

2 Wellesley's Goals for the Next Ten Years

Because all communities experience change, every update of the comprehensive plan requires a reevaluation of Town goals for the next ten years. In every plan there will be enduring goals that represent critical elements of Wellesley's identity as a town, while other goals will recede in importance because the Town will have worked hard to reach them. Changing circumstances and trends can create the need for new goals. It is therefore essential to engage residents and others in a discussion about what kinds of issues the Town should focus on in the next ten years.

The 1994 Plan included a large number of often overlapping goals and objectives. Although very thorough and comprehensive, the plan did not provide a clear set of priorities across all the elements or categories in the plan. For the current update of the comprehensive plan, the Planning Board wanted to identify a set of priorities for the next ten years. As a result, priority-setting exercises were incorporated into the public participation process.

A. THE COMMUNITY SPEAKS: PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The Town and consulting team undertook a variety of activities designed to elicit ideas and recommendations from residents, business people, institutional representatives, and property owners. These activities began with a town-wide survey and continued through a series of public meetings, workshops, and one-on-one conversations.

The Survey

The Planning Board commissioned a community survey from Davidson-Peterson Associates. The purpose of the survey was to find out how satisfied Town residents and officials are with Town services, what their perceptions are about the community, and their priority concerns.

In February 2004, a sample of Wellesley households received a letter with a unique code giving them access to an on-line survey. (Those without access to a computer were invited to complete the survey at the library or obtain a paper survey at Town Hall.) The sample included 500 households in each of Wellesley's seven precincts, 240 Town Meeting members, and 84 Town officials. Twenty-nine percent of the precinct sample (1,004 persons) completed the survey and 31 percent of the Town Meeting and Town official sample responded. The consultants weighted the precinct responses to ensure geographical representation, but the response rates were quite similar across precincts, so little weighting was required. As is often the case in surveys of this kind, the respondent group tended to be somewhat older than the population as a whole, but in other respects the survey respondents were representative of Wellesley households. The survey asked respondents to rank or rate a set list of issues. The questions did not offer the option of "other" and there were no "free answer" questions in which respondents could write in their own responses.

WELLESLEY AS A GOOD PLACE TO LIVE

ESSENTIAL/VERY IMPORTANT CHARACTERISTICS	RESIDENT RESPONDENTS (%)	TOWN OFFICIALS RESPONDENTS (%)
Quality of education	85	85
Neighborhood character	79	79
Neighborhood parks and green spaces	77	72
Easy access to Boston	68	67
Town centers with in-town shopping	60	77
Biking and walking trails for recreation	57	61
Increasing real estate values	54	53
Institutions with interesting cultural activities	50	43
Senior services available	44	40

PROBLEM ISSUES IN WELLESLEY

SERIOUS PROBLEM	RESIDENT RESPONDENTS (%)	TOWN OFFICIALS RESPONDENTS (%)
Traffic on Washington Street	52	50
Availability of parking at stores	40	37
Traffic in my neighborhood	22	25
Availability of public transportation in town	19	19
Availability of diverse types of housing in town	17	36
Parking at train stations	17	18
Mix of stores/services	11	15
No serious problems	26	22

In responding to the question of “What makes Wellesley a nice place to live?” survey respondents ranked a series of characteristics.

Residents and Town officials were in substantial agreement about why Wellesley is a good place to live. The Town’s excellent school system is at the top of the list and three other characteristics that 60 percent or more respondents identified as “essential” or “very important” are central to the Comprehensive Plan: neighborhood character, parks and green spaces, and the village commercial districts. The interplay of these physical characteristics is what gives Wellesley its identity as a place.

Most Wellesley residents expressed satisfaction with Town services. With the exception of cable television service, all Town services were regarded as satisfactory by at least 70 percent of respondents. (Cable TV was thought satisfactory by 66 percent of residents and 50 percent of Town officials.) The same general level of satisfaction is evident in the results of a question asking respondents to rank the importance of seven issues as a serious problem for Wellesley. Town officials were more apt to see the lack of housing diversity as a serious problem, but in general, similar percentages of residents and officials otherwise tended to agree.

Survey respondents were asked to identify priorities for services, transportation, and housing. Residents and Town officials had somewhat different priorities, with Town officials giving more importance to building garages in commercial districts, providing affordable housing, and providing services for seniors to stay in single-family homes.

TOWN PRIORITIES RANKED

	RESIDENT	TOWN OFFICIALS
1	Preserve existing parks and green spaces for passive recreation	Build parking garages as part of retail areas in village centers
2	Enact restrictions on single-family home size to maintain neighborhood character	Preserve existing parks and green spaces for passive recreation
3	Complete bike paths/trails to/through all neighborhoods	Enact restrictions on single-family home size to maintain neighborhood character
4	Build parking garages as part of retail areas in village centers	Promote development of affordable housing choices
5	Improve pedestrian safety and traffic flow on Linden Street	Develop ways for shoppers to get to village centers without cars
6	Open teen center for afternoon/evening use	Provide services for seniors so they can stay in their single-family homes
7	Develop ways for commuters to reach train stations easily without cars	Complete bike paths/trails to/through all neighborhoods
8	Encourage adding public buses through town	Encourage adding public buses through town
9	Develop ways for shoppers to get to village centers without cars	Develop ways for commuters to reach train stations easily without cars
10	Provide services for seniors so they can stay in their single-family homes	Open teen center for afternoon/evening use
11	Provide more services for more seniors at senior centers	Build more sports fields and areas for active recreation
12	Widen Washington Street to four lanes to improve traffic flow	Improve pedestrian safety and traffic flow on Linden Street
13	Build more sidewalks	Promote the development of age-restricted housing for “empty nesters”
14	Promote development of affordable housing choices	Increase the amount of housing within walking distance of the train
15	Build more sports fields and areas for active recreation	Encourage the development of assisted living facilities
16	Encourage the development of assisted living facilities	Build more sidewalks
17	Promote the development of age-restricted housing for “empty nesters”	Widen Washington Street to four lanes to improve traffic flow
18	Increase the amount of housing within walking distance of the train	Provide more services for more seniors at senior centers

When asked to indicate their level of agreement with a series of statements about Wellesley, significant majorities of both residents and officials agreed with statements that implied a desire to “tame” the car within town. A majority also acknowledged that they could not afford to enter the residential market in Wellesley today.

Public Meetings

In mid-October 2004, a series of four Comprehensive Plan public meetings were held in quick succession to create widespread public awareness of the Comprehensive Plan process: one town-wide workshop on a Saturday morning and three workshops aimed at residents of three sets of individual precincts on weekday evenings. A week later, there was an early morning meeting for business and institutional stakeholders. Altogether, these meetings attracted nearly 170 members of the Wellesley community. The meetings were widely publicized through inserts in electric bills, flyers, and *The Wellesley Townsman*.

The primary focus of the workshops for residents was (1) to review and discuss the basic goals of the 1994 Comprehensive Plan in order to confirm, delete, revise, or add new goals; and (2) to identify priorities among the goals. Analytical maps prepared by the Wellesley GIS and Planning Departments were displayed at each meeting. A set of fact sheets on Wellesley was also available. At the sign-in table at each workshop, participants were asked to identify their homes with a star on a large map. The maps that resulted from this exercise demonstrated that the participants in the workshops represented all parts of the town in the case of the town-wide meeting and different parts of the various precincts in the case of the precinct meetings.

STATEMENTS ABOUT LIVING IN WELLESLEY

AGREE COMPLETELY OR SOMEWHAT	RESIDENT RESPONDENTS (%)	TOWN OFFICIALS RESPONDENTS (%)
I would like to have a more pedestrian-friendly commercial area in Wellesley.	71	60
I would love to see more historic buildings preserved in Wellesley.	66	57
I could not afford to move to Wellesley today.	61	64
I would love to leave my car at home if there were a convenient way to shop or commute without a car.	58	69
One of the hobbies I really enjoy is bird watching or walking in natural areas.	60	57
I wish I could bike to the village center or the train station on safe bikeways.	56	52
I/we would like to retire in a smaller home right here in Wellesley.	47	51
I'd do more walking if there were more sidewalks in my area.	35	29
If the sidewalks were safe, I would let my children walk to school more often.	33	34

The results of the survey showed that Wellesley residents are fundamentally satisfied with most aspects of life in the Town. They want to preserve their high quality of life, particularly by preserving neighborhood character, including the town’s network of open space, and they experience the impacts of the automobile as one of the major threats to quality of life and town character.



Each meeting began with a presentation by the consultants that provided an overview of current conditions and trends in Wellesley, a review of the major goals of the 1994 Comprehensive Plan and the Town's accomplishments towards meeting those goals, and a summary of the results from the survey. The purpose of the presentation was to provide participants with a broad context of information about change and continuity over the last decade and about Town activities implementing the last Comprehensive Plan. After the presentation, the participants worked in small groups with a facilitator and a map. In the precinct meetings, the groups were organized by precinct. In addition to reviewing the goals from the 1994 plan, participants also discussed other concerns and precinct-specific issues.

For the purposes of the workshops, the 1994 goals were consolidated as follows:

Housing

- Protect and enhance the residential character of Wellesley
- Expand housing diversity to respond to changing community needs and demographics
- Expand housing affordability for seniors and families with children

Economic Vitality

- Foster community-focused retail and service activities
- Enhance unique role and character of commercial areas

Land Use

- Protect and enhance Wellesley's residential and village character
- Strengthen neighborhood planning
- Maintain high standards of design excellence
- Pay special attention to town gateways – the major entrance corridors
- Retain Wellesley's unique identity while working cooperatively with regional partners to solve common problems.

Natural and Cultural Resources

- Restore, preserve, and enhance open space and sensitive natural resources for habitat protection and enrichment of community character
- Encourage sustainable use of resources
- Maintain and improve architectural image of the community

Open Space and Recreation

- Preserve open space significant for size or location
- Expand the trail system to link destinations town-wide
- Provide recreation facilities to meet Town needs



Circulation and Transportation

- Improve traffic and parking management
- Improve pedestrian circulation in commercial districts
- Implement town-wide pedestrian and bicycle planning
- Improve safety at key intersections
- Create intra-town public transportation services

Public Facilities and Services

- Plan for future Town recreational, educational, infrastructure, safety, and service needs

These goals were provided to each group for discussion and were also printed on poster-size sheets. After the small group sessions, each group reported on the goals that they would like to see retained, modified, or eliminated and which new goals they would like to add. These were written on the poster sheets and at the end of the meeting each person was given three adhesive dots to “vote” on the goals that he or she considered the top three priorities. (The votes could be distributed in any manner, from all on one item to three different items.) The



purpose of this exercise was to determine which goals attracted the most attention from meeting participants.

In many respects the 1994 goals still served as the foundation for the participants’ thinking about Wellesley. But they brought the experience of recent trends to refine the goals and provide examples. The priority-setting exercise reflected the small group discussions and was instructive in refining the focus of the general planning goals. For each general category below, the total number of “votes” is indicated, as well as votes in selected subcategories of the overall issue.

Housing (including character, diversity, affordability, and historic resources as a version of character): 92

- Regulation of bulk/mass to protect neighborhood character—45
- Diversity of housing type—29
- Affordability issues—3

Transportation issues: 71

- Safety and enforcement issues—15
- Promote alternatives to the car—14

Natural Resources and Open Space/ Recreation: 48

- Manage Morses Pond to avoid eutrophication and keep it a swimming pond: 12

Economic Development: 44

- Combination of maintaining non-chain businesses and preserving retail character that serves residents’ daily needs—33

Services and Facilities: 15

- Master plan for Town-owned improvements, including a plan to improve school facilities and other public buildings to allow flexible uses—10

Land Use: 6

What these numbers show is that the residential character of Wellesley, and particularly the threat to that character from “mansionization,” captured the highest proportion of the votes. Although affordability was discussed and in many cases acknowledged as an issue that that Town needed to work on, participants in the workshops did not want to spend their priority votes on affordable housing. In contrast to the concentration of attention on a few issues in the housing category, transportation in general attracted a lot of attention, but participant concerns were spread over a larger number of issues. Similarly, natural resources combined with open space and recreation was clearly important in the aggregate, but there was no one issue that focused the majority of attention. Economic development issues were quite a contrast: workshop participants were emphatic about their desire to see the Town’s commercial districts retain independent stores as well as the kind of retail and services that serve the everyday needs of the population—rather than a majority of chains and boutiques.

Meeting for Businesses and Institutions

Representatives of Wellesley businesses and educational institutions were invited to an early-morning weekday meeting to discuss their concerns. An abbreviated version of the PowerPoint presentation was given and then the participants were invited to give their views on how businesses, institutions, and the Town could work together better on issues of mutual concern. The major goal that emerged from the discussion was the evergreen issue of improving communication. Creating a systematic way to exchange information about upcoming changes or concerns was the most important goal.

Stakeholder Interviews

A series of interviews with precinct representatives on the Plan’s Steering Committee helped to identify the ingredients that make up the

Town’s character as well as—in some cases—the individual precincts themselves. Again, there was consistency among those interviewed that, as a family- and school-oriented, and neighborhood-based community, Wellesley is a “residential village” mixing homes, businesses, and access to public transportation. At the same time, the interviews almost uniformly pointed out the difficulties associated with an increase in the size of homes being built—“mansionization”—and their economic and physical impact on Wellesley’s character and diversity.

B. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES FOR THE NEXT TEN YEARS

Like many communities, Wellesley is seeking to balance important values embedded in three different arenas: the town as a whole, the neighborhood, and the interests of individual property owners. The Goals, Objectives, and Policies of this plan reflect a balance of those interests that in some ways goes beyond the priorities and preferences expressed by residents.

Two examples illustrate this. Affordable housing received support but was not seen as a priority issue by most respondents to the survey or participants in the public workshops. Nonetheless, affordable housing creation is an important issue for the town as a whole because it has not yet met the state’s 10 percent goal, which may be why Town officials gave it much higher importance than residents in the survey. A successful approach to creating affordable housing will help the Town meet some of its other goals, such as preserving neighborhood character. Another example is the question of how new construction in established neighborhoods changes their character. This has been an issue of intense interest to Wellesley residents for quite some time, but attempts to pass zoning amendments to con-

strain the size of new houses have failed repeatedly in Town Meeting. Many people are still very concerned about it, so the Town may have to try other approaches to balance neighborhood character with individual property rights.

As was reinforced in follow-up interviews, many of these items were couched in the context of maintaining Wellesley’s “character”—whether the issue was housing and the dangers of building out of scale; economic development and the need to maintain community-focused retail; transportation and the

impact of traffic on major town arterials; or open space and the desire to enhance the major natural assets that are already a signature of Wellesley’s character. Housing received particular attention as the focus turned to Wellesley’s desire—and ability—to support housing that is affordable and housing that serves diverse populations, including empty nesters and first-time buyers. The set of goals, objectives, and policy recommendations listed below represent the outcomes of Phase I and Phase II planning activities.

GOALS	OBJECTIVES	POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DECISION MAKERS
Phase One		
HOUSING		
Maintain the primarily single-family character of Wellesley’s housing stock.	Preserve the existing character on single-family neighborhood streets.	Focus additional multifamily housing in commercial areas or on arterial roads.
Maintain the physical form of Wellesley’s residential neighborhoods by balancing community standards with individual interests.	Define neighborhood character through a set of neighborhood character studies in collaboration with residents to identify the distinctive physical characteristics of each neighborhood.	Explore new ways to maintain neighborhood character such as Neighborhood Conservation Districts, form-based zoning, advisory design guidelines, zoning changes, and other options ranging from advisory to regulatory.
Promote the creation of housing units other than single-family homes to provide housing options for people across a range of income, age, family size, and needs, while complementing town character.	Work towards creating town house, condominium, and rental units in and near commercial districts and other appropriate locations.	Encourage developers to create mixed-use projects and residential projects that diversify the housing stock in Wellesley and provide residential options for older, empty-nester and young family households.
Promote the creation of housing units that are permanently affordable to households with incomes at 80 percent or below the area median income.	Adopt a plan with numerical targets to meet the Chapter 40B goal of ten percent affordable units.	Support the Wellesley Housing Development Corporation and seek developers who will develop mixed-income housing that meets the Town’s needs and complements town character.

2005 GOALS	OBJECTIVES	POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DECISION MAKERS
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT		
Maintain a diverse array of independent businesses.	Maintain businesses that serve the daily needs of residents.	Promote and support small business development to serve local residents.
Create mixed-use environments in commercial areas.	Leverage development and redevelopment opportunities to support both retailers and Town housing goals.	Promote mixed-use development and redevelopment at key sites in commercial areas.
Fund an economic development specialist to work more closely with business and institutional property owners.	Ensure dedicated attention to commercial areas and other non-residential development.	Provide funding for an economic development half-time position.
Create a system of regular communication among Town government, the business community, and local institutions.	Leverage opportunities for new public-private-institutional partnerships to provide mutual benefits to all stakeholders.	Support use of staff and committee time to create and sustain Town-business-institution communication links and partnership strategies.
Support and enhance the build out potential of non-residential property.	Increase tax revenue from non-residential property.	Consider increasing allowed density in existing non-residential areas based on a study of potential benefits and adverse impacts.
LAND USE		
Strengthen Town zoning regulations and design guidelines, and their enforcement, to ensure continuity of town character and quality of life.	Establish common ground among property owners, builders, and Town government to ensure consensus agreement.	Eliminate zoning provisions that are barriers to creation of mixed use and diversified housing in commercial districts. Create an ongoing design, regulatory, marketing, and information strategy to educate stakeholders on land use issues related to town character.
Improve the appearance of town gateways that need enhancement.	Distinguish Wellesley's identity at the major entrance corridors to town.	Focus on enhancements to the Lower Falls gateway and creating a plan for the Natick Line area.
Promote a mixture of land uses, including diverse types of residences, in commercial areas.	Meet the Town's need for more housing diversity and to increase the market for a mix of shops and services in commercial districts.	Create guidelines for mixed-use land uses and pursue projects appropriate for Wellesley.

GOALS	OBJECTIVES	POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DECISION MAKERS
Phase Two		
NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES		
<p>Restore, preserve, and enhance open space and sensitive natural resources for protection of water resources, wildlife habitat, biodiversity, and enrichment of community character.</p>	<p>Identify natural resources for protection and preservation.</p> <p>Protect the quantity and quality of surface water and groundwater.</p>	<p>Manage Moses Pond to avoid eutrophication and to maintain its use as an environmental and recreational resource.</p> <p>Continue small pond management based on the Pond Restoration Master Plan.</p> <p>Apply appropriate Best Management Practices to ensure preservation of natural resources.</p> <p>Continue NRC’s Shade Tree Development Program to provide enhanced tree canopies and aesthetics throughout town.</p> <p>Continue NRC’s Pesticide Awareness Campaign to encourage elimination of pesticides to protect the Town’s water resources.</p>
<p>Preserve cultural resources, including cultural landscapes, to maintain and enrich community character.</p>	<p>Identify cultural resources for preservation.</p> <p>Enhance community understanding of Wellesley’s historic resources, including buildings and landscapes.</p>	<p>Create public information programs on historic resources.</p> <p>Support efforts that encourage the preservation of historic properties.</p>
OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION		
<p>Preserve and enhance the Town’s open space system.</p>	<p>Identify opportunities to acquire new open space and permanently protect and preserve existing open space.</p>	<p>Permanently protect existing Town-owned open space with appropriate zoning and conservation restrictions.</p>
<p>Ensure continuation of Wellesley’s recreational facilities as major community assets.</p>	<p>Retain Moses Pond as a recreational asset.</p>	<p>Preserve a balance between active and passive recreation.</p>

GOALS	OBJECTIVES	POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DECISION MAKERS
Phase Two		
OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION		
Continue expansion of the trail system to link open space to town destinations.	Identify opportunities for new trails and enhancement of existing trails.	Support volunteer trail creation and enhancement.
TRANSPORTATION AND CIRCULATION		
Reduce traffic volume, especially during peak hours.	Reduce the impact of local or through traffic on the local road network.	Pursue opportunities for Transportation Demand Management (TDM), Transit-Oriented Development (TOD), participation in the Suburban Transit Initiative, and smart growth planning and zoning.
Encourage alternative means of transportation both within and outside of town.	<p>Increase the safety of and links in the existing pedestrian network.</p> <p>Create a town-wide bicycle route.</p> <p>Create an intra-town transit system.</p> <p>Provide links to existing and planned suburban transit stations.</p>	<p>Support viable traffic calming programs for areas with a demonstrated need.</p> <p>Explore shared use of shuttles or town-sponsored shuttles for intra-town transit.</p> <p>Include pedestrian and bicycle needs in all traffic and transportation improvement studies and projects.</p> <p>Incorporate the MassHighway Project Development and Design Guidebook (2006) in Town transportation projects and Project of Significant Impact (PSI) and subdivision standards.</p>
Manage parking to support commercial districts.	<p>Enhance customer access and traffic flow.</p> <p>Encourage employees in business areas to park outside of commercial areas in designated employee parking areas.</p>	Identify opportunities for new structured parking and shared parking near commercial areas, as well as better management of available parking.

GOALS	OBJECTIVES	POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DECISION MAKERS
Phase Two		
TRANSPORTATION AND CIRCULATION		
Seek improvement of transportation flow on regional routes.	Reduce rate of increase of local traffic congestion.	<p>Work with state and neighboring towns through the MPO to identify truck routes, locate commuter traffic routes away from congested areas, and establish corridor alliances with contiguous communities/subregions.</p> <p>Consider joining the MetroWest Regional Transit Authority.</p>
PUBLIC FACILITIES AND SERVICES		
Maintain school excellence.	Ensure that Wellesley’s students have access to needed classroom technology and adequate classroom space.	<p>Upgrade facilities to include state-of-the-art technology and classroom amenities.</p> <p>Renovate or replace aging facilities to meet classroom space needs generated by projected enrollment increases.</p>
Create additional community meeting space.	Investigate utilizing public schools for after-hours community activities and events.	Create a management system to monitor activities and secure restricted areas during after-hours community use.
Provide systematic oversight of Town facilities and infrastructure.	Develop a town asset management system to track infrastructure conditions.	Implement a computerized system to streamline maintenance records and track changes.
Improve public safety response times and operations.	Ensure the provision of adequate numbers of personnel and equipment.	Hire additional public safety staff and purchase new equipment as funds become available.
Enhance DPW and the Municipal Light Plant’s operations.	Provide adequate space and technology for operations.	<p>Construct an expanded DPW operations building and a new MLP facility.</p> <p>Replace or refurbish DPW vehicles and equipment.</p>
Clarify Town policies about the maintenance of private streets.	Implement a private street maintenance system.	Create a betterment system that will allow abutters to petition the Town for private road upgrades/maintenance.
Develop a uniform policy for street acceptance.	Create a street acceptance policy that covers private streets that are not part of new subdivisions.	Implement a process by which abutters can petition the Town for acceptance of private streets.