



# 6: Historic & Cultural Resources

## KEY FINDINGS

- + Natick has three local historic districts and 487 historic resources.
- + Only 16.8% of the historic resources are protected by MGL Article 76 which requires review of changes to historic resources.
- + In 2015, Natick had 81 artists, artisans & musical groups; 29 creative cultural enterprises, 42 arts education institutions/enterprises and 7 community cultural organizations, which together are an economic driver bringing visitors to the Town Center.

## Introduction

A town's historic, cultural and natural resources are instrumental in establishing the town character, providing an important link to the past, developing an understanding of how the town came to be what it is today, and creating the setting for future development. Throughout the course of Natick 2030+, as well as previous Town planning and visioning efforts, preserving and protecting historic and cultural resources was mentioned repeatedly in conversations with residents and other stakeholders. People were particularly concerned with the demolition and replacement of historic buildings with larger buildings out of character with the surrounding built environment.

Natick's history is described in Chapter 1: Introduction and in Chapter 3: Land Use and Zoning, as it relates to development patterns.

*Natick is rich in recreational, cultural and educational resources. The varying landscape and cultural activities act not only as a resource for residents, but also surrounding communities. As Natick looks to grow in the future, improving recreational and cultural resources will be important to attract the young professionals and families who participate in the knowledge economy. The community is already thinking about the value of recreational and cultural resources. At a recent charrette about Natick Center, participants identified cultural amenities as an asset to capitalize on for future development:*

*The people of Natick envision downtown Natick as a vibrant and diverse center for arts, commerce, and cultural resources. The vision includes preservation of the historical character of the downtown, affordability for residents and local businesses and accessibility to the Center through a wide range of transportation options.<sup>1</sup>*

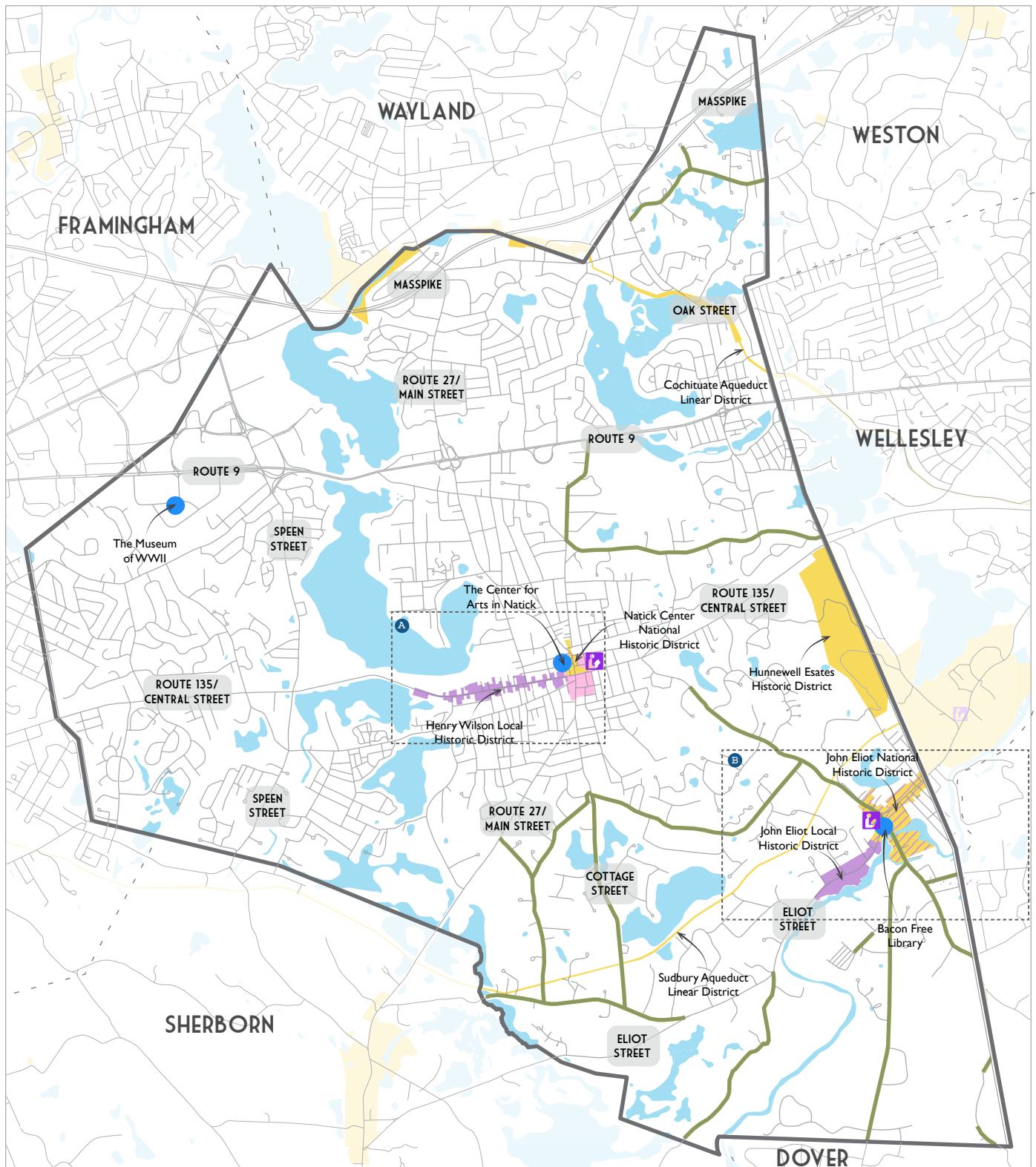
## Existing Conditions

### Historic Resources

Natick has a wealth of historic resources, including three historic districts and 487 buildings, bridges, aqueducts, monuments and burial grounds listed on the The Massachusetts Cultural Resources Information System (MACRIS) inventory (see Maps 6.1, 6.2 and 6.3). The following is a summary of the Massachusetts Historic Commission's 1980 *Reconnaissance Survey Town Report* which describes resources remaining from the historic periods:

- + **Contact Period (1500 - 1620):** Native trails around South Natick.
- + **First Settlement Period (1620 1675):** Native trails around South Natick.

<sup>1</sup> Natick 360: Our Community Yesterday and Today.



MAP 6.1: HISTORIC AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

- LEGEND**
- Local Historic District
  - National Register Historic District
  - Local & National Historic District
  - Natick Cultural District
  - Water
  - Cultural Point of Interest
  - Scenic Road
  - Library



- + **Colonial Period (1676 - 1776):** Two extremely rare houses near South Natick.
- + **Federal Period (1775 - 1830):** Village buildings in South Natick; Henry Wilson Shoe Shop.
- + **Early Industrial Period (1830 - 1870):** In Natick Center, residential development occurred on subdivisions northeast of North Main Street and North Avenue, and south of Central Street in the vicinity of Sherman, Plain, South Main and Cottage Streets. Residential buildings include Greek Revival style and simple side hall houses (West Central, Pleasant and Union Streets) and a large number of side hall cottages (Cottage, South Main and surrounding streets). Subsequent styles represented include Italianate, Second Empire and Victorian Gothic, with occasional rows of workers' houses scattered at Natick Center and South Natick. Institutional buildings include a Gothic Revival chapel (1862) at South Natick and industrial buildings include three-story wooden-frame factory buildings located along the railroad bed at Natick Center; most have been altered, although the baseball factory (ca. 1858) remains largely intact, and is the best example of its period. Buildings suitable for adaptive reuse have, for the most part, been rehabilitated for the new uses. The remaining industrial buildings are primarily one story and appear to have very limited reuse potential.
- + **Late Industrial Period (1870 - 1915):** Residential buildings include a Queen Anne-style house on Leach Lane, several Colonial Revival and Queen Anne-style houses (in Walnut Hill) and one altered Victorian Gothic-style house (Pleasant Street). Major public buildings of the period include the Victorian Gothic Morse Institute and the transitional Victorian Gothic/Queen Anne Bacon Library in South Natick (ca. 1880), scattered schoolhouses and one firehouse (early 1870s) at Natick Center (now TCAN). At least two Victorian Gothic-style, brick churches were built in Natick Center during this period. Natick Center is exceptionally rich in brick commercial blocks of Second Empire, Italianate, Victorian Gothic, Queen Anne and Colonial Revival styles built after the fire of 1874; commercial building elsewhere appears to be limited to two wood-frame commercial blocks (ca. 1890-1915) at South Natick. Industrial buildings include a small number of brick factory buildings along the railroad bed at Natick Center and several reinforced concrete factories (ca. 1910-25) along North Main and East Central Streets. Buildings suitable for adaptive reuse have, for the most part, been rehabilitated for the new uses. The remaining industrial buildings are one story and appear to have very limited reuse potential.
- + **Early Modern Period (1915 - 1940):** Residential buildings include mostly modest examples of bungalow and Colonial Revival-style houses. Institutional uses include school buildings of various styles throughout town.

The MACRIS inventory is summarized below. Approximately 70% of the listed resources are houses. Construction dates of all of the historic buildings range from 1696 to 1954:

- + Two of the buildings are from the 1600s
- + 6% are from the 1700s
- + 70% are from the 1800s
- + 24% are from the 1900s



Photo of the Isaac Felch House.



Photo of the Sawin Homestead.



Photos from the John Eliot National Register Historic District.

The identified buildings are clustered in the three Historic Districts described below, as well as north along North and South Main Street and in the area between Route 9 and West Central Avenue. There are several areas of town that have not yet been inventoried, including the residential neighborhood south of the Town Center, and South Natick by the Charles River, as well as older residential neighborhood scattered around Town.

Two houses on the MACRIS inventory that are particularly at risk and have been the subject of recent preservation discussions include:

- + The Isaac Felch House at the northeast corner of Bacon and North Main Streets. In 2015 the Town considered relocating the house to allow for intersection improvements but determined that the relocation was not cost effective.
- + The Sawin Homestead on South Street, within Mass Audubon's Broadmoor Wildlife Sanctuary. 2017 Fall Annual Town Meeting authorized the Town to acquire the building. Options explored to preserve this house include preserving the structure in place or relocating it.

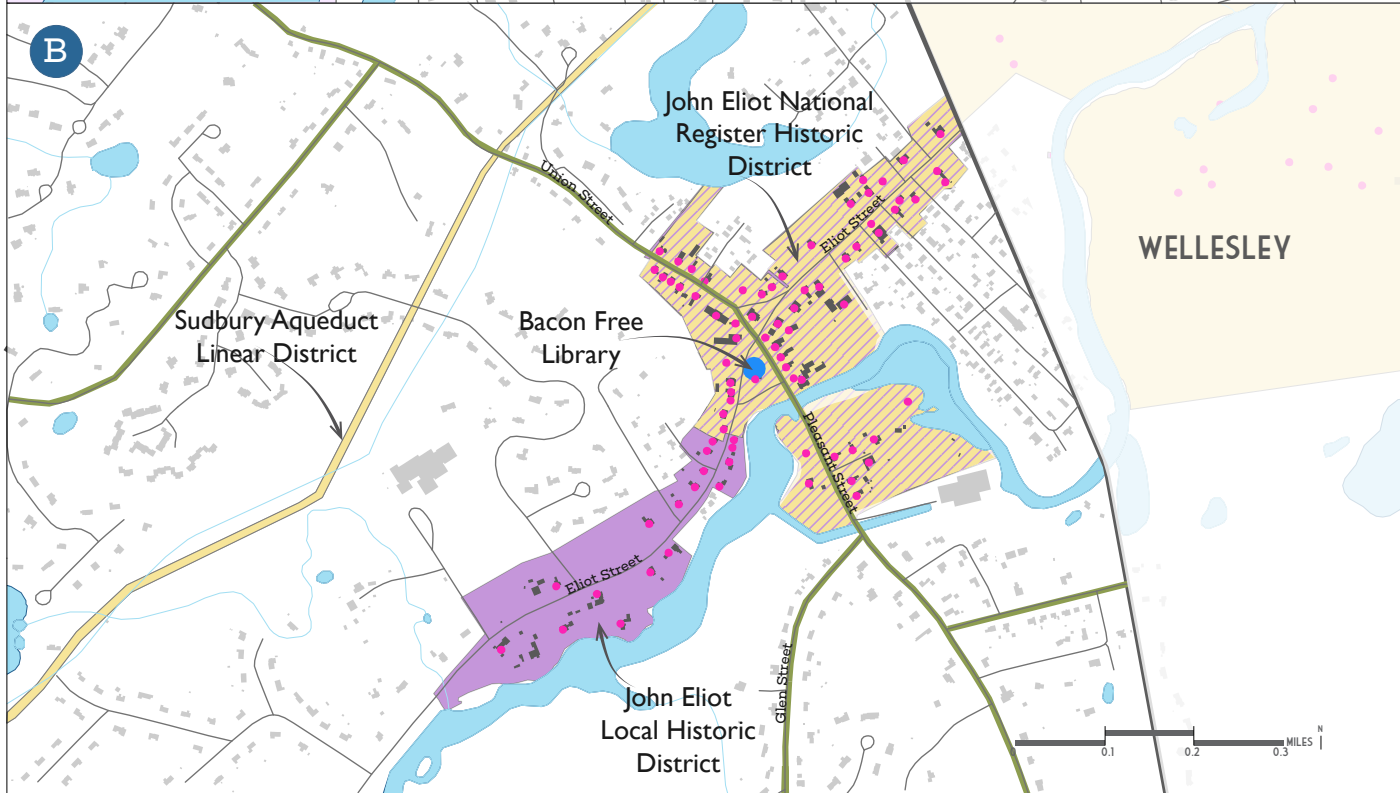
## Historic Districts

Natick has three local historic districts (see Maps 1 and 2); two of them are National Register Districts. The three districts are protected by regulations of the Historic District Commission as described later in this chapter.

- + The John Eliot National Register Historic District encompasses much of the area of South Natick along Union and Pleasant Streets, and Eliot Street from just west of Mill Street east to the Wellesley town line. The John Eliot Local Historic District extends further west along Eliot Street to just west of Riverbend Drive. This district encompasses the earliest settlement in Natick.
- + The Henry Wilson Local Historic District extends along West Central Street from just west of Main Street to Fiske Pond and primarily includes residential buildings.



Photos from the Henry Wilson Local Historic District.



MAP 6.2: HISTORIC DISTRICTS

- LEGEND**
- Local Historic District
  - National Register Historic District
  - Local & National Historic District
  - Natick Cultural District
  - Water
  - Historic Inventoried Area
  - Cultural Point of Interest
  - Historic Inventoried Property
  - Scenic Road

- + The Natick Center National Register and Local Historic District encompasses the area along North Main Street north of Central Street to just north of North Avenue. [Because most of the Natick Center buildings were constructed after the 1874 fire,] the consistent quality of buildings (Gothic and Romanesque) provides harmonious style, scale, color and texture, possessing a unity and beauty which may be identified with as the roots of Natick's development. Source: Massachusetts Historic Commission Survey form.



*Photos from the Natick Center National Register and Local Historic District.*

Historic districts listed on National and/or State Registers, but without Natick Local Historic District status, include:

- + The Sudbury Aqueduct Linear District (on both the State and National Registers)
- + Sacred Heart Church Complex (included in the John Eliot National Register Historic District)
- + The Cochituate Aqueduct Linear District (on the State Register)
- + Hunnewell Estates (on the State Register)
- + Clark Houses (on the State Register)

The following districts were included in the MACRIS Inventory, but currently have no local, state or federal designation:

- + Natick Research and Development Labs
- + Natick Speen Street Army National Guard Facility
- + The Natick Common
- + Lake Cochituate Reservoir
- + Cochituate Utility Buildings
- + Walnut Hill School



## Historic Buildings

### *Public Buildings*

The following Natick Town and federal buildings are listed on the historic inventory:

- + The original Morse Institute Library building was dedicated on December 25, 1873, less than two weeks before the fire that burned all of downtown. The library escaped with minor damage.
- + The Bacon Free Library in South Natick, home to the Natural and Historical Society Museum (1880)
- + The Natick Center Post Office (1937)
- + South Natick Fire Station (date not available)
- + Johnson Elementary School (1949)
- + Former Coolidge Junior High School, now used by the Natick Housing Authority (1926)
- + The historic Central Fire Station on Summer Street, built in 1875, was converted into The Center for Arts in Natick (TCAN) in 2003.



*From the top: Photos of the Morse Institute Library, the Bacon Free Library, the Natick Post Office, the South Natick Fire Station and the Johnson Elementary School.*



## Churches

Natick has five historic churches still operating as churches. Historic churches in the Town Center include:

- + First Congregational Church (1875)
- + St. Paul's Episcopal Church (1920)
- + St. Patrick's Church (1892-1902) - the complex includes several buildings which are currently vacant and comprise the site of a proposed mixed-use development. The redevelopment proposal does not include the church.
- + The Universalist Church (1890) is now the Annunciation Orthodox Church

Historic Churches in South Natick include:

- + Eliot Church (1828)



At left, from the top: Photos of the Former Coolidge Junior High School, the former Central Fire Station (now TCAN), the First Congregational Church and the Eliot Church.

Clockwise, from above: St. Patrick's Church, St. Paul's Church and the former Universalist Church.



**Former Churches**

Natick has three historic churches which have been converted to other uses or are permitted for conversion to another use.

- + The former Natick Episcopal Church on Wilson Street in Natick Center (Victorian Gothic – no year given) has been converted to residential use
- + Sacred Heart Church (1873) on Eliot Street in south Natick is vacant and is permitted for conversion to residential use.
- + The Eliot Federated Church of South Natick (1862) has been converted for use by the Riverbend School.



**Historic Objects**

Historic objects on the MA Historic Commission inventory include:

- + Civil War Soldiers Memorial (1868) on the Town Common
- + Spanish War Memorial (1926) on the Town Common
- + Wilson Memorial Tree Monument (tree planted in 1912) on the Town Common
- + Statue of the Blessed mother at Sacred Heart Church (date unavailable)
- + Natick – Boston Milestone (1750) on Hartford Street
- + Natick Research and Development Building #71 Flag Pole on Fourth Ave. (1954)



From the top: Photos of the former Natick Episcopal Church, the Sacred Heart Church and the former Eliot Federated Church.



Clockwise from above: Photos of the Civil War Memorial, the Spanish War Memorial and the Wilson Memorial Tree Monument.





### **Historic Burial Grounds and Cemeteries**

Historic burial grounds and cemeteries include:

- + Indian Burial Ground on Union Street in South Natick (1731)
- + Indian Cemetery on Pond Street west of Natick Center (1750)
- + North Natick Cemetery on North Main Street (1758)
- + Boden Lane Cemetery in West Natick (1815)
- + Ullrich Family Monument in South Natick (1961)



The Town of Natick commissioned two subsequent surveys of historic resources (in 2008 and 2012) with the following specific project goals:

- + *“To conduct an intensive survey of Natick using the MHC survey methodology and inventory forms.*
- + *To identify contexts for National Register evaluation and to apply the National Register criteria to all resources identified in the survey.*
- + *To submit to the Town a list of individual properties and/or districts that are recommended for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places.*



*The results of (these) survey(s) will assist the Town’s long-range preservation and growth management planning. The documents will be used to proactively control potential loss or destruction of historic resources through expansion of the Town’s inventory; expand adjacent historic districts to include newly surveyed properties; identify potential new districts; and expand the Town’s Design Review Committee Authority.<sup>2</sup>*

*From the top: Photos of the Indian Burial Ground sign, the Indian Burial Ground Marker and the entrance to the Boden Lane Cemetery.*

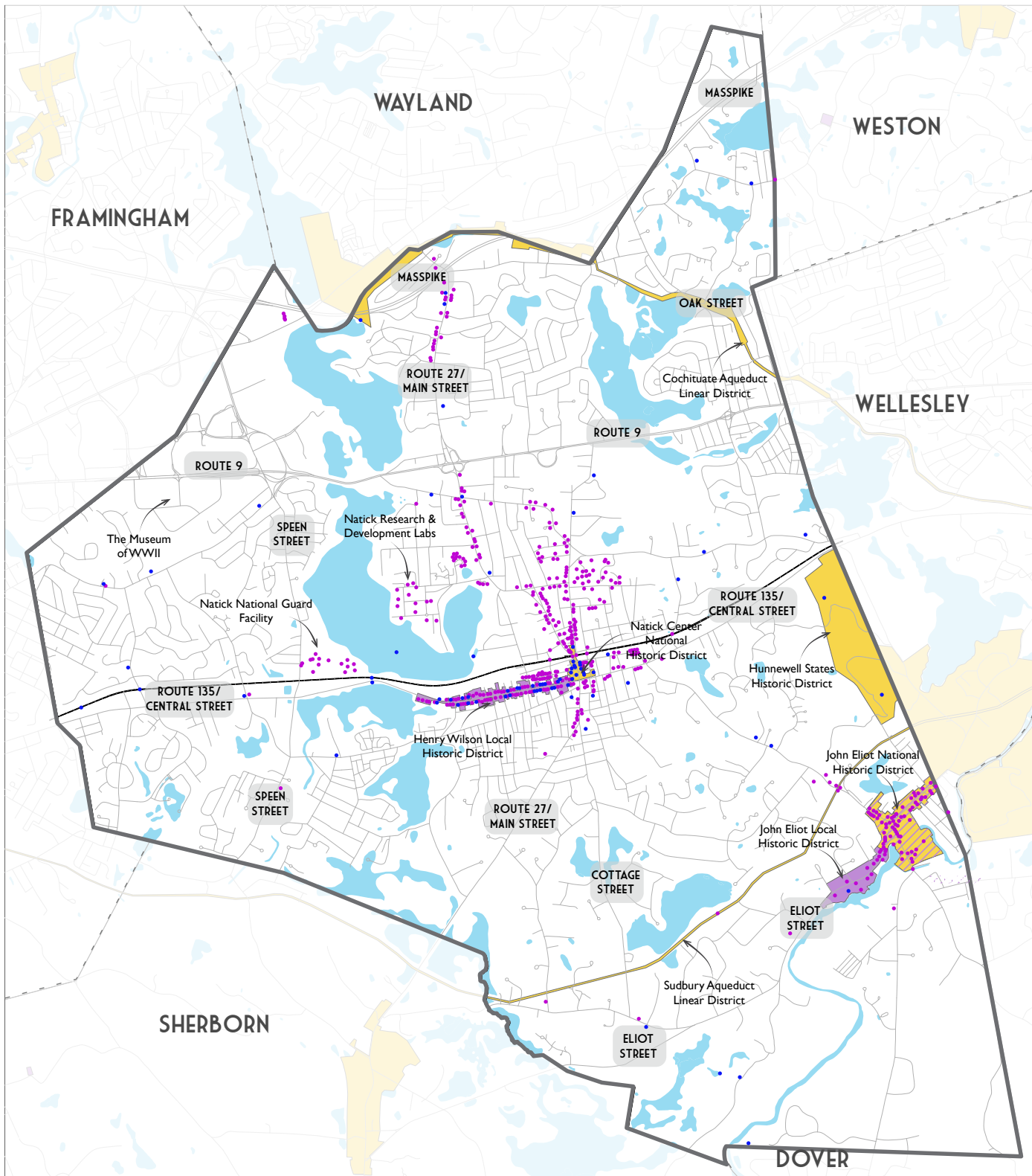
The surveyed properties have been included in the MACRIS Inventory described previously. Recommendations from both surveys include:

*Recommendations for Additional Preservation Planning Work: The Town’s education community, including the Historical Society, Public Library and the public schools, should be encouraged to develop historic preservation education materials and programs for the Town’s school system, utilizing the results of this survey. The Town of Natick could also utilize the results of this survey in interpretive programs to increase awareness of Natick’s historical and cultural assets. Interpretive programs could include the sponsorship of walking tours; the publication of brochures and books on the community’s architectural history and development; the establishment of displays in public buildings; and on site interpretation of historic buildings, structures, and sites with the existing marker program.*

*In addition future preservation planning should consider the establishment of local historic districts and appropriate protection mechanisms that would protect the identified historic resources that preserve and enhance the aspects of Natick’s heritage from demolition, loss of integrity, and decay.<sup>3</sup>*

**2** Historic and Cultural Resources Survey of Natick, Massachusetts, ttl-architects, August 2008.

**3** Historic and Cultural Resources Survey of Natick, Massachusetts, ttl-architects, October 2012.



- LEGEND**
- Article 76 Designation
  - No Article 76 Designation
  - Local Historic District
  - National Register Historic District
  - Local & National Historic District
  - Water

MAP 6.3: HISTORIC RESOURCES FROM THE MA CULTURAL RESOURCES INFORMATION SYSTEM (MACRIS)



The 2008 survey focused on Natick Center and considered all properties constructed up to 1967. Recommendations in addition to those described above include:

- + Expanding the Natick Center Historic District to include resources on South Avenue, Adams Street and a portion of Washington Avenue. This recommendation has not been implemented.
- + Expanding the John Eliot National Register Historic District to include resources further north on Union Street. This recommendation has not been implemented.
- + Further evaluation of properties along Grove Street, Charles Street and Walnut Street not included in the survey to determine the boundaries of a potential historic district. Additional properties in that area were part of the 2012 Survey described later and have been added to the MHC Inventory; no National Register District has been established.
- + Listing the United States Post Office on Common Street on the National Register. This recommendation has not been implemented.
- + The survey also included the following recommendation for additional preservation planning work: *The Side Hall Greek Revival and Italianate cottages along a portion of North Main Street (116 North Main Street – 160 North Main Street – included in the 2012 survey), the Italian neighborhood in the area around Summer Street and the residential properties at the east end of South Avenue are potential candidates as Neighborhood Conservation Districts. A Neighborhood Conservation District is a group of buildings and their settings that are architecturally and/or historically distinctive and worthy of protection based on their contribution to the architectural, cultural, political, economic or social history of the community. It is expected that the architectural resources in a Neighborhood Conservation District have lost some integrity and that the additional protections afforded by a local historic district are unwarranted. A Neighborhood Conservation District Bylaw is distinguished from a local historic district bylaw or ordinance by numerous categorical exemptions and non-binding advisory reviews. A Neighborhood Conservation District is established through passage of a bylaw or ordinance by majority vote of Town meeting or city council.* This recommendation has not been implemented.

The 2012 survey focused along North Main Street and properties within the Walnut Hill neighborhood including the Walnut School for the Arts. The North Main Street project area contains those resources located near the north end of the Felchville area of Natick at the intersection of Main Street and Bacon Street to the town line with Wayland.

*The late 19th and early 20th century development of this area for the most part remains intact with some late 20th century residential infill and commercial development which is located mostly in the area of Route 9.*

*Continued strip development threatens many of the residential properties and early roadside development along North Main Street, South Main Street, East Central Street, and South Avenue and the entire area remains under continual expansion from suburban development along secondary roads. Additional areas of town have also seen intense suburban development, resulting in some loss of historic resources. Neglect of many residential and multi-unit properties from lack of*



investments and regular maintenance has led to deterioration and loss of materials and details in many properties. Demolition of some of these deteriorated properties had occurred within the last several years on South Avenue and North Main Street.<sup>4</sup>

The Survey included the following recommendations:

- + *Creating a Walnut Hill National Register Historic District. Exact boundaries of a potential National Register District within this area remain to be determined as the west side of Beacon Street and Winnemay Street to the south have yet to be surveyed. This recommendation has not been implemented.*
- + *Nominating the John W. Walcott House at 24 Grove Street (1893) for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. Architecturally, the property is a well preserved example of an early twentieth century Colonial Revival residence that maintains a high degree of architectural integrity. The property is also significant for its association with local business man, John W. Walcott, the owner of the J.W. Walcott Shoe Company and who is credited with inventing the modern baseball. This recommendation has not been implemented.*
- + *Nominating the Henry C. Mulligan House at 7 Highland Street (1905) for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. The building is an example of a well preserved Tudor Revival residence constructed during the early twentieth century and is also significant for its association with Attorney and prominent businessman Henry C. Mulligan who was also very active in the local community. This recommendation has not been implemented.*
- + *Nominating the Gilbert W. Underwood Octagon House (circa 1870) at 23 Walnut Street for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. The octagon style is a rare style with no more than a few thousand constructed, mostly in New York, Massachusetts and the Midwest. The residence is locally significant as the only octagonal dwelling in Natick and is one of a few constructed in Middlesex County. This recommendation has not been implemented.*
- + *Nominating the Francis Bigelow House at 52 Walnut Street (circa 1875) for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. The house is an example of a well preserved towered Second Empire with associated carriage house and is also significant for its association with businessman Francis Bigelow who formed a partnership with his brother-in-law, John W. Walcott, known as J. W. Walcott and Co. This recommendation has not been implemented.*

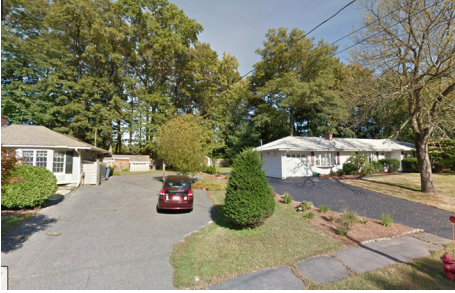


From the top: Photos of the John W. Walcott House, the Henry C. Mulligan House, the Gilbert W. Underwood Octagon House and the Francis Bigelow House.



Historic and Cultural Resources Survey of Natick, Massachusetts, ttl-architects, October 2012.

As discussed in Chapter 3: Land Use and Zoning, Natick saw significant residential development following World War II and has a number of neighborhoods that were built in styles typical of the 1940s and 1950s (i.e., mid-century neighborhoods). These neighborhoods have not been surveyed, but represent good examples of that period of residential subdivision development. In many cases, these neighborhoods continue to offer more reasonably priced housing options than newer development. There is a concern, however, that neighborhood character is threatened by tear-down activity and new development out of scale or character with existing houses. In other cases, existing homes have been altered significantly and the neighborhood no longer has a consistent character. An interest in preserving the integrity of these neighborhoods through design review and broader tear-down regulations has been expressed. Examples of these neighborhoods include the following.



From the top: Photos of houses in the Wethersfield, Lokerville, Robinhood Road, Nottingham Drive, Euclid Avenue and Strawberry Hill neighborhoods.

- + The Wethersfield neighborhood, although there is a concern that much of the neighborhood character/continuity has been lost due to teardown activity and alteration of existing houses.
- + The Brookdale Road (Lokerville) area in West Natick (1950s slab ranch style houses).
- + The Robinhood Road to Clifton Road area in West Natick adjacent to Lake Cochituate (1950s).
- + The Nottingham Drive/Sherwood Road area in West Natick (1940s and 1950s Sherwood Colonial houses).
- + The Virginia, Curtis and Pilgrim Road area in West Natick (1940s Pelham Cape houses)
- + The Euclid Avenue/Beverly Road area in East Natick (1940s and 1950s cape style houses).
- + The Strawberry Hill area (1940s and 1950s).

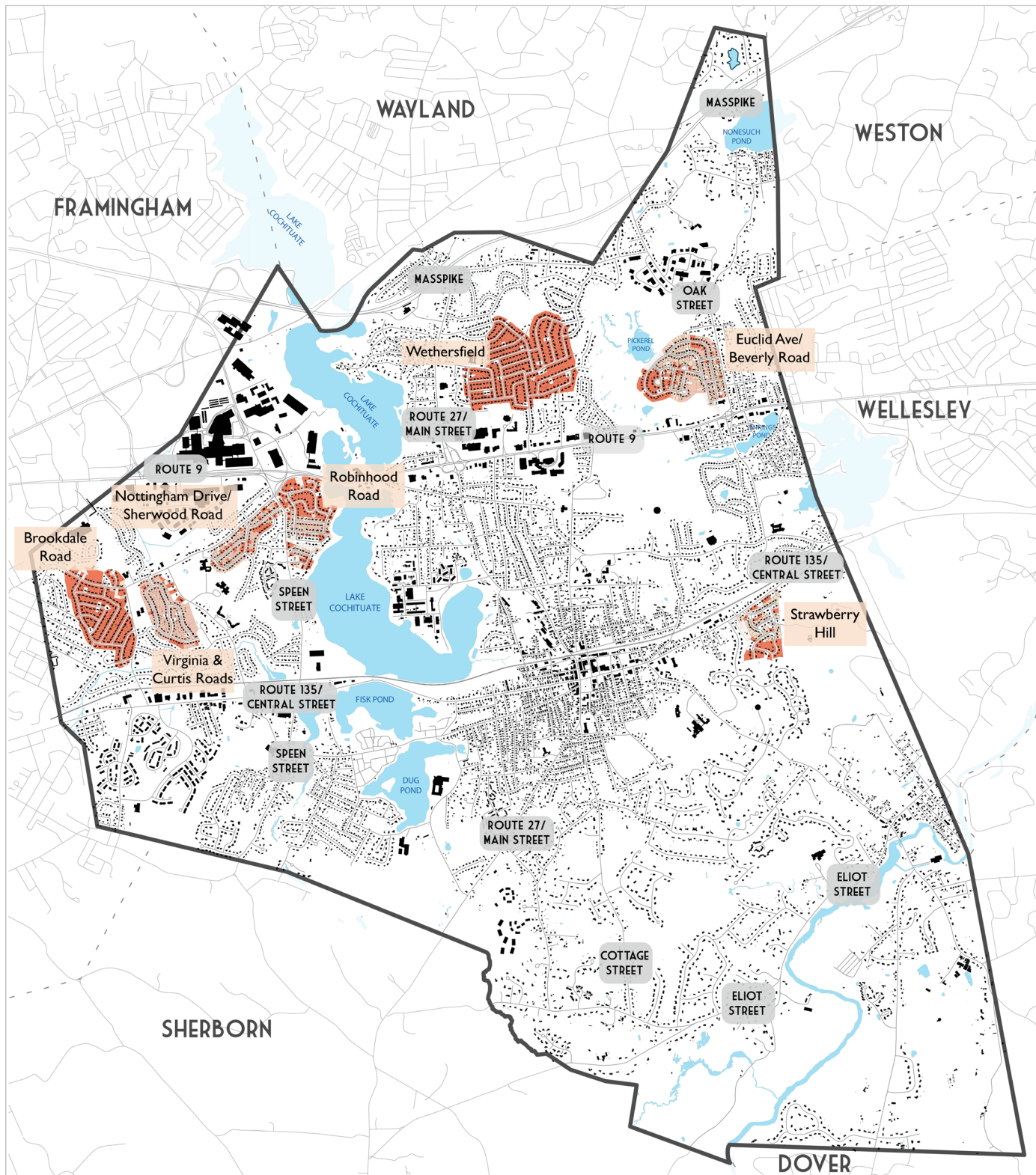
## Historic/Cultural Landscapes

Natick’s cultural landscapes have been eloquently described in Natick’s Heritage Landscapes by Peter Golden (Open Post), March 6, 2011. *Our open space and natural landscape, from the colonial-era graveyards that dot the town to a bird sanctuary, town forest, cedar swamp and gravel pit amount to upwards of 1600 acres, many of which are rich in historical association and features. But it is Natick’s unique inventory of forests, waterways and trails that gives one real pause. Too numerous to list in detail, they range from the Town Forest (a parcel of 100 acres given to the community by Mrs. H.S. Hunnewell in 1932) and Lake Cochituate to the Natick Community Organic Farm and Lookout Farm. The latter dates from 1651 and has been called the oldest, continually operating farmstead in America.*

*To the west of Lookout Farm lies Broadmoor, a 624 acre Audubon Wildlife Sanctuary notable for its historic associations, not the least of which is the Thomas Sawin House, the oldest built structure in the town. Skirting the southern flank of Broadmoor is the Charles River, a combined larder (fish and wildfowl) as well as transportation corridor for Native Americans in a previous age.*

*Just to the north of the Town Forest and across Route Nine, lies the “Sunkaway,” a seventy-acre parcel of swamp, pond and woodlands known to conservationists as “The Great White Cedar Swamp.” In centuries past the bark and wood of cedars was a vital resource for building canoes, weaving baskets and covering “wikiups,” the dome-like structures favored by Natick’s Praying Indians for seasonal shelter. Half a mile to the west of the Sunkaway lies Lake Cochituate, where a substantial Native American village located around the site of the present-day Mass Turnpike tolls, was decimated by raiding Mohawks in the late 1670s. On the southern end of the lake lies Pegun Cove, another Native American place.*

While many of these resources are connected by trails and walking paths, improving pedestrian connections among these resources and between these resources and neighborhoods continues to be a community goal.



**LEGEND**

BUILDING CONSTRUCTION YEAR	
<span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; background-color:#f0e68c; border:1px solid black;"></span> Prior to 1940	<span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; background-color:#800080; border:1px solid black;"></span> 1980-1989
<span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; background-color:#e69a00; border:1px solid black;"></span> 1940-1949	<span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; background-color:#4b0082; border:1px solid black;"></span> 1990-1999
<span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; background-color:#d9534f; border:1px solid black;"></span> 1950-1959	<span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; background-color:#2e0191; border:1px solid black;"></span> 2000-2009
<span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; background-color:#c0392b; border:1px solid black;"></span> 1960-1969	<span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; background-color:#000080; border:1px solid black;"></span> 2010-Present
<span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; background-color:#e91e63; border:1px solid black;"></span> 1970-1979	

**MAP 6.4 EXAMPLES OF MID-CENTURY NEIGHBORHOODS**





From the top: Photos of the Natick Community Organic Farm, Boradmoor, The Sunkaway and Lake Cochituate.

## ARTS AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

Natick has a large number of arts and cultural resources, ranging from individual musicians and visual artists to arts-related businesses and large organizations. These organizations and resources contribute to Natick's culture and the Town economy through employing residents as well as through taxes. And perhaps just as important, the arts serve as an economic driver in Natick, bringing visitors to the Town Center who patronize arts establishments as well as restaurants and other stores, and enhancing the Town's desirability as a place to live and work.

Natick: Our Community Yesterday and Today (citing the National Center for Charitable Statistics) stated that "cultural non-profits in Natick had a total revenue of just over \$600,000 and a total expenditure of just over \$560,000 in 2003. Contributions to non-profit organizations from people, businesses, and other organizations in Natick total just under \$180,000. The majority of revenues and expenditures are generated by one large arts organization, The Center for Arts in Natick (TCAN). TCAN is not Natick's only arts organization, but it is the largest."

A 2015 inventory of cultural assets in the Town of Natick revealed the following:

### Museums

#### *Natick Historical Society*

The Natick Historical Society, founded in 1870, operates a museum at the Bacon Library on Eliot Street in South Natick. "The museum and archives tell many rich stories for visitors to 58 Eliot Street. Walking tours of South Natick, illustrated talks, community events, educational programs for school children and families, changing exhibitions at the Morse Institute Library, and a traveling display kiosk share these stories with the community and with people who appreciate history everywhere."

"The Historical Society collects and conserves artifacts, papers and materials important to the origins, development and ongoing life of the town and provides rich educational experiences based on authentic objects, primary sources, stories and lives that engage senior, family and school group audiences in programs, exhibitions and publications. Natick Historical Society's Mission is to inspire an interest in Natick's rich and varied history from its unique origins as a Praying Indian Plantation to the present day." *Source: Natick Historical Society website*

#### *Museum of World War II*

The Museum of World War II on Mercer Street just south of Route 9 and The Golden Triangle is a research and educational institution "devoted to preserving and exhibiting the reality of WWII. With over 7,000 artifacts and 500,000 documents and pictures in research archives, it holds the most comprehensive collection of documents and artifacts on display anywhere." The museum receives 5,000 visitors and 500 students annually. In July of 2015 the Natick Zoning Board of Appeals approved an expansion plan for the museum that includes acquisition of an adjacent parcel and construction of a new 60,000 square foot building.

### *Henry Wilson Shoe Shop*

Although not a museum, the Henry Wilson Shoe Shop is operated by the Town of Natick as an historic site. The “ten footer” building is located on West Central Street in West Natick. Built in the 1850s, it was the shoe shop of Henry Wilson, a Senator from Massachusetts and the eighteenth Vice President of the United States. On July 24, 2000, it was listed in the National Register of Historic Places. A ten footer is a small backyard shop structure that was built in the 18th and 19th centuries in New England to serve as a shoemaker’s shop. The name came from the fact that the floor dimensions were usually about 10 feet by 10 feet. The ten footers were forerunners of the large shoe factories that developed in New England later in the 19th century.

## Performance and Educational Venues

### *The Center for Arts in Natick*

The Center for Arts in Natick (TCAN) provides a cultural center to the MetroWest Boston region, where national and emerging artists present 350 performances, literary events, art classes and exhibitions annually in an environment that brings together individuals, families, children and seniors. TCAN draws audiences from throughout eastern Massachusetts and from as far afield as southern New Hampshire, Connecticut and Rhode Island. The Town of Natick, along with residents and TCAN, collaborated to turn an historic firehouse into a permanent Arts Center, successfully anchoring Natick’s downtown as an arts destination. A newly opened theater on the second floor provides space for screening movies.

TYPE OF RESOURCE	NUMBER OF RESOURCES
Individual Artists, Artisans & Musical Groups	81
Creative Cultural Enterprises, including retail galleries, museums, design/photo services, performing arts theaters and theatre companies	29
Arts Education Institutions, Instruction Enterprises & Other organizations that offer classes	42
Community Cultural Organizations (includes organizations focusing on history, poetry, painting and quilting along with two associations – Natick Artists Open Studios and the Natick Farmers & Winter Markets. The Natick Historical Society, Quinobequin Quilters and Natick Farmers & Winter Markets each have over 100 members.	7

**TABLE 6.1: CULTURAL ASSETS IN NATICK.**

*Source: Natick Center Cultural District Cultural Asset Catalog, September 2015, prepared by FinePoint Associates for The Town of Natick and Natick Center Cultural District*



### ***Morse Institute Library***

The Morse Institute Library in Natick Center is also a cultural and educational focal point for the Natick community. In 1997, the library expanded and modernized to provide more meeting room space and shelving for books and electronic services, such as access to the internet and other multimedia. The library offered over 1,200 programs in 2005, ranging from musical performances, book talks, and story hours to a variety of training classes. Approximately 350,000 individuals took advantage of the Library’s rich resources and meeting rooms were used over 5,700 times in fiscal Year 2016. *Source: Morse Institute Library Draft Strategic Plan FY2018-FY2022.*

### ***Walnut Hill School for the Arts***

The Walnut Hill School for the Arts, an independent boarding and day high school in Natick, has two large performance spaces:

- + The Keiter Center for Performing Arts is used mostly for school productions, many of which are attended by Natick residents. The Walnut Hill Keiter Performance Center had 9,131 visitors in 2014, and 9,290 visits were forecast for 2015.
- + The newly opened Delbridge Family Center for the Arts includes gallery space and a performance space on the first floor, with a dance studio on the second floor. Prometheus Dance has moved its headquarters from Cambridge to Walnut Hill and will operate out of the Delbridge Center. The move is expected to lead to more opportunities for MetroWest residents to experience professional dance through performances, classes, festivals and other activities.



## **Public Art**

In addition to memorials described earlier, public art in Natick encompasses a large number of murals, concentrated mainly around the Town Center, which help to enliven the streetscape and acknowledge the vibrant arts community:

- + Common Street Spiritual Center Unity Mural (2015)
- + Bus shelter mural (2014)
- + Adams Street Murals (2000s)
- + Next Stop Natick Mural at Commuter Rail Station (1999)
- + Five Crows Mural on Union Court off Main Street (2013)
- + Electrical Boxes (2016)
- + Mosaics on Court Street (2012-13)
- + Stained glass installations at the Morse Institute.



*From the top: Photos of the Natick Historical Society at the Bacon Free Library, the Museum of World War II and the Henry Wilson Shoe Shop.*



From the top: Photos of The Center for the Arts in Natick, the Morse Institute Library and the Delbridge Family Center for the Arts.

## Local and Regional Non-Profit Organizations

### *Natick Center Cultural District*

Natick's thriving arts community is mostly concentrated around Natick Center. The Natick Center Cultural District (NCCD) received a state Cultural District designation in 2012. NCCD is funded by the Town and has over 200 members.

The total number of visitors to NCCD events and organizations was 87,000 in 2011, with 100,000 forecast for 2015 and an annual increase target of 15%. Natick Days is a one of the biggest NCCD events, with 9,500 visitors in 2014, 10,500 forecast for 2015 and an annual increase target of 1,000 visitors. Total visitation to arts events was 418,608 in 2014, with 439,437 forecast for 2015 and an annual target increase of 10%. Actual numbers are not available for 2015 and 2016.

The NCCD Advisory Board launched a strategic planning effort in the fall of 2013. The effort resulted in the 2015-2020 Strategic Plan, summarized below.

*Mission Statement: The NCCD's mission is to cultivate a lively and diverse downtown neighborhood by enhancing the cultural, economic and social life of our community. We are led by an innovative partnership of public, private, non-profit and cultural voices.*

*Vision: Natick Center will be a cultural hub of MetroWest, serving as a regional destination for arts, culture, dining, shopping, business, special events, and community gatherings for residents and visitors alike.*

*Values Statement: We believe that supporting arts and culture is pivotal to creating a sustainable economic engine in Natick Center, and that the success of the Natick Center Cultural District will improve the downtown area for everyone's benefit.*

*Investing in a robust Cultural District brings more foot traffic to the downtown and keeps dollars spent in the local economy, ultimately resulting in more tax revenue and jobs created. A vibrant cultural community with opportunities for expansion attracts new artists, cultural organizations and businesses, improving quality of life and making communities more attractive for the benefit of residents and visitors alike. Source: NCCD Strategic Plan 2015-2020*

The Strategic Planning Committee identified four Pillars of the Cultural District which sustain the District and represent the strategic goals. These interdependent goals include:

- + Culture: Increase Capacity for Arts and Cultural Development
- + Community/Social: Enhance Natick Center as a Community Gathering Place
- + Economic Development: Foster Economic Development in Natick Center and the Community Overall
- + Governance/Sustainability: Ensure the Long-Term Stability and Success of the Cultural District



The NCCD is governed by Natick Center Associates, Inc., a non-profit, public/private partnership with over 40 years of history working for downtown revitalization. Natick Center Associates is comprised of property owners, retail and office workers, concerned neighbors, Town officials, nonprofits and corporations. Natick Center Associates and the Town of Natick are mutually responsible for the successful achievement of NCCD goals and compliance with Massachusetts Cultural Council's Cultural Districts Initiative requirements.

***The Massachusetts Cultural Facilities Fund***

The Massachusetts Cultural Facilities Fund (CFF) is an initiative of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts through the Massachusetts Cultural Council. The goal of the Cultural Facilities Fund is to increase investments from both the public sector and the private sector to support the sound planning and development of cultural facilities in Massachusetts. Funds awarded to Natick projects in the past have included a \$300,000 award to the Museum of World War II for expansion of this facility to triple exhibition space and create an education center.

***The Natick Cultural Council***

The Natick Cultural Council is also funded through the Massachusetts Cultural Council. The Massachusetts Cultural Council makes annual allocations to each municipality based on population and the state's annual budget. The Natick Cultural Council allocation is generally between \$5,000 and \$10,000; that money is then distributed through an annual grant cycle that prioritizes events and projects that have a direct benefit to residents. Projects funded in the past have included an annual 4th grade trip to attend a performance at Wheelock College, a science and art summer school program, performances at TCAN and an expansion of the Natick Open Studios program.

*At left, from the top: Photos of the Unity Mural, the bus shelter mural, Adams Street murals, Next Stop Natick Mural, electrical boxes and mosaics on Court Street.*



From the top: the Natick Center Cultural District logo, (three) photos of Natick Arts Walk 2016 and photo of Natick Days 2016.

## Historic and Cultural Resources Planning

### Historical Commission

Consistent with Massachusetts General Law Chapter 40, Section 8D, Natick established an Historical Commission, for the preservation, protection and development of the historical or archaeological assets the town. The commission "shall conduct researches for places of historic or archaeological value, shall cooperate with the state archaeologist in conducting such researches or other surveys, and shall seek to coordinate the activities of unofficial bodies organized for similar purposes, and may advertise, prepare, print and distribute books, maps, charts, plans and pamphlets which it deems necessary for its work."

Over the years, the Natick Historic Commission has expanded the inventory of historic resources in Natick and plans to inventory the neighborhood just south of Natick Center and South Natick by the river.

### Historic District Commission

Under the authority of the Historic District Act, Chapter 40C, of the Massachusetts General Laws, Natick established its own Historic District Commission in 1974 with the concurrent establishment of the original John Eliot Historic District in South Natick. The Commission also oversees activity in the Natick Center and Henry Wilson Historic Districts.

Under the Historic District By-Law and the rules adopted by the Town of Natick Historic District Commission, certification by the Commission is required before work is begun that will affect grounds or the exterior of buildings within the Local Historic Districts that are visible from a public way. Work that requires prior certification includes any alteration to the exterior of a structure, including any work involving signs, walls and fences, terraces, walks, driveways, etc. Certification is not required for work done inside a building that does not affect its exterior, or for work on grounds and the exterior of buildings that will not be visible to the public.

### Natick Design Review Board

The intent of this board, which derives authority from the Natick Zoning Bylaw, is to provide detailed review of exterior alterations made to structures having substantial impact on the Natick Downtown Mixed Use District, to prevent blight, to enhance the natural and aesthetic qualities of the Downtown, to conserve the value of land and buildings, and to protect and preserve the historic and cultural heritage of the Downtown and its surrounding neighborhoods. The five-person board is composed of a Planning Board Representative appointed by the Planning Board; and two at-large members, a Natick Center Associates Representative, and an Historical Commission Representative, all appointed by Board of Selectmen.

## Local Regulations, Policies and Initiatives

### ***Natick Zoning Bylaw Section III-J – Historic Preservation***

This regulation was enacted “to encourage the preservation and continued use of buildings of historic or architectural significance” and “to protect the existing character of neighborhoods by the adaptive reuse of such buildings or structures.”

Under this regulation, the Special Permit Granting Authority (SPGA), the Planning Board, may grant a special permit for re-use, construction, and occupancy of buildings, and structures relating to qualifying buildings, if either of the following criteria are met:

- + Determination by the State Historical Commission that the building or structure is eligible for nomination on the National Register of Historic Places, or is already included in such
- + Unanimous vote of the Natick Historical Commission, subsequent to a public hearing, that the building or structure is of historic, architectural or cultural significance.

In addition to uses allowed as of right or by Special Permit in the underlying zoning district, the SPGA may grant a special permit to allow town houses, an apartment house or a home occupation/customary home occupation.

A Historic Preservation must conform to the following requirements:

- + Number of dwelling units (net usable area divided by 3,500 square feet)
- + The ability to provide adequate off-street parking; new construction shall be limited to 10 percent of the interior habitable floor area or above grade gross volume of the historic building;
- + For new construction the SPGA may modify the dimensional requirements for the district by up to 10 percent.

Approval of the application for a special permit to allow for a Historic Preservation project is subject to an SPGA determination that the Plan is superior to a conventional site development, based on the following criteria:

- + The proposed project substantially preserves the building or structure.
- + Determination that the development is not substantially more detrimental to abutting properties and neighborhood.
- + Appropriate use of materials and manner of construction.
- + Preservation of landscape features and scenic views.

### ***MGL Article 76: Regulations for the Demolition, Alteration or Relocation of Historically Significant Buildings or Structures.***

“This bylaw was adopted for the purpose of protecting and preserving significant buildings and structures which constitute or reflect distinctive features pertaining

to the history of the Town of Natick and for the purpose of promoting the public welfare through the retention of the architectural, historical, cultural and aesthetic heritage of the Town.” The intent of this bylaw is to encourage owners, and others, to preserve, rehabilitate and restore significant buildings or structures rather than demolishing them.

This bylaw applies to:

- + Any building or structure listed on, or which is subject of a pending application for inclusion on, the National Register of Historic Places or the Massachusetts State Register of Historic Places; or
- + Any building or structure included in the Inventory of Historic and Archaeological Assets of the Commonwealth. Further nominations to said inventory shall occur only after notice to the assessed owner of the building or structure and a public hearing on said proposed nomination.
- + The provisions of this bylaw shall not apply to any building or structure located in a local historical district subject to regulation under the provisions of General Laws Chapter 40C.

The bylaw requires that, upon receipt of an application for a permit to demolish, alter or relocate a building or structure that is regulated by this bylaw, the application is forwarded to the Natick Historic Commission. The Commission then determines whether the building or structure is regulated by this bylaw, and if so, whether the building or structure may be a Historically Significant Building or Structure.

If the Commission preliminarily determines that the building or structure may be a Historically Significant Building or Structure, the application is reviewed at a public hearing and the Commission determines whether the building or structure is a Preferably Preserved Building or Structure. If the determination is that the subject building or structure is Preferably Preserved, the Inspector may not issue a permit for a period of six months from the date of such determination, unless the Commission informs the Building Inspector in writing prior to the expiration of the six month period that:

- + The Commission is satisfied that the applicant has made a bonafide, reasonable, and unsuccessful effort to locate a purchaser for the building or structure who is willing to preserve, move, rehabilitate or restore the building or structure; or
- + The applicant has agreed to accept such permit subject to conditions approved by the commission.

Currently, only 16.8% of Natick’s inventoried historic resources are protected by MGL Article 76. The remainder of the resources were added to the inventory after the adoption of Article 76 and are not covered by its regulations. It is the goal of the Historic Commission to conduct the public hearing process required to have all of the inventoried resources covered by the bylaw.

## Issues and Opportunities

Natick 360 included the following goal related to the list of issues and opportunities below: *Promote, foster and enable an economically, socially and culturally vibrant and diverse Natick Center.* That goal is still strongly supported today.

At the November 29, 2016 Natick 2030+ Community Meeting, a number of residents discussed their desire for the Town to go further in preserving, protecting and cultivating Natick's historic resources. Other issues and opportunities were identified through stakeholder meetings and research for this report. These suggestions for the most part can be organized into the following categories:

### **Maintenance of Public Historic Resources:**

- + Considering adoption of the Community Preservation Act and participating in the Metropolitan Area Planning Council's Historic Heritage Program.
- + Improving the area around the Veteran's Memorial.
- + Displaying more of the Natick Historical Society's collection (note: the Historical Society is a private organization).
- + Trying to find grant money to repair headstones in ancient cemeteries.
- + Funding repairs to the Henry Wilson Memorial.

### **Strengthening Protection of Historic Resources:**

- + Reducing teardown activity and creating more prescriptive zoning and/or design review authority for tear downs to ensure that new development is compatible with the character of adjacent development in both residential and commercial districts.
- + Better integrating historical landmarks into physical plans.
- + Expanding the inventory of historic resources to other parts of the Town not yet covered, including the neighborhoods adjacent to the Town Center, south Natick by the river, and early post World War II neighborhoods.
- + Expanding the list of historic properties protected by Article 76 to include all inventoried properties.
- + Providing grants for renovation of historic buildings.
- + Highlighting the Town's history and resources.
- + Including more information on the Town's historical heritage when telling Natick's story.
- + Cultivating Natick's historical heritage.

- + Creating stronger ties to Natick Labs.
- + Expanding on Natick's cultural resources.
- + Better utilizing the existing cultural talent in Natick.
- + Creating more nightlife in the Town Center to provide "after theater" dining or drinking options.
- + Expanding the arts and cultural resources to encourage their continued contribution to the vitality and economic strength of Natick Center.

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