

CHAPTER 1: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

VISION STATEMENT

West Boylston is a charming New England town that exemplifies the best features of small-town life. We enjoy a beautiful natural environment, highlighted by the scenic Wachusett Reservoir. We cherish our historic roots, large expanses of protected open space, family-oriented neighborhoods, specialty retail shops, and a limited but productive industrial base. Our educational system and municipal services make efficient use of local tax dollars and offer top-notch quality. As an integral part of the Central Massachusetts region, our town has access to cultural assets and employment opportunities that rank among the best in New England. We have worked to craft a well thought out Master Plan that will meet the needs of the citizens of West Boylston.

Through its survey of the citizenry conducted in 1999, the Town-Wide Planning Committee learned that residents appreciate the Town's assets and do not wish to see radical change alter its overall appearance and small town charm. We seek to accommodate growth that will retain our character and make West Boylston an even better place to live and work. Our Vision of tomorrow includes:

1. A healthy, safe and clean environment similar to what we enjoy today.
2. An active citizenry involved in Town government dedicated to improving public services and nurturing our sense of community. The Town should adopt measures to encourage public participation in Town government.
3. Ample opportunity to participate in recreational activities suitable for those of all ages and abilities.
4. Improved communication and partnerships with state agencies such as the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) and the Massachusetts Highway Department, other municipalities, and non-government agencies.
5. Equitable payment from the DCR, including in-kind contributions, for land held for water supply protection.
6. A school system with resources sufficient to provide a superior education for our children and is a source of pride for residents.
7. Preservation of plentiful open space in order to protect our natural resources, maintain scenic views, and offer residents the pleasure of enjoying an unspoiled environment.
8. Vibrant businesses and industries that provide employment, contribute to the tax base, and meet the needs of residents for goods and services.
9. A safe and efficient street network that offers convenient access to regional highways and community facilities, and protects neighborhood tranquility.
10. A network of sidewalks and trails between neighborhoods that provides ready access to commercial areas, schools, and recreation facilities.
11. A variety of housing options that meet the incomes, needs and lifestyles of a diverse population.
12. A strong supply of housing that is affordable and addresses the needs of our grown children and civil servants who appreciate what our community has to offer and who wish to live here.
13. A Route 12 Corridor that contains a mix of commercial activity to meet the needs of residents for goods and services. Our vision includes an improved roadway designed to carry traffic safely and smoothly, and an improved physical appearance (landscaping, lighting, signage, site design) that will make the Corridor an attractive gateway to the community.
14. Public buildings that are well maintained through adoption of a long-range capital improvement program, replacement of aging facilities on a priority basis, and investment in a sound maintenance program to prolong the useful life of such buildings.

15. An enhanced Town Center located in the vicinity of the Town Commons that can be the focal point of the Town's civic and cultural affairs. The Town Hall should be as near the Town Center as possible.
16. Greater regional cooperation and partnerships with neighboring towns to meet our Town's needs.

The Master Plan and this Executive Summary are organized under the broad topics of Economic Development, Housing, Open Space and Recreation, Transportation, Land Use, Municipal Facilities and Financial Constraints. Each topic is then developed outlining existing condition and describing the goals for the town and possible strategies to achieve these goals.

It should be noted that change is a fact of town life and therefore, some data reported in the charts created in 2003 may need adjustment. However, it can be said that broadly speaking, the data reflects life in West Boylston at the beginning of the 21st Century.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Summary of Existing Conditions

1. The Town's economic base is composed primarily of small businesses. There is no one large employer that makes a high property tax payment to fund local services.
2. Two near-by interchanges with I-190 provide a ready access to the interstate highway system.
3. Bordering Worcester, there exists a strong regional economic market that West Boylston can draw upon. With Fitchburg and Leominster to the north, the Town is well situated to provide services to a large area.
4. Many small retailers find the Route 12 Corridor attractive, and there appears to be a wide diversity of offerings. Retail trade makes up the largest concentration of economic activity in the Town, and most of these shops have few employees.
5. The Route 12 Buildout Analysis demonstrated that only a few large commercial lots exist in the Corridor that can accommodate new growth. Because of the age and condition of many of the buildings, it is likely that renovation and expansion will be the primary vehicle for growth in the Corridor.
6. The Region possesses enormous resources of knowledge and expertise with its many schools of higher education.
7. Because of the small, stable population in town, business growth will be dependent upon the ability of existing firms to attract customers from beyond the Town's boundaries to sample what the Town has to offer. A marketing strategy keyed upon local assets is essential to draw regional residents to the Town, and provision of diverse activities will draw them back again.
8. The sewer construction project will bring the benefits of a public sewer system to most of the Town's commercial and industrial districts. In the past, development had been limited by soil conditions to accommodate on-site septic systems. Higher intensity development will now be possible, up to the floor area permitted by zoning.
9. The Business Survey results indicate that most business people feel West Boylston is a good place to run a business, but feel that Town officials do not support their needs.

Economic Development Goals

1. Improve communication between the Town and business community to resolve differences and develop a closer working relationship.
2. Increase the capacity of the local government to promote economic development by insuring adequate resources are devoted to the task.
3. Seek to broaden the tax base by promoting new economic development in designated business and industrial zones where neighborhood impacts can be minimized.

4. Promote small-scale retail and tourist oriented outlets that build upon existing strengths and are compatible with the skills of the local workforce.
5. Implement a Marketing Strategy that highlights the Town's natural resource assets, convenient location, proximity to Worcester, regional economic strengths, and service-oriented government.
6. Seek to retain local companies wherever possible by offering consistent permitting practices, efficient services, and a supportive environment for running a business.
7. Provide quality physical infrastructure to meet the needs of business and industry, including an adequate supply of clean water, sewage treatment, and congestion-free roads in good condition.

Economic Development Strategies

1. Create an Economic Development Commission or Task Force to promote economic development in West Boylston. Such an entity would serve as a vehicle for communication, where the public and private sectors can debate appropriate economic development policy for the Town, seek to develop a consensus, apply for grants to improve local infrastructure, and work to promote economic growth. An EDC would foster a better business climate by increasing communication between the business community and town government.
2. Promote and market the strengths of commercial and industrial areas:
 - a) The Hartwell Street industrial district should be focused on traditional industrial activities. Access should be improved to minimize traffic impacts on residential neighborhoods.
 - b) The Worcester Corporate Center provides opportunity for high value office, R&D, and light industrial uses.
 - c) The Route 12 commercial district should be reserved for restaurants, multi-tenant buildings, retail stores and service businesses that provide conveniences for West Boylston residents and draws outside shoppers from the larger region. Substantial public investment in the highway and adjacent land is needed to enhance economic growth along the highway.
 - d) Oakdale should be preserved as a traditional New England village with small-scale commercial activity.
 - e) The Town Center area should be reserved for high-end retail shops and small professional offices.
3. Encourage small business development. Since smaller companies make up the backbone of the economic base, it is important for the Town to do what it can to insure the public sector provides a safe and healthy environment within which to operate such a business.
4. Improve coordination among municipal boards and departments to insure that local land use boards have current information when acting on development applications.
5. Act in concert with regional economic strengths. The region is particularly strong in the areas of medicine, medical instruments, biotechnology, software development, computer equipment, insurance, and telecommunications. Recruitment efforts directed to companies in these clusters are more likely to yield successes than attempting to attract companies in sectors without a foothold in Central Massachusetts.
6. Become active in regional and state economic development planning. It is difficult for any one community or agency to have all of the expertise that is needed to sustain and grow the Central Massachusetts economy. Maintaining close communication with a wide variety of related organizations, and relying upon the expertise of other professionals can stretch limited resources to their fullest extent.
7. Become a member of an Economic Target Area (ETA). Because West Boylston is not a member of an ETA, it is at a disadvantage when companies are making expansion or re-location decisions.
8. Develop a marketing program to promote West Boylston as a desirable community to locate a small business. The marketing strategy should be geared to the economic strengths of the Town and its likely target business audience. The Town could: expand its web site to promote economic development;

maintain an inventory of available land and vacant buildings; promote quality of life issues that make the Town special; prepare a glossy brochure to attract corporate executives; and highlight the Town's low, one-class tax rate.

9. Work with the Massachusetts Highway Department to improve the Route 12 Corridor. The physical appearance of the Route 12 Corridor is an impediment to expanding business opportunity. But a reconstruction of the roadway, locating power lines underground, clearly identifying travel and turning lanes, eliminating confusing and unneeded curb cuts, adding street trees and planting strips, and providing safe pedestrian access via new sidewalks will promote additional private investment.
10. Develop tourism as an economic engine. The Town has numerous natural assets that attract residents of surrounding towns. While here, many will make the time to browse among local shops and may make impulse purchases as part of their outing. Local businesses should cater to these tourists.
11. Hold community fairs and special events. Community celebrations offer a positive way for residents to come together and celebrate the Town's heritage and its current community spirit. Residents from outside the community can be welcomed and perhaps spend some cash while visiting the Town.
12. Education / School to Work. All employers need access to a skilled and enterprising labor force. Even with the state's superior higher education system, the specialization of many highly technical industries in Central Massachusetts requires that the workforce be educated to meet diverse needs. The economic task force can help make local employers aware of technical and financial resources to assist companies in staying profitable in a highly competitive environment.
13. Provide lending sources and technical assistance to small businesses. Small businesses often have difficulty financing improvements from conventional lending sources. Banks with branch offices in West Boylston can provide a commitment to funding local businesses that wish to expand or start a new business here. The Town should implement existing state and federal funding options.
14. Create non-profit Economic Development Alliance with neighboring towns. As a small community, West Boylston may not be able to support a concentrated economic development program on its own. However, surrounding communities may be willing to forge closer ties through creation of a non-profit corporation dedicated to promoting economic development.

HOUSING

Summary of Existing Conditions

1. Much of West Boylston's housing stock was built in the post WW II era. Built on small lots by today's standards, and often of much smaller size than new homes, this housing stock plays a key role in offering lower cost housing for middle-income individuals.
2. However, there is an affordability problem in West Boylston today. Housing prices have escalated rapidly in the past several years, making it extremely difficult for first-time homebuyers, young adults who grew up in Town, and civil servants to be able to afford to buy a home.
3. West Boylston does not fare favorably in relation to Chapter 40B requirements as only 2.85% of the year-round housing units meet the state definition of affordability. ("Affordability" in terms of Chapter 40B requires government subsidies and qualifying residents based on income limitations, and is not a reflection of actual rents or costs.) As a result, there are incentives for developers to submit comprehensive permit applications designed to overcome zoning density limitations to meet the regional need for housing for those of low and moderate income.
4. In addition, there is a need for housing options for a diverse and changing world. In the past, most of the new housing occurred as large-lot, single family homes. However, in recent years, the majority of new housing in Town is designed for "active adults over 55".
5. The Town has taken positive steps in offering higher-density housing, e.g. the adoption of an elderly housing overlay district to allow Hillside Village condominiums to be built.
6. Census data reveals that few rental units were built in the previous decade, thus increasing the difficulty of finding an affordable unit in West Boylston for households of all incomes.

7. Condominiums offer a more affordable option for those entering the home buying market, and can help to build equity for later purchase of a single family home.
8. Compared to surrounding towns, West Boylston's older housing stock provides many affordable housing opportunities that are not subsidized; unfortunately, these do not qualify as low and moderate income units on the state's Chapter 40B subsidized housing inventory.

Housing Goals

1. By the year 2020, West Boylston should have ten percent of its year-round housing stock determined to be affordable units as defined under MGL Chapter 40B.
2. West Boylston should continue to provide housing for a broad range of incomes. This would include ownership and rental housing for elderly, disabled and civil servants as defined by the Town's housing needs which may vary from time to time.
3. West Boylston should encourage housing developments that result in a diverse population and offers alternatives to meet the needs of residents of differing ages, economic status, and household characteristics. All proposed developments should be built in harmony with the environment, be mindful of neighborhood character, and wherever possible adhere to the principles of "Smart Growth".
4. Seek to amend MGL c. 40B to count the many market-rate units that are already affordable, even without a state or federal subsidy, as units that qualify toward a community's goal of having 10% of its year-round housing stock affordable.

Strategies to Meet the Goals

1. The Town purchased land at the jail and should consider leasing a portion of the site for affordable housing.
2. The Housing Authority should seek funding to build additional rental units.
3. Form collaborative relationships with the Housing Authority or the regional administering agency, RCAP Solutions (formerly Rural Housing Improvement (RHI)), to increase the use of Section 8 certificates and vouchers. These should be project based, i.e. vouchers or certificates that remain with specific units in West Boylston.
4. Promote additional Local Initiative Projects (LIP). The LIP program affords the Town the opportunity to work closely with a developer on all aspects of a project. Even if no financial subsidy is provided, the technical assistance provided by the state is deemed a subsidy and units count towards the Chapter 40B goal.
5. Create a non-profit housing trust, or work with an existing organization, to raise funds for affordable housing activities. Such an entity offers flexibility in creating affordable housing since it can accept gifts of land or money and can borrow funds to build housing. In addition, the West Boylston Land Trust can be a vehicle for acquiring land for such purposes.
6. The Housing Partnership should be empowered to implement a housing agenda to address the needs of the community. Affordable housing development is a complex task that requires committed local leaders and experienced developers. The Partnership could work with an experienced non-profit housing developer to bring in expertise in affordable housing development not otherwise available to the Town. RCAP Solutions is one such agency that has expressed a willingness to work with the Town on affordable housing production.
7. Adopt an incentive Zoning Bylaw to encourage developers to provide housing for low and moderate-income households by allowing increased density and reduced frontage requirements as well "cluster development" options. An Incentive Bylaw allows for a percentage of the units in a development to be permanently restricted to low and moderate-income households.
8. The Housing Partnership should convene a forum on housing issues in West Boylston.

9. The Town should participate in the soft second mortgage program. First-time homebuyers obtain a second mortgage of 20% of the purchase price, which carries a lower rate and deferral of principal for 10 years to increase one's buying power.
10. Identify land in tax delinquency that may be suitable for housing. Continue with the tax title process for promising sites and offer such properties to developers or first-time homebuyers who will agree to long-term affordability restrictions.
11. Consider re-zoning additional land for higher density housing, especially land near bus routes and with access to water and sewer services. Zoning bylaw requirements for multi-family housing should be revised to include standards to achieve high quality design, neighborhood compatibility, and environmental protection.
12. Evaluate the existing building stock in West Boylston to identify opportunities to rehabilitate structures for affordable housing. Possibilities could include single-family conversions, and older apartment buildings that are in need of renovation.
13. Promote the use of the existing accessory apartment provision of the zoning bylaw to create units reserved for low and moderate-income renters. Determine if the Town can offer incentives that would encourage greater use of this technique.
14. Apply for CDBG funds to start a housing rehabilitation program. This will enable elderly and low and moderate-income households to make needed repairs to their property and to continue to live in their home. The Town can also help homeowners apply for grants and loans for home repairs and replacement of failed septic systems in non-sewered areas.
15. Consider adoption of the Community Preservation Act (CPA). Under the CPA a real estate surcharge of 1%-3% is applied to all property to raise revenue for affordable housing, historic preservation, and open space acquisition.
16. Consider using the tool of "limited development" to create some affordable units. Limited development entails selling a percentage of land acquired as open space for new housing. The proceeds from the land sale help to defray the Town's cost of acquiring the site. Rather than seek the highest sale price, the land could be sold at below market value to lower overall housing costs for qualified applicants. Deed restrictions insure the property remains affordable for future buyers.

OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION

Based on the "Open Space and Recreation Plan, 2002 Update"

PLAN SUMMARY

Certain key points became evident during the formulation of this plan. First, the survey of residents taken in 1999 indicates the priority that townspeople give to the preservation of the rural character of the Town. Second, DCR owns a tremendous amount of open space, and the Town benefits from these holdings in terms of open space and lovely vistas, but this land is restricted and is mostly unavailable for active recreational use by the local residents. Third, if the DCR were to prohibit public access to its lands, as Worcester has done with its watershed lands in Holden, the Town would have a real shortage of open space. Fourth, the small amount of Town-owned open space is very heavily used for athletic facilities, which limits other more passive uses. Fifth, the existing open space is very unevenly distributed throughout the Town.

The intent of the Open Space and Recreation Plan is to increase the awareness of citizens and public officials to the benefits of preserving undeveloped land and to plan for the future. The Plan provides strategies for conserving and managing open spaces. Recommendations include expanding recreational facilities, which are currently over-used, and improving access to those facilities. The Plan proposes to coordinate with DCR to investigate and negotiate community use of DCR lands that would not have a negative impact on the water quality of the Reservoir. The Plan recognizes the need to plan now to preserve open space threatened by the development that may result from the installation of sewers and from growth spreading westward from Boston.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Resource Protection Goals

1. Assure that the Town's open space and recreation concerns are addressed when decisions are made regarding the future uses of DCR and former county-owned land.
2. Protect environmentally sensitive areas through restrictions on development or acquisition of development rights.
3. Establish wildlife greenway corridors.
4. Preserve existing farmland and establish a plan for acquisition/protection of land under Chapter 61, 61A, and 61B.
5. Create an open space/cluster zoning bylaw to protect water quality and to maintain open space, especially in areas that have been or will be sewered.
6. Coordinate open space preservation with historical preservation.
7. Work with town departments to protect existing natural features on town-owned open space
8. Preserve fisheries in the Reservoir and its tributaries.
9. Consider limitation of increases in inter-basin transfer of water that will occur with the sewer project.
10. Promote water conservation and reduce the amount of "unaccounted for" water.
11. Find ways to protect privately owned wetlands and seek certification of vernal pools.
12. Reduce stream bank erosion and eutrophication of ponds, such as Carroll's Pond.
13. Promote alternatives to polluting land use practices, such as excessive fertilizer use.

Community Goals

1. Acquire more land for open space and recreation, and improve existing facilities.
2. Work with the DCR and state legislature to ensure local access to DCR-owned parcels for passive recreation and, where suitable, for active recreation.
3. Acquire more open space and develop recreation facilities in the more densely developed southern part of town.
4. Upgrade existing recreation facilities so they are handicapped accessible.
5. Develop maps, pamphlets, and informational packets about town-owned open space and recreational facilities, and develop an outreach campaign for the public.
6. Increase opportunities for passive recreation on town-owned land, especially for the elderly.
7. Preserve small town character of town.
8. Develop both North-South and East-West trail linkages for walkways and wildlife corridors, and develop linkages to trails and wildlife corridors in abutting towns.
9. Develop sidewalks and walking trails to facilitate pedestrian traffic.
10. Increase access to recreational facilities by very young children at Pride Park and Woodland Park.
11. Support historic interpretive trail development along the Mass. Central Rail Trail.

Management Goals

1. Support the permanent Open Space Advisory Committee to develop overall plans and implementation strategies for open space. The Committee should have input into town decisions that affect open space, parks and resource protection.
2. Establish a plan to familiarize local officials and residents about the benefits of open space.

3. Help the West Boylston Land Trust become an effective community resource and coordinate actions of the Land Trust with town boards and commissions.
4. Develop and implement an operation and maintenance plan and, where appropriate, a fee structure, for the town's recreational facilities.
5. Obtain a commitment from the Town to preserve and expand the current amount of town-owned open space and recreational land.
6. Develop and implement rules and regulations for use of parks and recreational facilities.
7. Have professional assistance available for town officials making land use and recreation decisions and for interactions with state, county, and DCR officials.
8. Develop mechanism to ensure input from town boards and departments into Planning Board's site plan review and subdivision review process.
9. Create coordinated, professional management of the town's water supply and new sewers.
10. Improve enforcement of bylaws designed to protect the environment, such as Aquifer Protection Zoning.
11. Hold a public hearing to get public input whenever a use change is proposed for any open space owned by the Town.

TRANSPORTATION

Summary of Existing Conditions

1. With two interchanges to I-190, the Town has excellent access to the interstate highway system. North/south travel is well developed with major routes such as I-190 and Routes 12 and 140 running in this direction.
2. East/west movement is generally limited by the Wachusett Reservoir and topographic constraints.
3. There are no major regional highway projects planned for the near-term. Town-wide traffic is expected to increase by 16% over the course of this decade and by about 10% the following decade. To accommodate this additional traffic, high volume roads will require intersection improvements and changes in geometry.
4. The principal transportation improvement project that should be planned for is the upgrade to Route 12 through the commercial corridor. Route 12 should be viewed as the principal gateway through the Town and improved to enhance economic development and travel conditions. A variety of improvements will be needed, including re-surfacing, new curbs and sidewalks, attractive landscaping, signage controls, and placing overhead wires underground.
5. The Town of Holden has proposed the construction of a new interchange with I-190 in Holden at Malden Street near Lee Street in West Boylston. West Boylston officials are opposed to the project because of anticipated negative impacts it would have on the community. Many issues will need to be considered and resolved before support for this construction can occur.
6. The sewer improvement project currently underway will result in many local streets receiving a finish course that will greatly improve neighborhood conditions.
7. Poor access to the Hartwell Street industrial district results in negative traffic impacts on residential neighborhoods in West Boylston and Worcester.
8. Recent cutbacks in the state's Chapter 90 program will drastically curtail needed road improvements in other locations.
9. With the re-construction of the Route 140 bridge over the Thomas Basin in 2003, there are no other bridges in need of repair in West Boylston at this time.
10. The top 4 accident locations are: Scarlett Marketplace site drive, the intersection of Routes 12 and 140, the intersection of Franklin Street and Route 12, and the intersection of Route 12, Woodland Street and Pierce Street.

11. The WRTA provides bus service to West Boylston along Route 12 to the Town Center. Typical weekday ridership is just under 100 passengers per day. The service provides an important mode of transportation for those unable to own a personal vehicle. With service cuts on the horizon for the WRTA, it is important for officials and residents support the service and to monitor possible route reductions.
12. Recent changes to the manner in which the MBTA assessments are calculated means that West Boylston will begin to pay an assessment of \$7,500 in 2005 and the amounts will increase in succeeding years.
13. Due to lack of funds, sidewalk maintenance has suffered. In general, the Town has not sought to develop a good interconnected sidewalk system for pedestrians.
14. The Wachusett Greenways Trail along the former Mass. Central Railroad offers a valuable amenity for local and regional residents. It is anticipated that the trail will eventually provide a long distance route from Sterling to Oakham. The *Open Space and Recreation Plan* and CMRPC's *North Subregion Inter-Community Trail Connection Feasibility Study* contains other trail options to encourage pedestrian activity in West Boylston.

Transportation Goals

1. Promote efficient transportation systems that provide for different modes of travel to meet the needs of all West Boylston residents while maintaining a small town atmosphere.
2. Make improvements to existing roadway infrastructure to improve safety and reduce congestion.
3. Promote alternatives to automobile travel, including greater pedestrian activity, safe bicycling, and maximum use of transit services.
4. Develop property in coordination with the adjacent road and trail systems to promote greater connectivity, improve traffic circulation, and provide municipal services in an efficient manner.

Strategies to Improve Transportation Systems

1. The highest priority for transportation should be the improvement of the Route 12 Corridor. The Town should begin the process of developing conceptual design plans with its own funds and work closely with MassHighway officials on long range funding. Such a project will bolster the Town's image as a business-friendly community and yield positive benefits on community aesthetics, economic development, and promoting alternative modes of travel. Recommendations of the *Route 12 Traffic Study* should be implemented, including consolidating curb cuts to allow one, or a maximum of two, curb cuts per site, in order to reduce the number of conflicting turning maneuvers, re-aligning intersections with poor geometry, upgrading or adding signal control where warranted, and making access improvements at high volume site drives.
2. The second highest priority for transportation is to improve the access to the industrial area. This will entail the reconstruction of the southern end of Shrewsbury Street, called Briar Lane in Worcester. Local officials should pursue road alternatives to the Hartwell Street industrial district in order to divert truck traffic on Maple Street and other residential neighborhoods. For example, perhaps Hartwell Street could be extended to Temple Street (Rt. 140) if topography permits.
3. The Town should adopt a Pavement Management Program to insure the continuing upkeep of the streets and walkway systems.
4. To reduce heavy reliance on automobile use, the Town should embark on a plan to improve and construct sidewalks and promote bicycling activity through expansion of the trail system. Particular attention should be provided to improving walking systems near schools to encourage more students to walk to school. In addition, sidewalks should be constructed where necessary along Route 12 to promote pedestrian safety along this busy roadway.
5. The Town should move forward on recommendations in the *Open Space and Recreation Plan* and *North Subregion Inter-Community Trail Connection Feasibility Study* regarding enhancements to the local and regional trail systems.

6. The Planning Board should review its Subdivision street width standards, particularly where traffic volumes are low, to determine if narrower streets are feasible without compromising public safety or affecting municipal services. Narrow streets encourage slower speeds, minimize the amount of storm water runoff, lower construction costs of development, and reduce long-term maintenance costs.
7. In addition, the Planning Board should review its Subdivision Regulations to improve street connectivity. Standards could be adopted for distance between intersecting streets and promoting pedestrian connectivity.
8. At high accident locations, the Town should undertake a careful analysis of traffic patterns and design improvements to reduce accident rates.
9. Local officials should participate in regional transportation planning activities, especially those of the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission. Such involvement can keep the Town abreast of possible regional transportation projects that may affect the Town and insure that Town supported projects are advanced to construction.
10. To insure that transportation issues remain “on the front burner” the Town should create a Transportation Committee to study transportation needs and work to implement targeted improvements. The Committee should tackle the Route 12 Corridor reconstruction, sidewalk and trail projects, and remedies at high crash locations.
11. Where currently absent in high traffic areas, curb ramps should be installed for handicapped accessibility to allow those in wheelchairs to use community facilities.
12. The Board of Selectmen should open a dialogue with the WRTA to seek improved transit services for West Boylston. Possibilities include more frequent service on the existing route, expanding the area currently served, and adding a shuttle from a central location in West Boylston to Union Station for Boston commuters.

LAND USE

Summary of Existing Conditions

1. A very high percentage of the Town (42.1%) is State or County owned (including the Wachusett Reservoir). Including municipal property and lands owned by churches, charitable organizations, railroads, and utilities, 46.5% of the Town is tax-exempt.
2. The required minimum lot size of the Town’s two residential districts is 40,000 square feet, thereby prohibiting new single-family development of a high or medium density. Low-density residential development continues in West Boylston at a steady, slow pace.
3. Excluding utilities, land actively used for commercial and industrial purposes accounts for 5.2% of the Town’s land area, while vacant commercial and industrial land accounts for 2.5%.
4. With the short supply of vacant commercial land, future growth in the commercial sector will need to come from re-development of existing properties at a higher intensity.
5. Land devoted to agriculture has been slowly disappearing over the years due to West Boylston’s prime residential market and purchases by the DCR for watershed protection.
6. A total of 460.7 acres is devoted to open space use and classified by the Assessors under various tax abatement programs as follows:

Chapter 61, Forestry	157.1
Chapter 61A, Agriculture	82.6
Chapter 61B, Recreation	221.0
Total	460.7

These lands are not permanently protected and may be removed by the owner for development.

7. While the DCR will remain vigilant in regulating development in the watershed, land purchases over the next few years will likely slow down since most of the environmentally sensitive land deemed necessary to protect the watershed has already been acquired.
8. Future growth may be constrained by limits on the Town's water supply. The Water District has instituted water conservation, meter replacement, and leak detection measures that have resulted in significant reductions in "unaccounted for" water use. A recent report for the District recommended maximizing the existing water supply sources, rather than seeking to develop new sources, to mitigate a projected water supply deficit. In addition, water treatment for high levels of iron and manganese may be needed in order to increase the quantity of water available.
9. While the overall land use pattern in West Boylston is unlikely to change in the future, the completion of the Town sewer system (projected for the end of 2005), will likely increase the rate of development and change the type of development that occurs. In particular:
 - a) The slow, steady pace of low-density residential development over the last 17 years may quicken as land previously restricted from development by slowly percolating soils is now able to connect to the public sewer system.
 - b) High-density residential development has increased during the last few years, reversing the trend that occurred between 1985 and 1999. With the availability of sewers, developers may take advantage of the strong housing market in West Boylston to propose multiple family developments using the Chapter 40B comprehensive permit process.
 - c) The current influx of industrial companies to the Hartwell Street area should continue; however, a worsening economy could cancel out the effect of the new sewer system in the near term. The Worcester Corporate Center is connected to the Worcester sewer system and will likely not face capacity constraints that may occur elsewhere in West Boylston.
 - d) Commercial development will not be able to spread out at low densities since there is so little undeveloped commercial land remaining. With most such development restricted to the Route 12 Corridor, the lack of available land and Cohen bill restrictions may make it economically attractive to replace older, low density commercial structures with a more compact and aesthetically attractive design.
 - e) There appears to be some disagreement regarding the overall capacity of the Town's sewer system, and the capacity of the sewer mains in Holden and Worcester that carry Town flows to the Upper Blackstone Water Pollution Abatement District treatment plant. The Town should immediately develop a plan to accurately quantify the excess capacity for new development and to regulate system extension. The plan should include physical limitations as well as permitting and legal restrictions, and should be developed with public input. It should formulate criteria for expansion that are applicable to all landowners.

Land Use Goals

1. With a heavy reliance on the residential sector to pay for municipal services, commercial and industrial development should be encouraged in appropriate locations. Re-development of under-utilized properties should be promoted to create higher value, job-creating enterprises.
2. With a dwindling supply of developable land, remaining land should be developed efficiently in order to maximize the benefit to the Town. New development should be compact in form, contain a mix of land uses, be of greater intensity, accommodate pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit users, and preserve significant open space and sensitive natural resources.
3. Still rural areas of town should be maintained at low density. Residential developments should be designed to preserve open space, respect natural resources, and have visual compatibility with the character of the Town.
4. Limited water and sewer capacity should be managed carefully. Service extensions should only be allowed to areas that are consistent with the Town's water and sewer plans in order to accommodate

moderate density residential development (4 units per acre) or significant commercial/industrial development.

5. The villages of Oakdale, Pincroft, and the Town Center should be preserved as compact, mixed use districts by encouraging small-scale commercial and residential uses and architecturally compatible buildings that reflect the existing development pattern.
6. While the Route 12 Corridor has limited expansion potential, over time the Corridor should be re-developed from a commercial strip into a community Gateway to offer a positive image of the Town and foster private investment.
7. Moderate density multi-family housing should be encouraged in areas that have access to public transit, are connected to public water and sewer systems, and are near commercial services.
8. Improve coordination among municipal boards and departments to insure that local land use boards have current information when acting on development applications.
9. To help create a strong community identity, plans should be prepared to enhance the Town Center in the vicinity of the Library and Gazebo. Municipal buildings, public institutions, and cultural activities should be concentrated in this central location to create a strong focal point for community services and public events. An important step would be to re-locate the new Town Hall as near to the Town Center as possible.
10. Revise the Zoning Bylaw and Subdivision Regulations to implement the vision of the Master Plan.

Land Use Strategies

1. Adopt a new Zoning Map with Assessors parcels as the base. Currently, zoning boundaries are defined as offsets from roads and natural features, and often split lot lines into more than one district. Zoning boundaries should be adjusted to align with parcel boundaries.
2. Create Village zoning districts for Oakdale, Pincroft and the Town Center to insure future development is compatible with the village character of each area. For properties with historic significance, owners should be encouraged to seek designation on the National and State Registers of Historic Places to provide recognition of their importance and aid in their preservation.
3. Assess the land use and zoning districts in town to consider adding land to the Business District where the impacts to surrounding areas are minimal and support services exist.
4. The Schedule of Use Regulations should be revised to insure appropriate land uses are proposed in each district.
5. Adopt a cluster development bylaw to preserve open space, preserve natural resource functions, and allow for a more compact development form.
6. Increase the permitted density of multiple family developments in the GR district now that sewers have removed concerns about poor soil suitability for septic systems. The existing density of 20,000 sq. ft. of lot area per dwelling unit (2.2 units per acre) should be increased to 4 units per acre.
7. To re-develop Route 12 as the Gateway through West Boylston, a plan should be prepared that not only includes roadway and traffic improvements but beautification elements as well, such as enhanced landscaping, pedestrian connections, and underground wiring.
8. The Planning Board should review its Subdivision Regulations to improve street connectivity. Requiring sidewalks and trails can encourage greater pedestrian and bicycling use and improve connections to adjacent subdivisions and commercial areas. Narrower street widths should also be examined for low-density developments to minimize land disturbance and the amount of runoff from impervious surfaces.
9. Consider passing the Community Preservation Act. As a local option, the Town can impose a surtax of between 1% - 3% to protect open space, develop affordable housing and preserve historic properties.
10. Study the feasibility of allowing Mixed Use Development, where a mix of residential, commercial, and institutional land uses is authorized at a greater intensity in a carefully planned manner. This

innovative technique minimizes the conversion of open space to low-density uses while providing a variety of services in close proximity that help to reduce automobile trips.

11. Consider prohibiting single-family homes in Business districts to minimize conflicts between incompatible land uses and insure that new development utilizes the limited supply of such property for high value uses.
12. Develop a policy for the expansion of utilities that will restrict growth in areas where growth is not consistent with the Master Plan.
13. With the merger of the MDC into the new Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), the Town should keep abreast of changes to the agency's land use policies. For example, will DCR continue to buy land for watershed protection, and what can be done to facilitate use of key parcels for recreational use?
14. Reduce the minimum lot size in Industrial districts from 5 acres to 2 acres in order to reduce the cost of buildable lots for industrial uses.
15. Enforcing the terms of the Zoning Bylaw, and requiring strict adherence to conditions imposed by land use boards in approving development applications, are necessary to insure the Town's land use policies are implemented in accordance with the wishes of residents. The Board of Selectmen must work to insure adequate resources are allocated for zoning enforcement.
16. Upon adoption of the Master Plan, the Town should undertake a thorough revision of the Zoning Bylaw to insure that its requirements are fully consistent with the Plan.

MUNICIPAL FACILITIES

Summary of Existing Conditions

1. The Town has a backlog of municipal building needs due to an inability to properly fund needed improvements over time.
2. The Town should adopt a long-range program for improving existing municipal buildings to insure that necessary repairs are made to provide efficient services for residents.
3. In a study prepared by Haynes, Lieneck and Smith, Inc. the following findings and deficiencies were noted in the area of municipal building needs:
 - a) Legislation was passed to allow the Town to purchase 61 acres of County land off Paul X. Tivnan Drive near the Jail for municipal buildings. The Town should move to acquire this land.
 - b) The municipal light plant should then build a new facility in this area.
 - c) The Streets and Parks Building no longer meets the Town's needs. A new facility should be built on the former County land to be acquired by the Jail.
 - d) As a former school, the Mixer Building is ill suited for municipal offices. The high cost of renovation makes it a poor use of public funds. The structure should be demolished.
 - e) Since the Mixer Building is the home of the senior center, a new home for the senior center/community center should be found.
 - f) The Shepard Building is structurally sound. It should be renovated and house the police, fire and dispatch services.
 - g) The Bancroft Building is structurally sound and should be renovated to house municipal offices.
 - h) The municipal pool is inadequate for today's needs. There is no strong consensus for the right approach to take at this time. Options under consideration include demolishing the pool, renovating it, enclosing it for continuous use, or constructing a new enclosed pool with 14,000 square feet of space.

Municipal Facilities Goals

1. The Town will adopt a long-range capital improvement program to adequately fund a municipal building construction program to replace aging capital facilities.
2. The Town will embark on an aggressive funding program to achieve a high level of services for residents. The Town will commit to a capital program to construct new facilities and renovate existing buildings for new uses.
3. To prevent a re-occurrence of municipal buildings deteriorating over time, the Town will create a funding mechanism to insure its buildings are properly maintained. The Town will investigate the feasibility of a centralized maintenance system for all facilities.

Municipal Facilities Strategies

1. Public Safety Building: Combine Police, Fire and Dispatch departments at the Shepard Building; expand the structure from 9,720 square feet to 12,260 square feet.
2. Streets and Parks Building: Construct a new building on former County land; combine with Municipal Light Plant building.
3. Town Hall: Convert Bancroft Building to town office building.
4. Senior Center: Demolish Mixter Building and provide a 12,025 square foot Community Center with a large function room and that provides offices and space for the Senior Center’s activities. This will make room for new playing fields and future building use.

<u>Recommendations of the Building Study</u>	<u>2003 Cost</u>	<u>Projected Cost</u>	<u>Year</u>
1. Public Safety Building	\$1,500,000	\$2,100,000	2005
2. Streets and Parks Building	3,000,000	3,800,000	2006
3. Town Hall	1,715,000	3,000,000	2008
4. Senior/Community Center	<u>1,860,000</u>	<u>2,700,000</u>	2009
Total	\$8,075,000	\$11,600,000	

Other Short and Long Range Needs (Not Ranked):

1. Build additional school classrooms as needed.
2. Build new light plant building with cost to be borne out of revenues.
3. Reuse the existing light plant building by school department or other town offices.
4. Purchase land near the Library for parking purposes. (Approx. \$300,000)
5. Repair or replace the Town Pool. (\$1 – 3 million)
6. Build new playing fields.
7. Acquire land for cemetery.
8. Permanent toilets for parks. (Approx \$160,000 each)

FINANCIAL CONSTRAINTS

Summary of Existing Conditions

1. Steeply rising costs that make it increasingly difficult to fund yearly operating budgets, much less pay for needed capital projects.
2. The Town has postponed needed capital expenses in order to reduce its debt payments; as a result, debt service decreased from 12% of the budget in FY 2001 to 9.6% in FY 2005.
3. Residential properties have been asked to shoulder an increasing share of local services. The average single family tax bill increased from \$2,911.31 in FY 2001 to \$3,637.55 in FY 2005. This amounts to an increase of 25% over the five-year period.
4. The residential tax levy increased by over \$2.0 million from 2001 to 2005, and now represents over 84% of the total tax levy.
5. Limited new growth due to lack of buildable land, significant land acquisitions by the State, and restrictions imposed under the Cohen Act have reduced the Town's ability to see significant growth to keep pace with rising costs.
6. Many citizens are not aware of the numerous challenges facing the Town in the form of aging capital infrastructure, operating revenue shortfalls, and compliance obligations, and of the implications of failing to take action to address these challenges.
7. Increased taxes will be accepted by West Boylston citizens only if they are convinced of the need. Yearly operating budgets must be balanced and should be paid for by recurring revenue. Costs will continue to rise well beyond revenue growth.

Financial Goals

1. Develop and implement a budget process that considers the entire Town's needs fairly and promotes cooperation and understanding among the various departments. Improve citizen information and outreach in the budget process.
2. Develop and implement a realistic and effective capital improvement financial plan and process.
3. The Reservoir and the State Agency controlling it are here to stay and the Town must try to improve its relationship with whatever agency is in control. Continue working for higher PILOT funds.
4. Communicate regularly with the Worcester County Sheriff and increase efforts to get more benefits from hosting The House of Correction.
5. Explore expanding the tax base through increased economic development.
6. Explore new ways of providing Town services that will cut costs or improve services; including revisiting failed past attempts to see if conditions or attitudes have changed.
7. Seek grant money from outside sources to support Town operations as much as possible. Complying with State regulations increases the Town's eligibility for grants and other payments.
8. Identify state laws and regulations that negatively affect West Boylston, and pursue appropriate strategies to pass amendments more favorable to the Town.
9. Regionalize purchasing and/or other governmental functions and services where such will reduce costs.

Financial Strategies

1. Consider the entire Town's needs fairly and develop priorities, understanding the impacts of any budget cuts. When evaluating the Town's needs, consider all major citizen groups within the Town and the relative ability of each to benefit or withstand changes in priorities.
2. Capital improvement funds should be included in all yearly budgets. In addition, insure building and facility maintenance costs are properly accounted for each year. Do not defer to later years.

3. Implement the municipal building plan contained in this Master Plan as soon as finances allow. Our municipal buildings must be reconditioned, expanded or replaced. A capital building program must be started.
4. Form a permanent Capital Planning Committee to assist the Town in planning for, administering, and prioritizing capital improvement needs.
5. Investigate a centralized maintenance system responsible for maintaining all Town buildings and facilities.
6. The Wachusett Reservoir, extensive land holdings, and strong State land use controls affect the Town's ability to grow. It is in the Town's best interest to work to improve its relationship with the State agency in charge of watershed protection.
7. Continue working for higher PILOT funds (Payment In Lieu Of Taxes) from State-owned lands.
8. Negotiate for appropriate use of State controlled lands by the Town.
9. Take advantage of any technical assistance or grants offered by the State.
10. The new Sheriff and jail administration offer an opportunity to negotiate for payments to offset costs incurred by hosting this facility. Similarly, local officials should look for ways to increase prisoner work projects beneficial to the Town, take advantage of offers to use lockup facilities, and request use of Corrections personnel as special duty police officers when needed.
11. Implement strategies contained in the Economic Development section of this Master Plan.
12. If needed, allocate Town funds, and/or apply for State grants, to help increase the Town's tax base.
13. Explore new ways of providing Town services, such as:
 - a. Establish a "Pay as you throw" trash pickup service. (Short term)
 - b. Develop a trash transfer facility. (Long Term)
 - c. Cut or cap employee health care costs.
 - d. Control legal expenses by eliminating unproductive law suits.
 - e. Consolidate departments.
 - f. Enforce zoning bylaws and town regulations that will increase revenues.
 - g. Share equipment and manpower wherever possible.
 - h. Improve communication among departments.
 - i. Improve equipment maintenance programs.
 - j. Improve citizen understanding of the financial costs required to provide the services they want and promote citizen involvement in any changes.
14. Seek to comply with State regulations to increase the Town's eligibility for grants and other payments.
15. Communicate openly and work cooperatively with State agencies to insure the Town's interests are represented in State decision-making processes.
16. Keep required planning efforts, such as the Open Space and Recreation Plan and the Housing Plan, up-to-date and meet any other requirements that make the Town eligible for State funds.
17. Do not establish costly programs not needed by the Town just because they result in State grants.
18. While regional service and purchasing proposals might not have been approved in the past, potential cost savings may be realized through efforts to gain the public's trust and support.
19. Take a proactive approach to Regionalization of functions, purchasing, and/or departments.