
**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMPONENT
OF THE WAKEFIELD MASTER PLAN**



MAIN STREET



NORTH AVENUE



THE JUNCTION



GREENWOOD



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMPONENT OF THE WAKEFIELD MASTER PLAN

PREPARED FOR:

THE TOWN OF WAKEFIELD
TOWN HALL
ONE LAFAYETTE STREET
WAKEFIELD , MASSACHUSETTS

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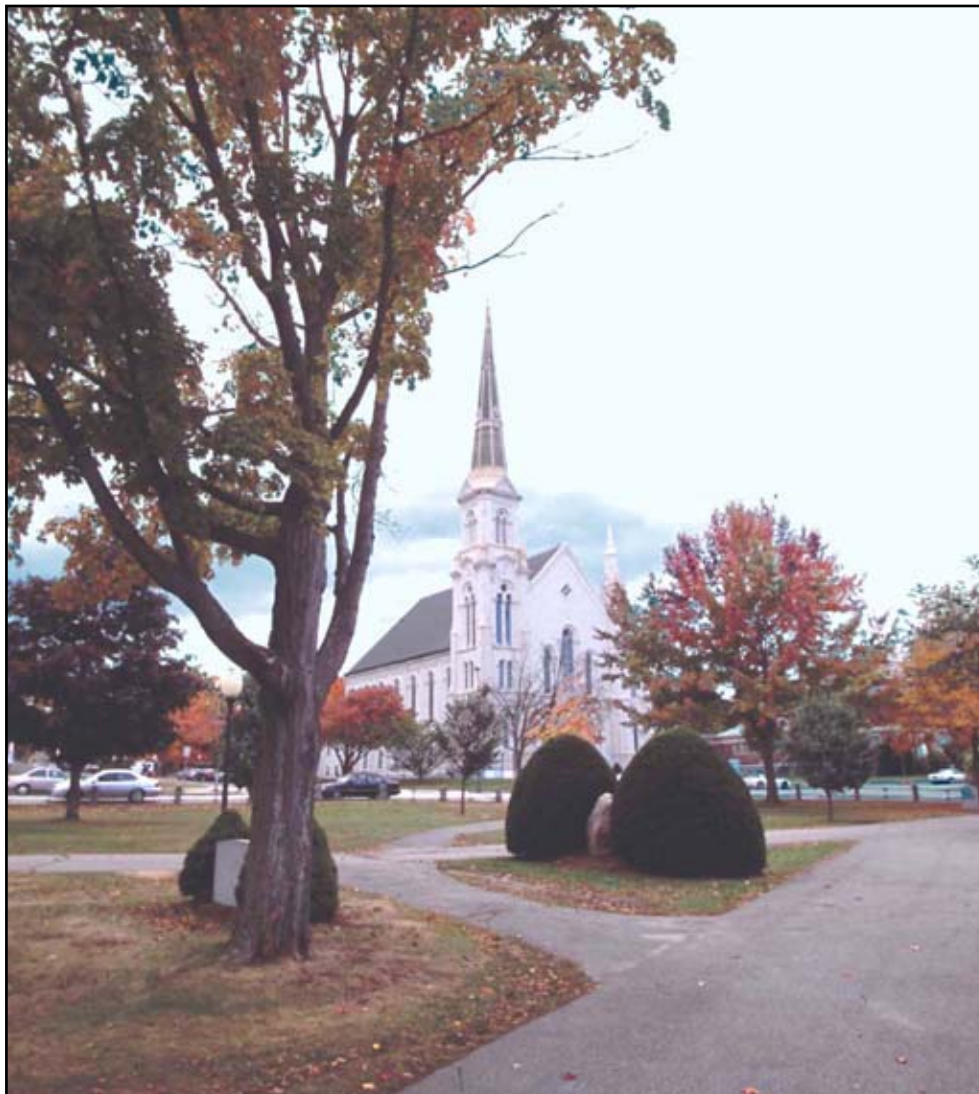
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The Economic Development Master Plan establishes a long term vision for economic growth in Wakefield that will reinforce the character of the town and contribute to the quality of life for its residents. The economic and the physical structure of the town are considered in relation to one another so that Wakefield can set the best direction for new development.



The Wakefield Common establishes a sense of civic dignity and connection to tradition that should be preserved as the town continues to change with the times.

1. MASTER PLAN PURPOSE

The purpose of the Economic Development Master Plan is to develop a long-term vision for Wakefield that identifies fiscal priorities, development opportunities, and organizational structures to improve the town's tax base and support the financial well-being of its businesses and citizens. The Plan focuses the town's attention on ways to encourage private sector investment that will bring about the Economic Development Goals and Objectives set out in Section IV.

This Economic Development Plan is a critical component of Wakefield's comprehensive Master Plan for the future growth of the community. The goals and policy changes suggested in the Economic Development Plan are meant to be compatible with the previously adopted Preservation and Housing components of the Master Plan. The plan's policy and implementation recommendations are based on the Economic Development Goals and Objectives articulated in Section IV. They provide a basis for evaluating development proposals that come before the town, as well as forming a foundation for the components of the Master Plan that will follow.

The high level of participation by local citizens in the Master Planning process, and the important contributions made by the Town in its preparation reflect Wakefield's commitment to controlling its fiscal and physical development. During the most recent planning effort town officials, economic development committee members and citizens clearly articulated their economic development concerns. These discussions and the proposals embodied in this Master Plan build on the Economic Development Issues Report released in July, 2002, by the Town of Wakefield and prepared by the Town Planner, Paul Reavis.



Lake Quannapowitt offers recreational opportunities and a strong visual identity for the town of Wakefield.

Route 128 skirts the edge of Wakefield, connecting the town to the region without disturbing its commercial core or its residential neighborhoods.





The commuter rail line connects Downtown Wakefield and Greenwood to Boston and neighboring communities.

Shady streets and quiet neighborhoods offer a range of housing types, although single family residences predominate.



The goals expressed in the Issues Report and that were further articulated in numerous discussions can be summarized as follows:

- Maintain and improve town character and quality of life by respecting its history, neighborhoods, open space, and natural beauty;
- Support local businesses and provide appropriate catalysts to jump-start desired development and improvements in the business districts;
- Increase Town revenue by building the tax base so that needed services can be provided; an emphasis on commercial property development can relieve the burden on residents;
- Provide more quality jobs for Wakefield citizens;
- Cultivate new development opportunities, redevelopment opportunities, and the growth of small businesses;
- Provide guidelines for evaluating the competing economic development needs and options for the community;
- Clarify short and long-term objectives, and
- Develop replicable models and tools for future development that embrace Wakefield's economic development and quality of life goals and objectives.

2. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT BACKGROUND

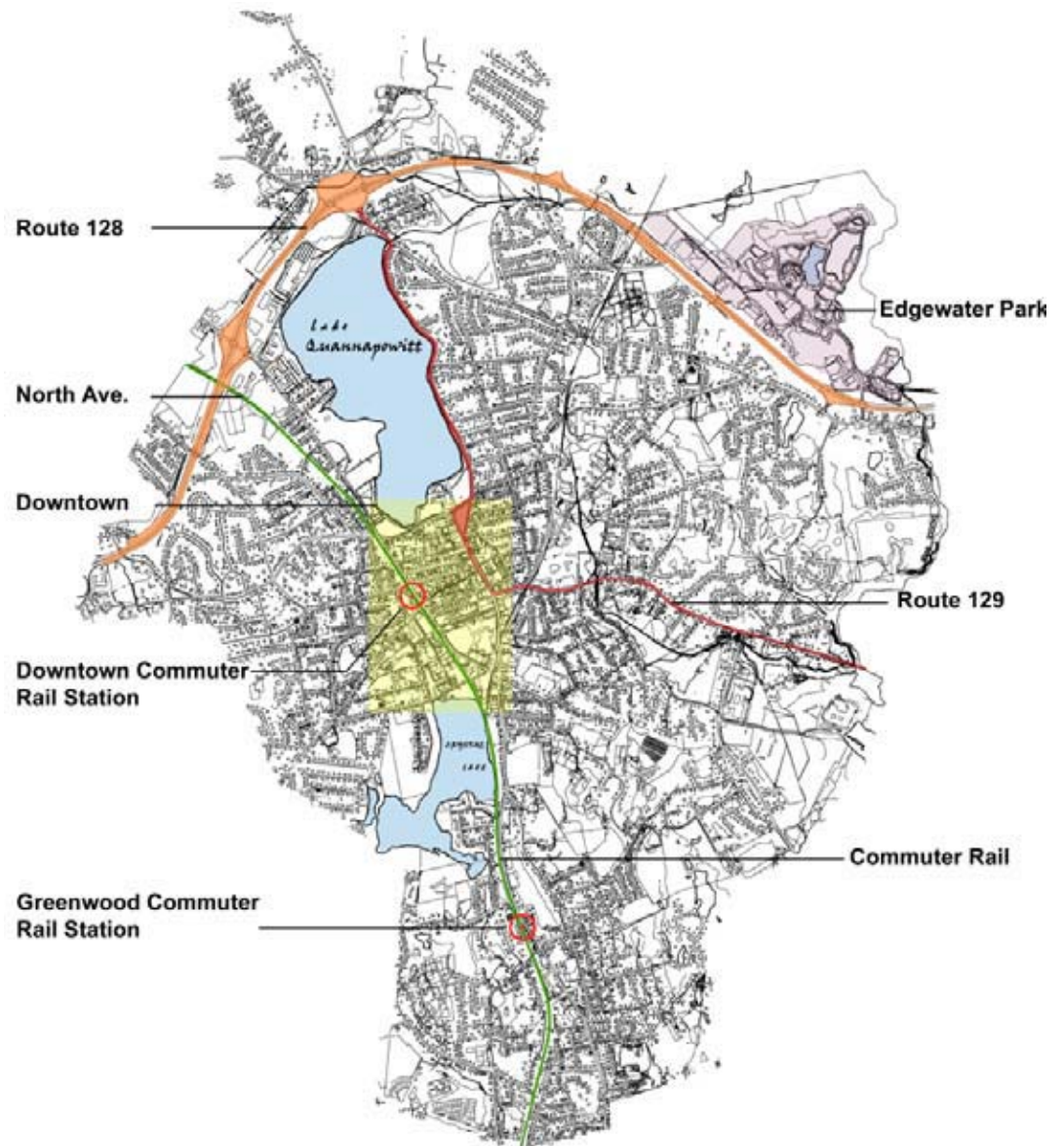
Wakefield is blessed with an attractive physical setting, a rich history and a pivotal location in the region. Natural features such as Lake Quannapowitt, and neighborhoods from Greenwood and Lakeside to downtown and the Common create a series of striking environments.

Over the past century and a half the town has put its assets to good use, fostering the growth of successful businesses and attracting residents to its ever-growing neighborhoods. There are still significant opportunities, however, for further development. The potential remains for considerable economic growth that will lead to improvements in the quality of life for Wakefield's residents.

The location of the major ring road connector around Boston, Route 128, could not be more ideal. The road cuts through only the most northern portion of Wakefield, offering glimpses of Lake Quannapowitt and providing access to and visibility from the regional highway system (including I-93), while protecting residential and commercial areas from its impacts. The commuter rail line running through downtown and Greenwood provides another option for those commuting into Boston. The natural beauty, coherent urban form and transportation infrastructure create a solid foundation on which to base continued economic development.

Wakefield is primarily a family-centered bedroom community with remnant industrial uses scattered throughout the town and office parks located along Route 128. The town is laid out according to familiar New England building patterns, although new construction, particularly some of the more recent residential projects, have not always supported the

Wakefield is well served by highways and rail lines





Significant commercial development has taken place along Route 128, although opportunities for large scale development in the future are limited by land availability.

Downtown Wakefield's charm is still evident, although both the physical structure and retail mix need improving.



town's traditional fabric. This Master Plan recommends that new development, instrumental to building and supporting the town's fiscal health, should be designed to reinforce those qualities that give the Town its identity, charm and cohesiveness.

In the Nineteenth Century Wakefield's economy was substantially self-sustaining. Local manufacturing took advantage of the railroads and provided employment for the residents of the town. Key industries included knitting mills, rattan, shoes, pianos, and ice cutting on Crystal Lake. The Twentieth Century, however, brought economic and technological changes that undermined local industry. Wakefield became primarily a residential community, its workforce commuting to Boston and to towns along the Route 128 and I-93 corridors.

The Town of Wakefield's economic fate is increasingly linked to that of the Boston metropolitan region and the Metro North area. As in many other towns nearby, the growth of the Route 128 technology corridor in the 1980's created a significant office and service sector that provides commercial tax revenue to ease the tax burden on residential property owners. Today, however, the growth potential for commercial development in Wakefield is limited by the relative scarcity of land available for additional large-scale office projects.

While the office sector has grown in the past decades, retail has been less successful. The Town's offerings are limited in comparison to other communities in the area, and less attractive to today's demanding consumer. The Town Center has not fared well because of regional competition, perceived lack of parking, its fading image, and the out-of-date merchandise mix. Still, the town's commercial districts serve certain needs and, in some locations, provide retail in a distinct and attractive setting.

While the Town is dependent on the economic future of the metropolitan area, it must work strategically to increase its share of the commercial growth that will occur in the area, and should strive to capture a larger share of retail purchases by its own residents and others in the vicinity.

To accomplish this, Wakefield must make itself more attractive to the business community and to the consumers whom it wants to attract. The town should identify and build on its strengths and support its local merchants through both its policies and citizens' purchases.

Wakefield, like almost every city and town in Massachusetts, is facing fiscal challenges. Proposition 2 ½ limits the town's ability to meet its financial needs by limiting the ability to raise tax rates. New development provides a source of much needed new revenues, and it is important that Wakefield pursue its share of regional opportunities.

Not all development, however, will be beneficial for Wakefield's future. Clear guidelines must be established to balance the public interest with private gain. Some recently constructed condominium developments undermine the character of the community, and incentives and controls must be developed to channel new construction in more appropriate directions. Residential developments are taxed at a much lower rate than commercial buildings suggesting that some uses should be encourage over others. This Master Plan offers a range of development options and opportunities along with an evaluation of their fiscal and physical benefits and appropriateness. They are intended as models for the kind of revenue-enhancing developments that are in Wakefield's long-term interest.



Albion Street has the potential to be an active pedestrian street lined with small shops and cafes.

The recent redevelopment of historic Harvard Mills near downtown as office space reinforces the character of Wakefield while increasing job opportunities and the town's tax base.

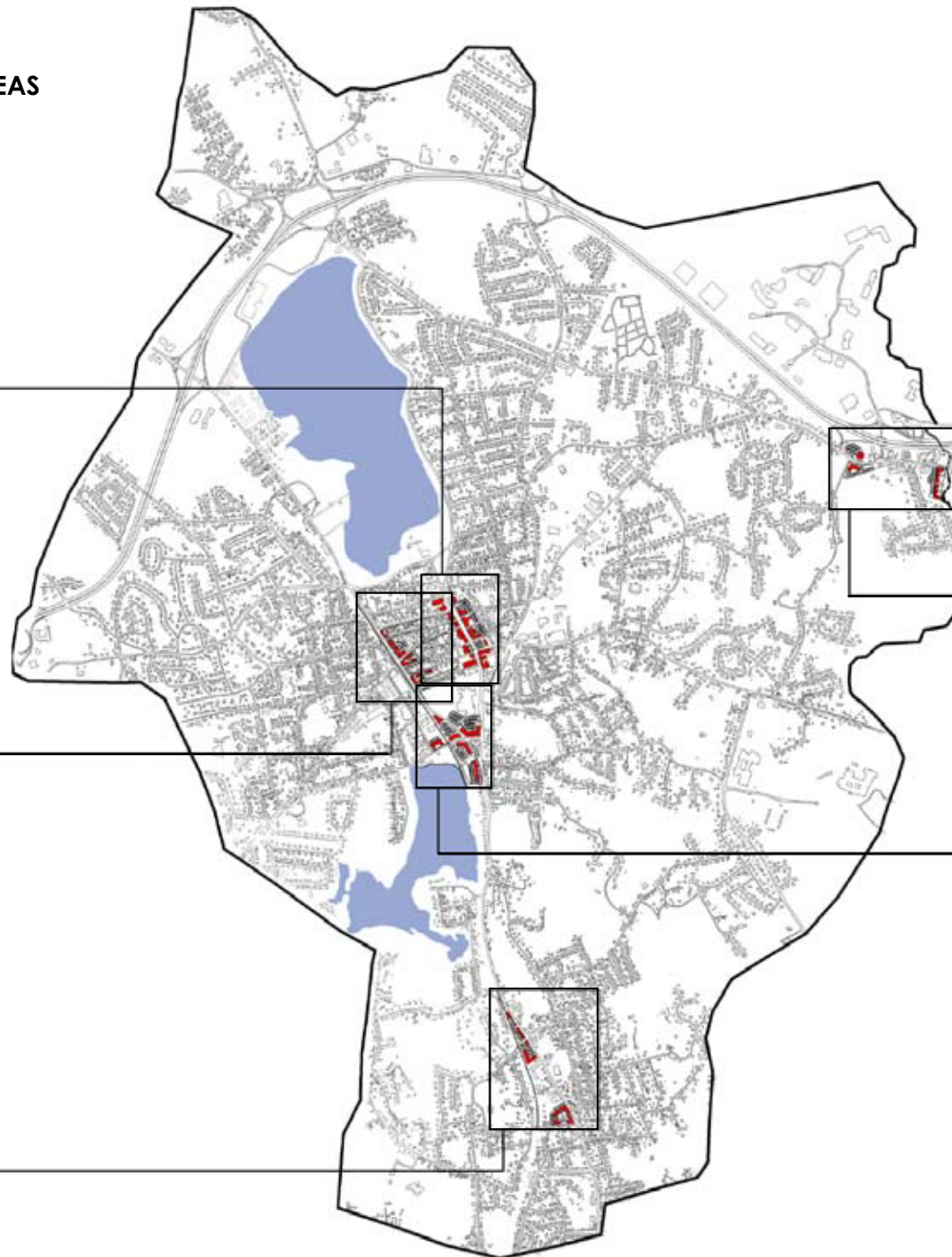


CRITICAL STUDY AREAS

MAIN ST. DOWNTOWN

NORTH AVENUE

MAIN ST. GREENWOOD



SALEM ST. @ ROUTE 128

THE JUNCTION

3. CRITICAL STUDY AREAS

Many economic development issues should be addressed on a town-wide basis. Others are best looked at in relation to a particular place, since economic development and the physical structure of the town are inextricably linked in so many ways. The critical study areas provide the opportunity to tie general development issues to specific locations.

Retail areas that have not been maintained discourage new investment that could sustain the small town flavor that attracts people to Wakefield in the first place. Inappropriately designed development can turn pleasant country roads into traffic choked expanses of asphalt. Development brings economic resources to Wakefield that can improve the quality of life, but can also change the character of the town in ways that do not enhance its strong sense of place. This Master Plan ties economic advancement together with physical planning so that private prosperity and the public interest develop



Recent housing development has not always complemented the Town's neighborhood character, turning away from the public streets.

together in appropriate ways.

To understand the relationship of economic development to the town's physical structure, this Master Plan looks at development opportunities at five study areas, proposing particular uses and building forms that would constitute the highest and best uses of each site. All five locations offer significant opportunities for economic growth.

These study areas were chosen because they are important places in Wakefield, and appropriate development at these locations could enhance the perception of Wakefield as a thriving community with a real sense of character. They were also chosen because they are typical of many places in Wakefield, and can be models for the type of positive development that could be replicated elsewhere in town.

Within each study area both residential and commercial development are proposed. As in the region as a whole, home values have skyrocketed in recent years, making residential construction attractive. Wakefield is also an excellent location for service industries and office space. Despite the current depression in the office real estate market, the quality commercial properties at Edgewater Park and throughout Wakefield have maintained relatively high occupancy levels. New uses are being found for obsolete manufacturing buildings for both residential and commercial redevelopment.

Each has benefits for Wakefield. Careful consideration, however, must be given to the appropriateness of each development type for any specific location being considered.



Downtown – The current streetscape and retail mix suggest a comforting downtown character, but lack vitality and a clear identity.



North Avenue Near Albion St - The proximity to downtown and the commuter rail station could support transit oriented development currently promoted through “smart growth” initiatives.



The Junction – A critical crossroad location suggests a southern “gateway” to downtown with a connection to Crystal Lake. Significant infrastructure work will be required to take advantage of this opportunity.

Downtown

Main St. between Yale Ave. and Armory St. is the retail and social heart of Wakefield. Upgrading the retail mix, resolving parking and traffic concerns, inserting carefully designed new buildings, and providing streetscape, facade, and signage improvements will reinforce the Downtown’s centrality to community life.

North Avenue

The commuter rail station makes North Avenue near Albion Street the type of location actively promoted by “smart growth” advocates for transit oriented development. This mix of housing and commercial construction will reinforce the strength of downtown as a destination accessible by public transportation.

The Junction

Located between downtown and Crystal Lake, the Junction now turns its back on both with a collection of old industrial buildings, car lots, and poorly designed intersections. Mixed use redevelopment and reconfigured streets will reconnect the area to the water and downtown with a vibrant living and shopping district that can create a gateway to downtown.



Greenwood – A poorly maintained streetscape and speeding traffic interfere with the development of this well situated neighborhood center.

Greenwood

The commuter rail stop and small scale retail environment create a strong neighborhood center. Challenges include traffic and parking problems and a neglected streetscape. Modest physical and organizational improvements can make Greenwood a model for neighborhood retail development.



Salem St. at Route 128 – Environmental issues have limited development although new construction is possible within the semi-rural context.

Salem St. at Rt. 128

Like many of Wakefield's pleasant country roads, Salem Street near the Lynnfield line has lost some of its charm to inappropriate development. The right patterns of land use will allow significant new construction while reinforcing the area's rural character and allowing access to natural areas. Significant environmental issues, however, must be addressed before development can take place.