

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The Wendell Community Development Plan has been developed under Executive Order 418. Issued in 2000, Executive Order 418 offered municipalities funding to create Community Development Plans, such as this one, which address four principal areas: open space and resource protection, housing, economic development, and transportation. Wendell received an exemption from the open space and natural resource section because of its recent Open Space and Recreation Plan (2002), which was approved by the Massachusetts Executive Office of Environmental Affairs, Division of Conservation Services. This Executive Summary presents the key findings and recommendations of Wendell's Community Development Plan.

Community Development Plans use the information collected through the planning process to establish options and strategies to guide future development and to protect important natural, historic, and scenic resources.

Vision Statement

In 2002, prior to the start of Wendell's Community Development Plan, a series of public forums were held to discuss town issues and priorities and to establish a vision for Wendell's future. A vision statement for the Town was developed based on the forum discussions. This vision statement, and its goals and objectives, helped guide the creation of the Community Development Plan. The vision statement is as follows:

Our primary vision for the Town of Wendell is to preserve its rural and unique community character while seeking to improve the quality of life for its residents. We recognize that the careful management of land use and population growth will help the town protect its natural, historic, and scenic assets while enhancing people's abilities to enjoy these valuable resources. We envision land planning and regulation of development as key tools to meet our specific community needs, while at the same time, allowing for a more controlled population increase over the long term that is sustainable for the Town of Wendell.

Through careful and sustained proactive planning, we hope to encourage the kinds of land use which will maintain and improve the overall health and well-being of the aquatic, forest, and open-field ecosystems, and wildlife habitats, and which will help the town to permanently protect and manage its open spaces. The Open Space and Recreation Plan for Wendell will contribute to this undertaking. We actively support the development of small-scale commercial, economic growth as well as encourage cottage industries that will blend with Wendell's rural environment. We recognize the need to research the status and condition of our current road situation and to consider access to public transportation and to current and

proposed bicycle paths and trails within the region. Future planning should consider the adverse impact that a rising tax rate has upon residents with limited incomes.

In order to achieve the concepts outlined in this vision statement, the Wendell Community Development Plan Committee along with the Planning Board have identified a number of shared goals and objectives to help guide the preparation and implementation of the Town of Wendell's Community Development Plan. By including as many of the Town's residents as possible, to make this vision a reality, we hope to foster more active participation in town affairs and promote more involvement in activities which will strengthen our unique community.

It is recognized that many of the goals listed below are conflicting. However, these goals represent general concepts considered important by a significant number of townspeople. The Planning Board, in proposing future changes to the town bylaws, will hold these goals in mind.

Goal – To preserve Wendell's rural character by preserving its diversity of wildlife and open spaces

- Preserve and increase amount of protected land.
- Create greenways both within town and connecting with greenways in surrounding towns.
- Enhance scenic roads bylaw to further protect byways.
- Preserve the dark night sky by minimizing light pollution.
- Promote community based ecological education and related activities.
- Insure that the Town's Zoning Bylaws continue to be protective of natural resources and quality of life.
- Implement the Open Space Plan.

Goal – Diversify tax base and increase community services through the facilitation of economic development

- Promote the development of cottage industries and the appropriate use of local resources.
- Promote ecologically sound development.
- Maintain and improve appropriate bylaws to ensure sound development practices.
- Create business district(s) *to allow the separation of businesses from land uses with which they may not be entirely compatible, and to encourage the establishment of new businesses*¹.
- Explore alternatives to present tax and revenue structure.

¹ This bullet item was modified slightly from the original vision statement by the Community Development Plan Committee during the creation of the Plan.

Goal – Improve transportation options for residents

- Maintain roadways in keeping with their designation as scenic and rural roads (This incorporates maintaining stone walls, trees, proper drainage, minimal road width, guard rails and minimal lighting).
- Retain and maintain dirt roads.
- Determine the legal status of all roads to clarify issues of development and maintenance.
- Increase access to coordinated and/or public transport, especially for seniors and keep the community informed of these options.
- Explore means to control the speed of traffic, including education, traffic calming and enforcement of speed limits.

Goal – To encourage diverse housing and rental options while preserving Wendell's rural character and unique community

- Encourage efforts to make Wendell's housing inventory both affordable and energy efficient.
- Encourage the development of housing for our elders and low to moderately priced rental units.
- Review current sub-division regulations and cluster development options.
- Determine a sustainable rate of residential growth, that the town and its residents can manage, without creating adverse fiscal impacts, to aid in the development of future bylaws.
- *Consider the creation of traditional neighborhood district(s) that allow a mix of residential and business land uses².*

Open Space and Resource Protection

The Executive Order 418 Interagency Working Group exempted the Town of Wendell from creating an Open Space and Resource Protection section for the Community Development Plan, because of the recently completed Wendell Open Space and Recreation Plan (2002). The Wendell Open Space and Recreation Plan was approved by the Massachusetts Executive Office of Environmental Affairs, Division of Conservation Services.

The Open Space and Recreation Plan is an important document that helps guide and influence Wendell's planning priorities and initiatives, including the creation of this Community Development Plan. The Community Development Plan Committee consequently felt it was important to reference the Open Space and Recreation Plan's primary goals and recommendations in this new Plan. These goals and recommendations are summarized below. In addition, as discussed in the mapping chapter of this Plan (Chapter 6), the Open Space and Recreation Plan's Action Plan Map was referred to extensively during the creation of the Development Suitability Map. The Action Plan Map identified potential greenways and priority areas for open space protection.

² This bullet item was added to the vision statement by the Community Development Plan Committee during the creation of the Plan.

Open Space and Recreation Plan Goals

- To ensure that the Town of Wendell retains its rural character and sense of community and maintains or improves the quality of its air and water, and the diversity and integrity of native fauna and flora through the conservation of locally important natural, open space, and cultural resources.
- To ensure that the Town of Wendell improves the quality, quantity, and accessibility of its recreational resources for current and future generations, especially for teens and seniors.

Open Space and Recreation Plan Recommendations

The Open Space and Recreation Plan included 37 action steps for implementation. These action steps are summarized in Chapter 1. Of the 37 action steps in the Open Space and Recreation Plan, the following 11 actions were identified as the being the most important: *(The current status of these action items is provided in italics.)*

- Authorize a municipal Open Space Committee. *(An official Wendell Open Space Committee has been established.)*
- Identify funding sources for land protection. *(In progress.)*
- Identify focus or priority areas for protection. *(The Open Space Committee has begun to prioritize areas for future protection.)*
- Develop a protocol for assigning the right-of-first refusal to purchase Chapter 61, 61A, and 61B land to a local land trust *(In progress.)*
- Explore establishing a Land Acquisition Fund. *(In progress.)*
- Determine if the Conservation Commission has the capacity to own and manage conservation land. *(In progress.)*
- Ensure the training of Open Space Committee members in conservation alternatives. *(The Open Space Committee is considering future training in estate planning related to land preservation for members.)*
- Develop an ongoing program of ecological-based recreational/educational opportunities for Wendell residents such as biodiversity days and wildlife monitoring *(The Open Space Committee has coordinated educational programs on vernal pools and on open space preservation.)*
- Secure the services of a consulting forester or ecologist to review all Town lands and determine which would be the most appropriate as a Town Forest or Conservation Land/Community Garden/Orchard. *(Not yet undertaken.)*

- Develop management/stewardship plans for each Town-owned property. *(At the Spring 2004 Wendell Town Meeting, the Town approved the hiring of a forester to prepare a management plan for the new Conservation Commission land off Montague Road near Dirth Road. Management plans for other Town-owned properties have not yet been undertaken.)*
- With the input of all municipal boards, determine probable future uses of all Town-owned lands. *(The management plan being prepared for the Conservation Commission land off Montague Road will include a discussion of potential future recreational and other uses for the property. Other Town-owned lands have yet to be studied.)*

The Community Development Plan Committee supports the preservation of additional open space in Wendell. The committee encourages working landscapes in which the economic activity occurring on open space parcels, such as farming and forestry, help these land areas remain undeveloped. Preserving open space and supporting working landscapes are both valuable activities for town planning, as much as, revising zoning bylaws and forming new zoning districts.

Committee members feel it is important to balance open space preservation and development activities. It is also important to have involvement by both the Open Space Committee and Community Development Plan Committee as the Town works to identify any additional areas that should be permanently protected as open space and the areas that may be the most suitable for future development.

Economic Development

The Economic Development chapter (Chapter 2) reviews Wendell's current economic base and labor pool characteristics. The chapter also discusses some of the primary business factors and issues influencing economic development within the Town. The key findings and recommendations of the Economic Development chapter are listed below.

Key Findings

- In 2002, Wendell had 599 residents participating in the labor force. In 2002, the unemployment rate for Wendell was 3.5%, lower than the rates for Franklin County (4.1%) and the State (5.3%) overall.
- An estimated 82% of working residents in Wendell commute to jobs outside of Wendell. This includes 42% who work elsewhere in Franklin County, 38% who work outside of Franklin County elsewhere in the State, and 2% who work outside of Massachusetts, predominantly in Vermont or New Hampshire. Also, approximately 10% of employed Wendell residents work from home.
- In 2000, 37% of working Wendell residents were employed in the Education, Health, and Social Services Sector. The next largest sectors were Manufacturing (11%), Retail Trade (9%), and Construction (9%).

- The largest employer located in Wendell is the Lake Grove School at Maple Valley. Lake Grove School had an estimated 157 employees in 2002, a small fraction of whom are Wendell residents. The two next largest employers are the Town of Wendell (3 full-time and 39 part-time employees) and the Swift River Elementary School (70 full-time employees).
- Wendell has a significant number of cottage industries and home businesses. These businesses cover a wide range of services, including computer support and web site design; construction; automotive repair and salvage; arts activities such as photography, video production, fine arts, and music recording; accounting; and massage therapy. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, an estimated 18% of working Wendell residents are self-employed.
- Wendell residents are well educated. An estimated 92% of Wendell residents age 25 and over have graduated from high school, and 42% have a college bachelor's degree or a graduate degree. Statewide, 85% of adults age 25 and over have graduated from high school, and 33% have a bachelor's degree or graduate degree.
- Wendell's Zoning Bylaws allow home businesses, cottage industries, and many agricultural uses by right. The bylaws also allow retail stores, professional offices, restaurants, garages, inns, and industrial uses by special permit. Wendell currently has no specific geographic area designated for new business development. Interest has been expressed in possibly creating a business district, or traditional neighborhood district, for new or expanded commercial activities.
- Wendell presently has no municipal water or sewer systems. The lack of public water and sewer infrastructure does not preclude small scale economic development, but makes Wendell an unsuitable location for larger-scale commercial or industrial growth. Wendell has a study underway to investigate the possibility of establishing a shared septic system in the town common area to serve public buildings and some private residents. The Town has also started evaluating the feasibility of connecting some sections of Wendell to the Town of Erving's sewer system. In addition, Lake Grove School is considering building an on-site wastewater treatment plant that could possibly be used to serve some homes or businesses, as well as its campus; the School is in discussions with the Town about this facility.

Key Recommendations

- Promote and encourage new and existing home-based businesses and cottage industries. Identify resources that will assist entrepreneurs and business operators in their activities, such as having access to a photocopier, and help establish them.
- Support the continued operation of farms and other agricultural and forestry-based businesses in town. Town support of programs that preserve agricultural land, such as the Agricultural Preservation Restriction Program, is one way to help sustain existing agricultural businesses. Other ways to advocate for these businesses include Town support of regional agricultural and forestry business development projects, such as CISA (Communities Involved with Sustaining Agriculture) and North Quabbin Woods, and residents purchasing local farm and forestry products.
- Advocate for advanced telecommunications broadband services to be made available in the region to help with existing and emerging business development. Participate in telecommunications initiatives in the region, and explore broadband options for providing Wendell businesses and residents with better telecommunications access.
- Consider establishing a business district(s) in Wendell to promote appropriate business development, including businesses that may not be entirely compatible with residential land uses. This task could be undertaken by the Planning Board or some other committee or group of residents.
- Consider establishing a traditional neighborhood district(s) in Wendell that allows for slightly higher density development and for a mix of commercial/business, civic, and residential uses.
- Maintain and work to improve relationships with Commonwealth of Massachusetts agencies and private entities that own significant properties in Wendell. These entities include Lake Grove School and the State Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR). DCR manages Wendell State Forest. Work with the significant property owners to identify and address any ongoing issues, and explore potential partnering opportunities which would be to the owner's and community's mutual benefit.

Housing

The Housing chapter (Chapter 3) describes housing characteristics, examines housing needs, and recommends actions to improve housing opportunities for low, moderate, and middle-income residents. The key findings and recommendations of this housing assessment are summarized below.

Key Findings

- As of 2000, Wendell had approximately 439 housing units and a population of 986. There is currently an average of 2.4 people per occupied housing unit. An estimated 10% of Wendell's housing stock consists of mobile homes.

- An estimated 73% of Wendell's housing units are occupied by homeowners. In Franklin County as a whole, 62% of housing units are owner-occupied. A high level of homeownership generally adds to a town's sense of community and stability, and increases residents' level of commitment and involvement in the town. Another important factor in Wendell is the long length of time that many residents have lived in town.
- Housing in Wendell is currently affordable for most residents. Housing is generally considered affordable when households spend no more than 30% of their income on housing costs. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, on average, Wendell homeowners with mortgages spend 23% of their incomes on housing, and homeowners without mortgages spend 10%. On average, renter households in Wendell spend 25% of their incomes on their housing, indicating that rental housing is relatively expensive and less affordable for its occupants. An estimated 43% of renter households are considered to be low-income, compared to 18% of homeowner households.
- Even though housing is affordable for most residents, some residents, especially low-income residents, may face housing affordability issues. An estimated 51 households in Wendell (13% of all households in town) have burdensome housing costs based on their income. Approximately 71% of the burdened households are considered to be low income.
- One identified housing need in Wendell is for affordable housing options for elderly residents. Another need is for additional rental housing to allow young adults (ages 18-30) who grew up in Wendell and who want to continue to live in town on their own, but who do not yet have the money to buy a home. One potential way of addressing both issues is through the Town's new Secondary Dwelling Bylaw. The bylaw allows a small secondary housing unit to be constructed on the same lot as an existing home.
- Wendell's Zoning Bylaws provide for future development in a flexible manner which accommodates future growth and housing to meet community and landowner needs. The bylaws allow single-family dwellings, two-family dwellings, and small boarding houses by right. The bylaws allow three-family units, secondary dwellings, and guest cabins by special permit. In addition, through its Conservation Development Bylaw, the Town allows developments of single-unit and/or two-unit dwellings to have reduced roadway frontage and lot sizes in exchange for land being permanently set aside as open space. There is interest in town in comprehensively reviewing Wendell's Zoning Bylaws and considering changes to make them more effective and better at helping shape the type of town that Wendell will become in the future.

Key Recommendations

- Promote the use of Wendell's Conservation Development Bylaw which encourages residential development to occur in a way that helps preserve open space areas. The Conservation Development Bylaw can also help create housing that is more affordable than traditional subdivisions because of reduced infrastructure costs. Consider if any changes to the bylaw would help promote this type of development over standard Subdivision Approval-Not-Required (ANR) development.
- Promote the use of the Town's new Secondary Dwelling Bylaw which allows a small secondary housing unit to be constructed on the same lot as an existing home, and offers an important affordable housing option for residents.
- Encourage the conversion of single-family dwellings to two-family dwellings in appropriate areas for seniors and other homeowners who have extra space in their homes, and who could benefit from the extra income that subdividing their homes could bring. Another option could be the rental of single rooms in principal residential structures. Both of these residential uses are allowed by right under Wendell's Zoning Bylaws, and could help make homeownership more affordable for residents on limited incomes, including some elderly. Ensure that homes that add new housing units or new bedrooms are still in compliance with septic system regulations.
- Investigate whether any section of town, such as village areas, could be appropriate for slightly higher density zoning. One possibility for higher density is the creation of a traditional neighborhood district(s) in town containing a mix of residential and business uses. Areas with high densities could help promote housing affordability by allowing range of housing options, including housing for seniors, and stores with rental housing above them.
- Encourage the study of potential future public water and sewer options. Such options could make higher density zoning more feasible.
- Work with affordable housing developers to identify appropriate locations in Wendell for new affordable housing and to promote such development. Insist that any constructed new affordable homes have long-term deed restrictions of at least 30 years to help them remain affordable for low and moderate-income households.
- Investigate the procedures and restrictions regarding property owners building and updating their own homes. Consider changes to facilitate this type of residential development.
- Work with legislators to encourage the State to continue revising Chapter 40B to provide additional flexibility and local control in the creation of affordable housing, and to further expand its definition of "affordable housing."

- Work with legislators to encourage the passage of the Land Use Reform Act, which proposes significant changes and reforms to the State Zoning Act (Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 40A), and gives local governments more control over future development.

Road Research

The Road Research chapter (Chapter 4) presents the results of research into the legal status and layout of a number of roads in Wendell. The roads for this research project were selected by the Wendell Highway Commission. Legal status was researched for five roads in Wendell. These roads are Rockwell Hill Road, Old Farley Road, Old Egypt Road, Kentfield Road, and Sears Road. The legal status of roads is important as it affects potential “Approval Not Required” (ANR) and other development along the roads, and the Town’s level of responsibility for road maintenance and improvements.

Layouts were researched for five other Wendell roads: Wendell Depot Road, Locke’s Village Road, Montague Road, Farley Road, and Mormon Hollow Road. Knowing the layout of roads is important for improvement and construction projects. The key findings and recommendations for this research are summarized below.

Key Findings

- Since the dissolution of the Franklin County Commission, the Executive Committee of the Franklin Regional Council of Governments has had principal jurisdiction over the creation, alteration, and discontinuance of county roads within Franklin County.
- In 1986, the Town of Wendell’s Town Meeting approved an article to legally discontinue a number of old, rarely used roads and “paper roads” which existed on town maps. Additional infrequently used or paper roads in town could be discontinued through a blanket discontinuance. To discontinue a road through a blanket discontinuance, it is not necessary to prove that the road was ever a public way. Blanket discontinuances appear to be legally binding and have been upheld by the Massachusetts Appeals Court (*Rivers v. Warwick* (1994)). Owners of property along these roads could make claims of damages if their access to their properties is adversely impacted by the discontinuance action. Another related option can be to have a blanket discontinuance of maintenance, as allowed under Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 82, Section 32A. Under this option, a town road can be discontinued and re-created as a statutory private way. Statutory private ways retain public access, but the remove a town’s responsibility for maintenance or liability for use. Additionally, statutory private ways are not considered public ways under the Massachusetts Subdivision Control Act, and therefore cannot be used as frontage for Subdivision Approval Not Required (ANR) development. They also cannot be used to meet frontage requirements for development on existing building lots.

- The entirety of Old Egypt Road and portions of Old Farley Road and Kentfield Roads were discontinued through the 1986 Town Meeting road discontinuance article. As a result of their discontinuance, these road segments are no longer a town maintenance responsibility, and they are not eligible for development.
- Rockwell Hill Road is still an active county way and as such, the Town of Wendell has the legal responsibility to maintain it. Rockwell Hill Road is eligible for ANR and other development.
- The legal status of Sears Road and some sections of Old Farley Road was unable to be determined within this project and will require more extensive research of the Town's records. Most of Sears Road is located within the Wendell State Forest.
- All of the five county roads in Wendell (Wendell Depot Road, Locke's Village Road, Montague Road, Farley Road, and Mormon Hollow Road) that were researched in terms of their layouts have remaining questions regarding their legal locations. For example, Wendell Depot Road, Farley Road, and Mormon Hollow Road all have sections without set bounds. Without bounds present, any future activities requiring precise knowledge of the location of these roads will likely require a relocation of the section of interest in order to clearly establish the road's legal boundaries.

Key Recommendations

Road Record Maintenance and Bookkeeping

- Make two complete copies of the Wendell Town Meeting Minutes Books for public use. The Town Meeting Minutes Books contain a record of all actions taken at Town Meetings since the founding of the Town of Wendell. The Town Meeting records are currently in poor condition and deteriorating rapidly. Town roads are created, relocated, and discontinued through Town Meeting actions and having access to the historic records is invaluable. Once the copies of the Minutes Books have been made, it is suggested that one copy be kept at the town offices and one at the town library. Then when members of the public want to review the Minutes Book, they can hopefully be referred to these copies and not the original, deteriorating records. Also, the Wendell Library has a copy of the Town Meeting Minutes Books in slide format. These slides could be used to create the paper copies for public use. It is also recommended that the slide records be transferred to an electronic format which would be more accessible to the public and therefore more useful for residents.

- Continue the previous work to index road actions that have been taken by Town Meeting since Wendell's founding. In the late 1970s, a Road Research Committee and town staff members developed a list of Town Meeting articles that have involved road actions. As part of the work for the road research chapter, the Franklin Regional Council of Governments has researched some of the early road actions based on the Road Research Committee's list and entered each road action into a database. It would be worthwhile to continue this work. It would also be useful to review the minutes for Town Meetings since the late 1970s to learn what road actions have occurred over the last few decades. The Board of Selectmen should be encouraged to designate a town staff member or committee to oversee the road indexing work.
- Devise a plan to archivally preserve the Town Meeting Minutes Books, and pursue funding for the preservation efforts. Potential sources of funding for preservation of the Minutes Books include historic organizations or Town Meeting. Once the Minutes Books have been preserved, store them in an environment with a stable temperature and little humidity. One option may be to have the preserved records stored at the Greenfield Community College.

Road Status and Discontinuances

- Work to systematically review the road network in Wendell and to classify the roads into different categories including county ways, town ways, private ways, and ways with an uncertain status. Review the work conducted for the 1986 Town Meeting article to discontinue a number of town roads. Prepare a list of all the roads in Wendell and their current legal status.
- Work with the Franklin Regional Council of Governments and the Massachusetts Highway Department (MassHighway) to update the State's road data for Wendell. The road data layer available through MassHighway currently does not accurately depict the present status of some roads in Wendell, including roads that the Town has discontinued. A road's status is important for determining whether or not that road can be used as frontage for new development. This is an issue of concern for planning future development and potential growth areas, and the Town could benefit greatly from an updated road map. As part of the Community Development Plan, some updates were made to the MassHighway roads data layer to indicate roads that were discontinued by Wendell Town Meeting in 1986. Continuing the research into the status of roads in Wendell as suggested above, will help determine what further updates to the roads data layer may be necessary.

- Consider various options for discontinuing official town ways that are no longer used as roads or/and that have inadequate access for future development. Possible options include having a blanket discontinuance of all roads that are not contained in an official road list, based on the research conducted regarding the legal status of individual roads in Wendell. Another option is to discontinue older, rarely used public ways one-by-one. If Wendell chooses to discontinue an old town way, it may also want to consider re-establishing the way as a statutory private way, an action which would retain public access, but restrict future development along the way.
- Review county road records, and consider whether any old, unused county ways that are still officially in-place should be discontinued. Contact the Franklin Regional Council of Governments, which has authority over county road actions, if any discontinuances are sought for old county roads or partial segments of them.

Transportation Services and Needs

The Transportation Services and Needs chapter (Chapter 5) reviews current transportation transit and paratransit services in and near Wendell, and provides an overview of travel patterns and transportation needs among Town residents. The chapter also discusses the transportation needs of Wendell residents, including the Town's seniors and residents with disabilities, since these populations are the most likely to need transportation assistance. The chapter uses the results of a recent transportation survey for much of its needs assessment. The transportation survey was conducted as part of the community development planning process and was mailed to all Wendell households (380 households) as an insert in the Wendell Town Newsletter in January 2004. Sixty-three surveys were returned. The key findings and recommendations of the chapter are presented beginning on the next page.

Key Findings

- Approximately 71% of Wendell households have two cars or more, and 98% of households have one car or more. It is estimated that 8 households (2%) have no car. Car ownership can be expensive for households on limited or fixed incomes. Approximately 23% of Wendell households are considered to have low incomes, and 10% of residents live below the poverty level.
- Slightly over three-quarters (76%) of the transportation survey respondents indicated that they drive their cars every day. The second most popular mode of travel was walking with 24% of respondents saying that they walk daily and 45% indicating that they walk at least once a week.
- There are currently no fixed-route transit services available within the Town of Wendell. The closest bus routes are the Franklin Regional Transit Authority (FRTA) route along Route 2/2A between Greenfield and Athol, and the Greenfield-Montague Transportation Area (GMTA) route between Greenfield and Millers Falls/Montague Center. Both of these routes run weekdays, and the GMTA route has two runs to Millers Falls each Saturday. Another bus service sometimes used by Wendell

residents is the GMTA's Greenfield-Amherst route that runs along Route 63 and goes through Turners Falls and Millers Falls. The Wendell transportation survey asked residents whether they had used any of these bus routes during the last year. Only four of the respondents indicated that they had.

- Wendell seniors and residents with disabilities have access to door-to-door van transportation service provided through the FRTA. The FRTA contracts with local van companies to provide van transportation to seniors and residents with disabilities. Through the FRTA, Wendell residents who qualify have access to van service provided by the Orange Council on Aging. The Orange Council on Aging offers van service for Wendell, Orange, New Salem, and Warwick. Each Tuesday, van service is available to qualifying Wendell residents for medical and shopping trips, and for rides to the Orange Council on Aging meal site. Very few Wendell residents use the Orange Council on Aging transportation service.
- Van transportation is sometimes also available for seniors and disabled residents through service agencies such as Franklin County Home Care, MassHealth, the Department of Mental Retardation, and Department of Public Health. The FRTA and these agencies can provide more information about their transportation services.
- According to the recent transportation survey, the top four destinations of Wendell residents when they leave their homes are Greenfield, Amherst, Wendell, and Orange. Wendell and the other three towns are the top destinations for both work and non-work trips.
- The survey respondents were asked about how important different transportation services are to them. Among the services that residents considered Very Important or Important were improving transportation services for the elderly and disabled (supported by 82% of respondents) and expanding current regional bus services to include Wendell (supported by 74% of respondents). There was also fairly high support for a carpool or rideshare program (supported by 56% of respondents).
- Services that were considered Not Important included providing local bus service around Wendell (viewed as Not Important by 54% of survey respondents) and connecting transit services to area biking and walking trails (43%). One transit service that was met with mixed feelings was providing transportation to students who go to school outside of Wendell. Almost half of respondents (48%) considered this service Very Important or Important; another 38% considered it Not Important.

Key Recommendations

- Explore the feasibility of re-establishing a formal rideshare/carpool program in town. Consider having it be coordinated through both the Town of Wendell web site and a central community location.
- Work with area legislators to encourage the State to increase financial support for transit services in Western Massachusetts, and to develop a more equitable funding mechanism.
- Continue to promote currently available transportation services for seniors and residents with disabilities and to expand services as demand and needs warrant.
- Work with Lake Grove School to explore and promote commuting transportation options. Lake Grove School is the largest employer in Wendell by far, with over 150 employees. Promoting carpools and other commute options among Lake Grove's employees could have a large positive impact on traffic in Wendell. It could also help increase the public profile and viability of these transport modes within the town.
- Consider encouraging an increased range of business services in town for Wendell residents. In the recent transportation survey, residents were asked, "What types of additional services and businesses do you wish were located in Wendell so you wouldn't need to go elsewhere for them?" The most common responses (approximately 13 or 14 responses each) were for a gas station, grocery store, and restaurant/take out. Items with 4 to 5 responses included an ATM/bank, car repair, hardware/lumber store, and places with movies/entertainment. In general, the survey respondents supported having services in Wendell that they use regularly and which would be convenient to have located closer. A few respondents indicated that they would not like any additional services and enjoy Wendell just the way it is. Greater in-town services could decrease the need for Wendell residents to travel for their basic needs. More business services could also contribute positively to the Town's tax base.

Potential Development Mapping

The Potential Development Mapping chapter (Chapter 6) contains a discussion and a methodology for identifying which areas in Wendell may be unsuitable for future development due to their status as permanently protected land, or their sensitive environmental characteristics and important natural, historic, and scenic assets. The chapter also evaluates which parts of Wendell may be the most appropriate for new development. The final product of the chapter is the Development Suitability Map which identifies the potentially most suitable areas for future development, and conditions, such as steep slopes or wetlands, that could limit future development. This mapping chapter builds upon the research conducted for the Wendell Open Space and Recreation Plan (2002) and the Open Space Plan's Action Plan Map. The Action Plan Map indicates the Town's permanently protected and temporarily protected (through Chapter 61, 61A, or 61B) open space areas, potential greenway spaces, and priority areas for protection from development.

The areas in Wendell that the Community Development Plan Committee considered the potentially most suitable for future development met all of the following criteria:

- They do not have any absolute constraints (slopes over 25%, wetlands, permanently protected open space, etc.) that would prevent development.
- They have slopes of 15% or less.
- They are located along a paved roadway.
- They are located near current civic and public activity centers.
- They are not in areas with sensitive environmental habitats, as documented by the Massachusetts Natural Heritage Endangered Species Program.
- They were not designated as potential greenways or priority areas for protection in the Wendell Open Space and Recreation Plan.

Based on these criteria, the Community Development Plan Committee has identified two areas in town that it feels could potentially be the most suitable for future development. These areas are marked on the Development Suitability Map with a pink asterisk; they include Wendell Depot and Wendell Center (town offices/town common). The committee feels that since these two areas already serve as focal points for activity and businesses in Wendell, they could be the most suitable parts of town for future growth. These areas might also be appropriate for designations as traditional neighborhood districts which allow a mix of land uses and a slightly higher density of development than is permitted elsewhere in town.

Currently, all of Wendell is zoned to require a minimum lot size of three acres for single-family homes, two-family homes, and businesses, and a minimum of four acres for three-family homes and lots with both a primary and a secondary dwelling.

Wendell is a rural community with many unpaved roads, no public sewer infrastructure, and no public water lines. It may be challenging for Wendell to accommodate higher densities without more extensive water infrastructure and septic/sewer infrastructure (either public sewer or shared septic systems.) As mentioned earlier, the Town of Wendell recently received funding to study potential future options for sewer/septic systems. Potential options include installing a shared septic system in Wendell Center, connecting sections of Wendell to the Town of Erving's sewer system, and connecting some homes and businesses to the wastewater treatment plant that is being proposed for Lake Grove School. The study of sewer/septic options will assist Wendell in assessing whether some areas of town, such as Wendell Depot and Wendell Center, could successfully accommodate higher densities. The Town will also need to further investigate soil conditions and septic system constraints to ensure that any higher density development will not threaten the quality of Wendell's aquifer recharge areas.

Key Recommendations

- Assist with the study of potential future public water and sewer options for Wendell.
- Further investigate whether the Wendell Depot or Wendell Center areas could be appropriate for slightly higher development densities. Also further consider whether one or both of these areas could be suitable for traditional neighborhood districts allowing a mix of developed land uses. As appropriate, consider revisions to Wendell's zoning to support these changes.
- Revisit the Action Plan Map created for the Open Space and Recreation Plan and consider whether any changes should be made to the identified priority areas for future open space protection.

Next Steps in Implementing the Community Development Plan

An important next step in implementing the Community Development Plan is to hold public forums to present the key findings and recommendations of the Plan. These forums could be a mix of formal and informal gatherings. As part of these meetings, residents will be asked to help prioritize the Plan recommendations and to identify which they consider the most important for the Town to pursue first.

It is important to involve additional residents in further discussions on development issues and the need to balance open space protection and development, including what additional parts of town should be considered for permanent open space protection and which areas should be considered for future growth. The Open Space Committee and other town boards and committees should be involved in these discussions as well.

It is particularly essential for other town boards and additional residents to be included in any discussions of potential zoning changes to reflect the recommendations of the Community Development Plan. One key concept supported by the Community Development Plan Committee is to establish traditional neighborhood districts that allow a mix of residential and business uses, and higher development densities. The Wendell Depot and Wendell Center (town common/Town Hall) areas have been proposed as potential sites for these neighborhood districts.