

A PLAN FOR HARVARD

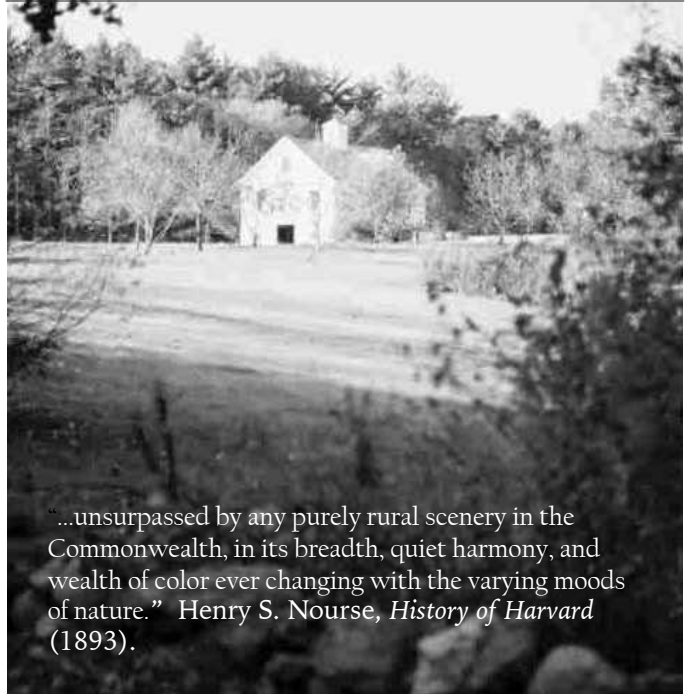
Introduction

Harvard casts an indelible impression of nature, heritage and place. Known to many for its productive orchards and its history of communal settlements by social and religious visionaries, Harvard is peerless for its small-town charm, scenic vistas and large tracts of open space, all of which matter deeply to residents new and old. A tour from Prospect Hill south to Still River Village, from the Town Center east along Massachusetts Avenue, or north on Old Littleton Road as it ascends and traverses Oak Hill, is enough to convince even a cynic that Harvard's dignified beauty puts the town in a class of its own.

Harvard is a predominantly residential community of 5,230 people.¹ Though its population is small, Harvard ranks in the upper third of Massachusetts municipalities for total land area. Its population density of 227 persons per mi²

makes Harvard similar to a number of towns along and west of the Connecticut River Valley, yet in built character, it differs from them in significant ways. Just as Harvard's villages provide a record of the town's history, the new homes that line its outlying roadways attest to a late-20th century development phase that was sparked largely by regional transportation improvements and economic growth. Located on the outer edge of the I-495 corridor and crossed by Route 2 (see Fig. 1-A), Harvard is in one of the most rapidly growing areas of the state. While closer to Worcester (22 miles) than to Boston (31 miles), the town is oriented toward the economy of Eastern Massachusetts and its development has been influenced by trends in that part of the Commonwealth. Nearby towns such as Boxborough, Bolton and Groton have also absorbed a considerable amount of new growth in the past 10-15 years.

Harvard's vistas and unblemished hillsides explain why most of the town is included in the Massachusetts Scenic Landscape Inventory. The hills of Harvard offer views in all directions, including the Boston skyline and the mountains of Central Massachusetts and Southern New Hampshire. Furthermore, the town's entire western boundary is defined by the Nashua River, which lies in plain view across the valley from Prospect Hill. In Harvard, a significant portion of the Nashua River watershed is protected by the Oxbow National Wildlife Refuge, a large conservation area owned by the U.S. Fisheries and Wildlife Service. Thanks to concerted efforts by local and regional authorities, 12,884 acres of the Central Nashua River watershed in Harvard, Bolton, Lancaster and



“...unsurpassed by any purely rural scenery in the Commonwealth, in its breadth, quiet harmony, and wealth of color ever changing with the varying moods of nature.” Henry S. Nourse, *History of Harvard* (1893).

Harvard, Massachusetts.

1. Census 2000, Summary File 1, Worcester County Census Tract 7142 (Harvard).

Leominster have been designated as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC). Such resources as Bare Hill Pond, the Town Center, Fruitlands, Prospect Hill and Still River, the Shaker Village and Oak Hill provide Harvard with identifiable landmarks and they form the basis for many of the recommendations and strategies outlined in the Master Plan.

The town's natural features are complimented by historic and modern homes of the highest quality and value. Spacious, tastefully designed residences surrounded by well-kept yards and fine gardens convey an air of formality that befits Harvard's prestige. A recurring feature of Harvard's built environment is the fence. Stone walls and traditional wooden fences supply visual continuity between the town's villages, farms and new neighborhoods, and they underscore the value that residents place on privacy. Harvard also has an enviable roster of historically significant institutions, both public and private. In addition to the renowned Fruitlands, buildings such as Town Hall and Harvard Public Library, (Old) Bromfield School, the town's several churches, a small religious community in Still River Village, and the Shaker Village in northern Harvard all point to a community that has much to be proud of -- and much to protect.

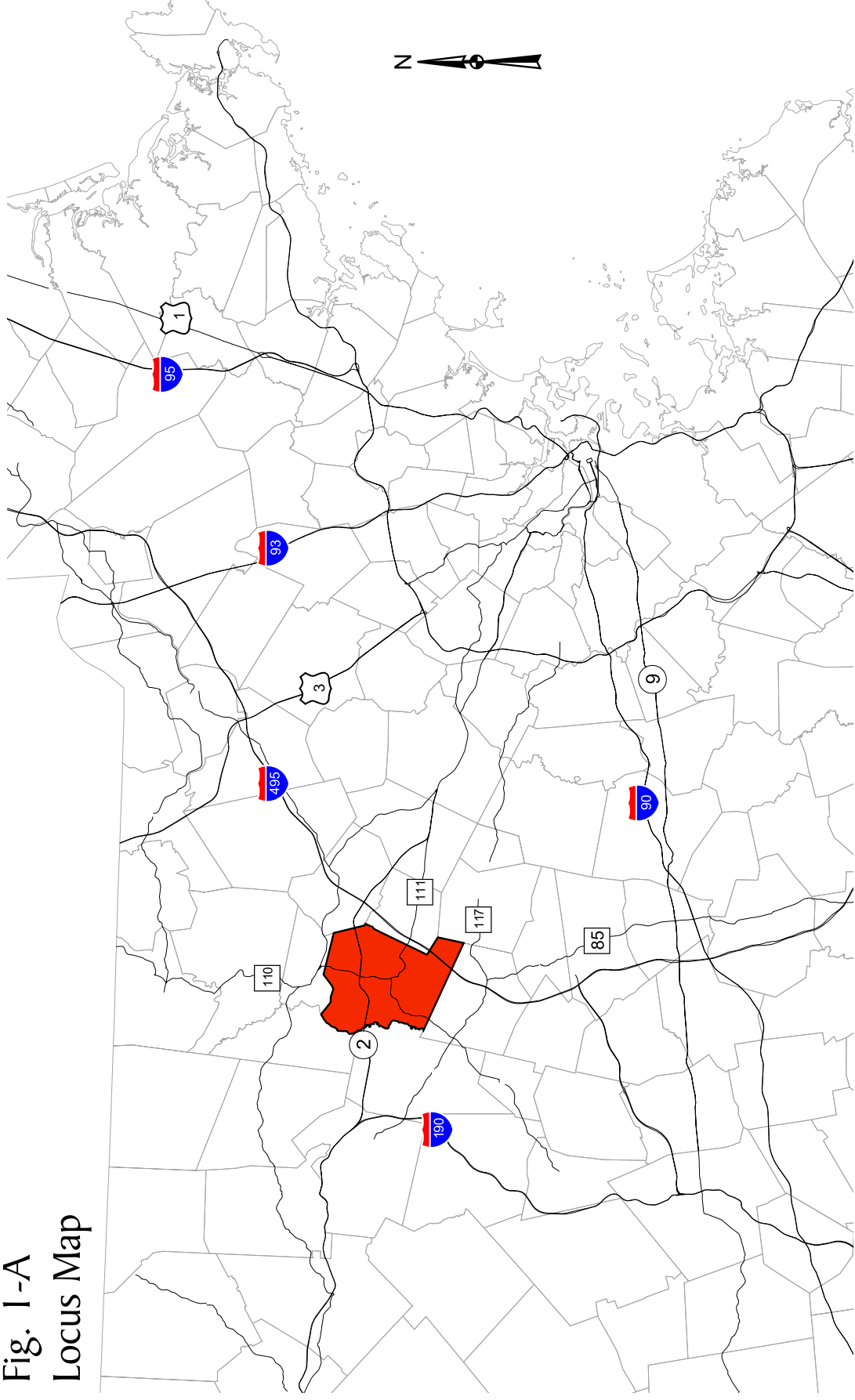
Harvard's distinguishing feature is open space, particularly orchards. Though the number of active farms declined in Harvard during the last half of the 20th century, the town still has vital commercial orchards and a number of small, leisure or "home" farms. Today, nearly 1,400 acres of agricultural land are controlled by Chapter 61-A agreements. Harvard's farms and orchards, together with several large tracts of land in forest management, local conservation holdings and property owned by state and federal agencies, mean that open space constitutes about 40% of the town. The mix and arrangement of wetlands, meadows, pasture and crops, forests, open water and stunning hillsides make some areas of Harvard seem almost timeless.

Harvard has so much going for it that some may wonder why the town needs a master plan at all. Most of the town's 1,637 homeowners are affluent, highly educated people who seem willing to pay one of the state's highest tax bills in exchange for the best of community and school services. They cherish what Harvard offers: the excellence of its schools, the pristine quality, abundance and diversity of its environmental resources, and the social customs of living in a small town. More than 82% of Harvard's households are families -- a percentage far exceeding that of the state as a whole -- and nearly 45% of the town's families have children under 18. It makes sense that Harvard has one of the

Fences & Gateways



Fig. 1-A
Locus Map



Commonwealth's highest achieving public school systems. It also makes sense that Harvard attracts unusually qualified, caring volunteers to local government service, and that residents see themselves as stakeholders in major decisions which affect their community. There is something to be said for living in a town with the state's eighth highest median household income: beyond the sheer privilege of living in Harvard, the town has resources and uses them wisely.

Harvard's desirability also contributes to public policy conflicts, however. Sometimes it is difficult for residents of communities like Harvard to see that the kind of development they prefer comes with environmental and social costs. A succession of large house lots along rural roadways, each with a private driveway, lawns and an immaculately landscaped yard, contributes not only to Harvard's aura but also to the fragmentation of open space and the reduction of critical wildlife habitat. Despite the size of Harvard's open space inventory, only half of what the town calls "open space" is permanently protected. Considering Harvard's unprotected open space and its vacant or underutilized residential land, there is still plenty of room to grow.

Under current zoning regulations, Harvard could accommodate another 2,600-2,700 housing units on land that has yet to be developed. The commercial district on Ayer Road has untapped capacity for another 1.1-1.2 million ft² of new business growth. If future development mirrors recent trends, Harvard at build-out will be a very different town. It may remain low-density and affluent, but the qualities that distinguish Harvard today will have been sacrificed for an unimaginative approach to controlled growth. Harvard wants to be a small town and preserve its unique attributes. Though Harvard's land use policies are clearly geared toward "small," they are not at all mindful of place. To realize the vision and goals of the Master Plan, Harvard needs policies that harmonize development with the character of the land.

Under our "American" culture the powers of the town and public agencies to control the direction and timing of community growth are severely limited. We Americans, having "conquered the wilderness" and profited mightily from the constant increase in land values over three centuries, have strong views about private property rights and the "right to do with our own whatever we please." It has been said that "Americans have a 'Divine Right' to speculate in land."

Charles Eliot, *Planning for Harvard*, II-38, 1969.

Harvard's Planning History

Fourteen years ago, Harvard revisited and updated its first master plan, written by well-known landscape architect Charles W. Eliot in 1969. Eliot knew Harvard quite well. He had worked with the Planning Board during the late 1950s, moderating a panel discussion on Harvard's future only a few years after the town adopted its first zoning bylaw (1951). By the time Eliot finished his master plan report in 1969, Harvard's population had increased by 60% in one decade because of housing starts prompted by a sequence of regional highway improvements: Route 2 (1950) and I-495 (1965). The 423 homes that were built in Harvard between 1950-1970 came at the expense of some 1,800 acres of land, mainly farms.

Eliot played an instrumental role in helping Harvard launch what would become one of the strongest records of conservancy of any town in the Commonwealth. He promoted a town-wide greenbelt plan and encouraged Harvard to buy open space. Ever since the 1960s, Harvard has been acquiring conservation land and development rights, on its own or in conjunction with the Harvard Conservation Trust, organized in 1973. However, many of Eliot's other master plan proposals were never implemented or they were carried out only in part. Perhaps Harvard residents did not believe the town would continue to grow and change as rapidly as Eliot predicted, or they hoped that by acquiring large parcels, they could reduce the amount of new development enough to keep the town substantially as it was: small, private, and pastoral.

Though Harvard's population growth rate eventually stabilized, the development impacts that occurred after 1969 were pervasive, qualitative and increasingly costly to the town. Between 1970-1985, Harvard's housing stock increased by 81%, from 855 to 1,554 homes (Fig. 1-B), this time at the expense of forests. It fell to a new generation of town officials, aided by a different planning firm, to dissect what had happened in Harvard since Eliot's day and to propose growth management ideas that residents might be willing to accept. With few exceptions, the Town Plan Committee and Connery Associates recommended a slate of actions similar to those outlined in the original master plan. Some of the recommendations were implemented; most were not.

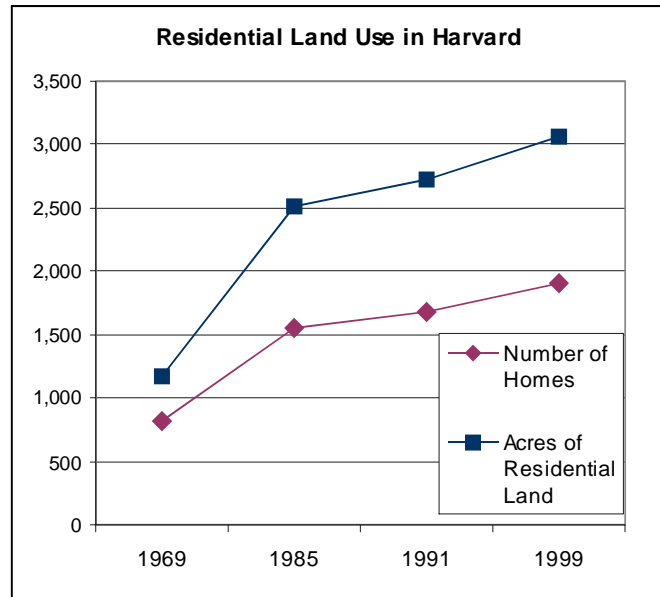


Fig. 1-B. Note: residential acres do not include farms.

Harvard changed considerably between 1969-1988 and so did Massachusetts planning practice. In the intervening years, the state legislature adopted a new zoning act (1975) and several court decisions had a profound impact on land use regulation. Fiscal impact studies also became increasingly popular. In the late 1970s, Harvard and 314 other communities participated in a statewide growth policy project that sought to encourage regional planning and rejuvenate urban and rural centers, yet by 1988, there was no longer an Office of State Planning to direct (or fund) the recommendations of that study. Environmental, affordable housing and public finance laws that were barely on the horizon in Eliot's day had become routine -- and often thorny -- issues for most communities. Connery Associates and other planners working on master plans in the mid-1980s found themselves sorting through a mosaic of statutes, regulations and policies that left many communities confused and worried about an eclipse of local control.

Possibly, Harvard residents were too distraught about growth to take actions that they considered risky, or perhaps they simply disagreed with the Town Plan Committee's proposals. The town had changed so much in such a short period of time: 40 years earlier, Harvard had only 370 homes and slightly more than 1,000 residents, and 50 years before the Planning Board adopted the *Harvard Town Plan*, there were more small businesses scattered around town than most residents could imagine, let alone remember, in 1988 -- including a slaughterhouse. Harvard *had been* a farming town not so long ago, but at the end of the 1980s, it was an emerging suburb with vestiges of its agricultural past. It still had successful commercial orchards and a number of small leisure or home farms, yet its development pattern and economic base were irrevocably changed by transportation, technology, land market conditions and obviously, by zoning, during the last half of the 20th century. Only a few years after the Town Plan Committee finished the second master plan, Harvard's last dairy farm closed. So did Fort Devens.

The Devens Factor

Neither Eliot in *Planning for Harvard* nor Connery Associates in the *Town Plan* had much to say about the large section of Harvard that lies west of the railroad, a section known historically as Shabikin and later, as Fort Devens. That both of Harvard's previous master plans include very few references to Fort Devens makes sense, to a point. In 1917, the U.S. Army acquired land from 112 property owners in Harvard, Ayer, Shirley and Lancaster to build one of the 16 military training camps that were established during World War I. Most of the land lies inside Harvard's corporate limits, yet

during its 80-year lifespan, Fort Devens was commonly described by outsiders as an Army post located in Ayer. Since the federal government had jurisdiction over the base, Harvard and its master plan consultants paid relatively little attention to the future of Fort Devens, concentrating instead on what the town could rightfully control: land use and development *east* of the railroad.

Though Fort Devens became a permanent installation in 1931, the base was periodically activated and de-activated until the Vietnam era began. Over a period of about 15 years, beginning in the late 1950s, the Army built a considerable amount of housing for military families at Fort Devens. Woodlands adjacent to Shirley and Harvard were cleared to make way for new neighborhoods of four-, six- and eight-unit buildings, access roads and playgrounds. The base that had been out of sight and largely out of mind for several decades would develop a new identity by 1965. Tensions between residents of surrounding communities and residents of military neighborhoods began to escalate, including occasional conflicts over the use of Mirror Lake, historically known as Hell Pond. In the 1970s, the Army created an Army Community Relations Committee to address these problems, yet within a decade, rumors that Fort Devens would close became more frequent and widespread.



Fort Devens Reception Center, Winter 1965.

In 1991, the Army confirmed its intent to close Fort Devens. A complicated, expensive and contentious disposition process ensued, culminating in an event that many residents who lived in Harvard at the time recall today with bitterness: the “Super Town Meeting” of December 1994. After Harvard, Ayer, Shirley and Lancaster voters agreed to endorse the *Devens Reuse Plan*, state government acquired the Army base and began to redevelop it as a large employment compound. Responsibility for making Devens an economic success story lies with MassDevelopment, a quasi-public state agency that differs operationally and culturally from the small towns with a direct stake in the land.

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For a number of reasons, Harvard has found it very difficult to contend with the transformation of Devens to an industrial center. First, the redevelopment process has moved at a much faster pace than anyone expected when the *Devens Reuse Plan* was written several years ago. As a result, the impacts of new and different land uses at Devens are a fact of daily life in Harvard today, particularly for neighborhoods along Ayer Road north of Route 2. Second, since MassDevelopment is a public corporation operating under a mandate from the legislature, it has an interest in developing Devens quickly, visibly, and to the maximum extent allowed under the *Devens Reuse Plan*. Often, MassDevelopment’s interests and Harvard’s seem completely antithetical.

Third, Harvard residents are divided over the future of Devens, which means that the town does not speak with one voice in conveying what it wants from MassDevelopment. Finally, MassDevelopment’s operating style is closed and insular while Harvard (like the vast majority of small towns) is accustomed to an open, public process for making decisions that affect the community. Differences in style, constituencies and institutional interests make it almost impossible for MassDevelopment and Harvard to see eye-to-eye about priorities at Devens -- priorities that affect one-fifth of Harvard’s total land area and its only substantial aquifers.

Devens is important to Harvard, but it is not the town’s only challenge and in some ways it is not the most important one. A number of needs are more compelling today than when they were identified by Eliot in 1969, by Connery Associates in 1988, and more recently, by Shary Berg and Claire Woodford Dempsey, co-authors of a study commissioned by the Harvard Historical Commission, *Planning for Harvard’s Rural Landscape: Case Studies in Historic Conservation* (1997). The vision and goals

of the 2002 Master Plan show, in both implicit and obvious ways, that Harvard residents *also* recognize many of the same needs.

Major Findings of the Master Plan

Planning and Zoning¹

- Harvard's land is not homogenous, yet the Zoning Bylaw prescribes a uniform development outcome for 97% of the town. The Town Center, Prospect Hill and Massachusetts Avenue are not at all alike, but if fully developed according to Harvard's land use regulations, they would be indistinguishable.
- Present land use policies neither encourage nor allow the kinds of development that many town officials and residents say they want in their community. Despite its noble aims, the Zoning Bylaw sponsors development outcomes that differ from the goals of the Master Plan.
- Five years ago, the Harvard Historical Commission sponsored an important study, *Planning for Harvard's Rural Landscape*. The authors of that project argue persuasively that four factors play an instrumental role in defining Harvard's rural identity:
 - Traditional settlement patterns with village centers surrounded by farms.
 - The endurance of active agriculture.
 - The view from the road.
 - Historic resources.

Harvard's current land use regulations do not acknowledge, reward or protect these character-defining features. Harvard needs creative zoning incentives to use land efficiently, preserve open space, encourage agriculture and protect scenic views. Most new development in Harvard consists of single-family homes on Approval Not Required or "Form A" lots along existing streets. The incremental extension of housing into rural areas intrudes on the roadside



Still River Village



View from the road in Harvard.

1. These and other findings are discussed in Chapter 3 of the Master Plan.

views that are so central to Harvard's character, and increases locally generated traffic on town roads.

- The Town Center is Harvard's most significant community facility. Its historic buildings, the Town Common, the convergence of key roadways and the presence of major community facilities all contribute to the Town Center's distinctive sense of place. Residents identify strongly with the Harvard Center, yet the area is zoned for development that is not at all like what exists today. In fact, Harvard's regulations run counter to the basic principles of village center design. To maintain and enhance the Town Center's vitality, Harvard needs zoning that encourages use and reuse flexibility for its historic buildings, allows for infill development and sets appropriate performance standards for new land uses.
- Under its current regulatory framework, Harvard cannot recreate or reinforce its historic development pattern. Though the master plan goals call for "a balanced mix of village centers, agricultural, forested and open lands, and small neighborhoods," Harvard's land use policies do not recognize *any* villages, high-priority open space or unique neighborhood areas. If the town were to develop in strict conformance with the zoning bylaw, virtually all of Harvard would be comprised of single-family homes on 1.5-acre lots. Not only would Harvard have lost its farmland and forests, but it also would have sacrificed the form, function and ambience of its historic villages.
- Harvard does not have public sewer service, so all of the town's homes and businesses are served individually by on-site wastewater disposal systems. The town seems to have relied on the prevalence of poor soil conditions to manage growth for many years. Homes built during the past decade occupy lots with an average area of more than four acres. Advanced wastewater technology and the flexibility afforded by current Title V regulations will eventually facilitate the conversion of difficult-to-develop land. It is very important for Harvard's land use regulations to convey what residents want rather than leaving the town's future development to chance opportunities created by new technology.

Open Space and Resource Protection

- Harvard aspires to be a community that retains its sense of place. Historic built resources are as influential as open space in defining Harvard's character, yet the town has no community-wide preservation strategy or regulations to protect its historically significant buildings from demolition or inappropriate alteration. Its two local historic districts, while very important in the areas to which they apply, are not adequate to protect all – or even a significant majority – of Harvard's cultural assets.
- Since water resource protection has always been important to Harvard, the community vision statement's desire for an ample supply of clean water is not at all surprising. However, some essential water quality tools are noticeably absent from the town's repertoire of land use, public health and safety regulations. For example, Harvard has not enacted groundwater protection zoning to control activity in recharge areas for its own public wells or DEP-regulated commercial water supplies. Despite recommendations of past planning studies, Harvard has yet to establish a watershed protection district for its most significant water body, Bare Hill Pond, and the town does not mandate periodic maintenance of septic systems. In addition, Harvard has only indirect control over land use and development choices that affect its largest and highest-yield aquifers, which are located at Devens.
- The master plan vision statement also calls for clean air, yet ironically, the town's growth policies encourage auto-dependent development. Despite Harvard's rural image, many of its roads are dangerous for walking, horseback riding and bicycling, mainly because of traffic speeds. The

emerging pattern of suburban development, broadly distributed throughout Harvard, necessitates driving to and from most parts of the community, and to out-of-town locations for basic goods and services.

- Harvard has acquired a considerable amount of open space in the past 40 years. Its own efforts, coupled with those of state and federal agencies, mean that 21% of the town's land is permanently protected from development. Harvard has worked very hard to create a linked system of open space throughout the town, but the system is incomplete. While Harvard is recognized as a leader in open space acquisition statewide, the town has none of the regulatory tools that so many communities have used successfully to save and connect large tracts of open space. As a result, Harvard depends almost entirely on public spending to achieve its conservation land goals. Instead of encouraging development that protects open space, Harvard unwittingly encourages development that breaches forests, fields and wildlife habitat.
- The Harvard Conservation Commission needs a predictable source of funds to buy priority land as it becomes available. A program of consistent, annual appropriations to the Conservation Fund is a basic open space protection tool. It should be supplemented, not replaced, by Community Preservation Act (CPA) revenue and occasional open space bond authorizations.

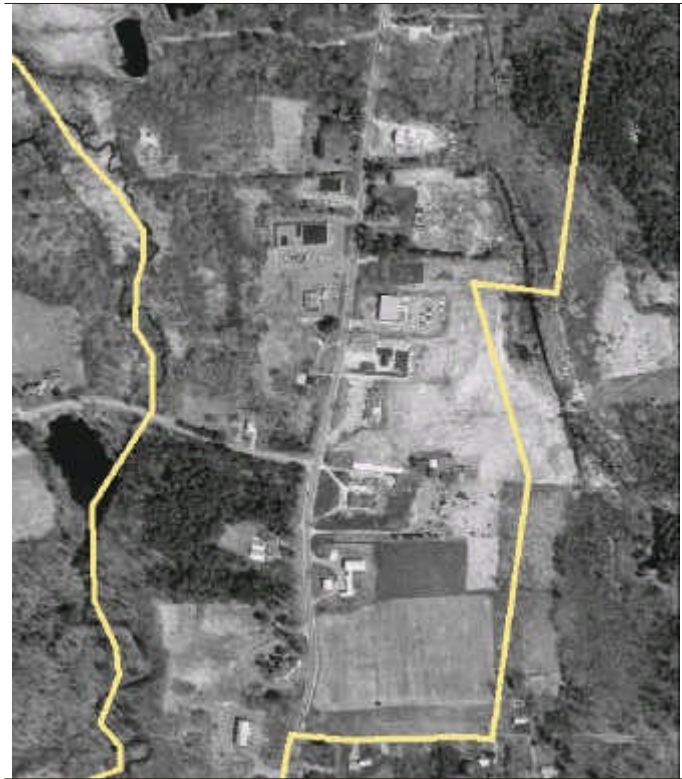
Housing

- The master plan vision anticipates that in 20 years, Harvard's sense of community will be shaped by social and economic inclusiveness, i.e., "home to a broad range of household sizes and incomes." However, while Harvard wants to keep senior and young citizens in town, the zoning bylaw provides no mechanisms to develop housing suitable for or affordable to either of these population groups.
- The cost of homes in Harvard is a significant barrier to the vision statement's definition of "sense of community." Today, Harvard's median single-family home sale price of \$525,000 is affordable to a household with annual earnings of about \$169,000. However, the median household income in the Boston metropolitan area is only \$55,235 and in Harvard, it is \$107,934. Clearly, homes in Harvard exceed the buying power of most people. Under conventional mortgage lending criteria, a household earning the median income of \$107,934 faces a housing affordability gap of nearly \$212,000.
- By promoting single-family homes and prohibiting or making infeasible other types of residential land use, Harvard attracts development that creates a large demand for town and school services. As a result, Harvard homeowners pay very high residential tax bills and property taxes aggravate the town's affordability gap.
- The number of renter-occupied units in Harvard declined slightly during the past decade, from 185 to 171 units. Foxglove Apartments, an age-restricted comprehensive permit development of 24 units, is the only source of new rental housing in Harvard. The zoning bylaw regulates multi-family land use, but the zoning map does not designate any areas for multi-family development. While conversions of single-family to multi-family homes are allowed, the town's unusually large land area requirement makes residential conversions impractical. In the absence of offering realistic ways to create rental units, Harvard effectively invites comprehensive permits under Chapter 40B.
- Harvard has 41 units of housing affordable to lower-income people, or 2.2% of all year-round homes in town, not including Devens. To achieve the Chapter 40B minimum of 10% low-income housing, Harvard needs at least 143 more affordable homes. A proposed comprehensive permit development on Littleton County Road may help to meet some of Harvard's low-income housing

responsibilities, but Harvard needs a coherent housing strategy, adequate development and management capacity, and mechanisms to encourage scattered site low- and moderate-income housing at a scale that Harvard can absorb.

Local Economy

- Harvard has a very small base of businesses and employment opportunities. The town's 178 establishments employ about 1,039 people, a third of whom work for local, state or federal agencies and another third for service businesses. Except for government jobs, most of Harvard's employment is centered in the C District on Ayer Road, a rural highway characterized by very low-density, strip commercial development. The limited number of jobs in Harvard translates into an unusually low jobs-to-housing unit ratio of .54. Not surprisingly, the vast majority of adult workers in Harvard commute elsewhere to work each day, and residents must also travel to nearby towns for many of the goods and services they need. A small commercial base may enhance the town's image as a residential community, but it also contributes to the limited mix of businesses on Ayer Road and to the auto-dependent nature of Harvard's land use pattern.



Existing low-density commercial development on Ayer Road. Yellow line indicates boundaries of the C District.

- Harvard's vision calls for a "sustainable future" with a diverse tax base and the flexibility to adapt to changing economic conditions. Today, the taxable value of all non-residential land in Harvard is equal to 3.63% of the town's total assessed valuation, down from 5-5.5% a decade ago. Significantly, the assessed value of all farms, forests and recreation areas under Chapter 61, 61-A and 61-B agreements is 4.86% of Harvard's total assessed valuation. In FY 2002, commercial and industrial property generated only \$352,650 in real estate taxes – slightly more than one-third of Harvard's total appropriation for public safety services and slightly less than the entire culture and recreation budget.

Harvard's unusually low property tax revenue from commercial land use does not reflect inaccurate assessments. Rather, it reflects a combination of the town's small allocation of land for economic development, the particular types and limited mix of businesses that Harvard attracts, and restrictions placed on the amount of development that can occur on business-zoned land. To improve the quality and value of its commercial base, Harvard needs to overhaul its zoning regulations, strengthen its site plan standards, adopt a design review bylaw and promote businesses that can meet the community's needs for goods and services. The town cannot rely on development at Devens as a means to improve the local tax base because Harvard may never regain jurisdiction over its land.

- Harvard is concerned about the impacts of future growth on municipal and school service costs, but the town lacks policies, regulations and programs to promote community economic development. As a result, Harvard's economic base is very small and the burden of property taxes falls almost exclusively on homeowners. Its average single-family tax bill ranks 34th in the Commonwealth. In the past ten years, the average tax bill in Harvard increased by 54% -- not including debt service for the expansion of Bromfield School or the authorized-but-not-issued debt for relocating the library to Old Bromfield.
- Farms and orchards are an important part of Harvard's local economy, yet Harvard -- like most towns -- has traditionally viewed agriculture as an open space concern, not an economic one. Though New England agriculture has gradually shifted toward retail sales in order to survive, Harvard's zoning prohibits retail activity in a residential zone and nearly all land in Harvard is contained within a single residential zoning district. The town has unwittingly created obstacles to profitable farming and as a result, its economic development, open space and rural character objectives are at odds.

Traffic & Circulation

- Harvard's road network plays a critical role in conveying and reinforcing the town's rural character. The town needs protective pavement management policies, strong scenic road controls and improved site plan standards to assure that its roads are both aesthetically pleasing and safe for all modes of travel.
- Although through traffic appears to be increasing on some of Harvard's roadways, speed more than volume is a major concern and it is caused by non-local *and* local drivers. Harvard residents need to "take back" their streets, but a change in the way people view and treat roads in residential neighborhoods must begin *inside* Harvard or the town will not be able to influence the way outsiders drive through the community. Harvard needs a community-based traffic management plan.
- Ayer Road north of Route 2 is a major opportunity area for Harvard. It has the potential to support an attractive village with commercial and residential development of high-quality design, and a far superior utilization of land for parking, walkways and landscaping. Under existing conditions, however, Ayer Road is dangerous for pedestrians and drivers alike. Traffic incidents occur more frequently in the C District along Ayer Road than in any other section of Harvard. Without new approaches to zoning, a workable site plan review bylaw and a corridor plan, it will not be possible for Harvard to establish a vital, safe village business area in this location.

Major Recommendations of the Master Plan

Master Plan Implementation

Harvard needs basic resources to implement the Master Plan, increase its capacity to carry out future planning initiatives and support the work of existing town boards and committees. Toward these ends, the town should:

- Establish a permanent Master Plan Implementation Committee to act as the coordinating body for implementing the 10-year action plan.
- Establish and make a continuous funding commitment to the position of town planner or director of planning and development.
- Carry out a complete Geographic Information System (GIS) installation at Town Hall, integrating the operations of the assessor's office, planning, conservation and health departments, inspectional services and public works.

Development Policy Plan

The Master Plan's central recommendations are illustrated on Map 1-1, the proposed Development Policy Plan. The major components of the Development Policy Plan are outlined below and explained in greater detail in Chapter 5 of the Master Plan report.

Zoning

Harvard's environmental resources, historic development pattern and agricultural landscapes should be recognized and reinforced by appropriate zoning regulations. The town needs to adopt more flexible development controls in the Agricultural-Residential District and by creating overlay zoning districts, Harvard should institute special development regulations that are tailored to the use, density and design needs of five critical areas:

- Town Center
- Prospect Hill and Still River Village
- Bare Hill Pond Watershed
- Oak Hill
- Ayer Road north of Route 2.

To achieve its Master Plan goals, Harvard should amend the Zoning Bylaw to address several needs on a community-wide basis. Specifically, the town should provide for:

- An improved site plan review process for all zoning districts, including design review for all commercial uses and some residential uses.
- Stronger scenic road controls.

- Historic preservation requirements, including a demolition delay bylaw and special incentives that make preservation economically feasible, e.g.:
 - Greater intensity of use, e.g., single-family conversions to three- or four-family residences in a district that otherwise limits residential development to single-family detached homes.
 - Mix of uses, e.g., the flexibility to convert a historic building to a mix of offices, specialty retail or a small restaurant combined with residential units in a district that otherwise limits land use to a single class (residential or commercial).
 - The “last resort” relocation of a building slated for demolition to another lot with an existing residence, or to a non-conforming lot, for use and occupancy as a residential or non-residential unit.
- Clear representation of wetlands and watershed areas on the Zoning Map, consolidation and strengthening of existing wetland, watershed and flood plain regulations, and groundwater protection regulations for public water supplies and private water supplies for commercial and community use.
- A menu of open space zoning tools so that town boards, land owners and developers can respond sensitively to a variety of conditions:
 - An effective cluster bylaw that saves open space, promotes efficient use of land and encourages a variety of housing options.
 - Special regulations to encourage common driveways and flexible siting of new homes in order to protect open space on Approval Not Required (ANR) lots.
 - Incentives to develop land for uses that typically preserve large amounts of open space, e.g., assisted living and elderly congregate housing facilities.

Harvard has many opportunities to provide housing choice, i.e., to diversify its housing stock and increase the supply of homes affordable to lower- and middle-income households. Toward these ends, the town should:

- Develop, adopt and implement a coherent, realistic affordable housing strategy. Harvard must make a commitment to developing homes that satisfy the requirements of Chapter 40B.
- Adopt clear, fair and predictable regulations for single-family to multi-family conversions and for creating accessory apartments in single-family homes.
- Create special overlay zoning districts to encourage elderly, multi-family and mixed-use residential development in and adjacent to established community service areas, e.g., the Town Center and the C District on Ayer Road.
- Employ a combination of incentives and mandates to include affordable housing units in new residential and mixed-use development.

Other Regulations, Policies and Programs

To complement the Master Plan’s recommended zoning changes, Harvard needs to:

- Maintain timely updates of its Open Space and Recreation Plan and make a consistent, annual commitment of resources to the Conservation Fund.

- Prioritize lands of conservation interest by the type of strategy best suited to each parcel. Although some properties ought to be acquired because of their location, natural resources or significance to wildlife, others may be ideal candidates for a combination of preservation and development. Working with landowners is key -- but Harvard must have the right zoning in place to facilitate development that can simultaneously save open space.
- Allocate Community Preservation Act (CPA) revenue equitably to each of the three purposes recognized by the statute: open space, historic preservation, and affordable housing.
- Nominate additional properties for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.
- Establish more local historic districts or alternatively, neighborhood conservation districts.
- Pursue preservation restrictions to protect historic buildings just as the town currently pursues conservation restrictions to protect open space.
- Develop and implement a Community-Based Transportation Plan to address traffic speeds and driving behavior on Harvard's major, secondary and rural roadways.
- Adopt a street classification plan and use it to guide road maintenance, repair and reconstruction projects, along with traffic management policies.

Critical Planning Areas

Town Center

Harvard's community vision anticipates a balanced mix of land uses in the Town Center and a place that retains its historic village form. Toward these ends, Harvard should:

- Amend the Zoning Bylaw to provide for:
 - A Town Center Overlay District that encourages a mix of residential, institutional and business uses, with appropriate site plan and design controls to assure compatibility between new uses and the existing character of the area.
 - A Residential Compatibility Overlay District to encourage a greater mix of housing around the Town Center.
- Develop and implement a public realm plan for the Town Center in order to encourage pedestrian and bicycle access, assure attractive, safe parking, and provide adequate public amenities.
- Fund a permanent solution to the Town Center's wastewater disposal needs so that existing and future land uses retain their value and can adapt to changing market conditions.
- Conduct a feasibility study for the disposition and reuse of Harvard Public Library and other publicly owned historic buildings that contribute significantly to the Town Center's sense of place but may be obsolete or inadequate for their present use.

Still River Village

The Master Plan vision statement calls for the preservation and enhancement of established village areas, the protection of open space and a retained sense of place as the town continues to grow. The Still River section of Harvard is critical to achieving these ends. Accordingly, Harvard should:

- Amend the Zoning Bylaw to provide for:
 - A Still River Village Overlay District with site plan and design regulations that relate appropriately to the developed form and scenic resources of this historic village area.
 - A limited mix of non-residential uses.
 - Historic preservation incentives.
- Establish a local historic district or a neighborhood conservation district for Still River Village.

Bare Hill Pond Watershed

Harvard needs to amend the Zoning Bylaw to establish a Bare Hill Pond Watershed Overlay Protection District, with special regulations to address:

- A lower threshold for uses requiring a special permit and an explicit list of prohibited activities
- Minimum lot size
- Drainage design
- Erosion and sedimentation controls
- Impervious coverage
- Special site plan standards for large-scale, exempt land uses, e.g., institutional, municipal and school uses.

In addition, the town should:

- Adopt regulations for mandatory septic system maintenance throughout the watershed.
- Consider establishing a Bare Hill Pond Commission with policy, regulatory and permitting jurisdiction over all land within the watershed in Harvard.

Agricultural and Historic Landscape Areas

The Master Plan classifies the Prospect Hill-Still River and Oak Hill sections of Harvard as Agricultural & Historic Landscape Districts -- areas with open, rural landscapes, scenic view corridors, institutional and farming land uses, and historic roadways. The strategies for these locations include zoning and non-zoning techniques:

- Amend the zoning bylaw to provide special cluster incentives and design regulations, a provision for planned residential development, and preservation standards for accessory and agricultural outbuildings, including non-residential uses.
- Designate Prospect Hill Road, Still River Road, Massachusetts Avenue, Littleton County Road, Oak Hill Road and Pinnacle Road as high-priority scenic ways.
- Adopt higher performance standards for clearing, grading, protection of trees and stone walls, and construction activity that alters views from the road.
- Target open space and historic preservation resources in these two planning areas.

- Establish an Agricultural Incentives Committee to consider forming Agricultural Incentive Districts in Harvard, thereby increasing the amount of Chapter 61-61A land and institutionalizing a local government liaison with the town's farm and orchard owners.

Ayer Road

Ayer Road north of Route 2 has the potential to be a thriving village with homes, shops, services and community facilities. The town's zoning does not encourage these outcomes and in many ways, it frustrates them. Harvard should amend the Zoning Bylaw and Zoning Map in order to:

- Establish a Community Commercial Overlay District that encourages mixed-use village development in a portion of the existing C District.
- Revise the existing C District regulations to address access, site plan and design issues identified during the Master Plan process.
- Establish a Residential Compatibility Overlay District to increase the diversity and affordability of housing, provide incentives for elderly housing and assisted living facilities, and promote open space-cluster options on vacant land adjacent to Ayer Road.

The town also needs to address vehicular traffic incidents, speeding, and the volume of truck traffic on Ayer Road. Accordingly, Harvard needs to:

- Fund and conduct a corridor study for Ayer Road north of Route 2, focusing on traffic controls, intersection improvements, traffic calming techniques and pedestrian and bicycle access to make the roadway safe for local and non-local traffic.
- Work with MassDevelopment to redirect trucks through Devens and away from Ayer Road.
- Install gateway signage that doubles as a welcome/traffic enforcement warning system.
- Target Area Road for the use of mobile speed alerts.
- Support the Harvard Police Department's efforts to enforce traffic laws on Ayer Road, including funds for adequate policing.

Harvard needs to understand that directing development on Ayer Road will require strategies beyond zoning, in part because the C District already has a number of established businesses. Without effective incentives to make reinvestment a feasible option for existing commercial property owners, it will be difficult for Harvard to secure improvements in this area. For capacity to plan, finance and carry out desired development and redevelopment activity on North Ayer Road, Harvard should establish a non-profit development corporation to:

- Carry out development activities on Ayer Road, working at the town's direction.
- Obtain and invest public funds in development, redevelopment and infrastructure improvements.

Finally, Harvard should identify and secure open space and land for outdoor recreation areas, community and neighborhood facilities along or near Ayer Road.

Devens

The Master Plan makes two recommendations concerning Devens:

- In conjunction with MassDevelopment, Harvard should co-sponsor a review of opportunities and constraints for the use and development of land at Salerno Circle. Some town officials have expressed an interest in using the land for a future school site while representatives of MassDevelopment see Salerno Circle as a desirable area for corporate offices. Given Salerno Circle's proximity to the border between Harvard and Devens, its eventual redevelopment will have a direct, visible impact on nearby neighborhoods. Harvard should accept MassDevelopment's offer to finance a concept plan and feasibility study for this area.
- Begin to plan for a formal system of open space, pedestrian and bicycle connections between Harvard and Devens. The Board of Selectmen should work with Mass Development and the residents of Old Mill Road and Depot Road to replace the existing chain-link fence and gates with attractive wooden posts, signs and kiosks such as those found at the trail entrances to many conservation areas.