



# Hingham

## MASTER PLAN SUMMARY 2002

### INTRODUCTION

A municipal Master Plan is a statement of public policy to guide decision-making for future development. In part, it involves taking stock to provide a concise baseline of current trends relative to the environment, natural and cultural resources, population, housing stock, economic base needs and opportunities. The legal basis for master planning in Massachusetts comes from Chapter 41, Section 81D of the General Laws of Massachusetts. This act charges Planning Boards to create a Master Plan "to provide a basis for decision making regarding the long-term physical development of the Municipality." Public participation plays a critical role in the process, as the law requires an "interactive public process" to determine the goals and policies.

The last updated Master Plan for the Town of Hingham was prepared in 1968. The process of creating this updated version of the Master Plan began in 1996 with the creation of the



Photo by Michael O'Neill

Zoning By-Law Committee, followed by the establishment of a Master Plan Committee in 1998. Under the guidance of the Master Plan Committee work was conducted by consultants John Brown Associates, Bruce Campbell Associates and the Bluestone Planning Group. Throughout the planning process, the Master Plan Committee has actively sought public input from local committees, boards and community groups. In conclusion, this final document, completed in 2001, reflects the culmination of more than five years of work on the part of the entire community. The master

planning process leaves our community well equipped to guide future land use development and redevelopment in a manner that is consistent with Hingham's needs and the best interests of its citizens. This brief document provides a summary of the topics addressed in the Hingham Master Plan, and the broad recommendations put forth by topic.

**For more information about the master planning process or to review a complete copy of the plan document, please contact the Hingham Planning Board.**

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**HOW OUR REMAINING LAND IS DEVELOPED WILL HAVE CRITICAL IMPACTS ON MUNICIPAL SERVICES, WATER SUPPLY, THE ENVIRONMENT, SCHOOLS AND THE QUALITY OF LIFE IN HINGHAM.**

## LAND USE

**H**ingham is a suburban community, with a majority of its total area already developed. Predominant land uses in developed areas are residential and public, though the town features industrial, commercial and even agricultural areas as well. Factors that have determined land use patterns include availability of utilities and infrastructure, soil suitability, access and location. How our remaining land is developed will have critical impacts on municipal

services, water supply, the environment, schools and the quality of life in Hingham. The Master Plan identified the following broad recommendations to guide decisions relative to future land use in the Town.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Protect Hingham's historic village character from excessive growth and development
- Carefully balance growth and economic benefits with the protection of our natural environment and

character-defining cultural resources

- Maintain the character of existing neighborhoods through design standards, design review and strengthened regulations
- Reserve sufficient Town-owned land for future facility needs
- Manage growth and future development to limit adverse fiscal impacts
- Cluster commercial uses in strategic locations to limit commercial sprawl and strip development

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

**H**ingham's economic base has remained steady throughout the past decade. Recent trends show a broadening of Hingham's employment base, reflecting an increase in the entire South Shore subregion. Employment in manufacturing, transportation, communications, and utilities has declined, while there has been growth in services, construction and the trades. The Town has reasonably good access to the regional labor supply through a variety of modes of transportation. The unemployment rate of Hingham residents is consistently lower than the state average. Most Hingham residents commute to other locations to work, while the majority of employees working in Hingham come from other communities,

resulting in a slight inflow of labor to the town. The tax base in Hingham is primarily residential, though construction of commercial real estate has increased in the past few years. While residents are enthusiastic about the fiscal benefits resulting from commercial development, they expressed concern with the potential impact of commercial development on traffic, town character and quality of life. Along with the surge in residential uses, this growth presents significant challenges to existing infrastructure that need to be addressed in order for Hingham's economy to remain strong.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Support and strengthen local businesses that are

beneficial to the community in terms of providing services, products, employment, and tax revenue

- Maintain high design standards for existing and new commercial developments
- Attract new businesses that fit the character of the community, in terms of scale, attractiveness, and functionality
- Other than the town center, major traffic producing economic development should be kept near regional highways
- Aesthetically and fiscally desirable land uses (e.g. high tech, office, senior assisted living) should be proactively sought out
- Improved infrastructure must accompany commercial growth

**COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT. . . PRESENTS SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGES TO EXISTING INFRASTRUCTURE THAT NEED TO BE ADDRESSED IN ORDER FOR HINGHAM'S ECONOMY TO REMAIN STRONG.**

**HINGHAM RESIDENTS IDENTIFIED THE NEED TO BALANCE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT WITH PROTECTION OF NATURAL ENVIRONMENT AS A TOP PRIORITY.**

## NATURAL RESOURCES

**H**ingham contains an abundance of natural resources and a rich variety of natural habitats including wetlands, rivers, beaches, floodplains and saltwater marshes. Beyond the critical role they play in supporting natural ecosystems, these resources contribute valuable or irreplaceable services to the people of Hingham and the surrounding towns by providing drinking water, clear air, flood control and other benefits. In doing the research for the Master Plan, Hingham residents identified the need to balance growth and development with protection of natural environment as a top priority.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Protect and enhance Hingham's natural environment for the benefit of current and future citizens
- Protect sensitive freshwater and saltwater resources, especially wetlands, the Flood Plain and Watershed District, rare species habitats such as vernal pools, and Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) from inappropriate development and other potential hazards
- Enforce state and local wetland protection laws and monitor Order of Conditions to prevent wetland degradation from runoff, mowing, construction and filling
- Monitor and address water quality in Hingham Harbor
- Protect sources of drinking water against pollution from runoff, nitrogen loading, and other forms of non-point source pollution
- Maintain sufficient natural areas to sustain viable populations of native plant and wildlife species.
- Monitor and control invasive species
- Encourage development projects that promote the creation and extension of greenways so that wildlife can travel among Hingham's various conservation areas

## OPEN SPACE

**H**ingham has been very pro-active in planning, acquiring and managing open space for conservation purposes. The Town has also benefited from land conservation activities of the state and non-profit organizations such as the Trustees of Reservations. This open land provides wildlife habitat, groundwater recharge areas, and opportunities for hiking, camping, and the enjoyment of nature. Despite Hingham's already rich inventory of public open space, a majority of residents feel that the town should continue to acquire and protect additional open space.

**A MAJORITY OF HINGHAM RESIDENTS FEEL THAT THE TOWN SHOULD CONTINUE TO ACQUIRE AND PROTECT ADDITIONAL OPEN SPACE.**



Photo by Phil Swanson

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Link open space parcels to form a greenway or open space network
- Require that all new development include adequate and accessible open space
- Increase public access to and use of existing open spaces areas within Hingham
- Provide sufficient open space resources for all neighborhoods in the Town of Hingham
- The Conservation Commission, Open Space Committee, and Community Preservation Committee should work together to increase the amount of permanently protected open space in Hingham

## RECREATION

RESIDENTS FEEL THAT THERE IS STILL A NEED FOR ADDITIONAL NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS AND BETTER ACCESS TO EXISTING FACILITIES—A NEED WHICH WILL ONLY INCREASE WITH PROJECTED FUTURE POPULATION GROWTH.

**H**ingham residents enthusiastically support and use their town recreational facilities. The town is rich in parks, playfields, and other facilities providing recreational opportunities for citizens of all ages. The newly renovated Town Hall building includes an indoor recreation center, fitness room, and ample performance and meeting space. Residents feel that there is still a need for additional neighborhood parks and better access to existing facilities—a need

which will only increase with projected future population growth. Currently, one of the most pressing recreational issues is the need for additional field time for use by school, town and club athletic teams, and better coordination and cooperation between the various users.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Continue to expand recreational opportunities on a town-wide basis
- Seek new park and playground sites for under-served and densely populated neighborhoods
- Improve access to existing facilities through appropriate signage and parking
- Earmark funding to improve maintenance at existing recreational facilities
- Improve coordination and cooperation between the various organizations that use manage and maintain recreational facilities
- Support the development of recreational facilities planned for the former depot land adjacent to Bare Cove Park

## HISTORIC AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

RESIDENTS EXPRESSED GRAVE CONCERNS THAT FUTURE GROWTH COULD THREATEN THE INTEGRITY OF IRREPLACEABLE HISTORIC RESOURCES.

**T**he Town of Hingham, first settled in 1635 by the Puritans, and incorporated as the twelfth town in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, is rich in historic and cultural resources. Through the work of the Hingham Historical Society, Historical Commission, and Historic Districts Commission, the Town has created a number of local historic districts. The two commissions have also prepared the Historic Districts Handbook, which many regard as the best local handbook of restoration guidelines of its kind in the Commonwealth. Hingham has designated several of its beautiful roads as “scenic roads,” including Lazell Street/Union Street, Free Street, Turkey Hill Lane/Pope’s Lane and part of Leavitt Street. While the town has succeeded in retaining much of

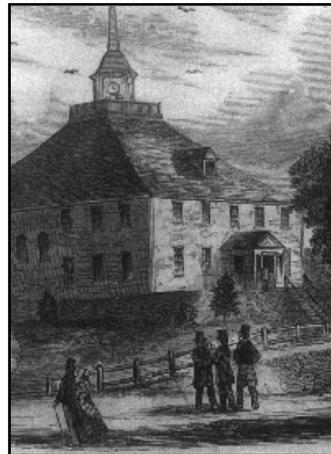


Photo by Phil Swanson, of a 19th century print

its historic character, residents expressed grave concerns that future growth could threaten the integrity of irreplaceable historic resources.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Continue to document and inventory Hingham’s historic resources, including historic districts, structures, landscapes, and critical vistas
- Focus preservation efforts on areas targeted for significant growth
- Expand the Hingham Center Historic Boundary to include additional historically significant structures
- Protect Hingham’s character-defining landscapes from further alteration through land acquisition, land swaps, tax abatements and the establishment and purchase of scenic easements
- Identify additional scenic roads for designation and protection
- Clearly define mitigation measures to protect Hingham Square BEFORE commuter rail construction begins and the plans are set in stone
- Provide sufficient resources to adequately staff the Historical Commission and Historic Districts Commission

## HOUSING

As of April 2001, there were approximately 7,522 year round housing units in Hingham. The bulk of these are single-family dwellings, with approximately 20% two-family or multi-family dwellings. The number of households in Hingham continues to increase, though the average household size is decreasing. Property values have been consistently high, while vacancy rates have been consistently low. There are very few rental properties on the market. Providing affordable housing is one of Hingham's biggest challenges. Currently, only 2.33% of Hingham's housing

stock is considered affordable, while the state requires that every town should have 10% affordable housing stock under Chapter 40B. Hingham's demographics indicate that there is not a sufficient supply of homes for "empty nesters" to be able to stay in Hingham when they wish to downsize. Equally pressing is the need for additional housing units for emerging new families, single heads of households, would-be first time homebuyers, and persons of low to moderate income.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Develop a town-wide plan to accommodate the full

- diversity of housing needs
- Carefully integrate new or expanded housing into existing districts and neighborhoods so that it is not physically or environmentally disruptive to the surrounding context
- Allow for the creation of accessory apartments in larger and/or older homes
- Allow for the creation of apartments in upper stories of existing businesses in Hingham Square if sufficient parking can be provided
- Utilize the Local Initiative Program (LIP) to the fullest extent possible to encourage the construction of affordable homes

HINGHAM'S DEMOGRAPHICS INDICATE A NEED FOR ADDITIONAL HOUSING UNITS FOR EMERGING NEW FAMILIES, SINGLE HEADS OF HOUSEHOLDS, WOULD-BE FIRST TIME HOMEBUYERS, PERSONS OF LOW TO MODERATE INCOME, AND THE ELDERLY.

## TRANSPORTATION

Over the past few decades, Hingham has developed as a largely automobile-oriented suburb. While a small percentage of residents utilize the commuter boat, trains and buses, residents primarily drive to work, school and recreational venues. Indeed, many residents express concern with the increasing overcrowding on our roadways, and perceived deterioration of transportation infrastructure. Further, the Town is at a juncture where significant changes are anticipated to take place, including the arrival of re-activated commuter rail service, the redevelopment of Hingham Shipyard, new development in South Hingham, and the general

aging of the population. These changes will place new and different demands on Hingham's transportation infrastructure.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Focus roadway improvements on safety enhancements, not increased capacity, including the addition of turn lanes at high accident locations, improved visibility, and enhancements for pedestrian and bicycle traffic.
- Promote roadway improvements that maintain community character
- Minimize cut-throughs on residential streets
- Encourage collaboration between the Town planning

- agencies, the DPW and MassHighway
- Utilize Traffic Demand Management (TDM) Strategies; promote the use of public transportation, walking and bicycling, to access the commuter boat and commuter rail stations
- Coordinate long-range transportation improvements with adjoining towns
- Develop parking plans or regulations that ensure adequacy of parking for commuter boat and commuter rail facilities
- Determine the actual impact of the Greenbush construction on parking in Hingham Square, and make recommendations to ensure parking adequacy

THE ARRIVAL OF RE-ACTIVATED COMMUTER RAIL SERVICE, THE REDEVELOPMENT OF HINGHAM SHIPYARD, NEW DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH HINGHAM, AND THE GENERAL AGING OF THE POPULATION . . . WILL PLACE NEW AND DIFFERENT DEMANDS ON HINGHAM'S TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE.

## PUBLIC FACILITIES

ONE OF THE STRONGEST RECOMMENDATIONS TO COME OUT OF THE MASTER PLAN WAS THAT THE TOWN SHOULD HOLD ON TO EXISTING UNUSED MUNICIPAL LAND AND FACILITIES TO ENSURE THAT FUTURE NEEDS CAN BE ACCOMMODATED.

The Town of Hingham provides a wide range of high-quality municipal services to its citizens and businesses. These include public safety, roadway maintenance, waste disposal, recycling, recreation, electric power, public education and a public library. In addition, the Town provides a wide range of human services through its Senior Center/Council on Aging, Health Department, Town's Veteran's Agent, etc. Required governmental and administrative functions are provided through offices such as the Town Clerk, Assessors, Treasurers, and the Building Department. All of these services require adequate staffing and facilities. To meet this need the Town has

recently consolidated offices in the recently renovated Town Hall, upgraded schools, and expanded the public Library. Plans are currently underway to develop the former Depot land adjacent to Bare Cove Park for a wide variety of uses including recreation, housing and a DPW facility. Residents are proud of the Town's top-notch public facilities, but expressed concern that as the population grows, new facilities may be required. One of the strongest recommendations to come out of the Master Plan was that the Town should hold on to existing unused municipal land and facilities to ensure that future needs can be accommodated.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Assure adequate facilities and staffing are available to provide a high standard of municipal services
- Continue to provide excellent educational system
- Expand recreational opportunities
- Retain municipal ownership of currently unused or underutilized town-owned properties to meet future needs—both anticipated and unanticipated
- Continue to plan ahead for major capital improvements and, accordingly, forward-looking capital budgets
- Coordinate maintenance responsibilities among town departments

## MASTER PLAN COMMITTEE

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For more information about the master planning process, or to review a complete copy of the plan document, please contact the Hingham Planning Board.

## TOWN OF HINGHAM

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