

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION, VISION AND GOALS

### 1. INTRODUCTION

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The Master Plan Steering Committee (MPSC) is pleased to present this *Master Plan* to the citizens of Harvard with the hope that it will prove to be a useful tool for preserving the character of the Town and be a guide for sustainable growth. We are deeply indebted to all of the committee members and residents who participated in workshops, surveys, roundtables, and document reviews, which composed a clear voice for formulating a unified public policy to address the key issues confronting Harvard in the years ahead.

In many ways, Harvard has been able to preserve its small-town appeal. Its excellent schools, plentiful open space, scenic views, lack of traffic congestion, and historic Town Center have kept property values high and provided residents with a pristine environment. Growth has continued at a slow pace, and low density zoning regulations have prevented many of the ills of suburbanization and commercial sprawl. However, even slow growth causes problems that call for action.

Harvard last updated its Master Plan in 2002. It set forth an agenda of urgent tasks to confront identified concerns. The Town checked off many items on the list only to be replaced with new issues that were not anticipated at the time. In undertaking this planning process officials devised a two-phased strategy to take stock of the current state of affairs and to devise a new game plan to meet residents' expectations for preserving Harvard's community fabric. This 2016 Update is the result of numerous public input sessions and committee meetings and sets out a clear path for guiding the Town forward over the next ten-year planning horizon.

Phase I, completed in 2012 with the assistance of Brown Walker Associates and Wolf Landscape Architecture, crafted a Vision for the future and established a set of Goals and Objectives that define the principles by which Harvard will evaluate all future courses of action. Phase I identified five major subject areas that were to be the focus of in-depth examinations in Phase II. These include Devens, Conservation, Housing, the Ayer Road Commercial District, and the Town Center. *Phase I: Vision and Goals* is a stand-alone report but is an integral component of the Master Plan. The Vision and Goals from Phase I are re-printed below due to their importance in shaping the work program and strategic thinking that occurred throughout Phase II.

*Phase II: Harvard Master Plan*, contains the various elements required by the Massachusetts Master Plan Law, MGL c. 41 §81-D, in order to constitute a complete Plan. Chapters 2-8 introduce the various elements in sequence with text, maps, and analysis to acquaint the reader with current conditions, including Devens factors that pertain to that element. Chapter 9 reports on the status of Devens. Chapter 10, Opportunities and Challenges, discusses the implications of the five focus areas from Phase I. Chapter 11 offers implementation actions for each element that are intended to resolve problems or correct deficiencies identified in the report. Each action lists a particular board or department that is responsible for shepherding that particular item through to completion. In this way, the various entities in Town government can be held accountable if they "drop the ball" and lose sight of the overall mission.

The MPSC believes it has completed its charge, and upon adoption by the Planning Board, will disband. We leave it to others to pick up the banner and carry on with the difficult, yet important

task of actually accomplishing the things we believe to be important to the Town's future. We urge the Planning Board to appoint an implementation committee to track progress of the Action Plan. It is all too easy to focus on day-to-day responsibilities and lose sight of the ultimate goal of working to help Harvard fulfill its potential to be a wonderful place to live for all of its citizens and to make sure its beauty remains for future generations. While the Planning Board will take the lead for many of the land use recommendations, there are numerous other committees in Town that must also step up and assume responsibility for improving conditions within their domain.

Phase II began with the selection of RKG, Associates to be the professional consultant to assist the MPSC with analysis and identification of workable solutions to resolve major areas of concern. Upon delivery of an initial draft, Harvard cut ties with the consultant and assumed a more direct role in formulating the key components of the Plan, with technical assistance provided by the Town's consulting planner, William Scanlan. Near the end of the process, realizing that it did not have a sufficient grasp on the complexity of the matter of resuming (or not resuming) jurisdiction of Devens, Harvard hired the consulting firm of Burns and McDonnell to undertake a thorough evaluation of this question. *Devens Impact Evaluation and Recommendations* (December 2015) will be an invaluable resource to help residents understand the benefits and responsibilities of Harvard taking back control of its historic lands at Devens.

Readers may choose to read the Plan from cover to cover, or just zero in on a particular area of interest. The Town needs capable citizen-volunteers to participate in all aspects of local government. We ask each resident to consider devoting some time and creative energy to the rewarding task of public service.

The Vision and Goals from Phase I follow.

## **2. VISION STATEMENT FROM PHASE 1**

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Harvard's community vision is the picture that the Town has painted of its future; it is an inspiration and a focus on what is possible. It answers the question "Where do we want to go," and articulates the dreams and hopes of Harvard's residents. It expresses what residents want Harvard to look like into the next decade and into a future that will be shaped by decisions the Town makes over the next few years. In the context of the Master Plan, the goals define the results that we expect after having taken actions outlined in the plan.

Harvard's shared vision comes from the hearts and minds of the hundreds of residents who engaged in Phase I of the master planning process and who shared their ideas about what they like about Harvard and about what they felt should change in town. The commonalities indicate shared beliefs, values, and desires, and are the basis for Harvard's community vision. It is important to note that these commonalities also show a great consistency across time as can be seen in Harvard's vision statement from its 2002 Master Plan.

([http://www.harvard.ma.us/Pages/HarvardMA\\_BComm/Planning/exec.pdf](http://www.harvard.ma.us/Pages/HarvardMA_BComm/Planning/exec.pdf)).

### **Vision Statement**

In 2020 Harvard will be a town that continues to foster a strong and vibrant sense of community and place, embraces careful stewardship and enhancement of its natural, historic and cultural resources, understands a clear direction in its role in Devens' governance, and employs best practices for achieving long-term sustainability. An informed and involved community is critical

to accomplishing this vision.

### 3. TOWN GOALS

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#### **Harvard has a robust sense of community and place:**

- Encourage a strong volunteer government and provide necessary staff support
- Encourage active civic life through public and private institutions and organizations
- Develop housing to accommodate a diversity of needs and population
- Foster a variety of gathering places for all generations
- Maintain the Town Center as the institutional, civic and cultural heart of the community, as envisioned in the 2005 Town Center Action Plan

#### **Harvard has a defined role in Devens:**

- Analyze fiscal and community impact of Devens on Harvard
- Use public outreach and education to ascertain Harvard's preferred direction and encourage and promote the awareness of the stake Harvard has in Devens in terms of governance, schools, and the civic life of the town
- Collaborate with Devens' stakeholders, including Ayer, Shirley and MassDevelopment
- Decide on Harvard's role in governance of Devens

#### **Harvard is assured long-term sustainability:**

- Develop plans for investment in public infrastructure, buildings and equipment
- Diversify and strengthen the town's revenue base
- Invest in near and long-term energy efficiencies
- Encourage retail and commercial activities of appropriate size and in appropriate locations as determined by residents and market

#### **Harvard engages in judicious stewardship of natural, historic and cultural resources:**

- Preserve and enhance historic buildings and cultural resources
- Identify and protect critical natural resource areas
- Restore and/or maintain key viewsheds
- Support agricultural heritage and farms
- Preserve stone walls and shade trees along rural roads
- Adopt best management practices on public conservation lands and disseminate them to the public

#### 4. FOCUS AREA GOALS

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##### **DEVENS**

###### *Goals*

- Be engaged and informed participants in planning for Devens' development and governance.
- Set a timeline for determining Harvard's preferred direction with respect to local governance of Devens.
- Understand the full scale of potential benefits and liabilities related to governance decisions.
- Ensure decision on local governance results in a positive outcome for Harvard and other stakeholders, including the Commonwealth, the region, and our neighbor towns.
- Keep Devens' neighborhoods intact.

##### **AYER ROAD COMMERCIAL DISTRICT**

###### *Goals*

- Diversify Harvard's economy and tax base with an appropriate mix of residential and commercial development in the Commercial District.
- Work with existing and new businesses to attract commercial services that fit the town.
- Decrease barriers and increase incentives for attracting new business.
- Work with adjacent neighborhoods, town residents, and other stakeholders to facilitate planning and coordination prior to any permitting processes.
- Understand the relationship between economic development of the C-District and Devens, in terms of various factors such as transportation and circulation, conservation, and housing.

##### **HOUSING**

###### *Goals*

- Increase the diversity of housing types in Harvard to meet the needs of a greater variety of households.
- Ensure that new housing is harmonious in design with the character of the community.
- Provide a greater variety of housing throughout Harvard.
- Be proactive in meeting the state's affordable housing goals.

##### **TOWN CENTER**

###### *Goals*

- Emphasize Town Center's role as the central community gathering place.
- Accommodate land uses that meet different needs of the community across different time scales.
- Integrate the natural landscape with the historic beauty and viewsheds of the Town Center.
- Provide safe, convenient and attractive circulation choices for pedestrians that reduce parking demands.
- Maintain and enhance public buildings for cultural and community uses.
- Protect and optimize multi-family and rental properties to provide diverse housing options.

## CONSERVATION

### Goals

- Conserve natural, historic and cultural resources.
- Preserve the Town's defining landscapes that are valued by Harvard's residents and reflective of the rural heritage.
- Protect local watersheds.
- Protect Harvard's agricultural base.
- Preserve historic structures and locations.

## 5. FINDINGS OF THE 2014 MASTER PLAN SURVEY

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The Master Plan Steering Committee and RKG Associates developed a citizen survey to assess residents' sentiments regarding important topics facing Harvard in the years ahead. Understanding citizens' desires is an important element of preparing a Master Plan, and surveys help to place in perspective the relative merits of various choices. Results may help to shape local growth policies and can serve as indicators of support, or non-support, for possible implementation measures to address the threats and opportunities confronting Harvard.

The survey contained six demographic/identification questions and 51 public policy questions. The survey was administered on the internet in the spring of 2014 via Survey Monkey. It required interested parties to have access to a computer and an internet connection. Paper copies were also available at the Senior Center and in other locations. 239 residents completed the survey. As primarily an on-line instrument without checks on who could take it or the number of times one could participate, the survey does not represent a statistically valid, random sample of residents. Local officials should use caution in interpreting the results. Nevertheless, the survey offers some interesting insights into the mutual aspirations of the citizens.

Presented below is a summary of key findings from the survey organized by topic. The tabulation of data is in Appendix 4 and includes a brief interpretation of the results for each question.

### Housing

Harvard's housing stock consists principally of single family dwellings on large lots, and respondents see a need to diversify the housing stock. In particular, respondents believe there is a need for housing that would allow older homeowners to move to a smaller unit and remain near-by even if it means increasing density in some locations. A high percentage of respondents believe that ethnic, generational, and economic diversity are important for the health and vitality of Harvard. Respondents feel that the Commercial District (C District) is an appropriate location for mixed use development (locations that provide a mix of residential and commercial uses), but they were divided on whether or not the C District is an appropriate location for affordable housing. A majority of respondents believe that Harvard needs more affordable housing, but such is not the case for special needs housing. Respondents believe that Devens provides opportunities to broaden the housing mix for the Town.

### Economic Development

Respondents think that Harvard relies heavily on residential property to raise taxes for municipal services, and they would like to see the Town broaden its tax base through commercial growth. Respondents favor uses that provide services to meet local needs, and not just those that will generate tax revenue. In fact, a majority believe the Town should have a more “business-friendly” approach regarding development in the C District. While loss of town character from greater commercial growth is a concern for some, a greater number believe such growth is possible without altering town character. Some respondents have concerns that economic growth could negatively impact surrounding neighborhoods, but many believe this can be accomplished without adversely affecting nearby residents. Respondents believe the Town should implement appearance controls on new development and should carefully consider the types of uses to allow in the C District. Respondents think that lack of infrastructure along Ayer Road is an impediment to growth, and that bringing infrastructure to the area would spur economic growth and provide revenue for the Town.

### Municipal Facilities

If Harvard ever needs a site for a new school, respondents were about evenly split over whether it should remain within the school campus in the Town Center or locate elsewhere. There is lack of support for single stream recycling, although nearly half of the respondents had no opinion on the question. In addition, respondents believe that a fee-per-bag system for waste disposal would not increase recycling, and there is little support for adopting that approach. Respondents clearly support actively maintaining Town buildings, and would be willing to raise taxes to do so. A majority of respondents also believe that the Town should hire a full-time facility manager to look after Town buildings. Respondents support preservation of historic town buildings even if it costs more. Unfortunately, there appears to be a widespread perception that local boards do not communicate well or collaborate together and lack capacity to manage a more complex municipal structure, i.e. assuming jurisdiction of Devens.

### Town Center

Respondents favor keeping municipal and school buildings in the Town Center. They believe that expanding water and sewer districts there would allow the area to accommodate additional growth. A proposed walking path from the Town Beach through the Center enjoys modest support. A pub or restaurant is the kind of use respondents would like to see open there. Nearly half of the respondents are not in favor of increasing residential density or encouraging affordable housing in the Center. Respondents would like to see the Town implement a comprehensive circulation plan to address traffic flow, parking problems, and pedestrian comfort and safety in the Town Center.

### Transportations

Respondents would support re-opening roads that used to lead to Devens if the Town resumes jurisdiction. Respondents do not believe greater traffic enforcement by police will curtail speeding on local roads, nor do they think that cut-through traffic is responsible for unsafe travel speeds. Instead, respondents strongly endorse building paths for pedestrians and bicyclists to insure their safety. Respondents approve increasing spending on road maintenance.

### Devens

The question of resuming jurisdiction over Devens is an important issue for Harvard. Respondents think that the Town should not resume jurisdiction unless the revenues gained are greater than the cost of services. However, over half of the respondents neither agree nor disagree with whether Devens will become fiscally self-supporting within the next decade. Respondents recognize that Harvard will need to hire more professionals due to the complexity of assuming control over a large community. Acquiring conservation lands and recreation facilities is perceived as a benefit of resuming jurisdiction. Furthermore, respondents have confidence that local boards will do a good job protecting the natural resources. Another benefit respondents perceive from resuming jurisdiction is gaining control over the aquifer that underlies Devens. (Harvard is looking for a new water source at the present time.) Respondents recognize that Harvard's small town character might change by absorbing the intensively developed former Army base.

### Natural and Cultural Resources

Respondents exhibit a strong ethic for preserving the Town's natural and cultural resources. 73% support preserving Harvard's historic landscapes, including historic lands, sites, stone walls, objects, and areas. Preserving agricultural lands received the greatest amount of support in the entire survey; 90% agree that the preservation of agricultural land should be encouraged. In addition, a large majority wishes to preserve the Town's resources for future generations and is willing to spend more to do so. Many respondents view open space (cluster) development as one way to accomplish this task, but 37% could not agree or disagree on the technique. A clear majority believes it is necessary to exercise good stewardship of conservation lands through proper management and maintenance and would like to secure a reliable funding source. Creating new historic districts or expanding existing districts does not appear to be a priority, although questions elsewhere indicate strong support for historic preservation in general.