmental organizations to monitor state legislative activities, identify important issues potentially affecting Newton's resources, and provide a lobbying voice where appropriate.
- Continue the long-term process of improving sanitary and storm sewer systems to reduce inflow and infiltration.

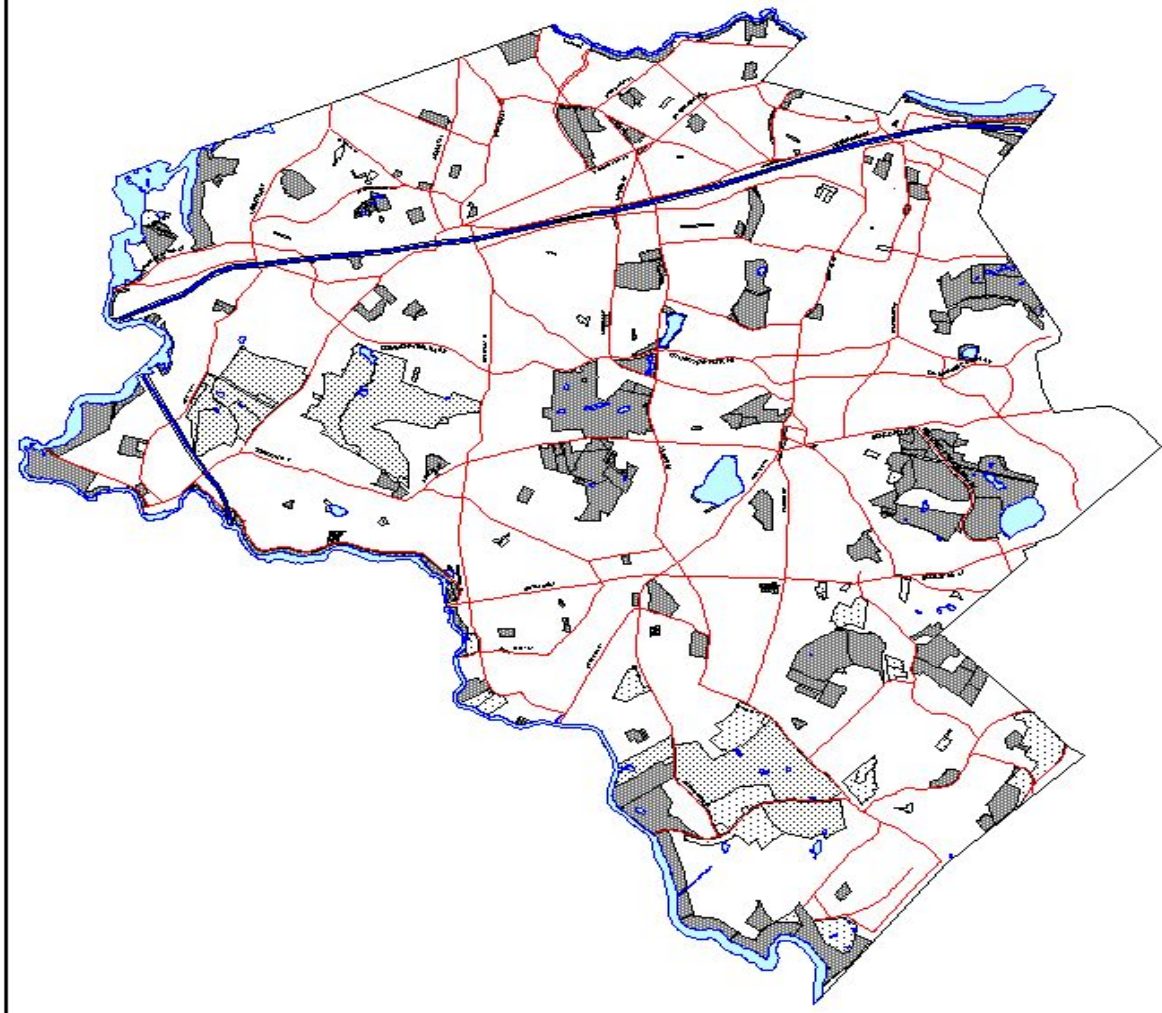
- Develop, implement and maintain a series of programs to increase water conservation both privately and by City government, such as providing incentives for private and public land holders to collect and use rainwater and graywater for irrigation.

❖ **BUILD INSTITUTIONAL AND INFORMATION RESOURCES**

- Provide resources to research, document, and regularly monitor the geological, biological and environmental resources in the City to better protect our environmental resources. Implement ongoing programs to accomplish this such as:
 - Compile an inventory of natural resources for inclusion in the City's GIS database, using input from personnel, organizations, and experts.
 - Identify resources that are at risk of damage, then target them for regular monitoring and preservation efforts.
 - Give properties adjacent to targeted areas high priority in the City's long-term planning strategy.
 - Revise zoning regulations to protect identified resources.
- Provide an awareness and appreciation of our environmental resources as a valuable educational experience to Newton's citizens, including school age children, while benefiting efforts to identify and maintain those resources. Implement specific projects to achieve this goal such as:
 - Develop, implement, and maintain programs to teach students and inform adults about existing environmental programs, resources, and activities.

- Encourage City departments to work with the Newton School Committee to improve and develop environmentally sensitive programs and activities (e.g., recycling programs, environmental nature center, Conservation Corps).
- Build capacity to accomplish the above approaches, using voluntary citizen commissions and/or effective City department responsibility for staffing.
- Do a diagnostic review of Newton's zoning to identify needed steps to achieve these values, and then pursue those steps.

Open Space



Legend

Open Space


- Public
- Private

Major Streets

- Interstate Highway
- Major Artery



Public Open Space:
Land owned by the Conservation Commission, Parks & Recreation, MDC, MWRRA, Newton Schools and some cemeteries.

Private Open Space:
Privately owned undeveloped land and golf courses.

W  E

S

2000 0 2000 4000 Feet

MAP DATE: May 10 2002

