

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

LexingtonNext serves as a policy document and foundation for local government direction on land use and physical development and related areas, including impacts and consequences for climate change, diversity and equity. It provides a primary tool for planners and local officials to address community priorities in long-range planning and investment. A Comprehensive Plan is a long-range plan typically updated every 10-15 years.

The Comprehensive Plan (The Plan) process provides an opportunity to:

- take stock
- reflect on past accomplishments
- identify changes in community demographics, the environment, expectations and/or attitudes
- identify shared values
- articulate a vision for the future
- define new goals for achieving that vision

LexingtonNext is based on significant public outreach and reflects the town's shared community values and goals. It conveys to existing and potential future residents, business owners and others, the type of community Lexington is and wants to be and helps the Town prepare for change, bounce back from unforeseen challenges, and cherish what we treasure. It is a clear roadmap for anyone who would like to join in making improvements, and it bolsters the confidence of grant funders and investors by increasing certainty and predictability.

Goals and objectives are focused around the following topic areas:

- Diversity and Inclusion
- Housing
- Economic Vitality
- Sustainability & Resiliency
- Open Space and Natural Resources
- Historic Resources
- Recreation & Community Gathering
- Transportation & Circulation
- Public Facilities & Services

Although contemporary planning practice for developing Comprehensive Plans has expanded over time to include areas such as Public Health/Wellness, Governance, Arts & Culture, and Technology & Innovation, the Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee (CPAC) has deliberately focused LexingtonNext on the physical environment. This decision is in keeping with the Committee's charge, in response to the community input received, and reflective of the strength of Lexington's municipal bodies and community organizations and institutions in addressing Town needs.

LexingtonNext is organized in three volumes:

- Vol I: The Plan
- Vol II: Inventory & Assessment of Existing Resources

July 19, 2022

- Vol III: Documentation of Public Input

Outreach and Participation

LexingtonNext is the result of extensive public engagement. In addition to an active Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee and a Project Website, multiple engagement techniques were used to educate and engage the community and to identify issues and opportunities. Information was gathered through more than seventeen events, surveys, social pinpoint, and forums and over 60 interviews with community leaders and staff.

Input from other relevant forums in Lexington was reviewed as were other planning documents, the 2003 Comprehensive Plan, and resources from other organizations in town.

Key Issues and Priorities

Based on data gathered, residents clearly identified the following priorities for inclusion in the Comprehensive Plan:

- Maintaining and respecting Lexington’s sense of “place” as a community with significant historical and natural resources, excellent public schools, and robust town services.
- Supporting the vitality of the Town Center and Lexington’s smaller commercial areas through a vibrant mix of businesses
- Increasing transportation options
- Evaluating opportunities for mixed use (residences/business) in commercial areas
- Diversifying housing options in terms of both cost and type of housing

In addition to the above-mentioned key priorities there is a strong emphasis in all of these elements and goals with a desire to integrate and advance racial and social equity and promoting environmental sustainability in all areas.

Public Events to gather input on priorities

2018

- Kick-off event
- 3 World Cafes

2019

- Discovery Day
- Workshop
- Historic Resources & Preservation and Existing Conditions Trend Presentation
- Economic Development Existing Conditions Trend Presentation
- Transportation Existing Conditions Trends Presentation
- Housing Existing Conditions Trends Presentation
- Demographics Existing Conditions Trends Presentation

2020

February Open Space, Recreation, Natural Resources Public Forum

2021

- Re-Discovery Day
- June Public Forum (virtual)
- September Housing Public Forum (virtual)
- October Economic Vitality Forum(virtual)
- Social Pinpoint Survey
- Stakeholder Interviews

2022

- Planning Board & Public Review of Draft

July 19, 2022

Context

Shifts in Lexington

Notable Changes since the 2003 Comprehensive Plan

- Significant investment in Town-owned facilities
- Major redevelopment of existing housing stock
- Significant demographic changes/increase in:
 - Asian population
 - Aging population
 - Young children
 - Median income
- Addressed topical issues
 - Public Information Officer
 - Sustainability Director
 - Chief Equity Officer
 - Human Rights and Disability Commission
 - Stepped up to meet sustainability goals
- Town Meeting commitment to view all plans through equity lens

Housing

Lexington has seen home prices rise by an astronomical amount, with median home prices increasing 237% between 2009 and 2019. Median income is the sixth highest in Massachusetts. The community expressed increasing concern that the lack of socio-economic diversity among residents' stifles diversity on other fronts.

Transportation

The input received was initially weighted toward transportation concerns. (June 25, 2018 Summary memo, SWOT analysis from Kick-off event input). This shifted based on the input collected from over 120 people at three events held in autumn of 2018 using the World Café method for community conversations. Transportation, including bicycling and walking, was still of significant concern, but concerns about housing affordability and availability had edged well ahead. (Fall 2018 Public Outreach Events; 2018 World Cafe Input Frequency Analysis)

Since the last Lexington Comprehensive Plan (2003) the community's top concerns have not significantly shifted, only grown more acute. This urgency is in large part arising from significant national crisis that occurred during the course of planning for LexingtonNext.

- The global COVID 19 pandemic
- The national racial awakening of the summer of 2020
- The undeniable climate crisis of global warming

July 19, 2022

Each of these events have impacted what we heard and have become cross cutting themes throughout the Plan.

COVID 19 Pandemic:

The COVID-19 pandemic influenced community priorities in many ways and highlighted

- An increased appreciation for open spaces, recreational facilities, trails, parks, and the Bikeway.
- A need to address increased demand for non-traditional working spaces including in-home offices and shared co-workspaces.
- The need for emergency preparedness, specifically for town facilities and services.
- Concerns for the health of local businesses and dining establishments, and the need to find creative ways for attracting patrons back to in-person shopping and dining.

The Summer of Racial Awakening

At the midpoint of the long arc of the development of this plan, while in the throes of the COVID pandemic, another phenomenon eclipsed the pandemic's influence on LexingtonNext: the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and other Black Americans at the hands of police officers in major US cities, as well as by civilians. Many reacted with prolonged protests and outrage, in what has now been called a summer of racial awakening. This racial awakening resonated in Lexington, where residents' began speaking about Lexington's lack of diversity, high housing cost, and exclusivity.

Climate Crisis

The reality of a climate crisis continues to come more into focus and in 2021 Lexington took bold action to address the climate crisis:

- Annual Town Meeting adopted innovative articles regulating fossil fuel infrastructure.
- Special Town Meeting amended zoning adopted earlier in the year by down-zoning to create an incentive for additional density in exchange for reduced onsite fossil fuel combustion for HVAC.

From the June 15, 2021 LexingtonNext virtual forum poll and chat comments:

"We need to develop tools to understand why some diverse communities such as the black community are not choosing Lexington and work on addressing those issues."

"The national racial reckoning has been interesting. Conversations have been front and center and prompted me to read and listen much more. I hope organizations like towns like ours take this movement forward with bold policies."

"The diversity is quite wide by ethnicity, other than perhaps black/ Latinx, but the big problem is economic inequality."

"Encourage people to get to know their neighbors, and to actively meet and get to know people of different backgrounds/skin color."

"Understand that we all do better when we all do better and its corollaries: I do better when you do better."

"Concerned about the lack of discussion on DEI for future Lexington."

"The Town may want to look at its budget through a DEI lens."

"...everything we do needs to be looked at with an equity and climate change impact lens!"

"I suggest broadening what we mean by "racial reckoning" and being inclusive of all kinds of social justice."

"...we need to figure out how to equalize things a bit better."

Vision & Goals

Vision Statement

The Town of Lexington prides itself on being a vibrant community where residents place a high value on learning at all ages. Lexington's historic buildings and landscapes, many open spaces and trails, excellent schools, high quality public facilities and services, and proximity to Boston make it an attractive place to live, work and play. Lexington is committed to maintaining and expanding social and civic connections for current residents, people that work in Lexington, future residents and people visiting.

This Comprehensive Plan Update envisions a town that fosters a sense of belonging for all. By actively engaging in dialogue to balance issues related to housing, access and transportation, climate change, economic vitality, open space, natural resources, and more, we strive to create a community that:

- provides an environment that enables a diverse population of people to live, work, and thrive;
- encourages a flourishing business community that contributes to the town's financial;
- stability and offers excellent local employment opportunities;
- cultivates a wide range of exceptional recreational, cultural, educational, and social opportunities that support creativity and innovation;
- sustains our natural resources and fosters an ecologically balanced community;
- offers a variety of safe, accessible, and sustainable mobility options; and
- models stewardship and sustainability of the town's financial, human, information, and physical assets.

Goals and Objectives

The substance of the plan seeks to realize this Vision through the following goals and objectives. As with any Comprehensive Plan, the goals and recommendations for LexingtonNext are synthesized from 1) Lexington's public and stakeholder input, 2) consideration of the inventory and assessment of existing conditions and data collected for Lexington, and 3) professional best practices, methods and solutions from other jurisdictions and from within the planning profession and other relevant disciplines (e.g., community development corporations).

GOAL 1.0: To increase the DIVERSITY and promote the INCLUSION of people visiting, living and working in Lexington

- + Objective 1.1. Remove barriers to living in Lexington.
- + Objective 1.2. Foster a sense of belonging and promote interaction amongst all.
- + Objective 1.3. Support people of all ages and abilities.
- + Objective 1.4. Attract people of diverse backgrounds to work in Lexington.
- + Objective 1.5 Improve town-wide communication and to encourage broader participation in decision-making

GOAL 2.0: To enable and encourage a wide range of HOUSING OPTIONS that are inclusive for all life stages, incomes, and needs

July 19, 2022

- + Objective 2.1. Expand opportunities for producing a range of housing in a variety of locations throughout town
- + Objective 2.2. Increase the supply of affordable housing eligible for Lexington's subsidized housing inventory for low and moderate-income households
- + Objective 2.3. Develop housing that is accessible to older persons
- + Objective 2.4. Protect existing historically and/or architecturally significant homes and preserve homes that contribute to the diversity of housing options
- + Objective 2.5. Increase the efficiency and effectiveness of housing policy
- + Objective 2.6. Enable more flexible use of residences to adapt to changing working and living arrangements
- + Objective 2.7. Achieve environmental sustainability of the town's new and existing housing stock
- + Objective 2.8. Support fair housing goals

GOAL 3.0: To promote a **VITAL ECONOMIC SYSTEM** that is self-sustaining, supports a variety of small and large businesses, contributes to the tax base that support the town, and improves the balance of services to meet the needs of residents, employees, and visitors

- + Objective 3.1. Develop and advance policies to encourage private redevelopment to realize the vision for a more exciting Commercial Manufacturing District.
- + Objective 3.2. Continue to make improvements to Lexington Center so that it becomes more of a "destination."
- + Objective 3.3. Create a more walkable, bikeable, and aesthetically pleasing East Lexington commercial district.
- + Objective 3.4. Retain and support existing businesses and evaluate opportunities for commercial growth in strategic locations.
- + Objective 3.5. Develop sustainable long-range tourism practices to support the independent businesses, arts, cultural and historic organizations, and characteristics of the town's commercial centers.
- + Objective 3.6. Support "talent driven economic development.

July 19, 2022

GOAL 4.0: To protect the **ENVIRONMENT** and enhance long-term **SUSTAINABILITY** and **RESILIENCE**

- + Objective 4.1. Become a net-zero community by 2050
- + Objective 4.2. Improve the resilience of town-owned assets and infrastructure
- + Objective 4.3. Reduce transportation emissions and make Lexington a more livable community by improving sustainable transportation options and reducing single occupancy trips

GOAL 5.0: To protect **OPEN SPACES** and **NATURAL RESOURCES** and enhance connections among these assets

- + Objective 5.1. Conserve natural resources
- + Objective 5.2. Protect existing and acquire new open spaces in balance with the need for land for affordable housing
- + Objective 5.3. Connect open spaces
- + Objective 5.4. Incorporate natural resource and open space protection measures into the town's sustainability and resiliency goals.

GOAL 6.0: To protect, preserve, and promote awareness and appreciation of Lexington's **HISTORIC RESOURCES** from throughout its history

- + Objective 6.1. Protect historic buildings and structures from demolition and decay
- + Objective 6.2. Plan and prioritize historic preservation policies and funding
- + Objective 6.3. Increase public awareness of Lexington's important historic resources

GOAL 7.0: To make **TRAVELING** into, out of, and within Lexington safe, pleasant, and efficient with sustainable and equitable mobility options for all ages and abilities

- + Objective 7.1. Improve traffic management policies to reduce traffic, increase safety, and enhance quality of life.
- + Objective 7.2. Improve and expand options for walking, biking, and micromobility throughout Lexington.
- + Objective 7.3. Improve parking strategies to help achieve transportation and economic development goals at specific locations in town.
- + Objective 7.4. Expand transit options.
- + Objective 7.5. Investigate land use policies that align with or can help advance our transportation goals.
- + Objective 7.6. Encourage and support a shift away from automobile dependency by increasing public awareness and community pride in use of alternative modes of travel.

July 19, 2022

GOAL 8.0 To improve and expand facilities for **RECREATION AND COMMUNITY GATHERING** to support holistic wellbeing, a sense of belonging, enhanced social connections, and opportunities for fun

- + Objective 8.1. Improve and expand recreational land and facilities to meet the programmatic needs of the town.
- + Objective 8.2. Maintain, expand, and promote opportunities for both formal and informal community gathering spaces.
- + Objective 8.3. Consider all residents when planning improvements to, and/or additions to, public and community spaces.

GOAL 9.0: To provide well maintained, updated, inclusive, and sustainable **PUBLIC FACILITIES** to serve and meet community needs.

- + Objective 9.1. Support effective maintenance and improvement of educational facilities to create up to date environments for students, faculty, and staff.
- + Objective 9.2. Ensure that town-owned buildings support programmatic needs and effectively meet the changing needs of the town.
- + Objective 9.3. Continue to maintain and replace town infrastructure and upgrade systems to meet demand.
- + Objective 9.4. Continue to address sustainability and climatic impacts in renovation of existing and new facilities.

July 19, 2022

The Plan Structure

The chapters in Vol. I outline each of the goals in more detail. They include:

- A brief summary of existing conditions highlighting key issues (for a full inventory of existing conditions see Vol. II)
- A summary of community input and an overview
- An overview related Town of Lexington Goals and Objectives from other Municipal Organizations and Committees
- An implementation table that identifies Action Steps, Responsible Parties, potential partners and other factors to support the implementation of each of the objectives and help to achieve the goal.

The Plan is not a legal document and is aspirational. Under each goal, recommendations, and action items for achieving the goal are listed in the order of the time frame in which they might be implemented, based on complexity of implementation and requirements for coordination with other recommendations and actions. The order does not imply priority.

Implementation

Implementing a plan means focusing on the vision and goals expressed herein and following through on its objectives and strategies. It is an on-going, long-term process requiring significant effort and the cooperation of multiple parties. The Plan, together with the implementation tables, identifies recommendations and action steps, along with the responsible party, support parties, the timeframe for implementation, and other master plan elements with which the action should be coordinated.

Critical to achieving the goals of The Plan is engagement and buy in from the Town regarding the goals and objectives, continued reference to the Plan, and regular evaluation of progress.

The Plan is intended to be a “living” document and opportunities will always arise that align with the LexingtonNext’s goals but were not foreseen when LexingtonNext was completed. Still, the Implementation section of the plan expresses the steps we agree to pursue to help realize the goals from today’s vantage point.