TOWN OF WELLESLEY *MASSACHUSETTS*

NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION

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July 22, 2014

RE: Wellesley Natural Resources Commission Report on the North 40

To Whom It May Concern:

The following document, prepared for the North Forty Property Steering Committee, represents an analysis of the open spaces in the Town of Wellesley and their per capita use, as compared to the towns of Needham, Natick and the City of Newton.

The data for this document was accumulated by the authors using NRC internal sources and through public information available from the individual towns.

The most important finding in this report: Sixty percent of Wellesley's "open space" is actually privately owned.

If additional information is desired, please contact us.

Heidi Kost-Gross, NRC Chair
Raina McManus, NRC Commissioner and Principal Author

NRC Justification for Town Acquisition and Use of the North 40 Property

Presented to the North 40 Steering Committee July 22, 2014

It is the mission of the NRC to maintain Wellesley's public open spaces and to acquire additional land when opportunities arise.

Wellesley College officials recently informed the Town that the land known as the North 40 would be put on the market for sale. This 46-acre parcel more than meets NRC land acquisition goals, as outlined in the ***NRC Criteria for Open Space Acquisition*****,** which is attached to this report.

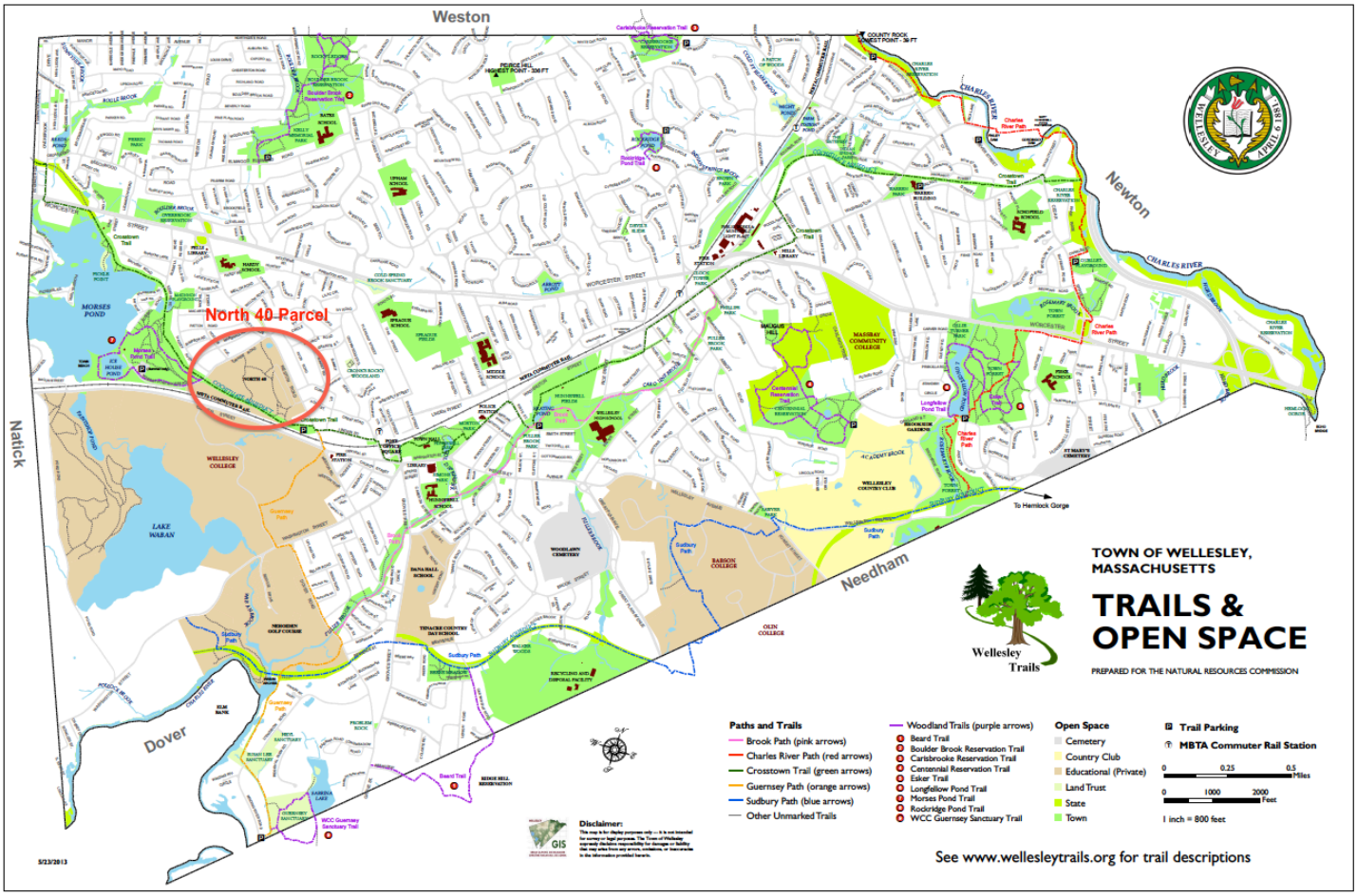
Mostly accumulated from the late 19th to the early 20th century, Wellesley's open spaces and natural resources provide extensive opportunities for the entire community to engage in, all contributing greatly to the quality of life our residents expect and enjoy.

Additionally, our open spaces provide valuable wildlife habitat and contribute to the health of our environment (and to us) by protecting our drinking water, storm water and cleaning our air.

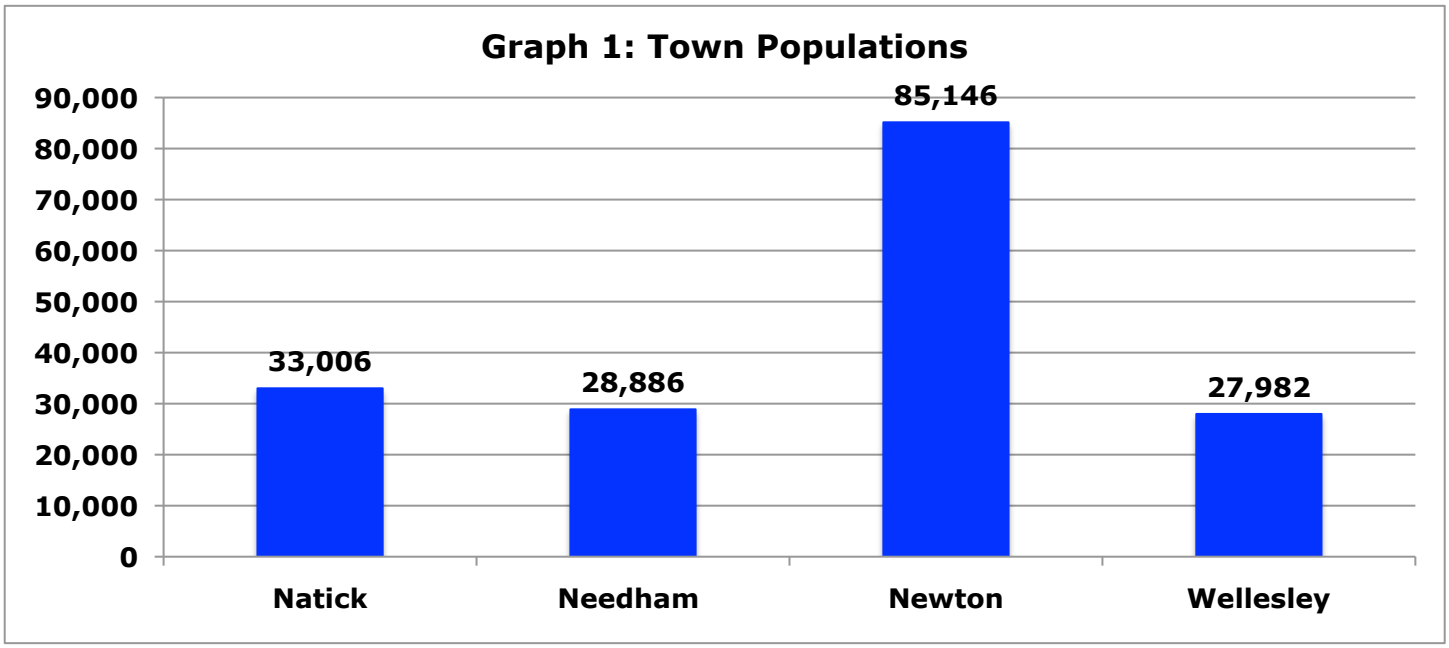
In fact, recognizing the above environmental qualities, our residents have continuously demonstrated their support for the acquisition of open spaces, such as the 1982 purchase of the 40-acre Centennial Park, and most recently, the approval of the Fuller Brook Park Restoration Project. Individual neighborhoods continue to work hard to raise funds to secure and maintain small pocket parks and playgrounds, and their Friends' groups are the go-to assets for the NRC.

The following study carefully examines the benefits of obtaining all – or part – of the N40 for open space and for recreation, as well as the negative implications of the loss of this land for residents. As comparators for our analysis, we used Natick, Needham, and Newton.

Located on the western side of town, this large undeveloped parcel of land is bounded by Route 135, Weston Road and Turner Road, as shown below in the red circle.

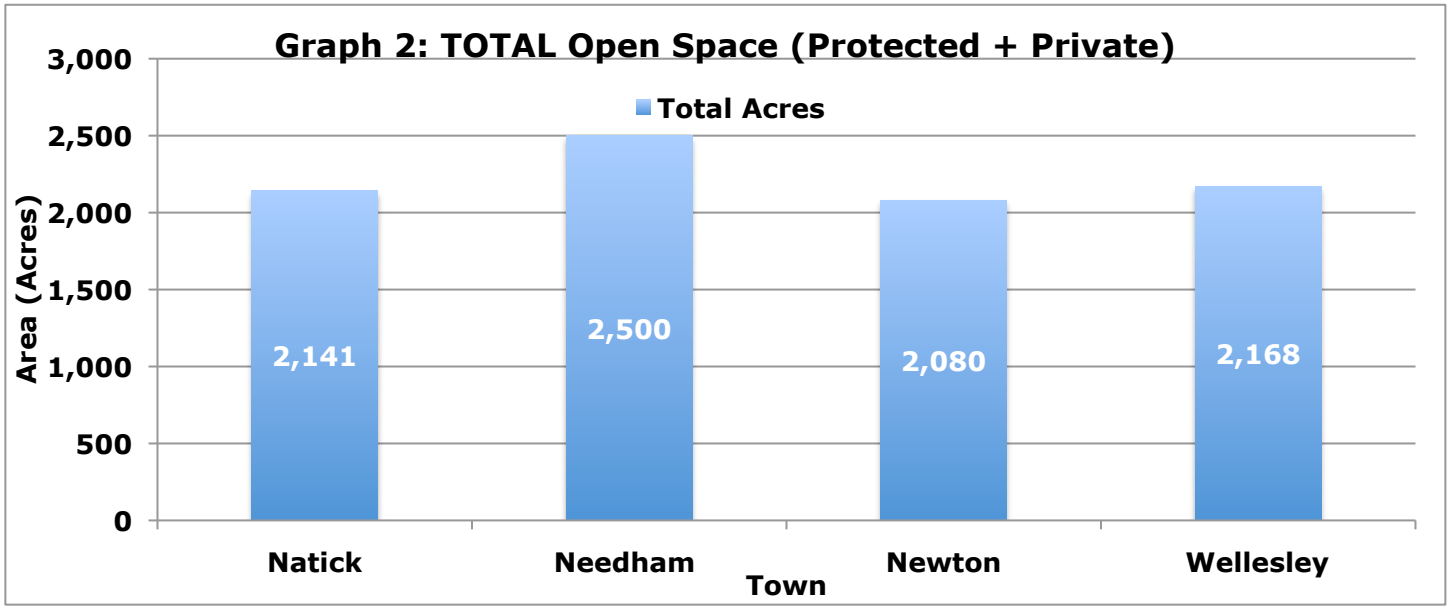


First, let's look at the relative populations of these 3 municipalities as compared to Wellesley. (See Graph 1 below created from the 2010 US Census data). Wellesley has the smallest population of the four municipalities, with Newton having the largest population.



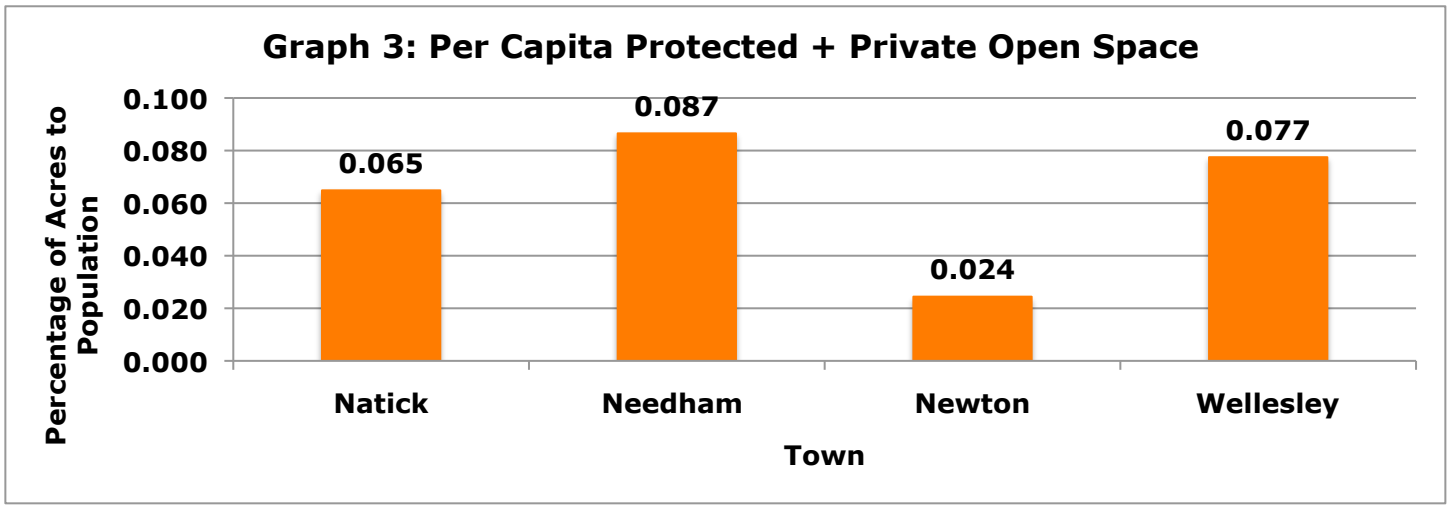
Now, let's examine the total *open spaces,* including both public protected lands and private unprotected lands.

Graph 2 shows that Wellesley, Natick, and Newton are relatively close in their total open space, with Needham having the largest amount of open space.



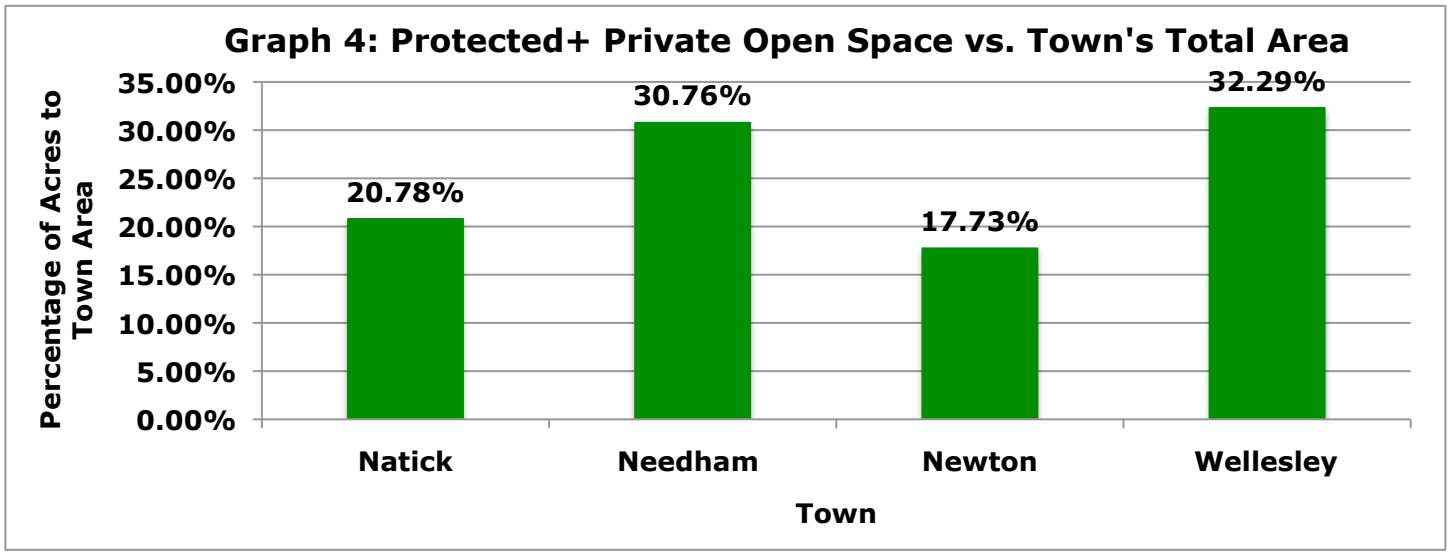
If we combine the data behind Graph 1 and Graph 2, we create Graph 3, which shows the *per capita* values for the total open space versus the population of each municipality.

Note that Wellesley is second behind Needham in its per capita ranking.



Graph 4 shows the percentage of the municipalities' total area that is occupied by its total open spaces.

Note that Wellesley leads with the largest percentage of open spaces in its total municipal area.



<u>However,</u> the above 4 graphs do not provide a complete picture of Wellesley's open space. If we examine the breakdown of the open space into the two categories of *<u>protected open space</u>* and *<u>private unprotected space,</u>* as show in Graph 5, it shows that Wellesley ranks *<u>last</u>* in the percentage of its total open space that is *<u>protected open space.</u>*

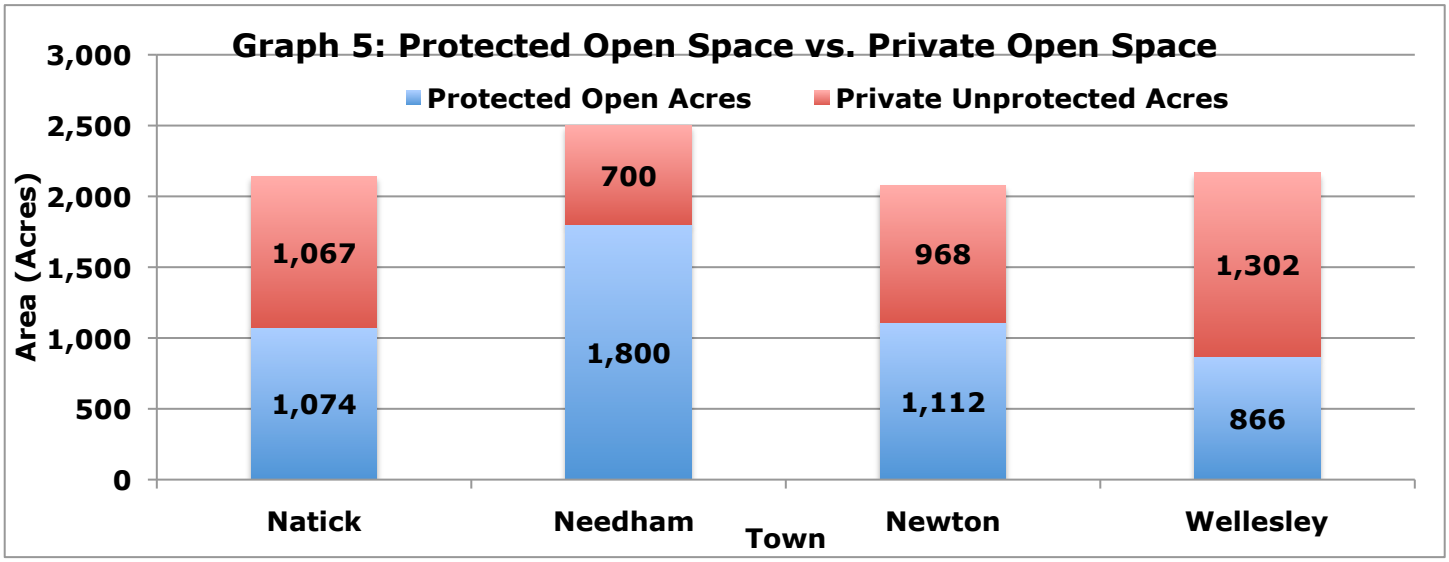


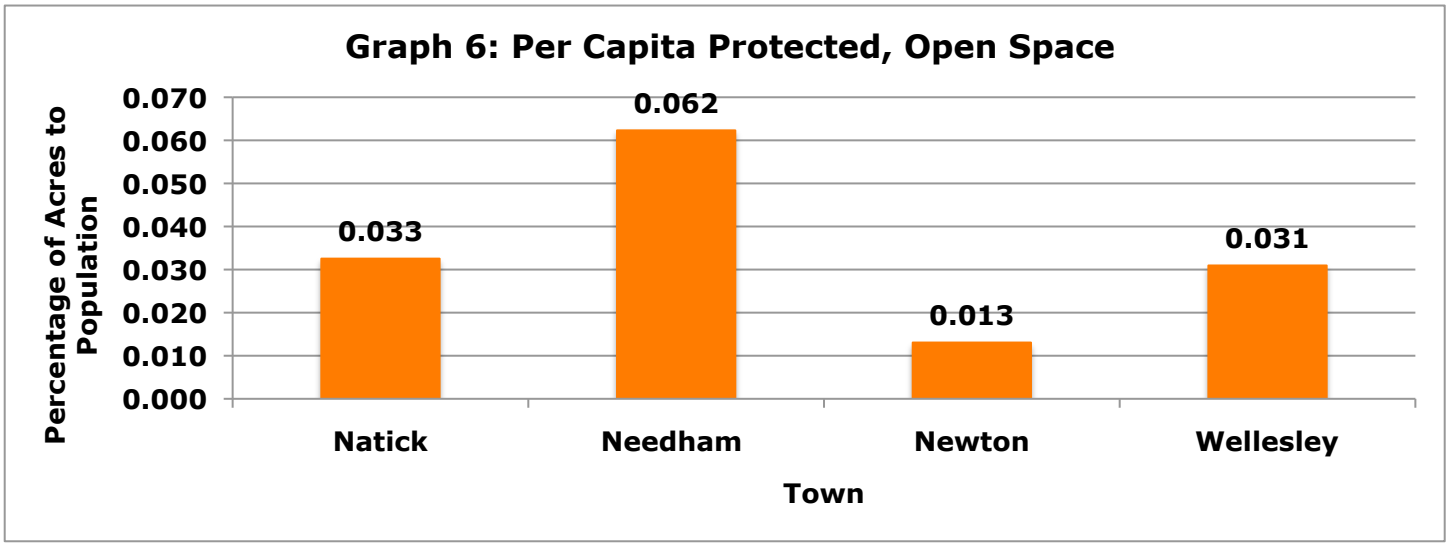
Table 1 (below) provides a percentage view of the protected open space versus private unprotected space.

Table 1

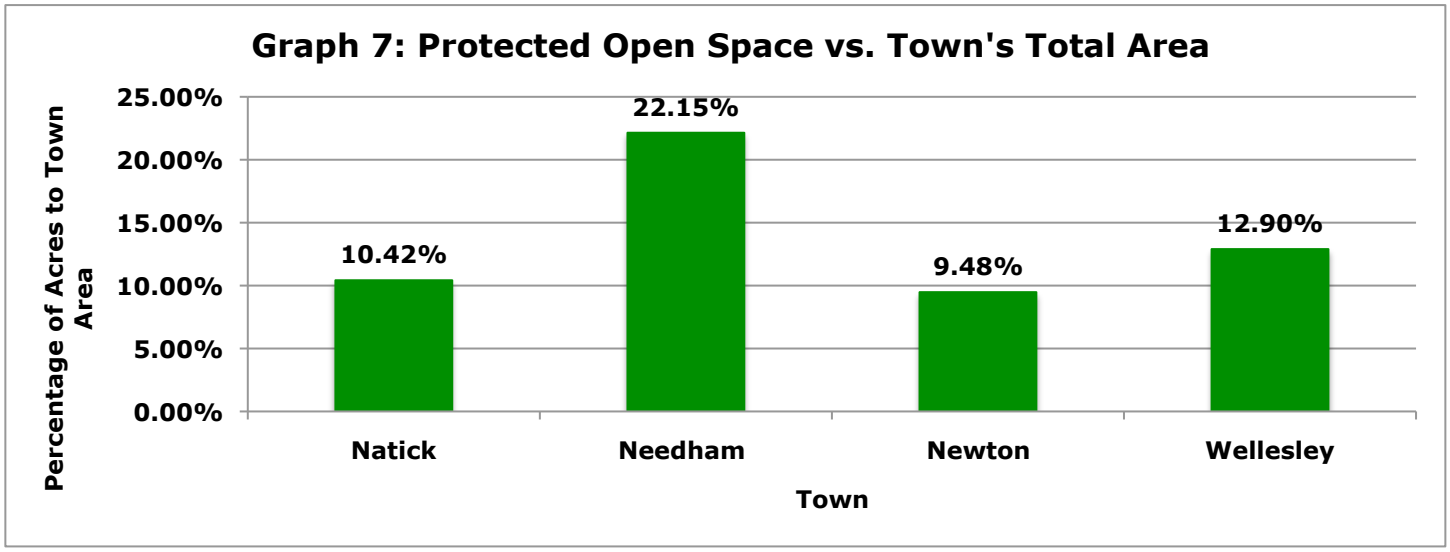
Town	%Protected Open	% Private, Unprotected
Natick	50%	50%
Needham	72%	28%
Newton	53%	47%
Wellesley	40%	60%

Note: 60% of Wellesley's open space is private unprotected space, with only 40% of its open space protected. This puts Wellesley in *last* place of the four municipalities.

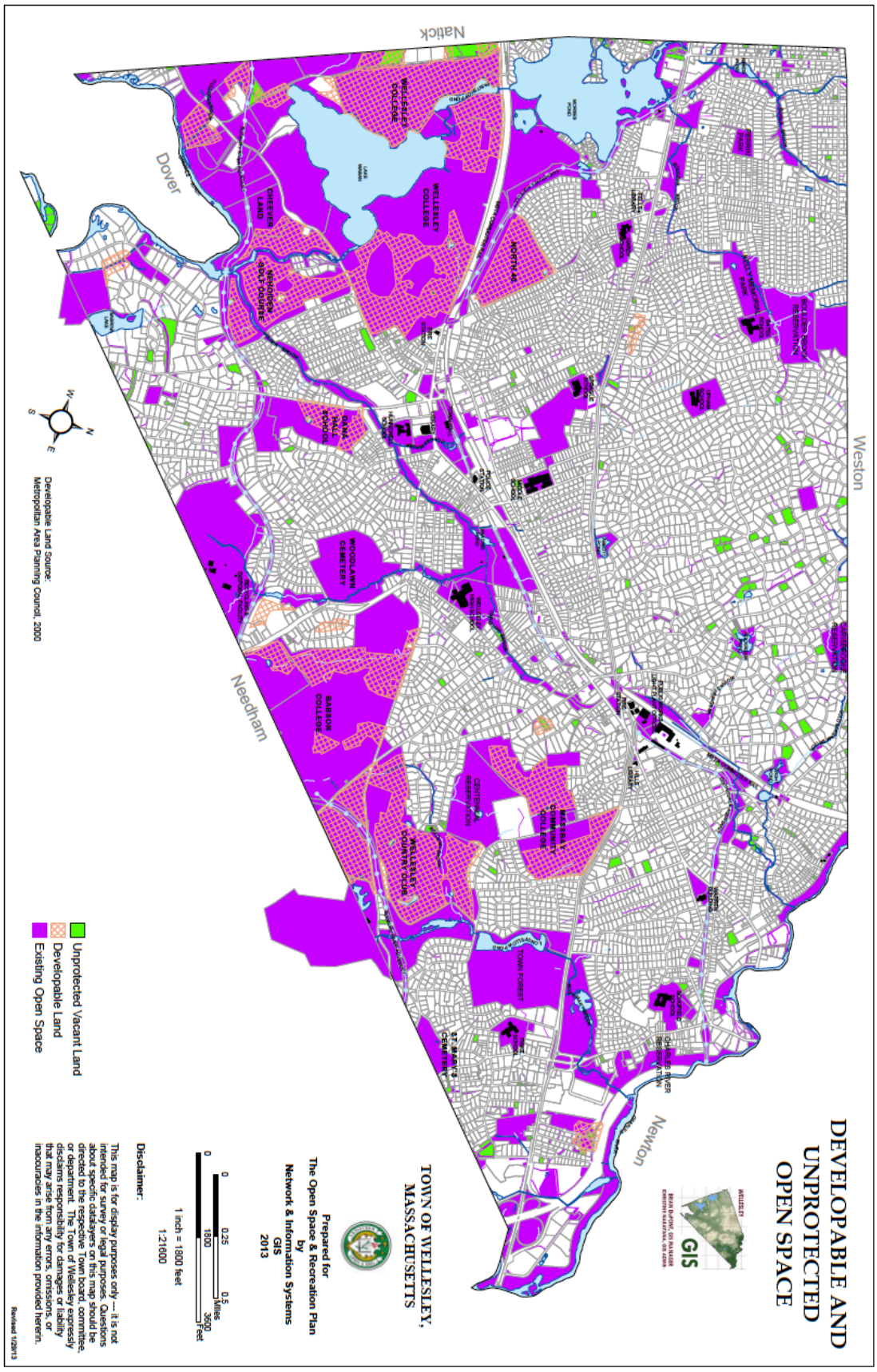
Considering an extreme case where all private unprotected open space is lost, Wellesley would slip from 2nd in its per capita rating, shown in Graph 3, to third as shown in Graph 6.



Finally, Graph 7 shows the change in Wellesley's number-one ranking in open space as shown in Graph 4 to a distant second place behind Needham.



Our analysis clearly shows that Wellesley needs <u>to not only preserve its open space, but needs to aggressively acquire more open space to protect against private conversion of the considerable private, unprotected space.</u>



Summary:

As the above analysis makes clear, the North 40 property represents an important opportunity for Wellesley to positively impact its open space assets.

Specifically, acquiring the 46 acres of open space contained in the North 40 will raise Wellesley's open space from 40% to 42%.

Also, this change represents a 5.3% increase in our total protected open space, raising it from 866 acres to 912 acres.

Additionally, Wellesley's per capita of protected open space is currently **at 0.031, or 1,350 square feet per person.** The acquisition of the North 40 would increase our per capita protected open space **by 87 square feet, to 1,437 square feet per person.**

Furthermore, the town's percentage of protected open space–as a percentage of the entire town's land area–**will rise from 12.90% to 13.58%.**

Please refer to the appendices for detailed maps of the open space of each municipality.

Following is the NRC's North 40 Wish List:

The Commissioners envision more passive and more intensive recreational uses for this site, all centered on the land's natural infrastructure and viability.

This would include (in no particular order):

- Community Gardens
- Trial and Demonstration Gardens
- Walking and Hiking Trails
- Biking Paths – for recreation, and for travel in lieu of Weston Road
- An innovative Playground as center for play and educational opportunities to explore the natural phenomena of the site, as well as a water feature
- Playing Fields for field sports

All features would be accessible via trails to encourage alternatives to car use.

In summary, Wellesley has less open space compared to our neighboring towns. Our residents already heavily use the North 40 for passive recreation, including gardening. The NRC believes acquiring the land would be strongly supported by our community and makes good sense for our Town.

It is well understood that large homes–or any other institutional development–will never serve the civic use and beauty of our Town as will the North 40 as open, passive and recreational space. As our Town Historian, Beth Hinchcliffe, writes in **A Brief History of Wellesley:**

> *"And finally, the flower in the (town) seal symbolizes the town's concern for its future. By providing new open space… and by continuing the level of pride in our town shown by Wellesley's leaders throughout the years, Wellesley's residents are pledging to future citizens gifts of immeasurable value: land, the beauty of nature, and the rare treasure of a community truly pledged to cooperation and unity."*

NRC CRITERIA FOR OPEN SPACE AQUISITION
The Natural Resources Commission evaluates potential open space acquisitions according to the following criteria. The applicability of the acquisition of the North 40 property is identified below:

I. RELATIONSHIP TO OPEN SPACE GOALS

A. Is the parcel identified in the Comprehensive Open Space Plan For Conservation or Recreation or does it meet a specific public open space need in terms of location, type of land or resource protection relating to one or more of the following:

Protection of wetlands:	**YES**
Protection or improvement of water quality:	**YES**
Active recreational uses (potential for playing fields, access to recreational resources such as the Charles River, regional resources, etc.):	**YES**
Passive open space uses (conservation, wildlife habitat, nature study areas):	**YES**
Urban parks in or near shopping and commercial areas:	**YES**
Neighborhood or pocket parks and buffer areas:	**YES**
Trail system and open space linkages:	**YES**

Would acquisition of the parcel contribute to Town land use goals as expressed in:

Town zoning regulations:	**TBD**
The Town's Comprehensive (Master) Plan as updated by the Planning Board:	**YES**

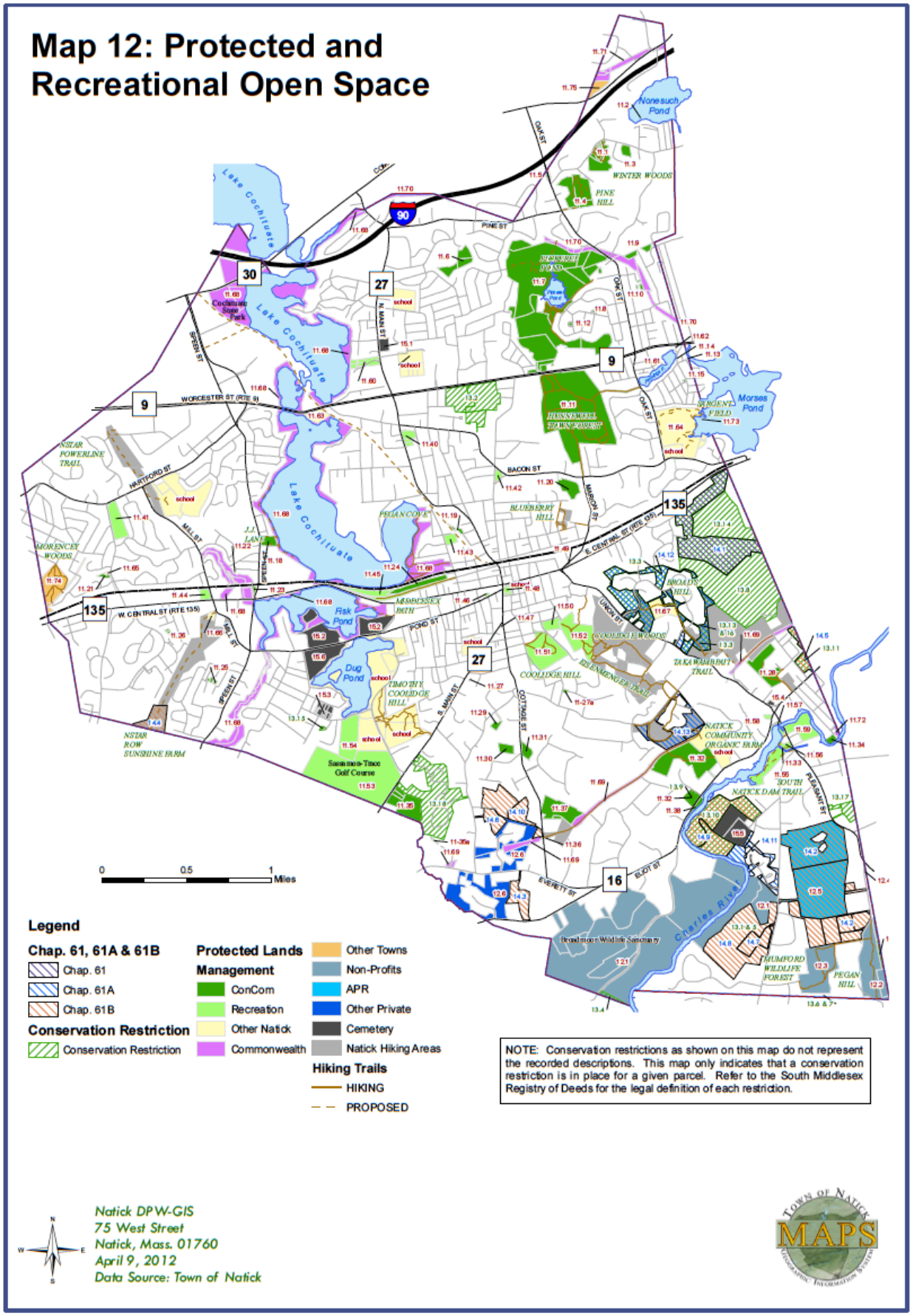
II. EVALUATION OF THE SITE

To what degree does the parcel fulfill the need or needs identified above?	**ALL**
Is the parcel essential in terms of type or location, or is there another parcel owned by the Town or available for future acquisition or public use that would do the job equally well or better?	**NORTH 40 PARCEL IS ESSENTIAL**
Can the parcel serve several purposes in relation to Town goals or needs?	**YES**
Can the parcel be linked to adjacent lands to enhance the usefulness of the open space system beyond the parcel's own boundaries?	**YES**
Is there adequate public access to the parcel?	**YES**

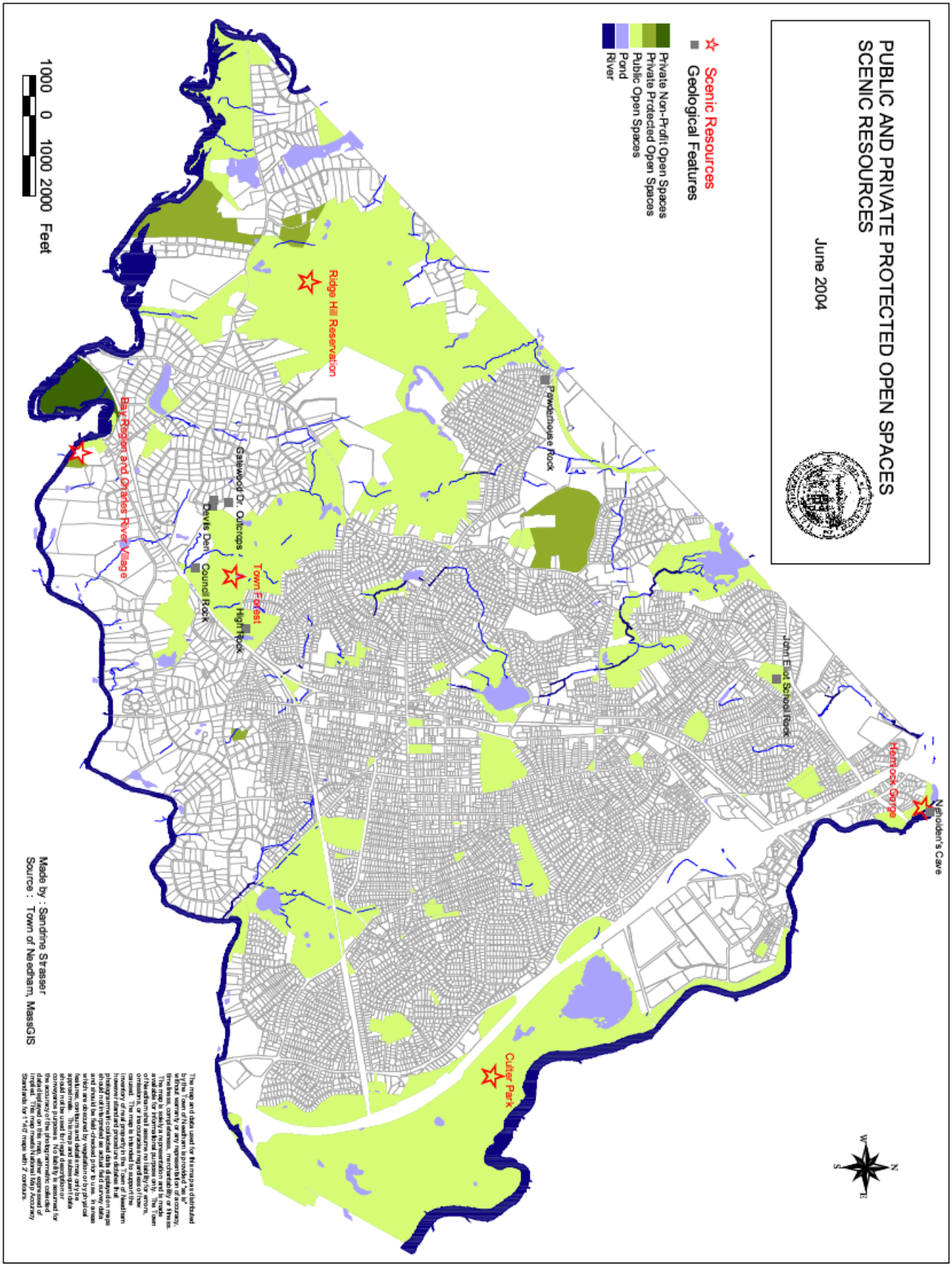
III. EVALUATION OF COST/BENEFIT EQUATION

Does the cost of acquiring the parcel bear a favorable relationship to the parcel's public value as open space?	**YES**
Are there indirect costs that this acquisition would incur, such as unusual maintenance needs, insurance costs, etc.?	**NONE IDENTIFIED**
Are there alternatives to outright acquisition in fee, such as acquiring development rights, conservation easements or restrictions, zoning, wetlands regulation, cooperative use arrangements, etc.?	**TBD**
What are the possible sources of funding for the acquisition (state or federal grants, public fundraising, neighborhood contributions, etc.)?	**PRIMARY SOURCE FOR OPEN SPACE ACQUISITION WOULD BE CPA FUNDS**

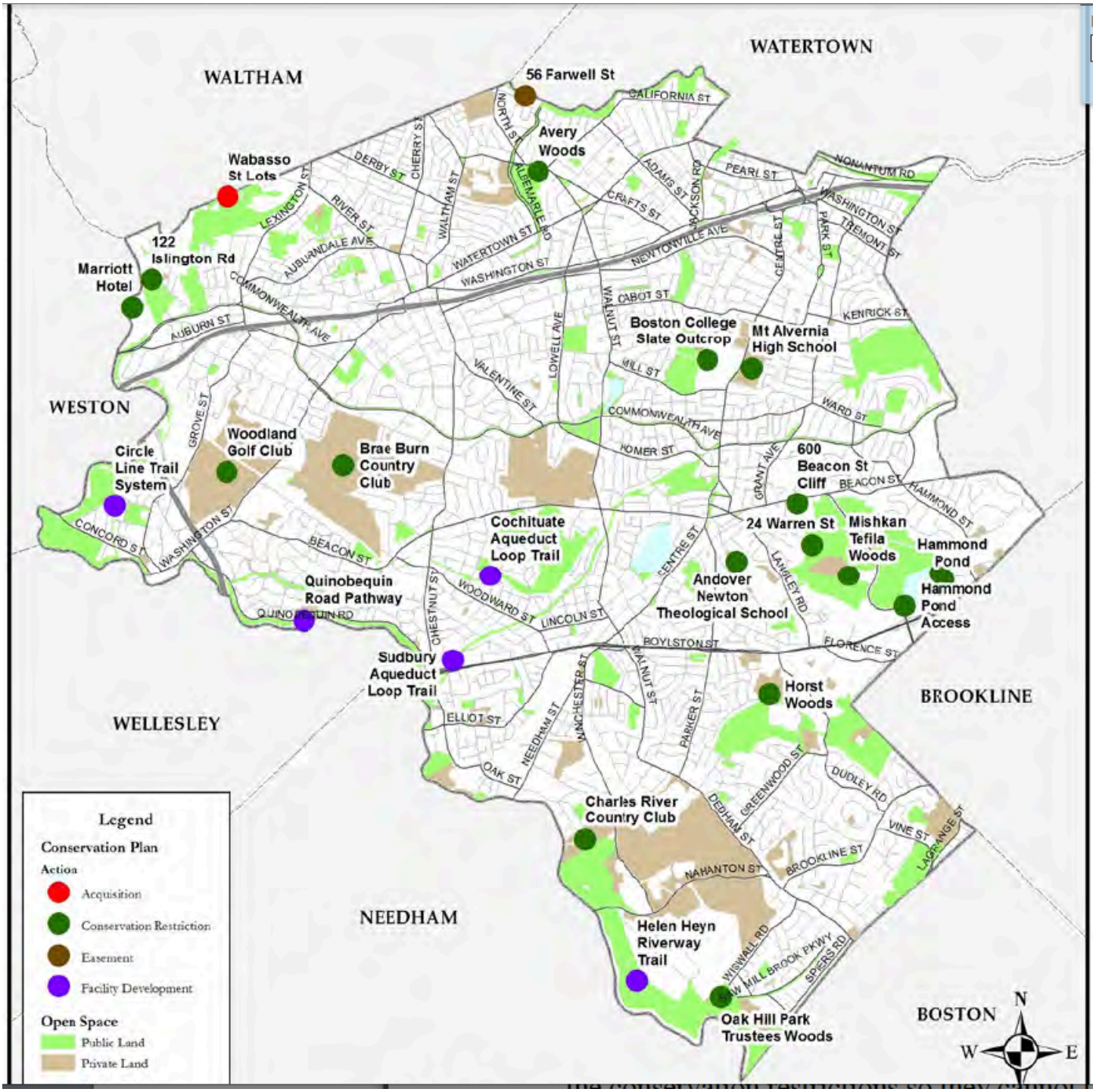
Appendix A – Map of Natick's Open Space



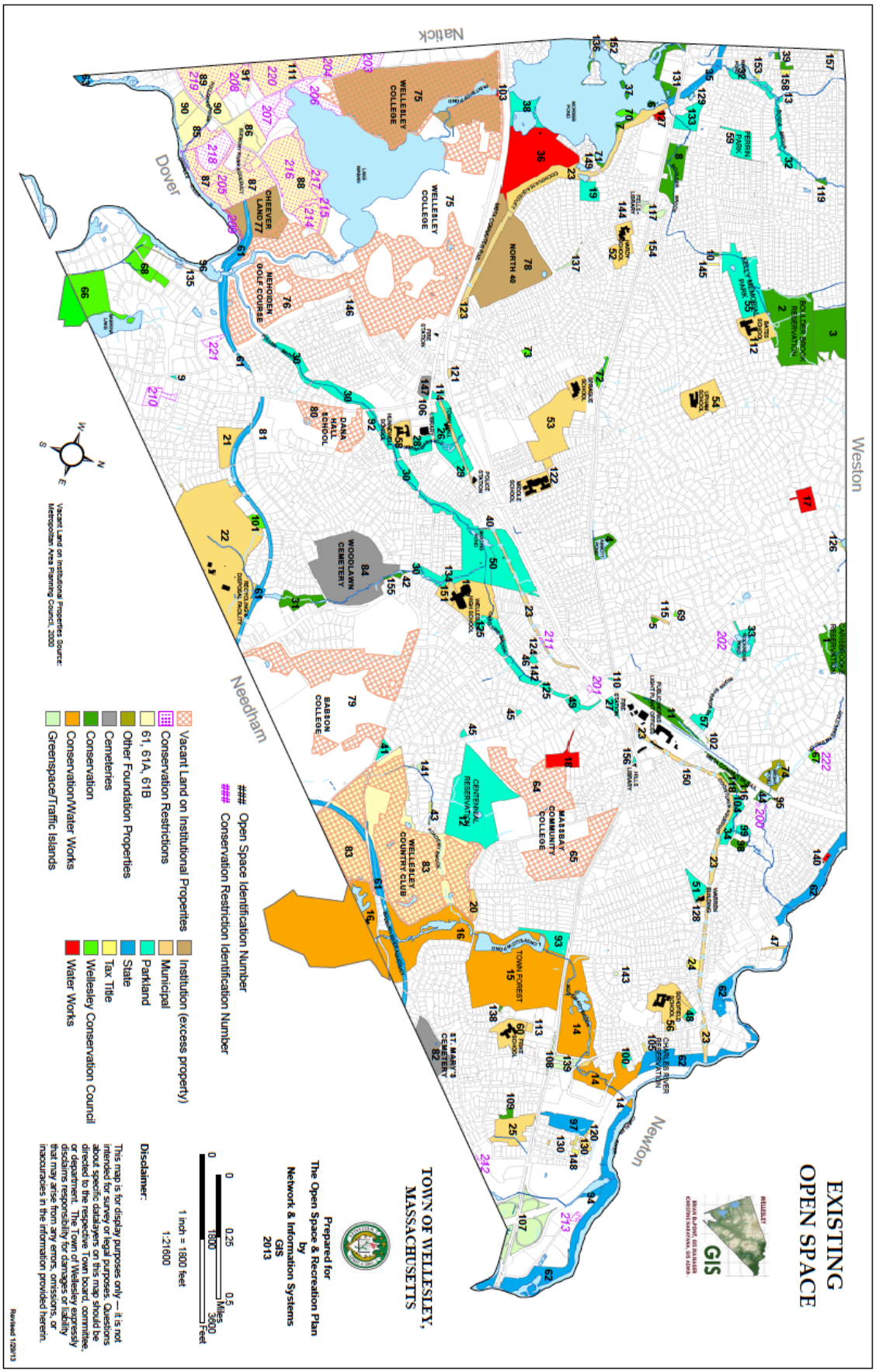
Appendix B – Map of Needham's Open Space



Appendix C – Map of Newton's Open Space



Appendix D –
Map of Wellesley's Open Space, Corresponding to the Inventory of Lands of Conservation



Appendix E – Breakdown of Wellesley's Open Spaces

Chart 1 below shows a breakdown of Wellesley's public protected open space versus the private unprotected open space. Chart 2 shows the breakdown of the private unprotected 1,302 acres.

Chart 1: Breakdown of Public Protected vs. Private Unprotected Open Space (acres)

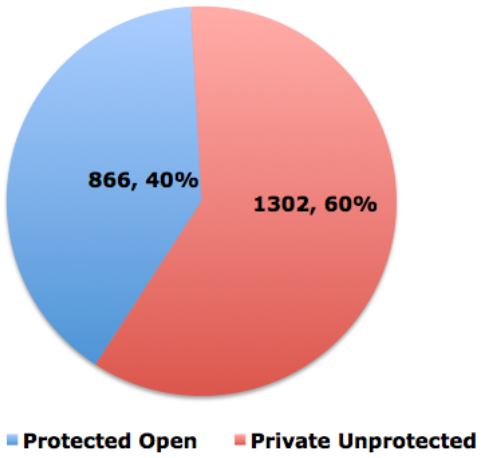
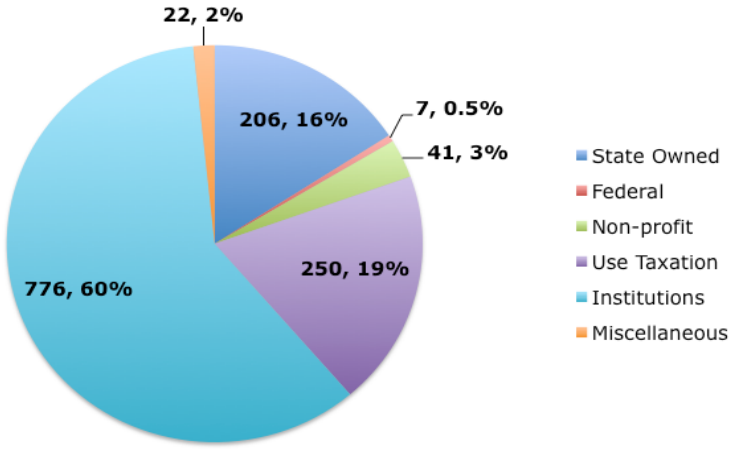


Chart 2: Breakdown of Private Unprotected Space



REFERENCES:

Population numbers are from the 2010 US Census

NATICK

Natick Open Space and Recreation Plan 2012

http://www.natickma.gov/sites/natickma/files/file/file/natickosrpfinal.pdf

Page 1: The inventory of Lands of Conservation and Recreation Interest identifies 1074 acres of protected open space and recreation land owned by the Town, Sate and abutting towns.

Page 54: 1067 Acres of Unprotected Privately owned Parcels

NEEDHAM

Town Of Needham Community Preservation Plan, October 14, 2005, Amended March 26, 2014

http://www.needhamma.gov/documentcenter/view/9621

Page 12: 1800 Acres of Permanently Protected Open Space

(2500 Acres of Designated Open Space)

NEWTON

City of Newton Recreation and Open Space Plan Update 2013-2017

http://www.newtonma.gov/civicax/filebank/documents/45077

Page 38: Inventory of Lands of Conservation and Recreation Interest

WELLESLEY data compiled from the:

Inventory of Lands of Conservation and Recreational Interest, on file with the NRC

866 Acres of Protected Town-owned Land includes Conservation and Parkland

1302 Acres of Private Unprotected Lands includes Municipal Lands (Schools, playing fields; 61B (Golf Courses); State-owned land; non-profit conservation organizations, Federally-owned land (National Guard), Institutional lands (Dana Hall, Babson, 10-Acre, Wellesley College, Cemeteries, etc.), and single residences like the Hunnewell Estate and miscellaneous land.