

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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

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

- take stock;
- reflect on past accomplishments;
- identify changes in community demographics, the environment, expectations, and attitudes;
- identify shared values;
- articulate a vision for the future; and
- 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 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 those who would like to make improvements and it bolsters the confidence of grant funders and investors by increasing certainty and predictability.

The Plan covers the following topic areas or goals:

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

Although planning practice for Comprehensive Plans has expanded over time to include areas such as Public Health and Wellness, Governance, Arts and Culture, and Technology and Innovation, this Plan is deliberately focused on the physical environment. This decision is in keeping with state law, community input, and reflects the strength of Lexington's municipal bodies, community organizations, and institutions in addressing Town needs.

LexingtonNext is organized in three volumes:

- Vol I: The Plan
- Vol II: Inventory and Assessment of Existing Resources
- 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 (CPAC) 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, 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 the data gathered, residents 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 residential and business uses in commercial areas; and
- Diversifying housing options in terms of both cost and type of housing.

In addition to these priorities there is a strong emphasis in all elements and goals to advance racial and social equity and promote environmental sustainability.

## Public Events to gather input on priorities

2018

- Kick-off event
- 3 World Cafés

2019

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

2020

- February Open Space, Recreation, and 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 and Public Review of Draft Implementation and Goals (Summer)

## Context Shifts in Lexington

### Notable Changes since the 2003 Comprehensive Plan

- Significant investment in Town-owned facilities
- Major redevelopment of existing housing stock
- Significant increase in:
  - Asian population
  - Aging population
  - Young children
  - Median income
- Hiring of:
  - Public Information Officer/Director of Communications
  - Sustainability and Resilience Officer
  - Chief Equity Officer
- Creation of:
  - Human Rights Committee
  - Commission on Disability
- Enhanced sustainability goals
- Town Meeting commitment to view all plans through an equity lens

### Housing

Lexington has seen home prices rise by an astronomical amount, with median home prices more than tripling between 2009 and 2019 to well over a million dollars. Median income is the sixth highest in Massachusetts while older residents on limited incomes are struggling to remain in town. The community expressed increasing concern that the lack of socio-economic diversity among residents' stifles diversity on other fronts. Only 5.5% of Lexington's housing units are restricted to below market rate prices, creating years-long wait lists for housing for lower income individuals and families. Lexington's zoning does not match its housing needs because housing types such as multi-family dwellings are prohibited or severely limited.

### National changes

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

- The global COVID 19 pandemic
- Increased attention to institutional racism
- The undeniable climate crisis of global warming

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 home offices and shared workspaces;
- The need for emergency preparedness, specifically for town facilities and services; and
- Concern for the health of local businesses and dining establishments, and a need to find creative ways to attract patrons back to in-person shopping and dining.

## Race

Many residents expressed concern about the lack of racial diversity in Lexington and the lack of community support for people that are not white or are part of historically marginalized groups. The murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and other Black Americans at the hands of police officers in major US cities were at the forefront of the news during development of LexingtonNext. Black Americans, other racial groups, immigrants, persons with disabilities, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA+) persons experienced these traumas and, along with their allies, advocated for equality and equity. As a result, a wider audience began talking about systemic racism and how to be more inclusive. The racially motivated attacks on Black Americans and Asian Americans during the pandemic further highlighted the need to address racial inequities across our local community at an institutional level. A Comprehensive Plan is intended to provide a basis for decision making regarding a community's long-term physical development — equity impacts should be considered in all municipal and land-use related decision making. It is critical to analyze who benefits and who does not benefit from municipal decision making. While inclusivity was always considered in Plan development, the events of 2020 made clear the need for a separate element that became Goal 1, Diversity and Inclusion. Lexington's history of exclusion with high housing costs, one-family housing, and lack of public transportation have contributed to Lexington's current lack of racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity.

## Climate Crisis

In 2021, Lexington took bold action to address the climate crisis:

- The Annual Town Meeting adopted an innovative bylaw regulating fossil fuel infrastructure.

A Special Town Meeting amended the zoning bylaw to make it easier to build solar energy systems.

**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 and 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 spaces, 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
- model 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 of LexingtonNext are synthesized from:

- 1) public and stakeholder input,
- 2) consideration of the inventory and assessment of existing conditions and data collected, and
- 3) professional best practices, methods, and solutions from other jurisdictions, the planning profession, and other relevant disciplines (e.g., community development corporations).

**GOAL 1.0: To promote the DIVERSITY, EQUITY, and 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 among residents, visitors, and people working in town
- + Objective 1.3. Support people of all ages and abilities
- + Objective 1.4. Attract people of diverse backgrounds to work in town
- + Objective 1.5 Improve town-wide communication and encourage broader participation in decision-making

GOAL 2.0: To promote a wide range of **HOUSING** options that respond to the needs of households, regardless of income and life stage

- + Objective 2.1. Produce a range of housing types in a variety of locations throughout town
- + Objective 2.2. Increase and preserve the supply of subsidized housing
- + Objective 2.3. Encourage housing for older persons
- + Objective 2.4. Protect the exterior of existing historically or architecturally significant homes
- + Objective 2.5. Preserve homes that contribute to the diversity of housing options
- + Objective 2.6. Increase the efficiency of housing efforts
- + Objective 2.7. Enable flexible use of housing to adapt to changing working and living arrangements
- + Objective 2.8. Make new and existing housing environmentally sustainable
- + Objective 2.9. Affirmatively further fair housing

GOAL 3.0: To promote a **VITAL ECONOMY**, including a variety of small and large businesses that contribute to the tax base and provide goods and services to meet the needs of residents, employees, and visitors

- + Objective 3.1. Encourage private redevelopment in large commercial areas, making them more exciting
- + Objective 3.2. Improve Lexington Center so that it becomes more of a “destination”
- + Objective 3.3. Create a walkable, bikeable, and aesthetically pleasing East Lexington commercial area
- + Objective 3.4. Retain and support existing businesses and evaluate opportunities for commercial growth in strategic locations.
- + Objective 3.5. Develop sustainable tourism practices to support the independent businesses, arts, cultural and historic organizations, and characteristics of the town’s commercial areas
- + Objective 3.6. Support “talent driven economic development”

GOAL 4.0: To enhance quality of life, health, and safety by implementing practices and policies that enhance **SUSTAINABILITY** and **RESILIENCY** in our community

- + Objective 4.1. Become a net-zero emissions community
- + Objective 4.2. Improve the resiliency of town-owned assets and infrastructure
- + Objective 4.3. Reduce transportation emissions by improving sustainable transportation options and reducing single occupancy vehicle trips

GOAL 5.0: To protect **OPEN SPACES** and **NATURAL RESOURCES** and to enhance their connections

- + Objective 5.1. Conserve natural resources
- + Objective 5.2. Protect open spaces in balance with other town needs such as 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** and **CULTURAL 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 increase safety and enhance quality of life
- + Objective 7.2. Expand options for walking, biking, and micro-mobility
- + Objective 7.3. Improve parking strategies to achieve transportation and economic development goals
- + Objective 7.4. Expand transit options
- + Objective 7.5. Adopt land use policies that advance the town's transportation goals
- + Objective 7.6. Increase public awareness and community pride in use of alternative modes of travel

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



- + Objective 8.1. Improve and expand recreational land and facilities to meet the 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 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. Maintain and improve educational facilities to create up to date environments for all 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. Maintain and replace town infrastructure and upgrade systems to meet demand
- + Objective 9.4. Address sustainability and climate impacts in renovation of existing and new facilities

GOAL 10: To support and advance Goals 1-9 through wise LAND USE PLANNING.

- + Objective 10.1. Meet municipal land use needs
- + Objective 10.2. Meet other land use needs

## The Plan Structure

The chapters in Volume 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;
- An overview of related Town of Lexington Goals and Objectives from other Municipal Organizations and Committees; and
- An implementation table that identifies Potential Actions, Responsible Parties, 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 within it 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, including many volunteers.

Critical to achieving the goals of the Plan is engagement 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. Opportunities will arise that align with the Plan’s goals but were not foreseen when it was completed. The Implementation section of the plan expresses the steps to realize the goals from today’s vantage point.