



IMAGINE SHARON

PRESERVE OUR PAST | FORGE OUR FUTURE



COMPREHENSIVE MASTER PLAN
Sharon, Massachusetts
JULY 2019

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

IMAGINE SHARON

“Preserve our Past | Forge our Future”

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This chapter was prepared by Barry Keppard, thanks to a grant from the Metropolitan Area Planning Council.

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Imagine Sharon is presented in memory of Walter “Joe” Roach, a lifelong resident of Sharon who proudly worked for the Sharon schools and the fire department, and served for 20 years on the Select Board, as well as numerous committees. He dedicated his life in service to Sharon and its residents.

The Master Plan Steering Committee recognizes the extraordinary time and effort from dedicated volunteers and Town employees throughout the Imagine Sharon master planning process and the efforts ahead to implement the vision laid out in the Master Plan. The following departments, boards, committees, and individuals contributed generously to this report. In addition to those named, large numbers of individuals, organizations, and groups also contributed to this process through their thoughtful and constructive input and comments that are greatly appreciated.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OVERVIEW

The Sharon Master Plan Steering Committee (MPSC) held its first meeting in December of 2016 to begin work on defining the goals for the Master Plan and preparing a Request for Proposals for consultant assistance in preparing the plan. The Town of Sharon has never had a comprehensive Master Plan and the Steering Committee articulated the need for a clear vision to frame the Master Plan and an implementation plan to ensure that the Town can move forward with recommendations and action items. Major benefits of master planning for the town include:

- Allow the Town to plan across multiple areas of interest and explore connections and opportunities for multi-benefit strategies and initiatives.
- Understand the full range of recommendations to enact over the next decade, enabling prioritization of actions and spending.
- Guide the Town towards effective short-term decision-making that does not preclude long-term opportunities.
- Illustrate how changing demographic trends and advancing technologies will impact conditions, but also foster new opportunities and initiatives.
- Provide specific action plans to support implementation and collaboration among local government, organizations, and residents.

The MPSC consisted of 15 members and represented a diverse range of skills and interests (see Acknowledgements for a list of MPSC members). The MPSC set a two-year time frame for the planning process and issued the Request for Proposals in August 2017. CivicMoxie, LLC was selected as the Master Plan consultant and worked commenced in early 2018.

Traditional comprehensive master plans are organized by planning elements which are required by Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 41, 81D:

- Natural & Cultural Resources
- Economic Development
- Housing
- Land Use
- Open Space & Recreation
- Facilities & Services
- Circulation & Transportation

Each master plan must also have an implementation section.

In addition, the Sharon MPSC decided to include Community Health as a Master Plan element and received a grant and technical assistance from the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) to complete that work. This element was written by members of the MPSC with assistance from MAPC.

THE PROCESS

The first six months of the planning process involved collecting data and documenting existing conditions. The consultant team conducted one-on-one interviews with Town staff and key stakeholders, facilitated focus groups around some of the planning elements, and a project kick-off survey was launched to inform residents of the master planning process and solicit initial input. The first public meeting was held in June 2018. In the fall of 2018, the planning team presented initial findings and existing conditions and asked stakeholders to give feedback on various options and scenarios for the future of the town in the form of draft Master Plan goals. Between October 2018 and the spring of 2019, the planning team conducted supplementary outreach, tested draft planning goals and recommendations with the senior leadership team for the Town of Sharon, and revised the draft Master Plan according to all feedback. During this time, members of the MPSC, with assistance from MAPC, developed the Community Health element of the plan.

In May 2019, the third public meeting presented the full draft plan goals and recommendations for final feedback. Throughout the planning process, the consultant team met with the MPSC to discuss elements of the plan and to ensure that the goals and recommendations of the plan were aligned across Town functions and departments as much as possible. Integration and alignment of plan elements was seen as necessary to optimize resources and achieve strong community support. The Master Plan also aligns with the *Open Space and Recreation Master Plan Update 2019* efforts that were underway concurrently with the master planning process, as well as the *Sharon Housing Production Plan Update 2018*.

In addition to the three public meetings, other outreach methods were used to ensure as many community members as possible participated in the planning process. Outreach tools included a second, more extensive online public survey, outreach by MPSC members during Sharon public events and festivities (tabling), and a “Do-it-Yourself” meeting kit that was distributed in hard copy and online to allow residents to organize small meetings in their homes or other locations to offer feedback in ways most comfortable for them. Select board, committee, and other board members also attended public meetings. Many of these comments are reflected in the pages that follow. The planning team used a public feedback, professional analysis, MPSC input, and comments from the Town’s senior leadership to help shape the substance of this plan.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE PLAN

Section 1 – Introduction

Section 1 gives a broad overview of the planning process and major issues facing the town, as well as recent and current planning efforts and projects.

Major Issues Facing the Town

- Limited developable land available to plan for housing and expanding the commercial tax base.
- Ongoing attempts to enhance Post Office Square, constrained by septic system limits.
- A comparatively high residential tax rate and Town revenue that relies heavily on residential taxes.
- An aging population with few affordable and age-friendly options for downsizing, despite older residents’ desire to remain in town.
- A robust arts and cultural community which lacks a unifying voice and organizational structure to seek grant funding, raise visibility, and attract donors and audiences.
- The ongoing need to monitor and maintain natural resources to provide for future quantity and quality of drinking water.
- Risks associated with climate change creating the need for investment in sustainable and preventive solutions as well as emergency preparedness.
- A lack of safe and viable transportation alternatives to connect key destinations within town.
- Limited parking capacity at the commuter rail station, restricting residents’ access to Boston and Providence via commuter train.
- Recent increase in new building and infrastructure projects to meet the service needs of residents, without additional tax base to support and sustain these new investments.
- The desire to invest in and maintain a high-quality school system, while also keeping taxes affordable for residents throughout their life course.
- Consideration of future staffing and planning needs to adequately address these issues and implement the goals and recommendations in this Master Plan.
- Recognition of how challenges related to housing, transportation, and climate change fit within the broader state and regional context, creating new opportunities for regional partnerships, planning, and coordination.

Section 2 – Demographic Trends

The Town of Sharon's estimated 2016 population was 18,193 and grew at a slower rate than the county or state between 2000 and 2016.

Key trends and characteristics of the town population (2016) include:

- The town is growing more racially diverse with a composition of: White 79%, Asian 16.3%, Hispanic 4%. The increased racial diversity includes a two and a half times increase in the Asian population since 2000 (from 4.9% to 16.3% of the town's population). In addition, the number of Hispanic residents has more than doubled during that same time period.
- Sharon's median age was almost 43 years old in 2016 compared to 39 years for the state and 41 years for the county; 14.7% of town residents are 65 or older and Sharon's share of older adult residents grew from 10.9% to 14.7% between 2000 and 2016.
- In 2016, almost one-third of Sharon residents (30.3%) were children and teenagers 19 years or younger.
- Compared to the county and the state, Sharon's percentage of the population between 20-34 years old was considerably smaller at 9.8%, compared to the county (18.4%) and the state (21%).

Key household characteristics for Sharon:

- Sharon's estimated homeownership rate was 86% in 2016, compared to 68.5% for the county and 62.1% for the state.
- Families constituted 83.9% of Sharon households in 2016 versus 66% for the county and 63.6% for the state.
- Sharon has a higher percentage of households that include children and youth. Among Sharon households, 43% included persons 18 years or younger, compared to almost 31.8% and 30.1% for the county and the state, respectively.
- For households with a person over 60, Sharon (39.1%) matched the county (39.7%) and state (38.1%) shares.
- Sharon's estimated median household income in 2016 was \$127,500, 41.3% higher than the county (\$90,226) and 79.7% above the state (\$70,954).
- Sharon stands out with 27.6% of households with incomes of at least \$200,000—far above 15.2% for the county and about 9.6% for the state.

Takeaways

- Across interviews, focus groups, and surveys, Sharon residents and stakeholders have identified diversity as a key strength of the community.
- Sharon must address the needs of its aging population including more affordable housing choices for older adults who wish to downsize, and increased services for this population.
- The quality of Sharon Public Schools is a major reason residents' decide to live in Sharon and contributes to the the high number of families with children who live here.
- There are concerns about resident turnover, specifically families leaving Sharon when their kids graduate high school, and the town losing engaged citizens who have been an active part of the community.

Some major trends that will influence the future of Sharon include:

- The Town will have to consider how to fund increasing expenses for infrastructure and service maintenance, as well as increasing demand for services that support the high quality of life residents have come to expect.
- The ongoing costs associated with maintaining the quality of public education and the expected tax increase to fund construction of the new high school and public library buildings could have an impact on the town's demographics. Residents are concerned with the continued ability of the Town to support the diversity in its population that residents value.
- There is a growing movement in town to embrace and actively apply sustainability principles and practices to Sharon's policies and goals. The Town will have to consider how it will coordinate its sustainability actions regionally and statewide.
- There is an increase in the number of households, even as the total population of the town remains fairly constant over time. What does this increase mean for land use considerations and the need for zoning regulations to respond to changing needs of residents?
- The Town must consider the aging of the population and Sharon's ability to offer residents necessary social services and affordable housing options that allow for aging in community.

Section 3 – The Vision for Sharon

Throughout the planning process, strong themes emerged regarding the special character of Sharon. These themes centered on the importance of the community and the connectedness of residents in Sharon. Overwhelmingly, when asked what makes Sharon unique, residents, Town staff, and business owners answered, “the people.” This strong focus on the connectedness of residents shapes the Master Plan vision:

The vision for Sharon’s future is an inclusive, accessible, and vibrant community that aims to improve quality of life for all. This vision is “*Sharon Connected*,” a town that connects people to people, place to place, and ideas to action, to preserve our past and forge our future.

“*Sharon Connected*” prioritizes initiatives that celebrate civic connections, which nurture a sense of community and encourage social interaction and regional cooperation, and those that improve quality, accessibility, and connectedness of neighborhoods, infrastructure, and community resources.

This vision is supported by the goals and recommendations in the Master Plan and are specified in each master plan element and will be integrated through a robust implementation plan. **The vision, as related to the elements of the plan, is described below in the order of the master plan elements, not priority.**

- Arts, cultural, and historic resources enrich our lives, bring people together, and provide social, economic, and educational benefits.
- Economic vitality is the engine of a vibrant live/work community.
- A variety of housing options promotes socioeconomic diversity and an age-friendly community.
- Thoughtful land use and zoning supports the Town’s goals and initiatives.
- Protection, preservation, and enhancement of open space, natural resources, and recreational areas are essential to community health.
- Public facilities, services, and infrastructure are the backbone to maintaining a functioning community.
- Transportation and mobility enable safe access for all users, including pedestrians and cyclists of all ages and abilities.

- Health policy, universal design, and targeted programming foster improved community health and quality of life.

Section 4 – Plan Elements

Section 4 includes all of the plan elements and for each element, the plan includes an introduction, existing conditions, “what the community said,” and goals and recommended policies and actions. This *Imagine Sharon* Master Plan advocates for a cohesive approach to planning that avoids putting separate planning elements in silos and that embraces a cross-disciplinary approach to planning across Town departments and interests. For ease in understanding the roles of various Town departments, and to meet State requirements for master planning, this section of the Plan is organized by plan element; however, there are references throughout to link plan recommendations across elements to ensure a cohesive and integrated approach to planning.

Section 4.1 Cultural and Historic Resources

Sharon’s cultural resources are cherished by residents. From the many volunteer efforts and nonprofit cultural organizations, to the public school arts programs, and the individual artistic efforts of residents and businesses, these resources are seen as a defining characteristic of the town.

Goals:

1. Support a unified approach to coordinating, funding, and marketing cultural and historic assets and events in the town.
2. Make strong connections through communication and coordination between Sharon’s arts, culture, historic, and business communities to support sustainable, vibrant public spaces and robust amenities and services for residents and visitors.
3. Better use existing buildings and physical spaces for arts and culture and identify new opportunities for multi-use arts and cultural spaces in town.
4. Document and make known the full breadth of Sharon’s history and historic resources.

Section 4.2 Economic Vitality

The Town's economic stability is a high priority for residents of Sharon. Maintaining and growing Sharon's economic base is important to alleviate the tax burden on residential property owners. Many residents have voiced a desire for creative economic investment to sustain Town expenditures and services and maintain affordability for residents.

Goals:

1. Enhance and reinforce Post Office Square as a community center for local businesses and activities.
2. Create a strong, supportive environment for local businesses and self-employed/start-ups.
3. Expand commercial and industrial development to create a more balanced tax base.
4. Create septic and sewer capacity to foster economic development.
5. Develop new capacity to undertake economic development and related activities.

Section 4.3 Housing

For over 50 years, the Town's boards and committees have worked to increase housing diversity in Sharon. The *Sharon Housing Production Plan, 2018-2023 Update (2018 HPP)*, provides a recent in-depth snapshot of the current housing conditions in town, along with recommendations to meet the housing demands identified as the town population's needs change. The 2018 HPP is intended to guide housing creation and preservation in Sharon, help the Town maintain its State-mandated affordable housing goals, increase affordable housing opportunities, and provide housing options for residents of all ages. The Master Plan supports the goals and recommendations in the 2018 HPP while also viewing housing goals in concert with other town-wide goals.

Goals:

1. Support and encourage mixed-use development in appropriate areas in town (e.g., Post Office Square, Cobbs Corner, Shaw's Plaza, and the Heights Plaza area).
2. Promote and allow housing types for aging in community, especially options that foster community and intergenerational connections in walkable neighborhoods with access to services and shops.
3. Create green and sustainable housing, including mixed-use options and walkable locations in close proximity to shops and services.

4. Create and preserve affordable units, particularly rental units, to ensure continued socioeconomic diversity and to maintain at least 10% of Sharon's year-round housing stock as affordable per MGL c.40B.

Section 4.4 Land Use and Zoning

Land use regulations have implications for all of the other elements of Sharon's Master Plan. As one of the Town's main tools to maintain and direct uses the community wants, zoning and land use regulations are critical to the Town's effort to be proactive about directing change and protecting the features that residents wish to preserve.

Goals:

1. Encourage mixed-use development, where appropriate, to support connectivity, walkability, aging in community, and local businesses.
2. Encourage economic growth and development, following sustainable practices and concepts, in the town's commercial and industrial districts to generate an increase in commercial tax revenue and to create destinations for residents and visitors.
3. Maintain the character of the town and its neighborhoods while allowing appropriate redevelopment and growth.
4. Coordinate Town efforts to plan for future infrastructure, services, programs, facilities, and finances.

Section 4.5 Open Space, Recreation, and Natural Resources

As much of Sharon's town character, history, and current recreational opportunities are tied to its distinct abundance of open spaces and natural resources, ensuring their ongoing maintenance and protection will be crucial to the continued vibrancy of the town.

Goals:

1. Preserve and actively maintain the town's natural resources and water quality and supply, incorporating sustainable concepts and systems whenever possible.
2. Ensure long-term preservation of open space and agriculture properties and make new strategic acquisitions where possible.
3. Connect passive and active recreational spaces, trails, and natural resources, including the Lake.
4. Expand recreational opportunities for all age groups and abilities in town.

Section 4.6 Public Facilities and Infrastructure

Access to high quality services, robust infrastructure, and appropriately maintained public facilities is a critical component of quality of life for residents in town. The growing and changing needs of the population impact the current and future needs for public facilities and infrastructure while also impacting Town finances.

Goals:

1. Improve the septic and sewage treatment conditions and facilities in town.
2. Maintain and improve existing Town facilities.
3. Maintain and improve physical infrastructure systems in town.
4. Expand funding sources to improve infrastructure, programs, and services.
5. Improve communication and social service systems in town.
6. Support the continuing quality of the Sharon Public Schools.

Section 4.7 Transportation and Mobility

Sharon, known for its farms, Lake Massapoag, and other beautiful natural resources, is also a commuter town. With excellent access to the regional highway network, including Route 1, Route 24, Route 27, and Interstate 95 (I-95), as well as an MBTA commuter rail station, many residents commute north to Boston and Cambridge, south to Providence, and to surrounding towns. The location of housing, public facilities, and other major destinations all greatly impact the ease of mobility of residents. As a result, considerations about land use as it relates to social and physical connections and residents' mobility are a main focus in this Master Plan.

Goals:

1. Continue to adhere to and promote Complete Streets principles with all roadway infrastructure improvements to increase walkability and bikeability.
2. Improve pedestrian safety and accessibility for all ages and abilities through Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance.
3. Expand local and regional transportation networks by partnering with existing organizations that support transit and shared mobility.
4. Implement transportation policies and infrastructure improvements holistically to promote transportation and land use connections.

Section 4.8 Community Health

Population health is shaped by our collective exposures to healthy and unhealthy environments – it begins in our homes, in our children's schools, in the natural and built environment, and at our places of employment. Sharon is committed to being a town where everyone has access to a healthy environment (social, economic, physical) regardless of their gender, race, ethnicity, age, economic circumstances, or abilities.

Goals:

1. Promote environments that foster formal and informal connections among neighbors and peers to enhance social capital and intergenerational ties.
2. Support the mental and emotional wellness of children and youth to reduce the potential for risky behavior and to increase opportunities among all youth in town.
3. Enhance local public health resources to address environmental exposures and respond to health threats, including those created by climate change, that could affect the physical health and mental wellbeing of residents.
4. Continue prioritization of active transportation and traffic safety investments to support daily physical activity and exposure to health-supporting environments.
5. Pursue an Age- and Dementia-Friendly Strategy to increase opportunities for residents to age in community.
6. Consider health impacts of proposed projects and policies by integrating a Health and Equity Lens into local decision-making.
7. Improve communication and coordination across health and social services in Town, with considerations for the unique needs of all residents throughout the life course.

Section 5– Implementation Actions

The Master Plan employs a systems approach to align goals across plan elements and to assist the Town in making the best use of its resources by encouraging boards and committees, Town departments, and residents to seek and coordinate mutually beneficial solutions across disciplines and interests. In the spirit of this approach, this section outlines both the actions (the “what”) and the processes (the “how”) of plan implementation by including:

- **The Master Plan Systems Checklist** – a formalized list of considerations to be discussed and questions to be answered as each proposed action moves forward. This will enable information to be gathered and understood in an interdisciplinary manner regarding financial, environmental, health, and other impacts prior to action. The checklist is a guide that ensures an interdisciplinary approach to planning and implementation and is intended to be edited over time based on use.
- **The Master Plan Implementation Action Chart** – a list of actions, as described in the Plan Elements section of this Master Plan (Section 4), that is categorized by major plan elements.
- **Master Plan Implementation Start-ups** – detailed step-by-step and other information to help the Town get started on four selected focus areas for implementation:
 - » Support a unified approach to coordinating, funding, and marketing arts, cultural, and historic assets and events in the town (relates to Section 4.1);
 - » Create a civic or business organization to assist local businesses and entrepreneurs (relates to Section 4.2);
 - » Increase septic and sewer capacity within the town (relates to Sections 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, and 4.6); and
 - » Enhance the characteristics of an age-friendly community for residents and visitors at all points in the life course (relates to all Sections).

The start-ups are provided in this Master Plan because of the Town’s somewhat unique position of not having a town planner who can oversee the plan, coordinate between departments and initiatives, and identify grants and funding sources to support plan recommendations. Many recommendations in the plan support the addition of a town planner to Town staff in the recognition that the benefits incurred by having someone coordinate efforts and identify funding far outweigh the fiscal costs of the staff position.

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“SHARON CONNECTED,”

A TOWN THAT CONNECTS

PEOPLE TO PEOPLE,

PLACE TO PLACE, AND

IDEAS TO ACTION, TO

PRESERVE OUR PAST AND

FORGE OUR FUTURE.

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SECTION 1:

INTRODUCTION



INTRODUCTION

PRESERVE OUR PAST | FORGE OUR FUTURE

The Town of Sharon's history can be traced back to its relationship to the area's defining natural resource, Lake Massapoag (the Lake). The Lake and surrounding area served as a hunting and fishing ground to local Native Americans for hundreds of years prior to European settlement of the area starting in 1637, with early settlements being part of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. After being incorporated briefly as first the District and then the Town of Stoughtonham in 1765 and 1775, the current extents of the town were eventually named Sharon in 1783, after Israel's Sharon plain.

Sharon, like many other historic settlements in New England, shares a deep relationship with American history. During the Revolution, Lake Massapoag was mined for scrap iron ore, which was used to manufacture cannons and cannonballs for the Continental Army. After the war's end, local heroine Deborah Sampson, an American woman famous for her decision to disguise herself as a man to fight in the Revolutionary War, would settle in Sharon until her death. She is buried in Rock Ridge Cemetery and her statue greets visitors at the entry to the current Sharon Public Library building.

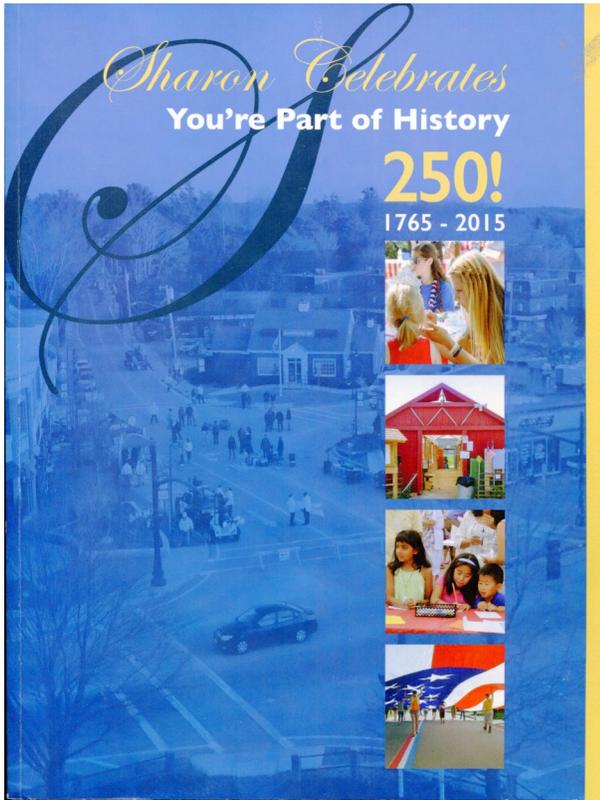
The Town purchased Lake Massapoag from the Plymouth Rubber Company in 1936, and the lakefront has since served a number of recreational uses, supporting summer camps and resorts along its shoreline. The Lake and the town's other natural resources remain a source of pride and are integral to the town's character.

While the major resorts no longer exist, summer camps still dot the western shore of the Lake. The town remains a predominantly single-family home community known for its diversity and inclusiveness. Sharon's Town Center has a long history focused on Main Street and in Post Office Square. As the highways were built, many industrial businesses moved toward the western part of the town, while shopping plazas filled in South Main Street. The existence of the MBTA Sharon commuter rail station links Sharon with Boston to the North and Providence to the South.

In 2015, Sharon celebrated its 250-year history with a series of events and programs commemorated in Sharon Celebrates 250! – You're a Part of History. During the year-long celebration, the intangible quality of a close-knit and welcoming community that is treasured by so many residents of Sharon was on full display.



The statue of Deborah Sampson, American Revolutionary War Heroine, located in front of the current Sharon Public Library building.



WHY PLAN FOR SHARON NOW?

The Sharon Master Plan Steering Committee (MPSC) presents Imagine Sharon, the town-wide comprehensive plan that explores current and future challenges faced by the Town of Sharon and offers goals and recommendations to address these during the next ten to fifteen years. This plan represents a unified vision for Sharon, developed from resident and stakeholder feedback gathered through robust public outreach. Imagine Sharon includes detailed data and information to help the Town prioritize needs as it works to achieve this vision.

Sharon has not previously undertaken a comprehensive master planning process. This will be the first such guide for the Town as it seeks to provide both a high quality of life for residents and also be fiscally responsible. The benefits of master planning are numerous:

- Allow the Town to plan across multiple areas of interest and explore connections and opportunities for multi-benefit strategies and initiatives.
- Understand the full range of recommendations to enact over the next decade, enabling prioritization of actions and spending.
- Guide the Town toward effective short-term decision-making that does not preclude long-term opportunities.
- Illustrate how changing demographic trends and advancing technologies will impact conditions but also foster new opportunities and initiatives.
- Provide specific action plans to support implementation and collaboration among local government, organizations, and residents.



Source: Sharon Celebrates 250! – You're Part of History

Planning is particularly important now as there are several emerging needs as well as long-standing issues which must be faced as the Town plans for the next decade and beyond. These issues include:

- Limited developable land available to plan for housing and expanding the commercial tax base.
- Ongoing attempts to enhance Post Office Square, constrained by septic system limits.
- A comparatively high residential tax rate and Town revenue that relies heavily on residential taxes.
- An aging population with few affordable and age-friendly options for downsizing, despite older residents' desire to remain in town.
- A robust arts and cultural community which lacks a unifying voice and organizational structure to seek grant funding, raise visibility, and attract donors and audiences.
- The ongoing need to monitor and maintain natural resources to provide for future quantity and quality of drinking water.
- The seriousness of climate change creating the need for investment in sustainable and preventive solutions as well as emergency preparedness.
- A lack of safe and viable transportation alternatives to connect key destinations within town.
- Limited parking capacity at the commuter rail station, restricting residents' access to Boston and Providence via commuter train.
- Recent increase in new building and infrastructure projects to meet the service needs of residents, without additional tax base to support and sustain these new investments.
- The desire to invest in and maintain a high-quality school system, while also keeping taxes affordable for residents throughout their life course.
- Consideration of future staffing and planning needs to adequately address these issues and implement the goals and recommendations in this Master Plan.
- Recognition of how challenges related to housing, transportation, and climate change fit within the broader state and regional context, creating new opportunities for regional partnerships, planning, and coordination.

With a long-range scope, this Imagine Sharon Master Plan (Master Plan) allows the Town to build on recent planning efforts that impact multiple aspects of community health and environmental sustainability, with examples including:

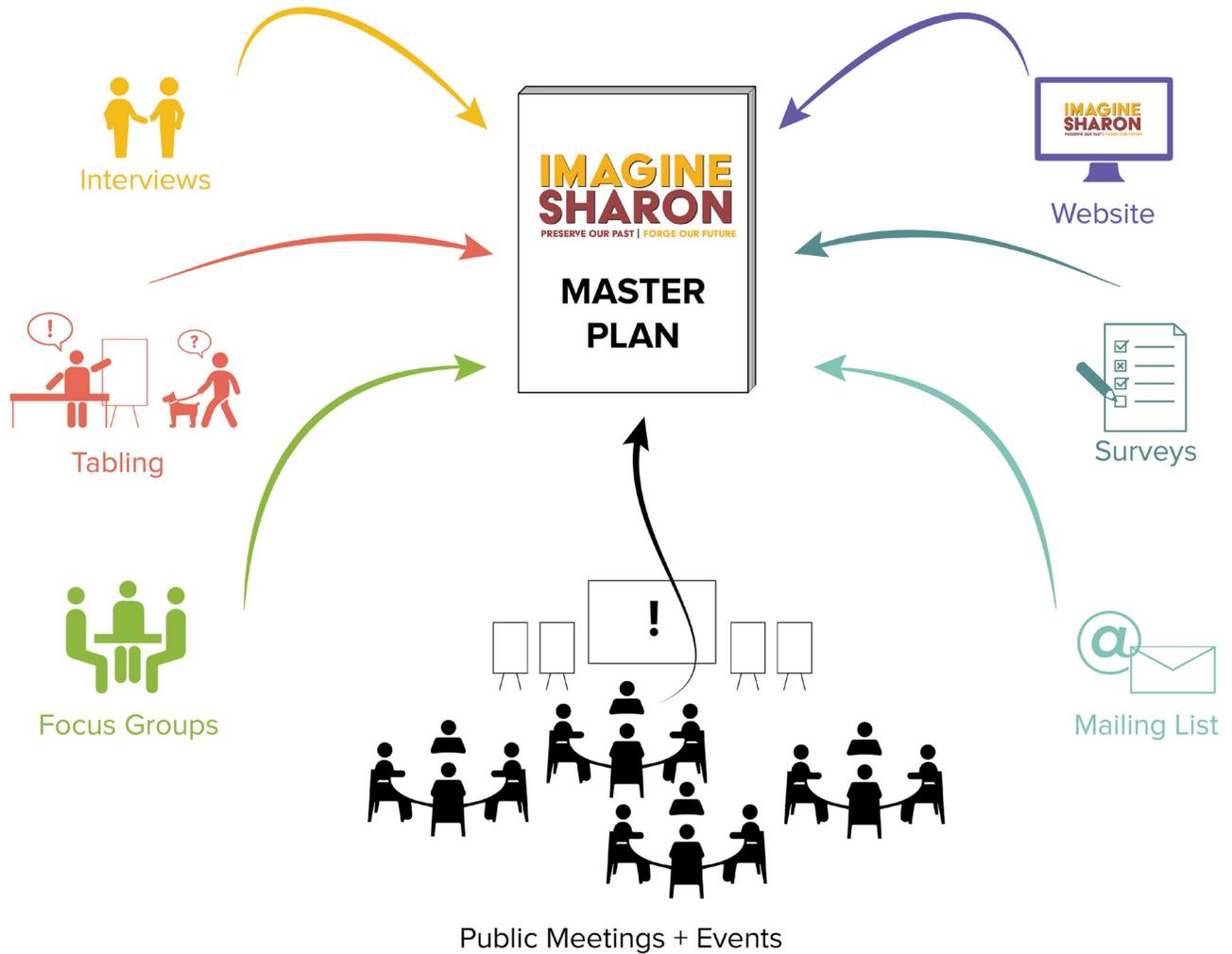
- Sharon Housing Production Plan Update 2018
- Open Space and Recreation Master Plan Update 2019
- New Town Hall construction (energy-efficient building, ADA accessible)
- Completion of the new Public Safety building
- \$1 million MassWorks grant to support infrastructure improvements on South Main near the Sharon Gallery site

This Master Plan also recognizes recent successes moving the town toward greater environmental sustainability, including:

- Efforts to improve walkability through the Safe Routes to School and Complete Streets programs
- Recognition by the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MADEP) Drinking Water Program for Water Quality Compliance and Water Conservation for implementing water use restrictions and effective resident outreach
- Designation as a Massachusetts Green Community and as a MassDEP SMART trash town
- Implementation of the Sharon Power Choice program, enabling municipal aggregation of electricity purchasing

These plans and recent initiatives, among numerous others, form the foundation for this Master Plan.

Figure 2: Community Outreach and Engagement Methods



Data Gathering

The data gathering phase involved an extensive period of soliciting input from many different sources, including:

- Town Department reports, studies, and data
- Feedback at public meetings
- Community engagement and outreach (see below)
- Town professional staff
- Town-wide surveys
- MPSC meetings
- Email correspondence through ImagineSharon@townofsharon.net

This community outreach and engagement included:

- Interviews with key stakeholders and Town officials (see Appendix A).
- Four focus groups, with stakeholders involved with arts, culture, and history; local businesses and property owners; social services, and; teens.
- Three public meetings with over 150 individual participants.
- 27 Sharon Master Plan Steering Committee meetings since appointment of the MPSC by the Select Board in 2016, through June 2019.
- Online Imagine Sharon Kickoff Survey (851 respondents from May through June 2018) (See Appendix A for Summary of Results).
- Online Town-wide Fall Imagine Sharon Survey (840 respondents from September through October 2018) (See Appendix A for Summary of Results).
- 2 Department Head/Senior Staff meetings.
- Do-It-Yourself Meeting Kits (four completed kits submitted).
- Multiple connections to Sharon residents through MPSC members tabling at Square Jam and other events throughout the year.

Analysis and Plan Development

After collecting and assembling data, CivicMoxie and the MPSC worked together to analyze and interpret information to shape the vision and goals for the future of the town. A draft vision was created based on stakeholder feedback and MPSC review. CivicMoxie then used public input and the planning team analysis to identify goals and recommendations for each of the plan elements that serve the vision. These elements provide the core of the Master Plan and inform implementation steps for Sharon.

IMAGINE SHARON

PRESERVE OUR PAST | FORGE OUR FUTURE

DIY MEETING KIT

How to host your own meeting and participate in the planning process

CONTENTS:
 1: Getting Started 2: Sign in Sheet 3: Discussion Questions 4: Map for Discussion 5: Return Instructions

Date: _____
 Meeting Leader: _____
 Email: _____

CivicMoxie®
experts in place

TO RETURN:

Please put all completed materials in the manila envelope, seal, and take to one of the following locations:

1. Sharon Public Library (Main Desk) - 11 North Main Street
2. Sharon Community Center (1st Floor, Recreation Department) - 219 Massapoag Avenue
3. Sharon Department of Public Works (Rear Building) - 217 South Main Street
4. Sharon High School, Main Office (Front Desk during school hours) - 181 Pond Street

We hope the meeting served as a chance to connect with others in your community, and that you were able to invite at least 3-4 friends, family members, or neighbors to join you!

QUESTIONS?

Contact the Master Plan Steering Committee: ImagineSharon@townofsharon.org

THANK YOU!

We deeply appreciate your time, effort, and feedback as we complete this process. Garnering feedback from the community is crucial in any community planning effort, and we believe the input gathered in informal settings such as these provides a unique look into the thoughts, feelings, and opinions of Sharon residents and community members.

IMAGINE SHARON

PRESERVE OUR PAST | FORGE OUR FUTURE

An example of the Imagine Sharon Do-It-Yourself Meeting Kit.

WHAT IS IN THIS PLAN

The Sharon Master Plan addresses all nine elements required by Massachusetts General Law – Chapter 41 Section 81D, including: goals and policies statement, land use plan, housing, economic development, natural and cultural resources, open space and recreation, services and facilities, circulation, and implementation program. In addition, the MPSC chose to include a community health element. Additionally, while not a stand-alone section, “sustainability” is a high-priority topic that has been incorporated throughout all applicable sections. The Sharon Master Plan is organized as follows:

Section 1: Introduction

This section offers the rationale for planning now and provides important background including recent planning efforts, the scope and timeline for the Master Planning process, and the framework for the Master Plan document.

Section 2: Sharon Today: Demographics and Trends

This section provides the foundation on which many of the plan goals and recommendations are built. Data include key attributes of the town and local and broader trends that will influence planning in the next decade and beyond.

Section 3: Imagining Sharon for Tomorrow: Community Vision

This section provides a vision for Sharon overall as well as for each of the plan elements.

Section 4: Plan Elements

This section breaks down each of the Master Plan elements, outlines existing conditions, describes what was heard from the community, and identifies goals and recommendations to address current and future challenges related to each element. The following plan elements are described in detail in this section:

- 4.1 Cultural and Historic Resources
- 4.2 Economic Vitality
- 4.3 Housing
- 4.4 Land Use and Zoning
- 4.5 Open Space, Recreation, and Natural Resources
- 4.6 Public Facilities and Infrastructure
- 4.7 Transportation and Mobility
- 4.8 Community Health

While Community Health is not required by the State, Section 4.8 was prepared by a subcommittee of the MPSC together with a consultant at the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) because of its relevance and importance to improving and sustaining quality of life for all residents in town.

Also included in each element are relevant goals identified from the Metropolitan Area Planning Council’s 2008 MetroFuture, the Greater Boston Region’s 30-year plan.

Section 5: Implementation Actions

To enable this plan to serve as a living document and actively guide short- and long-term decision making in town, this section outlines each plan goal and recommendation along with the responsible entities for implementation. In addition, key questions or conditions, including when recommended actions impact multiple goals in different categories, and suggested timeframes are identified.

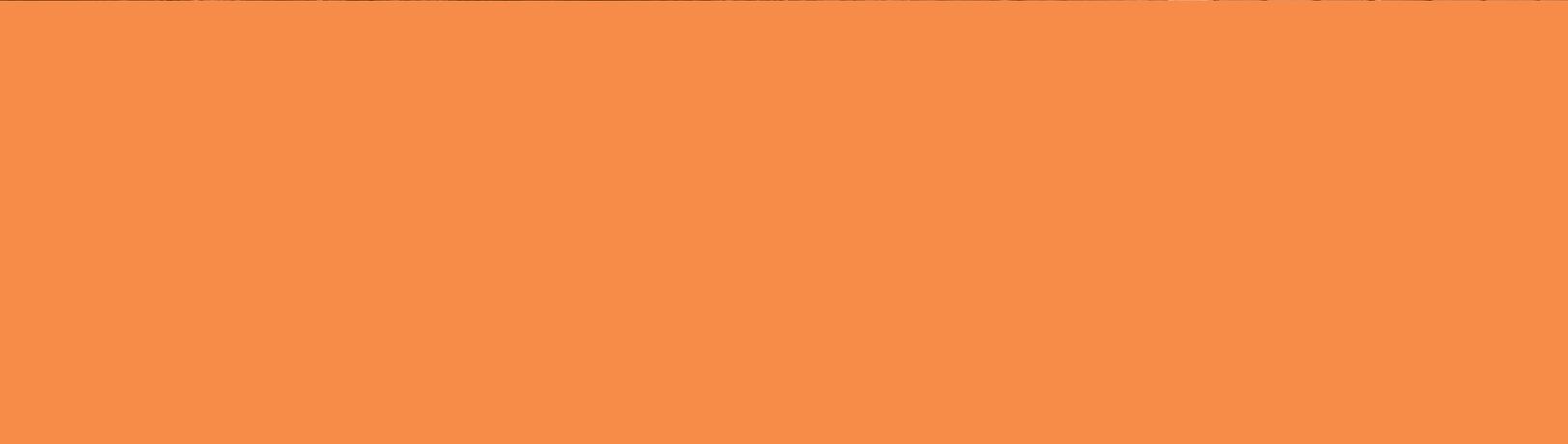
All of the sections of this plan provide a clear and concise roadmap for the Town as it undertakes the next decade or more of planning. Imagine Sharon presents a cohesive approach that looks across interests and disciplines and offers exciting possibilities to use resources wisely and apply innovative strategies for success.

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SECTION 2:

SHARON TODAY



DEMOGRAPHICS AND TRENDS

The Imagine Sharon Comprehensive Master Plan describes the town's existing conditions, examines historic and emerging trends, articulates a vision for Sharon's future, and outlines strategies to achieve this vision. To do this, the Imagine Sharon planning process presents a demographic analysis of the town and considers how shifts in population characteristics are changing the opportunities, challenges, and needs facing Sharon today and in the future.

DEMOGRAPHICS

The Town of Sharon's estimated 2016 population was 18,193, according to the 2016 American Community Survey Data (ACS). The population grew at a slower rate than Norfolk County or Massachusetts from 2000 to 2016. Table 1 summarizes several indicators of well-being for these three geographies, and Sharon exceeds the county and the state for all measures. Data gathered for this section are from the 2012 to 2016 American Community Survey (ACS), which releases estimates based on five years of data (called "five-year" estimates) which are helpful when showing trends. The information in this section cites both five-year estimates as well as the one-year snapshot from 2016, the most recent year available when this planning process began.¹

Key trends and characteristics for Sharon's population (2016):

- Sharon's estimated 2016 population of 18,193 represents a 4.5% increase from 2000, with most of this growth occurring since 2010.
- By comparison, the state and county grew by 6.2% and 6.3%, respectively, since 2000.
- The town is growing more racially diverse with a composition of: White 79%, Asian 16.3%, Hispanic 4%. The increased racial diversity includes a two and a half times increase in the Asian population since 2000 (from 4.9% to 16.3% of the town's population). In addition, the number of Hispanic residents has more than doubled during that same time period.
- Sharon's median age was almost 43 years old in 2016 compared to 39 years for the state and 41 years for the county; 14.7% of town residents are 65 or older, slightly below the county (15.7%) and state (15.1%). The share of the town's 65 and older population has grown more than the county and state since 2000; Sharon's share of older adult residents grew from 10.9% to 14.7% between 2000 and 2016.
- In 2016, almost one-third of Sharon residents (30.3%) were children and teenagers 19 years or younger – a larger share than for the county (24.2%) and state (23.7%).
- Compared to the county and the state, Sharon's percentage of the population between 20-34 years old was considerably smaller at 9.8%, compared to the county (18.4%) and the state (21%).

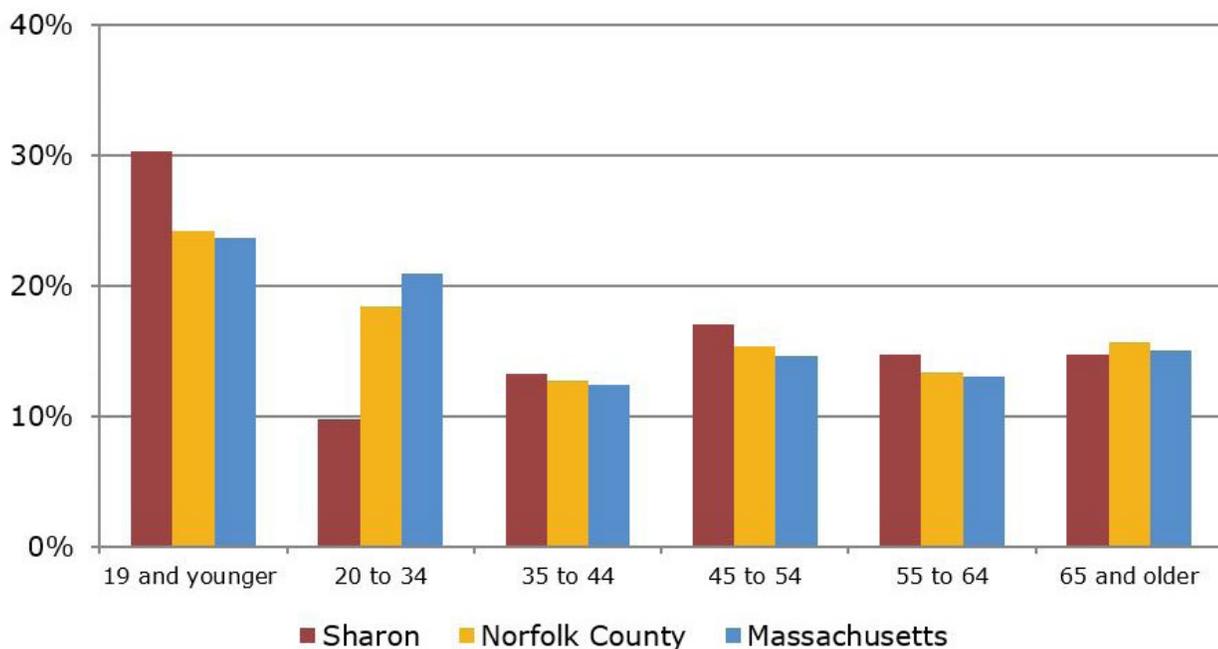
¹ It is important to note that there are differences between MAPC projections and Town of Sharon projections, particularly for school enrollment. This Master Plan references MAPC data because MAPC consistently collects and analyzes a full range of data points and it is the best data available. For this reason, many surrounding towns use MAPC projections, even acknowledging that some local nuances may be lacking because of the irregularities that can occur at the smaller geographic town level. Town data used for the MSBA process for enrollment should be considered a local and more finely grained look at population trends for school considerations and planning. This master planning process occurred close to the 2020 census and it is recommended that these projection statistics be reevaluated after new census data is available and/or MAPC updates its projections as a part of its regional master planning efforts

Table 1: Household and Resident Well-Being Indicators for Sharon, Norfolk County, and Massachusetts, 2016

Indicator	Sharon	Norfolk County	Massachusetts
Unemployment Rate, 2017 Annual Average	3.7%	3.7%	4.3%
Median Household Income, 2016	\$127,500	\$90,226	\$70,954
Poverty Rate-All Residents, 2016	1.9%	6.7%	11.4%
Child Poverty Rate, 2016	2.0%	6.9%	14.9%
Poverty Rate, 65 Years and Over, 2016	3.3%	7.3%	9.0%
Percent of Population Ages 25+ with Bachelors Degree or Higher, 2016	73.2%	51.2%	41.2%
Self-employment Rate, 2016	22.1%	11.2%	11.8%
Employed in management, business, science, or arts occupations	69.1%	51.9%	44.7%

Source: 2012 to 2016 American Community Survey Data and Local Area Unemployment Statistics Program.

Figure 3: 2016 Percentage of Population by Age for Sharon, Norfolk County and Massachusetts



Source: 2012 to 2016 American Community Survey Data.

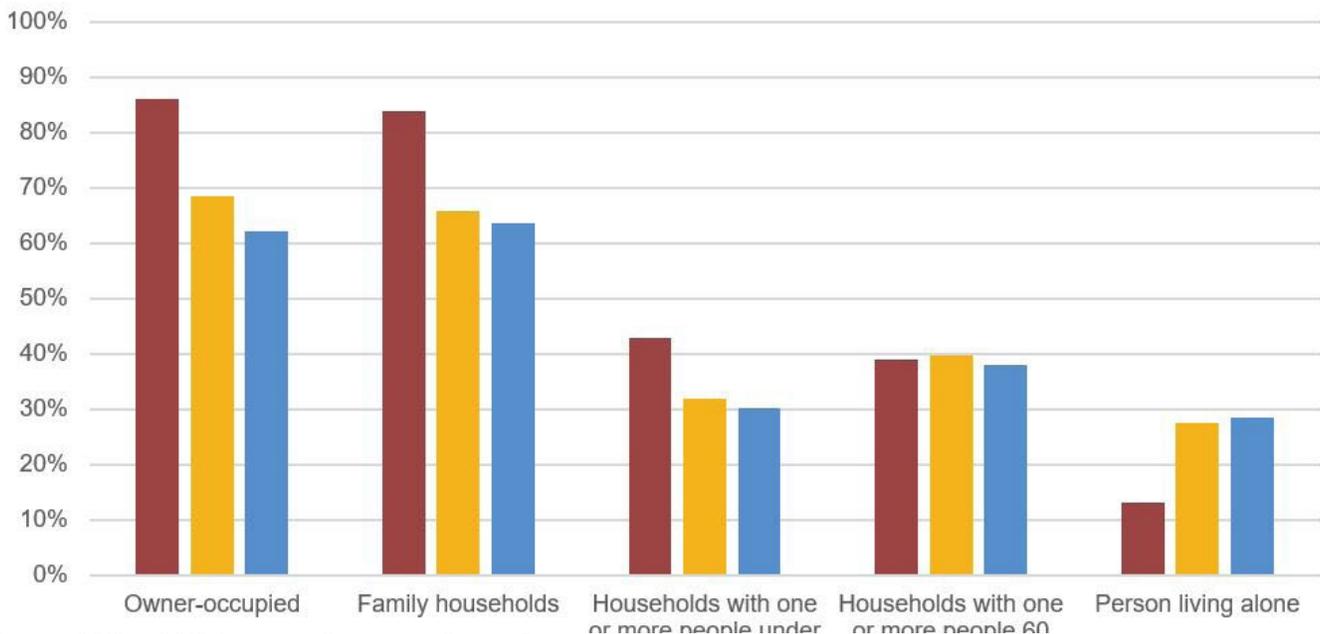
Household Composition

Sharon had an estimated 6,180 households in 2016, a 4.1% increase since 2000, and an average household size of 2.94. Sharon’s households have a much higher income with a larger proportion of homeowners and family households than the county and the state. Sharon also has a higher share of family households and households with children than the county and the state but a smaller share of persons living alone.

Key household characteristics for Sharon:

- Sharon’s estimated homeownership rate was 86% in 2016, compared to 68.5% for the county and 62.1% for the state.
- Families constituted 83.9% of Sharon households in 2016 versus 66% for the county and 63.6% for the state.
- Sharon has a higher percentage of households that include children and youth. Among Sharon households, 43% included persons 18 years or younger, compared to almost 31.8% and 30.1% for the county and the state, respectively.
- For households with a person over 60, Sharon (39.1%) matched the county (39.7%) and state (38.1%) shares.
- Sharon’s estimated median household income in 2016 was \$127,500, 41.3% higher than the county (\$90,226) and 79.7% above the state (\$70,954).
- Sharon stands out with 27.6% of households with incomes of at least \$200,000—far above 15.2% for the county and about 9.6% for the state.
- Consistent with its high incomes, Sharon’s poverty rate is extremely low at 1.9%, compared to almost 6.7% for the county and 11.4% for the state.
- Sharon’s 2016 poverty rate for children was also very low at approximately 2.0% compared to the county (6.9%) and the state (14.8%). For residents 65 years and older, Sharon’s 2016 poverty rate was approximately 3.3%, with the county’s percentage at 7.3% and state at 9.0%.

Figure 4: 2016 Household Composition: Sharon, Norfolk County, and Massachusetts



Source: 2012 to 2016 American Community Survey Data.



Lake Massapoag

What the Community said:

- In interviews, public meetings, and in the town-wide 2018 Imagine Sharon Fall Survey (2018 Fall Survey), participants and respondents voiced a strong concern about the rapidly growing older adult population of the community and the changing needs for programs, services, and affordable and appropriately sized housing. The Town needs to articulate what it can do to help them.
- While the median household incomes are higher than many communities in the state, the cost of living – primarily the residential property taxes – are very high and becoming prohibitive for older adults and those with more limited incomes.
- Sharon has a significant number of families with school-age children. In the 2018 Fall Survey, more Sharon residents ranked “Quality of Schools” as the most important characteristic of Sharon to its future as a desirable community in which to live than any other characteristic and “High quality schools” was ranked the highest for the question, “Why did you choose Sharon to live or work” on the same survey.
- Some residents noted that families tend to leave Sharon once their children have graduated from the public school system. In meetings, Town officials provided anecdotal examples of this trend. Of the 63 survey respondents who said they are planning to move in the next five to ten years, 40% said it was because their children will graduate from the school system and many cited high residential property taxes as the reason for moving.
- Public meeting participants and 2018 Fall Survey respondents identified the town’s religious and cultural diversity and welcoming community as one of Sharon’s best qualities.

Figure 5: Imagine Sharon 2018 Fall Survey response to Question 1: Name three words that describe Sharon.



Key Takeaways and Trends

- Across interviews, focus groups, and surveys, Sharon residents and stakeholders have identified diversity as a key strength of the community.
- Sharon must address the needs of its aging population including more affordable housing choices for older adults who wish to downsize, and increased services for this population.
- The quality of Sharon Public Schools is a major contributor to residents' decision to live in Sharon and contribute to the perception of Sharon as a desirable place to live, contributing to the high number of families with children who live here.
- There are concerns about resident turnover, specifically families leaving Sharon when their kids graduate high school, with the town losing engaged citizens who have been an active part of the community, and opening a house for a new family to move in to further continue the growth in the number of households with children.

Some key trends that will influence the future of Sharon include:

- The Town will have to consider how to fund increasing expenses for infrastructure and service maintenance, as well as increasing demand for services that support the high quality of life residents have come to expect.
- The ongoing costs associated with maintaining the quality of public education and the expected tax increase to fund construction of the new high school and public library buildings could have an impact on the town's demographics. Residents are concerned with the continued ability of the Town to support the diversity in its population that residents value.
- There is a growing movement in town to embrace and actively apply sustainability principles and practices to Sharon's policies and goals. The Town will have to consider how it will coordinate its sustainability actions regionally and statewide.
- There is an increase in the number of households, even as the total population of the town remains fairly constant over time. What does this increase mean for land use considerations and the need for zoning regulations to respond to changing needs of residents?

- The Town must consider the aging of the population and Sharon's ability to offer residents necessary social services and affordable housing options that allow for aging in community.

Some of these trends are explored in more detail below:

Increasing expenses for infrastructure and service maintenance and improvements to continue the high quality of life for residents and ongoing costs associated with maintaining the quality of public education.

During the master planning process, residents most consistently cited the people of Sharon and quality of public education as the special qualities that make the town a wonderful place to live. In fact, Sharon has consistently ranked as a top place to live in Massachusetts and beyond. In 2013, Sharon was at the top of Money Magazine's "Best Places to Live in America." Several of the criteria included the town's easy access to downtown Boston and the Route 128 corridor, the beauty of its natural resources, high quality of the public schools, and the religious and cultural diversity of its residents.

Clear priorities for residents include maintaining the trends of public education excellence and small-town quality of life beloved by locals.

Town- and community-wide movement to embrace and actively apply sustainability principles and practices and to coordinate regionally and statewide.

When considering future trends, Sharon may consider its role and contribution to the Massachusetts Global Warming Solutions Act (outlined below). A number of factors contribute to greenhouse gas emissions, and by extension, climate change – necessitating that creative, comprehensive, and cross-sector solutions start locally and transcend political and physical boundaries. At the 2019 Annual Town Meeting, Article 23 was passed, banning the use of plastic bags at retail stores; Article 25 also passed, which is a resolution to adopt a targeted reduction in greenhouse gas emissions to zero by 2050 and to transition to 100% of renewable energy for the Town. Both articles were citizen petitions, demonstrating grassroots efforts and resident support to make Sharon a sustainable community. By embracing these and future solutions on a local level, Sharon will become more sustainable and will take an active role in helping Massachusetts meet or even exceed its future emission reduction goals.

Regional Sustainability Commitments

MetroFuture: Making a Greater Boston Region is an initiative of the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) that was completed in May 2008 and that includes a series of goals around energy, air, water, and wildlife (Goals 56 through 65). These goals start with #56, “By using less energy and sourcing more of it from renewable resources, the region will be a national leader in reducing greenhouse gas emissions.” Many towns and cities in Massachusetts have been instituting sustainability policies and programs with short- and long-range goals that mirror these MetroFuture goals. The MAPC is now undertaking a regional plan for the Boston area called MetroCommon. There are nine broad goals for this regional plan, including the following four which address sustainability and health:

- A Climate-Resilient Region: Metro Boston is prepared for — and resilient to — the impacts of climate change.
- A Net Zero Carbon Region: The Metro Boston region is highly energy efficient and has reduced its greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions to net zero.
- A Healthy Environment: Greater Boston’s air, water, land, and other natural resources are clean and protected — for us and the rest of the ecosystem.
- Healthy and Safe Neighborhoods: We are safe, healthy, and connected to each other.

Source: <https://metrocommon.mapc.org/>



Increase in number of households, even as population remains fairly constant over time.

Population projections by the MAPC indicate that even as the town’s population is expected to remain constant over time, the number of households will increase. An aging population, with more single-person households, and households with no children or fewer children, will contribute to this trend. While the charts below project minimal changes in the town’s population between 2020 to 2030, according to the Sharon Housing Production Plan – 2018-2023 Update, the total number of new housing demanded in 2020 will be about 349 units. Importantly, the 2005 Affordable Housing Production Plan did not estimate housing demand so there is no comparison for prior years. How will Sharon accommodate this demand?

STATE LEGISLATION

Massachusetts Global Warming Solutions Act (GWSA)

In August 2008, the Global Warming Solutions Act (GWSA) was signed into law, making Massachusetts one of the first states in the nation to move forward with a comprehensive regulatory program to address Climate Change. The GWSA requires the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EOEEA), in consultation with other State agencies and the public, to set economy-wide greenhouse gas (GHG) emission reduction goals for Massachusetts that will achieve reductions of:

- By 2020: Between 10 percent and 25 percent below statewide 1990 GHG emission levels.
- By 2050: 80 percent below statewide 1990 GHG emission levels.

As of 2018, Massachusetts has achieved a reduction of 21.4% of 1990 GHG emission levels and is projected to achieve a 25.4% reduction by 2020. This progress has been due in part to municipal-led energy efficiency programs as well as rebates and incentives provided by Mass Save despite an overall population increase throughout the Commonwealth.

Source: GWSA 10-Year Progress Report <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/global-warming-solutions-act-background>

Increased demand for housing stock that meets the need of current and future populations

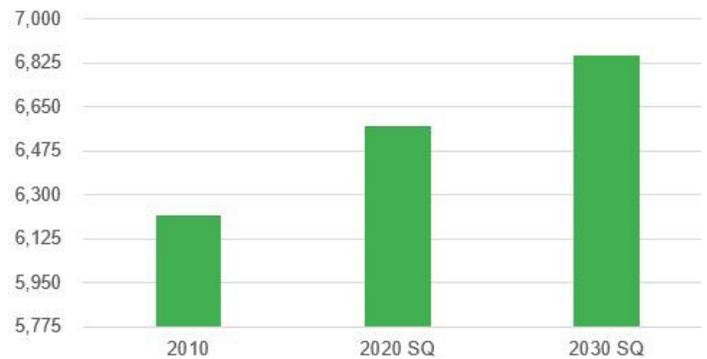
In addition to considering the ways in which new housing can be added in town, policies should address the likely mismatch between what current residents need now and in the near future, and the existing housing stock. This mismatch between present and future should be a key concern for the Town and includes the inability of aging residents to find affordable and suitable housing to allow them to age in the community, continue to participate in civic life, and remain connected to the people around them. These housing issues are already a concern for the growing number of older residents who see no pathway to remaining in the community as they age, and to younger residents who cannot afford to move back when they start families.

MAPC has projected a decrease in school-age children in Sharon between the years 2020-2030. Sharon Public Schools have been planning for a modest increase in student population for this same time period, particularly as the age cohorts move up to middle school and high school. The difference between MAPC and Town school projects indicates that Sharon should approach capital building projects and school improvements with an eye toward flexibility and innovation. Thinking about educational facilities, their accessibility, potential functionality for alternative uses, and complementary uses and connectivity to business centers could all be important ways for the Town to acknowledge and prepare for changes or unexpected shifts in future population trends.

MORE INFORMATION

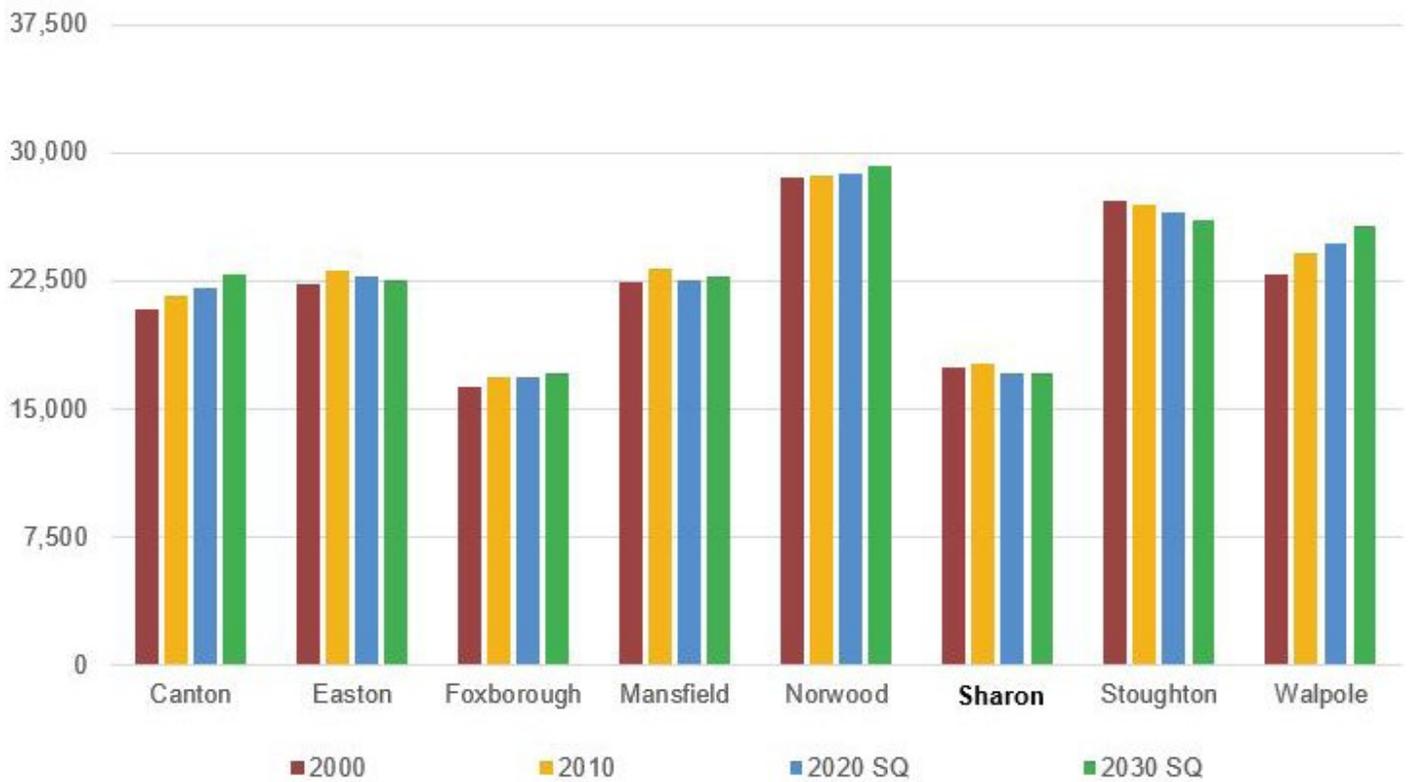
In 2014, MAPC issued its Metro Boston Population and Housing Projections looking ahead to 2030. This report included analyses for regional population projections as well as by municipalities. These projections were generated to assist municipalities in identifying areas of focus for their long-term planning efforts, particularly with respect to the rapidly growing older adult populations in the region. Sharon’s Housing Production Plan – 2018-2023 Update utilizes the MAPC projections as well as American Community Survey data in its analyses and recommendations.

Figure 6: MAPC Projected Households (Sharon only)



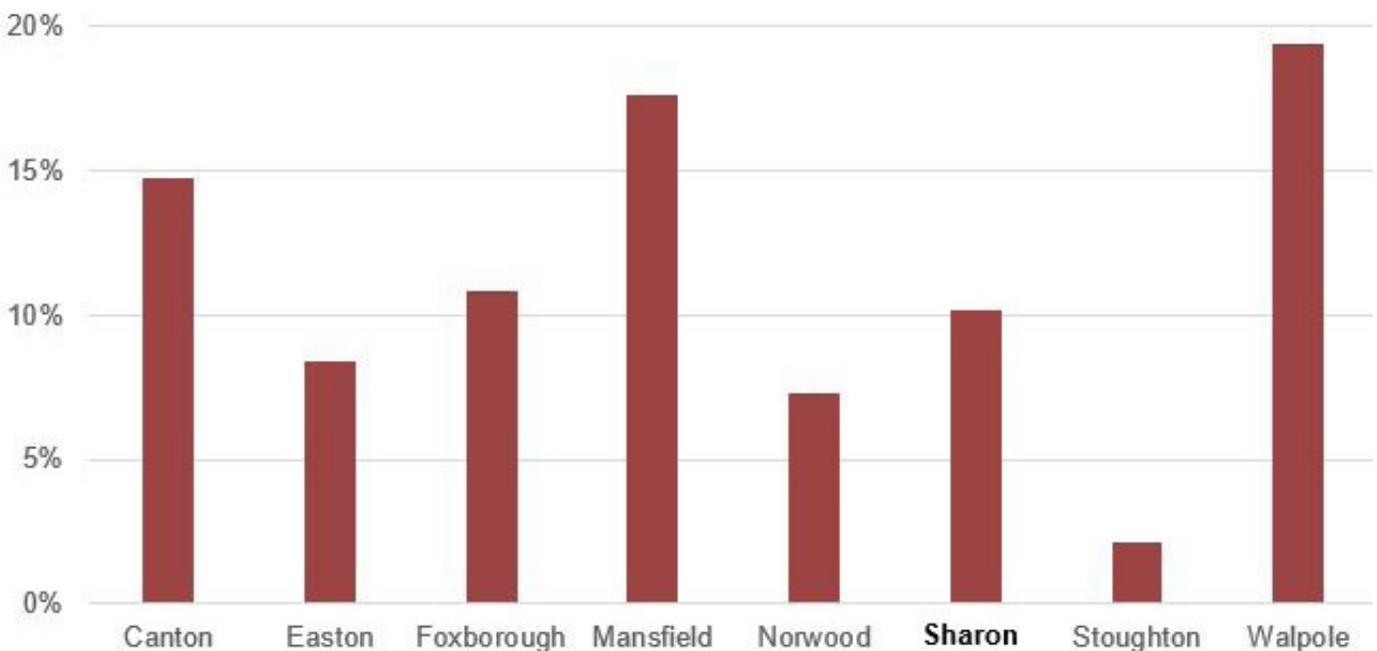
Data Source: 2014 MAPC Metro Boston Population and Housing Demand Projections.

Figure 7: MAPC Population Projections: Regional Comparison



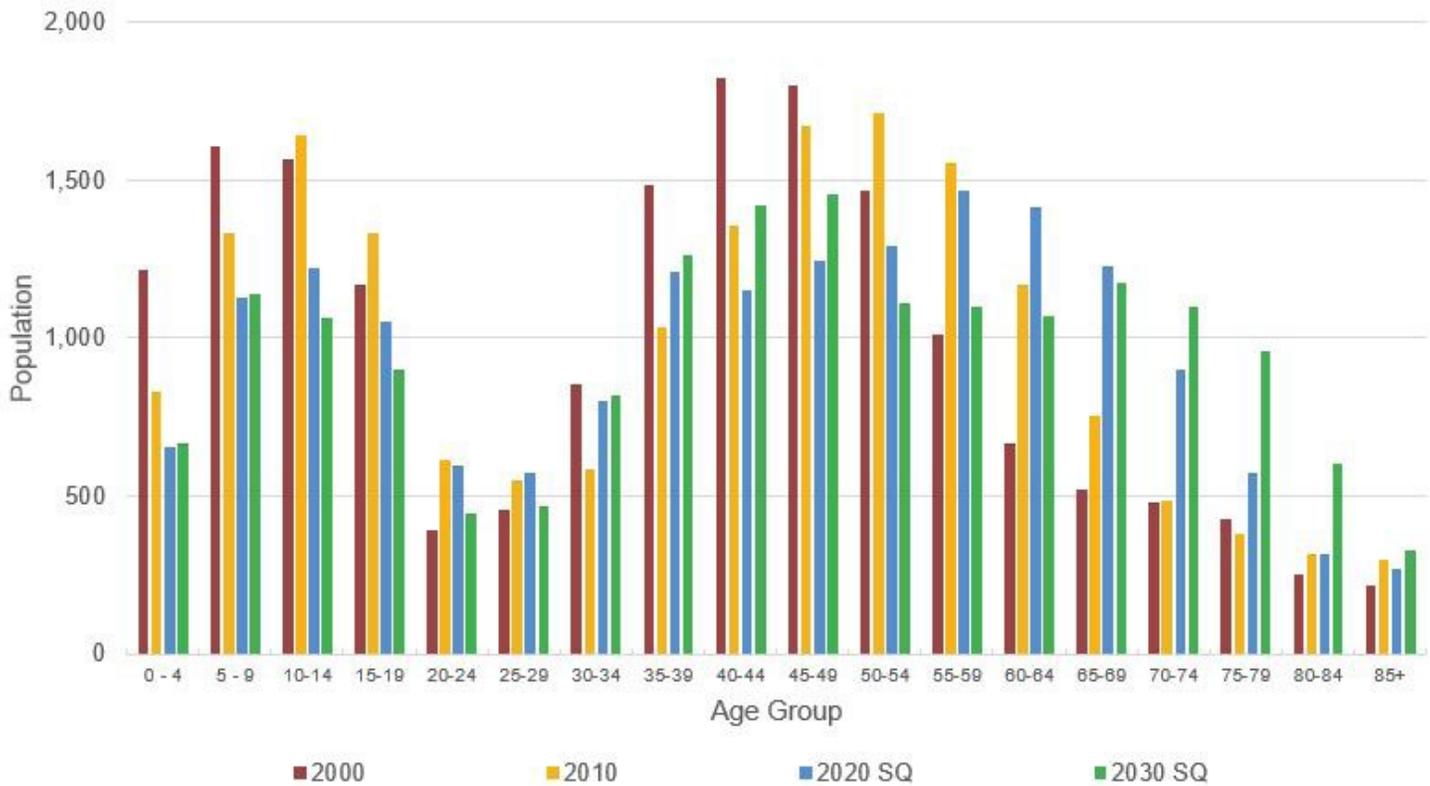
Data Source: 2014 MAPC Metro Boston Population and Housing Demand Projections.

Figure 8: MAPC Household Percent Change 2010 – 2020: Regional Comparison



Data Source: 2014 MAPC Metro Boston Population and Housing Demand Projections.

Figure 9: MAPC Projected Population for Sharon by Age Group



Data Source: 2014 MAPC Metro Boston Population and Housing Demand Projections.

Aging of the population and the Town's ability to offer residents necessary social services and aging in community housing options.

The demand for social services is growing in the town and requests for services provided at the public library are increasing yearly. Physically accessible and affordable housing is one of the top needs of older residents expressed to the Council on Aging, along with transportation options for those not driving, and the desire for more and a broader range of social and educational programming. While this increase in need is related to other factors than just the town's aging population, there are indications that the needs of aging adults must be addressed in a holistic manner to ensure the best use of resources and that aging residents continue to be connected to the larger Sharon community. Housing, land use, transportation, social services, and community health strategies in this Master Plan address these trends.

Accommodation and adjustment as population diversity continues.

With growing Asian and Hispanic populations, there are opportunities to celebrate the unique qualities of Sharon by incorporating new ways that the changing demographics can enhance culture, arts, connectivity, and the vibrancy of public spaces and neighborhoods through events and programs. Town-wide events, programs, and services should continue to encourage community-building across ages, cultures, religions, and languages, with a balance of family- and age-friendly activities throughout the year.

Issues to Consider

Several issues and questions emerged from this analysis and community feedback regarding demographics and community trends:

- How can the community retain and enhance its connectedness while accommodating growing ethnic and racial diversity?
- Are there new social services and/or ways of thinking about space, Town services, programs, and traditions, that can acknowledge changing demographics and enhance the rich diversity of traditions in the town?
- Are there specific areas, such as use of public spaces, physical pathways, design and function of community gathering spaces, and even arts and culture that can reflect the changing demographics and enhance connectivity and opportunities for all?
- What are specific services, or new opportunities for education, cultural activities, or economic development as the town evolves?
- Are there special services or infrastructure needed to serve the town's rapidly growing older adult population, and can these services and improvements also serve groups of all ages, including the town's expected growth in the numbers of families with children?
- How can the Town continue to be child and family-friendly through opportunities for play, green spaces, and safe streets?
- How might land use regulations be adapted or changed to innovatively meet new challenges and goals in the town?
- How can a more diverse and affordable housing supply be encouraged through changes in zoning and land use policy, and influenced by infrastructure investment?
- How can the Town embrace and support the growing local movement to actively apply sustainability principles and practices to Sharon's policies and goals? How can Sharon coordinate those sustainability actions regionally and statewide?
- The multiple trends and conditions in the town indicate the strong need for balanced decision-making in the coming decades as the Town considers the varied needs of Sharon's residents, across all ages, abilities, and household structures. The Town must consider how to both address these needs universally, and also balance these investments with the other infrastructure needs (e.g., buildings, sidewalks, transportation, and roadways) in a fiscally responsible manner.

These issues are considered in the goals and recommendations of this Master Plan.



SECTION 3: IMAGINING SHARON FOR TOMORROW



COMMUNITY VISION

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the planning process, strong themes emerged regarding the special character of Sharon. These themes centered on the importance of the community and the connectedness of residents in Sharon. Overwhelmingly, when asked what makes Sharon unique, residents, Town staff, and business owners answered, “the people.” This strong focus on the connectedness of residents shapes the Master Plan vision:



Participants in the *Imagine Sharon* public meetings visited feedback stations, contributed to breakout sessions, and engaged in lively conversations about the future of the town.

“SHARON CONNECTED”

The vision for Sharon’s future is an inclusive, accessible, and vibrant community that aims to improve quality of life for all. This vision is “Sharon Connected,” a town that connects people to people, place to place, and ideas to action, to preserve our past and forge our future.

“Sharon Connected” prioritizes initiatives that celebrate civic connections, which nurture a sense of community and encourage social interaction and regional cooperation, and those that improve quality, accessibility, and connectedness of neighborhoods, infrastructure, and community resources.

The Imagine Sharon Master Plan builds upon the range of initiatives and institutions that serve Sharon’s population. To foster community ownership of this vision, the fundamental principles that direct Imagine Sharon’s goals and objectives were drawn from community stakeholders, through widespread engagement activities, including surveys, public meetings, and outreach at several Town events. The goals and objectives supporting each principle to achieve this vision are specified in each master plan element and will be integrated through a robust implementation plan. They are described in the order of the master plan elements, not priority.

- **Arts, cultural, and historic resources enrich our lives, bring people together, and provide social, economic, and educational benefits.** We will become a community more strongly connected to the stories of Sharon’s past, its present, and its future. We will improve accessibility to historic places, enhance arts opportunities, and celebrate cultural programs held at local venues and shared spaces, with improved communication and coordination between organizations.
- **Economic vitality is the engine of a vibrant live/work community.** We will enhance the economic vitality of Sharon’s commercial and industrial areas, promote Post Office Square as an active community and town center, nurture new enterprises, and strengthen connections among existing businesses, entrepreneurs, and self-employed residents, and more broadly, with residents and the larger community.



Community members stopping by the Imagine Sharon table at the 2018 Square Jam Festival

- **A variety of housing options promotes socioeconomic diversity and an age-friendly community.** We will leverage development and zoning strategies to preserve Sharon’s socioeconomic diversity and neighborhood character. We will promote housing policies that improve affordability for Sharon residents across their life-course and explore creating mixed-use developments, where appropriate.
- **Thoughtful land use zoning supports the Town’s goals and initiatives.** We will adopt land use and zoning policies that consider development patterns, enhance connectivity, promote sound fiscal health, complement community needs, and improve sustainability of both building and environment.
- **Protection, preservation, and enhancement of open space, natural resources, and recreational areas are essential to community health.** We will preserve and protect open spaces and natural resources with an emphasis on sustaining a healthy and potable water supply. We will improve recreational areas to ensure they are explorable, accessible, and communal features of Sharon, and connected, where possible, to other public spaces, commercial areas, and neighborhoods.
- **Public facilities, services, and infrastructure are the backbone to maintaining a functioning community.** We will deliver high quality services, sustain school performance, maintain public facilities, support smart growth initiatives, and invest in infrastructure through planned maintenance and improvement as needed to enable economic growth. We will increase awareness, coordination, and accessibility of existing services and leverage advanced technology to improve communication. We will incorporate and adopt sustainability policies and practices together with technology advancements to address the impact of climate change.
- **Transportation and mobility enable safe access for all users, including pedestrians and cyclists of all ages and abilities.** We will adopt universal design principles to create a multi-modal transportation system that utilizes public transit, advanced technology, and existing infrastructure to connect people and places through walkable and bikeable neighborhoods, while reducing congestion and greenhouse gas emissions.
- **Health policy, universal design, and targeted programming foster improved community health and quality of life.** We will approach decision making with consideration of public health issues and consider implications of Town decisions on quality of life for residents of all ages and abilities. We will improve public health outreach, communication, and service offerings to address current and emerging public health needs through data-driven assessment, public-private partnerships, and coordinated systems of service delivery.

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SECTION 4:

PLAN ELEMENTS





PLAN ELEMENTS

This Imagine Sharon Master Plan advocates for a cohesive approach to planning that avoids putting separate planning elements in silos and that embraces a cross-disciplinary approach to planning across Town departments and interests. For ease in understanding the roles of various Town departments, and to meet State requirements for master planning, this section of the Plan is organized by plan element:

4.1 Cultural and Historic Resources

4.2 Economic Vitality

4.3 Housing

4.4 Land Use and Zoning

4.5 Open Space, Recreation, and Natural Resources

4.6 Public Facilities and Infrastructure

4.7 Transportation and Mobility

4.8 Community Health

Each plan element includes the following information:

- Introduction
- This “Element” Today: Existing Conditions
- What the Community Said
- Goals and Recommended Policies and Actions

MAPC MetroFuture and MetroCommon 2050

The Metropolitan Area Planning Council’s MetroFuture (2008) is the Greater Boston Region’s 30-year plan “to better the lives of people who live and work in Metropolitan Boston between now and 2030.” Originally adopted in 2008, the plan capitalizes on the region’s assets and sets a path for the future of Greater Boston by establishing 65 goals for the year 2030. Throughout Section 4, each planning element references MetroFuture goals related to and in support of the goals and recommendations within the given section. Aligning Sharon’s goals with those of the region can help to achieve these goals locally and contribute to their overall progress throughout the greater Boston metropolitan area.

MetroCommon 2050

Building on the work of MetroFuture, MAPC is currently engaged in Greater Boston’s next regional long-range plan, looking ahead to 2050. Currently, the MetroCommon 2050 initiative has nine draft goals: a climate-resilient region; getting around the region conveniently and affordably; homes for all; a net zero carbon region; a healthy environment; economic security and prosperity; healthy and safe neighborhoods; thriving arts, culture, and heritage; and dynamic representative government. While these goals will not be finalized until 2020, aligning Sharon’s goals with those of the region can help to achieve these goals locally and contribute to their overall progress throughout the greater Boston metropolitan area.





4.1 CULTURAL AND HISTORIC RESOURCES

CULTURAL RESOURCES

This section presents cultural and historic resources. Cultural resources, which includes the arts, is presented first, followed by historic resources. While cultural and historic resources are presented separately in this section, there are clear overlapping interests and opportunities.

Introduction

Sharon's cultural resources are cherished by residents. From the many volunteer efforts and nonprofit cultural organizations, to the public school arts programs, and the individual artistic efforts of residents and businesses, these resources are seen as a defining characteristic of the town. This element describes the organizational infrastructure supporting arts and culture throughout the town, assesses available performance space, and offers recommendations for improving coordination, funding, and outreach efforts around arts programming.

Cultural Resources Today: Existing Conditions

The richness of cultural offerings and initiatives spans music, performing arts, and visual and craft arts, with a strong focus on school-based programs. Sharon High School has a strong performing arts and music program and residents are proud of the Sharon Community Chamber Orchestra which offers professional-level musical performances. FAME (Friends of Art and Music Education) is a nonprofit that supports art, music, and theatre in all five of Sharon's public schools.

Many organizations exist that cater to the cultural diversity of the town including the Creative Arts Association, the Sharon Cultural Council (which exists solely to administer Massachusetts Cultural Council Grants), and the Public Library. There are many programs and opportunities for involvement in the visual arts, music, theater, and dance for students, artists, and residents, including Sharon Community Education, the Sharon Dance Center, and a range of events and activities throughout the town.

Key cultural characteristics include the following:

- Sharon has a large number and diversity of religious organizations and institutions. The Sharon Interfaith Clergy Council facilitates building community and shared understanding across faith traditions in town.
- There are a number of recurring arts and cultural events throughout town, including a summer concert series at Lake Massapoag Beech Tree Park, monthly concerts at Not Just Another Coffeehouse at the Unitarian Universalist Church, Square Jam which occurs each year in August, and the first annual Porch Fest which is scheduled for September 2019.
- Despite a large number and diversity of arts and cultural groups in Sharon, there is currently no unifying force for arts and cultural organizations and programs in the community. The Sharon Cultural Council exists to administer yearly grants from the Massachusetts Cultural Council but does not have the capacity for more programming and coordination, nor does it conduct fundraising or marketing for arts initiatives. The Sharon Creative Arts Association is a group that encourages the development of visual arts and crafts in the community.
- While there appears to be great town-wide interest and general support for the arts and cultural programs, outside of the Sharon Cultural Council, there is little Town financial or infrastructure support. In particular, the Town lacks arts funding, there are private insurance requirements for art displays in public buildings and public space use (i.e., the Town no longer carries insurance for these displays), and there is a lack of available performance space open to the community.
- Several arts organizations, such as FAME (Friends of Art and Music Education) and Sharon Creative Arts Association, offer scholarships to students graduating from Sharon High School.
- Within the schools, FAME provides grants for materials, instruments, expenses, and events that are outside of the schools' budgets. The Parent Teacher Student Organizations (PTSOs) also support the arts in the schools.
- Indoor venues for the arts tend to include schools and religious institutions. However, school spaces limit use by external organizations because of scheduling and access issues. The Community Center used to be a center for classes, dancing, and other performing arts, but after significant structural deficiencies were found, it was renovated and repurposed to also include other Town offices and uses.
- Outdoor venues include the stage at the beach, but the columns impose limitations on dance. Temporary stages are constructed for special events, such as Square Jam. A list of existing performance spaces is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Existing Sharon Cultural and Performance Spaces and Buildings

Venue	Description
Sharon Middle School	Concert style auditorium, not ideal for performing arts because of size, lack of support spaces for dressing, sets, and limited availability.
Sharon High School	Unable to have public access during the day, after school use by outside groups is also difficult. Evening use is available for a fee. There are plans for a town vote in Fall 2019 to determine whether the Town will build a new high school. Future high school plans may change opportunities for performance space.
Library	Community room for 70-75 people, full Audio Visual (AV), sound system, not completely private. Plans for the recently approved new Library include a community space accessible to community groups after hours to host 120 people. The Town expects to receive the state grant award of almost \$7.5 million in July 2019 with the project commencing soon thereafter.
Community Center	Upstairs and downstairs spaces but the ballroom is heavily used and can be difficult to schedule due to its popularity. The downstairs Adult Center room can be used but is smaller.
Churches	Many of the churches host cultural events and activities. The Unitarian Church of Sharon hosts Not Just Another Coffeehouse once a month with paid musicians, the First Baptist Church hosts music school recitals.
Synagogues	Acapella at Temple Israel, Temple Sinai hosts the New England Repertory theater. Both synagogues host lectures and music events, and anyone can rent their ballrooms for a fee.
Beach	Beech Tree Park gazebo is available seasonally and can be reserved through the Recreation Department.
Moose Hill	Hosts gallery shows and chamber music nights indoor and outdoor.

Sample of Cultural Organizations

- » Sharon Cultural Council
- » Police and Fire Museum
- » Sharon Public Library
- » Creative Arts Association
- » Sharon Community Chamber Orchestra
- » Sharon MA Concert Artist and Music Teachers Association
- » Temple Sinai
- » Sustainable Sharon Arts and Culture Committee
- » Cultural Arts Committee at Temple Israel
- » Sharon Public Schools
- » FAME (Friends of Art and Music Education)



Sharon Community Center

What the Community Said

Key takeaways from the community input from meetings, the Fall 2018 online survey, meetings-in-a-box, interviews, and focus groups, and other submitted comments:

- Focus group participants described the arts environment and community as active, but they believe that much of the activity is not well-known and that the cultural offerings in the town could be better marketed to residents.
- From the Fall 2018 Survey: Historical, artistic, and cultural activities and programs were ranked as the least important characteristic of Sharon, when considering the future of Sharon as a desirable community in which to live.
- Local artists and arts and cultural organizations in town said that there appears to be great interest and general conceptual support for the arts and cultural programs but there is no specific funding, nor is there a dedicated arts council, Town employee, or arts organization to coordinate grant proposals, maintain a calendar, and increase visibility for the arts in Sharon.
- There is a limited ability for arts organizations to use Town-owned spaces. For example, with the Community Center, the Town seeks to make a profit from renting spaces to residents. Between costs for room rental and insurance, using these spaces can be cost-prohibitive. Rehearsal space is also needed for dance and youth programs.
- The town lacks grand public statements of art such as a public art program, a more visible entrance or gateway at Post Office Square, and signage projects that could help create greater visibility for the arts in the town.
- The Town has dropped insurance coverage for art displays in public buildings, shifting the costs to artists, which makes it difficult for artists to contribute to public art initiatives as their works are not protected.
- Dance is an invisible art form in Sharon with no dance in the schools. Many Greater Boston High Schools have dance programs as electives or as clubs.
- A number of nonprofit organizations in town are struggling to get new members; boards of some organizations feel they are simply swapping members across institutions instead of growing the pool of residents volunteering and supporting the arts.
- Some arts advocates wish to explore future uses for the old Library building when a new facility is constructed. Specifically, the Town could consider using the old building for community gatherings, event space, or other arts and culture uses.
- There is a desire for greater organizational collaboration between historic organizations and arts and cultural groups to increase effective outreach, improve fundraising, and grow, as well as coordinate programming and increase visibility and marketing.

HISTORIC RESOURCES

Introduction

Sharon has many historic buildings and structures, with various levels of local, state, and national recognition. There is a desire for the Town and historic organizations and initiatives to more actively engage residents in historic preservation. This element describes the status of historic properties in town, assesses current preservation efforts, and proposes recommendations for greater collaboration and coordination.

Historic Resources Today: Existing Conditions

Historic resources represent a wide range of periods important to the Town's history, including Native American, Colonial, Nineteenth Century and Early Twentieth Century. The Town has a diverse array of resources documented on the Massachusetts Historical Commission's (MHC) inventory. These historic resources are dispersed throughout Sharon, with several concentrated in Post Office Square. These resources represent a diverse array of assets that expand beyond historic buildings and structures to include archeological sites, cemeteries, and monuments. Diverse historic periods, resource types, and geographic locations present unique challenges for the small number of historic preservation organizations in Sharon.

The town's acclaimed natural resources also boast historic and cultural components. From the 1800s to the mid-1900s, people came to stay at inns and hotels to enjoy the clean air and water at Lake Massapoag. Today, Camp Wonderland and Everwood Day Camp continue the town's legacy as summer recreational locations, though geared more toward children. Sharon's Community Center, a former resort hotel and then the St. Francis Retreat Lodge for the Franciscan Brothers, was acquired by the Town in 1967. The Community Center has activities for all ages and also houses the Town's Recreation Department and Adult Center/Council on Aging. Lake Massapoag, Moose Hill Wildlife Sanctuary, and Borderland State Park, three of the top attractions in town, host cultural events, summer concerts, and seasonal programming.

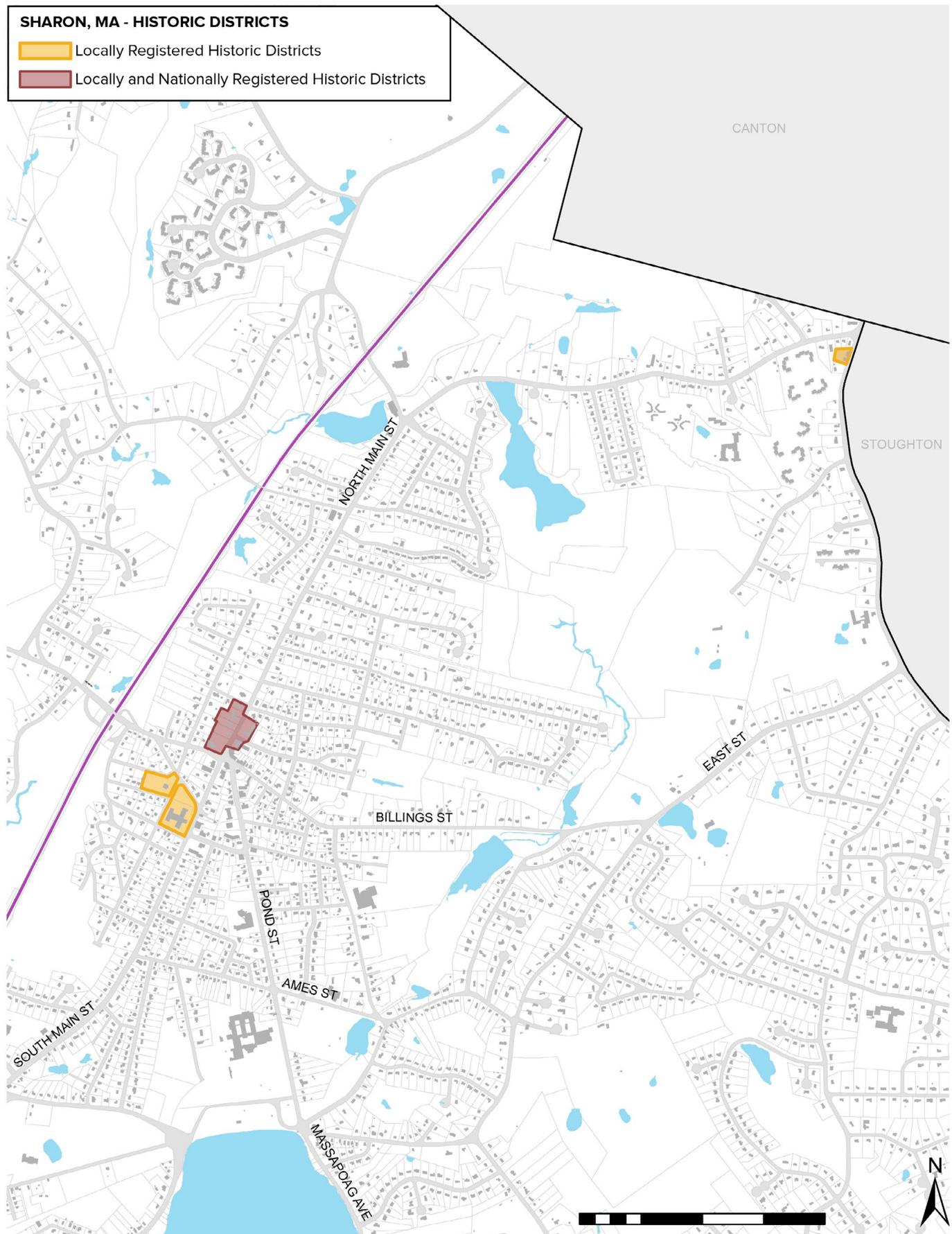


The Wilber School, now the Wilber School Apartments, is in a Local Historic District and has been listed on the National Register of Historic Places since 2010.



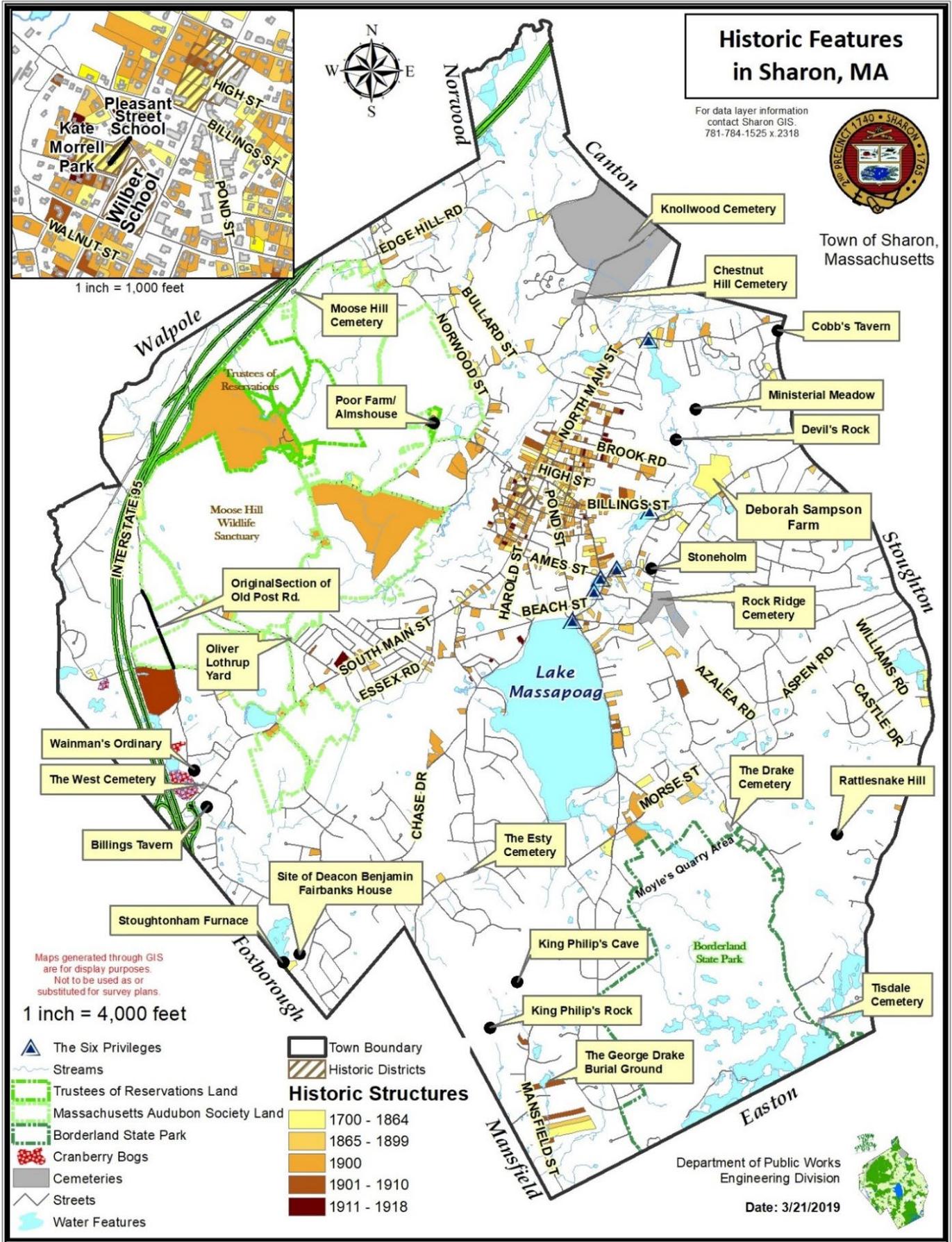
The Pleasant Street School now contains apartments owned and managed by Sharon Housing Authority.

Figure 10: Sharon Historic Districts Map



Data Source: Town of Sharon Department of Public Works Engineering/GIS Division.

Figure 11: Sharon Historic Resources

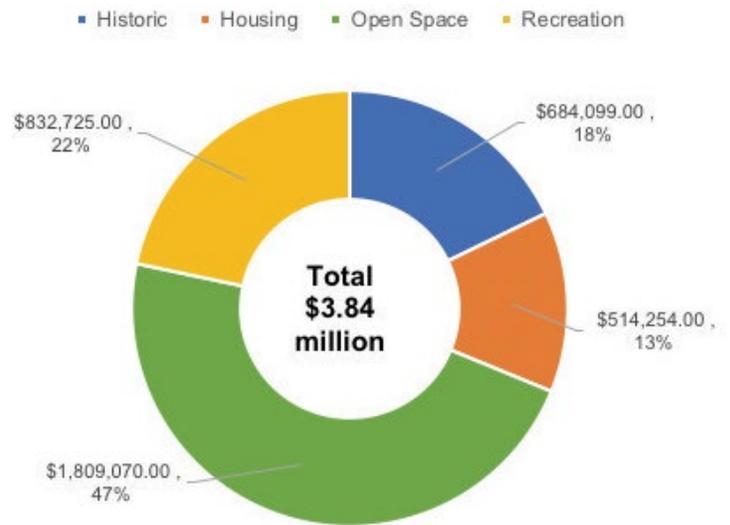


Source: Town of Sharon Department of Public Works Engineering/GIS Division.

Key historic characteristics include the following:

- The Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System (MACRIS) data maintained by the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) lists 523 properties with historic significance designated in Sharon: 475 are individual buildings; 28 are structures, such as walls, ponds, or bridges; 9 are burial grounds; 8 are multi-building areas; and 3 are objects, such as historic monuments, markers or statues.
- The Sharon Historic Commission updated its historic resource survey in 2008.
- Three areas are designated Local Historic Districts (LHD) – Town Center, Cobbs Tavern, and the Wilber School/Pleasant Street School/Kate Morrell Park districts. (See Figure 10. Sharon Historic Districts Map)
- The Town has one National Register Historic District: the Sharon Historic District (Town Center).
- Five other individual properties are on the National Register of Historic Places: Borderland Historic District (i.e., Borderland State Park, partly in Easton), Cobb’s Tavern, Stoneholm, the Stoughtonham Furnace Site, and the Charles L. Wilber School.
- Any building 100 years or older or listed on the Town’s inventory from the Sharon Historic Commission is subject to the local demolition delay bylaw.
- Funds from the State’s Community Preservation Act (CPA) can be used for four purposes, to: preserve historic sites, create affordable housing, preserve open space, and develop outdoor recreational facilities. Since adopting the State’s CPA in 2006, approximately 18% of the Town’s total allocation of CPA funds have gone toward historic preservation projects.
- Few recommendations detailed in the Sharon Historic Commission’s updated 2008 Historic Resource Survey (part of the Community Preservation Plan Fiscal Years 2009-2013 report) have been completed to date.

Figure 12: Sharon Community Preservation Act (CPA) Funding Allocation for Historic Resources, 2006-2018



The State’s CPA requires a minimum of 10% of CPA allocations be used for open space projects (not including recreation), 10% for historic preservation projects, and 10% for affordable housing projects with the remainder to be used for any of the four purpose categories.

Source: Graphic by Metropolitan Area Planning Council with information from the Community Preservation Coalition Database



Sharon Public Library, Source: Sharon Public Library Postcard Collection

What the Community Said

Key takeaways from the community input from meetings, the Fall 2018 online survey, meetings-in-a-box, interviews, and focus groups, and other submitted comments:

- Historic community structures are mostly gone or are no longer used for community gatherings, including arts and culture events. There was a large civic auditorium which hosted many community events but this was demolished and no replacement was built.
- There is strong alignment between many historic and cultural goals and needs, including:
 - » Increasing interest among residents in preservation, conservation, and town history, including educational materials and school programming;
 - » Greater collaboration between local organizations; and
 - » Additional historic interpretive programming, brochures, and displays in public spaces.
- The effectiveness of the one-year waiting period for the Demolition Delay Bylaw has a limited impact on demolition decisions, with developers including the waiting period in their permitting and construction plans.
- There is a desire to have the Town use and design public space and signage to support the arts, cultural, and historic character of the town, including public art, wayfinding, and paving designs.
- There is interest among members of the Sharon Cultural Council to expand their convening and coordinating role around arts and culture in the town.

GOALS AND RECOMMENDED POLICIES AND ACTIONS

The Goals and Recommendations in this section are placed within the greater context of the following MAPC MetroFuture Goals:

Goal #7 - Cities, towns, and neighborhoods will retain their sense of uniqueness and community character.

Goal #8 - Historic resources will be preserved and enhanced.

Goal #43 - More people will take advantage of the region's artistic and cultural resources



While feedback from the community indicates that many residents are proud of Sharon's cultural and historic resources and assets, there is general consensus that there are three broad areas that can benefit from Master Plan recommendations: 1) increase funding from the Town and other sources; 2) create a unifying effort or organization to identify funding, coordinate calendars, seek collaborative opportunities, and elevate visibility; and 3) identify additional public and private spaces that can serve as community gathering and cultural venues.

The following goals and recommendations address key issues heard during the master planning process. These recommendations work in concert with all the Master Plan recommendations, particularly, Economic Vitality; Land Use and Zoning; and Open Space, Recreation, and Natural Resources.

Goal 1: Support a unified approach to coordinating, funding, and marketing cultural and historic assets and events in the town.

Cultural and historic resources thrive when efforts are coordinated and marketing and information are shared on a unified platform. The pursuit of funding, efforts to heighten visibility, and making the case for all kinds of support is more sustainable when coordinated across multiple stakeholders. The Town does not have a cultural commission or cultural office and the Sharon Cultural Council's primary purpose is to administer Massachusetts Cultural Council grant monies annually. Crafting a unified approach to arts, cultural, and historic assets and events in the town and coordinating cultural and historic initiatives with other sectors can reap benefits for all.

Recommendations:

- 1A. Create a collaborative, town-wide arts, business, and historic organization to share resources, support mutual interests, and pursue diverse funding to support goals and initiatives.
- 1B. Celebrate and support the multicultural aspects of Sharon that bring the community together through town-wide events and programs.
- 1C. Consider hiring a staff person or town planner who can coordinate Town efforts and initiatives, pursue grants and funds to support the town's arts and cultural organizations, coordinate historic preservation efforts, and facilitate education and outreach efforts with schools and local businesses.

Goal 2: Make strong connections through communication and coordination between Sharon’s arts, culture, historic, and business communities to support sustainable, vibrant public spaces and robust amenities and services for residents and visitors.

Arts, cultural, and historic preservation organizations have many of the same goals and interests as the business community. All of these stakeholders depend on customers or members and have to meet practical considerations driven by revenue and expenditures. There are other common interests that create compelling reasons why the business, cultural, arts, and historic communities should coordinate with each other. In a time when brick and mortar stores are losing ground to internet sales, the unique areas of strength that local business and culture can offer, include experience, authenticity, and dining. Many towns and cities have seen great success when interests align, and varied stakeholders can join forces to effectively market their products and grow their customer/member base.

Recommendations:

- 2A. Support collaboration between the various sectors in the community. Create an ad hoc task force consisting of cultural, historic preservation, business, and recreational/open space stakeholders and meet regularly to share information on what these sectors are doing.
- 2B. Coordinate with or integrate into the recommended business group to identify ways cultural and business stakeholders can support each other. (See Economic Vitality)

Goal 3: Better use existing buildings and physical spaces for arts and culture and identify new opportunities for multi-use arts and cultural spaces in town.

Arts and cultural uses are spread across the town and there is a low level of visibility for some of the initiatives. In addition, varying policies about space usage at the High School and reduced availability of space at the Sharon Community Center have made finding space difficult and sometimes costly. The Master Plan can encourage creative thinking about arts and cultural uses in a variety of public spaces including Town buildings, open space, and parks, and also in private spaces.

Recommendations:

- 3A. Maximize use of space at the Sharon Community Center and make it affordable and more available for outside groups and community members. Add a makerspace or other creative collaborative workspace.
- 3B. Create and support a multi-use community space in the new Library.
- 3C. Identify and support more community art spaces and more public art throughout town, such as in the old Library, the former Sacred Heart space, and designated areas of Camp Everwood and at public access points for the Lake. Create new destinations for community art in town. Consider the entire town as a public cultural venue by incorporating functional art into public spaces such as the green space at the new Town Hall or the park adjacent to the Wilber School.
- 3D. Consider the “town as a stage” and support more performance spaces and shared spaces throughout Sharon, including using festivals and events to celebrate the arts.
- 3E. Identify and support a Post Office Square location for arts and cultural events and activities, and also consider creating other “arts and culture” districts or clusters in town. Investigate the reuse of the existing public Library building for community and cultural events when the new Library building is completed and the Wilber School Auditorium space.
- 3F. Ensure that zoning allows for artists’ studios and galleries in a variety of locations throughout the town.

Goal 4: Document and make known the full breadth of Sharon's history and historic resources.

Building awareness is a vital step in any town's preservation strategy. Only by knowing Sharon's past can residents decide what they want the town to become in the future. Increasing knowledge of Sharon's history and historic resources through thoughtful documentation, good marketing, programming, and signage can transform residents into advocates, fostering town-wide responsibility for these historic assets. A celebration of the town's heritage will also cultivate a stronger sense of a cohesive town identity.

Recommendations:

- 4A. Identify additional historic locations and structures not on existing inventories. This is the first step the Town must take to improve and protect historic resources. This should be undertaken prior to a formal Historic Resource Survey, and then further refined using the methodology of that survey.
- 4B. Update the Town's inventory of historic assets in continued collaboration with the Library. As was the case with the 2008 Historic and Cultural Resources Survey of Sharon, this work is often undertaken by consultants using funding from MHC through the CPA. Recent and updated survey work lay the foundation for expanding existing historic districts, forming neighborhood conservation districts, and other potential regulatory activities that enable historic preservation.

- 4C. Consider expanding the existing and adding new local historic districts as well as voluntary neighborhood conservation districts as a method to preserve design characteristics at the neighborhood-level within the town. (Also see *Land Use and Zoning*) Neighborhood Conservation Districts (NCDs) are established by a group of residents seeking to preserve their neighborhood's architecturally-distinctive character and heritage. Once established, the district is governed by a set of design-oriented review standards for exterior architectural features. NCDs can be a good method to protect areas that are architecturally and/or historically significant but may not qualify for inclusion in a local historic district (e.g., the resources may not be old enough to qualify as historic). Often NCDs will require alterations, construction, demolitions, or work of any kind be approved by a town historic commission.

The Massachusetts Attorney General has approved NCD bylaws in multiple Massachusetts communities: Amesbury, Brookline, Ipswich, Lexington, Lincoln, Newton, and Wellesley. Amesbury and Lexington adopted their NCDs as amendments to their respective zoning bylaws, and followed the procedures required by the Zoning Act. In addition, some of these towns invited the affected property owners to participate in the formation and governance of their NCDs.²

² Rackemann, Sawyer & Brewster, P.C., Massachusetts Land Use Monitor, <http://www.massachusettslandusemonitor.com/policy/ag-reviewing-controversial-neighborhood-conservation-district-in-brookline/>, accessed 10/29/15.

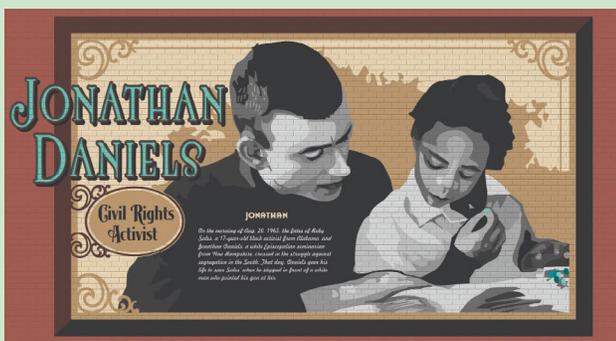
CASE STUDY

Magical History Tour, Keene NH

In June 2019, a group of hundreds of professional artists, the Walldogs, traveled to Keene, NH and painted 16 murals, showcasing the town's rich history. Together, the murals became The Magical History Tour, a downtown walking route for the public to enjoy. Besides murals, the festival also offered live music, face painting, art demonstrations, a Walldog art auction, and community mural-making. The Keene Walldog Team of 50 volunteers, led by resident Peter Poanessa, worked hard for almost 2 years to organize, fund raise, and involve the locals in this event with support provided by many sponsors, such as Keene State College and Putnam University. Their goal is to promote Keene's culture by animating history through art while bringing the community together.



Source: walldogsinkeene.com



Jonathan Daniels by Chris Lovelady,

Source: walldogsinkeene.com

- 4D. Promote education and create new ways for residents and visitors to experience Sharon's rich history, including the town's manufacturing and industrial history, and link to cultural resources and local businesses and promotional opportunities through online information, signage, and promotional materials.

Residents and visitors alike can be made more aware of Sharon's historic resources through historic markers, brochures, walking tours, and other interpretive programming. The Historical Society could spearhead this effort in conjunction with the Public Library, public schools, and other town education-oriented organizations. This initiative could include the creation of "history in context of location." This includes interactive opportunities through markers, kiosks, and technology at and about the locations of local stories related to significant cultural and historic events, including pre-Revolution, Revolution, time of the first train station, iron bog and ice farming at the Lake, and other manufacturing and local business history. In addition, this provides an opportunity for the intersection of art and history, by using innovative art installations to raise the visibility of the town's history, such as using statues, plaques, and murals to document notable Sharon residents throughout history, former industries, unique historic events, and other historic landmarks.

- 4E. Highlight agricultural sites and resources and link these to other town spaces and local businesses. (Also see Open Space, Recreation, and Natural Resources) Include these resources on maps of the business areas and cultural maps and information lists. Wayfinding and interpretive historic signage should include open space and recreation destinations and histories.

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PUMPKINS
Carving Pumpkins
1.99/lb

4.2 ECONOMIC VITALITY

Introduction

The Town's economic stability is a high priority for residents of Sharon. Maintaining and growing Sharon's economic base is important to alleviate the tax burden on residential property owners. Many residents have voiced a desire for creative economic investment to sustain Town expenditures and services and maintain affordability for residents.

This element describes the current economic trends in the town, characterizes the education and employment characteristics of Sharon residents, details the resident and commercial tax base, describes community perspectives on economic development, and proposes recommendations for targeted development.

Economic Resources Today: Existing Conditions

During the planning process, two major themes emerged regarding Sharon's economic health: 1) growing the non-residential property tax base to alleviate the tax burden on residential property owners, and 2) improving and growing local businesses and services within the town, particularly in Post Office Square, to improve residents' and visitors' experiences in town and overall quality of life. Information on the town's existing economic base (jobs and businesses located in the town), the workforce (Sharon residents who are employed or self-employed in any location), and property tax base is provided below.

Economic Base

The economic health of a town depends on the jobs available within the boundaries of the town, as well as the employment characteristics of its residents. Sharon's economic base, defined as jobs and businesses located within the Town of Sharon, did not fare as well as Norfolk County or Massachusetts in the past decade. Total employment in Sharon declined 2% from 2005 to 2016, compared to increases of 10% in the county and 8% in the state. Local employment numbers are one of the factors that helps determine a community's overall health, with the number of jobs in town reflecting available services and goods, as well as opportunities for residents to work without a commute. The Town of Sharon experienced job growth in the Education and Health Care Services and Leisure and Hospitality sectors but at a slower rate than the county and state. The one sector in which Sharon grew at a much higher rate than the state and county is

Trade, Transportation, and Utilities, increasing by 26% from 2005 to 2016 while county and state employment in that sector remained stable (see Table 3). The approved Sharon Gallery development is projected to create approximately 500 jobs, including temporary construction jobs as well as permanent jobs.

Other key observations about Sharon's economic base, based on an analysis of the Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages and American Community Survey data, include:

- Establishment growth decreased between 2005 and 2016, in contrast to significant increases in establishments at the county and state levels.
- Sharon's 2016 employment base was diversified with no one sector accounting for more than 26.3% of its job base (see Fig. 13).
- Trade, Transportation and Utilities, Education and Health Care Services, and Leisure and Hospitality were the primary sources of job growth in the post-recession period.
- Sharon's growth in two sectors (Education and Health Services and Leisure and Hospitality) lagged state and county growth rates. Similarly, between 2010 and 2016, the town did not experience comparable growth in Professional and Business Services either, declining by 35% in Sharon, as compared to growth of 10% in the county and 19% for the state.
- Sharon has a larger base of manufacturing, warehouse, and distribution jobs compared to the state and county. The town's good highway access to I-95 and the expansion of online retailing, provide an opportunity for Sharon to attract additional development to serve this market.



Sharon Market

Opposite Page: Wards Berry Farm

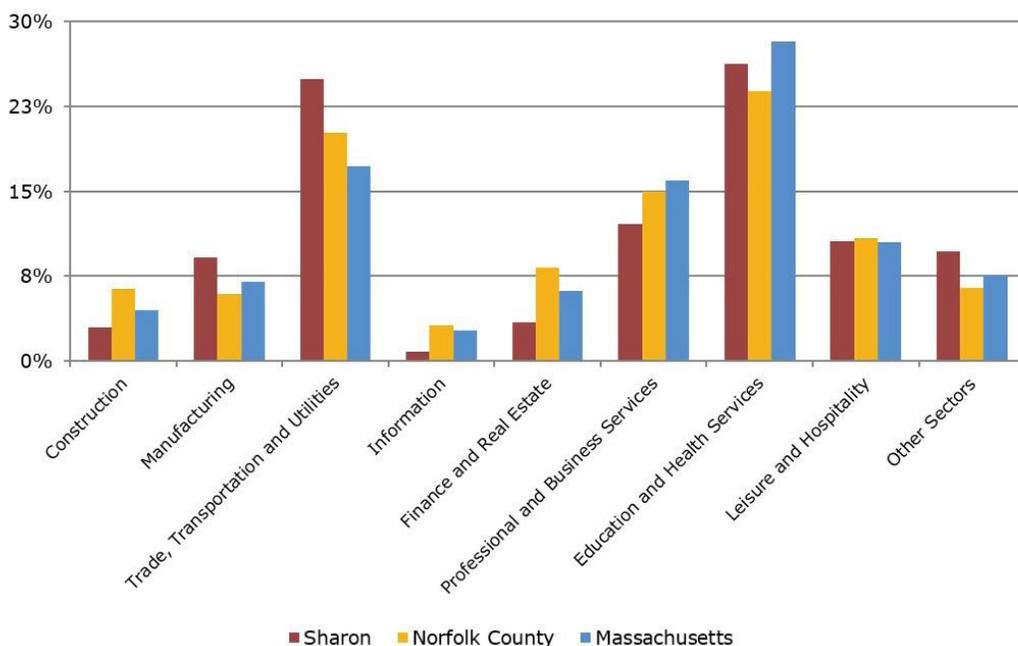
Table 3: Town Employment and Economic Base Indicators, 2005 to 2016

Indicator	Sharon	Norfolk County	Massachusetts
Employment Growth, 2005 to 2016	-2.0%	10.9%	8.4%
Establishment Growth*, 2005 to 2016	-3.9%	17.1%	20.2%
Payroll Growth, 2005 to 2016	18.7%	40.4%	48.8%
Average Wage, 2016	\$51,688	\$62,348	\$67,444
Manufacturing Employment Change, 2005 to 2016	-22.5%	-22.8%	-19.6%
Professional and Business Services, 2005 to 2016	-30.4%	13.6%	19.4%
Trade, Transportation and Utilities, 2005 to 2016	26.3%	4.1%	0.1%
Education and Health Care, 2005 to 2016	13.1%	31.2%	29.7%
Leisure and Hospitality, 2005 to 2016	7.4%	33.5%	23.4%

* An establishment is a single physical location of a business, e.g., a single factory, store, or office. It may account for the entire business (as in a single location restaurant) or be one location for a larger multi-location business. Establishment growth is the change from 2005 to 2016 in the total number of business establishments located in Sharon.

Source: Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages.

Figure 13: Employment by Sector: Sharon, Norfolk County and Massachusetts, 2016



Source: Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages.

Sharon's Workforce – Education and Employment of Sharon Residents

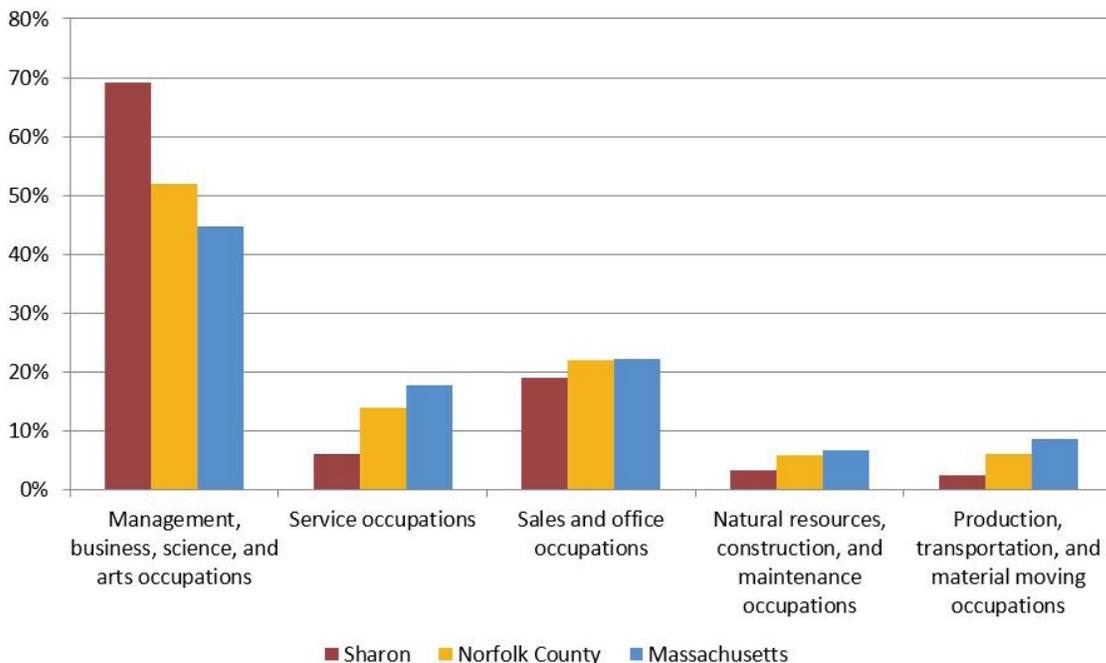
Sharon's residents in the workforce³ are highly educated and concentrated in high skill and well-paying occupations. Approximately 73% of Sharon residents have a bachelor's degree or higher, well above the county (51%) and state (41%), based on 2016 ACS data. A high percentage (69.1%) of Sharon's working residents are in Management, Business, Science, and Arts occupations, which contributes to the town's high median household income of \$127,500. In contrast, 51.9% of county workers and 44.7% of state workers work in these high-skill occupations (see Fig. 14).

Other key observations about employment characteristics of Sharon's residents in the workforce, based on an analysis of the Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages and American Community Survey Data include:

- Sharon's economic prosperity is largely the result of residents' employment and income through participation in the larger regional economy.
- Sharon had 840 self-employed residents and a self-employment rate equal to 9% of its labor force, much higher than the rate for the county (5.6%) and the state (5.9%).

³ Workforce means any employment, whether located in the Town of Sharon, or elsewhere.

Figure 14: Occupations for Workers Living in Sharon, Norfolk County, and Massachusetts



Source: 2012 to 2016 American Community Survey Data

Property Tax Base

Sharon has the lowest FY2018 valuation of its Commercial, Industrial and Personal (CIP) Property (i.e., the commercial and industrial tax base used to determine property taxes) along with the highest residential tax rate among its adjacent communities. The Town's rate of growth in its CIP valuation used to determine property taxes has been lower than that of its neighboring communities since FY2005.

- At \$3.42 billion, Sharon has the third lowest total assessed valuation among its neighboring communities, slightly above Easton and Foxborough and well below Canton and Norwood (see Table 4).
- Sharon has a uniform property tax rate equal to \$19.37 per thousand in FY2018 for both residential and commercial property. Thus, Sharon does not have a higher non-residential tax rate for commercial and industrial property, resulting in a lower commercial and industrial tax rate than all of its neighbors except Easton and Foxborough.
- Sharon's commercial and industrial tax base valuation, at \$243.7 million in FY2018, is far below other communities which range from \$421.6 million in Easton to \$1.44 billion in Norwood.
- The Town of Sharon experienced a solid 33% increase in assessed property values from FY2006 to FY2018 – the second highest percentage growth among its neighbors after Foxborough. However, CIP property accounted for only 10% of the town's growth in property value—the lowest share among adjacent communities. Consequently, residential property has accounted for over 90% of Sharon's assessment growth since FY2006.
- The approved mixed-use Sharon Gallery development will increase the Town's commercial tax base as the non-residential phases are developed.

Table 4: FY 2018 Property Tax Assessments, Assessment Growth and Tax Rates, Sharon and Surrounding Communities

Property Tax Measure	Sharon	Canton	Easton	Foxborough	Norwood	Stoughton	Walpole
Total Assessed Valuation, FY2018 (in millions)	\$3,422	\$4,749	\$3,377	\$3,100	\$5,096	\$3,783	\$4,352
CIP Assessed Valuation, FY2018 (in millions)	\$244	\$1,115	\$422	\$699	\$1,444	\$760	\$579
Residential Share, FY2018	92.9%	76.5%	87.5%	77.4%	71.7%	79.9%	86.7%
CP Share, FY2018	7.1%	23.5%	12.5%	22.6%	28.3%	20.1%	13.3%
Assessment Growth, FY2005 to FY2018 (in millions)	\$854	\$1,142	\$664	\$895	\$1,164	\$709	\$932
Percent Assessment Growth, FY2005 to FY2018	33.3%	31.7%	24.5%	40.6%	19.6%	23.1%	27.3%
CIP Share of Assessment Growth	10.1%	27.5%	23.7%	25.9%	31.7%	37.3%	18.3%
Tax Rate, FY2018	\$19.37	\$12.42 / \$25.86	\$16.21	\$14.57 / \$18.15	\$11.09 / \$22.47	\$14.81 / \$26.14	\$15.27 / \$20.33

Source: Massachusetts Department of Revenue.



Post Office Square businesses

What the Community Said

- In the Fall 2018 Survey, when asked which three types of new stores or businesses would attract them to visit and shop in Sharon more often, Sharon residents identified a full-service restaurant (63%), coffee shop/café (41%), and specialty food store (39%) as their most desired uses.
- Throughout community meetings, surveys, interviews, and focus groups, Sharon residents and stakeholders have referenced the lack of commercial base as driving up property tax rates, which contributes to a higher cost of living for everyone, but particularly for both younger adults and older adults.
- Local business focus group participants indicated a desire for Town assistance, possibly through a staff position, to focus on and coordinate marketing, technical assistance, and other economic development issues for the Town.
- Consistently, public meeting participants and Town Department leaders identified Sharon’s lack of a proper sewage system as a limiting factor in location and amount of potential commercial growth. Reciprocally, the lack of a proper septic system has been tied to the town’s lack of commercial tax revenues, which limit available funds for major infrastructure investments.
- Participants at the second public meeting favored the strategic improvement of Post Office Square, possibly creating a “Town Green”- type multi-use public space that would help to attract and support diverse businesses.
- Public meeting participants link increasing concerns about the limited commercial tax base and rising residential taxes to the recent approvals of several new buildings and projects in Town (e.g., new Public Safety building, new Town Hall, and new Library) with more potential new buildings on the horizon (e.g., new High School).

**A
COMMERCIAL
TAX BASE
IS SEEN AS
THE LIMITING
FACTOR IN
BUILDING
UPON
SHARON’S
STRENGTHS.**

GOALS AND RECOMMENDED POLICIES AND ACTIONS

The Goals and Recommendations in this section are placed within the greater context of the following MAPC MetroFuture Goals:

Goal #2 - Throughout the region, most new growth will occur through reuse of previously developed land and buildings.

Goal #10 - Growth in the region will be guided by informed, inclusive, and proactive planning.

Goal #12 - Communities will work together to plan for growth and share resources.

Goal #30 - Municipalities will operate efficiently and will have adequate funding with less reliance on the property tax.

Goal #33 - Metro Boston will be globally competitive in the knowledge economy.

Goal #34 - The region will be a national leader in the green technology and clean energy sectors.

Goal #35 - Small business owners and entrepreneurs will play a major role in the region's economy and innovation.

Goal #37 - A strong supply of educated and skilled workers—of all ages—will encourage businesses to locate and expand here.

Goal #41 - Corporations and institutions will see civic engagement and sustainability as central to their own success.

Goal #42 - The region's agricultural economy will grow through a focus on sustainable farming and by bringing more locally produced foods to the market.

Goal #59 - The region will produce more renewable energy and will obtain more of its energy from renewable sources.



Sharon's economic vitality goals build on the community's key assets, including Post Office Square, entrepreneurial activity among residents, and the economic potential of its cultural and agricultural resources. These goals also reflect the community's desire to expand its non-residential tax base and strengthen Post Office Square as a community and business center. The Town's 2009 Post Office Square Area Plan laid out a wide range of recommendations to strengthen the town center, with several of the issues and recommendations still relevant today. Since current wastewater infrastructure and the absence of existing Town staff or organizations focused on economic development emerged as critical barriers to economic growth and vitality, the plan proposes actions to address these critical needs. Other issues considered in the Master Plan goals include strategies to support the large number of self-employed residents and ways to take advantage of the Town's relatively low commercial and industrial tax rate to attract more non-residential development. Consequently, the economic vitality plan element includes recommendations and action items to advance the goals detailed as follows.



Post Office Square

Goal 1: Enhance and reinforce Post Office Square as a community center for local businesses and activities.

Post Office Square, as a commercial center with a diverse mix of businesses, is an important asset for Sharon that is valued by community residents. By strengthening Post Office Square as both a location where businesses can thrive and a vibrant, pedestrian-oriented community center, Sharon can grow its commercial tax base and improve the quality of life for residents.

This goal can be advanced through a combination of activities and physical improvements that make Post Office Square a more attractive and active place while improving the investment potential for new commercial and business development.



Existing mixed-use buildings in Post Office Square

Recommendations:

- 1A. Consider incentives to encourage commercial and mixed-use development or redevelopment within Post Office Square, with options that utilize sustainable concepts where possible, such as increasing allowable density and/or lot coverage ratios, as well as temporary property tax relief, and district improvement financing. Several factors make development in Post Office challenging and add costs. These include assembling smaller sites to create a larger and more viable project, addressing septic requirements, and adaptive reuse or possibly demolition of existing buildings. Since current commercial rents are unlikely to make such development financially feasible, Sharon should consider providing incentives to enhance the financial viability of projects with the goal of phasing out incentives as the market strengthens such that rents can cover the full cost of development. Potential incentives include:
 - » Raise the allowable density of permitted development (i.e., through higher allowable densities/lot coverage ratios). This would allow developers to increase rental and project revenues and improve project feasibility by allocating land and other fixed costs across more leasable space.
 - » Temporary property tax relief helps reduce the financial risk for a project in the early years when development needs to lease-up and stabilize its costs. By lowering operating costs and increasing net income, tax relief helps new projects cover debt payments and generate returns to investors. Any property tax relief would ideally phase out over time to ensure Sharon benefits from increased tax revenues. One common approach used by cities and towns is to phase in the full tax bill in 20% increments over five years.
 - » District Improvement Financing (DIF) is often used to fund needed infrastructure improvements for the district but it can be used for other purposes that can improve project feasibility (e.g., providing parking, higher risk financing, site assembly, etc.). Sharon would need to undertake a study to assess the feasibility of establishing a DIF district before deciding whether to pursue this option.

(Also see Public Facilities and Infrastructure)

WHAT IS DISTRICT IMPROVEMENT FINANCING? WHAT IS TAX INCREMENT FINANCING?

In Massachusetts, District Improvement Financing (DIF) and Tax Increment Financing (TIF) are economic tools that municipalities can use to promote redevelopment through public-private partnerships. District Improvement Financing (DIF) is a tool (similar to but slightly different from Tax Increment Financing) whereby increases in local property taxes (or a portion thereof) for a defined district are set aside for specific purposes rather than going to the Town's general fund. While determining the value of the tax increment is essentially the same for both DIF and TIF, how the tax increment is used as an incentive is very different:

- Using DIF, municipalities can pledge all or a portion of tax increments to fund district improvements over time.
- With TIF, municipalities may grant property tax exemptions to landowners of up to 100% of the tax increment for a fixed period.

While both programs provide opportunities to redevelop areas in ways to lead to increased property values, increased tax revenue, improved infrastructure, and other quality of life improvements, TIF focuses on job creation while DIF allows significant flexibility in planning for the district's housing and commercial needs. Public-private agreements are crucial to the success of both programs.

DIF is authorized by M.B.L.c. 40Q and its implementing regulations 402 CMR 3.00 et seq.

A municipality must designate a development district and corresponding development program, which must be certified by the State Economic Assistance Coordinating Council (EACC).

Each district must have a unique development program that spells out the goals of the district and implementation steps. Once the district and program are certified, the town can use various implementation tools, including acquiring land, constructing or reconstructing improvements (such as buildings, roads, schools, and parks), incurring indebtedness (usually through posting bonds), and pledging tax increments and other project revenues for repayment of these debts.

TIF is authorized by M.G.L.c. 40§59 and its implementing regulations 760 CMR 22.01. A municipality must designate a TIF zone and initiate a TIF by vote of its governing body approving the TIF plan.

TIF plans include several components, including identifying property owners in the TIF Zone, executing agreements between the municipality and each property owner within the TIF zone, and creating plans and specifications of construction projects. TIF provides a direct upfront benefit to property owners and developers via tax relief to help pay construction costs.

Source: www.mass.gov/service-details/smart-growth-smart-energy-toolkit-modules-district-improvement-financing-diftax

CASE STUDY

District Improvement Financing – Concord, New Hampshire

Concord, New Hampshire used District Improvement Financing to advance reuse of a vacant lumberyard and mill building into a hotel, conference center, and housing. A DIF district was created, and Concord issued bonds to finance site and road improvements needed for redevelopment and reuse of the site. Several new projects have been built at the site adding \$40 million to the city's tax base. Increased tax revenue from new development at the site flow to the DIF district and are used repay these bonds.

Source: www.mass.gov/service-details/case-studies-district-improvement-financing-dif-and-tax-increment-financing-tif

- 1B. Offer additional seasonal events and programming in Post Office Square to complement existing successful events that bring residents and visitors together. A more complete calendar of events and activities in Post Office Square has dual benefits: 1) attracting more customers to support local businesses; and 2) increasing programming for Sharon residents to socialize, have fun, and celebrate. These activities might combine new events with expanding some existing events to include Post Office Square. The new organization mentioned in Recommendation 5B could coordinate the planning and organization. While the events and activities should reflect the ideas, interests, and unique aspects of Sharon and participating organizations, examples from other communities include: arts festivals, outdoor music and films, winter festivals, multicultural festivals, pop-up galleries, stores, and dining, celebration/reenactments of historic events, and school-related events.

CASE STUDY

District Improvement Financing Plan – Paul Revere Heritage Site, Canton Massachusetts

Using a combination of Community Preservation funds and a District Improvement Financing Plan (MGL 40Q), the town of Canton, Massachusetts was able to create a plan to both develop 272 homes as well as rehabilitate an historic Paul Revere-owned mill. It was the combination of funds that solidified the final plan for the district, which was to split the property in to two parcels facilitating the new development of both condominiums and age-restricted apartments, as well as a conversion of the historic Paul Revere Mill into a restaurant and the barn into a small museum and cultural center. The project also includes improvements to the accompanying open space that is being designated as the town's first common. To comply with the stipulations of 40Q, Canton issued municipal bonds, which are not applied against the Town's debt limits. Additionally, the Town will be able to tax the incremental assessed value to pay for public infrastructure projects such as roads, bridges, and schools.

<https://www.town.canton.ma.us/524/Plymouth-Rubber-Redevelopment>

<https://businessviewmagazine.com/canton-massachusetts-home-paul-revere-heritage-site/improvement-financing-dif-and-tax-increment-financing-tif/>

CASE STUDY

Other downtown organizations can offer examples of events and marketing for town businesses in Post Office Square:



Source: salemartsfestival.com

Downtown Salem Events

Salem Main Streets (SMS) created a year-round event calendar to bring more customers downtown beyond its peak summer and Halloween seasons. These events include:

- Salem So Sweet – a February Chocolate and Ice Cream Festival
- Salem Arts Festival held in June
- Farmers Market – held weekly June thru October
- August Ice Scream Bowl
- Halloween Parade in October
- Holiday Tree Lighting in November
- New Year’s Eve Family Celebration

SMS also cosponsors other events including Film and Poetry Festivals and Restaurant Week in March.



Source: natickcenter.org

Natick Center Cultural District

In 2012, Natick was one of 14 districts in Massachusetts to receive one of the state’s first “Cultural District” designations. The district is a thriving area of artists, small businesses, and schools. Partnered with the town’s Parks and Recreation Department, the district hosts events like:

- Weekly farmers market
- Summer concerts in public spaces
- Natick Nights – Every Thursday in June
- Family Performing Arts Series in July
- Family Picnic Summer Theater
- Porchfest in September

<https://www.natickcenter.org>



Source: melrosechamber.org

Melrose Cultural Council

The Melrose Cultural Council, in partnership with organizations like the Melrose Chamber of Commerce, funds artistic projects and activities in the community. This public/private partnership works together to host events such as:

- Melrose Arts Festival in April every year
- Annual Summer Stroll in July
- Window Art Walk every fall
- Victorian Fair in September
- Trick or Treat at Melrose businesses
- Home for the Holidays in December

<https://www.cityofmelrose.org/discover-melrose/pages/parks-recreation>

<https://members.melrosechamber.org/communitycalendar>

1C. Add beautification, improved graphics, and wayfinding signage for Post Office Square, including identifying locations for public art and public gathering/event space in Post Office Square, other commercial areas, and around the Lake. These improvements will enhance the attractiveness of Post Office Square, improve the environment and safety for pedestrians, and foster connections between businesses and other destinations located in and around Post Office Square (e.g., the Library, the Sharon Historical Society, churches, the Post Office, and various restaurants). A combination of public improvements and efforts by property owners and businesses will have maximum impact. A committee including Town officials, businesses, property owners, and residents could be established to identify locations and plan broad design elements for wayfinding signs, plantings, and other beautification items along with guidance on business signs and window displays. Signage should extend beyond Post Office Square to connect visitors to other town assets and destinations such as the Lake, farms, and conservation and recreation areas. Combining signage with public art can also enrich the attractiveness of other commercial areas. More public gathering spaces around the Lake will enhance the use of this key community recreational asset, particularly during off-peak season. Grants and funds through the Sharon Cultural Council and MassDevelopment Commonwealth Places program could potentially be used for events and projects at the selected sites.

Goal 2: Create a strong, supportive environment for local businesses and self-employed/start-ups.

Sharon has a large base of independent, small businesses along with many self-employed residents and a workforce concentrated in management and technical occupations that can be a seed bed for starting new enterprises. Existing small businesses and aspiring entrepreneurs will benefit from more attention and support to start, grow, and stabilize their enterprises. Through deploying multiple tools that make it more transparent and easier to start a business, while mobilizing local resources to support and encourage entrepreneurs, Sharon will build a solid foundation for ongoing economic vitality.

Recommendations:

- 2A.** Establish a civic or business group to promote Sharon as a business location and to enable businesses to connect and coordinate with each other. This organization could also provide support for local entrepreneurs and self-employed residents, as well as coordinate with the arts, cultural, and historic groups in town, including the new collaborative described under Goal 5B and in the Cultural and Historic Resources plan element. This group might be organized as a committee or interest group within the Neponset River Regional Chamber, if Sharon becomes a member. Town staff can serve as a catalyst or initiator for creating this organization. Once established, the group would set its own priorities and activities with its own volunteer civic leadership that ideally would include business owners, property owners, non-profit organizations, and residents. Town staff would provide targeted support and resources, as appropriate, for specific projects and activities.
- 2B.** Create an entrepreneur and self-employed support group that hosts regular networking meetings and informational and skills development sessions. This support group could be organized and hosted by the Town, perhaps through the Library, or by the new civic group formed in recommendation 2A. It might start with monthly events, expanding to more frequent activities if there is sufficient interest. These events could combine informal social and networking time with an informational and educational component with featured speakers.

2C. *Prepare a guide to “starting a business in Sharon”. This guide would provide an accessible single document to guide a business through the required steps to open a new business in Sharon, with details for different types of common businesses and information regarding sustainable principles adopted by the Town at the 2014 Annual Town Meeting and new Articles being passed, such as the 2019 Article 23 – Plastic Waste Reduction Bylaw Amendment reducing plastic bag use. It would be a useful resource to an existing business seeking to move or create a branch in Sharon along with entrepreneurs seeking to open their first enterprise. Commercial realtors could also use the guide when they work with businesses looking for property in the region. By making the business start-up process more transparent and understandable, Sharon will be signaling that it wants to bring more businesses to the town and might also reduce the amount of staff time needed to explain the process.*

2D. *Create a Town economic development web page to encourage and assist businesses seeking to locate in Sharon or start a business in town. Many communities have created such pages to provide: 1) important community information related to business location decisions; 2) a single point-of-contact in the Town for businesses seeking space or sites or that need help navigating licensing and permitting requirements; and 3) links to helpful local and regional business resources. As with the guide in 2C, this website signals that Sharon wants to bring more businesses to town and makes the process of locating in Sharon easier. Town staff can prepare this guide with assistance from a small user advisory committee of local businesses, brokers, and attorneys.*

EXAMPLES

Starting a Business Guide

Several cities and towns have created these types of guides. Examples include:

Easthampton

<https://easthamptonma.gov/business/small-business-permitting-guide.html>

Haverhill

(Provides this information through its business portal website)
<https://www.haverhillbusinessportal.com/start-a-business>

EXAMPLES

City and Town Government Economic Development Websites

Examples include:

Bedford

<https://www.bedfordma.gov/economic-development>

Salem

<https://www.salem.com/business-and-economic-development>

Walpole

<https://www.walpole-ma.gov/community-and-economic-development>



Bradford Mill shared workspace in Concord, MA
 Source: www.bradfordmill.com

2E. Support the creation of a co-working space for people who have home-based businesses, new entrepreneurs, and residents who telecommute part-time and want meeting and collaboration space. This will help Sharon provide real estate that addresses the demand among a growing number of individuals and entrepreneurs for new types of workspace to accommodate their needs and promote social and business connections. More detail on how Sharon can implement this recommendation is provided under recommendations 3B and 3D.

2F. Encourage potential eco- and agri-tourism through collaboration with Ward’s Berry Farm, Crescent Ridge Dairy, Moose Hill Wildlife Sanctuary, Borderland Park, Sharon Friends of Conservation, and local businesses. Sharon’s mix of agricultural businesses and conservation areas represent a combined destination that can be marketed to visitors interested in farms, outdoor activities, and natural resources. Increased visitor activity will support these important agricultural businesses and potentially increase customers for other Sharon businesses, such as restaurants. A first step to promoting Sharon as an agricultural tourism destination is identifying all of the town’s related businesses, farms, conservation areas, and parks. The “Explore Sharon” brochure generated by MAPC and the Town can be used as a base for information and graphics (see Fig 15). Once these sites are identified they can be organized into a “Sharon Ecological and Agricultural Trail” with a distinct sign and logo to mark them and create a print and online guide to visiting them. Each stop on the trail would cross-promote visits to the other sites. A town-wide event or festival celebrating its agricultural heritage could also be created to highlight these sites and attract visitors. (Also see Open Space and Natural Resources)

Figure 15: Explore Sharon Brochure



explore Sharon
Linking history, linking nature

"A nice place to live because it's naturally beautiful," says a welcome sign near Post Office Square. Sharon's natural beauty coupled with its rich history and easy access makes it a true gem. From hiking and biking trails to beautiful lakes and streams to conservation and wildlife areas, Sharon's open spaces and historical sites have been successfully preserved for residents and visitors to enjoy.

Sharon is located halfway between Boston and Providence, Rhode Island and is easily accessible to Routes 95, 1 and 27. The MBTA's Commuter Rail Providence/Stoughton line serves the town with a station on Depot Street.

Local fare

Ward's Berry Farm
614 South Main Street
781-784-3600
Pick-Your-Own, farmers market, CSA, bakery, sandwiches, smoothies, hayrides.

Crescent Ridge Dairy
355 Bay Road
781-784-7237
Fresh local milk, grass-fed beef, world-famous ice cream, and seasonal farmers market.

Angel's Café
3 Post Office Square
781-784-8184
Coffee, bakery, sandwiches, salads.

Pizzigando Cafe
1 Pond Street
781-784-8161
Pizzeria and grill.

Alice's Mandarin Taste
37 Pond Street
781-784-7377
Szechuan and Mandarin cuisine.

Carriage House Pizzeria
21 South Main Street
781-784-2700
Pizza, subs, salads, Italian fare.

Coriander Bistro
5 Post Office Square
781-784-2300
Indian and Nepali food.










TOWN OF WALPOLE
to Francis William Bird Park

TOWN OF CANTON
to Canton Aqueduct and Reservoir Pond

TOWN OF STOUGHTON
to Mary Baker Eddy Historic House and Bird Street Conservation Area

TOWN OF FOXBOROUGH
to Gillette Stadium and F. Gilbert Hills State Forest

TOWN OF EASTON
to Children's Museum and Ames Estate

THE TRUSTEES OF RESERVATIONS MOOSE HILL FARM & TRAILS

MASS AUDUBON'S MOOSE HILL WILDLIFE SANCTUARY & TRAILS

MASSAPOAG TRAIL

BEAVER BROOK TRAIL

HISTORIC BIKE TRAIL

LAKE MASSAPOAG

LAKE MASSAPOAG LOOP

KING PHILIP'S ROCK TRAIL

BORDERLAND STATE PARK & TRAILS

Photos, clockwise from top:
American Robin eggs, Garter Snake, Ann-Marie Ford, Cobb's Tavern, Sharon Historical Society, Fire Engine, Heidi Hevey Lane, Annie's Pond, Deer, Ann-Marie Ford, Ward's Berry Farm, Coriander Bistro, Alice's Mandarin Taste, Sunset over Lake Massapoag, Peter Higgins, Deborah Sampson's grave, Matt Dacko, Ward's Berry Farm, Ann-Marie Ford, Sharon sign, Heidi Hevey Lane.

Version 2.0 January 2017



Source: www.townofsharon.net.

2G. Consider having the new civic or business group, and possibly the Town, join the Neponset River Regional Chamber to enhance resources and visibility for small businesses. This option would help Sharon's businesses and broader economic development strategies connect to the regional business community and access information and resources provided by the Neponset River Regional Chamber. It would also improve Sharon's profile within the Neponset River region and help stimulate interest among existing businesses to consider Sharon as a location for future expansion or relocation. Active participation in the NRRC could advance opportunities for partnering and coordinating with other local governments, community groups, and private entities in the region to articulate an overarching economic development strategy, particularly as it relates sustainable development, eco- and agri-tourism, and green businesses



Parking lot behind Alice's Mandarin in Post Office Square



Multi-tenant building on Merchant Street

Goal 3: Expand commercial and industrial development to create a more balanced tax base. (Also see Public Facilities and Infrastructure and Land Use and Zoning)

Sharon's property tax base is largely residential (93%) which places most of the financial burden of supporting Town services on residents. This also results in Sharon having a high residential property tax rate compared to nearby communities. High residential property taxes may lessen residents' support for important Town services and create a hardship for residents on fixed and/or lower incomes. While Sharon has land and infrastructure constraints on new non-residential development, there are opportunities to expand the commercial and industrial tax base.

Recommendations:

3A. Review zoning for the Route 1 corridor and the commercial and industrial zoned areas adjacent to I-95 to allow for higher density development to increase the potential for multi-story office and commercial uses. *This area has strong market potential for further development given its highway access and density of surrounding uses. While the area is largely developed with single-story industrial and commercial buildings, there is potential for infill development at some sites. New zoning with higher density will allow for higher value uses that can add more to the Town's tax base than the current pattern of single-story buildings. New commercial uses – particularly those in green/sustainable technology, products, and services – should be encouraged and considered as allowed uses with support by the Town as a new prospective sector for business and job growth. Implementing this recommendation would require a review of the appropriate boundaries, densities, and allowable uses under any revised zoning and its relationship to uses, parking, and infrastructure needs. (Also see Land Use and Zoning)*

3B. Incentivize sustainable projects that employ adaptive reuse strategies, including sustainable concepts where possible, for warehouses, the current Library building, Wilbur School Auditorium, and other buildings to expand the commercial and industrial tax base and provide spaces for small businesses and entrepreneurs, such as incubator, makerspace, and co-working space. *There is a growing need for new and more diverse types of space for businesses and entrepreneurs, as the number and types of small entrepreneurial enterprises expands along with the gig economy, in which individuals are self-employed, often working on demand through digital platforms and marketplaces. Real estate firms, developers, and economic development organizations are responding to this need by offering small and more flexible spaces in conjunction with shared space, equipment, information, and networking to assist tenant businesses. The primary types of spaces include:*

- » **Small Business Incubators** – buildings dedicated to growing new enterprises through flexible space, shared facilities and equipment, mentoring, and technical services with tenancy often limited to a few years.
- » **Co-working spaces** – buildings or sections of buildings with a mix of leased desks and small offices for individuals and small businesses along with some shared office equipment and services. Some spaces offer classes and social events while encouraging networking and community building among tenants.
- » **Makerspaces** – a building offering leased space and specialized equipment for production-oriented businesses, artisans, and creative enterprises. Some also offer classes and equipment rental to non-tenant members.

CASE STUDY

The Library as Potential Adaptive Reuse

Sharon should encourage the development of one or more of these types of building projects to nurture new and more varied types of enterprises while supporting resident entrepreneurs and self-employed persons. An excellent opportunity exists to reuse the current Sharon Public Library building for this purpose, once the new Library building is completed. The Town should first evaluate the potential for adaptive reuse of the current Library building and weigh its benefits against other new uses of the Library. If the results of this analysis are affirmative, the Town could issue an RFP for sale or long-term lease of the Library building with reuse for a co-working, makerspace, and/or incubator or similar space as a condition for disposition. A second approach to fostering these types of projects is to 1) identify developers interested in building these projects in the local area; and 2) identify owners of suitable building for these uses that are fully or partially vacant and offered for sale or lease. Through the new civic economic development group and/or new Town economic development staff-person, Sharon can play a “match-making” role to connect the developers and building owners and then work with them, as a facilitator and problem-solver to help bring a project to fruition.



Existing Sharon Public Library

- 3C. Support possible mixed-use and commercial redevelopment at Shaw's Plaza, Sharon Heights Plaza, and study Cobbs Corner. These areas have potential for new infill development and/or redevelopment. Shaw's Plaza has both infill and redevelopment potential with its easy access to the highway. A project with ground floor retail and upper story offices would be ideal for maximizing its tax base contribution. A second-best option is a higher density mixed-use project with retail and housing. Sharon Heights Plaza is also a sizable site with low density uses that could accommodate higher density and higher value development. The Town can signal its interest in supporting redevelopment by ensuring proper zoning is in place and approaching the current owner to discuss potential redevelopment. Cobbs Corner is another area with potential for additional development as there is considerable commercial development in the area, mostly in the adjacent towns. The Town staff should inventory Sharon sites within and adjacent to the Cobbs Corner area, assess their appropriateness and potential for commercial use, and review current land use regulations to determine if any zoning changes should be considered to allow for additional commercial development in the Sharon portion of Cobbs Corner. (Also see Land Use and Zoning for analysis of potential built out areas in town)
- 3D. Encourage public and private shared business spaces. As an adjunct or alternative to 3B, the Town, through a new civic economic development organization or staff person, can work to establish smaller-scale shared spaces for entrepreneurs and self-employed residents within portions of existing buildings. For example, while there will be some space at the new Library, additional shared business spaces could be included at the old Library building or by an affordable for-profit business and artist incubator, similar to the Norwood Space Center. This could also include identifying existing property owners willing to use part of their building – perhaps a vacant space or underutilized common space or the Wilbur School Auditorium – as a shared work space. There are several benefits that may motivate a private property owner to do this: gaining exposure, identifying possible future tenants, testing the co-working concept before undertaking a longer-term project, and making a civic or charitable contribution.

Goal 4: Create septic and sewer capacity to foster economic development. (Also see Cultural and Historic Resources, and Public Facilities and Infrastructure)

Sharon's reliance on private septic systems is a major constraint to further economic development. Any new development must comply with current state and local regulations, which require sufficient and appropriate land to accommodate septic systems. If an existing development site cannot meet regulatory standards, a project must either get approval and incur the cost to connect to an existing sewer system in a neighboring town or acquire adjacent land that will permit installation of the needed septic system. Moreover, older and more densely developed areas, particularly Post Office Square, may have properties with existing systems that do not comply with current regulations and lack adjacent sites that can bring them into compliance. This situation will likely preclude significant infill development or redevelopment projects to expand Post Office Square's businesses and commercial tax base and may impact new development options near Route 1 and I-95.

Recommendations:

Sharon can pursue several options to address this key economic development issue and are further detailed in Public Facilities and Infrastructure.

- 4A. Further evaluate the potential of a community septic system on a portion of Young Israel of Sharon's and/or Temple Israel's property near Post Office Square. Following up on the 2009 Post Office Square Area Plan, a preliminary assessment was conducted on the viability of the Temple Israel site for a community septic system in Spring 2009, but there was no further action. Any substantial renovation concepts, infill development, or redevelopment to properties in Post Office Square are tightly constrained by the existing septic capacity, particularly for smaller-sized parcels.*
- 4B. Explore the possibility of connecting to the MWRA sewer in Walpole, Norwood, Canton or Stoughton. While the Department of Public Works (DPW) has taken a cursory look at connecting to Norwood, a more thorough study of possible connections to the MWRA sewer would clarify technical and financial feasibility.*
- 4C. Evaluate the possibility of connecting to the Mansfield Wastewater Treatment Plant.*

Goal 5: Develop new capacity to undertake economic development and related activities.

Sharon currently does not have staff and organizational capacity to implement economic development projects and connect economic development activities with other Town initiatives. Without staff time dedicated for economic development activities and with no civic organization to leverage the town's arts, cultural, and historic assets for economic development, two actions are recommended to address these capacity gaps:

Recommendations:

- 5A. Consider hiring a part-time grants writer to assist in obtaining funds for initiatives and/or a part-time planner/economic development director to lead and coordinate programs and initiatives to support local businesses and entrepreneurs. This position could be the first step toward the hiring of a full-time town planner or staff person who can coordinate related Town economic development efforts and initiatives and pursue grants and funds with other related programs and services. (Also see Cultural and Historic Resources, Housing, Land Use and Zoning, Open Space and Natural Resources, and Public Facilities and Infrastructure)*
- 5B. Create a collaborative, town-wide arts, business, and historic committee to share resources, support mutual interests, and pursue diverse funding to support goals and initiatives. This would be a Town-initiated group to bring together Town staff, committee members in arts, business, and history, and non-profit organizations (including the new business civic group proposed in recommendation 2A and the arts and cultural group recommended in Cultural and Historic Resources) to coordinate their work and draw on their combined resources to implement projects and initiatives in support of common goals. For example, this collaborative would facilitate utilizing town-wide arts, cultural and historic resources to support planning and organizing seasonal events and programming in Post Office Square under recommendation 1B. (Also see Cultural and Historic Resources)*

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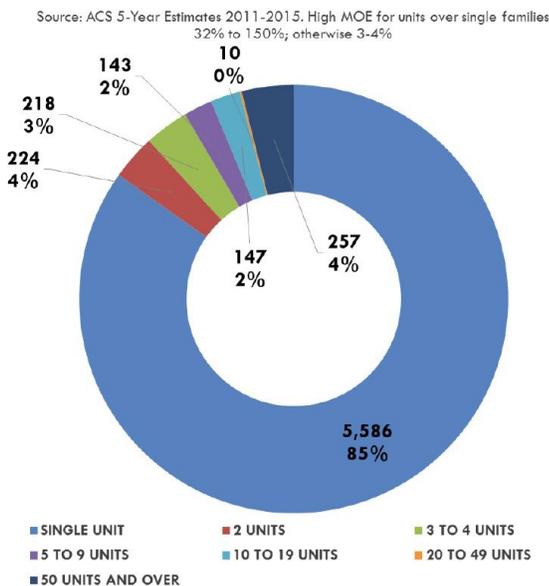
4.3 HOUSING

Introduction

For over 50 years, the Town’s boards and committees have worked to increase housing diversity in Sharon. The *Sharon Housing Production Plan, 2018-2023 Update* (2018 HPP) prepared by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) with assistance from Town staff, provides a recent in-depth snapshot of the current housing conditions in town, along with recommendations to meet the housing demands identified as the town’s population’s needs change. The 2018 HPP is intended to guide housing creation and preservation in Sharon, help the Town maintain its State-mandated affordable housing goals, increase affordable housing opportunities, and provide housing options for residents of all ages. This Master Plan supports the goals and recommendations in the 2018 HPP while also viewing housing goals in concert with other town-wide goals.

Drawing on the 2018 HPP, this element describes trends for existing housing stock available in Sharon, assesses housing affordability, lists current zoning restrictions, and highlights recent projects; discusses common housing challenges expressed by residents and stakeholders; and offers recommendations for potential zoning modifications and funding allocation for creating new affordable housing.

Figure 16: Sharon Housing Units by Type – 2015



Source: Sharon Housing Production Plan, 2018-2023 Update.

Left: House in Sharon

Housing Today: Existing Conditions

While the town’s housing is overwhelmingly comprised of single-family homes, more recent developments have included multifamily, senior-oriented, and affordable units. Examining trends in housing prices, single-family ownership, and affordability in town and across the region can provide insights into promising and concerning trends to address. Affordability remains one of the ongoing concerns for populations throughout the life course. Key characteristics and trends include the following:

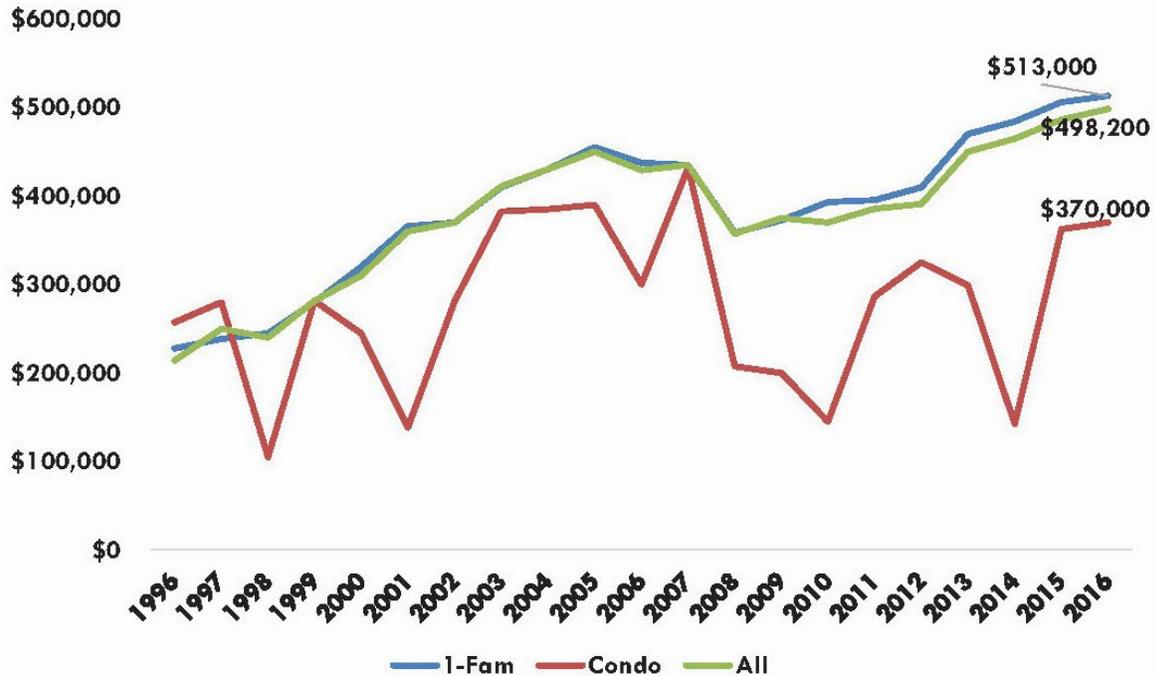
- The 2018 HPP notes that approximately 85% of Sharon’s housing units are single-family homes (see Fig. 16), which is the third highest percentage among the thirteen municipalities located within the Three Rivers Interlocal Council (TRIC) MAPC subregion (Canton, Dedham, Dover, Foxborough, Medfield, Milton, Needham, Norwood, Randolph, Sharon, Stoughton, Walpole, and Westwood). Only Medfield (88%) and Dover (95%) have higher percentages of single-family homes, with Norwood having the lowest at 52%.
- The 2017 Median housing price in Sharon was \$467,325 per The Warren Group, which was higher than the \$410,000 median housing price for Massachusetts. Sharon’s housing prices have been increasing following the recession prices in 2008. (See Fig. 17).
- Less than one-fifth (18%) of Sharon’s housing units are renter-occupied, which falls near the middle of the thirteen TRIC municipalities, per the 2018 HPP.
- The town’s 5% vacancy rate is one of the lowest in the state. For owner-occupied properties, the vacancy rate is even lower at less than 1%.

Housing Affordability

- While Sharon meets the 10% minimum for affordable housing units based on Massachusetts Chapter 40B requirements, a majority of affordable units are rental units only available to older adults and people with disabilities.
- There are limited opportunities for affordable home ownership. The 2018 HPP identified ten units out of 392 affordable units as being available for ownership.
- The Community Preservation Act (CPA) was adopted by the Town in 2006. Since then, approximately 13% of the Town’s total allocation of CPA funds has gone toward affordable housing projects.

Figure 17: Sharon Median Housing Prices 1996 - 2016

Adjusted to 2016 CPI Dollars
Source: The Warren Group 2016



Source: Sharon Housing Production Plan, 2018-2023 Update.

- CPA funds have only created one unit of affordable housing (through the acquisition and sale of the single-family home at 9 Glenview Road to an eligible household), with the remaining CPA housing funds going toward repairs for existing units at the Sharon Housing Authority’s Hixon Farm Road complex and South Pleasant Street School residences.
- In 2006, the Town established the Sharon Affordable Housing Trust (SAHT), but the trust is currently inactive with no identifiable funding.
- In the 2018 HPP, four identified Town-owned properties are deemed to have feasible affordable housing potential. However, analysis of the 16 parcels with greater than five acres for housing development potential, including the four owned by the Town, reveals that few to none have redevelopment potential due to existing site conditions or environmental constraints.
- Affordability and housing type are of particular concern for older adults aging in Sharon. The segment of Sharon’s population ages 65 years and over is expected to grow exponentially over the next decade with direct consequences on the desired types and prices of housing for these residents.

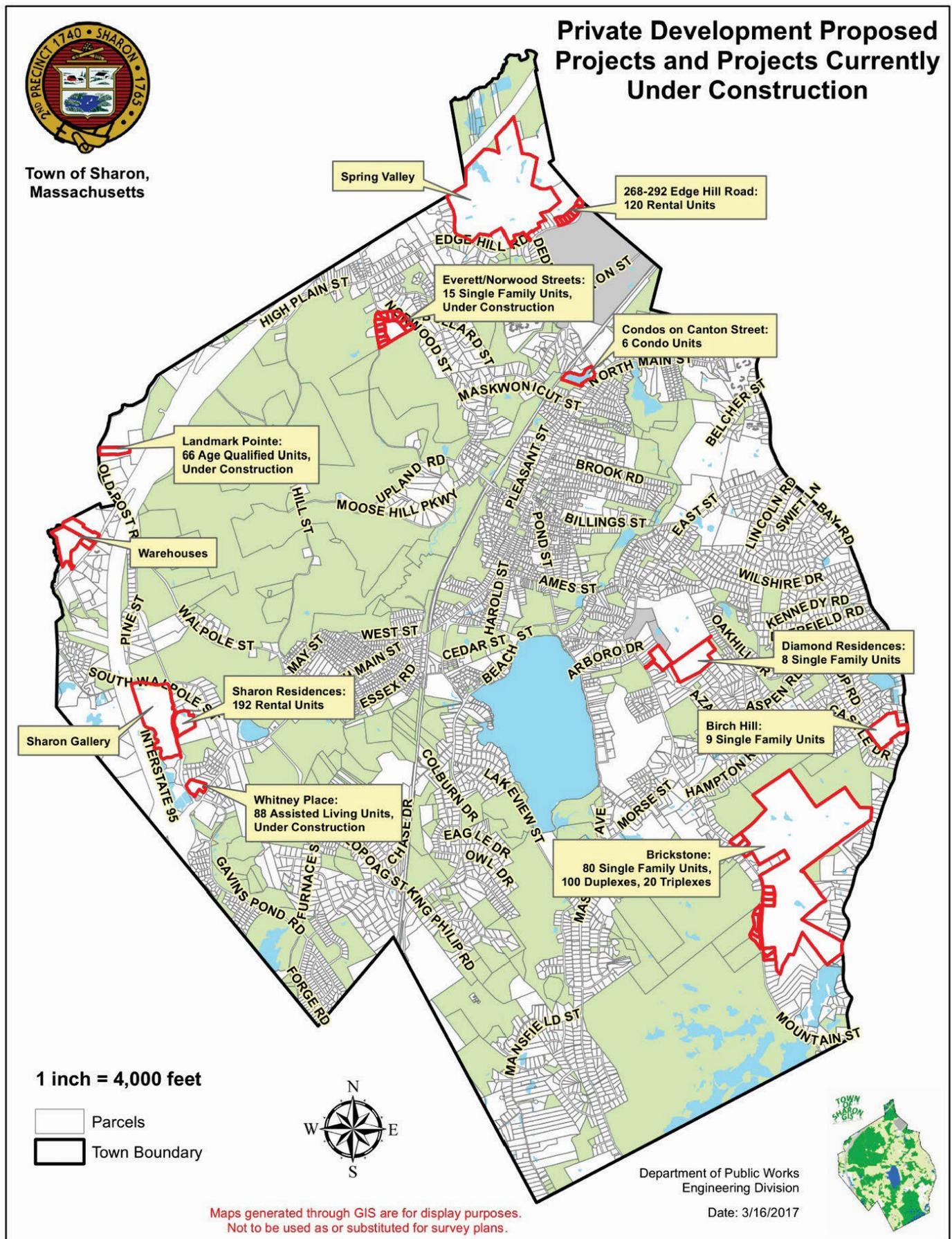
Zoning

- Multifamily development is limited by zoning to the Sharon Commons Smart Growth Overlay District (SGSGOD) and Housing Authority District, and two-family residential is only allowed by-right in the three business districts and one of the residential districts.
- Accessory units, specifically detached units, are not currently specifically addressed in the use regulations.

Recent Housing Projects

- Since the 2018 HPP completion, Phase One of Landmark Pointe (now called 635 Old Post) has been completed, adding 33 units of 55+ housing with an additional 33 units to be added in Phase 2. Additionally, 88 units of the 192-unit Sharon Residences were completed at Whitney Place Assisted Living, which opened in Fall 2017 (see Fig. 18).

Figure 18: Private Development Proposed Projects and Projects Currently Under Construction



Source: Sharon Housing Production Plan 2018-2023 Update. Note, that since the creation of this map for the 2018 HPP, that Spring Valley has been renamed to Cape Club of Sharon



Example housing types in Sharon.

Sharon’s Area Median Income (AMI) figures are determined annually by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Sharon is part of the Boston-Cambridge-Quincy Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA). These income limits are used to determine eligibility for different levels of affordable housing. For example, to qualify for an affordable unit restricted to 80% AMI, a family of four’s annual income in 2018 would have to be \$81,100 or less (see Table 5).

Table 5: 2018 Sharon Area Median Income (AMI) Limits by Household Size

Household Size	80% AMI	100% AMI	120% AMI
1	\$56,800	\$75,460	\$90,552
2	\$64,900	\$86,240	\$103,488
3	\$73,000	\$97,020	\$116,424
4	\$81,100	\$107,800	\$129,360
5	\$87,600	\$116,424	\$139,709
6	\$94,100	\$125,048	\$150,058
7	\$100,600	\$133,672	\$160,406
8	\$107,100	\$142,296	\$170,755

Source: 80% AMI figures from HUD; 100% AMI figures from Community Preservation Act; 120% AMI figures adjusted from CPA.



What the Community Said

Key takeaways from the community input from meetings, the Fall 2018 online survey, meetings-in-a-box, interviews, and focus groups, and other submitted comments:

- From interviews and survey comments, appropriately designed housing (single-floor layout) and affordability are the top concerns, particularly for older adults.
- From the 2018 Fall Survey, when residents were asked if they plan to stay in their current housing for the next five to ten years, approximately 9% indicated they did not intend to stay and 19% were unsure of their desire to stay.
 - » When prompted for a reason for moving, about 41% expressed a desire for different sized housing, 40% also indicated that their children will be finished with the Sharon public school system, and 30% cited housing costs.
 - » Of the 29 respondents who also selected “other,” 16 mentioned Sharon’s residential tax rate being too high to support long-term residency.
 - » Of the 63 respondents (about 8% of all respondents) who expressed a desire to move, 81% did not expect that their next housing would be in Sharon.

GOALS AND RECOMMENDED POLICIES AND ACTIONS

The Goals and Recommendations in this section are placed within the greater context of the following MAPC MetroFuture Goals:

Goal #13 - Families looking for suburban single-family homes will have a greater choice of smaller homes in more traditional neighborhood settings.

Goal #14 - An increasing share of housing in each municipality will be affordable to working families and fixed-income seniors.

Goal #15 - There will be less regional segregation as all municipalities increasingly reflect Metro Boston's growing diversity.

Goal #16 - Low-income households will be able to find affordable, adequate, conveniently located housing, in suburbs as well as cities, and they will be able to avoid displacement.

Goal #17 - Homelessness will be effectively eliminated from the region.

Goal #18 - The region's seniors will have more housing choices and opportunities to downsize while staying in their own community.

Goal #19 - Persons with physical or mental disabilities will be able to find housing that meets their needs in terms of design, services, and affordability.



Sharon is a desirable community to live in with many residents attracted to the town's high-quality school system and wealth of natural open spaces. As mentioned in Existing Conditions, Sharon's housing stock is overwhelmingly single-family homes. As the town's population increases and the demographics of the community change, there is a growing need for different housing types. The Housing section recommendations focus on increasing the variety of housing options, including more affordable options, to address well-documented affordability issues, and to improve the economic health and vitality of Post Office Square, and other suitable development areas.

Goal 1: Support and encourage mixed-use development in appropriate areas in town (e.g., Post Office Square, Cobbs Corner, Shaw's Plaza, and Sharon Heights Plaza). (Also see Land Use and Zoning).

Encouraging denser housing near the town center can strengthen the Town's ability to achieve other interrelated community goals, including sustainability and economic vibrancy. Targeting Post Office Square and other appropriate commercial areas, such as Cobbs Corner, Shaw's Plaza, and Heights Plaza, helps preserve the authenticity of the town's attractive suburban character while increasing the variety of housing options. This strategy also helps preserve the quality of critical environmental assets, such as the Town's drinking water supply, surface and groundwater, wetlands preservation, and air quality. Zoning and tax incentives are tools that can be used to encourage developers to build the types of housing needed in town in the most appropriate locations for denser development.

Residential units on the upper floors above commercial spaces can help to increase economic vitality of commercial areas, creating more customers for nearby businesses and providing more housing options with traditional top-of-shop apartments. In addition, mixed-use development can also reduce automobile trips, by making walking convenient, and the need for parking spaces. Having a variety of uses in a building with different peak parking demand days and times can also reduce the overall number of total parking spaces and area of impervious surfaces needed.

Recommendations:

- 1A. Review zoning in appropriate areas to see if the existing Mixed Use Overlay District (MUOD) regulations that currently apply only to Post Office Square could be applied to other commercial areas. (Also see *Economic Vitality and Land Use and Zoning*) Currently existing only in Post Office Square, this overlay district helps increase the availability of affordable housing and other alternative housing types, such as housing on upper floors in commercial transit-oriented neighborhoods.

1B. Consider possible tax incentives that encourage mixed-use development that includes housing in the Shaw's Plaza, Sharon Heights Plaza, Post Office Square, and Cobbs Corner. These incentives could be offered in concert with or in addition to the temporary property tax relief concept described in Economic Vitality, Goal 1, Rec. 1A. (Also see Economic Vitality and Land Use and Zoning).

CASE STUDY

Legislation

Special Legislation could be modeled after Chapter 148 of the Acts of 2015 Act Providing Affordable Housing Property Tax Incentives in the Town of Amherst. Amherst's property tax incentives allow a residential or mixed-use development with 10 or more dwelling units where at least 10% are affordable to low/moderate-income households to pay the increase in assessed value phased over a period of up to 10 years to the full assessed value of the property.

1C. Consider improvements to wastewater infrastructure, incorporating sustainable concepts where possible, to encourage new housing development in and near Post Office Square to include a variety of housing types, sizes, price ranges, and rentals and ownership to support the town's socioeconomic diversity and to utilize town center amenities and transit services. Higher density housing and mixed-use development is already allowed in Post Office Square under the Mixed Use Overlay District Zoning Bylaw. However, a more active district cannot be fully realized due to the lack of wastewater infrastructure in Post Office Square. To support the local businesses, accommodate new housing, and increase socioeconomic diversity, the Town and property owners will need to consider the future wastewater infrastructure. (Also see Economic Vitality and Public Facilities and Infrastructure).

Goal 2: Promote and allow housing types for aging in community, especially options that foster community and intergenerational connections in walkable neighborhoods with access to services and shops.

The segment of Sharon's population ages 65 years and over is expected to grow exponentially over the next decade with direct consequences on the desired types and prices of housing for these residents. Older adults often face challenges in single-family housing, such as keeping up with maintenance, rising property taxes, accessibility limitations, and limited access to services and transportation. In communities where single-family homes dominate the housing stock, many older adults may be over-housed (i.e., when individuals are living in units larger than they need or want).

Creating a variety of housing options for older adults, such as Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) and options incorporating Universal Design (UD) standards or visitability standards (both described in Recommendation 2C), near Post Office Square and the Sharon MBTA Commuter Rail Station could increase the number of residents who could walk to goods, services, and other activities. As older adults age, they often need a higher level of services and may seek housing options that are within walking-distance or are transit-accessible to these services. In addition to a variety of downsizing options, tax reduction programs, like the Property Tax Work-Off Abatement Program, help make larger existing properties more affordable for older adults.



Whitney Place is a retirement and assisted living and memory care facility. Source: www.dariodesigns.com

Recommendations:

2A. Allow and encourage accessory dwelling units (ADUs) and provide residents with educational “how to” materials for permitting, operation, and maintenance. Most of Sharon is zoned for single-family, but ADUs can provide housing options in these neighborhoods. ADUs, also known as granny flats or in-law units, can be created within a single-family home, in a garage, carriage house, or other separate accessory structure. They accommodate people’s needs as they change over time and increase housing flexibility that isn’t possible in a traditional single-family house. These units provide older adults the opportunity to downsize and remain close to their family as they age. They can also provide young professionals with modestly-sized options in residential neighborhoods. Although ADUs are considered part of the same property as the main home and cannot be bought or sold separately, they can be rented out, providing a second income stream. Although ADUs are not necessarily affordable units, by offering a smaller-sized housing option, they can increase the number of more modestly-priced residential units in or near commercial areas while preserving the historic community character. Along with zoning, the Town’s septic regulations will need to be reviewed to determine what thresholds or regulations might need to be adjusted to accommodate ADUs.

2B. Increase awareness of the existing Property Tax Work Off Abatement Program. Aging in community is not only about making sure that older adults have enough appropriately-designed housing options. Affordability of these housing options is critical. Residential property tax reduction and exemption programs allow older adults to defer paying local property taxes until the ownership of their home is transferred. Increasing awareness of the current older adults’ property tax programs offered in Sharon would help encourage more older residents to see if they qualify to participate.



Examples of accessory units. Accessory units can provide additional housing with limited visual and other impacts.

For More Information on the Existing Town Abatement Program:

- https://www.townofsharon.net/sites/sharonma/files/pages/proptaxsummary_fy19.pdf
- <https://www.townofsharon.net/assessors/pages/personal-exemption-information>

2C. Consider zoning amendments that encourage use of Universal Design (UD) standards or visitability standards for new housing, particularly near Post Office Square and other commercial areas. Accessible and ADA design standards are an important baseline in improving housing accessibility, but they often fail to consider the full spectrum of unique human characteristics and needs. Universal Design (UD) standards accommodate the diverse and changing needs of users across age, ability, language, and economic circumstance. UD standards encourage the creation of housing that is inclusive and accessible – allowing people of all abilities to live independently. While accessible housing may rely on audiovisual aids and technologies, such as a flashing light option when the doorbell is rung, UD homes try to incorporate features that are easy for all to use and commonly available rather than relying on specialized devices or strategies.

Visitability standards are a less comprehensive option. The term refers to single-family or owner-occupied housing designed in such a way that it can be lived in or visited by people who have trouble with steps or who use wheelchairs or walkers. This would require a barrier free entrance, wider first-floor doors, and first floor accessible bathrooms. More information can be found at: <https://www.visitability.org>.

Potential zoning amendments around UD and/or visitability standards could include:

- Allowing homeowners to modify access to their homes by-right rather than requiring a zoning variance as a reasonable accommodation in compliance with fair housing laws.
- Creating an overlay district (see Town of Harvard, MA or Town of Westport, MA).
- Creating a town-wide visitability code (see visitability standards).
- Encouraging new development to follow guidelines through a tax credit or other tax incentive to residents or developers that follow UD-certified guidelines.

CASE STUDY

Universal Design and Visitability Standards

The Town of Harvard, Massachusetts enacted the Hildreth Housing Overlay District (HHOD) in 2016 to help create more multifamily housing in this small centrally-located are of the town. Until this bylaw was passed, Harvard was a community primarily occupied by single-family homes. Like many small towns, the Town of Harvard recognized that the lack of housing choices is a constraint for the community, especially for older adults who want to age in community. The Town has been working to support the production of more multifamily and affordable housing to accommodate forecasted housing trends.

For more information:

- <https://www.mass.gov/files/documents/2017/06/zw/Harvard.pdf>
- <https://ecode360.com/33484198>

Much like the Town of Harvard, the Town of Westport in Massachusetts created the Noquochoke Overlay District (NOD) to incentivize new housing creation. Westport is a coastal town in southeastern Massachusetts with a history rich in agriculture and fishing. The Town created the NOD to ensure that some new housing will accommodate economically disadvantaged families, older adults wishing to stay in the community, and those with disabilities. As such, multifamily, affordable, and accessible housing is key to this district. Additionally, the Town requires a minimum of 30% of new housing in the NOD to be visitable, ensuring accessibility for older adults and those with disabilities.

For more information:

- <https://www.westport-ma.com/sites/westportma/files/uploads/zoningbylaws2015revised12-21-15.pdf>
- <https://www.westport-ma.com/sites/westportma/files/uploads/zoningby-lawszoningmaps12-21-15.pdf>

Goal 3: Create green and sustainable housing, including mixed-use options and walkable locations in close proximity to shops and services.

Sustainable housing can include building more walkable neighborhoods, incorporating open space into new housing development, and prioritizing green housing construction. Cluster housing, pocket neighborhoods, and neighborhood conservation districts can preserve Sharon's open space and overall character while allowing for new housing in town.

Recommendations:

3A. Further encourage or incentivize cluster and/or flexible subdivision design; consider discussions with developers of undeveloped but permitted properties regarding the potential environmental, social, and financial benefits of cluster neighborhood design, which would be allowed by special permit. Sharon has a Conservation Subdivision Design (CSD) bylaw (Sec. 4360) that offers density bonuses for clustered housing and affordable and market-rate age-qualified housing on at least a five-acre-lot.⁴ There are a handful of cluster-style subdivisions in town where a grouping of residences (such as cottage-style single family, townhouses, duplexes, small multifamily) are built on a site with land preserved for open space, recreational, or agricultural use. Increasing awareness of the benefits of this type of neighborhood among developers could encourage more to take advantage of this special permit zoning.

⁴ In May 2004, Sharon Town Meeting reduced the size of the parcel required for a CSD from ten to five acres.

CASE STUDY

Cottage/Pocket Neighborhoods

Sherborn, Massachusetts is a classic small New England town. Historically it was a farming town, but its proximity to Boston and the region's colleges has made it a destination for professionals looking to raise families outside of the city. Abbey Road is a new type of pocket community in Sherborn focusing on those over the age of 55 looking for an alternative to traditional senior housing communities. Abbey Road is centrally located in the town, allowing residents to not only connect with each other but also to enjoy their walkable location.

For more information: <http://www.abbeyroadsherborn.com/>

The Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation has also developed the Natural Resource Protection Zoning (NRPZ) bylaw, which strengthens the potential open space and natural resource protection of clustering. The recommended bylaw does several key things:

- Makes NRPZ developments by-right (and sprawl-type subdivisions by special permit)
- Allows five-acre property minimum
- Allows sharing of septic systems and aggregate calculations
- Provides incentives to create affordable units within the development including density bonuses
- Could also allow development of cohousing, which is a community of attached or single-family homes clustered around shared common spaces with an emphasis on close social interactions between households

3B. Allow smaller homes and cottage or "pocket neighborhood" developments, incorporating sustainable concepts and features where possible. Pocket neighborhoods are a type of communal living designed to foster community between neighbors while maintaining personal privacy. These developments are planned communities of modest, small homes where the front porches are grouped to overlook a central landscaped common area, typically a green space or courtyard. The site layout may often include a central gathering space for large events.



Abbey Road, Sherborn, MA Source: https://www.realtor.com/realestateandhomes-detail/2-Abbey-Rd_Sherborn_MA_01770_M30577-94160

3C. Consider strategies to manage teardowns and rebuilds of smaller starter homes and/or historic homes in addition to demolition delay for buildings of a certain age, such as creation of a Neighborhood Conservation District, or other zoning regulations that could include energy or infrastructure-related charges based on dimensional limits. (Also see Land Use and Zoning) Sharon has numerous modest-sized homes. Teardowns of these smaller houses to build new, larger, single-family units leads to a loss of the smaller and more affordable units.

The Town should consider developing a package of zoning amendments to help address the issue of teardowns and encourage preservation of smaller homes. For example, the Town of Wellesley adopted “Large House Review” provisions that require design review by the Planning Board and a separate review by the Design Review Board that considers compliance with standards and criteria including preservation of landscaping, scale of buildings, lighting, and open space.

Neighborhood Conservation Districts (NCDs) are established by a group of residents seeking to preserve their neighborhood’s architecturally-distinctive character and heritage. Once established, the district is governed by a set of design-oriented review standards for exterior architectural features. NCDs can be a good method to protect areas that are architecturally and/or historically significant but may not qualify for inclusion in a local historic district because the resource(s) may not be old enough to qualify as historic. Often NCDs will require alterations, construction, demolitions, or work of any kind be approved by the Historical Commission or newly appointed NCD Commission.

The Massachusetts Attorney General has approved NCD bylaws in multiple communities: Amesbury, Brookline, Ipswich, Lexington, Lincoln, Newton, and Wellesley. Amesbury and Lexington adopted their NCDs as amendments to their respective zoning bylaws, and followed the procedures required by the Zoning Act. In addition, the affected property owners were invited to participate in the formation and governance of their NCDs.



Boyde’s Crossing, Norfolk, MA Source: <https://www.nytimes.com/real-estate/usa/ma/norfolk/homes-for-sale/17-boyde-s-crossing/12864-72487767>

Boyde’s Crossing is a pocket neighborhood in Norfolk, Massachusetts open to residents of all ages. Construction started in 2016, with a goal of 40 homes. Those who move to the community have five options for the structure of the homes, all of which are being built with recycled and/or green materials. This neighborhood has a common area to incentivize community building, as well as a community garden for residents.

For more information: <https://boydescrossing.com>

Goal 4: Create and preserve affordable units, particularly rental units, to ensure continued socioeconomic diversity and to maintain at least 10% of Sharon’s year-round housing stock as affordable per MGL c.40B.

The Town may want to prioritize the creation of more rental units and alternative housing options – especially for non-family households, older adults, and family households with a single head of household. Multifamily options, especially rental units, can provide more affordable housing.

Not all of Sharon’s current Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI) units are affordable in perpetuity, and unless affordability is preserved, the affordability terms will expire, and those units will eventually be removed from the SHI. The Town should continue to create affordable units to maintain the State’s 10% affordability mandate as the overall number of housing units in the town continues to grow.

The five recommendations below address the need to increase local capacity to build and preserve affordable housing in Sharon.

Recommendations:

4A. Rejuvenate the Affordable Housing Trust with a fully appointed board and funding to identify alternative policies and projects to maintain Sharon’s 10% affordability threshold. *At the May 2006 Town Meeting, Sharon residents voted to form the Sharon Affordable Housing Trust (SAHT). Since then, the organization has become inactive but could be revitalized. Board members could be drawn from the town’s citizen-led Sharon Housing Partnership, or if determined more feasible, the duties could be assigned to another existing Town board or committee, such as the Planning Board or Community Preservation Committee (CPC). Funds could be appropriated from inclusionary development (outlined in 5B), and from State and Federal grants or programs (outlined in 5C).*

Most communities that have a housing trust and have adopted the Community Preservation Act (CPA), appropriate their CPA funds to the housing trust which then functions as the housing-arm of the CPC. The housing trust must adhere to the eligibility requirements of the CPA when using CPA funds. After funds are allocated to the housing trust, use of the funds does not need to be further approved through a Town Meeting vote. This may help streamline implementation of affordable housing projects.

MORE INFORMATION:

The CPA and Housing Trusts

Control over the transfer of CPA funds to a housing trust has been strengthened over the past few years, with new regulations defining the structure of these common transactions. In 2014, towns were encouraged to draft a grant agreement with the entities involved in the CPA fund transfer, clarifying timelines, use of funds, and any other protections for the parties involved. To prevent misuse of funds, in 2016, Massachusetts Governor Charlie Baker added additional regulations, including requiring the grant agreement, as well as stipulations for a separate management and reporting of CPA funds, and strict protections for funds allocated to chapter 44B low-income housing.

For More information: <https://www.communitypreservation.org/housing-trust-grant-agreements> and <https://www.communitypreservation.org/home/news/new-legislation-affects-cpa-transfers-housing-trusts-and-cpa-exemption-deadlines>

4B. Consider implementing a broader inclusionary housing policy with higher percentage requirements depending on development type and size. The Town could consider implementing an inclusionary zoning bylaw requiring all new residential market-rate development of a certain specified size to include a minimum percentage of affordable units for low- and moderate-income residents. In lieu of physical units on the site, some communities also allow developers to create off-site units or donate buildable land or make a financial contribution to a local housing fund—often the Housing Trust Fund.

4C. Apply for public funds, such as MassWorks or MassHousing’s Planning for Housing Production Program, to be used to help fund infrastructure construction and maintenance related to affordable housing creation. (Also see *Public Facilities and Infrastructure*)

Public grant programs, such as the two State programs outlined in detail below, could amplify the Town’s affordable housing creation as well as support some related infrastructure and maintenance costs. The Town should also review its eligibility for the State’s Housing Choice Initiative for potential funding and technical assistance.

CASE STUDY

Inclusionary Zoning

In Massachusetts, small towns are using inclusionary zoning bylaws to encourage developers to build more affordable housing units. Two towns on Cape Cod, Dennis and Barnstable, successfully used inclusionary zoning to increase the affordable housing options in their communities by solidifying support from community partners and creating new positions focused directly on managing these new laws. Dennis was able to increase its affordable housing by 24 units with 48 being the forecasted total. Barnstable is ambitiously working towards 1,000 affordable units in ten years. Newton last adopted its inclusionary zoning law in 2003, offering special permits to developers seeking to build affordable housing in the city. Newton chose to regulate square feet instead of unit size, to allow developers flexibility in space as long as 10% of the habitable area being developed is affordable housing. Additionally, the city charges developers a 3% fee on the sales price for a new build, or 3% of the assessed value of each unit for rental housing, if the developer chooses not to abide by the 10% affordable housing stipulation.

For more information: <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/case-studies-inclusionary-zoning>

MORE INFORMATION:

MassHousing’s Planning for Housing Production

Program provides cities and towns with technical assistance to implement local housing production goals, including:

Crafting new zoning to spur new housing growth, such as through Chapter 40A; Chapter 40R or a friendly 40B proposal;

- Assisting public infrastructure improvements that are needed to support new housing development, such as sewer connection needed to support a potential affordable housing development site;
- Building capacity in planning and community development, such as site feasibility or predevelopment studies; and
- Educating the public through data transparency initiatives, public engagement workshops, or other projects around feasibility.

For more information: https://www.masshousing.com/portal/server.pt/community/planning_programs/207/planning_for_housing_production

In addition to these funds, *MassWorks Infrastructure Grants* provide capital funds to municipalities to complete public infrastructure projects that support and spur housing growth. Funds can be used for sewer, curb-cuts, parking facilities, utility extensions, streets and roads, and other improvements on publicly-owned land – or on public leasehold, right-of-way, or easement.

For more information: <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/massworks-infrastructure-grants>, <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/housing>, and <https://www.mass.gov/orgs/housing-and-community-development>

- 4D. Increase the proportion of Community Preservation Act (CPA) funds allocated for the creation and preservation of affordable housing units. Per the Community Preservation Coalition CPA online database, Sharon has only allocated about 13% (\$514,000) of total revenue to affordable housing initiatives since adopting CPA in 2006. The target for any one CPA category can range between 10% and 80%. Funds can be set aside for housing in the CPA housing reserve or allocated to a housing trust. Some CPC's, including Eastham, Provincetown, and Somerville, have established target allocations ranging from 40% to 60% as CPC policy to help guide CPC's recommendations to the local legislative body.
- 4E. Consider hiring a full- or part-time town planner or staff person who can coordinate Town efforts and initiatives and pursue grants and funds to support housing creation, preservation, and affordability, and other related programs and services. A town planner or staff person would increase the Town's capacity to implement many of the recommendations outlined in this section chapter and assist in the management of the Town's growth generally. The Town can also reach out to neighboring communities to see if there is interest in creating a Regional Housing Services Office, which MAPC has assisted other communities to form. (Also see Arts, Cultural, and Historic Resources, Economic Vitality, Land Use and Zoning, Transportation and Mobility, Open Space and Natural Resources, and Public Facilities and Infrastructure)

MORE INFORMATION:

Other communities have used Community Preservation Act (CPA) funds to create a Housing Coordinator or Housing Specialist position (under the “support” verb in the Housing category) to assist with creating affordable housing. A dedicated housing staff member could support grant-writing efforts for housing-related programs and initiatives; staff the Housing Authority or revitalized Affordable Housing Trust; and/or serve as the main resource for community members—particularly for older adults or individuals with disabilities. Housing Coordinator positions that are funded completely through CPA are limited to working on CPA-eligible projects and on housing programs for residents who earn up to 100% AMI. To maximize the effectiveness of the Housing Coordinator, the position could be funded in part through CPA and in part through the Town, Affordable Housing Trust, or other grant funding.

For more information: <https://www.communitypreservation.org/housing-coordinators>

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4.4 LAND USE AND ZONING

Introduction

Land use regulations have implications for all of the other elements of Sharon's Master Plan. As one of the Town's main tools to maintain and direct uses the community wants, zoning and land use regulations are critical to the Town's effort to be proactive about directing change and protecting the features that residents wish to preserve.

This element describes current zoning and overlay districts, discusses the distribution of land use in town, highlights the role of permitting, emphasizes input from residents, and makes recommendations for promoting land use consistent with multiple Master Plan goals.

Additionally, the many publicly and privately-conserved open spaces and agricultural lands provide opportunities for both eco- and agri-tourism, while also offering much-needed habitats for diverse ecologies of various scales.

MORE INFORMATION:

Sustainability in Sharon

Ensuring that land use and zoning regulations align with sustainable best practices will be crucial to supporting Sharon's sustainability efforts. Implementing policy that preserves vegetated open space, reduces suburban sprawl, and supports mixed-use opportunities not only helps to contribute to a more sustainable future, but also encourages improvements that create vibrant, healthy communities. It will be imperative for the Town to find solutions that support these long-term goals while respecting Sharon's existing character, in addition to responding to the shifting needs of a changing population.

Opposite: Mixed use building on Pond St

Land Use and Zoning Today: Existing Conditions

The Town of Sharon occupies approximately 24.3 square miles of land, which supports a varied mix of land uses, including a relatively high proportion of land devoted to residential uses and agriculture, forestry, and recreation. Land uses include several types of residential uses (largely composed of single-family dwellings) on lots of varying sizes, commercial and civic uses, agricultural and open spaces, light industrial uses, and other mixed uses allowed in specified areas in the town. Key zoning and land use characteristics and trends are described below.

Zoning

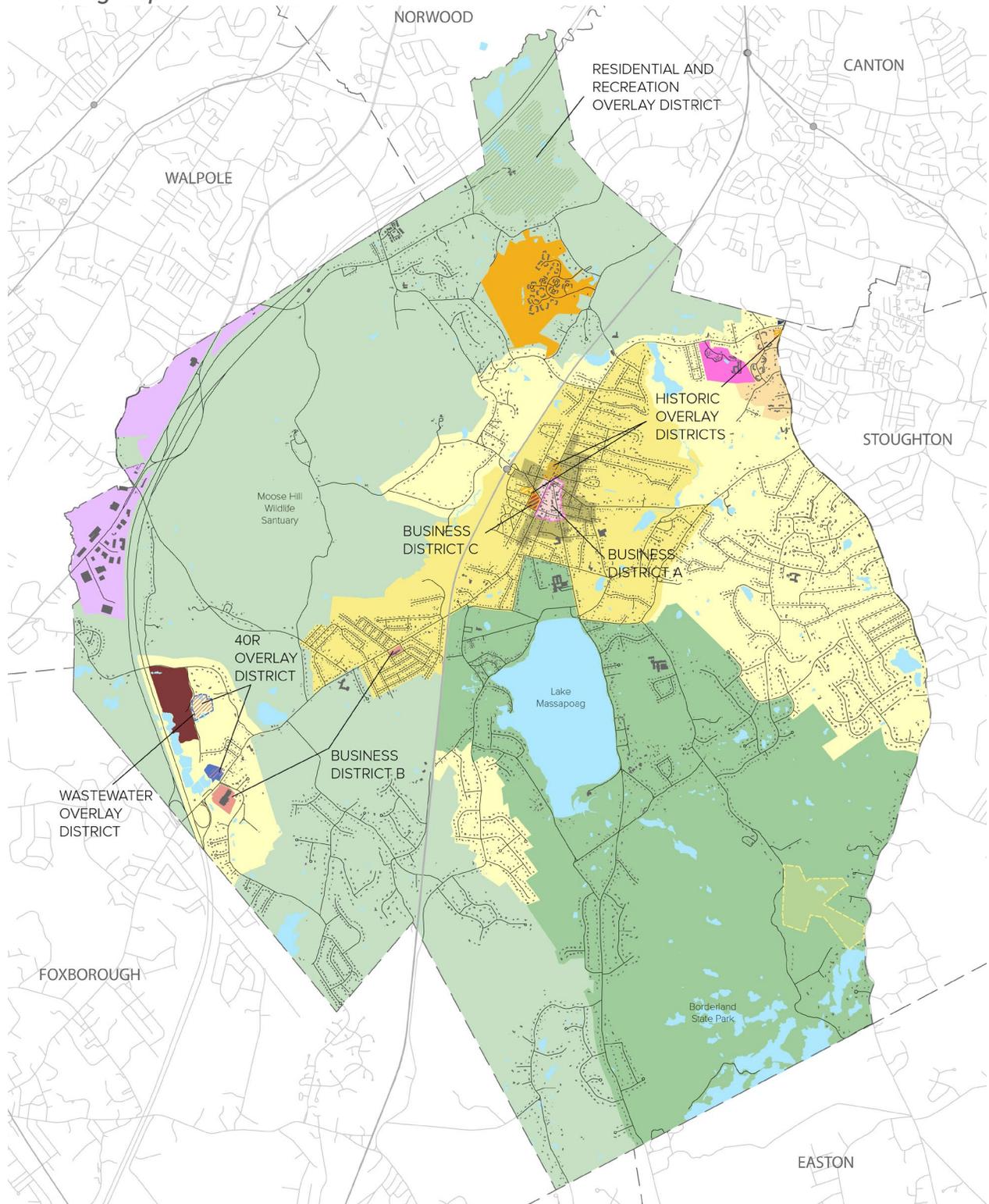
Similar to other historic New England towns, the majority of Sharon is zoned residential with smaller areas specified for commercial and industrial uses. Consistent with Sharon's history as an agricultural community, almost 69% of the town is zoned rural. Just over 97% of land allows residential uses, with an overwhelming majority zoned for single-family homes. Of this residentially-zoned land, approximately 99% (about 15,100 acres) allows only single-family housing as-of-right. Multifamily housing is allowed in several districts, such as the Housing Authority District, Senior Living Overlay District (SLOD), the Chapter 40R Sharon Commons Smart Growth Overlay District (SCSGOD), the Mixed-Use Overlay District (MUOD), and Business Districts, with varying requirements and permitting criteria. Accessory units, specifically detached units on single-family parcels, are not currently included in the use regulations.

Sharon's zoning also includes three Historic Overlay Districts, with two of them being in and near Post Office Square. The Sharon Historic District is in the National Register of Historic Places and includes nine buildings on both sides of North Main Street in Post Office Square, including the Sharon Public Library building.

Areas zoned as Business Districts, Professional Districts, and Light Industrial comprise approximately 3% of Sharon's land area. While the Light Industrial areas are concentrated west of I-95, the Business Districts are generally located along North and South Main Street and make up only approximately 100 acres of land (less than 1%)⁵ (see Table 6.).

⁵ Acreage estimates in all tables and charts in this section include rounded whole numbers which means all totals may not exactly equal 100%.

Figure 19: Zoning Map



Zoning

- Single Residence District A
- Single Residence District B
- Housing Authority District
- General Residence District
- Suburban District 1
- Suburban District 2
- Rural District 1
- Rural District 2

- Business District A
- Business District B
- Business District C
- Business District D
- Light Industrial
- Professional District
- Professional District B
- Water

- 40R Overlay District
- Wastewater Overlay District
- Recreation and Residential Overlay District
- Senior Living Overlay District
- Mixed Use Overlay District
- Historic Overlay District

- Roads
- Structures

Data Source: Town of Sharon GIS.

The Planning Board has regularly updated zoning to meet the ever-changing dynamics of local and regional economies and development. Some recent examples include:

- In May 2007, the SLOD was established in one area of Sharon near the Stoughton town border. The intent of the overlay is to allow an age-restricted multifamily community for persons age 62 or older that includes a minimum of 10% affordable dwelling units on-site with a possible option of providing 11% of the older adult units permitted within a SLOD development off-site in town. The development must also transfer to the Sharon Conservation Commission at least 2.8 acres of abutting or adjacent land for each acre of land contained in the lot, with a minimum lot size of 70 acres (this represents the entire District).
- The Sharon Commons Smart Growth Overlay District (SCSGOD) was established in November 2008, with Subzones A and B to encourage the development of a range of housing types. These subzones comprise just over 11.5 acres north of South Main Street and east of I-95. Within the subzones, a higher density of housing is allowed if several special requirements are met, including a minimum of 20% of housing units within the development to be affordable, with at least 10% being accessible.

Land Use

Sharon’s history as a small agricultural community that transformed into a summer resort town and then a highly-desirable suburban community, is reflected in the amount of single-family residential uses and open space in town. Open space (both publicly and privately-owned) comes in a variety of forms, including conservation land, golf courses, playing fields, and more. Land considered open space can sometimes have an alternate “primary use” listed in the tax assessment data. According to the Town’s Assessor’s Office, approximately 43% of the existing land in Sharon is currently categorized as open space, including parcels protected under Chapter 61, 61A, and 61B. (See Table 7. Sharon Land Use by Tax Assessment Category below)

Table 6: Sharon Land Area by Zoning Category*

Zoning Category	Acreage (Estimate)	Percentage (Estimate)
Single Residence District A	2,707	
Single Residence District B	1,360	
Housing Authority District	39	
General Residence District	102	
Suburban District 1	79	
Suburban District 2	204	
Rural District 1	6,554	
Rural District 2	4,226	
Residential Total	15,270	97.5%
Business District A	26	
Business District B	6	
Business District C	4	
Business District D	57	
Professional District A	1	
Professional District B	6	
Business Total	100	0.6%
Light Industrial	290	
Industrial Total	290	1.9%
TOTAL	15,659	100.0%

Source: Town of Sharon GIS used for acreage estimates. *Totals may equal more or less than sum of each category due to rounding of numbers.

Sharon has a typical small New England town center at Post Office Square that includes the Town Hall, the Post Office, the Sharon Public Library, local businesses, restaurants, services, religious buildings, limited mixed-uses, and the nearby MBTA Commuter Rail Station. Additional commercial, mixed use, and multifamily uses are concentrated along portions of South and North Main Street, in and near Post Office Square, by Cobbs Corner on the Canton and Stoughton borders, and near I-95 along the Walpole and Foxborough town lines.

An examination of permitting data can help the Town understand how it may accommodate economic growth and new housing options without necessarily increasing the percent of land developed at the same rate. The average number of annual building permits issued for single-family homes from 2008 to 2018 was approximately 12.5 and for multifamily units was approximately 44 but there were only four years during this time where multifamily permits were actually pulled (see Table 8). By comparison, the ten nearest municipalities had on average 28 multifamily units permitted yearly.⁶ The current rate of single-family home construction as well as the lack of consistent multifamily unit permitting yearly is less than ideal as it is not keeping pace with housing demand. The 2018 HPP projects a demand for 109 multifamily units and 240 single-family homes of mixed ownership and rental opportunities by 2020. The continued focus on single-family homes has been contributing to an unsustainable pattern of sprawl, which over time contributes to the development of previously undeveloped open space. Some options for addressing these concerns are including in the Economic Development and Land Use Analysis found later in this element.

⁶ <http://www.housing.ma/sharon/profile> The nearest ten municipalities include Avon, Canton, Dedham, Easton, Foxborough, Mansfield, Norwood, Stoughton, Walpole, and Westwood

Table 7: Sharon Land Use by Tax Assessment Category*

Tax Assessment Category	Acreage (Estimate*)	Percentage (Estimate*)
Residential	5,962	40.2%
Business/ Commercial	162	1.1%
Industrial	189	1.3%
Civic/Institutional	905	6.1%
Open Space/Ch 61, 61A, 61B	6,308	42.5%
Vacant/ Developable	472	3.2%
Other/ Roadway	830	5.6%
TOTAL	14,829	100.0%

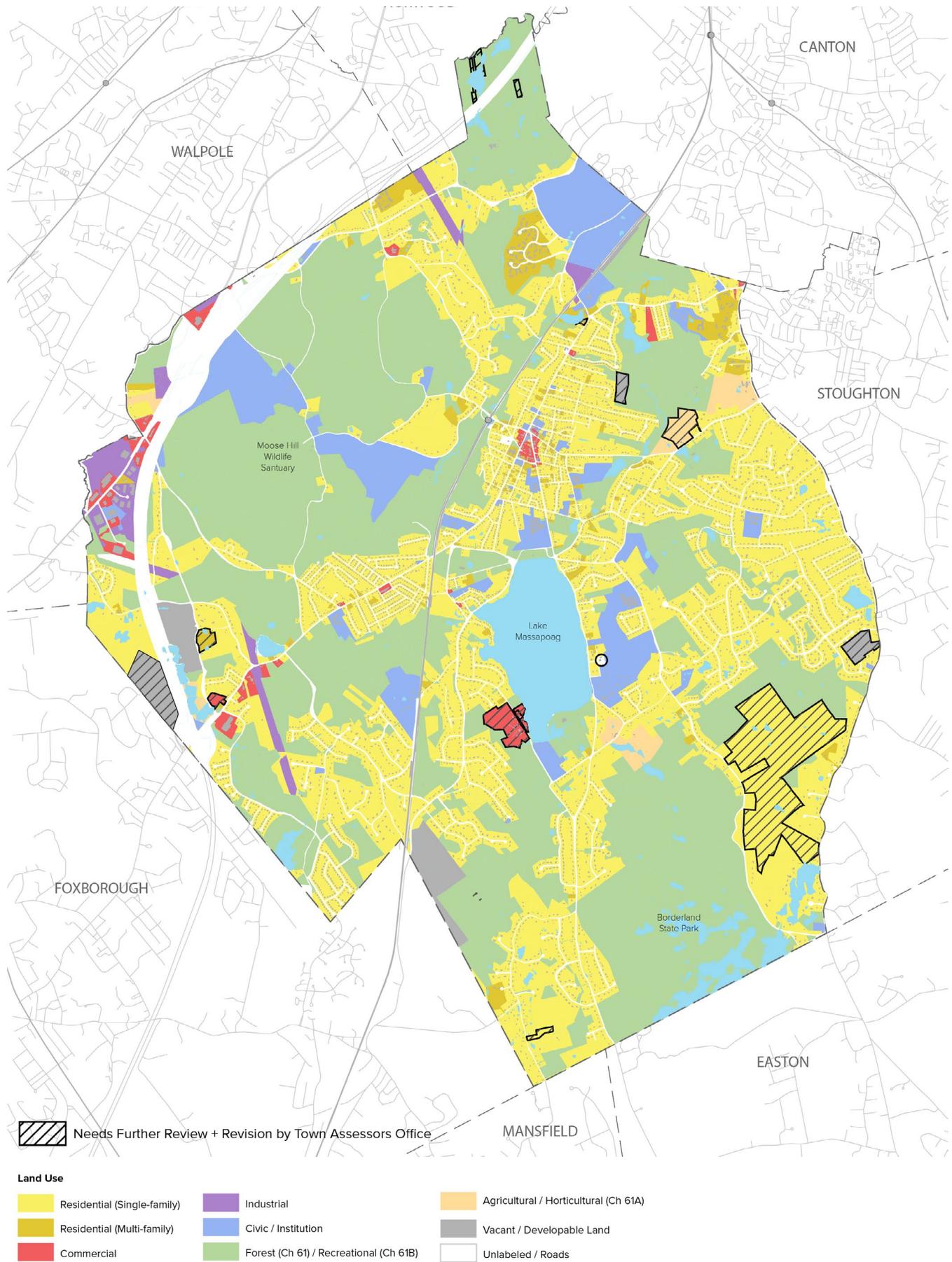
Source: Data from Town of Sharon GIS and Assessor's Office.
*Totals may equal more than sum of each category due to rounding of numbers.

Table 8: Sharon Residential Building Permits, 2008-2018

Building Permits (excluding additions/ alterations)	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
New Single-Family homes	5	12	17	19	32	21	2	12	10	5	2
Multifamily attached units	156	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	225	100
Total Residential	161	12	17	19	32	21	2	12	16	230	102

Source: Town of Sharon Department of Public Works.

Figure 20: Sharon Land Use Map



Data Source: Town of Sharon GIS; 2018 Tax Assessment Data.



Outdoor seating at Angel's Cafe

WHAT THE COMMUNITY SAID

- Residents noted an appreciation for the “rural character” of Sharon, characterized by its large, undisturbed swaths of natural and undeveloped areas and farmland.
- Many residents expressed a wish to be more proactive about land use instead of reacting to development proposals when many perceive it is too late to make changes. Through a more proactive approach, residents wish to shape development in ways that are more beneficial for the town and that may offer opportunities to preserve open space, even within development parcels.
- Some residents want to explore how zoning could support strategic growth within Sharon’s existing economic centers, resulting in mixed-use development in line with the existing character of these spaces.
- Community participants wish to more closely align land use regulations and policies with goals for economic vitality, housing, and open space and natural resources.
- Many residents have a desire to ensure that land uses are aligned with infrastructure investments such as roads and sidewalks as well as public safety, health, and social service areas.
- Some stakeholders expressed a shared hope that the Town can embrace environmental sustainability more intentionally by targeting preferred development footprints (such as smaller lots or pocket or cottage neighborhoods), creating wildlife corridors, clustering uses to reduce automobile dependence and congestion, and allowing Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) within existing neighborhoods.
- More tax revenue is needed from commercial properties to offset increasing demand for new building and facilities, public services and amenities. These increasing demands include: renovating or rebuilding Town buildings and infrastructure due to deferred maintenance, the needs of a growing older adult population, the goal of more land conservation and wildlife protection, the wish to retain the high quality of the public school system, and the hope that the Town can protect existing agricultural uses.
- To date, residents have prioritized improvement of public facilities including the new Public Safety Building, a new Town Hall, a new Library, and updated and/or new schools.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND LAND USE ANALYSIS

A consistent issue raised during the master planning process was the concern about the ongoing financial stability of the Town in the face of changing demographics, increased demand for social services, and the capital improvements needed for Town facilities. The Town has three possible ways to move forward and each will have an impact on the fiscal stability of the Town and its tax revenue. The analysis presented here looks at these three possibilities to assess their impacts and to provide residents with information to make educated choices about future development and fiscal policy. This analysis also addresses how these possibilities might serve multiple goals within the Master Plan. These three possibilities were presented at the second Master Plan public meeting for public feedback.

These possibilities for addressing economic development and financial stability are presented here and include:

Possibility 1: No Change in Policies, Programs, or Services

Possibility 2: Expand the Industrial and Commercial Tax Bases

Possibility 3: Increase Property Tax Revenue from Existing Commercial and Industrial Tax Base

Possibility 1: No Change in Policies, Programs, or Services

In five or ten, Sharon would see continued modest residential growth, permitted commercial development near I-95 occurs, but no other significant changes or commercial development encouraged/ proposed (see Fig. 21 and Table 9).

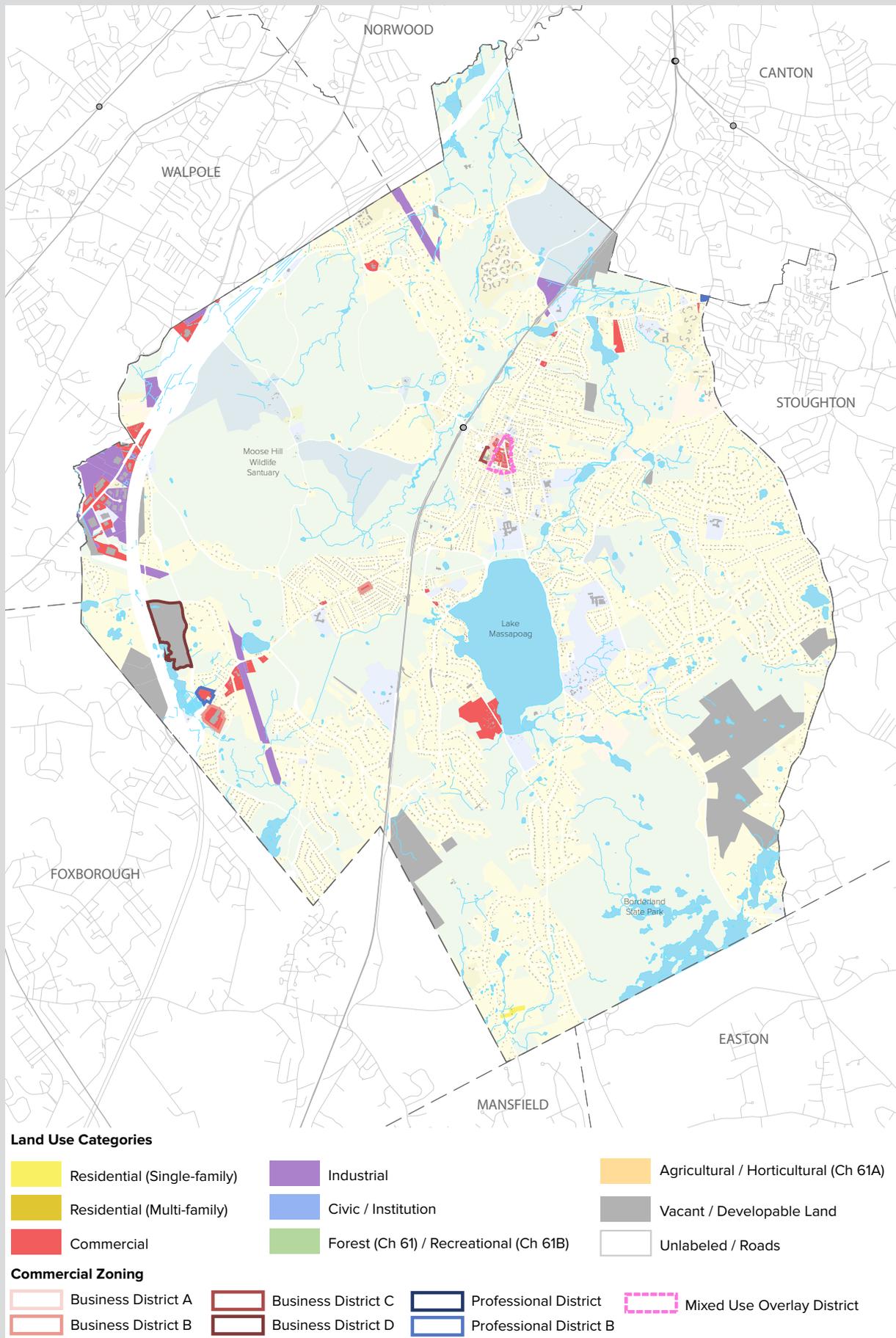
Table 9: Commercial and Industrial Acreage in Sharon

Commercial Acreage		
Source	Approx. Acres	% of Total Acreage
Existing Commercial Land Use	162	1.1%
Land Zoned for Commercial Use (Business District A, B, C, D; Professional District A, B; Mixed-Use Overlay)	100	0.6%

Industrial Acreage		
Source	Approx. Acres	% of Total Acreage
Existing Industrial Land Use*	189	1.3%
Land Zoned for Light Industrial Use	290	1.9%

Source: Town of Sharon GIS and 2018 Tax Assessment Data

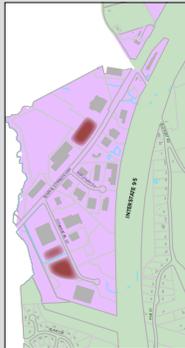
Figure 21: Commercial and Industrial Land use with Commercial Zoning Districts



Data Source: Town of Sharon GIS and 2018 Tax Assessment Data

**Possibility 2:
Expand the Industrial and Commercial Tax Bases**

This possibility presents additional commercial and industrial development in three parts of Sharon and estimates the resulting increase in Sharon’s tax base and revenue. Development assumptions and projections are intended to illustrate the potential areas, scale and fiscal impact of new business development and are not consultant team proposals or recommendations. Moreover, development sites and projects may vary under the actual implementation of this scenario. Implementation will depend on landowners’ willingness to develop or sell properties, the financial feasibility of projects, and addressing septic system requirements—especially in Post Office Square. The varied scenarios under Possibility 2 include:



Scenario 1: Route 1/Commercial Street

There would be new infill development with single-story industrial/warehouse buildings at five land sites. The size of the new buildings is based on reaching .25 lot coverage for each site.



Scenario 2: Business District B

This scenario has two parts:

2.1: A new infill 3 story office/retail building on the Shaw’s Plaza site; and



2.2: Redevelopment of Sharon Heights Shopping Center with a 3 story office/retail building. The size of the new Shaw’s Plaza building assuming reaching a lot coverage ratio of .50 from the current .27. The Sharon Heights building is based on three stories with the current lot coverage (.39).



Scenario 3: Post Office Square

This scenario includes site assembly and redevelopment at three relatively low-density locations: 1) East Chestnut and Pond Streets; 2) South Main Street northeast of CVS through the Mandarin Taste parking lot; and 3) South Main Street from Station Street to the Post Office. Redevelopment assumes new mixed-used three-story retail/office buildings at 50% lot coverage. Shared parking arrangements and alternative transportation to the commuter rail station would allow for reduced parking and higher density of development.

Development and fiscal outcomes under this scenario, summarized in Table 10, are projected as:

- 905,000 square feet of commercial/industrial/business development
- \$81.4 million in new assessed valuation
- \$1.5 million in additional non-residential property tax revenue

Table 10: Fiscal Outcomes for Possibility 2

Development Area	Development Type	Square Feet Developed	Additional Assessed Value	Additional Tax Revenue
Route 1/Commercial Street - 5 sites	Infill industrial /warehouse	292,800	\$11,126,400	\$215,538
Business District B- Shaw's Plaza	Infill office/retail -3 story	300,829	\$38,529,123	\$746,309
Business District B- Sharon Heights Shopping Center	Redevelop as 3 story office/retail	118,884	\$15,226,266	\$273,211
Post Office Square - 3 areas	Redevelopment of combined sites as 3 story office/retail	192,426	\$16,533,349	\$282,906
Total		904,939	\$81,415,137	\$1,517,964

Possibility 2A: Enhance Post Office Square as a Business and Community Center

This scenario would make multiple improvements to Post Office Square to strengthen its role as a community and business center. The goal would be to make Post Office Square a more attractive, pedestrian-oriented and active district where residents would come to take part in activities, meet and socialize with friends and neighbors, enjoy cafes and restaurants, and use a range of personal and business services. As these efforts increase the vibrancy, foot traffic and patronage in the square, new businesses would be attracted to square area and opportunities for future investment and development would grow.

A combination of physical and design improvements, events and programming, and more active management of Post Office Square as a commercial district would be undertaken such as:

- Creating a small plaza or park where informal socializing and events can take place;
- Implementing attractive signs, public arts, and building façade upgrades;
- Improving pedestrian safety and pathways with new crosswalks, fewer curb cuts, wider sidewalks, traffic calming;
- Holding regular community events and activities in Post Office Square, utilizing existing businesses, parking lots, and newly created public spaces;
- Working with property owners to fill vacant spaces with new businesses that add to the square's amenities;
- Creating spaces for seasonal pop-up business, food trucks, art installations or galleries;
- Forming an organization that brings together business owners, property owners, residents and the town government to actively manage and improve Post Office Square.

Two approaches are commonly used to bring community stakeholders together to manage and improve their commercial center:

- **Main Streets organizations** are non-profit organizations that employ a four point approach (Design, Promotion, Economic Restructuring and Organization) originally created by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. These are locally led and funded organizations supported by a national center (Main Streets America) that provides information, training and technical assistance and a national network of practitioners that share best practices. Successful Massachusetts examples include Salem, Somerville, and twenty neighborhood Main Street districts in Boston.
- **Business Improvement Districts (BID)**—property owners organize and agree to pay a special assessment to fund special services, physical improvements and activities to improve, market, and maintain a business district. Owners of at least 60% of properties in a proposed BID district must support its formation and petition the local government to establish the BID. Several hundred BIDs exist nationally with Hyannis and Amherst successful examples from small to mid-sized Massachusetts cities and towns.



*Bringing together commercial and residential uses creates a more vibrant, interesting town center.
Source: 6SN7 (CC BY 2.0)*

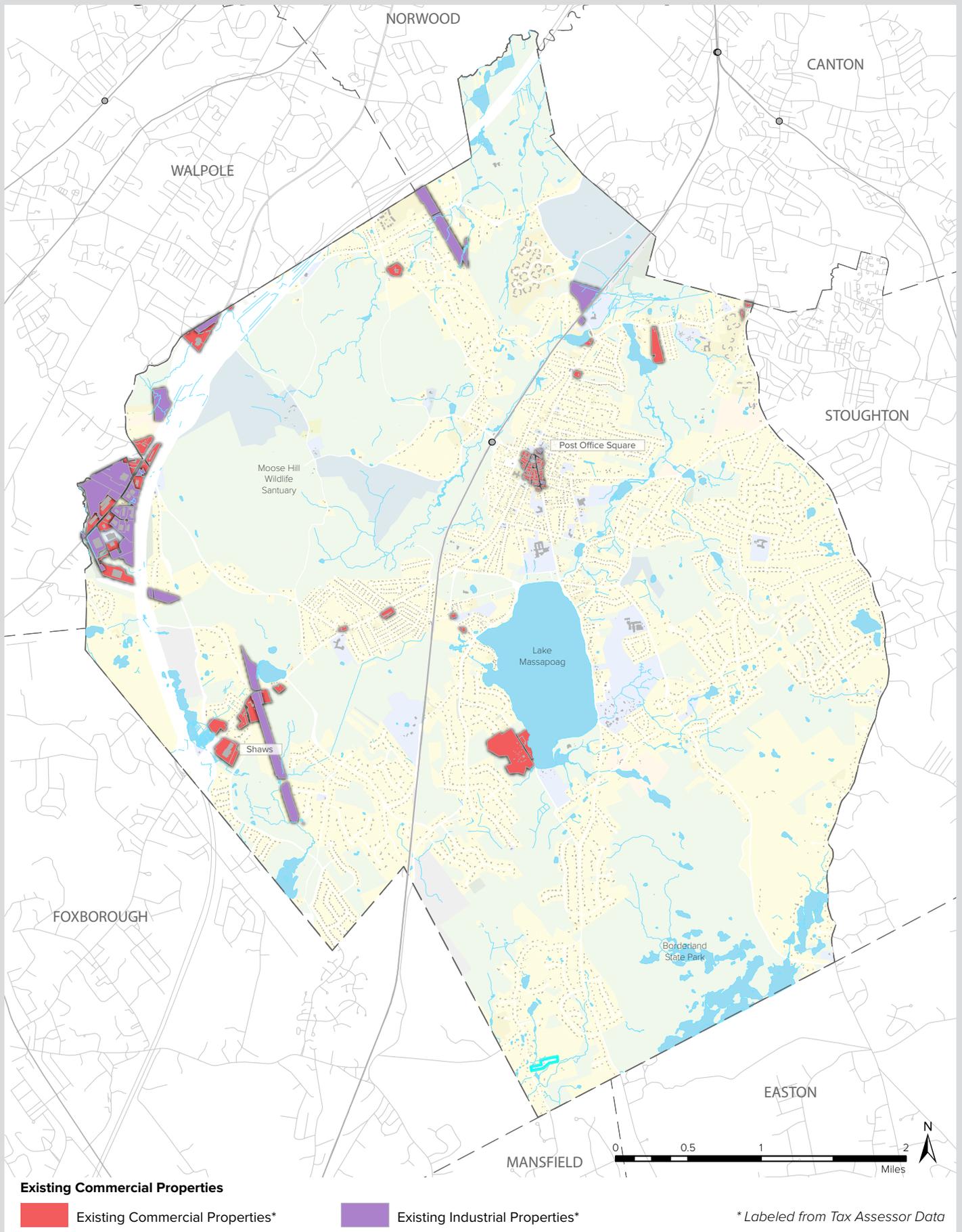


Square Jam.



Residents expressed a desire for more dining choices in town. Angel's Café is an example of one kind of the eating choices residents want.

Figure 22: Existing Commercial and Industrial Properties



Data Source: Town of Sharon GIS and 2018 Tax Assessment Data

**Possibility 3:
Increase Property Tax Revenue from Existing
Commercial and Industrial Tax Base**

Massachusetts law allows communities to tax commercial, industrial and personal (CIP) property at a higher tax rate than residential property, up to a cap of CIP property paying 175% of what it would contribute under a uniform tax rate. Under this scenario, Sharon could reduce its residential tax rate without adding new non-residential development by increasing the property tax rate for existing non-residential property owners and their business tenants (see Fig. 22).

Based on Sharon’s FY2018 assessed valuations and tax rates, raising the current CIP to the maximum level would increase the non-residential tax levy by \$3.5 million and the CIP tax rate from \$19.37 to \$33.90 per thousand. If all of the additional CIP tax revenue was used to reduce the residential tax levy, Sharon’s residential tax rate would decrease by 5.8% or \$1.11 per thousand, to \$18.26 (see Table 11).

Summary

In the second public meeting, residents were asked to assess the most desired pathway forward regarding Possibilities 2 and 3. There was approximately equal support for Possibilities 2 and 2A which represent expanding the existing commercial and industrial tax base and enhancing Post Office Square as a business and community center. There was much less support for increasing tax revenue from the existing commercial and industrial tax base by increasing commercial property tax rates.

Some of the appeal of both scenarios of Possibility 2 seemed to be the opportunity to address multiple goals within the Master Plan including creating more vibrant places for residents and

Table 11: Comparison of Current and Modified Tax

Current Regional Tax Rates		
<i>Town</i>	<i>CIP</i>	<i>Residential</i>
Sharon	\$19.37	\$19.37
Canton	\$25.86	\$12.42
Foxborough	\$18.15	\$14.57
Norwood	\$22.47	\$11.09
Stoughton	\$26.14	\$14.81
Walpole	\$20.33	\$15.27
Tax Rates if Modified Under Possibility 3		
Sharon	\$33.90	\$18.26

GOALS AND RECOMMENDED POLICIES AND ACTIONS

The Goals and Recommendations in this section are placed within the greater context of the following MAPC MetroFuture Goals:

Goal #2 - Most new growth will occur through reuse of previously developed land and buildings.

Goal #4 - In suburban municipalities, most new growth will occur near town and village centers.

Goal #5 - Most new home and jobs will be near train stops and bus route, and new growth will be designed to promote transit use.

Goal #6 - High-quality design will help compact development to enhance the region's character and livability.

Goal #7 - Cities, towns, and neighborhoods will retain their sense of uniqueness and community character.

Goal #9 - The region's landscape will retain its distinctive green spaces and working farms.

Goal #10 - Growth in the region will be guided by informed, inclusive, and proactive planning.

Goal #51 - Regional transportation planning will be linked with sustainable land use planning.

Goal #63 - The ecological condition of wetlands will improve, and fewer wetlands will be lost to development.

Goal #65 - A robust network of protected open spaces, farms, parks, and greenways will provide wildlife habitat, ecological benefits, recreational opportunities, and scenic beauty.



Feedback from the community indicates that many residents wish to retain the rural and agricultural character of the town by preserving open space and natural features. At the same time, there is a desire to add to the commercial tax base, if possible, and to support increased vibrancy and mixed-use development in Post Office Square which serves as the town center. The broad areas that can benefit from Master Plan recommendations include strategies to balance: 1) retaining the rural character of the town; 2) providing more housing choices for older adults as well as young families; and 3) enabling the Town to be proactive about incentivizing economic development and increasing the commercial tax base in ways that are compatible with Sharon's character.

The following goals and recommendations address these key issues heard during the master planning process. These recommendations work in concert with all the plan recommendations, particularly, Economic Vitality, Open Space, Recreation, and Natural Resources, and Public Facilities and Infrastructure. The Master Plan recommendations work in an integrated and complementary way so that Sharon can determine the best regulatory approach to achieve the desired land use patterns in the coming years while protecting the existing physical character of the town.

Goal 1: Encourage mixed-use development, where appropriate, to support connectivity, walkability, aging in community, and local businesses. (Also see Economic Vitality, Housing, Transportation and Mobility, Infrastructure, and Community Health)

Many of residents' wishes for the Master Plan are interconnected and depend on a coordinated land use strategy that strengthens physical and social connections while also supporting and growing local businesses and the town center. Mixed-use development that offers increased density in appropriate locations, if possible, can add vitality to existing areas of development, provide increased housing choices, and locate housing and services where they are most accessible by older adults and also teens and school children who have limited transportation options. Concentrating development in existing locations also serves sustainability goals and addresses residents' concerns about traffic congestion as it encourages pedestrian activity.

Mixed-use development, allowed in Post Office Square under the Town's Mixed Use Overlay District (MUOD) Zoning Bylaw, would introduce new patrons to businesses without substantially increasing the demand for parking in the town center. Additionally, mixed-use districts can help to strategically increase, diversify, and activate local business within select areas throughout the town, as identified in the Economic Development and Land Use Analysis found earlier in this element.

MORE INFORMATION:

Mixed Use Overlay District (MUOD)

A Mixed Use Overlay District (MUOD) is a set of regulations superimposed over the existing regulation that encourages mixed-use development often in line with "smart growth" principles. This type of district helps increase the availability of affordable housing and other alternative housing types, such as housing on upper floors in commercial transit-oriented neighborhoods

Recommendations:

- 1A. Review zoning in appropriate areas to see if MUOD regulations could be applied outside of Post Office Square. (Also see Economic Vitality and Housing) This mixed-use overlay district strategy could be expanded to allow mixed-use development in other areas that have existing capacity for development, such as Route 1, Cobbs Corner, and Sharon Heights Plaza.
- 1B. Consider incentives to encourage mixed-use development in the Shaws Plaza, Heights Plaza area, Post Office Square, and Cobbs Corner. (Also see Economic Vitality and Housing)
- 1C. Study additional areas for potential suitability for cluster or "pocket-neighborhood" development, such as cottages and cohousing. (Also see Housing)
- 1D. Consider a zoning requirement for on-site circulation and access management to connect to existing networks in certain types of new development or redevelopment (e.g., large development sites, and residential cul-de-sacs). (Also see Transportation and Mobility)
- 1E. Consider regulatory changes to parking standards in the zoning bylaws, which may include implementing parking maximums instead of parking minimums, shared parking, spaces dedicated to carshare or electric vehicle charging stations, designated shared ride pick-up and drop-off zones, and requiring bicycle parking. (Also see Transportation and Mobility)
- 1F. Clarify policies regarding the application of the hotel tax for rental of single-family and ADUs.

Goal 2: Encourage economic growth and development, following sustainable practices and concepts, in the town’s commercial and industrial districts to generate an increase in commercial tax revenue and to create destinations for residents and visitors. (Also see Public Facilities and Infrastructure)

Strategic development and redevelopment of available properties in the town’s commercial and industrial districts can help to meet the economic goals of the Town while providing needed commercial opportunities and potential recreational amenities such as destinations and trails for residents and visitors within the major thoroughfares of Sharon. Due to their relatively isolated nature, complementary growth near I-95 and Route 1 has the potential to be more spatially robust without affecting the overall character of centrally-located residential, commercial, and conservation areas. See the Economic Development and Land Use Analysis in this element for suggested focus areas.

Recommendations:

- 2A. Re-examine and align zoning regulations along Route 1 with Master Plan goals to encourage opportunities for more economic development, including dimensional regulations, including building height, Floor Area Ratio, and parking. (Also see Economic Vitality)*
- 2B. Consider expanding commercial districts along Main Street.*
- 2C. Consider adopting LEED standards and/or providing incentives for green building and development standards in adaptive reuse projects and new buildings. Requiring green building practices (currently these practices are suggested but not required) would increase the use of renewable energy products and infrastructure and encourage incorporation of recyclable materials into buildings. Encouraging the adaptive reuse of existing buildings including the current Library building also supports sustainable practices. (Also see Economic Vitality)*

Goal 3: Maintain the character of the town and its neighborhoods while allowing appropriate redevelopment and growth.

As previously mentioned, many town residents have voiced their desire to see the rural residential nature of Sharon preserved for years to come. To ensure that the distinct character of Sharon is maintained, the potential strategic redevelopment and growth mentioned above and throughout this plan should be paired with ongoing conservation and regulatory efforts, encapsulating both residential neighborhoods as well as key open space and agricultural lands. The recommendations in this section complement those in the Sharon 2019 OSRMP.

Recommendations:

- 3A. Consider and evaluate zoning strategies to manage teardowns and/or rebuilding of smaller starter homes and/or historic homes, such as the creation of a Neighborhood Conservation District, or other zoning regulations that could include energy or infrastructure-related charges based on dimensional limits. Sharon has numerous modest-sized homes, and teardowns of these houses to build new, larger, single-family homes leads to a loss of smaller, more affordable units. (Also see Culture and Historic Resources and Housing)*

In addition to the Town’s existing demolition delay for buildings of a certain age, the Town should consider developing a package of zoning amendments to help address the issue of teardowns and encourage preservation of smaller homes, such as the Town of Wellesley’s “Large House Review” provision that requires design review by the Planning Board and a separate review by the Design Review Board that considers compliance with standards and criteria including preservation of landscaping, scale of buildings, lighting, and open space.

Neighborhood Conservation Districts (NCDs) are established by a group of residents seeking to preserve their neighborhood’s architecturally-distinctive character and heritage. NCDs can be a good method to protect areas that are architecturally and/or historically significant but may not qualify for inclusion in a Local Historic District. (Also see Housing)

3B. Allow and encourage ADUs. Most of Sharon is zoned for single-family, but ADUs, also called granny flats or in-law units, can provide housing options within these neighborhoods in a single-family home, a garage, carriage house or other separate accessory structure. ADUs can offer modest housing units while preserving the historic neighborhood character, and while these units cannot be bought or sold separately from the main home, they can provide a secondary income stream as a rental. (Also see Housing)

3C. Consider zoning amendments that encourage use of Universal Design or visitability standards for new development, particularly for housing and those near commercial or mixed-use centers. In coordination with Accessible and ADA design standards, Universal Design (UD) standards accommodate the full spectrum of age and ability, and visitability standards allow for more flexibility, including a barrier free entrance, wider first-floor doors, and first floor accessible bathrooms. (Also see Housing)

Potential zoning amendments around Universal Design and/or visitability standards could include:

- Allowing homeowners to modify access to their homes “by-right” rather than requiring a zoning variance as a reasonable accommodation
- Creating an overlay district (See case studies in Housing)
- Creating a town-wide visitability code (Also see Housing)

3D. Further encourage or incentivize cluster and/or flexible subdivision design; consider discussions with developers of undeveloped but permitted properties regarding the potential environmental, social, and financial benefits of cluster neighborhood design. Sharon has a Conservation Subdivision Design (CSD) bylaw (Sec. 4360) that offers density bonuses for clustered housing and affordable and market-rate age-qualified housing on at least a five-acre lot. There are a handful of developments in town that contain cluster-style attributes. The Town should encourage more robust cluster develop where a grouping of residences (such as cottage-style single family, townhouses, duplexes, small multifamily) are built on a site with land preserved for open space, recreational, or agricultural use. (Also see Housing)

The Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation has also developed the Natural Resource Protection Zoning (NRPZ) bylaw, which strengthens the potential open space and natural resource protection of clustering. The recommended bylaw accomplishes the following:

- Makes NRPZ developments by-right (and sprawl-type subdivisions by special permit)
- Allows five-acre property minimum
- Allows sharing of septic systems and aggregate calculations
- Provides incentives to create affordable units within the development including density bonuses
- Could also allow development of cohousing

3E. Support conservation of priority lands identified for open space and agriculture in the 2019 OSRMP. These properties include, in part: 1) transition of the South Main Street cranberry bogs to Conservation Commission ownership, 2) Crescent Ridge Dairy, 3) Ward’s Berry Farm, 4) Rattlesnake Hill property, and 5) remaining Morse fields and woodlands.

3F. Align zoning for camp lands on the western shore of Lake Massapoag to protect existing camp uses. Currently these camps are all nonconforming uses which would allow a sale or reuse of this land for other uses, including housing. To protect these lands for camp and recreational use, the Town can align zoning so these uses are no longer non-conforming while other uses, which may not be desired instead of camps, are allowed as of right.

Goal 4: Coordinate Town efforts to plan for future infrastructure, services, programs, facilities, and finances.

The interrelated nature of many of the recommendations in this Master Plan calls for a deep and prolonged look across departments and resources to accomplish the goals for the town in the next decade and more. Considering and implementing goals and recommendations that cut across Town departments and commissions will require coordination.

Recommendations:

- 4A. Consider hiring a full- or part-time town planner or staff person who can coordinate Town efforts and initiatives and pursue grants and funds across departments to support overall town planning, economic development, housing creation and preservation, transportation and infrastructure improvements, sustainability efforts, historic preservation, open space conservation, and other related programs and services. It is unusual for a town with resources such as Sharon's to not have at least a part-time planner or other staff person who can coordinate between departments, identify diverse funding opportunities and grants, and work across sectors to ensure the Town can move forward on Master Plan recommendations as well as other initiatives that arise. These staff positions can earn more than their cost in grants secured and resources identified. (Also see Cultural and Historic Resources, Economic Vitality, Housing, Land Use and Zoning, Transportation and Mobility, Open Space, Recreation, and Natural Resources, and Public Facilities and Infrastructure)*
- 4B. Update and enforce Town development review and building design and construction requirements to maintain the constantly advancing standard of sustainable practices for all development, including and beyond residential and commercial construction, (e.g., the new Library project is designed to be LEED certified). Sharon has already earned designation as a Green Community. As required for Green Communities, Sharon residents adopted the performance-based Stretch Energy Code to encourage the construction of energy-efficient and sustainable homes in 2017. This was an important step. However, the Code does not address walkability or the size of homes and requires consistent enforcement to be effective.*



4.5 OPEN SPACE, RECREATION, AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Introduction

As much of Sharon's town character, history, and current recreational opportunities are tied to its distinct abundance of open spaces and natural resources, ensuring their ongoing maintenance and protection will be crucial to the continued vibrancy of the town. This element describes the type and distribution of open space in Sharon, the importance of public and privately-owned conservation land, the town's recreational resources, the importance of preserving the water supply, and the agricultural assets that the town offers, and offers recommendations for preserving and enhancing these town assets for the future.

This Master Plan recognizes the recently updated 2019 *Sharon Open Space and Recreation Master Plan (OSRMP)* and supports the importance of the open space and recreation framework and Five-Year Action Plan detailed in the *OSRMP*.

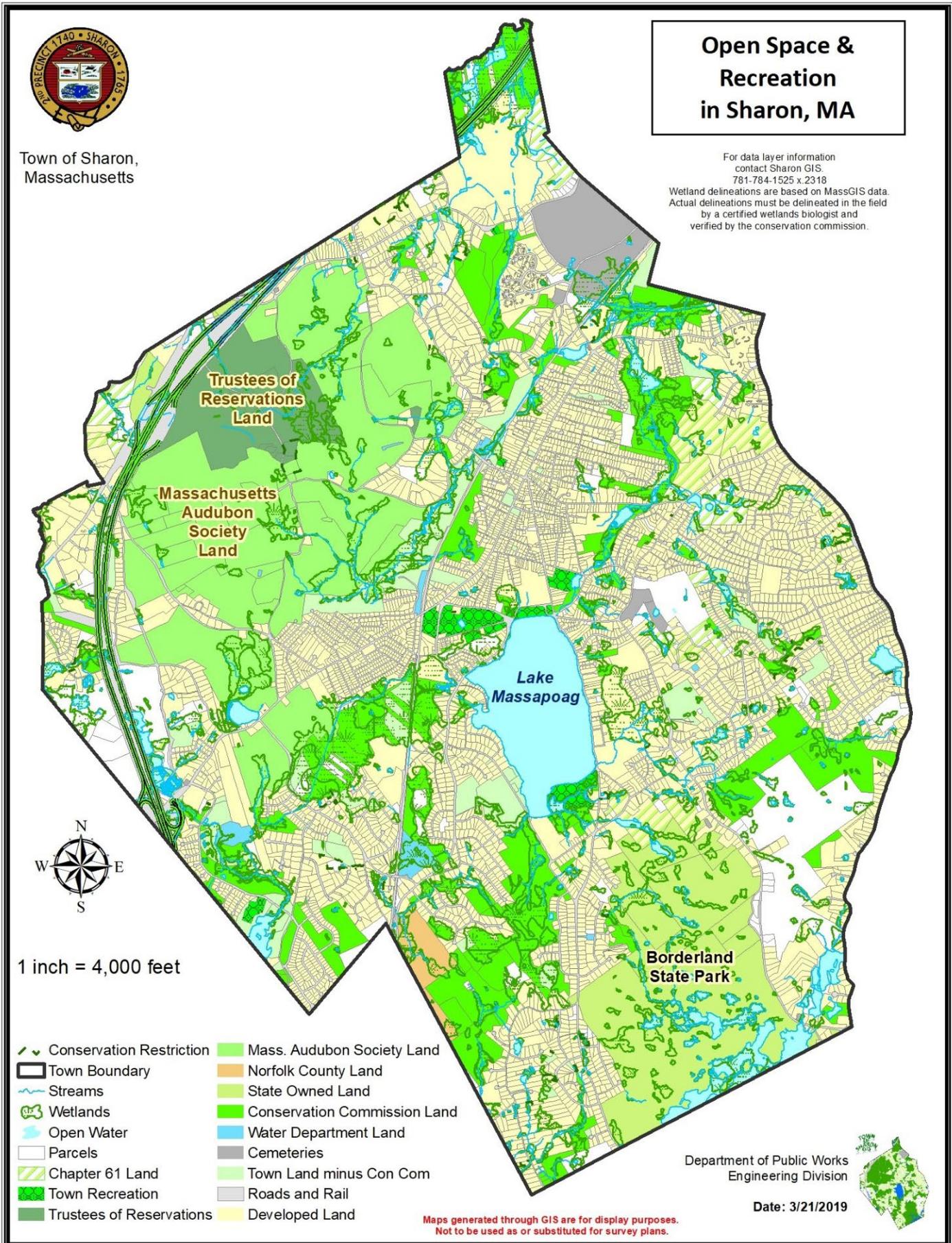
Open Space and Natural Resources Today: Existing Conditions

Despite Sharon's close proximity to Boston and its presence along the Providence/Stoughton commuter rail line, the town exudes rural character. The health of the town and its residents can be linked to its natural assets such as Lake Massapoag, which for centuries has been a major regional resource contributing hunting and fishing grounds, raw materials, and recreational opportunities throughout much of the area. Historically, the town has been known for its "healing air" and "exceptional water," including the Lake, ponds, streams, and local aquifers. While Sharon's stock of environmental resources and undeveloped land contribute to the character of the town, they also help to provide a unique set of recreational, ecological, and economic possibilities not often found in the Boston suburbs.



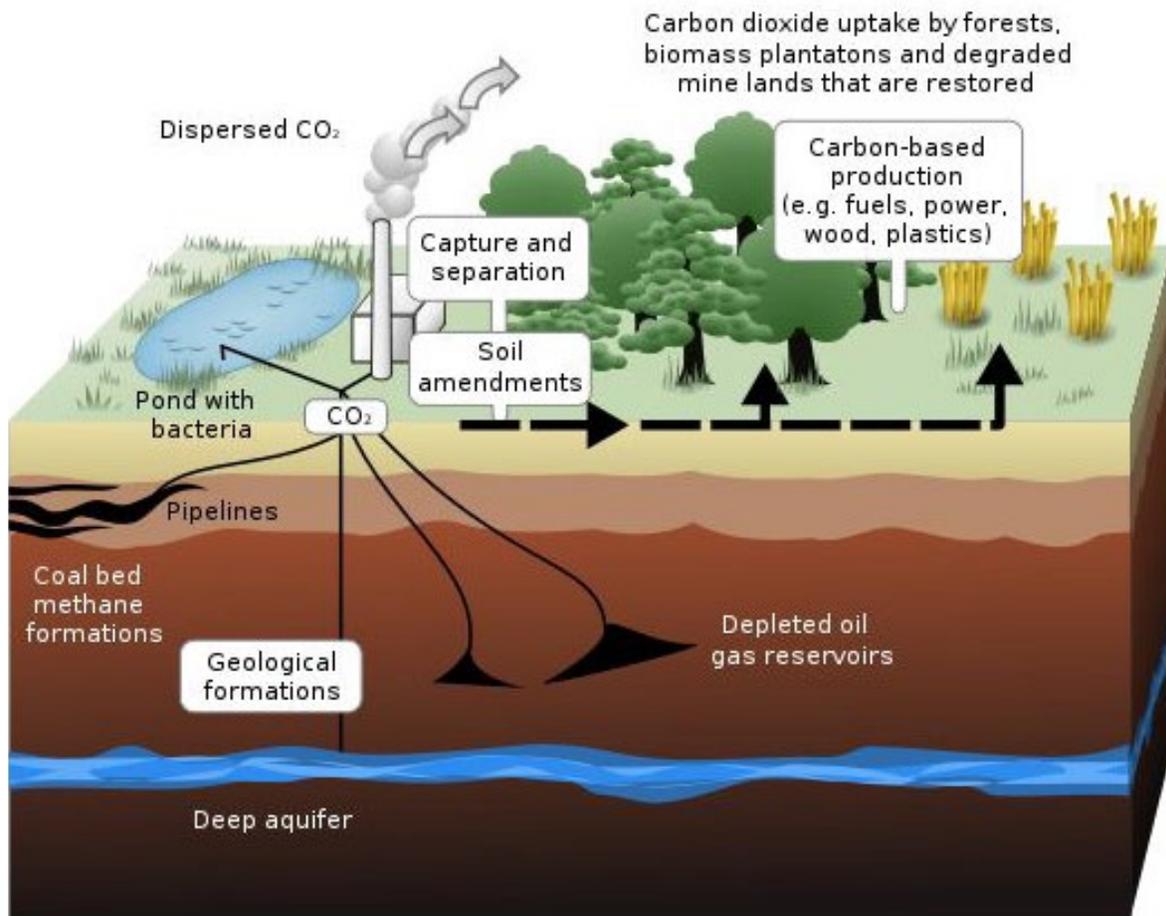
Opposite: Hammershop Pond Dam, Above: Lake Massapoag

Figure 23: Sharon Open Space and Recreation Map, 2019



Source: Sharon's 2019 Open Space and Recreation Master Plan

Figure 24: Carbon Impact Model



Many of the landscapes included under Sharon's definition of open space are vital contributors to carbon sequestration on a local and regional scale. Organic carbon sequestration is the natural process where trees, plants, and other forms of vegetation capture and store atmospheric carbon dioxide within the earth. As a result, the conservation and maintenance of woodlands, wetlands, and agricultural lands is critical when considering Sharon's role in the local and regional carbon cycle, as many of these resources contribute to ongoing carbon sequestration, providing environmental benefits both locally and throughout the region. Source: www.brighthubengineering.com

Sharon residents appreciate the many benefits derived from its abundance of natural assets, which help to contribute to a trend of healthy, active lifestyles among residents. Organized recreational activities are commonplace and help to reinforce an active town culture, with a population that supports a vibrant youth athletics system. Additionally, the many publicly and privately-conserved open spaces and agricultural lands provide opportunities for both eco- and agri-tourism, while also offering much-needed habitats for diverse ecologies of various scales.

The 2019 OSRMP, prepared under the direction of the Sharon Conservation Commission and Recreation Advisory Committee, provides a robust framework for open space, recreation, and natural resource planning in Sharon.

Following community meetings and input, there were five overarching goals identified by the OSRMP, which is informing this Master Plan:

1. Preserve and maintain high quality and adequate quantity of Sharon's water resources.
2. Continue land preservation and maintenance efforts of Town-owned open space and agricultural areas.
3. Promote and expand community education and involvement concerning open space and recreational resources.
4. Improve resource utilization and public benefit by increasing and expanding recreational facilities and programs.
5. Reconvene the Open Space and Recreation Master Plan Committee annually to review goals and progress.

Open Space

Sharon's 2019 *OSRMP* defines open space as "...wetlands and open water, conservation land, agricultural land, recreation land, forest land, both corridor and small park areas, wooded buffers along roadways, and other undeveloped land of particular conservation or recreation interest."

Total open space accounts for approximately 6,308 acres or 42.5%, according to the Town of Sharon GIS and Assessors Data. The Open Space and Recreation Map from the *OSRMP* (see Fig. 23) includes updated information from the Sharon Conservation Commission and Recreation Advisory Committee. This includes both public and private open spaces occupied by a variety of uses, detailed throughout this element.

Conservation

The majority of Sharon's acreage set aside for conservation is attributed to privately held sites. Moose Hill Wildlife Sanctuary and Moose Hill Farm combine to account for over 2,300 acres of conserved land. In addition, large swaths of publicly-owned open space are punctuated by the presence of Borderland State Park, a significant portion of which extends into the southern end of Sharon.

The following were identified as major parcels of conservation importance in Sharon's 2019 *OSRMP*:

*Privately-Owned Open Space**

- Moose Hill Wildlife Sanctuary – over 2,000 acres of open space owned by the Massachusetts Audubon Society Sanctuary, on which a nature center, gift shop, and 25-mile trail system are maintained. The Audubon Society hosts several programs on site, including vacation and summer camps, themed hikes, and various activities for local schools and families, such as maple sugaring.
- The Trustees of Reservations Moose Hill Farm – a 390-acre parcel features four miles of trails and a "Green Dog" program that allows dogs on trails, with agriculturally-based programming. Recently, a Cooperative Nature School was created at Moose Hill Farm for preschool-age children.

- Warner and Bay Circuit Trail Systems – Certain trailways at the Moose Hill Wildlife Sanctuary are part of larger trail systems. The Warner Trail connects Canton, Massachusetts to Diamond Hill State Park in Cumberland, Rhode Island; the Bay Circuit is intended to serve as an outer "Emerald Necklace" and is comprised of 200 miles of trailways that link parks and open space throughout the greater Boston region.

*Publicly-Owned Conservation Land**

- Borderland State Park – Over 900 acres of the 1,772-acre State Park is located within the Town of Sharon. The multi-use recreational area includes 17 miles of walking and horseback riding trails and is used year-round.
- Norfolk County-Owned Land – Consists of 94 acres of open space without trails.

*Conservation Commission-Owned Land**

- Massapoag Brook Lands – Approximately 350 acres along Massapoag Brook and four water bodies, within which is the three-mile Massapoag Trail.
- Elson Property – A 45-acre parcel that constitutes the headwaters of Sucker Brook that feeds into Lake Massapoag and includes the Elson-Cross Trail.
- King Phillip's Rock Lands – About 160 acres of land containing historical sites used by the Native Wampanoag Tribe in the 1600s that contain four miles of trails.
- Piona Land – 25-acre critical water resource area within the Atlantic White Cedar Swamp.
- Billings Land – About eleven acres of wooded land that abuts the Massapoag Brook greenbelt that contains a tree identification trail. Twelve additional acres were protected by Conservation Restriction in 2018.
- Gavins Pond Land – Approximately ten acres of land changed from Town ownership to permanent open space under the care and control of the Sharon Conservation Commission in 2018.
- Horizons for Youth (A) – Over 157 acres of woodland, wetland, and meadow deeded to the Sharon Conservation Commission with trails connecting to an existing system. Parcel (A) was given to the SCC in the 1990's, and the remaining Horizons for Youth-owned land was purchased by the Town in 2007 for combined conservation/ recreation use.

*Acreages and descriptions adapted from Sharon's 2019 *OSRMP*



Memorial Beach (above) and Walter Griffin Playground (below).

Recreation

The town features a highly active, engaged population that makes use of Sharon's rich natural resources for both active and passive forms of recreation. Due in part to wide varieties of opportunities for varying levels of activity, as well as the burgeoning school-aged population, open space is in high demand for programmed recreational activities ranging from independent athletic leagues to school-sponsored athletic programs. Sharon's abundance of natural, undeveloped open spaces and thriving agricultural sites provide opportunities for nature-based recreation that can help to make Sharon a regional destination for eco- and agri-tourism as well as recreation. The 2019 OSRMP indicated a wide range of activities and recreation opportunities residents have because of the rich natural and open space resources available throughout town.

- During spring, summer, and fall, the parks and trail systems in town are filled with hikers and walkers.
- Winter brings snow-shoers, cross-country skiers, and winter hikers to the trails and roadsides.
- All year-round, walkers, runners, and cyclists use Town roads.
- During spring and summer, Lake Massapoag is used for swimming, sunbathing, fishing, boating, kayaking, sailing, tubing, and related activities. For example, the Massapoag Yacht Club offers sailing lessons and races throughout the summer. Swimming lessons are available through the Recreation Department, and in late summer, Max Performance operates the Sharon Triathlon, making use of swimming, running, and biking opportunities around the Lake.
- During winter the Lake is used for ice fishing, and there is an ice-skating pond at Deborah Sampson Park.
- Parks, athletic fields, and active public open spaces are heavily and competitively used for organized athletics at various levels.

The following were identified as major parcels of recreational interest in Sharon's 2019 *OSRMP**:

- Sharon High School – Currently, 13.7 acres host several outdoor facilities including four tennis courts, two diamonds with field hockey and football practice areas, an eight-lane all-weather track, stadium seating for 650 to 700 spectators, and a multi-purpose field. Structures include a gymnasium and an auditorium. SHS's recreational facilities may change with the new high school design and construction.
- Sharon Middle School – The facilities on 22.2 acres include a football/soccer field, ¼-mile four-lane track, five tennis courts, one baseball diamond, outdoor basketball hoops, and a multi-purpose athletic field. There is also an outdoor playground. Structures include a gymnasium and an auditorium.
- Cottage Street Elementary School, East Elementary School, and Heights Elementary School – Each elementary school has an outdoor play space and a gymnasium. Conditions of the facilities at each school vary and are detailed in the *OSRMP*.
- Frank I Sullivan Recreation Area – This 20-acre site is the home of the Sharon Community Center and Sharon Adult Center and includes access to various lakefront recreation, including bocce courts, shuffleboard, pickleball, and seating, and to the water itself.
- Deborah Sampson Park – Composed of five baseball diamonds with dugouts and evening lighting, as well as four tennis courts, a basketball court, batting cages, and various unprogrammed park spaces, this 59-acre recreation area provides numerous opportunities for both active and passive recreation. A fitness trail connects this park to the Lake's edge, and a dog park is located nearby. The Sharon Community Gardens are located on the edge of this park where residents can manage a plot to grow seasonal produce.
- Veterans' Memorial Park Beach/Town Boat Launch Area – The beach includes 14.6 acres of beach complete with swimming docks, picnic tables, playground, bandstand, and a concession stand/bathhouse located off of Beach Street, on the north side of Lake Massapoag. The Town Boat Launch Area is at the east end of this park.
- Gavin's Pond Soccer Complex – Located on Gavin's Pond Road, the 55-acre site hosts two regulation-sized soccer fields and bathroom facilities created and used heavily by the Sharon Youth Soccer Association.
- Dr. Walter A. Griffin Playground – A 23-acre site located on Ames Street that features a playground, four softball diamonds and batting cage, a basketball court, and a multipurpose field.
- Mountain Street Recreation Facility – Outdoor facilities are proposed for this 60-acre former landfill site that would include walking trails, dog park, landscaping, and parking surrounding a planned solar energy field over the middle of the site.
- Beech Tree Park – A 1.9-acre parcel featuring a gazebo, park benches, and landscaping to welcome residents and visitors to the Massapoag Trailhead, which lies opposite the boat-launch parking area of Lake Massapoag. Weekly concerts occur on Sundays during the summer.
- Pettee's Sliding Hill – This three to four-acre area located on Hillside Avenue off of Depot Street is part of a larger Town-owned parcel and contains a sledding hill, woodlands, and conservation area.

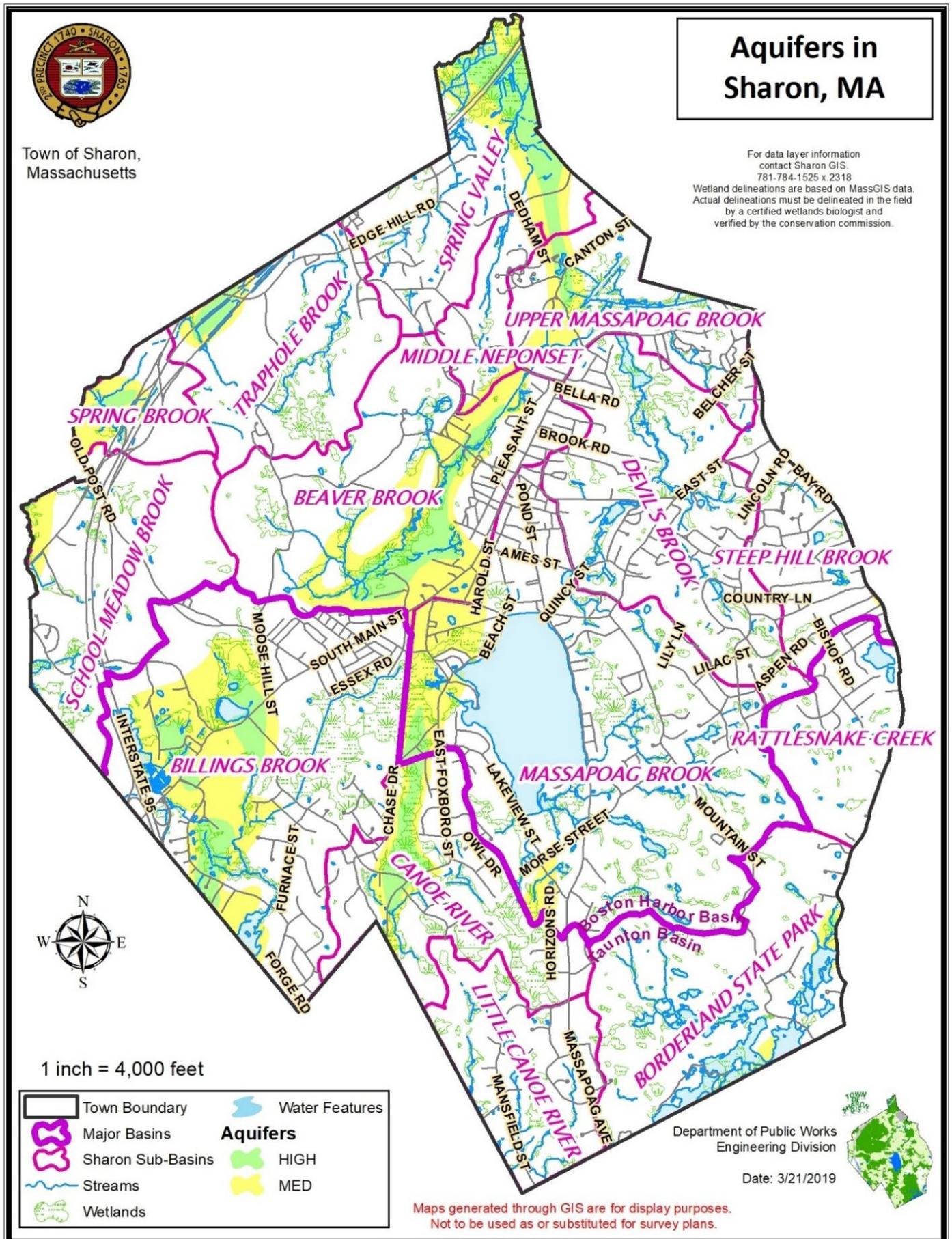
*Acreages and descriptions adapted from Sharon's 2019 *OSRMP*

Natural Resources

*Water Supply**

The 2019 *OSRMP* identified the preservation of water resources in terms of quantity and high quality, as a high priority for the Town. The importance of Sharon's water resources speaks to the environmental, commercial, and recreational value of the town's prominent water features, as well as the utility and ecological value of Sharon's various ecosystems (see Fig. 25). While Lake Massapoag provides a highly visible and sought-after recreational venue, smaller, isolated wetlands, streams, and ponds provide the necessary ecosystem that helps to protect, preserve, and maintain Sharon's various aquifers. As stated in the 2019 *OSRMP*, "To maintain its water self-sufficiency, the Town must vigilantly protect its water supply and minimize its impacts upon the groundwater supply."

Figure 25: Sharon Basins and Aquifers Map



Source: Sharon's 2019 Open Space and Recreation Master Plan

The following were identified as major water resources in Sharon's 2019 OSRMP*:

- Lake Massapoag (Lake) – The 353-acre lake is the largest water body in the area with significant historical importance to the town as well as being a highly utilized recreational resource; Town officials have established priorities for the Lake's use as: 1) swimming; 2) boating; and 3) fishing. Lake Massapoag empties into Massapoag Brook, which runs through a number of smaller ponds, including Hammershop Pond and Mann's Pond.
- Hammershop Pond Dam – Repairs to the Hammershop Pond Dam were completed in 2017.
- Mann's Pond Dam – The State has designated the Mann's Pond Dam to be in need of repairs, and the Town's phased repairs are underway.
- Billings Brook Watershed – Covering a 5.09 square-mile area that extends into the Town of Foxborough, the watershed drains toward the south, largely through Billings Brook which is fed via wetlands to the north and northeast.
- Canoe River Sub-basin – Though only a very small portion of this sub-basin is within Sharon, it is significant because Lake Massapoag comprises the northern portion of this sub-basin that extends and flows south into Foxborough, Mansfield, and Norton.
- Beaver Brook Sub-basin – This small sub-basin is fed by both groundwater and surface runoff, flowing northward to just south of Sawmill Pond.
- Isolated Wetlands – The numerous isolated wetlands located throughout town provide valuable ecosystem services including the protection of ground and surface waters, detaining storm flows, recharging local aquifers, and contributing to vernal pools that are critical to the life cycle of amphibians and reptiles.

*As described in 2019 OSRMP

Agriculture

Sharon currently hosts a number of successful agricultural centers that provide valuable resources both in terms of local produce, as well as agri-tourism opportunities, including Ward's Berry Farm, Crescent Ridge Dairy Farm, and Moose Hill Farm. In addition to garnering regional acclaim for their respective products, Sharon's agricultural institutions serve as agri-tourism destinations for locals and visitors alike that could inspire and support other complementary local businesses, such as farm-to-table dining. Besides being functioning farms, Crescent Ridge Dairy Farm and Ward's Berry Farm also have shops with their products and local goods, offer inviting websites, provide educational tours, and host seasonal activities and events, from a town-wide paper recycling day to hayrides and 4H Summer Camp (see Fig. 26). Moose Hill Farm is a historic farm where visitors can learn about agricultural history walking through the grounds and trails.

Figure 26: Crescent Ridge and Ward's Berry Farm Website



Crescent Ridge and Ward's Berry Farm Marketing/Websites.
Sources: www.crescentridge.com and www.wardsberryfarm.com.



Outdoor recreation facilities at the Sharon Community Center

What the Community Said

Key takeaways from the community input from meetings, the Fall 2018 online survey, meetings-in-a-box, interviews, and focus groups, and other submitted comments:

- Residents have voiced their concerns about the impact of development on local watersheds and the quality of the water supply.
- From the 2018 Fall Survey, Sharon residents ranked “Open Space, Recreation, and Natural Resources” second behind “Quality of Schools” when asked to rank how important characteristics of Sharon are to its future as a desirable community in which to live.
- Similarly, “Open Space” was also ranked second behind “High Quality Schools” on the question “Why did you choose Sharon to live or work” on the same survey.
- When asked about the top two places residents take visitors when they come to Sharon in the 2018 Fall Survey, the town’s open space, natural resources, and recreational assets topped this list: Ward’s Berry Farm, Moose Hill Farm, Crescent Ridge Dairy (65%); Lake Massapoag (58%); and Moose Hill Wildlife Sanctuary, Borderland State Park, and other parks/trails (31%).
- Residents voiced concerns about the current high demand placed on recreational fields and facilities by the large number of Sharon organized sports teams. Comments ranged from residents wanting more sports fields to worry that organized sports encroach on more passive types of open space.
- Similarly, residents noted the relative lack of open spaces unoccupied by organized sports and athletics programs available to community members for unprogrammed recreation.

GOALS AND RECOMMENDED POLICIES AND ACTIONS

The Goals and Recommendations in this section are placed within the greater context of the following MAPC MetroFuture Goals:

Goal #7 - Cities, towns, and neighborhoods will retain their sense of uniqueness and community character.

Goal #9 - The region's landscape will retain its distinctive green spaces and working farms.

Goal #23 - All neighborhoods will have access to safe and well-maintained parks, community gardens, and appropriate play spaces for children and youth.

Goal #42 - The region's agricultural economy will grow through a focus on sustainable farming and by bringing more locally produced foods to the market.

Goal #60 - The region will have better air quality, both indoors and out.

Goal #61 - Water resources will be carefully budgeted and sustainably managed so that clean water is available for appropriate uses and development.

Goal #62 - The region's rivers, streams, lakes, and ponds will have sufficient clean water to support healthy aquatic life and recreational uses.

Goal #63 - The ecological condition of wetlands will improve, and fewer wetlands will be lost to development.

Goal #64 - The region will retain its biodiversity and will have healthy populations of native plants and animals, and fewer invasive species.



Sharon has a wealth of natural resources which provide ample recreational opportunities and contribute to commercial businesses throughout the town. The feedback gathered throughout the planning process indicates that Sharon residents recognize the value and importance of open space and natural resources and appreciate the recreational value that they contribute to the town.

The following goals and recommendations address key issues heard during the master planning process and that are outlined in the Sharon 2019 *OSRMP*. These recommendations work in concert with this plan's recommendations across planning categories and are meant to be consistent with and supportive of the Town's 2019 *OSRMP* but not necessarily identical.

Goal 1: Preserve and actively maintain the town’s natural resources and water quality and supply, incorporating sustainable concepts and systems whenever possible.

Much of Sharon’s history and character can be traced to the abundance and quality of its natural resources, most notably Lake Massapoag, whose effluent streams and brooks contribute to many of Sharon’s robust local ecologies. As Sharon’s water supply is derived from local aquifers, the ongoing health of these natural resources is directly tied to the quality of Sharon’s water supply. Preservation and active management of these resources will be crucial to not only ensure the ongoing quality of Sharon’s water supply, but also to supporting the existing character of the town and the many recreational opportunities that make use of Sharon’s natural resources.

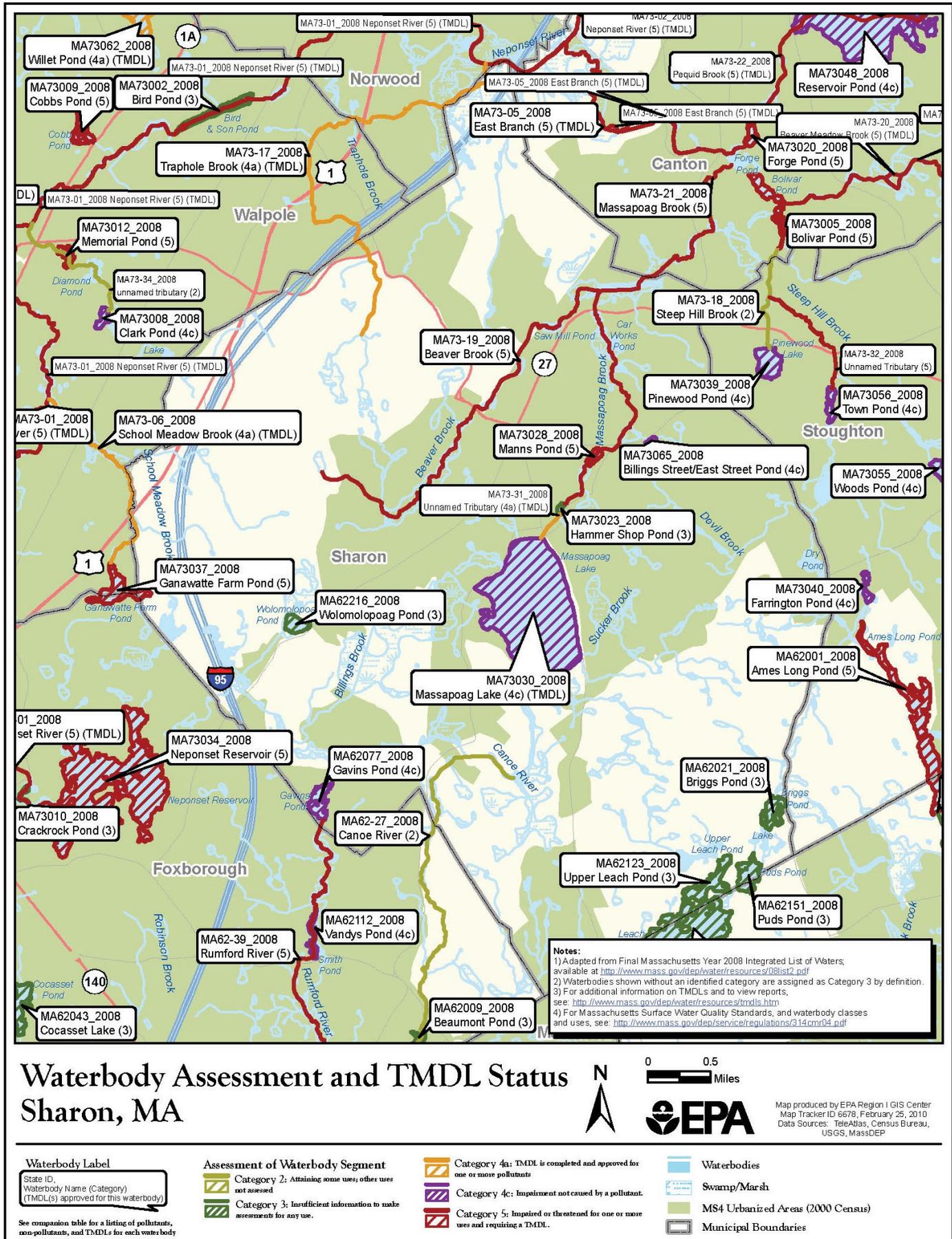
Recommendations:

- 1A. Maintain the Town’s open spaces and water bodies and follow a priority funding project list. By maintaining a current priority list, the Town and other interested nonprofit organizations can focus and coordinate community awareness and fundraising to leverage public funds. The 2019 OSRMP highlights the need for active protection and maintenance of Sharon’s water supply.
- 1B. Continue to preserve and maintain the beachfront at Lake Massapoag and add new amenities at the Lake. Residents cite the Lake as a major amenity and as a central defining feature of the town. The beachfront is a popular recreation spot and residents would like to see more amenities such as refreshments, additional parking, and seating areas. This recommendation builds on the recent plans for the playground approved for the Veterans’ Memorial Park Beach at the 2019 Annual Town Meeting.
- 1C. Maintain the viability of Lake Massapoag for water quality and improve management of the areas around the Lake and at the parks, including the removal of invasive species. In 2010, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) conducted an assessment and determination of Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) for waterbodies in Sharon, which indicated a few areas of concern, including the Lake (see Fig. 27).
- 1D. Require active water impact mitigation from development to preserve water quality and supply. The Town currently requires new development to mitigate impacts regarding water; however, as technology and materials improve, it would be reasonable for the Town to continually review its requirements to actively improve the quality and supply of the town’s water. (Also see Public Facilities and Infrastructure)
- 1E. Consider hiring a full- or part-time town planner or staff person who can coordinate Town efforts and initiatives and pursue grants and funds to support the Town’s open space and recreation goals, and other related programs and services. This staff position could look across Town needs and opportunities to identify potential collaborative grants and other funding efforts, provide economic value, and help ensure that recreational and natural resources are well-maintained and are available and accessible to as many residents as possible. Specific coordination and enhancement activities related to this element may include: recreation facility improvements, enhanced programming and activities, increased signage, and other cross-sector initiatives. (Also see Arts, Cultural, and Historic Resources, Economic Vitality, Housing, Land Use and Zoning, Transportation and Mobility, and Public Facilities and Infrastructure)



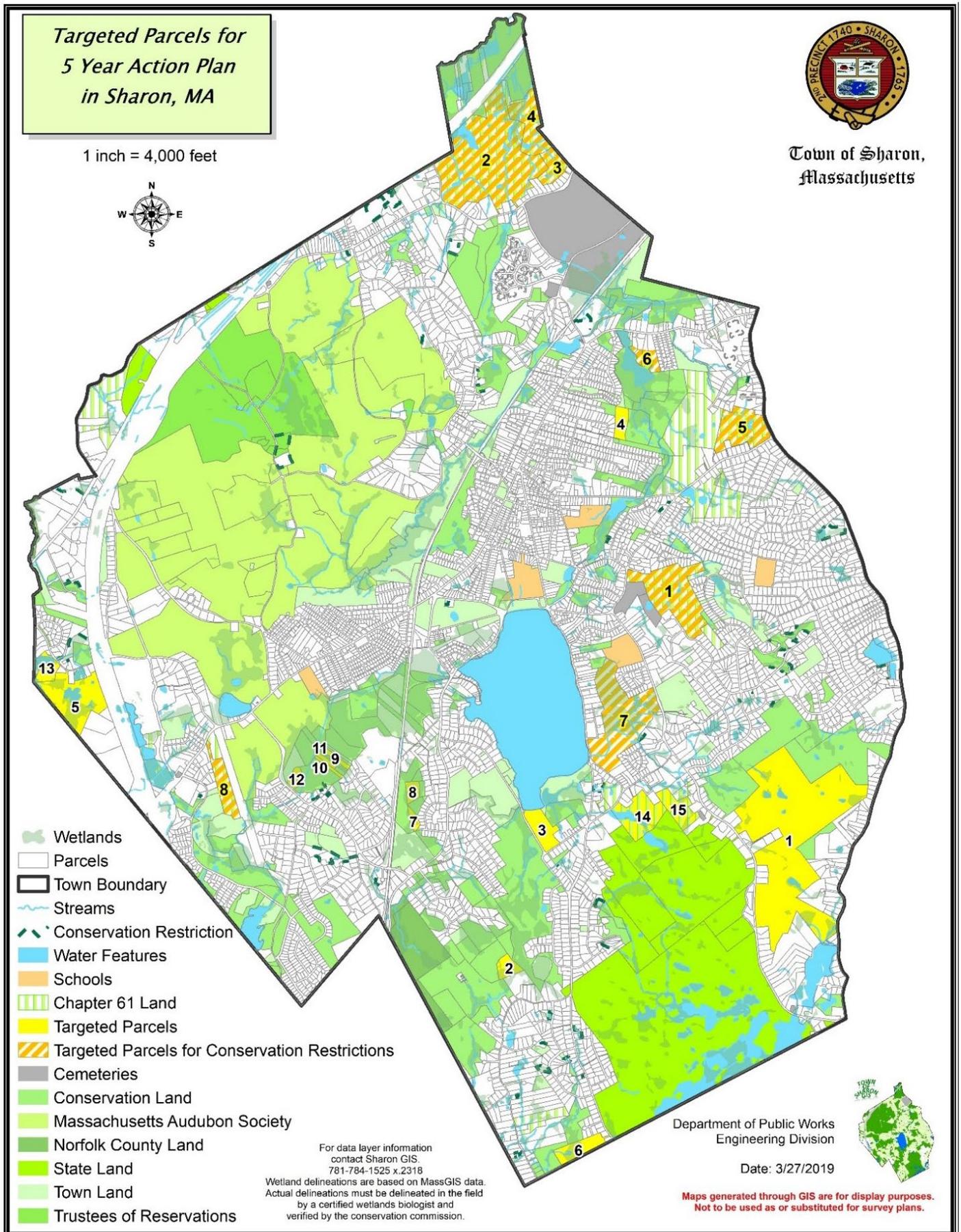
Ward’s Berry Farm

Figure 27: Sharon Waterbody Assessment



Source: https://www3.epa.gov/region1/npdes/stormwater/ma/305b303dMaps/Sharon_MA.pdf

Figure 28: Targeted Parcels for Five Year Action Plan



Source: Sharon's 2019 Open Space and Recreation Master Plan

Goal 2: Ensure long-term preservation of open space and agriculture properties and make new strategic acquisitions where possible. (Also see Land Use and Zoning)

Large swaths of Sharon are currently set aside for conservation. To continue this trend of conservation and to preserve the character of the town, areas critical to the local ecology, economy, and character of Sharon should be celebrated and preserved in their largely natural state. As previously mentioned in Sections 4.3 and 4.4, population growth may lead to continued development of currently undeveloped open spaces. Establishing incentives and leveraging key local ecological and agricultural resources in particular can help to assist ongoing conservation efforts.

Recommendations:

2A. Support and incentivize the conservation of priority lands that are privately owned, as identified for open space and agriculture in the Sharon 2019 Open Space and Recreation Master Plan. The 2019 OSRMP recommends pursuing “conservation/agricultural restrictions on remaining agricultural lands...” as well as priority properties for protection through Commission/Town ownership. Priority properties identified in the OSRMP (see Fig. 28), include, among others, Rattlesnake Hill, Sreda Property on Mansfield Street, Crescent Ridge Dairy, Ward’s Berry Farm, and the remaining Morse fields and woodlands.

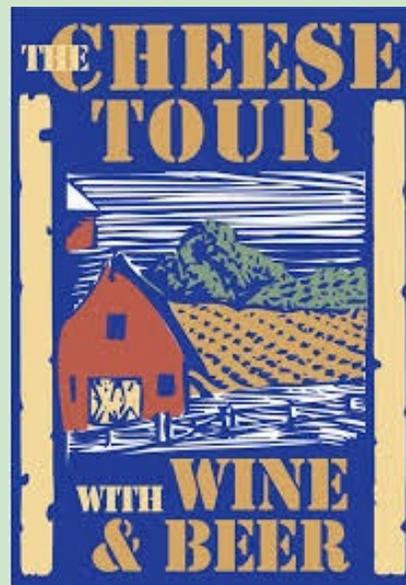
The Town should work with these property owners as soon as possible to discuss options for conservation. For property owners who want to conserve their properties, options might include tax incentives for conservation, partial Town purchase of properties, identification of some land for desired development with higher densities if remaining land is left in conservation (cluster development concept), and Town-support of a coordinated eco- and agri-tourism strategy to support active economic use (see 2B). (Also see Land Use and Zoning)

2B. Encourage potential eco- and agri-tourism through collaboration with Ward’s Berry Farm, Crescent Ridge Dairy, Moose Hill Wildlife Sanctuary, Borderland State Park, the Sharon Friends of Conservation nonprofit organization, and local businesses as a means to actively support the conservation of those lands.

The town has a significant number of agricultural and ecological assets to consider “packaging” these resources to create a program of support for marketing and visitors that can add value to existing uses that depend on an agricultural business model for financial success. By supporting an eco- and agri-tourism strategy for these businesses, the Town can provide incentives for land to remain in agricultural uses and can also provide support for other businesses in the town such as restaurants, art galleries, and retail that would benefit from an increased customer base. (Also see Economic Vitality)

CASE STUDY

The Cheese Tour Marketing Information



Source: www.thecheesetour.com

Over three days in Washington County, New York, residents and visitors can embark on self-guided tours of various artisanal cheesemakers while getting an inside look and taste of the process of cheese making throughout the area. With open-ended programming including the tours of local farms, tastings, book signings, and speaking events, participants can engage with as much or as little of the tour as the like – freeing them up to spend time in the various communities and town centers of Washington County. In Sharon, a similar event model could be adapted to help organize self-guided tours of the various agricultural resources throughout the town.

2C. Make strategic open and green space acquisitions where possible. The Town should be prepared to make additional open space purchases if circumstances present themselves. These acquisitions could be for public open space, conservation, or even for targeted development such as conservation/cluster housing development that achieves the Town’s housing goals and protects open or agricultural spaces. One example of a strategic acquisition might be the purchase of the Bank of America property in Post Office Square to create a town green. Possibilities for land swaps should also be investigated. This is simply one example of potential acquisitions and land swaps that may be possible in the coming decades and the Town should be prepared and proactive in seeking out opportunities.

Goal 3: Connect passive and active recreational spaces, trails, and natural resources, including the Lake. (Also see Transportation and Mobility)

Sharon’s wealth of natural resources provides a wide variety of opportunities for recreation. Ensuring that connections to, from, and within these largely undeveloped open spaces can help to not only improve access to these recreation opportunities, but also to enhance opportunities for mobility throughout the town as a whole. Ensuring that residents and visitors alike are easily able to navigate throughout both developed and natural areas with the assistance of clear, legible wayfinding and signage can help to enhance and encourage the use of these recreational spaces and natural resources, as well as promote new methods of access to residential and commercial areas.

Recommendations:

- 3A. Coordinate between the Town, the Massachusetts Audubon Society, and Borderland Park staff to add and distribute trail signage, trail and town-wide maps, and markers. The Sharon 2019 OSRMP recommends that the Town “promote and achieve adequate maintenance and upkeep of existing open space areas and trails, and connectivity where possible, by supporting and enhancing Sharon’s excellent level of citizen participation in open space preservation and management.” Providing signage connecting residential walkways and neighborhoods with existing trails and creating an overall trail signage and mapping system can draw increased visibility for trails and provide overall connectivity that encourages pedestrian use.
- 3B. Identify additional opportunities, including the recommendations in MAPC’s 2014 Lake Massapoag Bicycle Network Plan, to connect bicycle infrastructure and wayfinding not only to open space but to commercial and residential areas of Sharon to help reduce vehicle dependence. This recommendation is closely tied to 3A and supports increased neighborhood connectivity to a town-wide network of bike pathways and suggested routes, including separate bike lanes where possible (see Fig. 29). Increased visibility and knowledge of these routes can also increase cyclist safety through heightened public awareness and can support overall community health and goals to lessen traffic congestion and create a more sustainable Sharon. (Also see Transportation and Mobility)

Figure 29: Lake Massapoag Bicycle Network Plan



Prepared for the Town of Sharon
by Metropolitan Area Planning Council
Project funding provided by
MassDOT South Coast Rail Technical Assistance Grant
December 2014



Source: MAPC’s 2014 Lake Massapoag Bicycle Network Plan

3C. Promote and continue public outreach to educate and increase involvement of the community in the protection, maintenance, and active use of Sharon's open space and recreational resources.

Goal 4: Expand recreational opportunities for all age groups and abilities in town. (Also see Community Health)

Current levels of recreation amongst school-aged children in Sharon have created high demand for both indoor and outdoor recreational spaces. Ensuring that a wide variety of recreational opportunities are available to all ages, but particularly teens and school-aged children, can help to not only support expanded recreational opportunities, but also help to reduce the strain on Sharon's current recreational facilities and spaces. Exploring partnerships that expand physical space available in addition to increasing the variety of recreational options available can help to ensure that Sharon remains a town that supports a healthy, active lifestyles for all ages.

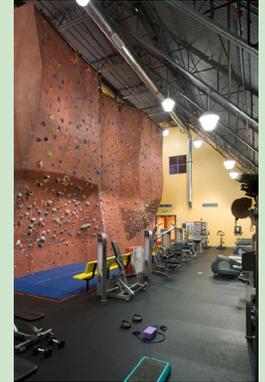
Recommendations:

4A. Provide or work with private partners to provide recreational spaces, activities, and exercise spaces (beyond team sports) for all age groups but particularly for school-age children (seven to twelve years) and teens. Indoor play spaces for toddlers, gathering spaces for teens, a makerspace for residents of all ages – these kinds of spaces can supplement traditional recreational offerings in the town and provide much-needed options for residents of all ages. The Town should think creatively about where these spaces could be located and operated: they could be run by local religious organizations, located in vacant private spaces, and/or combined with arts and culture endeavors to offer opportunities such as music, dance, and art classes. All existing offerings in the town as well as possible new opportunities, such as the planned makerspace in the new Library, should be catalogued and considered part of the overall recreational and activity program for Sharon, consistent with current programming and tracking by Sharon Community Education.

CASE STUDY

Recreational Space

Carbondale Community Center - Carbondale, IL



Sources: www.carbondalerec.com/programs and www.athleticbusiness.com/rec-center/a-small-town-colorado-recreation-center-goes-green.html

Located next to Carbondale's town hall, local transit options, and a regional bike path, the Carbondale Community Center provides much needed community space, fitness facilities, recreational opportunities, and community education and programming. Recreational opportunities for preschool, youth, adult, and older adults are all represented by programming that appeals to a wide variety of ages and abilities – truly embodying the ideal of a cohesive, multigenerational space. In addition to the community benefits listed above, the Carbondale Community Center is certified LEED platinum – due in no small part to its robust solar panels along the gymnasium roof, state-of-the-art insulation throughout the roof and walls, and a wide range of recycled materials used to construct the building.

Viking Sports



Source: <https://www.vikingcamps.com/activity-center/open-play>

A different alternative is found in Brookline, MA at the Viking Sports Open Play Space. Viking offers summer sports camps, youth and adult sports leagues, and host of other recreational programs that supplement and complement Brookline's official school and Town offerings.

- 4B. Create or work with private partners to create multi-use outdoor active recreational spaces, especially fields that can be used for organized sports. The Town can work with land owners to identify potential opportunities to partner on the creation of multi-use fields that can be used both by the public as well as by private recreation providers. Aligning needs and combining resources can allow efficiency of scale and recreational uses adjacent to other private uses could provide economic benefits (e.g., increased visibility for nonprofits, religious organizations, and businesses).
- 4C. Enhance functionality and improve features at Veterans' Memorial Park Beach as well as identify measures to improve the range of uses of the Sharon Community Center. Residents wish to see more variety of recreational choices at the Lake. Facilities such as a splash pad water feature and improved bandstand area could be attractive to both children and older adults, if designed with multi-generational use in mind. They can offer a vibrant option for recreation that draws in a diverse group of residents. Other amenities at the Lake can include improved food options and additional seating and gathering spaces.
- The Sharon Community Center is currently well-utilized, however, the 2019 OSRMP recommends identifying ways to improve the balance of programs, functions, and community needs.
- 4D. Improve accessibility for all ages and abilities, incorporate accessible and functional passive and recreational activities, and enhance management of Town-owned recreational and open spaces, such as the Mountain Street Landfill, Veterans' Memorial Park Beach, and Community Center.



Welcome to the

TOWN OF SHARON

Incorporated 1765



4.6 PUBLIC FACILITIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Introduction

Access to high quality services, robust infrastructure, and appropriately maintained public facilities is a critical component of quality of life for residents in town. The growing and changing needs of the population impact the current and future needs for public facilities and infrastructure while also impacting the finances of the Town.

This element describes the current status of existing, new, and future public facilities; notes the importance of roadway infrastructure and street design; assesses the Town's infrastructure for maintaining quantity and quality of water supply; explores the constraints of the current wastewater systems for economic development; makes observations on the Town's social services; and discusses the current status of the Sharon Public Schools.

Public Facilities and Infrastructure Today: Existing Conditions

Public facilities and infrastructure include many buildings and basic systems that the Town and its residents need to operate and thrive. The existing and future conditions of these facilities, infrastructure, and social service systems

are critically important for the community's wellbeing and effective long-term planning. These resources require significant funds to maintain and improve existing buildings and infrastructure, construct new facilities, as well as provide and expand needed services, which has economic implications for Town finances and future decision-making.

Public Facilities

Currently, Sharon's Town Offices are at three locations across town – Town Offices (90 South Main Street), the Public Safety Building and the Department of Public Works (211, 213, 217, and 219 South Main Street), and the Sharon Community Center (219 Massapoag Avenue).

The Town of Sharon has been in the process of upgrading many important public facilities over the past several years. These include the new Public Safety Building (opened 2017), the new Town Hall (expected completion 2019), and the new Public Library (funding approved at Town Meeting 2019). In addition, the Town is considering a proposal for a new high school. The recent construction and opening of the Public Safety Building in 2017 at the former Police Station and Department of Public Works location on South



Sharon Public Safety Facility. Source: <http://www.daedalusprojects.com/project-portfolio/sharon-public-safety/>



Existing Sharon Town Offices

Figure 30: Sharon Town Hall Project



New Town Hall rendering (above) and New Town Hall under construction (below; photo June 2019). Source: <https://www.townofsharon.net/home/pages/new-town-hall-project>

Main Street, now housing both the Fire Department and Police Station, is an example of one of several prioritized capital improvement projects in the town. The new Town Hall Project will replace the existing Town Offices with an updated, ADA-accessible building (see Fig. 30).

The Sharon Public Library was mentioned often during the *Imagine Sharon* planning process. The Library, like many similar facilities in the state, needs to update its programming and keep up with community requests for service and changing and growing needs. The historically-significant current Library building requires considerable maintenance and improvements, with ongoing flooding and structural issues. A new Sharon Public Library project has been planned and designed for One School Street following a multi-year feasibility study started in 2014 resulting in the July 2017 approval for a \$7.5 million grant from the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners (MBLC). In May 2019, the Town voted to proceed with the Sharon Public Library Project Funding in consecutive votes, one at Town Meeting and a subsequent vote via a ballot question at the Town Election.

With plans for the new Library moving ahead, the Town should thoughtfully examine how to repurpose and re-use the existing Library building. The current Library building is a historically-significant structure in a key location in Post Office Square. Thus, repurposing the building for a multi-use program may bring both activity and potential revenue streams to cover its renovation and maintenance. The re-use of the current Library is also discussed in the Cultural and Historic Resources and Economic Vitality elements.

The Town is in the design phase of the construction of a new high school. The Sharon Public Schools and the Town conducted the Sharon High School (SHS) feasibility study beginning in 2017 and included several scenarios with different programs, designs, and siting options. Community-wide discussions have taken place, exploring many choices including renovation or new construction. The current concept being pursued is for new construction on the existing SHS site with the existing building to be removed after completion of the new high school. Following the building construction, a portion of that site will be repurposed for sports fields and parking. As of May 2019, the Town was still inviting community input during the Schematic Design phase for the new SHS.

Figure 31: Proposed New Sharon Public Library Rendering from North Main Street



Source: <https://www.sharonpubliclibrary.org/expansiondesign.asp>

Figure 32: Rendering of Option N4 for the new Sharon High School (March 13, 2019 presentation)



Source: <https://www.shsbuilding.com/documents/pages/presentations>

MORE INFORMATION:

Renewable Energy Leader



Solar panels are not just limited to buildings; photo voltaic solar panels can be installed as canopies over parking lots to increase solar power generation. Source: <http://www.sensiblesolarsolutionsaz.com/about.html>

In line with the passage of Article 23 at the May 5, 2014 Town Meeting, the Town of Sharon could set a precedent of sustainability in the region as a leader in the adoption of renewable energy by installing solar panels on all new Town buildings and retrofitting existing buildings for solar in addition to working toward more efficient heating, cooling, and lighting throughout Town facilities.

Solar panel installation and efficiency improvements would be complementary to the Town's current efforts to implement a municipal electricity aggregation program, Sharon Power Choice. At the May 7, 2018 Town Meeting, the vote for the Town to pursue aggregation was approved. Since then, the Sharon's aggregation plan has been going through State regulatory review, with the Town targeting early 2020 for program launch, depending on the duration of the State regulatory review and approval process (www.masspowerchoice.com/sharon).

At the 2019 Annual Town Meeting, Article 25 was passed, which is a resolution to adopt a targeted reduction in greenhouse gas emissions to zero by 2050 and to transition to 100% of renewal energy for the town. The article calls for Town officials to consider the emission reduction goal in all its decision-making processes, establish a system to monitor and report the town's carbon emissions, and encourage the State to also adopt a similar goal.

Infrastructure

Roadway Infrastructure and Street Design

Sharon's road and sidewalk systems are critical to the functioning of the town and quality of life for residents. The Town's transportation infrastructure is described in detail in the Transportation and Mobility element, and as described in that element, the Town is continuing to update and maintain its existing roadway infrastructure to incorporate Complete Streets Design standards where appropriate, including prioritizing new sidewalks, bike paths, and ADA-compliant materials and design features.

Water Supply and Existing Water System

The Town's water supply is obtained from four gravel pack wells and two well fields. Sharon is permitted by Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MADEP) (through the Massachusetts Water Management Act, M.G.L. c. 21G) to withdraw a total of 3.12 MGD from these wells, which are located in two separate basins and are regulated by the Water Management Act. See Fig. 33 for location of the wells and water tanks in town.

The Superintendent of Public Works has reported that the drinking water has good overall quality and requires minimal treatment (sodium hypochlorite for disinfection, sodium fluoride for dental protection, and potassium hydroxide for pH adjustment/corrosion control). There have been reports that the existing drinking water supply has elevated iron and manganese concentrations; however, they do not exceed current drinking water standards, and the Town is currently evaluating treatment techniques to reduce those levels.

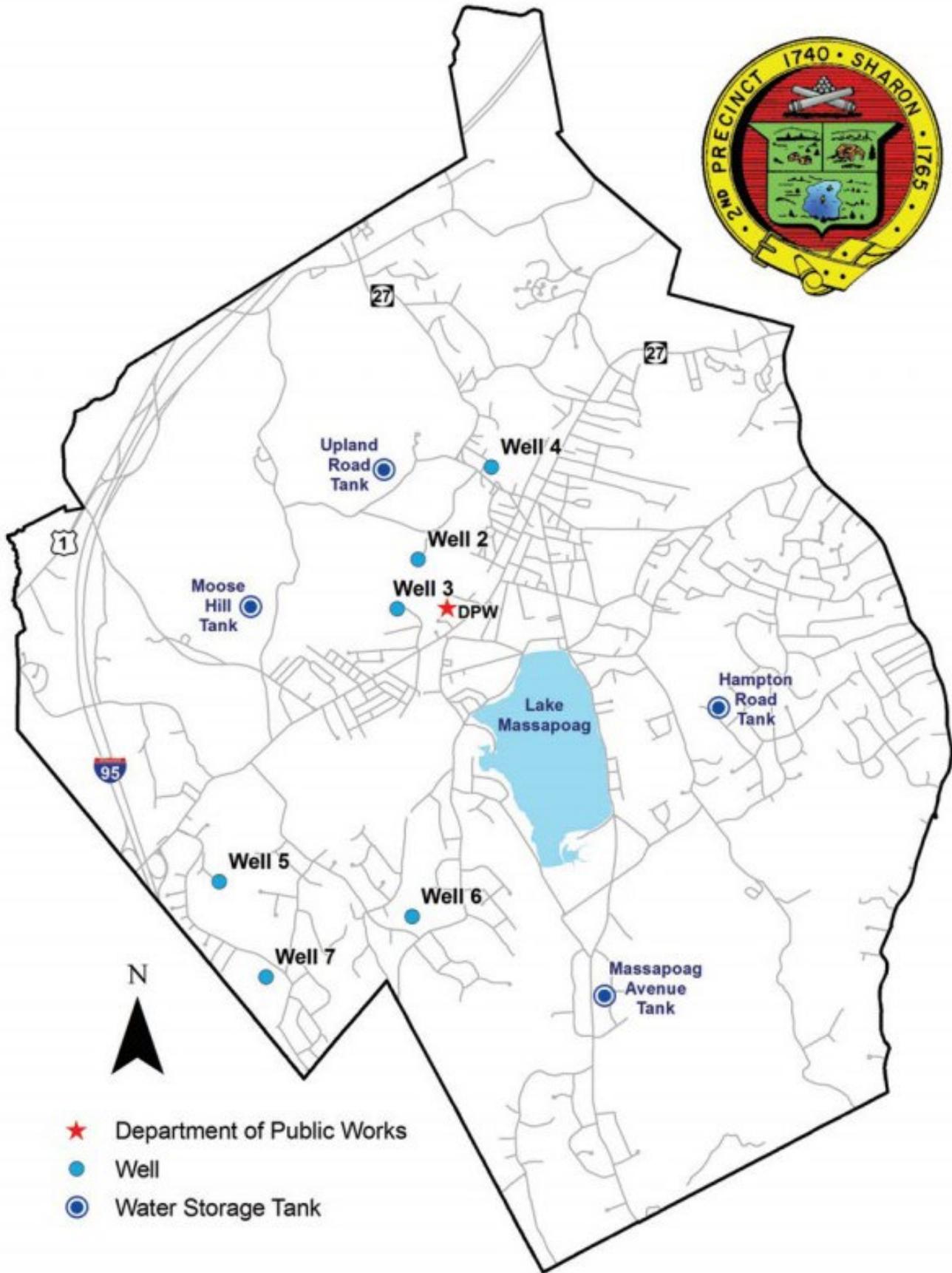
The Town's existing water system, while dated, is in good condition and continues to supply high-quality water. Concerns were raised through community input that the ability of the Town to provide high-quality water could be threatened by new development and climate change and that Sharon must be proactive to protect this precious resource through forward thinking policy and technology. The Town has begun requesting that new development proposals include the study and investigation of additional

MORE INFORMATION:

A **well field** is a series of wells that flows to the well station.

A **gravel packed well** is a single well dug into the aquifer with a screen at the bottom to allow water in, which goes to the well station.

Figure 33: Town Water Supply



Source: Sharon Water Quality Report for 2018

methods to enhance the Town’s water supply infrastructure. The Town’s Water Department serves approximately 98% of Sharon’s residences with drinking water. The remaining properties in Sharon use private wells to obtain drinking water. The water system is maintained at a hydraulic grade line of 426 feet. The Town maintains four water storage tanks with a total combined volume of three million gallons. Three of the tanks – the Hampton Road tank (installed in 1964), the Massapoag Avenue tank (installed in 1955), and the Upland Road tank (installed in 1935) – are steel tanks that were recently repainted. The Moose Hill tank (installed in 1952) is a concrete storage tank.

In the 2010 Water Department Master Plan Draft, there was an indication that the Town had a minor storage volume deficiency. However, since 2006, the volume of water pumped has dropped, and in 2017, Sharon withdrew an

MORE INFORMATION:

Sharon’s aquifers are higher in elevation than those in adjacent towns and provide water to the residents of Foxboro and Mansfield.

average of 1.07 million gallons per day (MGD) from these wells – below the amount permitted by the Massachusetts Water Management Act. This reduction in water pumped is likely the result of the Town’s water conservation efforts, including more restrictive outdoor water use regulations, as well as repairs to the water mains.

The Town’s water distribution system is made up of approximately 120 miles of water mains consisting of asbestos-cement, cast iron (lined and unlined), galvanized steel, polyvinyl chloride (PVC), ductile iron, and copper pipes, ranging in size from 1-inch to 20-inches. The system

Table 12: Sharon Well and Pump Station Summary

Station Number	Year Built ¹	Well Dimensions		Pumping Capacity ¹		Current Pump Operating Rate (gpm) ²	Safe Sustained Yield (Zone II) (gpm) ¹	WMA Maximum Daily Rate (gpm) ²	Last Redeveloped ¹	Standby Power ¹
		Inner Casing Diameter (inches) ¹	Depth ² (feet)	Flow (gpm)	Head (feet)					
2	1979 ³	9-8" wells	Varies from 28-42 ft b.g	P1=250 P2=350	P1=255 P2=280	118	300	325	1998	None
3	1954	24	45	500	231	97	275	265	2008	None
4	1959	18	85	840	285	364	840	695	1994	Natural Gas
5	1972	36	58	270	235	144	300	325	1997	Natural Gas
6	1976	24	56	450	215	0	450	245	1996	None
7	1989	6-8" wells	Varies from 37-44 ft b.g.	350	250	141	320	315	Tested in 2001	Natural Gas
Totals				2,760 gpm ⁴		846 gpm	2,485 gpm	2,170 gpm		

¹ Source: Draft Water Supply Master Plan, dated February 2010

² Source: MADEP 2017 Public Water Supply Annual Statistical Report

³ Well Station 2 was originally a wellfield built in 1915. Use of the wellfield was discontinued and single gravel packed well was constructed in the 1960s. In 1979, the single gravel pack well was abandoned, and the wellfield was re-instated

⁴ Using Well Station 2 flow of 350 gpm

was constructed in 1885 and portions of the existing water mains installed in 1885 are still in place.

More than half of Sharon is located within the groundwater or surface water protection overlay districts which protect the water supply and quality, in part, by placing constraints on development within these areas. See Table 12, Sharon Well and Pump Station Summary.

Wastewater System

The issue of wastewater capacity has been identified as a major limiting factor for both residential and commercial growth, development, and renovation of existing buildings. This may be the most significant town development constraint. According to the Town's septic system regulations (Article 7.06), it is possible that many septic tanks are likely to be in failure (due to their age). Failing septic systems have been known to cause groundwater and surface water contamination.

Other than the wastewater treatment facility for the Sharon High School and Middle School, Sharon does not have a municipal sanitary sewer system to serve residential or commercial properties. The town relies completely on on-site septic systems, leaching fields, and package treatment plans for wastewater management, including for non-residential areas. However, some buildings and properties near the perimeter of the town have worked with neighboring towns to utilize their sewer systems. In addition, some individual properties (such as golf courses and larger developments) have constructed private wastewater treatment systems to treat their waste. Wastewater management at the local level is guided by the Town's Board of Health Regulations, which are more stringent than the State's Title 5 regulations.

Several years ago, the Town did a preliminary investigation into connecting to the Massachusetts Water Resource Authority (MWRA) sewer line on the Norwood line; however, due to the potential costs associated with the sewer line it was determined that the connection was not feasible at that time.

Stormwater Management

The Town of Sharon is currently meeting the federal and state stormwater management requirements. Sharon's Conservation Commission (with MassDEP's assistance) ensures that work within the town's wetland and protected areas comply with the Massachusetts Wetland Protection

MORE INFORMATION:

Water and Energy Efficiency

In addition to the protections placed on its water supply, Sharon residents have recognized the need to increase water and energy efficiency on a comprehensive scale – helping to ensure a sustainable water supply and contribute to a more sustainable future by reducing Sharon's greenhouse gas emissions. As referenced previously, the following text of approved Article 23 from the 2014 Town Meeting text outlines Sharon's commitment to reducing greenhouse gas emissions:

“To see if the Town recognizes that greenhouse gas emissions generated by fossil fuels have already set climate change in motion, and that arresting these changes will require actions at every level of society, including federal, state, local and individual, to:

- Become more water- and energy-efficient in our homes, businesses, schools and town facilities.
- Incorporate water- and energy-efficiency into all new buildings and developments.
- Adopt clean, renewable energy sources such as wind and solar.

Sharon Town Meeting hereby encourages every elected and appointed town official to promote measures that conserve vital water and energy resources and minimize carbon emissions.”

Sharon residents recently approved Article 25 at the 2019 Town Meeting that the Town adopt a goal to reduce gas emissions to zero by 2050 and that the officials and Town staff consider this goal during all municipal decisions to the extent feasible.

Act (WPA), the 2008 MassDEP Stormwater Management Handbook, and the Rules and Regulations of the Sharon Conservation Commission. The current Rules and Regulations of the Sharon Conservation Commission include more stringent stormwater management standards than the 2008 MassDEP Stormwater Management Handbook.

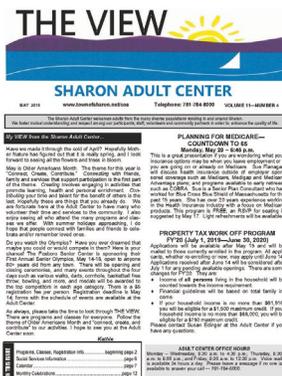
MORE INFORMATION:

The Neponset River Watershed Association, a grassroots conservation group, has been working with individual towns as well as the Neponset Stormwater Partnership that includes Sharon. For further information on the partnership, see <https://www.neponset.org/projects/neponset-stormwater-partnership/> and <https://yourcleanwater.org/>

The Town is beginning the process of updating its stormwater management regulations and systems to comply with new federal stormwater regulations, specifically the EPA 2018 MS4 permit. With the help of the Neponset Stormwater Partnership and the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC), the Town's Engineering Division completed a Stormwater Management Plan. This document explains the Town's approach to the following requirements of the MS4 permit: Public Outreach and Education; Public Involvement and Participation; Illicit Discharge Detection and Elimination Program; Construction Site Stormwater Runoff Control; Post Construction Stormwater Management; and Municipal Stormwater Infrastructure Operation and Maintenance Plan. The Town is on track to meet the next MS4 deadline of July 2020.

Sharon is currently a member of the Neponset Stormwater Partnership, which includes the neighboring towns of Canton, Dedham, Foxborough, Medfield, Milton, Norwood, Quincy, Stoughton, and Westwood, along with MAPC and the Neponset River Watershed Association. The Neponset Stormwater Partnership looks to address and coordinate stormwater management at the regional scale.

Figure 34: The Sharon Adult Center Newsletter



Source: Town of Sharon Adult Center

Social Services Infrastructure

Social Services

Public infrastructure often refers to physical structure, but in the context of the systems or structures that create a whole community, social services are a vital part of the town. As described in more detail in the Community Health element, the Town provides programs and referral services through the Sharon Adult Center/Council on Aging (COA), Commission on Disabilities, Library, Health Department, Housing Authority, Recreation Department, and Schools. An overview is offered here to emphasize how social services is explicitly connected to infrastructure.

The Town's Council on Aging offers a wide range of assistance to adults who are 60 years old or older and their families, all residents with disabilities, and in some instances, younger adults. The COA has seen a marked increase in program and service demand with requests ranging from social service and financial assistance referrals to a wide variety of educational and recreation programs to transportation for non-driving older adults. COA works closely with other Town departments, including the Health Department, Recreation Department, and the Library and is also actively involved with COAs from neighboring towns and HESSCO, the regional Aging Services Access Point (ASAP) and Area Agency on Aging (AAA) for South Norfolk County. Coordination and expansion of social, financial, and health services, particularly for older adults, will be an ongoing effort for the Town. (See Community Health for more detail.)

An informal network of community and religious organizations provide some programs, coordinate efforts with service providers, fundraise, and support local community efforts. When not available in Sharon, residents use services and programs that are provided by agencies and organizations in neighboring towns, such as Father Bill's Place and MainSpring House, for free lunches and temporary housing.

Public Schools

The Sharon Public Schools (SPS) are one of the most frequently cited reasons that people choose to live in Sharon. The high quality of the school system is both a source of great pride as well as concern from a financial sustainability standpoint.

Sharon's Public School system includes three elementary schools, the Cottage Street School, East Elementary School, and Heights Elementary School, Sharon Middle School (SMS), and Sharon High School (SHS), which recently came in 35th among Massachusetts schools in the 2019 U.S. News Best High Schools rankings. Though population projections from MAPC have indicated a decrease in student-age population, the school system's overall enrollment has remained generally steady over the past ten years with a very slight increase in 2018 and 2019. Even with minor growth or decline in student population, SPS's buildings and facilities will continue to need maintenance and improvements as educational programs and technology evolve.

Discussion about concerns about the Sharon High School facilities began in 2013, with an existing conditions study prepared by the architecture firm SMMA, which showed that the existing building did not comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and also was not in compliance with Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) standards regarding classroom and school size in relation to the delivery of instruction. In 2016, the district submitted a Statement of Interest with the MSBA to secure State funding for renovating the existing facility or building a new high school. In February 2017, SHS was invited into the MSBA's 2017 Eligibility Period, during which the district secured community support to enter into a Feasibility Study. The SHS Building Project is currently in Schematic Design phase for the new SHS facility.

MORE INFORMATION:

Town-wide sustainability efforts related to infrastructure and services have significant grassroots support. Information and assistance for programs ranging from recycling and residential composting to Complete Streets and Safe Routes to School have been supported at both a grassroots level as well as an organizational level. Groups such as the Sustainable Sharon Coalition, Sharon Saves, and Sharon Friends of Conservation have been actively providing Sharon residents with information about conservation and available sustainability programs as well as supporting new policies and services.



Sharon Middle School. Source: <https://www.sharon.k12.ma.us/Domain/181>

Of the Town's \$86.6 million Fiscal Year 2020 budget, Sharon's schools account for approximately 52% of the total (just under \$45.4 million). To maintain the expected high quality of the public schools, the School Committee, SPS, and the Town should continue to align priorities and coordinate recommendations as closely as possible, particularly regarding facilities and transportation.



What the Community Said

Key takeaways from the community input from meetings, the Fall 2018 online survey, meetings-in-a-box, interviews, and focus groups, and other submitted comments:

- From the 2018 Fall Survey, one of the highlighted qualities of the town is public safety and public safety services.
- As previously discussed, Sharon's lack of sewer system has been cited as a limiting factor to development in interviews, focus groups, and public meetings.
- The Sustainable Sharon Coalition would like to work with the Town and schools to institute sustainability initiatives regarding renewable energy and solid waste reduction practices.
- Services related to older adults, which is a growing segment of the population, will need to be comprehensive in the coming years, including transportation, housing, health, social, and financial assistance.
- The growing diversity of the town's residents creates the need for a more multi-cultural support structure that understands and responds to varied cultural and social needs.
- Multiple individuals, stakeholders, and groups across planning topics voiced concern that the Community Center is underutilized and not efficiently managed – citing difficulties and confusion around scheduling, pricing, and access.
- The high quality of the Sharon Public Schools is well-documented as a top reason for living in Sharon. In the 2018 Fall Survey, schools topped the list of responses for: "Why did you choose Sharon to live or work" and "Rank how important the following characteristics of Sharon are to its future as a desirable community to live."

GOALS AND RECOMMENDED POLICIES AND ACTIONS

The Goals and Recommendations in this section are placed within the greater context of the following MAPC MetroFuture Goals:

Goal #11 - The region will be prepared for and resilient to natural disasters and climate change.

Goal #27 - Children and youth will have access to a strong system of early education programs, after-school programs, teen centers, and youth organizations.

Goal #28 - Public schools will provide a high-quality education for all students, not only in the fundamentals, but also in areas like health education, physical education, art, music, civics, and science.

Goal #54 - Roads, bridges, and railways will be safe and well maintained.

Goal #56 - The region will be a national leader in reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Goal #57 - The region will use progressively less energy for electricity, heating, cooling, and transportation.

Goal #58 - The region will produce less solid waste, and more of that waste will be recycled or composted.

Goal #59 - The region will produce more renewable energy and will obtain more of its energy from renewable sources.

Goal #61 - Water resources will be carefully budgeted and sustainably managed so that clean water is available for appropriate uses and development.

Goal #62 - The region's rivers, streams, lakes, and ponds will have sufficient clean water to support healthy aquatic life and recreational uses.



As described in Existing Conditions, the Town of Sharon has long had a solid foundation for its physical and social infrastructure. While community needs evolve, technology improves, and environmental policies change, the goals and recommendations listed here encourage the Town to continue being proactive in maintaining and improving the facilities and systems currently in place.

Goal 1: Improve the septic and sewage treatment conditions and facilities in town.

A vast majority of property owners in Sharon rely on on-site septic systems with leaching fields for wastewater management. A few properties utilize private package treatment systems or connect to treatment systems of neighboring towns. Based on conversations with the Master Plan Steering Committee and community members throughout the master planning process, it is evident that one of the major issues for the Town to address is its wastewater capacity and the presence of aging septic systems.

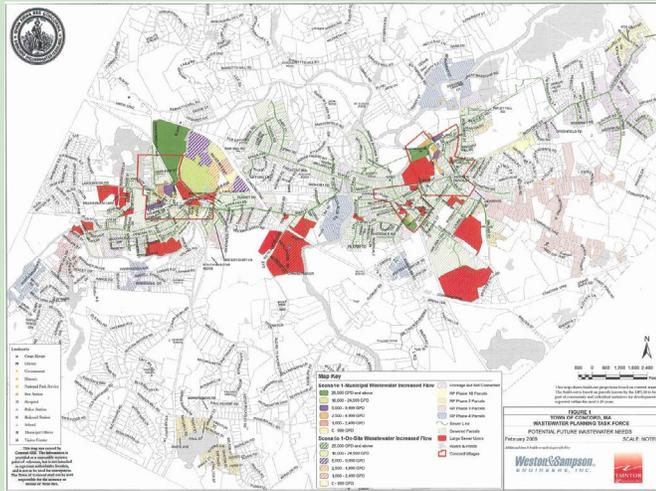
The recommendations described below center around two alternatives to improve Sharon's wastewater system: 1) investigate opportunities for community or shared septic systems, or 2) evaluate connecting to an existing wastewater treatment system (MWRA) or expanding the number of properties connected to the Mansfield wastewater treatment system. Both creating community (shared) septic systems and connecting to an existing wastewater treatment system in a neighboring town will most likely require installing new sewer infrastructure (pipes and manholes) within existing roadways.

Recommendations:

- 1A. Educate the public about septic systems, recommended maintenance, sustainable alternative systems, and how to identify a failing septic system. There is a significant amount of information regarding septic systems on the Town's website under both the Department of Public Works and Health Department. However, a periodic educational campaign would remind property owners of the benefits of proactive maintenance and awareness to alternative systems.

For more information: <https://www.townofsharon.net/septic%20system%20information> and <https://www.townofsharon.net/health-department/pages/septic-information>

Concord, MA Wastewater Management



In 2009 the Town of Concord developed a *Comprehensive Wastewater Management Plan* to assess the Town's current and future wastewater needs by examining the existing wastewater conditions throughout Concord and evaluating potential alternatives for wastewater management in the areas of town where property owners had or could have potential wastewater disposal problems. Concord had a limited sewer system that collects wastewater and brings it to a municipal treatment plant. Many homeowners use on-site septic systems, but several parcels were experiencing challenges with these systems such as: insufficient space, proximity to natural resource areas, high groundwater, and poor soil and bedrock ground conditions. The limited municipal sewer system was impacting the town's ability to grow, and many residents wanted to connect into the wastewater treatment plant. A *Comprehensive Wastewater Management Plan* (Plan) was developed to address the Town's need to expand its septic/sewer capacity. The Plan recommended that Concord increase its sewer system to include approximately 740 more parcels (gravity sewers and low-pressure sewer systems); construct two new localized collection system and neighborhood treatment systems to serve approximately 240 properties; construct shared septic systems for a limited number of parcels; and some parcels would continue to use their on-site septic system. The Plan also evaluated and recommended some methods for the Town to fund the sewer and septic improvements such as: betterment fees from individual property owners who benefit from the project; increased taxes; and increased fees to users of the Town's wastewater treatment system.

Source: Town of Concord, Massachusetts *Comprehensive Wastewater Management Plan Summary*, February 2009, prepared by Weston & Sampson Engineers, Inc.

- 1B. Complete a comprehensive wastewater management plan to analyze potential alternatives to improve Sharon's septic and sewer capacity, such as evaluating the possibility of connecting to the MWRA wastewater system in Walpole, Canton, or Stoughton, and further assessing a possible connection to Norwood; expanding the number of properties connected to the Mansfield wastewater treatment system; or the construction of localized collection systems and neighborhood treatment systems. Include a town-wide search to identify potential locations that could be designated for community septic systems as part of the comprehensive wastewater management plan. (Also see Economic Vitality)
- 1C. Communicate and discuss with property owners the benefits and costs of a community septic system. (Also see Economic Vitality)
- 1D. Resume conversations with Young Israel of Sharon and/or Temple Israel property owners to determine if a portion of either property could be the site for a potential community septic system for Post Office Square. Following up on the 2009 Post Office Square Area Plan, a preliminary assessment was conducted on the viability of the Temple Israel site for a community septic system in Spring 2009. There was no further action following the assessment. Resuming interest in this possibility, the Town would need to: determine the expected flow from Post Office Square, assess if a package treatment plant and groundwater discharge permit are required, develop estimates, and present the potential costs to Post Office Square property owners. (Also see Economic Vitality)

Goal 2: Maintain and improve existing Town facilities.

Recommendations:

- 2A. Assist and support the Library's planning, financing, and construction of its new facility.
- 2B. Conduct a planning process for the re-use of the current Library building to possibly include a mix of uses, such as a coffee shop, a shared co-working space, multi-use community space for use by residents and local organizations, among others. (Also see Cultural and Historic Resources and Economic Vitality)
- 2C. Provide updated technology in public facilities. For future renovations or construction, the Town should consider increasing sustainable building design and construction requirements towards LEED certification (e.g., the new Library's Silver LEED certification).
- 2D. Expand communication between the Town departments and the Schools to continue and improve coordination of maintenance and facility and transportation-related improvements. (Also see Goal 6, below)

Goal 3: Maintain and improve physical infrastructure systems in town.

Sharon's water system is an older system; however, the Town is doing an excellent job of rehabilitating aging portions of the system and completing the necessary maintenance. The Town will need to continue to evaluate treatment techniques to reduce the iron and manganese in its drinking water supply.

Recommendations:

- 3A. Continue to monitor, maintain, and improve, as necessary, the quality of the water supply and delivery systems, including creating emergency water connections with neighboring communities, as appropriate. (Also see Open Space, Recreation, and Natural Resources)
- 3B. Continue to evaluate water treatment methods to reduce the iron and manganese concentrations in the drinking water.
- 3C. Investigate and improve stormwater infrastructure to support a more sustainable system.

MORE INFORMATION:

What is Green Infrastructure?

Green infrastructure is an approach to stormwater management that protects, restores, and/or mimics the natural water cycle. Examples of green infrastructure components include: rain gardens, green roofs, permeable paver parking lots, bioretention cells, tree filter boxes, and constructed wetlands. Green infrastructure can be adapted and incorporated at a wide range of scales from an individual property to an entire watershed.

Source: <https://www.epa.gov/green-infrastructure/what-green-infrastructure>



Example of permeable pavement that can treat and/or store rainwater where it falls. Source: <https://www.epa.gov/green-infrastructure/what-green-infrastructure>



Rain garden outside of the Sharon Historical Society built by Binah School students. Source: Sharon Historical Society (via Google)

- 3D. Monitor the effectiveness of the Town's stormwater bylaw as well as the Rules and Regulations of the Sharon Conservation Commission. Review the bylaw and regulations for conformance to all federal and state stormwater management requirements.
- 3E. Revise bylaws and regulations to be consistent with MAPC recommendations for proper stormwater management practices.
- 3F. Continue to implement the Massachusetts MS4 permit requirements and MassDEP Stormwater Management Policy.
- 3G. Evaluate opportunities to incorporate green infrastructure components into existing paved and unpaved areas, particularly for municipal projects, whenever possible. In conjunction, revise the Town's existing bylaw and regulations to require the use of green infrastructure components into future projects to the maximum extent feasible.
- 3H. For the purposes of reducing stormwater runoff and flooding, encourage property owners to utilize more pervious surface materials and other sustainable solutions on their existing developed properties.
- 3I. Coordinate infrastructure maintenance with new infrastructure development and other construction or maintenance opportunities, particularly with utilities and non-Town agencies and entities, to include sustainable goals, as supported by the Town, and to decrease project costs.
- 3J. Improve communications infrastructure and technology by working with service providers to minimize "dead zones" in town.
- 3K. Continue to explore new policies, programs, and technologies to further the town's environmental sustainability, including support of solar energy for public facilities.

Goal 4: Expand funding sources to improve infrastructure, programs, and services.

Recommendations:

- 4A. Study potential eligibility for road and infrastructure grants such as MassWorks, the potential for Sharon to become a Housing Choice Community, and the feasibility of participating in MassHousing's Planning for Housing Production Program, to help fund infrastructure related to affordable housing creation.
- 4B. Explore potential use of a "betterment" tax, development fees, district improvement financing, and other financing tools. (Also see Economic Vitality)
- 4C. Consider applying for State Revolving Funds to be used for infrastructure improvements.
- 4D. Consider hiring a full- or part-time town planner or staff person who can coordinate Town efforts and initiatives and pursue grants and funds to support service and infrastructure improvements, coordination of communications and social services, and other related programs and services. (Also see Cultural and Historic Resources, Economic Vitality, Housing, Land Use and Zoning, Transportation and Mobility, and Open Space and Natural Resources)

Goal 5: Improve communication and social service systems in town.

Recommendations:

- 5A. Improve communication between the Town government, residents, and institutions.
- 5B. Enhance coordination and communication for improved emergency management planning.
- 5C. In coordination with Community Health goals and recommendations, evaluate the increasing and changing demand for Town services and programs for all residents, particularly for older adults, and coordinate available services and programs with a formal referral system. The Town should assess the needs and costs to provide additional support for existing Town programs and services run through the Sharon Adult Center/Council on Aging, Health Department, Recreation Department, and other departments.
- 5D. Educate residents, businesses, and property owners about existing physical infrastructure conditions (e.g., roadways, sidewalks, septic, wastewater, and stormwater) as well as the Town's available social services (e.g., Council on Aging and Health Department) and the costs of maintenance and service delivery. (Also see Community Health)

Goal 6: Support the continuing quality of the Sharon Public Schools.

Recommendations:

- 6A. Support, where feasible, strategic objectives and initiatives from the Sharon Public School Strategic Plan 2018-2021, particularly pertaining to facilities and infrastructure.
- 6B. Create multi-use space(s) at the High School that could be available to the community for use outside of school hours. Feedback from arts and cultural groups indicated that there is demand for multi-use spaces in the schools. With the planned High School project, there is an opportunity to meet the need for community use by providing spaces that are accessible to the public after hours and that have flexibility to change use over time depending on demand and demographic changes.
- 6C. Expand communication between the Town departments and the Schools to continue and improve coordination of maintenance and facility and transportation-related improvements. (Also see Goal 2)
- 6D. Maintain and upgrade the buildings and facilities of the school district so they are up to current code and integrate the necessary technology to support the needs of the administration, staff, and students.
- 6E. Consider short- and long-term economic and transportation impacts and population projections in school restructuring decisions.



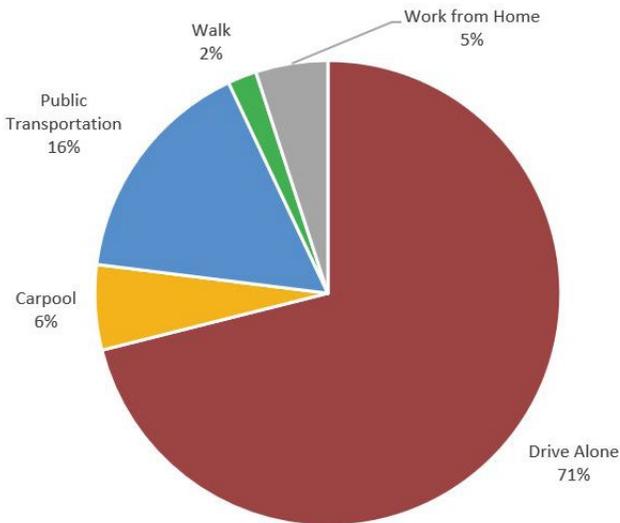
4.7 TRANSPORTATION AND MOBILITY

Introduction

Sharon, known for its farms, Lake Massapoag, and other beautiful natural resources, is also a commuter town. With excellent access to the regional highway network, including Route 1, Route 24, Route 27, and Interstate 95 (I-95), as well as an MBTA commuter rail station, many residents commute north to Boston and Cambridge, south to Providence, and to surrounding towns. The location of housing, public facilities, and other major destinations all greatly impact the ease of mobility of residents. As a result, considerations about land use as it relates to social and physical connections and residents' mobility are a main focus in this Master Plan.

This element describes common modes of transportation in Sharon; details the accessibility of transportation for different populations; explores parking and roadway and sidewalk conditions; and offers recommendations for addressing the current gaps in mobility and related infrastructure and coordinating across different planning elements to improve transportation and mobility for all residents.

Figure 35: Mode to Work in Sharon



Data Source: American Community Survey, 2012-2016 Five-Year Estimates, obtained from MAPC DataCommon on May 16, 2019

Transportation and Mobility Today: Existing Conditions

Within Sharon, connectivity and levels of mobility vary. At community meetings, participants said transportation issues continue to be challenging and that traffic impacts their quality of life. Most traffic congestion and parking issues tend to be around peak-hours near main roads, schools, and the commuter rail. With an MBTA commuter rail station located downtown, community support for more walking and biking networks, and interest in local transit service, there are many possible avenues for providing more transportation choice for residents to get to where they live, work, and play. Current conditions regarding modes of transportation and existing networks, as well as traffic volumes and operations and parking in the town center and for school-related functions are described below.

Modes of Transportation

Sharon is a suburban community, and as is common with commuter towns, residents often rely on personal vehicles as the main mode of transportation. The most common way people currently move through and around Sharon is by car, with approximately 71% of residents commuting to work by automobile each day. Sharon has the fourth lowest drive-alone to work rate of surrounding towns in the Three Rivers Interlocal Council (TRIC) region, behind Milton, Westwood, and Dover. This comparatively low drive-alone to work rate shows that Sharon residents are utilizing other modes of travel and may be more receptive to additional opportunities for multimodal travel, such as rideshare, carshare, shuttles, and improved bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, several of which the Town has been actively exploring. Expanding mobility options will especially help non-driving residents, particularly older adults whose homes are not always close to commercial and social destinations (see Fig. 35 and Table 13).

Table 13: Mobility Comparison in MAPC TRIC Subregion Existing Networks

	Drive Alone to Work	Transit to Work
Foxborough	86%	4%
Stoughton	78%	8%
Walpole	78%	8%
Norwood	77%	9%
Medfield	74%	9%
Randolph	74%	11%
Canton	73%	15%
Dedham	73%	10%
Needham	72%	11%
Sharon	71%	16%
Dover	70%	7%
Westwood	68%	17%
Milton	66%	12%

Data Source: American Community Survey, 2012-2016 Five-Year Estimates, obtained from MAPC Data Common on May 16, 2019.

Public Transportation

Sharon has one MBTA commuter rail station located near Post Office Square, just over one-quarter mile from the intersection of North Main Street and Depot Street. Commuters can access both Boston and Providence via this line. Of surrounding communities in the TRIC region, Sharon is ranked second highest for residents using public transportation to get work, only behind Westwood. There also may be additional residents taking public transit from neighboring towns, including Canton, due to location, train schedules, and parking availability at Sharon Station. Table 14 provides an overview of the Sharon commuter rail station characteristics.

In addition to the commuter rail there are a few other publicly available transit services, none of which provide comprehensive or complementary public transit for residents across the town. The closest bus services are Greater Attleboro Regional Transit Authority (GATRA) and Brockton Area Transit (BAT), but neither provides service in Sharon. There is also the MBTA Route 716 providing service from Cobbs Corner in Canton to Mattapan in Boston. The MBTA provides The RIDE paratransit service in Sharon. The RIDE generally operates from 5:00 AM to 1:00 AM daily, and trips must be scheduled one to seven days in advance. Constraints have been noted for the RIDE van service, including the RIDE’s service area. To promote greater access to the commuter rail, the Town previously tested having a remote parking facility for the commuter rail and shuttle service to the station. The lot was originally located at Crescent Ridge and then was relocated closer to the center of town. The service was not well-promoted and only ran briefly.

The Sharon Adult Center/Council on Aging provides a volunteer-run van for medical transportation for older adults and residents with disabilities. The van operates Monday through Friday mornings between 9:00AM and 11:30AM and offers rides to appointments within Sharon, Norwood, Canton, Stoughton, and Brockton. The request for services by older adults, particularly for transportation, has been increasing for medical appointments as well as a variety educational and recreational programs.

Parking at the commuter rail station is one of the main transportation concerns in Sharon. Parking is currently provided by both the MBTA for a daily rate and the Town through quarterly passes. Town passes sell out almost immediately, and parking access at the MBTA lot fills up quickly by early morning. Anecdotally, enforcement of parking passes at the Town lot is inconsistent. The Town has a recently revived Transportation Advisory Board whose first charge is to study the issue of commuter rail parking. This board will study options to improve existing train station parking and circulation, including ride share, carpooling, and shuttles, along with the feasibility of constructing a parking garage or other structure.

The Town has also been participating in the regional Neponset Valley Suburban Mobility Working Group, which includes representatives from the MBTA, MassDOT, Regional Transit Authorities, municipalities, institutions, private organizations, and other stakeholders to comprehensively look at mobility issues and develop a transportation strategy to address local and regional mobility needs. Many traffic and transit issues impact the region and require a wider lens for solutions, allowing and fostering coordination of policies, projects, and services between neighboring communities.

Table 14: Sharon Commuter Rail Station Characteristics

<i>Sharon Commuter Rail Station</i>	
Location	Depot Street in town center
Parking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 539 spaces in Town operated lot • 212 spaces in MBTA operated lot
Bike Parking	Capacity for approximately 51 bikes. Recorded as having capacity.
Multimodal Connections	Complete sidewalk network to the station, but lack of safe crosswalks across Route 27. There are also no bicycle lanes on Route 27. There is a very narrow shoulder and some narrow sidewalks north of station.
Service	Providence/Stoughton Line Service between Sharon and Boston Weekday service: 5:38 AM – 12:34 AM Weekend service: 6:58 AM – 11:41 PM Weekday: 20 inbound and outbound trips Saturday: 9 inbound and outbound trips Sunday: 7 inbound and outbound trips
Ridership	1,048 inbound daily boardings

Data Sources: Town-operated lot and MBTA-operate lot parking capacities: Town of Sharon Department of Public Works; Bicycle Parking Capacity and Utilization: 2009–10 Inventory at MBTA Facilities, CTPS; Service as of June 2019: www.MBTA.com/stops/Sharon; Ridership and Service Statistics: MBTA (2014).

Roadways

Sharon has about 147 miles of roadway⁷ and approximately 55 miles of sidewalk.⁸ In terms of functional classification, roads and highways are grouped into classes or types that are based on the road’s intended character of service. The key characteristic defining roadway classification is the degree to which a roadway emphasizes movement through an area versus local access. Within Sharon, Interstate 95 provides the greatest degree of movement, followed by Route 27, South Main Street, and Billings Street/East Street. The majority of roads in Sharon are local roads, which prioritize neighborhood access. More detail on the functional classification of roadways in Sharon is provided in Appendix B.

Main Roadways:

- I-95 runs along the western border of town and provides access to Boston to the north and Providence to the south.
- Route 27 runs in an east/west direction through town and is known as Norwood/Depot Street and North Main Street.
- South/North Main Street runs in a southwest to northeast direction through town through Post Office Square.
- South Main Street serves as the town’s “Main Street” from Chestnut Street to the south to School Street toward the north. Downtown Sharon is known as Post Office Square and is sometimes also called Town Center, which is the intersection of Depot Street, South Main Street, Pond Street, and Billings Street.

Pavement Condition/Management Program

The Town uses a digital pavement management program database to prioritize improvements and repaving for roadways and sidewalks. The road and sidewalk projects listed in Table 15 were completed in 2018 and those listed in Table 16 are scheduled for 2019. In Massachusetts, the Chapter 90 Program funds municipal capital improvements such as roadway preservation and improvement projects.

⁷ Town of Sharon Department of Public Works
⁸ Data from CTPS (Boston Region MPO)

Table 15: Roadway and Sidewalk Projects Completed in 2018

Roadway	Limits	Project Type
East Foxboro Street	Beach Street to Colburn Wolomolopoag Street to 600 ft. south	Road Repaved
Mohawk Street	East Foxboro to End	Road Repaved
Williams Road	Marcus to End	Road Repaved and Sidewalks Reconstructed
Bishop Road	Eisenhower Drive to End	Road Repaved and Sidewalks Reconstructed
Massapoag Avenue	Water Tank Access Road to Thorny Lea Road	Road Repaved and New Sidewalk Constructed
Laurel Road	South Main Street to End	Sidewalks Reconstructed
Mitchell Road	South Main Street to Laurel Road	Sidewalks Reconstructed
Moose Hill Street	Walpole Street to High Plain Street	Road Repaved

Source: Information received from Sharon Town Engineering via email sent on 5/16/19.

Table 16: Roadway Projects Scheduled for 2019

Roadway	Limits	Project Type
Livingston Road	Sturges Road to Lakeview Street	Road Repaving and Sidewalk Reconstruction
Eisenhower Drive	Bishop Road to Castle Drive	Road Repaving and Sidewalk Reconstruction
Norwood Street (one lane)	Maskwonicut Street to Cobbler Lane	Road Repaving
Community Center Access Road	Massapoag Avenue to Parking Lot	Road Repaving and New Sidewalk Construction
Ames Street	Quincy Street to East Street	Road Repaved and New Sidewalk Constructed

Source: Information received from Sharon Town Engineering via email sent on 5/16/19.

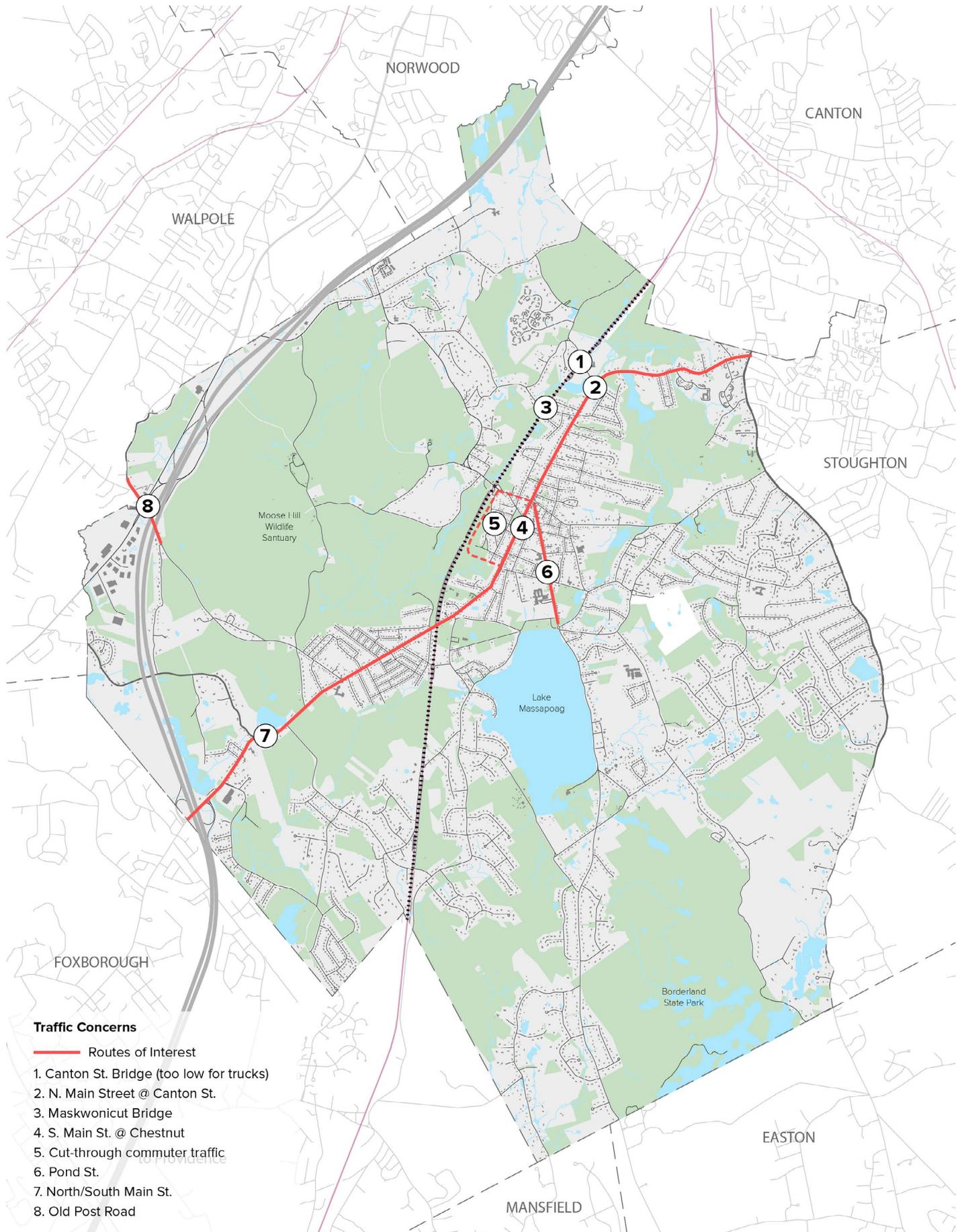
Traffic Volumes & Operations

Based on interviews with Town officials, traffic concerns appear to be related to congestion during morning and evening commuting hours and congestion related to commuter rail and school drop-off. Areas of concern for traffic operations in Sharon based on interviews with Town officials, existing reports and studies, and community input are summarized below, and depicted in Fig. 36. Further information on existing traffic studies and data is available in Appendix C. Identified issues by location include:

- **North/South Main Street:** Speeding and safety concerns due to the downward slope and curve of North Main Street approaching Cobbs Corner.
- **South Main Street at Chestnut Street:** Cut-through traffic in the neighborhood between South Main Street and east of the commuter rail station, particularly by morning commuters.
- **Post Office Square/Pond Street:** Excessive curb cuts for vehicular entrances and exits and pedestrian safety issues.
- **Old Post Road:** Potential for increased traffic as a result of new development.

Eight roadway projects within Sharon are programmed or likely to be programmed to receive federal funding in the Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization’s Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). Projects include signal and intersection improvements on South Main Street and the Maskwonicut Street Bridge over the MBTA-Amtrak Railroad. A full list of projects is provided in Appendix D.

Figure 36: Key Town and Community-Identified Traffic Concerns



Source: Town of Sharon GIS

Town Center Parking and School-Related Parking

The capacity for parking in town remains a contested issue. In Post Office Square, there is free one-hour on-street parking from 6:00 AM to 7:00 PM along South Main Street. There are multiple publicly accessible off-street and private parking lots in Post Office Square with the larger ones being the lot off Billings Street and High Street. A utilization study of parking in Post Office Square, including public spaces and private lots, was completed as part of the *2009 Post Office Square Area Plan*. The highest occupancy recorded in the lot off Billings Street was 68% at 2:00 PM. Overall the study found low parking utilization in Post Office Square, with the highest demand from 12:00-1:00 PM, during lunch hour. The study concluded that due to the availability of parking, the town does not have a physical parking shortage, but rather, has a perceived parking availability problem. There is currently no parking management plan for Post Office Square.

Parking availability, in addition to traffic at drop-off and pick-up, at each of the elementary schools, particularly Heights Elementary School, and at Sharon High School, has been an issue for school employees, parents, and students. Sharon Public Schools and the Department of Public Works have been working on parking management strategies and infrastructure modifications for each school, with strategies ranging from drop-off and pick-up policies to infrastructure improvements.

Walking and Biking

Walking and biking are important modes of travel for connecting to Sharon's open space resources, schools, neighborhoods, commercial areas, and commuter rail station. Alternative modes of transportation also reduce congestion and vehicle miles traveled. Residents of all ages, and particularly those who cannot or choose not to drive, are looking for a safe pedestrian and bicycle network to move within town.

When looking at streets and sidewalks, there is a notable differentiation in types of roads. Non-limited access roads are typically locally or State-owned roads that provide access to adjacent properties. This is in contrast to limited-access roads, or highways, that provide only limited access to adjacent properties and have a barrier separating opposing traffic. Local examples of limited-access roadways include Route 1 and I-95.

Approximately 48% of the Town's non-limited access roads have sidewalks on at least one side. Of the 13 municipalities in the TRIC region, Sharon falls in the middle in terms of percentage of roadway with sidewalks, as seen in Table 17.

The town center is characterized by a pedestrian-oriented environment with sidewalks on both sides of the street, decorative crosswalks, and two lanes of traffic with on-street parking. As part of the Master Plan, opportunities for upgrading sidewalks and pedestrian crossings can be evaluated for improved safety, comfort, and compliance with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) regulations.

Town officials report that there is demand for more sidewalks throughout Sharon. New sidewalks have recently been added on Massapoag Avenue, connecting to the middle school and high school and along Lakeview Street around Lake Massapoag. The Town has been trying to balance the creation of new sidewalks with the need to maintain existing sidewalks, especially those in older subdivisions. The large number of scenic roads in town presents an additional barrier to creating new sidewalks, as scenic roads require special procedures, such as involving the Historic Commission in the sidewalk design so as not to change the character of the road.

Table 17: Sidewalk Miles by Municipality in the TRIC Region

	<i>Total Non-Limited Access Centerline Miles⁷</i>	<i>Sidewalk Miles</i>	<i>Percentage Of Centerline Miles Of Sidewalks</i>
Dover	62	1	2%
Westwood	87	31	35%
Stoughton	121	46	38%
Canton	105	41	39%
Medfield	76	32	43%
Foxborough	104	47	45%
Sharon	115	55	48%
Walpole	137	74	54%
Dedham	103	62.4	61%
Milton	118	75.6	64%
Randolph	113	74	66%
Needham	134	103	77%
Norwood	121	95	79%

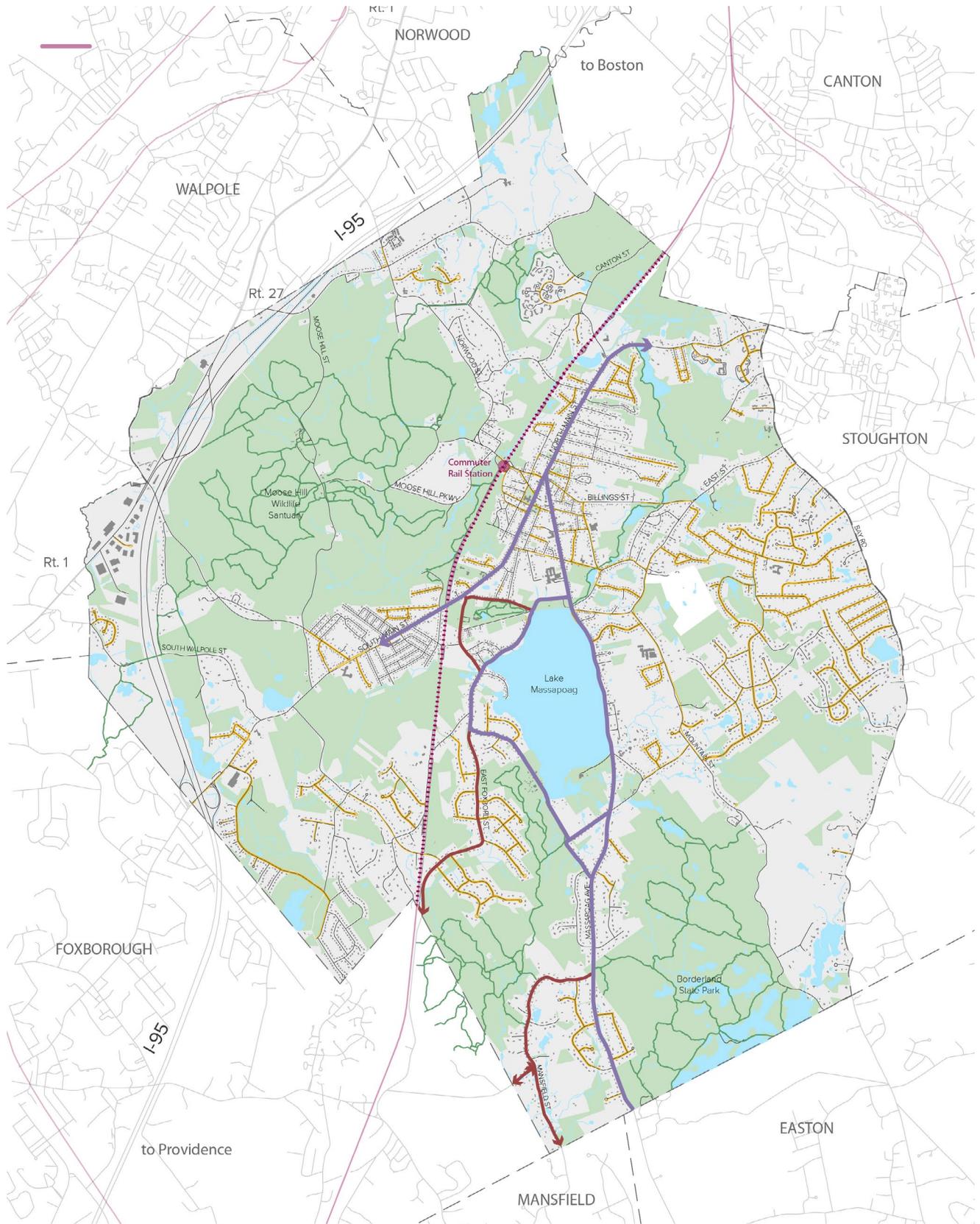
⁷ “Non-limited access centerline miles” refers to total length of roadways that provide access to adjacent properties, not including limited-access highways, such as Route 1 and I-95. The measurement for sidewalk miles does not differentiate between if a sidewalk is on both sides versus just one side of the street.

Source: CTPS; Note: CTPS has a lower number of miles of roadway listed for Sharon than the Town’s Department of Public Works. The table is helpful for general comparisons with neighboring communities.

Bicycle infrastructure in Sharon is limited but not unusual for the region. A comparison of bicycle infrastructure in Sharon to TRIC communities is provided in Table 18. The town currently has 0.2 miles of off-road multi-use paths. The Town worked with MAPC on the 2014 Lake Massapoag Bicycle Network Plan which identified the following three main goals: 1) Improve connectivity of Sharon’s natural and recreational resources; 2) Improve visibility of Sharon’s natural and recreational resources; and 3) Leverage Sharon’s natural and recreational resources for economic development. Recommendations focused on developing a bicycle network around Lake Massapoag to support non-motorized connections to Sharon’s open spaces and other destinations, including the local businesses. Fig. 37 illustrates desired bicycle connections in Sharon.

The hiking/biking trail system in Sharon includes: The 30-mile Warner Trail from Sharon to Rhode Island and the Bay Circuit Trail, part of a 200-mile corridor forming an outer ring around Boston, linking Sharon to Easton and Walpole, as well as recreational resources within Sharon. These recreational areas include Moose Hill Wildlife Sanctuary, Lake Massapoag, and Borderland State Park, as well as numerous other trails, such as King Philip’s Rock Trail, Friends Trail, Massapoag Trail, and many more.

Figure 37: Desired Bicycle Connections in Sharon



Transportation + Circulation

- Trails
- Sidewalks
- Commuter Rail (Providence/Stoughton Line)
- Commuter Rail Station
- Proposed Bicycle Path 1*
- Proposed Bicycle Path 2*
- * via MPAC Lake Massapoag Bicycle Network Plan

Data Source: Town of Sharon GIS; Proposed Bicycle Paths from Town of Sharon and MAPC 2014 Lake Massapoag Bicycle Network Plan.

Table 18: Comparison of Bicycle Facilities in the TRIC Region

	Total Non-limited Access Centerline Miles	Bicycle Lane Miles	Shared-use Path Miles	Marked Shared Lane Miles	Paved Bike Shoulder with 4 Foot Minimum Width Miles	Total Bike Network Miles	Percentage of Centerline Miles
Milton	118	4.1	2.8	6.6	0	13.5	11%
Needham	134	0	0.5	0	2.2	2.7	2%
Randolph	113	0	0.8	0	0	0.8	1%
Dedham	103	0.7	0	0	0	0.7	1%
Sharon	115	0	0.2	0	0	0.2	0%
Canton	105	0	0	0	0	0	0%
Dover	62	0	0	0	0	0	0%
Foxborough	104	0	0	0	0	0	0%
Medfield	76	0	0	0	0	0	0%
Norwood	121	0	0	0	0	0	0%
Stoughton	121	0	0	0	0	0	0%
Walpole	137	0	0	0	0	0	0%
Westwood	87	0	0	0	0	0	0%

Source: Central Transportation Planning Staff (CTPS) 2014, <https://www.ctps.org/node/3217>

Current Town Efforts

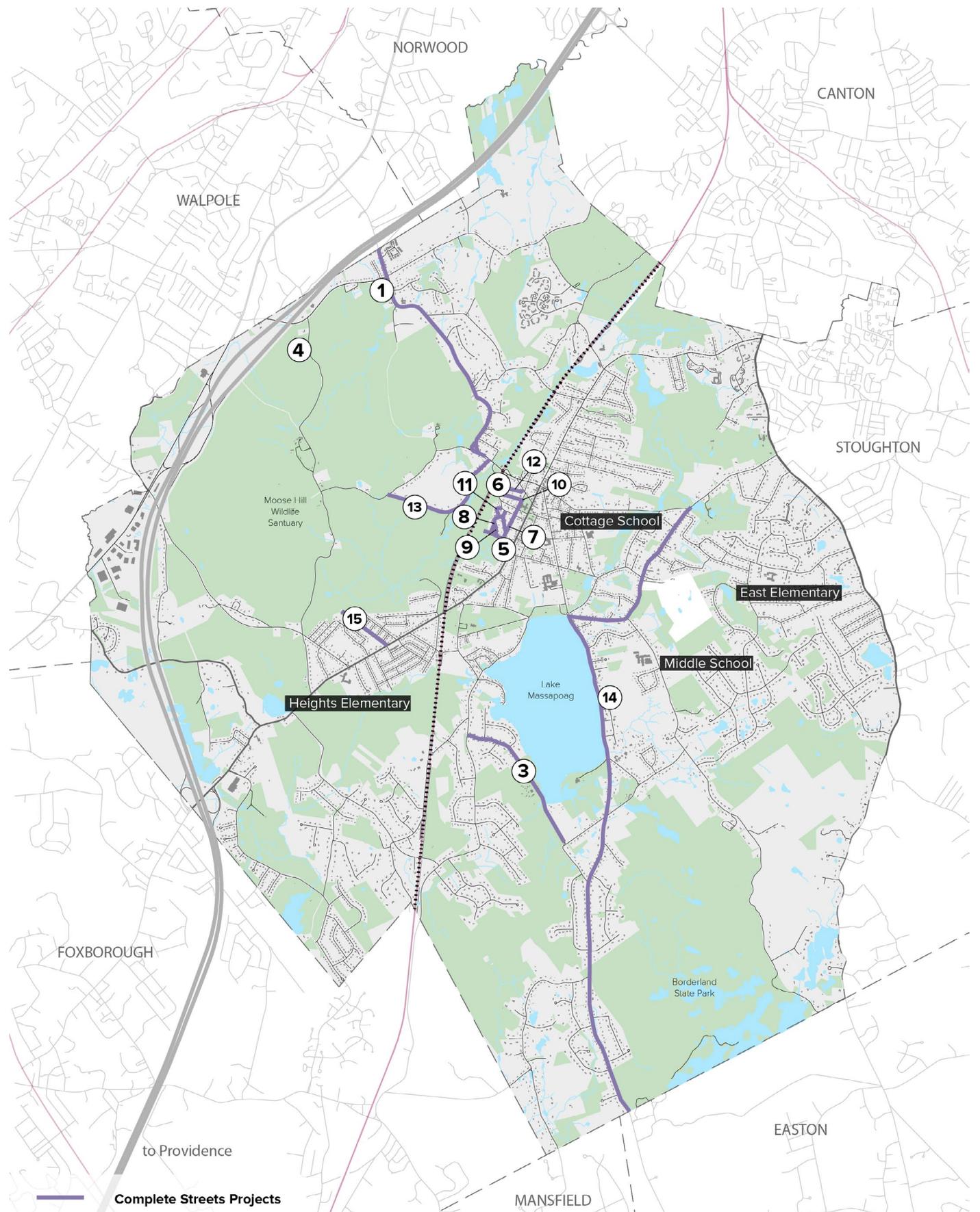
Complete Streets

Complete Streets bring together goals for pedestrians, cyclists, and public transit users to align priorities and create safe and sustainable transportation alternatives. In June 2018 Sharon finalized its Complete Streets Prioritization Plan, including 15 prioritized projects, as seen in Fig. 38. The prioritized Complete Streets projects in Sharon are listed in Table 19. The MassDOT Complete Streets Funding Program provides technical assistance and construction funds to municipalities that develop Complete Streets policies and prioritization plans. The plans identify projects to improve safety and provided a connected network for pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit users. Sharon can use funding from the program to develop a transportation network with connections between transit, schools, open space, and the town center. The types of improvements in Sharon’s prioritization plan include:

- Priority corridors for new sidewalks to connect to schools, parks, and train station
- Sharrows and bicycle route signage
- A bike trail to Easton

The Town is currently pursuing funding for sidewalks on Moose Hill Street (Priority #4) to connect to Heights Elementary School. The safety of children walking to school during rush hour when vehicle volumes are at their highest is one of the Town’s primary concerns.

Figure 38: Prioritized Complete Streets Projects



Source: Town of Sharon Department of Public Works.

Table 19: Prioritized Complete Streets Projects in Sharon

<i>Rank</i>	<i>Project</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Project Limits</i>
1	Norwood Street Train Station Sidewalk	Construct new sidewalk that will improve safety and pedestrian access to the Sharon Train Station, sharrows and bike route signage	From Terrapin Road to Edge Hill Road
2	East Street Sidewalk	Construct new sidewalk. Will provide connection to Middle School and East Elementary for students, sharrows and bike route signage	Paul Revere to Bay Road
3	Lakeview Street to Massapoag Ave	Construct new sidewalk that will improve safety on narrow roadway that has two large camps for children and the Lake Massapoag Yacht Club. Completes loop around Lake, sharrows and bike route signage	Livingston to Massapoag Avenue
4	Moose Hill Street Sidewalk	Construct new sidewalk that will improve safety for school children walking to Heights Elementary School, sharrows and bike route signage	From South Main to Walpole Street for students to Heights Elementary
5	Oakland Road Sidewalk	Construct new sidewalk. Will provide safer pedestrian connection to Train Station, sharrows and bike route signage	South Main Street to End
6	Pine Road Sidewalk	Construct new sidewalk. Will provide safer pedestrian connection to Train Station, sharrows and bike route signage	South Pleasant to End
7	Edgewood Road Sidewalk	Construct new sidewalk. Will provide safer pedestrian connection to Train Station, sharrows and bike route signage	South Pleasant to Chestnut
8	Valley Road Sidewalk	Construct new sidewalk. Will provide safer pedestrian connection to Train Station, sharrows and bike route signage	Edgewood to End
9	Sylvan Road Sidewalk	Construct new sidewalk. Will provide safer pedestrian connection to Train Station	Valley Road to End
10	South Pleasant Street Sidewalk	Construct new sidewalk. Will provide safer pedestrian connection to Train Station, sharrows and bike route signage	Chestnut Street to End
11	Ridge Road Sidewalk	Construct new sidewalk. Will provide safer pedestrian connection to Train Station, sharrows and bike route signage	Chestnut Street to Valley Road
12	Forest Road	Construct new sidewalk that will improve pedestrian safety and access to the Train Station, sharrows and bike route signage	Station Street to End
13	Moose Hill Parkway Sidewalk	Construct new sidewalk that will improve pedestrian access to the Train Station and Mass Audubon Site, sharrows and bike route signage	Norwood Street End of Upland Road to Upland Road at Moose Hill Street
14	Massapoag Avenue Sidewalk	Construct new sidewalk and extend bike trail. Sidewalk extends to Borderland State Park, sharrows and bike route signage	Water Tank to Easton
15	Berkshire Avenue	Construct new sidewalk to improve pedestrian safety and walking to Heights Elementary and bus stops for Middle and High School, sharrows and bike route signage	South Main Street to End

Source: Sharon Complete Streets Prioritization Plan, June 2018

Safe Routes to Schools

The MassDOT Safe Routes to Schools (SRTS) program is a federally-funded program that works with schools and communities to increase walking and biking among students. The program includes not just physical improvements for safety but the Five E's: Education, Encouragement, Enforcement, Evaluation, and Engineering. The Cottage Street School in Sharon won the Exemplary School of the year award in 2018. Four schools in Sharon currently participate in the program:

- Cottage Street Elementary School
- East Elementary School
- Heights Elementary School
- Sharon Middle School

These schools are all adjacent to corridors identified in the Complete Streets Prioritization Plan. The Complete Streets program enables safety and connectivity goals to be aligned between SRTS and Complete Streets.



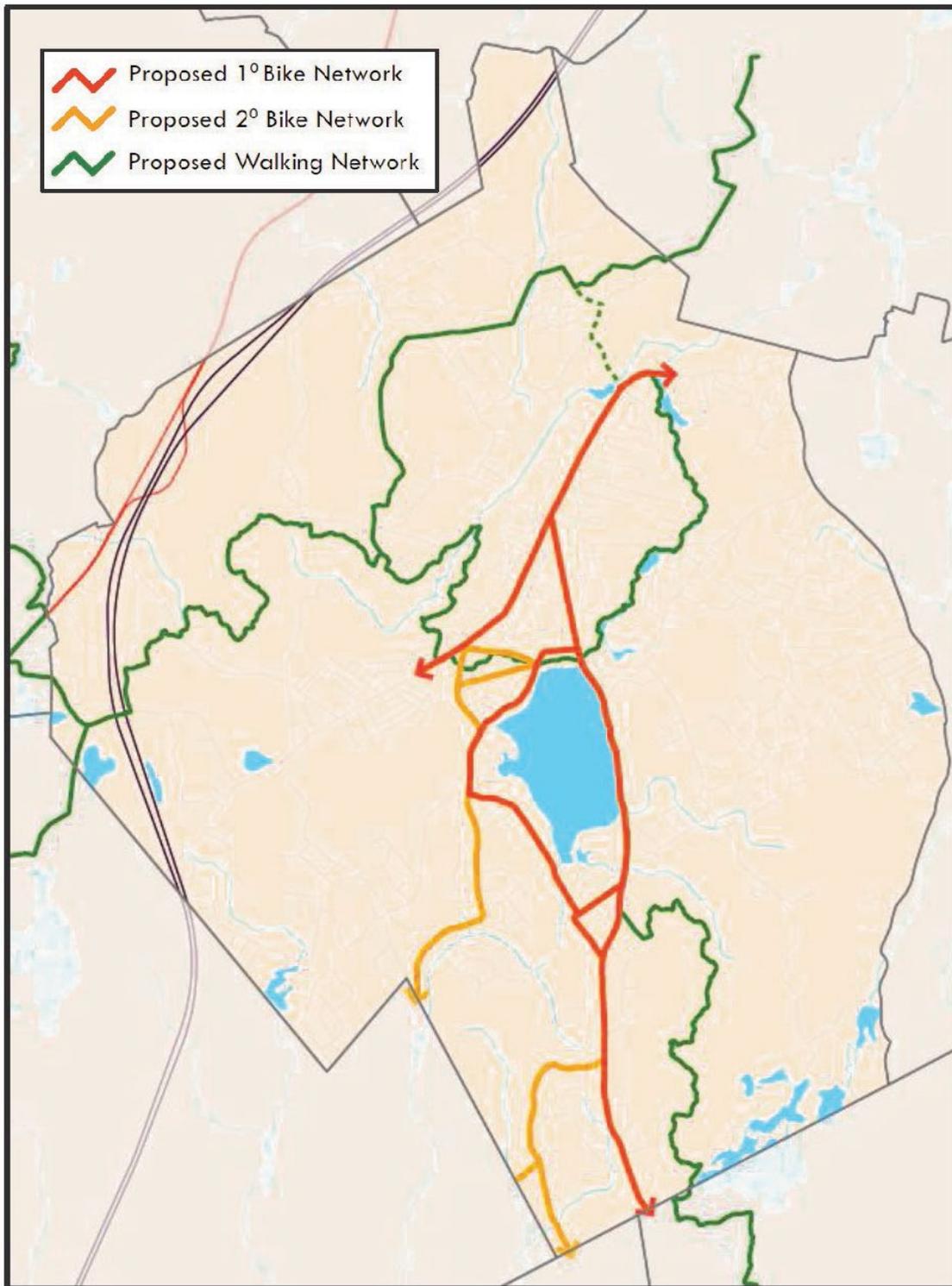
MORE INFORMATION:

According to the Inventory of U.S. Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Sinks 1990–2016, the transportation sector has been identified as a significant contributor to greenhouse gas emissions. Reducing excessive use of carbon-emitting ground transport options will be crucial to any effort to mitigate Sharon's contributions to climate change.

The primary mode of transportation for the majority of Sharon residents is the automobile. Changing transportation habits at the local level to prioritize low-emission or zero emissions transportation options (e.g., public transit, cycling, walking) can help to reduce Sharon's overall carbon footprint. Additionally, changing vehicle habits has the potential to address local traffic issues for those who require travel by vehicle.

Due in part to the work of local organizations such as the Sustainable Sharon Coalition (SSC), programs such as Safe Routes to School have been implemented with large degrees of success, increasingly walkability for students in the town and providing a number of benefits ranging from increased safety and health to overall greenhouse gas emission reduction.

Figure 39: The Lake Massapoag Bicycle Network Plan



Lake Massapoag Bicycle Network Plan (2014)

This plan, prepared by MAPC, identified bicycling patterns existing in 2014 in Sharon and laid out a framework to connect recreational areas through bicycle infrastructure. By making these connections, the town can be promoted as a destination for ecotourism, as over 40% of Sharon's land area is open space (over 6,500 acres). A map of the proposed bike network from the plan is provided in Fig. 39. The Bicycle Network Plan recommends providing bicycle infrastructure and wayfinding to guide visitors between points of interest in Sharon and using open space as an economic asset.

The bicycle network plan developed by MAPC identifies a 1-degree bike network, representing the routes most heavily traveled by bicyclists and the 2-degree network, representing popular side and alternative routes.
Source: https://www.townofsharon.net/sites/sharonma/files/u84/lake_massapoag_bicycle_network_plan.pdf



Sharon commuter rail station

What the Community Said

- In the Master Plan’s kickoff survey, about 26% of residents said traffic/transportation is the most challenging issue facing the town, and at the first two public meetings, participants noted that transportation and traffic present challenges that impact their quality of life.
- From community meetings and interviews, feedback indicates the biggest traffic concerns occur during rush hour when there are many cars on the main corridors that children are also using to walk to school, creating safety issues.
- Traffic along routes to schools and safety for students are major issues that the Town and schools have been working to improve.
- Parking is a significant concern at the commuter rail station.
- Sharon’s aging population will need enhanced transportation service options in the future. These services could also assist the school-age population and anyone else who cannot or chooses not to drive.
- There is demand for more bicycle infrastructure, including separate bike lanes, as documented in recent resident surveys and public meeting feedback and noted in interviews with Town officials, including along North/South Main Street.⁹
- Town officials believe there is potential to promote Sharon as a place for ecotourism. This corresponds with bike paths, lanes, and trails being the second highest response for what residents would like to see Sharon in the Town’s 2009-2016 Open Space and Recreation Plan survey.
- At community meetings, residents mentioned Bay Road as a priority for sidewalks.
- Almost 84% of respondents to the 2018 Fall Survey indicated that they drive 5 or more days a week for any reason, and 11% of respondents carpooled at least once a week.
- About 33% of the Fall Survey respondents indicated that they took the commuter rail on a weekly basis – though less than half of these riders indicated they rode the commuter rail 5 or more days a week
 - » Lower usage can possibly be attributed to the train schedule, parking constraints around the commuter rail station, which is often at full capacity during the work week, or because of people working from home part of the week.
 - » 72% of survey respondents identified methods of getting to/from the commuter rail station as “very important” or “somewhat important” when asked about transportation improvements in the next 10-15 years.
- 65% of the 2018 Fall Survey respondents indicated that they walk in town for any reason on a weekly basis – with almost 16% walking on a daily basis as a mode of transportation from one location to another.
 - » 73% of respondents identified “increased accessibility throughout town (e.g., more sidewalks, marked crossings, etc.)” as “Very important” or “Somewhat important” when considering transportation improvements in the next 10-15 years.
- About 24% of respondents to the 2018 Fall Survey indicated that they bike on a weekly basis; comments on the survey question indicated that this was limited to warmer months in the spring/summer.

⁹ Telephone interview with Town Engineer and Superintendent of Department of Public Works August 16, 2018

GOALS AND RECOMMENDED POLICIES AND ACTIONS

The Goals and Recommendations in this section are placed within the greater context of the following MAPC MetroFuture Goals:

Goal #45 - More people will use transit for work and personal trips.

Goal #46 - Commuters will have more options to avoid congestion.

Goal #47 - Most people will choose to walk or bike for short trips.

Goal #48 - The average person will drive fewer miles every day.

Goal #49 - Outlying areas will see little increase in traffic congestion.

Goal #50 - People with disabilities will find it easier to get around the region.

Goal #51 - Regional transportation planning will be linked with sustainable land use planning.

Goal #54 - Roads, bridges, and railways will be safe and well maintained.

Goal #56 - The region will be a national leader in reducing greenhouse gas emissions.



There are many avenues of opportunity for enhanced transportation and mobility in Sharon. As stated in the Existing Conditions, mobility in Sharon is supported by proximity to the regional highway system, an MBTA commuter rail station located in the town center, a walkable downtown area, and a large network of open space that could accommodate more walking and biking trails. At the same time, the town lacks comprehensive bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, has areas of safety concern for drivers and pedestrians, has limited local transit and first/last mile connection services, and does not have policies in place for better connecting new development to existing mobility resources, such as the commuter rail station. Residents have expressed support for increasing town-wide walking and biking connections, improving pedestrian safety and accessibility, expanding local transit options, and integrating transportation and land use policies and planning. The four goals developed from identifying these issues and opportunities provide a framework to guide the Town in moving forward to implement the identified transportation recommendations that will improve mobility options for residents, workers, and visitors of Sharon of all ages and abilities.

Goal 1: Continue to adhere to and promote Complete Streets principles with all roadway infrastructure improvements to increase walkability and bikeability.

Expanding multimodal options is key to shifting how people get in and around Sharon. Residents have demonstrated support for safer and more connected networks for walking and biking, especially for accessing schools and recreational areas. The 2018 Fall Survey showed that 65% of respondents walk on a weekly basis and 24% bike on a weekly basis. Bike paths, lanes, and trails were the second highest response for what residents would like to see in Sharon's future in the 2016 Open Space and Recreation Plan survey.

The Town has existing resources that it can expand upon to grow its walking and biking networks, such as the Complete Streets Policy and Prioritization Plan, developed in 2018, the Safe Routes to Schools program, the Town's automated pavement management system to prioritize new sidewalks and maintenance, and the Lake Massapoag Bicycle Network Plan developed by MAPC. Incorporating Post Office Square into the walking and biking networks is also important, as it provides a central destination with commercial services and a connection to the commuter rail.

Recommendations:

- 1A. As part of the Town's pavement management system and Complete Streets Prioritization Plan, continue to prioritize the creation of sidewalks, bike lanes, and trails starting with corridors connecting key destinations (e.g., half-mile from the train station, schools, Lake, and parks). Once the half-mile corridors have been established, appropriate portions of the system should be expanded, particularly for bikes.
- 1B. Advance design and construction for prioritized bicycle and pedestrian projects through existing local and State funding sources. Chapter 90 funds, development mitigation, Safe Routes to School, and MassWorks Infrastructure Program Grants can be used for both design and construction, while the MassDOT Complete Streets funding program and the State Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) can be used for construction funding.
- 1C. Identify opportunities to implement and expand the recommendations in MAPC's 2014 Lake Massapoag Bicycle Network Plan, to connect on-street and off-street bicycle infrastructure to open space and recreation, as well as to the commercial and residential areas of town in order to reduce vehicle dependence. The Town should develop town-wide pedestrian and bicycle master plans to link regional and local connections and fill in network gaps. MAPC has developed the Trail Implementation Toolkit to empower local municipalities and town planners to grow their walking and biking networks.
- 1D. Evaluate options for bike share companies to provide services in Sharon.
- 1E. Identify opportunities to implement recommendations from the 2009 Post Office Square Area Plan or consider new strategies to improve traffic circulation and promote a "park once and walk" environment to reduce congestion and unnecessary vehicle trips. Clear parking signage should be included with other wayfinding signage to reduce traffic related to searching for parking.
- 1F. Institute a parking management plan for Post Office Square based on parking utilization findings from the 2009 Post Office Square Area Plan or updated parking study.
- 1G. Designate rideshare drop off/pick up zones for services, like Uber and Lyft, in desirable areas, such as North/South Main Street and around the commuter rail station, to provide curbside management and integration of new technologies for dynamic curbside management in the future to allow more flexible use of curb space in busy areas.

Goal 2: Improve pedestrian safety and accessibility for all ages and abilities through Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance.

Transportation options in Sharon are especially important for older adults and children. Both of these groups have specialized transportation and mobility needs that can support one another. The safety of children walking to school during rush hour when the most vehicles are on the road is one of residents' primary concerns. Creating safer and more accessible walking connections for all ages and abilities that enable more people to walk can help reduce two major traffic concerns in Sharon: peak hour congestion around schools and the commuter rail station, and parking availability at the elementary schools and Sharon High School.

In the 2018 Fall Survey, 73% of respondents identified "increased accessibility throughout town (e.g., more sidewalks, marked crossings, etc.)" as very important or somewhat important in the next 10-15 years. Although Post Office Square is characterized by sidewalks and pedestrian crossings, there are opportunities to improve the safety and comfort of pedestrian infrastructure and upgrade for compliance with the ADA. These could be upgraded curb ramps, raised crosswalks, or accessible pedestrian signals. Applying these treatments outside of Post Office square can help reduce speeding and improve safety at problematic intersections to help create a safe and accessible town-wide pedestrian network, also in support of Goal 1.

Recommendations:

- 2A. Identify intersections in need of safety improvements and upgrade pedestrian crossing infrastructure including crosswalk markings, curb ramps, and pedestrian signals.
- 2B. Investigate the impact of lowering speed limits on certain roads in town and, where appropriate, use traffic calming measures, such as temporary speed feedback signs and/or installing more permanent calming elements, such as curb extensions, raised islands or medians, pavement markings, or raised crosswalks to reduce speeding.
- 2C. Conduct an ADA audit of key corridors in town to identify locations in need of improvements such as curb ramps, crosswalks, and accessible pedestrian signals, especially in relation to schools, public buildings/facilities, and the commuter rail station.



These photos illustrate some of the numerous ways to slow traffic and improve pedestrian safety.

Sources: Clockwise from top left: curb extension <https://www.myballard.com/2009/07/28/natural-drainage-project-meeting-to-morrow/>, pedestrian refuge island https://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/ped_bike/tools_solve/medians_brochure/, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/drdu/180848518/in/set-72157594185949280/>, raised crosswalk <https://www.brooklinema.gov/350/Recent-Roadway-Safety-Improvement-Projec>

Goal 3: Expand local and regional transportation networks by partnering with existing organizations that support transit and shared mobility.

One of Sharon's greatest transportation assets is its commuter rail station, providing regional connections to Boston and Providence. Making the commuter rail more accessible to residents, workers, and visitors of Sharon is a key component of increasing transit use. Insufficient parking at the commuter rail station is an issue that may keep people from using the train. In the 2018 Fall Survey, 72% of respondents said that methods of getting to the commuter rail are very or somewhat important for transportation improvements in the short term. Although the Town is conducting a feasibility study for a parking garage at the train station, expanding transportation options to the commuter rail is a viable alternative to make it more accessible for everyone, especially for younger and older populations.

Local transit that expands the local network and connects to the regional system is also a priority for Sharon. With existing resources such as the Neponset Valley Transportation Management Association (TMA) and Suburban Mobility Working Group, it is feasible to explore options to bring local transit to Sharon to not only support access to the commuter rail, but also to provide increased mobility for older adults. Suburban mobility is an increasingly important issue not only in Sharon, but throughout the greater Boston region, as shown with several case studies below.

Recommendations:

- 3A. Continue to participate in the Neponset Valley Transportation Management Association (TMA) and Suburban Mobility Working Group meetings and expand the Town's involvement to identify options for local transportation within Sharon and between neighboring towns to reduce gaps in service.
- 3B. Study demand and potential impacts of a new parking structure at the train station. Use results of parking garage feasibility study to inform parking demand at the commuter rail station and examine potential for off-site parking locations in conjunction with a shuttle service.
- 3C. Study demand and potential routes for a shuttle to and from the train station (matching the train schedules) to expand first/last mile connections to transit, including reviewing the previous pilot shuttle service in Sharon, researching first/last mile options utilized by similar towns (e.g., Bedford Dash), and investigating potential use of Adult Center vehicles for on-demand shuttle use during off hours.

CASE STUDY

Expanding Suburban Mobility in Massachusetts

Bedford DASH:

The Bedford DASH operates in Bedford and is one of four projects funded by the MassDOT Community Transit Grants program. The shuttle provides trips for groceries, meals, medical services, beauty services, social/recreation outings, jobs, and more upon request. Children ages 12-18 are also able to ride DASH with a signed permission form. Rides are reserved through calling ahead or online from 8:30 AM to 4:00 PM. The service operates Monday to Friday from 11:00 AM to 6:00 PM.

Crosstown Connect:

The Crosstown Connect is a public-private partnership Transportation Management Association (TMA) between the towns of Acton, Concord, Littleton, Maynard, Westford Acton, and businesses located within. The service was started to increase mobility and commuting options and reduce congestion. Crosstown connect provides several local transit options:

- Cross Action Transit (CAT): Fixed-route bus service in Acton linking residential areas, businesses, and South Acton Commuter Rail Station. The service runs hourly Monday to Friday from 8:00 AM to 6:00 PM. Fares are \$1.00 per trip.
- MinuteVan Dial-A-Ride: On-demand service open to all riders 12 and older to access work, medical appointments, shopping, and social and recreational resources. Trips must be reserved 24 hours in advance and up to one month. The service operates Monday through Friday from 8:00 AM to 11:00 AM and 12:15 PM to 6:15 PM.
- Council on Aging Vans: On-demand service for residents over 60 or with disabilities of Acton, Boxborough, Littleton, and Maynard. Service hours vary by town but generally operates weekdays from morning to late afternoon.
- Commuter Shuttles:
 - » Acton Rail Shuttle: Connects off-site parking with peak hour trains at South Acton MBTA Station. Registered riders are given parking privileges.
 - » Littleton-Westford Commuter Rail Shuttle: Services Westford Technology Park, Juniper Networks, Red Hat, Inc., IBM, and the Littleton/Route 495 Commuter Rail MBTA Station. IBM and Juniper will be donating on-site parking spaces for riders of the shuttle.



Bedford DASH bus. Source: Bedford DASH.



Cross Acton Transit (CAT) Bus. Source: Crosstownconnect.org



Commuter Shuttle at Littleton MBTA Commuter Rail Station.



Maynard-Acton Shuttle. Source: Crosstownconnect.org.

- » Maynard-Acton Shuttle: Services a loop from Maynard, Acton, and South Acton MBTA Commuter Rail Station, including Parker/Drummer, PSHQ, Maynard Golf, downtown Maynard, Mill and Main.

Quabog Connector:

The Quabog Connector services Belchertown, Brookfield, East Brookfield, Hardwick, Monson, Palmer, Ware, Warren, and West Brookfield. The shuttle is available to residents of any town ages 12 and older. Passengers can take trips to locations in any town, but priority is given to employment, job training programs, or other work-related destinations. Rides are requested by phone two days in advance. The service operates Monday through Friday from 6:30 AM to 7:00 PM. This year the service anticipates providing approximately 700 trips per month in the region.¹⁰

Greater Attleboro Regional Transit Authority (GATRA) and Uber Partnership:

In 2016 GATRA joined a local social consortium to develop a pilot program to provide Uber trips in Attleboro and Norton for senior citizens and persons with disabilities during later evening hours and Sundays when local public transit service is unavailable. Partnering service agencies were responsible for booking trips (not individuals), with trips booked via smart phone, tablet, or computer, in real time or in advance. As part of service, GATRA developed a Google Earth resource to help agencies identify existing bus routes and only book an Uber ride if GATRA service did not meet the transportation need. One year into the pilot program, 1,200 rides were booked, 25% of which were during the weekend when GATRA service is not available.¹¹ In 2019 GATRA secured funding to expand the program to Plymouth.

¹⁰ <https://www.mass.gov/files/documents/2018/12/19/awards2019.pdf>

pdf

¹¹ <http://www.mapc.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Ride-Hail-ing-Partnerships-Forum-2018Sept12-Summary-Final.pdf>

Goal 4: Implement transportation policies and infrastructure improvements holistically to promote transportation and land use connections. (Also see Economic Vitality, Land Use and Zoning, Open Space and Natural Resources, and Community Health)

Transportation and land use are fundamentally linked with the location of housing, services, public facilities, and job centers, influencing the mobility of residents. It is important for Sharon to be proactive in creating policies that incentivize employers to reduce employee drive-alone trips, and developers to provide on-site circulation, access management, and parking management strategies. When looking to the future, it is also important for the Town to anticipate technology changes such as electric, connected, and automated vehicles (AVs). It is largely unknown how these technologies will impact the transportation and land use systems, so Sharon must maintain awareness of technological advances, as well as Federal, State, and local policies surrounding connected and automated vehicles. If the goal is to increase share-mobility and provide more options for all residents, while reducing drive alone rates and vehicular congestion, the Town may want to consider updating zoning to incentivize shared-mobility through creating designated drop-off/pick up zones and reduced parking requirements. These interim steps can help shape the future of the transportation landscape with AVs.

Recommendations:

- 4A. Encourage businesses to join Neponset Valley TMA and/or use State resources, such as MassRides to provide transportation demand management strategies. These may include carpool incentives, emergency ride home programs, or transit benefits. Programs like the MassRides Emergency Ride Home (ERH) reimburse green commuters with a free ride home in the case of an emergency, which makes people more likely to choose transit or another sustainable travel mode because they know they will have a free alternative option should an emergency occur.**¹²

¹² <https://commute.com/blog/emergency-ride-home-has-a-new-look/>

4B. Consider regulatory changes to parking standards in the zoning bylaws, which may include implementing parking maximums instead of parking minimums, shared parking, spaces dedicated to carshare or electric vehicle charging stations, designated shared ride pick up/drop off zones, and requiring bicycle parking. (Also see Land Use and Zoning)

4C. Consider hiring a full- or part-time town planner or staff person who can coordinate Town efforts and initiatives and pursue grants and funds to support transportation planning and infrastructure programs and improvements and other related programs and services. (Also see Arts, Cultural, and Historic Resources, Economic Vitality, Housing, Land Use and Zoning, Open Space and Natural Resources, and Public Facilities and Infrastructure)

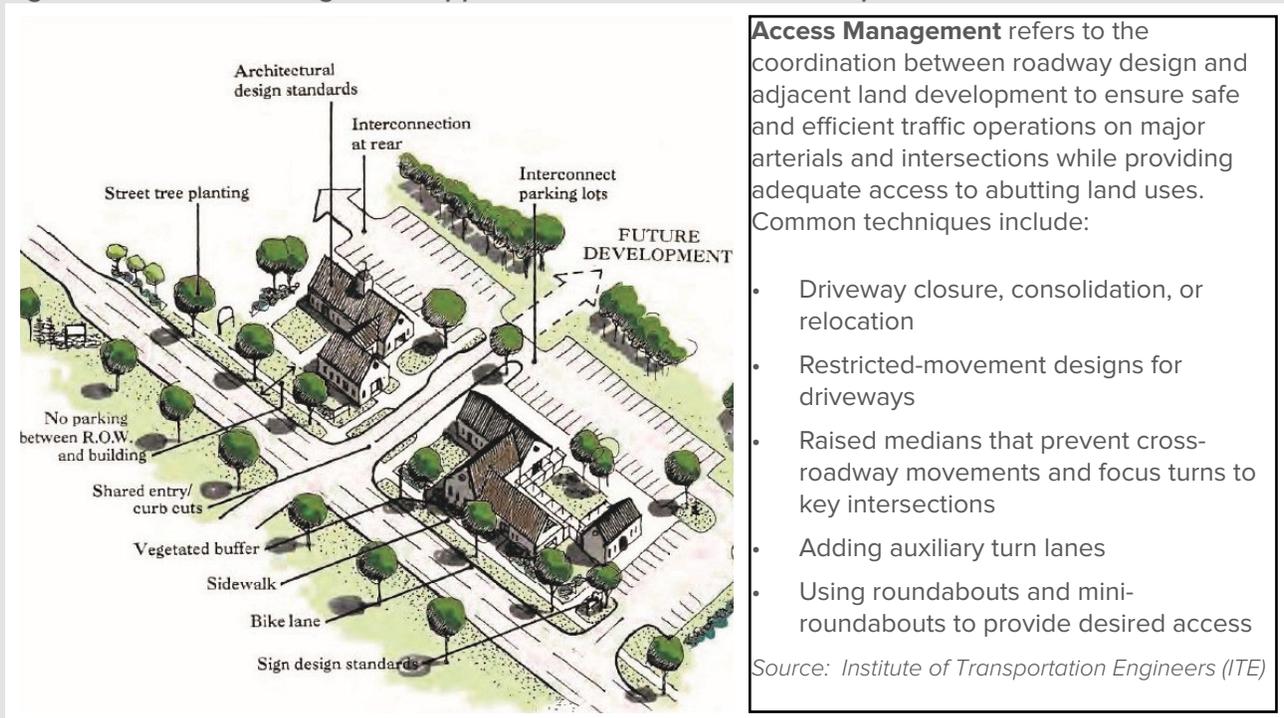
4D. Consider a zoning requirement for on-site circulation and access management to connect to existing networks in certain types of new development or redevelopment (e.g., large development sites and residential cul-de-sacs) (see Fig.40). (Also see Land Use and Zoning)

4E. Recognize and consider technology to support connected vehicle infrastructure to improve safety, traffic circulation, and congestion management.

4F. Support and incorporate technological and sustainable solutions and anticipate impacts of autonomous vehicles, both for private use and potential shuttles. This includes adding electric vehicle charging stations at Town facilities, as is planned for the new Library, and requiring electric vehicle charging stations in new private developments.

MORE INFORMATION:

Figure 40: Access Management Approach for Commercial Development



Source: MassDOT Project Development and Design Guide (2006)

CASE STUDY

Smart Parking: Marlborough, Massachusetts

As a medium-sized suburban city near the MassPike and I-495, Marlborough has put in place three types of provisions for shared parking, compact car spaces, and temporary reserve parking to help reduce the amount of empty parking spaces.

- » Shared Parking: Primarily used within the mixed-use center to maximize the efficient use of parking spaces throughout the day and night. The regulation has been effective, balancing demands from new developments with existing businesses. However, there have been some conflicts in downtown structured parking facilities that allow residential parking when businesses want their customer spaces to be as close to their buildings as possible, as well as the public works department requiring all parking lots be unoccupied overnight for snow removal purposes, which conflicts with residential parking.
- » Compact Car Spaces: Reserving specific spaces for compact car use allows up to 33% of a site's required parking spaces to be reduced by one foot in width and two feet in length, reducing the overall footprint needed to park the same number of cars.
- » Temporary Reserve Parking: Primarily used within industrial areas where daily demand for parking usually is far less than the required spaces, a portion of the required spaces would be considered "reserve" for select occasions. The reserve parking can be left in a grassy or earthen state, allowing a reduction of on-site paved parking while not limiting the total number of space available for temporary use. This helps reduce the City's total impervious surface coverage, which improves on-site stormwater retention and surface water quality.

<https://www.mass.gov/service-details/case-studies-smart-parking>

Other examples:

<https://www.move-forward.com/planning-for-shared-mobility-part-2-incorporating-shared-modes-into-developer-and-zoning-regulations/>



4.8 COMMUNITY HEALTH

This element was prepared by the Community Health subcommittee of the MPSC with assistance from MAPC.

Introduction

Population health is shaped by our collective exposures to healthy and unhealthy environments – it begins in our homes, in our children’s schools, in the natural and built environment, and at our places of employment. Healthy communities are “places where all individuals have access to healthy built, social, economic, and natural environments that give them the opportunity to live to their fullest potential, regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender, income, age, abilities, or other socially defined circumstances.”¹³

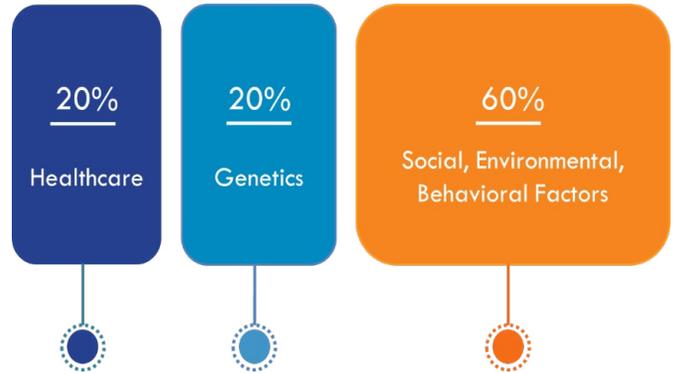
Given this relationship of our neighborhoods to our health, the Community Health element provides a framework for understanding how community conditions affect the health of Sharon’s residents (see Fig. 41).

This element uses a health equity lens to explore how certain populations in town may experience disproportionate impact due to factors such as geography, ethnicity, income, age, or other characteristics.

The Community Health element describes current health conditions and behaviors; assesses risks and opportunities presented by built, natural, and social environments; and proposes how to achieve improved health through community design strategies and services.

¹³ City of Seattle, “Racial Equity Toolkit to Assess Policies, Initiatives, Programs, and Budget Issues,” <http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/opi/healthequity/resources/seattle-toolkit.html>

Figure 42: Factors Responsible for Population Health



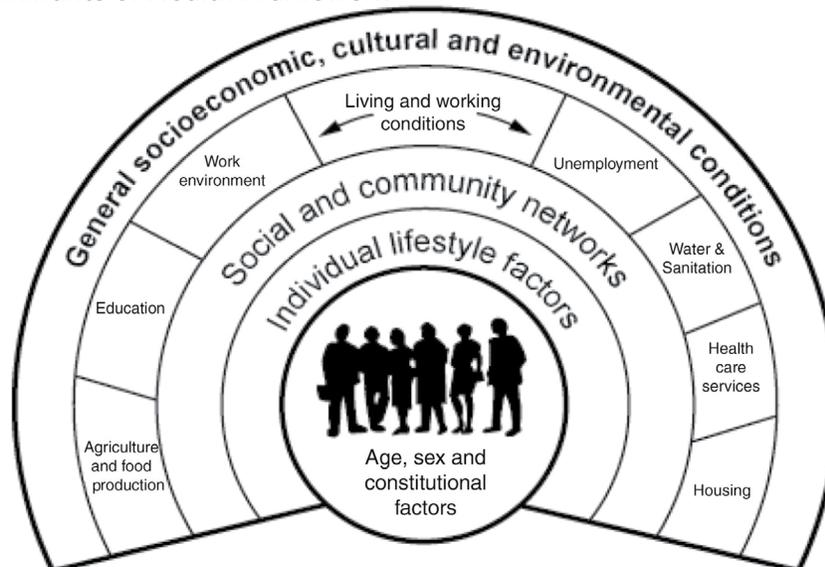
Source: Adapted from US County Health Rankings

The Role of Health in Planning and the Built Environment

Evidence shows that how we plan and build our neighborhoods affects the health and wellness of residents. Although these estimates are not exact, research focused on the history of the causes of disease suggests that at least 60% of our health is determined by social, environmental, and behavioral factors shaped by the context in which we live, while approximately 20% is due to genetics, and another 20% is shaped by health care (see Fig. 42).¹⁴

¹⁴ American Planning Association. Healthy Communities Policy Guide, 2017.

Figure 41: Social Determinants of Health Framework

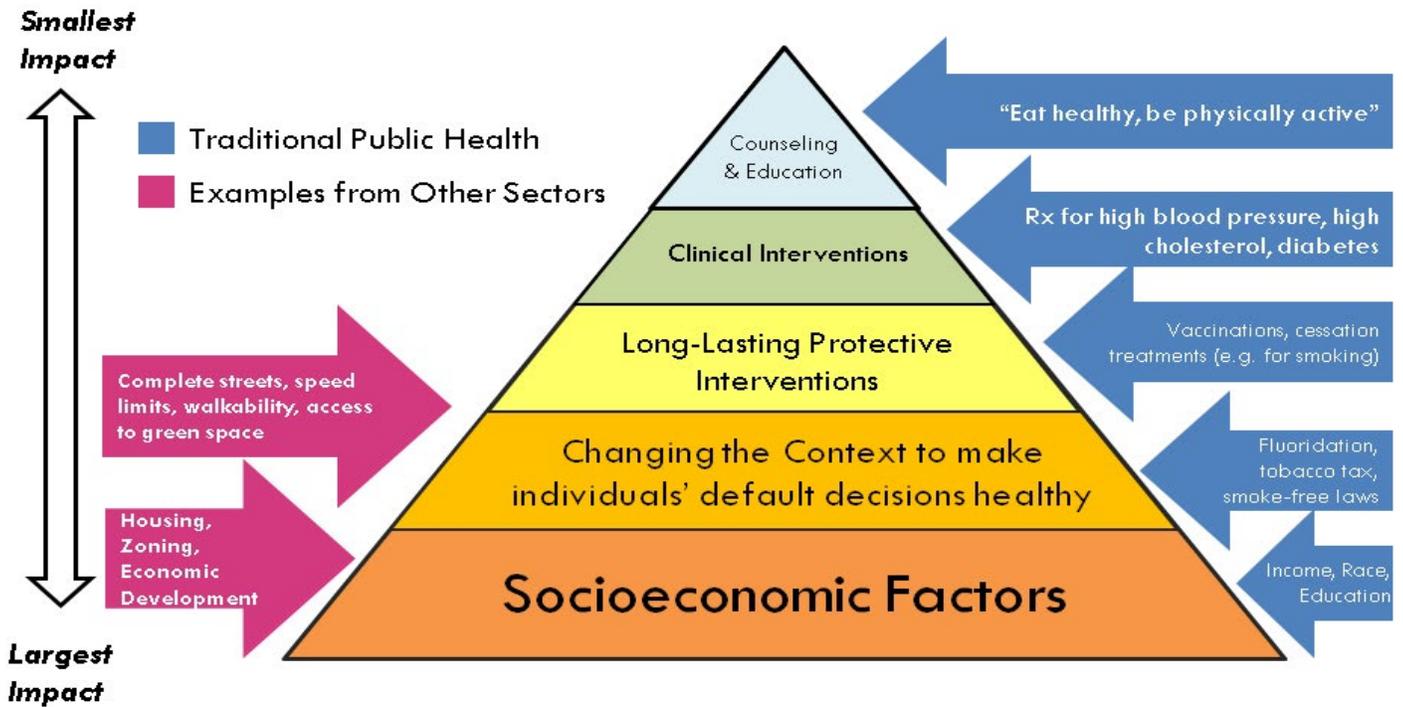


Source: World Health Organization.

Opposite Page: Public Garden

Figure 43: Health Impact Pyramid – Public Health and Non-Public Health Interventions

CDC Health Impact Pyramid



Source: Adapted from Frieden, *Framework for Public Health Action: The Health Impact Pyramid*

The relationship between health and planning is reinforced by data on the rates of chronic conditions and leading causes of death in the United States. The country is experiencing increasing levels of chronic disease like obesity and diabetes, and more people are dying from heart disease, stroke, and lower respiratory disease.¹⁵ Yet, these illnesses are highly preventable, as they are the result of behaviors, choices, and influences stemming directly or indirectly from a community's surrounding environment.

Future conditions, particularly those affected by climate change, influence this relationship as well. Extreme weather events will disrupt ecological and physical systems, creating greater risk to public health, including heat-related illnesses, air pollution-related impacts on cardiovascular and respiratory conditions, increased rates of allergic

and communicable diseases, and flooding.¹⁶ People with existing medical conditions, people without support mechanisms (e.g., a lack of access to air conditioning or health care services), people without social networks, older adults, women, lower income populations, and young children typically face the greatest climate change-related health risks.

Connecting health and planning provides an impetus to improve the supporting environments and create more opportunities for healthy living. Planning plays a key role in engaging community members in developing a vision for the future, setting the conditions for what and where changes will occur, and ultimately creating places which protect and promote health (see Fig. 43).

¹⁵ U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Deaths: Final Data for 2013*, Figure 10.

¹⁶ Health and Places Initiative. *Climate Change, Health, and Place: Research Brief*. <https://research.gsd.harvard.edu/hapi/files/2015/11/HAPI-Research-Brief-Climate-Change-113015-v1.2.pdf>

Figure 44: Relationship of Health Element to Other Master Plan Elements



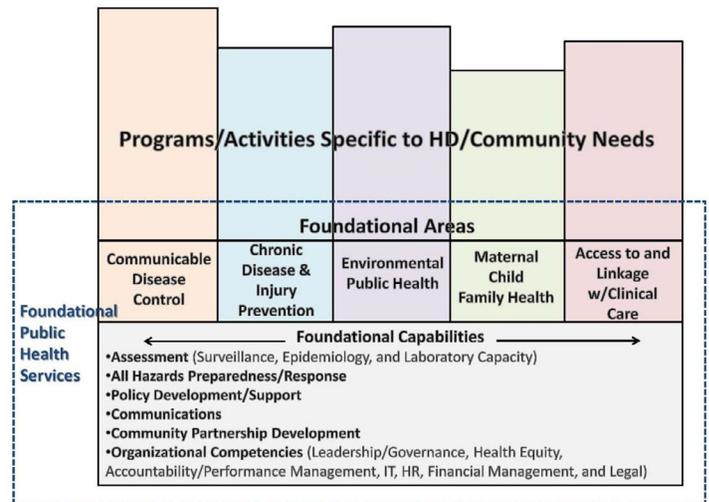
Community Health Today: Existing Conditions

Community Health is deeply linked to other elements of the Master Plan. This element presents new data and different perspectives on how current conditions in other elements can contribute to health, such as housing, transportation, and public facilities. Furthermore, the Community Health element provides evidence-based and evidence-informed strategies that should guide policies, projects, and decision-making regarding implementation of the Master Plan. Lastly, this element integrates the perspective of local public health by including Town of Sharon representatives from the Health Department, the Council on Aging, and the Commission on Disabilities in the planning process to inform future decisions around community change (see Fig. 44).

Local Health System

Health agents, public health nurses, boards of health, councils on aging, commissions on disability, schools, and recreation departments play important roles in protecting and promoting health and wellness in cities and towns. In the private sector, health care systems, hospitals, community-based clinicians, and long-term services and supports respond to acute health issues (e.g., heart attacks and accidents), support chronic and behavioral health needs (e.g., diabetes and substance use), and enable independent and supported living (e.g., assisted living, personal care attendants, and dementia care).

Figure 45: Foundational Public Health Services Framework



Source: *Defining and Constituting Foundational Capabilities and Areas VI*

Town of Sharon Health Department

Sharon is served by a Board of Health and a Health Department, which includes the Town's health agent, public health nurse, and administrative support. The activities performed by the Department and Board promote economic development, encourage active living, and provide essential services that address the needs across all ages and abilities, from the youngest residents to the oldest. They promote programs that support health and wellness among residents, and they lead and collaborate on efforts to protect the community from pollution, effectively respond to emergencies, and reduce the spread of infectious diseases.

A framework for understanding local health work is the Foundational Public Health Services (FPHS), which represents a minimum package of public health services that should be present in any jurisdiction.¹⁷ The FPHS includes two areas: foundational capabilities (i.e., skills) and foundational areas (i.e., areas of expertise or specific activities). (see Fig. 45)

¹⁷ RESOLVE – Public Health Leadership Forum, <https://www.resolve.ngo/site-healthleadershipforum/defining-and-constituting-foundational-capabilities-and-areas.htm>. Additional information about the implementation of FPHS has been developed by the Public Health National Center for Innovations, <https://phnci.org/fphs>.

Foundational Capabilities

The Sharon Health Department demonstrates many of the FPHS capabilities through their direct service provision as well as through partnerships with local and regional agencies. Below are examples of how the Sharon Health Department demonstrates its capabilities across several Master Plan elements (see Table 20).

Table 20: FPHS Capabilities

Capability	Example of Work
Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Needs assessments to monitor health factors and concerns Contribution to substance use studies carried out by Sharon Substance Prevention and Resource Coalition (SSPARC) Disease monitoring in collaboration with State public health agency (MDPH) and the Massachusetts Virtual Epidemiologic Network (MAVEN)
All Hazards Preparedness/Response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shelter planning and operations Planning for execution of an emergency dispensing site (EDS) Dissemination of town Emergency Planning Guide
Policy Development/Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comprehensive water quality program Subsidized trash service to elderly and disabled who meet specific income requirements Regulations on flavored tobacco products Health policy development around new regulations for elimination of plastic takeout bags
Communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dementia-Friendly Community trainings Radon awareness outreach Vector borne disease communications
Community Partnership Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partnerships with School District, Council on Aging, Fire Department, Conservation Commission Region 4A Emergency Preparedness Coalition
Organizational Competencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Program planning, public communications, and health analysis and assessment Private well protection

Foundational Areas

While many of the FPHS areas are defined through statutory requirements, the foundational areas are inclusive of a vast set of activities vital to sustaining healthy indoor and outdoor environments to which residents are regularly exposed. The Sharon Health Department and Board address the foundational areas through their work to

implement Massachusetts and local bylaws and regulations as well as through collaborative work with other municipal departments, community-based organizations, and regional coalitions. Below are examples of how the Health Department meets the foundational areas, across several health and environmental elements (see Table 21).

Table 21: FPHS Foundational Areas

Area	Example of Work
Communicable Disease Control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental causes of disease investigations • Vector borne disease control measures
Chronic Disease and Injury Prevention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wellness checks (via Public Health Nurse) • Tobacco/Vaping
Environmental Public Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food and restaurant inspections • Indoor air quality (ventilation, radon, mold, gases) • Vector control program • Bathing beaches • Water testing • Housing inspections • Wells (drinking water and irrigation wells) • Wastewater systems • Fertilizer, chemical and pesticide investigations • Animals and zoonotic diseases
Maternal, Child, and Family Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lice checks • Vaccination programs • Camp inspections • School based nursing program
Access to and Linkage with Clinical Care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influenza vaccinations • Public health nursing program • Blood pressure checks • Blood glucose checks

Context and Challenges

The public health capabilities and services offered are extensive. The work in the Sharon Health Department is carried out by a staff including one full-time Health Agent, a part-time nurse, a part-time administrative assistant, with additional support from a full-time Health Agent for Engineering. While Massachusetts is unique in its decentralization of local public health service delivery, national measures, by comparison, suggest a workforce of approximately four full-time staff per 10,000 residents.¹⁸ Staff include the roles of public health nurse, office support staff, health agent and sanitarian.

Local public health plays an important role with multiple local planning functions, from advisory to regulatory. A challenge to executing this role effectively is the provision of adequate resources to offer the minimum package of public health services. In addition, the Sharon Health Department collaborates with other boards and departments to carry out these foundational services. For example, the Health Department partners with the Sharon Conservation Commission around issues related to environmental health, such as preventing environmental pollutants, and testing and maintaining quality of drinking water and beach water.

Council on Aging

The Sharon Adult Center/Council on Aging (COA) is a Department within the town as well as an Advisory Board appointed by the Select Board. The Adult Center/COA responds to needs of adults who are aging in and around the Town of Sharon and provides community education related to issues encountered by older adults.¹⁹ The Town's Council on Aging offers a wide range of assistance to adults who are 60+ years old and their families, all residents with disabilities, and in some instances adults who do not meet the 60 year old age threshold. Staffing includes an Executive Director, a social worker, a volunteer coordinator, an activities coordinator, drivers, and administrative support. Welcoming residents from diverse backgrounds, the Adult Center/COA raises awareness around aging, provides social services, supports the independence of those aging in community, and engages in partnerships that enhance the quality of life among Sharon's older residents.

The services provided through the Adult Center/COA directly support health and wellness in multiple ways. Older residents can stay active by participating in yoga, Zumba, and cardio and strength training classes. Tai Chi and matter of balance classes help to maintain fitness and reduce the risk of falls, which are a significant threat to the health and independence of older adults. To address the growing public health concern of social isolation among older adults, the Adult Center serves as a community hub, providing an inclusive space for older residents to interact, meet with neighbors, and participate in an array of health and social activities. Residents are supported in building and maintaining social connections through the Adult Center/COA activities which include movie showings, local trips, and on-going groups (e.g., bridge, knitting, and bocce). Older residents can also find support in managing medical issues, paying taxes, and receiving food assistance as well as social connections among affinity groups (e.g., residents of South Asian descent).

The Adult Center/COA partners with the Sharon Health Department to offer health care services (e.g., blood pressure screenings). Additionally, social-work led support groups are available for caregivers and individuals with Parkinson's Disease. The Adult Center/COA offers programs that can reduce economic hardship among older adult households (e.g., subsidized trash program and fuel assistance) and provides a number of transportation services that help connect older residents with health and social services and other destinations, which is especially relevant for older adults who do not have access to a car or are not able to drive.

As noted in the Public Facilities element, the COA has seen a marked increase in program and service demand with requests ranging from social service and financial assistance referrals to a wide variety of educational and recreation programs to transportation for non-driving older adults. Coordination and expansion of social, financial, and health services, particularly for older adults, will be an ongoing need for the Town to address. (See Public Facilities for additional information on the COA's collaborations)

¹⁸ NACCHO 2016 National Profile of Local Health Departments: http://nacchoprofilestudy.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/ProfileReport_Aug2017_final.pdf

¹⁹ Sharon Adult Center/Council on Aging: <https://www.townofsharon.net/council-on-aging>

Table 22: Examples of Associated Strategies by Community Health Priority

South Shore Health	Norwood Hospital
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Priority: Social Determinants of Health and Access to Care.</u> Address food insecurity for low- to moderate income individuals and families; Increase availability of transitional housing and housing supports for those most at-risk. • <u>Priority: Behavioral Health/Substance Use Disorder.</u> Decrease depression and social isolation; Enhance access to timely transportation services for those in need who do not have access to a personal car. • <u>Priority: Chronic and Complex Conditions and their Risk Factors.</u> Increase physical activity and healthy eating; Reduce falls in elders. • <u>Priority: Health System Strengthening.</u> Promote collaboration with community health partners (e.g., state/local health departments, community coalitions). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Priority: Chronic Diseases with focus on Cancer, Heart Disease, and Diabetes.</u> Create partnership with the Norwood Housing Authority to increase access to healthy foods; provide resources and information to transportation services to improve access to clinical care. • <u>Priority: Mental Health.</u> Help develop a dementia friendly toolkit pilot program; Develop partnerships to promote community-based strategies that create a conversation to reduce the stigma surrounding mental illness. • <u>Priority: Substance Use Disorders.</u> Promote substance use awareness, prevention, and access to treatment. • <u>Priority: Housing Stability.</u> Pursue partnerships with community-based organizations to promote Housing First programs.

Sources: South Shore Health Community Benefits: <https://www.southshorehealth.org/about-us/community-benefits>; Norwood Hospital Community Health & Outreach: <https://www.norwood-hospital.org/about-us/community-health-outreach>

Supporting Social Services

The Town also provides programs and referral services through the Commission on Disabilities, the Public Library, Housing Authority, Recreation Department, and Schools. Supporting these Town-sponsored organizations, an informal network of community and religious organizations provide additional programs, coordinate efforts with service providers, fundraise, and support local community efforts. Residents also use many services and programs that are provided by agencies and organizations in neighboring towns, such as Father Bill’s Place and MainSpring House for free lunches and temporary housing.

Health Care Systems

The Town of Sharon is located within the service area of both South Shore Health (located in the Town of Weymouth) and the Norwood Hospital (located in the Town of Norwood).

South Shore Health is a non-profit health system that serves 34 municipalities in Plymouth and Norfolk counties.²⁰ The system includes hospital and clinic-based care and provides preventive and wellness services, primary care, cardiology care, cancer care, orthopedics, obstetrics, wound care, physical therapy and rehab, behavior health, and home health care. Norwood Hospital is part of Steward

²⁰ South Shore Health: <https://www.southshorehealth.org/>

Health Care, a private, for-profit physician-led health care network in the United States, serving 20 municipalities south and west of Boston.²¹ It is an acute care community hospital with clinical services that include obstetrics, cardiology, orthopedics, behavioral health, cancer care, and pediatrics.

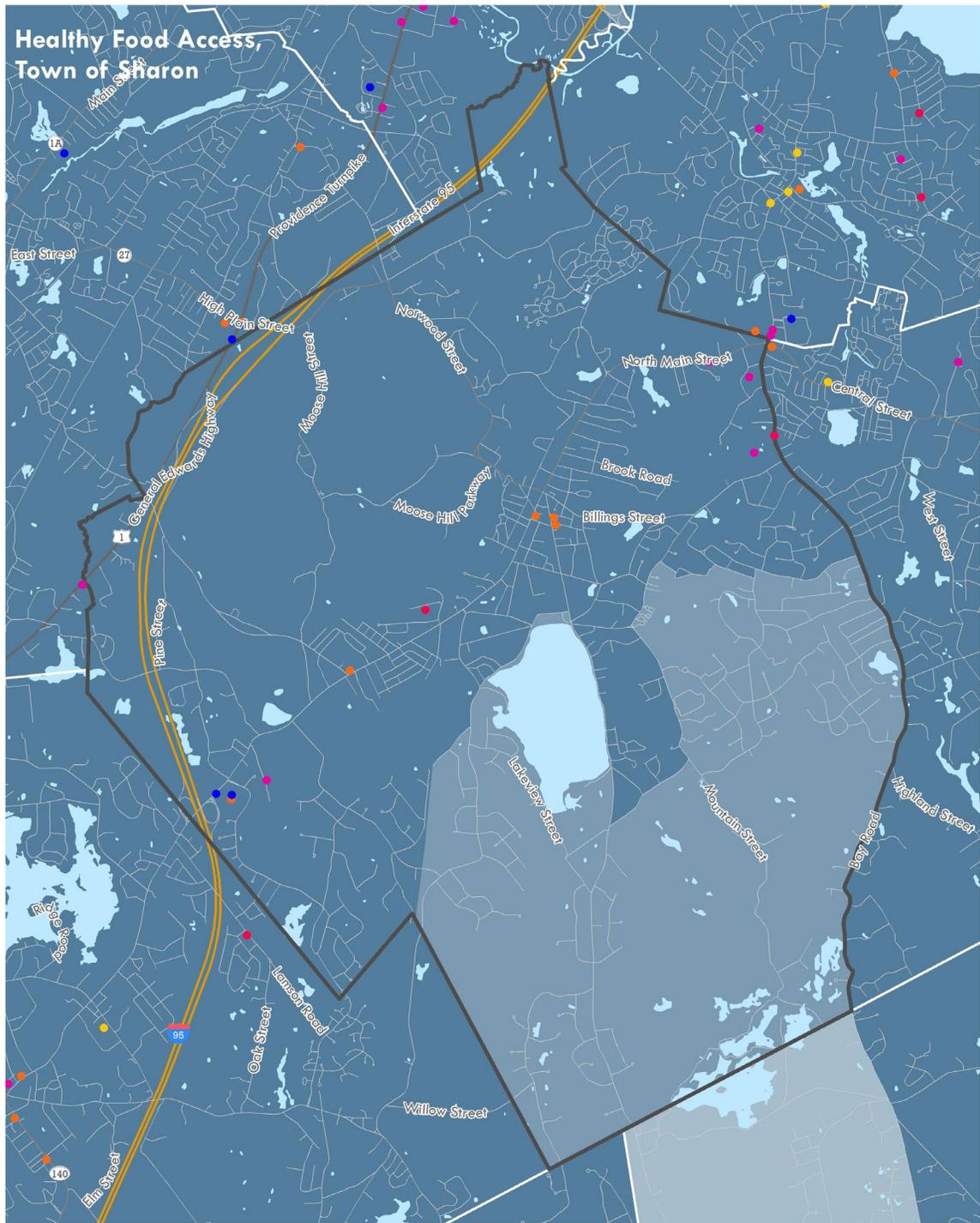
Most healthcare systems produce a community health needs assessment (CHNA) every three years to identify health priorities in communities where the health system is located (beyond a provider’s patient population). In connection with the CHNA, the health systems must propose community health improvement strategies, which in Massachusetts are recommended to focus on the social determinants of health.²²

The most recent CHNAs for South Shore Health and Norwood Hospital included the following community health priorities and proposed improvement strategies that have applicability in master planning processes (see Table 22).

²¹ Norwood Hospital: <https://www.norwood-hospital.org/>

²² The Attorney General has set four statewide priorities for strategies: Chronic Disease with a Focus on Cancer, Heart Disease and Diabetes Housing Stability/Homelessness Mental Illness and Mental Health Substance Use Disorders. In addition to these four focus issues, in 2017 DPH adopted six health priorities to guide the Community Health Initiative investments: Built Environment, Social Environment, Housing, Violence, Education, and Employment.

Figure 46: Five-mile Food Access Map



Food Retailers

- Small convenience store
- Convenience stores, pharmacies and drug stores
- Specialty food stores
- Small supermarkets and farmers markets
- Supermarkets and warehouses or supercenters

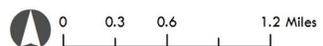
Access to Grocery Store? (5 mile)

- No
- Unlikely
- Likely
- Yes

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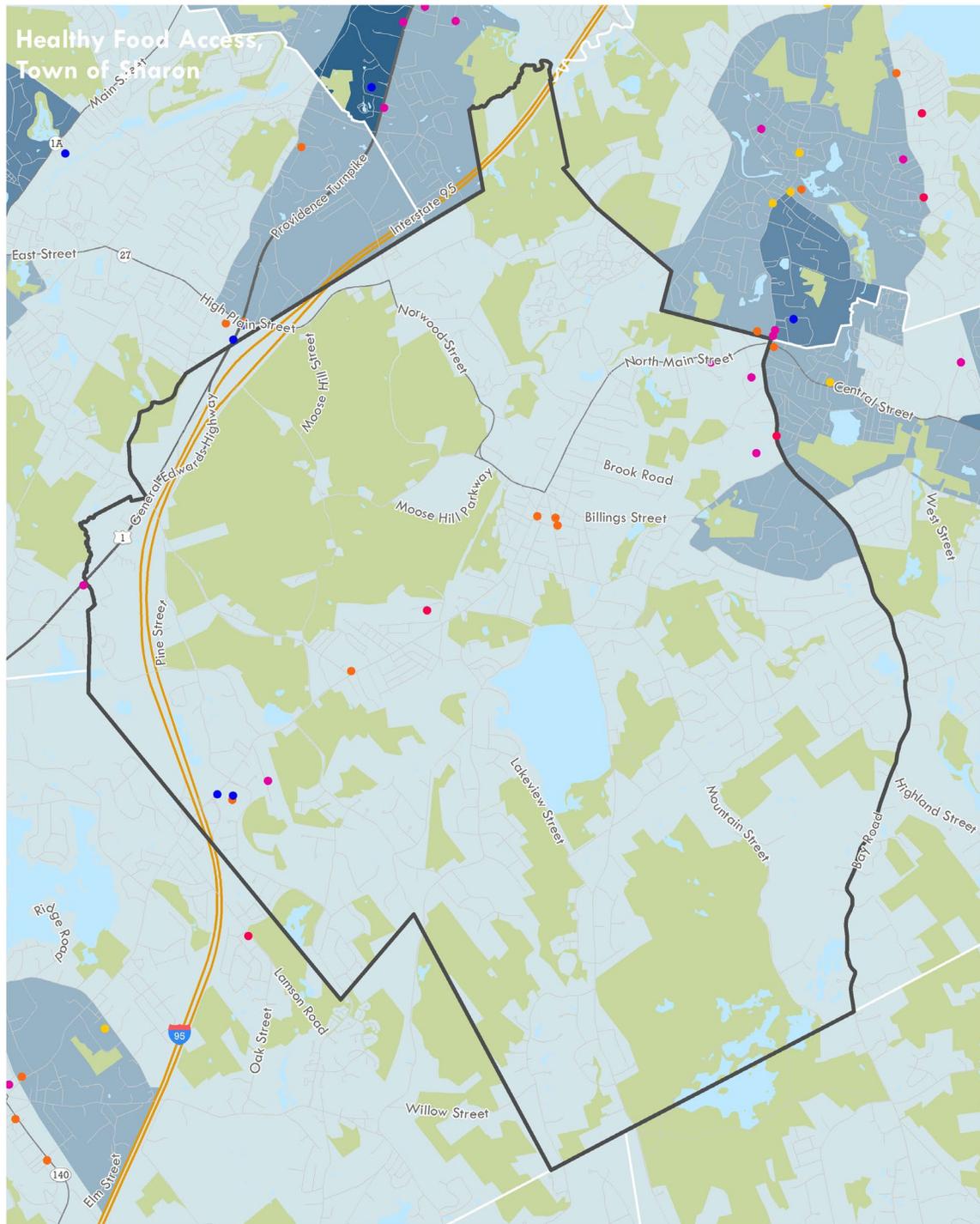
Data Sources: MassGIS, MAPC

April 2019



Source: Metropolitan Area Planning Council, MassGIS

Figure 47: One-mile Food Access Map



Food Retailers

- Small convenience store
- Convenience stores, pharmacies and drug stores
- Specialty food stores
- Small supermarkets and farmers markets
- Supermarkets and warehouses or supercenters

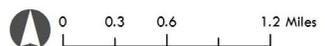
Access to Grocery Store? (1 mile)

- No
- Unlikely
- Likely
- Yes

Produced by:
Metropolitan Area Planning Council
60 Temple Place, Boston, MA 02111

Data Sources: MassGIS, MAPC

April 2019



Source: Metropolitan Area Planning Council, MassGIS

Access to Healthy Affordable Food

Research suggests that access to healthy and nutritious foods in neighborhoods play a critical role in residents' diets.²³ The choices that residents have available and ultimately make regarding their diet are associated with risks for chronic diseases, such as Type 2 diabetes, hypertension, and overweight and obesity.²⁴ Supermarkets provide a greater variety of healthy foods that are generally higher quality and more affordable when compared to smaller food stores, such as convenience stores. Although some discrepancy exists in the literature, poor supermarket access has been linked to increased rates of poor health outcomes such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and obesity when compared to neighborhoods that have supermarkets.²⁵

Using a five-mile drive radius, most of Sharon's residents have access to a grocery store, as well as other food access points like specialty shops and convenience stores. There are grocery stores adjacent to the eastern and western town borders and a collection of grocery stores are located along Route 1 on the town's border with Norwood and Walpole. The part of town south of Lake Massapoag offers the least access using the five-mile drive access measure. In addition, Sharon has a variety of additional healthy food options, such as Ward's Berry Farm located on South Main Street, which offers a variety of local produce, groceries, and other prepared foods. Ward's also offers seasonal fruit and vegetable picking opportunities and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs. The Farm at Moose Hill hosts a seasonal farm stand and a CSA program as well.

Comparatively, if a resident's mobility options are limited, such as not having access to a personal vehicle or the ability to drive, food access might be significantly impacted.

²³ Morland, Kimberly, Steve Wing, Ana Diez Roux, and Charles Poole. 2002. "Neighborhood Characteristics Associated with the Location of Food Stores and Food Service Places." *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 22 (1) (January): 23–29; Rose, Donald, and Rickelle Richards. 2004. "Food Store Access and Household Fruit and Vegetable Use Among Participants in the US Food Stamp Program." *Public Health Nutrition* 7 (8) (December): 1081–1088. doi:10.1079/PHN2004648.

²⁴ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Guide to Community Preventive Services - Promoting Good Nutrition*, <http://www.thecommunityguide.org/nutrition/index.html>

²⁵ Cotterill, Ronald, and Andrew Franklin. 1995. "The Urban Grocery Store Gap. No. 8." University of Connecticut, Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics, Charles J. Zwick Center for Food and Resource Policy; Powell, Lisa M, M Christopher Auld, Frank J Chaloupka, Patrick M O'Malley, and Lloyd D Johnston, 2007, "Associations Between Access to Food Stores and Adolescent Body Mass Index." *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 33 (4 Suppl.) (October): S301–307. doi:10.1016/j.amepre.2007.07.007.

For example, a one-mile drive radius (or the equivalent of a 20-minute walk) shows a stark difference for food access. Specifically, those who live closer to the Center of Town have much more limited options (see Fig. 46 and Fig. 47).

Housing Stability, Affordability, and Quality

Housing impacts health through multiple pathways: stability and affordability, quality and design, and location. Significant housing cost burdens can force families into harmful housing situations. Choosing between housing payments and other expenses is linked to cutting back on basic essentials such as food, medical care, and utilities, and can also contribute to increased stress, which decreases resilience, ages people more rapidly, and decreases resistance to disease.²⁶ Children in unstable housing are especially at risk of malnutrition and developmental delays that can have lifelong health consequences.²⁷ Affordable housing can also help victims of domestic violence escape the physical and mental health trauma caused by abuse and avoid the health risks associated with homelessness by providing permanent or transition housing options (see Fig. 48).²⁸

In Sharon, it is estimated that 20% of households are cost burdened, and 15% of households are severely cost burdened (total 35%), as compared to 22% and 18% of households statewide (total 40%).²⁹ (Also see Housing) In Sharon, looking at owner-occupied and renter-occupied homes, 41% of renters are cost burdened as compared to 32% of owners. This is lower than the statewide rates, where 49% of renters and 35% of owners are cost burdened. The relatively high rates of residential property taxes also impact the likelihood of being cost-burdened. (Also see Economic Vitality)

Housing that is not adequately maintained, ventilated, or free from pests and contaminants, such as mold, lead, and radon, is an important contributor to rates of injury, asthma, cancer, neurotoxicity, cardiovascular disease, depression, and poor mental health.

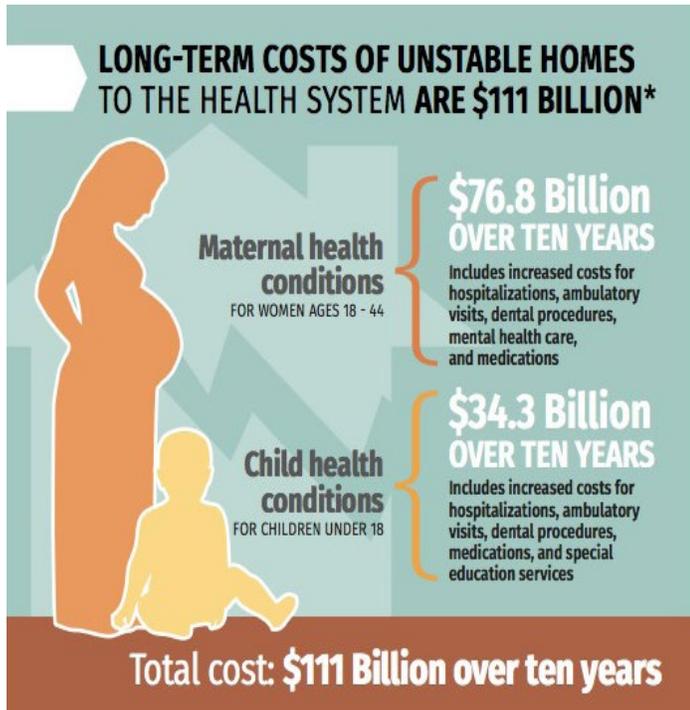
²⁶ RWJF *How Does Housing Affect Health?:* <https://www.rwjf.org/en/library/research/2011/05/housing-and-health.html>

²⁷ Cutts, Diana Becker, et al. "US housing insecurity and the health of very young children." *American Journal of Public Health* 101.8 (2011): 1508-1514.

²⁸ The Washington State Domestic Violence Housing First Program. *Domestic Violence Housing First: Cohort 2 Agencies Final Evaluation Report*, September 2011 – September 2014.

²⁹ Metropolitan Area Planning Council, *Housing.MA: The Massachusetts Housing Data Portal*, *Housing Data: Profile: Sharon*, <http://www.housing.ma/sharon/profile>.

Figure 48: Long-term Costs of Unstable Housing



Source: Children's Healthwatch

There are a number of measures of housing quality. A common hazard for homes in Massachusetts is lead paint. Legislation in 1978 banned lead in paint but many homes built before this date still have lead present. In Sharon, approximately 60% of the homes were built before 1978 (as compared to the state average of 71%). This indicates there is less chance of exposure and reporting data match this, with the prevalence of childhood blood lead levels in Sharon at 5.9 per 1,000 (less than one third of the state prevalence).³⁰ Aging plumbing can also contribute to the detection of lead in water.

The location of housing is critical for health as well. For the most part, households in neighborhoods that have higher population densities, access to destinations (i.e., proximity to libraries, retail stores), more grid-like street patterns, and access to high quality bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure

30 Town of Sharon Community Profile: <https://matracking.ehs.state.ma.us/>

Displacement and Health

When rent and home sale prices rise, and when costs associated with a home such as property taxes increase, households may be displaced from their current homes. In addition, in the context of rising prices, those who are displaced may not be able to find other available housing in the same neighborhood or municipality. Low- to moderate-income renters and fixed-income homeowners are most susceptible to displacement when housing costs rise.

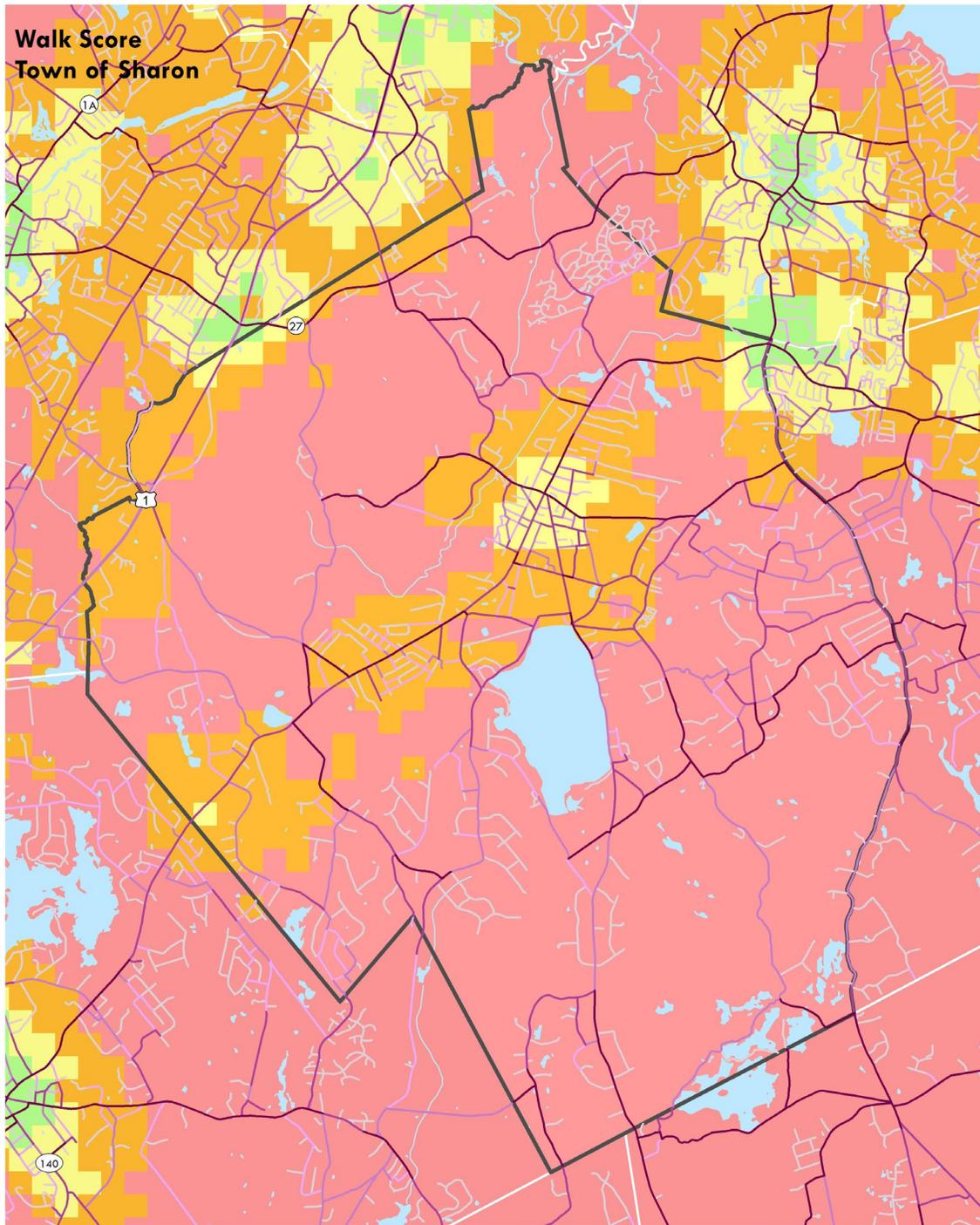
Displacement can introduce and further exacerbate health issues. Removing residents from existing social support networks can reduce the protective health effects of social cohesion. Displacement can also increase housing insecurity which has been linked to increased risks of poor health in household members and developmental delays in children. In addition, when displacement occurs, residents may or may not have access to housing units in neighborhoods with access to quality schools, out-of-school activities, public sector support, health care, social service programs, and employment. Lastly, displacement may result in homelessness for the affected household. Past studies have found that 15-20% of homeless families were the result of eviction from rental housing.

are positively associated with physical activity.³¹ Research shows that there are several measures of land use, including housing, that are correlated with higher levels of utilitarian physical activity, particularly walking.

Walk Score provides nationally-available, neighborhood-level data on distance to destinations and the potential to reach these destinations by walking. With the exception of the Center of Town, Walk Scores for Sharon tend to fall below 50, which would classify the town as car dependent. This means a car is likely needed for most trips and, on

31 Ewing, Reid, and Robert Cervero. 2010. "Travel and the Built Environment." *Journal of the American Planning Association* 76 (3): 265–294. doi:10.1080/01944361003766766.; Freeman, Lance, Kathryn Neckerman, Ofira Schwartz-Soicher, James Quinn, Catherine Richards, Michael D M Bader, Gina Lovasi, et al. 2012. "Neighborhood Walkability and Active Travel (Walking and Cycling) in New York City." *Journal of Urban Health: Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine* (September 1). doi:10.1007/s11524-012-9758-7; Giles-Corti, Billie, Fiona Bull, Matthew Knuiaman, Gavin McCormack, Kimberly Van Niel, Anna Timperio, Hayley Christian, et al. 2013. "The Influence of Urban Design on Neighbourhood Walking Following Residential Relocation: Longitudinal Results from the RESIDE Study." *Social Science & Medicine* 77 (January): 20–30. doi:10.1016/j.socscimed.2012.10.016.

Figure 49: Walk Score Measures



Walk Score

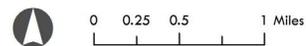
- Car-Dependent (0-24)
- Car-Dependent (25-49)
- Somewhat Walkable (50-69)
- Very Walkable (70-89)
- Walker's Paradise (90-100)

The information depicted on this map is for planning purposes only. It is not adequate for legal boundary definition, regulatory interpretation, or parcel-level analyses.

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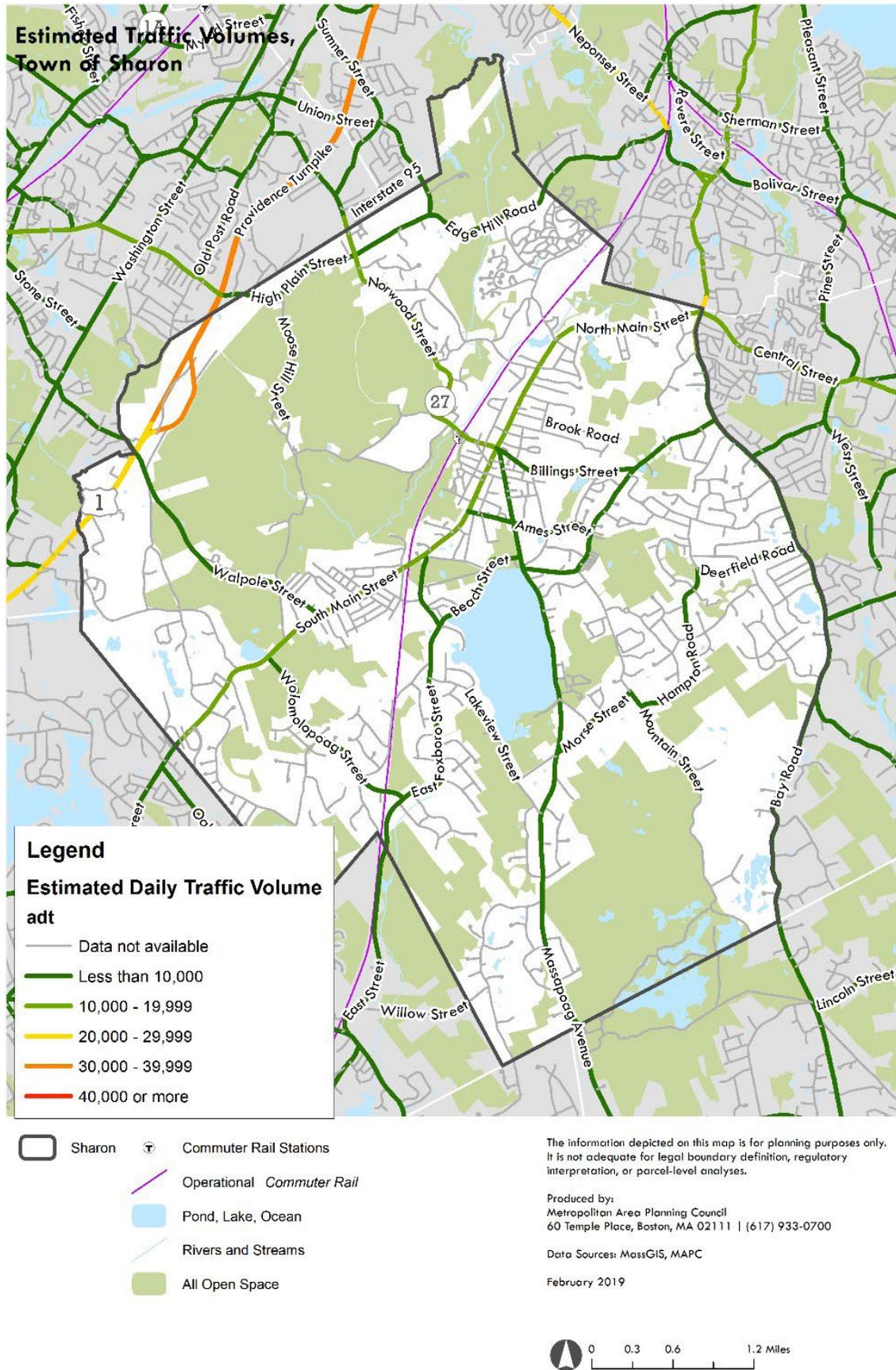
Data Sources: MassGIS, MAPC

May 2019



Source: Metropolitan Area Planning Council, MassGIS, Walk Score

Figure 50: Estimated Traffic Volumes



Source: Metropolitan Area Planning Council, MassDOT

the whole, reflects the proximity of housing in Sharon to destinations for work and errands (see Fig. 49).³²

Exposure to Air Pollution and Green Space

Exposure to air pollution has effects on human health. There is an extensive body of literature linking exposure to air pollution to mortality and hospitalizations: asthma exacerbation, chronic lung disease, heart attacks, certain cancers, and major cardiovascular disease.³³ Some harmful emissions occur naturally, like radon and ozone; in other cases, naturally occurring sources are worsened or new pollutants created through man-made emissions. A particular source is traffic-related emissions. Concentrations of traffic-related air pollution (TRAP) can be particularly high in areas with heavy congestion or high volumes of vehicular traffic. Near these locations, schools, homes, and those who walk or bicycle can be directly affected by short- and long-term exposure to the pollutants.

Most of the estimated volumes along roadways in Sharon fall far below thresholds associated with higher exposure levels (e.g., 30,000 vehicles per day/vpd). The exceptions are Route 1 and Interstate 95, both of which are near or above 30,000 vpd threshold (see Fig. 50).

Access to parks, open space, and greenery are associated with protection against poor mental health outcomes and fostering greater socializing and social support.³⁴ Parks and recreational spaces also present opportunities for physical activity. In many studies the presence of open space has been associated with greater levels of exercise.

A measure of access to open space is how many acres of open space there are per person in a specific geography.³⁵ Based on the 2010 population and recent land use data, the town has an average score of 1.55 acres per capita.

³² Walk Score: <https://www.walkscore.com/>

³³ US EPA, OAR, and Abt Associates, Inc. 2010. "Environmental Benefits Mapping and Analysis Program (BenMAP)." *User's Manual Appendices*. <http://www.epa.gov/air/benmap/docs.html>; Health Effects Institute. 2003. "Revised Analyses of Time-Series Studies of Air Pollution and Health." <http://pubs.healtheffects.org/view.php?id=4>; Roman, Henry A, Katherine D Walker, Tyra L Walsh, Lisa Conner, Harvey M Richmond, Bryan J Hubbell, and Patrick L Kinney. 2008. "Expert Judgment Assessment of the Mortality Impact of Changes in Ambient Fine Particulate Matter in the U.S." *Environmental Science & Technology* 42 (7) (April 1): 2268–2274

³⁴ Cities, Green Space, and Mental Well-Being: <http://oxfordre.com/environmentalscience/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199389414.001.0001/acrefore-9780199389414-e-93>

³⁵ The score is calculated by averaging the open space per capita of all 250m grids within a specific geographic extent. The average only takes into account grids where the population was greater than 0 in 2010.

Sharon's score is higher than the MAPC region as a whole (1.52 acres).

Exposure to green space can occur through publicly-accessible lands. Residents are also exposed to green space through contact and experience with vegetation like trees and shrubs throughout a community. One measure for vegetative coverage is the Normalized Difference Vegetation Index (NDVI). This measure is calculated from satellite imagery that identifies visible and near-infrared light reflected by vegetation.³⁶

The NDVI values are expressed between -1.0 to +1.0 with a higher positive value indicating the presence of more green vegetation. The Town of Sharon has a mean NDVI value of 0.58 (min/max = -0.33/0.78). The mean for the town is higher than the value across the MAPC region (0.51). The town's value indicates that the town as a whole has higher levels of exposure to green vegetation.

Active Transportation and Safety

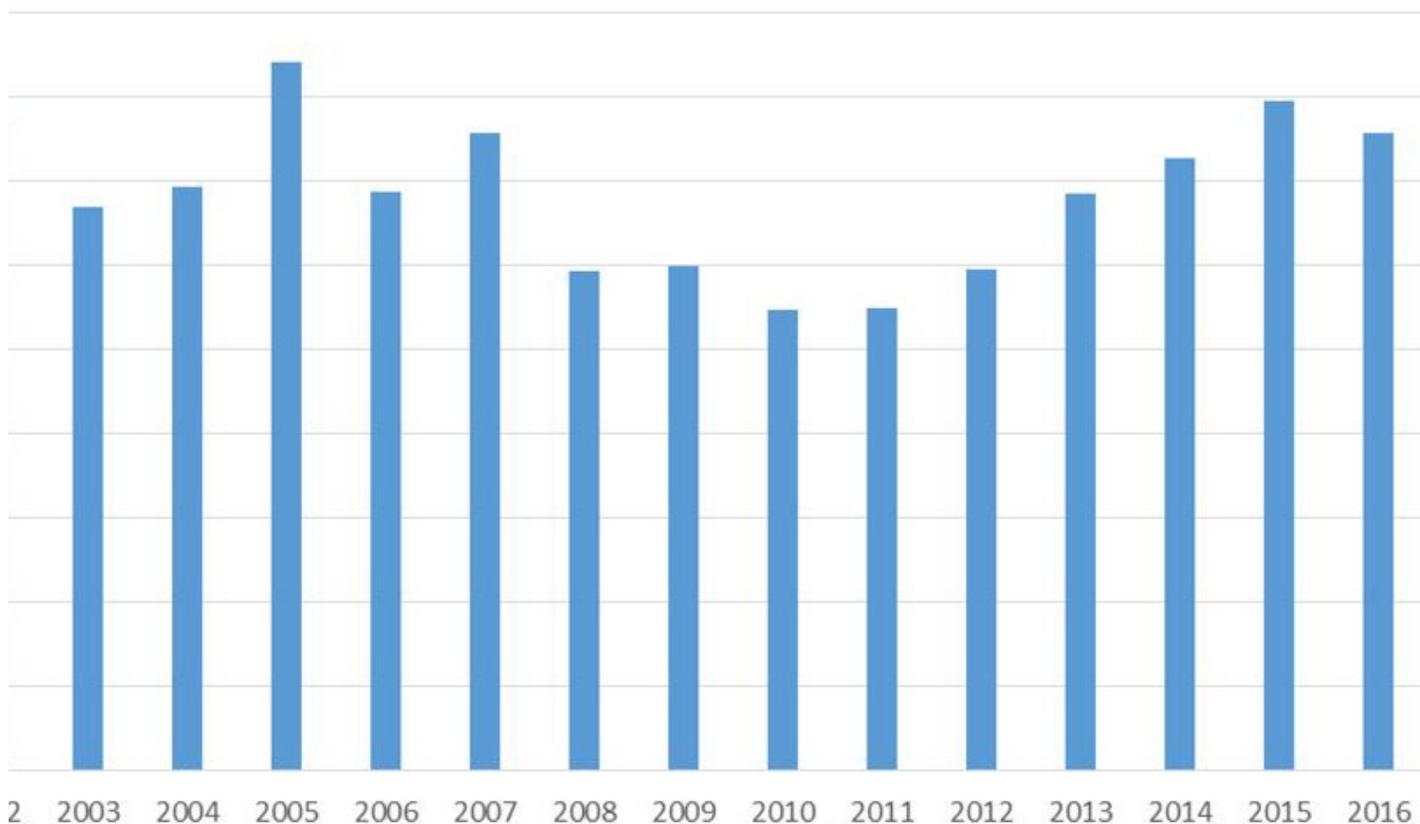
The health benefits of physical activity are well documented, yet less than half (49%) of all adults meet the Surgeon General's recommended 30 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity on most days of the week; only a fifth (20%) meet the guidelines for both aerobic physical and muscle-strengthening activity. Evidence suggests that good infrastructure (e.g., sidewalks and bike lanes) and public transportation access leads to increases in walking and biking for transportation purposes, and therefore plays an important role in increasing population level physical activity.

Using the most recent American Community Survey (ACS) data, it appears some residents may meet their physical activity requirements through work-based trips. While estimates show less than 2% of Sharon residents either bike or walk to work, approximately 16% use public transit for commuting – a mode that typically requires a walk or bike trip on at least one end of the commute. (See also Transportation)

Sharon has an extensive trail network for hiking and roadways that are used for recreational biking. So, while active transportation may not account for daily trips to work, shopping or services, there is infrastructure to support recreational physical activity.³⁷

³⁶ NASA Earth Observatory, "Measuring Vegetation (NDVI & EVI)", <http://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/Features/MeasuringVegetation/>
³⁷ Sallis, J. F., Floyd, M. F., Rodriguez, D. A., & Saelens, B. E. (2012). Role

Figure 51: Total Annual Crashes in the Town of Sharon



Source: MassDOT

Safety is a critical dimension of health when it comes to transportation. Motor vehicle crashes are one of the leading causes of death among younger populations (i.e., those between 16 and 25 years old) in the United States, and account for more than 32,000 deaths and 2.3 million nonfatal injuries annually. In addition to actual safety risk, perceptions of safety of the transportation system affect people’s behaviors (see Fig. 51).

There have been few reported traffic fatalities in Sharon, although after some years of declining numbers of crashes, there have been increases in the most recently reported data. Since 2002, there have been an average of 340 crashes per year and there were approximately 363, 397, and 378 crashes from 2014-2016, respectively.³⁸ This

of built environments in physical activity, obesity, and cardiovascular disease. Circulation, 125(5), 729-737.

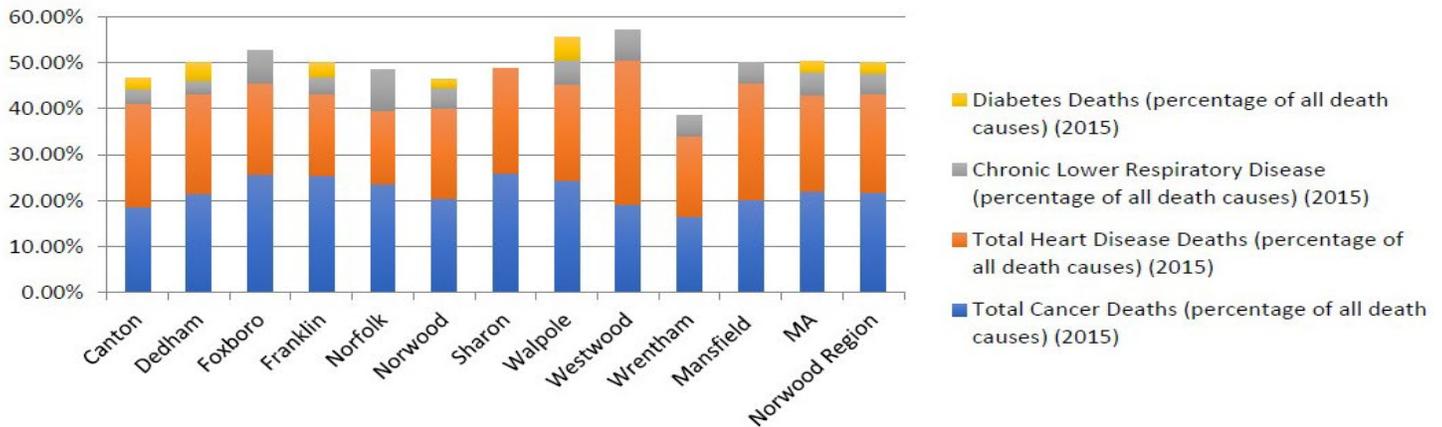
³⁸ Crash reporting includes all crashes within a jurisdiction so reporting for Sharon includes crashes that occurred on stretches of Interstate 95 and Route 1.

included four fatal crashes, three of which involved only motorists. During the 2014-2016 period, there were also seven crashes involving non-motorists (two cyclists, four pedestrians, and one wheelchair user); one crash resulted in a fatality and the others were injury crashes.³⁹

While actual traffic-related crashes may be relatively low, perceptions of safety can also have impacts. Feedback from residents and stakeholders highlighted that walking and biking along the roads in Sharon can feel unsafe. Reasons cited include the lack of sidewalks, gaps in sidewalk networks, and high vehicle speeds along roadways.

³⁹ Note: MassDOT crash reporting modified to include crash reported by media but that was not captured in the crash data report for Sharon. This crash resulted in a pedestrian fatality on Hampton Road in Sharon. <https://boston.cbslocal.com/2014/06/16/young-woman-killed-jogging-in-sharon-identified/>

Figure 52: Mortality Due to Chronic Disease (as a Percentage of All Causes), 2015



Source: Norwood Hospital Community Health Needs Assessment, 2018; mortality data for diabetes was unavailable for Foxboro, Franklin, Sharon, Wrentham and Mansfield. Chronic lower respiratory disease data was also unavailable for Sharon.

Community Connections

Social cohesion, which describes the extent of connectedness and solidarity of a community, and social support are associated with positive health outcomes. Common indicators of social cohesion are voting and geographic mobility. Using Elections and Voting data from the Secretary of the Commonwealth, more than three-quarters of voting-eligible residents (81%) of registered voters in Sharon participated in the 2016 presidential election. This is higher than the state percentage of registered voters who participated in the same election (65%).⁴⁰ Participation in local elections, which occur in May, offer a perspective on local civic engagement that is typically outside of state and national elections. Over the last five years (2013-2018), the average voter participation rate for local elections in Sharon was 15%, with the highest turnout in 2016.⁴¹ Voter participation in the May 2019 election was 25%.

Geographic mobility of residents can serve as a proxy measure for turnover or instability in a community. Communities with higher rates of year over year turnover may not allow residents to form and build social ties, lessening the potential for social cohesion. The ACS estimates for Sharon indicate a majority of residents are

⁴⁰ MA Secretary of the Commonwealth, Elections Division - Research and Statistics, Registration and Enrollment Statistic, <https://www.sec.state.ma.us/ele/eleidx.htm>

⁴¹ Sharon Town Clerk's Office, Town Election and Town Meeting Results, <https://www.townofsharon.net/town-clerk/pages/town-election-and-town-meeting-results>

remaining in their homes over time. Over two separate five-year periods, most residents have reported on average that they are in the same house that they were the previous year (ACS 2007-2011: 93%; 2012-2016: 93%).⁴² These percentages are higher than the MAPC region (85/86%) and the state (86%/87%) over the same periods.

Health Status Snapshot

General

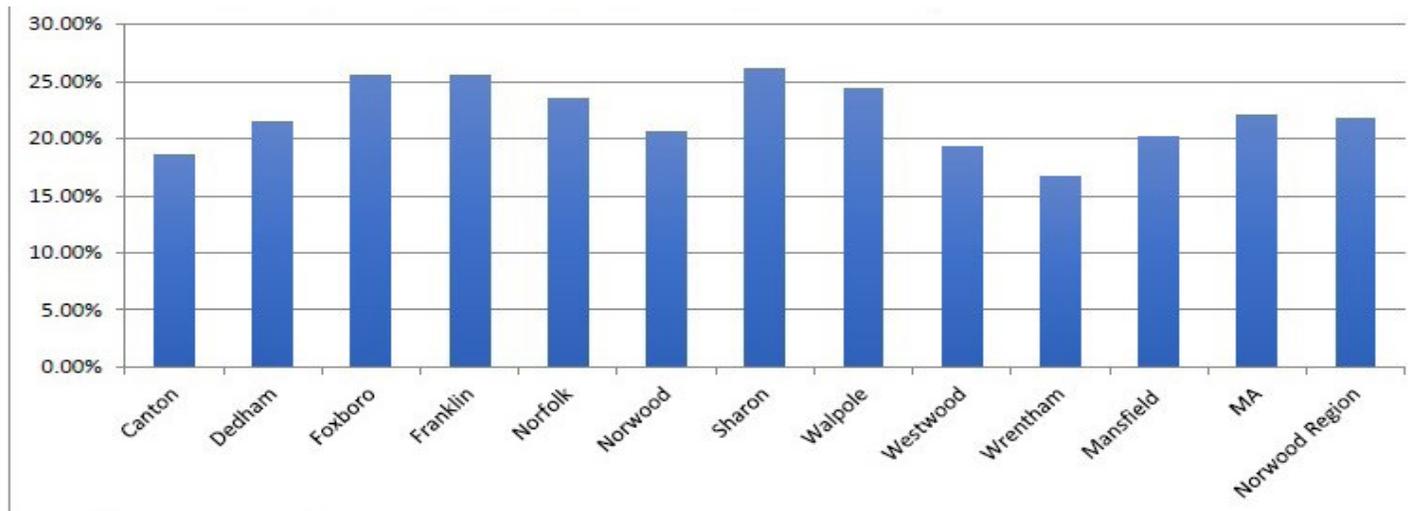
Available health data suggest that Sharon is a very healthy community with statistically significant differences compared to the state overall, including: lower rates of hospitalizations, lower levels of poor health behaviors, and lower prevalence of health conditions across nearly all conditions.

Chronic disease rates are among the lowest in the region and the state. Compared to other communities in the Norwood Hospital service area, Sharon has a lower mortality rate for causes including diabetes and chronic lower respiratory disease (see Fig. 52). Estimates from the state's Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) on measures of obesity and physical activity indicate that the town's residents perform better than residents of most other cities and towns in the state.

Cancer accounts for the highest percentage of mortality

⁴² U.S. Census Bureau; American Community Survey, 2007-2011 and 2012-2016 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Outbound Geographic Mobility

Figure 53: Cancer Mortality (All Types, as a Percentage of All Causes of Death), 2015



Source: Norwood Hospital Community Health Needs Assessment, 2018

in Sharon. The town mortality due to cancer exceeds the state's (26% vs. 22%) (see Fig. 53). Breast and prostate cancers contribute the most to overall cancer mortality in the town.

Health over the Lifespan: Age-Specific Health

A critical aspect of community health is examining the health of the population throughout the life course. Data specific to youth and older adults are included here. The purpose is to provide a spotlight on populations that are more susceptible to changes that can either promote or provide lifelong health and wellness.

Youth

Childhood and youth are critical periods for physical, social, and emotional development and a time when external factors such as exposure to significant adverse events (e.g., housing instability, trauma) or exposure to pollutants can adversely affect development. Similarly, engagement in prosocial and healthy behaviors can serve as protective factors that improve health outcomes and prevent illness. Many municipalities use youth surveys to gather information from youth about their health status and their experiences growing up in healthy environments.

Recent survey data for Sharon (see Fig. 54) suggest that Sharon's youth engage less in risky behaviors and more in healthy behaviors like physical activity and eating healthful foods.⁴³ However, there are two areas of concern:

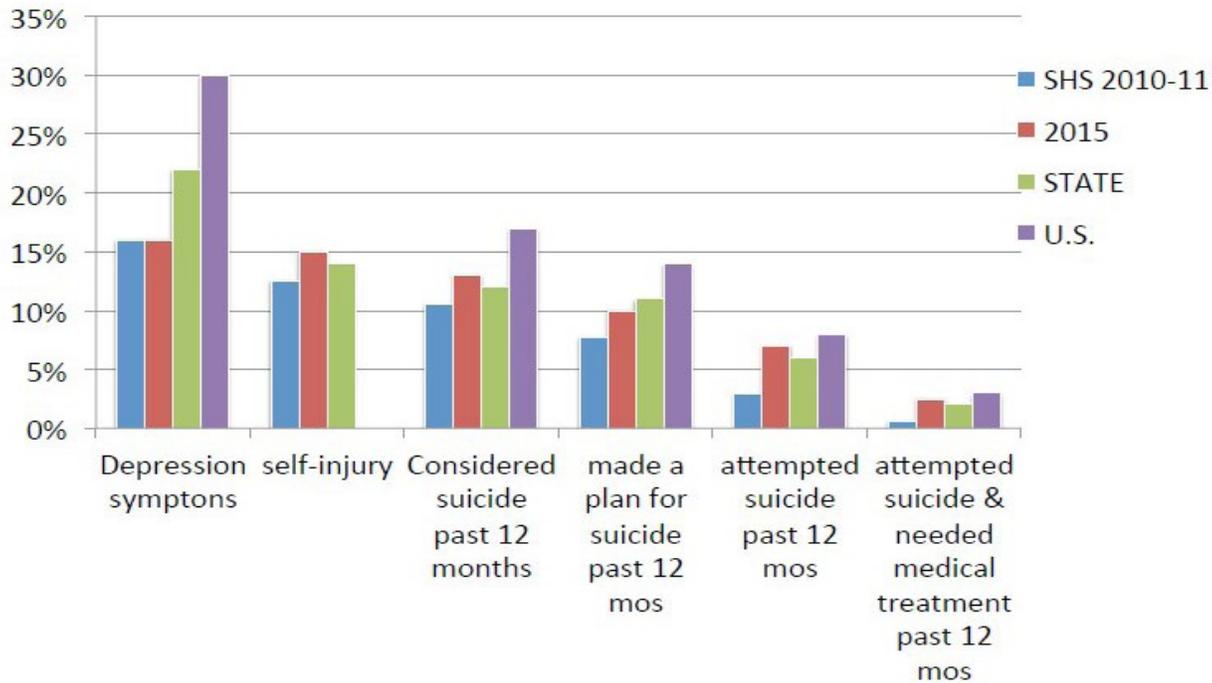
substance use and mental health.

The most recent self-reported survey data indicate that illegal use of prescription depressant, anti-anxiety, and tranquilizer drugs has increased from 2.9% in 2010-11 (29 students) to 4% (37 students) in 2015. While not a drastic increase, if the use is occurring through physician-prescribed routes, the rise may signal that depression and anxiety issues may be changing among high school students. Consistent with broader research on first exposure to opioids, 24% of students who used prescription pain pills illegally were first prescribed them by a doctor for an injury or post-surgery. Thus, substance use disorder may not always arise from illegal or recreational use. Lastly, the most common reason cited for illegally using prescription stimulant drugs was to improve academic performance (62% of users), while the second most common was to feel good or get high (14% of users).

Data from the 2015 survey suggest that there has been an increase in the percentage of high school students who have considered self-harm like suicide, when compared to the data from 2010-2011. In some cases, the percentages reporting these considerations do exceed state percentages; in no cases are they worse than national percentages.

43 2015 Sharon High School Youth Risk Behavior Survey

Figure 54: Sharon High School Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2015



Source: 2015 Sharon High School Youth Risk Behavior Survey

Older Adults

Massachusetts is set to experience growth in the number of residents who are 65 years and older. The growth in the number of older residents will challenge how residential and commercial infrastructure is built; what health, social, and economic services are offered; and how and where older residents interact with the rest of the community. In Sharon, the older population is projected to nearly double over the next 15 years and could account for nearly a quarter of the town’s overall population by 2030.

The Massachusetts Healthy Aging Collaborative has developed municipal profiles for cities and towns that show the health of older residents. For Sharon, data show that on nearly each measure, older residents in Sharon are in line with or better off than other older adults across the state. While Sharon’s older residents appear better in a relative sense, the percentages themselves provide useful information for addressing the health needs of this population. For example, the data indicate that very few older residents engage in substance use or smoking and

most engage in healthy behaviors such as physical activity. In contrast, the data convey that slightly more than one in 10 are living with Alzheimer’s disease or related dementias and one in three may be dealing with depression. Additionally, data suggest that more than half of older adults in town have limited access to supermarkets.

Select data for Sharon is presented below with green shading to indicate where the town performs better than the state, yellow to indicate an area of concern (i.e., borderline worse than the state), and red to indicate where the town performs worse than the state (see Table 23).⁴⁴ The full data profile is included in Appendix E.

⁴⁴ Interpretations about whether or not the Town is performing better, worse, or no differently than the state average are based on statistical significance. Statistical significance in this case was derived by the Massachusetts Healthy Aging Collaborative and is based on 95% confidence intervals. For specific information on how these were calculated, please visit: <https://mahealthyagingcollaborative.org/data-report/explore-the-profiles/data-sources-and-methods/#data>

Elements of a Healthy Community

Sharon Ratings (Green = Good; Yellow = Some room for improvement; Red = Lots of room for improvement)

Table 23: Sharon Adult Health Data Comparison to State Averages

Health Metric	Sharon	State
WELLNESS AND PREVENTION		
% 60+ with any physical activity within last month	76.9%	73.3%
% 60+ met CDC guidelines for physical activities (muscle-strengthening and aerobic physical activity)	17.9%	20.8%
% 60+ injured in a fall within last 12 months	9.8%	10.6%
% 60+ with self-reported fair or poor health status	18.2%	18.0%
% 60+ with 15+ physically unhealthy days last month	13.7%	12.7%
% 60+ with physical exam/check-up in past year	91.5%	89.3%
NUTRITION/DIET		
% 60+ with 5 or more servings of fruit or vegetables per day	16.9%	21.5%
% 60+ self-reported obese	23.9%	23.1%
% 65+ clinically diagnosed obese	17.2%	19.0%
% 65+ with high cholesterol	74.5%	75.0%
% 60+ excessive drinking	13.7%	9.3%
% 65+ with poor supermarket access	54.0%	29.3%
MENTAL HEALTH		
% 60+ with 15+ days poor mental health last month	7.1%	7.0%
% 65+ with depression	30.9%	31.5%
% 65+ with substance use disorders (drug use +/- alcohol abuse)	4.9%	6.6%
% 65+ with tobacco use disorders	4.4%	10.2%
CHRONIC DISEASE		
% 65+ with Alzheimer's disease or related dementias	14.8%	13.6%
% 65+ with diabetes	30.6%	31.7%
% 65+ with stroke	11.1%	12.0%
% 65+ with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease	17.0%	21.5%
% 65+ with asthma	15.0%	15.0%
% 65+ with hypertension	72.8%	76.2%
% 65+ ever had a heart attack	4.0%	4.6%
Summary chronic disease measures		
% 65+ with 4+ (out of 15) chronic conditions	57.2%	60.7%
% 65+ with 0 chronic conditions	7.1%	7.3%
LIVING WITH DISABILITY		
% 65+ with self-reported cognition difficulty	5.8%	8.3%
% 65+ with self-reported ambulatory difficulty	15.2%	20.2%
% 65+ with self-reported independent living difficulty	11.8%	14.3%

Source: Massachusetts Healthy Aging Collaborative 2018 Community Profile – Town of Sharon



What the Community Said

Key takeaways from the community input from meetings, the Fall 2018 online survey, meetings-in-a-box, interviews, and focus groups, and other submitted comments:

Imagine Sharon 2018 Fall Survey

- The words *health* and *healthy* were frequently used by residents as one of three words they would use to describe their vision for Sharon.
- Many who commented through the survey identified how built environment factors (e.g., sidewalks and roadway crossings) were connected to having a healthy and active town.
- Several residents noted that they would miss certain Town services if they were to go away, including nursing services from the Health Department and health safety services.
- Only 15% of respondents indicated that they walk or bike daily; one-third responded that they do not travel by walking at all on a weekly basis.
- One-third responded that they would walk more if options were improved; 23% would expect to bike more if transportation options were improved. In each case, most indicated that they would still be driving for the majority of their travel.
- Half of the survey respondents stated they were satisfied or neutral regarding health programs in town (e.g., school health, substance abuse programs, environmental health information, flu clinics); one-third, however, indicated that have not used the services.
- 10% of survey respondents indicated that the Town should expand or invest in health programs (e.g., school health, substance abuse programs, environmental health information, flu clinics).
- A large proportion indicated that they are not aware of the availability of health-related community features: health (50%), social services (70%) and community health education (57%).



Social Services Focus Group, Interviews and Direct Comments (some of these are also listed in Public Facilities)

- Public meeting participants and survey respondents indicated an interest in exploring shared transportation services to help serve the portion of Sharon's population who are unable to drive.
- Services related to older adults, which is a growing segment of the population, will need to be comprehensive in the coming years.
- Diversity and location of housing matters, as senior housing complexes on the periphery of Sharon create transportation challenges and lack social and physical connectivity.
- The growing diversity of the Town's residents creates the need for a more multi-cultural support structure that understands and responds to varied cultural and social needs.
- The Adult Center/COA provides a broad range of services and programs and serves as a hub for external referrals as needed. There is significant demand for these programs and services, and waitlists are common.
- Access to the Adult Center/COA can be limited for those without a car due its location in town.
- The Adult Center/COA provides robust transportation services for seniors, often providing transportation to medical appointments and other activities. However, there remain significant gaps in the supply of transportation services as the demand outweighs the supply.
- Faith-based communities, such as temples, churches and mosques, provide a supplemental network for social service referrals and community cohesion. They also play a critical role in promoting physical and emotional health, supporting social cohesion, and contributing to the vibrant religious and ethnic diversity of the Town.
- Housing supply is limited for older adults and people with disabilities, as smaller homes are being replaced by larger ones, with fewer opportunities for downsizing or creating accessible homes. This limits the ability of older adults to age in community.
- There is a lack of widespread understanding and information about the needs of people with disabilities in the town. The Sharon Commission on Disabilities emphasizes the importance of the public health and health care systems in town, understanding the unique health care needs of people with disabilities (e.g., a wheelchair scale) and engaging in public education campaigns to share important public awareness and information.
- The Recreation Department has a program which enables opportunities for recreation for children and youth with special needs. There should be greater attention to creating more inclusive recreational activities throughout town, for all abilities.
- Sharon youth could benefit from the creation of new spaces to congregate, hang out, and interact with friends, in a low-key and safe environment

GOALS AND RECOMMENDED POLICIES AND ACTIONS

The Goals and Recommendations in this section are placed within the greater context of the following MAPC MetroFuture Goals:

- Goal #18 - The region's seniors will have more housing choices and opportunities to downsize while staying in their own community.
- Goal #19 - Persons with physical or mental disabilities will be able to find housing that meets their needs in terms of design, services, and affordability.
- Goal #24 - Residents in all communities and of all incomes will have access to affordable healthy food.
- Goal #25 - More residents will build regular physical activity into their daily lives.
- Goal #26 - All residents will have access to affordable health care.
- Goal #27 - Children and youth will have access to a strong system of early education programs, after school programs, teen centers, and youth organizations.
- Goal #31 - The region's residents – including youth, seniors, and immigrants – will be well informed and engaged in civic life and community planning.
- Goal #32 - Seniors will remain active members of their communities.
- Goal #40 - Fewer of the region's residents will live in poverty.
- Goal #45 - More people will use transit for work and personal services.
- Goal #47 - Most people will choose to walk or bike for short trips.
- Goal #50 - People with disabilities will find it easier to get around the region.
- Goal #60 - The region will have better air quality, both indoors and out.



Goal 1: Promote environments that foster formal and informal connections among neighbors and peers to enhance social capital and intergenerational ties.

The Town of Sharon is home to numerous volunteer, affinity, and faith-based groups as well as municipal departments that provide spaces where people can connect with one another. Many, if not all, of these spaces, are inclusive and open to people from a variety of backgrounds, ages, and abilities. The Town should promote these spaces – maintain, create, expand – for current and future residents to sustain and build social capital.

Recommendations:

- 1A. Identify or develop publicly-accessible spaces as physical community hubs in each neighborhood in Sharon. The purpose of the hubs, which could be a park, playground, or cafe, is to provide a known location for neighbors to connect with one another, formally and informally.
- 1B. Hold at least two additional arts and culture programs annually that promote cultural equity and inclusivity. The program would promote cultural inclusivity for all town residents.

Goal 2: Support the mental and emotional wellness of children and youth to reduce the potential for risky behavior and to increase opportunities among all youth in town.

Experiences and behaviors that people have when they are young can impact them throughout their lives. As trends indicate, the behavioral health needs and substance use of youth in Sharon may be increasing. In addition, adults may face challenges themselves both in terms of their own behavioral health as well as how they respond to others whose lives are impacted by behavioral health issues.

Recommendations:

- 2A. Conduct an annual town-wide communications campaign to reduce the perception of stigma for receiving mental health and emotional support. The campaign, which may be new or expand on existing efforts, should include information about mental health literacy and language, peer mentoring, and how parents and older adults can model stigma-free behavior.*
- 2B. Support school-based programs to provide social and emotional support. Existing programs can be enhanced and evolved to provide support for youth who are living with depression or other mental health issues. If not already in place, the school system should also consider implementing a universal school-based suicide awareness and education program.*
- 2C. Strengthen coordination and communication among organizations who work with youth and families with children. There are municipal, non-profit, and volunteer organizations who already work to address factors that may influence the mental health and behavior of youth and children in town. The Town, or a partner organization, should convene these groups to identify potential ways to coordinate efforts so that actions are not duplicated and that collective work results in reduced self-report of risks to health of Sharon's youngest residents.*

- 2D. Identify environments, new spaces, reuse of existing spaces, or public spaces that support more unstructured play among children and youth in town. There is evidence that associations exist between unstructured, self-directed play and higher rates of creativity, pro-social behaviors, and rates of physical activity - all outcomes that are also associated with better mental health outcomes. The Town is encouraged to explore making more space available for unstructured play (e.g., playgrounds and fields), more time for children and youth to engage in these contexts (e.g., extended recesses, after school programs), and more support for parents (e.g. informational materials, volunteer supervisors). These spaces should enable flexible design to accommodate children and youth of all ages and provide additional opportunities for youth to congregate in a safe space in both daytime and evening hours.*

Goal 3: Enhance local public health resources to address environmental exposures and respond to health threats, including those created by climate change, that could affect the physical health and mental wellbeing of residents.

Local public health services provide a backbone for many elements of thriving community. Often going unseen, these services protect residents from illnesses, set conditions for safe indoor and outdoor environments, and provide readiness for emergency situations. Vulnerability to climate change related health impacts and disaster mitigation are closely related. Greater recognition and support should be provided to this work so that the town continues to enjoy its beneficial health status now and into the future.

Recommendations:

- 3A. Enhance public health communications. Staff support and time should be provided to the Health Department and Board so that more communication opportunities are available to share about local public health work and programming. The purpose of the communications is to build stronger appreciation and engagement with local public health services and better equip the community to respond to current and emerging threats. Communications could take the form of written, audio, or video materials and audiences may include residents, property owners, and businesses.
- 3B. Provide additional resources to enhance public health capacity. Local public health services are under resourced in Massachusetts. In most cases, this limits the ability of local health departments to meet emerging health issues as well as to engage in processes, like planning, that address social determinants of health. The Town should consider providing more resources, such as a Town Planner or grant writer, to the Health Department in order to enhance their capacity to engage in new issue area (e.g., climate change-driven health issues) and contribute to additional municipal processes.
- 3C. Sustain and enhance local and regional partnerships. A local health department in Massachusetts is likely not able to individually fulfill all of the FPHS. Strides can be made, but there are foundational areas that will be best addressed by another organization (e.g., provision of clinical services through a hospital, outreach to students through the schools). The Sharon Health Department should sustain the partnerships that it has in place and look to strategically increase partnerships both internally (i.e., other municipal departments) and externally.
- 3D. Develop and invest in programs to retrofit older housing stock that may have quality or exposure issues. The Health Department should lead an effort with other Town Departments (e.g., building division, Adult Center/COA) to gather and provide information to residents about healthy indoor environments. Given the age of housing stock in town, the effort would provide residents with clear pathways to addressing potential ongoing exposure issues.
- 3E. Conduct a Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness study to assess the potential impact of climate change and enable the Town to prepare efficiently and effectively to ensure the health of residents. The State Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) grant program is a helpful resource for towns in Massachusetts to plan for climate change resiliency and help to prioritize specific projects that best meet the needs of the town. Certification and grant funding are available through this effort. This is another example of how a Town planner could enable new assessment and funding opportunities for the Town.

Goal 4: Continue prioritization of active transportation and traffic safety investments to support daily physical activity and exposure to health-supporting environments.

Science continues to build around the importance of physical activity. And, while the evidence shows how physical activity reduces risk factors for chronic disease and cancer, most people still do not meet recommended levels. Building physical activity into more activities like taking transit, going on errands, or attending community events is one way to ensure more people stay active. While this change may be more difficult in less developed towns, there are actions that can be taken.

Recommendations:

- 4A. Consider adopting a data-driven traffic safety policy with the goal of eliminating fatalities and injuries from roadway crashes in Sharon. Taking guidance from the Vision Zero approach,⁴⁵ the Town can use crash data and local feedback to eliminate the potential for fatalities and serious injuries through changes which reduce speeds and conflicts between different modes of transport. Changes can also be communicated to influence perceptions of safety, particularly as they serve as barriers to walking and biking trips.
- 4B. Apply Complete Streets principles as part of site designs. Often Complete Streets principles are looked at as just applying to public thoroughfares. The principles should not be viewed only this way – the principles should carry through to the design of properties, especially any large site developments. In application, this looks like driveways that make accommodations for bicyclists and pedestrians, placement of shuttle stops in places connected to sidewalk networks and safely-designed crosswalks, and installation of benches and accessible curb ramps.

⁴⁵ Vision Zero sets a target of eliminating all serious injuries and deaths due to road traffic crashes. The approach focuses on how we design and operate our roadway system so that we prevent the potential for death or serious injury for roadway users, especially those who are most vulnerable. Vision Zero was first adopted in Sweden and has reduced deaths from road traffic crashes by 50% since 2000. The work has involved changes in planning and design, technology, education, and enforcement in order to create a system that protects the lives of motorists and non-motorists alike.

Goal 5: Pursue an Age- and Dementia-Friendly Strategy to increase opportunities for residents to age in community.

Sharon is served by a strong and dynamic Adult Center/ Council on Aging. The council and its services are likely to continue to see an increase in demand. While there will always be a need for programming, there are changes the Town can make that can improve the overall environment, and health, for those aging in the community. An Age-Friendly strategy, which sometimes is referred to as an “8 to 80” strategy, pursues changes that support residents across the life course.

Recommendations:

- 5A. Explore designation for the Town as Age- and Dementia-Friendly. The Town can work with the Massachusetts Healthy Aging Collaborative and Dementia Friendly Massachusetts to apply for the designations and take actions to become age-friendly across multiple domains, including transportation, housing, respect and social inclusion, and community and health services.⁴⁶ Identify and apply for funding opportunities that support these community efforts (e.g., Tufts Health Plan Foundation).
- 5B. Adopt guidance related to Universal Design and accessibility for publicly-accessible buildings, public spaces, and sidewalks. Such changes would ensure that public buildings, spaces, and pathways through the Town become more accessible and inviting to people of all ages and abilities. The guidance could also come from a town resolution to signal to developers, organizations, and residents about the benefits of Universal Design (UD) and the desire to include UD elements in proposed changes to private properties (e.g., visitability at the subdivision or site plan level). (See Housing)

⁴⁶ AARP The 8 Domains of Livability: Resources, <https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/network-age-friendly-communities/info-2015/8-domains-of-livability-resources.html>

5C. Invest in improved transportation practices and systems to enable greater mobility for older adults and persons with disabilities. Addressing the transportation needs would help to create a more inclusive and age-friendly community. On the practice side, use guidance documents that address how to design roadways that address the needs of older driver (e.g., *Federal Highway Administration’s Handbook for Designing Roadways for the Aging Population*⁴⁷). In addition, monitor and when possible, engage in planning for new services that connect those who are unable to drive to local and regional destinations (e.g., *Blue Hills CHNA Transportation Initiative*). Continue to participate in the sub-regional Suburban Mobility Working Group (See also Transportation)

5D. Provide home remodeling guidance through the Building Division. The Town can develop guidance by adding more information that specifically relates to modifications for aging residents and people with disabilities. Using guidance from AARP (e.g., *HomeFit guide*⁴⁸) and local contractors, more information could be provided about the most common changes to homes like zero-step entrances, adding grab bars, or walk-in showers. Additionally, incentives, such as lower permitting fees or expedited permitting, could be considered to help older residents afford to make these changes.

Goal 6: Consider health impacts of proposed projects and policies by integrating a Health and Equity Lens into local decision-making.

The town will experience additional growth and development in the years to come. It is helpful to anticipate public health impacts as part of these changes similar to how the Town assesses other impacts (e.g., traffic, public finances). Going forward, the Town should take actions to integrate public health into other municipal practices by applying a Health-in-All Policies approach to decision-making.

Recommendations:

6A. Use a health assessment tool, such as the Norfolk County 8 Coalition Plan for Health toolkit and checklist, in planning and development decision-making. A planning and health assessment tool can assist in local decision-making on proposed projects and policies. Decision-makers and residents can use this checklist to assess proposals quickly and have an informed discussion about potential positive and negative effects on public health generally and in relation to specific populations in the town (e.g., people of color, older adults, households with limited incomes, etc.).

6B. Explore the use of Racial Equity Impact Assessment in municipal planning and development decision-making. The tool would explore how a project may help create an even more inclusive community or may disproportionately impact populations who experience health disparities. Initial assessments should focus on significant proposals and be voluntary to explore how the process and assessment findings work within the Town’s decision-making processes. A model to consider is Race Forward’s Racial Equity Toolkit developed for the City of Seattle which lays out a process and offers a ready-to-use worksheet.⁴⁹

47 http://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/older_users/handbook/

48 <http://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/info-2014/aarp-home-fit-guide-aging-in-place.html>

49 City of Seattle, “Racial Equity Toolkit to Assess Policies, Initiatives, Programs, and Budget Issues,” <http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/opi/healthequity/resources/seattle-toolkit.html>

Goal 7: Improve communication and coordination across health and social services in town, with considerations for the unique needs of all residents throughout the life course. (Also see Public Facilities and Infrastructure corresponding goals)

7A. Coordinate available social, financial, and health services available through the Town and organize and formalize the referral system for services and programs available through the Town's departments; local religious institutions; and local and regional social, health, and educational organizations. Available services and programs should be known across Town Departments as well as among local and regional educational, health, and social service networks, providing a clear pathway for residents trying to access these services. Attention to reducing duplication and enhancing coordination and communication is critical.

7B. Evaluate the increasing and changing demand for Town services and programs for all residents, and particularly for older adults as well as children, youth, and families. With the town demographics expected to change in the coming years, there are different implications for residents who would like to age in community, as well as children, youth, and families who move to Sharon for the high-quality schools. Accurate data collection and projections are needed together with a coordinated approach to managing current needs and planning for future needs to ensure that the Town is prepared to meet the diverse needs of the community, in an efficient and equitable way.



SECTION 5:

IMPLEMENTATION ACTIONS



IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PLAN

INTRODUCTION

This *Imagine Sharon Master Plan* (Master Plan) reflects a multi-year planning process focused on community values and priorities, current Town initiatives, and a vision for the future. The Master Plan employs a systems approach to align goals across plan elements and to assist the Town in making the best use of its resources by encouraging boards and committees, Town departments, and residents to seek and coordinate mutually beneficial solutions across disciplines and interests. In the spirit of this approach, this section outlines both the actions (the “what”) and the processes (the “how”) of plan implementation by including:

- **The Master Plan Systems Checklist** – a formalized list of considerations to be discussed and questions to be answered as each proposed action moves forward. This will enable information to be gathered and understood in an interdisciplinary manner regarding financial, environmental, health, and other impacts prior to action. The checklist is a guide that ensures an interdisciplinary approach to planning and implementation and is intended to be edited over time based on use.
- **The Master Plan Implementation Action Chart** – a list of actions, as described in the Plan Elements section of this Master Plan (Section 4), that is categorized by major plan elements.
- **Master Plan Implementation Start-ups** – detailed step-by-step and other information to help the Town get started on four selected focus areas for implementation.

As this Master Plan looks at a fifteen-year horizon for implementation, exact timing of all recommendations is not detailed here. Suggestions, based on feedback from the MPSC, are made for near-term and longer-term action items but all tasks will be dependent on funding and Town priorities, as well as staff and partner capacity. These factors will change over time and the Town should prepare a yearly report documenting implementation progress on the Master Plan with notes on key factors enabling progress, or deterrents to action, as applicable. This yearly assessment will be a helpful tool in ensuring the plan is put to good use as the Town moves towards a collective vision for the future.

THE MASTER PLAN SYSTEMS CHECKLIST

The Master Plan Systems Checklist (Checklist) is an effort to formalize a process that currently exists in formal and informal ways in the Town, by which various departments ask questions, check data, and gather information regarding decisions, actions, and spending. The Checklist makes the process of exploring consequences, understanding budget ramifications, and measuring actions to uphold Town values easier to follow and more transparent. This Checklist is merely a starting point, designed to be continually modified to reflect changing priorities and policies. Still, maintaining and updating the Checklist will require multi-department and committee discussions for decision-making.

To illustrate how this Checklist can be used in the years ahead, we use “reuse of the existing Sharon Public Library building” as an example. This specific example is meant to illustrate the application of the Checklist for any type of implementation question or action, including similar issues of public building reuse or acquisition, as well as policy changes, staffing considerations, or program creation. The following prompts are example considerations raised through the use of the Master Plan Systems Checklist:

Town Reuse/Sale of the Existing Sharon Public Library Building

- What are the overall fiscal impacts related to selling the building for commercial/retail/dining use and generating property tax revenue vs. reusing the building for Town-related purposes or leasing the building for commercial uses?
- If the building is sold, will there be other opportunities to find additional space to purchase for Town needs or reuse Town-owned space, if needed, in the coming years?
- If the building remains a public asset, will more staff be needed to manage the building and maintain it?
- What is the annual cost of this staff in terms of salary, benefits, space, and equipment needs?
- What are building capital requirements in the coming years?
- Are the intended uses of the building supportive of the goals for the area around the site (i.e., will uses in the building support street life and vitality for the commercial centers, or nearby additional housing for denser, walkable areas, etc.) and supportive of recommendations in the previous *2009 Post Office Square Area Plan*?
- Are there other Town priorities that have more urgency (i.e., acquiring a conservation parcel, supporting more housing choices, etc.)? What should take priority and why?
- Are there alternatives to proposed reuse of the building for Town needs or to selling or leasing the building for private use?

The Checklists provided in this plan corresponds with three cross-element topics raised throughout the master planning process: environmental sustainability, community connectivity and health, and fiscal sustainability. The Checklist is intended to assist Town departments, commissions, committees, boards, task forces, and other organizations in reviewing potential studies, projects, and other actions holistically and make the best use of resources and capacity. The Checklist is meant as a starting point for discussion and it is expected that it will be refined and revised over time. It includes example questions that may be modified, added to, and otherwise revised and could include questions directly related to measurable metrics.

Environmental Sustainability

All plan element goals strive to: (a) lead by example with carbon-neutral, carbon-sequestering and water-efficient municipal services and are fully integrated with the Town's sustainability policies; (b) provide a fiscally sound path towards affordable investment in policies to achieve the goals; and, (c) provide incentives for all residents to pursue a range of individual choices to further environmental sustainability goals.

How does this proposed action impact Sharon's natural environment and sustainability goals?	Impact (Y/N/NA)	How does the project contribute to the goal?	What metrics can be used to measure the impact of this action relative to this domain?	How can we encourage positive effects and help mitigate or compensate for negative effects?
1. Will this proposed action advance the Town's sustainability policies?	Y			
	N			
2. Will this proposed action reduce greenhouse gas emissions and/or improve air quality?	Y			
	N			
3. Will this proposed action improve water quality, contribute to groundwater recharge, and/or increase climate resilience?	Y			
	N			
4. Will this proposed action contribute to the conservation of natural resources (e.g., water supply, open space, wildlife habitat)?	Y			
	N			
5. Will this proposed action engage residents to make sustainable choices?	Y			
	N			

Community Connectivity and Health

Sharon residents value the connectedness of their community, both in terms of physical and social aspects. Although “connectivity” can seem immeasurable, it is important for the Town’s decision-making to take into account different aspects of several Plan Elements that together create a holistic vision for the town and its future as a welcoming and healthy community.

How does this proposed action impact community connectivity and health?	Impact (Y/N/NA)	How does the project contribute to the goal?	What metrics can be used to measure the impact of this action relative to this domain?	How can we encourage positive effects and help mitigate or compensate for negative effects?
1. Will this proposed action improve physical connectivity (e.g., access and/or mobility choices) within the town?	Y			
	N			
2. Will this proposed action enhance Sharon’s social network and community well-being (e.g., programs, services, and other support)?	Y			
	N			
3. Will this proposed action increase housing choice and affordability?	Y			
	N			
4. Will this proposed action support a walkable and vibrant Post Office Square with healthy local businesses?	Y			
	N			
5. Will this proposed action encourage and provide safe walking, biking, and/or other forms of active transportation within the town?	Y			
	N			
6. Will this proposed action better connect the town’s open spaces, recreational areas, neighborhoods, and Post Office Square?	Y			
	N			
7. Will this proposed action improve the health and wellness of Sharon residents?v	Y			
	N			
8. Will this proposed action strengthen the Town’s ability to be an Age- and Dementia-Friendly community?	Y			
	N			

Fiscal Sustainability

Decisions about plan element actions should be made after careful assessment, analysis, and consideration of: (a) fiscal impact; (b) alternative paths that may result in comparable success or implementation; (c) potential unintended or ancillary impacts; and (d) opportunities for reduction in spending in other areas to offset possible increase in total spending.

How does this proposed action impact the Town's fiscal sustainability?	Impact (Y/N/NA)	What is the amount of associated funding, new costs, cost recovery, or revenue?	How can we reduce unanticipated financial costs/risks and maximize sustainable funding and revenue to support the project?
1. Will this proposed action have an identified and sustainable funding source? Are there outside grants, programs, low-cost loans or other sources of funding to offset the cost of this project?	Y		
	N		
2a. Will this proposed action require additional resources (i.e., staffing, space, equipment, and other direct or indirect costs)?	Y		
	N		
2b. Specify if proposed action has different short-term and long-term resource impacts.			
2c. Specify if proposed action requires additional resources from more than one Town department.			
3. Will this proposed action provide cost recovery or cost savings – specifically, additional upfront costs (e.g., materials, design, equipment, construction, etc.) that would be offset by longer-term savings or future revenues?	Y		
	N		
4. Will this project generate additional taxes, fees or other revenue for Sharon?	Y		
	N		
5. How will this initiative affect existing initiatives (does it supplement or complement an existing program or initiative? Will it replace an existing program or initiative?)	Y		
	N		

THE MASTER PLAN IMPLEMENTATION ACTION CHART

The Master Plan Implementation Action Chart (Action Chart) presents the Imagine Sharon recommended actions organized by planning element category. These actions, explained and listed in Section 4: Plan Elements, are gathered here in one place and listed along with information on the type of action, and responsible parties, so that there is an overall view of the Master Plan's scope. The Action Chart makes it easy to assess the scope of goals in any one area of interest and is also intended to assist departments, as well as boards, commissions, and committees, to anticipate the work under their purview. The Master Plan Checklist brings these actions together by encouraging multidisciplinary coordination and conversations.

Implementation Action Chart Key

Abbreviations:

- COA (Council on Aging and Sharon Adult Center)
- DPW (Department of Public Works)
- IT Dept (Information Technology Department)
- Library (Sharon Public Library); PO Sqr (Post Office Square)
- Schools (Sharon Public Schools/ School Commission)
- TA Board (Transportation Advisory Board)
- ZBA (Zoning Board of Appeals)

Timing

- Near term - 0-1 years
- Med term - 2-5 years
- Long term - 6+ years

Conclusion

Taken together, the Master Plan Systems Checklist and Implementation Action Chart are meant to help set priorities, encourage cross-disciplinary actions, and to ensure that implementation of the plan makes the best use of resources while embodying the values and goals of Town residents. The Town of Sharon, like all municipalities and towns, has limited resources. The successful implementation of the action items outlined in this Master Plan will depend on the collaboration of many parties—private, public, non-profit, and entities not affiliated with Town government.

Recommended Action by Plan Element	Recommended Action	Regulatory/ Policy/ Process	Physical Attribute/ Improvement	Programming/ Services	Suggested Implementing Parties	Timing (Near/ Med/ Long Term)
Cultural and Historic Resources	Recommended Action					
Goal #1	Support a unified approach to coordinating, funding, and marketing cultural and historic assets and events in the town.					
Recommendation A	Create a collaborative, town-wide arts, business, and historic organization to share resources, support mutual interests, and pursue diverse funding to support goals and initiatives.			X	Sharon Cultural Council; Historical Commission; arts, cultural, and historic organizations; local artists; local businesses	Near term/ On-going
Recommendation B	Celebrate and support the multicultural aspects of Sharon that bring the community together through town-wide events and programs.			X	Sharon Cultural Council; Historical Commission; Schools; arts, historic, and cultural organizations; religious organizations; local Town Administrator; Select Board; Finance Committee; Planning Board; DPW; Historical Commission; Sharon Cultural Commission Conservation Commission; Schools	Near term/ On-going
Recommendation C	Consider hiring a staff person or town planner who can coordinate Town efforts and initiatives, pursue grants and funds to support the town's arts and cultural organizations, coordinate historic preservation efforts, and facilitate education and outreach efforts with schools and local businesses.	X				Near term
Goal #2	Make strong connections through communication and coordination between Sharon's arts, culture, historic, and business communities to support sustainable, vibrant public spaces and robust amenities and services for residents and visitors.					
Recommendation A	Support collaboration between the various sectors in the community. Create an ad hoc task force consisting of cultural, historic preservation, business, and recreational/open space stakeholders and meet regularly to share information on what these sectors are doing.			X	Recreation Dept; COA; DPW; new town-wide arts, business & historic organization; local artists and community groups; Schools	Near term/ On-going
Recommendation B	Coordinate with or integrate into the recommended business group (see Economic Vitality) to identify ways cultural and business stakeholders can support each other.			X	New town-wide arts, business & historic organization	Near term/ On-going
Goal #3	Better use existing buildings and physical spaces for arts and culture and identify new opportunities for multi-use arts and cultural spaces in town.					
Recommendation A	Maximize use of space at the Sharon Community Center and make it affordable and more available for outside groups and community members; add a makerspace.		X	X	Recreation Dept; COA; DPW	Med term
Recommendation B	Create and support a multi-use community space in the new Library.		X	X	Historical Commission; Library; DPW	Near term - for current inventory, Med term - expansion of inventory
Recommendation C	Identify and support more community art spaces and more public art throughout town, such as in the old Library, the former Sacred Heart space, and designated areas of Camp Everwood and at public access points for the Lake. Create new destinations for community art in town.		X	X	Historical Commission; Planning Board; new town-wide arts, business & historic organization; neighborhood groups; property owners	Near/ Med term
Recommendation D	Consider the "town as a stage" and support more performance spaces and shared spaces throughout Sharon, including using festivals and events to celebrate the arts.		X	X	Historical Society; Library; new town-wide arts, business & historic organization	Near term / On-going
Recommendation E	Identify and support a Post Office Square location for arts and cultural events and activities, and also consider creating other "arts and culture" districts or clusters in town. Investigate the reuse of the existing public Library building for community and cultural events when the new Library building is completed and the Wilber School Auditorium space.		X	X	PO Sqr businesses; Library; Historical Society; new town-wide arts, business & historic organization; neighborhood groups; property owners	
Recommendation F	Ensure that zoning allows for artists' studios and galleries in a variety of locations throughout the town.	X			ZBA; Planning Board; DPW - Building Division; new town-wide arts, business & historic	Near/ Med term
Goal #4	Document and make known the full breadth of Sharon's history and historic resources.					

Recommended Action by Plan Element	Recommended Action	Regulatory/ Policy/ Process	Physical Attribute/ Improvement	Programming/ Services	Suggested Implementing Parties	Timing (Near/ Med/ Long Term)
Recommendation A	Identify additional historic locations and structures not on existing inventories.	X		X	Historical Commission; Sharon Historical Society, new town-wide arts, business & historic organization (see Economic Vitality); local artists and other community groups	Near term/ On-going
Recommendation B	Update the Town's inventory of historic assets in continued collaboration with the Library.			X	Historical Commission; Sharon Historical Society, new town-wide arts, business & historic organization (see Economic Vitality); local artists and other community groups	Near term/ On-going
Recommendation C	Consider expanding the existing and adding new local historic districts as well as voluntary neighborhood conservation districts as a method to preserve design characteristics at the neighborhood-level within the town.	X		X	Planning Board; ZBA; Historical Commission; neighborhood groups; property owners	Near term/ On-going
Recommendation D	Promote education and create new ways for residents and visitors to experience Sharon's rich history, including the town's manufacturing and industrial history, and link to cultural resources and local businesses and promotional opportunities through online information, signage, and promotional materials.		X	X	Historical Commission; Sharon Historical Society, new town-wide arts, business & historic organization (see Economic Vitality); local artists and businesses; other community groups	Near term/ On-going
Recommendation E	Highlight agricultural sites and resources and link these to other town spaces and local businesses.		X	X	Historical Commission; Sharon Historical Society, new town-wide arts, business & historic organization (see Economic Vitality); local artists and businesses; other community groups	Near/ Med term
Economic Vitality						
Goal #1	Enhance and reinforce Post Office Square as a community center for local businesses and activities.					
Recommendation A	Consider incentives to encourage commercial and mixed-use development or redevelopment within Post Office Square, with options that utilize sustainable concepts where possible, such as increasing allowable density and/or lot coverage ratios, as well as temporary property tax relief, and district improvement financing.	X			Town Administrator; Planning Board; ZBA; DPW; Finance Committee; Select Board; property owners	Near/ Med term
Recommendation B	Offer additional seasonal events and programming in Post Office Square to complement existing successful events that bring residents and visitors together.			X	Local businesses; Sharon Cultural Council; Library; new town-wide arts, business & historic organization (see Cultural and Historic Resources); Recreation Dept; other community DPW; PO Sqr businesses and property owners; new town-wide arts, business & historic organization (see Cultural and Historic Resources)	Near term/ On-going
Recommendation C	Add beautification, improved graphics, and wayfinding signage for Post Office Square, including identifying locations for public art and public gathering/event space in Post Office Square, other commercial areas, and around the Lake.		X			Med term
Goal #2	Create a strong, supportive environment for local businesses and self-employed/start-ups.					
Recommendation A	Establish a civic or business group to promote Sharon as a business location and to enable businesses to connect and coordinate with each other.			X	Local businesses and financial institutions; support from Town Administrator; possible partnership with Neponset Valley Chamber of	Near term/ On-going
Recommendation B	Create an entrepreneur and self-employed support group that hosts regular networking meetings and informational and skills development sessions.			X	New Civic/Business group; Library; local businesses; self-employed residents and entrepreneurs; support from Mass. Small Business Development Center and Neponset Valley Chamber of Commerce for programming	Med term/ On-going
Recommendation C	Prepare a guide to "starting a business in Sharon."			X	Town Administrator; DPW	Near term
Recommendation D	Create a Town economic development web page to encourage and assist businesses seeking to locate in Sharon or start a business in town.	X		X	New Civic/Business group; Town Administrator; IT Dept	Med term/ On-going
Recommendation E	Support the creation of a co-working space for people who have home-based businesses, new entrepreneurs, and residents who telecommute part-time and want meeting and collaboration space.		X	X	Local property owner(s); new Civic/Business group; Self-employed/ entrepreneur support group; consultant or manager with expertise in developing/operating coworking space; Library	Med term

Recommended Action by Plan Element	Recommended Action	Regulatory/ Policy/ Process	Physical Attribute/ Improvement	Programming/ Services	Suggested Implementing Parties	Timing (Near/ Med/ Long Term)
Recommendation F	Encourage potential eco- and agri-tourism through collaboration with Ward's Berry Farm, Crescent Ridge Dairy, Moose Hill Wildlife Sanctuary, Borderland Park, Sharon Friends of Conservation, and local businesses.			X	Local businesses; Conservation Commission; community groups; (in coordination with 2019 <i>Open Space and Recreation Master Plan</i>)	Near/ Med term
Recommendation G	Consider having the new civic or business group, and possibly the Town, join the Neponset River Regional Chamber to enhance resources and visibility for small businesses.	X		X	New Civic/Business Group; local business members of the Neponset Valley Chamber of Commerce	Near term/ On-going
Goal #3	Expand commercial and industrial development to create a more balanced tax base.					
Recommendation A	Review zoning for the Route 1 corridor and the commercial and industrial zoned areas adjacent to I-95 to allow for higher density development to increase the potential for multi-story office and commercial uses.	X			Planning Board; DPW - Engineering/GIS Division; ZBA	Near-term
Recommendation B	Incentivize sustainable projects that employ adaptive reuse strategies, including sustainable concepts where possible, for warehouses, the current Library building, Wilbur School Auditorium, and other buildings to expand the commercial and industrial tax base and provide spaces for small businesses and entrepreneurs, such as incubator, makerspace, and co-working space.	X	X		Town Administrator; Library; new Civic/Business Group; local business members and property owners	Med term
Recommendation C	Support possible mixed-use and commercial redevelopment at Shaw's Plaza, Sharon Heights Plaza, and study Cobbs Corner.	X			Planning Board; DPW - Engineering/GIS Division; new Civic/Business Group; local and regional developers	Med term/Long-term
Recommendation D	Encourage public and private shared business spaces.	X		X	Town Administrator; Library; new Civic/Business Group; local business members	Med term
Goal #4	Create septic and sewer capacity to foster economic development.					
Recommendation A	Further evaluate the potential of a community septic system on a portion of Young Israel of Sharon's and/or Temple Israel's property near Post Office Square.	X	X		Town Administrator; DPW; Health Dept, Board of Health; property owners	Near/ Med term
Recommendation B	Explore the possibility of connecting to the MWRA sewer in Walpole, Norwood, Canton or Stoughton.	X	X		Town Administrator; DPW; Health Dept, Board of Health; MWRA; neighboring communities	Med Term
Recommendation C	Evaluate the possibility of connecting to the Mansfield Wastewater Treatment Plant.	X	X		Town Administrator; DPW; Health Dept, Board of Health; Town of Mansfield	Med Term
Goal #5	Develop new capacity to undertake economic development and related activities.					
Recommendation A	Consider hiring a part-time grants writer to assist in obtaining funds for initiatives and/or a part-time planner/economic development director to lead and coordinate programs and initiatives to support local businesses and entrepreneurs.	X			Town Administrator; Finance Committee; Select Board; Planning Board	Near term
Recommendation B	Create a collaborative, town-wide arts, business, and historic committee to share resources, support mutual interests, and pursue diverse funding to support goals and initiatives.	X		X	New Civic/Business Group; Sharon Cultural Council, Historical Commission, local businesses and artists (see Cultural and	Near term
Housing						
Goal #1	Support and encourage mixed-use development in appropriate areas in town (e.g. Post Office Square, Cobbs Corner, Shaw's Plaza, and the Heights Plaza).					
Recommendation A	Review zoning in appropriate areas to see if the existing Mixed Use Overlay District regulations that currently apply only to Post Office Square could be applied to other commercial areas.	X			Planning Board; ZBA; property owners; local groups, such as Sustainable Sharon Coalition	Med term
Recommendation B	Consider possible tax incentives that encourage mixed-use development that includes housing in the Shaw's Plaza, Heights Plaza, Post Office Square, and Cobbs Corner.	X			Town Administrator; Planning Board; DPW; Finance Committee; Assessors Dept; property owners; local groups, such as Sustainable	Med/ Long term

Recommended Action by Plan Element	Recommended Action	Regulatory/ Policy/ Process	Physical Attribute/ Improvement	Programming/ Services	Suggested Implementing Parties	Timing (Near/ Med/ Long Term)
Recommendation C	Consider improvements to wastewater infrastructure, incorporating sustainable concepts where possible, to encourage new housing development in and near Post Office Square to include a variety of housing types, sizes, price ranges, and rentals and ownership to support the town's socioeconomic diversity and to utilize town center amenities and transit services.	X			Planning Board; Select Board; DPW; property owners; local groups, such as Sustainable Sharon Coalition	Med/ Long term
Goal #2	Promote and allow housing types for aging in community, especially options that foster community and intergenerational connections in walkable neighborhoods with access to services and shops.					
Recommendation A	Allow and encourage Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) and provide residents with educational "how to" materials for permitting, operation, and maintenance.	X			Planning Board; COA; Sharon Housing Authority; Sharon Housing Partnership; other community and housing organizations	Near term
Recommendation B	Increase awareness of the existing Property Tax Work Off Abatement Program.	X			Town Administrator; Finance Committee; Select Board; Assessors Department; COA	Near term
Recommendation C	Consider zoning amendments that encourage use of Universal Design (UD) standards or visibility standards for new housing, particularly near Post Office Square and other commercial areas.	X			Planning Board; DPW; COA; Commission on Disabilities; Property owners	Med/ Long term - to be coordinated with other zoning recommendations for
Goal #3	Create green and sustainable housing, including mixed-use options and walkable locations in close proximity to shops and services.					
Recommendation A	Further encourage or incentivize cluster and/or flexible subdivision design; consider discussions with developers of undeveloped but permitted properties regarding the potential environmental, social, and financial benefits of cluster neighborhood design, which would be allowed by special permit.	X			Planning Board; DPW; Conservation Commission; Sharon Housing Partnership; Sustainable Sharon Coalition	Near term
Recommendation B	Allow smaller homes and cottage or "pocket neighborhood" developments, incorporating sustainable concepts and features where possible.	X			Planning Board; DPW; ZBA; Conservation Commission; Sustainable Sharon Coalition	Near term
Recommendation C	Consider strategies to manage teardowns and rebuilds of smaller starter homes and/or historic homes in addition to demolition delay for buildings of a certain age, such as creation of a Neighborhood Conservation District, or other zoning regulations that could include energy or infrastructure-related charges based on dimensional limits.	X			Planning Board; DPW; Historical Commission	Near term
Goal #4	Create and preserve affordable units, particularly rental units, to ensure continued socioeconomic diversity and to maintain at least 10% of Sharon's year-round housing stock as affordable per MGL c.40B.					
Recommendation A	Rejuvenate the Affordable Housing Trust with a fully appointed board and funding to identify alternative policies and projects to maintain Sharon's 10% affordability threshold.	X			Town Administrator; Select Board; Finance Committee; Community Preservation Committee; Sharon Housing Partnership	Near term
Recommendation B	Consider implementing a broader inclusionary housing policy with higher percentage requirements depending on development type and size.	X			Town Administrator; Planning Board; Sharon Housing Partnership	Med term
Recommendation C	Apply for public funds, such as MassWorks or MassHousing's Planning for Housing Production Program, to be used to help fund infrastructure construction and maintenance related to affordable housing creation. The Town should also review its eligibility for the State's Housing Choice Initiative for potential funding and technical assistance.	X			DPW; Sharon Housing Authority; Sharon Housing Partnership	Near/ Med term
Recommendation D	Increase the proportion of Community Preservation Act (CPA) funds allocated for the creation and preservation of affordable housing units.	X			Community Preservation Committee; Conservation Commission; Sharon Housing Authority; Sharon Housing Partnership; Affordable Housing Trust; Finance Committee	Near term

Recommended Action by Plan Element	Recommended Action	Regulatory/ Policy/ Process	Physical Attribute/ Improvement	Programming/ Services	Suggested Implementing Parties	Timing (Near/ Med/ Long Term)
Recommendation E	Consider hiring a full- or part-time town planner or staff person who can coordinate Town efforts and initiatives and pursue grants and funds to support housing creation, preservation, and affordability, and other related programs and services.	X			Town Administrator; Select Board; Finance Committee; Planning Board; DPW; Historical Commission; Conservation Commission	Near term
Land Use and Zoning						
Goal #1	Encourage mixed-use development, where appropriate, to support connectivity, walkability, aging in community, and local businesses.					
Recommendation A	Review zoning in appropriate areas to see if Mixed Use Overlay District (MUOD) regulations could be applied outside of Post Office Square.	X			Planning Board; ZBA; DPW; new Civic/Business Group; property owners; Sharon	Near/ Med term
Recommendation B	Consider incentives to encourage mixed-use development in the Shaw's Plaza, Heights Plaza, Post Office Square, and Cobbs Corner.	X			Planning Board; ZBA; DPW; new Civic/Business Group; property owners; Sharon	Near/ Med term
Recommendation C	Study additional areas for potential suitability for cluster or "pocket-neighborhood" development, such as cottages and co-housing.	X			Planning Board; ZBA; DPW; Conservation Commission; Sharon Housing Partnership	Near term/ On-going
Recommendation D	Consider a zoning requirement for on-site circulation and access management to connect to existing networks in certain types of new development or redevelopment (e.g., large development sites and residential cul-de-sacs).	X			Planning Board; ZBA; TA Board (see Transportation and Mobility); DPW	Near term
Recommendation E	Consider regulatory changes to parking standards in the zoning bylaws, which may include implementing parking maximums instead of parking minimums, shared parking, spaces dedicated to carshare or electric vehicle charging stations, designated shared ride pick-up and drop-off zones, and requiring bicycle parking.	X			Planning Board; ZBA; TA Board (see Transportation and Mobility); DPW	Near/ Med term
Recommendation F	Clarify policies regarding the application of the hotel tax for rental of single-family and accessory units.	X			Town Administrator; Finance Committee; Planning Board	Near/ Med term
Goal #2	Encourage economic growth and development, following sustainable practices and concepts, in the town's commercial and industrial districts to generate an increase in commercial tax revenue and to create destinations for residents and visitors.					
Recommendation A	Re-examine and align zoning regulations along Route 1 with Master Plan goals to encourage opportunities for more economic development, including dimensional regulations, including building height, Floor Area Ratio, and parking.	X			Planning Board; ZBA; new Civic/Business group; property owners	Near/ Med term
Recommendation B	Consider expanding commercial districts along Main Street.	X			Planning Board; ZBA; new Civic/Business group; property owners	Near/ Med term
Recommendation C	Consider adopting LEED standards and/or providing incentives for green building and development standards in adaptive reuse projects and new buildings. Requiring green building practices (currently suggested but not required) would increase the use of renewable energy products and infrastructure and encourage incorporation of recyclable materials into buildings. Encouraging the adaptive reuse of existing buildings including the current Library building also supports sustainable practices.	X			Planning Board; ZBA; local groups, such as Sustainable Sharon Coalition; new Civic/Business group; property owners; local developers	Near term/ On-going
Goal #3	Maintain the character of the town and its neighborhoods while allowing appropriate redevelopment and growth.					
Recommendation A	Consider and evaluate zoning strategies to manage teardowns and/or rebuilding of smaller starter homes and/or historic homes, such as the creation of a Neighborhood Conservation District, or other zoning regulations that could include energy or infrastructure-related charges based on dimensional limits.	X			Planning Board; ZBA; Historical Commission; Sharon Housing Partnership; neighborhood groups; property owners	Near/ Med term
Recommendation B	Allow and encourage Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs).	X			Planning Board; ZBA; DPW; Historical Commission; COA; Sharon Housing Partnership; neighborhood groups	Near/ Med term

Recommended Action by Plan Element	Recommended Action	Regulatory/ Policy/ Process	Physical Attribute/ Improvement	Programming/ Services	Suggested Implementing Parties	Timing (Near/ Med/ Long Term)
Recommendation C	Consider zoning amendments that encourage use of Universal Design or visitability standards for new development, particularly for housing and those near commercial or mixed-use centers.	X			Planning Board; ZBA; DPW; COA; Commission on Disabilities	Near/ Med term
Recommendation D	Further encourage or incentivize cluster and/or flexible subdivision design; consider discussions with developers of undeveloped but permitted properties regarding the potential environmental, social, and financial benefits of cluster neighborhood design.	X			Planning Board; ZBA; Sharon Housing Partnership; local groups, such as Sustainable Sharon Coalition; local developers	Near/ Med term
Recommendation E	Support conservation of priority lands identified for open space and agriculture in the 2019 Open Space and Recreation Master Plan (OSRMP).	X			Conservation Commission; Town Administrator; Finance Committee; Planning Board; property	Near term/ On-going
Recommendation F	Align zoning for camp lands on the western shore of Lake Massapoag to protect existing camp uses	X			Planning Board; ZBA; Recreation Dept; Assessors Dept	Near/ Med term
Goal #4	Coordinate Town efforts to plan for future infrastructure, services, programs, facilities, and finances.					
Recommendation A	Consider hiring a full- or part-time town planner or staff person who can coordinate Town efforts and initiatives and pursue grants and funds across departments to support overall town planning, economic development, housing creation and preservation, transportation and infrastructure improvements, sustainability efforts, historic preservation, open space conservation, and other related programs and services.	X			Town Administrator; Select Board; Finance Committee; Planning Board; DPW; Historical Commission; Conservation Commission	Near term
Recommendation B	Update and enforce Town development review and building design and construction requirements to maintain the constantly advancing standard of sustainable practices for all development, including and beyond residential and commercial construction, (e.g., the new Library project is designed to be LEED certified).	X			DPW - Building Division; Planning Board; Conservation Commission; local groups, such as Sustainable Sharon Coalition	Near term
4.6 Open Space, Recreation, and Natural Resources	Preserve and actively maintain the town's natural resources and water quality and supply, incorporating sustainable concepts and systems whenever possible.	<i>Intended to complement and support the 2019 Open Space and Recreation Master Plan Goals and Objectives</i>				
Goal #1	Preserve and actively maintain the town's natural resources and water quality and supply, incorporating sustainable concepts and systems whenever possible.					
Recommendation A	Maintain the Town's open spaces and water bodies and follow a priority funding project list. The 2019 Open Space and Recreation Master Plan (OSRMP) highlights the need for active protection and maintenance of Sharon's water supply.		X		Conservation Commission; DPW; Town Administrator	Near term/ On-going
Recommendation B	Continue to preserve and maintain the beachfront at Lake Massapoag and add new amenities at the Lake.		X		DPW; Conservation Commission; Recreation Dept	Near term/ On-going
Recommendation C	Maintain the viability of Lake Massapoag for water quality and improve management of the areas around the Lake and at the parks, including the removal of invasive species.		X		DPW; Conservation Commission; Recreation Dept	Near term/ On-going
Recommendation D	Require active water impact mitigation from development to preserve water quality and supply.	X			DPW; Planning Board; ZBA; Conservation Commission	Near/ Med term
Recommendation E	Consider hiring a full- or part-time town planner or staff person who can coordinate Town efforts and initiatives and pursue grants and funds to support the Town's open space and recreation goals, and other related programs and services.	X			Town Administrator; Select Board; Finance Committee; Planning Board; DPW; Conservation Commission; Recreation Dept	Near term
Goal #2	Ensure long-term preservation of open space and agriculture properties and make new strategic acquisitions where possible.					
Recommendation A	Support and incentivize the conservation of priority lands that are privately owned, as identified for open space and agriculture in the Sharon 2019 OSRMP.	X		X	Conservation Commission; Planning Board; Recreation Dept; DPW; property owners; other local groups	Near term/ On-going

Recommended Action by Plan Element	Recommended Action	Regulatory/ Policy/ Process	Physical Attribute/ Improvement	Programming/ Services	Suggested Implementing Parties	Timing (Near/ Med/ Long Term)
Recommendation B	Encourage potential eco- and agri-tourism through collaboration with Ward's Berry Farm, Crescent Ridge Dairy, Moose Hill Wildlife Sanctuary, Borderland State Park, the Sharon Friends of Conservation nonprofit organization, and local businesses as a means to actively support the conservation of those lands.			X	Conservation Commission; Recreation Dept; new Civic/Business Group; new town-wide arts, business & historic organization (if separate from business group); businesses; property owners; other local groups such as the Town Administrator; Conservation Commission; Recreation Dept; Finance Committee; property owners; other local groups	Near/ Med term
Recommendation C	Make strategic open and green space acquisitions where possible.	X	X			Med/ Long term/ On-going
Goal #3	Connect passive and active recreational spaces, trails, and natural resources, including the Lake.					
Recommendation A	Coordinate between the Town, the Massachusetts Audubon Society, and Borderland Park staff to add and distribute trail signage, trail and town-wide maps, and markers.		X	X	DPW; TA Board; Massachusetts Audubon Society; Borderland State Park	Near/ Med term
Recommendation B	Identify additional opportunities, including the recommendations in MAPC's 2014 <i>Lake Massapoag Bicycle Network Plan</i> , to connect bicycle infrastructure and wayfinding not only to open space but to commercial and residential areas of Sharon to help reduce vehicle dependence.		X	X	DPW; TA Board; Recreation Dept; local groups	Near/ Med term
Recommendation C	Promote and continue public outreach to educate and increase involvement of the community in the protection, maintenance, and active use of Sharon's open space and recreational resources.			X	Conservation Commission; Recreation Dept; local groups	Near term/ On-going
Goal #4	Expand recreational opportunities for all age groups and abilities in town.					
Recommendation A	Provide or work with private partners to provide recreational spaces, activities, and exercise spaces (beyond team sports) for all age groups but particularly for school-age children (7 to 12 years) and teens.		X	X	Recreation Dept; Conservation Commission; DPW; Schools; Health Dept; COA; nonprofit and private athletic clubs, leagues, and businesses; other community groups	Med/ On-going
Recommendation B	Create or work with private partners to create multi-use outdoor active recreational spaces, especially fields that can be used for organized sports.			X	Recreation Dept; Conservation Commission; DPW; Schools; Health Dept; COA; nonprofit and private athletic clubs, leagues, and businesses; other community groups	Med/ On-going
Recommendation C	Enhance functionality and improve features at Veterans' Memorial Park Beach as well as identify measures to improve the range of uses of the Sharon Community Center.		X	X	Recreation Dept; Conservation Commission; COA; Commission on Disabilities; DPW; new town-wide arts, business, and historic organization; other community groups	Near/ Med term
Recommendation D	Improve accessibility for all ages and abilities, incorporate accessible and functional passive and recreational activities, and enhance management of Town-owned recreational and open spaces, such as the Mountain Street Landfill, Veterans' Memorial Park Beach, and Community Center.		X		Recreation Dept; DPW; COA; Commission on Disabilities; Conservation Commission; other community groups	Near term/ On-going
4.7 Public Facilities and Infrastructure						
Goal #1	Improve the septic and sewage treatment conditions and facilities in town.					
Recommendation A	Educate the public about septic systems, recommended maintenance, sustainable alternative systems, and how to identify a failing septic system.			X	DPW; Health Dept; new Civic/Business Group; Sharon Housing Partnership; neighborhood	Near term/ On-going
Recommendation B	Complete a comprehensive wastewater management plan to analyze potential alternatives to improve Sharon's septic and sewer capacity, such as evaluating the possibility of connecting to the MWRA wastewater system in Walpole, Canton, or Stoughton, and further assessing a possible connection to Norwood; expanding the number of properties connected to the Mansfield wastewater treatment system; or the construction of localized collection systems and neighborhood treatment systems.	X	X		DPW; MWRA; neighboring communities, including Walpole, Canton, Norwood, Stoughton, and Mansfield; possibly infrastructure consulting firm	Med/ Long term
Recommendation C	Communicate and discuss with property owners the benefits and costs of a community septic system.			X	DPW; Health Dept; new Civic/Business Group; Sharon Housing Partnership; neighborhood	Near/ Med term

Recommended Action by Plan Element	Recommended Action	Regulatory/ Policy/ Process	Physical Attribute/ Improvement	Programming/ Services	Suggested Implementing Parties	Timing (Near/ Med/ Long Term)
Recommendation D	Resume conversations with Young Israel of Sharon and/or Temple Israel property owners to determine if a portion of either property could be the site for a potential community septic system for Post Office Square	X	X		DPW; property owners; new Civic/Business Group	Near/ Med term
Goal #2	Maintain and improve existing Town facilities.					
Recommendation A	Assist and support the Library's planning, financing, and construction of its new facility.		X		DPW; Library; Town Administrator; Select Board	Near/ Med term
Recommendation B	Conduct a planning process for the re-use of the current Library building to possibly include a mix of uses, such as a coffee shop, a shared co-working space, multi-use community space for use by residents and local organizations, among others.	X	X		New full-time or part-time planner; DPW; Library; new Civic/Business Group; new town-wide arts, business, and historic organization; Recreation Dept; COA; other local groups	Near/ Med term
Recommendation C	Provide updated technology in public facilities.		X	X	DPW; Schools	Near/ Med term
Recommendation D	Expand communication between the Town departments and the Schools to continue and improve coordination of maintenance and facility and transportation-related improvements.	X			DPW; Schools; TA Board; Health Dept; Recreation Dept	Near term/ On-going
Goal #3	Maintain and improve physical infrastructure systems in town.					
Recommendation A	Continue to monitor, maintain, and improve, as necessary, the quality of the water supply and delivery systems, including creating emergency water connections with neighboring communities, as appropriate.	X	X		DPW; MWRA; neighboring communities; Conservation Commission	Near term/ On-going
Recommendation B	Continue to evaluate water treatment methods to reduce the iron and manganese concentrations in the drinking water.	X			DPW	Near term/ On-going
Recommendation C	Investigate and improve stormwater infrastructure to support a more sustainable system.	X	X		DPW; MWRA; Conservation Commission	Med/ Long term
Recommendation D	Monitor the effectiveness of the Town's stormwater bylaw as well as the Rules and Regulations of the Sharon Conservation Commission. Review the bylaw and regulations for conformance to all federal and state stormwater management requirements.	X			DPW; Planning Board; ZBA	Near/ Med term
Recommendation E	Revise bylaws and regulations to be consistent with MAPC recommendations for proper stormwater management practices.	X			DPW; Planning Board; ZBA	Near/ Med term
Recommendation F	Continue to implement the Massachusetts MS4 permit requirements and MassDEP Stormwater Management Policy.	X			DPW	Near term/ On-going
Recommendation G	Evaluate opportunities to incorporate green infrastructure components into existing paved and unpaved areas, particularly for municipal projects, whenever possible. In conjunction, revise the Town's existing bylaw and regulations to require the use of green infrastructure components into future projects to the maximum extent feasible.	X	X		DPW; new full-time or part-time planner; Planning Board; ZBA; Conservation Commission; local groups, such as Sustainable Sharon Coalition	Near term/ On-going
Recommendation H	For the purposes of reducing stormwater runoff and flooding, encourage property owners to utilize more pervious surface materials and other sustainable solutions on their existing developed properties.			X	DPW; new full-time or part-time planner; Conservation Commission; local groups, such as Sustainable Sharon Coalition; new Civic/Business Group; neighborhood groups	Near term/ On-going
Recommendation I	Coordinate infrastructure maintenance with new infrastructure development and other construction or maintenance opportunities, particularly with utilities and non-Town agencies and entities, to include sustainable goals, as supported by the Town, and to decrease project costs.	X	X		DPW; utility companies and service providers; MassDOT	Near term/ On-going
Recommendation J	Improve communications infrastructure and technology by working with service providers to minimize "dead zones" in town.		X	X	DPW; utility companies and service providers	Near/ Med term
Recommendation K	Continue to explore new policies, programs, and technologies to further the town's environmental sustainability, including support of solar energy for public facilities.	X	X		DPW; new full-time or part-time planner; Planning Board; Conservation Commission; local groups, such as Sustainable Sharon	Near term/ On-going
Goal #4	Expand funding sources to improve infrastructure, programs, and services.					

Recommended Action by Plan Element	Recommended Action	Regulatory/ Policy/ Process	Physical Attribute/ Improvement	Programming/ Services	Suggested Implementing Parties	Timing (Near/ Med/ Long Term)
Recommendation A	Study potential eligibility for road and infrastructure grants such as MassWorks, the potential for Sharon to become a Housing Choice Community, and the feasibility of participating in MassHousing's Planning for Housing Production Program, to help fund infrastructure related to affordable housing creation.	X			DPW; Finance Committee; new full-time or part-time planner; Housing Authority; Sharon Housing Partnership	Near term/ On-going
Recommendation B	Explore potential use of a "betterment" tax, development fees, district improvement financing, and other financing tools.	X			Town Administrator; DPW; Finance Committee; new full-time or part-time planner; new Civic/Business Group; property owners	Near/ Med term
Recommendation C	Consider applying for State Revolving Funds to be used for infrastructure improvements.	X			DPW; Finance Committee; new full-time or part-time planner	Near/ Med term
Recommendation D	Consider hiring a full- or part-time town planner or staff person who can coordinate Town efforts and initiatives and pursue grants and funds to support service and infrastructure improvements, coordination of communications and social services, and other related programs and services.	X			Town Administrator; Select Board; Finance Committee; Planning Board; DPW; Conservation Commission; Community Preservation Committee	Near term
Goal #5	Improve communication and social service systems in town.					
	Improve communication between the Town government, residents, and institutions.	X		X	Town Administrator; Select board; Town Departments; neighborhood groups; new Civic/Business Group; other local community organizations and institutions	Near term/ On-going
Recommendation A	Enhance coordination and communication for improved emergency management planning.	X		X	DPW; Police Dept; Fire Dept; Health Dept; Schools; neighborhood groups	Near/ Med term
Recommendation B	In coordination with Community Health goals and recommendations, evaluate the increasing and changing demand for Town services and programs for all residents, particularly for older adults, and coordinate available services and programs with a formal referral system.	X		X	COA; Commission on Disabilities; Health Dept; Schools; TA Board; local service providers and referral groups	Near/ Med term
Recommendation C	Educate residents, businesses, and property owners about existing physical infrastructure conditions (e.g., roadways, sidewalks, septic, wastewater, and stormwater) as well as the Town's available social services (e.g., Council on Aging and Health Department) and the costs of maintenance and service delivery.			X	DPW; Health Dept; COA; Commission on Disabilities; new Civic/Business Group; neighborhood groups; property owners	Near term/ On-going
Recommendation D						
Goal #6	Support the continuing quality of the Sharon Public Schools.					
	Support, where feasible, strategic objectives and initiatives from the Sharon Public School Strategic Plan 2018-2021, particularly pertaining to facilities and infrastructure.	X	X		Schools; DPW; Health Dept; TA Board; Town Administrator; Select Board	Near term/ On-going
Recommendation A	Create multi-use space(s) at the High School that could be available to the community for use outside of school hours.		X		Schools; Recreation Dept; new arts, business, and historic organization; DPW; local Schools; DPW; TA Board	Near term
Recommendation B	Expand communication between the Town departments and the Schools to continue and improve coordination of maintenance and facility and transportation-related improvements.	X			Schools; DPW; TA Board	Near term/ On-going
Recommendation C	Maintain and upgrade the buildings and facilities of the school district so they are up to current code and integrate the necessary technology to support the needs of the administration, staff, and students.		X		Schools; DPW	Near term/ On-going
Recommendation D	Consider short- and long-term economic and transportation impacts and population projections in school restructuring decisions.	X	X		Schools; Town Administrator; Select Board; DPW; TA Board; neighborhood groups	Near term/ On-going
Recommendation E						
Transportation and Mobility						
Goal #1	Continue to adhere to and promote Complete Streets principles with all roadway infrastructure improvements to increase walkability and bikeability.					
	As part of the Town's pavement management system and Complete Streets Prioritization Plan, continue to prioritize the creation of sidewalks, bike lanes, and trails starting with corridors connecting key destinations (e.g., half-mile from the train station, schools, Lake, and parks).		X		DPW - Engineering/ GIS Division; TA Board; Schools; Recreation Department; Conservation Commission	Near term/ On-going
Recommendation A						

Recommended Action by Plan Element	Recommended Action	Regulatory/ Policy/ Process	Physical Attribute/ Improvement	Programming/ Services	Suggested Implementing Parties	Timing (Near/ Med/ Long Term)
Recommendation B	Advance design and construction for prioritized bicycle and pedestrian projects through existing local and State funding sources.		X		DPW - Engineering/ GIS Division; TA Board; Schools; Recreation Department; Conservation	Near/ Med term
Recommendation C	Identify opportunities to implement and expand the recommendations in MAPC's 2014 <i>Lake Massapeog Bicycle Network Plan</i> , to connect on-street and off-street bicycle infrastructure to open space and recreation, as well as to the commercial and residential areas of town in order to reduce vehicle dependence.		X		DPW - Engineering/ GIS Division; TA Board; Schools; Recreation Department; Conservation Commission	Near/ Med term
Recommendation D	Evaluate options for bike share companies to provide services in Sharon.	X		X	DPW - Engineering/ GIS Division; TA Board; Recreation Department	Near/ Med term
Recommendation E	Identify opportunities to implement recommendations from the 2009 <i>Post Office Square Area Plan</i> or consider new strategies to improve traffic circulation and promote a "park once and walk" environment to reduce congestion and unnecessary vehicle trips.		X		DPW; TA Board; Town Administrator; new Civic/Business group (See Economic Vitality); PO Sqr businesses and property owners	Near term
Recommendation F	Institute a parking management plan for Post Office Square based on parking utilization findings from the 2009 <i>Post Office Square Area Plan</i> or updated parking study.	X		X	DPW; TA Board; Town Administrator; new Civic/Business group (See Economic Vitality); PO Sqr businesses and property owners	Med term
Recommendation G	Designate rideshare drop off/pick up zones for services, like Uber and Lyft, in desirable areas, such as North/South Main Street and around the commuter rail station, to provide curbside management and integration of new technologies for dynamic curbside management in the future to allow more flexible use of curb space in busy areas.	X	X		DPW - Engineering/ GIS Division; TA Board	Near/ Med term
Goal #2	Improve pedestrian safety and accessibility for all ages and abilities through Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance.					
Recommendation A	Identify intersections in need of safety improvements and upgrade pedestrian crossing infrastructure including crosswalk markings, curb ramps, and pedestrian signals.		X		DPW - Engineering/ GIS Division; TA Board	Near term/ On-going
Recommendation B	Investigate the impact of lowering speed limits on certain roads in town and, where appropriate, use traffic calming measures, such as temporary speed feedback signs and/or installing more permanent calming elements, such as curb extensions, raised islands or medians, pavement markings, or raised crosswalks to reduce speeding.	X	X		DPW - Engineering/ GIS Division; TA Board	Near term/ On-going
Recommendation C	Conduct an ADA audit of key corridors in town to identify locations in need of improvements such as curb ramps, crosswalks, and accessible pedestrian signals, especially in relation to schools, public buildings/facilities, and the commuter rail station.	X			DPW - Engineering/ GIS Division; TA Board	Near/ Med term
Goal #3	Expand local and regional transportation networks by partnering with existing organizations that support transit and shared mobility.					
Recommendation A	Continue to participate in the Neponset Valley Transportation Management Association (TMA) and Suburban Mobility Working Group meetings and expand the Town's involvement to identify options for local transportation within Sharon and between neighboring towns to reduce gaps in service.	X			New full-time or part-time planner (See Goal 4); New Civic/Business group (See Economic Vitality); TA Board; Town Administrator	Near term/ On-going
Recommendation B	Study demand and potential impacts of a new parking structure at the train station. Use results of parking garage feasibility study to inform parking demand at the commuter rail station and examine potential for off-site parking locations in conjunction with a shuttle service.		X	X	TA Board; new full-time or part-time planner (See Goal 4); DPW	Near/ Med term
Recommendation C	Study demand and potential routes for a shuttle to and from the train station (matching the train schedules) to expand first/last mile connections to transit, including reviewing the previous pilot shuttle service in Sharon, researching first/last mile options utilized by similar towns (e.g., Bedford Dash), and investigating potential use of Adult Center vehicles for on-demand shuttle use during off hours.			X	TA Board; new full-time or part-time planner	Med term
Goal #4	Implement transportation policies and infrastructure improvements holistically to promote transportation and land use connections.					

Recommended Action by Plan Element	Recommended Action	Regulatory/ Policy/ Process	Physical Attribute/ Improvement	Programming/ Services	Suggested Implementing Parties	Timing (Near/ Med/ Long Term)
Recommendation A	Encourage businesses to join Neponset Valley TMA and/or use State resources, such as MassRides to provide transportation demand management strategies.	X		X	New full-time or part-time planner; TA Board; new Civic/Business group (See Economic Vitality); PO Sq. businesses and property	Near term/ On-going
Recommendation B	Consider regulatory changes to parking standards in the zoning bylaws, which may include implementing parking maximums instead of parking minimums, shared parking, spaces dedicated to carshare or electric vehicle charging stations, designated shared ride pick up/drop off zones, and requiring bicycle parking.	x			New full-time or part-time planner; TA Board; Planning Board; ZBA; Town Administrator	Near term
Recommendation C	Consider hiring a full- or part-time town planner or staff person who can coordinate Town efforts and initiatives and pursue grants and funds to support transportation planning and infrastructure programs and improvements and other related programs and services.	X			Town Administrator; Select Board; Finance Committee; Planning Board; DPW; TA Board; Conservation Commission; Recreation Dept	Near term
Recommendation D	Consider a zoning requirement for on-site circulation and access management to connect to existing networks in certain types of new development or redevelopment (e.g., large development sites and residential cul-de-sacs).	X			New full-time or part-time planner; TA Board; Planning Board; ZBA; Town Administrator	Med term
Recommendation E	Recognize and consider technology to support connected vehicle infrastructure to improve safety, traffic circulation, and congestion management.	X	X		New full-time or part-time planner; TA Board; Planning Board	Med term/ On-going
Recommendation F	Support and incorporate technological and sustainable solutions and anticipate impacts of autonomous vehicles, both for private use and potential shuttles.	X	X		New full-time or part-time planner; TA Board; Planning Board	Med term/ On-going
Community Health	<i>This element was prepared by the Community Health Subcommittee of the Master Plan Steering Committee with M4PC</i>					
Goal #1	Promote environments that foster formal and informal connections among neighbors and peers to enhance social capital and intergenerational ties.					
Recommendation A	Identify or develop publicly-accessible spaces as physical community hubs in each neighborhood in Sharon.		X	X	Recreation Dept; DPW; COA; Library; Sharon Cultural Council; Community Preservation	Near term
Recommendation B	Hold at least two additional arts and culture programs annually that promote cultural equity and inclusivity.			X	Recreation Dept; DPW; COA; Library; Sharon Cultural Council; Community Preservation	Med term
Goal #2	Support the mental and emotional wellness of children and youth to reduce the potential for risky behavior and to increase opportunities among all youth in town.					
Recommendation A	Conduct an annual town-wide communications campaign to reduce the perception of stigma for receiving mental health and emotional support.			X	Schools; Recreation Dept; Sharon Substance Prevention and Resource Coalition; Library; Health Dept	Near term
Recommendation B	Support school-based programs to provide social and emotional support.			X	Schools; Recreation Dept; Sharon Substance Prevention and Resource Coalition; Library; Health Dept	Near term
Recommendation C	Strengthen coordination and communication among organizations who work with youth and families with children.			X	Schools; Recreation Dept; Sharon Substance Prevention and Resource Coalition; Library; Health Dept	Med term
Recommendation D	Identify environments, new spaces, reuse of existing spaces, or public spaces that support more unstructured play among children and youth in town.		X	X	Schools; Recreation Dept; Sharon Substance Prevention and Resource Coalition; Library; Health Dept	Med term
Goal #3	Enhance local public health resources to address environmental exposures and respond to health threats, including those created by climate change, that could affect the physical health and mental wellbeing of residents.					
Recommendation A	Enhance public health communications.			X	Health Dept; IT Dept; COA	Med term
Recommendation B	Provide additional resources to enhance public health capacity.			X	Health Dept; COA	Near term
Recommendation C	Sustain and enhance local and regional partnerships.	X		X	Health Dept; COA	Med term

Recommended Action by Plan Element	Recommended Action	Regulatory/ Policy/ Process	Physical Attribute/ Improvement	Programming/ Services	Suggested Implementing Parties	Timing (Near/ Med/ Long Term)
Recommendation D	Develop and invest in programs to retrofit older housing stock that may have quality or exposure issues.		X	X	Health Dept; Historical Commission; Sharon Housing Partnership; Planning Board; Community Preservation Committee	Long term
Recommendation E	Conduct a Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness study to assess the potential impact of climate change and enable the Town to prepare efficiently and effectively to ensure the health of residents.	X			New full-time or part-time planner; Planning Board; Conservation Commission; DPW; Sustainable Sharon Coalition	Med term
Goal #4	Continue prioritization of active transportation and traffic safety investments to support daily physical activity and exposure to health-supporting environments.					
Recommendation A	Consider adopting a data-driven traffic safety policy with the goal of eliminating fatalities and injuries from roadway crashes in Sharon.	X			TA Board; DPW; IT Dept	Med term
Recommendation B	Apply Complete Streets principles as part of site designs.	X	X		TA Board; DPW; IT Dept	Near term
Goal #5	Pursue an Age and Dementia Friendly Strategy to increase opportunities for residents to age in community.					
Recommendation A	Explore designation for the Town as Age- and Dementia-Friendly.					
Recommendation B	Adopt guidance related to Universal Design and accessibility for publicly-accessible buildings, public spaces, and sidewalks.	X		X	COA; Commission on Disabilities; Recreation Dept; DPW - Building Division; Health Dept; Planning Board; Library	Near term
Recommendation C	Invest in improved transportation practices and systems to enable greater mobility for older adults and persons with disabilities.	X	X		COA; Commission on Disabilities; Recreation Dept; DPW - Building Division; Health Dept; Planning Board; ZBA	Med term
Recommendation D	Provide home remodeling guidance through the Building Division.			X	COA; Commission on Disabilities; Recreation Dept; DPW - Building Division; Health Dept; Planning Board; ZBA	Med term
Goal #6	Consider health impacts of proposed projects and policies by integrating a Health and Equity Lens into local decision-making.					
Recommendation A	Use a health assessment tool, such as the Norfolk County 8 Coalition Plan for Health toolkit and checklist, in planning and development decision-making.	X			Health Dept; Planning Board; DPW; ZBA	Near term
Recommendation B	Explore the use of Racial Equity Impact Assessment in municipal planning and development decision making.	X			Town Administrator; Health Dept; Planning Board; DPW; ZBA	Med term
Goal #7	Improve communication and coordination across health and social services in town, with considerations for the unique needs of all residents throughout the life course.					
Recommendation A	Coordinate available social, financial, and health services available through the Town and organize and formalize the referral system for services and programs available through the Town's departments; local religious institutions; and local and regional social, health, and educational organizations.			X	COA; Health Dept; Commission on Disabilities; Housing Authority; Sharon Housing Partnership; Schools; Assessors Dept; nonprofit social organizations and religious institutions	Near term/ On-going
Recommendation B	Evaluate the increasing and changing demand for Town services and programs for all residents, and particularly for older adults as well as children, youth, and families.			X	COA; Health Dept; Commission on Disabilities; Housing Authority; Sharon Housing Partnership; Schools; Assessors Dept; nonprofit social organizations and religious institutions	Near term/ On-going

MASTER PLAN IMPLEMENTATION START-UPS

The implementation information below is meant to provide clear “start-up” guidance to the Town for some key elements and recommendations in the Master Plan. This guidance offers several recommendations broken down into smaller actions to facilitate achievability. Since the Town does not have a planner on staff at the time of this planning process, the information provided here is meant to offer a step-by-step checklist that includes each step necessary to enable a decision to be made and identify stakeholders who may be involved.

The following four focus areas were chosen by the Master Plan Steering Committee for Implementation Start-ups:

- 1. Arts, Culture, and Community:** Recommendation from Section 4.1, Cultural and Historic Resources – Support a unified approach to coordinating, funding, and marketing arts, cultural, and historic assets and events in the town;
- 2. Local Civic/Business Organization:** Recommendations from Section 4.2, Economic Vitality – Create a civic or business organization to assist local businesses and entrepreneurs;
- 3. Increase Septic and Sewer Capacity:** Recommendations from Section 4.6, Public Facilities and Infrastructure, as well as Section 4.2, Economic Vitality, Section 4.3, Housing, and Section 4.4. Land Use and Zoning – Increase septic and sewer capacity within the town; and
- 4. Foster and Maintain an Age-Friendly Community:** Recommendations from all of the Plan Elements – Enhance the characteristics of an age-friendly community for residents and visitors at all points in the life course.

The Implementation Start-ups provide step-by-step information to launch three specific goals within this Master Plan and to provide an organizational framework to address and integrate the numerous goals and recommendations of the Master Plan that are associated with fostering and maintaining Sharon as an age-friendly community. With these four Start-up implementation tools, the Town can move towards implementing its vision.

START-UP:

Cultural and Historic Resources: Arts, Culture, and Community

A major challenge facing the arts, cultural, and preservation community is that there is no single organization or department that supports arts and culture in Sharon. Most initiatives and organizations independently seek space, secure funding, and conduct marketing. There is a desire to collaborate to enable more coordinated and strategic marketing and fundraising efforts, as well as the desire for a common organization for everyone to work together on varied projects and initiatives. Common feedback received during the *Imagine Sharon* planning process included:

- There is a desire for a unifying arts and cultural organization that can apply for grants, coordinate efforts between various organizations and individuals, and pool marketing efforts to increase visibility.
- Existing arts and cultural entities would like to see increased Town funding for arts and culture and support from the Town for grant applications from nonprofits.
- There is a desire for greater use of space in public buildings for arts and culture and a more vibrant public art program.

In response to feedback, the Master Plan offers the following goal and recommendation:

SUPPORTED GOALS

CULTURAL AND HISTORIC RESOURCES

Goal 1: Support a unified approach to coordinating, funding, and marketing cultural and historic assets and events in the town.

Cultural and historic resources thrive when efforts are coordinated and marketing and information are shared on a unified platform. The pursuit of funding, efforts to heighten visibility, and making the case for all kinds of support is more sustainable when coordinated across multiple stakeholders. The Town does not have a cultural commission or cultural office and the Sharon Cultural Council's primary purpose is to administer Massachusetts Cultural Council grant monies annually. Crafting a unified approach to arts, cultural, and historic assets and events in the town and coordinating cultural and historic initiatives with other sectors can reap benefits for all.

Recommendations:

- 1A. *Create a collaborative, town-wide arts, business, and historic organization to share resources, support mutual interests, and pursue diverse funding to support goals and initiatives.*

This goal focuses on collaboration and cooperation, and the recommendation encourages exploring common interests and goals among town groups, nonprofits, businesses, and property owners. The mutual benefits are numerous:

- Businesses, nonprofits, and even agricultural interests and property owners in the town can benefit from greater visibility by joining together to package their offerings.
- Many of the businesses, nonprofits, and major events and activities in town have the same potential audience or customer base.
- By collaborating, particularly across sectors, additional funding and resources may be available. For instance, grants from foundations may be available for events and programs that encompass art, history, events, festivals, and even physical improvements such as bike paths and placemaking initiatives. Many grant-making organizations seek collaborative ventures that demonstrate wide-spread support across departments, organizations, and interests as proof of support and with the belief that more diverse support increases the likelihood of success.

Start-up Approach:

The Town serves as an active catalyst for an arts and cultural organization (to be a nonprofit 501(c)3). Clear goals, metrics, and guidelines are developed including measurements of success, and once the organization is established, the organization's board sets priorities and activities with volunteer leadership with targeted support and resources from Town government.

Initial Implementation – a step-by-step guide:

1. Identify who will lead the effort:
 - Designate a Town staff person (possibly Town Planner or Town Administrator) to use this Master Plan to create a short description of the effort.
 - Staff person to conduct initial outreach to arts, cultural, and historic preservation groups to invite them to join a five to seven-person core leadership group interested in advancing progress toward forming an arts and cultural organization.
 - Use the list of arts and cultural groups provided below (these groups were invited to a special focus group during the master planning process) for this initial outreach.

Goal: Begin to build a contact list of stakeholders and identify key stakeholders who might help with the initial efforts.

2. Plan and facilitate a meeting to test the idea of forming a nonprofit and to solicit volunteers to help.
 - Create agenda for meeting:
 - » Reiterate Master Plan findings and recommendation;
 - » Discuss benefits of a nonprofit (e.g., the ability to apply for grants not available to the Town, one organization that can consolidate efforts and give greater visibility to the arts, ability to collaborate with other groups, businesses, property owners, and the Town in a coordinated and strategic way);
 - » Discuss challenges (e.g., cost of forming a nonprofit, finding leadership, operational costs, identifying funding sources);
 - » Assess interest from meeting attendees and community groups in forming an organization; and
 - » Recruit volunteers to assist with effort and with larger information and recruitment effort.
 - Determine a time and location for meeting.
 - Send invitations to core stakeholder list with a short description of the purpose of the meeting and an agenda.
 - Facilitate meeting and determine who will assist in next steps.

Goal: Identify a core group of five to seven people who will assist with moving this effort forward and assign roles and a schedule for action steps.

3. Prepare materials and conduct outreach to disseminate information and inform the wider public of this effort.

- Town staff person works with leadership group to plan meeting and recruit attendees.
- Prepare flyer and promotional material for the meeting.
- Determine a time and location for meeting.
- Identify a possible sponsor for meeting refreshments.
- Send invitations for distribution to the contact lists and through the Town listservs.
- Ask all recipients to forward the invitation to others in their arts, cultural, and historic preservation networks.
- Use Eventbrite or other rsvp online software to register attendees and gather contact information.

Goal: Widely disseminate information on this effort and generate positive press coverage. Ensure that broader public meeting is well-attended by relevant stakeholders and that a diverse representation of town residents is achieved.

4. Convene meeting(s) of arts, cultural, and historic preservation stakeholders to discuss ideas, potential roles, and initiatives and programs of an organization, as well as next steps.

- Town staff person and core leadership group facilitates meeting.
- Meeting vets and tests interest in potential roles and activities:
 - » Networking/peer learning among arts, cultural, creative entrepreneurs, and historic preservation stakeholders;
 - » Promote Sharon as a town rich in arts, culture, creativity, and historic assets;
 - » Collaborate on fundraising and grant-writing for activities and initiatives that benefit all stakeholders (e.g., marketing, events, staff person);
 - » Collaborate with businesses (see Economic Vitality Start-up section) to fund and create joint marketing materials and unified calendar and information source;

- » Work with the Town to identify spaces for events and creative activities, simplify insurance requirements and permitting for events and festivals; and
- » Other ideas.
- Select a few short-term activities to show value of organization, expand base of participants. Examples include:
 - » Administer a survey to inventory existing resources and organizations and to determine needs;
 - » Create a database and map of all arts, cultural, and historic preservation activities, organizations, and events;
 - » Initiate a public art project and crowd-source funds to implement the project. Grants may be available from MassDevelopment’s Commonwealth Places program.⁵⁰ Use the effort to draft a simple set of guidelines for public art and to work with the Town to determine considerations for installation and maintenance;
 - » Contact the Metropolitan Area Planning Council to inquire about possible technical assistance from their arts and cultural division.
 - » Host networking and social events; and
 - » Have the Town play supportive roles with logistics, space, and communications.

Goal: Gain widespread knowledge and support for a town-wide organization and identify “doers” who will collaborate to implement a few small, near-term projects.

⁵⁰ <https://www.massdevelopment.com/what-we-offer/real-estate-services/commonwealth-places/>

5. Hold periodic meetings (possibly monthly evening meetings).
 - ❑ Combine informal social activities and networking with an educational program and project planning.
 - ❑ Spotlight different programs and activities each month.
 - ❑ Target one project and work toward implementation.

Goal: Create momentum and set regular expectations about participation, implementation, and results.

6. Initiate discussion to formalize group, its mission, and activities.
 - ❑ Start the process of formalization after a core group of participants exists and several successful activities have occurred.
 - ❑ Define mission, priorities, structure, and activities for group.
 - ❑ Town participates as a partner, supporter, and facilitator and coordinates with group on relevant activities and projects, such as:
 - ❑ Create a formal public art program; and
 - ❑ Promote arts, cultural, and historic assets in town and emphasize their connections to businesses and Post Office Square.

Goal: Create a sustainable organization that can apply for grants, collaborate with other groups, and serve the arts, cultural, and historic preservation efforts in Sharon.

Note:

As this recommendation requires collaboration, this Start-up section closely aligns with the recommendations in the Economic Vitality Start-up. To ensure that this collaboration can get started easily, the formation of the two organizations is treated separately in these sections and recommendations are made at the end of the sections for collaborative opportunities. In this way, arts, cultural, and historic preservation leaders and advocates can focus on the steps necessary to initiate an arts and cultural organization in the town that can then participate in collaborative efforts with businesses and property owners for mutual benefit.

Potential Organizations

- » Sharon Cultural Council
- » Police and Fire Museum
- » Sharon Public Library
- » Creative Arts Association
- » Sharon Community Chamber Orchestra
- » Sharon MA Concert Artist and Music Teachers Association
- » Temple Sinai
- » Sustainable Sharon Arts and Culture Committee
- » Cultural Arts Committee at Temple Israel
- » Sharon Public Schools
- » FAME (Friends of Art and Music Education)
- » And others...

START-UP:

Economic Vitality: Local Civic/Business Organization

Businesses in Sharon have no central organizing structure, nor is there a local Chamber of Commerce. As a result, businesses lack the capacity and collaborative framework to undertake joint marketing efforts, to share useful information, and to raise visibility. Issues such as permitting, septic systems, growth in space, or support of the Master Plan are difficult to address on an individual basis, and coordination with other initiatives is a challenge without a larger framework for businesses to work together. Common feedback received during the Imagine Sharon planning process regarding this issue included:

- There is a desire for businesses to work together to market and to advocate within the town and to pool resources to increase efficiency in business development efforts and to heighten visibility.
- Local business focus group participants indicated a desire for Town assistance, possibly through a staff position, to coordinate marketing, technical assistance, and other economic development issues for the Town.

In response to feedback, the Master Plan offers the following goal and recommendations:

Establish a civic or business group to promote Sharon as a business-friendly community and to enable businesses to connect and coordinate with each other. This organization could also join or partner with the Neponset River Regional Chamber, if desired. The group could include support for local entrepreneurs and self-employed consultants, as well as coordinate with the arts, cultural, and historic groups in town, described under the following Plan Elements.

SUPPORTED GOALS

ECONOMIC VITALITY

Goal 2: Create a strong, supportive environment for local businesses and self-employed/start-ups.

Sharon has a large base of independent, small businesses along with many self-employed residents and a workforce concentrated in management and technical occupations that can be a seed bed for starting new enterprises. Existing small businesses and aspiring entrepreneurs will benefit from more attention and support to start, grow, and stabilize their enterprises. Through deploying multiple tools that make it more transparent and easier to start a business, while mobilizing local resources to support and encourage entrepreneurs, Sharon will build a solid foundation for ongoing economic vitality.

Recommendations:

2A. Establish a civic or business group to promote Sharon as a business location and to enable businesses to connect and coordinate with each other.

2B. Create an entrepreneur and self-employed support group that hosts regular networking meetings and informational and skills development sessions.

These recommendations also align with the Cultural and Historic Resources Start-up steps.

Start-up Approach:

The Town serves as a catalyst for business lead civic organization. Once established, the civic/business group sets priorities and activities with volunteer leadership as well as targeted support and resources from the Town.

Initial Implementation – a step-by-step guide:

1. Designate a Town staff person (possibly Town Planner or Town Administrator) to conduct initial outreach to business owners and civic associations (e.g., Rotary Club, Lion's Club, Neponset River Regional Chamber) to discuss the idea for a local business group and its potential activities.
2. Identify a three- to five-person leadership group interested in helping to advance the organization.
3. Convene meeting(s) of business owners and other interested parties to discuss business group idea, potential roles and activities of the group, and next steps.
 - Town staff person to work with leadership group to plan meeting and recruit attendees.
 - Hold meeting to vet and test business interest in potential roles and activities:
 - » Networking and peer learning among businesses, self-employed residents;
 - » Holding educational workshops for businesses, self-employed residents;
 - » Shopping and business promotion;
 - » Promoting Sharon as a business location; and
 - » Other ideas.
 - Select a few short-term activities to show value of group, expand base of participants. Examples include:
 - » Networking and social events;
 - » Business to business promotions;
 - » Workshops and information sessions on key topics; and
 - » Have the Town play a supportive role with logistics, space, and communications.
4. Hold periodic meetings (perhaps monthly breakfast meetings).
 - Combine informal social/networking with an educational program and/or project planning.
 - Respond to interests of businesses and self-employed residents.
 - Survey self-employed residents to expand awareness of group and gauge their interest in specific activities.
5. Formalize organization and define ongoing mission and activities.
 - Initiate discussion to formalize group, its mission, and activities which include:
 - » Start the process of formalization after a core group of participants exists and several successful activities have occurred;
 - » Define mission, priorities, structure, and activities for the group;
 - » Create a guide to locating and/or starting a business in Sharon;
 - » Promote town arts, cultural, historic assets and their connections to businesses and Post Office Square; and
 - » Have the Town participate as a partner, supporter, and facilitator and coordinate with group on relevant activities and projects.

START-UP:

Start-up: Public Facilities and Infrastructure: Increase Septic and Sewer Capacity

One of the most frequent issues raised throughout the master planning process has been the limitations on smart growth economic development and housing opportunities due to the town's septic capacity. Since septic systems have been primarily installed and maintained by individual property owners and developers, the opportunities for building renovations, additions, infill development, and redevelopment are often limited because of the parcel size and available area for a self-contained septic system, as well as financial costs for private septic.

Common feedback received during the *Imagine Sharon* planning process regarding this issue included:

- Consistently, public meeting participants and Town Department leaders identified Sharon's lack of a proper sewage system as a limiting factor in location and amount of potential commercial growth. Reciprocally, the lack of a proper septic system has been tied to the Town's lack of commercial tax revenues, which limit available funds for major infrastructure investments.
- Other comments from residents noted that there are solutions to the septic challenges, but these solutions will need sustained attention and political will to move forward.

In response to feedback, the Master Plan offers the following goal and recommendation:

The Master Plan strongly recommends the Town evaluate opportunities to expand the Town's septic and sewer capacity for the purposes of fostering economic development and appropriate mixed-use, sustainable development. The goals and recommendations listed below are from Public Facilities and Infrastructure (supporting goals and recommendations in other plan elements are listed at the end of this Start-up section):

SUPPORTED GOALS

PUBLIC FACILITIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Goal 1: Improve the septic and sewage treatment conditions and facilities in town.

A vast majority of property owners in Sharon rely on on-site septic systems with leaching fields for wastewater management. A few properties utilize private package treatment systems or connect to treatment systems of neighboring towns. Based on conversations with the Master Plan Steering Committee and community members throughout the master planning process, it is evident that one of the major issues for the Town to address is its wastewater capacity and the presence of aging septic systems.

The recommendations described below center around two alternatives to improve Sharon's wastewater system: 1) investigate opportunities for community or shared septic systems, or 2) evaluate connecting to an existing wastewater treatment system (MWRA) or expanding the number of properties connected to the Mansfield wastewater treatment system. Both creating community (shared) septic systems and connecting to an existing wastewater treatment system in a neighboring town will most likely require installing new sewer infrastructure (pipes and manholes) within existing roadways.

Recommendations:

- 1A. *Educate the public about septic systems, recommended maintenance, sustainable alternative systems, and how to identify a failing septic system.*
- 1B. *Complete a comprehensive wastewater management plan to analyze potential alternatives to improve Sharon's septic and sewer capacity.*
- 1C. *Communicate and discuss with property owners the benefits and costs of a community septic system.*
- 1D. *Resume conversations with Young Israel of Sharon and/or Temple Israel property owners to determine if a portion of either property could be the site for a potential community septic system for Post Office Square.*

SUPPORTED GOALS (CONTINUED)

Goal 4: Expand funding sources to improve infrastructure, programs, and services.

Recommendations:

- 4A. Study potential eligibility for road and infrastructure grants such as MassWorks, the potential for Sharon to become a Housing Choice Community, and the feasibility of participating in MassHousing's Planning for Housing Production Program, to help fund infrastructure related to affordable housing creation.

Start-up Approach:

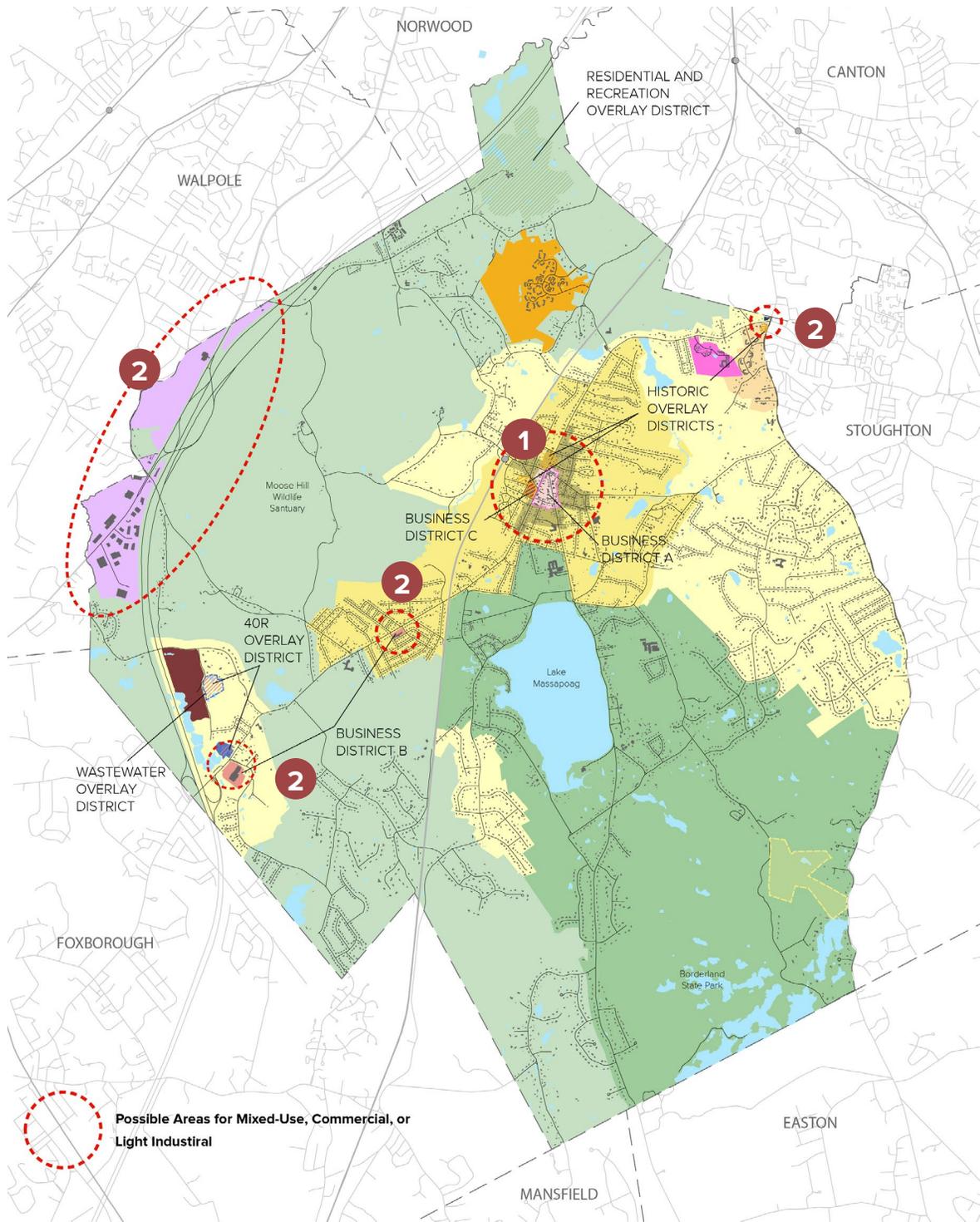
The Town can address this issue with a multifaceted approach that outlines short and long-term time frames. While this is a town-wide concern, there are strategies that can be explored depending on location and land use type – from individual residential parcels throughout town, to commercial properties near Post Office Square, to light industrial and commercial land near Route 1 and I-95.

There are multiple issues with the limited septic and sewer capacity within town and these can be organized into three categories, with coordinating and connecting approaches:

1. **Mixed-use and commercial parcels in and around Post Office Square**
2. **Existing commercial and light industrial parcels outside of Post Office Square**
3. **Residential areas throughout town**

Approaches 1 and 2 are specified by geography according to Fig. 55.

Figure 55: Possible Areas for Mixed-use, Commercial, or Light Industrial Uses.



Zoning

- | | | | | | |
|--|-----------------------------|--|-------------------------|--|---|
| | Single Residence District A | | Business District A | | 40R Overlay District |
| | Single Residence District B | | Business District B | | Wastewater Overlay District |
| | Housing Authority District | | Business District C | | Recreation and Residential Overlay District |
| | General Residence District | | Business District D | | Senior Living Overlay District |
| | Suburban District 1 | | Light Industrial | | Mixed Use Overlay District |
| | Suburban District 2 | | Professional District | | Historic Overlay District |
| | Rural District 1 | | Professional District B | | |
| | Rural District 2 | | Water | | |
| | | | Roads | | |
| | | | Structures | | |

#1: Mixed-Use and Commercial Parcels in and around Post Office Square

Initial Implementation – a step-by-step guide:

Much preliminary work has been done in studying the town's center in the *2009 Post Office Square Area Plan*. In this plan, recommendations were made to explore ways to increase sewer capacity for properties in Post Office Square. The step-by-step guide below builds from this plan.

1. Identify who will lead the effort:
 - Designate a Town staff person (possibly Town Planner or Town Administrator) in conjunction with the Public Works Department to use recommendations from this Master Plan and the 2009 Post Office Square Area Plan to create a short description of the effort.

Goal: Begin to build an internal team to help with initial efforts.

2. Starting with Post Office Square, revise the November 2010 spreadsheet and map with updated property information and ages of all the septic systems.

Goal: Compile updated property ownership data, business and use information, and septic system data, and assemble contact information for property and business owners.

3. Analyze and group together properties and identify property owners by age of systems for discussions on potential collaboration for upgrades.

Goal: For discussion purposes, prepare preliminary analysis to suggest potential property owner partnerships based on location, uses, and ages of current septic systems.

4. Host an educational session to educate property owners on the limitations of traditional septic systems, such as contamination, system life span, size limitations, and expansion constraints. Include specifications for a variety of commercial, residential, and mixed-uses.

Goal: Provide information and technical assistance for property owners looking to update their septic systems on their properties.

5. Develop a conceptual infill development scenario and prepare a preliminary analysis of potential septic demand if conceptual mixed-use, commercial, or residential infill development or redevelopment were to occur within Post Office Square to determine capacity needed for collaborative system and what additional capacity could be accommodated.

Goal: To calculate an estimated range of wastewater volume that would need to be treated if mixed-use infill development or redevelopment occurred.

6. Concurrently, resume conversations with Temple Israel regarding possible interest in leasing, use, and /or sale of a portion of Temple-owned property for a septic package system in future.

Goal: Understand if Temple Israel's excess property is still a viable option for a community septic system, including initial analysis of the technical conditions and financial estimates.

7. Research possible grants and funding for planning and installation assistance (e.g., MassWorks or MassHousing's Planning for Housing Production Program for infrastructure and public facilities in relation to affordable housing, Housing Choice Community infrastructure grants, or betterment fees or District Increment Financing).

Goal: As part of technical assistance to property owners, compile potential grants and funding sources specific to mixed-use, larger residential, or commercial developments.

Note:

Timeline would be short-term for these initial steps, with implementation time frame to be determined by ages of existing systems, funding, and property owners.

#2: Existing Commercial and Light Industrial Parcels outside of Post Office Square

Initial Implementation – a step-by-step guide:

One of the strategies for allowing development within an environmentally and financially sustainable framework is for the Town to encourage possible mixed-use, commercial, or light industrial development in areas that are already zoned for business and light industrial uses. In these areas, as in other parts of the town, property owners have to work within the sewer capacity limits of their parcels. However, there are property owners who have utilized their location near the town boundaries to connect to the MWRA sewer system through neighboring towns' systems. This approach could be useful in increasing the potential capacity of these parcels, which are already zoned for commercial and light industrial uses, for development that would expand the commercial tax base.

1. On a parcel map, identify property owners with updated property information and ages of all the corresponding septic systems.
 - Include properties whose developments are connected to MWRA connections of neighboring towns.

Goal: Compile updated property ownership data, business and use information, and septic system data and assemble contact information for property and business owners.

2. Host an educational session to educate property owners on the limitations of tradition septic systems (e.g., contamination, system's life span, size limitations, and expansion constraints).
 - Provide information about septic system requirements for mixed-use buildings and various commercial uses.

Goal: Provide information and technical assistance for property owners looking to update their septic systems on their properties and discuss future potential for additions, renovations, infill development, or redevelopment.

3. Conduct a feasibility study to evaluate connecting into the MWRA sewer system (through Walpole, Norwood, Canton, or Stoughton) or the Mansfield wastewater treatment system (through Foxborough or Mansfield).
 - The study should include technical and financial components as well as a cost-benefit analysis for different options, if necessary.

Goal: A comprehensive feasibility study that informs the Town and property owners of potential options that may or may not be reasonable to pursue as a means to increase wastewater capacity for the town or for specific properties along the town border.

4. Evaluate possible funding methods to connect into an existing sewer system (e.g., state grants and funds related to affordable housing, betterment fees, or District Increment Financing).

Goal: As part of technical assistance to property owners, compile potential grants and funding sources specific to mixed-use or commercial developments.

#3: Residential Areas throughout Town

Initial Implementation – a step-by-step guide:

While not specific to economic development and business support, within the town's existing residential neighborhoods, the septic capacity issue is an environmental and financial issue. Any new housing units within the residential neighborhoods – even the addition of an in-law or accessory dwelling unit (ADU) as part of an existing home – may be hindered by septic requirements. Thus, the issues presented by the town's reliance on septic affect a key value identified during this planning process – ensuring that a range of choices for housing can be provided to make Sharon an age-friendly community.

1. Educate the community on the limitations of traditional septic systems (e.g. contamination, system's life span, size limitations, and expansion constraints).
 - Advertise on the Town's website: <https://www.townofsharon.net/health-department/pages/septic-information> to remind residents and property owners of the need for regular maintenance and the environmental and financial implications for neglecting septic issues.

Goal: Provide information and technical assistance for property owners looking to update their septic systems on their properties and discuss future potential for additions, renovations, infill development, or redevelopment.

2. Review existing septic requirements for single-family residences to evaluate potential modifications to the septic compliance process for property owners who want to add an ADU.

Goal: Review septic compliance for single-family residences to clarify and reduce unintended burden for property owners looking to add an ADU while still being compliant.

1. Conduct a town-wide survey by location to assess property owner interest in participating in a community septic system.
 - If there is sufficient interest in a specific area, a study to identify possible locations for community septic fields should be considered.

Goal: Provide information and consent for the introduction of community septic fields within residential neighborhoods where desired by residents.

Possible Organizations to be Involved in this Start-up

- » Town Department of Public Works
- » Property Owners
- » Business Owners and newly organized local business organization
- » Developers
- » Community Preservation Committee
- » Sharon Housing Authority
- » Conservation Commission
- » Board of Health
- » And others

RELATED GOALS

A Systems Approach:

The goals and recommendations listed above are also supported by goals and recommendations in other elements of the Master Plan, including the following:

ECONOMIC VITALITY

Goal 4: Create septic and sewer capacity to foster economic development.

Recommendations:

- 4A. Further evaluate the potential of a community septic system on a portion of Young Israel of Sharon's and/or Temple Israel's property near Post Office Square.
- 4B. Explore the possibility of connecting to the MWRA sewer in Walpole, Norwood, Canton or Stoughton.
- 4C. Evaluate the possibility of connecting to the Mansfield Wastewater Treatment Plant.

HOUSING

Goal 1: Support and encourage mixed-use development in appropriate areas in town (e.g., Post Office Square, Cobbs Corner, Shaw's Plaza, and Sharon Heights Plaza).

- 1C. Consider improvements to wastewater infrastructure, incorporating sustainable concepts where possible, to encourage new housing development in and near Post Office Square to include a variety of housing types, sizes, price ranges, and rentals and ownership to support the town's socioeconomic diversity and to utilize town center amenities and transit services.

Goal 2: Promote and allow housing types for aging in community, especially options that foster community and intergenerational connections in walkable neighborhoods with access to services and shops.

Recommendation:

- 2A. Allow and encourage accessory dwelling units (ADUs) and provide residents with educational "how to" materials for permitting, operation, and maintenance.

LAND USE AND ZONING

Goal 1: Encourage mixed-use development, where appropriate, to support connectivity, walkability, aging in community, and local businesses.

Recommendations:

- 1A. Review zoning in appropriate areas to see if MUOD regulations could be applied outside of Post Office Square.
- 1B. Consider incentives to encourage mixed-use development in the Shaws Plaza, Heights Plaza, Post Office Square, and Cobbs Corner.
- 1C. Study additional areas for potential suitability for cluster or "pocket-neighborhood" development, such as cottages and cohousing.

Goal 3: Maintain the character of the town and its neighborhoods while allowing appropriate redevelopment and growth.

Recommendation:

- 3B. Allow and encourage ADUs.

START-UP:

Overall Master Plan: Foster and Maintain an Age-Friendly Community

One of the most frequent issues raised throughout the master planning process was overall challenges faced by older adults, as well as young families and single professionals. In order to be an accessible and welcoming community for a population of all ages and abilities, the Town will need to work with the broader community to address issues that include: the increasing housing costs and associated property tax burden, the need for enhanced physical access and mobility through town, and growing demand for social services and other community support. Fostering and maintaining an age-friendly and accessible community that allows older adults and long-time residents to age in community as their needs change, as well as providing the housing types and amenities needed and desired by young families, is a complex set of challenges that spans many of the elements in this Master Plan.

Common feedback received during the *Imagine Sharon* planning process regarding this issue included:

- Residents are concerned that the ability of older adults to remain in Sharon as they age is limited because of rapidly rising housing costs and the lack of appropriate housing stock.
- Recent senior housing construction has been away from the Town Center and lacks the walkability and connectivity that older adults need and want in order to access services and social opportunities.
- There is an increase in demand for social services and a concern that the Town is not prepared to meet these needs with staff and resources.
- Many residents recognize the qualities that support a friendly community for older adults are also the characteristics desired by younger residents, such as walkability, a range of mobility choices, welcoming public spaces, and opportunities for social connections and the spaces in which to enjoy them.
- Many participants in public meetings acknowledged that accessibility standards serve those with physical challenges as well as other parts of the population, including older adults and families with young children.

In response to feedback, the Master Plan offers a range of recommendations that address supporting Sharon as an age-friendly community that are woven throughout the plan within all the elements. While the core of the recommendations can be found in Community Health (Section 4.8), others can be found throughout the plan and specific recommendations related to enhancing Sharon as a welcoming community for residents and visitors at all points in the life course are provided in a reference chart at the end of this Start-up section.

Start-up Approach:

Because there are numerous plan goals and recommendations related to supporting Sharon as an age-friendly community, the start-up information focuses on creating the infrastructure and proper resources to coordinate efforts and ensure adequate attention is given toward action steps.

Initial Implementation – a step-by-step guide:

1. Designate Sharon Council on Aging (COA) as the leader of this coordinated effort to support efforts to ensure Sharon is an age-friendly community and to coordinate actions from the Master Plan.
2. Identify an advisory group of five to seven related stakeholders and groups to support COA efforts and to ensure the effort considers and includes residents and visitors on the entire life cycle spectrum of ages and abilities. Recommended advisory group members include representatives from:
 - » Health
 - » Schools
 - » DPW
 - » Transportation
 - » Housing
 - » Library
 - » Recreation
 - » Others as applicable
3. Convene the group and identify first tasks which should include:
 - Develop a checklist for use in Master Plan implementation to ensure each action and decision meets age-friendly criteria. Checklist items could include criteria such as the following:
 - » Does or can this action serve a broad segment of the population including older adults, disabled, and children/young families? What changes would be necessary to serve more people?
 - » Does this action create a more socially connected Sharon? What would have to be changed to do this?
- » Does this action create more physical connections for older adults or children/teens or disabled residents and visitors?
- » What funding might be available to help diversify this action to have more positive impact on a broader range of ages and abilities?
4. Identify the various State, nonprofit, and other agencies and organizations that can be resources and partners in the advisory group's efforts, including organizations and initiatives such as:
 - » Massachusetts Healthy Aging Collaborative
 - » Dementia Friendly Massachusetts
 - » Safe Routes to School
5. Work with a designated Town staff person or a newly appointed Town Planner to coordinate how the group's efforts will influence Master Plan implementation and how the group will interact with key Master Plan stakeholders and Town Departments.
6. Identify potential roles and activities of the group, and next steps. These could include:
 - » Develop guidance materials for Universal Design, visitability, and accessibility for Town use and for use by residents in private buildings.
 - » Provide advice and guidebooks, and consider incentives for homeowners, developers, and businesses to create buildings and spaces that are accessible and age-friendly for a diverse cross section of the population.
 - » Others as identified by the group.
7. Select one or two initiatives or projects to start.
8. Hold periodic meetings and ensure consistent coordination with Town efforts and Master Plan implementation.

RELATED GOALS

Master Plan Goals and Recommendations Related to Creating an Age-friendly Community:

The following are the goals and recommendations of this Master Plan that are connected with Sharon's ability to foster and maintain a town that is welcoming to residents throughout the life course and across all abilities and mobility needs:

HOUSING

Goal 2: Promote and allow housing types for aging in community, especially options that foster community and intergenerational connections in walkable neighborhoods with access to services and shops.

Recommendations:

- 2A. Allow and encourage accessory dwelling units (ADUs) and provide residents with educational "how to" materials for permitting, operation, and maintenance.
- 2B. Increase awareness of the existing Property Tax Work Off Abatement Program.
- 2C. Consider zoning amendments that encourage use of Universal Design (UD) standards or visitability standards for new housing, particularly near Post Office Square and other commercial areas.

Goal 3: Create green and sustainable housing, including mixed-use options and walkable locations in close proximity to shops and services.

Recommendations:

- 3A. Further encourage or incentivize cluster and/or flexible subdivision design; consider discussions with developers of undeveloped but permitted properties regarding the potential environmental, social, and financial benefits of cluster neighborhood design, which would be allowed by special permit.
- 3B. Allow smaller homes and cottage or "pocket neighborhood" developments, incorporating sustainable concepts and features where possible.

Goal 4: Create and preserve affordable units, particularly rental units, to ensure continued socioeconomic diversity and to maintain at least 10% of Sharon's year-round housing stock as affordable per MGL c.40B.

Recommendations:

- 4A. Rejuvenate the Affordable Housing Trust with a fully appointed board and funding to identify alternative policies and projects to maintain Sharon's 10% affordability threshold.
- 4B. Consider implementing a broader inclusionary housing policy with higher percentage requirements depending on development type and size.

LAND USE AND ZONING

Goal 1: Encourage mixed-use development, where appropriate, to support connectivity, walkability, aging in community, and local businesses.

Recommendations:

- 1D. Review zoning in appropriate areas to see if MUOD regulations could be applied outside of Post Office Square.
- 1E. Consider incentives to encourage mixed-use development in the Shaws Plaza, Heights Plaza, Post Office Square, and Cobbs Corner. (Also see Economic Vitality and Housing)
- 1F. Study additional areas for potential suitability for cluster or "pocket-neighborhood" development, such as cottages and co-housing. (Also see Housing)
- 1G. Consider a zoning requirement for on-site circulation and access management to connect to existing networks in certain types of new development or redevelopment.

RELATED GOALS (CONTINUED)

Goal 3: Maintain the character of the town and its neighborhoods while allowing appropriate redevelopment and growth.

Recommendations:

- 3A. Consider zoning amendments that encourage use of Universal Design or visitability standards for new development, particularly for housing and those near commercial or mixed-use centers.
- 3B. Further encourage or incentivize cluster and/or flexible subdivision design; consider discussions with developers of undeveloped but permitted properties regarding the potential environmental, social, and financial benefits of cluster neighborhood design.

OPEN SPACE, RECREATION, AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Goal 3: Connect passive and active recreational spaces, trails, and natural resources, including the Lake.

Recommendation:

- 3B. Identify additional opportunities, including the recommendations in MAPC's 2014 Lake Massapoag Bicycle Network Plan, to connect bicycle infrastructure and wayfinding not only to open space but to commercial and residential areas of Sharon to help reduce vehicle dependence.

Goal 4: Expand recreational opportunities for all age groups and abilities in town.

Recommendations:

- 4A. Provide or work with private partners to provide recreational spaces, activities, and exercise spaces (beyond team sports) for all age groups but particularly for school-age children (seven to twelve years) and teens.
- 4B. Create or work with private partners to create multi-use outdoor active recreational spaces, especially fields that can be used for organized sports.
- 4C. Enhance functionality and improve features at Veterans' Memorial Park Beach as well as identify measures to improve the range of uses of the Sharon Community Center.
- 4D. Improve accessibility for all ages and abilities, incorporate accessible and functional passive and recreational activities, and enhance management of Town-owned recreational and open spaces, such as the Mountain Street Landfill, Veterans' Memorial Park Beach, and Community Center.

PUBLIC FACILITIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Goal 5: Improve communication and social service systems in town.

Recommendations:

- 5C. In coordination with Community Health goals and recommendations, evaluate the increasing and changing demand for Town services and programs for all residents, particularly for older adults, and coordinate available services and programs with a formal referral system.
- 5D. Educate residents, businesses, and property owners about existing physical infrastructure conditions (e.g., roadways, sidewalks, septic, wastewater, and stormwater) as well as the Town's available social services (e.g., Council on Aging and Health Department) and the costs of maintenance and service delivery.

RELATED GOALS (CONTINUED)

TRANSPORTATION AND MOBILITY

Goal 1: Continue to adhere to and promote Complete Streets principles with all roadway infrastructure improvements to increase walkability and bikeability.

Recommendation:

1C. Identify opportunities to implement and expand the recommendations in MAPC's 2014 Lake Massapoag Bicycle Network Plan, to connect on-street and off-street bicycle infrastructure to open space and recreation, as well as to the commercial and residential areas of town in order to reduce vehicle dependence.

Goal 2: Improve pedestrian safety and accessibility for all ages and abilities through Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance.

Recommendations:

2A. Identify intersections in need of safety improvements and upgrade pedestrian crossing infrastructure including crosswalk markings, curb ramps, and pedestrian signals.

2B. Investigate the impact of lowering speed limits on certain roads in town and, where appropriate, use traffic calming measures, such as temporary speed feedback signs and/or installing more permanent calming elements, such as curb extensions, raised islands or medians, pavement markings, or raised crosswalks to reduce speeding.

Goal 3: Expand local and regional transportation networks by partnering with existing organizations that support transit and shared mobility.

Recommendation:

3A. Continue to participate in the Neponset Valley Transportation Management Association (TMA) and Suburban Mobility Working Group meetings and expand the Town's involvement to identify options for local transportation within Sharon and between neighboring towns to reduce gaps in service.

Goal 4: Implement transportation policies and infrastructure improvements holistically to promote transportation and land use connections.

Recommendations:

4A. Encourage businesses to join Neponset Valley TMA and/or use State resources, such as MassRides to provide transportation demand management strategies.

4F. Support and incorporate technological and sustainable solutions and anticipate impacts of autonomous vehicles, both for private use and potential shuttles.

COMMUNITY HEALTH

Goal 1: Promote environments that foster formal and informal connections among neighbors and peers to enhance social capital and intergenerational ties.

Recommendation:

1A. Identify or develop publicly-accessible spaces as physical community hubs in each neighborhood in Sharon.

Goal 4: Continue prioritization of active transportation and traffic safety investments to support daily physical activity and exposure to health-supporting environments.

Recommendations:

4A. Consider adopting a data-driven traffic safety policy with the goal of eliminating fatalities and injuries from roadway crashes in Sharon.

4B. Apply Complete Streets principles as part of site designs.

RELATED GOALS (CONTINUED)

Goal 5: Pursue an Age- and Dementia-Friendly Strategy to increase opportunities for residents to age in community.

Recommendations:

- 5A. Explore designation for the Town as Age- and Dementia-Friendly.
- 5B. Adopt guidance related to Universal Design and accessibility for publicly-accessible buildings, public spaces, and sidewalks.
- 5C. Invest in improved transportation practices and systems to enable greater mobility for older adults and persons with disabilities.
- 5D. Provide home remodeling guidance through the Building Division.

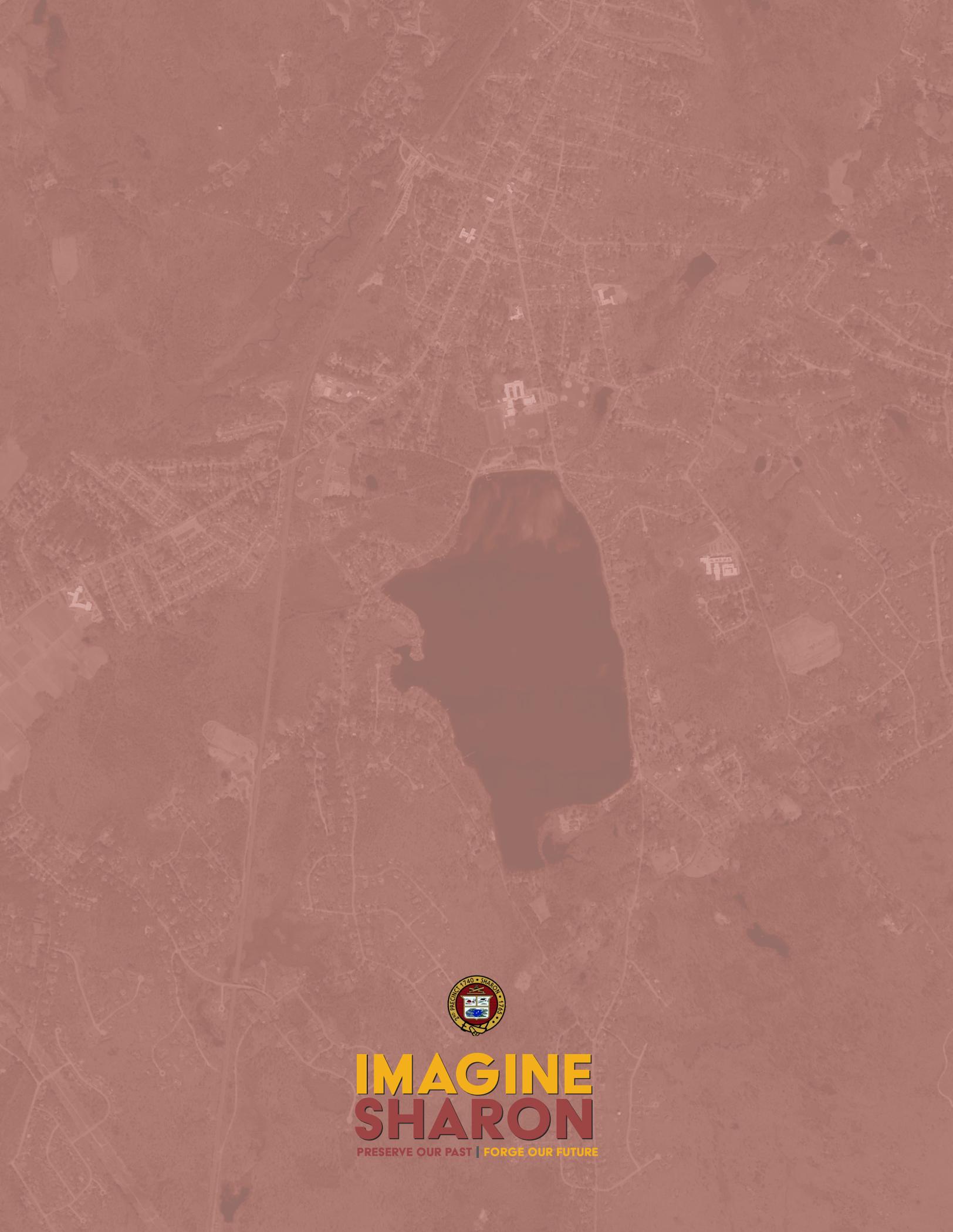
Goal 6: Consider health impacts of proposed projects and policies by integrating a Health and Equity Lens into local decision-making.

Recommendations:

- 6A. Use a health assessment tool, such as the Norfolk County 8 Coalition Plan for Health toolkit and checklist, in planning and development decision-making.
- 6B. Explore the use of Racial Equity Impact Assessment in municipal planning and development decision-making.

Goal 7: Improve communication and coordination across health and social services in town, with considerations for the unique needs of all residents throughout the life course.

- 7A. Coordinate available social, financial, and health services available through the Town and organize and formalize the referral system for services and programs available through the Town's departments; local religious institutions; and local and regional social, health, and educational organizations.
- 7B. Evaluate the increasing and changing demand for Town services and programs for all residents, and particularly for older adults as well as children, youth, and families.



IMAGINE SHARON

PRESERVE OUR PAST | FORGE OUR FUTURE