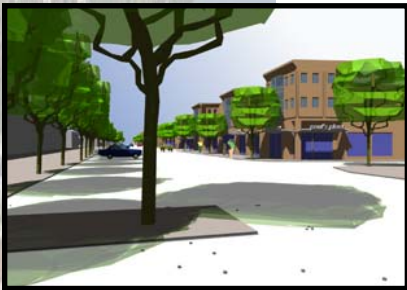


HOUSING COMPONENT OF THE WAKEFIELD MASTER PLAN



SUSTAINING STRONG NEIGHBORHOODS



MAINTAINING CHARACTER



PRESERVING OPEN SPACE



ENSURING AFFORDABILITY



HOUSING COMPONENT OF THE WAKEFIELD MASTER PLAN

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

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Wakefield must develop a strong Master Plan that reflects a community consensus as to how Wakefield should grow. Backed up by a strong zoning ordinance that encourages appropriate growth and discourages inappropriate growth with a combination of incentives and controls, a Master Plan vision can become a reality.

INTRODUCTION

HOUSING COMPONENT OF MASTER PLAN IN RELATION TO THE ENTIRE WAKEFIELD MASTER PLAN

Although the hopes, needs, and fears of Wakefield's residents may differ, this Housing Component of the Master Plan is intended to establish a series of generally shared values that can form the basis for future actions that benefit the greatest number of the Town's citizens.

This Housing Component is one in a series of components that will make up the Wakefield Master Plan. The preparation of a new Master Plan was authorized by Town Meeting in April 1999. The Wakefield Planning Board has organized the Master Planning process as a series of steps intended to protect and enhance the Town's character.

By adapting this Housing Component the Planning Board effectively replaces all housing goals contained in the 1989 Master Plan with this document. It is the Committee's intention that the new Master Plan propose actions and develop strategies for responding to the changing needs of the Town. Changes in the Town's Zoning bylaws are among the recommendations that are embodied in the Master Plan to encourage the citizens of Wakefield to control and direct growth.

To be an effective document the Master Plan must help build a consensus on the Town's needs and the most appropriate responses to them. The will of the Town is expressed at Town Meetings where zoning changes are authorized, and in the selection of public officials. To build consensus

the Housing Component of the Master Plan has been developed in close collaboration with the Town Planner, the Planning Board, the Housing Sub-committee, and the citizens of Wakefield through a series of meetings and a full day Forum.

PREVIOUS MASTER PLANS AND STUDIES

In 2001 the Planning Board adopted a Preservation Plan prepared by Alfred J. Lima, Planning Consultant. Many of its recommendations are embodied in the Housing Component planning approaches and Design Guidelines. The Historic Districts noted in the Plan are included in the maps that form a part of the Housing Component.

A Housing Issues Report, prepared in January 2001 by the Town of Wakefield, eloquently articulated many of the concerns that form the basis for the Housing Component of the Master Plan

Abacus Architects & Planners contracted in December, 2002, to prepare the Economic Development Component of Wakefield's Master Plan. Several of the sites studied, and many of the planning approaches taken in the Housing Component will be further developed in this document.

KEY MASTER PLAN ISSUES

Two overarching concerns are addressed by this Housing Component. Wakefield shares these issues with many other communities in Massachusetts:

- Wakefield has a distinct character that is threatened by recent and anticipated residential development. A loss of open space, an underutilization of downtown areas, and the construction of housing types and site layouts at odds with their surroundings are too often the result.
- Housing prices have risen far faster than incomes. Many people who live, or would like to live in Wakefield, cannot afford a home.

The resolution of these issues is complicated by Chapter 40B. This state regulation allows developers to override local zoning in towns with less than 10% affordable housing when proposing developments with a minimum of 25% affordable units.

Chapter 40B serves an important function in encouraging the development of affordable housing in Massachusetts. According to the Boston Foundation's report "Greater Boston Housing Report Card 2002", between 1997 and 2001, 77 percent of the affordable housing created in suburbs that did not meet the 40B threshold is a direct result of 40B. For Wakefield, however, the result has been development out of character with its context. One goal of this component of the Master Plan is to using 40B development not only to increase the supply of affordable housing in Wakefield but to channel it into areas that can benefit from new pedestrian-oriented residential development. If carefully planned such housing can help in the preservation of open space.

RECOGNIZED PROBLEMS WITH MASSACHUSETTS OUTDATED LAND USE REGULATIONS

Massachusetts zoning law establishes the context within which development takes place in Wakefield. Established in 1920 and amended in a piecemeal fashion ever since, it is considered outdated in its ability to respond to issues of affordability, open space, sprawl, urban redevelopment, and responsiveness to context. The American Planning Association describes it as among the most outdated in the nation. Although proposals for significantly changing or replacing the legal framework within which towns can develop their zoning and planning guidelines have been developed, there is no expectation that they will be adopted soon. Desires to cut commuting time, traffic jams, and loss of open space are countered by a resistance to increasing urban density and the trend towards larger houses on larger lots. Chapter 40A, the zoning law, and Chapter 41, the subdivision law, continue to encourage spread-out and ill-planned development according to many planners.

An understanding of the limitations of Massachusetts zoning law will help in understanding those tools that are available, and those that are not, to the Town of Wakefield as it seeks to guide development in appropriate directions. Some of these limitations are outlined below:

- **Home Rule** Current Massachusetts guidelines make no provisions for regional planning beyond the borders of the Commonwealth's 351 cities and towns. The principle of "Home Rule" allows them to govern themselves independently, undermining broader planning initiatives. Proposals to channel development pressures into the

decaying urban centers of one city while allowing the rural character of an adjacent town to be maintained would require a change from the current “Home Rule” approach.

- **Lack of Coordination** Unlike two thirds of the states, Massachusetts does not require a link between each Town's planning and zoning that would establish a set of planning principles backed up by zoning regulations to guide all development. Wakefield's often contradictory Zoning and Planning requirements are typical of the confused priorities that are used to evaluate proposals in most towns. Better coordination between Planning and Zoning would make responsible development easier.
- **No “Smart Growth” Provisions** Unlike many states, Massachusetts does not require or expressly authorize the use of contemporary planning strategies that would encourage clustered development and conservation planning. Responding to market forces and zoning that requires large lots, developers often spread out construction in ways that diminish available open space and lead to sprawl. Urban growth boundaries, such as those adopted in Oregon, are not encouraged by current legislation.
- **Lack of Limits** Massachusetts is the only state in the nation that allows the creation of building lots along existing roads without review and approval by the local Planning Board. Inappropriate development and the loss of rural character are often the result as development is stretched out along public roads. (Chapter 41, Section 81-p)
- **Rural Zoning Prohibited** Zoning that limits development to rural densities - one unit per 25 acres, for example, is not allowed under current state zoning guidelines. If paired with incentives for higher density development in town centers, such zoning could help maintain both rural and urban character.
- **Lack of Financial Incentives and Disincentives** Imposing extra fees on development in areas that require new water, road, or sewer infrastructure to subsidize denser urban development near public transportation encourages sustainable growth. These “greenfield fees” have been proposed, but have not been implemented to date.
- **Limited Tools for Encouraging Affordable Housing** Although Chapter 40B has been successful in encouraging the development of affordable housing, there are other measures the state could take to increase the amount that is available and encourage its location in appropriate places. These measures include:
 1. Expansion of the affordable housing trust.
 2. Increasing the bonding cap for state housing funds.
 3. Creating financial incentives for affordable housing development in urban centers near public transportation, schools, and shopping.

-
4. Providing additional funding for schools in towns that encourage multi-family housing to relieve overburdening of local school systems that can result.

Massachusetts' outdated land use regulations create a challenging environment for comprehensive planning. None-the-less, Wakefield can develop a strong Master Plan that reflects a community consensus as to how the Town should grow.

STRATEGIES FOR CHANNELING GROWTH IN PRODUCTIVE DIRECTIONS:

There are many opportunities for Wakefield to strengthen its Zoning Ordinance in ways that encourage appropriate growth and discourage inappropriate growth with a combination of incentives and controls. These opportunities include:

Conservation Subdivision Design/Cluster Zoning Compact development clusters building on one portion of a site and leaves the remainder as shared open space. Open space can be “social space,” such as a formalized green that can be used for entry, or “natural space”, that remains as untouched land. Such development requires a consensus on the value of open space and changes to current zoning. Incentives for this kind of development include unit bonuses for affordable housing and open space creation or preservation. The compact nature of the design can reduce site development costs and create another incentive.

Transferable Development Rights Rights to build on land that the Town would rather be left undeveloped are transferred to other sites in public or private ownership that the Town would prefer to have developed. Public and private interests are balanced as open space is preserved, urban areas requiring rejuvenation are developed, and property owners profit in the process. Increased unit counts are an incentive for affordable housing and open space preservation.

Inclusionary Zoning This allows or requires developers to provide an affordable housing component as part of a market rate development. Affordable units can be on or off site. Affordable units can be required or a town can create other incentives for affordable housing production. Inclusionary zoning allows a town that has met Chapter 40B’s 10% requirement to maintain that level of affordability.

Special Districts Special Districts encourage multi-family growth in specifically zoned locations, generally near public transportation or downtown, where greater densities can be accommodated. Planned overlay districts and other zoning mechanisms can be used to implement this kind of planning goal.

Main Street Zoning This type of zoning allows a mix of commercial and residential uses. Housing above stores is typical. Units can be affordable or market rate. The convenience for residents and increased business for stores helps renew urban areas while providing the kind of compact housing that the market is not providing in sufficient quantities. Changes to current zoning may be required to implement this kind of growth strategy.

ORGANIZATION OF THE HOUSING COMPONENT OF THE MASTER PLAN

This Master Plan is intended to have a clear narrative structure, outlining needs and providing strategies for fulfilling those needs in ways that balance public and private interests.

- **Section 2 – Housing Needs Assessment and Action Plan** documents housing needs in relation to changing demographics and housing costs.
- **Section 3 – Physical and Governmental Constraints and Opportunities** documents the physical and governmental constraints and opportunities that define the context in which housing needs can be satisfied.
- **Section 4 – Town Character** shows examples of how housing needs have been met in the past and establishes guidelines for future development in relation to Wakefield's natural and man-made features.
- **Sections 5 – Development Scenarios** explores suggested sites for housing development and the form these developments could take in order to reinforce the positive qualities of Wakefield.
- **Section 6 – Design Guidelines** gives more detail on how the strategies proposed in Section 5 can be developed to insure public benefits.
- **Section 7 – Implementation** proposes changes to zoning and identifies programs that could encourage development that satisfies housing needs while strengthening the physical and social fabric of the Town.