



Town of Bellingham 2020 Master Plan

Prepared by the Bellingham Master Plan Implementation Committee

Adopted December 2020

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Thank you!

The Town We Want...

To the Townspeople of Bellingham,

Over the past two years, the Master Plan Committee conducted a comprehensive review of our community to assess Bellingham's current and future conditions, opportunities, and challenges. The pages that follow are the culmination of our work together. We sincerely hope that this plan provides our present and future town leaders, and our fellow neighbors, with the information they need to make informed and thoughtful decisions in the years to come.

While developing this Master Plan, a recurring topic permeated much of our discussion. Namely, the challenge of maintaining Bellingham's historically low and affordable residential tax rates with the increasing cost of municipal services and preserving Bellingham's character and quality of life for its residents. Bellingham's residential tax burden is among the lowest in our region which, in part, reflects our Town's long held policy of prioritizing tax revenue through commercial development over increasing residential property taxes. The Town has historically relied on new revenue from commercial growth to support increases in the annual municipal budget. In fact, with the exception of the Spring 2020 Town Meeting, Bellingham never previously authorized a Proposition 2.5 override. Whether last Spring's override is an aberration, or a harbinger of things to come, is yet to be determined as several large expenditures loom ominously on the horizon in the form of unfunded mandates from the State and Federal governments as well as deferred maintenance on town roads, schools, and municipal infrastructure.

Bellingham's desire to increase its commercial base finds its origins in an earlier time in Bellingham's history when the Town enjoyed a much more rural character and faced limited opportunities for commercial investment. However, Bellingham is now a much-desired area for commercial investment due to its proximity to major transportation corridors as well as the Town's ongoing commitment to supporting and partnering with businesses in ways that improve both the community and the businesses long-term growth.

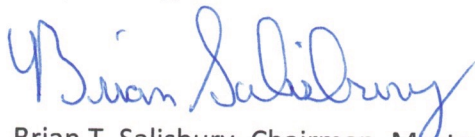
As such, Bellingham experienced a steady increase in commercial development over the past decade culminating in the recent development of large tracts of previously undeveloped industrially zoned parcels of land along Maple Street and Route 140. Bellingham also saw an increase in residential home construction including several large residential developments actively under construction or currently being permitted.

The cumulative effect of Bellingham transitioning from a once rural town to a more urban community, and the acceleration of that development over the past several years, have led many residents to question whether the Town should reexamine the long-term sustainability of continuing to rely so heavily on future commercial development to support increases in the annual municipal budget. There is now a recognition amongst a growing number of residents that this model should be updated to reflect a changing set of priorities that have emerged over

the past decade that emphasizes alternative forms of revenue and a greater willingness to make strategic investments to preserve Bellingham's natural environment, expand public and recreational spaces, improve the Town's long underfunded infrastructure and accessibility, increase educational opportunities, and expand community services. The challenge for Bellingham over the next decade will be to find the right balance between these two models as our Town continues to evolve and budgetary and land use pressures continue to increase.

Bellingham has much to be proud of and is positioned well for the next ten years due in no small part to the hard work and commitment of our Town boards and staff. The Committee would like to thank all the department heads, town leaders, board members, and our fellow neighbors who have assisted us in preparing the 2020 Master Plan. The committee would also like to recognize and extend a special thank you to James Kupfer, our Town Planner, who spearheaded this project over two long years. The Committee is grateful for his guidance and hard work.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Brian Salisbury". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Brian" and last name "Salisbury" clearly legible.

Brian T. Salisbury, Chairman, Master Plan Implementation Committee



Photos courtesy of the Bellingham Bulletin

INTRODUCTION

In accordance with the Bellingham Town Charter, adopted on May 26, 2004, the Planning Board “shall provide for the review of the comprehensive master plan every ten years, setting forth in graphic and textual form policies governing the future growth and development of the town's economic, developmental and human service needs.” In 2018, the Bellingham Planning Board recommenced the Master Plan Implementation Committee in order to facilitate the update to the 2010 Master Plan. A Master Plan is a long-term, comprehensive document that helps the residents and governing bodies of a community understand: current conditions and issues; the direction a community wants to go; and the specific actions needed in order to get there. According to Massachusetts General Law Chapter 41A Section 81D, Master Plans are: “A statement through text, maps, illustrations or other forms of communication that is designed to provide a basis for decision making regarding the long-term physical development of the municipality...”

A master plan can also:

- Be a process for deciding what to do, and how, when, why, and where to do it;
- Include a comprehensive analysis of all aspects of community development;
- Work to improve the welfare of people and their communities;
- Assist to create a community that offers better choices for where and how people live;
- Provide recommendations and an action plan, typically for a ten-year implementation period.

Elements of the Master Plan include:

- Land Use;
- Natural, Open Space and Recreation;
- Cultural and Historic Resources;
- Transportation;
- Housing;
- Economic Development; and
- Community Services and Facilities.

In addition, the 2020 Master Plan contains two added Elements: the Goals and Objectives and an Action Plan. These added elements organize the intended results into a framework and a path to implement the plan and fulfill each of the stated goals.

The Master Plan is intended to be a guide for the Town moving forward. Continually discussing these elements in the Town's land use decision process and organizing them into a plan helps to produce consistent, informed, and predictable use of our finite resources. These plans also help communities preserve their appearance and character, and promote efficient and effective economic development. While a lot of work went in to developing this plan, it is intended to be a living document that can expand and contract as the Town and society evolves over the next decade.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TIMELINE & ACTIVITIES

In January 2019, the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) awarded the Town of Bellingham a technical assistance grant for community engagement to support the town's master plan update process. Bellingham provided in-kind services. James S. Kupfer, MPA, AICP, the Bellingham Town Planner, acted as the local point of contact. He helped coordinate meetings, helped with community engagement activities and outreach initiatives, and assisted in the analysis of the data and community feedback. He and the Master Plan Implementation Committee played key roles in supporting MAPC in the public engagement effort.

Together, over five months, MAPC, Mr. Kupfer, and the Master Plan Implementation Committee established a thoughtful, inclusive vision and set of values that will guide the master plan update and the town's goals and priorities for the next ten years.

Engagement activities included several meetings with the Master Plan Implementation Committee, a community survey, and a public open house event. These allowed community members to share insights and feedback with members of the Master Plan Implementation Committee and the Bellingham Planning Department. Community members' ideas and statements are documented in this report, and they form the foundation of the vision and other elements of the Bellingham Master Plan.

The community survey collected over 300 responses. Fewer people participated in the open house, but those who did had in-depth conversations and gave some comprehensive feedback. Thanks to the public participation, the Vision and Values statement reflects the values community members hope will guide the town into the future.

In addition, the Committee conducted an updated recreation and open space survey. This survey built upon the 2018 survey completed for the Open Space Plan. This survey directly targeted stakeholders and decision makers and their responses helped guide those applicable chapters.

VISION AND VALUES STATEMENT

Bellingham is considered a maturing New England Town with ideal location. Community members are proud of the town's character, its family-friendly culture, emphasis on education, and its recreational and natural resources. These elements elevate the town's healthy quality of life and help to build strong relationships between residents.

Bellingham was historically a small working-class town. Residents consider it affordable and desirable. While Bellingham has benefited from industrial and economic growth, it still retains a small town feel today.

Today, Bellingham is at a crossroads regarding the region's growth, opportunities, and challenges. Residents want the town to remain family friendly, with ability to age in place, and encourage healthy lifestyles. They want it to value education, and to continue the town's stable and managed growth trajectory.

Community members' vision and values have been given a great deal of weight in Bellingham's Master Planning process and should continue to be considered during the implementation of the plan.

BELLINGHAM'S ASPIRATIONS

1. Bellingham remains a welcoming, affordable, and family friendly hometown. Residents of diverse ages, backgrounds, and abilities thrive.
2. Opportunities to improve quality of life for youth, the elderly, and families are expanded and developed.
3. Travel is more convenient, accessible, and multimodal. Transportation options in town include safe and reliable ways to bike, walk, access public transit, and drive.
4. A balanced approach to growth is reflected in planning and development. A balance is found between attracting new businesses, supporting established businesses, managing natural resources, and creating and maintaining appropriate character in new development as well with caring for open space.
5. Bellingham is an excellent town in which to start and operate a business. A walkable village feel in the town center is supported by a healthy economic atmosphere that includes family-owned and small businesses.
6. The town finds opportunities to promote varied neighborhood characteristics. Housing options are diverse and more affordable.
7. The town strengthens recreational options and improves facilities, parks, fields, gathering spaces for Bellingham residents.
8. Education becomes a greater priority, and every student has opportunities to learn and thrive.
9. Natural resources are cared for. Sustainability, energy efficiency, and resiliency are all priorities.
10. Town government is accessible and responsive to all community members.
11. Civic and community engagement is promoted and encouraged by town leadership, in the school system, and is practiced by residents.

Land Use History

The Town of Bellingham is eight miles long, two miles wide at its southern end and three miles wide at the northern end with a land area of 18.55 square miles. It is surrounded by seven Massachusetts towns and the Rhode Island state line.

1636 – 1718 Pre Colonial

During the 17th century, the Town of Bellingham originated as part of the Dedham grant of 1636. The original grant stretched from the border of Boston to Rhode Island. It included the present-day communities of Natick, Wellesley, Needham, Dover, Westwood, Norwood, Walpole, Medfield, Millis, Medway, Norfolk, Franklin, Bellingham, Wrentham, and Plainville. Bellingham was one of the farthest points of the grant and was known as unclaimed area between the Towns of Mendon and Wrentham. Different Native American groups occupied this region, and Bellingham was known to serve as a buffer between these groups during the early years. Bellingham settled in an area between the Charles River to the North and the Blackstone River drainage basin to the south. Primary transportation routes began to form as native trails along Hartford Avenue, Grove Street and Mechanic Street which all follow the Charles River. This area was also located on rolling lowland, glacial outwash plain and other outwash that left many deposits of sand and gravel which will later shape the future of Bellingham in another way.

European settlement began in the early Colonial Period, first in an area that was part of Mendon and then to the south in what was once Dedham and lastly to the north in an area along the Charles River purchased from the Native Americans. The King Philip's War in the early 1670's delayed much of the early settlement. As previously noted, the area known as Bellingham was a buffer between different tribes and with the war active the territory kept European newcomers away. In 1675, the peak of the chaos occurred when every house in nearby Mendon was burned and people fled through Bellingham towards Boston.

As the war concluded, the area of Bellingham began to settle. In the late 1600's Medfield joined Mendon "for the settling of the Common Rode way from town to town" which became part of the central road through Hartford from Boston to New York along what is now Hartford Avenue in Bellingham. The first European land owners were in the area around Beaver Pond in what was then Mendon. In 1685 Edward Rawson, the Puritan Secretary of the Colony, purchased and had confirmed by the Colonial Legislature, a tract of land of over 600 acres which became known as Rawson's Farm from Thomas Awassamag, in the current areas of Caryville and North Bellingham and made up about a third of the new town of Bellingham. In 1691 the Dedham selectmen sent two men to explore the land of now Bellingham and in 1698, the "proprietors of the common or undivided lands of Dedham" met and were informed that they contained about twenty-one hundred acres. They agreed to draw lots of about one hundred acres each. Jacob Bartlett and Nicholas Cook were the first two men granted tracts in Bellingham. Another nine families came within the next ten years and another forty men soon thereafter.

1719 – 1821 Start of a New Town

Bellingham remained a portion of Dedham until its incorporation in 1719 and was the last town incorporated in what is now Norfolk County. The new town of Bellingham was composed of three portions: Rawson's Farm, a small portion of Mendon, and the remaining two-thirds from Dedham, named after Sir Richard Bellingham, third governor of Massachusetts Bay. The town contained approximately forty families at the time of incorporation. The Town of Bellingham's uniqueness came in the form of its religious diversity. While in order to petition the General Court a Congregational Church must be supported, Bellingham contained Baptist and Quaker who resided in the area of Bellingham for many years prior and this would be an ongoing conflict as the Town grew.

In March of 1720, the original families held the first town meeting and on the agenda was the act to establish the first meeting house on what is now Blackstone Street (across from middle school) which stood until 1774 and "was the dividing point for one constable notified all inhabitants south of the meeting house and one to the north". In 1737 a free school was approved. The Open Town Meeting and Selectmen were leading the newly formed Bellingham to steady growth.

In 1740, the southern part of Bellingham, where the predominately Universalists society met, began to become restless. Residents discovered that the neighboring community to the south in Rhode Island paid only half as much in taxes and sent a petition to Rhode Island to join them. Massachusetts refused Rhode Island's offer. Around that time, elsewhere in Bellingham a group of families came together to form the fourth Baptist Church in Massachusetts. This church grew steadily and at the time that the first meeting house could no longer be used, the Baptist Church became the Town meeting house, though the Congregational Church was the Town sponsored church.

By 1765 the population of the town was 462 persons in 82 families and 72 houses. Bellingham had an agrarian economy in its earliest days but as the original Dedham explorers stated, the land was generally poor, although most residents were still farmers. The farmers were working with cattle and sheep grazing and any other form of farming that could help them to survive. As Bellingham grew the Town was no longer north and south but north, south and center. In 1767, town warrants were to be posted "in the three meeting houses in town; besides the old original one and that of the Baptists there was another at the South End which never was finished, and used by Universalists and later as a tavern, at Crooks Corner".

Of course, on July 4, 1776, Bellingham was one of many who voted to separate from England. The 1776 town warrant was now entitled "The Government and People of Massachusetts Bay."

An in-depth description of the Bellingham was written in a local paper in 1784: "Bellingham There is but one pond, beaver dam pond, remarkable for depth of water and miry shores almost surrounded by a cedar swamp. Into Charles River flow three small streams, North Branch, Stall Brook, Beaver Dam Brook. Peter's River and Bunge Brook in the south part empty at Providence. There are two grist mills, two saw mills and one fulling mill but of little or no use except in winter for want of water, nor all used even then. Roads are tolerably good but in some places sandy. The trade is small; people depend on the land and some mechanical employments. The number of farms is about 80. The inhabitants are about equally

divided between the Congregational and Baptist persuasions.” This description highlights once again the separation between the center and north of Bellingham from the south given its omission.

In 1802, a formal town hall was built and stands as it does today. At this point seven hundred and six residents claimed Bellingham as home. That year was also significant because Town Meeting, on December 24th, 1802, voted to procure the preaching of the Baptist denomination in the meeting house, and to raise a sum for the support of a minister. Over the course of the 18th century the three societies had been living amongst one another (Universalists, Baptist, and Congregational). May 1821, a committee of nine men, three from each religion formed to schedule which religion can use the meeting house and when. Given that the Town used the Baptist church for many years as their meeting house "the relation with the Town was so close that even the witnesses from the ten men who built the building did not agree whether it belonged to the town or the Baptists." The three groups agreed to use the meeting house at different times, separately.

At this point in the early 1820s the population had now climbed to one thousand thirty four.

1821- 1862 - Town Government Begins to Formalize

The 1820s brought new development and expansion of government. Bellingham started as a farming town but by 1828 Bellingham was “an active and flourishing manufacturing town.” By this time three cotton mills and one wool mill were established along the Charles River in North Bellingham. Boot and shoe production contributed to the local economy by 1830. During this time a horse-drawn wagon made a regular route from Milford to Boston selling boots and shoes. Several free standing wooden commercial structures were built along the main corridors of Hartford Avenue and at the Town Center and wide spread construction of cottages, mostly near the mills sprung up.

At this time local government became more active and defined. From this point Bellingham had a Board of Selectmen, Moderator, Town Clerk, Treasurer, Overseer of the Poor, Constable and few other positions. In 1832, it was voted to do all town business annually at the March meeting only. This still mostly holds true with in the Town Charter today. In 1836, the Town allocated funds on inoculation for small pox and built a temporary hospital at the town farm. In 1840, the town voted that the Selectmen should visit all manufacturing establishments and remove anything injurious to health. In 1841, there were nine schools with up to two hundred and seventy three pupils. In 1843, the Board of Health was established. In 1849, the first Board of Auditors was chosen and a school committee of three men was active. And in 1855, a town liquor agent was chosen.

Over the course of the thirty years from 1820 to 1850 the population of Bellingham only rose slightly to 1,281. Despite the limited population growth Bellingham was truly evolving as a Town.

1863 – 1969 Evolution from Agrarian to Suburb

North Bellingham was stimulated by the arrival of the New York and New England Railroad in 1863. This rail line entered the town from Medway and ran east to west through North Bellingham to Mendon. The railroad provided easy connectivity for the mills to materials and delivery of goods. By 1876, a depot,

store and post office stood along the tracks northwest of the mills on Maple Street. The mills became an important component of Bellingham's economy during the Civil War. In 1864 this industry employed more people than any other industry in town. However, the end of the war also led to the rapid collapse of this industry.

Beginning in the mid to late 1800's Bellingham began to see a large influx of foreign born populations. Irish and French Canadian were among the largest groups. 1895, St Brandan's Roman Catholic Church was built and a large population of Irish catholic began living in or near Bellingham. Many French, French Canadian and Polish families located to South Bellingham just outside of Woonsocket. The populations of Bellingham at this time maintained settlement concentrations around North Bellingham along Hartford Avenue, North Main Street, Center Street, South Main Street, and along Wrentham Road. South Bellingham however, grew as a suburb of now the City of Woonsocket by 1900.

The turn of the century brought new excitement to Bellingham. A state highway begun at Crooks Corner running north to south. New school houses began to spring up in both north and south Bellingham. Telephone, electric lights and gas lines began to reach much of Bellingham. Pedestrian trolley service was brought to Bellingham in 1897. The first line, the Milford, Holliston and Framingham Street Railway Company, ran from Medway through north Bellingham and into Milford. In 1898, the Milford, Attleboro and Woonsocket Street Railway Company established lines in Bellingham. The Railway Company expanded its ownership in town with the purchase of Silver Lake and surrounding acreage in 1899. The Railway built a 1,200-seat summer theater in 1900. During the summer of that year, the company constructed a carousel and a bridge connecting the shore with the island.

With the influx in technology, infrastructure, entertainment and jobs a steady increase in population continued and in just under 200 years Bellingham had gone from the 40 founding families to 1,953 residents in 1915. These residents began to move away from the traditional farm land and instead welcomed the arrival of suburban development and the growing importance of automobiles. Much of the development in the north and center continued to stay along the major transportation corridors. The southern portion of town experienced suburban and commercial development oriented towards Woonsocket bringing some three-deckers and multifamily housing.

As the 20th century progressed the automobile shaped Bellingham's growth. The North Bellingham mill remained in operation until the mid-twentieth century. The Caryville mill continued to operate into the 1990's. However, jobs began to leave to established hubs such as Boston, Providence and Worcester. Bellingham being thirty miles from each provided for a convenient commute. Additionally, the trolley became a short lived proposition. Ridership declined significantly by the early 1920's and fires caused Silver Lake amusements to suffer loses that it never recovered from. In 1924 the trolley ceased operation in Bellingham.

Between 1940 and 1970, Bellingham experienced postwar economic development similar to other towns in the state. A town of 5,421 people in 1955 skyrocketed to nearly 14,000 in 1970. Bellingham officially became a bedroom community. Subdivisions were established in the 1960s, including Pilgrim Village, located in North Bellingham, Scott Hill Acres, located off South Main Street, and Green Acres,

located off Center Street, both constructed in 1958 and the largest, a Campanelli development named Wethersfield, in 1960, located off North Main Street. These subdivisions all contained modest single family homes on small lots. At this point only one active farm remained.

Once again, as the town grew so did local government. Bellingham has kept the traditional open town meeting government and Board of Selectmen but now had several departments to provide the day to day services a suburban community now needs such as police, fire, library, public works, clerk, town administrator, assessor, treasurer, inspectional services and a robust parks and recreation. Zoning was adopted in 1960 to better regulate land uses as residents resided closer together.

1970 – Present Suburban Sprawl

By 1970, the easy access to Bellingham resulting from the completion of Interstate 495 brought significant commercial development as well as additional suburban residential development. Several large parcels of land in North Bellingham, near the 495 interchange, were developed with national chain retail stores and large retail strip centers. No longer a farming community, most remaining large undeveloped lots were utilized for gravel removal operations over the next thirty years. This played a significant role in reshaping Bellingham's topography as the town, from its first discovery, was known for its poor farming soils but contained excellent sandy material.

Bellingham became fairly proactive in the decades to come after the first major shift in development. 4,297 total housing units now existed in Bellingham in 1980 housing approximately 14,300 residents. 81 percent of those units were single family, much of the multifamily resided in South Bellingham that provided the remnants from the working community of Woonsocket. The town consolidated schools and established three elementary schools with an enrollment up to 3,353. A centralized fire station and library was built.

Bellingham, historically a community of modest means, continued to seek and promote a low cost of living. In order to maintain this, the Board of Selectmen recognized the newly found amenities such as Interstate 495 and proximity to Interstate 95 and established an Industrial Development Commission to market the town to industry to retain a lower tax rate for its residents. In 1980, 1.8 percent of the land was used for industrial and 8.5 percent was used for commercial purposes. By 1990, those numbers increased to 5.32 percent and 11.89 percent, respectively, bringing many small manufacturing jobs, while adding less than 900 new homes. The Town of Bellingham was now maintaining a 10 million dollar annual budget in 1990.

Development did not slow in the region in the 1990's and 2000's and because of this the Army Corp of Engineers sought out land to preserve as flood storage along the Charles River, now commonly known as the Charles River Meadowlands. Nearly 335 acres of land area is currently utilized between Bellingham and abutting Franklin in order to manage flood waters. In Bellingham, by 2000, nearly 27 percent of the Town was sewered and much of the town has town public water sources. The median single family home price jumped dramatically from \$153,000 in 1998 to \$320,000 in 2005. The three original church groups still remain prominent along with the Roman Catholic Church. Additional

industrial found its way to Bellingham, including two power plants and significant retail continued around the nearby highway.

In 2004, open town meeting voted to adopt Home Rule Charter preserving the original democratic structure founded nearly 300 years ago.

Between 2000 and 2010, Bellingham experienced modest population growth, increasing by just seven percent to 16,332 residents and the number of households increased by only 11 percent to 6,155. During that time, the population has aged and household size has shrunk, as is the case in many communities in the region. The percentage of residents between 55 to 64 years old increased by 49 percent which required the town to invest in a new senior center. At the same time, school enrollment in town decreased by nearly 12 percent between 2003 and 2014. In response, the town demolished one of the three elementary schools and consolidated districts once again in 2015.

Today Bellingham is a community of nearly 17,000 residents and a 55 million dollar annual budget. The Town has a mix of industry, major distribution centers, as well as nearly 1,000,000 square feet of retail which is located off of Interstate 495. Bellingham hosts approximately 6,214 jobs, but much like the early 20th century has witnessed a significant reduction in manufacturing jobs. Bellingham maintains a very modest residential tax rate relative to the region, stemming from approximately 28 percent of town revenues generated from the commercial base, which is higher than any of its neighboring towns, and housing costs that still remain below those closer to Boston.

However, as Bellingham changes, much stays the same. The Board of Selectmen still issue the warrant for Annual Open Town Meeting each year and post in public buildings throughout town. The 1802 Town Hall, recently refurbished, still looks down upon the residents. The main corridors of Hartford Avenue, Mechanic Street and Highway Route 126 still are the main ways through town. A few remaining mills still stand along the Charles River which still cuts through town. Many residents on Saturday or Sunday find themselves at one of the prominent religious buildings, the same three who were present in the founding years, as well as the Roman Catholic Church. Remnants of the old abandon rail lines can be found while walking along the recently built bike trail along the old rail bed, and a marker still stands on High Street where the Baptist Church that doubled as a meeting house once stood.

Today, as we write this master plan, Bellingham is in the midst of a generational pandemic that has far reaching consequences across the globe. Much like in the 1830 smallpox concern, local officials are once again taking the lead and assisting the community as we get through this together. The Selectmen have an established Local Action Emergency Committee, led by the Deputy Fire Chief and Town Administrator that has worked tirelessly with all departments, committees and the general public to temper the impacts to Bellingham. We will not know the lasting effects this pandemic may have on Bellingham and the Commonwealth but the community has done and will continue to do everything it can to make sure post pandemic Bellingham is as vibrant and welcoming as it always has been.

LAND USE GROWTH

BACKGROUND

Land use refers to the arrangement of residential, commercial, industrial, agricultural and other development activities on the land as well as the many strategies used to protect land from development activities. Of Bellingham's total area of approximately 12,000 acres, almost 80 percent has been either subdivided and developed for roads, homes, stores, office buildings, warehouses, or protected through various open space protections to preserve natural landscape of ponds, rivers, streams, wetlands, forests and grasslands.

To dig deeper, Bellingham recently concluded an impervious analysis study of all the developed surface area in the community. The analysis discovered that nearly 41,177,347 square feet or approximately 945 acres of land have been improved upon by some form of impervious surface. However, Bellingham over the years has been cognizant of this and has required significant protections along the way. Between the various conservation entities, Bellingham currently has nearly 1,764 acres of protected open space.

Historically Bellingham has had three distinct growth areas in the north, center, and south. Land development, mostly in the center and north has exploded upon recovering from the great recession. Not even an active global pandemic has slowed down construction. Building permits are being issued at record highs, and land use hearings continue despite the pandemic persisting through 2020.

Permit Year	Building Permits	New Residential	New Commercial/ Industrial
2010	515	12	1
2011	598	20	0
2012	652	22	0
2013	571	17	1
2014	745	40	3
2015	1032	39	1
2016	1043	41	1
2017	972	21	4
2018	1089	53	3
2019	1118	54	8
2020*	523	19	2
*2020 permits include from January through May only.			
Total	8858	338	24

Building Permits by Year, Bellingham Building Department, 2020

The 2010 Master Plan closely analyzed available land that could potentially see development and concluded that, *"out of Bellingham's approximately 12,000 acres, about 2,848 acres or 23.56% is open for development. The majority of this is in the agricultural (1240 acres) and industrial zones (588 acres)"*. However, the 2010 plan further concluded that, *"Selective zoning changes will need to be made to*

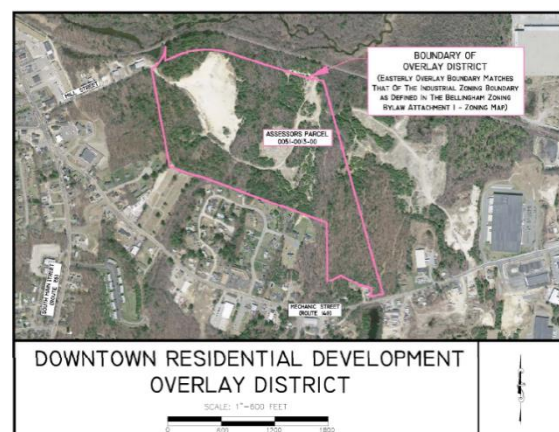
maximize development potential in all zones while still trying to maintain other quality of life issues such as wetlands and open space”.

This is a very astute observation that has held true. Traditional development patterns no longer meet the needs of developers and homeowners. Bellingham and the region no longer see two-acre developments. In fact, it is rare that an acre residential subdivision is proposed. Most developments are searching for land use code that will allow for dense walkable residential neighborhoods on small lots with recreational or open space nearby. Without proper zoning code that truly reflects the needs and desires of the community, landowners seeking full value for their land will pursue land uses not in align with the towns goals and objectives which may harm our quality of life and burden the town’s infrastructure.

In fact, this isn’t a new phenomenon, looking back, it is clear that up zoning has strangled new growth in Bellingham. One- and two-acre single family zoning has limited housing options for young families and an aging population seeking alternatives to their existing single-family homes in town. Additionally, the zoning map has not been updated significantly in 50 years creating a mismatch of uses to infrastructure, with industrial abutting residential homes, and to ripe undeveloped lots with incompatible zoning.

Recognizing this issue, the Planning Board took on a rezoning initiative in 2018. The Board sought to begin the process of updating the aging zoning map. The Board focused on three locations, Maple Street, Farm Street and Depot Street. With each location the Board looked to match the new zoning with the surrounding uses as well as infrastructure in place. After a lengthy public process, Annual Town Meeting overwhelmingly supported both the Farm Street and Maple Street rezoning efforts to allow for residential uses along both scenic roads. The hope is for long term revitalization of these once truly scenic roads. However, Depot Street, an industrial corridor surrounded by warehouse, a concrete plant and a freight line, remains Suburban zoned leaving a future conflict of uses. The Planning Board shall continue to address these conflicts and seek to development consistent zoning bylaws that lead to manageable growth that’s supports a better quality of life for the entire community.

In addition, the Planning Board has moved forward on multiple creative solutions to housing choices in Bellingham. Working in a public private partnership, the Board sought to understand the needs to development potential in certain areas of town and created multiple overlay districts to improve the development potential. Town Meeting added three new overlay districts to the Zoning Bylaws that support mixed residential uses in strategic areas to support downtown economic development and the reuse of existing sites such as the former Macy School.



Based on results from the developmental growth analysis along with input from the community and committee, a set of recommended goals, strategies and actions were developed.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

A. Balance Land Use and Manageable Growth

Bellingham shall implement this goal through:

1. Continue to seek opportunities to align new growth with infrastructure so not to overburden our roads or deplete our drinking water.
2. Broaden zoning choices for development that supports smart growth principles through such steps as creation of Village or Mixed-Use Districts and more flexible zoning options, including, but not limited to Planned Unit Developments, Overlay Zoning Districts, Traditional Neighborhood Developments and Form-Based Zoning.
3. Revise the Zoning Map to align uses with existing infrastructure.
4. Review the effectiveness of the Water Resource District. Look for ways to further prohibit uses that may impact drinking water supplies.

B. Increase Awareness and Respect for the Town's Limited Natural or Cultural Resources

Bellingham shall implement this goal through:

1. Review the Major Residential Development Bylaw and seek ways to incentivize its use to retain further open space.
2. Conduct an updated Cultural Resources Survey and seek State and National Register status for resources that may be eligible.

C. Support Strong Town Character with a Diversity of Smart Growth Patterns

Bellingham shall implement this goal through:

1. Bellingham's north to south orientation divides the Town into three distinct areas. Each area should have a design focus that creates a cohesive sense of place and Town character without isolating one area from the other.
2. Carry out Town Centers strategies focused on unifying the center. Support the current uses there and review zoning to expand upon existing opportunities. Create a Town Center Master Plan.
3. Form mechanism to explore additional modes of improvement of the business district such as a Business Improvement District or zoning overlay for Pulaski Boulevard.
4. Restrict residential development in commercial zones. Investigate the elimination of suburban and or agricultural zoning and have one residential zone.

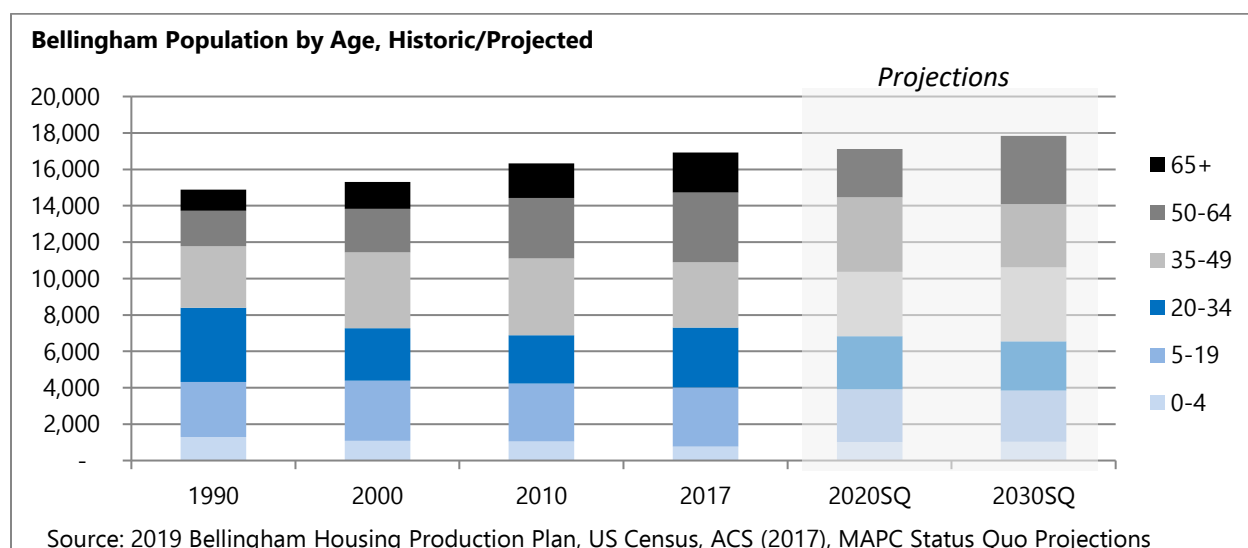
RESIDENTIAL STRATEGY

BACKGROUND

The Town of Bellingham's primary housing objective is to ensure that an adequate supply of housing, that is varied in type and price and located near necessary services and amenities, are available for existing and future residents. Unfortunately, as Bellingham continues to develop, residents, both current and prospective, have found themselves without these fundamental necessities.

Bellingham has seen steady growth over the last decade. Gaining a population of 3 to 7 percent per decade. Population growth has come in the form of new, predominantly single-family development, alongside an aging population seeking to remain in the town they grew up in. In 2020, the town of Bellingham recognizes the challenges many people face in accessing affordable housing options that meet their current needs. Bellingham is not unique. All across the Commonwealth, Massachusetts is forming what has been termed a "silver tsunami" of an aging population no longer interested in the large single-family lot lifestyle and seek to downsize to something more age friendly. As a result, the State as well as Bellingham have a housing supply that does not meet the existing demand.

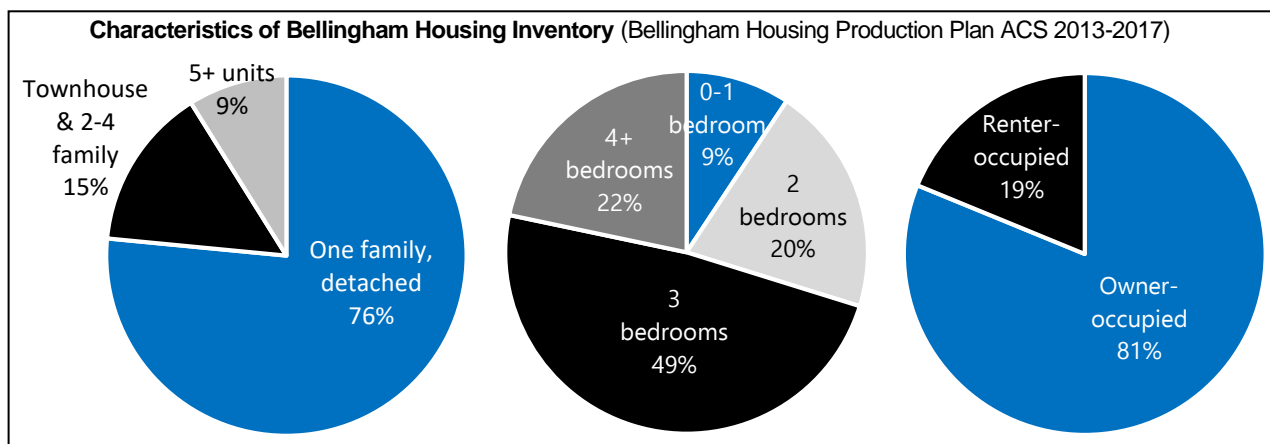
The chart below shows population trends and projections by age. Since 1990, the number of adults over age 50 has grown consistently and is expected to continue to climb. Those over 50 comprised of one fifth of Bellingham residents in 1990. In 2000, the percentage was one in three residents were over 50 years old. Today and projecting the next decade will only see that percentage continue to climb. Meanwhile, the population of younger adults and children has fluctuated over this time. In particular, the share of young adults (age 20-34) diminished significantly between 1990 and 2010, but more recently has grown. The number of school-aged children has remained moderately stable but has witnessed a modest decline since 2000.



As one can see, this disparity in supply and demand did not happen overnight. In the mid-20th century, the Federal government subsidized loans for veterans and middle income households to become homeowners in suburban communities, sparking an explosion of construction of modestly-sized homes in

Bellingham. As an outer belt suburban community, those homes in Bellingham historically have been moderately priced compared with surrounding communities, particularly closer to Boston.

Over the years, Bellingham has progressively amended its local zoning bylaws to require larger lot homes and limited multifamily housing. In the 1960's a single-family home could have been constructed on 10,000 square feet. In the 70's Town Meeting adjusted that requirement to 20,000 square feet. In the 90's the Town doubled the requirement to 40,000 square feet and 80,000 square feet for a duplex. As a result, the predominant form of housing in Bellingham is single family homes constructed in the mid- to late 20th century. The majority of housing units have 3 or more bedrooms, and less than 20 percent are renter-occupied. Over recent decades most new housing that has been constructed consists of increasingly large and expensive single-family homes and condominiums. There are limited housing options for young adults, individuals living alone, small households, or seniors wishing to downsize or to reduce the burden of maintaining their homes.



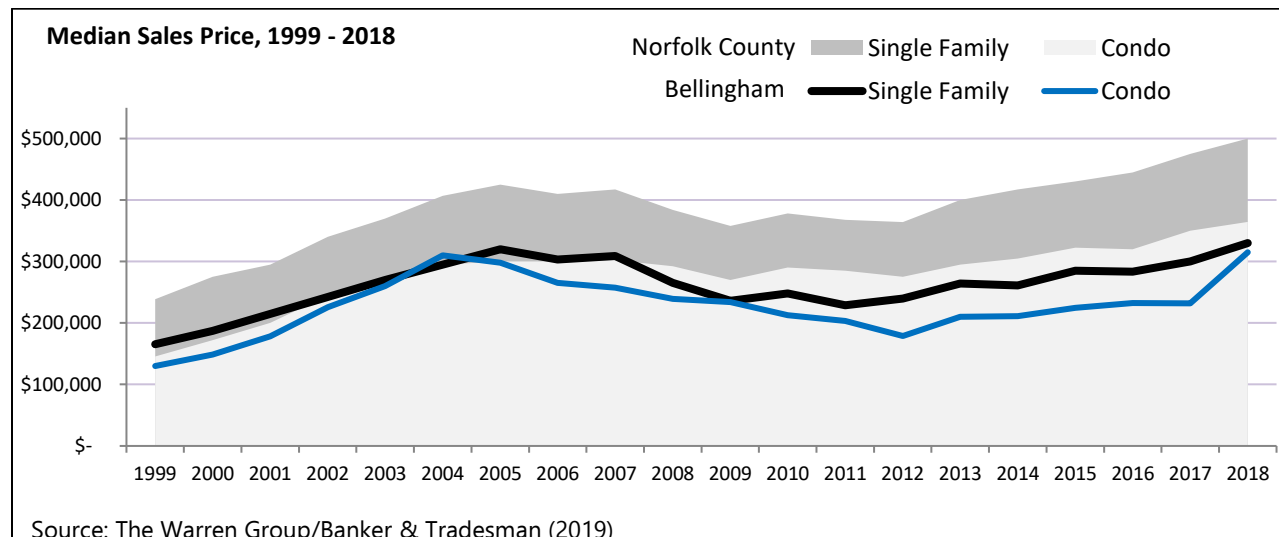
Over the past two decades, due to a variety of market and regulatory constraints as well as scarcity of land, the availability of new housing options has diminished in the Bellingham area. As a result, housing has become more expensive in Bellingham, outpacing household income growth, resulting in a higher share of households who struggle to afford to rent or buy a home in town.

A focus of the 1998 Bellingham Master Plan was to target higher-priced housing with the thought that such housing would be more fiscally sound, would influence the value of all housing in the Town, attract a more “skilled” population and add diversity to the housing stock. At that time the median single-family home prices were close to the State-defined affordability levels therefore lower-priced housing was not a focus of the plan.

This trend continued in the 2010 Master Plan update. Housing in Bellingham was and still is predominately large lot single-family homes. As predicted in the two plans, higher-priced housing was achieved through several large housing developments, and successfully influenced the value of all housing in the Town. By the end of the decade, the moderately priced affordable homes that dominated the housing stock in a 1998 Bellingham were no longer affordable. The median single-family home price jumped from \$153,000 in 1998 to a high median sale price of \$320,000 in 2005 and has steadily increased ever since. As a snapshot of current market conditions, the asking price for homes on

the market in August 2016, ranged from \$200,000 to \$800,000, with 11 homes priced under \$300,000 and 13 homes priced over \$500,000.

Sales prices for condominiums have followed a similar trend, typically at a slightly lower median price than single family homes. Condos currently on the market are comparable in price to many single-family homes, ranging from \$270,000 to \$470,000. Condos built in the 1980's are at the lower end of the price range, while newly constructed condos are in the high \$400,000 price range.



Compounding the issue, the increased housing costs have also outpaced wage growth nationally and locally over the last several decades. While home values in Bellingham have risen by about 83 percent since 2000, the median income of homeowners has increased only 53 percent over this time. In 2019, more than 1,700 households (28 percent) in Bellingham are paying more than 30 percent of their income on housing and are considered "cost burdened." In particular, households earning less than \$50,000 have the highest rate of cost burden, as there are little housing options available that are affordable to households at this income level. This lower income level also tends to include much of the senior population that are now disproportionately cost-burdened.

Cost Burden by Income, Age Householder

Household Income	Cost-Burdened Households	Total % Cost Burdened	Age	Cost-Burdened Households	% Cost Burdened
Less than \$50,000	1,142	69%	Under 35 years	58	10%
\$50,000-\$100,000	527	30%	35-64 years	1,094	26%
More than \$100,000	113	4%	65+ years	630	42%
Total	1,782	28%	Total	1,782	28%

Source: Bellingham Housing Production plan, ACS 2013-2017

According to ACS 2017 estimate, the median income for households in Bellingham is \$95,533. About 26 percent of residents earn below \$50,000, while 46 percent earn more than \$100,000. The table above

provides a comparison of household income distribution and the supply of homes affordable at each income range, based on ACS estimated value of single-family homes. Half of the town's housing stock is moderately valued, so that it would be affordable to households earning \$50,000-\$100,000. Just 6 percent of housing in Bellingham is valued at or under \$175,000, which is estimated to be the price range affordable for households earning up to \$50,000. In many cases, such low value houses require substantial improvements to maintain safe, habitable condition, which exceeds what low income households can afford.

Property taxes also contribute to housing cost burden, particularly for seniors who often own homes outright without a mortgage. Bellingham has relatively low residential property taxes, averaging \$4,488 in 2018, compared to \$5,993 average state-wide. A split tax rate, which charges commercial and industrial uses a higher tax rate than the residential tax rate help to offset residential costs and has contributed to keeping residential property taxes low. Bellingham relies on the commercial and industrial tax base to account for 28 percent of its revenue which is the highest in the region.

In an attempt to solve Bellingham's housing challenge, the Town must also not lose focus on impacts new development brings to the community. Bellingham recognizes that new housing options are sorely needed however the Town must continue to seek a balance of new development and quality of life. New housing choices should bring with it strict consideration to maintaining open space, both passive and active recreation, as well as impacts to traffic.

With all these noted constraints there are opportunities. The following section attempts to attack Bellingham's primary housing objective to ensure an adequate supply of housing to a diverse population. Based on results from the market analysis and existing conditions review, along with input from the community and committee, a set of recommended goals, strategies and actions were developed.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

A. Update zoning to create opportunities to encourage diversity in housing options.

Bellingham shall implement this goal through:

1. Seek to align inclusionary zoning requirements with local market conditions to allow for potential density bonuses.
2. Explore adding fixed locations for multifamily development.
3. Explore ways to add multifamily housing through adaptive reuse of existing inventory through a special permit process.
4. Incentivize creation of affordable units in Overlay Districts.
5. Reduce dimensional requirements for townhouse development.
6. Eliminate bedroom restrictions on multifamily housing.
7. Ensure that parking requirements are commensurate with the size and type of units and seek ways to reduce impervious surface.
8. Enable infill development on substandard vacant or underutilized properties.

B. Meet and Maintain M.G.L. 40B10% Affordable Housing Requirement.

Bellingham shall implement this goal through:

1. Identify sites for creation of affordable housing through new development, redevelopment, or preservation. Publicly- and privately-owned properties: explore or facilitate housing on sites such as:
 - Housing Authority-owned property on Center Street
 - Clark Property on Rt 140, Assessors Map and Parcel 51-4
 - 55+ Overlay District / New England Country Club
2. Preserve affordable units
 - Continue monitoring privately-owned affordable units in accordance with M.G.L 40B, particularly homeownership units.
 - Continue to support Housing Rehabilitation Program
 - Continue to support the Attorney General's Abandon Homes Program

C. Maximize Opportunities to Utilize Existing Housing Stock.

Bellingham shall implement this goal through:

1. Amend the inclusionary housing bylaw to further support offsite units by utilizing the existing abandon homes program.
2. Evaluate the Family Apartment Bylaw to allow for greater utilization and meet housing needs.
3. Explore Agriculture Zoning District to reduce lot area and frontage to match the Residential and Suburban Districts.
4. Seek Housing Choice designation by the State to become eligible for state grant funding.

D. Encourage Transit-Oriented Development Projects.

Bellingham shall implement this goal through:

1. New construction that encourages taking advantage of the nearby mass-transit systems will help with congestion.
2. Housing opportunities should include promoting healthy lifestyles that encourage walking, bicycling and other activities.
3. Exploring opportunities to extend commuter rail service into Bellingham to reduce through traffic from the west and south and promote multimodal transit options.

E. Review zoning initiatives that would allow greater housing densities and options for the senior population.

Bellingham shall implement this goal through:

1. Promote mixed-income housing developments that provide a range of housing types and prices to support a continuum of care.
2. Promote walkable dense housing near services and retail.
3. Explore zoning regulations to accommodate more innovative and flexible density and uses through evaluation of lot area, building height, lot line, lot shape, parking, and setbacks.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

BACKGROUND

Economic development has been a constant topic of discussion for the Town of Bellingham over the last ten years. Compared to the region, Bellingham has the lowest fiscal reliance on residential taxpayers, which account for 71.7 percent of all tax receipts. 2017 revenues from commercial, industrial, and personal property accounted for 28.3 percent of revenues. Additionally, Bellingham has the highest commercial and industrial property tax rate in the region, with \$20.72 per thousand dollar value.

However, as we look to the future, the Town must be cognizant of the finite available land for future commercial and industrial development. The current model, of maintaining the municipal budget through new growth has been adequate, but it is not sustainable. The next 10 years must bring new thoughts and ideas to how best to grow the town strategically to be fiscally sound while providing a more balanced quality of life.

Comparative Commercial Tax Base

Municipality	Residential Value	% Tax Base Residential	CIP Value Total	% Tax Base Commercial
Franklin	\$3,874,399,665	79.83	\$978,656,559	20.17
Hopkinton	\$2,909,012,220	83.99	\$554,460,147	16.01
Foxborough	\$2,202,413,648	75.84	\$701,767,972	24.16
Hamilton	\$1,424,219,400	95.15	\$72,644,988	4.85
Sharon	\$3,069,894,273	93.20	\$160,094,727	6.80
Wrentham	\$1,605,057,192	79.22	\$421,067,308	20.78
Bellingham	\$1,653,258,358	71.70	\$652,417,698	28.30

Source: FY2017 Rates- Massachusetts Dept of Revenue

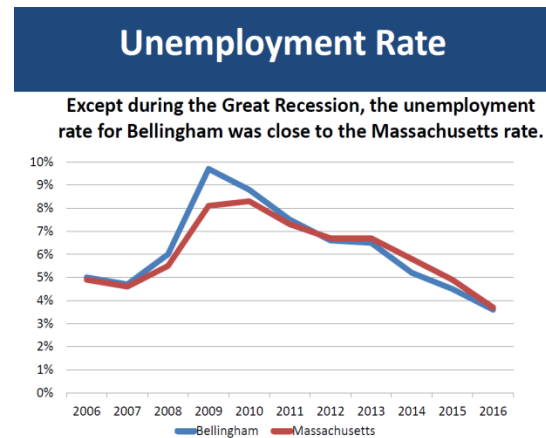
To get a better handle on the strengths, weaknesses and opportunities of Bellingham's economic environment, the Town commissioned the Metropolitan Area Planning Council to conduct an Economic Development Study in 2018. The completion of this study helped the committee better understand the existing conditions and identify economic development goals and strategies for the next ten years.

As the study defined, Bellingham's largest employers are generally located on Hartford Ave, with retailers representing the thirteen biggest private employers. Grocery store chains like Market Basket, Whole Foods, Stop and Shop, and to some extent, Walmart, represent Bellingham's \$17,000,000 grocery store sector, and along with Home Depot and Van Millwork's headquarters, are the only businesses with over a hundred employees. All of these retailers were permitted in the late 1990's and early 2000's and from those developments, Bellingham has become known as a shopping destination for people in the surrounding towns and nearby Rhode Island.

While those retailers maintain resilient with minimal vacancies over the years, no new retail has been developed in the past ten years. In contrast industrial complexes continue to seek homes in town given the proximity to I-495, I-95, and I-90. The Dunkin' Donuts Northeast Distribution Center and a Best Buy Warehouse, were constructed along Depot Street in the early 2000's and many more have followed to take advantage of the location, such as Victory Packaging warehouse, Campanelli Industrial Complex, Lincoln Properties warehouse.

Bellingham has seen some growth and diversification in its businesses, these have mostly been in the retail and industrial sectors. Although there are some higher skilled, higher paying jobs in Bellingham, they do not make up a large percentage of jobs. Two thirds of the jobs in Bellingham are in industries

where the average wage is below 50,000 dollars. In 2008, about 1,842 out of 5,472 employed in Bellingham had retail type jobs and earned an average weekly wage of \$415.00. The next largest group of employed workers was in the Food Services industry with 655 employed, earning about \$226 a week. Professional and Technical Services accounted for 27 business establishments that employed a total of 81 people with an average weekly wage rate of \$687. Several years into the great recession, Bellingham's unemployment rate had grown from 6.2% in 2008 to 10.4% in 2009.



Bellingham rebounded over the next decade. In 2016, there were 497 businesses in Bellingham employing a total of 6,330 workers. The Retail Trade, 36 percent of all jobs, or approximately 1,947 jobs, continued to be the main employer as well as Food Services at 14 percent and Wholesale Trade at 13 percent. The higher concentration of jobs in accommodation and food services and retail is consistent with communities whose economies are in large part dependent upon vehicle commuter traffic and your typical suburban bedroom community; however, retail makes up a larger segment of the local economy than generally found in Norfolk County. This likely reflects its historic development as a primarily residential community located within the I-495 beltway and major north-south and east-west corridors.

Table_: Employment and Average Weekly Wage by Industry (2016)

Industry <i>Red text denotes sectors in Bellingham with a higher percentage of jobs than Norfolk County.</i>	Bellingham				Norfolk County	
	Firms	# of Empl.	% Empl.	Avg. Weekly Wage	% Empl.	Avg. Weekly Wage
Construction	75	405	8%	\$1,220	7%	\$1,472
Manufacturing	32	507	9%	\$1,092	7%	\$1,543
Utilities	3	41	1%	\$2,731	0%	\$2,627
Wholesale Trade	32	725	13%	\$1,369	6%	\$1,758
Retail Trade	90	1,947	36%	\$505	14%	\$651
Transportation & Warehousing	11	64	1%	\$642	2%	\$920
Information	9	76	1%	\$686	3%	\$1,688
Finance & Insurance	13	62	1%	\$1,072	7%	\$1,903
Professional & Technical Services	31	124	2%	\$1,653	7%	\$2,208
Administrative & Waste Services	36	208	4%	\$716	6%	\$957
Educational Services	8	25	0%	\$335	3%	\$1,020
Health Care & Social Assistance	55	195	4%	\$665	17%	\$1,017
Arts, Entertainment & Recreation	7	61	1%	\$375	3%	\$925
Accommodation & Food Services	52	731	14%	\$334	9%	\$415
Other Services	53	213	4%	\$496	4%	\$720
Total/Average	507	5,384		\$794		\$1,199

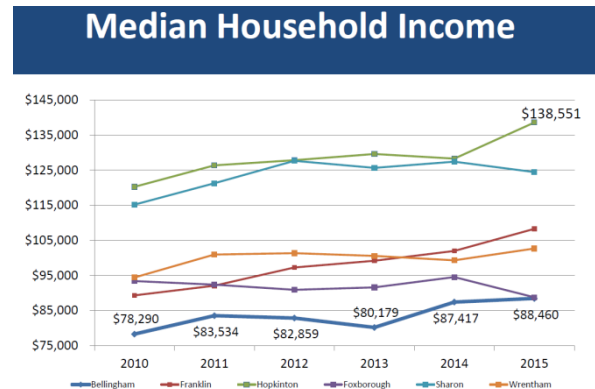
Source: MA Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development (EOLWD)

The highest paying industries in Bellingham are Management of Companies & Enterprises at \$93,438, Transportation & Warehousing at \$70,094, and Professional, Scientific, & Technical Services at \$59,280.

Bellingham's 2015 median household income of \$88,460 is higher than the state median, \$68,563 and is comparable than that for Norfolk County, \$88,262, but is lower than its neighboring communities.

Importantly, Bellingham wages have grown since 2010 with the household income increasing by 13 percent. Only Franklin and Hopkinton saw a faster growth in incomes, with 21 percent and 15 percent respectively. Conversely, incomes in Foxborough declined by 5 percent.

The Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development illustrates that for 2005 to 2015, Bellingham experienced, on average, a growth of 810 positions within ten industries. Conversely, within the same time period, the town saw a decrease of an average of 151 positions in four industries.



Within the ten year period between 2005 and 2015, the Healthcare and Social Assistance industry saw a 113 percent increase in Bellingham, increasing 106 positions by 2015. This displays the healthcare industry's growing impact as a hiring force in Bellingham. Wholesale Trade businesses hired the most new employees, with 357, almost doubling its total number of jobs, which is likely to continue as Campanelli Park opens as well as Lincoln Properties Park.

Administrative & Support and Waste Management & Remediation Services, which ranges from landscaping services to carpet cleaning services to travel agents, grew by 117 positions, whereas the Information industry grew by 60 jobs.



Conversely, manufacturing lost the most jobs within the ten-year period, shuttering 115 positions, or 18 percent. Only three other industries, Finance & Insurance, Construction, and Utilities, saw a decline of positions within the ten-year period, which, along with Manufacturing, saw a loss of 151 jobs.

The 2020 pandemic has introduced a new layer of uncertainty to the global economy. The National and State unemployment is at an all-time high. Locally, only time will tell how Bellingham fares. Bellingham's diverse economy may assist in a strong rebound and continue growth has come at an opportune time.

According to the 1998 Master Plan, Bellingham's economic circumstances seemed uncertain. The 1998 Plan stated that should the two power plants be constructed and businesses expand along Hartford Avenue tradeoffs in priorities would occur. Previously, the Town was willing to accept some traffic congestion for the increased fiscal benefits that come with more business development. In the 2010

Master Plan Update, strategies shifted toward ways to improve services to increase “quality of life” were noted as priorities. However, as the great recession hit Bellingham’s municipal finances became an even greater concern which focused needs and priorities back to new growth and development.

As we project to the future Bellingham conducted an opportunity gap analysis through the 2018 Economic Development Action Plan. The analysis demonstrated that retail and food services did in fact have some room to grow but the main opportunities Bellingham will likely see in the coming years are healthcare industries and warehouse and wholesale trade. Bellingham is in position for continued strategic growth, however, must be weary of the ever changing retail markets and their continued efforts to evolve to the changing shopping patterns. Less reliance on a commercial tax base and further diversification of land uses should solidify Bellingham’s tax base for the next ten years.

Based on results from the market analysis and existing conditions review, along with input from the community and committee, a set of recommended goals, strategies and actions were developed.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

- A. Bellingham’s economic development goal is to encourage a strong, diverse local economy which increases the tax base and results in more goods and services available to residents while prioritizing and improving upon the quality of life in Bellingham.

Bellingham shall implement this goal through:

1. Establish a mechanism to drive economic development to replace now defunct Industrial Development Commission. Discussions in 2018 focused around creating an Economic Development Committee.
2. Examine the business and industrial allowed uses. Look for opportunities for mixed uses that can share resources such as parking or varied traffic patterns.
3. Explore ways to improve the sign bylaw to create and maintain a cohesive visual framework for the Town.
4. Explore creation of a "Village District," for a pedestrian oriented corridor, such as in Bellingham Center, and part of Pulaski Boulevard. Develop a corridor master plan for each economic center.
5. Examine the sewer map for opportunities to extend to support village districts as well as preferred uses such as professional offices and medical industry.
6. Review and selectively rezone areas to classifications more suitable to the contiguous areas. Reexamine the Zoning Map to remove from business or industrial zoning those areas for which those uses are clearly ill-suited as well as identify priority development parcels more suited for commercial and industrial.
7. Modernize the zoning code to include new uses such as marijuana, micro-breweries, wireless technology such as 5G, delivery services, drones, require underground utilities, etc.
8. Evaluate the stormwater management bylaw and water resource district bylaw to determine if an impervious surface threshold should be defined or if the landscape requirements should be amended.

- B. Strategically maximize benefits of Bellingham’s geographic location both as a community located along major corridors in proximity to larger cities and as a town with established districts and public transportation access to Boston/Worcester/Providence to attract new economic investment.

Bellingham shall implement this goal through:

1. Focus on infill development in existing village centers where market opportunities are strongest to capture new investment.
2. Redevelop first. Identify and provide preference to existing built resources that are unused or underutilized.
3. Ensure infrastructure can support desired development types.
4. Advocate for improved public transit to improve the last mile to and from Bellingham.
5. Create additional non-auto transportation options and amenities within Bellingham including transit and bike and pedestrian accommodations.
6. Study potential for additional development at vacant land near I-495 and ways such land will not overly impact surrounding areas.
7. Identify strategic parcels along Route 140 near 495 with potential for commercial development to increase commercial tax revenues.
8. Seek both technical assistance and grant opportunities to expand the town’s public sewer system, especially within South Bellingham, in order to support future growth.

- C. Promote Bellingham and its businesses as a destination with more amenities and programming year-round.

Bellingham shall implement this goal through:

1. Provide additional events in the economic corridors to attract more visitors to Bellingham and local businesses throughout the year, for example, a farmer’s market.
2. Promote existing cultural, open space and recreation amenities and explore opportunities to create additional amenities to attract more visitors and their spending to Bellingham businesses.
3. Explore opportunities to bring more arts and culture to Bellingham.
4. Advocate for better transit service to provide improved access to commercial destinations and the commuter rail.

CIRCULATION & INFRASTRUCTURE

BACKGROUND

Massachusetts General Law states that each municipality shall review its “circulation” in each updated Master Plan. Circulation refers to the means by which we travel, whether by vehicle, by bicycle or on foot, and how we utilize these modes on the roads, sidewalks and trails within Bellingham to keep people and business moving. The purpose of the Circulation section of the Master Plan is to create goals and objectives that will diversify and better our transportation system. The Bellingham transportation system is the point of connection for every person in Bellingham, regardless of age, income, or ability. The transportation system ideally provides access to housing, jobs, schools, recreation and natural resources, and is a safe and efficient delivery system of public services and public safety. As our circulation is directly impacted by the quality and care of the Town’s infrastructure, both are addressed in this chapter.

Each year brings something new. The roadways in the year 2020 may appear drastically different in Bellingham than the decades that preceded it, but records indicate that Bellingham’s traffic issues from generations before remain the same. Noted in the 1970 Circulation plan and restated in the 1998 Master Plan “Virtually every conceivable system deficiency is found in Bellingham – inadequate capacity, inadequate safety, inadequate condition, and lack of convenient access between certain areas.”

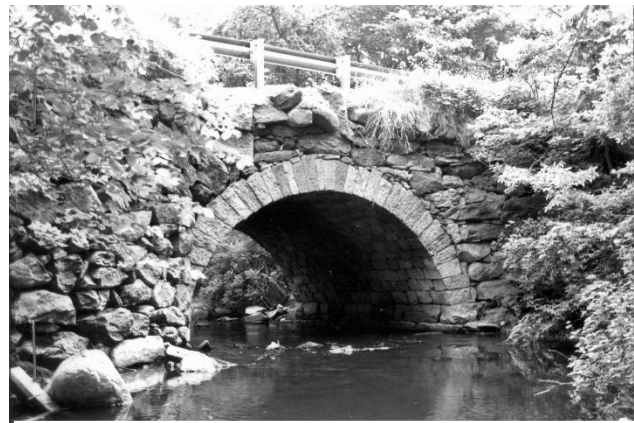
The 2010 Master Plan noted that, “only minor improvements have been made to circulation since the 1998 Plan. Most of these were constructed using mitigation funds from developers. No other significant strides have been made to improve poor overall circulation. Circulation was the biggest public works problem in 1998 and remains so ten years later. Due to years of insufficient funding, all town roads are reaching a state of decay that is undesirable.”

While traffic and circulation issues may not have changed much over 50 years. Traffic volumes on the regional interstate and arterials have increased significantly. Bellingham has two main arterial roads in town. One heading east to west and the other north to south. These main roads each encounter approximately 18,000 trips daily. Increased Town-wide traffic continues to illustrate how destructive congestion is to the quality of life of those living near and using our roadways. We have continued to see development in and around Bellingham and, with the exception of some minor reductions during economic down turns, continue to see an increasing amount of traffic passing through Bellingham. This is a chronic problem due to Bellingham’s geographic location. The major commuting routes that traverse east to west though town connect western communities to the interstate and commuter rail station at Franklin Forge Park. It is hard to imagine any level of redesign or reconstruction of roadways that will alleviate the morning and evening peak hours commutes.

Roadway infrastructure is first at mind when thinking of town wide infrastructure needs however Bellingham has a robust water and sewer network as well. The sewer network serves less than 27% of its population, and an even smaller percentage of its land area. The other 73% of the population relies upon individual on-site disposal systems. About 435,000 gallons per day of sewage is collected for

treatment. Because of the Town's shape and topography, Bellingham's gravity sewerage systems are generally divided just as the Town is divided between the Blackstone River basin into which the southern half of the Town drains, and the Charles River basin, into which the northern half drains. The system consists of 40 miles of sewer main and 10 sewer pumping stations that were mostly installed by 1991. Not much has been done to the system since. However, new development continues to expand the system and add a broader customer base delaying the need for rate increases.

The public water system is a different story. The Town of Bellingham's drinking water supply system includes 16 groundwater wells, eight pumping stations, three storage tanks, approximately 100 miles of water main, and 60 miles of water services. Wells and water mains have been replaced over the years and more are necessary. The Department of Public Works chips away at an endless list of capital improvement needs annually. DPW works closely with the Planning Board whenever new developments arise in order to attempt to improve connectivity and incorporate redundancy lines when available. In addition to the system capital improvements, water quality has been a concern over the years. A \$15.4 million town wide filtration project was completed in 2015; since then all water is filtered and treated before it is pumped into our distribution system. Two filtrations plants were constructed as part of the project. They filter out iron and manganese reducing the dirty water issue, disinfect the water to reduce the risk of bacterial contamination, and balance the acidity to reduce the exposure to lead and copper for Bellingham water customers. Most recently, MassDEP has identified a new source of drinking water contamination, known as Per-And Polyfluoroalkyl Substance (PFAS) that is prevalent in most every community across the Country. Bellingham has sought to confront this contamination concern early in the process. Although no regulations are currently in place regarding PFAS, the DPW has performed monthly sampling and testing at raw water sources and treated sample points to better understand the level of PFAS in the Town's



Depot Street Bridge over Charles River,
Massachusetts Historical Commission

drinking water. Results from early 2020 sampling show levels below the currently proposed regulatory limit, but not so far below that the concern of need to add treatment is eliminated. There remains the likelihood that the Town will soon need to add treatment to remove PFAS. The final determination on whether we need to add the treatment for PFAS removal will not be made until regulations are promulgated. The cost adding PFAS treatment is currently over \$6.0 Million.

Water conservation measures have become routine each summer in Bellingham and the region. Short term water use restrictions have been put in place to keep demand within manageable limits. A water use restriction bylaw has been in place since 1997 enabling the Town to enforce use restrictions in emergency periods. Situated in the stressed Charles River basin, future water use restrictions will be required each summer by the modifications to the Massachusetts Water Management Act. Water use

restriction are annually instituted based on the systems ability to keep up with demand. A regulatory calendar based use restriction is apply annually from May 1st to October 1st limiting watering to the hours of 5 PM to 9 AM.

There is a new federal regulation related to Bellingham infrastructure. It is the Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System, more commonly known as MS4, and the new permitting required under MS4 through the National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (MPDES). MS4 is the system that each municipality utilizes to discharge the waters of the U.S., designed to collect or convey stormwater (e.g., storm drains, pipes, ditches) to minimize the discharge of pollutants. Bellingham has had an active permit since the early 2000's. In 2018, EPA issued revised requirements and Bellingham is actively seeking opportunities to meet the revised permit requirements.

BELLINGHAM

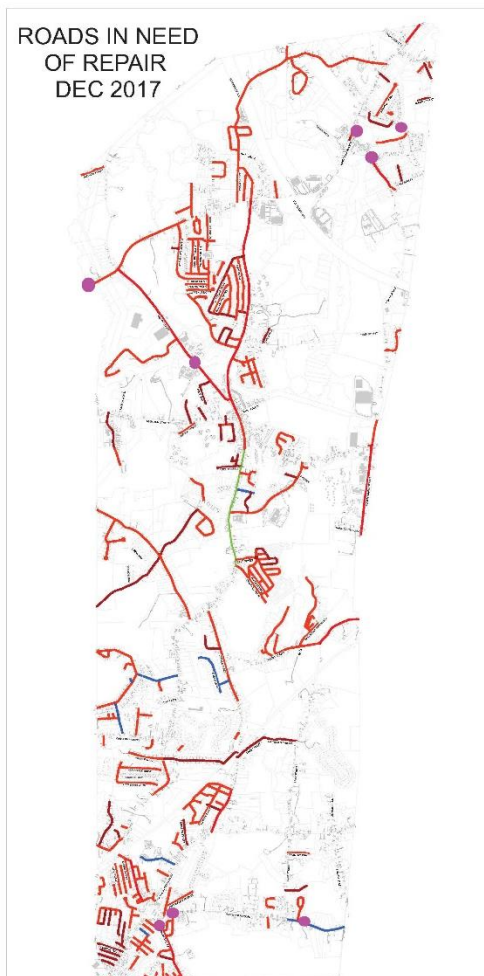
Highway District 3

Fiscal Year	Apportionment Amount
2019	\$542,834
2018	\$543,634
2017	\$541,217
2016	\$541,220
2015	\$812,162
2014	\$542,212

Even in the best of economic times, traffic and utility infrastructure are a severe strain on the municipal budget and a chronic concern for Bellingham residents. The utilizes water and sewer capital fees to continually address system needs. The Town's main source of roadway funding comes from State Chapter 90 funds. State Chapter 90 allocates funding annually to each municipality for costs incurred for eligible transportation projects. Cities and towns must submit receipts to the Highway Department district in which they are located which verifies that the expenditures qualify for reimbursement under Chapter 90. The annual funding stayed stagnant over the past five year with the exception of a onetime 2015 increase in appropriation by the Baker administration. This level of funding allows for routine maintenance to a small percentage of the existing town roadways. As noted in earlier chapters, the current model, of maintaining the municipal budget through state allocations and new growth have been adequate but has also increased the burden on the Town's existing infrastructure and has pushed off long needed improvements.

The December 2017 estimate of funding needed to bring all roads into a maintainable condition ranges between \$25 and \$53 million, depending on whether we include sidewalk and water service pipe upgrades. The cost of roadway improvements has been steadily increasing. The roadway system continues to age without sufficient financial commitment to maintain the roads. Roads, whose life span could be extended by lower cost preventative maintenance methods, have been allowed to decay to the point where costly reconstruction is the only available repair option. Reconstruction typically cost five to ten times more than preventative maintenance. In addition, many older streets need storm drain improvement. If puddles are not eliminated, resurfacing repairs will be short lived.

It is unrealistic to believe that the goals set forward in the 1998 and 2010 Master Plans can be achieved without increasing the amount of tax dollars being spent on the roads. The Town will need to commit more funding to circulation to make a real effort at meeting the stated goals. New construction projects with impacts to the circulation patterns will be required to contribute mitigation funds towards implementing some or part of, but not all of the goals outlined in this chapter.



Bellingham Department of Public Works, Roads in Need of Repair 2017

Although deferred maintenance has become a problem in the past ten years, some future planning toward traffic improvements and alternative transportation has occurred. With both state grants and public/private partnerships Bellingham has improved Route 140 at Maple Street and will soon improve the Route 140 and Route 126 town center intersection. Additionally, the Town sought and received Transportation Improvement dollars through the State to reconstruct Pulaski Boulevard and are scheduled to improve a significant portion of South Main Street in 2023. The town in partnership with the main landowners along Hartford Avenue continue to work with MassDOT to design an improvement plan to improve upon this corridor.

In addition to road and intersections studies, the town has seen a further increase in the need for multi modal opportunities. The SNETT (Southern New England Trunk Trail) regional bicycle trail, potentially linking Bellingham with towns both east and west is now underway with towns along the SNETT working towards making it a reality with the recent completion of the stretch from Prospect Street to Lake Street. Bellingham lacks a comprehensive network of bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure but the Town has made efforts to add bike lanes to new development and large road projects and have committed to a Complete Streets Policy starting in 2020.

Recently, Bellingham has been proactive in seeking out solutions and funding for alternative modes of transportation and improving service levels at existing intersections through grants and public/private partnerships. The town will be undertaking a ADA sidewalk improvements along North main Street in 2020 and seek to continue the effort through out town in the coming years.

The school system has worked towards a successful Safe Routes to School program. The development pattern and location of many neighborhoods relative to the location of schools makes it challenging to easily connect the two in a cost-effective manner. While the Town has made strides toward improving connections to and from schools, work still remains to create a series of safe walking and biking routes for students to get to school. Investments in safe routes for children will help improve health outcomes, increase physical activity (for both parents and children), and reduce traffic congestion and greenhouse gas emissions from vehicles.

The Town over the last few years has also seen further activity in the Greater Attleboro Taunton Regional Transit Authority (GATRA) service, has used some of its assessment to implement a very successful senior shuttle service.

	July	August	September	October	November	December	January	February	March	April	May	June	Totals
Dial a Ride	972	1199	1021	1176	1098	1076	1101	969	1051	1015	1202	1012	12892
Long Distance Medical	8	8	12	11	8	8	9	11	9	8	17	10	104
Shuttle	354	366	329	338	279	196	264	226	269	270	240	288	3419

Based on results from the various traffic studies throughout town, known infrastructure needs of the town and existing conditions review, along with input from the community and committee, a set of recommended goals, strategies and actions were developed.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Bellingham's circulation and infrastructure goal is to develop a system that includes convenient connectivity for every person in Bellingham, regardless of age, income, or ability and provide proper utility services available to residents while prioritizing and improving upon the quality of life in Bellingham.

A. Proper funding. Without a realistic local funding plan and local commitment there is no likelihood that circulation issues will improve.

Bellingham shall implement this goal through:

1. Establish a local funding mechanism to halt the downward spiral of road condition deterioration.
2. Become eligible for Complete Streets grant funding as well as other State and Federal grants in order to leverage local and private investment.
3. Research opportunities to increase or implement cost-sharing opportunities between adjacent or nearby towns. Regional consortiums and collective procurement programs for things such as highway maintenance services (including paving and traffic markings) are being implemented throughout the State.
4. Consider drafting and funding a comprehensive Traffic Master Plan. The plan should include a detailed capital plan with a list of projects intended to reduce congestion at intersections and safety. Basic conceptual plans and order of magnitude cost estimates should be part of this plan which should seek public input to prioritize a list of projects.

B. Manage land use to align with Infrastructure. Accommodate through travel with safety and provide adequate access to all parts of the Town for the convenience of residents and businesses alike.

Bellingham shall implement this goal through:

1. Continue to review all proposals for rezoning, special permits, development plan approvals, comprehensive permits, and other discretionary actions for avoiding congestion and protecting the quality of life through care for safety and comfort, tempering of noise, and minimizing environmental and other impacts of facility development.

2. Reexamine zoning to assure that high trip-generation uses are sited in appropriate locations with direct access to I-495.

C. Provide alternative Routes and Connectivity as an important congestion reducing tool.

Bellingham shall implement this goal through:

1. Seek connection points between proposed and abutting developments for complementary uses in order reduce vehicles entering and exiting public streets.
2. When land use boards review developments, seek connections to reduce dead ends, cul-de-sacs, etc.

D. Provide a multi modal environment throughout town for all users.

1. Make public transportation accessible, reliable and affordable.
2. Continue to support transit extension through Bellingham to Milford. The option which the MBTA train service can provide will make the Town a more attractive one, serves those who cannot drive or cannot afford to drive, and should reduce traffic on Route 140 what it would otherwise have been.
3. Construct sidewalks along the full length of every major road to enhance pedestrian use for access and recreational use.
4. Require bike lanes and shared use paths on major roadways.
5. Support and take advantage of trail programs and funding like the Rails to Trails and other local and regional initiatives.

E. Continue to improve the public water and sewer utility system

1. Continue to assure long-term improvements and loop connections to water resource utilities when new development requests to connect in order to improve water quality.
2. Continue to assure that residents and local businesses are adequately served and systems protected against unforeseen events or incidents, so as to protect public health and the environment, and to avoid excessive costs of individual systems.
3. Continue to manage utility system development so that it supports desired land use patterns, and in turn manage land development so that it does not needlessly obligate major utility costs to the community.
4. Continue to review proposed development water supply demands by use of the distribution system hydraulic model, water supply projections, and water withdrawal permits, to “Right Size” pipes and require mitigation of any new development that impacts the water supply system. Looking at not only project by project, but also all proposed water system demands.
5. Continue to address unaccounted water with a goal of less than 10% by:
 - Continue meter replacement program
 - Continue annual funding of system wide leak detection surveys.
 - Develop an aggressive water main and water service pipe replacement program.
6. Consider measures to encourage the existing buildings with sewer stub towards connecting and thereby broadening the customer base to keep sewer rates down.

7. Continue to avoid excessive public costs for utility systems and allocate those costs with equity for fee-payers.

F. Improve regulatory protections to the Town public water system.

1. Strengthen Planning Board regulations to encourage the use of “Green” technologies by developers to obtain optimum conservation, reuse, and water resources protection.
2. Support the enhancement of storm run off water quality and recharge quantity established within the National Pollution Discharge Elimination System Phase II Storm Water Program and promulgated by other State and Federal environmental authority’s initiatives and programs.
3. Enhance recharge of clean storm water run off, through continued compliance with National Pollution Discharge Elimination System Phase II Storm Water Program under the Town’s Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) Permit and any other State or Federal regulations or initiatives associated with storm water management and stream flow volume and quality enhancement.

NATURAL RESOURCES, OPEN SPACE, & RECREATION

BACKGROUND

Bellingham has always been dedicated to the capable and sensitive management of the Town's land and water resources, including providing protections for open space and furthering recreation opportunities. As the Town continues to face development pressure and the impacts of sprawl, Bellingham recognizes that careful planning for the protection of open space and recreation resources for the community is vital.

Given its long and narrow orientation, Bellingham offers a rich diversity of landscape character, including urban, suburban, small town, and rural/agricultural areas. The Town offers areas with trails, forests, fields, old stone walls, lakes, rivers, streams, marshes, and swamps. South Bellingham has the most urban area in the Town, as the area bordering Woonsocket, RI is densely developed with residential, commercial, and industrial uses. North Bellingham maintains large regional shopping centers on Route 126 at I-495, providing shopping and entertainment opportunities in Town. The small-town character of Bellingham is exemplified at the center of the town at the intersection of Routes 140 and 126, where a white steeple church, Town Hall, and several retail and services businesses are located. Most development in Bellingham since World War II has been suburban in character, resulting in suburban residential development throughout the Town. Bellingham still has areas of rural/agricultural character, although many of these areas in town have been developed into suburban-style residential areas.

Throughout Bellingham lives a variety of wildlife and vegetation, boasting native forests populated with both coniferous and hardwood trees, including oaks, red maples, and white pines. In upland and wetland areas, vegetation such as black choke cherry, witch hazel shrubs, swamp azalea, and high bush blueberries, among others, thrive. In the Town's open areas, including croplands, pastures, and meadows, plant-life such as grasses, herbs, shrubs, and vines grow and attract a variety of wildlife. Animals such as kestrels, meadow voles, meadowlarks, and red foxes frequently inhabit these areas. The woodland areas in Bellingham provide livable habitat for many animals, including squirrels, gray foxes, racoons, fishers, beavers, skunks, chipmunks, voles, mice, bats, opossums, and deer. Coyotes have also begun to expand their range into Bellingham. Common reptiles and amphibians also inhabit the Town, including garter and milk snakes, snapping turtles, and Red-backed and spotted salamanders. Ducks, geese, herons, otters, and frogs are attracted to the wetland areas in town. These forest and wetland habitats are found in abundance in Bellingham. Additionally, Bellingham is home to six rare and endangered species: the Marbled Salamander, the American Brook Lamprey (a fish), the Eastern Box Turtle, and three different species of plants, Dwarf Rattlesnake-plantain, Purple Needlegrass, and Philadelphia Panic Grass.

The Charles and Blackstone Rivers and other streams, lakes, and ponds provide habitat for numerous fisheries in Bellingham. Species that populate these waters include brown, brook, and rainbow trout, pickerel, perch, sunfish, redbreast, pumpkinseed, small- and large-mouth bass, white sucker, carp, golden shiner, fallfish, creek chub, and yellow and brown bullhead. There are also many certified and

potential vernal pools in Town, which fill with water in the fall and winter seasons and remain filled until the summer, when they dry up. These vernal pools provide important habitat that supports amphibians and invertebrate animals.

In order to protect these varied habitats, the Town of Bellingham has put forward significant local regulations. The Conservation Commission has in place a local wetland bylaw that further protects Wetland Protection Act jurisdictional areas. The Planning Board maintains a Water Resource District and offers a clustered subdivision alternative to by-right developments, which offer density bonuses in return for open space protected in perpetuity.

Bellingham is home to many scenic areas and vistas. High Street provides a scenic view of the Charles River and the wetlands that surround it, an area protected as a part of the Corps of Engineers' Charles River Natural Valley Storage Area. The other water bodies in Town, such as Silver Lake, Jenks Reservoir, Beaver Pond and Lake Hiawatha, also provide scenic venues. Scenic Roads in Town include Maple Street, High Street, and part of Farm Street, which in certain locations, offer tree-lined pathways with stone walls. A historic mill building can also be found in Town on Maple Street. Much discussion has been had regarding how to further protect and restore Bellingham's scenic designated roads. The Planning Board has offered zoning changes at these locations to limit future industrial growth and manage density. The Town constructed low impact development drainage to limit impervious surfaces and the Conservation Commission has gained many valuable open space parcels.

Since 2010, Bellingham has taken several actions to work towards the Town's open space and recreation goals and objectives. The Conservation Commission has made significant progress with respect to the Southern New England Trunkline Trail (SNETT) Project. An additional section of the SNETT, which spans



Southern New England Trunkline Trail, Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation

Lake St. to Prospect St. in Franklin, has been developed with the Commission's input and permitting assistance, creating a connection in the trail to the Town of Franklin.

The Conservation Commission continues to work with the Town Planning Board to obtain open space parcels in Bellingham through the plan review process and by offering conditional approvals that grant open space in perpetuity. By the end of the year, the Commission expects that around 200 acres of land has been protected in Bellingham over the last ten years.

The Town developed several initiatives to improve open space and to create more recreation opportunities in Bellingham. The Board of Health sponsors an Annual Town-Wide Clean Up Day in April to help collect litter and garbage found around Town. The Town has worked with the Silver Lake Playground Association to facilitate a recreational swimming area and the installation of the Splashpad at Silver Lake, which is widely used by the YMCA for various youth workshops over the summer months.

Additionally, the Conservation Commission has worked with the Boy Scouts to help them earn Eagle Scout Awards by completing projects around Bellingham. Some of the Eagle Scout projects initiated around Town include a large canopy for the picnic tables at Silver Lake, a bridge over an intermittent stream on High Street, an upgraded trail system featuring signage and a new kiosk on High Street, and the construction and installation of bat boxes on High Street and at Jenks Reservoir.



Town Administrator, Denis Fraine, Enjoying Silver Lake Park, by Gino Carlucci

In 2010, the protected open space areas in Bellingham had increased 11.9% to 1445.40 acres due to changes in the zoning bylaw. As of 2017, the total protected open space, including open space protected by the Town, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and the U.S. Corps of Engineers, in Bellingham has increased by 318.42 acres to a total of 1763.82 acres.

In 2017, Bellingham updated its Open Space and Recreation Plan to reflect the Town's current open space and recreation goals and objectives. A public outreach process was initiated pursuant to the updating of this Plan, which generated important feedback from the community. The residents of Bellingham indicated three major priorities for the Town: 1) protecting water resources, 2) protecting land for conservation purposes, and 3) protecting wildlife habitat. Additionally, 85% of the residents surveyed indicated a desire for more trail recreational opportunities, and over 50% of residents

indicated a desire for family-oriented recreation facilities, including family picnic areas, environmental education, and playgrounds.

In the furtherance of the development of this Chapter of the Master Plan, stakeholders were identified and surveyed about the open space and recreation facilities in Town. The feedback we received indicated positive aspects of the Town's open space and recreation facilities and areas for improvement of these facilities. Stakeholders indicated that the Town Common is a well-loved and highly utilized space in Town. The feedback also showed that the walking paths in Bellingham were a well-used recreational facility, and that the general accessibility of the open space and recreational facilities is a positive aspect of these facilities. Several areas for improvement were also identified by stakeholders. Stakeholders indicated a need for additional sports fields in Town, in addition to the improved maintenance of the sports field. Stakeholders also indicated that improved and uniform signage for the walking trails and parks around Town is needed. Suggestions were made with regard to the SNET Trail, including the addition of dog waste buckets and trail lighting. Stakeholders also expressed interest in the development of canoe access for the Charles River area. Lastly, there was an indicated desire for a dog park for Bellingham, providing pet-friendly recreational opportunities.

Based on review of the Open Space and Recreation Plan, its survey, along with input from the community and committee, a set of recommended goals, strategies, and actions were developed.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

- A. Open Space - Focus on the acquisition of protection of additional open space. Substantial development has occurred in Bellingham in the past ten years. Although this development has resulted in the acquiring of more than 300 additional acres of open space, there is a desire for more. By increasing open space, opportunities to link park and recreational spaces increase (a benefit to both wildlife and residents). A prominent example is the SNETT trail, which would link various public properties in Bellingham as well as linking Bellingham with Franklin, Blackstone, and beyond. Bellingham shall implement this goal through:
1. Extend protection of Beaver Pond. More than 24 acres of land abutting this important resource are not under Conservation Commission protection. More could be protected through flexible zoning, purchase, or other means.
 2. Protect Jenks Reservoir, Peter's Brook, and Bungay Brook. These make up an important sub-system in the Blackstone River watershed, and are linked with both existing and potential future Town water supplies. Further acquisition and use of flexible zoning are possible options.
 3. Focus on acquiring parcels that would protect the Peters River aquifer and the Priority habitat Area that is outside the Army Corps of Engineers Natural Valley Storage Area.
 4. Continue to work toward improving stormwater and wastewater recharge through zoning changes.

- B. Recreation - The demand for recreation opportunities for all ages has increased. In addition to needed recreational facilities and organized activities, residents have indicated a desire for more trails and bike paths. Existing recreational facilities need to be upgraded and assessed for handicap accessibility.

Bellingham shall implement this goal through:

1. Continue to work to connect both Silver Lake and the SNETT trail in Bellingham to the Franklin State Forest and the Franklin SNETT connection. At the time this Master Plan is being written, the Town has applied for a grant to design a link between the SNETT trail and Silver Lake, and for parking at the South School, to enhance access and value of the SNETT trail.
2. Enhance recreation opportunities within the Town by creating additional access points to the Charles River and SNETT.
3. Undertake a comprehensive inventory of existing facilities and develop a capital improvement program for retrofitting existing facilities for handicapped accessibility.
4. Pursue trail/bike path linkages, where possible connecting existing Town properties, working with developers and utilities to gain rights-of-way.
5. Strengthen enforcement of Town bylaws governing use of motorized ATVs on public lands.

- C. Resource Protection - Although the Town has greatly strengthened its protections for water resources, aquifer and groundwater recharge areas will always be a concern. Development should be guided onto properties other than those having high resource value in a natural state (e.g. Chapter 61A lands). Zoning should be examined to allow for more compact development, which results in the more efficient use of land and protection of natural resources.

Bellingham shall implement this goal through:

1. Provide citizens with pamphlets from the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) on use of fertilizers and pesticides in lawn care.
2. Strengthen Town regulations to assure that trees and other vegetation are retained in appropriate buffer areas as part of subdivisions or other development in appropriate cases.
3. Require replacement of topsoil which is removed in development, restoring it to depths sufficient to support vegetation
4. Explore support for the Community Preservation Act or alternative means of authorizing a Bellingham Land Bank, with dedicated real estate transfer fees earmarked for uses including preservation of open space, while also being mindful of the increased cost of living through other utility fees and taxes.
5. Include professional environmentalist support for community decision-making and administration in the considerations of how best to organize for staffing community development and land management.

- D. Regionalization - Through regionalization of services, towns are often able to provide more to their residents while spending less.

1. Protection and linkage of bordering resources as well as the enhancement of those resources. For instance, the SNETT trail could provide a bike and pedestrian corridor that could potentially link the Franklin State Forest with Silver Lake, the Blackstone State Forest and to the Providence-Worcester Bikeway.

COMMUNITY FACILITIES

BACKGROUND

As has been highlighted previously that Bellingham grew rapidly during the mid to late 1900's. First during the residential boom of the 1960s and 1970s followed by the commercial and industrial rise of the 1980s and 1990s. Power plants, retail plazas, and commercial growth provided a needed increase in tax revenue but created a stress on the Town's infrastructure and services.

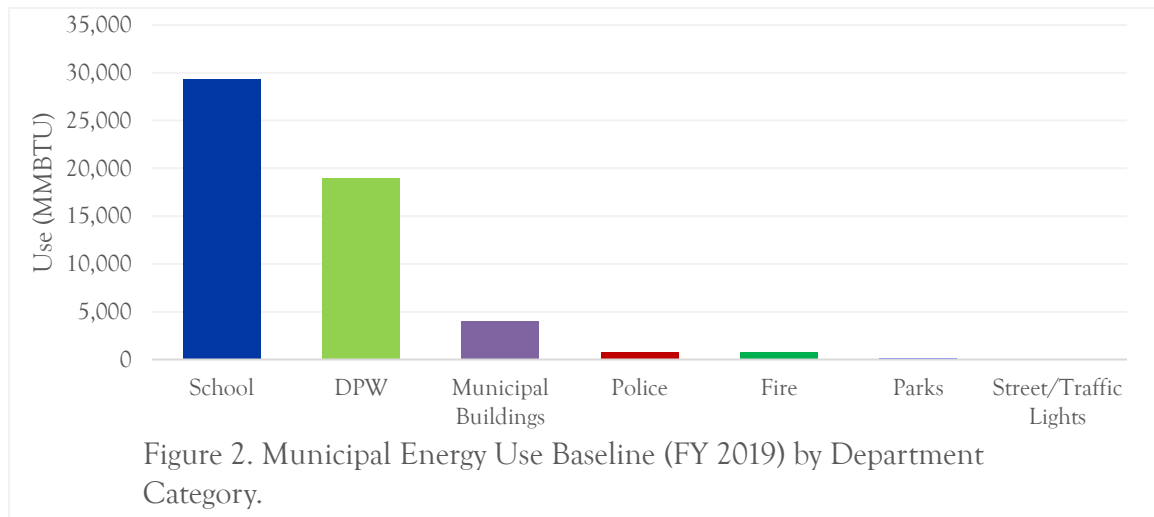
Expansion of town services and professionalism of town government from part-time volunteers to full-time staff resulted in a much needed investment in community facilities. Many of the town buildings had extended well beyond their useful life span and increased staffing left departments without adequate workspace. The 1980s saw a new library, central fire station and a elementary school in south Bellingham. The 1990s saw a high school, a remodeled and modernized middle school, municipal office facility, historically renovated town hall and senior citizen's center were major achievements with little burden to taxpayers over the next decade. The recession of the early 2000's slowed progress. However, a significant need for a proper police station necessitated its construction.

During this time, tight budgets and reduced spending caused a deferral of maintenance and abandonment of any further capital building projects. Difficult financial decisions were made to ensure the survival of the essential town services placing capital facilities and infrastructure improvement projects on a distant horizon.



Since the recession Bellingham has returned to a building boom. Significant industrial and residential uses have sited in town. The Town has sought to capture that new growth to recover from years of not maintaining buildings and roads. The Town has cognitively allowed for new growth to balance the budget so not to seek significant increases to the residential tax base. The Town has also looked strategically at its current building footprint and ways in which it can seek to improve. Bellingham consolidated elementary schools and demolished Macy Elementary in 2015. This leaves Bellingham with five school buildings that together offer a pre-kindergarten to 12th grade public education to all residents. Bellingham in recent years has lost many students to school choice and the expansion of the Benjamin Franklin Charter School in Franklin, however the overall enrollment numbers have remained relatively level with a slight decrease in the student population in recent years.

The Town has also created an Energy Reduction Plan in 2019 and conducted an energy audit of all its public facilities. Over the next five to ten years Bellingham seeks to reduce its energy consumption by a minimum of 20 percent which would total a potential cost savings of over 100,000 dollars annually.



The Town of Bellingham has identified energy savings measures in each facility category to reduce energy use 22.9% based on the total usage, as illustrated in the table below.

Table 2: Summary of Municipal Energy Use & Reductions				
Facility Category	MMBTU Used in Baseline Year (FY19)	% of Total MMBTU Baseline Energy Consumption	Projected Planned MMBTU Savings	Savings as % of Total MMBTU Baseline Energy Consumption
Building	36,399	67.2%	9,817	18.1%
Vehicles	10,426	19.2%	2,590	4.8%
Water/Sewer	7,226	13.3%	-	0.0%
Street/Traffic Lights	42	0.1%		0.0%
Open Space	79	0.1%		0.0%
Total	54,172	100.0%	12,407	22.9%

Through thorough analysis of the Town's existing capital needs. Below are the current identified needs for the existing facilities in 2020, projecting forward 10 years.

CURRENT FACILITIES

The following is a summary of current department needs for future community facilities:

Fire

The fire department has three locations. The central fire station, on Blackstone Street, was built to handle a staff of 11 personnel, today the department has a staff of 30. Due to the increase the bedroom, kitchen, and bathroom spaces are insufficient. Additionally, the apparatus bay is undersized for the

larger equipment and with the expansion, more vehicles are required which the current area cannot accommodate.

The South Bellingham station has just underwent significant upgrades and is in good order, however significant exterior improvements will be necessary in the coming years including improvements to the roof, windows, siding and overhead doors. The station in North Bellingham is just a garage and no longer meets DLS standards. This has created an unusable space for the department. Over the next ten years, if growth continues at the current pace, the town must decide whether or not to facilitate a fully functioning north Bellingham station to properly service this area of town. A feasibility study should be sought to understand the Fire Department's most optimal coverage plan, utilizing the two existing stations, and how best to cover North Bellingham.

Police

The Police Station was a top priority of the 2010 Master Plan. Since then the Police Station was constructed on Blackstone Street. Aside from vehicle purchases and simple maintenance of the facility, police likely will not need significant upgrades.

Senior Center

As predicted in the 2010 Master Plan, the Bellingham Senior Center continues to see a need for expansion. As the population of Bellingham continues to become older, required services from the senior center have become important. The Senior Center is currently seeking opportunities for an expansion to the parking, program space, administration space, as well as outdoor patio space and walking trails.

Additionally, the Senior Center is seeking to add a commercial kitchen to continuously provide hot meals to the senior population.

DPW

The 2010 Master Plan identified both the Police Station and Public Works building as the top priorities. As was mentioned, the new Police Station was achieved; however, the Public Works long list of concerns remain. It is evident that within the next ten years the Department of Public Works must upgrade or relocate their facilities. Below is a short list of outstanding concerns at this location.

Currently DPW has less than half the equipment storage space that is required. The storage space requires proper fire suppression and roof upgrades. Many vehicles are parked outside. These vehicles are used during severe storms and should be covered for immediate use. The parking area lacks proper drainage and is riddled with potholes.

Currently DPW has less than half the office space that is needed for the current staff and no space for future growth. The existing administrative staff office area was added in 1993 and has chronic ice dam issues in the winter and is difficult to heat and cool year-round. These offices are connected to the garage which allow fumes from the garage to enter the office. There is not an appropriate meeting room or break room.

The vehicle repair facilities are a retrofitted storage garage that when a vehicle leaves or come in the garage all heat is lost. There is also insufficient area for a vehicle wash bay. Most of our current vehicle wash is done in the garage and flows to town sewer after an oil and grit separator but space is limit for the number of vehicles needed to be washed.

BELLINGHAM PUBLIC LIBRARY

In 1989, a new 18,000 square foot library was constructed on Blackstone Street. The library employs 14 people. There are 7 full-time and 7 part-time staff members, and an expanded program of 16 volunteers who contribute to the smooth running of the library.

Over the past five years the library has seen fluctuations in circulation of library materials, but 2019 is back up to 2016 levels. Use of the Library Community Room is up by 33% and attendance at children's programs is up 16%. Ebook circulation has increased 40% in the past five years.

The library facility is now 30 years old. In 2018 the library completed the renovation of all interior public facing facilities, except the bathrooms. The 5-year strategic plan has mostly interior and exterior maintenance requests as well as HVAC and lighting improvements. The library also seeks to add patio and/or Other Outdoor Spaces, add a generator that would enable the library to stay open and serve as a community information center with Internet access and a charging center during storms and electrical outages, and connect to town sewer to replace the 30- year-old septic system.

General Public Facilities

The Town of Bellingham is always seeking to improve the public spaces around Town. The School Committee conducted a recreation master plan to better understand usage of the active ball fields. In addition, the Town seeks to create improvements to the Southern New England Trunk line Trail, continuing efforts to improve the condition and connectivity of sidewalks, adding additional greenscape on Harpin St (South Elementary/Ball fields) at the site of the closed Primavera School.

Schools

Bellingham has five public schools that offer a full pre-K to 12th grade public education. The Bellingham Administration offices recently moved to the Old Town Hall and the annex behind Old Town Hall. The administration will seek opportunities to improve upon those facilities if the opportunity arises. Aside from the administration offices, the Bellingham school facilities generally has a long list of outstanding upgrades, energy efficiency opportunities and maintenance concerns that the District will seek to improve upon but likely will not seek large capital building projects in the next 10 years.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

A. Provide Good Level of Community Services

The outreach survey indicated that in general, residents are pleased with the level of professional services, including the Fire and Police Departments and Library. Snow and trash removal also received positive feedback.

Bellingham shall implement this goal through:

1. Funding an assessment and feasibility study for a DPW Campus for possible location behind the existing DPW on Blackstone Street or other suitable location is a top priority.
2. Review Fire Department staffing, station locations and develop a staffing and equipment planning for the future. Improve Fire emergency response times in the northern portion of Town, where population and development has increased.
3. Planning should be undertaken to obtain grants or other sources of funding to prepare for future expansion of senior services.
4. Library usage has increased dramatically. In order to maintain the 30 year old facility for the next decade, a proactive approach should be taken to maintain both the physical building and services.

B. Fiscal Responsibility

Disciplined financial management has helped the town to consistently improve and maintain services. Additional consideration should be given to regionalization or privatization of services for cost savings and increased efficiency.

Bellingham shall implement this goal through:

1. Creative financing is needed before future new community facilities can be constructed. Construction funding through federal stimulus programs, grants, and funds available when long-term debt is retired must be sought before any project can be started.

C. Strong Town Image

The Town should continue to focus on maintaining and improving the feel and image of Bellingham.

Bellingham shall implement this goal through:

1. Seek opportunities to add open space both passive and active.
2. Create connections to walkable town destinations such as the Town Common and Old Town Hall.

D. Regionalization

As costs associated with municipal services continue to increase, many communities are looking toward regionalization as a means to share costs, while still providing the same or improved service. Currently Bellingham shares Animal Control services with Franklin. The DPW participates in regional salt procurement and towns provide an emergency mutual aid service. Opportunities to connect and share with other towns continue to expand.

Bellingham shall implement this goal through:

1. Consider opportunities to regionalize services and procurement to increase cost-sharing potential and decrease financial drains on the Town such as MS4 compliance, GIS mapping, procurement of goods and services, etc.

E. Energy Management

Energy costs increase substantially each year. With emphasis now placed on sustainable energy, energy efficiency should be included as a high priority for all new capital improvement projects as well as an ability to retrofit where applicable.

Bellingham shall implement this goal through:

1. Keep the school systems on track with the priorities outlined in the 2019 Energy Reduction Plan. Seek Green Communities funding to assist in energy reduction improvements.
2. Provide more fuel-efficient vehicles for various departments.
3. Investigate ways in which the town can partner with large scale solar developers to reduce energy cost and provide educational opportunities to the general public.

HISTORIC & CULTURAL RESOURCES

BACKGROUND

Change is our new constant. It comes swiftly; unannounced. And the hardest thing to figure out is how to make change a friend and not a foe.” Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel. Whether it be Chicago, Boston or Bellingham this quote is no truer than it is now. Bellingham has seen significant growth and change over the centuries. However, change can be your friend if you recognize and preserve what is most valuable.

A thorough review of Bellingham’s historic assets occurred at the turn of the century. The 1998 Master Plan process led to a 1999 preservation survey of historic places. In 2003-2004, the Planning Board created a sub-committee to work on an Historic Preservation Plan. The plan reached draft form but was never formally approved. Nevertheless, the plan and earlier survey of historic resources developed a list of opportunities for preservation by future town entities.

While some historic structures have been lost such as the Center School that was demolished as part of the Municipal Center Complex plan, many others have not been forgotten. The old Town Hall has been rehabilitated and is now a significant visual presence in the Town Center. Its rehab matches a 1910 plan for the building. The Bellingham Historical Commission building located in the old library connected to historic town hall through a newly dedicated park. This park marks the location where former military training grounds were located in the early years of the Town.

Both the North and Center Cemeteries are historically significant and on the State Register of Historic Places. The North Cemetery in Bellingham was started in 1714, five years before the town. It contains the remains of many of the town's earliest and most illustrious citizens. The Center Cemetery was started later but also has a long history with the Town.

The Bellingham Historical Commission was authorized as an official Town Board in 1972 and authorized by Town Meeting vote in 1974. Since its establishment, the goal of the

Historical Commission has been the protection

of the historic structures within the town, the preservation of archeological items and sites and the recording of the Town's history. The Commission, although active in the collection of Bellingham artifacts and history, has little involvement with the municipal aspect of preservation. There have been no updates to the inventory since the 1999 additions and no action taken toward getting buildings or areas listed in the State and National Registers. The Historical Commission functions, with great success, as a Historical Society rather than a municipal agency and that could and should change.



North Bellingham Cemetery and Oak Hill Cemetery,
Massachusetts Historical Commission

There still are no buildings or structures in Bellingham listed in the State or National Registers of Historic Places. The Town's inventory of local historic resources listed 42 buildings and two areas. No archaeological resources were added to the inventory, although presumably Bellingham would be rich in pre-historic archaeological materials as the Town sits between two major waterways, the Charles River basin and the Blackstone Valley basin.

The focus group sessions conducted by the 2020 Master Plan committee and survey indicated that there is a general feeling that Bellingham is lacking character and could use specific visions for different areas of Town. In addition, there appears to be a strong desire stemming from the 300th anniversary of the Town to seek further protections for historic structures.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

A. IMPROVE TOWN CHARACTER AND IMAGE

The Town of Bellingham is lacking a specific character or image of many other New England towns. Creating a centralized design vision for the Town with specific areas highlighted would help create a greater sense of place and community.

Bellingham shall implement this goal through:

1. Initiate a program for pedestrian enhancements in historic village areas, including sidewalks and crosswalks at all major intersections.
2. Explore strengthening the Town's Scenic Roads program, including designation of additional roads, Town provision of plantings and other enhancements, and strengthening of the Scenic Road bylaw.
3. Develop a strong sign control system, perhaps taking it outside of the Zoning Bylaw, with an improved system for achieving compliance.
4. Support the cultural commission and additional cultural events on town property.

B. STRENGTHEN HISTORIC PRESERVATION

Historic buildings and sites are routinely lost through new construction in the Town. Preserving historic resources provides a strong foundation for providing a sense of place for residents.

Bellingham shall implement this goal through:

1. Review and update the draft Historic Preservation Master Plan to include as part of the current Master Plan.
2. Continue to inventory historic resources as outlined in the Preservation Master Plan, in cooperation with the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) and meeting MHC standards for such surveys. Explore opportunities to inventory archaeological resources.
3. Pursue the listing of at least a small number of the Town's more prominent historical buildings, bridges, or other resources on the National Register of Historic Places.

IMPLEMENTATION

Over the last 20 years the Master Plan has evolved from a static road map to a living document. The 1998 Master Plan made a recommendation to create a “Master Plan Implementation Committee”, made up of members from the Planning Board, Selectmen, Conservation Commission, Finance Committee, and other organizations plus the Town Administrator and a few other Town staff.” However, the responsibility for creating this group was never clearly spelled out and consequently the group was never formed. The responsibility of implementing the goals of the 2008 Master Plan was left with the Planning Board who subsequently initiated the Master Plan Implementation Plan subcommittee. In 2020, this subcommittee has taken the reins and built upon previous studies to design much more than a road map for the next ten years but a living document that be that may provide balance by bringing all of the key recommendations into focus and organizing them into a plan of action. The schedule can be altered if Bellingham needs to respond to unforeseen opportunities or challenges, but the overall sequence of actions implies that some steps have a higher priority than others, and some steps need to occur sooner rather than later. Remember that the Master Plan is not an inflexible planning tool. This is a plan, not a book. Use it to plan and evolve over the next decade.

The following is a summary of the Master Plan Goals and the Master Plan Implementation Strategies that bring together each chapter into a matrix for future discussion and planning.

Summary of Goals

Land Use

- A. Balance Land Use and Manageable Growth
- B. Increase Awareness and Respect for the Town's Limited Natural or Cultural Resources
- C. Support Strong Town Character with a Diversity of Smart Growth Patterns

Residential

- A. Update zoning to create opportunities to encourage diversity in housing options.
- B. Meet and Maintain M.G.L. 40B10% Affordable Housing Requirement.
- C. Maximize Opportunities to Utilize Existing Housing Stock.
- D. Encourage Transit-Oriented Development Projects.
- E. Review zoning initiatives that would allow greater housing densities and options for the senior population.

Economic Development

- A. Bellingham's economic development goal is to encourage a strong, diverse local economy which increases the tax base and results in more goods and services available to residents while prioritizing and improving upon the quality of life in Bellingham.
- B. Strategically maximize benefits of Bellingham's geographic location both as a community located along major corridors in proximity to larger cities and as a town with established districts and public transportation access to Boston/Worcester/Providence to attract new economic investment.
- C. Promote Bellingham and its businesses as a destination with more amenities and programming year-round.

Circulation and Infrastructure

- A. Proper funding. Without a realistic local funding plan and local commitment there is no likelihood that circulation issues will improve.
- B. Manage land use to align with Infrastructure. Accommodate through travel with safety and provide adequate access to all parts of the Town for the convenience of residents and businesses alike.
- C. Provide alternative Routes and Connectivity as an important congestion reducing tool.

Bellingham shall implement this goal through:

- D. Provide a multi modal environment throughout town for all users.
- E. Continue to improve the public water and sewer utility system
- F. Improve regulatory protections to the Town public water system.

Open Space and Recreation

- A. Open Space - Focus on the acquisition of protection of additional open space. Substantial development has occurred in Bellingham in the past ten years. Although this development has resulted in the acquiring of more than 300 additional acres of open space, there is a desire for more. By increasing open space, opportunities to link park and recreational spaces increase (a benefit to both wildlife and residents). A prominent example is the SNETT trail, which would link various public properties in Bellingham as well as linking Bellingham with Franklin, Blackstone, and beyond.
- B. Recreation - The demand for recreation opportunities for all ages has increased. In addition to needed recreational facilities and organized activities, residents have indicated a desire for more trails and bike paths. Existing recreational facilities need to be upgraded and assessed for handicap accessibility.
- C. Resource Protection - Although the Town has greatly strengthened its protections for water resources, aquifer and groundwater recharge areas will always be a concern. Development should be guided onto properties other than those having high resource value in a natural state (e.g. Chapter 61A lands). Zoning should be examined to allow for more compact development, which results in the more efficient use of land and protection of natural resources.

- D. Regionalization - Through regionalization of services, towns are often able to provide more to their residents while spending less.

Community Facilities

A. Provide Good Level of Community Services

The outreach survey indicated that in general, residents are pleased with the level of professional services, including the Fire and Police Departments and Library. Snow and trash removal also received positive feedback.

B. Fiscal Responsibility

Disciplined financial management has helped the town to consistently improve and maintain services. Additional consideration should be given to regionalization or privatization of services for cost savings and increased efficiency.

C. Strong Town Image

The Town should continue to focus on maintaining and improving the feel and image of Bellingham.

D. Regionalization

As costs associated with municipal services continue to increase, many communities are looking toward regionalization as a means to share costs, while still providing the same or improved service. Currently Bellingham shares Animal Control services with Franklin. The DPW participates in regional salt procurement and towns provide an emergency mutual aid service. Opportunities to connect and share with other towns continue to expand.

E. Energy Management

Energy costs increase substantially each year. With emphasis now placed on sustainable energy, energy efficiency should be included as a high priority for all new capital improvement projects as well as an ability to retrofit where applicable.

Historic and Cultural Resources

A. Improve Town Character and Image

The Town of Bellingham is lacking a specific character or image of many other New England towns. Creating a centralized design vision for the Town with specific areas highlighted would help create a greater sense of place and community.

B. Strengthen Historic Preservation

Historic buildings and sites are routinely lost through new construction in the Town. Preserving historic resources provides a strong foundation for providing a sense of place for residents.

Master Plan Implementation Strategies

Implementation Strategies Matrix				
Chapters	Implementation Strategies	Responsible Entity	Timeframe	Priority
Land Use	A1. Continue to seek opportunities to align new growth with infrastructure so not to overburden our roads or drinking water.	Planning Board, DPW	1-3 years	High
	A2. Broaden zoning choices for development that supports smart growth principles through such steps as creation of Village or Mixed-Use Districts and more flexible zoning options, including, but not limited to Planned Unit Developments, Overlay Zoning Districts, Traditional Neighborhood Developments and Form-Based Zoning.	Planning Board	3-5 years	Medium
	A3. Revise the Zoning Map to align uses with existing infrastructure.	Planning Board	5-10 years	Medium
	A4. Review the effectiveness of the Water Resource District. Look for ways to further prohibit uses that may impact drinking water supplies.	Planning Board, DPW	5-10 years	Medium
	B1. Review the Major Residential Development Bylaw and seek ways to incentivize its use to retain further open space.	Planning Board, Conservation	5-10 years	Medium
	B2. Conduct an updated Cultural Resources Survey and seek State and National Register status for resources that may be eligible.	Historical Commission	5-10 years	Medium
	C1. Bellingham's north to south orientation divides the Town into three distinct areas. Each area should have a design focus that creates a cohesive sense of place and Town character without isolating one area from the other.	Planning Board	5-10 years	Low
	C2. Carry out Town Centers strategies focused on unifying the center. Support the current uses there and review zoning to expand upon existing opportunities. Create a Town Center Master Plan.	Planning Board	5-10 years	Medium

Chapters	Implementation Strategies	Responsible Entity	Timeframe	Priority
	C4. Restrict residential development in commercial zones. Investigate the elimination of suburban and or agricultural zoning and have one residential zone.	Planning Board	5-10 years	Low
Residential	A1. Seek to align inclusionary zoning requirements with local market conditions to allow for potential density bonuses.	Planning Board, Selectboard	3-5 years	Medium
	A2. Explore adding fixed locations for multifamily development.	Planning Board	5-10 years	Low
	A3. Explore ways to add multifamily housing through adaptive reuse of existing inventory through a special permit process.	Planning Board	5-10 years	Medium
	A4. Incentivize creation of affordable units in Overlay Districts.	Planning Board	5-10 years	Medium
	A5. Reduce dimensional requirements for townhouse development.	Planning Board	5-10 years	Low
	A6. Eliminate bedroom restrictions on multifamily housing.	Planning Board	5-10 years	Low
	A7. Ensure that parking requirements are commensurate with the size and type of units and seek ways to reduce impervious surface.	Planning Board	3-5 years	Medium
	A8. Enable infill development on substandard vacant or underutilized properties.	Planning Board, Building Dept	3-5 years	Medium
	B1. Identify sites for creation of affordable housing through new development, redevelopment, or preservation. Publicly- and privately-owned properties: explore or facilitate housing on sites such as: Housing Authority-owned property on Center Street, Clark Property on Rt 140, Assessors Map and Parcel 51-4, 55+ Overlay District / New England Country Club	Planning Board, Selectboard	3-5 years	High
	B2. Preserve affordable units by: Continue monitoring privately-owned affordable units in accordance with M.G.L 40B, particularly homeownership units. Continue to support Housing Rehabilitation Program. Continue to support the Attorney General's Abandon Homes Program.	Planning Board, Selectboard, Building Dept.	3-5 years	High

Chapters	Implementation Strategies	Responsible Entity	Timeframe	Priority
	C1. Amend the inclusionary housing bylaw to further support offsite units by utilizing the existing abandon homes program.	Planning Board, Building Dept.	3-5 years	Medium
	C2. Evaluate the Family Apartment Bylaw to allow for greater utilization and meet housing needs.	Planning Board	3-5 years	Medium
	C3. Explore Agriculture Zoning District to reduce lot area and frontage to match the Residential and Suburban Districts.	Planning Board	5-10 years	Low
	C4. Seek Housing Choice designation by the State to become eligible for state grant funding.	Planning Board, Selectboard	1-3 years	High
	D1. New construction that encourages taking advantage of the nearby mass-transit systems will help with congestion.	Planning Board, Selectboard	3-5 years	Medium
	D2. Housing opportunities should include promoting healthy lifestyles that encourage walking, bicycling and other activities.	Planning Board, Selectboard	1-3 years	Medium
	D3. Exploring opportunities to extend commuter rail service into Bellingham to reduce through traffic from the west and south and promote multimodal transit options.	Selectboard	5-10 years	Medium
	E1. Promote mixed-income housing developments that provide a range of housing types and prices to support a continuum of care.	Planning Board, Selectboard	3-5 years	Medium
	E2. Promote walkable dense housing near services and retail.	Planning Board, Selectboard	3-5 years	Medium
	E3. Explore zoning regulations to accommodate more innovative and flexible density and uses through evaluation of lot area, building height, lot line, lot shape, parking, and setbacks	Planning Board, Selectboard	3-5 years	Medium
Economic Development	A1. Establish a mechanism to drive economic development to replace now defunct Industrial Development Commission. Discussions in 2018 focused around creating an Economic Development Committee.	Selectboard	1-3 years	High
	A2. Examine the business and industrial allowed uses. Look for opportunities for mixed uses that can share resources such as parking or varied traffic patterns.	Planning Board, Selectboard	3-5 years	Medium

Chapters	Implementation Strategies	Responsible Entity	Timeframe	Priority
	A3. Explore ways to improve the sign bylaw to create and maintain a cohesive visual framework for the Town.	Planning Board, Building Dept.	1-3 years	High
	A4. Explore creation of a "Village District," for a pedestrian oriented corridor, such as in Bellingham Center, and part of Pulaski Boulevard. Develop a corridor master plan for each economic center.	Planning Board, Selectboard	3-5 years	Medium
	A5. Examine the sewer map for opportunities to extend to support village districts as well as preferred uses such as professional offices and medical industry.	Planning Board, DPW	3-5 years	Medium
	A6. Review and selectively rezone areas to classifications more suitable to the contiguous areas. Reexamine the Zoning Map to remove from business or industrial zoning those areas for which those uses are clearly ill-suited as well as identify priority development parcels more suited for commercial and industrial.	Planning Board	3-5 years	Medium
	A7. Modernize the zoning code to include new uses such as marijuana, micro-breweries, wireless technology such as 5G, delivery services, drones, require underground utilities, etc.	Planning Board	1-3 years	Medium
	A8. Evaluate the stormwater management bylaw and water resource district bylaw to determine if an impervious surface threshold should be defined or if the landscape requirements should be amended.	Planning Board, DPW	1-3 years	High
	B1. Focus on infill development in existing village centers where market opportunities are strongest to capture new investment.	Selectboard	3-5 years	Medium
	B2. Redevelop first. Identify and provide preference to existing built resources that are unused or underutilized.	Selectboard	3-5 years	Medium
	B3. Ensure infrastructure can support desired development types.	DPW	3-5 years	Medium
	B4. Advocate for improved public transit to improve the last mile to and from Bellingham.	Selectboard	5-10 years	Low

Chapters	Implementation Strategies	Responsible Entity	Timeframe	Priority
	B5. Create additional non-auto transportation options and amenities within Bellingham including transit and bike and pedestrian accommodations.	Planning Board, Selectboard, DPW	3-5 years	Medium
	B6. Study potential for additional development at vacant land near I-495 and ways such land will not overly impact surrounding areas.	Selectboard	3-5 years	Medium
	B7. Identify strategic parcels along Route 140 near 495 with potential for commercial development to increase commercial tax revenues.	Selectboard	3-5 years	Medium
	B8. Seek both technical assistance and grant opportunities to expand the town's public sewer system, especially within South Bellingham, in order to support future growth.	DPW	5-10 years	Low
	C1. Provide additional events in the economic corridors to attract more visitors to Bellingham and local businesses throughout the year, for example, a farmer's market.	Selectboard	3-5 years	Medium
	C2. Promote existing cultural, open space and recreation amenities and explore opportunities to create additional amenities to attract more visitors and their spending to Bellingham businesses.	Selectboard, Conservation, Historical	3-5 years	Medium
	C3. Explore opportunities to bring more arts and culture to Bellingham.	Cultural Council	5-10 years	Medium
	C4. Advocate for better transit service to provide improved access to commercial destinations and the commuter rail.	Selectboard	1-3 years	High
Circulation and Infrastructure	A1. Establish a local funding mechanism to halt the downward spiral of road condition deterioration.	Selectboard, DPW	3-5 years	High
	A2. Become eligible for Complete Streets grant funding as well as other State and Federal grants in order to leverage local and private investment.	Planning Board, DPW	1-3 years	High

Chapters	Implementation Strategies	Responsible Entity	Timeframe	Priority
	A3. Research opportunities to increase or implement cost-sharing opportunities between adjacent or nearby towns. Regional consortiums and collective procurement programs for things such as highway maintenance services (including paving and traffic markings) are being implemented throughout the State.	Selectboard, DPW	3-5 years	Medium
	A4. Consider drafting and funding a comprehensive Traffic Master Plan. The plan should include a detailed capital plan with a list of projects intended to reduce congestion at intersections and safety. Basic conceptual plans and order of magnitude cost estimates should be part of this plan which should seek public input to prioritize a list of projects.	DPW	5-10 years	Medium
	B1. Continue to review all proposals for rezoning, special permits, development plan approvals, comprehensive permits, and other discretionary actions for avoiding congestion and protecting the quality of life through care for safety and comfort, tempering of noise, and minimizing environmental and other impacts of facility development.	Planning Board, Conservation, Board of Health	1-3	High
	B2. Reexamine zoning to assure that high trip-generation uses are sited in appropriate locations with direct access to I-495.	Planning Board	1-3 years	High
	C1. Seek connection points between proposed and abutting developments for complementary uses in order reduce vehicles entering and exiting public streets.	Planning Board	3-5 years	Medium
	C2. When land use boards review developments, seek connections to reduce dead ends, cul-de-sacs, etc.	Planning Board, Zoning Board	3-5 years	Medium
	D1. Make public transportation accessible, reliable and affordable.	Planning Board, Selectboard	3-5 years	Medium

Chapters	Implementation Strategies	Responsible Entity	Timeframe	Priority
	D2. Continue to support transit extension through Bellingham to Milford. The option which the MBTA train service can provide will make the Town a more attractive one, serves those who cannot drive or cannot afford to drive, and should reduce traffic on Route 140 what it would otherwise have been.	Planning Board, Selectboard	3-5 years	Medium
	D3. Construct sidewalks along the full length of every major road to enhance pedestrian use for access and recreational use.	Planning Board, Selectboard	3-5 years	Medium
	D4. Require bike lanes and shared use paths on major roadways.	Planning Board, Selectboard	3-5 years	Medium
	D5. Support and take advantage of trail programs and funding like the Rails to Trails and other local and regional initiatives.	Planning Board, Selectboard, Conservation	3-5 years	Medium
	E1. Continue to assure long-term improvements and loop connections to water resource utilities when new development requests to connect in order to improve water quality.	Planning Board, Selectboard, DPW	3-5 years	Medium
	E2. Continue to assure that residents and local businesses are adequately served and systems protected against unforeseen events or incidents, so as to protect public health and the environment, and to avoid excessive costs of individual systems.	Planning Board, Selectboard, DPW	3-5 years	Medium
	E3. Continue to manage utility system development so that it supports desired land use patterns, and in turn manage land development so that it does not needlessly obligate major utility costs to the community.	Planning Board, Selectboard, DPW	3-5 years	Medium

Chapters	Implementation Strategies	Responsible Entity	Timeframe	Priority
	E4. Continue to review proposed development water supply demands by use of the distribution system hydraulic model, water supply projections, and water withdrawal permits, to “Right Size” pipes and require mitigation of any new development that impacts the water supply system. Looking at not only project by project, but also all proposed water system demands.	Planning Board, Selectboard, DPW	3-5 years	Medium
	E5. Continue to address unaccounted water with a goal of less than 10% by: Continue meter replacement program, continue annual funding of system wide leak detection surveys, Develop an aggressive water main replacement program.	Planning Board, Selectboard, DPW	3-5 years	Medium
	E6. Consider measures to encourage the existing buildings with sewer stub towards connecting and thereby broadening the customer base to keep sewer rates down.	Planning Board, Selectboard, DPW	3-5 years	Medium
	E7. Continue to avoid excessive public costs for utility systems and allocate those costs with equity for fee-payers.	Planning Board, Selectboard, DPW	3-5 years	Medium
	F1. Strengthen Planning Board regulations to encourage the use of “Green” technologies by developers to obtain optimum conservation, reuse, and water resources protection.	Planning Board,	3-5 years	Medium
	F2. Support the enhancement of storm run off water quality and recharge quantity established within the National Pollution Discharge Elimination System Phase II Storm Water Program and promulgated by other State and Federal environmental authority's initiatives and programs.	Planning Board, Selectboard, DPW	1-3 years	Medium

Chapters	Implementation Strategies	Responsible Entity	Timeframe	Priority
	F3. Enhance recharge of clean storm water run off, through continued compliance with National Pollution Discharge Elimination System Phase II Storm Water Program under the Town's Multi-Section Storm Sewer System (MS4) Permit and any other State or Federal regulations or initiatives associated with storm water management and stream flow volume and quality enhancement.	Planning Board, Selectboard, DPW	1-3 years	High
Open Space and Recreation	A1. Extend protection of Beaver Pond. More than 24 acres of land abutting this important resource are not under Conservation Commission protection. More could be protected through flexible zoning, purchase, or other means.	Conservation	3-5 years	High
	A2. Protect Jenks Reservoir, Peter's Brook, and Bungay Brook. These make up an important sub-system in the Blackstone River watershed, and are linked with both existing and potential future Town water supplies. Further acquisition and use of flexible zoning are possible options.	Planning Board, Conservation, DPW	1-3 years	High
	A3. Focus on acquiring parcels that would protect the Peters River aquifer and the Priority habitat Area that is outside the Army Corps of Engineers Natural Valley Storage Area.	Conservation, Planning Board	3-5 years	High
	A4. Continue to work toward improving stormwater and wastewater recharge through zoning changes.	Planning Board, Conservation, DPW	1-3 years	High

Chapters	Implementation Strategies	Responsible Entity	Timeframe	Priority
	B1. Continue to work to connect both Silver Lake and the SNETT trail in Bellingham to the Franklin and the Franklin SNETT connection.	Selectboard	3-5 years	Medium
	B2. Enhance recreation opportunities within the Town by creating additional access points to the Charles River and SNETT.	Selectboard	3-5 years	Medium
	B3. Undertake a comprehensive inventory of existing facilities and develop a capital improvement program for retrofitting existing facilities for handicapped accessibility.	Selectboard, DPW	3-5 years	Medium
	B4. Pursue trail/bike path linkages, where possible connecting existing Town properties, working with developers and utilities to gain rights-of-way.	Selectboard, Planning Board	3-5 years	Medium
	B5. Strengthen enforcement of Town bylaws governing use of motorized ATVs on public lands.	Selectboard, Police	3-5 years	Medium
	C1. Provide citizens with pamphlets from the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) on use of fertilizers and pesticides in lawn care.	Planning Board, DPW	3-5 years	Medium
	C2. Strengthen Town regulations to assure that trees and other vegetation are retained in appropriate buffer areas as part of subdivisions or other development in appropriate cases.	Planning Board	3-5 years	Medium
	C3. Require replacement of topsoil which is removed in development, restoring it to depths sufficient to support vegetation	Zoning Board, Planning Board	5-10 years	Low

Chapters	Implementation Strategies	Responsible Entity	Timeframe	Priority
	C4. Explore support for the Community Preservation Act or alternative means of authorizing a Bellingham Lank Bank, with dedicated real estate transfer fees earmarked for uses including preservation of open space.	Selectboard, Conservation, Planning Board	5-10 years	Medium
	C5. Include professional environmentalist support for community decision-making and administration in the considerations of how best to organize for staffing community development and land management.	Conservation	5-10 years	Medium
	D1. Protection and linkage of bordering resources as well as the enhancement of those resources. For instance, the SNETT trail could provide a bike and pedestrian corridor that could potentially link the Franklin State Forest with Silver Lake, the Blackstone State Forest and to the Providence-Worcester Bikeway.	Conservation, Planning Board	3-5 years	Medium
Community Facilities	A1. Funding an assessment and feasibility study for a DPW Campus for possible location behind the existing DPW on Blackstone Street or other suitable location is a top priority.	Selectboard, Finance, DPW	1-3 years	High
	A2. Review Fire Department staffing, station locations and develop a staffing and equipment planning for the future. Improve Fire emergency response times in the northern portion of Town, where population and development has increased.	Selectboard, Finance, Fire	3-5 years	Medium
	A3. Planning should be undertaken to obtain grants or other sources of funding to prepare for future expansion of senior services.	Selectboard, Finance, Senior Center	1-3 years	Medium
	A4. Library usage has increased dramatically. In order to maintain the 30 year old facility for the next decade, a proactive approach should be taken to maintain both the physical building and services.	Selectboard, Finance, Library	3-5 years	Medium

Chapters	Implementation Strategies	Responsible Entity	Timeframe	Priority
	B1. Creative financing is needed before future new community facilities can be constructed. Construction funding through federal stimulus programs, grants, and funds available when long-term debt is retired must be sought before any project can be started.	Selectboard, Finance	1-3 years	High
	C1. Seek opportunities to add open space both passive and active.	Conservation	1-3 years	Medium
	C2. Create connections to walkable town destinations such as the Town Common and Old Town Hall.	Selectboard, Planning Board	3-5 years	Medium
	D1. Consider opportunities to regionalize services and procurement to increase cost-sharing potential and decrease financial drains on the Town such as MS4 compliance, GIS mapping, procurement of goods and services, etc.	Selectboard, DPW	3-5 years	Medium
	E1. Keep the school systems on track with the priorities outlined in the 2019 Energy Reduction Plan. Seek Green Communities funding to assist in energy reduction improvements.	Selectboard, Schools	1-3 years	Medium
	E2. Provide more fuel-efficient vehicles for various departments.	Selectboard, Schools	1-3 years	Medium
	E3. Investigate ways in which the town can partner with large scale solar developers to reduce energy cost and provide educational opportunities to the general public.	Selectboard, Schools	1-3 years	Medium
Historic and Cultural Resources	A1. Initiate a program for pedestrian enhancements in historic village areas, including sidewalks and crosswalks at all major intersections.	Selectboard, Historic	3-5 years	Medium
	A2. Explore strengthening the Town's Scenic Roads program, including designation of additional roads, Town provision of plantings and other enhancements, and strengthening of the Scenic Road bylaw.	Planning Board	3-5 years	Medium

Chapters	Implementation Strategies	Responsible Entity	Timeframe	Priority
	A3. Develop a strong sign control system, perhaps taking it outside of the Zoning Bylaw, with an improved system for achieving compliance.	Selectboard, Planning Board, Building Dept.	3-5 years	Medium
	A4. Support the cultural council and additional cultural events on town property.	Selectboard, Cultural Commission	1-3 years	Medium
	B1. Review and update the draft Historic Preservation Master Plan to include as part of the current Master Plan.	Historic	3-5 years	Medium
	B2. Continue to inventory historic resources as outlined in the Preservation Master Plan, in cooperation with the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) and meeting MHC standards for such surveys. Explore opportunities to inventory archaeological resources.	Historic	3-5 years	Medium
	B3. Pursue the listing of at least a small number of the Town's more prominent historical buildings, bridges, or other resources on the National Register of Historic Places.	Historic	3-5 years	Medium

APPENDIX

Appendix A - Supporting Materials and References

BSC Group, Inc. (2020). Route 140 Corridor Study. Boston, MA.

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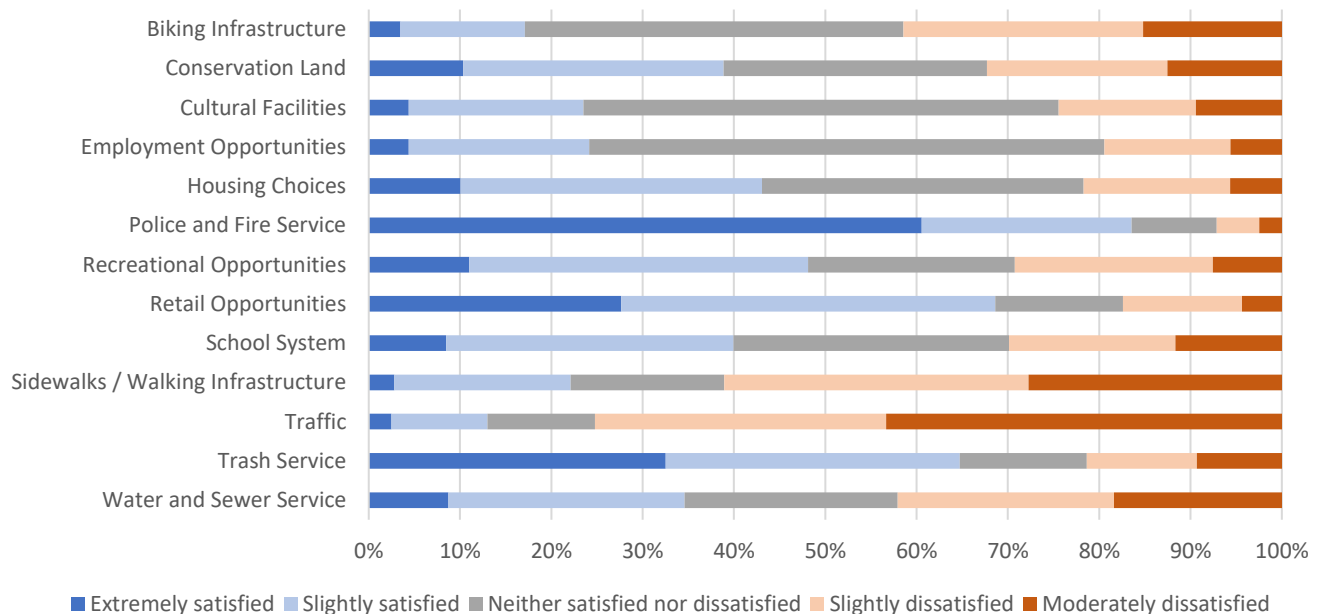
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<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/bellinghamtownnorfolkcountymassachusetts/PST0452177>

BELLINGHAM SURVEY DATA

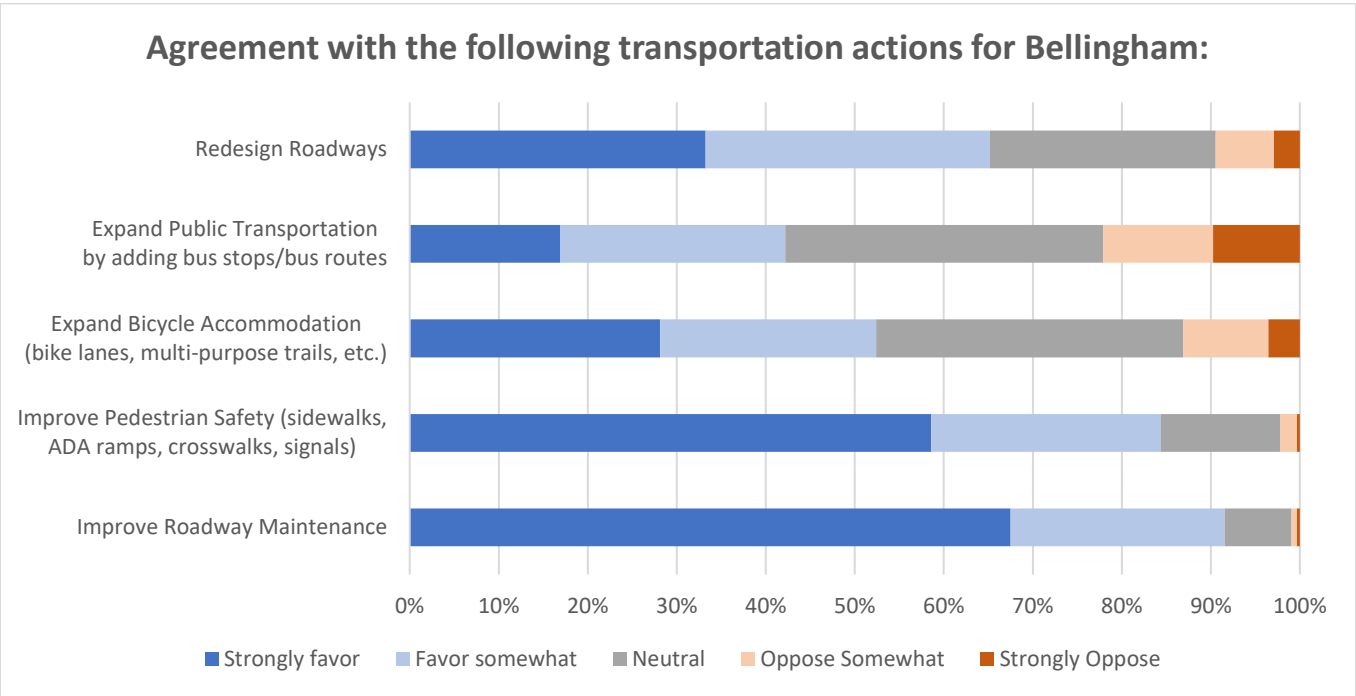
The opening and first questions of the Bellingham Master Plan Survey asked participants to write a newspaper headline. The question was “If you were writing a news headline for your ideal Bellingham in 10 years what would it say?” Below are themes that were most commonly cited connected to survey respondent’s news headlines. Please see Appendix 1 for all survey headlines.

Common Themes	# of Times Cited
Economic Development and Growth	58
Public Health and Safety	10
Open Space and Recreation	16
Housing	9
Historic and Cultural Resources	9
Transportation and Mobility	31
Climate, Environment, Sustainability, & Energy	13
Public Facilities and Services	13
Land Use and Zoning	48
Civic Engagement	4
Schools and Education	45
Demographics	19
Town Pride	98

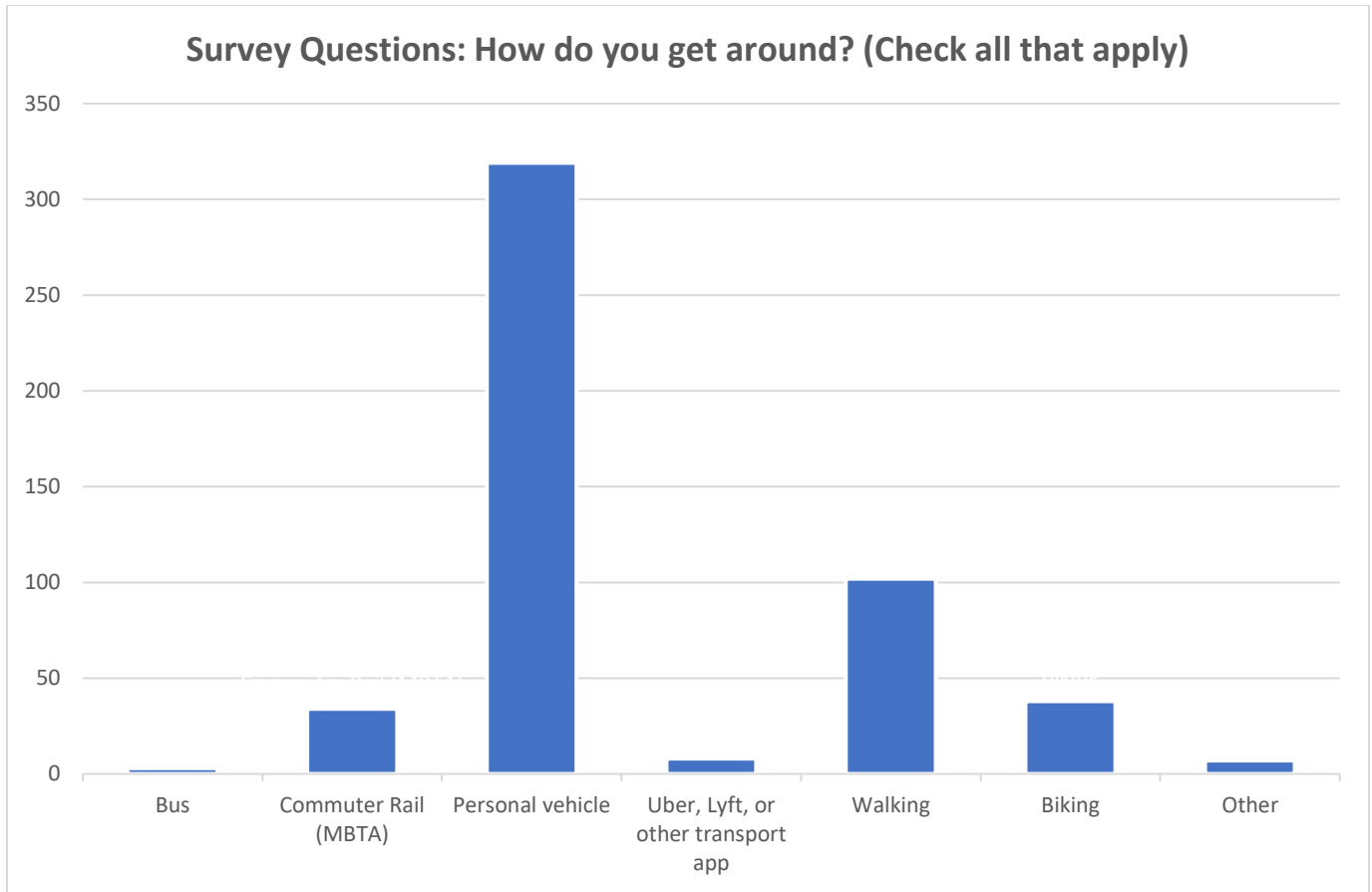
Satisfaction With Bellingham Services and Local Topics



Survey respondents are pleased with police and fire services, as well as with retail opportunities and trash services. Respondents appear to want improved transportation conditions and infrastructure; specifically, traffic, sidewalks, bike infrastructure. Employment opportunities and cultural facilities also had high levels of dissatisfaction.

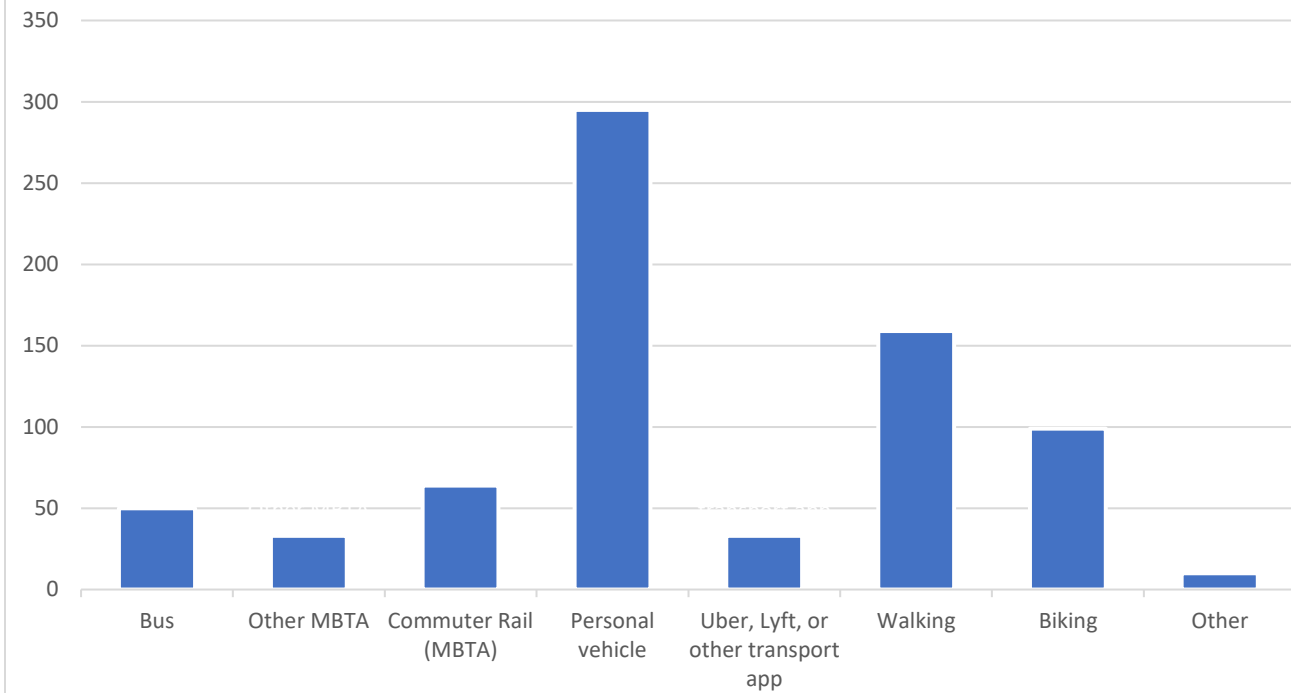


Survey respondents favored improving roadway maintenance and pedestrian safety and sidewalks. Expanding public transportation and adding more biking accommodations were less-popular options.



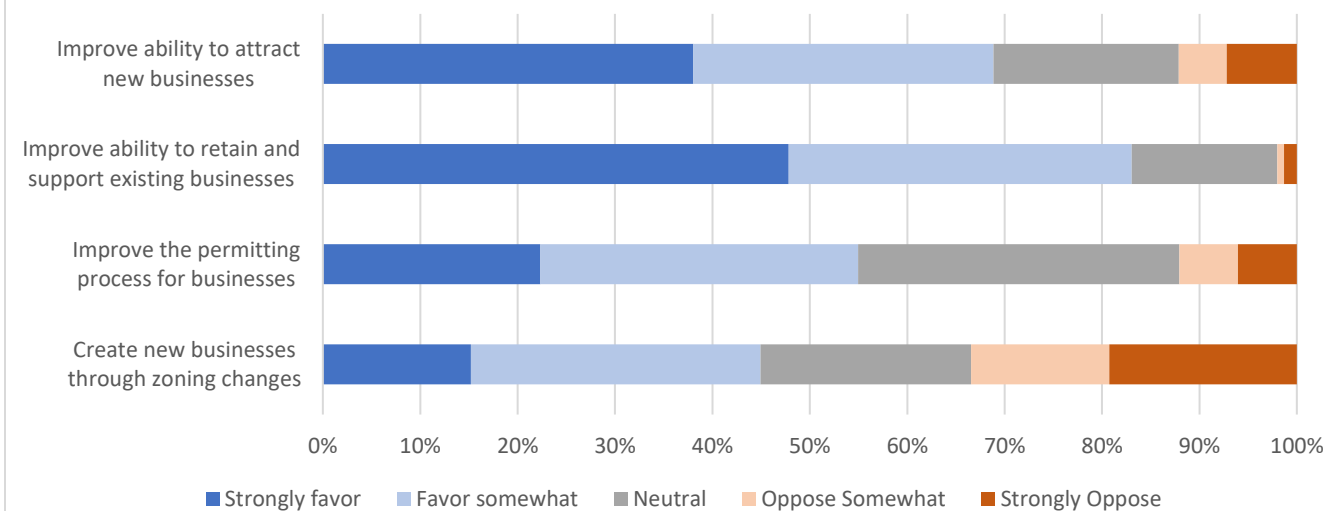
Respondents selected “personal vehicles” 319 times as a transportation mode they use. The “buses” option was the least selected. Several respondents listed “running” under the option “other.”

Survey Questions: How do you want to get around in the future? (Check all that apply)

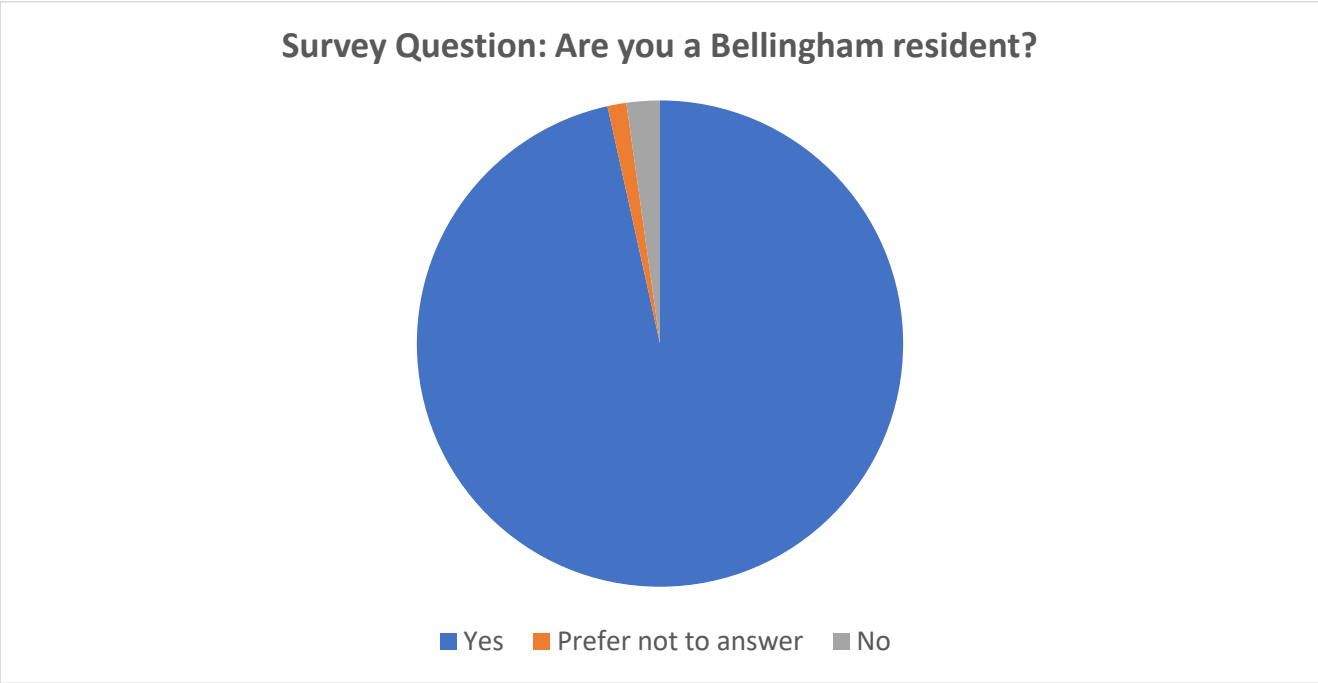


When it comes to how respondents want to get around in the future, the “personal vehicles” option was still the most popular at 295 selections. The option for Transportation Network Companies (TNC) like Uber and Lyft was only selected 33 times. Other methods respondents listed under “other” included “automatic vehicles,” “electric cars,” “personal rapid transit,” “real taxi,” “running,” and “hover craft/teleportation.”

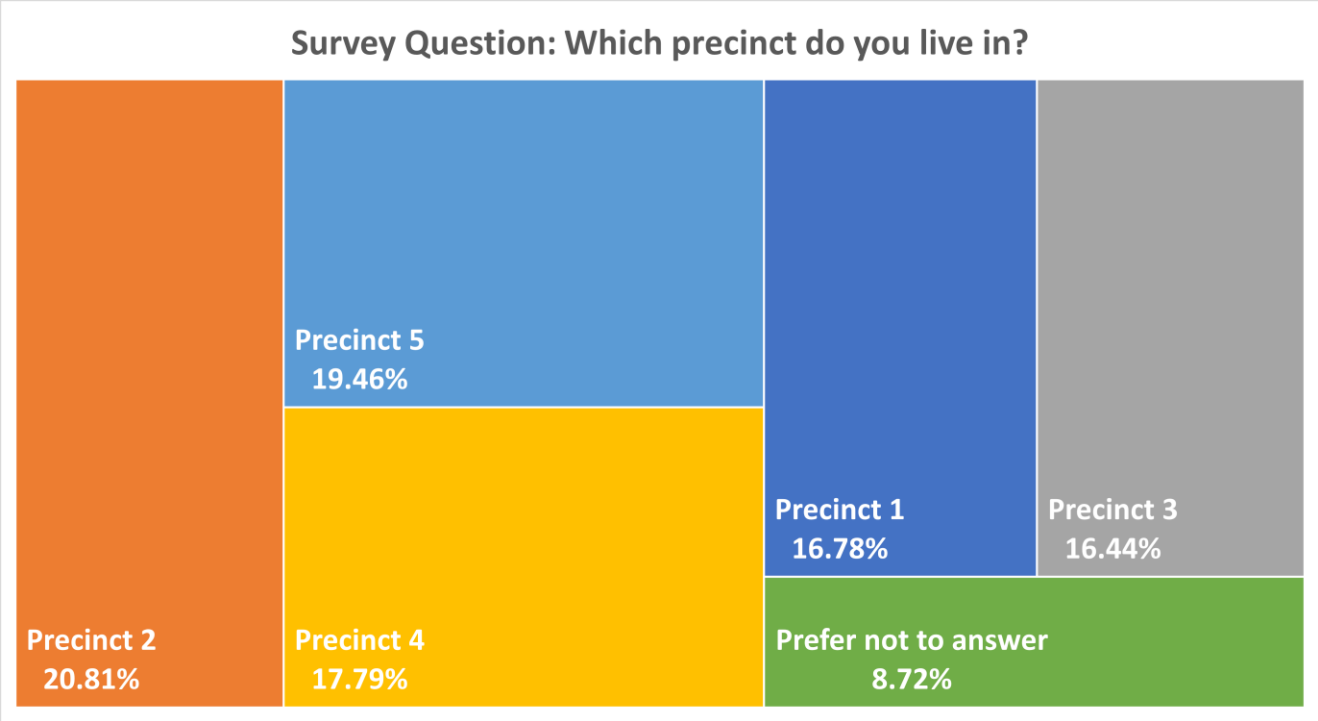
Survey Question: How do you feel about the following types of economic development ideas for Bellingham?



Survey respondents said that improving the ability to retain and support existing businesses was the best economic development approach the town could take. Creating new businesses through zoning changes was the least selected economic development option.

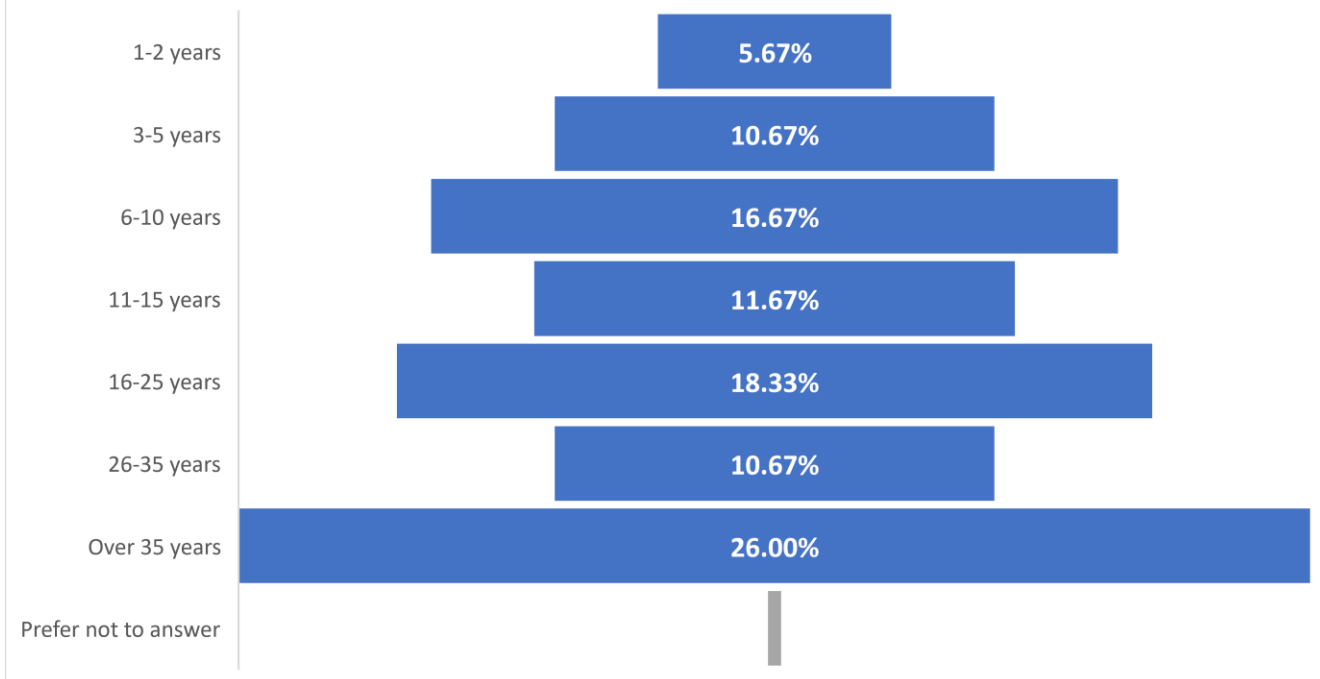


Bellingham residents represented 96 percent of survey respondents.



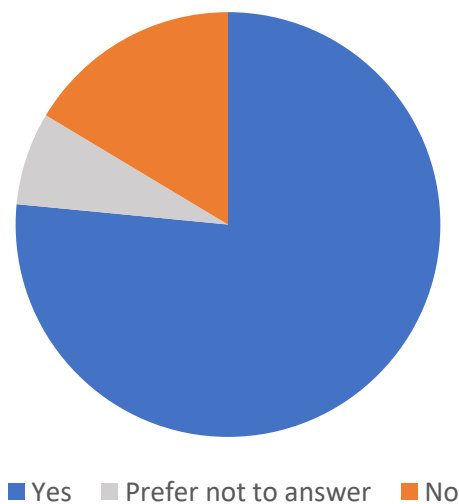
All five Bellingham precincts were well represented by survey respondents, although 8.72 percent opted not to answer which precinct they lived in.

Survey Question: How many years have you lived in Bellingham?



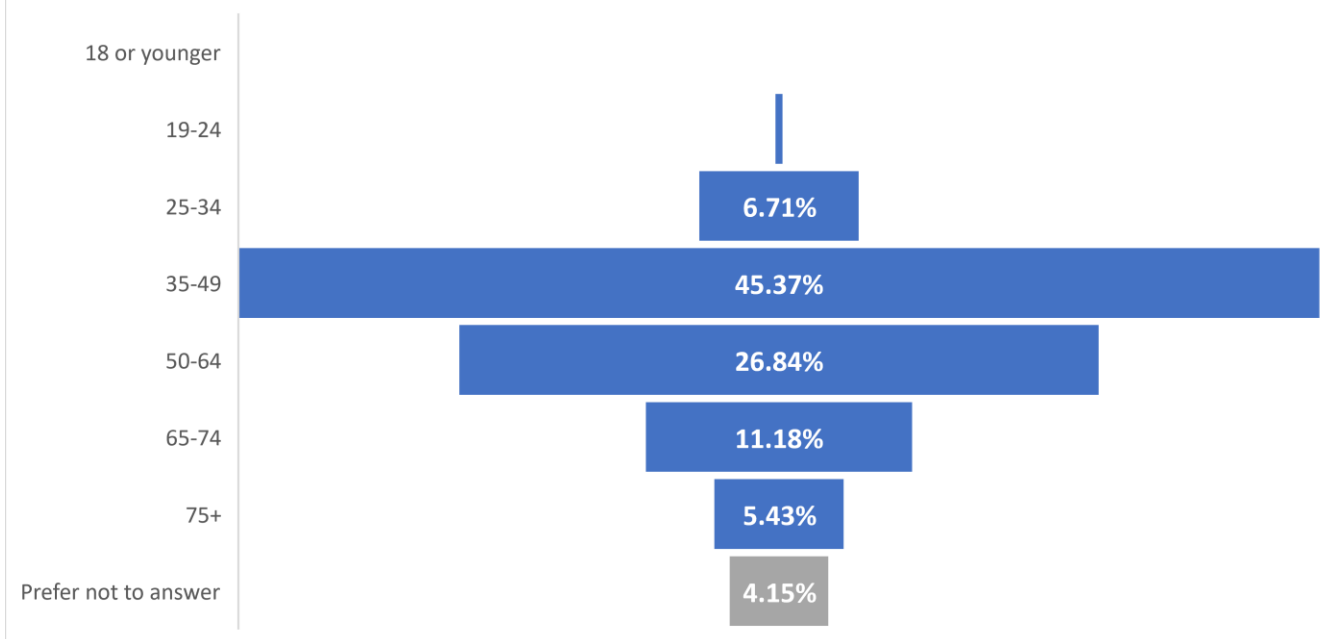
Residents who had lived in Bellingham for over 35 years were best represented among the survey takers, but interestingly, more than 15 percent of respondents had lived in town for five years or fewer.

Survey Question: Do you expect to live in Bellingham 10 years from now?



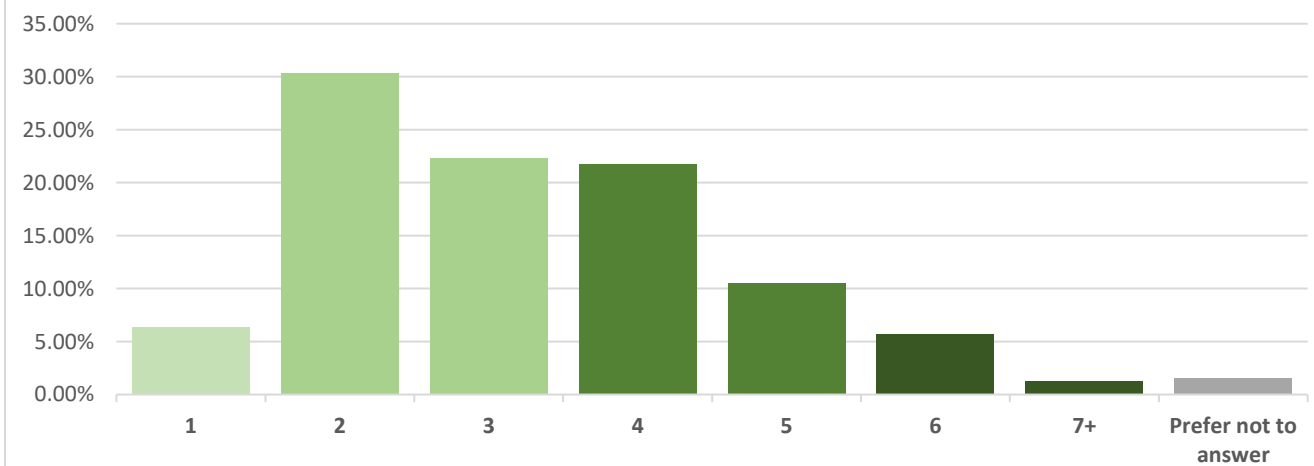
Seventy six percent of respondents said that they expect to live in Bellingham in ten years, and sixteen percent said they don't.

Survey Question: What age are you??



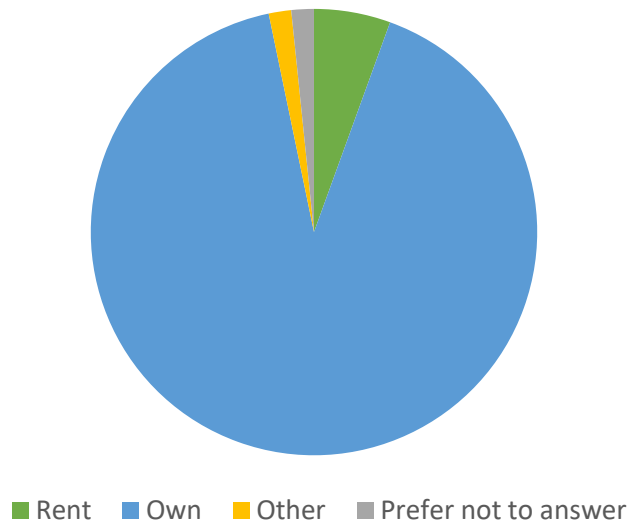
The 35- to 49-year- old age group was best represented among respondents, followed by the 50- to 64-year-old age group.

Survey Question: Including you, how many people live in your household?



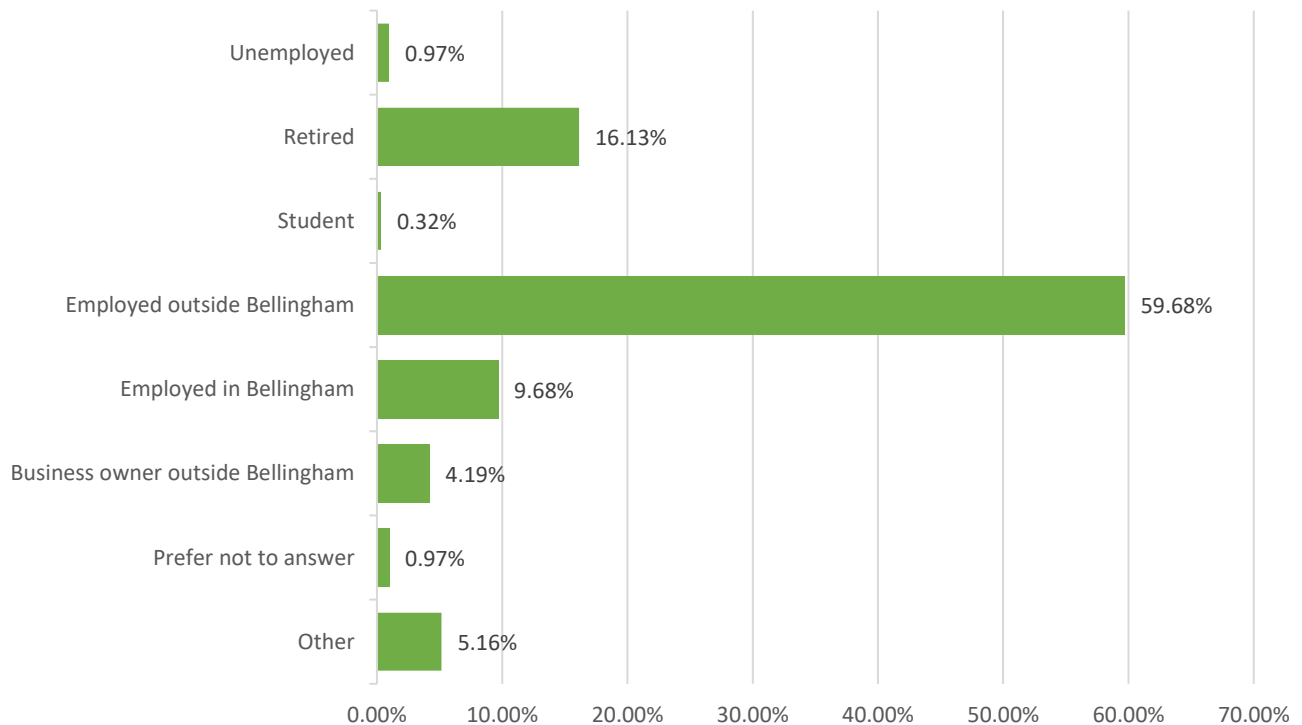
Thirty percent of survey respondents lived in households of two, twenty-two percent live in households three, twenty-one percent live in households of four, and ten percent in households of five.

Survey Question: Do you rent or own your home?



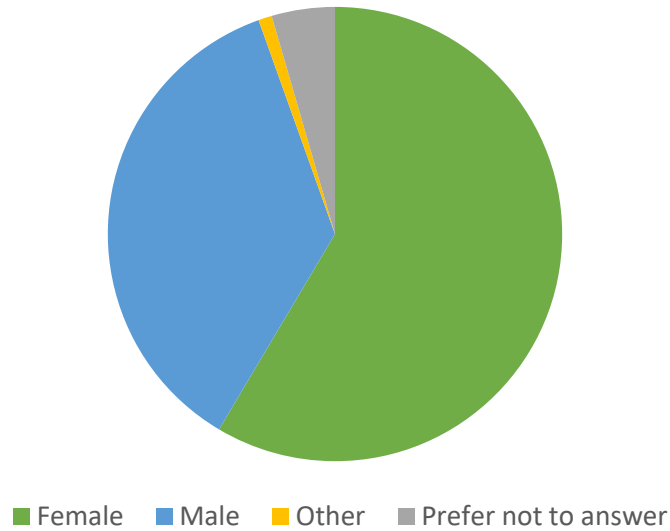
Ninety one percent of respondents are homeowners, while five percent of respondents are renters. Both “other” and “prefer not to answer” were two percent of respondents.

Survey Question: What best describes your employment status?



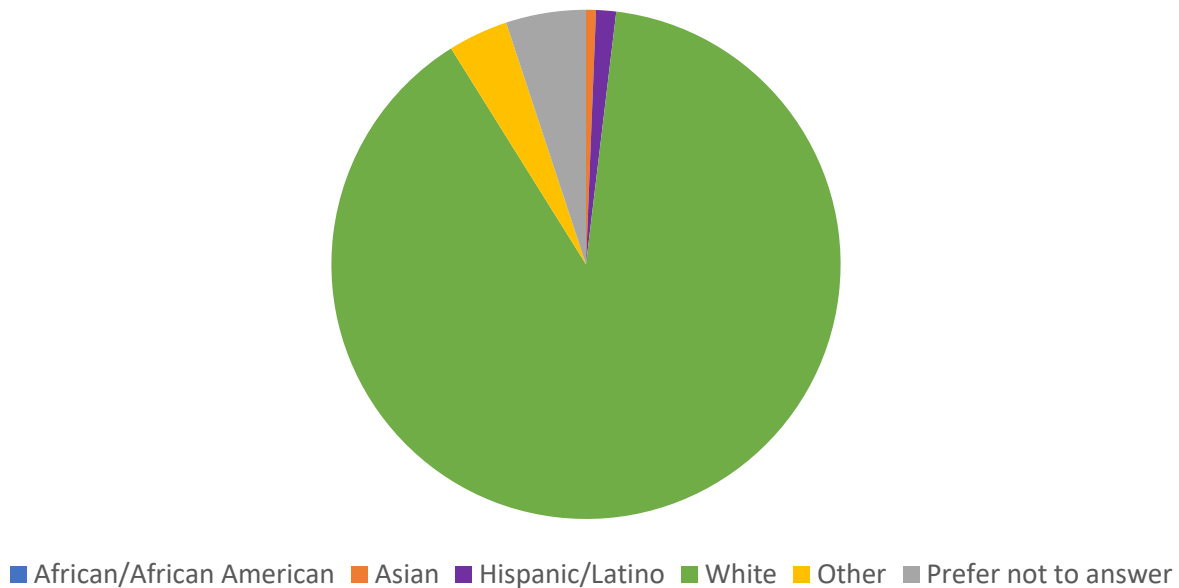
Most respondents – 59.68 percent – work outside of Bellingham. Retirees were the second largest group of respondents at 16.13 percent.

Survey Question: What is your gender?



On the survey's gender question, 58.52 percent of the respondents identified as female, and 36.01 percent as male. The "prefer not to answer" option was selected by 4.5 percent, and one percent selected "other."

Survey Question: How do you identify yourself? (Check all that apply)



Those who identify as "White" represented 89.21 percent of respondents. No respondents identified themselves as "African/African-American." Those who identified as "Hispanic/Latino" made up 1.27 percent of respondents, as "Asian" one percent of respondents. Five percent of respondents selected "Prefer not to answer," and 3.81 percent of respondents selected "Other." Under other, write-ins included "American," "Arab," "Human being," and "No impact."

BELLINGHAM OPEN HOUSE:

On October 23, an open house event was held to allow community members to help develop the plan's values and vision, and to ensure the public understood the plan elements. Because few attended, no real conclusions could be drawn from event. The ideas and feedback below were captured, however, and should be further investigated by members of the Master Plan Implementation Committee and Bellingham's Town Planner.

Transportation Board/Station:

1. "More reliable public transportation."
2. "Improve traffic light flow at rush hours."
3. "Work with other communities on; clean energy, shared transit, and increasing the amount of mass transportation."
4. "Local access to Franklin train station."
5. "Perform a town-wide transportation Master Plan."
6. "Separated bike lanes."
7. "Bypass from RI to 495."

Workforce Boards/Station:

1. On Housing: "More multi families"
2. Training and Education: "Co-op programs between industries and schools"
3. Other idea: "More jobs in clean energy"
4. Other idea: "Industrial jobs for those who cannot succeed at college."

Recreation Boards/Station:

1. Where do you play (now/today)?
 - a. Silver Lake
 - b. SNETT
 - c. Bellingham Softball Fields
 - d. Town Common
 - e. Senior Center
 - f. Arcand Park
 - g. DiPietro Elementary School
2. New play/recreation ideas for Bellingham
 - a. "Boating opportunities...de-weeding necessary."
 - b. "Park for fishing, biking, trails, and boating"
 - c. "Extend trails"
 - d. "Lots of open space for passive recreation."
 - e. "Tennis"
 - f. "Waterpark...more than a splash pad for...for older kids."
 - g. "Separated bike lanes"
 - h. "More wildlife"
 - i. "Outdoor ropes course"
 - j. "Improved sidewalks and installation of new sidewalks for walking in general and to access Town Common."

k. "Tennis Courts"

Collective Vision Board/Station:

Event participants had an opportunity to think about the concepts and values that should be used in the Master Plan Vision Statement. At the open house event, participants collaborated on words to add to a large board that resembled a Mad-Lib worksheet. They created a collective vision statement by selecting from a list of words or writing their own on sticky notes. Below are two examples of collective vision statements some event participants created. Again, due to the low event attendance this data doesn't lend itself to any meaningful takeaways but it merits further investigation.

Vision + Values



BEL LIBS

In Bellingham we are senior. We very much value health. In the past we have been able to _____. It is important to keep in mind climate when thinking about the future of the town. I hope Bellingham is able to transform when it comes to energy sustainability. One opportunity that we should be aware of is _____ because _____. Bellingham is place that I feel _____. One word that comes to mind when I think of Bellingham is resilience.

DRAW OUT YOUR
Vision of
Bellingham

DRAW OUT YOUR
Vision of
Bellingham

Station #1

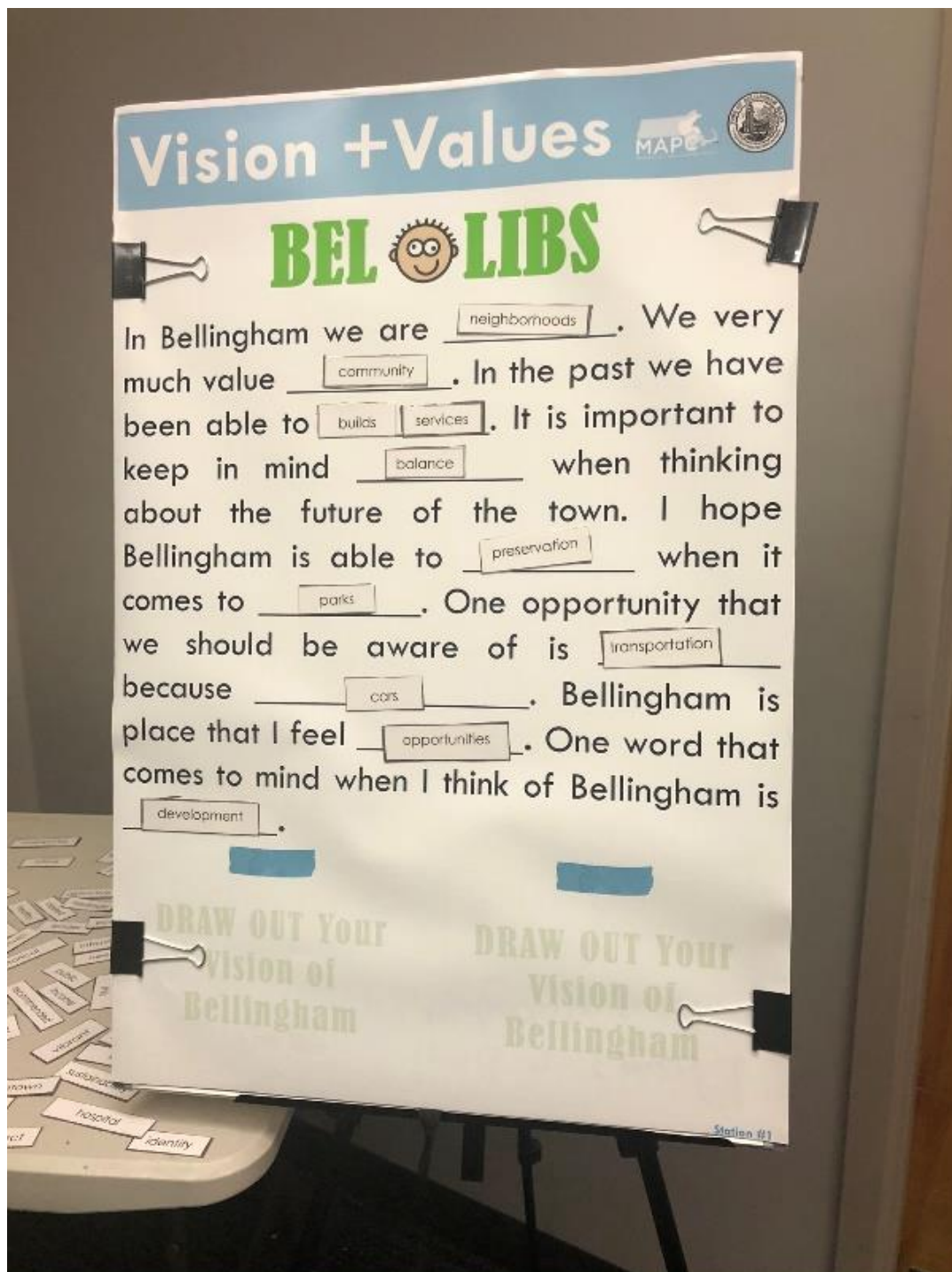
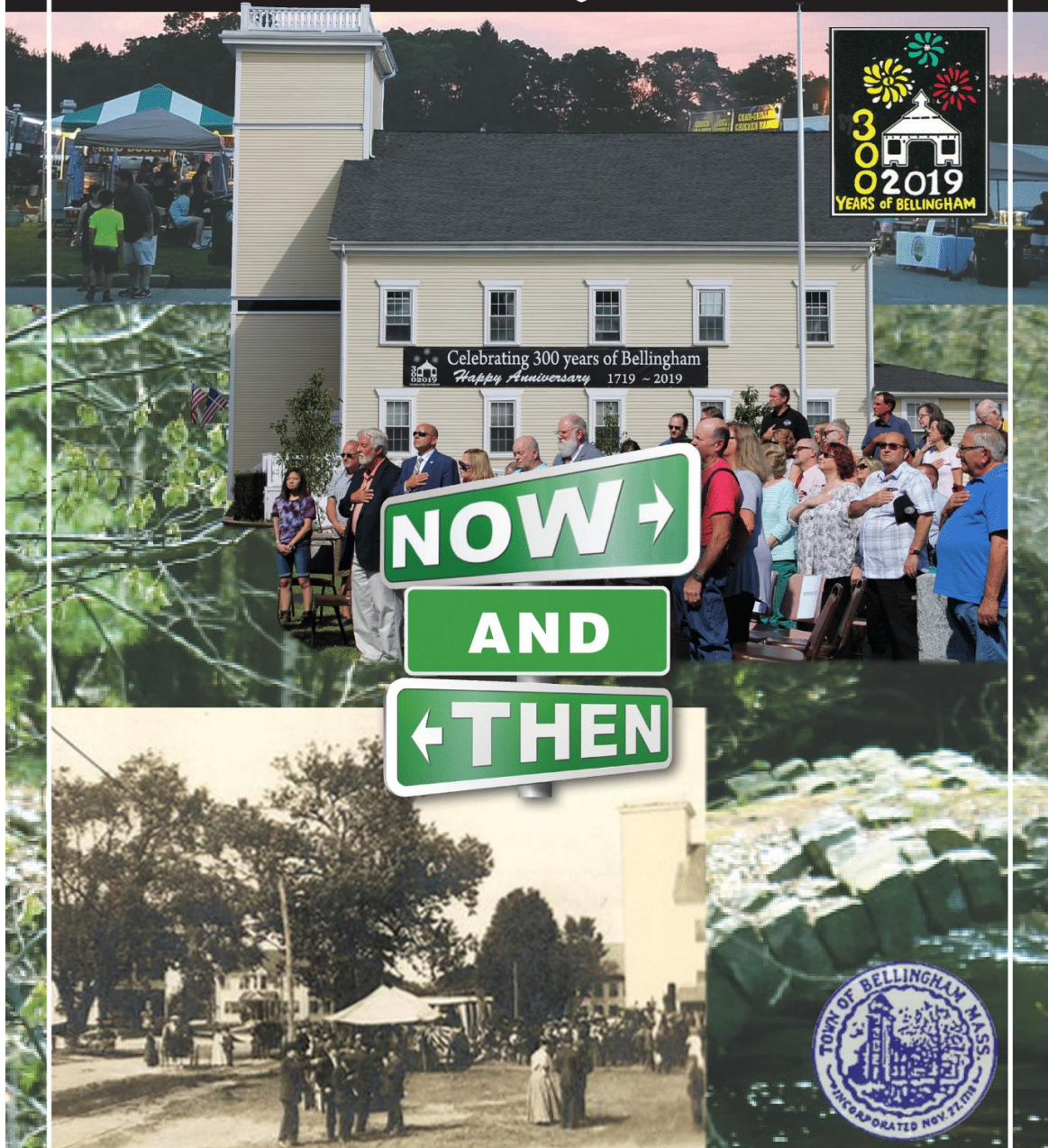


Figure 1: First and Second Collaborative Vision Statement

Bellingham



Celebrating the 300th Anniversary of Bellingham, MA