

Envision Easton Community Master Plan



Volume 2: The Road Map

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WHAT IS 'ENVISION EASTON'?

Envision Easton is the community master plan prepared for the Town of Easton, Massachusetts, and adopted by the Planning Board in 2014. The plan identifies and celebrates what currently makes Easton unique, and also reflects the vision of what residents would like to see the Town become over the next 10 to 20 years.

How to Use This Plan

This document provides policies that will help ensure a balance of preservation with growth, saving with spending, and history with new ideas. To accomplish this, the master plan consistently integrates considerations for the natural environment, cultural and educational resources, economic development, housing and neighborhoods, and transportation, access, and mobility.

Documentation of Envision Easton consists of three volumes:

1. Baseline Report
2. Road Map
3. Action Plan

The **Baseline Report** describes how Easton developed to its current state, providing facts, figures, and statistics. The Baseline Report includes information about a broad range of topics, such as, local government, community initiatives, and land use.

The **Road Map** has information associated with typical master plan development. It describes the processes used to create the Steering Committee and to gather a comprehensive resident perspective, and then how that information was compiled into a plan. Most importantly, the Road Map provides the goals, objectives, and action items of the future vision, so that municipal departments, boards, committees, and commissions can be guided in their coordinated work to make it a reality.

The **Action Plan** concisely documents the actions required to implement the vision, and assigns “owners” for each action. Though all three volumes of Envision Easton will be publicly available, the Action Plan is a tool that can be used by the “owners” to focus in on their specific responsibilities.

The Planning Process

The Town embarked on the development of Envision Easton in 2012 with the formal appointment of a Steering Committee and the selection of a consultant team. The Steering Committee was comprised of a group of individuals with diverse sets of expertise and interests relative to the community. With the assistance of the project consultants, the Steering Committee developed and maintained a Public Participation Plan (Appendix A) that was designed to engage residents and business owners in the community.

Highlights of the Envision Easton community engagement process include:

An Envision Easton website – At the outset of Envision Easton, a website was created. News, meeting agendas and minutes, presentations, online surveys, and other important information were made easily accessible to the public either directly on the site or via links to others.

Interviews – Project consultants conducted over 20 interviews with elected and appointed officials, Town staff, and other leaders within the community. The interviews were used primarily to gather facts about different areas of Town and its departments, but also to gain diverse perspectives about emerging issues and hopes for future direction.

Public Forums – Two public forums were held as part of Envision Easton: the First Forum, and the Second Summit. In the First Forum, keypad polling, small group brainstorming, and map review exercises were used to generate ideas about what was important to participants, and identify strategies to explore as the project moved forward. The Second Summit built on information captured from the First Forum. At this “open house”, residents were presented with the formative issues that were developed from their original feedback, and the goals and objectives associated with each one. Posters, dot voting, and written comments were the primary means by which feedback was collected during the Second Summit.

Surveys – Surveys used as a follow-up tool for each forum allowed residents who could not attend to participate online. They also provided attendees the chance to expand on the feedback they gave at the forums. Responses to the surveys assisted the Steering Committee in refining the plan moving forward.

Working Groups – Five areas of focus, presented at the First Forum, became the underlying structure by which the master plan was constructed. They are:

- Arts, Culture, and Education
- Economic Development
- Housing and Neighborhoods
- Natural Resources and Recreation
- Transportation, Access, and Mobility

Working Groups for each of these areas were convened to more deeply engage in the formative issues and creative ideas discovered during all of the public forums. Members of the Working

Groups were invited due to their interest or expertise in a particular area, and included residents, business owners, cultural leaders, municipal officials, engineers, volunteers, and others.

Major Themes and Big Ideas

Throughout the Envision Easton process, two important themes continued to emerge that capture the broadest underlying values for the plan: Sustainability and Communication/Connectivity. These issues effectively connect all of the Plan's focus areas and can be viewed as a platform for the rest of the plan elements.

Sustainability

Research and community discussion about the concept of sustainability was comprehensive and diverse. Three smaller themes emerged within this larger concept: Environmental, Economic and Community Sustainability.

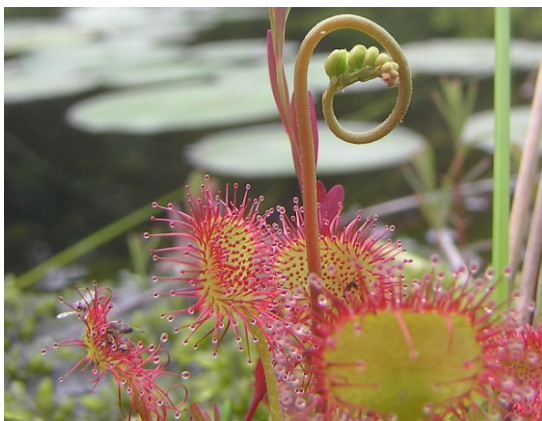
Environmental Sustainability

Think globally, act locally is a phrase frequently associated with protecting the natural resources needed to support viable communities. Locally, Easton is an established leader in addressing issues affecting the natural environment at the local level. Easton received the EPA's 2009 Environmental Merit Award in recognition for its initiatives to preserve forest lands; protect aquifer and watersheds; and reduce green-house gas omissions through energy conservation and alternative energy production.

"Easton has always worked very hard at preserving the environment and this is why we have such a beautiful town. I would hope that this would remain a high priority."

-Envision Easton survey

Easton started with a clear understanding of the value of its water resources and how the local and regional hydrologic system affects residents and business owners in fundamental ways. The municipal drinking water supply, riparian (i.e., river and stream) corridors, high groundwater tables, and some of the most impressive wetland complexes in the entire region represent important water resource challenges and opportunities at the heart of Easton's sustainability.



This sundew plant represents one of several carnivorous plant species that can be found in Hockomock Swamp.

One of the most important ways to ensure the long-term sustainability of water resources is through permanent open space protection. Streams, wetlands and aquifers are all replenished by rainfall that either flows over land during storms or percolates into the ground. The direct connection between rainfall, land cover, and water resource protection comes from a "watershed perspective" that is woven through many prior planning efforts in town. Through its own initiatives and with assistance from the state, Natural Resources Trust (NRT) and others, Easton has secured about one-third of its lands as protected open space, helping to ensure the long-term quality of its water resources. These areas also help to protect the

groundwater that serves as the Town's primary source of drinking water, mitigate potential impacts from flooding, and maintain groundwater at levels conducive to wetland health and sustained stream flows.

Protected land in Easton has many other benefits to the community beyond water resource quality. The biodiversity found in Easton is impressive with thousands of acres serving as home to a diverse range of wildlife and plant species, many globally and locally rare. Threatened or endangered species of turtles and salamanders, and both rare and common invertebrates and plants occur in the wide stretches of open space associated with the Canoe River Aquifer Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC), Hockomock Swamp, Borderland State Park and other areas. Discussions during Envision Easton helped to re-affirm local understanding that these open space and water resource areas are not just an important part of community-wide systems, but are critical to the integrity of regional systems. The Poquanticut-Mulberry Meadow Brook Corridor, Black Brook-Hockomock Corridor, and Queset Brook Corridor became more clearly recognized as both physical resources and tools for policy making. Thus, moving forward, open space acquisition, along with other protection tools can be strategically focused on land around these resources.



Langwater Farm provides organic produce to Easton and other communities through direct sales and the farmers' markets in the area. The farm recently expanded operations with broad community support.

While many people associate “protected land” with undeveloped forested landscapes, Easton is also active in protecting and promoting active agricultural lands. Active farms in Easton include privately held lots and public lands like the Wheaton Farm Community Garden. These lands further define Easton's character with rural landscapes that connect directly to the Town's agricultural heritage. Beyond the aesthetic appeal, agricultural activity provides people with a direct connection between their health, locally grown food and their kitchens. The farmers' market, the local Agricultural Commission, and the “right to farm” bylaw are examples of how Easton is providing greater access to healthy food while preserving historic landscapes and raising awareness of the viability of agriculture as a local enterprise.

With recent sustainability initiatives, Easton goes beyond the local and regional perspective associated with natural resource preservation and embraces a global perspective relative to energy production and efficiency. The Town was an early participant in the Massachusetts' Green Communities program which encourages communities to develop or adopt clean energy solutions that result in reduced carbon emissions and lower long-term energy costs. Through its Green Communities designation, Easton is eligible for state resources that will help implement a more sustainable energy system. Since 2009, the municipality has taken a “lead by example” approach with retrofits to public safety, public schools and public works buildings along with significant upgrades to streetlights. Two solar arrays have been constructed on town-owned

properties creating two wins for sustainability: cleaner energy production and lower electrical costs for the town.

The energy implementation programs in place at the state level consistently rank as some of the most effective in the country. Easton's status as a Green Community—coupled with the commitment of the Board of Selectmen, volunteer Boards and Town staff—make the Town well-positioned to achieve improvements in energy efficiency and production. These efforts are widely embraced across the community and demonstrate a strong understanding that new technologies and ways of thinking must be pursued to achieve a sustainable future.

Economic Sustainability

Planning for economic sustainability at the local level includes identifying a community's strengths and assets, and developing strategies to capitalize on those elements. This approach ensures important conventional strategies for business development and job creation are coupled with strategies that weave local culture into a plan for economic development. The ability to attract new business and the degree to which existing businesses can thrive is inextricably linked to the Town's approach to market and preserve many of the things that create such a high quality of life. Beyond local assets, outside forces will also affect Easton's approach to economic development. As the nation emerges from the most recent recession, the forecast for federal and state aid to communities suggests that towns like Easton will need to rely more heavily on local revenues to provide the level of services that currently maintain residents' quality of life. The degree to which existing businesses can thrive and new businesses can find opportunity will play a key role in expanding the local tax base in the coming decades.

Participants in Envision Easton generally embraced the idea of economic growth, but viewed this concept very differently from one area of the community to another. There was general agreement that there are easily identifiable areas in the community that serve, and should continue to serve, as centers for commerce and industry. Residents agreed that the Town should leverage increased levels of industry and commerce in several areas well-suited to growth. Centers of commercial activity like Five Corners, Route 138/Washington Street, the Easton Industrial Park, and North Easton Village were identified in previous plans as areas where business activity is desirable and local zoning reflects this. These areas generally have better transportation (primarily arterial or highway) access, and were identified as areas that will receive wastewater infrastructure investment over the coming years. Because commercial and industrial land availability is limited, using this type of infrastructure to encourage increased business activity will be an important strategy within Easton's overall economic development approach.

While residents agreed that some areas are appropriate for growth and others are not, they also agreed that any growth should be more clearly defined. In general, participants in the public forums and the Working Groups agreed that needs and desired outcomes for local commercial and industrial centers are very different. More care needs to be applied to future development of these centers so that they all, wherever possible, take the historic

“Easton needs to promote community and make the main street area more of a destination with restaurants, storefronts, coffee shops and the like to increase foot traffic and activity.”
-Envision Easton survey

character of an area into strong consideration. For example, the historic character of North Easton village is well-documented and is being revitalized as a traditional, small-scale and walkable shopping area. Five Corners, though it became part of a National Historic District in the same year as North Easton village, has been developed in a way that is disconnected from its historically more “pastoral” character. Going forward, Envision Easton has a chance to adjust these types of discrepancies with thoughtful planning, and viewing the entire Town as an integrated whole - appreciating and making connections between all the historical “neighborhoods”.

The process of customizing the regulatory approach to commercial and industrial centers is a critical piece of the larger effort to optimize both the economic performance of these areas and their benefits to the community. However, this is not the only role the Town should play in economic development. Easton should also take measures to directly engage the business community in a manner that builds relationships and creates a culture of cooperation around site-specific development. Marketing individual sites and directly engaging with property owners about potential investment opportunities can facilitate real estate investments that move the community, site by site, toward a more cohesive and sustainable local economy.

Community Sustainability

The efforts to increase the economic and environmental sustainability discussed above are designed, in large part, to maintain and improve the already high quality of life in Easton. From an environmental perspective, the open spaces, clean water, and scenic landscapes provide everyday enjoyment, sustain the health of residents, and help businesses stay viable. From an economic perspective, the prosperity of Easton’s local economy will continue to play a key role in financing many of the services that provide high quality education, well-maintained parks, recreational facilities, and social services for those in need. These areas can also create some measure of local employment, providing better connections between residents and job opportunities.

In addition to the environmental and economic factors that shape Easton’s future, issues related more broadly to community character and quality of life were continuing themes during Envision Easton. These elements overlap with the issues related to environment and economy, but focus more on the value of how residents experience everyday life in their community. The architectural treasures and high performing schools are just a sample of the assets that draw people to sink roots in Easton and call the Town “home”. The community maintains a fairly quiet, traditional New England charm with a healthy balance of natural lands, residential neighborhoods, and commercial districts. The classic downtown setting in North Easton and the collection of historic structures have long been part of Easton’s identity and the Town continues to invest strategically in the vibrancy of that area. Cultural offerings by both the Town and private entities are prevalent and growing with the coordination of the newly formed Easton Shovel Town Cultural District. This district includes the Ames Free Library, the Children’s Museum of Easton, Easton Historical Society, Governor Oliver Ames Estate and many other unique cultural offerings. Outside of the district, Stonehill College, Borderland State Park, Furnace Village, Wheaton Farm and other venues all contribute to Easton’s cultural experience.

Community conversations during Envision Easton continually celebrated the quality of life available to residents and identified strategies that build upon this existing foundation. As Easton looks to the future, many of the participants in Envision Easton called for investments to increase active and accessible living for residents of all ages. Many respondents stressed the need to address issues around public health and saw opportunities for recreation and exercise in everyday living. Residents understood the coming shifts in demographics and the importance of increasing accessible recreation for all ages.

“As a mother of a young, health oriented family, I really want more, safe, non-driving options for shopping and playing in Easton.”

-Envision Easton survey

Communication and Connectivity

In many of the Envision Easton forums, a common theme related to implementation was creating connections across the community. These connections were described broadly in a variety of ways:

- The coordination of resources for efficient implementation;
- Maintenance of programs that may emerge from the master plan;
- Citizen communication and education about the programs; and
- The creation of physical connections between different neighborhoods and resource areas.

Reaching the goals of Envision Easton requires a coordinated effort by over 20 boards, commissions, committees, and municipal departments in close collaboration with business, cultural, and residential communities. Overall management of the master plan is already underway by the Department of Planning and Community Development, and the Planning Board. Together they work closely on issues related to land use, economic development, transportation, and other areas addressed in Envision Easton.

While responsibilities for each piece of this master plan are divided, it is important for all of the owners to coordinate their work and to remain openly communicative with the residents. It is equally important for the residents to provide feedback about this plan and how it is implemented. Going forward, whenever necessary, the Town may form new working groups or committees, or ask individuals to participate on existing committees, if additional expertise or perspective is needed. For example, prior to Envision Easton, interest had been building to develop an Economic Development Council. With the support of resident feedback from Envision Easton, the Board of Selectmen approved its formation even before the master plan was adopted. A Bike and Pedestrian Working Group, working in conjunction with the Disabilities Commission, has also been formed to continue the work started in this area during the Envision Easton process.

To assist with coordination of all of these groups, an Envision Easton Coordination Team will be formed that includes a single member from each key agency. The Coordination Team will not be an official “committee”, but rather a more informal group whose primary responsibility is to maintain an awareness of everyone’s progress toward the goals established in this plan. The

team will meet periodically, perhaps two to three times each year, to review progress, discuss any roadblocks to achieving specific goals, and coordinate new partnerships.

With regard to physical connections, plans for movement in and out of Easton, and also within Easton, should remove boundaries. In the process of creating the Master Plan, a large number of Easton residents expressed a strong desire to create better sidewalk and/or bike path routes connecting neighborhoods, recreational areas, and commercial destinations. This type of access will have a significant positive impact on the quality of life in Easton. It may also have a positive effect on air quality and the environment by giving people an alternative to driving throughout town. However, given the narrow, winding nature of many of our existing roads—and the expressed desire to preserve and protect the rural beauty of the town—the town will have to be innovative and creative to realize this goal. Over the 20 years covered by this Master Plan, it is likely that committees and working groups will come together to address this goal in various areas of town.

THE ROAD MAP

Arts, Culture, and Education

Formative Issues for Arts, Culture, and Education

Easton residents are very aware of the many diverse cultural assets to which they have access. Discussions at community forums, interviews with officials, and sessions with the Working Group revealed an uncommonly sophisticated and shared understanding of the diverse and often subtle cultural opportunities in everyday life. Historic sites and buildings, scenic landscapes, institutions of higher learning, public schools, the library, and museums create a cultural network across the community and across generations. As with many success stories in Easton, residents were ready to celebrate the amenities they have, but also quick to identify opportunities for improvement. The following text represents a list of key issues that helped to shape the discussions of arts, culture and education within the Envision Easton process.

1. **Easton has a unique history that can be discovered through many of the places, landscapes, and buildings in the community.**

From a cultural perspective, what first captures the attention of many visitors to Easton are the historic structures that help to establish the Town's identity. A collection of architectural treasures designed by H. H. Richardson, along with the peace memorial designed by Frederick Law Olmsted¹, serve as the core of the National Historic Landmark District. This district, in turn, is a smaller part of the locally designated North Easton Historic District (also on the National Register of Historic Places). The southern area of the community is also home to several historic districts, which are generally established to protect the more pastoral landscapes and vistas that were created many years ago. However, during community discussions stakeholders were careful to point out that historic districts and buildings were only a part of the community's cultural identity. Beyond the historic downtown and well into the southern area of the community, there are many tightly knit neighborhoods characterized by quiet, walkable streets, historic homes, and specimen trees. These neighborhoods are one of the primary drivers for the high quality of life in the community and serve as a cornerstone for Easton's local culture.



Easton's landscapes throughout the community provide a cultural and historic backdrop to everyday life.

In addition to residential neighborhoods, Easton's open spaces and park lands provide a scenic cultural

¹ The "peace memorial" is originally a Memorial Cairn, also known as the Rockery, a Civil War monument (1881-1884) designed by Frederick Law Olmsted.

landscape through many areas of the community. Tall stands of white pines, roadways surrounded by mature forest, and large open park spaces in many areas foster a local culture that values the Town's natural landscapes. Places like Wheaton Farm and Old Pond Conservation Area are just two examples of places that serve as cultural assets for the community as a whole. Residents who participated in Envision Easton understood the relationship between these different places and called for policies that reinforced this "culture of place" throughout the community.

2. The Easton Shovel Town Cultural District offers great opportunity for increased cultural activity, cooperation and awareness.

One of the most promising developments in recent years is the Cultural Council's creation of the Easton Shovel Town Cultural District in 2012. The role of the District is to connect the distinct, including numerous cultural institutions both within and outside the North Easton Historic District, in a way that makes the area a more vibrant activity center. Since its inception, the District has been active in coordinating and promoting the various cultural institutions, activities and events in the area, creating a tangible momentum in the community for Easton's current and future cultural opportunities. The District has already opened an artist co-op within the Ames Shovel Works complex, hosted numerous art exhibits, musical performances, and



Face painting is one of the many activities offered to Easton's youth at events like the Governor Ames Estate Grand Opening. (Photograph courtesy of Kristopher Ventresco)

holiday teas, produced a video showcase on Community Access television for local artists, and brought together dozens of art, cultural, business and educational organizations. The grand opening of the Governor Ames Estate in June 2014 was a tremendous success. Nearly 2,000 people of all ages visited the Ames estate and participated in the District's all-day art, music, food and fun festival and art exhibition. The District's activities provide the added benefits of economic opportunity in the form of increased foot traffic and business activity within North Easton Village and opportunities to attract to new, creative businesses. This is a unique and exciting development in the community and offers an avenue for even more cultural activity in the future.

While the District is successful locally, it continues to pursue official designation by the Massachusetts Cultural Council (MCC), the state's lead agency for the support of artistic and cultural development across the Commonwealth. The agency provides a diverse set of services including technical support and grants for individual arts organizations, individuals and municipalities. At the time this plan was drafted, 19 different

districts existed in Massachusetts. The purpose of Cultural Districts is best articulated by MCC:

"These cultural districts help local arts, humanities, and science organizations improve the quality and range of their public programs so that more local families can benefit from them. They enhance the

experience for visitors and thus attract more tourist dollars and tax revenue. And they attract artists, cultural organizations, and entrepreneurs of all kinds - enhancing property values and making communities more attractive.”

- Massachusetts Cultural Council

Achieving this designation would provide the Town and District access to technical assistance and grant funds from MCC. The Board of Selectmen and other Town Boards officially supported this designation. The Town should continue to improve close coordination with the Cultural District and offer support for this work where necessary and appropriate.

3. Residents would like to see even more cultural venues in Easton.

In discussions at public forums, through surveys, and as part of the Working Group discussions, it became evident there is a strong local demand for additional cultural and artistic venues in Easton. Residents were happy to live in a region where access to places like Boston and Providence is relatively easy, allowing them to experience all of the cultural outlets those cities have to offer. However, many felt Easton could serve as a host for new venues as well. During a brainstorming session at the first public forum, participants felt that live performance, galleries and many other “artistic spaces” would be successful in the community due to pent up demand.



Residents and visitors flocked to the grand opening of the Governor Ames Estate in June 2014. Participants expressed a desire to see even more cultural events and venues in town. (Photograph courtesy of Kristopher Ventresco)

It is difficult for a Town like Easton to facilitate the development of very specific uses, particularly cultural or arts-based uses that generally operate as non-profit entities. While there may be local demand for various artistic venues, it can be difficult for these types of entities to thrive without a significant regional draw. Easton can find success with expanding artistic and cultural venues by capitalizing on its emerging Cultural District and through additional partnerships.

signage and restrictions on temporary outdoor sales are all examples of local regulatory standards that can unintentionally restrict the establishment of new permanent or temporary artistic venues. Close coordination with the Cultural District, community organizations, and the Library will be critical.

Regardless of the approach, the Town will need to be sure that local regulations do not provide roadblocks to artistic venues and events. Licensing, parking requirements,

4. Cultural institutions in Easton would be strengthened through greater coordination.

Although residents clearly see a need for more cultural venues in Easton, there was also a lot of discussion centered on the venues and institutions already in place. The public library, for example, provides educational programming for people of all ages. Stonehill College provides

opportunities in the form of lectures, performances, and art exhibits throughout most of the calendar year. Easton's public schools have tremendous music and arts programming that have students performing at the schools as well as in regional events outside the community. The Children's Museum is widely regarded as a cultural and learning centerpiece in the community and enjoys widespread support. These venues represent just a few examples of the diversity of arts, culture, and education opportunities that are available to Easton residents.

At public forums and in community discussions, residents were quick to acknowledge the value in all of these opportunities. They also acknowledged that awareness of these opportunities could be fostered more effectively. As an example, the Shovel Town Cultural District has made great strides in coordinating activities and organizations both within and outside the boundaries of the North Easton Historic District. The district, independent institutions, and media outlets provide some awareness of arts, culture and educational opportunities throughout Easton but none provides this service in a comprehensive fashion. People who participated in Envision Easton recognized how challenging it will be to better coordinate all of these different organizations, but also recognized the enormous potential benefit to residents, business owners and visitors. While it has not been especially active recently, the Cultural Council, in partnership with the Cultural District, Library and Town administration, could potentially play a lead role in this effort.

5. Easton can better capitalize on the number of visitors who come to see Easton's cultural attractions.



Oakes Ames Memorial Hall (foreground) and the Ames Free Library (background) are two of many historic treasures in the Town of Easton.

On a regional scale and beyond, Easton is known for its historic buildings, historic districts, and open spaces. The historical architectural assets in the Ames Local Historic District attract architectural students and connoisseurs and artists to the Village area to view and experience the works of Richardson, Olmsted and others. Numerous wedding receptions and other celebratory events are held in picturesque venues such as Oakes Ames Memorial Hall each year. Most notable among Easton's recreational assets is Borderland State Park, which straddles the Sharon/Easton town line and serves as a regional amenity for hiking, more active recreation like frisbee golf, a location for weddings, and offers

rotating art exhibits. The Governor Ames Estate, which is now managed by the Trustees of Reservations, is another important attraction, with 2,000 people attending the grand opening in June, 2014.

Many stakeholders in the Envision Easton process were aware that thousands of people come to Easton every year, but many others were surprised to learn that their community does have a

noteworthy tourist economy. The discussions drew mixed reactions with some residents being excited about the visibility, while others were more interested in protecting the quiet “bedroom community” character from too many visitors. There was consensus on the idea that, if people are coming to Easton already, opportunity exists to better capture tourist dollars to support the local economy. The continued efforts to redevelop Main Street properties and create a more vibrant center around Ames Shovel Works dovetail with the desire to provide “spill over” opportunities for visitors. Where visitors once may have spent a limited amount of time to see a particular attraction, Easton is poised to offer more to tourists in the near future. Adding shopping, dining, or other cultural opportunities—creating more of a “destination” in some of Easton’s commercial areas—can broaden the experience for visitors and increase spending on the local economy. This economic piece is also a requirement for achieving official Cultural District designation from the Commonwealth.

6. Easton views its public schools as one of its most significant cultural assets.

Many communities struggle with integrating their public schools into a master plan process. The ways in which administrations at Town Hall and the School Department are structured often create a situation where local government and school functions are not highly integrated. Typically, in a master plan document, school “buildings and grounds” are included in the larger discussion of recreational needs, but more meaningful discussions about the significance of public schools to the community are lacking. From the outset of the Envision Easton process, the project Steering Committee felt strongly that this document should reflect the enormous value the community as a whole places on its public schools.

In their first meeting, members of the Arts, Culture and Education Working Group identified Easton’s public schools as “one of the Town’s most important cultural assets”. This assertion echoed many of the sentiments raised at the opening forum and with other stakeholders. Enrolling more than 3,800 students, there was strong consensus that Easton’s schools are an integral piece of the Town’s identity and serve as a significant draw for families to move into the community. Town support of public education is demonstrated through active parent teacher organizations and grass roots support from groups like the Foundation for Excellence in Education in Easton (FEEE), which has raised over one million dollars locally to purchase state-of-the-art technology for classrooms and match funds innovative teacher grants. This level of support plays a vital role in the performance of local schools, with very high numbers of students consistently showing proficiency in reading and math. While participants in Envision Easton were quick to point out the many successes the school system has every year, people agreed there is always a need to strive for improvement. Collaboration with town agencies and other cultural groups in the community could lead to greater engagement of the student body in community affairs and higher levels of enrichment beyond the core curriculum.

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Goals, Objectives and Actions for Arts, Culture, and Education

	Lead Agency	Time Horizon (1-2 years; 2-5 years; 5-10 years)
Goal ACE-1. Maintain and enhance existing cultural assets and opportunities.		
Objective 1.1 Coordinate cultural activities among educational institutions, recreational groups, and other culturally oriented groups in Easton.		
Action 1A: Develop an easily maintained, centralized community calendar that displays cultural events.	Cultural Council, Cultural District, and other related civic groups	2-5 years; then ongoing
Action 1B: Where appropriate, provide administrative powers to individuals or groups for the community calendar so they can add content as new events are scheduled.	Information Technology	2-5 years
Action 1C: Share and coordinate promotion of public events among the Town and private partners (e.g., Stonehill College and local community organizations like the Lion’s Club, Knights of Columbus and the Natural Resources Trust).	Town Administrator, Information Technology, School Department, Town Clerk	2-5 years
Action 2: Convene regular planning meetings between cultural institutions in Easton to discuss programming for the coming months, ways to combine resources, bolster participation, and develop complementary programming.	Cultural District, Cultural Council and other related civic groups	1-2 years
Action 3: Develop a high quality map (and poster) that shows all of the Easton cultural facilities in a way that can be used in conjunction with the Town calendar.	Cultural District, GIS Department, and other related civic groups	2-5 years
Objective 1.2 Continue to identify, maintain and restore historic structures, landscapes and assets.		
Action 1: Develop neighborhood preservation and streetscape improvement strategies for areas identified by the Historical Commission as high priorities.	Historical Commission, Planning and Community Development	5-10 years
Action 2: Identify funding for and upgrade the Town’s inventory of Historic town resources to include all structures 75 years or older.	Historical Commission	2-5 years

Action 3:	Develop new or modify existing land-use regulatory tools to preserve historic assets and landscapes.	Planning and Community Development, Historical Commission	2-5 years
Action 4:	Develop illustrated design guidelines for individual neighborhoods to help property owners interested in renovations or redevelopment.	Historical Commission	5-10 years
Action 5:	Revise Site Plan Review and landscape standards in the Zoning Bylaw to help guide sound development practices consistent with Easton's historic character.	Planning and Community Development, Planning/Zoning Board	2-5 years
Action 6:	Perform a town-wide archaeological survey.	Historical Commission	5-10 years
Action 7:	Continue to provide platforms for the Historical Commission and Historical Society to raise awareness of existing resources in the community through the Town website and other media as appropriate.	Historical Commission, Historical Society, Town Administrator, Town Clerk	Ongoing
Objective 1.3	Identify opportunities to program parks and public spaces with appropriately scaled events.		
Action 1:	Meet with individuals or groups that coordinate activities in each park area or public venue to develop a list of potential events on a semi-annual basis.	Recreation Department, other parks leadership groups	2-5 years
Action 2:	Explore the development of a walking tour smart phone app or similar mechanism that will allow users to hear historical accounts and important information related to specific monuments or sites.	Historical Commission	2-5 years
Action 3:	Actively engage with Easton public school administration and faculty to explore opportunities to more effectively showcase the numerous visual, musical, and performing arts shows that occur in Easton's public spaces.	School Department, Ames Free Library, Cultural Council.	1-2 years
Goal ACE-2.	Pursue new cultural opportunities to enhance Easton's quality of life.		
Objective 2.1	Include cultural activities in a variety of facilities		
Action 1:	Ensure there are no unnecessary regulatory barriers to providing cultural spaces, amenities or events.	Planning and Community Development, Planning/Zoning Board	1-2 years
Action 2:	Develop a master signage/wayfinding plan for the Town.	Public Safety, Recreation Commission, School Department, Conservation	5-10 years for town-wide installation

		Commission, Chamber of Commerce, DPW, Public Spaces Committee	
Action 3:	Educate property and business owners on ways to integrate art into sidewalk or interior spaces.	Cultural Council	2-5 years
Action 4:	As part of the community calendar, include information on art showings that are being exhibited at local businesses.	Cultural Council, Cultural District	1-2 years
Action 5:	Continue to provide outreach to businesses about coordinating hours of operation to take advantage of cultural activities.	Cultural District	1-2 years
Objective 2.2	Establish and support an officially designated Cultural District.		
Action 1:	Coordinate with the Easton Shovel Town Cultural District to identify how the Town can support the designation process.	Board of Selectmen	1-2 years
Action 2:	Work with the Cultural District volunteers to understand the administrative needs for the district and determine how the Town might assist.	Cultural District, Town Administrator, Town Accountant	2-5 years
Action 3:	Identify opportunities to connect Easton's school age population with events and opportunities within the Cultural District.	Cultural District; School Department	2-5 years
Action 4:	Identify physical connections between facilities, schools, parks and other areas in Easton.	Bicycle and Pedestrian Working Group	1-2 years, then ongoing
Objective 2.3	Create diverse opportunities to cultivate new artists in the community.		
Action 1:	Integrate art education into continuing education offerings.	School Department, Stonehill College, Ames Free Library	5-10 years
Action 2:	Solicit organizations to provide "field trips" for both youth and adults to see major exhibits and shows in neighboring communities, at Stonehill College or in the Boston/Providence areas.	Ames Free Library, Community Based Organizations (Lions, etc.)	5-10 years
Action 3:	Consider the continued use of municipal or private buildings as potential venues for rotating art displays.	Ames Free Library, Cultural District, Cultural Council	2-5 years
Action 4:	Sponsor writing, visual art, photo and video contests of all styles and display the products in public spaces.	School Department; Ames Free Library, Cultural	2-5 years

		Council, Cultural District, Easton Community Access Television, Historical Society.	
Goal ACE-3.	Create and maintain a culture of lifelong learning for all residents.		
Objective 3.1	Support pre-school learning opportunities.		
Action 1:	Develop a listing of pre-school appropriate activities and share with Easton pre-schools.	Ames Free Library, School Department	2-5 years
Objective 3.2:	Support the School Committee in implementing their Strategic Plan.		
Action 1:	Continue collaboration with public schools to integrate the exploration of historic resources into the curriculum.	School Department, Historical Commission, Historical Society	Ongoing
Action 2:	Institute regular meetings and/or updates between the School Committee and designated town agents outside of the financial planning process.	Town Administrator	2-5 years
Objective 3.3	Support the development of education programs for adults and seniors.		
Action 1:	Survey Easton residents regarding the types of adult education opportunities that would be popular.	Council on Aging, Ames Free Library	1-2 years
Action 2:	Collaborate with Southeastern Vocational Technical High School to publicize its adult education opportunities.	Council on Aging, Cultural Council, Cultural District	1-2 years
Action 3:	Work with Stonehill College to ensure that special programming and “one-time” educational offerings are well-publicized. Include in new community calendar.	Stonehill College, Town Administrator , Cultural Council	1-2 years

Economic Development

Formative Issues for Economic Development

The economic health of a community impacts its desirability as a place to live and work and its ability to maintain a healthy level of services for residents and business owners. As many communities grapple with deep cuts to state and federal aid and are limited by Proposition 2 ½ for balancing budgets², offsetting costs by increasing non-residential revenue streams makes economic development more essential than ever. Local governments and citizens groups that engage more actively with their local and regional economies are better able to retain and support their local businesses, and maintain a healthy tax base. Partnerships between local government staff and the Chamber of Commerce (the Chamber), for example, can provide enormous efficiencies. With a point of contact in the business community like the Chamber, municipal staff can become aware of the individual needs of businesses as well as real estate opportunities very quickly. This type of network allows local government to deliver assistance or court new business opportunities in responsive manner conducive to business development.

Economic development is not an exact science in the sense that there is no singular analytical approach and no set of tools that are easily applicable from one town to another³. Engaging proactively in local economic development is a complex undertaking for communities to address. The health of a local economy is subject to both internal and external market forces, regulatory conditions, infrastructure limitations, regional influences, and dynamic political environments. While a municipality may have very little or no control over many of these externalities, there are things that can be done to address or improve local conditions. Local factors such as zoning regulations, available incentives, workforce composition, the cost and availability of land, commercial tax rates, and access to infrastructure will have an impact on where a business chooses to locate. Easton's limited highway access, high water tables, and land costs are a few of the challenges that the Town needs to address for higher levels of economic development.

During the Envision Easton Master Plan process, residents and business owners participated in a series of public forums, surveys, and workshops on economic development issues. Amongst participants, there was broad support for economic growth at a scale suitable to the community setting, and consensus that economic development should be a priority. The text below provides a brief description of the formative issues that framed discussions of economic development throughout the Envision Easton process.

1. Easton must encourage economic development to maintain its fiscal health.

Maintaining a healthy tax base is essential for Easton to sustain the level of services and quality of life the Town currently provides. In addition to easily identifiable services such as education,

² Proposition 2½ (Mass. Gen. Laws Ch. 59 § 21C) is a statute which places two limits property tax increases by Massachusetts municipalities: 1) The total annual property tax revenue raised by a municipality cannot exceed 2.5% of the assessed value of all taxable property; 2) The annual increase of property tax cannot exceed 2.5% (plus the amount attributable to taxes that are from new real property.)

³ *Small is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered* E.F. Schumacher's seminal collection of small essays first published by Blond & Briggs in 1973.

public safety, and road maintenance, the Town provides a number of other assets related to public health, recreational opportunities, assistance to seniors, and other supportive services. To provide these services, the Town currently relies on a combination of property tax revenues, local receipts, and state aid. Approximately 14.2% of Easton’s local tax revenues are currently generated by commercial or industrial properties with a total assessed valuation of close to \$350 million.

On average, Easton businesses pay more in taxes than they use in services, creating a revenue surplus to support the residential population. Owners of residential property, particularly single family housing, pay significantly less in taxes in relation to the services they consume, largely due to the cost of educating children. Table 1 compares the municipal service cost generated by different land uses in Easton against the average tax bill for that type of use, illustrating which uses create a fiscal surplus or deficit.⁴

Use	Number of Units	Average Number of Students per Unit	Average Annual Education Cost per Student	Cost of Town Service Delivery per Unit	Average Tax Bill	Deficit or Surplus per Unit
Single Family Homes	5,576	0.64	\$8,519	\$8,969	\$6,044	-\$2,925
Residential Condominiums	1,385	0.21		\$5,309	\$2,695	-\$2,615
Two-Family Homes	318	0.16		\$2,442	\$2,728	\$286
Three-Family Homes	69	0.16		\$1,628	\$1,874	\$247
Commercial/Industrial Uses	1,702	-		\$2,402	\$5,884	\$3,483

Source: Community Opportunities Group, Inc., 2014

A 1999 Town growth management study found that the average deficit per single family home was approximately \$1,000 for existing homes and \$1,722 for new construction.⁵ Table 1 shows how this deficit has increased significantly over the past 17 years. During the same year, commercial properties generated surpluses between \$2,600 and \$3,600 on an annual basis, which is on par with current levels.

When aggregated further, it is clear how important it is to offset the costs of the providing residents services (Table 2). The tax levy provides 61.8% of Easton’s budget, while state aid accounts for 16.7%. The remainder of the budget comes from multiple revenue sources such as local receipts (motor vehicle excise, utility fees, local permit and license fees, etc.) and other revenue sources (which can include grants, federal aid, etc.). According to the 2014 Annual Town Meeting Town Administrator’s budget presentation, the rate of new growth in Easton has generally declined in recent years. With cuts to state aid, it is increasingly important to increase and diversify the tax base to maintain the same level of service.

⁴ It is important to understand this table as a snapshot in time that examines only costs related to the school system. This should not be used to extrapolate “per student” or “per household” impacts from future development. A much more refined fiscal impact analysis would be required to predict those impacts.

⁵ Taintor & Whiteman, The Easton Growth Management Study, Phase II: Workshop Results (1999); 4.

Use	Residential	Commercial/Industrial
Tax Levy	\$40,418,672	\$5,756,105
Cost of Services	\$58,253,777	\$4,087,364
Surplus/Deficit	-\$17,835,105	\$1,668,741
Source: Massachusetts Department of Revenue and Community Opportunities Group, 2014		

Moving forward, the Town must be mindful of the fiscal deficits associated with residential use, and the positive tax revenue benefits of commercial growth. However, these analyses should not be interpreted to mean that residential development should somehow be stopped, or that Easton needs to significantly expand commercial areas. Rather, the Town should look to increase commercial or industrial use at a scale consistent with its suburban character. These businesses would, in turn, benefit from some increase in housing development in the community. Housing development must be understood as part of a proactive approach to economic development. Strategies to ensure housing development continues to be a positive force in Easton are discussed in more detail in the Housing section of this plan.

2. Commercially-zoned areas with existing or potential sewer and other infrastructure should be targeted for economic growth.

Zoning District	Acres	Percent
Business	889.0	4.7%
Eleemosynary (Institutional Uses)	478.5	2.5%
Industrial	624.6	3.3%
Neighborhood Business	0.85	0.0%
Residential	11,077.4	59.0%
Water	89.6	0.5%
Municipal and Open Space	5,629.2	30.0%
Total	18,789.1	100.0%
Source: Town of Easton GIS, 2014		

As shown in Table 3, of the nearly 19,000 acres in Easton, roughly 8.1% (1,514.4 acres) of the land area is zoned for commercial, industrial, or neighborhood business activities.⁶ Of the land that is zoned for those uses, 1,475 acres are currently being taxed for commercial uses, leaving approximately 39 acres that are zoned commercially but not presently

being used for commercial purposes.⁷ As Easton nears full build-out and faces environmental challenges, particularly with respect to water quality issues, the efficient use and maximization of lands currently zoned for commercial or industrial purposes, will become a priority. Commercial and industrial areas that will be served by sewer infrastructure offer the most opportunity.

In discussions with the Economic Development Working Group and during the public forums, it became clear that while many residents were supportive of expanding economic development

⁶ Town of Easton GIS, 2012.

⁷ Town of Easton Assessor's Database, 2014.

efforts, very few were in favor of expanding the commercial areas to support additional development. Participants felt many of the existing commercial and industrial parcels in Easton are underutilized, and efforts would be best focused on improving these areas rather than expanding or creating new ones. The ways in which underutilized parcels or buildings were identified varied by site; however, common themes pertained to lower densities than necessary (particularly with respect to building heights and the distances buildings are set back from property lines or one another), high vacancies, parking issues, environmental constraints, lack of vibrancy or attractive aesthetic, and the limitations of unsewered land.

Easton must identify specific geographic areas and economic sectors on which to concentrate economic development efforts. A recently completed study by the Dukakis Center for Urban & Regional Policy⁸ (DCURP) identified a number of Easton's strengths which include:

- Proximity to highways (specifically for business and retail uses. Manufacturing uses require closer access than Easton provides)
- Access to parking (outside of North Easton Village)
- Access to transportation engineering expertise
- Attractiveness of the community
- Access to universities and a professional labor force
- Quality of space and lack of contamination
- Provision of expedited permitting
- Low crime rates
- Availability of state tax incentives
- Access to information

These opportunities should be considered as areas are prioritized for targeted economic development. In addition, as priority areas become identified, site-specific issues should be addressed – for example, parking constraints in North Easton Village or a lack of sewerage at Five Corners – to ensure the efficient allocation of resources. This idea is reinforced by the DCURP study, which calls for Easton to “[r]esolve infrastructure capacity constraints through research and implementation of best practices and effective solutions.”

3. The Town will play an active role in facilitating appropriate development.

Easton prides itself on being an attractive and scenic community. The wide swaths of open space and preservation of critical historic resources like the Ames Shovel Shop or Oakes Ames Memorial Hall contribute to the community character that defines Easton. Although there is no set definition for what constitutes “appropriate” development in town, it is generally agreed that high impact or noxious uses and low-end design aesthetics are less desirable and considered to be inconsistent with Easton's community character.

⁸ Northeastern University Dukakis Center for Urban and Regional Policy, Economic Development Self-Assessment Tool (EDSAT): Results for the Town of Easton Massachusetts (February, 2014).



While not every development in Easton can look like the Ames Shovel Works, many important lessons can be learned from this successful adaptive re-use project. For example, the color and materials of the existing buildings was used to inform choices related to the landscaping (left). Signage used to locate a particular building incorporates an educational component and uses materials that reflect the history of the site (right). This attention to detail is something that can be transferred to many different neighborhoods in Easton and with guidance provided by the Town.

Although Easton is supportive of additional development, there is a strong sense that any new construction or redevelopment should meet a level of quality that is consistent with the better examples of development in town. In addition, as styles and opinions have changed over time, there is growing dissatisfaction with the appearance of strip development and box-style buildings (whether industrial or commercial). Design review⁹ is not currently required under the Zoning Bylaw and the Town of Easton has limited authority to review the appearance of new or redeveloped sites and buildings and therefore cannot control for consistency in appearance. During public outreach efforts, some residents supported a design review process for commercial structures, while many did not. Incentives may provide an alternative strategy to encourage attractive sites, balancing the desire of business owners to control construction expenses. Design guidelines could be considered as an intermediary action. Any new design review process should be added to the application process as seamlessly as possible so as to not place unnecessary additional financial and time burdens on applicants.

Regulatory issues are not confined to a lack of design review to control for aesthetics. During the Envision Easton process, a number of business owners identified zoning issues that negatively impact their properties and limit their ability to grow or expand. At the 2014 Annual Town Meeting amendments to the Zoning Bylaw increased allowable building height and decreased

⁹ Design review is a public process whereby an appointed or elected board is charged with the review and approval of the design of certain types of projects. The review can include landscaping and circulation, the appearance of any buildings or parking areas, and exterior signage or façade treatments.

allowable commercial setbacks to help alleviate these concerns. However further amendments to the Zoning Bylaw, potentially including maximum lot coverage and number of stories in some areas, will likely be required to allow for viable redevelopment or infill development opportunities on existing sites in the future.

4. The Town should increase local capacity and leadership for economic development.

Easton has relatively few resources *specifically* dedicated to fostering economic development. The Town does not currently employ an economic development professional, and the proposed creation of a new position was unpopular with residents during the public forums. However, not having these resources can place Easton at a disadvantage due to limited representation amongst local, regional, and state business associations, regional planning, and/or development agencies. The lack of a dedicated staff person often means that local businesses are largely left to their own devices to navigate through municipal boards, processes, and regulations and to coordinate amongst themselves for events or cross-promotion and marketing. The Town made progress recently by developing a business permitting guide, initiating collaborations with the local Chamber of Commerce and dedicating some staff resources to helping applicants to the permitting process. Not having a dedicated economic development professional also limits the Town's capacity to recruit new businesses and industries to actively retain existing businesses. The Board of Selectmen recently created an Economic Development Council, which will begin its work soon. With or without dedicated staff, this volunteer board can also help to champion economic development issues, and to connect the Town with its business community and the regional economy.

5. Easton must support and partner with the local business community.

Responsibilities for general business promotion and coordination generally fall to the local and regional chambers of commerce. The Easton Chamber of Commerce (Chamber) employs one part-time staff person, with services largely directed to member businesses. The Chamber hosts several community events each year including the Taste of Easton, as well as a number of After Hours and Business Breakfast events to help businesses network. The Chamber is an excellent local resource; however, its capacity is limited and the organization should be seen as a *partner* rather than the *de facto leadership* to the Town on economic development issues. The MetroSouth Chamber of Commerce has broader resources, but serves the entire region, not just Easton.

With this in mind, a number of residents and businesses were supportive of finding ways to promote local businesses and encourage residents to shop or procure services locally as a way to support the entire community. The Economic Development Working Group was very supportive of the Town adopting policies that would encourage the use of local vendors for public contracts, to the extent that doing so would not be in conflict with state regulations regarding public procurement. Many participants also felt it was important to improve the flow of information between the Town and businesses on regulatory issues, Town and State financing programs, workforce retention, training, tax incentives, and other tools. This is particularly important as the programmatic landscape in economic development changes at a rapid pace and requires continuous attention. The Economic Development Council offers opportunity to improve upon such communication and coordination.

6. Infrastructure and costs to do business are a challenge in Easton.

Although Easton enjoys natural beauty, rich artistic and cultural traditions, the presence of a skilled workforce, and reasonable transportation access, there are a number of issues and constraints that the Town must seek to address through planning efforts and policy decisions. These issues can generally be organized into two broad categories:

Infrastructure

One of the most limiting factors to economic development in Easton pertains to infrastructure. The lack of centralized sewerage in commercial areas limits the types of businesses that Easton can attract and retain. Although the wastewater treatment facility associated with the Ames Shovel Works will bring some sewer service to North Easton Village, the lack of sewer in most locations still hinders the retail mix as water intensive uses like restaurants and hair salons can face challenging wastewater disposal issues. In addition, although rents for manufacturing space are competitive in Easton, the lack of sewer (as well as the lack of rail, airport, or a highway within two miles) creates less than ideal conditions for many prospective tenants, especially uses like manufacturing and restaurants that require larger disposal systems. For those manufacturers who are located in Easton, the lack of sewer further impacts their ability to finance improvements because it limits the value of the property and reduces the total amount they may borrow. The absence of public transportation infrastructure, beyond a Brockton Area Transit bus to and from the Industrial Park, presents another infrastructure challenge. An increase in transit service would provide access to broader workforce for local business, provide different commuting options for residents and increases market access to retail and commercial establishments.

Land and Leasing Costs

The DCURP study examined Easton's relative advantage and disadvantages related to neighboring communities. From a cost perspective, the Town is at a disadvantage as retail space rents are \$5-\$11 higher per square foot in both North Easton Village and in the strips along Routes 6, 124, and 138 than they are in neighboring communities.¹⁰ General office rents are also higher than they are in neighboring for Class A, B, and C office space. Coupled with higher land costs, these rental rates can be more of a financial burden to local companies.

¹⁰ Northeastern University Dukakis Center for Urban and Regional Policy, Economic Development Self-Assessment Tool (EDSAT): Results for the Town of Easton Massachusetts (February, 2014); 19.

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Goals, Objectives and Actions for Economic Development

	Lead Agency	Time Horizon (1-2 years; 2-5 years; 5-10 years)
Goal ED-1: Establish consensus on geographic areas that are of top priority to support economic development activities.		
Objective 1.1 Identify geographic areas that are appropriate for development and types of businesses that are most desirable in Easton.		
Action 1: Create consensus on a definition for “appropriate” regarding what types of physical development and businesses are complementary to the character, labor pool, and existing businesses in Easton.	Planning and Community Development, Planning Board, Board of Health	2-5 years
Action 2: Assess if commercial and industrial zones are adequately sized and appropriately located relative to the location of critical infrastructure, available transportation routes, and environmentally or ecologically sensitive land.	Planning and Community Development, Planning Board, Board of Health	2-5 years
Action 3: Conduct market study to identify growth industries with spatial and labor pool needs that can be accommodated by Easton.	Planning and Community Development, Economic Development Council	1-2 years
Objective 1.2 Increase sewer capacity where it can have positive impact on economic development.		
Action 1: Prioritize infill development and redevelopment activities in sewerred areas.	Board of Selectmen, Town Administrator, Planning/Zoning Board, Board of Health	Ongoing
Action 2: Provide education on the positive impact sewerage can have on economic development.	Town Administrator, Planning and Community Development	2-5 years
Action 3: Continue to identify strategic sites that are adjacent to or nearby existing sewer lines in neighboring towns where additional capacity may be purchased and expanded.	Planning and Community Development, Town Administrator, Board of Health	5-10 years
Objective 1.3 Maintain and build upon existing commercial/industrial areas.		
Action 1: Establish criteria to identify and prioritize underutilized	Planning and Community	2-5 years

	or vacant property for development or redevelopment.	Development, Conservation Commission, Historic Commission, Water Department	
Action 2:	Identify and contact owners of underutilized properties to explore potential partnerships and redevelopment opportunities.	Planning and Community Development	Ongoing
Action 3:	Create an easily maintained and publicly viewable database of underutilized and available properties.	Town Administrator, Planning and Community Development, Economic Development Council	2-5 years
Action 4:	Assess and leverage the potential of the South Coast Rail on Easton's economic development.	Planning and Community Development	5-10 years
Goal ED-2:	Facilitate new development and support existing businesses.		
Objective 2.1	Review zoning bylaws and update to encourage appropriate commercial and industrial development.		
Action 1:	Perform a zoning diagnostic. Work with existing businesses and landlords to identify zoning regulations that unnecessarily hinder expansion or new development, create excessive process, or preclude uses or building styles that could be desirable.	Planning and Community Development, Planning/Zoning Board, Inspectional Services	1-2 years to perform diagnostic; 2-5 years to implement revisions
Action 2:	Consider adoption of design guidelines and design review for commercial and industrial properties to ensure attractive buildings, functional site design, and adequate screening and landscaping.	Planning and Community Development, Planning/Zoning Board	2-5 years
Action 3:	Create and adopt zoning with flexible use or dimensional standards to encourage infill development in existing commercial areas and redevelopment of underutilized parcels.	Planning and Community Development, Planning/Zoning Board	2-5 years
Action 4:	Incentivize optimal site design, energy efficiency, and include the provision of bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure.	Planning and Community Development, Green Communities	2-5 years
Action 5:	Streamline regulatory processes and improve communication among boards when permits from multiple boards are required.	Planning and Community Development, Town Administrator, Inspectional	1-2 years

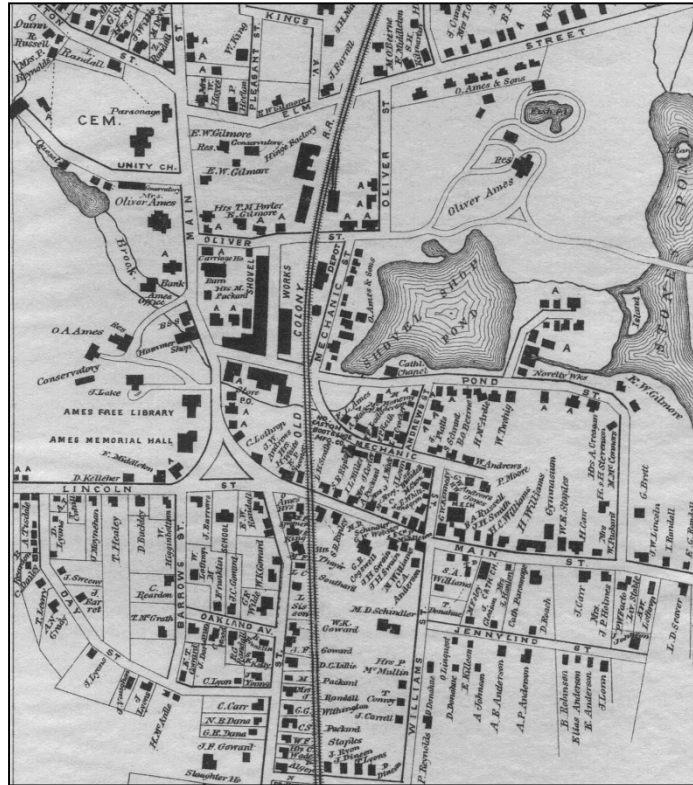
		Services, Board of Health, Fire Department	
Objective 2.2	Identify opportunities to facilitate and coordinate business development.		
Action 1:	Identify existing organizations that provide services to businesses in Easton (e.g. microloans, business planning, workshops, marketing assistance).	Easton Chamber of Commerce, Metro South Chamber of Commerce	1-2 years
Action 2:	Support efforts to develop a business outreach program for local business owners to meet and identify opportunities to partner together for services, local events, cross-promotion, and for other marketing opportunities (e.g. a website highlighting local businesses and news, email blasts, workshops).	Easton Chamber of Commerce, Metro South Chamber of Commerce	Ongoing
Action 3:	Engage commercial/industrial property owners and prospective business owners to identify challenges to development or redevelopment and leasing space.	Economic Development Council	1-2 years
Action 4:	Disseminate current information on funding sources and other support mechanisms for businesses.	Easton Chamber of Commerce, Metro South Chamber of Commerce	Ongoing
Action 5:	Leverage expedited permitting (e.g. 43D) to increase eligibility for predevelopment funds and other grant opportunities.	Planning and Community Development	Ongoing
Action 6:	In cooperation with the Chamber of Commerce, create a marketing strategy for Easton businesses.	Chamber of Commerce, Economic Development Council	5-10 years
Action 7:	Identify ways to capitalize on the presence of Stonehill College, Bridgewater State College, Massasoit Community College and Wheaton College to facilitate further economic development opportunities through education, spillover effects (from student population), and events.	Economic Development Council	2-5 years; then ongoing
Objective 2.3	Establish local leadership for economic development.		
Action 1:	Create a board, committee, or commission in local government that is responsible for economic development issues and activities and provide staff support.	Board of Selectmen	1-2 years
Action 2:	Consider forming an association (Business Improvement District, Merchant's Association, etc.) in North Easton	Economic Development Council, Board of Selectmen	5-10 years

	Village to address district specific issues such as parking, visual identity, ambience, marketing, and promotion.		
Objective 2.4	Support local businesses and services.		
Action 1:	Create and promote an “Easton First” or other like program to provide education and encourage residents to shop locally.	Economic Development Council	5-10 years
Action 2:	Adopt a municipal procurement policy that, when possible, encourages using local businesses for goods and services.	Town Administrator	2-5 years
Action 3:	Monitor and publicize education opportunities and workshops for small business owners offered through public or private sources within the parameters of state law.	Easton Chamber of Commerce	ongoing
Goal ED-3:	Continue to make Easton a desirable place to work and do business.		
Objective 3.1	Improve the flow of information between town government and businesses.		
Action 1:	Create “one-stop” shop for businesses to receive accurate information regarding required permits, forms, and a clear presentation of zoning requirements.	Planning and Community Development	1-2 years
Action 2:	Create tailored brochures for new businesses of different varieties (restaurants, personal services, professional office, etc.) highlighting critical regulatory information.	Economic Development Council	2-5 years
Action 3:	Provide municipal staff and board members with training in economic development issues (Massachusetts Economic Development Council workshops, conferences, lectures at Stonehill College, etc.).	Town Administrator	Ongoing
Objective 3.2	Support development of housing opportunities to attract a diverse workforce.		
Action 1:	Monitor housing values, housing types, and changes in household formations to identify workforce demographic groups who may not be adequately served.	Planning and Community Development, Affordable Housing Trust	Ongoing
Action 2:	Ensure housing strategies address needs for workforce housing.	Planning and community Development, Affordable Housing Trust, Board of Selectmen	Ongoing

Natural Resources and Recreation

Formative Issues for Natural Resources and Recreation

Natural resources represent the physical base that supports Easton’s quality of life. From the watersheds that supply drinking water to the parks and natural places that provide for recreation, all of these resources are critical to Easton’s current and future identity. In preparation for the public forums and working group process, an extensive inventory of natural, cultural and recreational resources was prepared. The resulting maps demonstrate that Easton’s landscape is fundamentally shaped by geology, landform, soils and drainage. These factors determined the original locations of farms, forests and villages in the days when everyone drew their livelihood from the land or depended on water power to run industrial mills (see inset map right). These resources influenced growth patterns through the suburban boom of the 20th Century, and continue to shape the Town today.



This historic map of North Easton shows how the Quiset Brook served as the primary driver for early settlement and industrialization in what has become the Town’s historic center.

As the Town grew from around 5,000 people in 1940 to more than 23,000 today, town, State and non-profit groups worked successfully to preserve many Easton’s most critical natural resources. Over 4,000 acres of land is permanently protected in the town. Many large tracts are located within and provide protection to distinct watersheds. Land preservation has occurred in an aggressive and opportunistic fashion. The result is a large inventory of land that forms the foundation for larger open space systems across the community. Looking at these preserved areas, it is now possible to see gaps in these systems where either development occurred or where there simply may not have been an opportunity to acquire the land for conservation. These areas are depicted in more detail in the Land Use section of the plan. Over the coming decades (20 to 50 years depending on the real estate market), land suitable for development that is not already protected is likely to be developed. As the Town moves into this next chapter in its land use history, it should prioritize future conservation efforts by consolidating existing conservation areas and linking them together into functional systems.

Natural Systems

Easton's natural systems are anchored by large protected areas that include the Borderland State Park, Wheaton Farm and the Hockomock Swamp. These systems are linked by the north-south running lowlands with their brooks and wetlands. If these links are broken, the ecological health and biodiversity supported by the system will be permanently degraded. Gaps and habitat fragmentation in wildlife corridors can disrupt the natural movements of many species for foraging, nesting and breeding resulting in the loss of species. Encroachment into undeveloped areas and up to the edges of protected open space can increase the numbers of invasive species that crowd out native and indigenous plant and animal species, a concern raised repeatedly in public discussions. Further, encroachment into riparian or other surface water buffers can lead to long-term water quality impacts that can upset aquatic ecosystems. It is likewise important to preserve and protect aquifer recharge areas to the Town's water supply¹¹ to ensure long-term viability. As the Town has done with parcels surrounding Town wells, focusing conservation on the unprotected "gap" parcels within important ecosystems and water supply areas, the Town can ensure the functioning of those systems into the future.

Cultural Systems

Easton's cultural landscape – made up of the historic villages, farms and estates, as well as the natural areas and road corridors that connect them – is another kind of system that needs to be protected to preserve its essential functions. These functions include maintaining the story of the Town for future generations, producing a strong identity and "sense of place," providing for local food production, and generally adding to the quality of life for every resident. Like a natural ecosystem, if these cultural landscapes are fragmented beyond a certain point they will no longer serve those functions – and Easton will have lost an asset that truly sets it apart from other suburban towns that either never had such a cultural landscape or already lost it due to fragmentation.

Recreational Systems

Recreation forms another kind of system that is integral to residents' quality of life. Easton has more than 20 recreation sites across the community today. The system will become more functional by meeting the need for additional facilities and by providing the staffing and the maintenance necessary to keep the facilities operating efficiently. It also means enhancing access to these facilities by designing for an aging population, improving access for people with disabilities, and connecting facilities to residential neighborhoods with walking and biking paths. There are opportunities to develop a town-wide system of trails, bike paths and routes that can connect parks and ball fields together while also serving as a recreational resource. Easton's Bike and Pedestrian working group has already started the planning process for these types of connections in town.

In addition to the understanding of natural, cultural and recreational resources and systems that emerged from the inventory and mapping process, the public forums and working group process helped to identify a series of formative issues for natural resources and recreation:

¹¹ Protection of water supply recharge areas is primarily the responsibility of the Easton Water Department.

1. The Town must work to meet the recreational needs of all residents.

Building and Maintaining Facilities

The Easton Recreation Department organizes a broad range of activities in town including youth summer programs, golf for different age groups, track and field, and tennis. A larger network of independent leagues organizes other sports in the community and creates high demand for recreational facilities. Demand for fields, and particularly for indoor sports venues, can be intense. Scheduling is complicated by the need for coordination between the Town, the School Department, youth sports leagues, and individual participants. While the addition of Keach Park has eased demand for ball fields, there is increasing need for facilities that are a good fit for busy residents who may not have time to join a league, but who could take advantage of places for walking, biking, fishing, etc. before or after work close to their homes. For many facilities, there is a need to enhance accessibility through better signage, parking, handicapped access improvements, and provision of lighting, benches and comfort facilities.

The idea of building new recreational facilities was not the primary focus of recreation discussions during Envision Easton. However, there was considerable interest in increasing the availability of indoor facilities. As with outdoor facilities, better systems for electronic scheduling and programming can only go so far with a limited number of venues. At the same time, the cost of construction and maintenance could make substantial new facilities an unrealistic option. One solution would involve a more deliberate inventory, analysis and cooperative planning effort between private venues like the YMCA, the Town School Department, and Stonehill College. This more intensive planning exercise would be used to identify opportunities for sharing facilities with the goal of greater efficiencies and savings for all parties. For example, as maintenance and utility costs continue to rise at the college in coming years, there may be limited opportunities for the Town or local youth sports leagues to run recreational programs for local residents, fees for which could help maintain those facilities.

Supporting Staff and Coordinating Programs

Providing facilities is only one aspect of meeting residents' recreational needs. Part of the puzzle is supporting the staff needed to plan, organize and run programs so that those facilities can be used most effectively. Staff members require up-to-date tools and training to establish a central hub for coordinating the use and schedule for various facilities. Discussion is needed on how to best balance the current hands-on approach to scheduling fields with the potential for a web-based, user-driven scheduling system. Participants in Envision Easton universally supported the idea of taking advantage of the latest digital scheduling tools.

Staffing levels have had a direct effect on current levels of maintenance, which is currently provided by school staff, volunteers, and a few employees of the Buildings and Grounds Division of the DPW. More regular and planned routine maintenance would improve the condition and lifespan of Town facilities, but would require additional Town resources. The Town does not currently have a Parks department, which in many Towns is charged with maintaining public parks and recreational facilities. Participants in public forums and working group meetings raised many creative ideas for meeting the financial challenges of building and maintaining recreation facilities. An emerging theme was the possibility of enhancing partnerships. This includes not only building cooperation among the schools, recreation department and public

works, but also augmenting public-private partnerships that would link town staff, boards and committees with businesses, non-profit institutions and user groups.

Enhancing Connectivity

The geographic distribution of different facilities is an ongoing issue in planning for recreation in Easton. In looking at the Town as a whole, most of the public recreational facilities are located in the northern and eastern parts of town. Residents of the western and southern areas of Easton have greater access to open space areas, but typically not to those offered by the Recreation Department. Many of the places that people want to visit, regardless of location, can only be accessed by automobile. There are sidewalks in the more densely developed areas, and walking paths in many open space areas, but few connections exist between the two. Roadway design can also be a barrier as many roads are either state highways with a large volume of car and truck traffic, or narrow roads with little room for bikes or pedestrians.



This photograph of Chestnut Street shows the narrow, rural roadway design that helps to define the character of several different neighborhoods. The Town will need to balance the aesthetic importance of these roads with the desire to increase safety and connectivity for pedestrians and cyclists.

While residents throughout town will continue to drive as needed to get to recreation or open space sites, improving access across the entire community remains a priority. During the Envision Easton process, building new facilities in the underserved areas of Easton was less of a short-term priority when compared with improving access from neighborhoods to existing facilities elsewhere in town. Participants continually raised the need to provide better walking and biking connections throughout the Town, starting with connecting neighborhoods with nearby parks, conservation areas and other recreation sites. As the Town works to extend and connect the existing network of natural areas there is an opportunity to link off-road recreational trails into a more robust system.

Maintaining and Policing Recreational Facilities and Conservation Areas

The Town invested considerable resources over the years to acquire and develop ball fields, parks, and conservation lands. Seldom, however, do the available funding sources for these activities extend to maintenance. Recreation facilities, whether “active” or “passive”—from nature trails to parking lots and baseball backstops—have a limited life span. Plans for depreciation and replacement should be made early-on in the life cycle of these facilities so that the Town can plan more effectively for needs that will arise five or ten years down the road.

As with maintenance costs, the need for additional policing and public safety for Easton’s recreation areas should be explored as part of the ongoing planning process. Traditional open

Agriculture

Despite its residential growth over the decades, Easton has been able to maintain agriculture in town. Farms continue to be an important cultural and natural feature. Unlike areas that grew back into woods (or were developed as subdivisions), Easton's remaining farms preserve a landscape that has changed little over centuries. Just as important, they preserve a culture and lifestyle that harkens back to an earlier age when agriculture was a much more important part of the Town's economy and identity.



The Easton Natural Resources Trust (NRT) demonstrates the potential to combine community education with the preservation of agricultural lands. The Sheep Farm (above) is part of a larger educational center that connects members of the community with present day agriculture and an important link to the Town's history. (Photograph courtesy of NRT)

Fortunately, preserving farmland represents an increasing opportunity for the future. Farming is enjoying a resurgence across the region, as more communities start to focus on the value and importance of local food production. The success of the Easton Community Gardens and the farmers market are examples of how the community is invested in local agriculture and increasing access to local healthy foods. To build on these successes, these efforts by necessity start with protection of the farmland itself. These efforts must then be combined with a process to transfer that land into the hands of a new generation of farmers. This represents

a unique economic challenge in the entire Boston region, where the "highest and best use" of farmland remains residential development – at least from a real estate perspective. Unless young farmers inherit the land, they are unlikely to be able to buy it from its current owner based on what they can earn farming it. Continuing to explore and encourage the use of innovative preservation options can ensure that farmland is available for agriculture. Options such as leasing land to farmers and licensing suitable town land for agricultural use are already at work in Easton. Another tool for protecting farmlands involves partnering landowners with conservancy organizations to acquire preservation restrictions on prime farmlands.

3. Easton's watersheds are key economic and environmental resources.

Local and Regional Change Continues to Impact Watershed Quality

Easton contains a network of rivers, streams, ponds and wetlands that absorb stormwater, mitigate the effects of flooding, provide diverse habitat, and protect the Town's water supply wells. Public water supply wells and adjacent lands are owned by the Town Water Department. Water bodies and wetlands are protected under local, state, and federal law. In spite of these protections, changes in the surrounding watersheds can have profound impacts. Locally, runoff from existing developed areas and potential future development sites increases the intensity of flooding and carries pollutants into water bodies. The increase of impervious cover as a result of potential future development is one factor that will exacerbate these impacts. The other major factor is climate change, with historic rainfall records from climate stations across the region

clearly showing that storms are more frequent and intense, at the same time the region also appears to be experiencing extended periods of drought.. As climate trends continue in this direction and development creates more impervious surface, flooding events may overburden both natural wetlands and town stormwater systems.

Making Watersheds More Resilient



Poquanticut Brook represents one of Easton's many fragile water resources that require proactive management and preservation to remain healthy. (photograph courtesy of Douglas Watts)

The Town can deal with the uncertain impacts of climate change and other regional issues by working to define the likely impact of these trends on local watersheds and planning for future water demand. In addition to enforcement of existing wetland and subdivision regulations, the Town can continue to identify and preserve buffer areas around existing and potential wellheads and aquifer recharge areas. Easton can work with land-owners and developers to implement best management practices that increase on-site infiltration, minimize erosion, reduce nutrient loads to water resources, and control other non-point source pollution.

4. Easton must employ a comprehensive approach to protecting its natural resources.

Setting Priorities for Conservation

Easton has protected many of the most sensitive habitat areas and water supplies. This was confirmed through the mapping and analyses performed for Envision Easton. However, these resources are becoming increasingly isolated and fragmented by residential subdivisions and roadside development. While the pace of development slowed in recent years, the underlying functions of the local ecosystem will gradually be degraded. The Town can and should continue to seize opportunities to preserve important wildlife habitat and plant communities. To the extent possible, acquisition should be strategic—guided by an understanding of the larger functional systems that support those areas.

The mapping process performed for Envision Easton identified natural resource areas, generally following the three main north-south valleys:

- Poquanticut-Mulberry Meadow Brook Corridor
- The Black Brook-Hockomock Corridor; and
- The Queset Brook Corridor

Overlaying the map of resource areas with a map of protected land shows that while many of these areas have already been protected, there are critical gaps that threaten the long-term health of the ecosystem. Many of these gaps in protection fall in areas where the brook corridors traverse farmland, thread between subdivisions, or pass through Furnace Village, Easton Center and North Easton Village. By focusing conservation activities on filling these gaps and maintaining the continuity of corridors, the Town can ensure that the ecological value of existing conservation areas will be maintained. A more detailed discussion of these maps is provided in the Land Use section of the plan.

Improving Ecological Management of Public and Private Lands

In addition to the outright acquisition of new open space, improving management of existing open space will play an important role in preserving natural systems. This involves both management of existing landscapes and design of new ones. Removal of invasive plant species in critical areas is an important issue for existing stream corridors, as these plants can spread quickly and dominate a local ecosystem within a very short period of time. Areas that are being farmed or kept as mowed lawns can benefit from the creation of naturalized buffers where more natural and permanent vegetative cover helps to filter stormwater and prevent erosion. For new construction, wetland permitting provides an opportunity to shape the edge of the corridor. Wider buffers are generally more protective, but often soil and topographical conditions may allow for a relatively narrow corridor to function just as well. Easton has historically enforced strong buffer protection standards in the development review process and should continue to do so.

Looking Ahead: Promoting Sustainability and Resilience in an Uncertain Future

Protecting and managing land may not be enough to maintain Easton's biodiversity amid the multiple threats posed by climate change, air and water pollution, and invasive species. Each of these issues presents a distinct challenge to the health of the ecosystem and a gradual, regional and long-term threat that would seem to defy local solutions (as well as the reach of the annual budget). As the Town plans for the future, it will be important to think through the implications of these trends and do what is possible now to prepare for the future.

Climate change is creating a generally warmer, wetter environment in the northeast. Plant and wildlife species adapted to these conditions will be moving north over time, displacing those currently in residence. Some of these species will need to be managed as "invasive," while others will help create a new kind of ecosystem. *The Massachusetts Climate Change Adaptation Report* was published in September 2011 by the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs and the state's Adaptation Advisory Committee. Important findings cited directly from that document include:

- In its 2007 report, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) found that the —warming of the climate system is unequivocal, as is now evident from observations of increases in global average air and ocean temperatures, widespread melting of snow and ice, and rising global average sea levels.
- New England is expected to experience changes in the amount, frequency, and timing of precipitation. Since 1900, precipitation recorded at United States Historical Climatology Network weather stations across the Northeast has increased on average by 5 to 10 percent.
- A more recent 50-year [review of precipitation records] shows an increase in total precipitation by approximately 10 percent (2.12 mm/year). Also, the most recent 30-year normal precipitation for Massachusetts is the highest it has been since records started to be taken.

One approach adopted by the Nature Conservancy (TNC) in response to these changes is to focus less on protecting the habitat of a particular rare species and more on preserving those places that are likely to support important communities of plants and animals no matter what happens in the future. TNC generally identifies these important areas by looking at soils and topography and looking for places that have a high variety of both as an indication of potential diversity. The assumption is that areas with a diverse cross section of soil types within a varied topography tend to support a rich ecosystem in every climate. If we protect these areas, we increase the likelihood that a more diverse profile of plants and animals will take up residence, even as conditions change.

Another likely impact of changing climate is an increase in extreme weather events. Because a warmer atmosphere retains more moisture and energy, storms will become more frequent and precipitation more intense. On the ground, this will result in increased occurrence of flooding and an increase in the area that is typically flooded. Protecting and buffering floodplains will be an important way to limit the impact of extreme weather across the Town. Improved stormwater management systems will also be needed, starting with the design of individual buildings, streets and parking lots. The most significant impacts in Easton may be generated by existing roads and parking lots rather than large new developments. Policies will need to be put in place to ensure that, as these existing areas are changed or improved, stormwater systems can mitigate the amount of runoff and help to reduce pollution.

5. Economy, resource protection, and quality of life are inextricably connected.

True sustainability for Easton, in large part, will be about finding an equitable long-term balance between preservation and growth. Over time, the community will need to continually re-evaluate how it is managing local and regional growth pressures within the context of its watersheds, climate and biodiversity. To a large extent, Easton is well-equipped to provide residents with their most basic needs— food, water, shelter, and access to work. But high quality of life is what keeps residents here and what draws new residents and businesses to the Town. The appeal of Easton is connected to the availability of amenities like parks, historic sites and natural areas, as well as to practical aspects like safety and security, good schools, and a convenient commute to work. Easton’s appeal is rooted in its historic character, scenic beauty, sense of community, and relative peace and quiet.

These elements of Easton—those which create such an attractive community setting—must be recognized as fundamental to the Town’s continued economic success. While it is always important to look closely at conventional economic development strategies related to business and workforce development, “quality of life” provides a much larger economic framework that includes the full spectrum of assets across the community. Residents, business owners and visitors understand Easton in terms of the full “experience” of their time here. The degree to which they feel “at home”, invested in their work, or excited about what they might discover are a few dimensions of what planners often refer to as “a sense of place”.

History demonstrates communities with a strong sense of place tend to be more economically resilient and Easton remains well-positioned to take advantage of its broad array of assets. Today many businesses are tied not to a particular resource or region, but rather locate where they have access to a workforce that is well trained, technologically sophisticated, and creative. In turn, these young, educated workers want to live in areas with a high quality of life. This trend is supporting strong economic growth in major cities like Boston, New York and San Francisco, but is also driving up of the cost of living in those cities to unsustainable levels. Easton can take advantage of the Town’s rich quality of life and manageable commuting times by offering residents an attractive balance between costs and benefits.

This same approach can attract new businesses to town, and foster the growth of a local economy that takes advantage of the Town’s unique assets and location. Part of this is making more efficient use of areas that are already developed, rather than growing into previously undeveloped areas. Filling in older, underutilized commercial areas can reduce the cost of development – but only if town zoning allows for enough density to make it profitable. Likewise, additional economic activity needs to be coupled with a high level of design quality, with a focus on creating attractive; pedestrian-friendly places that people will choose to visit. This in turn supports higher rental rates, increased investment in amenities and maintenance, and so forth, creating a self-reinforcing cycle that will drive redevelopment forward. The Town can encourage the process by:

- Supporting visioning and planning that define a shared vision for each community asset.
- Amending zoning to provide for increased density and an appropriate mix of uses in targeted growth areas.
- Establishing design standards or guidelines that require a high-level of design quality.

- Supporting infrastructure development, streetscape improvements, parks, and trail connections that add value to the area and attract private investment.
- Redeveloping town-owned buildings in the area, or locating new town buildings in areas that will support nearby redevelopment efforts.

While economic development might seem to be at odds with protection of natural and cultural resources, a more sustainable outlook understands that these are part of a greater whole. By maintaining its centuries-old pattern of villages surrounded by open space, Easton can preserve its character and quality of life while also creating an attractive setting for business growth. In short, protecting Easton's cultural and natural resources represents a direct economic investment.

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Goals, Objectives and Actions for Natural Resources and Recreation

		Lead Agency	Time Horizon (1-2 years; 2-5 years; 5-10 years)
Goal NRR-1.	Meet the recreational needs of all Easton residents.		
Objective 1.1	Provide access to a broad range of recreational facilities and programs.		
Action 1:	Effectively coordinate field scheduling among users, the recreation department and the schools by creating a central system for facility scheduling and maintenance.	Recreation Director, School Department, Information Technology	2-5 years
Action 2:	Assess recreational interests and develop additional facilities as needed (i.e. indoor, fields, walking areas, fishing, etc.).	Recreation Department, School Department	1-2 years; then ongoing
Action 3:	Expand accessibility for people of all ages and abilities by providing adequate parking, meeting ADA requirements, and providing shade, lighting, benches and other amenities.	Commission on Disabilities	Ongoing
Action 4:	Provide adequate resources to maintain Recreation Commission, Conservation Commission and School Department owned/managed facilities.	Board of Selectmen, Town Administrator	Ongoing
Action 5:	Provide consistent funding for recreation administration, program staff, and maintenance personnel.	Board of Selectmen, Town Administrator	Ongoing
Objective 1.2	Promote walking and biking recreation connections.		
Action 1:	Connect neighborhoods with nearby town conservation lands and recreational facilities by using and developing their own sidewalk, walking trail and bike path networks.	Planning and Community Development, DPW, Bicycle and Pedestrian Working Group	5-10 years
Action 2:	Create a working group charged with developing a master plan for town-wide pedestrian and bicycle networks.	Planning and Community Development	1-2 years
Objective 1.3	Ensure facilities are safe and well-maintained.		
Action 1:	Create a 5-year plan for maintenance to be reviewed and updated annually.	Recreation Commission, DPW	2-5 years to complete first round of all facilities plans; then ongoing
Action 2:	Establish cooperative management and maintenance policies and practices between public and private recreational organizations and facilities. For example, Frothingham Park is a privately-held recreational facility used for public recreational activities.	Town Administrator, Recreation Commission, DPW	2-5 years

Action 3:	Plan for depreciation and replacement of recreational facilities.	Recreation Commission, School Department	Ongoing
Action 4:	Promote and enforce safe and legal use of conservation areas for passive recreation.	Conservation Commission	Ongoing
Objective 1.4	Establish more consistent funding for recreational development and maintenance.		
Action 1:	Empower a committee comprised of representatives from the Conservation, Agricultural, and Recreation commissions, the Community Preservation Committee and the School Department to focus on funding needs.	Community Preservation Act Committee, Board of Selectmen	1-2 years
Action 2:	Explore creative approaches to funding, such as public-private partnerships, grant opportunities and fee programs.	Planning and Community Development (facilitator), Town Administrator	Ongoing
Action 3:	Develop a long-term funding and oversight plan.	Town Administrator	5-10 years
Objective 1.5	Increase public awareness and use of facilities and programs.		
Action 1:	Conduct public outreach programs.	Conservation Commission, Recreation Commission	Ongoing
Action 2:	Develop and install consistent wayfinding signage.	Conservation Commission, Bike and Pedestrian Working Group, Department of public Works	2-5 years to develop fully coordinated wayfinding plan; 5-10 years for town-wide installation
Action 3:	Make maps, descriptive literature and interpretive materials readily available.	Recreation Commission, GIS, Conservation Commission	2-5 years
Action 4:	Research and publish the history of all conservation lands.	Conservation Commission, Historic Commission	5-10 years
Goal NRR-2.	Preserve and protect Easton's visual, historic, geologic and agricultural resources that comprise our cultural landscape.		
Objective 2.1	Identify natural, historical, agricultural and scenic areas and preserve, protect or acquire them.		
Action 1:	Coordinate between the Historical Preservation Plan and the Open Space and Recreation Plan.	Historical Commission, Recreation Commission, Conservation Commission	1-2 years for open Space Plan Update
Action 2:	Update criteria for and designate scenic roads and scenic areas in Easton.	Planning/Zoning Board, Historical Commission	1-2 years to update criteria; then ongoing
Action 3:	Encourage the use of innovative, flexible development techniques, to preserve usable, accessible open space and	Planning/Zoning Board	2-5 years to draft and adopt any new zoning standards.

The Road Map: Natural Resources and Recreation

	recreation areas.		
Action 4:	Identify parcels needed to create a greenbelt system.	Conservation Commission	2-5 years
Objective 2.2	Preserve the farming heritage of the Town and reinvigorate agriculture.		
Action 1:	Lease or set aside town-owned land as appropriate for agricultural use.	Conservation Commission, Agricultural Commission	Ongoing
Action 2:	Promote sustainable agricultural practices throughout the community.	Agricultural Commission, Conservation Commission	Ongoing
Action 3:	Prioritize remaining parcels with agricultural potential for preservation.	Agricultural Commission, Conservation Commission, Community Preservation Committee	1-2 years to develop a list of prioritized parcels/
Goal NRR-3:	Protect and enhance watershed resources that provide the town's drinking water and protect against flood hazards.		
Objective 3.1	Ensure long-term viability of Easton's water resources.		
Action 1:	Support and reevaluate the water conservation program.	Water Division	2-5 years to identify needs and implement strategies
Action 2:	Evaluate and identify potential future water supply sources.	Water Division, Board of Health, Green Communities	5-10 years to complete investigations
Action 3:	Evaluate the impact of climate change on water resources and establish appropriate mitigation plans and policies.	Planning and Community Development, Water Division, Board of Health	2-5 years
Action 4:	Develop and implement a pond and waterway management plan for maintaining and improving water quality to support aquatic life and appropriate recreational activities.	Conservation Commission, Planning and Community Development	2-5 years
Objective 3.2	Continue to protect water resources through enforcement of wetland and floodplain regulations and promotion of best management practices.		
Action 1:	Ensure all developers, contractors and homeowners use best management practices to control sediment migration and soil erosion.	Planning/Zoning Board, Conservation Commission	2-5 years to update regulatory standards
Action 2:	Educate all developers, contractors and homeowners on sediment and erosion control best management practices and ensure such practices are followed.	Planning and Community Development, Conservation Commission	Ongoing
Action 3:	Continue to identify and acquire land in aquifer recharge areas and zones surrounding present and potential public water	Water Division, Community Preservation Act Committee,	Ongoing

	supplies.	Conservation Commission	
Goal NRR-4.	Preserve wildlife habitat and native plant communities and establish protected corridors to connect them.		
Objective 4.1	Identify and acquire or establish protections for lands with critical wildlife habitat, important plant communities, and wildlife corridors.		
Action 1:	Define and implement appropriate measures to protect identified habitats, communities and corridors such as acquisition in fee title, conservation easements, and open space set-asides as part of subdivisions, etc.	Conservation Commission, Community Preservation Act Committee	Ongoing
Action 2:	Implement recommendations of the Land Management Plan to ensure open space preservation goals are being met.	Conservation Commission	5-10 years
Objective 4.2	Protect biodiversity of remaining undeveloped areas.		
Action 1:	Develop and implement a program to mitigate the impact of invasive species, development pressures and climate change.	Conservation Commission, Planning and Community Development	2-5 years to establish the program.
Action 2:	Establish refuge areas.	Conservation Commission, Planning and Community Development	Ongoing
Action 3:	Publish information that helps residents observe and enjoy wildlife in a natural setting.	Conservation Commission	1-2 years to develop initial publications; then ongoing

Housing and Neighborhoods

Formative Issues for Housing and Neighborhoods

Easton faces housing-related challenges that are common to many Massachusetts communities, especially within the Boston suburbs. Easton is an older, well-established New England town that is substantially built out, meaning land that can be used for new development is limited and future growth will be incremental. The scenic quality of the Town, its high performing school system, fairly uniform housing stock, and proximity to Boston and Providence all work to create a strong housing market demand and higher than average home prices¹². Participants in the Envision Easton process expressed strong support for the Town's predominantly single family, suburban residential atmosphere and quality of life. Respondents to surveys and workshops consistently agreed with goals designed to protect the character of neighborhoods through preservation of open space and historic resources.

Yet with dwindling undeveloped land to accommodate new subdivisions, and predominant reliance on the residential tax base¹³, the Town must think strategically about future residential growth. Continuing to use open space protection to set boundaries and connect green belts will help to provide a geographic framework for future growth (see Land Use section). However, under current zoning, within the limited available buildable land, maximizing the tax yield would push the community toward the development of larger and larger homes. To focus growth on existing developed areas, especially those where future infrastructure investment is planned, Easton will need to expand the types of housing offered in a strategic manner. By providing a clear picture of how housing will be developed into the future, Easton can build on its strengths and fulfill local needs, while protecting areas that are unsuitable for development. Many of the key issues that shape Easton's approach to housing policy are discussed in this chapter.

1. Easton's neighborhoods are integral to the identity of the community and should be sustained and strengthened.

Many participants in Envision Easton grew up in the community and felt lucky to be able to stay and raise their own families in the same surroundings. For other participants who relocated to Easton from other towns or states, the appeal of the community is rooted in a strong connection to the Town's quality of life. In either case, residents often expressed their fondest impressions of Easton in their own neighborhoods, reflecting on the architecture of surrounding homes, places where their children play, or the quiet character of their street. Residents at public forums and participants in the Envision Easton working groups were thoughtful about the challenges faced by Easton and recognized many issues that would need to be carefully managed in order to maintain and strengthen existing neighborhoods. To effectively manage these issues, Easton must continue to coordinate with residents, developers and numerous town government departments to identify tools and safeguards that will maintain and strengthen neighborhood

¹² Easton typically has a median home sales price in the top three when compared with the ten communities in the region. See Envision Easton Baseline Report for more detail.

¹³ The residential tax levy provides 53% of the total overall budget for FY14 (Massachusetts Department of Revenue).

resources. Some of these tools and safeguards are introduced in the formative issues provided below.

Neighborhood Design

While all residents may not be aware of the specific design elements that help to define the “neighborhood character” of different streets, many participants in the Envision Easton process called attention to important design features. Elements like power lines, traffic signs, street trees, sidewalks, road width, lighting, corner treatments, and crosswalks all play an important role in how residents experience their streets on a daily basis. As discussions continue in Easton around increased mobility of residents and better connections between neighborhoods, it will be important to be mindful of the scale and design of improvements to ensure the protection and enhancement of neighborhood character. More detailed discussions on mobility and connectivity are provided in the section on Transportation, Mobility and Access.

Protection of Historic Properties

Easton has an impressive inventory of historic buildings that contribute significantly to the identity of neighborhoods throughout the community. Four areas of the Town are designated historic districts under the National Register of Historic Places. Beyond these designations the Massachusetts Historical Commission maintains a database of historic resources and identified 30 separate areas in Easton as significant along with 554 buildings. The Town’s Historical Commission continues to work on developing a town-wide inventory of buildings of historical significance. This inventory is connected to the



Homes with historic value may be allowed to fall into disrepair, which can increase pressure to demolish the structure and build anew. Part of the challenge in preserving the character of existing neighborhoods is working to preserve these structures.

This inventory is connected to the Building Demolition Review Regulations in an effort to protect historically significant structures from being demolished if feasible.

While demolition protection is an important tool, it is more of a “reactive” strategy for preservation and cannot always save historic structures. The preservation incentives associated with Historic Districts can also be an effective tool, but they depend on the awareness of property owners for implementation. Relying exclusively on these tools will not fully protect against incremental removal and replacement of building features that may be historically significant. In many cases, the erosion of a building’s historic features can be avoided through simple outreach and efforts to educate home owners.

Housing and Neighborhood Scale

In historic communities like Easton, neighborhoods that were established many decades ago are often characterized by smaller homes with very efficient construction and interior layouts. Collections of these homes across an entire neighborhood create a sense of scale and comfort for residents that they intuitively connect with an idea of “community character”. Over the past three decades in particular, the scale of these long-established communities has been disrupted as many individual homes were torn down and replaced with much larger structures. Easton, and North Easton Village, in particular, has seen several instances in recent years where smaller homes were razed and replaced with much larger buildings out of scale with the surrounding neighborhood. As Easton takes a closer look at its neighborhoods moving forward, refinements to basic zoning standards related to allowable height, building setbacks, and floor-to-area ratio (FAR) may be useful in protecting the character of these neighborhoods.

2. There is a need for diverse housing options and revisiting Easton’s land use regulations.

Housing Diversity

As with all communities across the U.S., demographic and market trends are creating needs and demands for different types of housing. The aging of baby boomers, shrinking family sizes, higher rental demand, rising and uncertain energy costs, and increases in market preferences all continue to create demands for a more diverse set of housing choices within an individual community. In some cases, these units are simply single-family units that may be smaller than what is typically found in Easton, or may be located on smaller lots. In other cases, there are demands for different styles such as cottages, quad-plexes, town homes, accessory dwelling units, or other similar models that may have been limited within Easton’s regulatory framework. Housing diversity may also include retrofits to existing homes that make them more accessible to the elderly or disabled. Regardless of the approach to diversifying housing, Easton is ready to explore different models and develop regulatory tools to encourage change that works within the context of the Town’s existing neighborhoods.

Many of the issues related to housing diversity and neighborhood design can be wholly or partially addressed through the Town’s Zoning Bylaw and Subdivision Regulations. The challenge for any community as it begins to think about these issues is to consider what elements are appropriate to regulate and what elements should be left to the discretion of property owners. These discussions can be very challenging at the community level and it is important for Towns like Easton to have open and honest dialogue—working through any tensions that arise between the desire to protect property rights and the desire to preserve many of the features that contribute

Potential Tools for Easton to Diversify Housing:

- Smaller lot options through a refined cluster housing bylaw;
- Potential expansion of Easton’s Chapter 40R program;
- Application of the state’s Compact Neighborhoods program;
- Detached Accessory Dwelling Units;
- Small multi-family models like quad-plex units;
- Townhomes; and
- Cottage communities.

to Easton's quality of life and economic success.

At the time Envision Easton was developed, the Zoning Bylaw applied a fairly uniform density for residential development town-wide, generally requiring lots with at least 40,000 sq. ft. of land and 150 feet of frontage on a public way for single family homes. There are some limited opportunities to deviate from this density through a special permit mechanism. The bylaw also allows for limited small-scale apartments in the Business District (with large minimum lot size that generally makes these developments infeasible), and two-family homes by special permit within the Residential or Business Districts. This fairly uniform approach to most of the residential areas provides a level of predictability for the Town. Requiring lots of a certain size and geometry helps to ensure that on-site disposal of wastewater will be feasible. With this approach as the foundation for residential development in the community, the Town can begin to explore other regulatory tools that provide some opportunity for different models. The Town has already had success in diversification with the application of Chapter 40R (a.k.a the State's 'Smart Growth District' program) in places around Queset Commons.

A community-wide education campaign and discussion around different housing types should occur in advance of drafting any proposed regulatory language meant to address housing diversity. Questions that should be explored in detail as a precursor to zoning reform include:

1. What are our options for different housing types?
2. What opportunities do different areas of the community offer (i.e., market opportunities, access, infrastructure, etc.)?
3. What housing types suit the needs of current and future residents?
4. What housing types can fit the traditional, historic character of Easton?
5. What areas of Town would be appropriate for different housing types?
6. What standards should be regulated? When does regulation "go too far"?

With answers to these questions, Easton will be well-prepared to identify a regulatory framework and specific tools that can help diversify housing while protecting its neighborhoods and the natural environment.

3. **The Town should coordinate future residential development with plans to expand or increase the capacity of local infrastructure.**

Beyond neighborhood impacts, there are coordination issues between infrastructure investment and housing that operate more on a town-wide scale. Infrastructure that supports wastewater treatment, transportation, and pedestrian and bicycle mobility impacts the cost of new development, quality of life, and the Town's capacity for growth. Easton can direct growth to areas that have the most capacity, and help to manage the cost of improvements to both existing residents and new development by coordinating residential development with investments in hard infrastructure.

Wastewater disposal in Easton is currently the greatest infrastructure constraint. This limitation was discussed during the community engagement process. Discussion was primarily

related to commercial or industrial properties that cannot achieve their full potential through the use of conventional on-site wastewater disposal. Easton's Comprehensive Wastewater Management Plan (CWMP) establishes the five highest priority areas of need in the community, where investment in infrastructure will be needed in the future to facilitate strategic economic growth. These areas include North Easton Village, South Easton, Five Corners, Turnpike Street, and Easton Center. As wastewater solutions are financed and implemented, the Town will need to be prepared to regulate the scale and density of development that could follow. These areas will represent tremendous opportunities to address many of the housing needs within the community as well as driving higher levels of commerce and fiscal revenue. Easton already has success in this regard with two major projects, Ames Shovel Works and Queset Commons. These projects enabled the Town to leverage the construction of wastewater treatment facilities that will serve the immediate surrounding neighborhoods in addition to the proposed developments.

In addition to wastewater treatment, residential development can be coordinated with transportation infrastructure and other public amenities that serve both existing and future residents. The Town guides the construction of new roadways, pedestrian and bicycle paths, open space, and stormwater management by means of its subdivision rules and regulations. The Town should continue to identify best practices and prioritize links for establishing connected networks, so these investments provide the optimal public benefit. Major development projects such as Ames Shovel Works also present opportunities to facilitate improvements to existing transportation infrastructure in developed areas. The potential development of commuter rail stations in North Easton would provide added incentive to examine other housing models that can respond to the market created by increased access to public transportation.

4. Easton will continue to work toward achieving the goal set by the Commonwealth for 10% affordable housing, and shall consider housing needs after reaching that threshold.

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts, like many other states, plays a significant role in how communities provide housing to families that qualify as “low to moderate income”. Perhaps the most powerful mechanism is the state law provision known as “Chapter 40B”, which provides a tool known as the “Comprehensive Permit”. This tool allows developers to override local zoning and regulatory controls when they propose a residential development in which at least 20% of the housing units are affordable to low and moderate income households. These homes are deed restricted in a way that keeps the resale value “affordable” and allows the units to be counted on the states Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI). Communities that have at least 10% of their overall housing stock recorded on the SHI have the ability to deny or condition Comprehensive Permits that do not align with local planning goals. Communities that do not meet the 10% goal are vulnerable to Comprehensive Permit proposals that often significantly exceed the density regularly allowed on a particular parcel of land.

Easton has made significant progress over the past decade toward achieving the 10% goal for SHI units. The Town will be approximately 280 units short of 10% after previously approved 40B subdivisions are constructed. Further comprehensive permit proposals currently under review could move the Town closer to achieving this goal. Once that 10% threshold is reached, Easton will need to shift policy towards maintaining it as the community continues to grow.

Looking Ahead: Multi-Family Housing

While the Envision Easton process was ongoing, the Town entertained several proposals for housing at varying levels of commitment from the different applicants. While not all of these projects actually went through the full permit process, each was considered under the Chapter 40B Comprehensive Permit mechanism. Two of these projects proposed large (+/- 250 unit) multi-family housing developments. This apparent market pressure to build multi-family housing potentially reflects the nationwide trend, particularly for areas close to cities like Boston. These proposals suggest that continued pressure to develop multi-family housing through the Comprehensive Permit may occur in Easton. If local and state officials view new applications as “consistent with local needs”, the Town could see an increase of several hundred multi-family units in the coming years. The addition of this number of multi-family units could impact the community with greater demands for services and potential traffic impacts. Easton must also work to fully understand the market implications of adding this number of multi-family units to its overall housing stock.

The addition of several hundred multi-family units as part of Comprehensive Permit applications would push Easton beyond the 10% statutory threshold under Chapter 40B. Easton will have greater control of how subsidized housing is produced in town after it achieves the 10% goal and gains greater local control of the Comprehensive Permit process. In order to maintain this control, the Town will need to increase the number of units on the SHI at a rate proportionate to new housing growth (i.e., stay above 10%). Monitoring existing subsidized housing units to ensure that they remain affordable to low and moderate income households and seeking opportunities to add SHI units through smaller scale projects can help the Town to stay above the 10% threshold. The Town can continue to entertain Comprehensive Permits where it deems a proposal is consistent with the community’s needs as part of a larger suite of tools designed to address housing needs in a sustainable and comprehensive manner. Continued coordination and support of the Housing Authority, the Affordable Housing Trust, and the Community Preservation Committee will be an integral part of this continued success. Easton may also wish to seek out partnerships with developers that have a proven track record of working with communities to provide high quality subsidized housing that meets local needs.

Goals, Objectives and Actions for Housing and Neighborhoods

	Lead Agency	Time Horizon (1-2 years; 2-5 years; 5-10 years)
Goal H-1: Match opportunities for housing with the needs of all of Easton’s residents.		
Objective 1.1 Provide diverse housing alternatives appropriate for seniors, young adults, families, small households, and people with mobility limitations.		
Action 1: Undertake a study to identify specific recommendations and consider zoning to create opportunities for a broader range of housing types.	Planning Board, Planning and Community Development	2-5 years
Objective 1.2 Identify areas that can accommodate new residential development, redevelopment, and infill development.		
Action 1: Identify areas for higher density zoning that also encourage protection of remaining open space.	Planning and Community Development, Planning Board	1-2 years
Action 2: Consider areas for compact housing districts, condominiums, duplexes, small single family units on small lots or on land owned in common.	Planning Board, Planning and Community Development	1-2 years
Action 3: Continue to prioritize sewer investment to serve residential neighborhoods with existing need and/or new development potential.	Board of Selectmen, DPW	Ongoing
Action 4: Coordinate housing development with investments in transportation and economic development.	Board of Selectmen, Town Administrator, Planning/ Zoning Board	Ongoing
Goal H-2: Protect the character of residential neighborhoods.		
Objective 2.1 Encourage development that reflects the density and scale of the existing neighborhood.		
Action 1: Establish advisory design guidelines to encourage new development or modifications to existing structures compatible with the neighborhood character.	Planning Board	2-5 years
Action 2: Analyze and refine zoning to align with development patterns that exist in different areas of the Town.	Planning and Community Development, Planning Board	2-5 years
Action 3: Consider a bylaw imposing stronger design standards on structures out of scale with other homes in the neighborhood.	Planning Board, Historic Commission	2-5 years

Objective 2.2	Encourage preservation of the Town's older housing stock and adaptive reuse of existing structures.		
Action 1:	Identify opportunity sites for adaptive reuse.	Planning and Community Development	1-2 years
Action 2:	Encourage reinvestment in established areas and rehabilitation of obsolete structures.	Historical Commission, Planning/Zoning Board	Ongoing
Action 3:	Facilitate rehabilitation and adaptation of existing structures to meet housing needs.	Affordable Housing Trust, Historical Commission	Ongoing
Objective 2.3	Enhance infrastructure to support residential neighborhoods.		
Action 1:	Undertake pedestrian/bicycle network plan to identifying priorities and funding opportunities.	Trails Committee	2-5 years
Action 2:	Consider regulatory incentives to encourage neighborhood infrastructure enhancements in connection with housing development.	Planning Board, Planning and Community Development	5-10 years
Action 3:	Implement the Comprehensive Wastewater Management Plan.	Board of Selectmen, DPW	Ongoing
Action 4:	Promote public and private investment in infrastructure and amenities that support and complement housing and mixed use development.	Planning Board, Board of Selectmen	Ongoing
Action 5:	Consider zoning to allow small scale business serving residential neighborhoods.	Planning Board, Planning and Community Development	2-5 years
Goal H-3:	Foster community partnerships to address housing needs.		
Objective 3.1	Build support for housing policy and investment through civic engagement.		
Action 1:	Build public consensus around and establish locations for housing.	Planning/Zoning Board, Planning and Community Development, Affordable Housing Trust	2-5 years
Action 2:	Incorporate broad public participation in developing zoning strategies to address housing needs.	Planning and Community Development, Planning/Zoning Board	Ongoing
Action 3:	Educate the public about affordable housing and create a dialogue about community needs and objectives.	Affordable Housing Trust, Council on Aging, Veterans' Services, Housing Authority	Ongoing

Objective 3.2	Coordinate available resources to address the need of residents for affordable housing.		
Action 1:	Identify community partners to facilitate development that is affordable.	Affordable Housing Trust	Ongoing
Action 2:	Continue working toward the State mandated goal of 10% of the Town’s housing stock qualify as “affordable”.	Affordable Housing Trust, Board of Selectmen	1-2 years
Action 3:	Continue to support the efforts of the Affordable Housing Trust.	Board of Selectmen, Town Administrator	Ongoing
Objective 3.3	Coordinate public resources with private capital.		
Action 1:	Use Housing Trust funds to leverage housing development projects that provide public benefits.	Affordable Housing Trust	2-5 years
Action 2:	Track affordable housing units with expiring affordability restrictions and pursue opportunities to preserve affordable housing.	Planning and Community Development	Ongoing
Action 3:	Ensure that affordable housing units are monitored for compliance with fair housing and affordability requirements.	Planning and Community Development	Ongoing
Action 4:	Identify opportunities for redevelopment or infill development in the vicinity of proposed train stations and areas with potential sewer capacity.	Planning and Community Development, Planning/Zoning Board	5-10 years

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Transportation, Mobility and Access

Formative Issues for Transportation, Mobility and Access

The Town of Easton faces many of the same transportation challenges typical to suburban communities in Massachusetts. Historically, as the Town moved away from traditional village patterns and transitioned to a “bedroom community”, most connections within the community and to other areas of the region focused almost exclusively on automobile travel. This approach continued through the highest growth periods from the mid to late 20th century. It was a primary influence in shaping the way Easton looks today.

Easton as a community is starting to recognize the need to expand on that one-dimensional approach to transportation in the community. Many factors—some global, some national, some local—are exerting pressure on Easton to identify new mobility options:

- The baby Boomer population is aging. The resulting increase in the population of senior and elderly individuals is causing communities to re-examine mobility challenges for these individuals. These challenges include both ambulatory and vehicular restrictions. It is important to remove mobility hurdles and increase transportation options in order to ensure this aging population, as well as other individuals with mobility issues, maintains a vital connection to the broader community and necessary services.
- Global climate change and fossil fuel dependency, while often controversial issues, have increased awareness of the importance of public transit in suburban communities as a way to reduce carbon emissions associated with individualized vehicular use.
- Recent developments in urban design, including so-called “Complete Streets”, have created innovative design strategies that help pedestrians, bicyclists and motorists share the road more safely.
- Health trends in the U.S., particularly with children have trended downward in recent years and many communities are looking for opportunities to increase physical activity in resident populations.
- The planning for the proposed South Coast Rail shows two potential rail stops in Easton. Should these plans come to fruition, Easton will need to be prepared to mitigate impacts and capitalize on economic opportunities.
- Anticipated reductions in state aid will place a strain on local budgets in Easton, requiring a resourceful approach to maintaining roads, sidewalks and other transportation features.

All of these issues and several others related to transportation, mobility and access were raised in community conversations during the Envision Easton process and a more detailed description of some of these policy drivers is provided below.

1. Roadway and intersection safety are high priorities.

Several dangerous traffic locations were identified by the regional planning commission and by members of the community during the Envision Easton process. Concerns include issues such as motorist sight distance, excessive speeds, and pedestrian crossing safety. These assertions are

borne out in local crash data and through discussions with Town officials. Several intersections are included among the Old Colony Planning Council (OCPC) list of top crash locations, and one intersection was at one time among the state’s list of top 200 crash locations (Five Corners, which was recently reconstructed). Most of these intersections are already controlled by traffic signals, so ongoing safety issues are often related to roadway design or “in and out” traffic at commercial locations.

From a land use perspective, commercial development directly affects traffic volumes and can contribute to safety issues. Vehicle conflicts occur where vehicles are turning and entering. This is especially true in areas where multiple curb cuts are present. The figure below illustrates the principles of “access management” that are used to help mitigate these congested and sometimes dangerous conditions. Areas in Easton like Five Corners or commercial clusters along Washington Street are examples of areas that can benefit greatly from this type of careful design.

Illustration of Access Management Approach for Commercial Development



Access Management refers to the coordination between roadway design and adjacent land development to ensure safe and efficient traffic operations on major arterials and intersections while providing adequate access to abutting land uses. Common techniques include:

- Driveway closure, consolidation, or relocation
- Restricted-movement designs for driveways
- Raised medians that prevent cross-roadway movements and focus turns to key intersections
- Adding auxiliary turn lanes
- Using roundabouts and mini-roundabouts to provide desired access

Source: Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE)

Source: MassDOT Project Development and Design Guide (2006)

2. Traffic circulation needs to be improved in a manner that unifies Easton.

Easton’s preferred location within the region, with easy access to regional highways, generally does not translate into significant congestion issues throughout town, with some exceptions. Delays occur where the capacity of a given roadway or intersection is strained or exceeded. OCPC considers Route 106 and Route 123 within Easton to be congested corridors. Several intersections along Main Street and along Route 138 experience poor levels of service, especially

during evening peak periods. Commuting patterns and future development will continue to create pressures on the Town's roads and intersections.

One ongoing area of concern is related to traffic that will be generated by the Ames Shovel Works development, and additional redevelopment on and around Main Street. Traffic studies completed as part of the project confirm acceptable levels of service on the surrounding road network once the development is complete and fully occupied. However, this project is representative of local concerns about traffic impacts for other potential development and is discussed further in the parking management section.

There is a perceived disconnect between different sections of Easton, in particular North and South Easton. This represents an opportunity to enhance the existing transportation system by creating new connections for other road users, such as pedestrians and bicyclists. More generally, the community expressed demand for both pedestrian and bicycle facilities in neighborhoods, business districts, and in between, which would help to create a more multimodal transportation system. Off-street connections for bicycles and pedestrians, such as multi-use paths are currently lacking between older and recent developments.

At the neighborhood level, a variety of design measures could be considered that would enhance the pedestrian experience and create better connections between areas of interest. Appropriate traffic calming measures, like raised crosswalks, curb extensions, and pedestrian crossing islands can enhance the pedestrian network while improving safety for motor vehicles.

Examples of Interim and Permanent Pedestrian Crossing Treatments



(clockwise from top left: interim median crossing island with paint and bollards; interim curb extension with paint and planters; permanent curb extension on side street; permanent median island with landscaping)

3. Parking management will become critical.

In suburban communities like Easton, one area of “low hanging fruit” related to the improvement of circulation is parking management. Parking is a valuable resource everywhere. This is particularly noticeable in places like North Easton Village where future development will create further demand on this constrained supply of spaces. While limiting future development or increasing the parking supply may help alleviate this pressure, a coordinated parking management strategy would achieve more lasting success for making the most of parking resources. All parking spaces are not equal in terms of demand and value, and a well-developed parking management program recognizes the different needs of business owners and employees, customers, and residents. Short-term parkers need access to parking close to their destination, while long-term parking can be somewhat farther removed. Time limits and costs should be coordinated accordingly to encourage turnover of parking spaces that are in highest demand.

Where appropriate, as is the case in North Easton Village, shared parking and a “park once” approach to make most efficient use of parking spaces should be a goal. On-site parking lots for new development in the village might be discouraged, and instead provided off-site in conveniently located public and/or private lots. Additional locations for these lots should be identified as part of the public process. Excellent pedestrian facilities and wayfinding are essential for connecting these lots with the businesses they serve.

Recent and planned development in the downtown area will continue to put pressure on existing parking resources. While this is the result of positive growth for the community, the parking challenge will need to be addressed. If and when the South Coast Rail project brings a commuter station to North Easton Village, parking demand will increase significantly, adding to the need for a full parking management plan for the area. As each project increases the vibrancy and foot traffic of the downtown area, the associated increase in the number of people who will want to park downtown will increase as well. Ensuring parking is available, convenient and managed will be important to the district's success in the future.

4. There is a desire for additional healthy and non-motorized transportation options.

Walking and biking are part of a complete, multimodal transportation system. Excellent pedestrian and bicycle facilities help support these modes as alternatives to single-occupancy vehicles. Participants in the Envision Easton process expressed a strong desire for making quality walking and biking facilities available for recreation. These facilities would also link neighborhoods to each other and to major attractions, like Borderland State Park. Easton residents showed a strong understanding of the connection between walking, biking and health benefits.¹⁴

Easton has many streets that offer no other safe options for travel beyond automobiles. This is a significant obstacle to healthy and non-motorized transportation alternatives. “Complete Streets” are designed to enable safe access for users of all ages and abilities including pedestrians, motorists, bicyclists, and transit riders. Applying principles of complete street

¹⁴ “Walking and Bicycling – Your Way to Health.” *The Benefits of Physical Activity*. Harvard School of Public Health.

design to existing roadways may be challenging in Easton as many of these right of way areas were established decades ago without any thought for multi-modal travel. However, the Town should remain vigilant in identifying opportunities where simple applications such as asphalt striping can create safer environments for motorists, cyclists and pedestrians. The bicycle and pedestrian working group has already been formed and has begun identifying priorities and potential connections.

Example of a Shared Bike Lane/Right Turn Lane



Source: National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO) Urban Bikeway Design Guide.

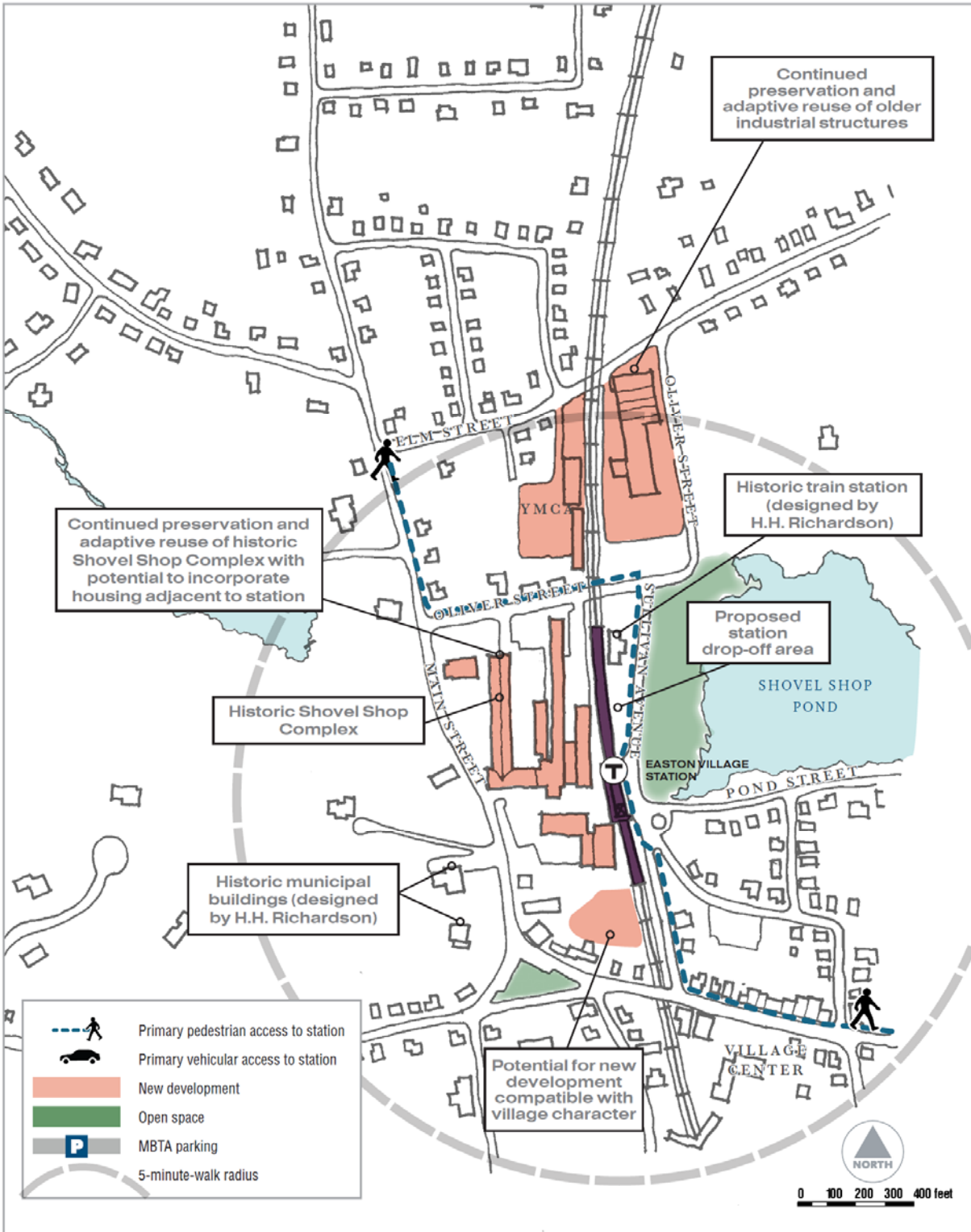
Looking Ahead: Planning for South Coast Rail

The South Coast Rail project is among the largest transportation projects underway in Massachusetts. The project's stated goal is to "more fully meet the existing and future demand for public transportation between Fall River/New Bedford and Boston and to enhance regional mobility, while supporting smart growth planning and development strategies in affected communities."¹ The proposed project alignment connects Boston South Station to Fall River and New Bedford with new rail service, including two proposed stations in Easton. Funding for this project is still pending, but continues to be included among the priority projects for the Commonwealth.

One of the proposed stations, Easton Village, would be located in North Easton Village, east of Main Street and adjacent to the Shovel Shop Complex (see figure next page). A passenger drop-off area is proposed on Sullivan Avenue. Very little dedicated parking is proposed. The second station is proposed on the northern edge of Easton near the Stoughton town line and existing Roche Brothers store and shopping center. A new MBTA parking lot is proposed with access from west of the shopping center.

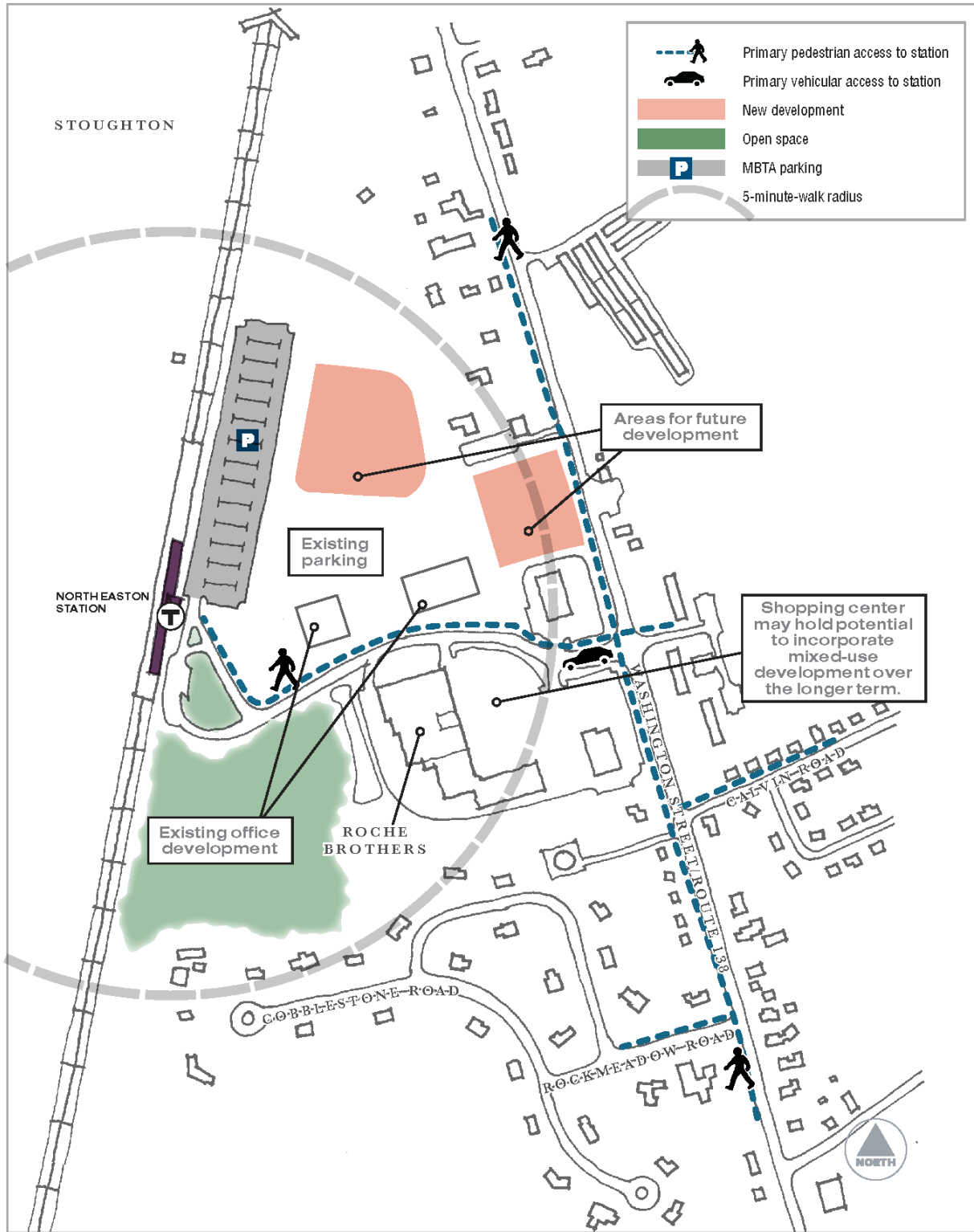
Both stations represent substantial opportunities and challenges for Easton. Chief among concerns expressed by the community are those related to the density of surrounding development, traffic and parking impacts directly associated with the stations, and traffic and safety impacts at railroad crossings. Seen through the lens of the other formative issues for the Town, these issues can be addressed holistically along with capacity improvements, multimodal enhancements, and management programs.

“Easton Village” Station Concept Plan



Source: South Coast Rail Economic Development and Land Use Corridor Plan. Executive Office of Transportation & Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development (2009).

“North Easton” Station Concept Plan



Source: South Coast Rail Economic Development and Land Use Corridor Plan. Executive Office of Transportation & Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development (2009).

5. Roadway maintenance and funding for transportation improvements are essential.

The Town has an ongoing pavement management program, which was approved and initiated in 2012. In 2012, there was a \$20 million backlog in needed repairs. Annual funding at the time was \$500,000 per year, against an annual cost of \$850,000 needed just to maintain the existing road surface rating.

The pavement management program's three-year plan prioritizes repairs based on road surface, traffic volume, construction method, and budget. Current funding levels have increased over the 2012 figures and include \$1 million per year in Chapter 90 (state) funding and \$500,000 in local road funding per year. As of spring 2014 (after the first year of implementation), the current repair backlog is \$16 million of needed repair and maintenance. The pavement management program reduces the backlog of maintenance but also highlights the importance of consistent funding levels to make needed repairs.

An important note on the existing pavement management program is that it only addresses roadway pavement. Sidewalks, curbing, and geometric changes to roadways are not currently included. Maintenance costs for potential improvements of this nature should be considered in coordination with the program. A similar program for sidewalks might also be explored, or integrated with the current program.

The regional Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), which is developed by the Old Colony Planning Council (OCPC) with MassDOT and regional transit authorities, is a four-year plan that lists transportation projects proposed for implementation in the next four fiscal years. The TIP describes project scope and outlines the projected costs and funding sources. Easton has a delegate that represents the community to the OCPC in the TIP development process. Inclusion of local transportation projects on the TIP is a crucial step for construction. Easton has successfully advocated for its projects, and coordination among the Department of Public Works, Department of Planning and Community Development, and OCPC should continue.

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Goals, Objectives and Actions for Transportation, Mobility and Access

	Lead Agency	Time Horizon (1-2 years; 2-5 years; 5-10 years)
Goal TMA-1: A <i>safe</i> transportation system for all users.		
Objective 1.1 Improve dangerous intersections and roadways.		
Action 1: Review, update, and prioritize the previously composed list of Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) high-accident locations. Identify MassDOT improvement projects that address high-accident and congested locations, and actively pursue funding.	Board of Selectmen, DPW, traffic Safety Committee	Ongoing
Action 2: Conduct studies/safety audits to identify and prioritize potential improvements for locations not part of planned projects through MassDOT.	Board of Selectmen, DPW	1-2 years; then ongoing
Action 3: Ensure participation in design of at-grade crossings proposed for SouthCoast Rail reconstruction.	Public Safety, DPW	TBD
Action 4: Identify potential locations for and implement appropriate targeted traffic calming measures.	Public Safety, DPW	Ongoing
Objective 1.2 Ensure that all users and motorists know how to use the road and how to interact with other users.		
Action 1: Review best practices for multimodal education campaigns.	Bike and Pedestrian Working group, Public Safety	5-10 years
Action 2: Create and implement a comprehensive education program that targets users of all ages and modes.	Bike and Pedestrian Working group, Public Safety	5-10 years
Action 3: Implement a school education program on transportation rules and etiquette.	Bike and Pedestrian Working Group, Public Safety	5-10 years
Objective 1.3 Improve pedestrian visibility.		
Action 1: Identify locations for improved lighting and include these locations in future projects.	Public Safety; Planning and Community Development	2-5 years; then ongoing
Action 2: Review pedestrian sign inventory. Identify locations where signage may be warranted such as crosswalks as well as locations where	Bicycle and Pedestrian Working Group, DPW	5-10 years

	signage may be overused and install new signs or remove existing signs as appropriate.		
Goal TMA-2:	A <i>connected</i> transportation system, within Easton and to the region.		
Objective 2.1	Establish connections between major destinations and neighborhoods within Easton.		
Action 1:	Conduct a comprehensive inventory of Town-wide pedestrian and bicycle network and address gaps in connectivity.	Bicycle and Pedestrian Working Group	2-5 years
Action 2:	Develop and implement a signage and wayfinding master plan.	Public Safety, Recreation Commission, School Department, Conservation Commission, Chamber of Commerce, DPW, Public Spaces Committee	2-5 years
Action 3:	Pursue Safe Routes to School program funding.	School Department	Ongoing
Action 4:	Pursue grants to fund trail connections.	Planning and Community Development	Ongoing
Action 5:	Promote connections between residential neighborhoods and local businesses, where appropriate.	Planning and Community Development, Bicycle and Pedestrian Working Group	Ongoing
Action 6:	Initiate a working group to identify potential trails.	Planning and Community Development	1-2 years
Objective 2.2	Accommodate the transportation needs of residents across all age groups and abilities and including non-drivers.		
Action 1:	Identify destinations that do not adequately accommodate non-drivers, and provide access.	Planning and Community Development, Public Safety	Ongoing
Action 2:	Attract taxi service and dial-a-ride shuttle service for the broader	Planning and	2-5 years

	community.	Community Development, Council on Aging	
Action 3:	Identify specific measures to improve transportation services to persons with disabilities and identify funding sources.	Commission on Disabilities, Council on Aging	Ongoing
Goal TMA-3.	A <i>well-maintained</i> transportation system.		
Objective 3.1	Use a diverse array of funding sources to maintain existing infrastructure.		
Action 1:	Coordinate with state and regional planning agencies and MassDOT to investigate and pursue funding.	DPW	Ongoing
Action 2:	Ensure high priority projects are well positioned (shovel ready) to apply for grants as they become available.	Town Administrator	Ongoing
Objective 3.2	Provide timely pavement management.		
Action 1:	Continue pavement management program.	DPW	Ongoing
Action 2:	Obtain funding to “catch up” on current pavement needs.	DPW, Board of Selectmen, Town Administrator	2-5 years
Objective 3.3	Ensure adequate maintenance for all infrastructure improvements.		
Action 1:	Coordinate between Town departments and outside agencies, including state and regional planning agencies and MassDOT, to evaluate project lifecycle costs.	Town Administrator, Town Engineer	Ongoing
Action 2:	Conduct a benefit/cost analysis of infrastructure improvements and consider costs of maintenance alongside capital costs for projects.	Town Administrator, Town Engineer	Ongoing
Action 3:	Assess the Town’s ability to maintain infrastructure and modify resources accordingly.	DPW	Ongoing
Goal TMA-4.	An <i>efficient</i> transportation system.		
Objective 4.1	Improve congested roadways and intersections.		
Action 1:	Explore traffic signal coordination opportunities.	Public Safety	Ongoing
Action 2:	Monitor and maintain pavement markings, signs, and traffic control devices.	Public Safety, DPW	Ongoing
Action 3:	Assess the causes of congestion and take appropriate actions to mitigate.	Public Safety, DPW	Ongoing
Objective 4.2	Consider the connection between transportation needs and land use for future development to manage traffic and parking demand.		
Action 1:	Continue to integrate traffic impact studies and peer reviews of the	Planning Board	1-2 years to codify requirements;

	traffic studies for planned developments.		then ongoing
Action 2:	Assess parking regulations and adopt policies that encourage shared parking where appropriate.	Planning/Zoning Board	2-5 years
Objective 4.3	Manage parking resources to accommodate the needs of residents, commuters, and businesses.		
Action 1:	Ensure that zoning requires adequate parking for new projects (i.e., not too much, not too little).	Planning Board	Ongoing
Action 2:	Conduct parking use and turnover studies within business districts to create a parking management program. Ensure availability of parking for business customers while protecting neighborhood parking.	Planning and Community Development	5-10 years
Goal TMA-5.	A <i>multimodal</i> transportation system.		
Objective 5.1	Adopt a Complete Streets policy that, where appropriate, provides for a variety of transportation choices that meet the needs of all.		
Action 1:	Prepare draft Complete Streets policy for review and adoption.	Planning and Community Development, Public Safety	2-5 years
Action 2:	Integrate Complete Streets when feasible and consistent with community goals.	DPW, Planning and Community Development, Traffic Safety Committee	Ongoing
Action 3:	Monitor performance of all transportation projects to evaluate multimodal benefits and impacts, and to ensure projects meet stated goals.	DPW	Ongoing
Objective 5.2	Increase accommodations for non-motorized modes.		
Action 1:	Inventory sidewalk and curb ramps and plan for improvements.	Commission on Disabilities, DPW, Bike and Pedestrian Working Group	1-2 years
Action 2:	Increase bike amenities such as bike racks, lanes and markings, where appropriate.	Planning and Community Development, DPW, Bike and Pedestrian Working Group	Ongoing
Objective 5.3	Expand public transit service, including local and regional bus		

	transit, in a manner that is consistent with community goals.		
Action 1:	Coordinate with MassDOT, state and regional planning agencies, and adjacent Town plans to establish and enhance connections between key destinations.	Planning and Community Development	Ongoing
Action 2:	Solicit support from legislators as needed to prioritize and implement regional connectivity projects	Board of Selectmen, Town Administrator	Ongoing
Action 3:	Identify gaps in connectivity between modes and implement improvements to improve overall connectivity.	Planning and Community Development	2-5 years
Action 4:	Identify major commuter routes and desired connections through windshield observations and license plate surveys.	Planning and Community Development	5-10 years
Action 5:	Coordinate with area transit systems to expand service in Easton to increase connections between key origins and destinations.	Planning and Community Development	1-2 years
Action 6:	Explore the need for and establish park and ride locations.	Planning and Community Development	1-2 years
Action 7:	Expand connections to commuter rail stations (Stoughton, Sharon, Mansfield, etc.).	Planning and Community Development	2-5 years
Action 8:	Explore ways to reduce parent-dependent vehicle trips for underage population (e.g., after-school employment connections).	Planning and Community Development, School Department	5-10 years
Action 9:	Explore ways to expand accessibility and availability for older residents.	Council on Aging	Ongoing
Objective 5.4	Plan transportation systems that accommodate future commuter rail in a manner that is consistent with other community goals.		
Action 1:	Promote denser mixed-use development around planned rail stations.	Planning and Community Development, Planning/Zoning Board	5-10 years
Action 2:	Mitigate the impacts of the South Coast Rail through actions including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exploring potential for parallel walk/bike path. 	Town Administrator, Planning and Community	Ongoing

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Effectively managing parking around station areas, including enforcement of no parking regulations. 	Development	
Action 3:	<p>Ensure efficient and effective multi-modal access to rail stations, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Safe, attractive sidewalks and pedestrian crossings with adequate lighting and other amenities. Adequate secure, covered bike parking in close proximity to stations. Integrated pick-up/drop-off areas with other needs, such as bus stops. 	Bicycle and Pedestrian Working Group	5-10 years
Goal TMA-6.	An <i>environmentally sustainable</i> transportation system that promotes human health.		
Objective 6.1	Minimize negative impacts on the environment.		
Action 1:	Improve air quality by reducing vehicle congestion.	Green Communities	Ongoing
Action 2:	Consider alternative fuel amenities (e.g., charging stations).	Green Communities	1-2 years
Action 3:	Consider transportation management strategies for larger developments.	Planning and Community Development	Ongoing
Objective 6.2	Educate the public about the benefits of active transportation modes for recreational and short trips, and encourage these activities.		
Action 1:	Review best practices for active transportation promotion from other communities.	Bike and Pedestrian Working Group, Board of Health	1-2 years
Action 2:	Develop and implement an educational campaign with key stakeholders.	Bike and Pedestrian Working Group, Board of Health	2-5 years

COMMUNITY SUPPORT STRUCTURES

Envision Easton was a committee-driven process that relied heavily on input from the community at large to frame the policy areas provided in the Road Map section of the plan. During public discussion, participants were encouraged to think big...to call out what was most important to them and identify strategies and partnerships that can affect positive change. The five policy areas identified in the Road Map section of the plan include many new ideas, or call for innovative strategies that will more boldly advance many of the policy approaches that have been in place for some time. While the need to look forward in this manner and the more visionary ideas that result are extremely important, it is equally important not to lose sight of the basic support structures that make life in Easton so appealing on a day to day basis. While Easton needs to aggressively pursue new approaches to resource protection, housing, and business development, it also needs to replace rooftops, cut grass, transport kids to school, pave and plow roads, and balance its checkbook. The Town has a responsibility to protect the safety of its residents, educate its children, support its wartime veterans, and provide services for people with special needs.

The list of duties that emerges from these responsibilities is lengthy, and the resources required to provide these services is substantial. Easton's local government performs administrative and maintenance activities that directly support environmental protection, economic development, and the continued improvement of overall quality of life. A detailed summary of these municipal functions can be found in the Public Services and Facilities chapter of the Envision Easton Baseline Report.

The Municipal Departments' Goals and Objectives

The Town of Easton, under the leadership of the Town Administrator's office, develops an annual Goals and Objectives document for each municipal department. The departments included in this document are listed in the call out box to the right. At the outset of the Envision Easton process, the heads of municipal departments were interviewed to learn more about daily operations. A review of the FY 2014 Goals and Objectives document confirmed that the core facility and service needs listed in that document reflect the issues identified in the Envision Easton interview process. There are several areas of overlap and consistency between the Road Map section of this plan and the Departments' Goals and Objectives. For example, where the TMA working group identified roadway maintenance as a high priority for the Town (TMA Objective 3.2), the Department of Public Works provides the following subsection in their chapter of the Goals and Objectives document:

Departments in Easton that Develop a Strategic Plan:

- Town Administrator
- Accounting
- Assessor's Office
- Board of Health
- Office of the Town Clerk
- Council on Aging
- Public Works
- Fire Department
- Information Technology
- Inspectional Services
- Planning and Community Development
- Police
- Recreation
- Office of the Treasurer/Collector

“Pavement Management

Another primary goal is to implement the first year of pavement management recommendations. As part of the overall pavement management program, we have developed a three year improvement plan. Following the implementation of the first year we will update the system and generate an update three year plan going forward.”

This level of hands on, highly detailed planning that occurs from one department to another demonstrates there is a strong culture of strategic planning in the local government. This is one of the many reasons Easton continues to thrive.

Planning for School Facilities

Planning for school facilities is performed annually through the School Department. Regular communication throughout the year between the School Department, the Principals at each school, and the Department of Public Works is used to develop a capital budget. This budget is presented each year to Town Meeting for review and approval.

In June 2014 the Town created a *Municipal and School Facilities Assessment*, which assessed needs for these facilities at a much more detailed level than the usual annual process. The report contains a Capital Improvement Plan (CIP), that not only identifies needs, but will serve as the platform for a more robust database-driven process known as “School Dude”. The report describes this initiative as follows:

“The Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) section of this study summarizes the recommendations for each building along with itemized costs. Items noted as building maintenance are compiled into a separate worksheet and that data is imported to the “School Dude” system, a computer data management plan purchased by the Town. The School Dude system is designed to assist in the planning and management of capital and maintenance improvements for both schools and public facilities. In the CIP spreadsheet building needs and recommendations are organized into seven categories: Health, Safety, and Welfare; Code Compliance; Functional Use of the Building; Handicap Accessibility; Maintenance – Extending the Life of the Facility; and Energy Efficiency. Estimated cost of the repairs, replacement, or work noted is developed based on the current cost of the work (today’s dollar value) and the items are given priority in terms of when repairs should occur, immediate (1-2 years), short term (3-5 years) or long term (6-9 years).”

This new platform for assessing and scheduling capital improvements will serve as the primary vehicle for school facilities planning in Easton. Moving forward, the Town should develop a short public education piece that describes the goals of this system and the benefits to the community. Ensuring that staff are adequately trained, data are effectively managed and backed up, and resources are identified for necessary software upgrades will be important to ensure the success of the program.

Envision Easton and Municipal Support for Services and Facilities

As a community-wide master plan, Envision Easton helps to provide a unified voice for the many initiatives that may be occurring in different areas of town or in different municipal departments. During the development process participants acknowledged the quality of the public services and education provided in Easton and broadly support the continuance of these

services. They also recognized these services require both in time and money, and decisions must be made on a regular basis about where to allocate the Town's finite resources. Depending on unique opportunities or challenges that arise outside of the Town's control, it may be necessary to shift priorities from one budget cycle to another. Envision Easton, as a guide for the community, provides assistance in the following ways:

- The plan continually calls for increased levels of dialogue and coordination between departments. Where strategies call for multiple parties to be at the table for implementation, it will be important for the Town to follow through. These parties were identified in the plan because each has a unique perspective on a particular strategy. The Working Groups and the Steering Committee worked on these documents with the underlying belief that this type of collaboration will inspire greater levels of efficiency and innovation.
- The document serves as a single, cohesive reference where residents and officials can quickly review the results of structured and detailed community discussions. For example, the formative issues provided throughout the Road Map chapter explain issues and ideas that truly shape Easton's identity. Taking time to read these in the context of local spending will help to provide a "big picture" understanding of needs throughout the community and potentially help to facilitate equitable distribution of resources. These sections can also be used as educational tools to raise awareness around the importance of individual issues (e.g., open space acquisition, historic preservation, infrastructure investment, housing diversity)
- The Baseline Report can be used to provide useful information to officials and residents when considering specific resource allocations. Information regarding the condition of particular buildings and stresses on existing services was researched in municipal documents and pulled from interviews with highly experienced staff people. This information can also be used as part of public education efforts to create a common understanding of existing needs.

In discussions regarding funding and allocation of municipal resources, Envision Easton should be viewed primarily as a resource, and not as a document that advocates for funding of one initiative or department over another. Those decisions are made through a variety of channels and groups such as Easton's Town Meeting, the Town Administrator, individual department heads and others. It will be important to continually promote this plan as a resource for all of those groups and every resident to facilitate a common understanding of challenging issues in the community.

LAND USE: AN INTEGRATED APPROACH

The Land Use section of any community master plan is where many of the other individual elements come together in a coordinated vision. Strategies related to housing diversity, neighborhood preservation, business development and environmental protection are woven together in a town-wide framework for how land will be used in the years to come. Looking back over the five focus areas through the lens of "land use", a series of maps form a Future Land Use Map for the Town of Easton (Appendix B).

Future Protection and Preservation

As discussed in previous sections of the plan, particularly in Natural Resources and Recreation (page 35), Easton has a rich inventory of natural resource areas that play a vital role in the overall health of the community. Easton also is home to a diverse range of cultural assets as described in the Arts, Culture and Education section of the plan (page 14). From a land use perspective, these resources provide the foundation for protection and preservation town-wide. Re-examining these maps (first presented in the Baseline Report) provides an important framework for land use policy into the future.

Natural Resource Priorities Map

The Natural Resources Priorities Map provided in this section of the plan shows a synthesis of surface water quality and public water supplies (Baseline Report (BR) Map 3), ecological values (BR Map 4), and agricultural resources (BR Map 5). Its purpose is to clearly illustrate the natural systems that need to be preserved largely intact if the function of these systems is to endure. The map also simplifies the graphic complexity of the Baseline Report inventory maps, making it easier to see where these systems are and how they relate to each other. The map is not meant to provide a precise determination of the importance of each parcel, but rather to show the role that each area plays in maintaining healthy natural systems.

Secondary Resource Areas are shown in light green. These represent areas that are important for one or two resources (wetlands, vernal pools, large forest blocks, aquifers, floodplains), but which are not critical to the survival of the underlying ecological or water supply system. They provide important habitat for plants and animals, especially by incorporating large areas of forest dotted by isolated wetlands and vernal pools. They also serve to buffer and connect primary resource areas and include watershed areas that provide recharge to the aquifers. What separates them from the Primary Resource Areas is that if they were lost the underlying functioning of ecosystems and water supplies would be impacted, but not destroyed.

Primary Natural Resource Areas are shown in dark green. These represent areas that have multiple resource values, including wildlife habitat, surface waters, and the aquifers that feed Easton's water supply wells. These include undeveloped areas along rivers, streams and ponds, which have the most importance for both water quality and wildlife habitat. They also include large wetland complexes and upland forest blocks that are immediately adjacent to riparian corridors or which overlap with wellhead protection areas. The aquifers feeding the town's wells tend to follow the same river and stream corridors that are the most important for wildlife habitat. This is fortunate, as it allows for investments in protecting the water supply to also serve in expanding conservation of other resources.

The third category represented on the map (in white) includes areas that are less important to maintaining functioning natural systems. Many of these areas are already developed or otherwise disturbed, or are actively managed for agriculture or recreation in a way that largely precludes any contribution to the ecosystem as a whole. This does not mean that these areas are not important as open space for other reasons—such as historic, visual or recreational value—but their loss would not significantly impair the function of natural systems.

Cultural Resource Priorities Map

The Cultural Resources Priorities Map shows lands that are most important to protecting Easton's historic character and quality of life. These include recognized historic sites and districts, as well as the surrounding cultural landscape of parks, estates, farms and rural roads. Like the natural resource assessment, this map illustrates a system that must be protected as a functional whole to preserve Easton's rich sense of place.

The cultural resource assessment begins with the inventory of cultural and historic resources (BR Map 6), including historic areas mapped on the Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System (MACRIS), historic sites surveyed by the town, and parcels with buildings over 75 years old. It includes the four National Register Districts in North Easton, Furnace Village, Borderlands and Bay Road and more than 500 buildings and historic sites identified on MACRIS. To this basic inventory, the Cultural Resource Priorities Map adds the Cultural Landscapes that surround those individual sites and provide their cultural context. These include Heritage Landscapes identified by the Massachusetts Heritage Landscape Inventory; a local inventory of scenic landscapes; active farmland from the agricultural inventory; and input from participants in the current master planning process.

Cultural Landscapes are linked together by Cultural Corridors. These historic roads are an important part of Easton's history, and they serve an important ongoing purpose of connecting historic sites and districts with scenic routes for walking, driving and bicycling. This system includes the Bay Circuit Trail, a recreational trail linking parks and open spaces from Newburyport to Kingston. In Easton the trail connects cultural landscapes from Borderlands to Furnace Village and Wheaton Farm.

The resulting map illustrates what many residents understand intuitively: Easton's visual and cultural character does not result from any single feature, but from the complex interplay of town centers, historic buildings, rural roads, pastures, orchards and other elements within a unified overall composition. Thus the experience of being in the center of North Easton cannot

Cultural Resources in the Landscape

As described elsewhere in this plan, the term "culture" includes everything associated with the past or present intellectual and artistic life of the town, including education, libraries, the fine and performing arts, history, and tourism. For the purpose of landscape planning, a cultural resource is the physical manifestation of that human culture in the landscape. Buildings, roads, bridges, gardens, estates, farms and other human-made features represent an important record of human achievement. Many are worth preserving to help tell that story for future generations, as well as for their inherent aesthetic value.

A "cultural landscape" refers to an area or corridor that embodies the history and culture of the town. According the National Park Service, this can include historic designed landscapes, like estates, cemeteries, gardens and even roads; places associated with an historical person or event; areas associated with a particular ethnic group; and historic vernacular landscapes – places that evolved over many years through human activity, such as villages, industrial sites and agricultural landscapes.

(<http://www.nps.gov/tps/how-to-preserve/briefs/36-cultural-landscapes.htm>)

be separated from the experience of driving past the old estates, or travelling down the Mulberry Meadow Brook valley through Furnace Village to Wheaton Farm. As with natural ecosystems, if one part of this cultural ecosystem is lost, the entirety of the composition can quickly be degraded.

Protecting Easton's Natural and Cultural Resources

Overlaying the different priority areas onto a single Natural and Cultural Resources Map demonstrates that many of the places that Easton residents value most are rich in both natural and cultural resources. Often following the valleys and brooks that powered the original mills and watered the farmland, these natural and cultural systems are braided together in ways that makes these landscapes particularly interesting and beautiful. They also represent unique conservation opportunities, where preservation of a single parcel could help protect a range of landscape values.

As discussed earlier in the plan, Easton is fortunate to have a history of forward thinking preservation efforts. Many of the Town's natural and cultural resource areas are already protected as town conservation land or with conservation easements. Other areas are permanently protected by the state as part of the Hockomock Swamp or Borderland State Park.

Land in private ownership may also be subject to varying levels of protection. Wetlands, water bodies and floodplains are protected to varying degrees by state and federal wetland protection laws. Cultural sites, buildings and monuments have different levels of protection. For example, buildings that are older than 75 years are subject to the local demolition delay bylaw. This bylaw provides a modest level of protection in that it delays potential demolition of the building in case there is unforeseen opportunity to save the structure.

Temporary protection for some properties is afforded by the state's "Chapter 61" program. This voluntary program provides a tax incentive for property that encourages farms, forest area, or recreation facilities to remain in place. While the program is very successful across Massachusetts and in Easton, it only affords partial protection of these uses. Once a property owner decides to discontinue the use, he or she is free to sell the land to another party who may be more interested in developing residential or commercial use.

The final map, Natural & Cultural Resource Priorities + Protected Open Space, combines the natural and cultural priorities with an overlay of protected open space to highlight those resource areas that are not protected. Natural and cultural priorities are blended together in a single purple shade. Permanently protected open space and other town-owned properties are shown as a grey overlay. Where the purple areas remain visible, they show resources that are potentially at risk. Some of these represent key gaps in otherwise protected stream corridors. Others are parcels that, if protected, would help consolidate large conservation areas, while still others represent critical buffers at the edge of existing conservation blocks.

Current zoning provides for residential or commercial development for every unprotected parcel of land. As described elsewhere in this plan, many areas can and should be developed or redeveloped to their full potential. For important open space resources, however, the Town will

look to employ a variety of tools that can help to protect these areas while honoring the value of individual property rights. These tools are identified in the implementation matrices provided as part of the five focus areas for this plan.

Future Growth and Development

The natural and cultural systems in Easton described above serve as a backdrop for future preservation efforts, but also help to frame future development and growth. As discussed previously in the plan (see Economic Development, page 24; Housing and Neighborhoods, page 50; Transportation, Mobility and Access, page 59) Easton’s historic development patterns and original roadway network continue to guide local land use decisions today. Places like North Easton, Furnace Village and Easton Center still shape the character of the community and inform decisions related to local zoning and infrastructure investment. The roadway configurations of Five Corners and Route 138 (the historic “Taunton Turnpike”) also play a key role in how the Town is looking to plan stronger mixed use “nodes” in the community and strengthen its commercial and industrial corridors.

Using the policy discussions from every focus area in the plan to identify strategies for growth, preservation and protection, this section of the plan provides a town-wide Future land Use Map. This map is a policy document that generally identifies how land use in the future is envisioned across the community. The map is not a regulatory tool, but provides a framework and guide for the community to make decisions. In several cases, the individual categories do not identify a single use for an area, but rather look at how a particular part of Town might function in the future. This is particularly true for historic or emerging “mixed use” areas in the community that can include commercial, residential and open space uses as part of an integrated whole. The following nine future land use designations are included on the map.

Eleemosynary

The Eleemosynary area includes a large cluster of public and institutionally owned land in the eastern part of the Town with most of the land bordered by the rail line to the west, the Town border to the east, Main Street to the north and Belmont Street to the south. A portion of the land extends northward beyond Main Street. The entire area includes Stonehill College, Natural Resources Trust (NRT), land owned by the Water Commission, Easton Cemetery, and the Moreau Hall Elementary School. The Town of Easton considers all of these uses to be \ assets in their current state. Where land is preserved, the Town will continue protection of these open space/cultural lands. Easton continues to see the Moreau School property as an asset and will continue to assist and partner with NRT and Stonehill College in ways that maintain these important partnerships.

Industrial

On the east side of Town, The Easton Industrial Park makes up 200 acres of land along the border of Easton, south of Belmont Street, east of Route 138, and north of Queset Brook. These lands will remain designated for industrial uses that will contribute to local economic development in a way that is compatible with the Town’s character and takes advantage of future wastewater capacity. A recent study of the Industrial Park recognizes the potential economic impact of expansion within the Park, especially with the potential addition of sanitary sewer.

Commercial Industrial Corridor

Two areas are designated as Commercial Industrial Corridor. The first generally runs north/south along Route 138 from the rail line at its northern limits past Route 106 and to the Hockomock Swamp. Historically, despite the commercial zoning in place, this area of the community has not shown the same level of economic activity as other areas designated for commercial use. Challenges related to more transient traffic patterns, lot geometry, and high water tables make development in this area more challenging. On the west side of the Town, commercial industrial land is designated along Route 106 from the town border to what might be considered the edge of Furnace Village. From a long term perspective, Easton looks to invest in these areas through the future installation of a sewer collection system. The designation of “commercial industrial” acknowledges that the Town may look to a broader mix of uses in order to increase the potential market appeal of these areas. While the land south of Route 106 remains in this designation, and will therefore be developable in accordance with the Zoning Bylaw, the Town recognizes the potential conservation value of this area. Easton will continue to look for opportunities to preserve and/or acquire land in this area adjacent to Hockomock Swamp to strengthen protection of this resource.

Mixed Use Node

Two areas of Easton are designated as Mixed Use Nodes for future land use. In both of these areas, Easton recognizes the potential for growth that would contribute positively to the community. The Town will look to facilitate more coordinated mixed-use development here that provides opportunities for both commerce and housing. Design of these areas moving forward should look to improve connectivity between parcels in a way that allows both motorists and pedestrians the opportunity to access numerous establishments in a safe and efficient manner. These areas have the potential to be served by some form of public transportation in the future. Concentrating uses and providing better connections through street design and transit will reinforce these mixed use nodes as potential “destinations”, contributing to both to the local economy and quality of life in the community.

The first area considered as a Mixed Use Node lies generally along Belmont Street and on Washington Street between Belmont and Depot Street. This section of Town already supports a viable collection of business uses. With the recent addition of the Queset Commons development, the Town recognizes efforts to create a small mixed use center through the use of the State’s Chapter 40R program. Adjacent industrial lands and Stonehill College provide centers of activity that will support commerce and a mix of uses into the future. The Wastewater treatment plant currently under construction at Queset Commons will offer wastewater capacity to this area in the near future. Current planning is underway to ensure zoning and infrastructure improvements are coordinated to provide the greatest possible benefit to both the Town and property owners in the area.

To the north, on Route 138 along the border of Stoughton, what is known locally as “the Roche Brothers Plaza” occupies much of what is designated as the second Mixed Use Node. This area has already demonstrated the ability to support healthy levels of commerce and potential future investment in a commuter rail stop could increase its marketability. Easton (coordinating with Stoughton) will continue to carefully consider the ability to expand a mix if uses in this area.

Mixed Use Corridor

Running north/south along Route 138, a Mixed Use Corridor is designated approximately between the Roche Brothers Plaza to the north and Main Street to the south. This unique designation recognizes the specific role played by this stretch of Washington Street with a collection of small-scale businesses that generally provide services to people passing through the area by car. In several instances, former residences have been converted to businesses, which serve to retain the small-scale residential character of this corridor. Easton looks to continue this trend of modest, but positive economic development in the area into the future.

Mixed Use Center

The area identified as Mixed Use Center on the Future Land Use Map encompasses land surrounding what people in Easton refer to as “Five Corners” and “Furnace Village”. While many residents may not readily view this area as a single village, the potential to knit this area together into a more cohesive village does exist. As a commercial center, Five Corners continues to thrive and the Town looks to capitalize on the ability to grow in a way that meets the needs of residents and contributes to the local tax base. Future investment in infrastructure could be leveraged here to better connect Furnace Village to Five Corners, providing opportunities for both residents and business owners to benefit from the increased levels of commerce in the area. As with all areas identified for growth in the community, design of future development will be important to ensure it maintains the distinct character of that area of Town.

Traditional Village

The Traditional Village designation of the Future Land Use Map covers the area surrounding the core of North Easton’s historic land use development. At the heart of this area are the Shovel Works, the Children’s Museum, the Ames Free Library, Oak Ames Memorial Hall, the Rockery, the YMCA, Frothingham Hall, and Main Street. Farther out from the core, traditional neighborhoods, ponds, and several small parks provide a setting that is truly unique. The land use goal for this area is to allow for modest infill development that supports the viability of the core mixed use area and surrounding neighborhoods. Preserving and strengthening the historic elements of the area and providing stronger connections between neighborhoods and the commercial core will be high priorities. The goals for this area will be achieved through a mix of public investment in infrastructure and ongoing private property improvements.

Traditional Neighborhood

Two areas are identified on the Future Land Use Map as Traditional Neighborhoods. These neighborhoods are characterized primarily by single family homes on smaller lots that developed around major transportation routes. Other housing types, including duplexes and small apartment buildings are present, as are limited business uses. Traditional neighborhoods are generally walkable, with sidewalks along most streets. Though few services and amenities are available within the neighborhood itself, these neighborhoods abut commercial centers and/or corridors. Architectural styles vary and mature trees and landscaping are prevalent on both public and private lots.

Easton Center is an area of neighborhood homes characterized primarily by post World War II single-family construction with older homes scattered throughout. The Center Elementary School provides the central organizing feature of the neighborhood and, along with Yardley Rink, provides most of the available recreation and open space. The neighborhood includes

several historically significant elements including 19th century homes and the Town's Civil War memorial.

Eastondale is an area of neighborhood homes characterized primarily by mid-19th to early 20th century conventional single-family construction. This neighborhood historically supported a number of small businesses and was once served by a rail line and then a trolley that provided residents transportation to work in Brockton. A few businesses continue to operate. The Eastondale playground located off Pine Street provides recreation and open space.

Open Space/Residential

The Residential designations on the Future Land Use Map cover the majority of the Town and identify where most of Easton's single-family home development has taken place in recent decades, and where it is likely to continue. New subdivisions and small-scale neighborhood development are most appropriate for these areas. Importantly, this land use designation contains many of Easton's most prominent parks and conservation areas and also much of the land associated with the Town's greenbelt areas as described above. The Town therefore considers open space preservation to be an important ongoing effort in the Residential land use area. Strategic acquisition of lands (through purchase, donation, or other similar means) that would enhance greenbelt connections, fortify stream or wetland buffers, or preserve culturally important lands will be pursued by the Town and/or the Natural Resources Trust (NRT).

The Role of Regulatory Reform in Achieving Future Land Use Goals

To achieve the land use goals articulated for the nine different land use designations, a wide range of tools must be applied. Preservation tools, discussed at length in other sections of the plan, include land acquisition, design guidelines and tax incentives. With regard to growth, the plan discusses the types of investments and incentives that will help to foster and guide growth in a sustainable manner. The use of the Town's Comprehensive Wastewater Management Plan (CWMP), water supply protection, construction of sidewalks and several other similar investments are called for in the plan. Also integral to fostering and guiding growth is maintaining a local regulatory structure that is tailored to the vision for each future land use area.

Easton's Zoning Bylaw was adopted in 1973 and has been continually updated since that time. The chronology of amendments attached to the Zoning Bylaw shows that amendments were successfully passed almost every year since 1981. In some cases, these amendments were minor housekeeping items such as adjustments to individual standards or definitions. In other cases, amendments were substantial, such as the addition of the Queset Smart Growth Overlay District in 2008 or the section allowing Large-Scale Ground Mounted Solar Photovoltaic Installations adopted in 2011. To achieve the land use goals articulated by the Future Land Use Map and associated text, the Zoning Bylaw will need to be continually updated in the coming years.

The details of regulatory changes to come will be developed as the responsible parties identified in this plan begin their work. In some cases, drafting new regulatory provisions could begin right away. For example, there are many parcels throughout the community that are "split" by a zoning district boundary (e.g., part "business" and part "residential"). These parcels may face

unnecessary hurdles trying to gain permit approval for a use that is fully appropriate to the site. As a matter of good housekeeping, the Town may wish to change district boundaries to fit parcels boundaries where appropriate. Other amendments to the Zoning Bylaw may require more thought before new language is drafted, particularly where community engagement will be required to achieve consensus. For example, the “Commercial/Industrial Corridor” area on the Future Land Use Map is zoned primarily as either “Industrial” or “Business” under the current Bylaw. The Future Land Use Map recognizes that the Town could consider a broader range of possible uses here, including both industrial and business uses. This is an example of an issue that should be brought forward for public discussion to gage local opinion and educate the Town as a whole regarding new trends in industrial activity.

Regardless of the order in which amendments are drafted, Envision Easton should be seen as a reference point for potential regulatory reform moving forward. Citizens, municipal officials, and business owners should use this document as either a platform for their own proposals, or as a reference by which to measure proposals from other parties. The Town has already demonstrated the willingness to regularly update the Zoning Bylaw, something many other communities do not have the capacity, vision or political will to attempt. With Envision Easton as a guide, the Town is even more strongly situated to implement local regulatory reform in a way that fosters a more sustainable Easton.

Appendix A: Public Participation Plan, A Working Document for the Steering Committee



PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN

ORIGINAL:

March 26, 2013

AMENDMENTS:

June 4, 2013: Revised title to “Envision Easton”; language regarding the elements of the plan; revised Working Group structure; revised project schedule.

July 30, 2013: Revised Working Group structure to include details on the Transportation, Access and Mobility Working Group.

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Purpose of the Public Participation Plan

The Public Participation Plan (PPP) is the official public involvement document and an integral part of the development of Envision Easton. This plan specifies the Project Team's goals, strategies and techniques to be considered and employed in achieving the goals of the public participation process. The goal of the PPP is to ensure that the process for public engagement is inclusive, sensitive, and responsive to the diverse issues of the stakeholders and the public, and builds upon previous studies and public outreach activities. The document is meant to be both a resource for those actively working on the development of the plan as well as an information source for other stakeholders who are interested in the process.

This document was amended and revised regularly to meet the evolving needs of the project. Final composition of groups and list of stakeholders targeted for interviews changed over the course of the project depending on needs and opportunities. Individuals and groups that contributed to the document are listed in the acknowledgements of the plan document.

B. Goals for Public Participation

Central to public participation is access and inclusiveness. The process must be transparent so the public is educated and informed before plan development, in response to plan development, and at plan adoption and implementation.

The following goals have been developed to establish the general framework for the PPP and explain the Project Team's approach to achieving a meaningful public participation process:

1. Inform and Educate the Public
2. Reach Out and Build Consensus
3. Engage the Public/Encourage Continued Participation
4. Use Input to Shape Policies, Plans, and Programs

II. PROJECT OVERVIEW

A. Overall Goal for Envision Easton

Envision Easton will clearly articulate the vision and goals of the community and provide the Town with a roadmap for accomplishing these items. This Comprehensive Master Plan is a critical step towards establishing innovative and successful policies and practices that will guide Easton to a sustainable future. This Comprehensive Master Plan will replace the existing Master Plan developed in April, 1971. Envision Easton will seek to balance the community's desire for appropriate growth management, protection of natural and cultural resources, community character, and sense of place within the context of property rights and sound fiscal management.

Envision Easton will address the topic areas listed here. Final selection of the plan "Elements" will occur later in the project.

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

III. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN PROCESS AND SCHEDULE

The Project Team seeks to empower and improve opportunities for the public to voice their values, ideas and concerns regarding community planning decisions. The team is committed to ensure early and continuous public involvement throughout all major phases of the project. The following tools and processes will be employed during the public participation process:

- A. Project Awareness** – It is the Project Team's primary goal to make information accessible to the public, as well as provide information that is accurate, understandable and pertinent to community planning. The Project Team will also educate the public about the planning process and provide supportive policy, program and technical information. Educating the public facilitates meaningful public contribution and continued public engagement.

1. Project Website

A project web site has been developed to include all aspects of the Envision Easton process and to provide a repository of information the general public can access relative to background information/research (existing plans, studies and reports), recent presentations (PowerPoint presentations, graphics and meeting minutes), and information on how to get involved and schedule of upcoming events. The site address:

www.envisioneaston.com

2. E-mail Notifications

The use of e-mail notifications will be one way in which the Steering Committee will alert residents and business owners regarding important opportunities related to the project. Announcements for public meetings, the posting of draft products, and other project milestones will be announced through this outlet. The primary mechanism for this will be through the Town Crier e-mail service through the Town of Easton. The Steering Committee will also look to “piggy back” other distribution lists through groups like the Library, Lions, etc.

3. Posters and Fliers

During the course of the project, fliers and posters will be used strategically to draw attention to the website, events, or other project milestones. Posters will be used for two types of “listening posts”: temporary and long-term.

The temporary posters will be used in high traffic areas, such as local supermarkets, and will serve two purposes. The first is to draw attention to a specific event, such as a public forum. The second is to use an informal survey to gather more people to the project network. For the temporary posters, they must be designed so that the essential content can be delivered to a reader in less than one minute. People filling out the survey should be able to do so in less than two minutes. Raffle grocery gift cards will be used in conjunction with the survey to incentivize participation.

A poster designed to sit for the duration of the project will be placed in the library. This poster will contain more information, with readers being able to spend 5-10 minutes perusing the material. An 8.5 x 11 blank space will be placed in this poster where fliers can be taped and switched out as needed.

4. Media Outreach

Local media will be an integrated element to the overall outreach process. Similar to the use of e-mail and posters, local news outlets can be used to draw attention to special events and milestones. Additionally, these outlets can be used to do

more in depth pieces dealing with the overall purpose of the project, what the community expects to achieve, and the key policy objectives that are emerging over the course of the project. Outlets that can be tapped at various points in the project, as determined by the Communications Subcommittee, include:

- The Enterprise (daily news)
- Easton Journal (contact Susan Weinstein)
- The Patch (contact Patrick Maguire)
- The Globe South (contact Steve Hatch)
- The Easton Buzz
- Easton Community Action Television (ECAT)
- WSHL

The consultant team will lead the development of press release material and work with the Communications Subcommittee to determine which members of the Steering Committee, Town staff, or other stakeholders should take part in media outreach (e.g., interviews, etc.)

5. Social Media

The Town's best outlet for social media engagement is through Facebook, as the Town already has a site in place. The Communications Subcommittee will be launching a supplementary Facebook page for the project, which will allow the group to post materials to other users' pages and receive new friends as well. Facebook will be used throughout the project to prepare for and report on public discussion. A member of the Communications Subcommittee will play the lead role in posting material to the Facebook site and developing a network of "friends."

6. Steering Committee Outreach

With all of the different media outlets and technology based tools that can be used to engage the public, one of the most important tools for awareness is still "word of mouth." Over the course of the project, the Steering Committee will continually engage friends, colleagues, businesses and neighbors face-to-face in order to maintain project awareness and to ensure stakeholders continue to access the many outlets available to them.

B. Municipal Interviews

At the outset of the project, the consultant team will conduct a series of interviews with municipal officials, departments and town boards/committees to identify needs, issues, and concerns. Several formats will be used, including personal one-on-one discussions, group interviews, and by telephone. Municipal interviews will serve as a preliminary (qualitative) data-gathering tool to gain insight into

what issues and concerns can be expected when reaching out to the broader public.

The following municipal officials, departments and town boards/committees have been identified for interviews by the consultant team:

1. Economic Development
 - Capital Planning Commission – Frederic MacLennan, Chair
2. Public Services And Facilities
 - Council on Aging – Dolores Kent
 - Information Technology – Michael Deltano, Information Systems Manager
 - Water Division – John Marsh, Operations Manager
 - School Department – Dr. Michael Green, Superintendent
 - Fire Department – Kevin Partridge, Chief
 - Police Department – Allen Krajcik, Chief
 - Ames Free Library – Uma Hiremath, Director
 - DPW – David Field, Director
 - Veteran’s Service Department – John Hogan/Heath Hobson
 - Commission on Disabilities – Robert Coe, Chair
 - Municipal Building Committee – Robert Vatalaro, Chair
3. Transportation/Circulation
 - Fire Department – Kevin Partridge, Chief
 - Police Department – Allen Krajcik, Chief
 - DPW – David Field, Director
4. Housing and Neighborhoods
 - Tax Assessor – Robert Alford
 - Building Inspector – Mark Trivett
 - Council on Aging – Dolores Kent
 - Affordable Housing Trust – Donna Bonia, Chair
 - Community Preservation Act Committee – James Lee, Chair
5. Natural, Historic and Cultural Resources
 - Cultural Council – Christine Junge, Chair
 - Historic Commission – Melanie Deware, Chair
 - Community Preservation Act Committee – James Lee, Chair
6. Open Space and Recreation
 - Conservation Commission – Jonathan Chace, Vice-Chair
 - Agricultural Commission – Ed Hands
 - Recreation Department – Anne Dailey, Program Director

- Community Preservation Act Committee – James Lee, Chair
7. Sustainability
- Green Communities Committee – Adrienne Edwards, Chair

C. Public Meetings

1. First Public Meeting—Fact Sharing and Listening

HW will facilitate the first public meeting to introduce the project. HW will work with municipal staff and the Steering Committee to refine and finalize the approach to this meeting based on staff members’ experience with engagement in the community. Conceptually, the meeting will include approximately 45 minutes of keypad polling to familiarize attendees with some of the more notable facts from the Baseline Report. Breakout sessions will then be facilitated to generate discussion on Economic Development and Housing, Transportation, and Natural/Cultural Resources. In general, the purposes of this first public meeting include:

- Introduce the project and the project team
- Explain the significance of the Master Plan
- Present some of the highlights from the baseline research
- Discuss the potential framework for the Plan
- Solicit feedback on residents’ concerns over specific elements
- Advise the public on how to stay involved

2. Second Public Meeting—Policy Development

Once the Working Groups (see description below) have identified a strong series of formative issues for the community to consider, the consultants will facilitate the second public meeting to present these concepts. Design of the meeting will be determined in consultation with the Steering Committee. The goals of this meeting will include:

- Present the key findings of our analyses
- Present the list of formative issues that will shape each of the elements in the plan
- Solicit feedback on “what’s good”, “what needs improving”, and “ what’s missing”
- Remind attendees of what has been completed in the project and the schedule moving forward

D. Steering Committee

1. Basic Information

a. Overall Charge

The Planning Board, under the requirements of Massachusetts General Law Chapter 41 Section 81D is charged with making a Master Plan for the Town of Easton. Such plans are designed to provide the basis for guidance, coordination and accountability to future decision makers regarding the long term physical development and growth of the community. As such, the Planning Board will request the Board of Selectmen appoint a Master Plan Steering Committee to oversee development of a Comprehensive Master Plan for Easton. This Committee will work under the direction and oversight of the Planning Board throughout the process of developing the Master Plan and will present the Board with drafts of the Plan for review and the final plan for review and adoption.

b. Mission

To build consensus around a comprehensive strategy for Easton's future by engaging public input and directing the process of developing a Comprehensive Master Plan for Easton. The Master Plan Steering Committee will direct the development of Envision Easton working with the Planning and Zoning Board, the Planning Department and the consultant selected to prepare the Master Plan. The Committee shall formally and publically report its activities to the Planning and Zoning Board at least bi-monthly.

Reports shall be made to the Board of Selectmen upon request of the Selectmen or Planning Board.

c. Composition

The Board of Selectmen shall solicit the community for volunteers to serve on the Steering Committee and refer for a recommendation all applications to the Planning Board. The Selectmen and Planning Board shall endeavor to construct a committee that is representative of the community at-large and consists of no more than sixteen (16) members.

In making its recommendation the Planning Board may consider representation from the various elected and volunteer boards that serve the Town, as well as a minimum of four (4) at-large members the purpose of which is to make sure important stakeholder groups are represented. These groups include, but are not limited to the commercial and industrial sector, the non-profit sector, civic organizations, veteran's organizations, and religious organizations that operate in the Town and have a stake in its future.

In addition to holding a seat on the Steering Committee the School Committee may name a student representative to sit as an associate member of the Steering Committee.

All members shall be residents of Easton. The Selectmen may make exceptions to the residency requirement for the four at-large members if suitable Easton residents are unavailable.

Volunteer Committee Chairs, The Town Administrator and Department Heads shall be available to the steering committee as needed in an advisory capacity.

2. Responsibilities

a. Draft Plan

Working with the Master Plan Consultant, the Planning and Zoning Board and the Planning Department staff, produce a draft Master Plan for the Town of Easton for review and approval of the Planning and Zoning Board.

b. Engage Stakeholders

It is important that a broad cross section of the community demographic provide input and comment throughout the process. Stakeholders should be representative of, but certainly not limited to, all age groups, ethnicities, various economic means, religious and secular associations, and family structures.

c. Seek Advice and Counsel

The Steering Committee shall seek out the advice and counsel of elected officials including, but not limited to:

- Board of Selectmen
- Board of Health
- Board of Assessors
- Housing Authority
- School Committee
- Finance Committee

The Steering Committee will seek out the advice and counsel of volunteer Boards and Committees including, but not limited to the following:

- Zoning Board of Appeals
- Affordable Housing Trust
- Conservation Commission

- Historical Commission
- Agricultural Commission
- Cultural Council
- Historical Commission
- Green Communities Committee
- Council on Aging
- Commission on Disabilities
- Cemetery Commission

d. Creating and Maintaining a Process for Plan Development

The Steering Committee, with assistance from municipal staff and its consultant team, has developed

- Establish schedule of public involvement
- Conduct outreach
- Confirm milestones and deliverable due dates
- Ensure work is proceeding on schedule
- Convene from its membership and establishing guidelines for composition of Working Groups to study and report on specific topics
- Identifying obstacles and roadblocks to progress and helping to resolve or escalate as necessary for resolution
- Provide guidance for the creation and reviewing of data, findings, and draft documents and providing comment and input

3. Steering Committee Members

Catherine Adler (Co-Chair)	Gregory Strange (Co-Chair)
Ellen Barlow	Brian Hoffman
Craig Binney	Christopher Kone
Dawn Boynton	Majid Laskkari
Peter Buhl	Walter Mirrione
Keith Graveline	Paul Prew
Patti Groebe	Beth Shapiro
Edmund Hands	

4. Steering Committee Meeting Schedule

Steering Committee meetings are generally scheduled for the 2nd and 4th Wednesday of each month. It is anticipated that this schedule will be adjusted often to accommodate other events such as Working Group meetings, public meetings or other project demands. Meetings will be announced through standard public notification procedures and through the project website.

E. Working Groups/Targeted Stakeholders

1. Working Groups Identified and Membership

Public participation often involves key people, groups, and organizations who are tied closely to municipal and regional decisions through either their profession or area of expertise. The Steering Committee will pursue the development of Working Groups for individual plan elements as well as a subcommittee to deal specifically with communications. The Steering Committee will invite the following groups/individuals to participate in Working Groups:

a. Housing and Neighborhoods Working Group

- Affordable Housing Trust (Dona Bonia – Chair)
- Douglas King Builders, Inc. (Doug King – 40R developer)
- Beacon Communities, LLC (Doug Cohen (Ames Shovel Works development))
- Community Preservation Act Committee (James Lee – Chair)
- Tax Assessor – Robert Alford
- Building Inspector – Mark Trivett
- Council on Aging – Dolores Kent

b. Economic Development Working Group

- Stonehill College (Craig Binney – Community Liaison/Steering Committee member)
- Douglas King Builders, Inc.
- Capital Planning Committee (Frederic MacLennan – Chair)
- Finance Committee (Carol Nestler – Chair)
- Chamber of Commerce (Kerri Nichols – Program Director)
- Old Colony Planning Council (Bruce Hughes - Economic Development / Community Planner)

c. Recreation and Natural Resources Working Group

- Community Preservation Act Committee
- Youth Sports/Fields Committee
- Canoe River Aquifer Advisory Committee (Adrienne Edwards)
- NRT – John Varella

- Friends of Easton Public Gardens (Fred Hammond/Ken Miller – Directors)
- Frothingham Park
- Conservation Commission – Jonathan Chace, Vice-Chair
- Agricultural Commission – Ed Hands
- Recreation Department – Anne Dailey, Program Director
- Community Preservation Act Committee – James Lee, Chair
- Conservation Commission – Jonathan Chace, Vice-Chair

d. Arts, Culture and Education Working Group

- NRT– John Varella
- Easton Historical Society (Frank Meninno – Curator/Caretaker)
- Children’s Museum
- Cultural Council (Christine Junge – Chair)
- Agricultural Commission (Ed Hands)
- Historic Commission – Melanie Deware, Chair
- Cultural District Subcommittee – Carolyn Cole, Chair
- Stonehill College (Craig Binney – Community Liaison/Steering Committee member)
- Ames Free Library (Uma Hiremath – Executive Director)

e. Transportation, Access and Mobility

- Neil Levine
- Bob Mance
- DPW – Highway (Maurice Goulet)
- Planning Board (Peter Deschenes)
- Council on Aging (Darlene Miller)
- YMCA (Greg Wolfe)
- Police Chief (Allen Krajcik)
- DPW Director (David Field)
- Building Inspector (Mark Trivett)
- Fire Department (Jeff Webster)
- Bicyclist (Mark Sferrazza)
- Board of Heath (Jennifer Nichols – Chair)
- Council on Disabilities (Robert Coe - Chair)

f. Communications Subcommittee

- Steering Committee members and Planning Staff: Brian Hoffman, Gary Anderson, Cathy Adler, and Greg Strange

2. Working Group Responsibilities and Involvement

The following roles will be assigned to each Working Group (not including the Communications Subcommittee):

a. Baseline Report Review and Developing Formative Issues

The first product developed by the consultant is the Baseline Report, which is designed to provide a detailed snapshot of existing conditions in Easton as they relate to each Master Plan Element. The Baseline Report will be provided to all of the Working Groups electronically in advance of their first meeting with the consultant team. At the beginning of the first meeting, the consultant team and Working Group will identify areas of the Baseline Report that require amendment. The larger part of the meeting will involve the development of what is identified in the consultants' scope of work as "formative issues."

One of the most critical phases in the project is to identify what the formative issues are for each Element. These are the issues or conditions that will drive the more important and/or the unique policies for the Town. For example, the presence of two designated Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC's) may be a driving policy issue for the Natural and Cultural Resources Element. Similarly, the forthcoming rail service expansion in Easton will likely be seen as a formative issue for the Transportation and Land Use Elements. The consultant team will facilitate a single meeting with each Working Group to generate a list and a shared understanding of each formative issue.

b. Review of Goals and Policies

Once the formative issues are identified for each Element, the consultant team will develop a framework of Goals and Policies that answers to those formative issues. This is the first attempt to draft language for the so-called "Roadmap" document of the Master Plan. Drafts of these Goals and Policies will be delivered to each Working Group in advance of the second meeting with the consultant team, where the document will be reviewed in detail. The revised Goals and Policies framework will then be delivered to the full Steering Committee for review.

c. Development of Implementation Strategies

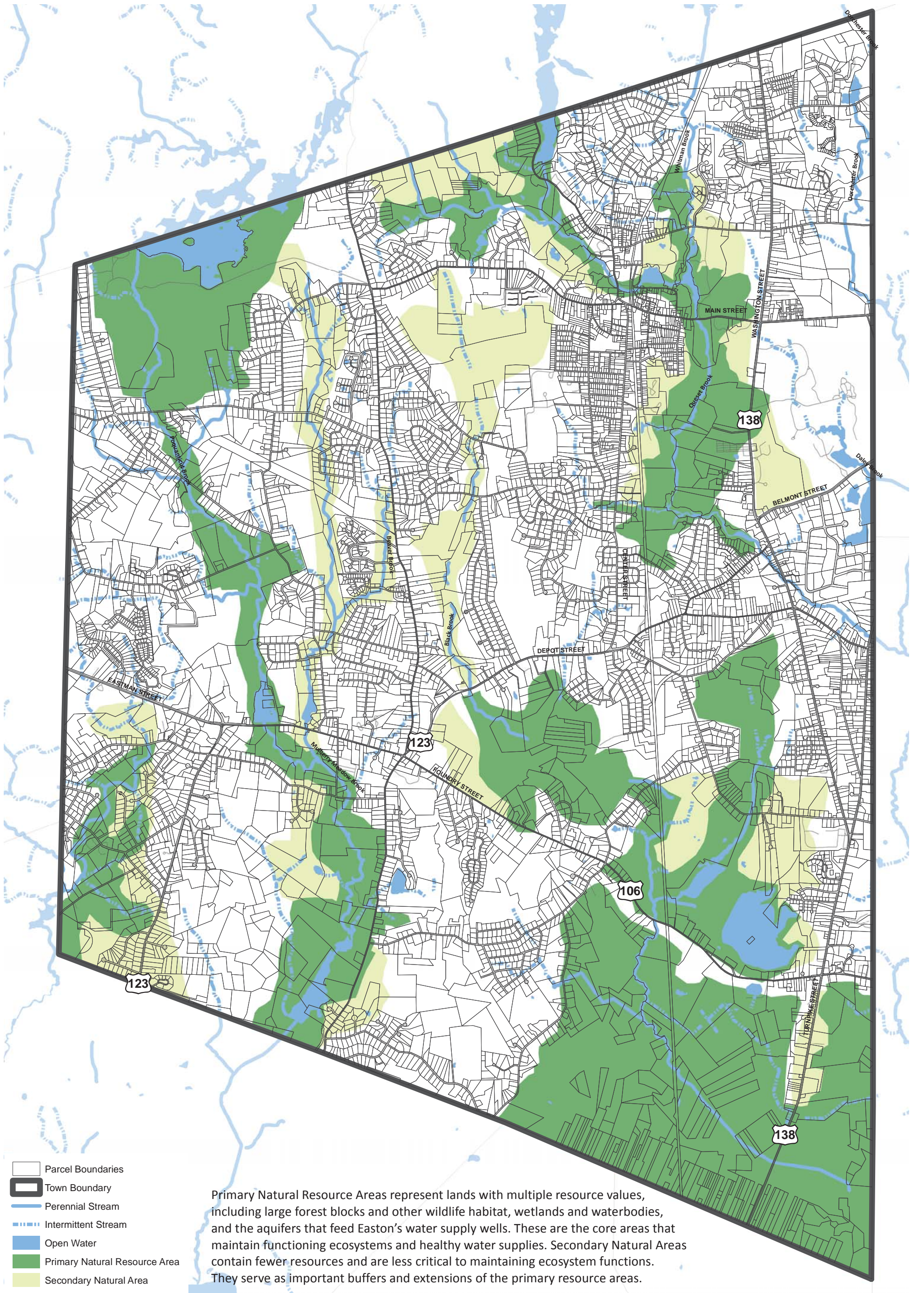
The final step in the Roadmap development, and the final task for each Working Group, is the development of an Implementation Plan. Using the Goals and Policies framework created for each Element of the plan as a guide, the Working Groups will identify short-, medium-, and long-term action items to fully implement the Master Plan.

3. Targeted Stakeholders

The consultant team will be responsible for directly engaging individuals or groups that may not be assigned to a Working Group or municipal interview, but will still provide valuable insight into the plan development. Individuals and groups identified to date include:

- David Colton – Town Administrator
- Lions Club (Lee Williams)
- Easton Women of Today (Lisa Jessick – President)
- Interfaith Council
- Fred Ames

Appendix B: Envision Easton Maps



EASTON, MASSACHUSETTS

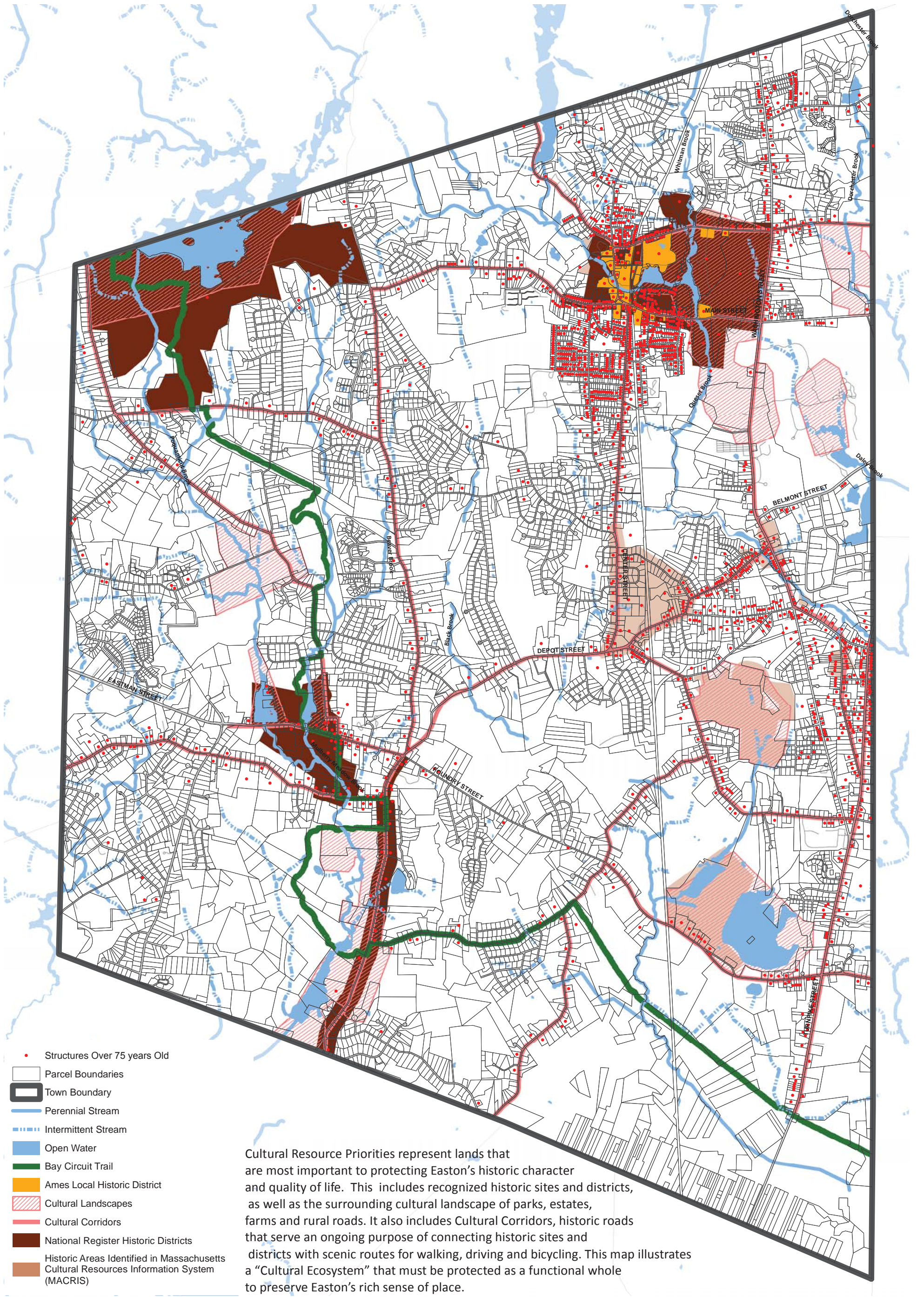
Natural Resource Priorities

Dodson & Flinker
September 10, 2014

Source: Town of Easton and the Office of Geographic and Environmental Information (MassGIS).

SCALE: 1" = 0.25 MILES





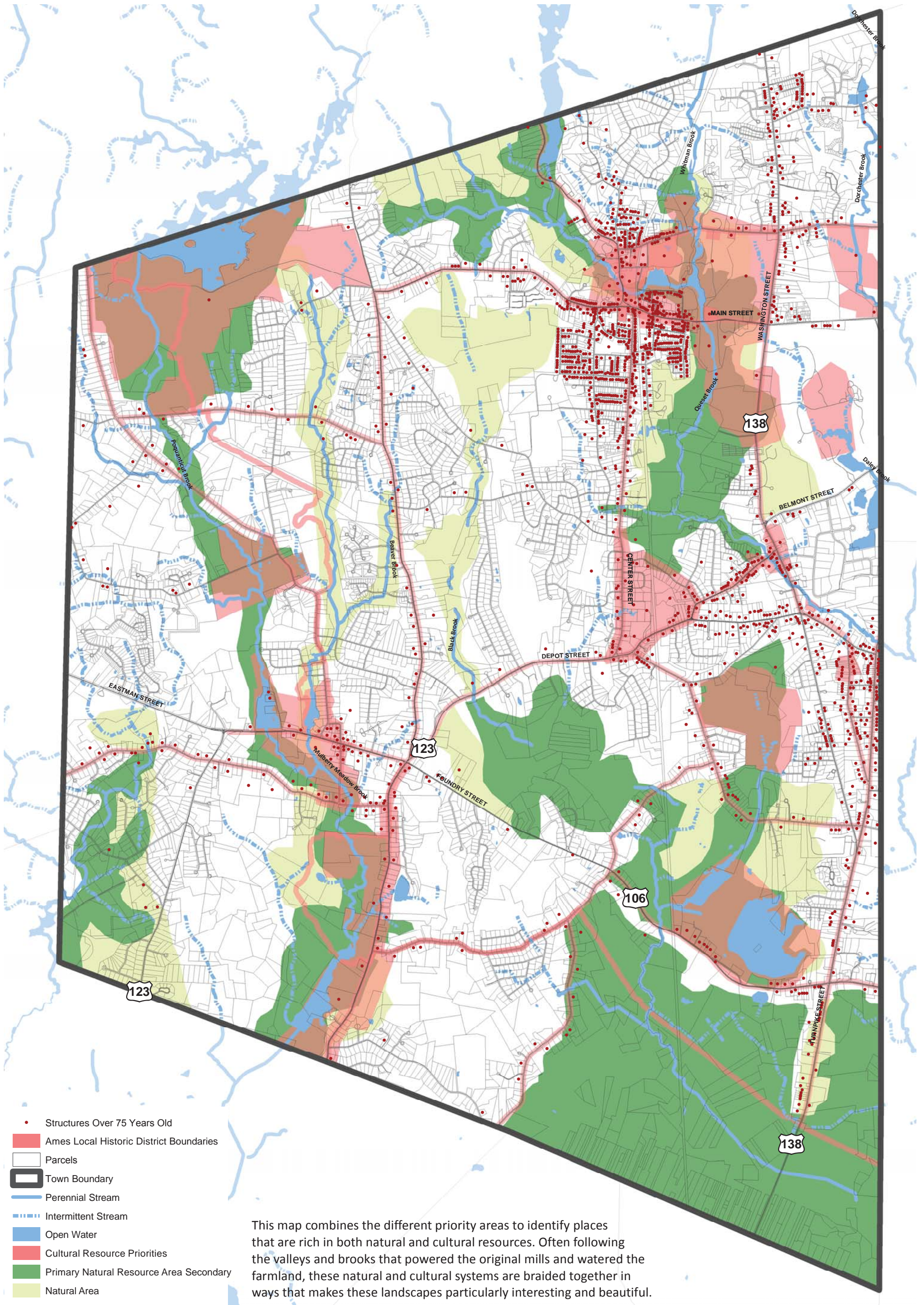
Cultural Resource Priorities represent lands that are most important to protecting Easton’s historic character and quality of life. This includes recognized historic sites and districts, as well as the surrounding cultural landscape of parks, estates, farms and rural roads. It also includes Cultural Corridors, historic roads that serve an ongoing purpose of connecting historic sites and districts with scenic routes for walking, driving and bicycling. This map illustrates a “Cultural Ecosystem” that must be protected as a functional whole to preserve Easton’s rich sense of place.

EASTON, MASSACHUSETTS

Cultural Resource Priorities

Dodson & Flinker
 September 10, 2014

Source: Town of Easton and the Office of Geographic and Environmental Information (MassGIS).
 SCALE: 1" = 0.25 MILES
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EASTON, MASSACHUSETTS

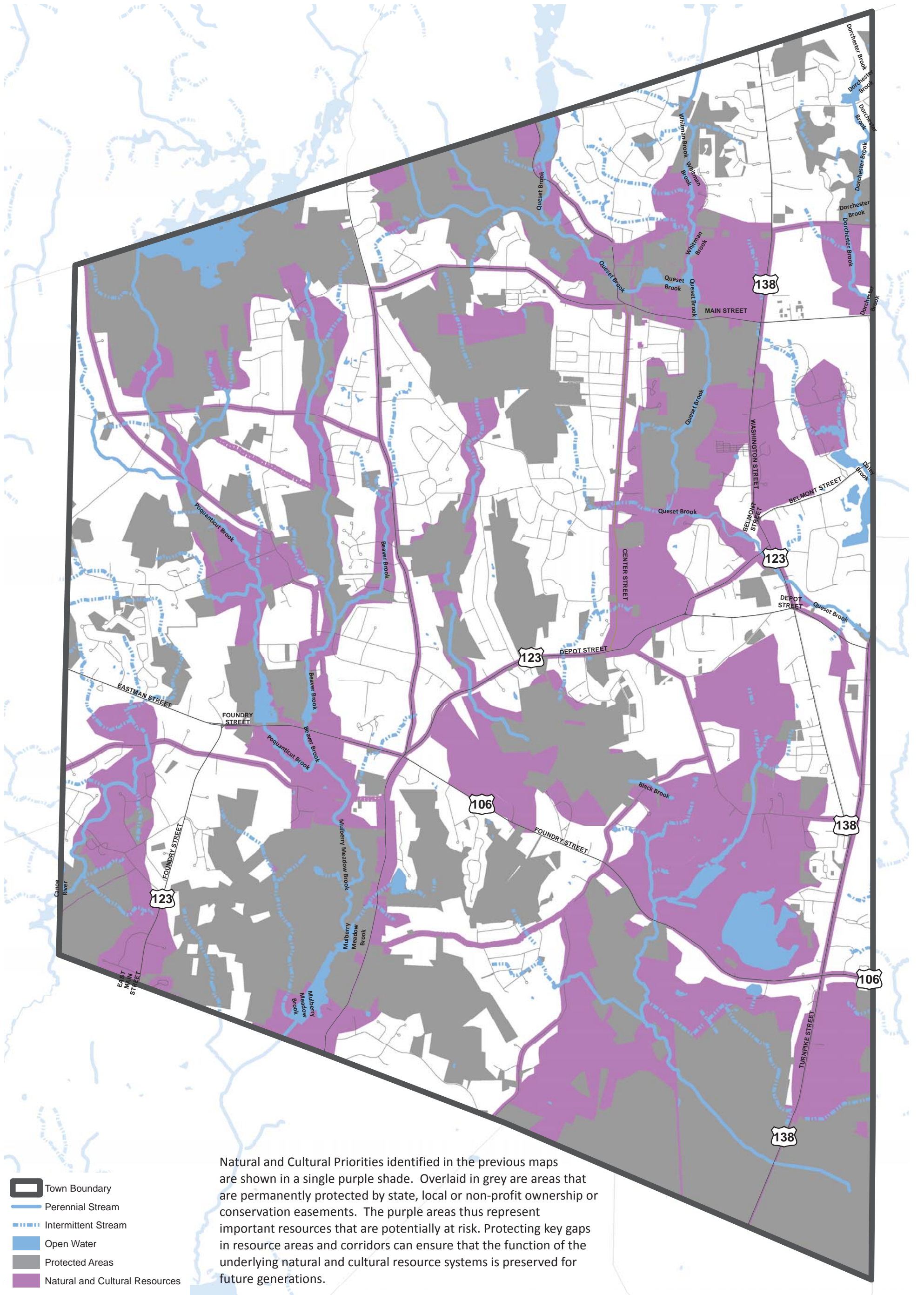
Natural & Cultural Resource Priorities

Dodson & Flinker
September 10, 2014

Source: Town of Easton and the Office of Geographic and Environmental Information (MassGIS).

SCALE: 1" = 0.25 MILES





EASTON, MASSACHUSETTS

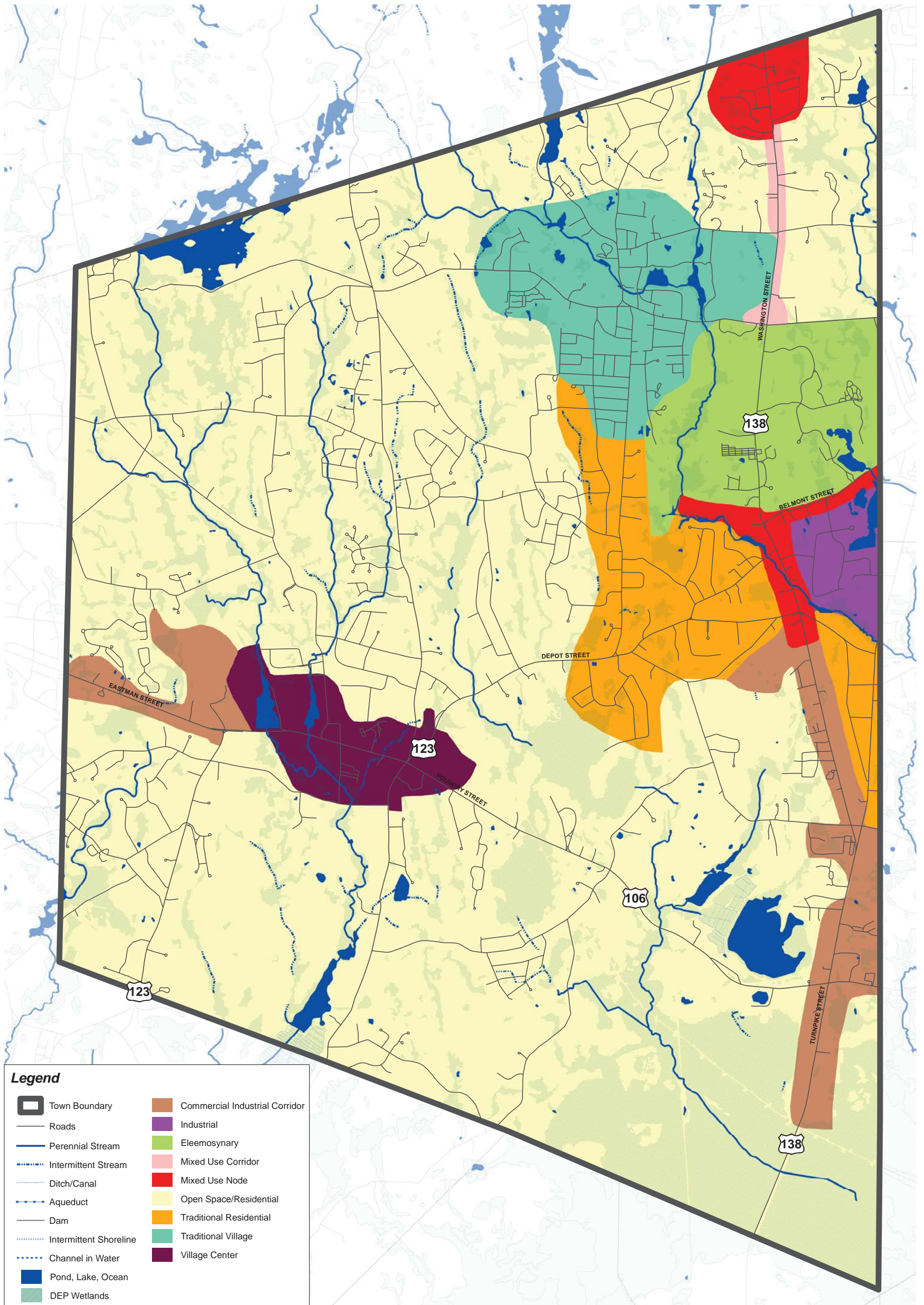
Unprotected Natural & Cultural Resources

Dodson & Flinker
September 10, 2014

Source: Town of Easton and the Office of Geographic and Environmental Information (MassGIS).

SCALE: 1" = 0.25 MILES





EASTON, MASSACHUSETTS

Future Land Use Map

August 12, 2014

Source: Town of Easton and the Office of Geographic and Environmental Information (MassGIS).

SCALE: 1" = 0.25 MILES