



Town of Natick Economic Development Study and Action Plan Task 1 Report



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Introduction

Investment Consulting Associates (ICA) has completed **Task 1: Community and Consulting Team Coordination** for its Targeted Economic Development Study and Action Plan for the Town of Natick. The most successful projects begin with establishing a strong relationship between the consulting team, client, and community stakeholders through which the exchange of data and ideas can occur. To this end, Task 1 consisted of the following deliverables:

- Steering Committee Formation
- Review of Economic Development Reports
- Community Open House Economic Development Table and Notes
- Business Roundtable and Notes

Additionally, ICA has held biweekly conference calls with the Town of Natick to deliver regular updates and progress reports. Beyond the scope of these conference calls, ICA and the Town of Natick have actively engaged in further communication to support project objectives.

Steering Committee Formation

ICA, with guidance and input from the Town of Natick, established a Steering Committee as stipulated in its list of deliverables. This committee was created to guide the overall Targeted Economic Development Action Plan process. The Steering Committee consists of the following persons:

- James Errickson, Director of Community and Economic Development – Town of Natick
- Teresa Evans
- Garry Holmes, President – RW Holmes Realty
- Rick Jennett, Chair, Board of Selectman –Town of Natick
- Douglas Landry, Senior Vice President – VHB
- Christopher Steele, President – ICA North America
- Maeghan Welford, Chief of Staff – Mass Tech Collaborative

Review of Economic Development Reports

The Town of Natick provided ICA with documents for review in order for the team to gain a comprehensive understanding of the Town's past economic development efforts and environment. The documents provided are as follows:

- **When You Center in Natick** – 1950
- **Know Natick** – 1976

- **Natick Center Design Master Plan – 1998**
- **Parking Development Evaluation & Strategies for Natick Center – 2002**
- **Natick 360 Strategic Plan: 2008-2012 – 2008**
- **Natick 360 Strategic Plan: 2008-2012 Executive Summary – 2012**
- **Natick 360: Our Community Yesterday and Today – 2008-2012**
- **Natick 360 Strategic Options – 2007**
- **US Army Natick Soldier Research, Development, and Engineering Center (NSRDEC) – 2009**
- **Route 9 Corridor Study – 2011**
- **Route 9 Smart Growth Plan – 2013**
- **Route 9 Smart Growth Plan: Appendices A, B, & C – 2013**
- **Natick Center Forward Study – 2012**
- **Natick EDSAT Narrative – 2012**
- **Natick EDSAT Printout – 2012**
- **Natick Housing Production Plan – 2012**
- **Downtown Parking Strategy for Natick Town Center: Evaluations and Recommendations – 2013**
- **Natick Center Parking Strategy Presentation – 2013**
- **Parking Advisory Committee: Findings and Recommendations for Board of Selectmen – 2014**
- **MBTA Station Conceptual Design & Implementation Plan – 2014**
- **Natick EDC 2014 Town Meeting Report – 2014**
- **Top 200 Employers of Framingham, MA NECTA Division – 2014**
- **Tax Classification Hearing – 2015**
- **Zoning Map: Town of Natick – 2016**
- **Town of Natick FY - 2017-2021 Capital Improvement Program – 2015**
- **Speen Street/Route 9 Concept**

All of the documents were reviewed and summarized by ICA staff. A summary of each document can be found in Appendix A.

Comprehensive Plan Open House: Economic Development Table

On June 16, 2016, the Town of Natick held a Comprehensive Plan Open House for residents at Natick Commons. ICA operated a table at the event to gain community feedback pertinent to its Targeted Economic Development Study and Action Plan. ICA gathered information from residents regarding areas of opportunity and concern for Natick's future development and on a set of five economic development questions. Notes on identified areas of opportunity and

concern, as well as resident comments on economic development in Natick, can be found in Appendix B.

Natick Business Roundtable

On June 27, 2016, ICA and the Town of Natick held the Natick Business Roundtable at The Verve hotel. Roundtable discussion centered on four main topics: Natick's business assets, obstacles to business and opportunities for improvement, economic development vision, and key competitors. Notes on key points, including general and firm-specific commentary for each topic, can be found in Appendix C.

Next Steps

Having completed Task 1, ICA will launch **Task 2: Baseline Analysis of the Town's Economic Development Position**. The goal of this task is to gain a better understanding of Natick's current economic base, commercial environment, policies and processes, and competitiveness in order to identify the town's opportunities and weaknesses. To this end, this task will consist of:

- Site Analysis of Targeted Districts and Sites
- Analysis of Regulations, Policies and Processes
- Assessment of Economic Development Infrastructure
- Comparative Analysis of Assets as Compared to Competitive Set (Reverse Site Selection Modelling)
- Local Quotient and Shift Share Analysis (Local and Regional Marketplace Trends)
- Opportunity and Match Profiles
- SWOT Analysis and Summary
- Second Community Meeting

Appendix A – Natick Document Review

1950 – When You Center in Natick

Published by the Natick Industrial Council. A pamphlet advocating Natick as a center for industry. It touts Natick's infrastructure (sites, utilities, and transportation routes), labor pool, and regional advantages (airport, port of Boston, education, recreation etc.).

1976 – Know Natick

This document was produced by The League of Women Voters of Natick and provides a broad overview of the town. The book first discusses a brief history of Natick and then details the community, voter information, state and county-level government, town government, planning, land use, and zoning, health, education, public libraries, human services, recreation, and police & fire.

June 1998 – Natick Center Design Master Plan

This document was produced by Goody, Clancy & Associates and Carol R. Johnson Associates for the Natick Center Design Task Force and Natick Center Associates. It is primarily concerned with the design framework of Natick Center. It is mostly concerned with design aesthetics and pedestrian-friendly initiatives. The plan covers the following topics of interest:

- **A. Public Environment**
 - **II – Access:** Main access to Route 9 and Mass Turnpike, as well as commuter rail.
 - **II – Commerce:** Retail accounts for less than 1/5 of floor area in downtown Natick. Banks dominate the center's commercial space.
 - **II – Physical Character:** Main corridors of Natick Center are Main St (a commercial corridor) and East Central Street (a civic corridor). The town has enjoyed the Natick Center Historic District designation since 1977.
 - **II – Reinvestment:** Natick went through a \$29 million investment program of its civic facilities (notably the Morse Library and Municipal Complex), as well as public investment in 4 projects: the North Main Bridge rebuild, Moran park construction, Middlesex Ave improvements, and Route 135 redesign and rebuild. \$6 million of private investment occurred between 1991 and 1997 (The Dolphin restaurant as an example).
 - **II – Byrne McKinney Market Study:** 1997 study done by Byrne McKinney and Associates. Focuses on Natick Center redevelopment of office and retail space, façade, and parking. This is justified by the apparent increase in household incomes at the time.
 - **II – HSA Parking Study:** 53% more parking needed to meet peak parking demand in Center Natick if all building vacancies were filled. Furthermore, if Natick Center went under a full redevelopment, this demand would mean an additional 64% parking would be needed. The study recommended 3 approaches:

- More standardized signage for parking.
 - Enforcement of parking regulations to maximize best possible use of existing parking.
 - Add more parking areas: decks to Middlesex Garage and on the Municipal Complex lot, and a parking along Middlesex Ave, W. Central, and Summer Streets.
- **IV-A-2.** Intersections of Main and Central Streets seen to be excessively wide, discouraging pedestrian crossing. Section 2 and 3 really focus on improving the pedestrian experience.
- Natick struggles to incorporate traffic from Route 27 and Route 135.
 - Suggested burying utilities underground in Natick Center.
- **IV-A-4.** Expresses a desire to build a commuter parking garage behind Natick’s Municipal Complex. Also precludes to considering Middlesex avenue (which is proposed in the June 2014 Parking Advisory Committee document).

September 2002 – Parking Development Evaluation and Strategies for Natick Center

This document was produced by Abramson & Associates, Walker Parking Consultants, Philip B. Herr & Associates, and The Cecil Group for Natick Center Associates and the Town of Natick to facilitate the development of a future parking plan for Natick Center by identifying various parking strategies for Natick’s municipally-owned parking facilities and their respective implications. The report:

- Focused on scenarios for the future development of Middlesex Deck and the South Avenue lot after an evaluation of Natick’s four municipally-owned parking facilities in the Center.
- Explores many programming, design, and financing options for the two parking sites. This included scenarios involving parking only financed by the private sector, the public sector, or both, scenarios involving mixed-used development with costs of additional off-site parking shared or borne entirely by the private sector, and scenarios involving extending site footprints. All options were driven by an assessment of parking requirements to meet existing needs (currently served and underserved demand) and to support new demand from the development of new/rehabilitated office space in the mixed-use zone north of Route 135. These alternatives can be found in table form on page 7 and in a table between page 12 and 13.
- Targeted additional parking supply sufficient to support 60,000-80,000 SF of additional occupied office space and assumed a parking ratio of 3 spaces per 1000 SF of office space. The report determined that the South Avenue Lot was not well located to support the parking that would result from new/rehabilitated office development.
- Finds that Middlesex Deck is an appropriate site for a new parking deck that would significantly increase parking supply available to present and future office workers.
- Finds that the South Avenue Lot is an appropriate site for a parking deck that could be developed in conjunction with a mixed-use component – potentially a residential project. The

site would be the preferred location for the development of additional commuter parking, if undertaken.

Natick 360: Our Community Yesterday and Today

The Phase 1 study for Natick 360 prepared by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council. The report provides extensive data pertaining to Economic Development, such as demographics, geography, economics, traffic and transportation.

- **Geo-physical and Regional Setting**

- Sits along the Mass Turnpike 18 miles west of Boston. Has large ponds and reservoirs, as well as the Charles River.
- Natick consumes water within its own municipal level water supply, staying well within its limit of 5.63 million gallons per day.
- Major routes: 135, 27, 16, and 9. I-90 connects Natick to I-495 and I-95
- 2 commuter rail stations: Natick Center and Natick West. Access to Boston and Worcester.

- **Population and Housing**

- *Ageing population* and decreasing household size. Single family units in high demand but most of town's stock is pre-1960.
- 1/3 of households have 80% less the regional median income – lots of qualifications for low-income housing. Housing affordable relative to the region. Vacancy rates for Natick are low (2.2% compared to 9.1%), which could mean a shortage that could discourage labor markets. There is a massive gap in Chapter 40B housing units (619 short of the needed 1337).
- Population growth rate expect to slow to about 2%. Ages 20-34 (the prime group for young professionals) has been declining dramatically. The 35-54 age group is also expected to decline. (see page 14). The Town is an aging population.
- 90% white. Total foreign born increasing (increasing diversity).

- **Commerce and Economy**

- Labor force has decreased 5% since 2000, while jobs available in Natick has remained relatively steady (as of 2005). However, the ratio of jobs to available workers is the worst it has been since 1990. Nevertheless, Natick's unemployment rate is historically less than the metro area.
- Natick's economy is heavily involved in management and professional fields as a result of its highly educated workforce. Trade and services jobs dominate the makeup of Natick's job sectors (Figure 28). Manufacturing jobs equal in number to government jobs.

- 1) Retail (5,662 jobs).
 - Natick has the densest area of retail in MA created by Route 9, Route 30, and Speen Street (the “Golden Triangle”).
- 2) Professional and Technical services (2,939 jobs).
- 3) Health Care (2,616).
- Top employers (Figure 29):
 - 1) US Army (US Army Soldier Systems Center)
 - 2) Metrowest Medical Healthcare
 - 3) MathWorks
 - 4) Boston Scientific
 - 5) BJ’s Wholesale
- **Government and Finances**
 - Town Meeting style of government. See Figure 31 for its structure.
 - \$93 million budget. Expenses surpassed revenues in 2005 (**largely in part due to rapidly increasing cost of healthcare insurance, a mandatory cost**).
 - Revenues
 - 73.20% Property Tax
 - 13.50% Local Receipts (trash, school bus, other service fees)
 - 13.30% State Aid
 - **PROPOSITION 2.5** – “Proposition 2 ½ sets a maximum tax rate of 2.5 percent of assessed value (\$25 per \$1,000), limits the levy to no more than 2.5 percent of a community’s assessed value, and limits the growth of the levy to no more than 2.5 percent per year regardless of the growth in assessed value. New growth is not counted in the levy limit in its first year. After that it becomes a permanent part of the levy limit base, leading to a compounding effect as the levy limit is increased annually by 2.5 percent. Hence, new growth becomes one of the few remaining options to increase revenues.” (Page 43)
 - **Only 1%** of Natick’s Property Tax base CIP value comes from Industrial Properties.
 - Expansion of the Natick Mall will help add to the commercial tax base of Natick.
 - Expenditures
 - 3 main mandatory cost items: Health Insurance, Debt Service, and Retirement.
 - Schools are the largest portion of the operating budget, at 43%.
- **Physical Plan and Zoning**

- Referencing Map 3 on Page 50, 93% of Natick is zoned for residential development. But 33 of these acres are downtown Mixed Use (having commercial elements).
- 1400 acres undeveloped. 98% of it is in a residential zone, leaving only 455,000 sqft of potential commercial/office/industrial use space based on current zoning.
- Commercial development still moves forward in Natick in the form of redevelopment (example: Natick Mall).
- Residential development proposed or approved projects: downtown revitalization in the HOOP District. A Chapter 40B development never the Cloverleaf development, and two Chapter 40B developments (Hunter's Woods and South Natick Hills) in southern Natick.
- Changes in Zoning
 - Housing Overlay Option Plan – converts industrial property to residential zoning intended for persons of low to moderate income. Attention to public spaces must be incorporated in the design. It is more proactive than 40B and is for citizens with even less affordability. **HOOP was done to increase population density, create economic revitalization and bring 40B under the Town's control.**
 - Zoning for single family units creates more traffic. So the Town is exploring connecting sidewalks with trails to create more walkability.
- **Traffic and Transportation**
 - Most Natick residents work in either Natick or Boston. Their commutes are typically 45 minutes or less (see Figure 51). More people are now commuting from outside the MAPC as well as working outside the MAPC than 10 years ago. The vast majority take the car to work, while under 10% use public transportation.
 - Transit - the MBTA commuter rail has two stations. Natick Center to South Station Boston = 33/36 min. Natick West to South Station = 38/41 minutes. Ridership counts can be seen in Figure 53, page 65.
 - Traffic – on Route 9, an average daily volume of +50,000. On Speen Street, +30,000. Routes 27, 135, and 16 enjoy less traffic. But congestion is poor on Route 9 and 135 during peak hours. Route 9 also has the most accidents (see figure 55, page 67).
- Page 71 identifies resources and external funding opportunities.

Natick 360 Strategic Options: June 8-10, 2007

This Town workshop took place at Kennedy Middle School with the aim of identifying Strategic Options for the town, which would then be narrowed down into concise goals for the Strategic Plan. The document contains the unanimously agreed upon Value and Vision Statements. It then contains a Budget and Finance message by the Town Administrator of the time (Ms. Martha White), outlining how budget constraints were a reality, leaving some to consider a Proposition 2 ½ Override election.

7 General Strategic Options were identified, with 29 sub-options:

- Continuous improvement of Public Education
- Increasing Civic Engagement and Leadership
- Improving Natick’s Environment, Health and Safety
- Enlivening Natick Center
- Improving the Town’s Infrastructure and Transportation Options
- Planning for Change and Managing Growth
- Town Financing Strategies

Natick 360 Strategic Plan: 2008-2012 Executive Summary

This document was produced to summarize the Natick 360 Strategic Plan and its process. The planning process began in 2006 after approval by Town Meeting. It was sponsored by **5** main groups: **Board of Selectmen, Conservation Commission, Finance Committee, Planning Board, and School Committee.** The process went through 4 phases:

- **PHASE 1:** Our Community Yesterday and Today – a published study that will be summarized below as a separate document.
- **PHASE 2:** Our Shared Values and Vision – a summary of the values and vision of the community through citizen input at a Town meeting titled “Vision for the Future.”
- **PHASE 3:** Our Strategic Options – a series of meetings and workshops which produced strategic options for addressing Natick’s key issues. (A document on this phase will be reviewed as well)
- **PHASE 4:** Our Strategic Choices – Strategic choices were narrowed down to 12 actionable goals. Done initially by a 2007 “Strategic Choice” meeting where citizens participated. Then the 5 sponsoring entities narrowed it down further.
- This document summarized the Shared Values and Vision, the Strategic Goals, and details the planning process.
- Consulting Partners for Natick 360 were the Metropolitan Area Planning Council, Blackerby Associates, Inc., and ETC Institute.

Natick 360 Strategic Plan: 2008-2012

The Natick 360 Strategic Plan: 2008-2012 was completed on March 31, 2008. It is a result of the 4 other planning documents’ findings (Our Community: Yesterday and Today, Strategic Options, and the Executive Summary).

- The Value and Vision statements can be found on page 2 of the final plan.

- 12 Strategic goals were identified:
 - Assure short-term and long-term financial stability of the Town in order to sustain the services required and desired by the community.
 - Ensure that people are well-informed about what the Town is doing, so that people vote and participate in Town boards and committees.
 - Maintain public safety commensurate with growth and change.
 - Proactively plan for new development appropriate for neighborhoods and the community.
 - Improve educational quality, opportunities and outcomes for each student, regardless of age or ability.
 - Develop and implement a plan for extraordinary capital projects.
 - Develop a comprehensive system for maintaining and improving public facilities, infrastructure, and ordinary capital requirements.
 - Improve traffic flows and minimize the impact of traffic on the Town.
 - Encourage Natick's transition to an environmentally sustainable community.
 - Attract and retain businesses providing high-quality jobs.
 - Promote, foster and enable an economically, socially and culturally vibrant and diverse Natick Center.
 - Address the intellectual, physical and social needs of all Natick residents.
- Each Strategic Goal has specific **Action Items**, assigned to the responsibility of the following groups:
 - Board of Selectmen
 - Conservation Commission
 - Finance Committee
 - Planning Board
 - School Committee

2011 & 2013 – Route 9 Corridor Study and Smart Growth Plan

These two documents were produced by MetroWest Regional Collaborative and the Metropolitan Area Planning Council for the towns of Natick, Framingham, Wellesley, and Southborough to outline various strategies and make recommendations regarding the future development of the Route 9 MetroWest corridor.

Key findings from the Corridor Study (2011) include:

- Phase one analysis (“build-out”) showed that there is potential for significant future development along Route 9 under existing zoning conditions. However, the total amount of potential growth would result in traffic that would overwhelm Route 9’s capacity.
- The scenario from phase two analysis (“community test”), which involved changes to current land use/zoning and development density, still achieved significant development potential commercially and residentially while reducing the overall associated traffic in the corridor compared to phase one. This traffic reduction relied on converting a considerable amount of SOV trips to non-SOV trips.
- Build out: 88% increase in commercial SF + additional ~3000 housing units with 40% increase in SOV traffic.
- Community test: 61% increase in commercial SF + additional 945 housing units with 16% increase in SOV traffic.

Key points from the Smart Growth Plan (2013) include:

- *This report is a more detailed study of what the implementation of the corridor study’s recommendations – namely future development along Route 9 involving mixed-use, compact walkable developments, and an improved non-SOV environment to mitigate traffic – would entail.*
- The report selects three key opportunity areas along the Route 9 corridor: Fayville Village of Southborough, Framingham Center, and Natick Mall/Shopper’s World area known as the “Golden Triangle” on the Natick-Framingham line. Conceptual design plans/visualizations were developed for each area based on development recommendations from the corridor study, smart growth principles, and public meeting feedback.
- Designs for each opportunity area involved mixed use, higher density/compact housing, pedestrian-oriented streetscapes, transportation improvements (to advance more connected environment, denser development, interior linkages between parcels) and public transit/walking/bike lanes. Design concept images begin on page 18. More specific transformation improvement recommendations for all opportunity areas begins on page 31.
- Ensuring smart growth in these opportunity areas will rely on well-defined design criteria and new zoning in addition to transportation improvements: specific recommendations for both categories begin on page 35.

2013 – Smart Growth Plan Appendices A & B

These appendices accompany the 2013 Smart Growth Plan.

- Appendix A is a series of images detailing case studies of smart growth in other parts of the country.
- Appendix B are the keypad results to questions about smart growth concepts asked at the Route 9 Smart Growth Public Meeting in May 2012.
- Appendix C – Guidelines for Pedestrian and Bicycle Environments: This plan was developed by MetroWest for the “MetroWest Moves” Community Transformation Grant given to the Towns of Framingham, Hudson, and Marlborough. Although this does not apply to Natick, perhaps some of the tactics could be coopted by Natick Center.

2012 – Natick EDSAT Narrative

This document was produced by Northeastern University’s Dukakis Center and the National League of Cities for the Town of Natick and highlights the town’s primary strengths and weaknesses for economic development. The report finds:

- Strengths among Very Important Location Factors: workforce composition, labor, fast track permits
- Strengths among Important Location Factors: public transit, quality of available space, crime, local schools, amenities at sites
- Strengths among Less Important Location Factors: rail, proximity to universities and research
- Weaknesses among Very Important Location Factors: timeliness of approvals, rents, parking
- Weaknesses among Important Location Factors: critical mass firms, predictable permits, business incentives, citizen participation, housing, land (space) → sites available (list), cross marketing
- Weaknesses among Less Important Location Factors: website

Natick EDSAT Printout – 2012

This document was completed by the Town of Natick using a self-assessment tool from the Dukakis Center for Urban and Regional Policy at Northeastern University and the National League of Cities Center for Research and Innovation. An accompanying EDSAT Narrative can also be used to provide a synthesized result of the survey. Here are some key results:

- Natick scored poorly on Highway Access for commercial, industry/manufacturing, and office.
- Its Public Transportation assessment was strong.
- It’s parking resources were weak relative to Natick’s comparison group.
- Natick was average in the Traffic, Airport, Rail and Business Services self-assessment.
- Natick was weak in its assessment of Critical Mass Firms.
- Natick is strong in Proximity to Universities and Research (given the Greater Boston Area).
- The cost per kilowatt hour is considered high compared to Natick’s comparison group.
- Rents for manufacturing, retail, and office space are considered high (weak in comparison to peers).
- The quality of Natick’s sites is strong, considering a low percentage of sites are brownfield sites. However, pertaining to the availability of sites, Natick is average.
- Unfortunately, Natick lack’s large parcels for industrial and commercial development (>5 acres)
- The Natick workforce was assessed as adequate to strong, as well as its labor costs.

- Natick could stand to improve on its citizen participation process, given that abutters and neighbors seem to slow permitting processes.
- Housing costs are high compared to peers.
- Schools are above average.
- Natick is strong in State incentives that could be applied.

2012 – Natick Housing Production Plan

This document was produced by LDS Consulting Group for the Town of Natick to identify the supply and demand for affordable housing in Natick and to provide a strategic plan to assist the town in determining how it should best direct and leverage its resources to meet affordable housing needs. Key points from the report include:

- There has been a consistent increase in the number of housing units in Natick over the last two decades, but at a rate slower than housing growth on the county and state level. The housing stock continues to lack diversity: more than 70% of homes are single family and ownership units. There are few rental options, especially for lower-income individuals. In 2010, 5.1% of housing units were vacant, which may indicate a housing supply shortage. Housing values and real estate tax bills have been increasing overall since 2000, making it increasingly difficult for lower-income individuals to remain in Natick.
- The town has exceeded the 10% SHI affordable housing threshold, the state’s goal. Natick has a wide range of tools but a limited amount of funding sources to preserve and create affordable housing in the community. Overall, the town needs a greater variety of housing choices for residents and therefore other sources of revenue to fund such projects.
- There are 815 actual affordable housing units in Natick (differs from SHI count). The Natick Housing Authority manages 429 housing units with significant wait times and other challenges due to constrained funding and aging buildings. More affordable rental units are expected with the building of two new developments; all developments report high occupancy and high demand for affordable units.
- There is a gap of roughly \$250,000 between what is affordable to a low-income family of four earning 80% of AMI and the average sale price of such a home in Natick. Market rents are also out of reach for low-income residents.
- The vast majority of stakeholder individuals and organizations interviewed believed more affordable housing is needed in Natick, especially for families and one-parent households.
- There is significant demand multi-family units at the 50% and 80% AMI levels. The report suggests that the greatest need is for affordable rental housing. If there is a desire for additional homeownership units, the report suggests they be single-family homes and not for households earning significantly below 70% AMI.
- Constraints to affordable development include: public transportation, parking & traffic issues
- The Town should work towards a specific set of affordable housing goals:
 - Preserve existing affordable homeownership and rental units

- Increase the supply of affordable rental housing for very low-income (<50% AMI) and low-income (50%-80% AMI) families
- Increase the supply of affordable rental housing for very low-income (<50% AMI) seniors
- Provide low-income seniors with housing options that include supportive services (i.e. assisted living facilities)
- Increase affordable homeownership opportunities for low-income (<80% AMI), firsttime homebuyers.
- Increase housing and support opportunities for special needs populations such as battered women, developmentally disabled persons, survivors of traumatic brain injury, veterans or formerly homeless persons.
- Identify additional sources of funding for affordable developments.
- To meet these housing goals, the study suggests a number of implementation strategies in the areas of education and capacity building, zoning and planning, preservation, and housing production. A summary of these points can be found on page 15-16.

2012 – Natick Center Forward Study

This document details findings from the Natick Center Forward event held by the Town of Natick and Natick Center Associates to elicit public input as a part of the larger planning and development process for Natick Center. Key findings based on consensus within the participant groups included:

- Mobility
 - Like: Natick Center accessibility by foot, car, bike and transit, walkability of Natick Center
 - Dislike: Lack of parking, unsafe pedestrian conditions, volume/congestion of car traffic
 - For future development: create more parking distributed throughout the center
- Arts, culture, and community
 - Like: Arts and cultural attractions (particularly TCAN), Morse library and associated events, Town Common and associated events, strong sense of community
 - Dislike: No consensus issues
 - For future development: more public art, future institutional development
- Residential
 - Like/Dislike: No consensus issues
 - For future development: more housing to support diverse community needs, better utilization of existing buildings, no strong preferences for the types of development that could accompany a garage, many strong opinions against further residential development downtown
- Form and function
 - Like: Scale, appearance, character, architecture, “small town” appearance
 - Dislike: Lack of architectural continuity, uninviting streetscapes
 - For future development: More inviting/exciting streetscapes and greenery, upgrade visual appeal, improved signage, interest/appeal/quality of new buildings is important
- Commercial
 - Like: Variety of independent stores/businesses
 - Dislike: Need for more restaurants/nightlife, need for more intensity/more variety/key types (book store, grocery), secondary or service businesses in prime retail locations,

- lack of critical mass of customers to support businesses, lack of anchor stores and specialty stores
- For future development: more intensive use and greater variety of stores in Natick Center with a focus on restaurants and retail destinations, better utilization of existing buildings, no strong preferences from the types of development that could accompany a garage, increased commercial development
- Next steps include:
 - Share report findings with Town boards/committees with jurisdiction in Natick Center
 - Convene Merchants Council or other NCA groups to evaluate what study information may have near term value
 - Consider zoning bylaws in Natick Center for future action
 - Provide regular updates to Town Meeting
 - Continue to work with Economic Development Secretary to obtain funding for parking garage(s)
 - Track and support passages of Home Rules Petitions in the current legislative session to ensure that the town has authority to enter into long-term leases for land at the South Avenue and Middlesex Avenue parking lots
 - Develop preferred parking garage configuration alternatives to anticipate state and/or local funding
 - Begin process of developing RFP for Middlesex and South Avenue parcels
 - Continue to negotiate with property owners for necessary easements to provide safety and streetscape improvements to Main Street, providing a proposed roadway design as needed
 - Continue to address safety issues including pedestrian and vehicular

January 2013 – Downtown Parking Strategy for Natick Town Center: Evaluations and Recommendations

This document was produced by The Cecil Group and Nelson/Nygaard Consulting Associates for MassDevelopment and the Town of Natick to identify short and long-term parking strategies that the town could pursue to accomplish its overall economic and development goals for Downtown Natick. The report finds:

- Natick should focus the public parking strategy within the traditional center.
- Parking supply seems appropriate and adequate in the near term. Existing issues included limited availability of parking in a few places and time periods.
- Many private sector buildings and uses rely on a combination of off-site private and public spaces to meet their needs. However, the total supply of reasonably-located parking exceeds current demand.
- The existing parking supply is adequate to support more intensive use of existing buildings if available supply is better used. A moderate level of new development in Natick Center can be supported before conversion of surface lots to structured parking will be needed. Ultimately, more extensive development will require structured parking.
- As the value of land and development increases over time, an economic threshold will be reached where the private sector will be able to cover the cost of structured parking.

- Natick owns the two most probable sites for structured parking and new development (with new development occurring on or near the parking structure sites). To complete the economic development potential for Natick Center, the town can offer the parcels for private sector redevelopment including parking structures. This would also provide a combination of private parking and public parking spaces needed for other downtown uses.
- There are four sites that are realistic candidates for parking structures within the downtown; of the three the town controls, only two (Middlesex and South Avenue) could be developed with a cost-effective/efficient parking structure. Here, parking structures could be created in conjunction with on-site and off-site development.
- Downtown commuter parking does not generally benefit the downtown economically and should be limited relative to other needs.
- Natick can increase the availability of conveniently-located spaces through pricing and other methods.
- Improving pedestrian environment can make the downtown parking more convenient by better connecting businesses and other destinations.
- Enhanced parking signage and wayfinding can better distribute vehicles to appropriate locations and increase convenience.
- Natick should encourage/support off-site parking solutions for private sector uses and development through its land use and development regulatory policies.
- In the short term, Natick should focus on parking management methods to enhance the efficient use of existing parking resources. Over a longer term, Natick should monitor parking demand and market conditions and be prepared to offer its two large parking lots as components of private sector development projects.
- Natick should generally discourage the expansion of commuter parking spaces in the downtown area.

2013 – Natick Center Parking Strategy PowerPoint

This is a PowerPoint that complements the Downtown Parking Strategy document produced by The Cecil Group and Nelson/Nygaard Consulting Associates by providing presentation-style summary points and additional supporting images (maps, graphs, photos, etc).

June 2014 – Parking Advisory Committee: Findings & Recommendations for the Board Selectmen

This document was produced by the Town of Natick's Parking Advisory Committee in order to identify existing resources & deficiencies, thereby making tactical and strategic recommendations. The document found the following:

- **Section 2 - Scope Assessment & Determinations** - A need of 1278 spots was only met by an existing 818 spots. Spots divided into the following categories: Visitor/Customer, Business/Employee, Town Employee, and Commuter.
 - **High Demand:** on Main Street between 11-2 (lunch) and 4-beyond (after business hours) parking is inadequate (demand exceeds capacity).

- **Low Demand:** on Main Street between 9:00-11:00 am, 2:00-4:00 pm weekdays.
- **Section 3 - Tactical Recommendations**
 - New parking meters – especially in the zone of Main St. and its immediate core area.
 - Permits, Meter Rate Structures & Duration Limits.
 - Improved Enforcement & Fines.
 - Separation of Metered vs. Permit locations.
 - Signage towards parking resources.
 - Zoning (similar to enforcement, of on-street parking overnight).
 - Issuance of Residential Parking Permits.
- **Section 4 - Strategic Recommendations**
 - The town will lease the sites to the proponent for \$1/yr for 99 years; the proponent will develop the space (no town funds).
 - No affordable housing component required (at the time of the committee, Natick exceeded the 10% requirement).
 - The proponent will provide 100-150 incremental structured parking spaces, in addition to the amount of spaces required by zoning laws.
 - Natick will sell permits for spaces, returning the revenue to the developer to be used as maintenance fees.
 - Committee recommended 2 RFPs:
 - Middlesex Avenue – have parking for business/employee permit holders to nurture economic growth in downtown area.
 - South Avenue – a parking resource for Town employees (those at Town Hall and Library). After hours, available as customer parking.
 - The Committee seemed to prefer a Private/Public parking facility as opposed to a Municipal Option which requires the Town itself to fund, construct, and maintain the facilities.

2014 – MBTA Station Conceptual Design & Implementation Plan

This document was produced by McMahon Associates and URS for the Town of Natick to outline conceptual designs for upgrading the Natick Center MBTA Commuter Rail Station and assess feasibility/implementation. Key points from the report include:

- The central project need was to update the station in accordance with the American Disabilities Act (ADA), provide enhanced access for all modes of travel, develop a multi-modal transit hub, and support community development in Natick Center.

- More specific goals include:
 - Integrate MBTA commuter rail and MWRTA bus services by providing ADA-compliant, efficiently operated transit stations and connections for inbound commutes to Boston, and reverse commutes to Natick to access employment opportunities.
 - Integrate ADA accessibility, along with safe and convenient accommodation for local bus transit passengers, pedestrians, bicycles, and motor vehicle parking, pick-up/drop-off, and circulation to support the first/last mile of commutes associated with Natick Center Station.
 - Pursue visual and infrastructure improvements that enhance the quality of Natick Center, integrate the CRT with station design, and explore joint development opportunities that may unlock potential funding sources.
 - Consider the relative costs of alternatives and pursue a variety of funding sources.
 - Ensure that the station and associated development is compatible with the community, architecturally and functionally, while minimizing impacts on environmental resources.
- The report includes many conceptual drawings throughout designed to achieve these goals.
- The report outlines a broad implementation framework:
 1. Ongoing Collaboration of Project Parties – MBTA, MWRTA, and Town of Natick should work together to achieve streamlined design and implementation, while ensuring needs of transit providers are met.
 2. Outreach, Public & Business Support – Continued engagement with the community will build support for a multimodal transportation station and boost advocacy at the state and federal level.
 3. Secure funding – A wide range of funding options may be pursued for design and construction of the rail and bus station, and ancillary pedestrian and bicycle improvements.
- A general implementation timeline is also outlined:
 - Immediate: Advocacy & Collaboration
 - Short-Term: Improvements, CRT Connection, Funding Streetscape Improvements, Funding Station Design and Construction
 - Medium-Term: Design & Permitting of Station, Implement Streetscape Improvements
 - Long-Term: Construction of Station, Air Rights Development
- Funding avenues are explored on page 38.

2014 – Natick EDC Town Meeting Report

This document is a PowerPoint presentation delivered by the Natick Economic Development Committee to the Natick Town Meeting in Spring 2014.

- The presentation reviews four core areas: About the Economic Development Committee, Why Economic Development Matters, Highlights of EDC activity, and What Lies Ahead (challenges and opportunities).
- Natick’s Economic Development Committee (EDC) is an advisory board, created by the Natick Board of Selectmen in 2009. The charge of the EDC is to attract business development to Natick that will maximize tax revenue and generate employment opportunities, promote utilization of existing infrastructure and facilities to the fullest extent possible, recognize neighborhood and

- community issues, concerns, and character, identify and plan for changing trends and opportunities, and market Natick for economic development and strategic partnerships.
- The presentation underscores that economic development matters because it eases the tax burden on Natick residents, provides jobs, goods and services for the community, and customers that spend money in the community, contributes to Natick's quality of life (scholarships, fundraisers, volunteers, attractiveness as place to live), and allows for continued investment in community services/infrastructure.
 - The presentation includes highlights of EDC activity include:
 - Programs: Economic Development Self-Assessment tool (EDSAT), Biotechnology/Life Sciences Breakfast, Natick Business Park / Economic Opportunity Area (EOA) Summit
 - Policy: endorsed local options tax increases, advocated for creation of Economic Development Planner position, promoted cross-departmental/committee collaboration
 - Promotion: meetings with current, prospective employers and landlords, involvement in community (Natick Solider Systems Center (Natick Labs), Natick Center Associates, Committee participation (e.g., Parking, By Laws)), creation of Natick Economic Development website, endorsed Food Truck Festival
 - The presentation outlines key upcoming challenges and opportunities for the town in terms of economic development:
 - CHALLENGES: Competition is increasing and aggressive. Key competitor towns include Westborough, Marlborough, Franklin, and Framingham in addition to Boston, Cambridge, Waltham, Lowell, and Worcester. Regional coalitions and partnerships are also a threat, including the Middlesex 3 Coalition, N2 Innovation Corridor, and the 495/MetroWest Partnership. Maintaining the commitment of the Natick community and government administration to economic development is also listed as an upcoming challenge.
 - OPPORTUNITIES: Opportunity areas for future economic development include Natick Center, industrial and business parks, Route 9, Route 27, Route 30/Speen St., projects detailed in the NSSC and Walnut Hill master plans,
 - Key EDC priorities for 2015 were funding and delivering an economic development strategic plan, recommending priorities and incentives plan for Economic Opportunity Areas, exploring committee structure/privatization, working with BOS and ED Planner to refine and deliver on EDC's charge, and identifying and prioritizing marketing strategies.

Town of Natick FY - 2017-2021 Capital Improvement Program

Published December 4, 2015 by the Town of Natick, this document details the planned Capital Improvement Program (CIP) for FY 2017-2021. For the prior five years, Town of Natick targeted spending 6% of its Net Revenues on Capital Spending (cash and debt service).

- Potential methods for financing capital investments:
 - Available Funds (Free Cash) from the general fund.
 - General Stabilization Fund – needs 2/3 quantum vote of Town Meeting to be used as a funding source. Less used now that the Capital Stabilization Fund was created.

- Capital Stabilization Fund – est. 2010 Town Hall Meeting. Funds can be used to service capital equipment and improvements and also debt service on prior capital purchases.
 - Generally appropriated from Free Cash.
 - Debt Service – the financing of capital improvements through borrowing, appropriated to the General Fund Tax Levy or Enterprise Funds. Debt service has varied, but has never exceeded 10% of General Fund Revenue.
- The report details an itemized summary of all capital expenditures from 2011 – 2015.

Tax Classification Hearing – FY 2015

This presentation was made by Jan Dangelo, MAA, Direct of Assessing. It details the Levy Limit Calculation, Maximum Allowable Levy, Residential Factor (below 1 would allow a split tax rate to increase the CIP tax class' rate).

- It did not recommend a Residential Exemption (up to 20% exemption).
- 20 properties qualified for the Small Commercial Exemption (up to 10% exemption). Again, he did not recommend a Small Commercial Exemption for Natick.
- Projected Tax Rate for FY 2015: \$13.82 if Selectmen vote residential factor of one.
- Top 10 Taxpayers contribute to 11.14% of Levy.

2016 11X17 Zoning Map – Town of Natick

This map was issued by the Natick Planning Board on February 17, 2016. It incorporates all zoning amendments made by Town Meeting. Notice that HOOP I & II Overlays are located at Natick Center in order to increase density. Meanwhile, Industrial sites are small and have become overlaid by the Regional Center Overlay District (RED), Mall Center Overlay District (BLACK), and the Highway Corridor Overlay District (Green).

Speen Street/Route 9 Concept

This document is a set of conceptual designs for development in the Speen Street/Route 9 area.

TOP 200 Employers of Framingham, MA NECTA Division

This spreadsheet indicates that Natick has 32 of the top 200 employers in the Framingham MA NECTA Division. The Top 3 employers, between 1,000 – 4,999 employees, are Leonard Morse Hospital, Math Works Inc., and McCarty Assoc. American Medical Response and the US Army Soldier Systems Center employ within the 500-999 bracket. Natick's 5 next largest employers are Cognex Corp, Macy's, Neiman Marcus, Nordstrom, and Roche Bros (employing between 250 and 499 employees). The rest of the 32 companies on the list employ between 100 and 249 employees.

US Army Natick Soldier Research, Development, and Engineering Center (NSRDEC)

This document is published by the US Army as a Broad Agency Announcement and made effective on April 1, 2009. The mission of NSRDEC is to “Maximize the Warrior’s Survivability, Sustainability, Mobility, Combat Effectiveness and Quality of Life by Treating the Warrior as a System.” NSRDEC therefore develops advanced systems towards clothing, equipment, shelter, and nutrition for the soldier.

This document outlines the process for paper and concept proposals to NSRDEC, their evaluation process, safety requirements, the scientific and technological areas of interest the NSRDEC seeks to research, and finally proposal forms.

Appendix B – Open House Event Notes

Areas of Opportunity

- Northeast Natick enclosed by Route 9, Oak Street, and Commonwealth Road
- West Natick along Route 9 and East Central Street
- East Natick Industrial Park
- Sherwood Plaza
- MBTA stop at West Central Street
- Triangle enclosed by Route 9 and Speen Street (including Natick Mall)
- Middlesex and South Avenue

Areas of Concern

- Areas of undeveloped land near Hunnewell Town Forest and Broadmoor Wildlife Sanctuary
- Natick Center

Question 1: What does economic development mean for the Town of Natick?

- More companies like MathWorks (in the Mall) along Route 9 Corridor
- Housing, transportation, and public services
- Enough to sustain our needed tax revenue
- Bigger tax base; influx of workers and patrons to buy local services and increase restaurant and hotel taxes
- Balancing new businesses without inundating the town. Keep Natick's history and character intact
- Change the tax base; new citizens
- More revenues, better services
- Natick Center – businesses on the first floor with housing above
- I know little about economic development, but appreciate the work of those who do, that has provided such a strong financial base for Natick
- Balanced tax base, continued town vibrancy; in concert with downtown development, work is walking distance

Question 2: What opportunities for economic development and new business currently exist in Natick?

- More arts and culture, good quality dining
- Artist colony
- Grocery store
- Better use of downtown retail space – more interesting stores and restaurants, better use of South Ave (get rid of repair shops and replace with more appealing development)
- Find new uses for existing old buildings
- Route 9, Sherwood, off Oak Street

- Around MBTA stations, reverse commuters
- Activity centers for families with young children
- Services beyond banks; small business opportunities

Question 3: What are priorities for Natick’s future commercial development? What changes are most important or most needed in the community?

- Improved support of over-65 community – housing and services
- Professional office space (doctors and lawyers) and new medical facilities/healthcare
- Grocery store
- New technology companies and clean industries (software, energy)
- New business can be added without building new condo complexes in downtown – look at Wellesley
- Think tank; not industrial
- Lively Center, walkable neighborhood
- I would like to see Natick encourage alternative energy development, both by encouraging new business innovation and encouraging residents, businesses, and the town to take advantage of opportunities, especially from local businesses
- Light industry, biotech and supporting industries
- Improve infrastructure at Tech Circle along Route 135/Stratford Road

Question 4: What are your biggest concerns regarding Natick’s economic development future? What impacts need to be avoided? What elements of the town need to be preserved?

- Our small town feel should be preserved
- Too many school children, no elderly living in town
- Please don’t bring more burden to the school system! Preserve historic downtown, and please re-zone with a plan!
- Keep industrial development from having a negative impact on residential areas
- Worried about huge condo complexes. Old buildings and Natick’s history need to be maintained.
- Traffic impacts
- We need to develop long-term planning to ensure continued strong financial standing for Natick, including planning for increasing staff and pension health and other costs, as well as special education and other unfunded mandates. Concurrently, we need to preserve the character of the town, including open space and recreations and help residents to stay as they age
- Balance growth with impact on traffic

Question 5: What are they key obstacles to Natick’s future?

- Diminishing retail tax base

- Need more public transportation – facilitate transportation to commuter rail to get cars off roads
- Traffic, no MBTA service, cannot ride bike in winter
- Rapid growth
- An uninformed citizenry
- Traffic. Additionally, any new buildings in downtown should match the current architecture.
- Crowded schools
- Traffic at Center
- Grow in a smart way that keeps Natick affordable for families and senior citizens



Appendix C – Business Roundtable Notes

Assets

Transportation Networks

- Access to highways, commuter rail, strong and continually developing first mile-last mile ridership
- Distinctive Hospitality Group: access to the MassPike and other key highways especially important

Customer Base and Demand Generators

- Access to diverse body of consumers in-town and from nearby areas
- Distinctive Hospitality Group: access to high number of corporate headquarters in MetroWest area
- Sherwood Plaza: diverse body of consumers allows for 10-20 mile draw radius

Proximity to Labor Base

- Good availability of proximate housing for employees within and nearby Natick
- MathWorks: many employees find apartment housing in Framingham

Affordability and Value

- Availability of high value, yet affordable land and real estate
- SBH Sciences and MathWorks: site affordability and value play a key role in facility location decision, especially over other industry cluster areas (ex. Cambridge)

Access to Talent and Universities

- Proximity to many major universities and colleges allows for access to talent pool and academic partners
- MathWorks: access to talent/academic institutions is a key element for business growth, but the firm also pulls from out of state and out of country talent pools

Community and Family Environment

- Community events, education systems, “small town feel” create positive environment for employees to raise families

Obstacles and Opportunities for Improvement

Transportation Networks

- Non-SOV transport systems are immature
- Further develop public transport and first mile-last mile systems
 - Enhance affordability, timing, and frequency of non-SOV systems (esp. MBTA/commuter rail)
 - Further integrate non-SOV conduits (bike paths)
 - Enhance town’s cultural and entertainment experiences as a means of expanding non-SOV transportation

- A note that expanded non-SOV transport often leads to expanded community of young professionals
- Funding as a key obstacle to transportation improvements

Real Estate Owners and Developers

- Lack of forward thinking among real estate owners, landlords, and developers
- Many spaces and storefronts are not best use, esp. Natick Center

Permitting and Regulatory Processes

- Low innovation speed and velocity of change
- Unpredictable permitting/zoning process and timelines
 - Considerable intractability in boards/town meetings
 - Strong, but minority voices often undermine projects
- Enhance inter-board, inter-town, and regional coordination and planning
- Consider training board chairs in conversation/feedback facilitation as a means of improving town meeting efficiency

Housing

- Expand affordable housing

Economic Development Vision

- More collaborative and efficient boards, including inter-board collaboration, that build consensus and buy-in
- Shift business attraction tone (“we want you” vs. “you want us”)
- Define specific attraction targets for the town as a whole and for its distinct areas, then match targets with unique attraction strategies
- Predictable permitting process and regulatory environment conducive to economic development goals
- Reconcile business growth efforts with desire to preserve “small town feel”
- Expand economic development resources, staffing, and support
- Translate visions and goals into actionable tactics

Key Competitors

- Wellesley
 - Predictable and clear permitting/regulatory processes
- Marlborough
 - Predictable and clear permitting/regulatory processes
- Needham
- Newton
 - Proximity to 128
 - Blue Ribbon BBQ: noted many landlords more willing to lease to newer restaurant businesses
- Framingham

- Strong PR/marketing strategies
- Potential opportunities for collaboration with Natick, esp. in Golden Triangle

