



Sen Ki, 1255 High St.



Buckmaster Pond

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NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

BACKGROUND

This section of the Comprehensive Plan provides an assessment of natural, historic, and cultural resources in Westwood. Westwood's natural and cultural resources play a critical role in supporting the overall health and social viability of the community and contribute to the Town's historical and social identity. The overall landscape and social characteristics of a town are often what makes it most special and unique to residents.

Natural Resources

The topography of Westwood is varied with numerous streams, wetlands and ponds, fertile upland, and many areas of bedrock and rock outcroppings. The Town is in two watersheds. Two-thirds of the southern portion of Westwood is in the Neponset River Watershed and the northeastern portion of the Town is in the Charles River Watershed. Bodies of water and wetlands occupy approximately 155 and 464 acres of the Town's area, respectively. Buckmaster Pond at 28 acres is the Town's largest body of water. Since 1885, that pond has been available as a public water supply for the Town of Norwood. Thus, Norwood owns the water rights of Buckmaster Pond and is therefore limited in its recreational use. Westwood enjoys the land area around the pond with passive recreation in the park areas for hiking trails, picnicking, and birdwatching. A sidewalk along Pond Street provides scenic views. In the northeast section of Town is Rock Meadow Brook with small ponds (Lee and Storrow) and Powissett Brook draining Cedar Swamp and Storrow Pond to the Charles River. Westwood's Conservation Commission regulates the Massachusetts Wetland's Protection Act and local Wetlands Protection Bylaw.

In the southern end of Town, Bubbling Brook (defining the Town boundary with Walpole) joins Mill Brook at Pettee's Pond, flows through Willet Pond and into Ellis Pond. There they are joined by Germany Brook, which drains Buckmaster Pond and Pine Swamp. That brook eventually reaches the Neponset River via Hawes Brook. Purgatory Brook rises in Sandy Valley and Dead Swamp, flows to Purgatory Swamp where is joined by Plantingfield Brook and South Brook, then drains to the Neponset.

NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES – FINAL DRAFT

The Neponset River and its environs on the eastern border of Town bordering Norwood are part of an Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) which contains habitats of rare wildlife and priority habitats of rare species. The area is designated an ACEC by the Secretary of Environmental Affairs based on the significance of the natural resources: the river and its adjacent wetlands and floodplains, the associated aquifers and public water supplies, and the diverse wildlife habitats. The designation directs State environmental agencies to take actions to preserve, restore and enhance the resources of the ACEC, and is intended to encourage and facilitate stewardship by public and private owners. The Westwood portion of these environmentally sensitive areas is relatively small as most of the ACEC and habitat areas are in adjoining towns.

The Dedham-Westwood Water District (DWWD) has six wells in Westwood and eleven in Dedham. Westwood works closely with the DWWD by distributing all Planning Board applications to the DWWD for review and comment and participates in monthly staff meetings. Westwood has established Water Resource Protection Overlay Zoning Districts to protect, preserve, and maintain the existing and potential groundwater supply and recharge areas. Westwood's Zoning Bylaw requires a special permit application and public hearing when certain uses, new buildings or structures are proposed within 400 feet of a public water supply well and sets specific use and review criteria to protect Westwood's water resources.

Stormwater runoff is an on-going threat to water quality everywhere. In 2015, Westwood Town Meeting adopted a Stormwater Management General Bylaw to review and regulate stormwater to ensure proper treatment and quantity of stormwater runoff into the stormwater systems. The Bylaw requires review of any disturbance over 5,000 sq. ft. to control flooding and protect against contamination and illegal discharge. Westwood's Zoning includes Flood Area Overlay Districts to reduce flooding, preserve the ground water table, and limit development in areas prone to flooding. The Conservation Commission and Planning Board utilize low impact development techniques to review applications, including rain gardens, pervious paving, reducing the amount of pavement by narrowing roads, and capturing rainwater from rooftops and parking areas with best management practices.

The Open Space Residential Development (OSRD) Zoning Bylaw and the Flexible Multiple Use Overlay Districts (FMUOD) influence long-term development for environmentally sensitive areas. The OSRD provides residential incentives to conserve more open space. The FMUOD provides incentives, imposes performance standards and offers flexible solutions to challenging environmental and land restrictions.

Westwood has thirteen designated scenic roads: Canton Street, Dover Road, Downey Street, East Street, Everett Street, Fox Hill Street, Grove Street, Milk Street, Mill Street, Sandy Valley Road, Summer Street, Thatcher Street, and Woodland Road. The Board reviews proposed alterations such as the removal and trimming of mature trees and destruction of stonewalls with the intent of preserving the natural, scenic, and aesthetic character of designated scenic roads.

In 2018, the Westwood Community Trails program was established to oversee public education and use and maintenance of Westwood's existing trail systems. Westwood's Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety Committee has partnered with Hale Reservation to oversee and maintain the trails and promote Westwood's trail network. Monthly hikes and various clean-up events are underway and managed by the Westwood Community Trails program.

The Westwood Land Trust was established in 1999 to preserve open space and natural resources, retain Westwood's rural character, and support native wildlife. The Land Trust has successfully acquired and protected over 220 acres since its inception.

Historic Resources

Westwood's land was originally part of the 1636 Dedham Grant. Over the years, a separate parish known as Clapboard Trees was established which later became West Dedham. In 1897 that area was incorporated as the Town of Westwood. Early settlers were subsistence farmers who also harvested timber from the thick woodlands. Over the years, saw and grist mills were developed along the Town's brooks and ponds. Taverns on Washington and High Streets were the centers of commercial activities. The influence of the automobile on Westwood's development in the 1930s and there was a period of rapid development of residential subdivisions in Islington and in the High Street area. Much of this history is visible in Westwood's current land patterns.

Westwood's Historical Commission (WHC) works with other boards and commissions in planning and implementing programs for the identification, evaluation, and protection of Westwood's history. In 1995, the WHC documented the Town's history and over the next three years, conducted a multiple-phase comprehensive survey of Westwood's cultural resources. The survey catalogs the cultural resources of the major periods of the Town's historic development from the first colonial European presence to the 1960s. In addition to this survey, the WHC prepared a narrative history of the development of Westwood and a list of properties eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

In 1998 Westwood established two historic districts with the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC). One district is called the Colburn School-High Street District and includes 48 properties. The other is the Fisher School-High Street District with 20 properties. These districts stretch along High Street from Pleasant Valley Road to Church Square (the intersection of High, Pond and Nahatan Streets). A past inventory found a significant number of individual properties in Town are also considered eligible for National Register listing.

In 2016, Westwood Town Meeting adopted a Historic Structure Demolition Bylaw. The purpose of the Bylaw is to protect and preserve Westwood's historic structures constructed on or before December 31, 1910. The Bylaw gives authority to the Commission to impose up to a six month delay before the Building Commissioner may issue a demolition permit for historic properties. The goal is to encourage owners to seek alternative options to preserve historic buildings rather than complete demolition. The WHC has become more active and meets regularly to review demolition and pre-determination requests.

The Westwood Historical Society was founded in 1965 and is an active organization serving the community. The Society is a charitable, educational institution, supported by memberships and private donations with a mission to preserve Westwood's history, educate the community, and advocate for historic preservation. The following buildings and areas contribute to the Westwood's history and unique character:

The Town Pound: Initially part of the first land grant, was built as a place to hold animals that strayed from their owners and were waiting to be claimed. The pound was originally enclosed by a wooden fence and later a stone wall, which is depicted on the Town's Seal.

Oven Mouth: This is a Native American Landmark, also known as Devil's Oven. This cave was used by Native Americans during the Colonial Period of the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

Old Westwood Cemetery – West Dedham Cemetery: This cemetery was constructed in 1752 on Nahatan Street at High Street.

The Fisher School: Built in 1845 on Clapboardtree Street and is currently the headquarters of the Westwood Historical Society. The structure has been relocated a few times. For the past 20 years, every 3rd grade student in Westwood spends a day at the Fisher School studying the curriculum of 1868. The students wear period clothing and material to mimic the time. This program is run by the Westwood Historical Society with the support of the Westwood Public Schools.

The Colburn School: The former school building, constructed in 1874, and named for Warren Colburn, a Westwood educator who wrote the math book titled *Intellectual Arithmetic* that is used in Westwood's 3rd grade program at the Fisher School. This book was used by elementary schools in 26 states in 1868 and in countries throughout the world. The Colburn School building was historically preserved in 2012 for reuse as a mixed-use building with a bank on the first floor and six residences on the upper floors.

The Obed Baker House: Built by Obed Baker for his wife Betsey Metcalf Baker in 1812. As a young girl in Providence, RI, Betsey Baker learned how to make a fashionable straw bonnet. Up until that time, straw bonnets were only available from England. As the wife of Obed Baker, a local teamster, and taught other women this craft. The local bonnet makers supported local churches. Betsey is listed on Google.com as one of America's first entrepreneurs. The Obed Baker House was relocated to 909 High Street in 2002. Efforts to find a new use for this historic structure have continued.

Wentworth Hall: First built in 1884 as a one room schoolhouse, this building also served as the first Westwood Town Hall, a community center, a place for church services, a fire station, and offices for the Parks and Recreation Department, before becoming the Islington Branch Library in 1959.

Westwood Town Hall: This Classical Revival brick building with slate roof was designed by Stebbins & Watkins Architects of Boston, MA and constructed in 1910. It has served as the Westwood Town Hall ever since.

Cultural Resources

Westwood's cultural resources add to the community's character and sense of place. Westwood's cultural resources include a variety of organizations and institutions such as libraries, town services, special events and robust community involvement and participation. These cultural resources add to the overall community network and create a unique environment for residents.

The Westwood Cultural Council (WCC) helps provide cultural opportunities for residents by giving grants to community members wishing to provide opportunities in the arts and humanities for Westwood residents. The WCC receives grant funding from the Massachusetts Cultural Coalition.

Westwood's two libraries; the main library on High Street and the Wentworth Hall Islington branch as well as the Town's human services departments including the Council on Aging provide a wide variety of programming and services to the community such as book clubs, youth programs, speakers, information sessions, education, and social services for seniors, youth, teens, and members of the community. The Town's human service offices work to offer a wide range of services and activities for Westwood residents. Many of these events and offices have resided in the Islington Community Center (ICC) at the corner of East and Washington Street. In 2018, Annual Town Meeting approved a redevelopment project that includes relocating and renovating the Wentworth Hall Library and constructing an addition that will house the offices of the Youth and Family Services Department and provides a new multi-purpose space that will be available for use by the community.

A quarterly newsletter known as the Community Newsletter is mailed monthly to all households containing a wide variety of events and news to share with community members. In 2018 the Town created an electronic news bulletin the "Westwood Wire" distributed by email to subscribers. The Westwood Wire is managed by the Town Administrators office and is intended to share updates related to town services, important information for residents and local events. The Town's website serves as the hub of information.

Westwood residents are active in a wide variety of ways, and resident engagement efforts during the Comprehensive Planning process support further growth in community involvement. Westwood residents support more opportunities for resident participation, an increased sense of community among town residents, and support for diversity. Westwood currently offers a number of special community events that encourage cultural and community connection. Westwood Day is an annual community event held each fall and includes a variety of activities, entertainment, demonstrations, local vendors, a road race, and Westwood's homecoming football game. Saint Mark of Ephesus Orthodox Cathedral hosts an annual Greek Festival each September since 2014. The two-day event celebrates Greek culture with traditional food, music, dance, and activities. DiWali Festival of Lights is a community-wide event hosted annually each October or November by the Westwood Indian American Association. This event is an opportunity to share Indian culture, pageantry, food, fashion, and rituals with the Westwood community.

In 2019, the Westwood Library hosted an inaugural Eid ul-Fitr celebration to learn about the holiday and religious tradition for Muslims, who break their month long Ramadan fast by celebrating with friends and family. Finally, a Christmas Tree Lighting is hosted each year by the Town along with winter activities in front of Town Hall.

Special Places

During the early visioning process of preparing this Plan, Town residents participated in the development of a "special places" inventory. Residents were asked to identify those places in Town that define Westwood as a unique and special place. These could include outstanding views or landscapes, sites or buildings of historic value, or essential places in the community's life. These are places that give form to residents' internal images of the community, are identified with cherished rituals, or contribute subconsciously to everyday life. The sites listed below are among the many places identified with photographs or noted as favorite places during the survey or visioning session.

Open Space and Natural Features

NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES – FINAL DRAFT

- Hale Reservation - 1,200 acres of woods, streams, ponds, and meadows
- Lowell Woods
- Gay Street aesthetic and scenic road
- Buckmaster Pond
- Wentworth Conservation Area

Institutions

- First Parish Church
- Colburn School Building

Water Resources

- Buckmaster Pond - fishing derby in spring, band concerts in summer

Community

- Westwood Media Center – Westwood's local television for community and government programming

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

- Protect notable resources by fostering historic preservation and encouraging rehabilitation projects.
- Develop a strong policy for historic preservation enhancements.
- Increase opportunities for community gathering through artistic, cultural, and other place-making activities to strengthen the sense of community.
- Protect and improve access to open space and natural resources.

STRATEGIC APPROACH

Protection of natural, historic, and cultural resources requires a broad and cooperative effort among residents, businesses, institutions, community organizations, local agencies, boards and commissions. Regional intergovernmental coordination is necessary, since these natural resources are not confined by Town boundaries. Commitment to historic preservation should be prioritized and supported, and should include research from other communities that have successfully implemented historic preservation methods.

IMPLEMENTING ACTIONS

- NC1. Continue working cooperatively with neighboring municipalities, Dedham-Westwood Water District (DWWD), and regional groups such as the Neponset River Watershed Association and Charles River Watershed Association to protect the quality and supply of ground and surface waters and related habitat.
- NC2. Utilize the provisions of the Open Space Residential Development (OSRD), Flexible Multiple Use Overlay (FMUOD) and Environmental Impact and Design Review (EIDR) sections of the Zoning Bylaw and the Subdivision Regulations to achieve site design that is protective of environmental and cultural resources by:

NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES – FINAL DRAFT

- steering development away from sensitive areas such as steep slopes, wetlands and scenic areas;
 - requiring stormwater improvements for all redevelopment projects;
 - minimizing cut and fill, the area over which vegetation is disturbed; and
 - minimizing the amount of impervious surfaces.
- NC3. Encourage all new residential construction to be developed as an Open Space Residential Development (OSRD) supporting open space preservation and low impact development techniques.
- NC4. Provide connections to fragmented open spaces and seek to ensure, through the various means available, that contiguous areas of undeveloped land are maintained.
- NC5. Encourage economic development that is compatible with sound resource protection and management.
- NC6. Collaborate with the Dedham-Westwood Water District (DWWD), to continuously review and evaluate best practices to reduce and prevent pollution and contamination into the water supply and aquifers.
- NC7. Ensure that future sources of storm water pollution do not degrade water quality.
- NC8. Require improvement to existing stormwater management systems when sites are redeveloped.
- NC9. Provide incentives to encourage redevelopment of historic properties. Establish a historic preservation fund and network of historic rehabilitation professionals to be called upon when opportunities arise.
- NC10. Establish design criteria and apply a focused design review as part of the Planning Board's review process for new construction, particularly in the Washington and High Street Town Center areas.
- NC11. Consider providing zoning relief or other incentives for projects that preserve historic resources.
- NC12. Partner with University Station to host events at the Plaza and Park such as concerts, performances, and other cultural activities.
- NC13. Discourage use of invasive species by residents and encourage their removal and proper disposal.
- NC14. Adopt a tree preservation bylaw to protect and encourage the preservation of trees during construction.
- NC15. Establish a tree fund for new and replacement of street trees.
- NC16. Install Scenic Road signs on all designated scenic roads.
- NC17. Establish a historic plaque program to recognize historic renovations.
- NC18. Perform a survey of properties to submit eligible individual properties to the National Historic Register for listing.

NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES – FINAL DRAFT

- NC19. Revise and strengthen the Planning Board’s Scenic Road Regulations to address enforcement, encourage continued scenic views and preservation of stonewalls by requiring the re-use of stone from proposed removal projects and require tree replacement.
- NC20. Consider submitting additional streets for Scenic Road Designation such as Gay Street, Clapboardtree Street and any other roads that may embody the desired scenic character.
- NC21. Evaluate the effectiveness of the Historic Structures Demolition Bylaw and consider revisions to lengthen the demolition delay, provide incentives and alternatives to demolition of historic structures.
- NC22. Explore funding opportunities for historic preservation and cultural enhancement.
- NC23. Investigate the benefits of adopting the Community Preservation Act (CPA) to help preserve historic properties and open space. NC24. Develop a coordinated master calendar listing for all local cultural events and activities.
- NC25. Explore opportunities for “pocket parks and parklets” and other small or temporary gathering spaces throughout town.
- NC26. Utilize Westwood Community Trails Program to organize trail maintenance and organize volunteers to lead hikes and other events.
- NC27. Collaborate with Massachusetts Division of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) to establish trail and sidewalk connections to Blue Hills Reservation.
- NC28. Develop maps, brochures, electronic material, and signage to promote and raise awareness of existing trails, conservation areas, and historic sites.
- NC29. Work with the Neponset River Watershed Association and DCR to improve opportunities for use of the Neponset River as a recreational resource, including a canoe launch.
- NC30. Seek ways to increase recycling and reduce solid waste disposal such as public education campaign for best practices to prevent contamination and providing recycling receptacles at all public places such as parks, fields, and town centers.
- NC31. Partner with Westwood Cultural Council to continue to promote and highlight cultural diversity and educate the Westwood Community.
- NC32. Continue to pursue the historic rehabilitation and reuse of the Obed Baker House, as well as ensuring its preservation.
- NC33. Promote the use of the Fischer School for meetings, activities and events.
- NC34. Explore the feasibility of recreating the historic Blue Hart Tavern.
- NC35. Design new sidewalks and pedestrian improvements to be compatible with the natural environment through design that respects natural features such as mature trees, stonewalls, and encourages natural buffers between vehicles and pedestrians.

RESOURCES

Westwood Open Space & Recreation Plan, Adopted by the Planning Board February 26, 2019, Conditionally approved by MA Department of Conservation and Recreation July 11, 2019.

Westwood Zoning Bylaw, May 6, 2019
Vision Session Preliminary Report, Special Places Campaign

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