



## 8. Public Facilities and Services

### KEY FINDINGS

- + The Town employs 300 full-time employees and 175 part-time employees.
- + In 2016, over 9,500 residents took part in programs offered by the Parks and Recreation Department.
- + The Morse Institute Library houses over 200,000 books and serves between 900 and 1,000 people per day.
- + Natick's school enrollment has grown by over 1,100 children in the last decade.
- + The Town has a AAA Bond Rating, and is on sound financial ground.

### Introduction

Community facilities are places that house municipal programs and services and provide vital space for the administration of local government. Community services represent what a unit of local government does to meet the needs of its residents and businesses. These concepts – the functions of town government, what it does, and how and where – are critical to the continued delivery of services to everyone in Natick. Over time, the duties of town governments everywhere have evolved due to changes in federal and state laws and public expectations. Natick provides many different types of services for residents and businesses, and will need to continue monitoring fiscal conditions and local desires to balance efficient service delivery and service quality. This chapter provides an overview of the different types of facilities and services provided in Natick to benchmark where the Town is today.

### Existing Conditions

#### Municipal Facilities

The Town of Natick's Facilities Management Department currently manages thirty-four individual buildings and properties which include twenty-six municipal buildings and eight school buildings. Staff in the Facilities Management Department is responsible for the on-going maintenance of over 1.1 million square feet of built space across Town-owned buildings.<sup>1</sup> These buildings have a combined insurance value of over \$276 million.<sup>2</sup> This section lists and briefly describes the buildings the Town is responsible for maintaining.

#### Town Hall

Natick's Town Hall occupies the corner of East Central Street and Church Street. It opened in 1998 as part of the larger downtown revitalization project that brought in a new town hall, police and fire station, and an expansion to the Morse Institute Library. This expansion of public facilities was significantly funded by the redevelopment of the Natick Mall in the early 1990s. Most Town departments are in Town Hall, including the Town Administrator, Town Clerk, Finance Department, Community and Economic Development, Health Department, and the School Department. The three-story building includes offices, conference rooms, and the primary meeting room for major Town boards. A small parking area for staff and visitors is located on the east side of Church Street across from Town Hall.

**1** FY 2017 Preliminary Facilities Budget. March 24, 2016.

**2** Natick Insurance Policy, Statement of Value. Town of Natick, FY 2016.

## Public Safety Buildings

In 1998, the Town opened a public safety building at 20-32 East Central Street, creating a combined police station and fire station (Fire Station #1). The Fire Department, occupying the east end of the building, has five large bay doors for vehicle access and storage in addition to offices, general storage, and personnel space for the Fire Department employees. The Police Department occupies the west end of the building which includes a large parking lot to the rear for police and civilian vehicles. The total size of the building is just under 54,000 square feet.<sup>3</sup>

The Fire Department has three additional fire stations located across Natick to meet response time requirements. The remaining stations are smaller and built earlier than Fire Station #1. These include:



Natick Fire Station

- + **Fire Station #2:** a two-story building consisting of 2,050 square feet of space constructed in 1950. The station is located at 45 Eliot Street and serves the South Natick area.
- + **Fire Station #3:** a one-story building consisting of 3,200 square feet of space constructed in 1958. The station is located at 2 Rhode Island Drive and serves the northeastern side of Natick.
- + **Fire Station #4:** a two-story building consisting of 4,982 square feet of space constructed in 1958. The station is located at 268 Speen Street and serves the western portion of Natick around the Natick Mall area (The Golden Triangle). Design of the new station is underway and a \$15.5 million Proposition 2 1/2 debt exclusion for the station was approved at the 2018 Fall Annual Town Meeting.

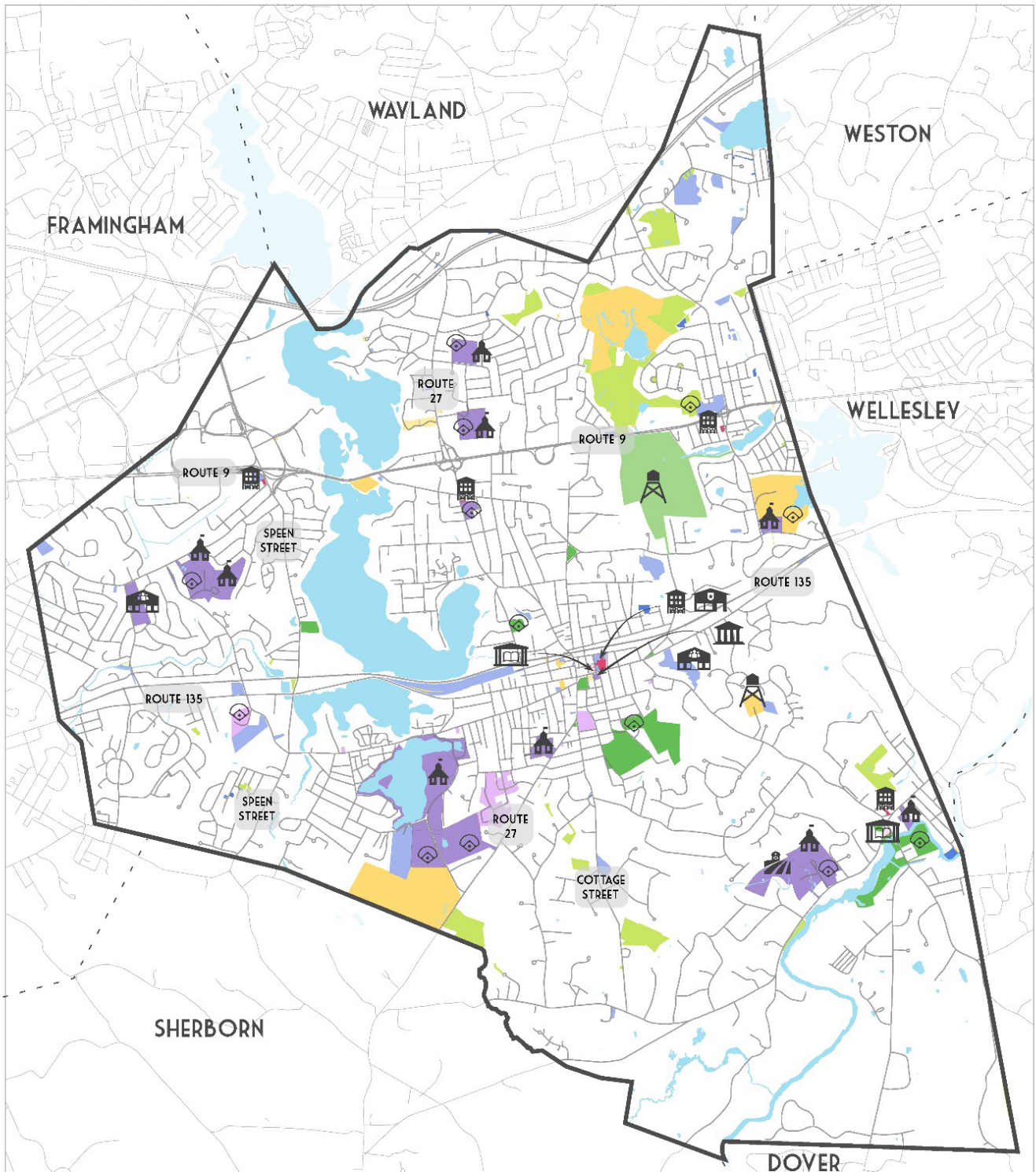
## Public Works






















Constructed in 1980, the Public Works Department (DPW) facility at 75 West Street is a two-story 50,000 square foot facility that houses all the different divisions within DPW. This includes water and sewer, engineering, land facilities and natural resources, maintenance, and geographic information systems (GIS). DPW also has a 14,500 square foot maintenance garage located at 75 West Street that was constructed in 1993. The Town also has storage and maintenance space at their facility located at 17 Oak Street. This space includes storage for landscaping materials and road salt.

## Schools

Natick's public school system is one of the pillars of the Town, and a top reason new residents are moving here. One of the consequences of having an attractive community with good schools is increased enrollment. The recent increases in school enrollment, coupled with the projected continuation of those increases, is placing immense pressure on the current school facilities to accommodate the rapid increase in enrollment. The Town is now looking at ways to increase school capacity through a combination of new schools, modular classrooms, and redistribution of children at the elementary school level. Currently, the maintenance of school facilities falls under the Director of Facilities who oversees school custodians and maintenance staff.

<sup>3</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all information on Natick Town-owned facilities came from the Natick Insurance Policy, Statement of Value. Town of Natick, FY 2016.



L E G E N D	<b>PUBLIC OWNERSHIP</b>			School
		Parks & Recreation Department		Police Station
		Forest Committee		Fire Station
		Conservation Commission		Town Hall
		Cemetery		Library
		Public Works		Water Tower
		Board of Selectmen/Town Hall		Community/Rec Center
		Fire Department		Farm
		Town of Natick		Recreation Fields
		Tax Possession		
	School			
	Housing Authority			
	Library			

**MAP 8.1: NATICK'S PUBLIC FACILITIES**

*This map shows the approximate location of public facilities in Natick. Source: Town of Natick, CSS, RKG Associates*



## Elementary Schools

Natick has five public elementary schools spread throughout in order to serve the different neighborhoods. These schools include:

- + **Bennett-Hemenway School:** 22 East Evergreen Street. The Bennett School was last renovated in 1998 and is approximately 71,000 square feet in size. The school was originally built to serve 600 students. The total enrollment at Ben-Hem was 625 students in 2016.
- + **Brown School:** 1 Jean Burke Drive. The Brown School was last renovated in 1975 and is approximately 55,200 square feet in size. In 2016, the Town added six modular classrooms to help ease capacity issues. The school was originally built to serve 450 students, but the new modular classrooms have increased that capacity to 600. The total enrollment at Brown was 512 students in 2016.
- + **Johnson School:** 99 South Main Street. The Johnson School was last renovated in 1940 and is approximately 26,800 square feet in size. The school was originally built to serve 250 students. The total enrollment at Johnson was 223 students in 2016.
- + **Lilja School:** 41 Bacon Street. The Lilja School was last renovated in 1998 and is approximately 54,000 square feet in size. The school was originally built to serve 450 students. Natick is planning to add six new modular classrooms to the Lilja School, which will increase capacity to 600 students. The total enrollment at Lilja was 418 students in 2016.
- + **Memorial School:** 107 Eliot Street. The Memorial School was last renovated in 1960 and is approximately 60,500 square feet in size. The school was originally built to serve 450 students.<sup>4</sup> The total enrollment at Memorial was 436 students in 2016.<sup>5</sup>

## Middle Schools

Natick has two middle schools which are located about 2.5 miles apart on the northern side of Natick:

- + **Kennedy Middle School:** 1 Phillip Lucier Drive. The Kennedy School was last renovated in 1965 and is approximately 106,000 square feet in size. The school was originally built to serve 600 students. In 2012, the Town added six modular classrooms at Kennedy to ease capacity issues. The total enrollment at Kennedy was 647 students in 2016. Funding for the design and construction of a new Kennedy Middle School was approved at the 2018 Special Town Meeting #1. The Massachusetts School Building Authority also has approved funding.
- + **Wilson Middle School:** 24 Rutledge Road. The Wilson School was last renovated in 2003 and is approximately 135,000 square feet in size. The Wilson Middle School is also facing capacity challenges. When originally constructed it was designed to educate 850 students, and it is currently educating 958.<sup>6</sup>

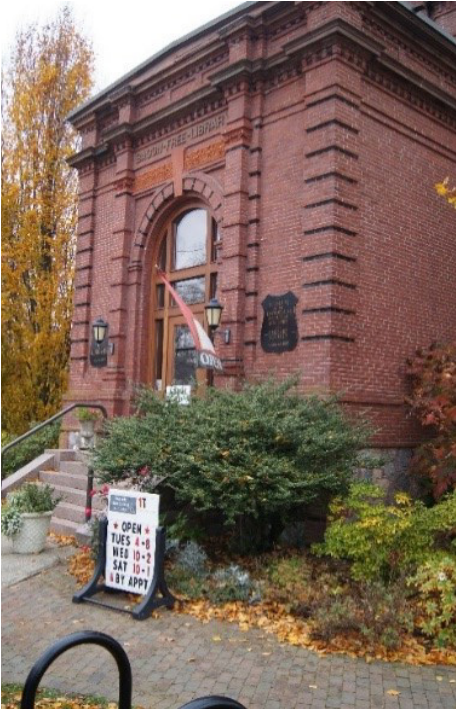
<sup>4</sup> Original building capacity numbers provided by James Kane, Natick Facilities Manager, March 29, 2017.

<sup>5</sup> Enrollment numbers provided by Natick Public Schools, Enrollment Projections Presentation from December 6, 2016.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

## Natick High School

The newest of all the schools in the Natick Public School system, Natick High School was constructed in 2012 and is approximately 255,000 square feet in size. It is located at 15 West Street, and has frontage on Dug Pond. The high school campus also includes playing fields, tennis courts, and a substantial array of rooftop solar panels. The Town is currently exploring the idea of creating solar canopies over the parking lot at the high school. The High School was originally designed to accommodate 1,600 students. Enrollment as of 2016 was 1,546.



Bacon Free Library

## Libraries

The Town of Natick is fortunate to have two beautifully designed libraries. South Natick is served by the historical Bacon Free Library, which is a small 5,500 square foot building constructed in 1880.<sup>7</sup> The library provides traditional library services and programming, and is also home to the Natick Historical Society Museum which has space on the bottom floor.

The second library in Natick is the Morse Institute Library. Originally constructed in 1808 with a volume of one hundred books, the library provides a wide range of printed material in circulation, other forms of media, and programming. In 1994, the Town voted to spend \$7.4 million for renovations and a major addition to the library. The new facility opened in 1997, and tripled the size of the previous space to expand printed material, digital offerings, and an archive room.<sup>8</sup> Today, the Morse Library is just under 61,000 square feet in size and not only serves as a lending site for books and media, but also provides programs, space, and uses similar to a community center.

## Community Center and Recreation

Natick also offers a wide range of indoor and outdoor community and recreation facilities beyond the traditional parks and recreation fields and playgrounds.

### Natick Community-Senior Center

Opened in 2012, the new \$10.25 million Community-Senior Center at 117 East Central Street is about 30,000 square feet in size and offers the second-largest gymnasium in Town, bathrooms and locker rooms, a fitness center, and offices for Town departments. It is in a walkable convenient location just outside Natick Center.<sup>9</sup> The Community-Senior Center currently houses the Council on Aging, Human Resources, and Veteran Services staff.

### Cole Center

Located at 179 Boden Lane, the Cole Center was constructed as a school in 1956 and was retrofitted into a 25,000-square foot recreation center in 1993. The Center offers a wide range of youth sports activities through the Recreation and Parks Department. While the space is programmed by Recreation and Parks, the building is maintained by the Facilities Management Department.

<sup>7</sup> Bacon Free Library. <http://baconfreelibrary.org/about/>

<sup>8</sup> Morse Institute Library. <http://morseinstitute.org/about/history/>

<sup>9</sup> Boston Globe, "\$10.25m Center Opening in Natick". September, 2012. <https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/regionals/north/2012/09/15/natick-senior-community-center-opening-next-month/05BEaRmAjyDSCxEwwXy7QI/story.html>

## Chase Arena

The William L. Chase Arena is a Town of Natick public ice skating facility which is operated through a partnership between the Town and FMC Ice Sports that began in 2003. The facility is located at 35 Windsor Avenue, and is approximately 32,500 square feet in size. In addition to the ice skating rink, the facility includes a heated conference room, facilities for birthday parties, and a small café.

## Community Organic Farm

Founded in 1975, the Natick Community Organic Farm is a nonprofit, certified-organic farm providing open space and farm products for Natick residents all year long. In addition to farming plots, the site includes a barn, greenhouse, nature center, and solar arrays. While the Farm is officially under the auspices of the Conservation Commission and has its own farming staff to oversee day-to-day operations, the buildings and structures on site are maintained by the Facilities Management Department.

## Facilities Planning

Natick does not have an updated and comprehensive facilities study looking at each Town-owned building to assess the condition and a long-term strategy for repairs and on-going maintenance. The Town does look at individual facilities and develops shorter-term needs and funding requests that feed directly into the five-year Capital Improvement Plan. The Facilities Management Department covers Town facilities and school facilities, making annual requests for improvements to both types of facilities annually through the Capital Improvement Plan which feeds into budget appropriations at Town Meeting. The Fiscal Year 2017-2021 draft Capital Improvement Program indicates that the Facilities Management Department is requesting about \$2.8 million for a variety of capital projects at Town and school facilities. The total request across the five-year time horizon is \$8.6 million.<sup>10</sup> An interview conducted with the Director of Facilities indicated a desire to complete a longer-term, more comprehensive assessment of all Town-owned facilities and programs, both on-going maintenance needs and major capital investments over a twenty-year period.<sup>11</sup>

## Energy Efficiency

The Town of Natick had been a municipal leader in sustainability and energy efficiency for over a decade when the Town joined ICLEI Local Governments for Sustainability in 2004 and established a baseline greenhouse gas emissions inventory and reduction goals. In the spring of 2010, Natick became one of the first Green Communities in Massachusetts and established a baseline for energy consumption and a plan to reduce consumption by 20 percent in five years. These efforts were led by the former Environmental Compliance Officer (now retired), and now by the Sustainability Coordinator who reports directly to the Town Administrator.

The Town has undertaken substantial efforts to reduce energy consumption for Town-owned facilities (both Town and school buildings), and has been pursuing ways to generate energy through renewable sources such as solar arrays on roofs and solar canopies over municipal parking lots. The Town has also invested in energy audits, lighting upgrades, HVAC controls, water system improvements, and building monitoring systems to track and improve energy efficiency. Natick met the Green Community's goal of reducing energy consumption by 20 percent, which saves the Town approximately \$387,000 annually.<sup>12</sup>

**10** FY2017-2021 Draft Capital Improvement Plan, Natick.

**11** Interview with James Kane, Facilities Director. September 28, 2016.

**12** Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources, Town of Natick - Municipal Energy Efficiency Case Study, December 2015.

## Municipal Services

The Natick Town Administrator serves as the Chief Operating Officer and is appointed by the Board of Selectmen. The Town Administrator oversees the daily operations of the Town, advises on policies and procedures, and enforces the Town's Bylaws as passed by Town Meeting. This position is also responsible for the management of all Town departments (excluding the School Department), and Town funds, providing support to the volunteer committee system, working with other levels of government, and managing special projects for the Board of Selectmen. The Town payroll includes about 300 full-time employees and 175 part-time employees,<sup>13</sup> and the School Department employs 632 full- and part-time staff.<sup>14</sup> Town employees and local boards and committees provide a variety of local government services to residents and businesses.

## Town Departments

### Administration and Finance

Natick's Town Administrator oversees the daily operations of the Town and works directly for the Board of Selectmen. Each year the Town Administrator prepares an annual budget in coordination with department heads for submittal to the Board of Selectmen, which is then reviewed by the Finance Committee, and ultimately presented to Town Meeting.

The Town Clerk is an elected position in Natick, and serves as the "gateway into the community" providing information to residents and visitors. The Clerk is the chief election official, overseeing polling places; maintains the Town's Bylaws and Charter; and issues state licenses and permits.<sup>15</sup>

Natick's financial operations are handled by several different departments that all fall under the auspices of the Finance Department. In 2012, Town Meeting voted to centralize the different finance functions under one Finance Department which is overseen by the Deputy Town Administrator/Finance Director. The three-member elected Board of Assessors oversees the annual valuation of property in Natick and determines the rate of taxation for vote at Town Meeting. The Board is supported by the Director of Assessing and staff members in the Assessor's Office. Staff in the Assessor's Office evaluate about 1,300 buildings each year plus hundreds of sales. A substantial portion of evaluations are done in-house with current staff, but some specific evaluations will necessitate the use of an outside consultant (particularly commercial properties).<sup>16</sup>

The Finance Department also includes the Town Collector/Treasurer who is responsible for billing, collecting, and investing all monies due to the Town through taxes, permits, and fees. The Treasurer also issues all debt for short- and long-term borrowing, the maintenance of any property taken by tax title, and disposition of foreclosed property. The Town Comptroller is appointed to a three-year term by the Board of Selectmen and is responsible for maintaining the Town's financial records. This includes records of all receipts and payables, including Town payroll. The Comptroller maintains accounts payable records for both the Town and the School Department. Together, each of these offices works with the Town Administrator, Finance Committee, and Board of Selectmen to manage and strengthen the Town's fiscal health.



Natick Town Hall

**13** Richard Tranfaglia, Natick Human Resources Director.

**14** Town of Natick, FY 2016 Budget Appropriation.

**15** Town of Natick, <http://www.natickma.gov/358/Town-Clerk>

**16** Interview with Jan Dangelo and Eric Henderson, Assessor's Office. September, 2016.

## Public Safety

The Natick Police Department employs eighty-one full- and part-time staff members including the Police Chief, four Division Commanders, nine Patrol Sergeants, thirty-one Patrol Officers, and seven Investigators.<sup>17</sup> The Police Department also employs several administrative support staff, an Animal Control Officer, School Resource Officers, and ten Dispatchers. The Police also coordinate with the Natick Police Auxiliary which assists with traffic management at events and parades in Town.

The Natick Fire Department is responsible for providing emergency fire control, emergency medical care, disaster mitigation, and life rescue assistance. As was noted earlier, the Fire Department operates out of four separate stations located across Natick. The Department employs eighty-eight full-time staff which includes a Fire Chief, five Deputy Chiefs, five Captains, fifteen Lieutenants, and fifty-six Firefighters. The Department also includes Administrative Assistants and Training Officers. Thirty-four percent of the firefighting staff are certified as paramedics, and 99 percent are certified as EMTs. An overwhelming majority of the calls the Fire Department responds to are for emergency medical services.<sup>18</sup> The Fire Department is also responsible for smoke detector inspections and quarterly fire inspections in buildings across Town.



*Public Works Building*

## Public Works

Natick has a combined Public Works Department (DPW) which is responsible for the administration and maintenance of the Town's water and waste-water system, trash collection, municipal energy efforts, vehicle and equipment maintenance, roadways and sidewalks, storm-water drainage, engineering, GIS, common areas, parks, and trees in the public right-of-way.<sup>19</sup> The DPW employs fifty-three full-time staff, and seven part-time staff across several divisions which include:

- + **Water and Sewer:** responsible for operating and maintaining the Town's 10 water wells, the water treatment plant, and thirty-six sewer pump stations across town. They are also responsible for maintaining and replacing sewer and water pipes, as well as 1,400 hydrants. The Board of Selectmen in Natick serve as the Water and Sewer Commission and are responsible for setting the water and sewer rates.
- + **Administration:** responsible for the supervision, administration support, and secretarial services to the DPW as a whole. This includes preparation of payroll and working with the Comptroller to track account transactions. The staff also assists with resident issues and handling emergency and storm-related phone calls.
- + **Engineering:** responsible for providing guidance and technical support to a wide range of departments, boards, and commissions within Town government, as well as citizens in Natick. This division is the primary repository for roadway plans, site plans, and utility plans. Engineering is also responsible for calculating and maintaining construction bonds and managing stormwater permits.
- + **Highway and Sanitation:** responsible for the maintenance of the Town's 195 miles of roadway which includes lane and crosswalk striping, signage, catch basins, street sweeping, filling potholes, and snow removal services.

<sup>17</sup> Town of Natick, FY 2016 Budget Appropriation.

<sup>18</sup> Town of Natick, FY 2016 Budget Appropriation.

<sup>19</sup> Town of Natick, <http://www.natickma.gov/249/Public-Works>

- + **Land Facilities and Natural Resources:** responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of trees on public property, athletic fields, cemeteries, parks, and playgrounds. The division works closely with the Recreation and Parks, School, Conservation, and Facilities Management Departments in Natick.
- + **Equipment Maintenance:** responsible for the maintenance of the Town's vehicle fleet and equipment.
- + **Geographic Information Systems (GIS):** responsible for maintaining and upgrading the Town's digital and online inventory of spatial information such as tax parcels, public utilities, roadway infrastructure, surface water, aerial imagery, and public safety data. The GIS division maintains an online mapping portal for public use as well.<sup>20</sup>

## Community and Economic Development

The Community and Economic Development Department administers and enforces land development and building regulations that have been adopted by the Town and/or the State of Massachusetts. This includes the administration and enforcement of the Zoning Bylaw, building codes and permits, and the protection of natural resources. The Department employs ten full-time staff members and six part-time staff members, most of whom are located in the Building Department to assist with administering permits and carrying out inspections. Community and Economic Development is a consolidated department that includes the following divisions:

- + **Planning and Economic Development:** responsible for short- and long-term land use, economic development, and transportation planning across the Town. Planning staff undertake on-going reviews of development projects, Special Permits, and subdivisions to ensure consistency with the Zoning Bylaw and that permit conditions are being met. Staff assists a substantial number of groups and boards in Natick including the Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals, Open Space Committee, Natick Center Associates, the Economic Development Committee, and the Board of Selectmen. Staff are also serving as the day-to-day contacts for this Master Plan on behalf of the Planning Board.
  - + Economic Development staff are responsible for creating a business-friendly community that is attractive to new companies looking to locate in Natick, and ensuring current businesses remain in town. The Economic Development Planner interfaces with local boards and committees, as well as regional entities like the MetroWest Chamber of Commerce and the MetroWest Visitors Bureau.
  - + The Planning Division serves as primary staff to the five member elected Planning Board in Natick which has statutory authority for preparing the Town's Master Plan, holding public hearings and making recommendations to Town Meeting with regard to zoning changes, and approving, modifying, or rejecting subdivision applications. Planning staff assist the Zoning Board of Appeals, which is a five-member board appointed by the Board of Selectmen to hear and decide on appeals from decisions of the Building Inspector, Special Permits as allowed in the Zoning Bylaws, variances from the Zoning Bylaws, and other appeals in accordance with Chapter 40A.

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Natick MapGeo Site: <https://natickma.mapgeo.io/?latlng=42.289774%2C-71.352428&zoom=12>

- + **Building Department:** The Building Commissioner and Building Inspectors are responsible for permitting and monitoring the construction and alteration of all buildings or structures in Natick. This includes the inspection of built structures, stoves, fences, signs, and pools. They are also charged with enforcing standards for safety, energy, fire, sanitary, and access. The Building Department is responsible for establishing fees for inspections, certification of inspections, and the enforcement and administration of Natick's Zoning Bylaws.
- + **Conservation Commission:** Natick's part-time Conservation Agent provides staff support to the Conservation Commission. The Commission is a seven-member board appointed by the Board of Selectmen to oversee the protection and preservation of natural resources in Natick. The Commission reviews projects for compliance with G.L. c. 131, section 40, the Massachusetts Wetland Protection Act.

## Community Services



*Natick Community-Senior Center*

In Massachusetts, Community Services typically includes some form of healthcare and wellness, social services for the elderly, and financial assistance for veterans. The Community Services Department in Natick is comprised of Recreation and Parks, Council on Aging, Human Services, Veteran's Services, and the Natick Community Organic Farm. In Natick, the Health Department is a separate department responsible for day-to-day operations, while the three-member Board of Health is responsible for setting town-wide policies.

Within Community Services, the Council on Aging division provides social assistance, transportation, and programming services to the elderly. The Division is advised by a sixteen-member Council that is appointed to three-year terms by the Board of Selectmen. The Council on Aging is staffed by five full-time and four part-time employees who are responsible for providing an array of activities, programs, and services to meet the educational, social, health, and wellness of elders, families, and individuals with disabilities in Natick.<sup>21</sup>

A large percentage of the programming for the Council takes place at the Community-Senior Center. The Town's senior population, similar to many other towns in Massachusetts, has been growing and will continue to grow, placing additional strains on programming and transportation services in the future.<sup>22</sup> There is only one part-time staff person who is responsible for transportation for seniors and disabled residents. This service is very popular, and is constrained by both staffing and space on the current vehicle fleet. The Town has one twelve-person van and one newly acquired car which can seat two people. The Town has a pool of volunteer drivers (20-25) who will drive residents to medical appointments and are eligible for mileage reimbursement from the Town.<sup>23</sup>

The Community Services Department also encompasses Human Services and Veteran's Services. Human Services is staffed by two full-time employees, one Social Worker and one Outreach Coordinator who are responsible for determining the eligibility of residents for public benefits, referrals for home care services, counseling, subsidized housing, and insurance. The Division also provides advocacy and crisis intervention. The Veteran's Services Division is staffed by one full-time Veteran's Agent and one full-time Executive Assistant. This Division is responsible for assisting Natick's veterans and their families with the State's Veteran's Benefits Program and filing for federal benefits.

**21** Town of Natick, <http://www.natickma.gov/626/Council-on-Aging>

**22** Interview with Susan Ramsey, Director of Council on Aging. September, 2016.

**23** Ibid.

Finally, the Community Services Department is responsible for the Town's Recreation and Parks division. A very large and complex division, Recreation and Parks employs four full-time staff and over two hundred part-time staff that put on 375 individual programs across twenty-nine different parks and facilities in Natick. In Fiscal Year 2016, the Division had over 750 volunteers who dedicated 30,000 hours to programs in town that helped over 9,500 residents participate.<sup>24</sup> All of this is overseen by one Director, one Assistant Director, one Program and Events Director, and a ¾ time Special Needs Coordinator. The repairs and maintenance of town-owned fields, playgrounds, and buildings are taken care of by the Facilities Management Department and the Land Facilities and Natural Resources division of the DPW.



*Fields Outside of a Natick Elementary School*

## Library and Culture

Natick offers its residents access to two public libraries: the Morse Institute Library and the Bacon Free Library. From a budgetary perspective, the two libraries are separate and do not share a budget or staff. The Morse Library, located in Natick Center across from Town Hall, is a 60,000 square foot building housing over 200,000 books. The staff, comprised of sixteen full-time and forty part-time employees, serves between 900 to 1,000 people every day. The library is open Monday through Thursday from 10AM to 9PM, Friday and Saturday from 10AM to 5PM, and Sunday from 2PM to 5PM. Over the last four years, the Morse Library has had close to 300,000 visits and 500,000 pieces of media in circulation each year.<sup>25</sup> The library offers free access to print and non-print materials, provides hands-on learning experience for residents in Natick and MetroWest, and serves as a cultural and community gathering space for events and exhibits. The library provides free Wi-Fi and computer access, and offers classes for English as a Second Language (ESL) learners, budding entrepreneurs, and youth in the community. As use of the library continues to grow, there are space constraints and staffing constraints that need to be addressed, primarily the addition of a full-time professional bookkeeper.



*Bacon Free Library*

The Bacon Free Library is a much smaller building which primarily serves the South Natick area. The building itself is a historical landmark in Natick. Constructed in 1880 the 5,500-square foot space had a total circulation of about 39,000 and offered close to 400 programs in 2016. The library is staffed by all part-time employees which include one Director, one Assistant Director, and three Library Assistants.<sup>26</sup> The library is currently open Monday from 2PM to 5:30PM, Tuesday from 9:30AM to 8:30PM, Wednesday through Friday from 9:30AM to 5:30PM, and Saturday from 9AM to 1PM. The building is also home to the Natick Historical Society Museum (on the bottom floor) which offers a rich collection of artifacts and local memorabilia.

**24**

Town of Natick, FY 2016 Budget Appropriation.

**25**

Town of Natick, FY 2016 Budget Appropriation.

**26**

Ibid.

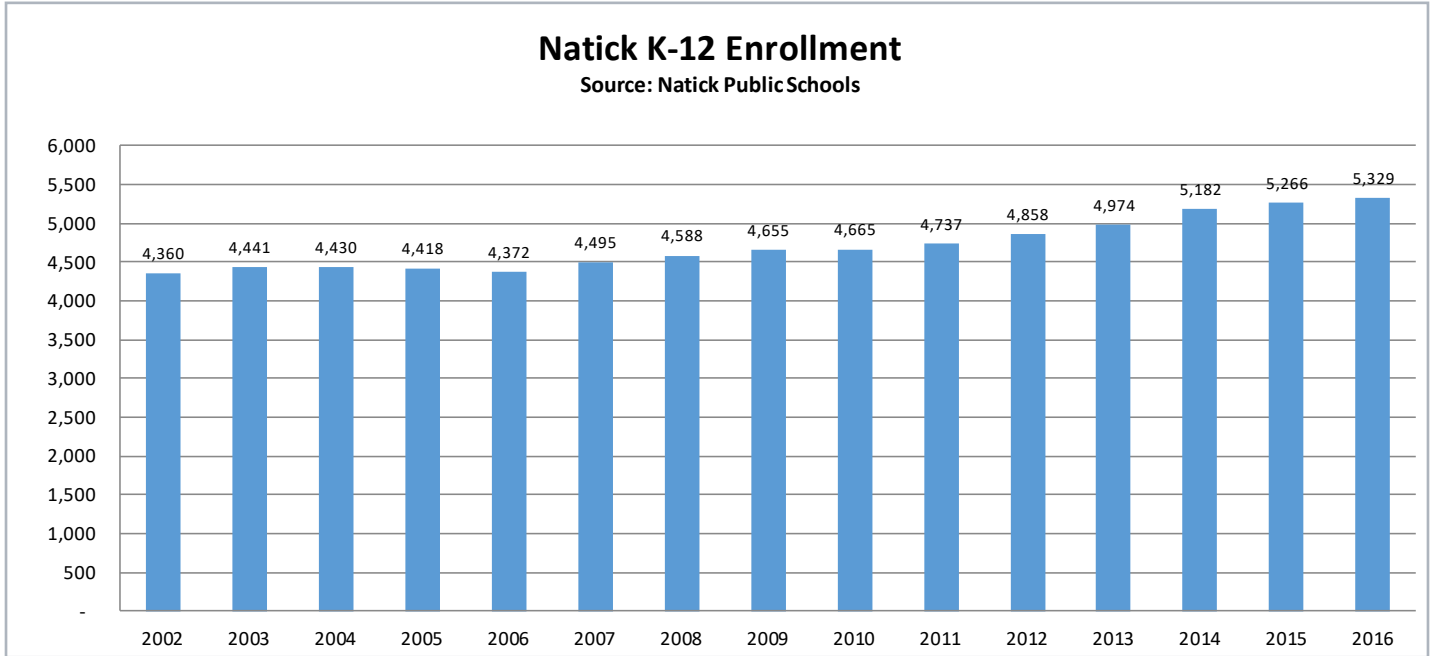


FIGURE 8.1: SCHOOL ENROLLMENT TRENDS

## Public Schools

The Natick Public School system is comprised of eight individual schools, five elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school. Elementary schools in Natick cover grades K through 4, the middle schools cover grades 5 through 8, and high school covers grades 9 through 12. The most recent enrollment figures for Fiscal Year 2017 have total enrollment at 5,480 students. Since 2006, enrollment has increased by 1,108 students or ninety-three students per year. This increase far outpaced the estimated school projections and the trend of increasing enrollment is anticipated to continue for the next ten years.<sup>27</sup>

The Natick Public School system is an excellent school district. Natick High School is considered one of the top fifty high schools in Massachusetts. In 2016, over 90 percent of the district’s tenth grade students achieved Advanced or Proficient ratings in the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) tests.<sup>28</sup> The district is overseen by a seven-member elected School Committee. The District employs the equivalent of 313 full-time teachers and department heads, a number that has been increasing over the last several years.<sup>29</sup>

## Town Finances

The Town of Natick’s total budget for Fiscal Year 2016 was appropriated at \$134.7 million to pay for municipal services, with 77 percent of revenues derived from the local tax levy.<sup>30</sup> In Natick, the residential portion of the tax levy provides 78 percent of the revenue generated by property and personal taxes.<sup>31</sup> Like most other towns across Massachusetts, Natick obtains operating revenues from a limited number of sources: the tax levy, local receipts generated by various departmental services, state aid, and any uncommitted revenues from previous years (“free cash”).

**27** Enrollment numbers provided by Natick Public Schools, Enrollment Projections Presentation from December 6, 2016.

**28** “Best Public High Schools in 2016”. Boston magazine, 2016. <http://www.bostonmagazine.com/best-schools-boston-2016-chart-public-high-schools/>

**29** Town of Natick, FY 2016 Budget Appropriation.

**30** Ibid.

**31** Massachusetts Department of Revenue, Municipal Data Bank, Municipal Actual Revenues and Expenditures.

The General Fund, or the fund used by municipalities to account for and report the vast majority of local revenues and expenditures, is primarily composed of real and personal property taxes (tax levy). Other General Fund revenues come from excise taxes on motor vehicles, user fees, permits, licenses, and other miscellaneous sources. Local aid from the state accounts for only 8.6 percent of all General Fund revenues. In Fiscal Year 2016, approximately 95 percent of local aid came in the form of Chapter 70 school funding and Unrestricted General Government Aid (UGGA).<sup>32</sup> Natick also receives close to one million dollars a year in Chapter 90 transportation funding from the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT).<sup>33</sup> Natick also has a self-supporting municipal enterprise fund established for the water and sewer system which generates about \$2.2 million per year.

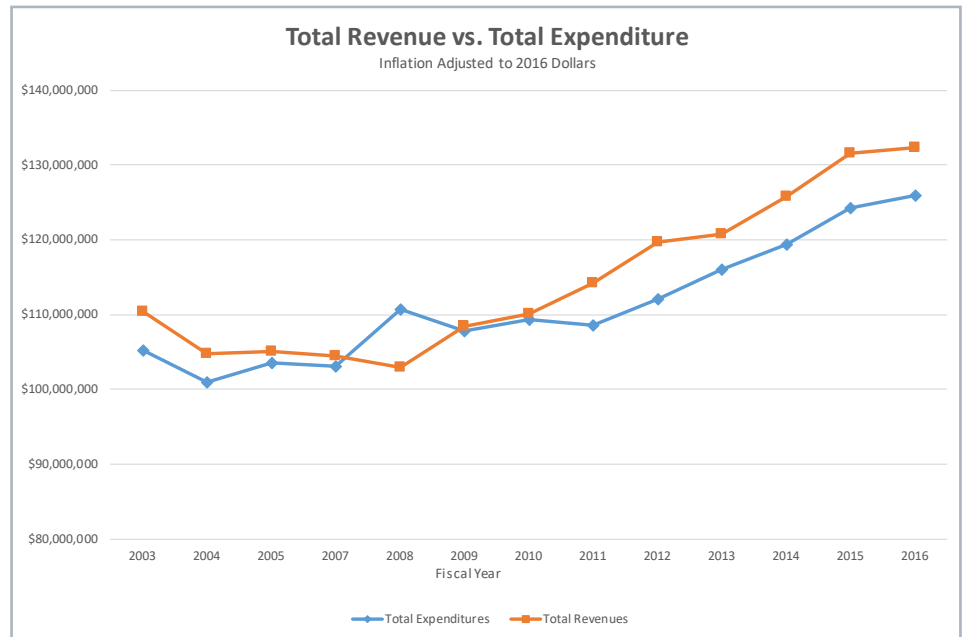


FIGURE 8.2: REVENUE VS. EXPENDITURES

In Natick, residential property makes up 78 percent of the tax levy, while commercial, industrial, and personal property make up the remaining 22 percent.<sup>34</sup> This split compares favorably to many communities with similar characteristics in MetroWest and along Route 128. Table 8.1 compares current tax rates and the percent split of each town’s tax levy. Some communities in Massachusetts have chosen to split their tax rates to shift more of the tax burden on either the residential side or the commercial side. Typically, most communities that have a split rate choose to increase the commercial tax rate as a way to lower residential rates, thereby lowering the residential tax burden.

Natick has a single tax rate, which is a positive attribute from the viewpoint of commercial and industrial businesses. Moving to a split tax rate can be detrimental to attracting and retaining commercial and industrial businesses. Small businesses that are leasing space from a building owner would likely see that increased cost passed on in the form of a rent increase. Since commercial properties in Natick are valued using the income approach, an increase in expenditures from a rise in taxes will decrease the valuation of the property. These are just some of the reasons many communities across the Commonwealth have decided to stay with a single tax rate.

**32** Massachusetts Department of Revenue, Division of Local Services, Municipal Databank. Fiscal Year 2016.

**33** MassDOT, Chapter 90 Apportionment. Fiscal Year 2017.

**34** Massachusetts Department of Revenue, Division of Local Services, Municipal Databank.

MUNICIPALITY	RESIDENTIAL	C/I/P	RES. % OF TOTAL LEVY	C/I/P % OF TOTAL LEVY
Natick	13.57	13.57	77.63	22.37
Belmont	12.56	12.56	94.74	5.26
Framingham	17.38	37.98	59.90	40.10
Holliston	18.79	18.79	87.23	12.77
Medford	11.19	21.82	78.95	21.05
Melrose	12.33	18.78	91.79	8.21
Needham	11.54	23.02	75.38	24.62
Reading	14.50	14.50	91.75	8.25
Stoneham	12.70	22.55	82.48	17.52
Wellesley	11.83	11.83	87.08	12.92
Winchester	11.68	11.02	95.49	4.51

**TABLE 8.1: TAX RATE COMPARISON**

Source: Mass Department of Revenue, Municipal Data Bank.  
(C/I/P: Commercial/Industrial/Personal)

Even with the single tax rate, Natick’s average single-family tax bill is comparable to many communities in MetroWest and along Route 128. Table 8.1 again compares Natick to several other towns using a few different financial indicators.

MUNICIPALITY	2013 POPULATION	POPULATION DENSITY SQ. MI.	2016 AVG. SF TAX BILL	2011 DOR INCOME PER CAPITA	2014 EQV PER CAPITA	2016 EXPENDITURES PER CAPITA	2016 LEVY PER CAPITA
Natick	35,214	2,335	\$6,868	\$49,772	\$197,692	\$3,457	\$2,835
Belmont	25,332	5,436	\$11,656	\$73,324	\$227,405	\$3,252	\$3,272
Framingham	70,441	2,804	\$6,065	\$30,811	\$108,051	\$3,339	\$2,505
Holliston	14,162	757	\$7,819	\$49,993	\$148,110	\$3,688	\$3,019
Medford	57,170	7,023	\$4,747	\$32,853	\$128,128	\$2,401	\$1,764
Melrose	27,690	5,904	\$5,746	\$42,056	\$139,994	\$2,812	\$1,929
Needham	29,736	2,358	\$9,587	\$93,395	\$278,902	\$4,295	\$4,012
Reading	25,327	2,551	\$7,242	\$49,019	\$159,026	\$3,254	\$2,467
Stoneham	21,734	3,534	\$5,526	\$37,745	\$145,620	\$2,734	\$2,116
Wellesley	29,090	2,858	\$13,971	\$154,864	\$351,082	\$4,546	\$4,382
Winchester	22,079	3,655	\$10,948	\$90,976	\$273,751	\$3,944	\$3,478

**TABLE 8.2: FINANCIAL COMPARISON DATA**

Source: Mass Department of Revenue, Municipal Data Bank.  
SF: Single Family  
DOR: Department of Revenue  
EQV: Equalized Valuation

## Expenditures

In Fiscal Year 2016, Natick spent about \$3,457 per capita on Town and school services.<sup>35</sup> Overall, the Town has seen rising expenditures on the capital and operation sides due to the growing population and the cost of delivering services at the same level or better. One of the largest financial increases has been in the school budget, which was projected to increase by 7.4 percent between FY 16 and FY 17. This pattern is not unique to Natick. Many towns in Massachusetts – especially those that place a high value on the quality of their public schools – have sacrificed municipal spending to preserve school personnel and programs. Natick also has the added challenge of having to accommodate an increasing enrollment in schools that have already outpaced their design capacities. This has necessitated capital projects that have increased capacity in both temporary and permanent ways. Education and Learning expenditures are anticipated to make up 45 percent of the Town’s total expenditures in FY 17.<sup>36</sup> Overall costs for education have been increasing since 2003.

**35** Massachusetts Department of Revenue, Division of Local Services, Municipal Databank.

**36** Town of Natick, FY 2016 Budget Appropriation.

**37** Ibid.

The Town has been able to make progress in bringing down municipal expenditures related to employee benefits and health care. Recent negotiations with the General Government and School Department unions should result in over \$1 million in savings over FY 16 costs. Challenges with the Public Employee Retirement Administration Commission still impact the Town’s financial stability, with fixed increases of 7 percent through the year 2024.<sup>37</sup> This is evidenced in Figure 8.3 showing fixed costs continuing to climb since 2012.

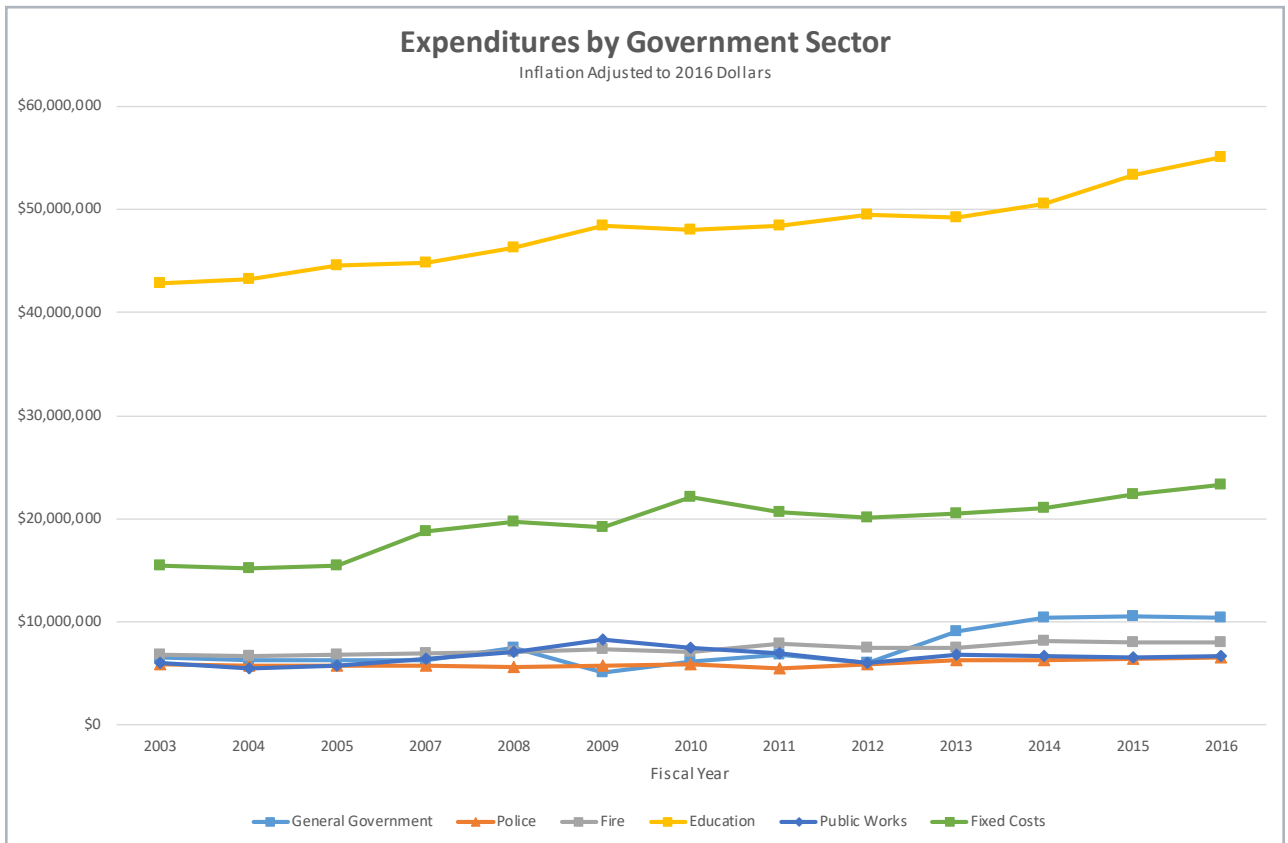


FIGURE 8.3: EXPENDITURES BY SECTOR

## Issues and Opportunities

The issues and opportunities described in this section were derived from conversations with Natick residents at the November 2016 Community Meeting, discussions with Town staff and business and property owners, previous plans and studies, and research.

### Changing Demographics

Natick's demographics are changing. Like many communities across the Commonwealth, a large cohort of Natick residents is getting older and are choosing to stay in the community. As Boomers age out of the workforce and look to retire, many will remain in their homes where cost and maintenance will be challenging. Natick does not have very many senior housing options, particularly those that are affordably-priced. The Town's Council on Aging is challenged by the growing demand for transportation services, as well as cultural and educational programming at the Community Center. If housing choices are expanded and more seniors are able to remain in Natick, the Town will also need to ensure that Public Safety services, Public Works, Human Services, Council on Aging, the Library, Recreation and Parks are adequately funded and prepared to play a role in making the Town age-friendly. The role of family as the caretaker is changing, therefore the Town needs to begin planning for the accommodations older residents will require.

How will the Town address growth at both ends of the age spectrum moving forward?

On the flip side, Natick is also experiencing an increase in the number of young families with children who are moving to Town. These residents are moving to Natick for a host of reasons which include access to jobs and transportation choices, parks and amenities, a great school system, and housing that is more affordable than many of the surrounding towns. The turnover of the single-family homes in Natick is driving a significant portion of the school enrollment increases, and is also placing additional demands on park and recreation services and the library. The Town needs to continue to evaluate the needs of both younger and older residents and plan ahead for future services, staff capacity, and facility space.

### School Enrollment and Capacity Challenges

Over the last decade, the Natick Public School system saw an increase in enrollment of over 1,000 new students. The Town has made strategic investments at several schools, with additional investments forthcoming, to maximize capacity on existing sites with interior reconfigurations and modular classroom additions. At the same time, the Town is working with the Massachusetts School Building Authority to address capacity issues at the Kennedy Middle School. In addition, there are capacity challenges at the Wilson Middle School, as well as the Lilja, Johnson, and Memorial Elementary Schools. If residents in Natick want to continue to have quality school facilities to support their children's education, there will need to be a series of large facility-based investments made to address school capacity in the next three to five years. In addition to facility upgrades, enrollment increases also require staff increases IF the Town wishes to keep current faculty to student ratios (or lower them over time).

“Natick is a mid-sized town that is continuing to grow and change.”

## Facilities Management

The excellent educational, recreational, cultural, and environmental services that the Town offers enhance the quality of life for residents, but these and other public services are increasingly expensive. While many of Natick’s public facilities are in good to excellent condition, there are some that will require capital improvements, and some may need to be retired, rebuilt, or rededicated to other purposes. The Town is fortunate to have a full-time Director of Facilities; the Town has not yet developed a long-term capital facilities plan. A twenty-year facilities plan would help the Town understand its potential long-term needs, and budget for maintenance and replacement far in advance.

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