

LEXINGTON COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE INVENTORY: LAND USE

INTRODUCTION

Land use refers to the arrangement of residential, commercial, industrial, agricultural, and other activities on the land, as well as the natural landscape of ponds, rivers, streams, wetlands, forests, and grasslands that support them. Of Lexington's 10,676 acres (16.68 square miles), approximately 68% percent has been developed for roads, homes, stores, offices, light manufacturing companies and their associated driveways and parking lots. The remaining land, approximately 3,400 acres, is undeveloped or in a natural state, or serves some type of open space use.

The following chapter provides an inventory of existing land use patterns, together with an overview of Lexington's zoning, as the town's primary tool for regulating development.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

LAND USE CHANGE

Settled in 1642 and incorporated in 1713, Lexington has changed significantly from its earliest days as a farming and logging community. With the 1846 extension of the railroad from Boston to Lexington Center, the town's land uses began to mirror the emerging suburb, complete with two busy commercial centers (Lexington Center and East Lexington). By the late 1800s, the town evolved into a tourist destination and summer resort community. The most significant shift in land use came after the



POTENTIAL SHORT-TERM OR LONG-TERM IMPACTS OF COVID-19

- Many Lexington residents who commuted to jobs in Boston, Cambridge, and along the I-95 corridor before the onset of COVID-19 and were then ordered to work remotely, may continue to do so in the future, perhaps permanently. As a result, more retail and commercial establishments may be in demand to service the work-at-home population, and Lexington's zoning may require amending to accommodate this demand.

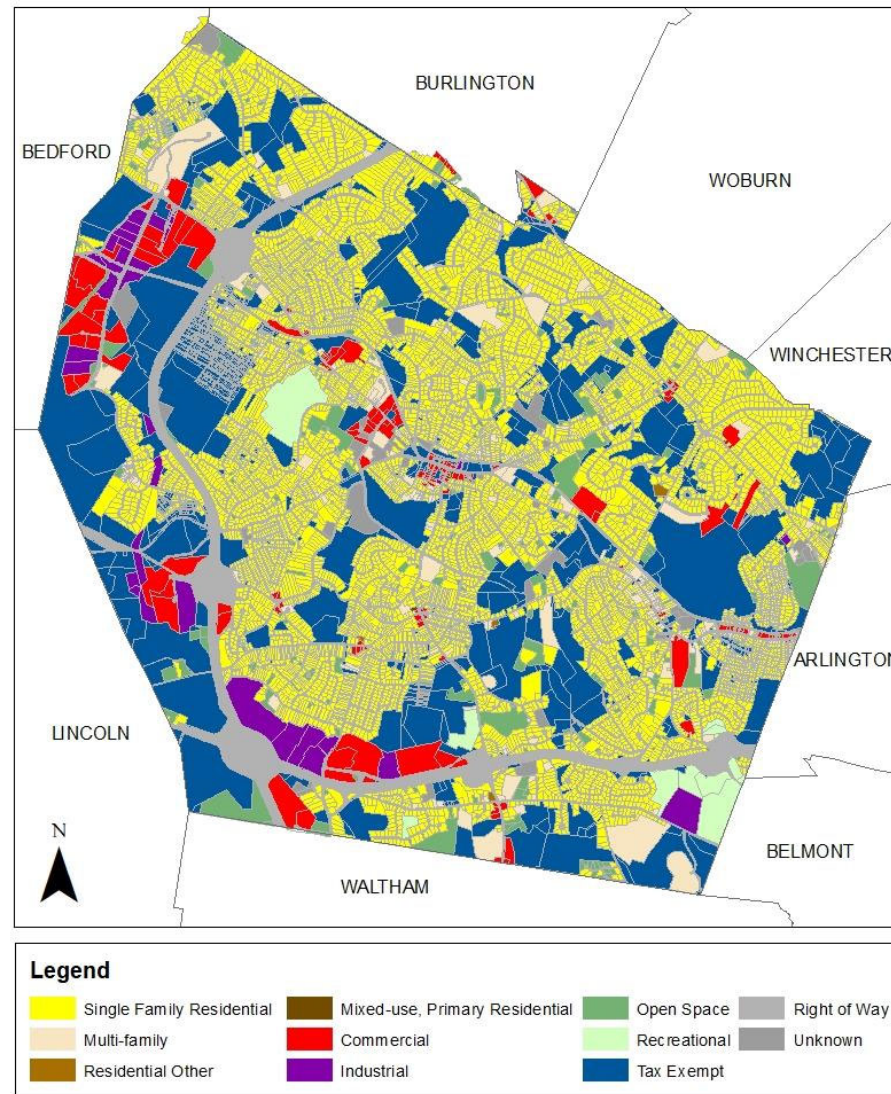
SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

- Lexington has a limited amount of land designated for commercial use; residential use is seven times greater than commercial use.
- The Hartwell Avenue corridor offers opportunity for development of new commercial activity, particularly if future decisions about the use of Hanscom Airforce Base provide for this.
- Lexington has established professional planning capacity through its planning department, which ensures that town boards have timely access to "best practices" and qualified personnel to advise them during the permitting and approval processes.

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Figure 1. Lexington Land Use.

Lexington Land Use (2020)



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end of World War II, when the population boomed along with expanded residential construction. Over one-third of Lexington’s housing stock was constructed between 1950 and 1970.

Since the mid-20th century, land uses have largely remained the same. Most changes have been the result of the town’s acquisition of open space lands, or from redevelopment of single-family homes and adoption of planned development districts. Until the mid-1990’s development (both commercial and residential), took place predominantly on vacant land. As vacant land became scarcer, development shifted to previously developed land, and today, land is being redeveloped to the greatest extent allowed by Lexington’s Zoning Bylaw. Since the completion of the 2002/2003 Comprehensive Plan, single-family residential development has been the predominant land use in Lexington.

CURRENT LAND USE INVENTORY

Lexington’s land uses fall into twelve different categories, with the single-family only residential zone accounting for 39.34% of the town, and all residential zones (including Mixed-Use) making up 43.42%. Tax-exempt land accounts for the second largest land use at 3,019 acres or 28.28% of total land.

Table 1. Lexington Land Use.

LEXINGTON LAND USE		
Category	Acreage	% of Total Land
Residential-Single-Family	4,199.9	39.34
Residential-Multi-Family	427.7	4.01
Residential-Other	6.6	0.06
Mixed-Use-Primarily Residential	1.2	0.01
Commercial	495.0	4.64
Industrial	263.8	2.47
Tax-Exempt	3,019.0	28.28
Open Space	446.1	4.18
Recreation	181.5	1.7
Water	1.4	0.01
Right-of-Way	1,462.8	13.7
Unknown	170.9	1.6
TOTAL	10,675.9	100

NEIGHBORHOODS

Lexington’s many neighborhoods contribute to land use patterns. In recent years, the town has focused on four of the neighborhoods that present the greatest opportunities for commercial and economic activity:

- **East Lexington/Follen Heights.** Located in the southeastern corner of Lexington approximately two

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GROWTH OF RESIDENTIAL LAND USE

- Between 1998 and 2017, the town approved 72 definitive subdivision plans, creating 416 new units of housing.
- During this same period, the number of total lots in Lexington increased by 26.7%.
- Between 2010 and 2019, permits for single-family homes ranged from a low of 51 per year (2011) to a high of 103 per year (2015). Over the ten-year period, a total of 821 permits were issued.
- In 2015, of the approximately 600 acres of developable land remaining in Lexington, 90% were zoned for residential use.

miles from the town center, this area includes a small business district, as well as the Arlington Great Meadow, Follen Heights and portions of the Dunback Meadow and Belmont Country Club.

- **Hartwell Avenue/Bedford Street.** Located off I-95, this low-density area contains a group of specialized military research and development companies that provide regional employment. In 2021, Town Meeting voted down a proposal to create the Hartwell Innovation Park, a new zoning district in the area, that would allow for expanded

economic development. A more complete description of this new district appears later in this chapter.

- **South Lexington,** abutting both Waltham and Lincoln and transected by I-95 and Route 2, is one of Lexington's economic centers. Through formation of Planned Development Districts, the area incorporates residential and commercial uses, as well as office space. In 2015, a South Lexington Transportation Study assessed existing conditions and outlined steps for transit improvement.
- **Central Business,** Lexington's downtown commercial area, includes the Battle Breen, Cary Memorial Library and Hall, town offices and police station, and a portion of the Minuteman Commuter Bikeway.

EXISTING ZONING

OVERVIEW

Zoning is the primary tool for regulating land use, and Lexington has embraced this tool for nearly 100 years, adopting its first zoning in 1924. A zoning bylaw separates land uses, sets dimensional standards, and establishes use requirements in order to regulate land use. In Lexington, land is regulated by the Zoning Bylaw and Subdivision Regulations, both of which are implemented by the Planning Board, and enforced by the Building Commissioner/Zoning Enforcement Officer and Zoning

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Board of Appeals. The following zoning districts have been established in Lexington to regulate land:

- 12 zoning districts
- 5 Planned Development Districts (PD)
- 10 Planned Residential Districts (PR)
- 16 Planned Commercial Districts (PC)
- 2 Neighborhood Conservation Districts (NCD)

RESIDENTIAL DISTRICTS

Land zoned for residential use falls into four separate categories, and covers most of the town:

One-Family Dwelling (RO), 3,596.50 acres, reserved for single-family dwellings, as well as religious, institutional, educational, and agricultural uses, and community facilities. Minimum lot sizes are 30,000 square feet and one unit is allowed per acre.

One-Family Dwelling (RS), 3,105.55 acres, reserved for single-family dwellings, as well as religious, institutional, educational, and agricultural uses, and community facilities. Minimum lot sizes are 15,500 square feet, and up to two units are allowed per acre.

Two-Family Dwelling (RT), 40.94 acres, reserved for single- and two-family dwellings, as well as religious, institutional, educational, and agricultural uses, and community facilities.

Minimum lot sizes are 15,500 square feet and 2-4 units are allowed per acre.

The fourth category, **Planned Residential Development**, is described below under “Planned Development Districts.”

COMMERCIAL & INDUSTRIAL ZONING DISTRICTS

Lexington has created eight zones for commercial and industrial uses:

Central Business (CB), 15.79 acres, reserved for mixed use development along a commercial corridor, with no minimum lot size requirement.

Local Office (CLO), 18.44 acres, reserved for office and commercial businesses, with a minimum lot size requirement of 30,000 square feet.

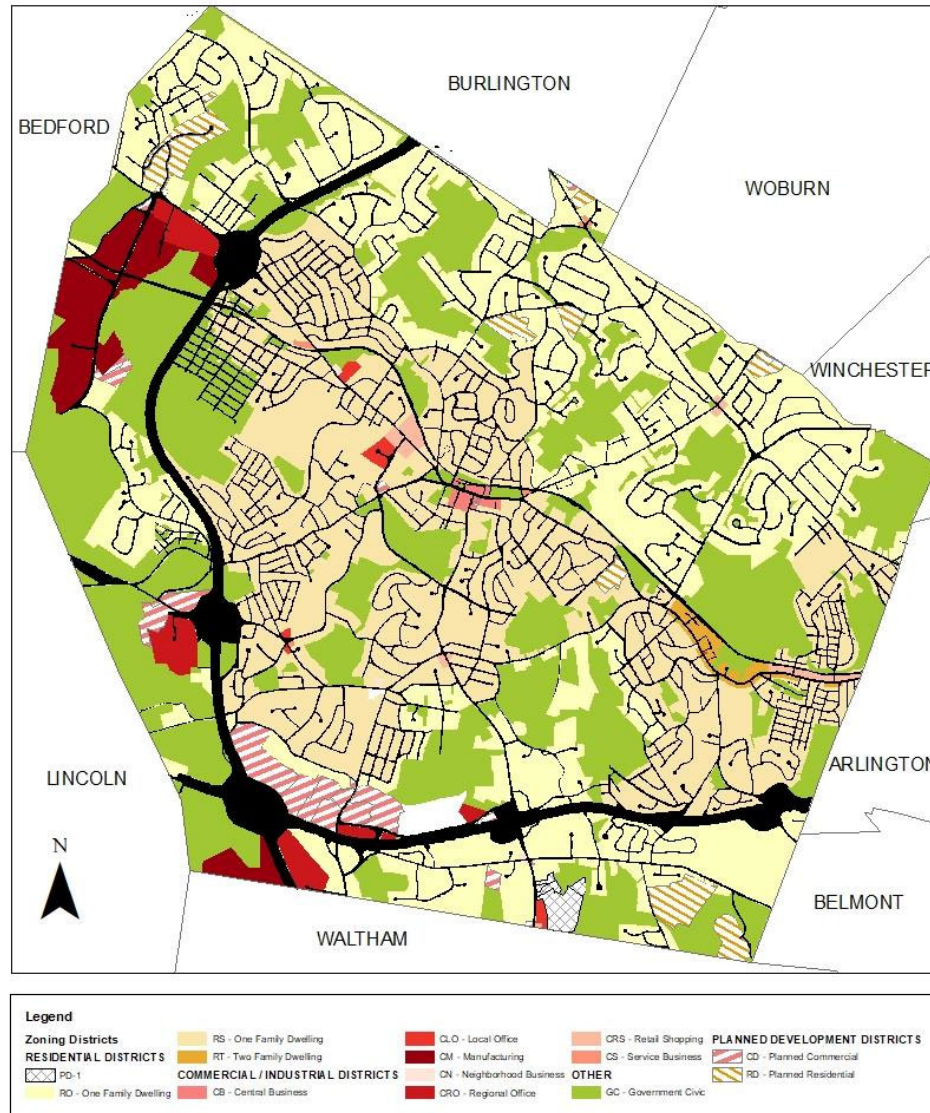
Manufacturing (CM), 285.72 acres, reserved for a mixture of commercial, manufacturing and industrial uses with a minimum lot size requirement of 3 acres.

Neighborhood Business (CN), 8.78 acres, allowing single- and two-family residential uses in addition to small commercial and service-oriented uses, with a minimum lot size requirement of 15,500 square feet and limit of 2-4 units per acre.

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Figure 2. Lexington Zoning Districts.

Lexington Zoning Districts



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Regional Office (CRO), 90.39 acres, reserved for office and commercial businesses, with a minimum lot size requirement of five acres.

Retail Shopping (CRS), 33.67 acres, allowing commercial uses only on a minimum lot size of 15,500 square feet.

Service Business (CS), 5.15 acres, reserved for service-oriented businesses on a minimum lot size of 20,000 square feet.

Commercial Service Expanded (CSX), 2.24 acres, allowing for a mix of commercial, industrial, and manufacturing uses, on a minimum lot size of 30,000 square feet.

GOVERNMENT CIVIC DISTRICT

Land zoned for **Government Civic** uses (**GC**), 3,014.95 acres, is reserved for land with a particular public nature. Minimum lot size and units per acre do not apply.

PLANNED DEVELOPMENT DISTRICTS

In addition to those outlined above, Lexington has adopted, as part of its zoning bylaw, provisions for creating Planned Districts. Such districts provide more flexibility to developers, as they allow for development that may not otherwise be allowed by zoning. Their intent is to achieve a higher and better form of development that is unique to the parcel and its context by improving the

streetscape, adding to the open space and trail system, ensuring safe circulation and providing transportation options. Planned districts must undergo a zoning amendment through the Town Meeting process before development may proceed. To date, Lexington has approved 31 such districts for commercial (PC), residential (PR), and mixed-use (PD) development, covering a total of 430.48 acres.

NEIGHBORHOOD CONSERVATION DISTRICTS

In addition to the residential zoning districts discussed above, Lexington has established two **Neighborhood Conservation Districts (NCD)**.¹ The intent of these is to preserve, protect and enhance significant areas of the community by allowing projects within the district to go beyond what the Zoning Bylaw allows. Impact of a proposed development on a district's overall scale, its streetscape, and its existing significant buildings may be considered. Specific regulations differ from neighborhood to neighborhood and are enforced by individual NCD commissions. Lexington's two NCDs are:

- **Pierce-Lockwood**, fifteen homes bounded by Massachusetts Avenue, Tower Park, the Minuteman Bikeway, and Maple Street

¹ Chapter 78 of the Code of Lexington contains the Neighborhood Conservation District enabling legislation.

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- **Turning Mill**, 113 parcels along Demar, Dewey, Gould, Grimes, Mountain, Partridge, and Turning Mill Road, as well as Jeffrey Terrace.

OVERLAY DISTRICTS

Lexington has established two overlay districts with the intent of improving residents' safety and increase the overall quality of life. By definition, overlay districts do not supersede other zoning districts, but are superimposed over other zoning districts.

Lexington's two overlay districts are:

National Flood Insurance District (NFI), intended to "reduce the threats to life and personal injury; eliminate new hazards to emergency response officials; prevent the occurrence of public emergencies resulting from water quality, contamination, and pollution due to flooding; avoid the loss of utility services which if damaged by flooding would disrupt or shut down the utility network and impact regions of the community beyond the site of flooding; eliminate costs associated with the response and cleanup of flooding conditions, and reduce damage to public and private property resulting from flooding waters."²

Transportation Management Overlay District (TMO), intended to allow "effective multi-modal transportation networks that increase the quality of life in Lexington through improved traffic management and mitigation."

² Town of Lexington Zoning Bylaw and Development Regulations, adopted March 20, 2013.

OTHER PROVISIONS OF THE ZONING BYLAW

Historic Districts. Lexington maintains four contiguous Historic Districts that follow the spine of Massachusetts Avenue and include a total of 570 historic properties. The districts were established in the 1950s and 1960s under the provisions of M. G. L. Chapter 447, Acts of 1956, "An Act Establishing an Historic Districts Commission for the Town of Lexington and Defining its Powers and Duties and Establishing Historic Districts in the Town of Lexington." For more information about the districts, refer to the Historic and Cultural Resources chapter of this inventory.

ZONING AMENDMENTS SINCE 2003

Amendments to Lexington's Zoning Bylaw are approved by Town Meeting in accordance with M. G. L. Chapter 40A, Section 5. Since 2003, Town Meeting has voted to amend the Zoning Bylaw numerous times, including, in 2013, a recodification of the law itself. Amendments have ranged from minor edits to rezoning of areas within the community. A summary of the major amendments appears below:

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- 2004: Avalon Bay re-zoning was approved for former Met State Hospital site 387 units with 25% of units affordable and sixty units age-restricted.
- 2005: Town Meeting approved revised the accessory apartment bylaw, allowing larger units by right and including buildings constructed after 1983 as eligible for accessory units.
- 2005: after a previous unsuccessful attempt, Town Meeting rezoned the former Lexington Battle Green Inn for the Lexington Place Condominiums. The project included three affordable residential units.
- 2008: Town Meeting approved changes to the “cluster” subdivision bylaw.
- 2009: Town Meeting increased the floor-area-ratio.
- 2014 – 2020: Town Meeting voted to amend the zoning bylaw multiple times to modify regulations pertaining to services in storefronts, accessory uses, building heights and dimensions, off-street parking, driveways, signs in commercial districts, Special Permit Residential Developments, Planned Developments and others. Each amendment is identified, along with the corresponding Town Meeting warrant article number, in the Lexington Zoning Bylaw.

In 2021, Town Meeting considered the establishment of a new Planned Development District, the Hartwell Innovation Park, or C-HIP, as a means of increasing economic development opportunities in one of the town’s major employment centers. The new district would rejuvenate the area by balancing a by-right permitting process for desired uses and aggressive dimensional standards with strict adherence to sustainable building practices and design guidelines and regulations. By implementing the C-HIP Zoning Bylaw, the Planning Board Regulations, and the C-HIP Design Guidelines, the town aimed to create an attractive, sustainable, and vibrant area. The proposal article was defeated.

TOWN DEPARTMENTS AND BOARDS

LEXINGTON PLANNING DEPARTMENT

The Planning Department is responsible for coordinating all planning and development-related activities of the town including land use and comprehensive planning. Staff serve as liaisons to the Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals, and to subcommittees associated with each board.

LEXINGTON PLANNING BOARD

The Planning Board is responsible for the review of residential special permit applications, administering Subdivision Regulations in accordance with the state subdivision control law,

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and adopting zoning amendments and rezoning petitions according to the Zoning Bylaw. Subcommittees of the Planning Board include the Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee, the Neighborhood Conservation District Study Committee and the Residential Policy Committee.

LEXINGTON ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS

Lexington's Zoning Board of Appeals hears and makes decisions regarding administrative appeals, applications for special permits and petitions for variances. Appointed by the Select Board, the ZBA consists of five full members serving five-year terms, and six associate members serving one-year terms.

2003 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

The 2003 Comprehensive Plan recommended fourteen actions related to land use, twelve of which were accomplished:

- Establishing a policy that in acting on the description of "surplus" public land, priority should be given to diversity-serving housing and preservation of important open spaces;
- Enhancing existing cluster provisions by allowing for lower density and a by-right cluster option as a true open space residential provision;
- Re-examining impervious surface controls;

- Improving Planned Development Districts through use of performance-based controls;
- Observing residential/non-residential balance;
- Periodically assessing links between land use and the environment;
- Securing funding for open space;
- Strengthening diversity of neighborhood character;
- Avoiding unbroken seas of asphalt by amending current landscaping requirements to preclude large scale parking areas;
- Using town facilities and operations as a demonstration of good resource efficiency and waste-reduction practices;
- Providing incentives for development that has low non-renewable energy demand and other resource-efficient design approaches; and
- Helping "helpful businesses."

Recommendations yet to be implemented include:

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- Specifying non-residential benefit expectations by offering developer incentives; and
- Mandating subdivision open space through use of special permits.
- Lexington retains a few open landholdings (25 to 35 acres in size) that are zoned for single-family homes but are currently in other land uses. Under current zoning these landholdings could be converted to market-rate single-family homes by right.

ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

- Lexington has a limited amount of land designated for commercial use; residential acreage amounts to seven times that of commercial.
- Between 2010 and 2019, permits for single-family homes ranged from a low of 51 per year (2011) to a high of 103 per year (2015). Over the ten-year period, a total of 821 permit were issued.
- Many Lexington residents who commuted to jobs in Boston, Cambridge, and along the I-95 corridor before the onset of COVID-19 may continue to do so in the future, perhaps permanently. As a result, more retail and commercial establishments may be in demand to service the work-at-home population, and Lexington's zoning may require amending to accommodate this demand.
- The Hartwell Avenue corridor offers opportunity for development of new commercial activity, particularly if future decisions about the use of Hanscom Airforce Base provide for this.

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LIST OF RESOURCES

Town of Lexington website: www.lexingtonma.gov
Lexington Zoning Bylaw (2013)

INTERVIEWS

Tom Malloy, Lexington Town Manager

Lexington Select Board

Jill Hai, Chair
Suzie Barry
Douglas Lucente
Joe Pato
Mark Sandeen

Lexington Planning Board

Charles Hornig, Chair
Bob Creech
Michael Leon
Robert Peters
Melanie Thompson

Lexington Zoning Board of Appeals

Ralph Clifford
Jennifer Gingras

Lexington Center Committee

Jerry Michelson
Casey Hagerty

Caryl Dlugy, East Lexington