

# Natick 360

Honoring Our Past. Planning Our Future



## Briefing on Natick Today

### Introduction

Natick 360 is the Town of Natick long-range strategic planning process. The process consists of 4 phases:

- *Phase I Natick: Our Community Yesterday and Today* will create information about Natick as it exists today
- *Phase II Natick: Our Shared Vision for the Future* will collect information from the public about what is valued in Natick and people's aspirations for the future
- *Phase III Natick: Our Strategic Options* will have town leaders work to create different scenarios to move Natick toward the future vision
- *Phase IV Natick: Our Strategic Choices* will give the public a chance to prioritize different strategic options

All phases of Natick 360 will be approved by the Sponsoring Boards<sup>1</sup> and the final strategic plan will be approved by Town Meeting. The process is being managed by a 9-person Strategic Planning Oversight Committee.<sup>2</sup>

This weekend, you are participating in the beginning of Phase II of the planning process: *Our Shared Vision for the Future*. To provide you with some context for the visioning workshops, we have extracted a few interesting facts about living and working in Natick from the Phase I research.<sup>3</sup> The complete Phase I report will be reviewed by the Sponsoring Boards and will be available to the public upon their approval.

### Natick is in a great location

Natick is a community of 32,170 people located 18 miles west of Boston. The town's location in the center of Metrowest Boston and its access to major transportation routes make it an attractive place to live and to work. Natick has many lakes and ponds, and has a portion of the Charles River coursing through the southern part of the town. The town has a long and distinguished history which is visible in many buildings and landscapes preserved throughout the community.

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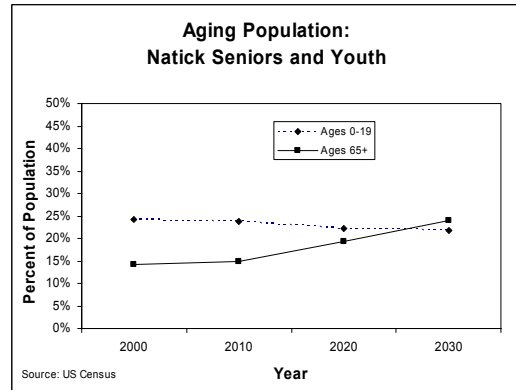
<sup>1</sup> The Sponsoring Boards for the Natick 360 process are the Natick Board of Selectmen, School Committee, Planning Board, Finance Committee, and Conservation Commission.

<sup>2</sup> The Strategic Planning Oversight Committee is Rosemary Driscoll, Terri Evans, Matthew Gardner, John Heerwagen, David Parish, George Richards, Craig Ross, Harlee Strauss, and Fred Witte.

<sup>3</sup> Phase 1 research has been conducted by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council extracting data from federal and state data sources.

## Natick's population is getting older

Like most of the United States, Natick's population is aging. The US Census is projecting that the percent of children in the Natick community will remain relatively constant in the future, but the percent of seniors will grow dramatically. Today, one in seven residents is a senior age 65 and older and 10% of Natick households consist of seniors living alone. In 20 years, about one in four Natick residents will be seniors.

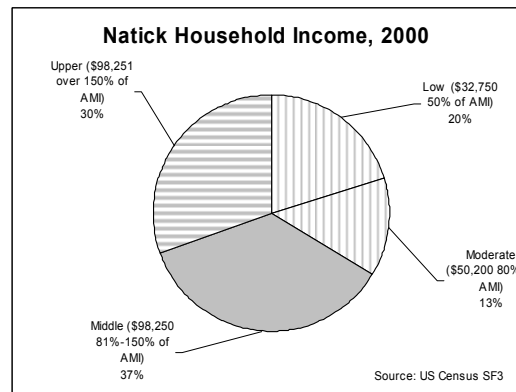


## Natick's population is highly educated

Sixty percent (60%) of Natick residents have a 2-year or 4-year college degree and 23% of Natick residents have a graduate degree. In contrast, communities in the Boston metropolitan region have 47% of residents with a 2-year or 4-year degree and only 18% with graduate degrees. The number of Natick residents with graduate degrees grew by 47% between 1990 and 2000.

## Natick is an economically diverse community

Residents of Natick have a broad range of incomes. More than 30% of the population is considered "high income".<sup>4</sup> At the same time, one-third of Natick households has income below the moderate-income threshold and potentially qualifies for subsidized housing assistance<sup>5</sup>. In addition, 2.8% of Natick residents live below the poverty level.



Examining income by age, households headed by seniors age 75+ have a median household income of \$27,415. By contrast, households headed by young adults under age 25 have a median household income of \$52,847 – the highest young adult income among Natick's benchmark peer communities.<sup>6</sup>

## Natick is becoming more culturally diverse

Following national and regional trends, Natick is becoming more culturally diverse. Almost 10% of Natick residents were born in a foreign country based on the 2000 census. This number is up from 7% of Natick residents in the 1990 census.

<sup>4</sup> US Dept of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) defines upper income households in Natick as those with household incomes above \$98,251 which is 150% of the area median income.

<sup>5</sup> HUD defines moderate and low income households in Natick as those below \$50,200 which is 80% of the area median income.

<sup>6</sup> Natick's peer group communities reported by Municipal Benchmarking are Arlington, Burlington, Braintree, Canton, Chelmsford, Dedham, Franklin, Lexington, Needham, Newton, North Andover, Northborough, Norwood, Milton, Reading, Shrewsbury, Wakefield, Walpole, Wellesley, and Westborough

## Natick is a family-oriented community

Sixty-four percent (64%) of Natick's 13,368 households are family households.<sup>7</sup> Thirty percent (30%) of households have kids under the age of 18. Approximately 5,236 school children live in Natick with 89% attending Natick Public Schools and 11% attending private schools.

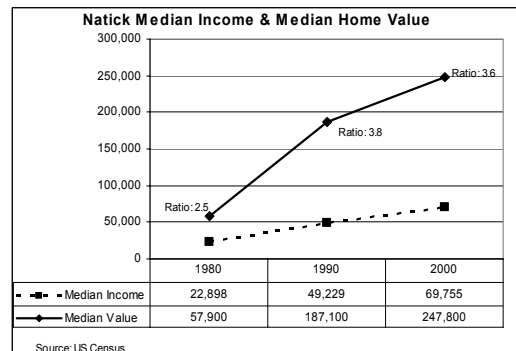
## In a very expensive region, Natick homes are relatively affordable

Natick home prices are 12-13% lower than other communities in the region. The median price for a single family home in Natick is \$449,400. Condominium prices, in particular, are affordable – averaging 29% lower than the region with a median price of \$239,250. However, low prices and the community's desirability have increased demand and since 2001, Natick home and condominium prices have risen faster than the region, on average. Natick, like most communities in the Boston region, is challenged to provide housing affordable to a broad range of incomes.

## Lack of affordable housing is changing the composition of the community

Being able to afford a home in Natick is increasingly difficult for all but the highest income buyers.

In 2000, the median home cost in Natick was 3.6 times higher than the median income in the community, up from 2.5 times income in 1980.<sup>8</sup> Natick has 718 affordable housing units compared to a state Chapter 40B standard of 1,337 units.<sup>9</sup> With more than 1,200 new units of condominium housing coming (see next section), Natick will add approximately 450 new affordable housing units. However, even with 450 new affordable units, the town will be short of the Chapter 40B 10% quota goal and will continue to be subject to 40B development.<sup>10</sup>



## High land values are driving condominium development

Developers are seeking high density development to offset high land costs. More than 1,200 condominium units are proposed to be developed in Natick in the next several years. Natick Center's HOOP zoning was designed to concentrate high density condominiums in the downtown area. However, until Natick meets the 10% affordable housing standard, the state's Chapter 40B legislation permits high density residential development on virtually any residential, commercial, or industrial parcel in Natick.

<sup>7</sup> A family household contains at least two persons -- the householder and at least one other person related to the householder by birth, marriage, or adoption (US Census)

<sup>8</sup> A rule of thumb for measuring affordability is that median home prices should not exceed 2.5 times the median household income. Natick has not been affordable by this measure since 1980.

<sup>9</sup> Chapter 40B, enacted in 1969, sets a standard for communities of 10% of all housing stock being designated as affordable (determined by area median income). To date, 47 cities and towns have achieved this standard. For communities falling below the 10% standard, developers have the ability to appeal to the state for permitting for residential development that includes 20-25% affordable units. According to the Natick Housing Plan, Natick currently has 5.1% of housing designated as affordable - well below the state's 10% standard.

<sup>10</sup> Natick Housing Plan 2006

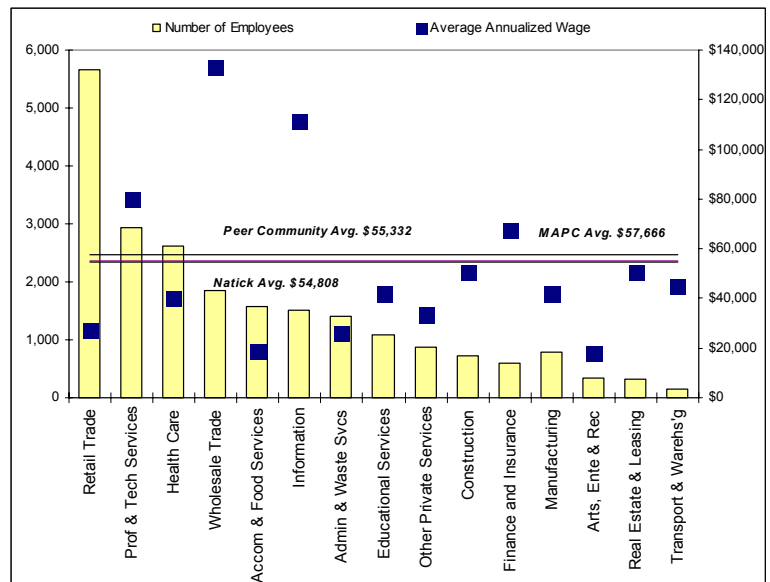
## Natick residents are well-employed

Approximately 18,500 residents in Natick are employed and Natick’s unemployment rate has been consistently lower than other communities in the region. Most of Natick’s residents (56%) work in management and professional jobs – a category that has grown by 37% since 1990. Another 24% of Natick residents work in sales and office jobs and 10% work in service jobs.

## Natick employers offer a wide range of jobs to the region

The largest employment category in Natick is retail – accounting for 25% of all jobs in the community. The retail jobs are concentrated in Natick’s Golden Triangle, which is the highest density retail district in the state and soon will be home to the largest mall in New England. While Natick has a large number of retail jobs, the wages for these jobs are low – averaging just \$27,193 per year.

Natick also has a large base of high paying jobs in professional services and information technology. Information technology jobs pay high wages (averaging \$111,282) and account for 6.8% of all jobs in Natick. Professional and technical service jobs are another large category accounting for 13.1% of all jobs in Natick and paying an average annual wage of \$79,864.



## More workers commute into Natick than commute out of town

More people commute into Natick (17,098) than commute out of Natick (13,765). The large number of local employers enables 23% of Natick’s working residents to work within the community. About 17% of Natick’s working residents commute to Boston and another 10% commute to Framingham.

Eighty-five percent (85%) of Natick’s working residents commute by car while 9% use public transportation. Natick’s two train stations board more passengers on the Worcester-Boston line than any other community.

Journey to Work 2000	
Natick Residents commuting to	% Working Residents
Natick	23%
Boston	17%
Framingham	10%
Wellesley	6%
Newton	4%
Cambridge	4%
Waltham	4%
Needham	2%
Marlborough	1%
Wayland	1%
All Others	27%

Source: US Census

## More to come

The Phase I report *Natick: Our Community Yesterday and Today* will contain a wealth of additional information about Natick’s town finances, traffic, recreational and cultural amenities, physical plan and zoning, and other useful information. Look for the report to be released soon after review by the Sponsoring Boards.