

PHYSICAL AND GOVERNMENTAL CONSTRAINTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

METHODOLOGY AND DATA SOURCES.

The maps that follow combine a number of data sources to define as clearly as possible the factors that limit housing development.

Base maps showing topography, property lines, and buildings were provided by the Town of Wakefield based on aerial surveys. Additional information supplied by MASSGIS has been overlaid on this base map information to identify the physical and governmental constraints and opportunities that create the context for the creation of housing. This information can be used in two ways:

For a specific site these maps identify the zoning district, the presence or absence of significant flooding, historic district designation, slopes, and other features of the site that suggest limitations on housing development.

When seen from a town-wide perspective, these maps also suggest broad patterns in the natural landscape and urban fabric that give character to each neighborhood and the town as a whole. Bands of green along a ribbon of blue suggest water-oriented open space that could sponsor pedestrian connections from one part of town to another. Dense clusters of building suggest the nucleus of a local community that could be reinforced by sensitive infill construction. Steep topography indicates the hills and valleys where development threatens a loss of open space if not handled carefully.

This Master Plan identifies many of these broad patterns and proposes housing development strategies that work with, rather than against this context.

Some of the information conveyed by these maps is prescriptive – zoning, for example. Other information can be used in a more subjective manner, requiring a sensitivity to the nuances of topography and architectural context that maps can only suggest. Sections 5 and 6 of this Master Plan component show how this information can be put to use in designing and evaluating housing proposals.



The sensitive design of stairs and retaining walls help connect houses to the public street while allowing them to feel part of the natural landscape.

A roadway wrapping a hilltop leads to a series of houses on Curve Street.



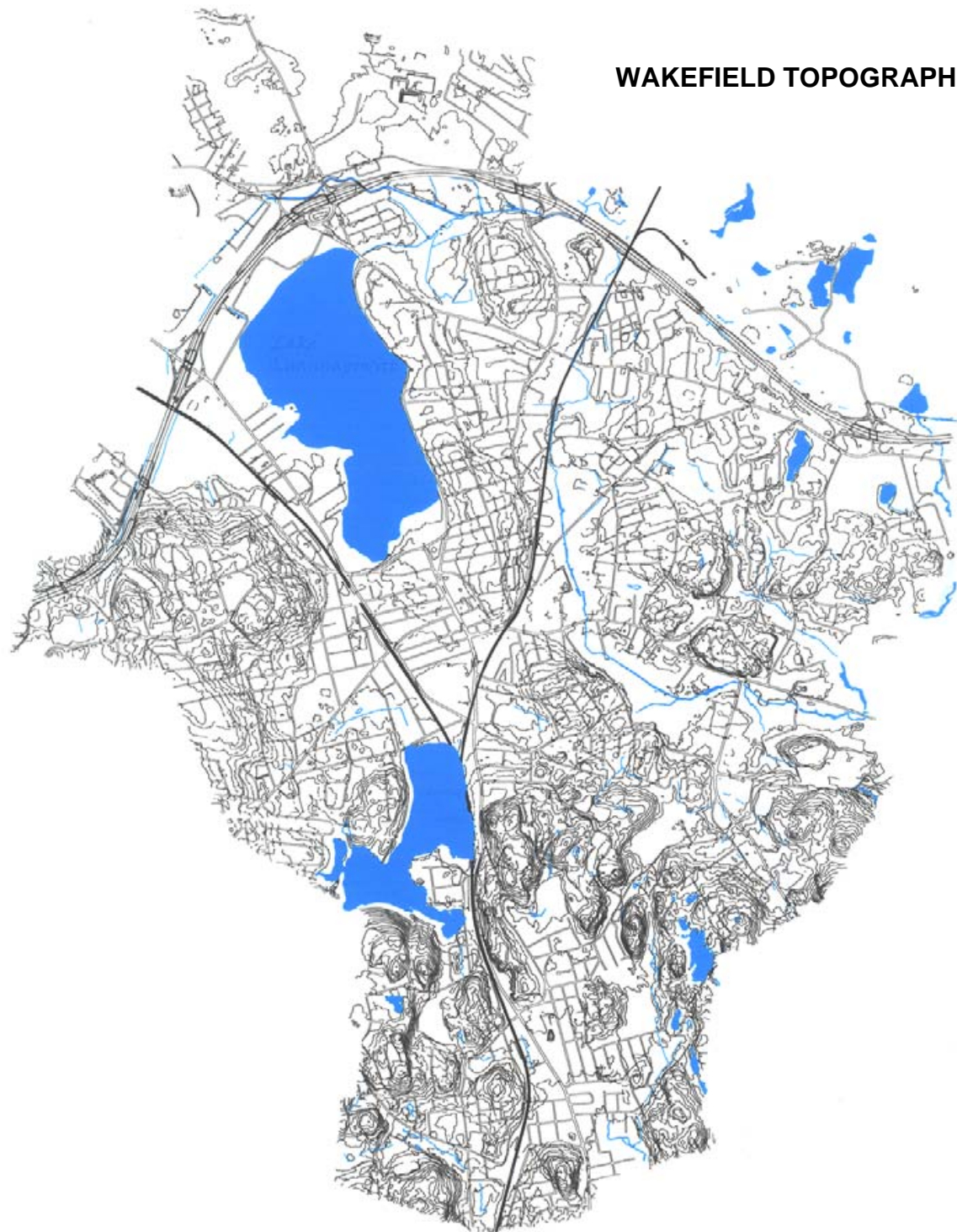
TOPOGRAPHY

Historically, development in Wakefield has been defined by its topography. Relatively level areas have been developed first. In general, steeper areas have been developed only recently. A street layout that works with the topography and thoughtfully designed retaining walls and stairs can allow housing on hillsides to be integrated into the landscape.

Low-lying areas have generally remained undeveloped due to water control issues and, more recently, wetland regulations. Hillsides have not received the same kind of protection.

To a significant extent the topography defines the experience of moving through and living in Wakefield. The hill lining Main Street through Greenwood, the low areas on either side of the Mill River as it snakes its way through town, and the hills that define intimate neighborhoods in Montrose help give Wakefield its character.

The topographic map suggests that housing development needs to be understood in the context of larger patterns in the landscape. Opportunities for open space networks connecting wetlands or hilltops, the visibility of a site in relation to the surrounding landscape, or the secluded nature of a parcel that suggests its appropriateness for development can all become more apparent when individual parcels are seen in the context of landscape features.



Topographic lines show the steep slopes that define many areas in Wakefield.



The Mill river provides opportunities for scenic open areas, but requires accommodations from adjacent property owners.

Wakefield's lakes help define the community, creating scenic places for recreation.



WETLANDS

Wakefield's water resources - lakes, streams, and wetlands - are valuable assets, providing recreational opportunities and a connection to nature for residents. Housing development can take advantage of proximity to these areas. Development can also open vistas to lake views and provide access to waterfronts. Controlled public access as part of a greenspace network utilizing easements on private land and publicly owned open space would encourage respect for Wakefield's lakes, rivers, and wetlands.

It is important, however, that new development not exacerbate problems with Wakefield's overburdened drainage system. More effective enforcement of flood zone requirements and a clear definition of the vegetated wetlands would help prevent construction in areas subject to flooding. Prohibitions on increases in flow volumes and a reduction in impervious surfacing can help reduce runoff and the problems that come with it.

Channeling housing development into areas with required drainage infrastructure and away from areas with steep slopes and low-lying land can help preserve wetlands while accommodating new construction.


WAKEFIELD WETLANDS MAP


Lake Quannapowitt


Mill River and
associated wetlands

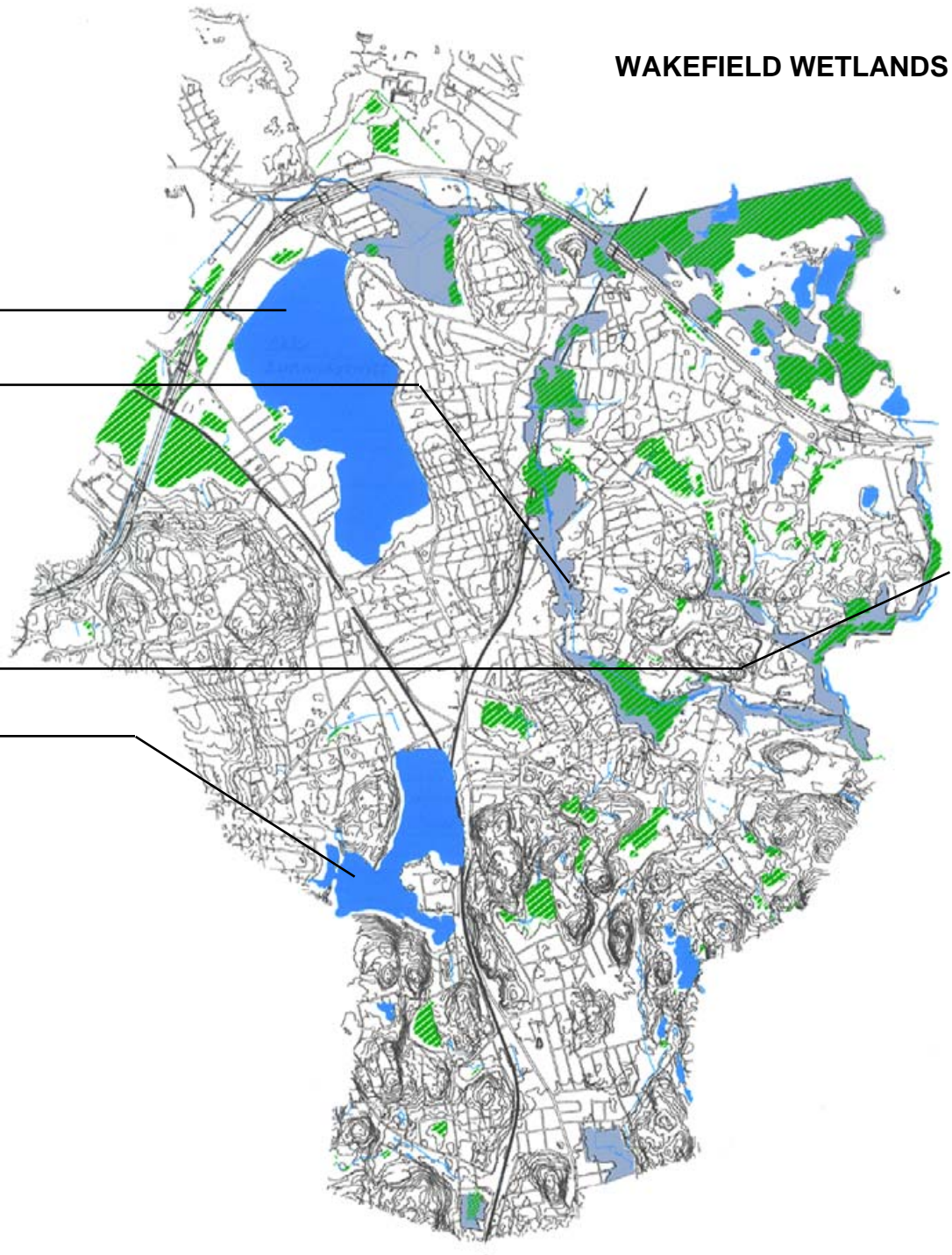
Saugus River

Crystal Lake

 = Streams and Lakes

 = Areas Subject To Flooding

 = Wetlands





Small commons are the focus of some West Side neighborhoods.

The Mill River is potentially part of an open space network connecting different neighborhoods.



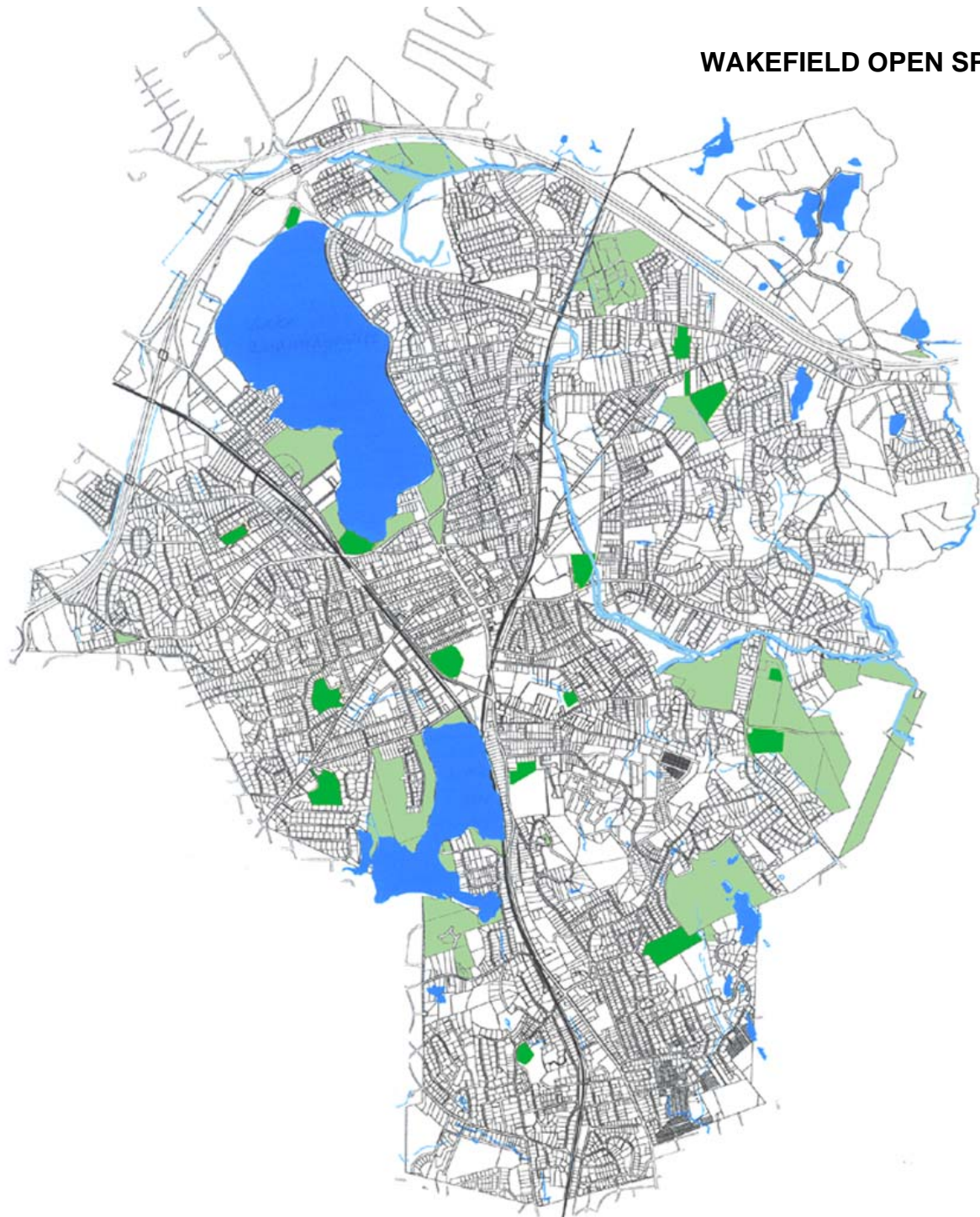
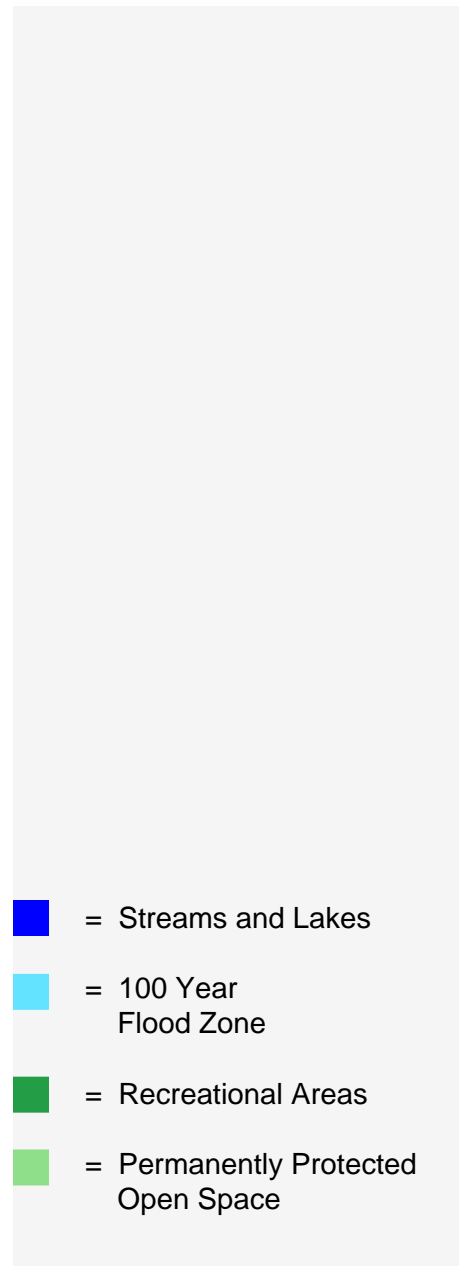
OPEN SPACE

There is a significant amount of land in Wakefield that has been preserved as open space. Parcels vary in size and are scattered throughout the neighborhoods. Some are parks, some are schools or the land around municipal buildings, and some are parcels that are protected as watersheds, wetlands, areas subject to flooding, or as woodlands. Many properties have significant natural attributes. Others are tucked into residential neighborhoods providing recreation space. And while the wetlands are protected, the hillsides are not and are being steadily developed. These developments to date have been large lot subdivisions involving extensive clear cutting and blasting.

Small greens and other common open spaces are found throughout Wakefield and are much beloved features of many neighborhoods. These features were often built by housing developers because the enhancements made the developments desirable places to live, with corresponding improvements in sales.

Open space is relatively evenly distributed throughout the different neighborhoods, insuring accessibility no matter where residents live. Yet the isolation of one parcel from the next makes it difficult for them to coalesce into an open space network. Such a network would allow the creation of bike trails, walking trails, and wild life habitat that could connect different neighborhoods with an alternative to streets and roadways.

The Mill River, Crystal Lake and Lake Quannapowitt waterfronts, and the wooded hillsides in Greenwood all offer the opportunity for more extended open space systems utilizing publicly owned land and easements on private property. The creation or formalization of these open space networks will help with the evaluation of development proposals for individual parcels, the consideration of the transfer of development rights with private owners and developers, as well as possible Town purchases of additional properties.





Winding streets and large trees characterize many of Wakefield's neighborhoods.

Stone walls and piers mark the entries to several West Side neighborhoods or the parks associated with them.



NEIGHBORHOODS

Neighborhood boundaries do not define governmental or administrative areas. They derive from a combination of meaningful natural and constructed features that establish a sense of place with which a person or family feels associated.

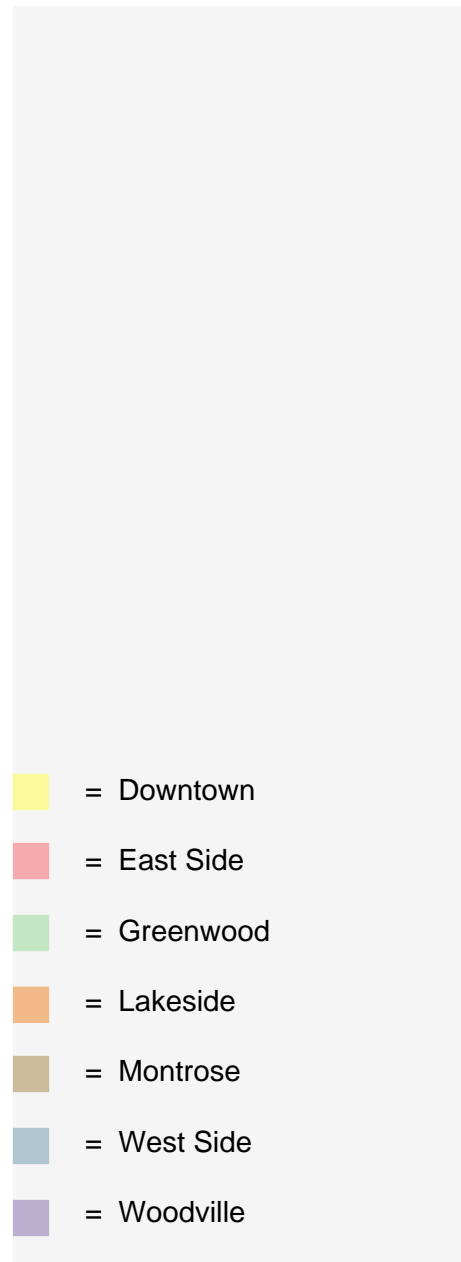
These neighborhoods are not homogenous. Many contain a mix of residential and commercial areas giving them a sense of independence. All contain a mixture of open space and denser development, small side streets and major arteries that together create a pleasing sense of variety. They are each of a size that they can be traversed by foot in less than an hour.

Each neighborhood has its own character. The big Victorians of the West Side, the small bungalows and wooded hills of Greenwood, and the urbanity of Downtown clearly differentiate each neighborhood from the next.

The neighborhood map suggests the relationship of each neighborhood to defining features: a lake, a network of roads, the railroad tracks, a series of hills or wetlands.

This combination of variety and clear character makes prescriptive design guidelines tailored for each neighborhood difficult to define. Yet each neighborhood's sense of identity should help define the appropriateness of development proposals and housing types that are considered. Preserving neighborhood identity while allowing carefully considered change should be a goal of Planning and Zoning Policy.

WAKEFIELD NEIGHBORHOODS





Stately houses close to the street give Lafayette St. a distinct character.

Wakefield Park's rambling houses are centered on a triangular green.



HISTORIC DISTRICTS


Wakefield's Historic Districts form the geographic and cultural core for the Town, a physical link with the past that connects residents to a shared heritage. Their preservation is important in helping the Town to maintain its character. New interventions in these, and surrounding areas, should carefully consider the form and scale of existing buildings.

The real lesson of these districts is not in the nostalgia they induce, nor in the traditional forms and details of their architecture, but in the urban planning principals that structure their use of land.

The homes in the West Side district may be grand, but they are close enough together to form a real neighborhood. Trees, fences and sidewalks along the street make walking a rich experience. Generous porches suggest a connection between public streets and private houses. The streetscape is detailed and evocative, with small parks and green spaces forming a focus for public life. The West Side is an excellent model for new residential development, no matter the size or style of the houses.

The Downtown district's mixture of residential, institutional, and commercial uses, integrated into a dense urban center, is another valuable model for future Wakefield development. The pedestrian oriented scale, the integration of open spaces, and the rich mix of building types is an attractive prototype for new development Downtown or in the smaller commercial cores. The new architecture need not replicate the old to create the strong sense of urbanity that makes this district so attractive.

WAKEFIELD HISTORIC DISTRICTS

 = Streams and Lakes

 = EXISTING HISTORIC DISTRICTS


1 = Common Historic District


2 = Church-Lafayette Streets

3 = Yale Avenue


4 = Wakefield Park


PROPOSED


 = Prospect Street Historic District


 = Salem Street Historic District


 = Yale Avenue/Avon-Chestnut Streets


 = Downtown Wakefield Historic Districts

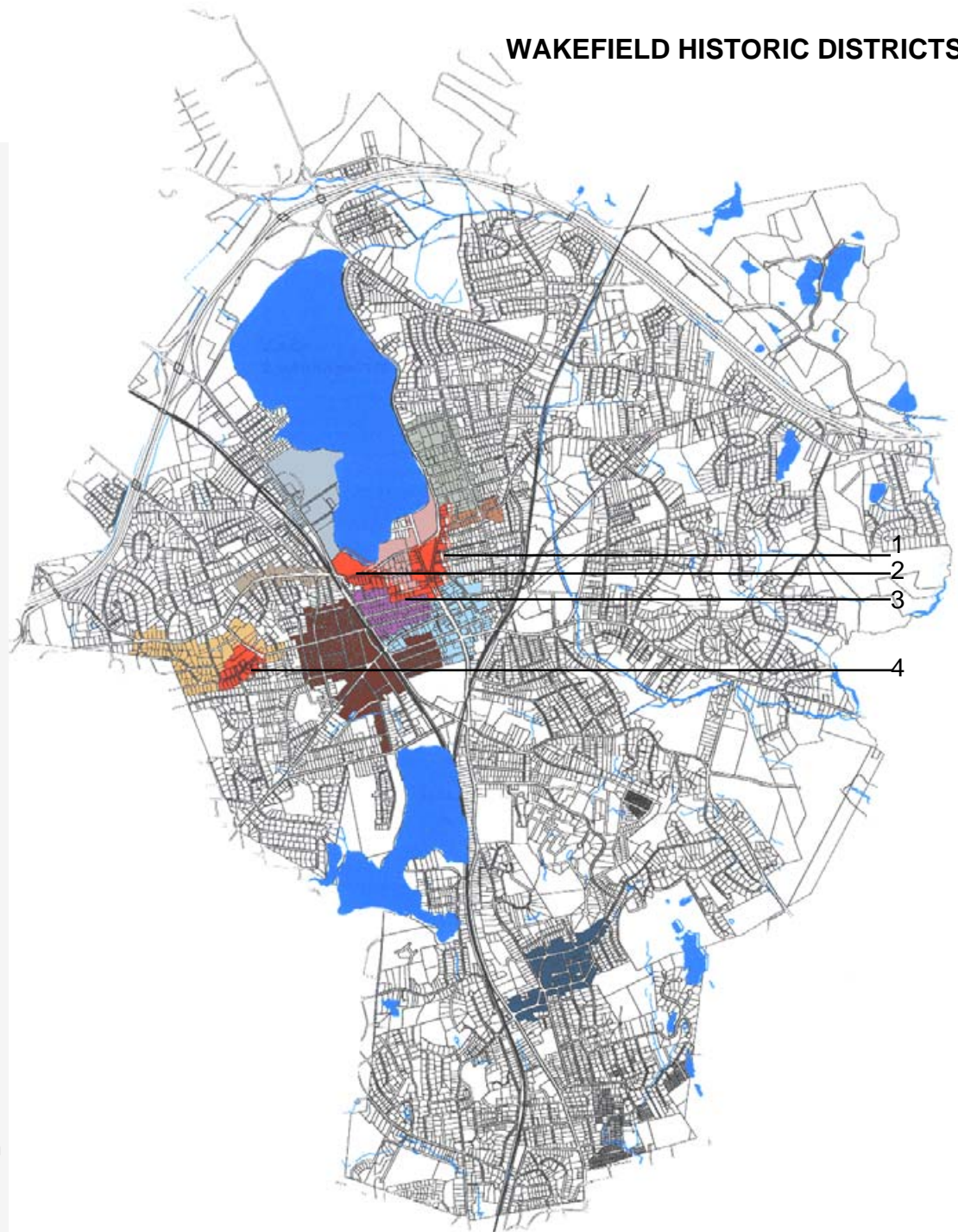
 = North Avenue Historic Districts

 = Lakeside Historic District

 = Greenwood Historic District

 = Common/Church-Lafayette Streets

 = Wakefield Park Historic District Extension





Zoning that allows mixed use development: retail combined with housing can create strong connections between residential areas and neighborhood centers.







ZONING

Zoning is the primary tool towns use to define appropriate and inappropriate uses, dimensional requirements and densities, and design features. It is a crude tool at best, designed to prevent the worst abuses of the public interest, but rarely requiring design excellence or creative problem solving.

Segregation of uses to prevent the incursion of business and industry into residential areas, and large setback and lot size requirements have not necessarily protected neighborhood character and rural charm as anticipated. The definitive nature of the zones and associated requirements contrast with the fluid nature of town life and the variety of uses and development types accommodated within a zone.

The zoning map clarifies the interrelationship of different zones and suggests how zoning can be associated with planning strategies for specific areas with unique needs and opportunities. All of the constraints and opportunities represented in the maps on the previous pages can be brought to bear on zones and their requirements to reflect a policy consensus on desired patterns of growth.

WAKEFIELD ZONING

-  = Streams and Lakes
-  = General Residential
-  = Single Residential
-  = Special Single Residence
-  = Business/ Limited Business
-  = Neighborhood Business
-  = Light Industrial
-  = Industrial
-  = Municipal Disposal

