

Plan ASHLAND

The seal of the Town of Ashland, Massachusetts, is circular and features a white building, green trees, a blue sky, and a clock face. The text "Town of Ashland, Mass." is at the top and "Incorporated March 16, 1846" is at the bottom.

Comprehensive Plan Community Vision, Goals and Land Use Element **DRAFT**

April, 2016



Acknowledgements

This document was produced with assistance from the Ashland Comprehensive Plan Advisory Group: Kris O. Briggs, Yolanda Greaves, Board of Selectmen; Preston Crow, Chair, Planning Board. ; Michael Herbert, Town Manager; Nathaniel Strosberg, Town Planner; members of many Ashland town departments; elected officials and citizens, as well as the former Ashland Comprehensive Plan Committee: Joel Arbeitman, Kris O. Briggs, Yolanda Greaves, Chair, John P. Kirwan, Sandra Mokey, Margot E. Northam, Janet Platt, Diane T. Roberts, Florence Seidell.

Technical planning assistance was provided by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council: Jennifer Raitt, Assistant Director of Land use Planning and Chief Housing Planner; Karina Milchman, Regional Planning & Housing Specialist; Karen Adelman, Web Communications Specialist; Tim Reardon, Director of Data Services; Paul Dell'Aquila, Executive Director, MetroWest Regional Collaborative; Joan Blaustein, Senior Regional Planner.

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ASHLAND COMMUNITY VISION STATEMENT

The Community Vision Statement is based on hundreds of comments and suggestions received during the public outreach process. The Ashland Comprehensive Plan Advisory Group adopted the following vision:

The Town of Ashland is a thriving community that we are proud to call home. We are committed to taking charge of our future and proud of our commitment to sustainability. We are a regional collaborator and a leader working across our municipal boundaries to achieve our goals. Our public schools are centers of excellence, drawing in new residents and families. Our community flourishes because engaged residents, business owners, and leaders work together to advance and communicate common values, goals, and priorities of the Ashland Comprehensive Plan. The Town has sufficient resources and strong infrastructure to support our thriving community.



This is a screenshot of the Plan Ashland webpage on Ashland's website

In addition to the general vision above, the Advisory Group drafted supporting vision statements for five topics or elements in a Comprehensive Plan: Land Use, Housing, Economic Development, Transportation and Open Space and Recreation. These are also based on public comments.

Following are the supporting vision statements with the goals for each element.

VISION AND GOALS FOR FIVE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN ELEMENTS

Land Use Vision Our downtown, key corridors and neighborhoods are sustainable and vibrant

Land Use Goals

1. Accommodates key development and preservation activities through Ashland's Zoning By-law.
2. Implement land use policies that support and encourage appropriately-scaled and mixed-use developments in key areas of town.
3. Consider form-based code
4. Ensure coordination and alignment among all land use review and permitting entities

Housing Vision Ashland welcomes residents of all ages and socio-economic backgrounds by providing a variety of housing opportunities

Housing Goals

1. Work to preserve and advance affordability in town
2. Maintain high quality of life through sustainable planning and housing production
3. Ensure affordability throughout town and target affordable housing production to designated sites
4. Build community awareness of housing issues and activities
5. Address unmet housing needs through programming
6. Adopt zoning changes to promote affordable housing production and diverse housing typologies
7. Promote healthy housing

Economic Development Vision Ashland maintains a strong economic base and diverse local economy with places for people to live, shop, work and gather. The town provides prime access to key employment centers in our region.

Economic Development Goals

1. Plan for, stimulate and maintain viable, well-designed and vibrant development along key corridors and downtown
2. Provide comprehensive and site specific planning and technical assistance to advance economic development at key locations

3. Plan for and implement public facilities and utility improvements along key corridors and downtown
4. Attract and retain a range of businesses in town's commercial areas
5. Provide and promote incentives
6. Build town's reputation as an energy-efficiency leader
7. Leverage open space, natural resources and recreational opportunities as an economic asset
8. Ensure organizational capacity to lead in and implement economic development activities
9. Leverage regional business leadership and organizations to promote the town and expand resources

Transportation Vision Ashland offers viable walking, biking and public transportation options.

Transportation Goals

1. Commission a parking study and ensure adequate parking is provided downtown, address space availability, management, and accessibility
2. Continue to advocate for and advance roadway improvements along key corridors
3. Create sidewalk connectivity and linkages between neighborhoods and key amenities
4. Advocate for and implement Complete Streets
5. Create safe bicycle and pedestrian options throughout town
6. Provide consistent way finding and signage to showcase and connect people with town amenities
7. Ensure local and regional development does not adversely impact traffic in neighborhoods, along key corridors and downtown
8. Expand and improve public transportation options
9. Ensure adequate resources for Town operations, street and sidewalk maintenance and reconstruction

Open Space and Recreation Vision Ashland stewards open space and recreational opportunities and promotes an array of vital environmental, natural, historical and cultural resources.

Open Space and Recreation Goals **To be Added**

PROJECT CONTEXT

Ashland has a long history of planning. The town developed Master Plans in 1962, 1972 and 1988. The most recent Plan, completed in 2003, updated the 1988 Plan. In 2014, Ashland again embarked on a project to revise its Comprehensive Plan. (Master Plan and Comprehensive Plan are used interchangeably in this report.)

The Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) was retained by the Town to work with the community to develop a community vision, strategic goals and priorities. In addition, MAPC worked with Ashland citizens, town officials and the Planning Board Advisory Committee to make recommendations for future land use and redevelopment.

Process

The process to revise a comprehensive plan typically includes as many residents, property and business owners as possible. In addition, town officials provide guidance and information. Engaging a large variety and number of people interested and invested in Ashland allows for a wide range of concerns, issues and potential solutions to be identified. Hopefully, participants will remain involved to accomplish the goals and priorities in the Plan.

The planning process began in 2014. Several focus groups were held with town departments, at the senior center, and with mothers particularly interested in the schools. Planners visited a farmer's market to raise awareness about the Plan process. There was a Plan Ashland webpage on the town's website. In the six weeks leading up to the October 27, 2014 public visioning forum, questions were put on the webpage. There were hundreds of responses, via the web, facebook and written comments to these surveys, termed "lightning polls". The Appendix has a complete record of all the public comments received.

Housing Production Plan

At the same time the visioning and goal development were underway, MAPC was also assisting Ashland in writing a Housing Production Plan (HPP). The HPP was approved by the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Economic in February, 2016. The main recommendations of the HPP inform the housing vision and goals in this report. In addition, meetings held during the Housing Plan preparation resulted in additional public participation.

Vision and Goals

Communities start the master planning process with a vision statement. The concept is to provide general guidance on the aspirations of the town. Goals are specific targets the town identifies to help achieve the vision. Objectives, priorities and action steps provide additional details about how to realize the goals.

Ashland's vision is inclusive and encompasses the community's values for how it wishes to manage change in the future.

As the rest of the Comprehensive Plan elements are researched and written, it may be prudent to review and revise the goals. This is appropriate as new information, and additional public input, is incorporated in the Plan.

LAND USE ELEMENT

Introduction

The purpose of developing a master or comprehensive plan is to help a community manage change. A comprehensive plan typically includes information about the environment, transportation, housing, open space, capital needs, etc. No topic is more fundamental to managing change than land use. Land use refers, quite simply, to how the land is being used. It includes the alteration of the natural environment because of the development of buildings, transportation corridors, parks, etc. to create the “built environment”. And the term land use also includes open, undeveloped land and natural resources.

Land use is a foundation element in a plan because changes to how, and how intensively, the land is developed (or not) characterize a community’s growth (or lack thereof) over time. Without a land use plan, a community has no guide for where and how it wishes to grow. The land use plan can identify areas for different kinds of housing, making sure the community is welcoming at all stages of life; it can identify opportunities to conserve appropriate amounts of open space and protect treasured views. The land use plan can be a catalyst for economic development by encouraging business and/or industrial uses in appropriate areas of town.

The land use element is organized to provide brief summaries of community history and demographic change, followed by the scenario modeling section. This is the heart of the land use element, allowing the community to compare various alternatives to manage growth and change. Ashland has been the focus of several recent, excellent reports providing guidance for economic development and urban design. Together, they supply encyclopedic reference material on Ashland. There is no need to repeat this information. Rather, MAPC’s scenario modeling provides new information in a different format, and should be the focus of the next Comprehensive Plan Land Use Element.

The scenario modeling is followed by summary information on land use characteristics, and a brief review of other reports. MAPC recommendations for action conclude the report.

Ashland Yesterday, Ashland Today

Ashland, Massachusetts, is 13 square miles and located 22 miles west of Boston. Ashland is bounded by: Framingham on the northeast; Sherborn the east; Holliston on the south; Hopkinton on the southwest and Southborough the northwest.

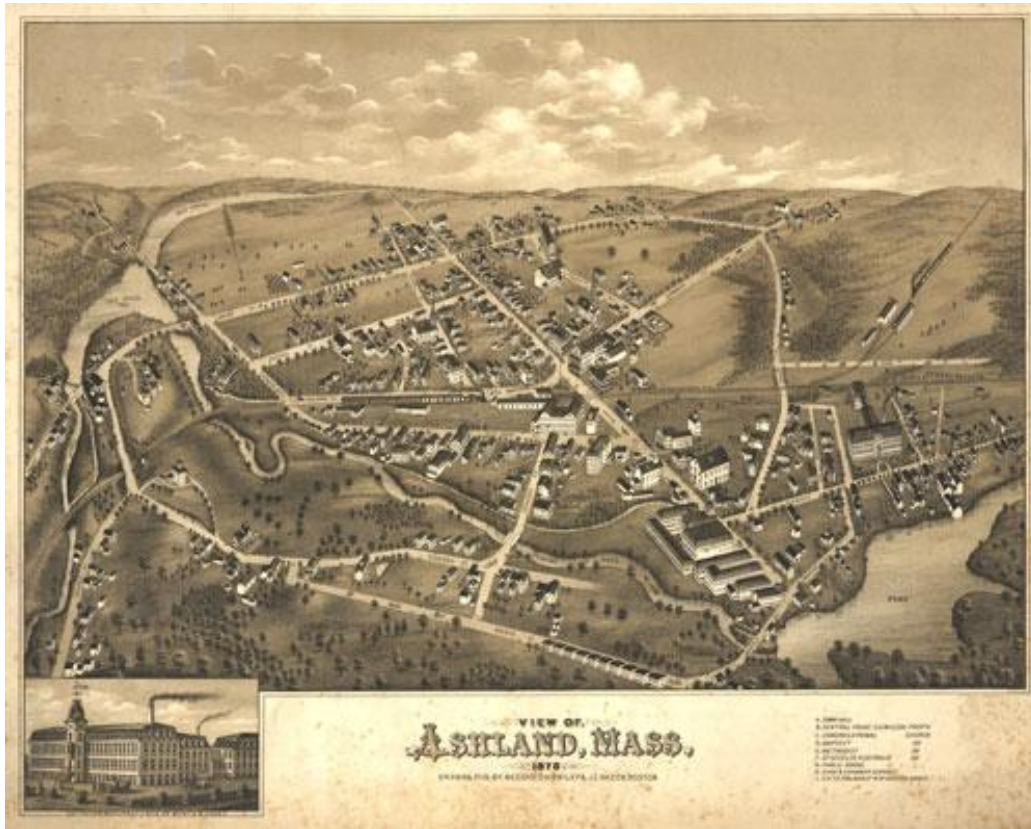
History Informs Land Use

How land is used over time results in land use patterns. These patterns are informed by how inhabitants made their livelihoods, and how people and goods were transported. In many New England towns, the historic land use patterns include farm lands/orchards, mill structures and dams on rivers, railroad rights of ways, and roads connecting to adjacent communities. Ashland was formed in 1846 by combining land from the neighboring communities of Framingham, Holliston and Hopkinton. Formerly called Unionville, the area included the typical settlement pattern of farms and mills, including nearby housing for the mill workers. The Sudbury River bisects the community, and in 1834 rail lines were laid adjacent to the river. Today, the same right of way is used by the Metropolitan Boston Transportation Authority (MBTA) Worcester branch commuter railroad. The current train station, however, is located about a mile from the town center. State routes 135 and 126 pass through Ashland and Interstate Route 90 traverses the northern corner. There is no I-90 direct exit to Ashland, however.

In the 20th century, manufacturing electric synchronous clocks was an important industry in Ashland. The clock mechanism relies on electric current to maintain accurate time and is considered a break-through technology. Manufacturing in Ashland continued until 1979. The Economic Development Element of the Comprehensive Plan will provide more details on current manufacturing and businesses in Ashland.

The land use pattern has evolved from farms and mills to residential suburban development, with commuters going to jobs in Boston and along Interstate Route 495 and the Metro West region. Ashland, unlike many smaller communities, also has allowed construction of multi-family housing. This type of housing provides more choices for residents, allowing empty-nesters as well as first-time renters to remain or locate to Ashland.

The map below, drawn in 1878, includes the railroad tracks, the river, and some of the street layouts that exist today. Note the large manufacturing buildings, as well as houses.

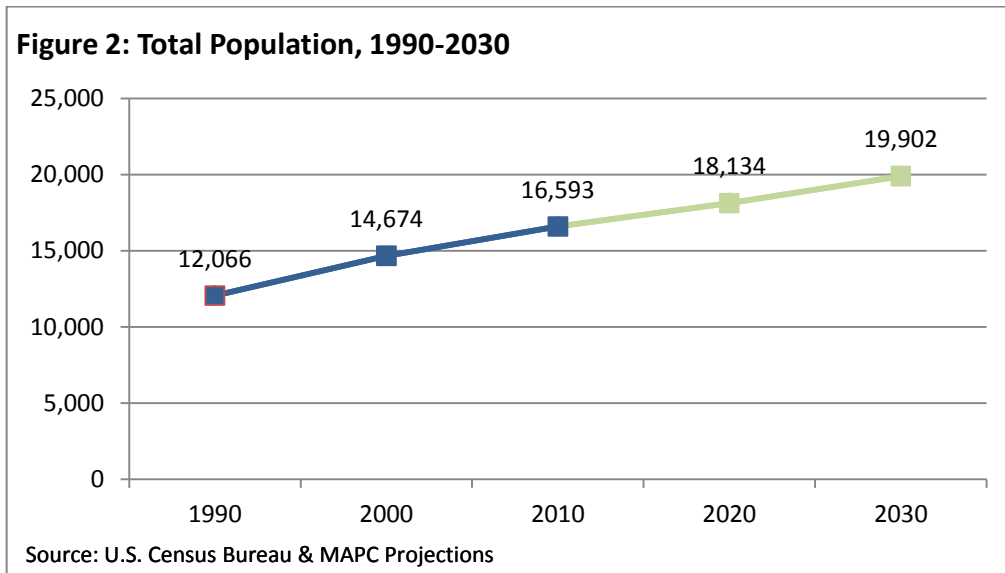


Source: www.worldmapsonline.com

Demographic Profile: Increased Population + Demand for More Housing

Population

Ashland's population has consistently grown since 1990. Between 1990 and 2010, the population increased by more than a third, or 4,547 residents, to 16,593. The Metropolitan Area Planning Council, of which Ashland is a member, developed population estimates as part of writing MetroFuture, the regional plan. These estimates were based on an analysis of changing trends in births, deaths, migration, and housing occupancy. MetroFuture projects that by 2030, Ashland's population will increase almost 18%, adding an estimated 3,374 more people in 20 years, for a total population of 19,902.



The graph above charts the information from the table below.

Table 1: Population by Age

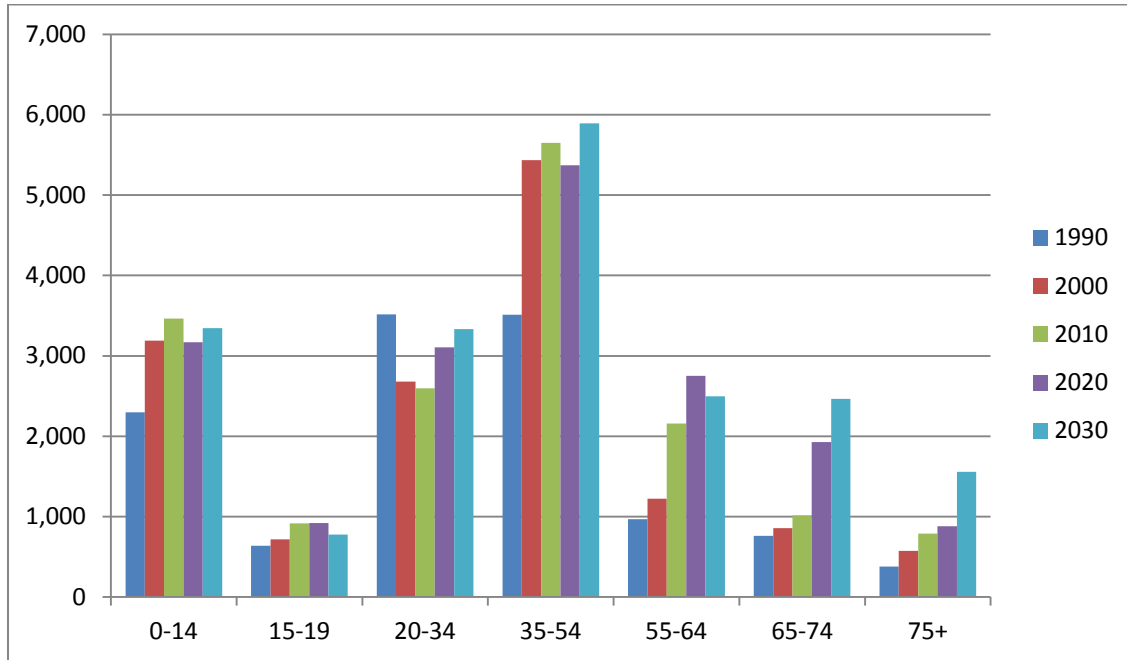
	1990	2000	2010	2020	2030	Change 2010-2030	% Change 2010-2030
0-14	2,299	3,189	3,463	3,168	3,344	-119	-3.4%
15-19	636	719	918	920	778	-140	-15.3%
20-34	3,514	2,678	2,598	3,105	3,333	735	28.3%
35-54	3,510	5,432	5,649	5,372	5,892	243	4.3%
55-64	968	1,224	2,159	2,750	2,498	339	15.7%
65-74	761	856	1,015	1,926	2,465	1,450	142.9%
75+	378	576	791	879	1,557	766	96.8%
Total	14,056	16,674	18,603	20,140	21,897	3,274	17.7%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau & MAPC Projections

In recent years, Ashland's overall population has aged. While nearly all age groups increased by at least 44% between 1990 and 2010, those age 20-34 decreased by more than a quarter and those age 55 and over increased by 88%. Those age 75 and over increased by 109%. Going forward, this aging of the population is projected to intensify. Between 2010 and 2030, the population under the age of 19 is projected to decline by 19%, while the most significant growth

will be among those aged 65 and up, with a 143% increase in those 65-74 and a 97% increase in residents aged 75+.

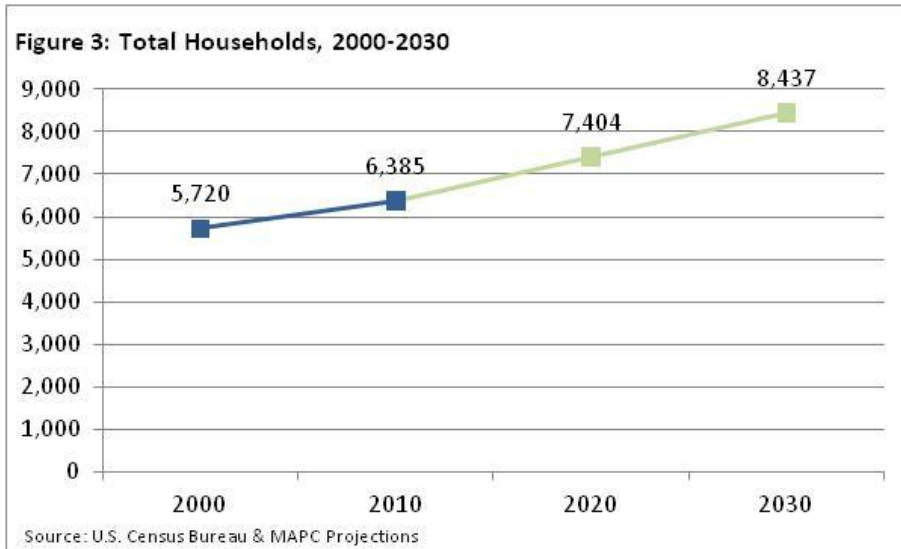
The age distribution of Ashland’s residents from 1990 projected through 2030 is shown in the column chart below. Note the growth in the



Household Composition and Demand for Housing

More than the number of people, or total population, the number and type of households and their spending power within a community correlate to the demand for housing units. Each household resides in one dwelling unit, regardless of the number of household members.

As of the 2010 Census, Ashland is home to 5,720 households. This represents an increase of 12% since 2000. Similar to MetroFuture projections for Ashland’s population, this increase will continue in the future. Within the 20-year timeframe between 2010 and 2030, Ashland is projected to add 2,052 households, a 32% increase.



Household Characteristics are Changing

Ashland experienced a 13% increase in population from 14,674 in 2000 to 16,593 in 2010. While Ashland's younger residents increased in number during that time period, MAPC's MetroFuture projections indicate this will not be an ongoing trend. As is characteristic of many municipalities in the region, the town's population will age dramatically going towards 2030. Between 2010 and then, the population age 0-19 is projected to decrease by 6%, while the population age 65 and older will increase 123%.

Ashland's number of households also increased between 2000 and 2010, by 12% from 5,720 to 6,385. Nearly 40% of households include children under 18 years old, and household size has not shrunk in recent years, as is common throughout the region. Nevertheless, by 2030, the number of households in Ashland is projected to increase by 32% to 8,437. Householders over the age of 60 are projected to increase the most: 94% from 2010. Households comprised of older individuals tend to be smaller. This fact points to the need for a sufficient number of smaller housing units to meet the expected demand.

More than three-quarters of Ashland's 6,609 housing units are single-family homes, and 80% of all housing is owner-occupied. The town's vacancy rate is quite low at 3%, despite the fact that between 2000 and 2013, 850 residential permits were issued, 71% of which were for single-family homes. Home values have been steadily rising since 2011, though they have not yet recovered to their 2005 peak.

Conclusion

The population and housing data indicates the demand for housing, now and in the future. For 2030, MAPC estimates a demand for 877 additional housing units: 514 single-family and 363 multifamily units. Ashland's Housing Production Plan provides strategies to deal with housing needs.

A key issue is providing sufficient housing for all segments of the housing market. Ashland's median household income is \$93,233; however more than a quarter of residents are low income. The current number of subsidized housing units is 241 to meet the needs of 1,635 low income households currently living in Ashland.

The Land Use element of the Comprehensive Plan should address housing strategies in order to coordinate the land use and zoning implementation recommendations.

Scenario Modeling or “Alternative Futures”

To support the land use element of the Ashland Comprehensive Plan, MAPC has prepared a GIS-based land use model of the town. This model estimates the development capacity of each land parcel in the town under current zoning and potential alternative land use regulations. It also estimates the distribution and impacts of new residential and commercial development under various job growth and housing demand scenarios. In consultation with the Comprehensive Plan Committee, MAPC created three scenarios representing “alternative futures” for the Town of Ashland, each representing a different set of land use policies and growth assumptions.

These scenarios can be compared on a variety of metrics related to municipal finances, water, schools, and transportation. While not intended to provide a precise and definitive forecast of future conditions, these scenarios can help the town to compare the relative impacts of development scenarios in relation to community goals and concerns. This section describes the key inputs and assumptions of the land use analysis, followed by a brief description of the three scenarios, a more detailed comparison of development in key parts of town, and finally the town-wide metrics for all three.

Land Use Projections

The land use projections are based on detailed data about the town’s current land use, development history and proposed projects, physical and environmental constraints, likely demographic change, and regional economic trends. Estimates of the impacts of development are based on local examples, municipal trends, and literature research. These datasets and assumptions are linked in an interconnected and responsive model that can be used to quickly generate new scenarios for the town’s future.

The land use analysis is performed in four basic steps:

1. Calculate the developable area of each parcel, after subtracting wetlands and accounting for other constraints;
2. Apply land use assumptions to each parcel and calculate total development potential and net increase over existing square footage;
3. Allocate a specified amount of housing and commercial growth based on development potential, location, constraints, and other factors;
4. Calculate the town-wide impacts of the projected development on a variety of metrics.

For detailed information about how scenario modeling is conducted, including a discussion of key data sources and model functions, including land use assumptions, please see Appendix 2.

Ashland Alternative Futures

In consultation with the Comprehensive Plan Committee, MAPC prepared three different scenarios for the town's land use in 2030: a "Business as Usual" scenario based on current zoning and land use development patterns; an "Economic Emphasis" scenario that represents one possible outcome of efforts to promote more commercial development and to discourage residential development; and a "Focused Growth" scenario that seeks to concentrate growth in selected locations while discouraging development spread out along major corridors and in neighborhoods. These three scenarios are described briefly here. Their different outcomes for development in specific areas of town are described in the next section, and their relative impacts on town-wide indicators are described after that.

Business as Usual involves no major changes in town zoning, housing policies, development decisions, or assumptions about future growth levels. This scenario assumes the following:

- The town maintains current zoning districts, review process, and development policies
- The town maintains current share of MetroWest jobs. Specifically, this scenario assumes the town will capture 3.8% of the 15,000 new jobs projected for MetroWest from 2010 – 2030, or approximately 550 new jobs requiring approximately 300,000 square feet of commercial square footage.
- The town would permit a level of housing development consistent with MAPC projections. Specifically, the Stronger Region scenario anticipates demand for 1,100 single family homes and 1,000 condominiums, apartments, or townhouses in Ashland between 2010 and 2030.
- Development currently "in the pipeline" moves forward. This includes the following developments:
 - Ashland Woods
 - 250 West Union Street
 - 73 Olive Street (subdivision)
 - 133 West Union Street
 - Ashland Rail Transit District Phase 1
 - 21 Main Street
 - 41 Front Street
 - Village of the Americas
 - 466 Chestnut Street
 - 369 Pond Street
 - 83 Nickerson Road
 - Lots 2A & 2B Butterfield Drive

The **Economic Emphasis** scenario is one that might result from policies to promote more commercial development and to discourage residential development. This scenario assumes:

- The town adopts additional incentives for high-value commercial growth such as office and medical development; and public and private sector partners redouble their efforts to aggressively market the area for economic development. Specifically, the scenario assumes MetroWest employment increase by 20,000 by the year 2030 (versus 15,000 in the Business as Usual scenario), and Ashland would be able to capture 8% of all net job growth in MetroWest, for a total of approximately 1,600 new jobs requiring approximately 800,000 square feet of new commercial space.
- The town would place additional limits on housing growth, making multifamily development options more limited, and would expend resources to acquire developable parcels to prevent housing development. Specifically, the result is assumed to be a 30% reduction in total housing production, with 750 single family units and 750 units in multifamily housing or townhouses produced between 2010 and 2030.

Focused Growth emphasizes more growth around Ashland Downtown, near the MBTA Commuter Rail station, and at strategic spots along Pond Street, with less growth spread out along main corridors. This scenario assumes:

- The town would see a more rapid pace of multifamily housing production (two thirds of the net increase), to accommodate preferences of seniors to downsize while staying in Ashland. There would be a corresponding reduction in single family home construction. Overall, the scenario assumes the town would see production of 750 single family homes and 1,450 units in multifamily or townhouse development.
- There would be a substantial increase in residential and mixed use development near downtown and in the rail transit area—including redevelopment of existing industrial parcels.
- The successful revitalization of Ashland Downtown would entice more residents to shop in the area, resulting in less “leakage” out of town, and leading to higher overall economic growth. Specifically, the town is assumed to capture 5% of total MetroWest job growth of 15,000 jobs, resulting in a net increase of 750 jobs in the town.
- The town would take action to discourage development (commercial or residential) spread out along major corridors in town; new land use controls would be put in place to discourage the conversion of residential structures to commercial uses or multifamily housing, especially along Routes 135 (West Union and Waverly Streets) and 126 (Pond Street.)

Key Planning Areas

MAPC’s analysis of land use development focused on the locally-identified Priority Development Areas that were delineated through the 495/MetroWest Development Compact Planning process that concluded in 2012. This section describes projected development in each of these key planning areas under the three scenarios.

Ashland Downtown: Revitalization of Ashland's downtown is a preeminent priority in town, and has been the subject of numerous prior planning and visioning efforts. However, this revitalization has been slow to take root, with only two small-scale retail or mixed use development projects currently underway. Previous studies have identified various possible causes for the slow pace of redevelopment in Ashland Downtown, including complex and overlapping zoning requirements, numerous regulatory authorities, and parking and open space requirements inconsistent with a compact downtown. Retail competition from Pond Street and other commercial areas of town may also make it difficult for businesses in the downtown area to thrive in the absence of a substantially larger resident population nearby and concerted efforts at placemaking and urban design improvements.

The Business as Usual scenario anticipates no changes in the town's planning or regulatory framework in the Downtown. As a result, the area would see steady stream of small-scale redevelopment activities, principally retail with some multistory mixed use development. The Economic Emphasis scenario, with its focus on regionally significant office and retail development, would entail no major deviation from Business as Usual in the Downtown, except for a decrease in the amount of residential development through policies intended to discourage multifamily housing. Meanwhile, the underlying premise of the Focused Growth scenario is that new housing development in and around the Downtown area is a critical strategy to help revitalize the commercial district and provide attractive downsizing options for Ashland seniors. This scenario would see a substantial portion of Ashland's multifamily housing demand met through residential and mixed use development in the Downtown and industrial properties nearby, including Megunko Road.

Ashland Rail Transit District: The Ashland Rail Transit district has been the site of an evolving development proposal for nearly 15 years. Most recently, an application for site plan modification was submitted to the town in October 2015, detailing plans for 398 1- and 2-bedroom apartments west of the MBTA Access Road. This first phase of the rail transit district development was incorporated into all three scenarios. Future phases may bring additional development to this area, and various subdistricts here provide the opportunity for additional residential as well as commercial uses. However, these future phases are not specified in any of the three alternatives.

Pleasant Street: The 0.7 mile stretch of Pleasant Street from the MBTA station to Ashland Downtown was identified as a priority development area. Currently a mix of light industrial and residential (single family and two-family, predominately), this corridor may plan an important role in linking the transit station itself to the Downtown. Existing zoning allows for a wide variety of uses, including warehousing and storage as well as multifamily residential. The Business as Usual scenario anticipates that under the existing zoning the corridor may see a mix of continued commercial as well as some isolated multifamily residential uses. However, the greater the variety of future development on this stretch, the harder it will be to establish a coherent streetscape that provides an inviting and convenient route for residents and visitors intending to walk from the

MBTA station to downtown. The Economic Emphasis scenario would reduce the potential for residential uses on this stretch of roadway, reinforcing its light industrial character. The Focused Growth scenario would entail new zoning with a focus on multifamily development on underused lots closest to the Downtown in the short term, and extending new multifamily and mixed use along the length of the corridor to ultimately replace the light industrial uses by 2030 or 2040.

Pond Street Corridor: A mixed use overlay district for Pond Street was adopted in 2005, and a roadway reconstruction plan is currently being developed for the corridor. However, development potential in this corridor is limited by environmental constraints, complex zoning requirements (e.g., residential uses are only permitted as part of a mixed-use development), and weak market conditions. While there are a handful of development proposals currently being advanced, they are generally limited to low-density and relatively low-value uses such as warehouses, contractor yards, vehicle repair, and ground-mounted solar installations. The only exception is an 80+ bed assisted living facility just south of Eliot Street.

The Business as Usual scenario would see a continued mix of lower-density commercial uses (both light industrial and retail) as well as some multifamily housing spread along the stretch of this corridor from Framingham to Holliston. The Economic Emphasis scenario would leverage the proposed streetscape improvements to attract higher value office and medical development to this corridor, seeking to capitalize on its proximity to Framingham. (Whether or not such tenants would find Pond Street an attractive location, given its lack of nearby highway access, is beyond the scope of this analysis.) In contrast, a Focused Growth approach would substantially reduce development potential along most of the corridor in order to prevent new sprawl and to protect the proposed streetscape improvements from being undermined by new curb cuts and major developments; new growth in the corridor would be focused at the intersection of Pond Street and Eliot Street. A combination of pedestrian-oriented mixed use developments and public realm improvements would be designed to create the sense of a small town center focused here, with the currently vacant Sears property as the first site for redevelopment.

Waverly Street / Wildwood: The area at the intersection of Waverly Street and East Union Street has been designated as the Wildwood Mixed Use District and was identified as local development priority during the 495/MetroWest Community Compact process (though it was not advanced as a regional priority.) MAPC estimates that the parcels around this intersection could accommodate 200,000 square feet of commercial development under the current zoning overlay, in a mix of industrial, office, and retail uses. Under Business as Usual it is not anticipated that this area would see anywhere near that amount of development. An Economic Emphasis approach would aggressively market this junction as a major development opportunity with the goal of attracting office and medical development. The Focused Growth scenario would actively discourage new commercial development in this area with the goal of steering more investment toward the downtown or designated nodes on Pond Street.

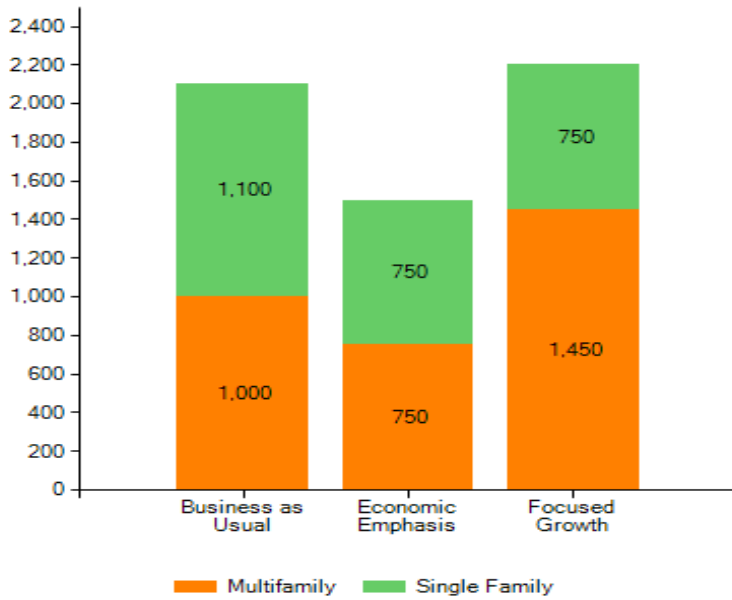
Scenario Summary

MAPC estimated the impacts of each scenario on key indicators relevant to the town's finances, economic competitiveness, and quality of life. These comparative statistics are presented in the table below.

<i>Business as Usual</i>	The <i>Business as Usual</i> scenario involves no major changes in town zoning, housing policies, or development decisions. <ul data-bbox="513 506 1438 688" style="list-style-type: none">• Maintain current zoning districts, review process, development policies• Assume the town maintains current share of MetroWest jobs (3.8%)• Assume the town permits a level of housing development consistent with MAPC projections (approx. 2,100 units)• Assume development currently “in the pipeline” moves forward.
<i>Economic Emphasis</i>	The <i>Economic Emphasis</i> scenario shows the results of policies to promote more commercial development and to discourage residential development. <ul data-bbox="513 926 1425 1171" style="list-style-type: none">• Aggressively market the town for economic development and adopt additional incentives for high-value commercial growth• Place additional limits on housing growth and acquire developable parcels• Assume Ashland is able to capture 8% of job growth in MetroWest• Assume housing development is 30% less than projected by MAPC for 2010 - 2030
<i>Focused Growth</i>	The <i>Focused Growth</i> scenario would see more growth around Ashland Downtown and at strategic spots along Pond Street, with less growth spread out along main corridors. <ul data-bbox="513 1377 1442 1724" style="list-style-type: none">• This scenario assumes a more rapid pace of multifamily housing production (two thirds of the net increase), to accommodate preferences of seniors to downsize while staying in Ashland. There would be a corresponding reduction in single family home construction.• Entails additional residential and mixed uses near downtown and in the rail transit area—including redevelopment of existing industrial parcels.• Assumes actions are taken to discourage strip development and conversion of residential structures to commercial uses along major corridors.

Scenario Comparison

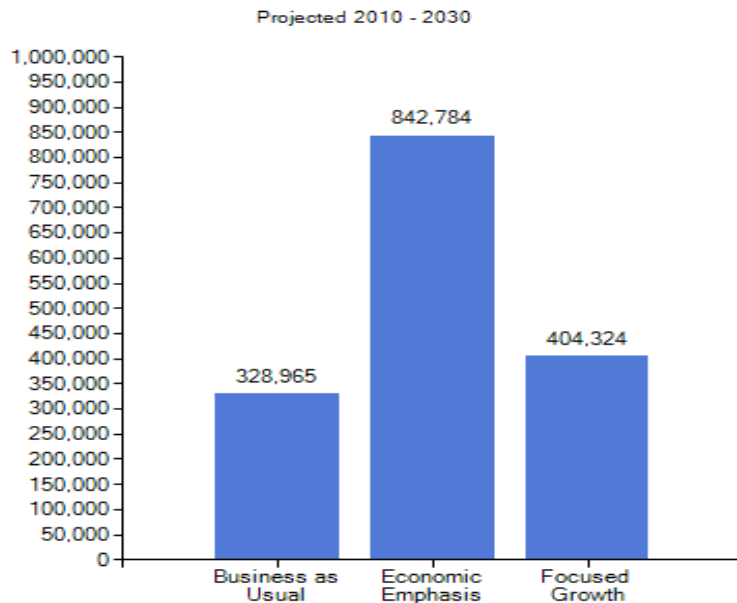
Housing Units by Type



This chart shows the number of new housing units, by type (single family vs. multifamily) projected between 2010 and 2030, under each scenario. The Economic Emphasis scenario would see 1,500 new housing units, versus 2,100 for Business as Usual and 2,200 for Focused Growth.

Benchmark: Ashland added approximately 1,800 housing units between 1990 and 2010.

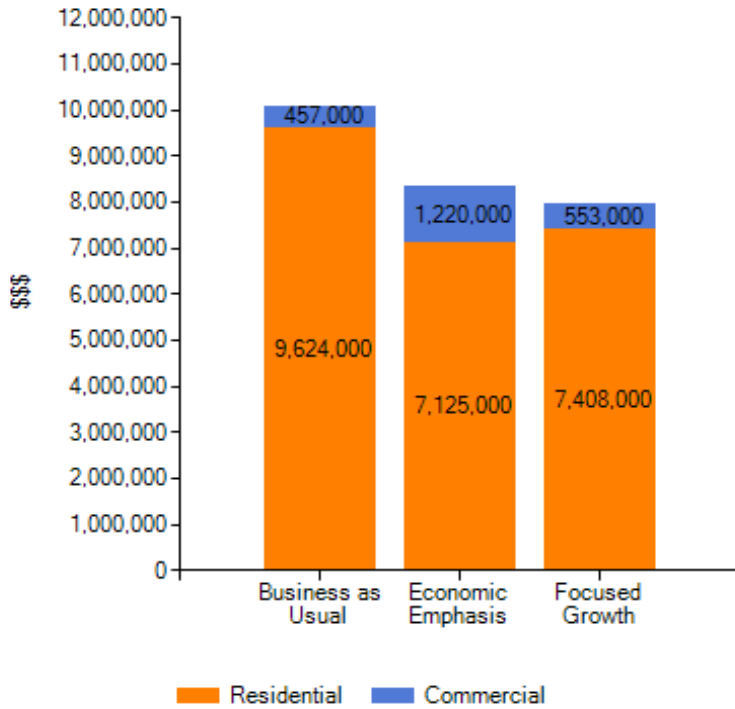
Additional Commercial Floor Area



This chart shows the net increase in commercial floor area anticipated under each scenario.

Benchmark: Approximately 220,000 square feet of commercial space was built in Ashland between 2000 and 2012.

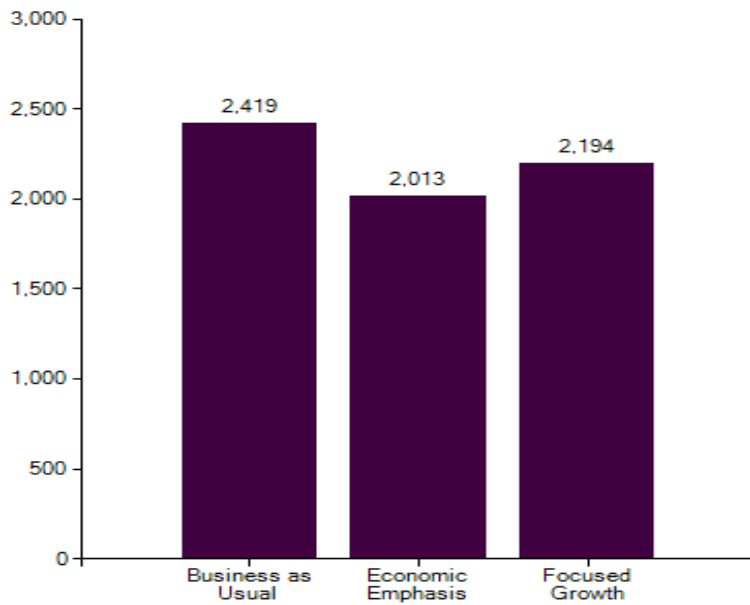
New Growth Tax Revenue by Type



This chart shows the anticipated *net new* tax revenue from each scenario, based on the assessed building values of comparable recent development. Revenue estimates are based on 2013 tax rate and are discounted for existing buildings on redevelopment sites. Under the Economic Emphasis scenario, 14.6% of net new tax revenue would derive from commercial uses, versus 5 – 6% under the other two.

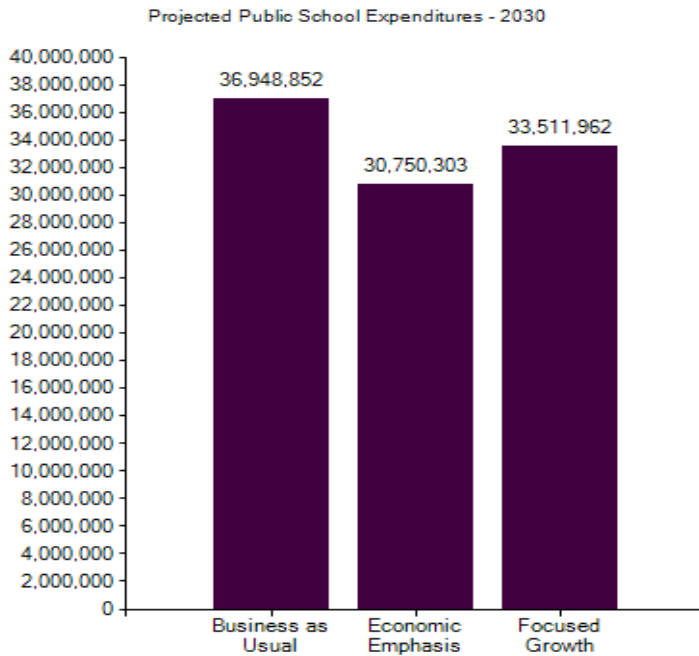
Benchmark: Commercial and industrial properties currently comprise 7% of the towns property tax levy.

Projected Public School Enrollment - 2030



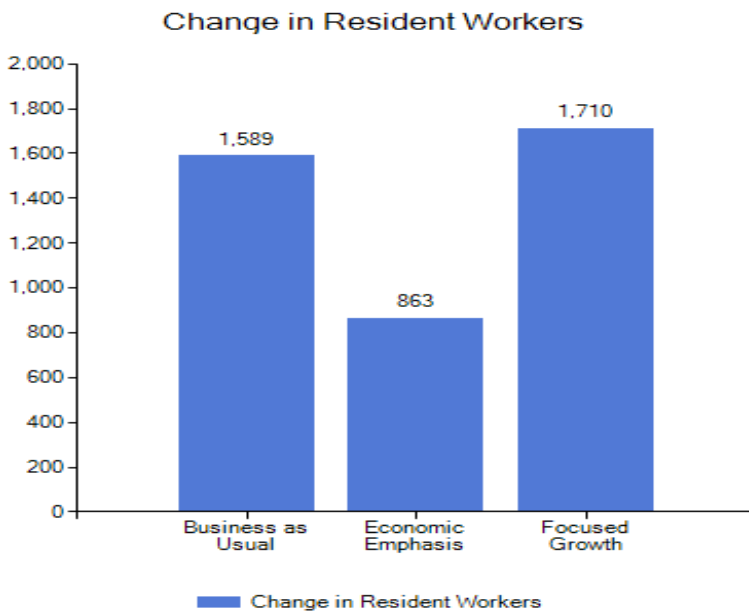
This chart shows projected enrollment in Ashland Public Schools in 2030 based on MAPC projections and expected school-age occupancy new housing, assuming that the out-of-district enrollment stays a steady share of the total. All three scenarios would see declines in enrollment of 9% to 24%.

Benchmark: Ashland Public School enrollment was 2,650 in 2010.



This chart shows projected public school expenditures, based on the projected enrollment and extended growth in per-pupil expenditures. The scenarios see an increase of 30% to 60%

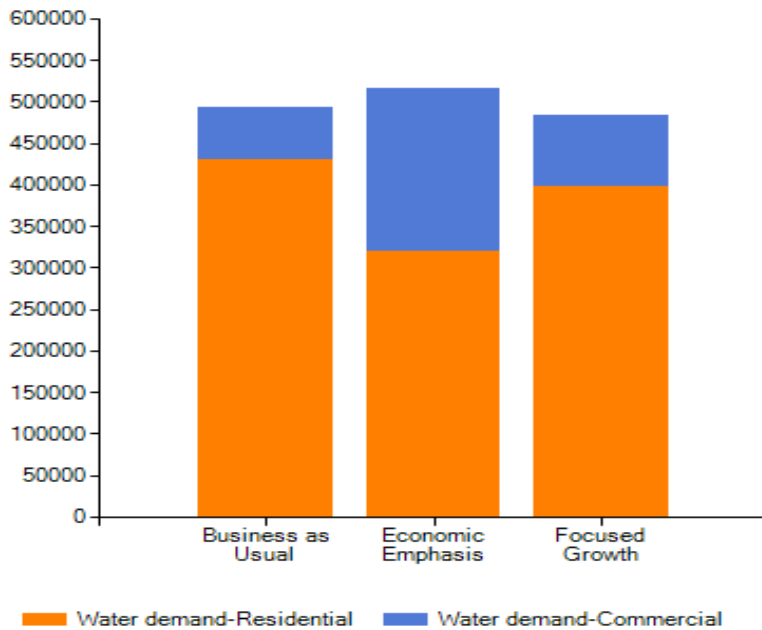
Benchmark: Per-pupil expenses in Ashland rose approximately 3% annually from 2000 to 2013



This chart shows the projected change in the number of resident workers from 2010 to 2030, based on the projected population and demographics. The number of resident workers increases 20% under Business as Usual and Focused Growth, only 10% under Economic Emphasis.

Benchmark: There were an estimated 8,600 resident workers in Ashland in 2010.

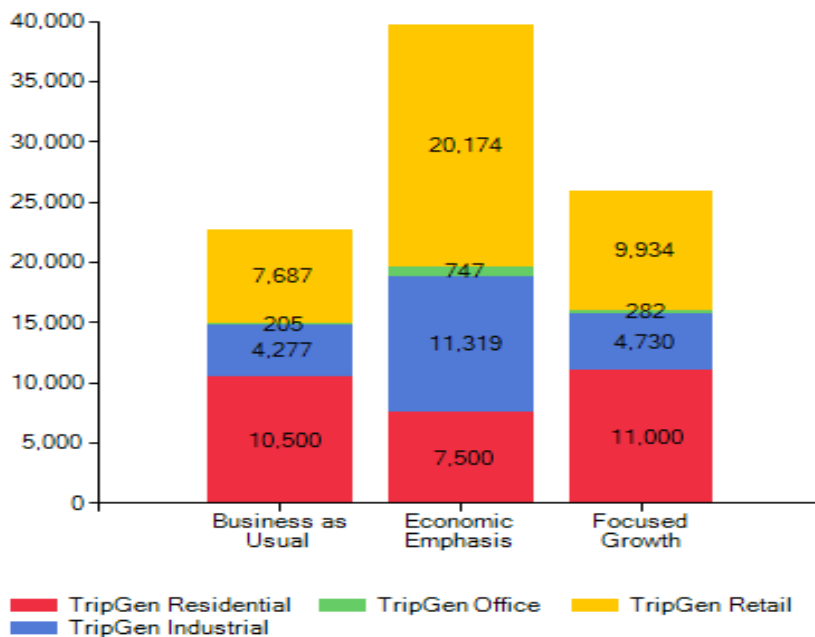
Water Demand



This chart estimates the total new water demand under the three scenarios. Increase in water demand comparable across all three scenarios: approximately 500,000 gallons per day by 2030

Benchmark: The town's water system pumped 1.9 million gallons per day in 2013.

Trip Generation

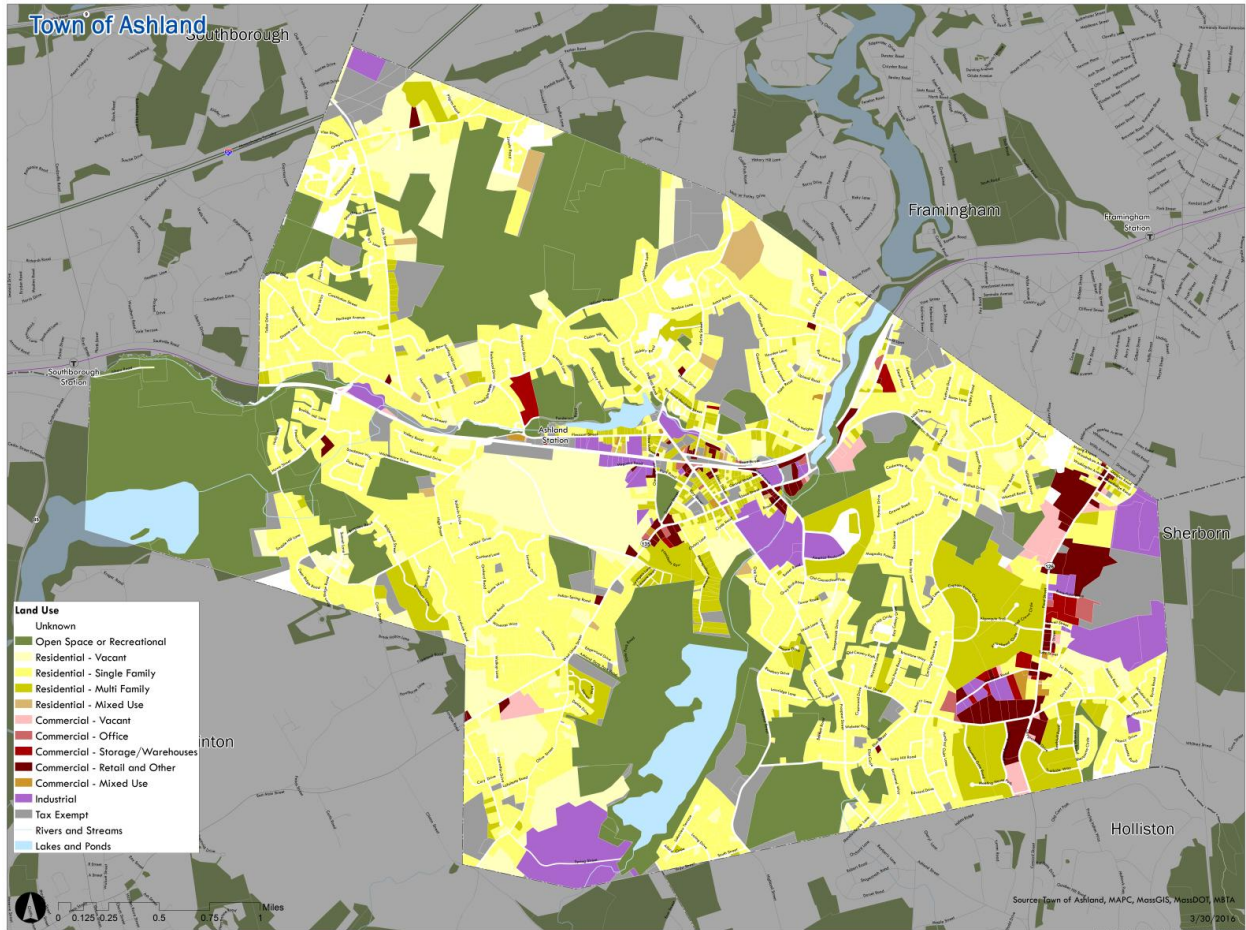


This chart estimates the number of new auto trips generated by various types of development under the three scenarios.

Benchmark: Pond Street was travelled by approximately 12,000 vehicles per day on an average weekday in 2009.

Land Use Characteristics

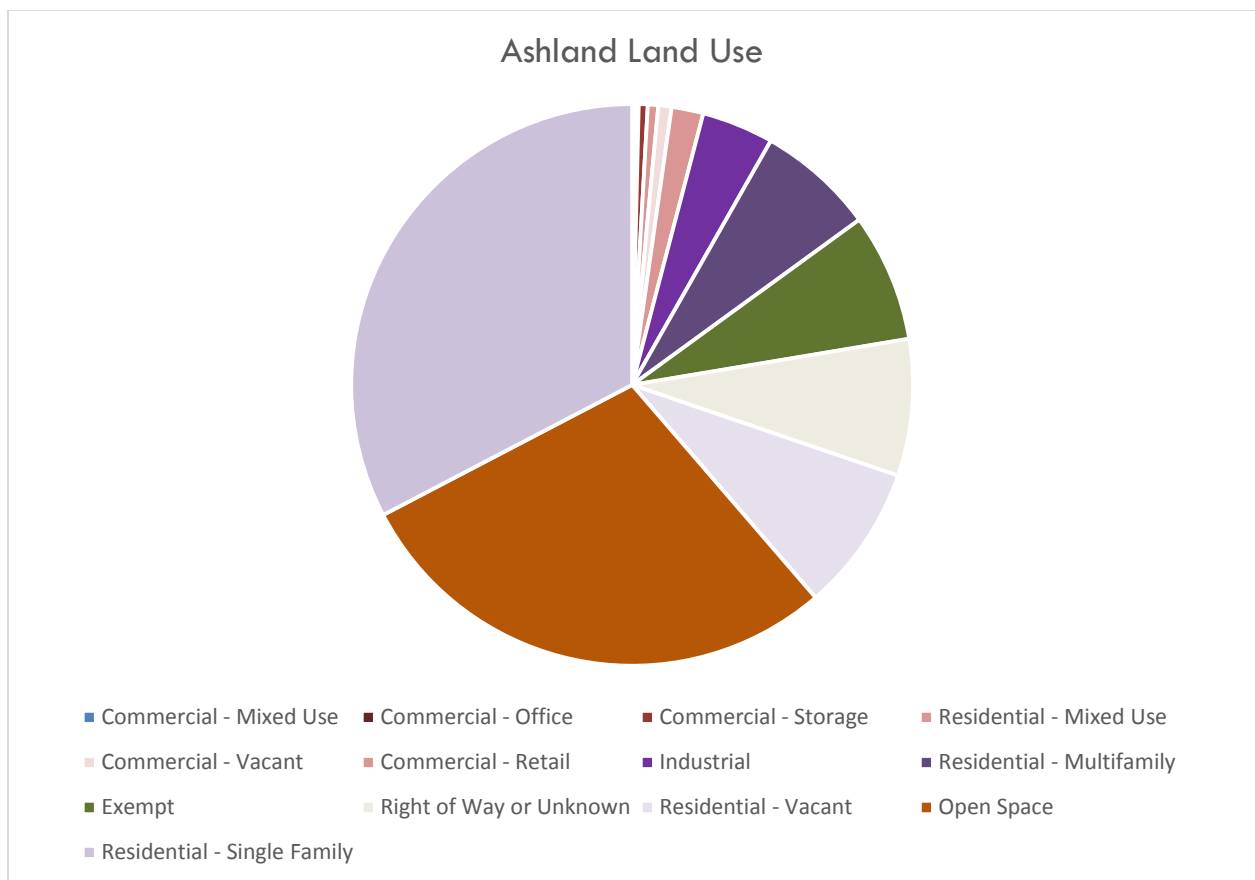
Overview



The map above shows the land uses classified according to the Ashland assessing records and Massachusetts Geographic Information System (MassGIS) data.

The green represents open space in the town. The darker yellow shade denotes single family residential uses, and the lighter yellow vacant, residentially-zoned land. The yellow-green shade shows the location of multi-family housing. Commercial/retail uses are clustered in the downtown, and along Route 126, with some along Route 135. The largest areas of industrial uses are found on the Sherborn border; on both sides of Spring Street, near the boundary with Hopkinton; and an area bisected by Cold Spring Brook, between Main Street and Chestnut Street. There are also industrial uses near the downtown and the Sudbury River.

Open Space/Recreational land accounts for approximately 29% (or 2362 acres) of the 8,239 acres comprising the town of Ashland. Residential uses account for 48%, or 3,944 acres (both developed and zoned for residential development). The various categories of commercial and retail land uses total 273 acres, or 3.3%. Industrially-used land is 341 acres, 4%. The mixed use category, which is broken down by separate residential and commercial components, totals 63 acres, or .8% of the land. Tax exempt land uses (typically municipal uses, churches, etc.) is 608 acres, or 7%. The balance is rights of ways. The pie chart below shows these various categories in detail.



Sources: Town of Ashland Assessing Data; MassGIS; MAPC

Developed Land Summary

Ashland's pattern of land uses, like that of many New England towns, has been influenced by the historic road, water and railroads in town. This section will review land that has been developed, or built on.

The Sudbury River, running east from Framingham to Southborough/Hopkinton on the west, was harnessed for mills as early as the 1730's. Running parallel to the River, the Boston and Worcester (B&W) Railroad had tracks completed as far as Ashland by 1834, commencing service thru to Worcester on July 4, 1835. The route included a stop in the area that would become the town center of Ashland. Unionville, as the area was known at the time, was equal distance from Framingham and Hopkinton, and five miles from Holliston. The B&W carried both passengers and freight from the beginning. The railroad and the Sudbury River physically divide the Town into a northern and southern portion.

State Routes 126 and 135 run generally north/south and are located in the eastern and central portions, respectively of the community, carrying traffic through Ashland, but to the town center. Downtown Ashland is located along Main Street, including the intersections of Main, Front Street and Homer Avenue and Summer Street. The land uses are a mixture of retail, some industrial and residences, including historic structures reflecting the continued evolution of this area.

The same mix of commercial development, industry and housing is found along Route 126/Pond Street. Route 135/Union Street has a small node of commercial uses around the intersection with Cherry and Summer Streets.

Only 49 acres are currently developed as residential/commercial mixed use.

The majority of the rest of the land in Ashland is used for either residences or open space. Single family residences utilize 33% of the land in Ashland. Multi-family dwellings occupy another 7% of the land. The built residential category accounts for 40% of the land. Many of the homes are located on suburban-style cul de sacs, with no connectivity between the different developments.

Undeveloped Land Summary

Undeveloped land includes lands used for conservation, parks, recreation, agriculture, and vacant land zoned for residential, commercial or industrial uses. These lands may be publicly or privately owned. They are important because they also form part of Ashland's land use pattern. The lands zoned for use provide information on the ready availability to expand these uses.

Ashland is fortunate to have almost 29% of its land in open space. The Town Forest in the northeast portion of the community, Hopkinton State Park and Reservoir on the western boundary, and Ashland State Park and Reservoir in the southern part of town provide recreation opportunities easily accessible to most residents. Altogether, these areas comprise ____ acres. There are ___ acres of Chapter 61, 61A, 61B lands. These are properties used for agricultural purposes and they are eligible for local property tax relief as long as they remain in these uses.

According to the assessing data, there are 695 acres of vacant, residentially zoned land and 63 acres of commercially-zoned vacant land. The current data likely includes the large parcel zoned in the Rail Transit District south of Ashland station.

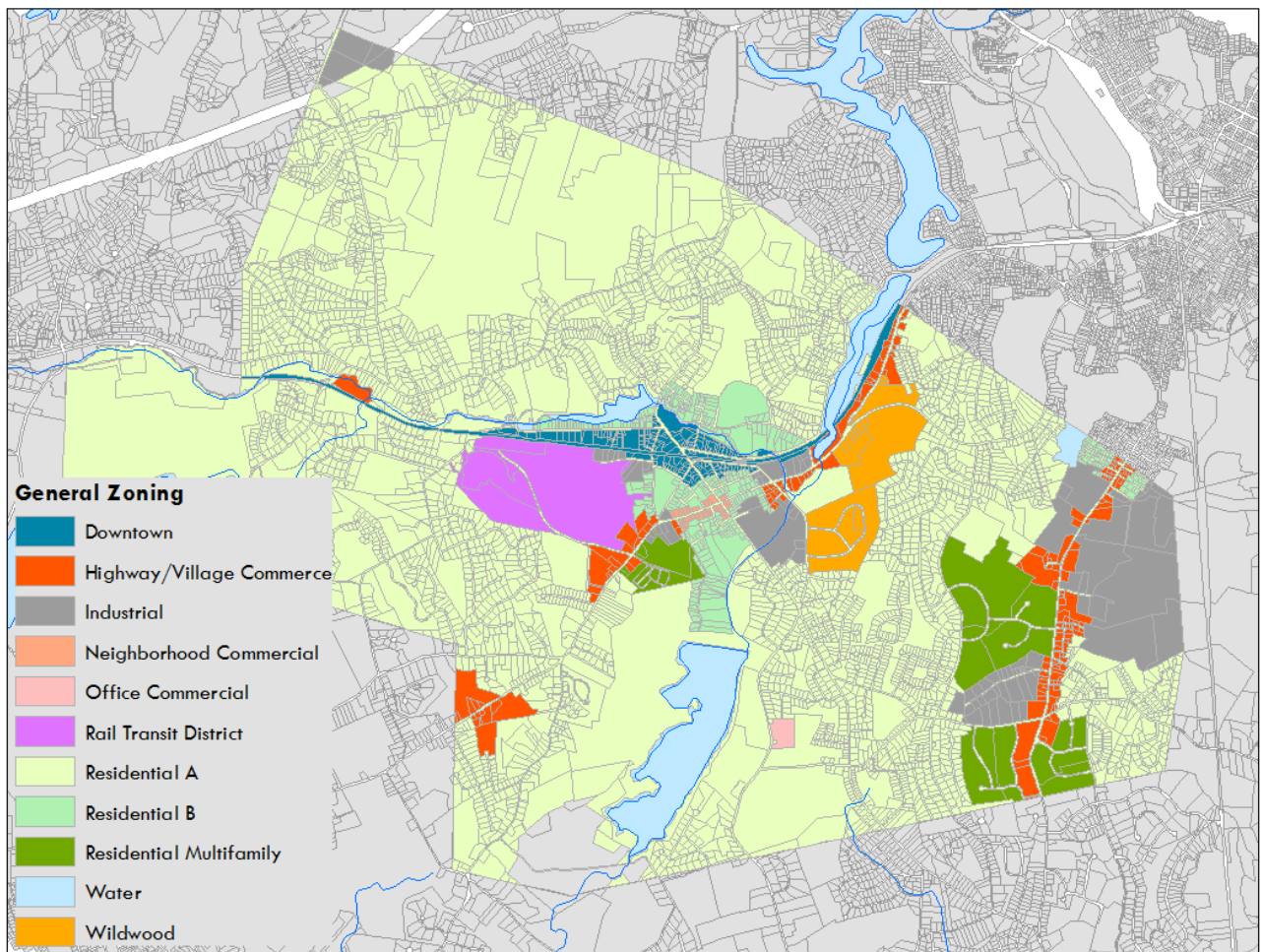
Conclusion

Ashland's land use pattern is based on its 300 year history of development. Rivers and lakes, the terrain, and transportation infrastructure further define a community's character. Changes in these patterns occur when new development or redevelopment takes place. Changes to industrial uses often provide redevelopment opportunities. For areas developed with small lots (such as part of the downtown area), new development may not occur unless there is lot consolidation, either privately or as a result of town action.

If changes in the land use pattern are needed or desirable, the chief mechanism to achieve this is through zoning, the subject of the next section.

Zoning and Other Land Use Regulations

Zoning by-laws regulate the kind, intensity and location of development within a community. Ashland has numerous zoning districts and overlay districts that exist in town. There are three basic Residential zones, but housing is also permitted in most of the commercial districts (except for the Industrial District) and is allowed in specified subdistricts of the Ashland Downtown District, the Pond Street Mixed Use Overlay District, the Wildwood Mixed Use Special District, and the Rail Transit District. Below is a generalized zoning map. The map indicates the zoning districts. Each separate district has regulations about what types of uses are allowed, dimensional standards (such as height limits), and parking requirements.



A summary of the various zoning districts in Ashland follows

Residence A covers three-quarters of the town. It is a conventional district for single-family home development, though Ashland also allows assisted living facilities and senior housing by right. A conforming lot in this district requires at least 30,000 sq. ft. of land (90 percent upland) and 150 feet of frontage with a 40-foot front setback. In addition, lot shape regulations apply in RA and all other zoning districts (Section 4.1.4).

Residence B covers approximately 400 parcels around Downtown Ashland and the north side of Pond Street/Route 126. It allows both single-family and two-family dwellings (new or by conversion) by right. A conforming lot in the RB district has 20,000 sq. ft. of land and 125 feet of frontage, but a two-family home requires 30,000 sq. ft. Further, Ashland imposes a maximum floor area cap of 4,500 sq. ft. on single-family and two-family dwellings in the RB (and other) districts for lots with less than 30,000 sq. ft. in area. The size limit applies unless the Board of Appeals grants a waiver.

Residence Multifamily (RM) is a district designated for multi-family housing - except that multi-family dwellings are allowed only by special permit from the Board of Appeals and only on parcels of five or more acres with at least 300 feet of frontage. There is a density limit of one unit per 5,000 sq. ft. of lot area and 2,500 sq. ft. per bedroom. The design standards clearly favor townhouses over garden-style units (and by default, homeownership developments over rental housing) for Ashland prohibits building entrances that provide access to more than two units and also limits building heights to two stories and twenty-eight feet. By contrast, the maximum height for single-family and two-family homes in all zoning districts is 2 1/2 stories and 35 feet.

Highway Commerce (CH) is a commercial district where single-family dwellings, assisted living facilities, and senior housing developments are permitted as of right. The Board of Appeals has authority to grant special permits for two-family homes and "planned" multi-family developments (a term undefined in the Zoning By-law.) Although not shown in the Table of Principal Use Regulations, mixed uses with residential units are allowed by special permit in the CH district, up to five units per acre (Section 7.7). There is a maximum height of three stories for residential uses (two stories less than allowed for commercial uses.)

Downtown Commerce (CD) is nearly identical to CH, except that two-family homes are allowed by right and mini-storage facilities are prohibited. Dwellings must comply with the same dimensional regulations that apply in the RB district, including maximum height of three stories and thirty-five feet (two stories less than allowed for commercial uses.)

Village Commerce (CV) is a small district east of Route 126 in the Southeast corner of town. In this district, two-family homes require a special permit. The minimum lot requirement is 15,000 sq. ft., with at least 100 feet of frontage; the minimum front setback, twenty feet; and the maximum height, four stories.

Neighborhood Commerce (CN) is the only area in Ashland where the town allows accessory apartments by right and the Board of Appeals can grant a special permit to convert a single-family or two-family home to multi-family units (up to four). There is a very small minimum lot area requirement of 5,000 sq. ft. However, there is a maximum lot coverage rule of 15 percent.

Office Commerce (CO) allows single-family dwellings but is the only commercial district that prohibits two-family dwellings. However, a mixed-use building with upper-story housing units is allowed by special permit.

Ashland Downtown District (ADD) is intended to operate as Ashland's downtown zoning. It consists of three sub-areas, each with different use and dimensional requirements. It is the only district to impose a *maximum* front setback or to regulate use intensity based on gross floor area ratio (FAR.) Parking requirements are 75% of what would typically be required in other districts.

Sub-Area A provides for the highest intensity of use (FAR 2.0); it allows multi-family dwellings and both horizontal and vertical mixed uses by right, together with retail stores, bakeries, ice cream shops, restaurants, theatres, indoor recreation, light industrial uses, Single-family and two-family homes are prohibited. Multi-family density cannot exceed ten units per acre. Permissible building heights vary by class of use.

Sub-Area B is similar to Sub-Area A, but single-family dwellings are allowed by special permit.

Sub-Area C seems to encourage a more residentially oriented mix of uses. Here, the town allows single-family homes by right and limits multi-family dwellings to a special permit requirement. Buildings are limited to three stories regardless of use.

Ashland has placed many expectations on development in the ADD, and some of those expectations imply a desire for larger-scale projects. For example, the town requires construction of sidewalks in front of buildings in the ADD, pedestrian areas and amenities for buildings exceeding 30,000 sq. ft., and connecting walkways with adjacent neighborhoods. These standards would not be difficult for a large-scale project, but for existing properties seeking to evolve toward the goals of the ADD, the cost to provide pedestrian infrastructure could be problematic and may discourage small redevelopment projects.

Pond Street Mixed-Use Overlay District (PSMUOD) allows horizontal and vertical mixed uses, retail development, light industrial uses, and research and development, if a proposed project satisfies eight criteria and five review standards. The maximum building height is five stories, though the Planning Board can approve a height increase. PSMUOD contemplates fairly high-density development, for the district allows multi-family units up to one per 2,000 sq. ft. of lot area (21 units per acre). Any development with ten or more dwelling units is required to set aside at least 10 percent of the units as housing affordable to low- and moderate-income households.

Wildwood Mixed Use Special District (WMUSD) consists of five sub-areas with a combined total of about 150 acres. Wildwood "A" provides for more residential uses and a variety of housing

by right, whereas Wildwood "B," "D," and "E" around the intersection of Waverly, East Union, and Union Streets provide for industrial and office uses, restaurants, banks, and nursing homes by right, and hotels by special permit. Development in the WMUSD requires a minimum tract of fifty acres. The maximum residential density permitted in the district varies by sub-area and class of use. For example, senior housing requires a minimum of 4,000 sq. ft. per unit plus 1,050 feet for two bedrooms, but multi-family units without age restrictions require a minimum of 5,000 sq. ft. per unit and 1,000 sq. ft. per bedroom. The by-law also imposes limits on the percentage of developable land that can be devoted to multi-family dwellings in Wildwood "A," and when proposed in Wildwood "D," multi-family projects have to include a reservation of land for commercial development. As in the PSMUOD, affordable housing is required in Wildwood "A" and "D." This district has remarkably prescriptive site planning requirements and performance standards, and specific application procedures (in addition to Ashland's site plan application requirements) that are intended to document a project's consistency with the WMUSD by-law.

Rail Transit District (RTD) includes nearly 200 acres in the vicinity of the Ashland MBTA station and the Nyanza Superfund site. The RTD concept calls for a mix of industrial, commercial, and residential uses in a planned arrangement that takes advantage of access to commuter rail. It consists of six sub-areas, including three that encourage many types of residential uses and one sub-area (A) limited to age-restricted housing. Rental housing is specifically listed as a permitted use in only one sub-area (D). The maximum allowable density for the RTD as a whole depends on the unit type, with rental housing at a maximum of twenty units per buildable acre (in sub-area E) and ten units per buildable acre for age-restricted units. A Transit Village Community (TVC) composed of "luxury" housing units and accessory services is allowed by right with significantly reduced off-street parking requirements, subject to site plan review by the Planning Board, in two of the RTD's sub-areas.

Specific Zoning Issues

1. Mixed-Use Development

As described above, mixed use development is permitted, generally by special permit, in a variety of zoning districts and overlay districts in Ashland.

2. Accessory Dwellings

Section 7.6 of the zoning by-laws permit Accessory Family Dwelling Units in single family homes by special permit. The by-law limits occupancy of the accessory unit to four persons and requires owner occupancy of the structure (either the principal or accessory unit.) Boarders and lodgers are not permitted. The floor area of the accessory unit may not exceed 800 square feet, or 25% of the floor area of the principal unit, whichever is larger. Occupancy permits for accessory units must be renewed every two years and are not transferrable upon sale or change of occupancy.

3. Conversion of Dwellings

Single family buildings may be converted to two-family dwellings in the Residence B, Residence Multifamily, Downtown Commerce, and Neighborhood Commerce districts as-of-right, and in the Highway Commerce and Village Commerce districts subject to special permit by the Board of Appeals. Conversion to three-or four family structures is permitted only in the Neighborhood

Commerce district by special permit from the Board of Appeals. The zoning by-law prohibits expansion of the principal structure or the creation of additional entrances visible from a street. The lot must satisfy minimum lot area requirements plus 50% of the lot area requirement for each additional unit. Minimum unit size is 700 square feet.

4. Over-55 Housing Developments

Section 7.2 of the Zoning by-law sets forth requirements for “Senior Residential Communities” in Ashland. Units must be owned/occupied by at least one person over 55 and no more than one non-handicapped person under that age, except in case of emergency and for a limited period of time. Maximum density for such developments is five units per acre, with no more than two bedrooms per unit. Only detached or attached single family homes are permitted. Specific site design requirements are specified in the by-law, including a prohibition on through streets, maximum lot coverage of 25%, and a 30-foot separation distance between structures.

5. Parking Requirements

The zoning by-law requires two spaces per residential unit, except in the ADD, where requirements are reduced by 25%. Shared parking and reductions in parking requirements are permitted by special permit in certain districts such as the Village Commerce and Neighborhood Commerce districts.

Other Land Use Regulations

Other regulations pertinent to land use development in Ashland include subdivision control and site plan review, both under the purview of the Planning Board. Site Plan Review applies to all new construction (except single family homes) and substantial alternations to commercial and industrial buildings. Also, the Ashland Wetlands Bylaw and Stormwater Bylaw are both administered by the Conservation Commission. The Historical Commission is responsible for managing the demolition delay bylaw.

Ashland also has a Redevelopment Authority with eminent domain powers that enable it to plan and implement redevelopment of “blighted areas”. Any plans must be approved by the Planning Board, ensuring a coordinated approach to redevelopment in Ashland.

Putting It All Together

The final version of a land use element in a comprehensive plan should be prepared after all the other elements have been completed, so that economic development, housing, transportation and open space goals can all be taken into account, along with municipal space needs. The following are therefore a preliminary set of Land Use Recommendations based on the Vision and Goals, the 2015 Housing Production Plan and MAPC's review of past planning studies completed for the town of Ashland by other consultants.

DRAFT MAPC Recommendations

1. Confirm the Focused Growth scenario, showing more growth around Ashland Downtown and at strategic spots on Rte. 126/Pond Street.
2. Ensure that other plan elements support this scenario.
3. Revise the Ashland zoning by-law to accomplish/implement the land use goals. The by-law is overly complex and difficult to use.
4. Consider including an infill development provision to encourage development of small single-family homes on substandard size lots.
5. Adopt an inclusionary housing bylaw.
6. Strengthen existing commercial/shopping plaza nodes on Route 126 by adding new uses, enhancing walkability and adding open space and landscape amenities.
7. Reinforce safe routes and connections to the Bay Circuit Trail where it crosses Route 126.
8. Strengthen frontages on Route 126 by adding public and private landscaping enhancements in the front yard setback and consolidating the number of curb cuts.
9. Plan for open space paths/trail network and additional sidewalks.
10. Continue to work on relocating the police and fire stations outside of downtown Ashland.