

VII. Land Uses

Wellesley’s rich historic heritage helped to create the special community character that makes the town a desirable place to live. Evidence of this character exists throughout Wellesley, most notably in the traditional town center, and in the village centers with their historic architecture. The extent and variety of land uses are among the strongest determinants of the town's character. Wellesley's special community character, so highly valued by its citizens and by those who come to Wellesley as potential residents, visitors, tourists, workers, and shoppers, can be irretrievably altered by major growth and change.

Aerial View of Natick/Wellesley Town Boundary Photo L1

Zoning is the primary tool that allows a community to control the types, size and appearance of land uses. A zoning bylaw specifies how land is used, and the division of land areas into different zoning districts. Zoning changes over time, sometimes with little regard to building compatibility with the surrounding neighborhood. The Massachusetts Smart Growth Toolkit advises that “most zoning and subdivision regulations actually promote the sprawling development patterns that citizens generally oppose.



Wide streets, missing or small buffer strips, the absence of public shade trees, and building structures set back far from the street with parking areas within the front yard setback all detract from what citizens want from their neighborhoods. Developers often agree with the citizens, yet find that mixed uses, traditional design, and pedestrian-friendly streets are difficult, if not illegal, to build due to zoning constraints.”¹

Aerial View of Study Area - Photo L2



¹ Smart Growth / Smart Energy Toolkit - Form-Based Codes (FBCs), 2008

A key component of the Gateway study was a close look at the variety of the land uses within the study area. Residents expressed concerns about the adverse impact of some of the existing land uses within the study area, and stated their desires for new land uses that would be beneficial to the study area and the quality of life of Wellesley residents. In the first pages of this Section, the existing land uses are described and depicted. The later pages of this Section describe some of the themes that arose from the public participation throughout the planning process. Many of the themes and recommendations are directly related to land uses.

As you approach the Natick/Wellesley town boundary on Route 9 eastbound, you are aware of the diverse types of businesses on both sides of the highway. There is a heavy automotive land use presence ranging from gas stations to used car and new car sales and service. Mixed among the automotive uses, you'll discover a well-maintained office building surrounded by small retail uses, a furniture store and a bank.

As you can see from the aerial view, the single-

Collage of Businesses Adjacent to Westbound Lane of Route 9 near Natick Town Boundary– Photo L3



most obvious physical condition at the Natick/Wellesley town boundary is a substantially built environment. The majority of this western-most Gateway is covered with asphalt, bricks and mortar. To the south of Route 9 in the West Gateway, you can see Bogle Brook flowing under Route 9 through a wooded wetland and floodplain area that leads to Morses Pond. Morses Pond provides 40% of the town's drinking water for Wellesley residents. To the north, you can see an affordable housing development adjacent to a large residential neighborhood.

The photos above depict the businesses clustered on the west-bound lane with arrows to their location on the aerial view. The land uses in this area consist of small retail stores, gasoline

stations, automotive services, financial institutions and offices.

The photos provide evidence of the contrasts between older buildings and uses and uses and buildings that are two to three decades newer. In addition, it introduces the pervasive automotive uses which include gas stations, automotive repair shops, used car sales and new car sales. They also provide evidence of the urban environment that consists of asphalt, bricks and mortar with very little landscaping to soften the view.

Collage of Businesses Adjacent to Eastbound Lane of Route 9 near Natick Town Boundary– Photo L4

The study area ultimately drains into Morses



Pond. Morses Pond, a 103-acre, shallow eutrophic pond, is one of Wellesley's most visible natural resources. It serves as a recreational resource and its aquifer serves as a source for the town's public

water supply. The dense urban environment along Route 9 and adjacent to Morses Pond poses a threat to the health of the pond, and is likely a major contributor to the eutrophication of the pond. This topic is discussed in Section V. Natural Resources of the study report.

The photos labeled L4 show the land uses on the east-bound side of Route 9 at the Natick town line. As we saw with the westbound side of Route 9 in this location, the developable land is virtually paved and covered with dense commercial development, which is primarily automotive in nature.

The former Wellesley Travel Inn, a motor inn, restaurant and office building that has been vacant for a number of years, is one of the opportunities for redevelopment in the study area. However, it is important to note that much of the land area that appears to be open for redevelopment has limited or no development potential, this will be illustrated and discussed further in this section.



Traveling east along Route 9, you will notice another large auto dealership, Mazda.

Tucked very close to the



Mazda Dealership and Dunkin Donuts – Photo L 5

dealership is a Dunkin' Donuts franchise with a very difficult entrance and limited parking. The site location of the Dunkin Donuts is particularly tight, and the entrance and exit are difficult. At peak business hours, the queuing extends onto Route 9, which is heavily traveled. This can create an unsafe vehicular conflict on a fairly regular basis.

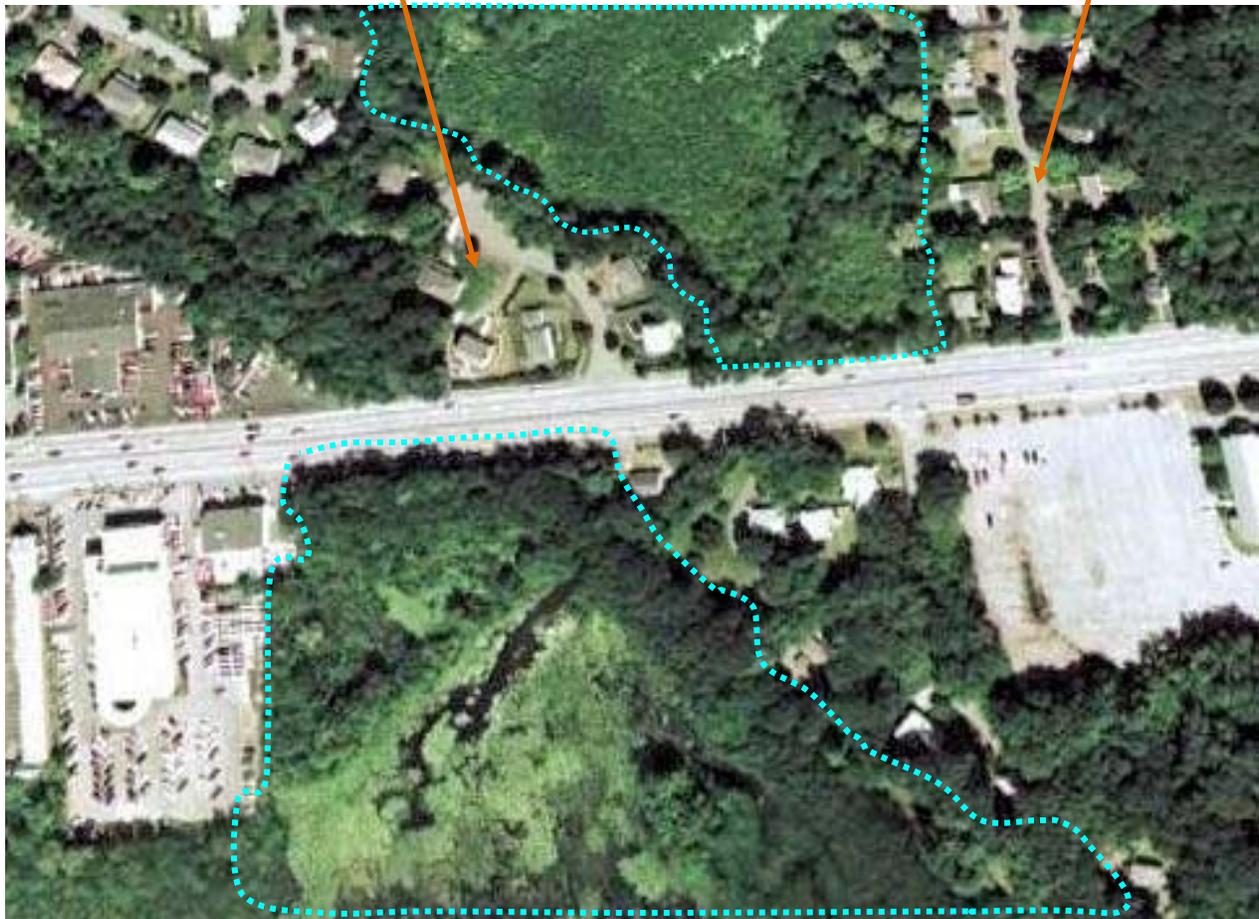
Immediately after the Dunkin Donuts, you enter an area that consists of low- density residential



subdivision development s with subdivision roadways directly off Route 9, Ottaway and Lexington, surrounded by open



space, protected open space, and wetland resources – another brook connected
Center Portion of Study Area - Figure L1



to Morses Pond, which is on the south side of Route 9. This area contains widely differing land uses. It features auto-motive new car sales and service, a fast food drive-through restaurant,

protected open space, wetland and wildlife resources, specialty retail and large lot residential land uses.

The large photo clearly shows the environmental constraints surrounding the eastbound side of the study area, and the protected open space adjacent to the westbound lanes of Route 9. We'll discuss these constraints in greater detail in subsequent paragraphs.



Some distance away, you'll notice California Closets, which is surrounded by the Overbrook Reservation. Adjacent to the eastbound travel lane you'll find a well-maintained office park, Wayne Office Park, nestled on a Overbrook Reservation



Weston Road Area - Figure L2

Gateway Study Area (see photo L6 on the following page).

The landscaping at California Closets and at the Wayne Office Park is a departure from all of the other businesses located in the Wellesley West Gateway Study Area. As redevelopment occurs, the Town should encourage the project proponents to provide a certain minimum amount of landscaping. Over time, the hardscape will soften and the gateway will be more aesthetically appealing.





888 Worcester Street - Photo L 6



As you approach the Weston Road exit from an eastbound direction, you'll notice the new Fells Hollow residential development on the site of a former nursing home. Fells Hollow is a 28 unit, age restricted residential development which was granted a comprehensive

permit by the Wellesley Board of Appeals under Chapter 40B of

the General Laws of the Commonwealth. Seven of the 28 units are deed restricted for affordable households. The property manager appeared before the town in January 2008 to try to ease the age restriction to open the condominium development to a wider market citing the economy's toll on the real estate market as the reason for the request. This is becoming prevalent in MeroWest, so it is important to look at the fiscal impacts of development as a whole, and of particular types of land uses.

Fiscal Analysis of Proposed Development

While fiscal impact fees are still not allowed in Massachusetts, communities can make use of fiscal impact studies of proposed development and re-development proposals. However, these studies should be interpreted with caution. A study that lacks the benefit of the details available once the developer has made progress in the permitting process has to fall back on generic data obtained from comparable developments, yet project design changes that occur between a concept plan and a special permit or site plan submission can significantly alter the assumptions used in a fiscal impact study.

A fiscal impact analysis assesses the relationship between the amount of municipal revenue generated by a variety of land uses and their related community service costs. Most fiscal impact analyses are designed to evaluate the impacts of new development, such as the impacts of a proposed project or growth that may be triggered by a zoning change. A fiscal impact analysis will help a community determine whether a proposed land use is revenue positive (it generates more revenue than it costs in public services), revenue-neutral (land use is at the break-even point) or revenue negative (land use costs more in public services than the revenue it produces).

In general, a fiscal impact study sheds light on the costs and revenue associated with proposed development, but fiscal impact practice is not without hazards. Specifically, a common pitfall in fiscal impact studies is excessive focus on advertised sale prices as a market barometer. The

Typical Findings

- **Over 60 studies were summarized nationwide**
 - American Farmland Trust
 - Skagit County Washington
 - Alliance for Quality Growth, and others
- **All results tend to show nearly the same metrics**
- **For every dollar of revenue received:**
 - Residential development costs the Community \$1.11 to \$1.25 to provide services
 - Commercial / industrial development costs the Community \$0.25 to \$0.40 to provide services
 - Farm and Open Space land costs the Community **\$0.29 to \$0.50 to provide services**

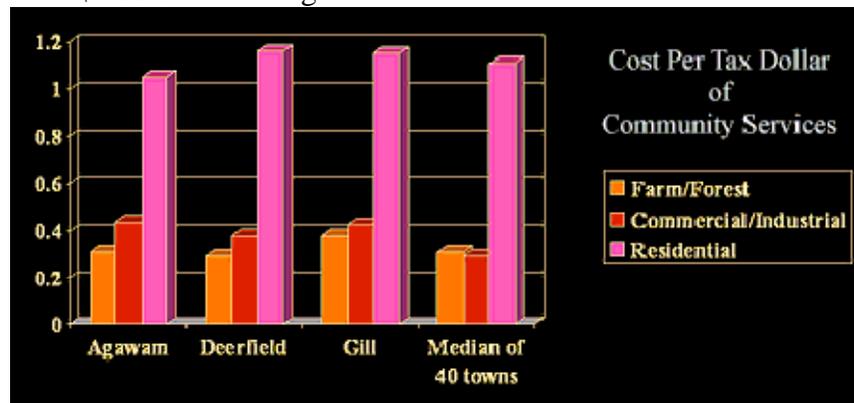
assessed value of recently built homes or commercial developments is more important to a fiscal impact study than what appears to be happening in the market.

Another way to consider the relationship between local government finance and land use is to examine costs and revenues under current development conditions, also known as a “Cost of Community Services” study. Such studies have been conducted around the US and many results are listed on the website of the American Farmland Trust (www.farmland.org). In general, residential development is an economic drain while commercial/industrial and farmland/forest/open space more than pay their own way.

A land use with a positive cost revenue ratio may seem advantageous, yet the amount of surplus revenue it generates may be remarkably small. Low-density commercial development tends to produce a positive revenue ratio and a very small surplus, for reasons ranging from inefficient land use to high public safety costs.

Cost of Community Services- Massachusetts

- Open Space Land costs \$0.33 in services for each \$1.00 of revenue generated
- Residential development costs between \$1.12 to \$1.30 for each \$1.00 of revenue generated



(source: American Farmland Trust data – Massachusetts)

Impact of Nonresidential Uses. Determining the fiscal impact of commercial development requires an assessment of similar business activity elsewhere in a community or market area. If a new business is likely to draw too many customers away from other stores, its net fiscal impact may be less advantageous than it appears. A carefully planned mix of shops, perhaps with a small restaurant could help to diversify the sources of property tax revenue generated by new development in the Wellesley West Gateway study area, and simultaneously respect downtown's role as the civic, social, cultural and business center of the town.

Housing Types and Household Population. Federal census data for Wellesley and other affluent suburbs in the Metro-West area shows that two-bedroom townhouses generate few school-age children. Since the average number of school-age children per household in owner-occupied townhouses and multi-family condominiums is smaller than the average number in owner-occupied, detached single-family homes, the inclusion of two-bedroom units in the Wellesley West Gateway study area would be advantageous to the Town from a fiscal perspective. It is important to note that if many of the two bedroom townhouses were occupied by renters rather than owners, there would likely be more school costs generated. MWGMC's research indicates that the average household size in renter-occupied townhouses is larger than in owner-occupied townhouses.

Mixed-Use Development. Mixed-use housing units (meaning units developed in conjunction with commercial space) were identified as a housing type that would fit well within the Wellesley West Gateway. Regrettably, Massachusetts has very little experience with new mixed-use development. Therefore, it is very difficult to predict the household population and school costs associated with this housing type. The uncertainty can be somewhat alleviated through design standards. For instance, if the housing units were all second story units over commercial uses, you could reduce the school cost impact because these units are typically occupied by smaller size households.

Municipal Services. Research indicates that the presence of multi-family rental and over 55 housing units can generate about 20% more incident response and emergency medical calls per unit than other residential uses. However, emergency medical calls often generate enough revenue from insurance companies to defray the cost of an ambulance response.

After looking at the various segments of the study area and the relationship or lack of relationship to adjacent or nearby segments within the study area, one can reach a basic finding. There are things that residents like, and others that residents don't like and want to change. The goals and recommendations set forth in the next two sections will help Wellesley to take what is liked and make sure to allow it, encourage it, require it, and protect it. They will also help Wellesley take what was identified as needing to be changed, and work to both discourage it and to prevent expansion of it.

It is important to recognize several key questions that served as a basis of the conceptual land use goals presented in the following section of the study report.

- What is the current pattern of land uses?
- What are the zoning designations? What uses are allowed in each zoning category?
- What environmental regulations limit development?
- Is the study area growing faster or more slowly than the region (or state) as a whole?

- Where do land uses conflict with the adjacent land uses, and where are they compatible?
- What types of businesses currently exist? Do they meet the needs to the nearby neighborhoods?
- What types of housing exist?
- What types of retail, office, and industrial land uses exist?
- How much capacity is available in water, sewer, and stormwater systems? Are there plans to expand and extend these systems?
- Are there unique local conditions, including individual businesses, developers, or landowners, that could have a substantial impact on future development?