

# Natick 360

Honoring Our Past. Planning Our Future.



## Vision for the Future Values and Vision Inputs Consolidation (Ver. 2.0, November 14, 2006)

### Preface

Over 325 Natick citizens gathered at Wilson Middle School Saturday and Sunday, October 28-29, to share their ideas about what they value about living in Natick, and their vision for Natick's future.

The participants each invested two hours in Natick's future by attending one of six workshops, four Saturday and two Sunday. At each workshop, the participants joined small groups of 10-18. After introductions, they further divided into smaller groups to consider first the Values questions:

- What would you like to preserve here in Natick?
- What are the community's values that are so important to you in Natick that you would not want to lose?
- What do you value the most about living in Natick?

Participants then broke into smaller groups again to brainstorm their vision of Natick's future:

- If you had one wish for the future of Natick, what would it be?
- Twenty years from now, what will an ideal Natick look like to you?
- What will Natick look like when your children choose a place to live?

Near the end of the session, all concurrent workshop participants came together to share their values and visions, to develop Common Themes among all the workshops.

Professional facilitators led each small group and took notes on easel pads. This document rearranges those notes to group the values information and the vision information together, while eliminating duplication. Numbers in parentheses ( ) show how many small groups reported the item.

The next step in the process is to share this information and work with the public and the five boards and committees that sponsor Natick 360 to write values statements and vision statements that will guide the remainder of the Natick 360 strategic plan. The five sponsors are: Board of Selectmen, Conservation Commission, Finance Committee, Planning Committee and School Committee.

### Natick 360

The Natick 360 strategic planning process is a citizen-driven approach to creating a long-range plan for the Town of Natick. It is organized into four phases:

1. *Our Community Yesterday and Today* report by MAPC.
2. *Our Shared Vision for the Future*, with community workshops, Oct. 27-29, 2006, to develop Values and Vision statements for the Town.
3. *Our Strategic Options*, organized around focus areas and alternative scenarios, with policies, programs and projects, and associated costs.
4. *Our Strategic Choices*, with community workshops, May 18-20, 2007 and a scientific sample survey in June 2007.

The Fall 2007 Town Meeting will consider adopting the final strategic plan.

The Strategic Planning Oversight Committee directs the process: Craig Ross and David Parish, Co-Chairs, Rosemary Driscoll, Terri Evans, John Heerwagen, Matthew Gardner, George Richards, Harlee Strauss and Fred Witte. Blackerby Associates, independent consultants, manages and facilitates the process.

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## Values: Common Themes

### Affordability, Housing, Neighborhoods and Development

- Affordability (16) of housing and general cost of living is a value but already in jeopardy (3); want to preserve and increase/enhance affordability in the community to support diverse populations economically and by age-group
  - Town service employees should be able to afford to live in the town where they work: teachers, police, fire, etc.
  - Affordable housing options should be dispersed around the Town, and balanced with infrastructure, roads and schools
  - Continue to have lower cost of housing and taxes, relative to many surrounding communities.
  - Young families and returning children should be able to own a home and live in Natick.
  - Vulnerable populations – including people who are aging and disabled – should be able to remain in their homes even as property values or taxes increase.
- Housing density (6) options should be concentrated in selected areas, such as Natick Center, near train stations, etc., where infrastructure can support them.
- Neighborhoods should maintain their character as they are redeveloped, such as parks, neighborliness and ‘tree-lined street-ness,’ density, use of accessory living units, etc. Contributing to the ‘small-town feel’
- Open space should be preserved in spite of more intensive development.
- Preserve local autonomy and control over growth and development.
- Preserve unique neighborhoods and satellite mini-cores or villages, to foster a sense of neighborhood identity, and establish valuable focal points for Town activities.

### Arts & Culture, Library

- A very strong & burgeoning Arts & Cultural presence lends a new and valuable dimension to the Town (4)
- Natick Center is a cultural center of attraction (4), with family oriented; family programs; youth exposure; community arts; activities; music school; performance and visual arts; studios; galleries; The Center for the Arts in Natick (6).
- Natick Libraries (7) are valuable community assets, serving as gateways to participation in Town life, a gathering place for citizens, and support for family educational activities.

### Business & Economy

- Businesses are welcome and encouraged; they support Town infrastructure and participate in community activities.
- The diversity of the employers in Natick is valuable, supporting different job skills, wage levels and business sectors, such as retail, technology, military (2) and finance.
- Natick’s major employers are important partners in Natick’s economy.
- The Natick Mall is a valuable asset, which pays property taxes and wages, attracts shoppers region-wide, and provides entertainment and shopping options for Town residents, while occupying a corner of the Town separate from Natick Center.

## Community/Senior/Teen/Recreation Center

- Preserve commitment to seniors (2)
- Preserve outstanding recreation programs.

## Diversity

- Natick values diversity, tolerance and acceptance of differences (5): intergenerational (11), socio-economic (18), political (4), religion (4), cultural (4), racial & ethnic (5), backgrounds, newcomers (6) and vulnerable populations, and the interconnections (2) among these different groups.
- Diversity of businesses/jobs in Natick (5)

## Education & Schools

- Education: preserve strong schools at all levels (8)
  - Quality teachers
  - Culture of continuous improvement
  - Good pre-school program & all day kindergarten
  - Elementary schools are great and getting better (5)
  - Value middle schoolers as individuals
  - Natick High School Pride (3): Home of Champions; NHS Sports; good coaches
  - Strong special ed
  - Strong curriculum: 15 AP courses, 3-4 languages; library programs
  - High performing high school
  - Student community service
- Compared to neighboring towns (8)
  - Factoring in economic diversity...we outrank other towns
  - We outperform others in sports, community inclusiveness, music
- We need to be willing to spend more on education (10)
  - Funding constraints: Average per pupil...\$7-8,000/student; kids are our future...put our dollars there
  - Distribution of dollars: where do we want the dollars to go, i.e. attract high quality
  - Willingness of town to invest in its schools, not just buildings but the teachers and value system; commitment to education and schools (3)
- Neighborhood schools (5)
- Schools and the community (5)
  - Like elected School Committee – representation
  - Community, parents involvement (2)
  - Cooperation between school community and rest of town
  - One generation looks after the next...we never lost our connectedness (schools)

## Government, Hospitals, Service Organizations & Participation

- Town government (4) is accessible (5); has good communications; is open (2); and is composed of diverse, cooperative, dedicated, caring, active, giving, volunteers (2) and civil servants (2).
- Opportunities to become engaged in town life; participation (8); 300 participate in Natick 360; group participants involved in 35 organizations & institutions
- Representative Town Meeting form of government (2)
- Interagency cooperation
  - Natick Center Association and Town Government
  - Planning board re: downtown...Hoop District...Smart growth, etc.
  - School and Natick Service Council
- Financial stability of town:
  - Stable tax base much better than any town council...no big jumps or surprises
  - Downtown buildings
- Commitment to long term continuous improvement
- Preserve amazing town services (5): firefighting, trash(3), schools, etc.
- Natick Service Council (3)
- Preserve hospitals (2) within the Town of Natick, and the top quality services currently available

## Natick Center, Common, History

- Character of downtown (3); strong downtown center builds community; engaging; wide mix of uses: residential, commercial, retail, professional
- Maintain historical integrity & preservation (8): town hall, fire and police station look historical; we have been sensitive to retain the historical look
- Vibrant downtown (9) is a focal point to gather (8), with handsome, libraries (5), economic base, convenient, inviting, lush (3)
- Locally owned businesses (13): Natick Is a real town; not the Gap; no chains; Casey's
- Keep downtown art component (4); encourage it: TCAN (3) karate, music, concerts on common, flea market, restaurants, art shows, museums, associations, Kids Connect and other programs (3) after school
- The Common (10)
- Natick Center is walkable and is accessible to neighborhoods and transportation systems.

## Open Space & Environment

- Preserve open space (19), natural environments (2); passive & active recreation (3); conservation; parks (2); lakes (4); beaches (2); Town forest (8); trees (3); Dug Pond; river (2); Audubon (2); playing fields; wetlands; wildlife (2); vernal pools,
- Preserve historical sites (2), including Indian burial ground
- Farms (14): "I would really hate to see this disappear" "Spiritually refreshing that it is there." "That would be a sad loss." "If it goes on the market, Town should buy it up."
- Accessibility (5): walkable / bikeable

## Public Safety

- Feeling of safety (8): Sidewalks (2), Police, fire; some folks feel OK not locking doors!
- Safe place for kids evenings & weekends – low crime (2)
  - Activities, Recreation & Parks
  - Community Farm
  - Natick Coop Play Group
  - TCAN

## Recreation & Sports

- Great recreational programs (7) and recreational facilities (2)
- Events (6): Natick Days, Concerts, Farmer’s Market, concerts, tour de Natick, book sales; Friday night ball games; block parties
- Preserve senior service programs, i.e. classes, something going on all the time
- Youth sports programs (6)
- We like how people can interact through recreational opportunities...like Wood Trail, Concerts, etc.

## Town Culture

- Small town feeling (19); large town amenities; common beliefs; convenient; real town; right size; small town values; identity (3); pride (7) sense of place; heart and passion (2); “Old fashioned” feel (2); more than a Mall
- Interconnections among residents, expressed through participation in civic affairs and volunteerism (12), through community organizations (12), enable people to live, work, play, pray in Natick (3), and strengthen the residents’ “sense of community” (19)
- Amenities, fabric and culture of Natick
  - Events (5); activities (4); culture, artist colony, TCAN (4); youth sports and education
  - Transportation center / crossroads (2) of major highways west of Boston
  - Senior Center /Community Center (3)
- Natick residents are friendly (9), family-oriented (6), neighborly (8), welcoming (6), unpretentious (3): down-to-Earth; regular folk.
- Natick residents value their long history (8), heritage and traditions

## Transportation, Traffic & Roads

- We have and value alternative transportation; commuter rail between Boston and Worcester (9)
- Accessibility to Mass Pike
  - Neighborhood bus (3) and LIFT Bus; seniors can’t drive.

## Vision: Common Themes

### Business & Employment

- Small biz, people live and work here
- Keep open to business and residences (2)
- The Mall is Natick-friendly; the tone of discussion with /about the malls is friendly; better relationships; Mall held more accountable to contracts made with the Town; retail jobs; high end Mall condos; Mall businesses will jump at chance to sponsor activities
- Largely bedroom community; place to live, not industry, but large businesses, such as Boston Scientific, Mathworks, Cognex, TJX
- Attract employment (2), but there are some limits on space; place with good paying jobs and housing that people can afford (employees, young families, seniors, teachers, Town employees, etc.)
- Major commercial activity is focused only on Route 9

### Community Center/Senior Center/Teen Center/Public Pool

- We have an intergenerational (11) community center (11); senior center (2); downtown (2); pool (3); gym; youth center (5); areas for kids to socialize: skateboard park; expand on artistic cluster that is currently downtown
- Reevaluation of educational and recreational opportunities for kids, seniors and all ages, have been reinvented to suit the changes in population and demographics.

### Development, Housing, Affordability, Neighborhoods & Growth

- Proactive planning and zoning for to support development around the town center and mini-center cores (6); smart growth (3)
- Strengthened identities of the many neighborhoods (3). Scale the town facilities, etc. to a neighborhood size; parks for the neighborhood (2)
- Lower neighborhood densities (3), higher density downtown; more single family owner occupied homes, perhaps through tax incentives (2)
- Zoning:
  - Control our own destiny (2); controversy promotes ideas and discussion
  - Zoning to cap development, control density, increase affordability
  - Work with developers – don't litigate
- Development must consider traffic impacts. (3)
- Planned town where you can work and live close by...more green...self sustaining
- Balance space (2): residential, public, commercial; mediated by green space; manage growth to avoid over-development; some space must be retained as open (2).
- No high-rises
- Affordable (19); wide variety of quality housing meeting the needs of all generations going forward, children, seniors, teachers, firefighters, students, young families, retirement, rentals, downsizing.
- Have integrated housing (2) so you don't feel like you are separated from the community; young & old together

## Diversity

- Maintain our identity as family and friends and tolerant
- Integrating intergenerational (8) opportunities and abilities; integrate with youth; multi generations are involved in schools/community
- Better welcoming, networking of new and old (2)
- Cultural (7), religion and ethnic (8) and racial diversity
- Socio-economic diversity (8) strengthened;
- Housing diversity (4): smaller units and condos downtown and other affordable housing; affordable rental stock; 55+ housing; assisted living
- No more Redmen, tomahawk chop or painting on post office wall. Use the name of the Indians that were here.

## Education and Schools

- Educational excellence at all levels (19): improved schools that rival the rich towns in terms of offerings and results;
  - Improved school curricula (3), geared to college prep
  - Small class sizes (3)
  - Reason to move town rather than to leave (3)
  - Higher test scores in schools (3); deemphasize MCAST
  - Diverse extracurricular activities
  - More electives (7); foreign languages at lower levels; international baccalaureate; technical skills alternatives (2); driver's education; music; encourage students to take risks, learn new things through broad range of programs, electives, academic support
  - Home of Champions means more than athletics; home of scholars (3)
  - Teachers are the best (6); honor and respect kids and learning; history teachers teach history; it's the people; more than a building
  - Teach kids how to think, to want to think
  - State-of-the-art technology (4), for students and for administration
  - Additional funding with accountability (3); look to grant funding and expertise from foundations and think-tanks
  - Special populations; special education programs; gifted programs
  - Libraries
- New high school (14); in 20 years, the high school is 19 or 10 years old; point of community pride (2); design for better instruction
  - Swim team pool (2)
  - Integrates with senior center... parents, seniors, non-parents are committed to the entire school system.
  - Energy efficient (2); ventilated, lighting, healthy
  - Monitor construction, budget
- Renovated elementary schools; accommodate population growth; retrofit green buildings
- Commitment to keeping of physical infrastructure of schools current (3)
- No 5<sup>th</sup> grade in middle school (4)

## Energy, Sustainability, Environmental Protection

- We are a leader as a green community (3); responsibility.
- Clean lake; water (2); green spaces
- Green, sustainable, more energy independent (2); diversified renewable energy sources
- We have aggressively implemented even more innovative recycling strategies (2).
- Continue recycling effort: look at town wide energy use, green buildings
- New high school: “green” building
- Native landscaping without chemicals

## Government, Participation, Taxes

- An involved community (7), residents and businesses; volunteers; Acknowledged as a leader in governance, education, environment and economy
- Inclusive, transparent (4) government (4); open town meeting
- Financially stable
  - Sufficient financial resources that are planned without huge jumps in taxes
  - We have stable finances...predictable revenue streams and cost projections...fewer state surprises.
- Managed growth, with an eye to impact for services, schools, infrastructure
- We have more accountability for fiscal responsibility (7)
  - We have found more sources of revenue for the town
  - We are paying more taxes. The first test was in 2007-08.
  - We are paying less taxes (2)
  - We have fewer fees – trash, athletic, school, school bus – services included in taxes
  - We don’t have confiscatory tax rates...we have continued good planning
  - We have maintained senior discounts too.
  - We don’t pit one group vs. another (seniors *vs.* schools and children)
  - People have better understanding of how town works
  - Outsource certain functions: health, pension, WIFI, trash, payroll
  - A rainy-day fund to be kept for years when state payments dip.
- We have implemented a split tax rate (2), separating business from residential (2).
- We have not implemented a split tax rate (3) ; business friendly
- Network with other institutions, other towns; regional solutions to some problems (2)
- Educate people how to participate in zoning cases.

## Health Care & Hospital

- We will have kept our hospital (5), emergency room facilities and flu shots and well baby clinic; clinics in other parts of town; community health; and affordable, consistent health care for children
- Health insurance cooperatives (2)
- Hospital partners with others nearby in regional health network

## **Natick Center, Downtown, Common**

- Natick Center has evolved to a retail and business center. Separated and mixed. A strong vital, vibrant, thriving downtown (3); mixed uses (4); smart growth
- Downtown with small town feel; a hub of the community that maintains its character (2)
- Affordable housing mix downtown (10); live, work, play, shop
- Continue to grow as a cultural center and meeting place; magnet (4); a destination downtown where outsiders shop and spend money (6); see Needham.
- Maintaining mix of large and small businesses; local businesses; diverse stores (4)
- Visual attractiveness of old and new, integrated architecturally; use upper floors of existing buildings (8); aesthetically pleasing consistency; social, political, architectural, cultural; historical buildings (4)
- Downtown parking (15): commuter(2); outside downtown, keep cars out (5), walkable (4); 400 spaces
- Accessibility: more public transportation; bike paths; sidewalks; safer crosswalks; invite participation (9)
- We have a grocery store or own indoor farmer's market downtown (12).
- We have more restaurants, bookstore, cultural (TCAN) (5) activities downtown, with night life (13), 24-hour town; movie, shopping, bowling
- Maintained infrastructure: streets, sidewalks, schools, municipal buildings

## **Open Space, Parks**

- More open space (7), connected (4) throughout Town; 1/3 of Natick is green; wildlife corridors; dog park;
  - Use the space above the rail lines; like Millennium Park in Chicago!
  - Open a big park, throughout town; place to fly a kite; sports fields; hiking woods
  - Tie within Natick to downtown
- Existing farmlands are preserved as working farms.
- Open space and recreation areas are bike and pedestrian friendly
- Preserve and maintain outdoor assets (6); Cochituate Rail Trail; passive uses such as skating
- More accessible(3); trails (3); forest, lake, Broadmoor
- Better access to nature and recreation
- The town takes advantage of some mall open space.
  - Active/passive recreation
- Controlled growth (2): preservation of open space (2), water supply, and neighborhood parks for gathering old and young; balance open space with development
- Natick is declared a Tree City, USA
  - Along sidewalks
  - Underground utilities

## Planning Processes

- Program for maintenance and investment in infrastructure (2) to keep pace with growth
- People ask us, how did you (3) create such a great community, with all these features?:
  - Go from good to great: schools and senior life
  - Community participation
  - Bike paths
  - In-town transportation
  - Green community
  - Sidewalks
  - Make Cochituate State Park so inviting?, make Pegan Cove so great?
  - Make it so livable?
  - Mobilize so many?
  - Make the schools listed as number 1 in the state?
  - Continuously invigorate the schools?
  - Maintain your neighborhood feel?
  - Achieve the regional transportation that was affordable and realistic?
  - Get resources from the state...back?
  - Retain the economic diversity?
- Natick 360 Process (4)
  - Reflect voices of all of Natick
  - Do it regularly, ongoing (3)
  - Accomplishment; early successes
  - Vote!
  - Boards work collaboratively on common goals
  - Town is too reactive; conduct pro-active years-out planning with community involvement
- Comprehensive master plan: schools (new high school), traffic (calming), zoning, open space, bike lanes, housing affordability
- Conduct a study: do families with kids cost more than those families without kids?
- Civil discourse when there are disagreements
- Controlled planning and development and keep citizens involved
- Government / process
  - Town government has a bias toward action to resolve issues
  - Form of government is appropriate to the challenges we face
  - Natick is inward focused...benchmark other communities other perspectives
  - Recognize committee work
- Smart growth (2): traffic, housing, business, flexibility (can we respond to cases individually re: affordability and their ability to pay taxes)
- Not excessive population jump

## Public Safety

- Public safety (5); no crime, appropriate fire, police, paramedical services, emergency situations, disasters, terrorism.

## Public Services, Human Services

- Maintain and improve: Recreation programs (2) breadth of offerings; okay to pay for services, i.e. pool
- Expand Natick after school program(2)
- Effective dissemination of information, coordinated, consistent; activity programs could have an add on to let people know about town resources
- Stay the way it is with conveniences
- Need for social services: Natick Service Center funded by private donations only; get a social services agency in place
- More active Natick American Legion
- TCAN: outreach to all ages for classes; movies
- Longer library hours and funding

## Town Culture

- Maintain positive feeling of potential and forward vision
- Volunteerism (4); families helping families; weave community together;
- Big town amenities with a small town feel (9)
- Preserve sense of community (5); events; community of communities; place; clubs; character; place for children to live when they grow up; keep the essence of community with more services and amenities; Whole Village model – neighbors helping neighbors, relying on the community to ‘be’ the family; preserve community values
- Diverse (2), inclusive (2), welcoming (3), vibrant, cohesive community, with connectedness and services for all ages; caring
- Make history of Natick more open and available (2); Praying Indians.
- Open forum for all ideas (2); faith community collaborations
- Cooperation with surrounding communities for services
- Full life fitness for all ages...walking trails, weight room facilities open to public, community will be a healthier place to live

## Transportation, Traffic

- Better transportation, fewer cars on the road (4); change the paradigm away from improving traffic flow; create fewer trips
  - Local energy independence 0% emissions
- Traffic managed (4); overall plan; less congestion; traffic signs are clear; interchanges; timed lights (2); north-south artery across Rte. 9, bypassing neighborhoods (3); solve traffic on Rte. 27 without making a four lane highway; no 18-wheelers on Speen St.
- More public transportation options (19) within town: neighborhood bus (8); major employer shuttles to commuter rail (4); regional solutions; Mall (2); carpooling; solutions for seniors (2)
- More sidewalks (12); safer; walk or bike to school (3)
- Natick is part of RTA, Regional Transportation Authority (4); mall has a terminal
- Roads infrastructure in better condition (4); repairs coordinated
- Access to downtown: bike (18), walk (10), rail trail (5); cross Rte. 9 on footbridge; streetcars
- With 1,200 condos in three years (potentially), that's a major concern.
- We have taken advantage of air space above rail lines (2).
- Physical continuity – able to get around the town, walk, commuter rail
- Commuter-friendly transport & parking