

## 5. Growth and Development Patterns

Norton has continued to make progress in balancing growth with the conservation and preservation of areas of significant cultural, historic, and natural resource value, both through the efforts of its Conservation Commission and in conjunction with partners such as the Land Preservation Society of Norton and the Nature Conservancy. In addition, the Planning Department is conducting a comprehensive review of the town's zoning and land use rules and regulations. The town is also working with SRPEDD on a regional land use/build-out study, and is in the process of developing a Complete Streets program, also with the assistance of SRPEDD.

The Massachusetts Audubon Society's Losing Ground: Planning for Resilience report (2014), contains a statistical profile of land use trends in all 351 cities and towns in Massachusetts between 2005 and 2013. In the context of the Audubon report, natural land is defined as forest, wetland, and water; open land is defined as agricultural areas, bare soil, or low vegetation, and; developed land includes low density residential and commercial/industrial/high density residential development. Most of this recent completed and planned larger-scale development in Norton is related to its major roads and proximity and connections to the Rte. 495 corridor.

According to data in the Losing Ground report, between 2005 and 2013, Norton experienced 113 acres of new development. This development included the conversion of 51 acres of natural land and the conversion of 62 acres of open land. Norton did manage to protect an additional 227 acres between 2005-2013, despite the economic challenges present in the country as a whole. Since the publication of the Losing Ground report in 2014, the town, in conjunction with the conservation partners mentioned above, has added significant properties in the Crane Farm Preserve (40 acres) and the Erikson Conservation Land (21 acres). Presently, approximately 24% of Norton's land area is permanently protected.

The Crane Farm, mentioned above, is also home to a 3-acre Community Supported Agricultural (CSA) venture, Second Nature Farm. The land is leased by Adam Tedeschi, who started Second Nature Farm in 2009. Second Nature grows Certified Naturally Grown vegetables (does not use synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, or genetically modified organisms – GMOs).

Overall, the amount of land in active agriculture, while still significant, has been in decline in southeastern Massachusetts for several decades. This decline, both in Norton and other communities throughout southeastern Massachusetts, reflects the region's aging farming population and the trends in the lifestyle choices of their heirs. Many older farmers are retiring and their farms are not being retained for agricultural purposes by their heirs. For those who do continue to farm the land, diversification, value-added products, and specialty crops have made agriculture an economically viable pursuit.

In Norton, significant amounts of long-time, family owned and operated farmland have become vulnerable to development. In 2017, the Houghton Farm, on Rte. 123, in very close proximity to Rte. 495, was, after a lengthy debate, rezoned from residential to commercial at Spring Town Meeting to accommodate industrial development on the 190-acre site. Houghton Farm was previously one of the priority areas targeted for conservation by the Town and its conservation partners, but had always been considered for commercial/industrial use because of its proximity to Rte. 495.

Items in *italics* are included in the Glossary found in Section 12.

## *Infrastructure*

### a) Transportation

Several important transportation routes and systems either traverse or skirt Norton. State Routes 140 (running north-south) and 123 (running east-west) are major bisectors of the Town. Interstate 495 (running north-south) also passes through the northern portion of Norton, with an interchange located in the northeast portion of town at Leonard Street (Rte. 123). A second 495 interchange is located in the north-central portion of town at Rte. 140. These routes all make Norton very accessible to motorists throughout the region and beyond. The Norton Highway Department maintains approximately 109 miles of roadway.

The MBTA Commuter Rail has stations in both Mansfield and Attleboro that can serve the Norton area. Since the mid 1990's, the MBTA has engaged in a very long, studied, and at times, controversial planning process to restore commuter rail service between Fall River, New Bedford, and South Station in Boston. This process took shape in the form of the South Coast Rail Corridor Plan (2009). The route alignment plan has been vetted publicly through two extensive federal, state, and local review processes. The preferred alignment would bring the rail from Boston, through Stoughton, Easton, and Taunton before splitting off to New Bedford and continuing on to Fall River. Some preparation work for the proposed rail expansion has been done in New Bedford and Fall River, at the ends of the line, but the entire project may not be realized (pending funding) until 2029 or later. In 2017, a second alternative, referred to as Phase I, proposed construction of a Middleboro connector along what is now an existing freight line, to bring passengers up from Fall River. This project is also in the planning stages.

The Greater Attleboro Taunton Regional Authority, GATRA, headquartered in neighboring Taunton, is the local transit agency, and provides direct service to the Route 6 commercial center. GATRA also provides pick-up/demand ride services based upon eligibility.

Norton is also in the process of design and construction of a multi-modal trail (bike, pedestrian, equestrian) along the Mansfield Sewer right-of-way, with a few sections of on-road lanes where the right-of-way either has wetland issues or gaps. The "Norton Rai Trail" will extend the existing World War II Memorial Trail in Mansfield. When completed, the four (4) mile Norton portion of the trail will provide a connection between the Mansfield Commuter Rail Station and the Myles Standish Industrial Park on the Norton- Taunton municipal boundary. The trail will feature a paved ten (10) foot wide multi-use trail with a parallel five (5) foot wide unpaved equestrian trail, similar to the Mansfield portion. This project is being coordinated with the Mass DOT by the local Norton Alternative Transportation Committee.

### b) Water

The Norton Water Department provides 1.3 million gallons per day to its customers. All of Norton's drinking water comes from the Canoe River Sole Source Aquifer in the Taunton River Basin. Norton, Mansfield, Sharon, Easton, and Foxboro all derive some portion of their respective water supplies from the Canoe River Aquifer. The five towns are also members of the Canoe River Aquifer Advisory Committee, a municipally appointed regional stewardship organization that works to promote public awareness and protection of this water resource.

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The Norton water supply distribution system consists of five (5) gravel-packed wells, four (4) storage facilities that hold a combined 5.85 million gallons of water, and approximately 120 miles of water main. All of the wells are located within the Town's Water Resources Protection District.

The Town has had a history of water discoloration problems over the years. These problems stem from the presence of manganese and iron in the water system. Town officials have met with staff from the Mass DEP and EPA Region I in order to address the problem. The Town is in the process of siting, designing, and constructing a Water Treatment Facility to treat the manganese and iron problem. The DEP has already approved plant construction. The plant construction is expected to be completed in 2019.

c) Sewer (*courtesy of the Mansfield, Foxborough, Norton Regional Wastewater District*)

The communities of Mansfield, Foxborough, and Norton approved an agreement establishing the MFN Regional Wastewater District which took effect on July 1, 2014, following approval at each municipal Annual Town Meeting. The District is overseen by a seven (7) member Commission (22 members each from Norton and Foxboro, and 3 from Mansfield, whose staff operates the regional treatment facility).

Located in Norton, adjacent to the Myles Standish Industrial Park, the MFN Regional Wastewater Facility is currently a 3.14 million gallon-per-day(MGD) advanced wastewater treatment facility that uses nature's own biological means of purification, but in a faster, more concentrated way. The facility treats wastewater and septage from Mansfield, Foxborough, and Norton (Easton was recently allotted some limited capacity in the facility as well, by agreement of the District Commission). The facility discharges treated effluent to the Three Mile River, which flows to the Narragansett Bay via the Taunton River. In 2014, the facility treated approximately 812 million gallons of wastewater.

The Environmental Protection Agency issued a new National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Permit for the MFN facility that tightened the allowable limits on the discharge of nitrogen and phosphorous in the waste stream. In order to comply with the new limits, the District developed an engineering and design plan for upgrades to the existing wastewater treatment facility. The District applied for, and received, funding through the MA Department of Environmental Protection's State Revolving Loan Fund Program (SRF) for water pollution abatement to offset a majority of the cost of the facility upgrade. The improvements to the facility will also include an expansion of capacity to 4.14 MGD. The groundbreaking for the new construction took place in August of 2016 and is anticipated to take 28 months to complete. As of the fall of 2017, the project is approximately 45% complete.

The improvements to the wastewater facility will allow Norton to undertake the first major sewer project in town for many years. At the Norton Annual Town Meeting in May of 2017, voters approved \$3.32 million to provide sewer service to Woodland Meadows (senior housing complex) and two schools, all with septic system problems. The new sewer line would travel up Route 123 (West Main Street) to a new pump station at Wheaton College, which recently finalized plans to tie into the MFN District system.

## *Long-Term Development Patterns*

### a) Zoning

In terms of impacting open space conservation and retention initiatives, three major zoning-related changes have occurred since the last Open Space and Recreation Plan was completed.

In July of 2009, Norton passed an amendment to its Floodplain Districts in order to comply with the new Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Draft (2009) and Final (2014) Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRM) for the town. The adaptation of supplemental language relevant to the updated maps and reconfigured flood zones provides an additional planning tool for flood prone/at risk areas as well as keeps local homeowners eligible for the state and federal flood insurance programs.

In May of 2017, the 190 acre Houghton Farm was rezoned from residential to commercial use to accommodate the development of an industrial park.

Another related effort undertaken by the town, in conjunction with the South Coast Rail Project, and tied to local zoning and planning protocol, is the designation and mapping of Priority Development (PDA) and Priority Protection Areas (PPA) within the community. This community driven planning exercise was originally conducted in 2008 by the three regional planning agencies serving the thirty-one (31) communities addressed in the South Coast Rail Corridor Plan. In 2013, the regional planning agencies, including SRPEDD, revisited the original process and choices as part of a five-year update process.

PDA's are areas that are appropriate for increased development or redevelopment due to several factors, including: good transportation access; available infrastructure (primarily sewer and water); an absence of environmental constraints, and; local support. PDA's can range from a single parcel to many acres, and can include small scale infill, commercial, industrial, mixed-use, transit facilities, or other such projects.

PPA's are areas that are important to protect due to the presence of significant natural or cultural resources, including, but not limited to: rare and endangered species habitats; areas critical to water supply; historic areas; scenic vistas, and; agricultural areas. PPA's can also vary greatly in size, from small species dependent areas, to large expanses of intact habitat. These sites may be candidates for protection through acquisition, conservation restriction, or other means.

A community's Priority Area designations can guide municipal decisions about zoning revisions, infrastructure investments, and conservation efforts. In addition, these Community Priority Area designations are used as the foundation for developing Regional and State Priority Area designations. Finally, in the fall of 2010, the Patrick Administration issued Executive Order 525 (E.O. 525) providing for the implementation of the South Coast Rail Corridor Plan and Corridor Map (including PPA's and PDA's) through state agency actions and investments. These state actions have the potential to help leverage local and private investments in the priority areas. **(see PPA-PDA: Norton Community Priority Areas, Appendix E)**

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## b) Build-Out Scenario

A *build-out* analysis answers one simple question for a city or town: “what is the remaining supply of development under existing zoning?” In other words, a build-out shows a community what would happen if development occurred on all of its current buildable land. This hypothetical scenario is extremely unlikely to occur – even in the distant future – because every city or town in Massachusetts is part of a larger regional, statewide, and national market where there are varying levels of competition and demand for housing and jobs.

That said, growth projections, while hypothetical, take into account information such as demographic trends. These measurable trends can be combined with zoning and land characteristics, market and demand analysis, and professional planning to allow cities and towns to establish a more realistic estimate of how, when, and where they will grow.

Norton’s existing zoning and planning regulations, in combination with state and federal laws, as well as the town’s current annual growth rate and amount of available land, are all considered in predicting what Norton could look like at full build-out (meaning, if all potentially developable land was built upon).

The potential build-out impacts for Norton, as presented in the original Executive Office of Environmental Affairs analysis completed in 2000, (and included in previous Open Space and Recreation Plans) have been updated to account for the latest and best data available from federal and state sources, and an in-depth analysis of local conditions (and changes since 2000). The results of the land use and build-out analysis are summarized below.

### *Summary of Build-Out Impacts 2017\**

Additional Developable Land Area (acres)	6.918 ac.
Additional Residential Units	2,349
Additional Residents	4,244
Additional Commercial/Industrial Buildable Floor Area (sq. ft.)	38,140,515 sq. ft.
Additional School Children, K-12, at Build-Out	767
Additional Residential Water Demand at Build-Out	381,960 gpd
Additional Commercial and Industrial Water Demand at Build-Out	1,617,000 gpd

*\*Remember - these build-out projections are based on the consumption of all developable land. There will undoubtedly be changes made to zoning, planning, and conservation regulations over time. There will be improvements made to the infrastructure that may well be accompanied by restrictions that limit growth potential (sewering capacity, available water supply, etc.). The build-out’s ultimate value is that it presents us with a worst case scenario while we still have time to make beneficial regulatory and policy changes.*

*2010 Data References applied: Average household size 2.69; occupancy rate of 95.2%; 18.1% of the population is enrolled in K-12 schools, both public and private; 6918 acres of developable land (or rather parcels with additional development potential; some may already be partially developed).*

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