



WINCHESTER MASTER PLAN 2030

PHASE I EXISTING CONDITIONS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report prepared for the Master Plan Steering Committee (MPSC) summarizes the key findings of Phase I of the Winchester Master Plan 2030 Existing Conditions analysis for the Town of Winchester, Massachusetts. The full report is available at www.xxx.xxx

MASTER PLAN PURPOSE

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 roughly 45 percent, adding about 7,000 residents. What else has changed? What remains the same? What do community members value? How do they envision the Town's future?

The Town of Winchester is creating a Master Plan to answer key questions like these and to provide local policy-makers with a rational path to prepare for and shape the future development and preservation of the community with particular attention to areas of Winchester that are currently undergoing intensive development pressure. A master plan is a way to respond to change over time. It is a long-term (10 year) visionary plan for the community's physical evolution. Only by first imagining where we want to go, can we figure out how to get there.

The 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 (DHCD).

A Master Plan is meaningful only if it is implemented. That is why it is vital to develop a realistic plan that is thoroughly vetted and, ultimately, embraced by residents, town officials, and other community members.

Basic Components of a Master Plan

1. an analysis of **existing conditions** that builds on past and current plans with the most current available data
2. a **ten-year community vision** with measurable goals to support the vision
3. specific regulatory, programming, and physical improvement **strategies**
4. a five-year implementation **action plan**

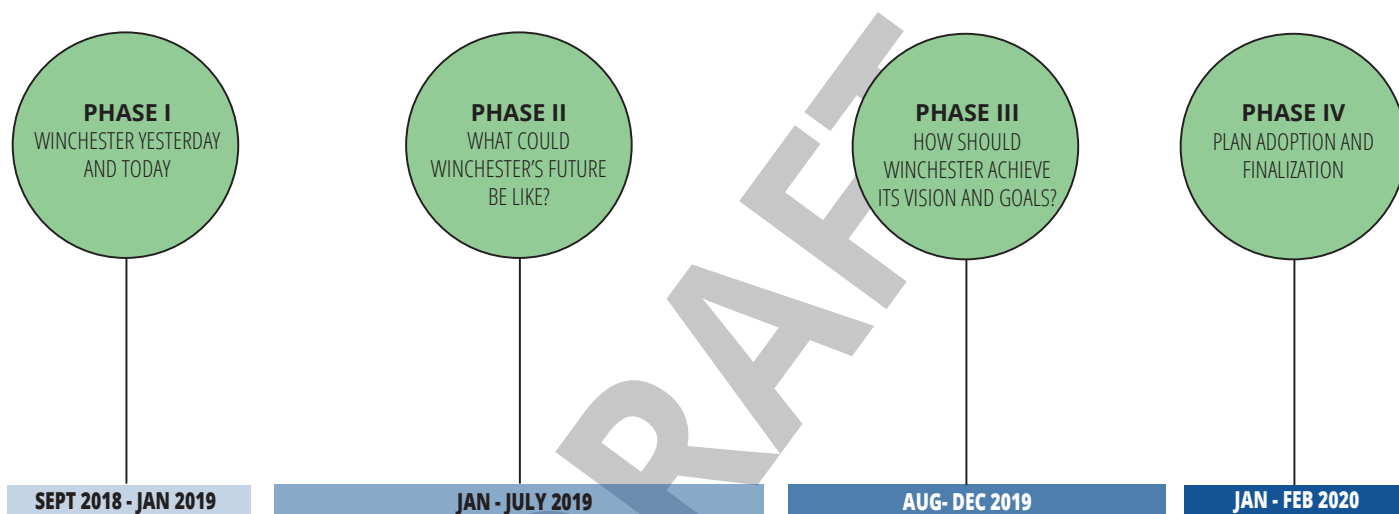
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Project Team: JM Goldson community preservation + planning (*Project Lead; Housing and Demographics; Historic and Cultural Resources; Open Space, Natural Resources, and Recreation*); RKG Associates Inc. (*Land Use; Economic Development; Public Facilities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

PLANNING PROCESS AND SCHEDULE

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.



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:

1. Land Use
2. Housing and Demographics
3. Economic Development
4. Historic and Cultural Resources
5. Open Space, Natural Resources, and Recreation
6. Circulation and Transportation
7. Public Facilities and Services

SUMMARY OF PHASE I FINDINGS

Fundamental Elements that Define Winchester's Community Character

Winchester is an attractive, mature suburban community¹ with easy access to regional employment centers via highways and commuter rail; a variety of coherent, primarily single-family, residential neighborhoods; an attractive town center that serves as the institutional, cultural, and commercial hub for the town; and remarkable historic fabric that expands beyond its extensive stock of well-preserved historic homes. Winchester, while largely developed, has a significant amount and quality of protected conservation areas; parks, playgrounds, and play fields; and natural features that include large and small water bodies.

Key Changes Facing the Community

Winchester's population is growing and changing. More families with children are moving into the community—drawn by the performance and reputation of the public schools—while the proportion of residents that are older adults or younger adults is declining. The increase in school-age children in Winchester has added to an already over-stressed school system. The population is also somewhat more racially/ethnically diverse than in the past with a growing proportion of residents identifying as Asian, primarily Chinese. New services, programs, and organizations have sprung up to serve these new communities.

Winchester household incomes, high in the past, are now even higher—median household income grew almost 60 percent between 2000 and 2016 while the median for households across the state grew about 41 percent in the same period. Housing costs in Winchester are growing at an even faster rate than household income with median sale prices for all single-family house and condo sales increasing about 115 percent between 2000 and 2018.

Most Winchester residents commute to other communities in the region for employment while most of Winchester's workers commute in from somewhere else. About 10,000 people leave the community daily for work, while just over 8,000 people enter the community for work. Many people who work in Winchester cannot afford to live there. The lack of housing affordability and mismatch of resident skill set with the available jobs in Winchester leads to physical repercussions, such as increased traffic congestion, and impacts social dynamics, such as reinforcing Winchester's reputation as a privileged community.

Overall, new development has been slow due to limited viable development sites and strong regulatory controls. Most new residential development has been the result of tear-downs to build new single-or two-family houses on properties once occupied by older, smaller houses. This out-of-scale development has threatened Winchester's historic fabric and the character of the town's individual neighborhoods.

Flooding has been an ongoing issue in Winchester that the town has been actively addressing with mitigation measures. With the increased frequency and intensity of storms, flooding will likely become more severe and require more drastic strategies.

¹ "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.

Winchester's Town Center is the historic, cultural, and commercial hub for the town. Balancing new development opportunities while maintaining the character of the area is an ongoing challenge.

The North Main Street corridor offers a great opportunity for the Town to look at redevelopment options that could include a mix of retail, offices, and residential uses.

Winchester's desirability and extremely high home values has created a market for tear down-rebuilds which threatens the scale and aesthetics of many established neighborhoods. This redevelopment pattern also takes lower-cost starter homes off the market in favor of much larger—and far more expensive—housing.

Winchester's industrial areas house a mix of industrial, commercial, office, and recreation-based businesses. Changes in the market have led to non-industrial users occupying these spaces.

Increasing school enrollment stresses the Town's budget and quickly fills space in schools.

The Town has undertaken several large-scale capital building projects in recent years while operational and staff budgets have remained relatively unchanged.

Adequately maintaining town and school facilities is challenging but critical to extending their life.

Police, Fire, and EMS staff are well-trained but challenges exist with staff retention, succession planning, and dispatch services.

Single occupancy vehicle drivers make up over 70 percent of commuting traffic.

Middle and high school start times have recently changed to coincide with elementary schools creating parent drop-off traffic congestion and pedestrian-safety issues in the downtown area and other areas.

The new Tri-Community Greenway offers a multi-use pathway to neighboring towns.

Route 3 Cambridge Street acts as pedestrian barrier, creating safety concerns for kids walking to elementary schools west of Cambridge Street.

Complete Streets Policy and Plan adopted in 2016 indicates policy change towards providing multi-modal transportation facilities and increased safety measures for all users.

Maintaining neighborhood character is challenging while also encouraging creation of more diverse housing options.

At 1.9 percent, Winchester is far below the state's mandated 10 percent affordable housing requirement which opens the door to potential 40B housing developments that may or may not fit with the character of the area in which they are proposed.

Many modest-sized houses have been lost through redevelopment into larger, more expensive houses.

Housing supply has not kept up with demand, contributing to high housing costs.

A lack of housing options—including smaller, rental, accessible, and affordable units—creates barriers for people in a variety of life stages to thrive in the community and to achieve greater socio-economic diversity in the community.

The town has limited resources to encourage housing development.

Winchester's high housing costs results in much of the workforce being imported from other communities.

An active effort to attract new employers can help diversify the existing employment base. This effort should align existing resident wants with current and future business and consumer needs, particularly in the North Main Street area.

The recent expansion of Winchester Hospital at 620 Washington Street, and its continued presence in the community is a major asset. However, the potential consolidation of Winchester Hospital into the Beth Israel Deaconess Health System may adversely impact local employment.

Increased development pressure puts many of Winchester's historic resources at risk and contributes to out-of-character development.

There are many community groups and non-profits, but most heavily rely on a small subset of volunteers.

Recent initiatives, such as expanding the buildings protected under the demolition delay bylaw, have strengthened historic resource protections.

Other initiatives in the pipeline, such as the Local Historic District and Cultural District, can increase protection, public visibility, and funding streams.

Funding for cultural programs and events tend to be driven and funded by community groups and non-profits.

As Winchester's population has grown more diverse, community groups, such as the Multicultural Network, Winchester School of Chinese Culture, or the Town Common Task Force, have grown to support these new populations.



Winchester is largely built-out making it unlikely that the Town's open space will increase substantially beyond its current inventory. The challenge will be to preserve the quality of the Town's existing open space—particularly as development and redevelopment pressures will increase density in many areas of town.

Many open space sites in Winchester are highly-programmed open space, such as recreation fields and agricultural land.

Although the Tri-Community Greenway increases bike and pedestrian access to many parks and athletic fields, including Ginn Field, Skillings Field, and the fields at Muraco School, other open space and recreational land may be difficult to access by non-car transportation.

In many areas of the country, particularly in the Northeast, precipitation events appear to be increasing in frequency and intensity due to global climate change. Stronger and more frequent storms could potentially lead to higher increased street and riverine flooding in Winchester. Without careful planning and engineering design, new and redevelopment projects have the potential to increase storm water runoff and downstream flooding.

Key Challenges and Opportunities

The *Existing Conditions Analysis* points to a few key challenges and opportunities that warrant further consideration and discussion in Phase II of the Master Plan process to identify community sentiment, values, and priorities and to set the direction for a community vision and goals.

- Finding an appropriate balance between preservation and development, particularly identifying strategic redevelopment opportunities that reinforce and enhance neighborhood character, increase economic vitality, and strengthen the community's resiliency.
- Creating stronger protection for historic resources to more effectively protect the historic, architectural, and visual character of Winchester's neighborhoods.
- Enabling development of appropriately-scaled and designed housing options to help maintain and support socio-economic diversity of the town's population and increase the economic vitality of local commercial and industrial businesses.
- Focusing commercial and/or mixed-use redevelopment and revitalization efforts along North Main Street, in Town Center, and within the town's industrial districts.
- Preserving and improving the quality of the Town's current open space inventory—particularly as development and redevelopment pressures will increase density in many areas of town.
- Creating circulation network changes that allow for less reliance on vehicles and provide safe, pleasant, non-motorized mobility options to enhance connections between destinations within Winchester including commercial areas, town buildings and services, and open space and recreation areas, in addition to regional destinations.
- Integrating transportation improvements with new developments, regulatory changes in land use, and increased density.
- Providing adequate funding for capital costs of public facilities, including schools, other town properties, streets, sidewalks, and other infrastructure, as well as operational and maintenance costs to ensure the level of facilities and services that residents expect.

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 Phase II. 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 where community members can 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.