



## WINCHESTER MASTER PLAN 2030

# PHASE I EXISTING CONDITIONS

## REPORT

This report prepared for the Master Plan Steering Committee (MPSC) details the findings of Phase I of the Winchester Master Plan 2030 Existing Conditions analysis for the Town of Winchester, Massachusetts.

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# Introduction

## Purpose

This report is a detailed compilation of the results of Phase I of the Winchester Master Plan 2030 analysis of existing conditions. Phase I focuses on understanding the physical, environmental, cultural, and demographic characteristics of Winchester—What was the community like in the past? How has it developed and changed over time? What are the community’s key issues and opportunities?

When the Town’s last full Master Plan was completed in 1953, approximately 15,500 people were living in Winchester (*U.S. Census Bureau*). Since that time, the town’s population has grown by roughly 45 percent—adding about 7,000 residents. In the early 1950s, Winchester was struggling to accommodate growing school enrollments, especially with substantial residential growth opportunities on the Town’s west side (the area west of Cambridge Street). Winchester in 2018 is, again, experiencing school capacity limitations and has plans to accommodate growing enrollments.

In the 1950s, Winchester was still trying to achieve a goal set in the 1920s to provide parks and playgrounds within walking distance (1/4 of a mile) to every dwelling. In 2018, this goal has now largely been achieved. The 1950s plan also called for a new fire station and the town built one on the west side of town in response to the plan.

The Town has undertaken a variety of effective planning efforts in more recent decades including:

- a *Triangle Area Master Plan* in 1997—for the 585-acre triangle-shaped area in the northeast part of town—that was largely implemented by the Planning Board in the late 1990s and early 2000s
- a community visioning process in 2004 with associated master plan elements including a *Strategic Plan Transportation Element*, an associated *Traffic Calming Study*, and a *Plan to Preserve Winchester’s Architectural Heritage*
- a partial-master plan in 2010 that became a useful strategic plan and resulted in multiple regulatory initiatives and other projects
- a *Climate Action Plan* in 2011 that led to several successful flood mitigation projects and an update to the Town’s *All Hazards Mitigation Plan* in 2016
- an *Open Space and Recreation Plan* approved by the state in 2013, making Winchester eligible for state funding for parks and open space conservation
- a *Public Schools Master Plan* in 2017, leading to the identification of various significant capital improvements to support expanded school capacity and facility improvements
- a recently completed, *Housing Production Plan* in 2018, identifying opportunities and constraints in the housing market
- a *Fields Master Plan*, currently in-progress, addressing the ongoing and projected capacity needs of Winchester’s athletic fields

Using these planning studies and reports and others as an important foundation, this current effort by the Town of Winchester to create a comprehensive master plan will provide local policy-makers with a roadmap to shape future development, prepare for future challenges, and preserve its existing community. The Master Plan will pay particular attention to areas of Winchester currently undergoing

intensive development pressure as well as areas that could offer transformation opportunities, particularly the North Main Street, Cross Street, and Swanton Street corridors.

*A master plan is a way to respond to change over time. It is a long-range (10-year) visionary plan for the community's physical evolution. A master plan helps the community imagine—and create a better future. Only by first imagining where we want to go, can we figure out how to get there.*

The basic components included in the Winchester Master Plan will be:

1. an analysis of **existing conditions** that builds on past and current plans with the most current available data and identifies key trends, challenges, and opportunities
2. a **ten-year community vision** with measurable **goals** to support the vision—the vision and goals will set the stage to identify appropriate, effective, and feasible strategies
3. specific regulatory, programming, and physical improvement **strategies** that work together to reinforce the community's vision and goals and provide informed balance between competing interests and values
4. a **five-year implementation action plan** that includes specific municipal actions, scheduled expansion/replacement of public facilities and infrastructure, anticipated costs and revenue, and a process/schedule for regulatory amendments

Although these components are listed sequentially, this type of process should be iterative and flow between components at times. Future components will likely inform, and augment analysis completed in past phases.

The Winchester Master Plan will comply with all statutory requirements per MGL c.41 s.81D. The Master Plan must be locally approved by the Planning Board and filed with the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development. The required topical elements that a Master Plan must address by Massachusetts statute are as follows<sup>1</sup>:

- Land Use
- Circulation
- Economic Development
- Housing
- Natural, Historic, and Cultural Resources
- Open Space and Recreation
- Public Facilities and Service

## Project Team

### MASTER PLAN STEERING COMMITTEE (MPSC)

Diab Jerius, Heather von Mering, Elizabeth Cregger, Heather Hannon and Maureen Meister (Planning Board); Denis Collet (Precinct 1 Representative); Keri Layton (Precinct 2 Representative); Robin Wolf (Precinct 4 Representative); Joyce Westner (Precinct 5 Representative); James Johnson (Precinct 6 Representative); Magda Ferrari (Precinct 7 Representative); Sherry Winkelman (Precinct 8 Representative); John Clemson (Historical Commission); Tracy Burhans (Design Review Committee); Zeke Nims and David Miller (Conservation Commission); Brian Szekely (Town Planner)

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<sup>1</sup> Note, the project team has made one small refinement to these statutory elements by incorporating natural resources with the open space and recreation element—now, the Open Space, Natural Resources, and Recreation element.

## CONSULTANT TEAM

JM Goldson community preservation + planning (Project Lead; Housing and Demographics; Historic and Cultural Resources; Open Space, Natural Resources, and Recreation); RKG Associates Inc. (Land Use; Economic Development; Public Facilities and Services); Toole Design Group (Transportation and Circulation); Bob Mitchell, FAICP (Land Use and Zoning).

### Winchester Community History and Regional Context

Winchester is a mature suburban town<sup>2</sup> located eight miles northwest of Boston in Middlesex County and encompasses close to 6.5 square miles. It is bordered by the municipalities of Arlington, Medford, Lexington, Stoneham, and Woburn. As a town-form of government, the Winchester's local legislative body is a representative town meeting; its chief executive body is the Select Board; and it is administered by a town manager. The population, which is just under 22,500, is projected to grow over the coming years.

Like many historic New England towns, Winchester was shaped by its geography, habitable land, and water resources. Of its 4,062.17 acres, approximately 893.10 acres, or 22 percent of the total land area, is covered by water bodies, protected open space, or otherwise undevelopable land. Bounded by hilly terrain on the east and west, Winchester's colonial-era development pattern began in the low-land valley areas of town north/south transportation routes. Once called "Waterfield", Winchester's chain of lakes, ponds, and waterways helped shape Winchester's landscape—acting first as sources of irrigation and water power, and, now, as recreational and aesthetic amenities.

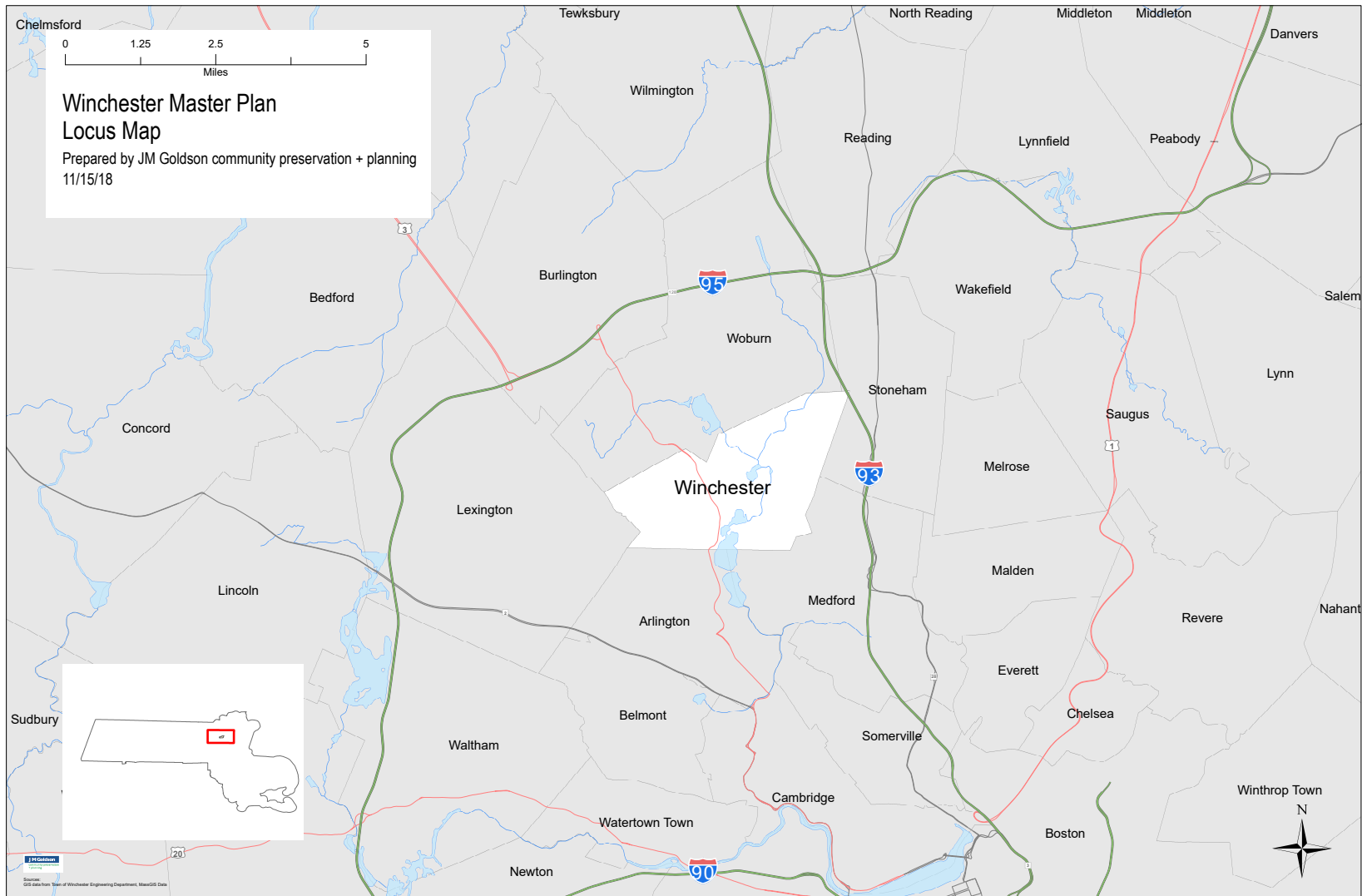
Originally part of Woburn, Winchester was incorporated in 1850. After incorporation, the area near the First Congregational Church, the railroad, and Town Common rapidly took shape as the town's commercial, social, and institutional center. Many of the town's important historic civic buildings, including the Town Hall, Winchester Post Office, Public Library, and Winchester Savings Bank are still located within Winchester Center. Industry flourished along the Aberjona River in small mills and tanneries, bolstered by the opening of the Middlesex Canal (1803) and later, the Boston and Lowell Railroad (1835). These developments provided quick and easy access to markets in Boston.

While the railroad boosted industrial production, Winchester's population began to fracture economically and geographically as wealthy Boston residents—attracted by the easy commute and eager to escape city life—began moving into one side of town. From the 1870s onward, upper- and middle-class Bostonians settled in mansions and architect-designed commuter neighborhoods in the Flats, Myopia Hill, and east of Town Center. In the north, industrial workers settled near the mills and factories, such as the Canal Street-Salem Street neighborhood and Swanton-Cross Street neighborhood.

By the early 1900s, Winchester's industrial peak had passed—paving the way for residential development to now dominate the landscape. Over time, residential development pushed westward past Route 3. Neighborhoods with gridded streets were replaced by curvilinear streets and large lot subdivisions. Winchester still maintains several commercial corridors and areas, including the Town Center. The Main Street and Washington Street corridors radiate out from Winchester Town Center and continue to serve as commercial and residential spines that connect to Woburn to the north. Now, as a mature suburb, Winchester must balance development with maintaining the community's natural character.

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<sup>2</sup> "Mature suburb" communities are classified as having mid-century suburb of moderate density with owner-occupied single-family homes on ¼ - ½ acre lots. They are nearly built out with scattered parcels of vacant developable land (<15% of land area is vacant & developable). New development occurs primarily through infill, redevelopment, and teardowns. More information on other community types can be found here: [http://www.mapc.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Massachusetts-Community-Types-Summary-July\\_2008.pdf](http://www.mapc.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Massachusetts-Community-Types-Summary-July_2008.pdf).

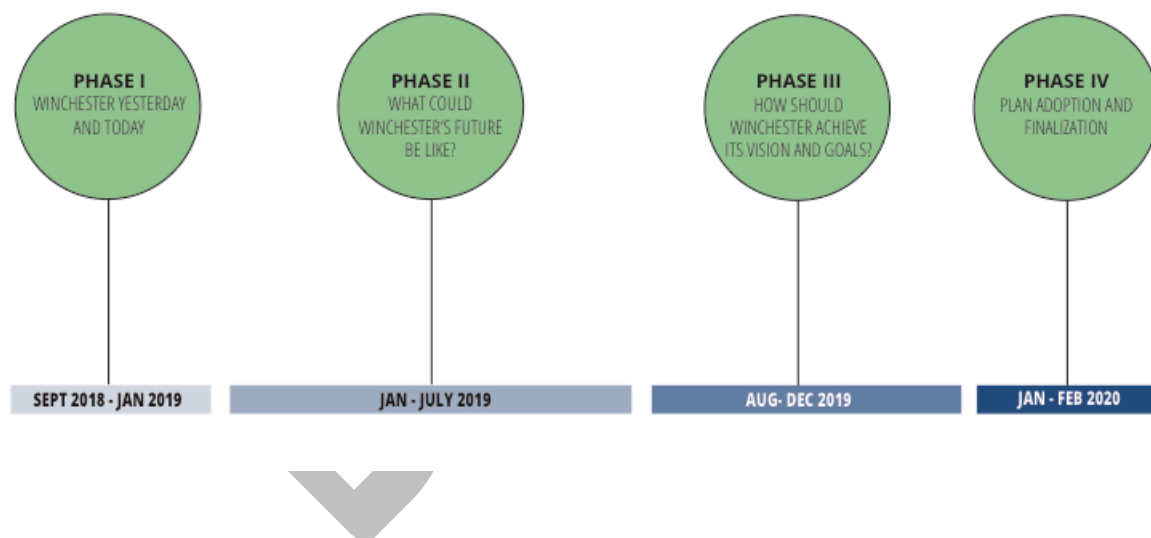


## Planning Process & Approach

The project team's approach to the Winchester Master Plan planning process is based on the belief that facilitating a meaningful, accessible, and inclusive process is as important as—or arguably more important than—the final plan report. Facilitating collaborative and highly-interactive community engagement that utilizes a wide variety of engagement tools is critical to this planning effort.

To create a meaningful and effective Master Plan the elements of the plan are not planned in silos, but rather integrated systematically so that they consider and reinforce one another—and support the regional planning framework. The structure—and flexibility—of the planning process is critical to reaching a substantive understanding of the system as a whole.

The schedule for completing the Master Plan is roughly 18 months—beginning in September 2018 and wrapping up in February 2020. The planning process consists of four-phases: (I) Winchester Yesterday and Today; (II) What could Winchester's Future be like?; (III) How should Winchester Achieve its Vision and Goals?; and (IV) Plan Adoption and Finalization. This report presents the findings from the Existing Conditions Analysis in Phase I.





The Master Plan process launched in September 2018 with Phase I. The town’s consultant reviewed all relevant plans and studies and gathered current data, including focus groups with relevant stakeholders, to understand existing conditions and identify key issues and opportunities. The resulting Existing Conditions report updates and expands the work done for the 2010 Phase I Winchester Master Plan. The report includes detailed analysis presented in seven element chapters:

- ## PHASE I PROJECT SCHEDULE

The project team executed an ambitious schedule for Phase I. The project kicked-off in early September with a community tour and public meeting with the Master Plan Steering Committee (MPSC). Later in September, the project team presented the project schedule and introduced the team at a Select Board meeting. In early October, the team held six focus groups and multiple interviews to gain a better understanding of key issues and opportunities and to help focus the direction of data collection and analysis of existing conditions. The team submitted a first draft of the Existing Conditions report on November 16, revised with input from the MPSC, and presented a final draft to the Select Board in December. Throughout Phase I, the project team worked with the MPSC's marketing subcommittee to create a logo and project brand and launch an interactive website (hosted by coUrbanize) to prepare for Phase II of the project. Phase II will kick-off in January 2019.



## Report Content and Organization

The report is organized in seven chapters—one for each element—that summarizes key trends and challenges, provides an inventory of existing conditions, and offers conclusions that identifies key trends emerging based on the analysis. The chapters are as follows:

**Chapter 1: Land Use.** This chapter describes Winchester's land use patterns and the zoning regulation that shape the community.

**Chapter 2: Housing and Demographics.** This chapter describes Winchester's demographics and housing stock, and illustrates issues concerning the preservation and development of housing in the community.

**Chapter 3: Economic Development.** This chapter describes Winchester's economic conditions—the factors that drive them—and identifies issues with regard to supporting and strengthening the local economy.

**Chapter 4: Historic and Cultural Resources.** This chapter describes Winchester's historic and cultural resources—both physical and social—and identifies issues affecting preservation and community building.

**Chapter 5: Open Space, Natural Resources, and Recreation.** This chapter details Winchester's existing natural resources, recreational amenities, environmental organizations, and sustainability initiatives and identifies issues that can inform adaptation and resiliency efforts

**Chapter 6: Circulation and Transportation.** This chapter outlines Winchester's existing transportation network, including public transportation and multi-modal facilities, describes ongoing local initiatives, and identifies considerations for future transportation and circulation planning

**Chapter 7: Public Facilities and Services.** This chapter details Winchester's existing public facilities and services and proposes considerations to help meet the needs of the community

## Next Steps

Expect to see the project team out and about at a variety of public forums, meetings, and other community events as Phase II rolls out this winter and spring. Phase II will focus on meaningful engagement with the community to develop a ten-year community vision and goals for the Master Plan—both overall and for each element. The engagement process will be structured to identify tensions, choices, and alternative visions and goals. Community engagement is always critical—but particularly in this phase. The project team will create an effective outreach and engagement plan to reach as many members of the community with special focus on reaching community members that are less likely to participate in town events and meetings.

This phase and engagement will be enhanced through the new project website at [www.xxxx.xxxx](http://www.xxxx.xxxx) where community members offer input, obtain information, and follow the progress of the project.

The outcome of these multi-faceted community engagement efforts will be a draft ten-year community vision statement and goals that will be completed in July 2019.