

6

Managing Land Use for the Future

GOALS	OBJECTIVES	POLICIES
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.

A. LAND USE ISSUES

This chapter focuses on the land use management and regulation challenges that face Wellesley as identified in the planning elements in the other chapters of this Comprehensive Plan document. Although housing and economic development are perhaps the most important of the land use policies in any community and are likely to have the most impact on land use, transportation, open space, natural resources, cultural resources and public facilities also influence the land use plan.

Reflecting the settled character of Wellesley, changes in land use are likely to take the form of adjustments to prevailing zoning or to prevailing uses rather than full-scale change. Like many older communities in which most of the land has been developed, over time Wellesley has established a number of small and specialized zoning districts, as well as overlay districts. The Comprehensive Plan process identified several goals related to land use:

- Mitigating the effect of teardowns and mansionization on community character.

- Fostering more diversity in housing types, especially housing that would be attractive to empty-nesters who want to downsize but stay in Wellesley.
- Creating more permanently affordable housing for moderate-income households.
- Improving commercial districts, especially those at Wellesley’s entrance corridors— Lower Falls and Natick Line.
- Preserving independent retail and services in the commercial districts that meet everyday needs.

Most of the land use recommendations on man- sionization in the housing chapter of this plan focus on how the Town can gain more influence over the design of replacement houses, rather than on more regulation. The exception is the recommendation to create a residential site plan review process for replacement homes or addi- tions that result in the new structure being three or more times larger than the old structure. This recommendation does not affect the fundamen- tally residential use of the land in question.

All the other issues focus attention on a rather small part of Wellesley’s land—the commercial and industrial zoning districts or a few potential sites with specific characteristics. In the com- munity meetings, these were always the loca- tions that people talked about when asked where to locate housing of different types and higher densities. The closing of Diehl’s and impending changes to Linden Street have also heightened concern about the character of Wellesley’s com- mercial districts and how they serve residents.

Adjustments to Wellesley’s Zoning Bylaw

Wellesley has “cumulative” zoning, with single residence zones as the most restrictive in terms of land uses. As the allowed residential density increases in other residential zones and then as commercial and industrial uses are allowed in

ZONES ALLOWING MULTI-FAMILY HOUSING

ZONE	MINIMUM LOT AREA/ DWELLING UNIT (S.F.)	TOTAL LAND AREA (ACRES)
Town House	4000	4
General Residence	7000	73
Multi-family	3000	6
Limited Apartment	1800	7
Lower Falls	2500	9
Village Commercial		
Wellesley Square	2500	16
Commercial District		
Business	2500	42
Business A	2500	41
Industrial	2500	19
Industrial A	2500	16
Total Units		

Source: Wellesley Planning Department

their respective zoning districts, the uses per- mitted in more restrictive districts continue to be allowed. In general, the Zoning Bylaw func- tions quite well and allows the Town consider- able oversight of projects other than single-fam- ily home construction.

All the commercial districts allow multifamily residential uses and there are four residen- tial zones that allow more than single-family houses. Three of those zones cover relatively small areas and were tailored for specific projects that are not expected to change. The General Residence zone, however, covers 73 acres but allows only two-family buildings and town houses in addition to single-family houses. Opportunities to meet the Town’s goals for more diverse and affordable housing types may emerge in the General Residence zone. In order to accommodate this possibility the Town might consider allowing higher densities if the project proponents could demonstrate through a special

permit process that the project would meet a set of design and development standards.

Achieving Multiple Goals in Commercial Districts

Participants in the Comprehensive Plan public meetings saw the commercial districts as the most acceptable locations to construct new housing that is not single-family housing. A mixed-use approach, combining housing with retail stores, was often mentioned. There are a small number of large, developable sites that could accommodate mixed-use projects or housing, and there are a number of sites with older buildings that could be ripe for redevelopment, particularly in the smaller commercial areas. Linden Street is already the subject of a very significant proposal. The Planning Board has negotiated the inclusion of more housing in the project, in addition to the predominantly retail and commercial mix originally proposed.

In order to illustrate the wide potential of some of these sites and the importance of design principles and decisions, the Comprehensive Plan consultant prepared a set of mixed-use development scenarios for several sites. Appearing in the pages that follow are schemes for the Grossman's site in Lower Falls (27 Washington Street) and two sites in the Natick Line area, the Wellesley Motor Inn and the St. James's Church sites. These scenarios show just some of the variety of ways that these sites could be redeveloped to provide more or less housing, commercial, and office space. All three sites are also linked to water and offer the potential for accessible open space. Some of the scenarios show a suburban model of relatively low numbers of housing units and surface parking. However, the housing market is so strong in Wellesley that new development of sufficient scale (such as 100 units) could easily support underground or structured parking to share with commercial uses. With underground or a parking garage

(surrounded by retail shops, so the garage would not be visible), it becomes possible simultaneously to have more housing units and more green open space. At the same time, the additional population living in these commercial areas would help support retail stores and services. It is important to keep in mind that these development scenarios do not represent actual development proposals. They are simply concepts that could be used to discuss preferred outcomes with property owners.

Unfortunately, none of the sites used for the illustrative examples is adjacent to one of Wellesley's commuter rail stations. However, residential uses generate less traffic than commercial uses, so in these scenarios, housing would be expected to have moderate traffic impacts. Opportunities also exist near the stations. The Tailby Lot is already the subject of a feasibility study and adjacent parcels could also accommodate additional development while benefiting from improved design.

MIXED-USE DEVELOPMENT SCENARIOS

Meeting multiple goals through redevelopment in commercial districts:

- diverse housing types
- improved town gateways
- more affordable housing
- additional open space



Grossman's Site—Lower Falls





GROSSMAN'S SITE DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

1. Conserve the river's edge: create a continuous, publicly accessible green ribbon along the river
2. Establish connections and linkages to the river and site amenities
3. Extend "Main Street" character along the Washington Street face of the site
4. Respect front-to-front and back-to-back relationships of buildings so that building fronts face other building fronts
5. Locate residential uses adjacent to existing neighboring residential area



SCENARIO A: Housing/Supermarket/Retail—5 Housing Units

■ Retail	67,000sf	* Parking Generated	273 spaces
■ Office	0sf	Parking Provided	275 spaces
■ Loft (live/work)	5 units	Structured	0
■ Apartment	0 units	Deck	0
■ Duplex	0 units	Surface	275
■ Town House	0 units	Garage	0
■ Single-Family	0 units	Net Commercial	67,000sf
■ Open Space	yes	Net Dwelling Unts	5 units
		Max Height	3LVL
		Project Density (gross)	1.5DU/acres



SCENARIO B: Supermarket/Retail—31 Housing Units

■ Retail	64,000sf	■ *Parking Generated	251 spaces
■ Office	0sf	Parking Provided	258 spaces
■ Loft (live/work)	6 units	Structured	0
■ Apartment	25 units	Deck	44
■ Duplex	0 units	Surface	214
■ Town House	0 units	Garage	0
■ Single-Family	0 units	Net Commercial	64,000sf
■ Open Space	yes	Net Dwelling Unts	31 units
		Max Height	3LVL
		Project Density (gross)	6DU/acres



SCENARIO C: Supermarket/Office/Retail—100 Housing Units

■ Retail	66,000sf	 *Parking Generated	363 spaces
■ Office	8,000sf	 Parking Provided	370 spaces
■ Loft (live/work)	20 units	 Structured	250
■ Apartment	80 units	 Deck	85
■ Duplex	0 units	 Surface	35
■ Town House	0 units	 Garage	0
■ Single-Family	0 units	 Net Commercial	74,000sf
■ Open Space	yes	 Net Dwelling Unts	100 units
		 Max Height	3LVL
		 Project Density (gross)	19DU/acres



SCENARIO D: Small Supermarket/Roof Gardens—54 Housing Units

■ Retail	36,000sf	■ *Parking Generated	196 spaces
■ Office	0sf	■ Parking Provided	185 spaces
■ Loft (live/work)	2 units	Structured	0
■ Apartment	52 units	Deck	80
■ Duplex	0 units	Surface	105
■ Town House	0 units	Garage	0
■ Single-Family	0 units	Net Commercial	36,000sf
■ Open Space	yes	Net Dwelling Unts	54 units
		Max Height	3LVL
		Project Density (gross)	10.5DU/acres



SCENARIO E: Small Supermarket—104 Housing Units

■ Retail	36,000sf	■ *Parking Generated	271 spaces
■ Office	0sf	■ Parking Provided	256 spaces
■ Loft (live/work)	4 units	Structured	170
■ Apartment	100 units	Deck	70
■ Duplex	0 units	Surface	16
■ Town House	0 units	Garage	0
■ Single-Family	0 units	Net Commercial	36,000sf
■ Open Space	yes	Net Dwelling Unts	104 units
		Max Height	3LVL
		Project Density (gross)	20DU/acres

MIXED-USE DEVELOPMENT SCENARIOS

Meeting multiple goals through redevelopment in commercial districts:

- diverse housing types
- improved town gateways
- more affordable housing
- additional open space



Motor Inn/St. James's Sites—Natick Line





ST. JAMES'S DIVERSE HOUSING SCENARIO

■ Retail	0sf	Adaptive Use of Church Building	
■ Office	0sf	Net Commercial	0sf
■ Loft (live/work)	0 units	Net Dwelling Unts	133 units
■ Apartment	100 units	Max Height	3LVL
■ Duplex	6 units	Project Density (gross)	18DU/acres
■ Town House	20 units		
■ Single-Family	7 units		
■ Open Space	yes		



NATICK LINE/ST. JAMES'S SITE DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

1. Extend network of streets and paths
2. Re-establish linkages to the water and open spaces
3. Create appropriate development parcels
4. Define placement and physical guidelines for building
5. Create a gateway element at the Natick line
6. Strategically locate parking



SCENARIO A: Retail/Office—50 Apartments

■ Retail	9,500sf	■ *Parking Generated	135 spaces
■ Office	9,500sf	Parking Provided	128 spaces
■ Loft (live/work)	0 units	Structured	0
■ Apartment	50 units	Deck	70
■ Duplex	0 units	Surface	32
■ Town House	0 units	Garage	0
■ Single-Family	0 units	Net Commercial	19,000sf
■ Open Space	yes	Net Dwelling Unts	50 units
		Max Height	2.5LVL
		Project Density (gross)	21DU/acres



SCENARIO B: Retail/Office—20 Town Houses/Duplex/Lofts

■ Retail	10,500sf	■ *Parking Generated	100 spaces
■ Office	10,500sf	■ Parking Provided	106 spaces
■ Loft (live/work)	8 units	■ Structured	0
■ Apartment	0 units	■ Deck	0
■ Duplex	6 units	■ Surface	84
■ Town House	6 units	■ Garage	22
■ Single-Family	0 units	Net Commercial	21,000sf
■ Open Space	yes	Net Dwelling Unts	20 units
		Max Height	2.5LVL
		Project Density (gross)	8.7DU/acres



SCENARIO C: Retail/Office—55 Diverse Housing Units

■ Retail	11,000sf	■ *Parking Generated	118 spaces
■ Office	0sf	■ Parking Provided	102 spaces
■ Loft (live/work)	9 units	Structured	0
■ Apartment	36 units	Deck	70
■ Duplex	0 units	Surface	32
■ Town House	10 units	Garage	0
■ Single-Family	0 units	Net Commercial	11,000sf
■ Open Space	yes	Net Dwelling Units	55 units
		Max Height	3LVL
		Project Density (gross)	24DU/acres

Wellesley, like other communities that are close to full buildout, needs to be highly strategic in its planning, seeking to achieve a number of different objectives by identifying development opportunities that solve more than one challenge at a time. In moving forward with a set of interrelated development strategies—residential, commercial, open space, and transportation—and using them as a collective guide to decision-making, Wellesley will be in a position to reduce, if not eliminate, the unintended consequences of managing change as a series of independent activities rather than as an interrelated system.

B. RECOMMENDATIONS

Make adjustments to zoning to clarify language and provide flexibility.

ACTIONS:

Review the General Residence district to allow a special permit option for projects with higher densities that meet Town design standards and other requirements. Of the four residential districts that allow more than single-family housing, the General Residence district is the one that covers the largest area (73 acres). The current minimum lot area per dwelling unit is 7,000 square feet. Residents are sensitive to the possibility that an across-the-board increase in the permitted density in this zoning district might create adverse impacts on neighbors. However, well-designed housing at somewhat higher densities could be desirable in some locations. A special permit option tied to findings on design and impacts would provide flexibility while ensuring that the town would be able to control any increases over the base density.

Review the language allowing mixed-use buildings in commercial districts to clarify

the requirements for setbacks and similar standards. Current language is ambiguous because there are different standards for commercial uses and for residential uses, making it unclear which standard prevails in a mixed-use project. The zoning could be amended to provide for specific requirements, or an amendment could provide that certain design and performance standards have to be met in the site plan review process.

Amend zoning in commercial districts, where needed, to ensure redevelopment would retain desired village commercial character. In some commercial districts—for example, Wellesley Hills Square—the potential outcome of existing zoning is inconsistent with the current village character of the commercial district and with the goals for the district as expressed in the Vision Plan. Current zoning in Wellesley Hills allows parking in the front and similar suburban-strip style development. Zoning in commercial districts should be modified to promote pedestrian-friendly design while accommodating cars and parking.

Create an overlay district with design standards for multifamily, nonresidential and mixed uses from Natick Line to Russell Road. The Natick Line commercial district and the southern part of Route 9 that includes the St. James’s site and the adjacent office building should be included in an overlay district that encourages improved site design and function as properties are redeveloped in this area. Ten years ago, the towns of Natick and Framingham developed and adopted a common overlay district for their sections of Route 9, which had become increasingly dysfunctional and unattractive after decades of sprawling corridor growth. Over the last ten years, as properties have been redeveloped, these sections of Route 9 have improved and the towns found that the property owners often did not even require the density or other incentives

offered to encourage them to make improvements. An overlay for a commercial district like this one can be surprisingly effective in a relatively short time because, unlike residential areas, retailers need to refresh and redevelop more often in order to stay competitive and attract customers.

Make a plan to recodify the Zoning Bylaw in the next ten years. The current Zoning Bylaw is the result of an accretion of amendments and has become increasingly complex over the years. As a result, redundancies, inconsistencies and conflicts have inevitably been introduced. During the next ten years, the Planning Board should request funding for assistance to recodify the Zoning Bylaw.

Raise public awareness about and understanding of land use issues in Wellesley.

Residents and other property owners often lack good information about the land use system, the technical vocabulary of land use regulation, and the authority of regulatory boards—including the limits on their authority.

ACTIONS:

Adapt or develop brochures, guidebooks, and presentations to educate Wellesley residents and other property owners about the land use system. A succinct guide to the land use system and to land use regulation helps property owners when they want to make changes to their property and informs potential developers. Materials developed by others could be adapted to fit Wellesley’s circumstances. High-school students could be involved in creating these materials through classes or clubs.

Make these materials available through multiple means in town. Any materials should be made available on the web site, in Town Hall, the Library, the recreation center, the community center, and the Council on Aging, but they could

also be offered to organizations such as the Chamber of Commerce, parent organizations, congregations, service organizations, and so on. Flyers publicizing the existence of these materials on the Town web site could be included in electric bills or posted in supermarkets and other places frequented by many residents. Members of the Planning Board could also offer to give presentations to community groups. It is usually more effective to go where the people are rather than ask them to come to you. Finally, in some communities Planning Department staff or Planning Board members visit school classes to talk about the physical character of the town and how development occurs.

Promote redevelopment in the commercial districts that meets the Town’s goals for mixed-use development and diversification of the housing stock.

In many cases, the changes in land use that the Town would prefer cannot be achieved through a regulatory strategy. Although the zoning frameworks must be in place to allow the Town’s preferred development types, in many cases the Town will have to take an active role to work with property owners and even recruit suitable developers.

ACTIONS:

Discuss the potential for mixed-use projects that meet Town goals with owners of suitable sites and with possible developers. The development scenarios provided earlier in this chapter illustrate the fact that even in a town that is largely built out and where there are a limited number of suitable sites for mixed-use development and higher density housing, it is still possible to envision a variety of well-designed options. Similar scenarios could be created for other sites. By sharing these ideas with property owners, the Town can communicate the kind of development it is seeking. However, the market at any one time may not be completely aligned

with Town objectives. For example, at the time of writing, condominiums and not rental housing are the most desirable housing product for the commercial districts from the market point of view. However, the Town would benefit from creation of rental housing with an affordable component through a “friendly 40B.” In such a case, it would be worthwhile for the Town to identify potential developers who produce the kind of rental housing with affordable units that would be suitable to Wellesley’s character and begin working with them to bring a development to the town.

Consider adopting mandatory cluster development zoning for the remaining large open space parcels in Wellesley.

The Wellesley Country Club, Mass Bay Community College, and other educational institutions own the remaining large parcels of open space in Wellesley. Should any of that land be offered for sale, the most likely outcome would be large, single-family houses. Mandatory cluster development zoning would ensure that significant open space would remain even if there were some limited residential development on these lands.

