

NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES – 10-17-20



Sen Ki, 1255 High St.



Buckmaster Pond

NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

BACKGROUND

This section of the Comprehensive Plan is an assessment of the natural, historic, and cultural resources in Westwood. It includes environmental, wildlife, and geological features, and is an evaluation of the cultural resources contributing to the Town's historical and social identity. Westwood's natural and cultural resources play a critical role in supporting the overall health and social viability of the community. The overall landscape and social characteristics of a town are often what makes it 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 to Buckmaster Pond, limiting its recreational use. Westwood enjoys passive recreation in the park areas around the pond for hiking, picnicking, birdwatching, and enjoying the views along the Pond Street sidewalk.

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. In the southern end of Town, Bubbling Brook, defining the Town boundary with Walpole, and Mill Brook both flow into Pettee's Pond and then 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 it is joined by Plantingfield Brook and South Brook, and then drains to the Neponset. Westwood's Conservation Commission protects these resources under the Massachusetts Wetland's Protection Act and Westwood's local Wetlands Protection Bylaw.

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The Neponset River and its environs on the eastern border of Town bordering Canton are part of an Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) which contains 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 actively serving on its board and sending all Planning Board applications to the DWWD for review and comment. Westwood has established Water Resource Protection Overlay Zoning Districts to protect and maintain the existing and potential groundwater supply and recharge areas throughout Town. Westwood's Zoning Bylaw sets specific use and review criteria and requires a special permit application and public hearing when certain uses and new buildings or structures are proposed within 400 feet of a DWWD well or within a Water Resource Protection District.

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 flood-prone areas. The Conservation Commission and Planning Board, when reviewing applications, require low impact design techniques including rain gardens, pervious paving, reduced pavement by narrower roads, rainwater recharge systems for rooftops and parking areas, and best management practices.

The Open Space Residential Development (OSRD) Zoning Bylaw and the Flexible Multiple Use Overlay District (FMUOD) promote environmentally sensitive development. The OSRD provides residential incentives to conserve more open space. The FMUOD provides incentives, imposes performance standards, and offers mixed-use solutions in appropriate development areas.

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. Under the Scenic Road Regulations, the Planning Board reviews proposed removal and trimming of mature trees and the destruction of ancient stone walls within a scenic road right-of-way to preserve the road's natural, scenic, and aesthetic character.

In 2018, the Westwood Community Trails Program was established to promote the use, maintenance, and awareness of Westwood's trails. It is overseen by the Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety Committee and administered by Hale to recruit and train volunteers, and organize trail programs such as hikes, trail maintenance, and clean-ups.

Westwood Land Trust was established in 1999 to promote the protection and stewardship of open space and natural resources in Westwood. Since its inception the Land Trust has successfully preserved over 220 acres by acquiring the development rights and placing conservation restrictions on Westwood properties.

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 developed along the Town's brooks and ponds. Taverns on Washington and High Streets were the centers of commercial activity.

The influence of the automobile on Westwood's development began in the 1930s after the demise of the two streetcar lines on Washington and High Streets and the rapid residential development in the Islington and High Street areas. Following World War II was also a period of significant subdivision development and population increases. Much of this history is apparent in Westwood's current land use patterns.

The Westwood 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. Included is 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. 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.

In 2016, Westwood Town Meeting adopted a Historic Structures Demolition Bylaw to help preserve Westwood's historic structures constructed before December 31, 1910. The Bylaw gives authority to the Historical Commission to impose up to a six-month delay before a demolition permit may be issued. The goal is to encourage owners to preserve historic buildings rather than complete demolition. WHC meets regularly to review demolition and pre-determination requests.

The Westwood Historical Society was founded in 1965 and 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, it was built 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. A sketch made in 1899 by Lucius Damrell which included a large oak tree within the stone wall is on the Town 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.

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The Fisher School: Built in 1845 on Clapboardtree Street and currently the headquarters of the Westwood Historical Society, this one-room schoolhouse has been relocated several times and now serves as a living history setting for school programs and cultural activities. For the past 20 years, every third-grade student in Westwood spends a day at the Fisher School studying the curriculum of 1868. The students wear period clothing and use materials of the time. This program is run by the Westwood Historical Society with the support of the Westwood Public Schools.

The Colburn School: This former school building, constructed in 1874, was named for Warren Colburn, a Westwood educator who wrote the math book titled *Intellectual Arithmetic* that is used in Westwood's third-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 as a mixed-use building with a bank on the first floor and six residences on the upper floors.

The Obed Baker House: This home was built by Obed Baker, a local teamster, for his wife Betsey Metcalf Baker in 1812. As a young girl in Providence, RI, she learned how to make a fashionable straw bonnet. Up until that time, straw bonnets were only available from England. She continued to make bonnets and taught other women this craft. 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 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. This includes a variety of organizations, libraries, Town services, and special events involving robust community participation. These cultural resources add to the overall feeling of community and create a welcoming 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. 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 and the Council on Aging provide a wide variety of programming and services such as book clubs, youth programs, speakers, information sessions, education, and social services for seniors, youth, teens, and other members of the community. 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

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constructing an addition that will house the Youth and Family Services Department and provide multi-purpose space for use by the community.

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

Westwood residents are active in a wide variety of ways, and resident engagement during the Comprehensive Plan update process demonstrated further growth in community involvement. Residents showed support for more opportunities for participation, an increased sense of community, and more diversity. Westwood currently offers a variety of special community events that encourage cultural and community connection. Westwood Day is an annual community event held each fall that 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 celebrating Greek culture with traditional food, music, and dance. DiWali Festival of Lights is held annually by the Westwood Indian American Association to share Indian culture, pageantry, food, fashion, and rituals with the Westwood community. In 2019, the Westwood Library hosted an inaugural Eid al-Fitr celebration to learn about this holiday and religious tradition for Muslims, who break their month-long Ramadan fast 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 of community activity. 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

- Hale – 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.

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Community

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

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Objective 1: Protect notable resources by fostering historic preservation and encouraging rehabilitation projects.

Objective 2: Increase opportunities for community gathering through artistic, cultural, and other place-making activities to strengthen the sense of community.

Objective 3: 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, and state and 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 follow the examples from other communities that have successfully implemented historic preservation methods.

IMPLEMENTING ACTIONS

The following actions are not in any prioritized order.

- 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 District (FMUOD), and Environmental Impact and Design Review (EIDR) sections of the Zoning Bylaw and the Subdivision Rules and Regulations to achieve site design that is protective of environmental and cultural resources by:
- Keeping development away from sensitive areas such as steep slopes, wetlands, and scenic areas.
 - Requiring stormwater improvements for all redevelopment projects.
 - Minimizing cut and fill, and the area over which vegetation is disturbed.
 - Minimizing impervious surfaces.
- NC3. Encourage new residential construction to be an Open Space Residential Development (OSRD) supporting open space preservation and low impact design techniques.
- NC4. Provide connections to fragmented open space and ensure that contiguous areas of undeveloped land are preserved.
- NC5. Encourage economic development to employ resource protection and management.

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- NC6. Collaborate with the Dedham-Westwood Water District (DWWD) to continuously review and evaluate best practices to reduce and prevent pollution and contamination to the water supply and aquifers.
- NC7. Ensure that storm water systems 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 a network of historic rehabilitation professionals available when needed.
- NC10. Formalize the Planning Board design review process by establishing standards for architecture, building orientation, materials, and site design, particularly in the Washington and High Street Town Centers.
- NC11. Provide zoning relief or other incentives for projects preserving 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 preserve trees during construction.
- NC15. Establish a tree fund for the care, replacement, and addition of street trees.
- NC16. Install Scenic Road signs on designated scenic roads.
- NC17. Establish a historic plaque program to recognize historic renovations.
- NC18. Perform a survey of properties to submit for listing on the National Historic Register.
- NC19. Review the Planning Board's rules and regulations for scenic roads under the Scenic Roads Law to address enforcement, require the re-use of removed stones, and tree replacement.
- NC20. Consider submitting additional streets for Scenic Road Designation such as Gay Street, Clapboardtree Street, and other roads that may qualify.
- NC21. Evaluate the effectiveness of the Historic Structures Demolition Bylaw, consider lengthening the demolition delay, and consider incentives and alternatives to demolition.
- NC22. Explore funding opportunities for historic preservation and cultural enhancement.
- NC23. Investigate adopting the Community Preservation Act (CPA) to preserve historic properties and acquire open space. Other eligible funding from CPA is for affordable housing and for outdoor recreation facilities which is discussed in the Housing section and in the Open Space and Recreation section.
- NC24. Develop a coordinated master calendar for all local cultural events and activities.

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- NC25. Explore opportunities for “pocket parks and parklets” and other small or temporary gathering space throughout town.
- NC26. Utilize the Westwood Community Trails Program to organize trail maintenance, volunteer-lead hikes, and cleanup events.
- NC27. Collaborate with Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) to establish trail and sidewalk connections from the Warner Trail and University Avenue to the Blue Hills Reservation.
- NC28. Develop maps, brochures, electronic material, and signage to promote and raise awareness of trails, conservation areas, and historic sites.
- NC29. Work with the Neponset River Watershed Association and DCR to promote recreational use of the Neponset River and provide a canoe launch.
- NC30. Increase public education of recycling and solid waste reduction to prevent contamination. Provide recycling receptacles at all public places such as parks, fields, and town centers.
- NC31. Partner with the Westwood Cultural Council to continue to promote cultural diversity and to educate the Westwood community.
- NC32. Complete the historic rehabilitation and reuse of the Obed Baker House to insure its preservation.
- NC33. Promote the use of the Fisher School for meetings, activities, and events.
- NC34. Explore the feasibility of recreating the historic Blue Hart Tavern.
- NC35. Design sidewalks and pedestrian improvements to be compatible with the natural environment by respecting stonewalls, mature trees, and other natural features, and providing 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