



University Station



Islington Center

## LAND USE

### BACKGROUND

Westwood's land use pattern is fully established, with over 80 percent of the Town's 7,155-acre land area now committed through development or preservation. This condition, characteristic of a mature suburb, will continue to influence the community's future development. Since most of the land is either developed or protected from development, any significant growth is possible only through intensification of existing developed areas, or new development of unprotected open land, given that 11 percent of Westwood's current open space is unprotected.

The Town's existing pattern of land use is the product of historical factors and past policy decisions. At the time the Town of Westwood was incorporated in 1897, the area that became Westwood was mostly outlying farms and a few mills alongside streams. After the turn of the century, Westwood experienced a migration of wealthy families from the city who purchased the large farms in the northern and eastern portions of the town for seasonal or year-round homes. Around the same time, street railways were built along High and Washington Streets which gave rise to small-scale commercial development along the routes and attracted newcomers to settle. Following World War I, the automobile displaced the railways and the Town experienced its first wave of residential subdivisions in the areas of Nahatan/Pond Streets, north of Buckmaster Pond, and Windsor/Hampton Roads. A second larger wave of suburbanization began after World War II and continued for decades. The 1949 rezoning of property near the Route 128 railroad station for light industrial and business uses eventually yielded the Westwood Industrial Park in the 1960s.

This history is imprinted on today's land use pattern. Commercial development, civic institutions, and higher density residential development cluster along the radial corridors of High and Washington Streets, while land along Route 1 and the Providence commuter rail line support regional-scale business. The early estate areas still exhibit the lowest residential densities and largest tracts of undeveloped land, and the densities of the remaining predominantly single-family residential neighborhoods reflect the zoning policies in place when they were developed.

Of the Town's 11 square miles, 59 percent is residential (55 percent is single-family residential, and the remainder is two, three-family, or multi-family residential). Over the past two decades, the Town has averaged about 11 additional single-family homes per year (see Table X, Housing). Most of these, along with the new homes replacing teardowns, have not altered land use patterns

though there is some modification of neighborhood character. The Town's Open Space Residential Development (OSRD) bylaw has been effective in shaping new residential developments to preserve open space, protect environmental quality, and respond to the housing needs of the community. The most significant growth and diversification of the Town's housing stock has occurred with the mixed-use redevelopment of commercial properties at University Station and in Islington Center.

Under current zoning, future single-family residential development will continue to be small subdivisions, additional houses on scattered parcels, and redevelopment of existing residential properties. There is potential for multi-family dwellings in mixed-use developments within the four FMUOD overlay districts that permit housing described earlier in the Westwood Accomplishments sections and shown on the official zoning map.

The percentage of land in commercial and industrial use has remained stable (under 5 percent), but there has been an appreciable redevelopment of that land to upgrade and expand commercial square footage and value, provide public amenities, and generate significant new tax revenue. This was a result of the Flexible Multiple Use Overlay District (FMUOD) zoning being applied to many of Westwood's commercial and industrial districts. Most notable are University Station's two million square foot transit-oriented mixed-use development, and the revitalization of the commercial and civic uses in Islington Center. Essential considerations for any redevelopment in the town centers are the size, scope, appearance, and type of business activities, as well as compatibility with adjacent residential neighborhoods.

The second highest percentage of land use is open space at about 25 percent. This includes public and private land, both protected and unprotected. Hale, a private nonprofit organization holds the largest tracts of unprotected open space amounting to 7.3 percent of the Town's land area. Another 100 acres with little or no protection is held by Norfolk Golf Club and by Dedham Country and Polo Club, which are private golf courses. The Town owns 750.5 acres, of which 43 parcels totaling 557.27 acres under the care and custody of the Conservation Commission, four parcels with 72.99 acres under the control of the Select Board, and 13 properties totaling 120 acres dedicated to public recreation and educational uses managed by the School Committee or Recreation Commission [Further Detailed in the Open Space & Recreation Section]. All unprotected public and privately-held land is potentially developable for another use.

**Table X: Westwood Land Use - 2019**

<b>Land Use Type</b>	<b>Acres</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Commercial	211	3.0
Community <sup>1</sup>	238	3.3
Industrial	85	1.2
Institutional <sup>2</sup>	31	0.4
Mixed Use	137	1.9
Open Space	1,802	25.2
Residential Single Family	4,015	56.1

**LAND USE DRAFT – 10-20-2020**

Residential Two Family	35	0.5
Residential 3+ Units	140	2.0
Roads	461	6.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>7,155</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: land use figures and percentages were calculated using Town GIS and the Westwood, MA Online Assessment Database for Fiscal Year 2019. The full parcel is assigned only one specific land use.

<sup>1</sup> Community: schools, municipal facilities

<sup>2</sup> Institutional: churches and American Legion Hall

The predominant concerns regarding land use expressed by the public in the survey and visioning session include: maintaining a small town community character, especially in the town centers; preservation of natural resources and open space; expanding housing options; community cohesion; and fiscal stability.

Some elements of protecting community character are to manage the nature and appearance of the High Street, and Islington commercial districts; and protecting the Sandy Valley/Purgatory Brook and Noanet corridors. The character of the Town also depends upon social and economic qualities that land use may affect. For example, it is important to the character of the Town that current residents will still find appropriate housing here as they age, and that their children will have opportunities to live here as well.

Every natural feature in the Town not already protected by ownership or control is a potential for development. Protection can be gained by open space acquisition, by conservation restrictions, or by shaping the development in the planning stage to provide protection, such as through Open Space Residential Development zoning. The 2000 Plan set as a modest objective preserving an average of 35 acres per year over the subsequent decade, bringing protected open land to at least 1,600 acres, and likely resulting in an approximately stable population. Between 2000 and 2018, Westwood Land Trust preserved an average of about 12 acres per year by securing conservation restrictions exclusively with private donations. Another 25 acres were preserved through conditions of approval on residential development projects.

Fiscal stability requires continuing to support economic development and doing so in ways that are not damaging to the basic residential qualities of the community. In 2019, commercial properties represented 16 percent of the Town's assessed valuations and 27 percent of total property taxes paid. The Town should continue to strengthen the commercial tax base to at least maintain this level of fiscal contribution and vitality from the commercial sector. This plan recommends this by calling for not expanding the geographic extent of existing commercial areas, but improving and intensifying uses, while continuing protection of open space by relying on OSRD and FMUOD and other review standards to preserve as much open space and other attributes as possible.

## **GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

- Objective 1:** Strengthen the design and quality of the pedestrian-oriented Villages, increase connectivity through pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure and micro transit alternatives such as shuttles and ride-sharing, while maintaining the sound character of the Town, both business or residential.
- Objective 2:** Guide residential development to protect open space, serve diverse social needs, respect resource protection, and have visual compatibility with the character of Westwood.
- Objective 3:** Promote business development consistent with the overall objective of protecting residential quality of life.
- Objective 4:** Protect key open space resources through acquisition, conservation restrictions, and regulatory protection.

## **STRATEGIC APPROACH**

The major land use patterns of the Town are essentially committed by existing use and infrastructure patterns and reinforced by land use policies and regulations. Requiring additional attention, however, are the smaller-scale characteristics of development: not just what gets developed or how much gets developed, but also the specific qualities of that development, and how those smaller-scale characteristics reflect the preferences and interests of the Town. These actions are critical to success.

## **IMPLEMENTING ACTIONS**

The order in which these actions are listed is not meant to signify priority but are arranged under subject categories.

General:

- L1. Foster a greater sense of community by connecting Westwood's commercial centers, schools and other institutions, open space resources, and recreation facilities through new or improved community gathering places, shared use paths such as walking paths, bike paths, trails, and shuttle services.
- L2. Support legislation to reform the state's zoning, planning, and permitting laws to provide the Town with additional tools to pursue local objectives and better planning.
- L3. Repurpose municipally owned property, when available, to advance the Plan's objectives for town centers, housing, renewable energy, and/or open space and recreation.
- L4. Develop policies and criteria for preservation of the character of the Town's residential neighborhoods and commercial centers.

To promote quality of residential development and diversity of housing opportunities:

- L5. Continue to prioritize use of flexible density-based residential controls with performance-based incentives, as contained in the Open Space Residential Development and Flexible

## LAND USE DRAFT – 10-20-2020

Mixed Use Overlay District provisions of the Zoning Bylaw, giving the Town a stronger voice in siting, environmental protection, and housing choice.

- L6. Conduct a review of approved OSRD projects to explore whether the process and outcomes could be improved through bylaw or regulation revisions.
- L7. Promote diversified housing through "cottage communities," small lot elderly housing, 2- and 3-family homes, small-scale multi-family housing, accessory dwelling units, and incentives for such developments.
- L8. Explore incentives and regulatory provisions to preserve and expand the stock of starter homes and moderately priced housing.

To support viable, sustainable, and compatible business development:

- L9. Strengthen the town's civic/commercial centers by promoting pedestrian-friendly, compact, mixed-use redevelopment, coherent community-oriented design, and featuring social gathering spaces.
- L10. Work with commercial property owners in the town centers to continually upgrade properties to maintain and attract local retail, restaurants, and services serving the community.
- L11. Formalize the Planning Board design review process by establishing standards for architecture, building orientation, materials, and site design to achieve attractive and compatible commercial buildings, particularly for the desired village and pedestrian business areas on High and Washington Streets.
- L12. Foster mixed-use redevelopment in the Glacier/Everett Business District area, encouraging a rich but compatible integration of office uses, industrial uses, retail uses, and residential uses.

To protect key resources:

- L13. As part of the Town's long-range financial planning, include continuing support for open space acquisition and protection.
- L14. Continue to identify open space, scenic, cultural, and natural features that are of special significance to the community and set priorities for acquisition or protection.

## RESOURCES

Westwood Open Space and Recreation Plan, Adopted by the Planning Board on February 26, 2019.

Fenerty, Marjory R. 1972. West Dedham and Westwood: 300 Years.

Westwood Annual Town Reports, 2000-2018.

Westwood Official Zoning Map, Amended May 2018.