

# Harvard, Massachusetts

# Master Plan

November 2002

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*Executive Summary*



Harvard Master Plan Steering Committee & Harvard Planning Board

*Consultants*

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## Harvard's Vision

In twenty years, the Town of Harvard will be a town with:

### **A Sense of Community**

—Active participation of citizens in the town's civic life combined with small town celebrations and traditions will forge a strong sense of community.

—Harvard will be home to all ages and a broad range of household sizes and incomes.

—The cooperation of highly motivated staff, caring Town personnel and actively involved parents will contribute to schools that provide both a nurturing environment and high quality education.



### **A Sense of Place**

—The Town Center will serve as the social, governmental and cultural heart of the community, with other thriving village centers further strengthening Harvard's economic and community base.

—Harvard will support working orchards and farms and preserve its landscape of woodlands and fields, rural roadways and scenic vistas, and will connect these features and the Town and village centers with walking trails.

—The town will have clean air and an ample supply of clean water.

### **A Sustainable Future**

—Diversified commercial and residential bases will enable the town to realize its vision and provide the flexibility to adjust to changes in the economy.

—Close cooperation with neighboring towns and organizations involved in regional planning and resource protection will provide opportunities for realizing an expanded vision.

# Harvard's Master Plan Goals

## **Town Character Preservation**

Maintain a balanced mix of village centers; agricultural, forested and open space lands; and small neighborhoods.

Maintain the rural characteristics of the Town by:

Insuring no net loss of trees or stone walls and no net gain of asphalt width on existing scenic roadways.

Preserving and/or enhancing view sheds.

Preserving historic structures and landscapes.

Ensure a vibrant town center by maintaining a balance of residential, commercial, municipal and institutional uses.

Provide for a balance of non-vehicular and vehicular use on public roadways.

## **Housing**

Increase housing options, particularly the number and types of moderately priced senior and handicapped-accessible units.

Provide an environment to significantly increase the retention of young and senior citizens.

## **Agriculture**

Increase the options for economic viability of agricultural enterprises.

Identify and protect significant Chapter 61 lands.

## **Economic Strategies**

Broaden the sources of Town revenue.

Balance the costs and delivery of services with the available sources of revenue.

## **Natural Resources & the Environment**

Protect groundwater, recharge areas and wetlands to ensure a safe and adequate water supply.

Identify and protect wildlife habitats and other natural assets, such as Bare Hill Pond.

Preserve air quality and control noise, light and other environmental pollution.

## **Implementation**

Integrate the Master Plan into the operations of the town, Town Meeting and the Municipal boards and offices.

# A New Plan for Harvard

## Visions from the Past

### *Planning for Harvard: Comprehensive Plan (1969)*

Had Charles W. Eliot II composed a millennium vision statement when he wrote the town's first master plan in 1969, he would have imagined a place similar to today's Harvard. "Visioning" was not in vogue in the 1960s, but there is no doubt that Eliot had a vision for Harvard. During his 20-month engagement with the Harvard Planning Board, he saw many possibilities for what planners now call sustainable development: clean water, single-family homes mixed with smaller housing units, compact villages surrounded by large, connected tracts of open space, and a planned business district that required no new roads. Eliot's vision did not include losing 1,400 acres of forest to new development, yet he predicted that Harvard would absorb more homes than were actually built after 1970. When his firm conducted an inventory of Harvard neighborhoods in 1968, there were only 14 houses scattered across a 356-acre area west of Upper Bowers Brook. If he were alive now, Eliot would not be surprised to learn that the same area has 68 more homes. However, he might see the conversion of 190 acres of land to 68 house lots as evidence of flawed zoning. In Eliot's vision of Harvard, the 68 single-family homes (or more) were probably inevitable, but not at the expense of open space.

The renowned landscape architect was not opposed to development. In fact, Eliot cared deeply about historic preservation, housing quality and neighborhood design, and while he advocated for publicly controlled conservation areas, he also saw development as a possible opportunity to save land. Accordingly, Eliot recommended Planned Unit Development (PUD) zoning so that some of Harvard's new neighborhoods could replicate the form and atmosphere of its historic villages: dignified homes nestled together, unified by a common area and surrounded by open space. He believed in such techniques as PUD because in Eliot's mind, buildings, land and natural features ought to work harmoniously toward the goal of a balanced community. Eliot recognized that Harvard's poorly drained soils would make village development a difficult pursuit, but he saw potential in several places. He respected Harvard's preference for large-lot zoning and supported it – to a point. Eliot thought Harvard should consider more varied, land-based regulations, "down-zoning" (smaller lots) in some areas and "up-zoning" (larger lots) in others. If his ideas had taken hold in Harvard, a number of subdivision plans filed in the last 30 years would have been designed differently, and half of the 190 acres that became large house lots might be contiguous, protected open space today.

The problems to be faced are [not] all related to "growth," but reflect the original or basic, physical characteristics of the area, the history of the community, and the investments and commitments already made for its development. We build on foundations already established -- but sometimes have to rebuild or reinforce the foundations, and change the superstructure for new or changed uses. Planning must therefore be directed toward the correction of past mistakes or present trends, and toward the prevention of future errors and seizure of opportunities for desirable change.

Charles Eliot, *Planning for Harvard* (1969)

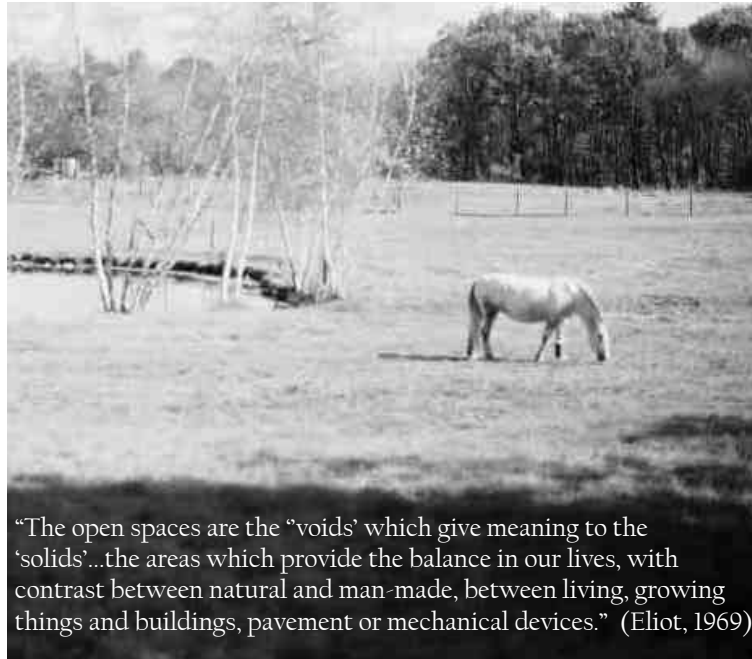
Though Harvard residents never warmed to the principles of PUD, they responded quite differently to Eliot's thoughts on public open space. In 1968, Harvard owned less than 300 acres of land and most of it was used for municipal services and school buildings. By the time Eliot finished the *Planning for Harvard: Comprehensive Plan*, town meeting had voted to purchase 94 acres of conservation land and

four years later, the Harvard Conservation Trust (HCT) was born. Since the early 1970s, the Harvard Conservation Commission and HCT have acquired or obtained restrictions on more than 2,000 acres of open space. Their combined holdings, along with land owned by the state and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, mean that 21% of Harvard's land area will never be developed. Harvard's 1969 *Comprehensive Plan* helped to inspire these investments and they are consistent with Eliot's vision.

Eliot would probably be struck by the town's very short supply of affordable housing, but it is difficult to know what he anticipated. Ironically, the state legislature enacted Chapter 40B the same year that Eliot finished Harvard's master plan. The

interests, motives and principles that formed the impetus for Chapter 40B have been forgotten in three decades of angry debate about low-income housing in Massachusetts. Very few people realize that Chapter 40B is a misnomer for "comprehensive permit law." Chapter 40B is actually the state's regional planning law. In 1969, at the end of a decade when policymakers worried about the state of the nation's cities, tools like comprehensive permits became part of a larger effort to restore urban areas by reducing the unequal distribution of wealth in metropolitan regions. Legislators who amended Chapter 40B by adding Sections 20-22 – which they dubbed the "Anti-Snob Zoning Act" – were informed by the prevailing wisdom of their day. Conversant in urban economics and a strong supporter of regional planning, Eliot agreed with the law's objectives but he was troubled by the rubric of "anti-snob zoning." He believed that large-lot zoning serves a purpose, and that a town like Harvard would be best served by using such promising techniques as PUD to change the mix and cost of homes, thereby gaining control over its housing destiny.

Harvard differs from Eliot's expectations in a few other ways. Though he understood why residents wanted to keep local services in the Town Center, Eliot questioned whether Harvard would be able to accommodate a more intensive school complex there. He suggested additional land purchases in the Town Center so that Harvard would have enough area to qualify for school construction grants as elementary and high school expansions became necessary. Since he imagined Harvard with more village nodes and a bustling business district north of Route 2, Eliot also encouraged the town to purchase land on or near Ayer Road and hold it in reserve for a future school site. As for Ayer Road itself, Eliot saw many opportunities to strengthen Harvard's tax base, including a hotel and shopping center just north of the Route 2 interchange. He also saw problems in Harvard's C District zoning, namely that it promised a commercial strip replete with scattered, uncoordinated business and industrial development. Eliot's vision of Ayer Road called for a controlled mix of intensive and light business development interspersed with variable-density housing. As one who valued Harvard's independent streak, Eliot thought the town should take matters into its own hands and create a local non-profit development corporation to implement the master plan for Ayer Road instead of waiting for private developers to make a move. Harvard adopted his proposal to downzone a section of the C District, but the larger vision – and the principles it embraced – never materialized.



"The open spaces are the 'voids' which give meaning to the 'solids'...the areas which provide the balance in our lives, with contrast between natural and man-made, between living, growing things and buildings, pavement or mechanical devices." (Eliot, 1969)

**Harvard's Pastoral Landscape.**



### Harvard Town Plan (1988)

Twenty years later, the Town Plan Committee and Michael Oman of Connery Associates worked for 18 months to update the *Comprehensive Plan*. Much like Eliot's work with the Planning Board, Oman's task was to help the Town Plan Committee articulate a set of coherent rural development principles to guide Harvard's future. Oman, the Town Plan Committee and about 40 subcommittee members did a considerable amount of work that culminated in the *Harvard Town Plan*. At least two aspects of the *Harvard Town Plan* are striking in comparison to the *Comprehensive Plan*: first, what it reveals about the extent to which Harvard had grown since the late 1960s, and second, the similarity of its recommendations to those made by Eliot. Though the two plans differ in several ways, records maintained by the Town Plan Committee show that the *Comprehensive Plan* had accurately foreseen a number of potential problems in Harvard – problems Eliot tried to avert in proposals that were implemented only in part, or not at all. Thus, it fell to the Committee and Oman to identify solutions that might be more palatable in the climate of the late 1980s.

As the Planning Board had done in the 1968, the Town Plan Committee surveyed Harvard households about a variety of issues and relied on the results as a measure of public opinion. The results of the 1968 and 1985 surveys suggest that despite the passage of time, residents shared very similar values and beliefs about the town. They cherished Harvard's clean natural resources, rural atmosphere and farms, and generally they took a dim view of apartments and industrial development. However, the *Harvard Town Plan* hints at deep differences of opinion about affordable housing, business development, or "change" of any kind.

Not surprisingly, the greatest opposition to change came from Harvard's newest residents: people who, for the most part, had paid dearly to buy a home in town at the peak of a growth wave. Though most of the survey respondents offered the same perspective on Harvard's desirability, regardless of how many years they had lived in town, longer-term residents were more inclined to favor such community attributes as a "broad socio-economic mix" and "managed" rather than "no" growth. Divisions like these are so common in small towns that usually they would seem

#### On the "C" District

This kind of strip zoning is also detrimental to the safety and efficiency of the main traffic artery because the numerous scattered entrances and exits, parking stops, etc., which are created to serve business developments, interfere with the free and safe movement of through traffic. (Eliot, 1969)

Harvard's commercial district and the town's expectations for its ultimate development are clearly in a state of limbo...If the zoning is not changed, the town will certainly experience...a fundamental change in the town's character, alteration of the future development path of the town, increased traffic... (Town Plan Committee, 1988)

#### On Housing & Village Development

The returns from the Questionnaire in answer to the question, "What is right about Harvard?" repeatedly referred to the Common and its surroundings as a physical expression of neighborliness, and as a "way of life" that should be safeguarded and emulated. Perhaps the existence in that area of a greater number of two, three and four-family dwellings than in all the rest of Harvard is significant...the fact suggests that new growth in Harvard might be guided and organized in new "villages" or groupings of mixed dwelling types around a common or surrounded by common land." (Eliot, 1969)

Notwithstanding the findings of the 1969 Eliot Plan, Harvard's growth since then has neither been guided toward areas identified as more appropriate nor away from those areas rated moderate or severe. Overall lot sizes have increased, but no provision has been made for greater density in the areas identified in the Eliot Plan as being appropriate for greater development... [Harvard] must articulate a vision of the type of development that is realistic and develop regulations, incentives and restrictions that will guide growth in a manner consistent with this vision. (Town Plan Committee, 1988)

insignificant, but Harvard's people never had a chance to work through the tensions that come with a period of intensive growth. Two years after the *Harvard Town Plan*'s adoption by the Planning Board, the U.S. Army confirmed its intent to close Fort Devens.

The Town Plan Committee adopted goals that largely reiterated the first master plan but took a different stance on the C District. In contrast to the village shopping center and hotel that Eliot had in mind, the Town Plan Committee envisioned a sharply reduced scale of development on Ayer Road and devoted several pages of the *Harvard Town Plan* to a subcommittee's analysis of retail and office space needs for a town of Harvard's estimated future population (10,000). The subcommittee argued that 650,000 ft<sup>2</sup> of commercial development would be adequate to meet local needs for goods, services and jobs. Accordingly, they proposed several measures to curtail the C District's growth potential, including a major reduction in the amount of development that could occur on each parcel and district-wide, and rezoning some of the land for residential use. Reminiscent of what happened in the late 1960s, residents accepted a few of the Town Plan Committee's ideas for the C District but stopped short of addressing the larger, more important points – development performance standards, better site plan review criteria, design review and village center zoning. Possibly, town meeting thought the proposals went too far. However, by enacting land use controls on a piecemeal basis, residents have unwittingly contributed to the worsened state of affairs on Ayer Road.

The *Harvard Town Plan* made seven assertions:

- Development regulations should account for the carrying capacity of land and natural resources.
- Residential development should provide more types of housing than single-family homes.
- Three major assets in Harvard warrant extraordinary protection: groundwater, the Town Center and the Bare Hill Pond watershed.
- Open space protection is central to the quality of Harvard's natural resources, the maintenance of its rural character, and the continuation of agriculture.
- If developed to its full potential, the C District would be incompatible with Harvard's town character and municipal capacity.
- Streets should be maintained for safety, but there should be no widening or significant alterations to the "country road" quality of Harvard's rural areas.
- Managing growth requires adequate administration, timely communication, and collaborative efforts by government and the private sector.

These conclusions formed the basis for 29 specific proposals. Eight were fully or partially implemented. Other than acquiring open space, Harvard has found it very difficult to act in its own growth management interests.



## Visions from the Present

The current Master Plan Steering Committee's vision statement and goals were also inspired by public commentary. A "Phase I" master plan visioning process (Spring 2001) supplied opportunities for residents to describe what they want Harvard to be, to explore the town's assets and confront the conditions that threaten its future. The transcript of their words is compelling, not only for the strong community-centered values it reflects but also for what it reveals about historic obstacles to master plan implementation in Harvard. For example:



Bare Hill Pond (2002)

- Harvard needs better information on natural resource limitations in order to (1) support an effective public education program, (2) identify "land use patterns considered sustainable," and (3) "develop a management plan and strategy for Bare Hill Pond."
- A safe and adequate water supply is a critical priority for Harvard, one that requires a "town-wide perspective...to protect water quality and quantity regionally as well as locally." Toward that end, the town should "closely analyze all wetland projects and increase the size of buffer zones to wetlands where necessary to protect against fragmentation, critical habitat loss, and water quality impacts."
- Make effective use of existing studies – notably, *Harvard's Rural Landscapes* (1997) – and incorporate the *Open Space Plan* into the Master Plan. Harvard needs to "...define different types and values of open space that direct preservation efforts," and "preserve Fruitlands and vistas to the west."
- The two village centers and commercial area are assets for building a sense of community. Harvard needs to "create mixed-use village centers [with] services, amenities, and gathering places," "direct development toward a village pattern" and "create a village atmosphere in the commercial district" with "strong design guidelines and site standards to support town character."
- Save the orchards by providing "[zoning] flexibility...to help with the viability of agricultural operations," "legal and monetary incentives," APR's or "a local Farmers Market for the regional market area."
- Manage growth impacts such as traffic and infrastructure demands by helping "boards and commissions prepare well-founded and supportable decisions on development" and "prepare the town [to respond] to a Chapter 40B project."
- Participate in regional decision-making through such means as a "town strategy for responses to Devens based on Harvard's goals," identification of "potential benefits and negatives associated with Devens," and public education "before any long-term commitments."

All of these statements express reasonable expectations for Harvard. Moreover, except for the inclusion of Devens on today's list of issues, all of these statements echo the yearnings of previous Harvard master plans. Curiously, the town's approach to land use regulation, public policy and self-governance remain inconsistent with or unable to fulfill its stated preferences. Though zoning is essential to growth management, it cannot be relied upon as an exclusive means of master plan

implementation. If town officials and residents want better information so they can defend their environmental assets or make sound permitting decisions, they must invest in the human resources required to obtain, analyze, report and manage that information. If they want to safeguard Harvard from a large, unwanted Chapter 40B development, they have to initiate ways to create a base of qualifying low-income units, as the town of Lincoln did. If they want productive agriculture, they must come to terms with the economic realities of farming and remove barriers to *profitable* farms. If they want to control traffic, they must take the kinds of pro-active steps that Harvard pursued with Cisco Systems, but they must also recognize ways that Harvard has caused many of its own traffic problems and be willing to address them.

During Phase II of the master plan process, residents had more opportunities to say what they want for their town. At one session, participants reiterated their desire for a vibrant, walkable Town Center, a new village district on Ayer Road, and residential alternatives to meet both affordability and senior housing needs, identifying possible opportunity areas on town maps. At another session, anxiety over the disposition of Devens made it very difficult for participants to talk about Harvard's future. The people of Harvard have good reasons to be anxious about Devens. However, allowing Devens to dwarf issues that existed in Residential Harvard long before the base closed is tantamount to submitting the town's destiny to MassDevelopment. Disputes over the fate of Devens have so polarized Harvard that at times, the town seems paralyzed by its own ambivalence. It would be very unfortunate if Harvard acquiesced again to a path of well-intended but fragmented policies. The town may not have absolute control over what happens to one-fifth of its land area today, but it has considerable untapped power to control what happens over the remaining 80 percent.



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"C" District, Ayer Road (2001)

In the absence of policies to realize goals of recurring importance to Harvard, private landowners, developers, homebuilders and town boards have had no choice but to comply with rules that foreclose opportunities to engage in protective land development. Meanwhile, Harvard has spent substantial sums of public money to buy open space, relying entirely on the labor of citizen volunteers to carry out conservation land projects that are often complicated and time-consuming. As new homes spread incrementally and randomly across Harvard's land, they fracture what had been undisturbed, contiguous open space, replace it with domain that is inhospitable to wildlife, and alter the rural landscape. It is little wonder that residents sense such urgency to buy open space. Unless the Harvard Conservation Trust (*also* citizen volunteers) can work out an alternative, public spending is the only technique in Harvard's open space and growth management toolbox. The Master Plan Update rests on a single assertion: the toolbox needs more resources.

# The Toolbox for Harvard

## *An Integrated Approach to Implementing the Master Plan*

### **Comprehensive Development Policy**

Harvard wants a sense of community and place, and a sustainable future. These are appropriate and attainable goals, but they require creative approaches to land use and an undivided will to achieve them. Though Harvard is one of the state's most beautiful and well-preserved communities, a number of factors place the town's customs, rural features and high quality of life at risk. An obvious internal factor is the stress that new development has placed on Harvard's fields and forests, its fiscal condition and the scenic character of its roads. Another internal factor involves the challenge of traffic management on long, rural byways that must meet the dual – and often contrary – functions of through roads and neighborhood streets. Often, the town seems to have difficulty resolving policy conflicts that stem, in part, from different perceptions of what it means to live in Harvard. In addition, as Harvard develops and its home prices climb far beyond the reach of most people, the community that could once rely on volunteers for a variety of civic functions is destined to confront two problems: a diminishing pool of residents with time for voluntary public service, and the eventuality that town government's payroll will grow. Harvard longs to retain its working farms and orchards, yet few residents realize that 40-50 years ago, the town had 1,500 more acres of agricultural land than exists today. Finally, Harvard's commitment to conservancy is evident in a nearly peerless record of accomplishments to protect land and water resources, but ironically, its zoning regulations exacerbate the loss of open space.

External factors also underlie many of the tensions that exist in Harvard today. Chief among them: Devens. During the Master Plan process, residents questioned whether Harvard should be trying to update its Master Plan given all of the uncertainties associated with Devens. Indeed, Devens is so much on the minds of local officials and townspeople that it acts as a barrier to useful dialogue about the state of "Residential Harvard." However, other external factors affect Harvard and they raise equally if not more important planning concerns. For example, the Cisco Systems development in Boxborough stands as a potential traffic threat, but the more compelling point about Cisco Systems is what it symbolizes for Harvard's region. Along with the redevelopment of Devens, Cisco Systems foreshadows profound change in the developed character of many small towns on the outermost edge of I-495, including Harvard. Changing and contradictory state policies also affect Harvard's future. Title V's recognition of new and emerging wastewater technology, the contested terrain of Chapter 40B, and the implications of state aid formulas for the "new Harvard" – that is, Harvard minus 7,500 military personnel and family members who counted as town residents a decade ago – create conditions that Harvard must contend with in the near-term, regardless of Devens. Moreover, like their counterparts across the Commonwealth, Harvard town officials have to sort through ways to manage growth despite serious weaknesses and omissions in the state zoning law.

### **Integration Concepts**

The proposals and recommendations of the Master Plan seek to translate Harvard's community vision and goals into a coherent, planned course of action. The Master Plan elements are unified by their consistency with these five concepts:

- Realizing Harvard's vision does not require pitting one master plan goal against another. Building a stronger economic base and providing for a mix of homes should respect and protect the town's

critical natural resources, open space and historic built assets. Regulations designed for sustainability enlist development as a partner in protecting public interests.

- Harvard's landscapes differ by location, form, shape, features and historic period. Zoning and other policies should support and respect these differences. A homogenous approach to zoning all but guarantees a homogenous outcome.
- Village centers, such as the Town Center, support life and community. Mixed-use and compact in design, with common open space and places to walk or socialize, villages help to direct development toward established areas and away from agricultural land and forests.
- Harvard does not want to establish an industrial base or promote the development of large commercial areas. Strategies to manage the town's fiscal future must be tailored to complement all of the major goals of the Master Plan, including: altering the mix of housing, allowing for more economic use of land in designated village areas, acquiring open space, and minimizing new road construction.
- Responsibility for Master Plan implementation rests with many town officials and departments, not only the Planning Board. A permanent master plan implementation committee with representation from key town boards and other citizen volunteers, equipped with adequate staff support, is essential for carrying out the Master Plan, monitoring outcomes, and setting in motion steps that will need to be taken for future master plan updates.

## Land Use Element

The Land Use Plan is the centerpiece of the Master Plan. It reasserts a number of key findings and recommendations in Harvard's previous master plan reports and supplements them with proposals that account for new information and different conditions.

### Guiding Concepts

- Land use regulations should clearly express what the town wants, and to be effective, they must be fair and applied consistently by permit granting authorities. Toward these ends, boards with jurisdiction over development need compatible policies and a shared understanding of the Master Plan.
- Development – within Residential Harvard and at Devens – must be engaged as the town's ally in protecting environmental, scenic and cultural resources.
- Agriculture brings economic, cultural, scenic and fiscal benefits to Harvard. Every effort should be made to preserve the town's farms and orchards.
- Single-family residences, farm homes, summer cottages and estates have played an important role in defining Harvard's visual and social character. Policies to encourage a broader mix of residential land uses and provide for affordable housing should emphasize design compatibility with Harvard's established architectural and landscape traditions.
- Villages are essential to Harvard's rural ambiance and to building a sense of community among residents. Policies to preserve, enhance and develop village areas should encourage housing choice, the provision of goods and services, and safe, convenient access to community institutions. Harvard's established villages have unique settlement patterns, built assets and open space resources. Land use regulations must be tailored to respect the elements of place in each village.

- New development on land that currently generates more revenue than community service costs should provide a comparable or greater fiscal benefit, when compatible with other goals of the master plan.

The continued relevance of past plans and new proposals to address Harvard's community vision and goals call for a reassessment of current land use policies. Table A compares the allocation of land to Harvard's existing zoning districts to the recommended allocation of land to zoning districts in the Land Use Plan. The Land Use Plan makes no change to the geography of Harvard's existing zoning districts. Rather, it promotes the strategic application of overlay districts to achieve development and preservation objectives in areas that warrant additional measures. It also promotes changes to the regulations that apply in existing zoning districts, as described below. The Land Use Policy Map is a conceptual representation of the existing and proposed zoning districts.

**Table A: Existing Conditions and Proposed Land Use Plan**

Existing Conditions		Land Use Plan	
<u>Zoning</u>		<u>Zoning</u>	
A-R	13,376.15	Agricultural-Residential	13,376.15
B	3.76	B District	3.76
C	442.86	C District	338.43
Watershed Protection-Flood Plain	244.60	<u>Overlay Districts</u>	
Watershed Protection-Flood Hazard	1,641.25	Community Commercial District	104.32
		Town Center Overlay District	468.19
Other Jurisdictions <sup>1</sup>	3,526.49	Still River Village Overlay District	213.05
		Residential Compatibility Overlay District	1,462.77
Total	17,349.25	Agricultural & Historic Landscapes Overlay District	5,107.69
		Bare Hill Pond Watershed Protection District	1,821.64
		Groundwater Protection Overlay District	1,579.80

1. Devens, Oxbow National Wildlife Refuge.

## Natural & Cultural Resources Element

Harvard residents benefit immeasurably from living in a community with many natural features and built assets. The town's location on the Nashua River, its beautifully preserved views to Mount Wachusett and Mount Monadnock to the west and north, and eastward to the Boston skyline all contribute to the special sense of Harvard. Bare Hill Pond, the most significant natural feature in Harvard Center, inspires pride throughout the community. Residents also value Bowers Brook and a myriad of smaller streams that traverse the town, for these wetland and water resources provide critical wildlife habitat and hold the key to Harvard's present and future biodiversity.

Owing to four decades of work by local volunteers and investments by state and federal agencies, Harvard residents have numerous opportunities to explore the environmental resources in their town because there is a considerable amount of protected open space. In the absence of effective open space zoning, however, Harvard taxpayers have spent a considerable amount of money to defend their land, wetland and water resources from the adverse consequences of growth. As a result, establishing a connected system of open space and trails has been very hard – even though Harvard has one of the strongest open space protection records in Massachusetts.

Surely residents also value the widespread evidence of their town's history in *and* outside of Harvard's two local historic districts, yet the record of Phase I public meetings is silent on that matter of historic preservation. In fact, Harvard's heritage is expressed not only by its historic landscapes, but also its built assets. The town has done well at preserving the architectural integrity of Shaker Village and Harvard Center, and the Historical Commission has clearly tried to articulate a number of unmet preservation needs. However, Harvard needs to adopt the same culture of stewardship toward historic preservation that it has applied to open space protection. There are enough "lessons learned" from the losses experienced by towns close to Boston to make a persuasive case for regulatory and other interventions *now*.

### Guiding Concepts

- Bare Hill Pond is a critical environmental resource that demands a comprehensive approach to management, regulation and enforcement.
- Historically significant residential, institutional, agricultural and accessory buildings, along with their associated settings, are major contributors to Harvard's rural character and they are at risk. Every effort should be made to identify and protect them.
- Wetlands and water resource protection requires coordinated regulations and permitting policies, public education and a commitment to open space acquisition. It is also essential that Harvard diligently monitor MassDevelopment and proposals before the Devens Enterprise Commission (DEC) because the only large, abundant aquifers in Harvard are under the DEC's jurisdiction. Regardless of whether Harvard wants to reclaim its land at Devens, the town has a major stake in the quality of the aquifer system that runs along the eastern boundary of Devens.
- More than two-thirds of Harvard's land area is listed in the Massachusetts Scenic Landscape Inventory. Preserving Harvard's rural landscape and the rural characteristics of town roads requires sensitive regulations, open space acquisitions, and clear policy directives concerning maintenance and improvements to public ways.
- The recommendations in *Planning for Harvard's Rural Landscape: Case Studies in Historic Conservation* (1997) are vital to Harvard's future and they are incorporated by reference in the Master Plan.



## Housing Element

### Guiding Concepts

- Housing is Harvard's dominant form of development. Regulations, policies and initiatives that affect housing will have a greater influence than any other land use over the town's future character and fiscal well-being, the quality of its environmental resources and the amount of traffic on local roads.
- Harvard values its tradition as a community of families. As such, single-family homes will continue to be the town's primary residential land use.
- Harvard shares the civic and legal obligation of all communities to assure that at least 10% of its homes are affordable to low- and moderate-income households. Every effort should be made to increase the town's supply of affordable housing at a pace that Harvard can sustain. Harvard should not rely on comprehensive permits alone to meet the 10% standard under Chapter 40B.
- A broader mix of housing types and rental opportunities will be essential to achieving Harvard's "sense of community" vision. Accordingly, Harvard also should strive to produce homes affordable to middle-income households, and housing units that appeal to the elderly and young citizens.
- Residential development that attracts non-family households is important to the town's long-term fiscal stability and the affordability of property taxes to all residents.



## Open Space & Recreation Element

### Guiding Concepts

- Government, landowners and developers *share* responsibility for protecting open space.
- The incremental spread of suburban residential development on rural roads presents a serious threat to Harvard's open space – its agricultural landscapes, open fields and large, uninterrupted tracts of forest.
- Open space acquisitions should be targeted to achieve maximum public benefit: protecting wetlands, surface and groundwater resources, connecting existing open space, preserving scenic views and agricultural land, enhancing common space in or near village areas, and protecting historically significant properties.
- The acquisition or acceptance of gifts of land for recreation areas should be planned to serve population centers and to complement plans for future development of public facilities and schools.
- Harvard has a direct stake in protecting open space at Devens, regardless of whether the town decides to reclaim its land.
- Where feasible, all conservation and recreation areas should be accessible to persons with disabilities.

## Economic Development Element

### Guiding Concepts

- Providing residents with opportunities to purchase goods and service and work locally is important for the local economy, for building a sense of community, providing public amenities, increasing tax revenue and reducing the amount of auto-dependent growth in Harvard.
- Harvard's established areas are the most appropriate locations for economic development, new and revitalized.
- The vitality and attractiveness of business districts are enhanced by mixed-use development that includes housing.
- The ability to work at or near home is central to a sustainable economic development plan. Flexible work-at-home regulations and opportunities for local entrepreneurs to "move up" to village commercial space will benefit Harvard families and the local economy.
- Agriculture is and should remain a vibrant part of Harvard's economy. Preserving farms is a way to provide jobs, protect open space and enhance local property values.

## Community Facilities & Services Element

### Guiding Concepts

- The Town Center is Harvard's most important community facility. Plans for future development must respect the Town Center's finite capacity so that its land, buildings, circulation system and natural resources are not overwhelmed by a disproportional or an intensity of use that cannot be sustained.
- Schools should be located in or near mixed-use areas that are both convenient and safe for pedestrian and bicycle access, particularly in small towns that rely on school facilities for community meeting space and outdoor play areas.
- Harvard's municipal buildings are dignified, historic structures that befit the character of the town. Their continued use for civic purposes is consistent with the vision for Harvard Center, and the Master Plan should encourage strategies to achieve that end.
- A community that is home to all ages and a broad range of household sizes and incomes must provide services to meet the needs of a diverse population. Harvard must have adequate capacity – volunteers, personnel, space and funding — to manage and deliver town and school services.
- Opportunities for regional collaboration in such areas as purchasing, public works, public safety and public health services, planning, and resource protection should be explored whenever possible.



Hildreth House

## Circulation & Traffic Element

### Guiding Concepts

- Harvard's vision of sustainability calls for realistic, safe and accessible opportunities for non-vehicular travel in and between its villages, community service and commercial areas. Land use regulations to encourage village development must be complemented by public and private investment to build, maintain and promote a reasonable system of pedestrian facilities within village centers, and by public investment in facilities to connect village centers.
- Directing growth toward established areas will help to reduce overall traffic and encourage residents to park, walk to and patronize a variety of shops and services. However, Harvard's residential development is already widely dispersed throughout the town. Reducing the number of trips generated by low-density development will help, but it is not enough to alter in a substantial way either the speed or volume of traffic on Harvard's rural roads.
- Resident and non-local drivers have a shared responsibility for traffic safety in Harvard. Street classification policies, traffic calming techniques, public education and consistent police enforcement are available techniques for making Harvard roads safe for vehicular and non-vehicular users. The town needs to identify acceptable ways to control traffic and achieve resident buy-in.
- A pro-active, assertive role in regional transportation planning and major development review is very important. Establishing and maintaining credibility with other communities and regional organizations will be important for Harvard's ability to advocate for traffic management improvements that respect the town's character.

## Action Plan Summary<sup>2</sup>

### Part I: Town-Wide Needs

#### Policy & Administrative Framework: Appoint Master Plan Coordinating Committee

<u>Timeline:</u>	2003-2012	<u>Estimated Cost:</u>	None
<u>Priority:</u>	1	<u>Responsibility:</u>	BOS, P <sup>3</sup>

Action: Establish a Master Plan Coordinating Committee to implement the Master Plan.

#### Conservation Cluster (Open Space Zoning) Bylaw

<u>Timeline:</u>	2003-2004	<u>Estimated Cost:</u>	\$15,000-\$20,000
<u>Priority:</u>	1	<u>Responsibility:</u>	MPCC, PB

Action: Amend the Zoning Bylaw to establish a new, workable Conservation Cluster bylaw.

#### Backlot Development Bylaw

<u>Timeline:</u>	2003-2004	<u>Estimated Cost:</u>	\$3,500
<u>Priority:</u>	1	<u>Responsibility:</u>	MPCC, PB

Action: Amend the Zoning Bylaw to provide special design, buffer and setback standards for construction on lots created through the “Approval Not Required” process.

#### Historic Preservation

##### Zoning

<u>Timeline:</u>	2003-2004	<u>Estimated Cost:</u>	Master Plan Appendix H
<u>Priority:</u>	1	<u>Responsibility:</u>	MPCC, PB, HCC

Actions: amend the Zoning Bylaw by adding the following new provisions:

- Demolition delay bylaw
- Special development regulations for historic preservation

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2. A complete description and rationale for each action appear in Chapter 5 of the Master Plan.
  3. Acronymns: BOS, Board of Selectmen; PB, Planning Board; MPCC, Master Plan Coordinating Committee; HHC, Harvard Historical Commission; HHP, Harvard Housing Partnership; HLT, Harvard Library Trustees; TSAC, Traffic Safety Advisory Committee; CC, Conservation Commission; HCT, Harvard Conservation Trust; OSCP, Open Space and Recreation Plan Committee; TCPC, Town Center Planning Committee; BOA, Board of Assessors.

**Planning & Policy Tools**

<u>Timeline:</u>	2004-2009	<u>Estimated Cost:</u>	\$15,000-\$20,000 per year
<u>Priority:</u>	1	<u>Responsibility:</u>	HCC

Actions: pursue three additional strategies to protect historically significant properties:

- Nominations for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, focusing first on properties already identified as eligible but for which nominations have not yet been made.
- Additional historic property inventories in order to qualify more buildings or districts for National Register listing and also to pave the way for establishing additional local historic districts.
- Preservation restrictions from property owners who want to protect their historic homes or outbuildings.

**Non-Zoning Regulatory Tools**

<u>Timeline:</u>	2006-2011	<u>Estimated Cost:</u>	\$10,000
<u>Priority:</u>	1	<u>Responsibility:</u>	BOS, HCC

Actions: establish more local historic districts -- the most powerful historic preservation tool in Massachusetts.

**Agricultural-Retail Business**

<u>Timeline:</u>	2003	<u>Estimated Cost:</u>	None
<u>Priority:</u>	2	<u>Responsibility:</u>	MPCC, PB

Actions: Amend the Zoning Bylaw to define “Agricultural-Retail Business” and create corresponding regulations that allow farm stands to diversify their product lines, extend their operating season and increase profitability.

**Open Space & Recreation Plan**

<u>Timeline:</u>	2003, 2008	<u>Estimated Cost:</u>	\$6,000-\$7,500 per update
<u>Priority:</u>	1	<u>Responsibility:</u>	CC, OSPC

Actions: Complete update of expired Open Space and Recreation Plan and maintain timely future updates.

**Conservation Fund & Land Acquisition Policy**

<u>Timeline:</u>	Annual	<u>Estimated Cost:</u>	\$100,000/FY
<u>Priority:</u>	1	<u>Responsibility:</u>	CC

Actions: Make annual appropriation to the Conservation Fund.

## Housing Choice

### Agricultural-Residential District Zoning Amendments

<u>Timeline:</u>	2003-2004	<u>Estimated Cost:</u>	Master Plan Appendix H
<u>Priority:</u>	1	<u>Responsibility:</u>	MPCC, PB

Actions: Amend the Zoning Bylaw to:

- Include clear, fair and predictable special permit regulations for converting existing residences to multiple-residence buildings, subject to design review and site plan approval by the Planning Board.
- Require affordable units in conversions to three or more units.
- Facilitate the creation of one accessory apartment in a single-family home by special permit from the Planning Board.

### **Affordable Housing Strategy**

<u>Timeline:</u>	2004-2005	<u>Estimated Cost:</u>	\$20,000-\$25,000
<u>Priority:</u>	1	<u>Responsibility:</u>	BOS, HHP, PB

Actions: Create a comprehensive affordable housing strategy, taking into account opportunities to create Chapter 40B units under new state regulations.

## **Wetlands and Water Resource Protection**

### Groundwater Protection Overlay District

<u>Timeline:</u>	2004-2005	<u>Estimated Cost:</u>	Master Plan Appendix H
<u>Priority:</u>	1	<u>Responsibility:</u>	PB

Actions: Amend the Zoning Bylaw to regulate “Zone II” areas around DEP-regulated water supplies.

### Wetlands Protection and Flood Plain Overlay Districts

<u>Timeline:</u>	2004-2005	<u>Estimated Cost:</u>	\$2,500-\$3,500
<u>Priority:</u>	2	<u>Responsibility:</u>	MPCC, CC, BOH

Actions: Amend the Zoning Bylaw to provide clear definitions of regulated wetland and water resource areas, update the town’s regulations and improve the representation of the Wetlands and Watershed Protection District on the Zoning Map.



**Community-Based Transportation Program**

<u>Timeline:</u>	2004-2005	<u>Estimated Cost:</u>	\$6,000 (planning)
<u>Priority:</u>	1	<u>Responsibility:</u>	BOS, TSSC

Actions: Establish a comprehensive Community-Based Transportation Program, as follows:

- Designate a coordinating group, such as the Traffic Safety Study Committee, to spearhead and guide a town-wide traffic planning and implementation process.
- Establish a street classification system to set priorities, facilitate a consistent, coherent system of roadway treatments, e.g., signage, pavement striping, and pavement maintenance policies.
- Identify and classify traffic safety problems that exist on Harvard's roadways, and exploring the causes. This requires not only traffic data, but also field evaluations – ideally on foot – of roadway design and traffic activity under different conditions.
- Explore traffic management and traffic calming measures that may be effective to reduce traffic speeds on Harvard roads. It is important for residents to understand that traffic calming devices affect local *and* through traffic.

**Town Buildings Maintenance, Accessibility & Capital Improvements Plan**

<u>Timeline:</u>	2005	<u>Estimated Cost:</u>	\$40,000-\$50,000
<u>Priority:</u>	1	<u>Responsibility:</u>	MPCC, BOS

Actions: Appoint a standing Town Buildings Committee and commission a municipal buildings study.

**Information and Administration Resources**Town Planner

<u>Timeline:</u>	2005	<u>Estimated Cost:</u>	\$49,000-\$54,000/yr
<u>Priority:</u>	1	<u>Responsibility:</u>	PB

Actions: Establish and fund a full-time Town Planner position.

Geographic Information System

<u>Timeline:</u>	2010-2012	<u>Estimated Cost:</u>	Subject to scope of project
<u>Priority:</u>	2	<u>Responsibility:</u>	MPCC, PB, BOA

Actions: Complete a GIS installation at Town Hall, for use by the assessor, planning, conservation, board of health and other town departments.

Town Government Study

<u>Timeline:</u>	2010	<u>Estimated Cost:</u>	\$10,000
<u>Priority:</u>	2	<u>Responsibility:</u>	BOS

Action: Establish a town government study committee to consider:

- A formal consolidation of all traditional public works functions – highway, parks, cemeteries, water, solid waste disposal, engineering, and management of wastewater treatment facilities – under a single Department of Public Works that would report to the Board of Selectmen.
- The creation of a Bare Hill Pond Watershed Commission with broad policy, regulatory and permitting jurisdiction over Bare Hill Pond and watershed land located in Harvard.
- A consolidation of public safety functions – police, ambulance and fire.
- Board of Selectmen/Town Manager/Town Meeting form of government.

**Part II: Strategy Area Needs****Strategy Area: Ayer Road-North of Route 2**Community Commercial District

<u>Timeline:</u>	2003-2004	<u>Estimated Cost:</u>	\$25,000
<u>Priority:</u>	1	<u>Responsibility:</u>	MPCC, PB

Action: Amend the Zoning Bylaw to create a “Community Commercial District” over all or a substantial portion of the existing “C” District.

C District Amendments

<u>Timeline:</u>	2005-2006	<u>Estimated Cost:</u>	\$10,000
<u>Priority:</u>	1	<u>Responsibility:</u>	MPCC, PB

Action: Amend the Zoning Bylaw to strengthen the use, dimensional and site plan regulations for the remainder of the C District.

Residential Compatibility Overlay District

<u>Timeline:</u>	2006	<u>Estimated Cost:</u>	Master Plan Appendix H
<u>Priority:</u>	1	<u>Responsibility:</u>	MPCC, PB

Action: Amend the Zoning Bylaw to create a Residential Compatibility Overlay (RCO) District, the purpose of which is to encourage higher-density residential uses near goods and services in the community. The bylaw should provide for elderly housing and assisted living facilities, mixed residential development with single-family and common-wall housing units, and mandatory inclusion of affordable homes.

Non-Profit Development Corporation

<u>Timeline:</u>	2006	<u>Estimated Cost:</u>	Master Plan Appendix H
<u>Priority:</u>	1	<u>Responsibility:</u>	MPCC

Action: establish a local non-profit development corporation to assist the town with public works and economic development initiatives on Ayer Road north of Route 2.

Ayer Road Corridor Study

<u>Timeline:</u>	2008	<u>Estimated Cost:</u>	\$50,000-\$60,000
<u>Priority:</u>	1	<u>Responsibility:</u>	MPCC, BOS

Action: Initiate a corridor study for the entire length of North Ayer Road, from the Harvard/Ayer town line to the Route 2 interchange.

**Strategy Area: Harvard Center**Town Center Public Realm Plan

<u>Timeline:</u>	2005-2006	<u>Estimated Cost:</u>	\$20,000
<u>Priority:</u>	1	<u>Responsibility:</u>	MPCC, TCPC

Action: fund and complete a district improvements plan for parking, pedestrian walkways, public amenities and open space: a Town Center public realm plan.

Town Center Overlay District

<u>Timeline:</u>	2005-2006	<u>Estimated Cost:</u>	\$6,500
<u>Priority:</u>	1	<u>Responsibility:</u>	MPCC, PB, TCPC

Action: Amend the Zoning Bylaw to create a Town Center Overlay District, emphasizing a balanced mix of land uses.

Wastewater Feasibility Study

<u>Timeline:</u>	2007-2009	<u>Estimated Cost:</u>	\$25,000-\$30,000
<u>Priority:</u>	1	<u>Responsibility:</u>	BOS, TCPC

Action: Fund a feasibility study to provide adequate wastewater disposal capacity in the Town Center.

Residential Compatibility Overlay District

<u>Timeline:</u>	2006	<u>Estimated Cost:</u>	\$5,000-\$7,500
<u>Priority:</u>	1	<u>Responsibility:</u>	MPCC, PB

See discussion at Ayer Road Strategy Area. Action: Same.

Harvard Library Reuse Plan

<u>Timeline:</u>	2007	<u>Estimated Cost:</u>	\$35,000-\$40,000
<u>Priority:</u>	2	<u>Responsibility:</u>	MPCC, HLT, HHC, PB

Action: Fund a feasibility study for the reuse and disposition of Harvard Library.

**Strategy Area: Still River Village**Still River Village Overlay District

<u>Timeline:</u>	2008-2009	<u>Estimated Cost:</u>	\$5,000
<u>Priority:</u>	1	<u>Responsibility:</u>	MPCC, PB

Action: Amend the Zoning Bylaw to create an overlay zoning district that guides new development and changes to existing development to respect the unique form of Still River Village.

Historic Preservation

<u>Timeline:</u>	2005-2006	<u>Estimated Cost:</u>	\$15,000
<u>Priority:</u>	1		

Action: Implement “Historic Preservation” actions as they pertain to Still River area, especially (1) a local historic district or (2) a neighborhood conservation district.

**Strategy Area: Bare Hill Pond Watershed**

<u>Timeline:</u>	2004-2005	<u>Estimated Cost:</u>	\$4,500
<u>Priority:</u>	1		

Action: Amend the Zoning Bylaw by establishing a Bare Hill Pond Watershed District to lower the threshold for uses requiring a special permit, provide an explicit list of prohibited activities, and set appropriate development performance standards and site plan requirements.

**Strategy Areas: Prospect Hill-Still River, Oak Hill**Agricultural & Historic Landscapes District

<u>Timeline:</u>	2005-2008	<u>Estimated Cost:</u>	\$12,000
<u>Priority:</u>	1	<u>Responsibility:</u>	MPCC, PB, CC

Actions: (1) Amend the Zoning Bylaw to establish Agricultural & Historic Landscape Districts over the Prospect Hill-Still River and Oak Hill sections of Harvard in order to preserve open, rural landscapes, scenic view corridors, institutional and farming land uses, and historic roadways. (2) Designate Prospect Hill Road, Still River Road, Massachusetts Avenue, Littleton County Road, Oak Hill Road and Pinnacle Road as high-priority scenic ways and adopting higher performance standards for clearing, grading, protection of trees and stone walls, and construction activity that alters views from the road. (3) Target open space and historic preservation resources in these two planning areas.

**Strategy Area: Devens**Salerno Circle Review

<u>Timeline:</u>	2004-2005	<u>Estimated Cost:</u>	\$45,000-\$50,000
<u>Priority:</u>	2		

Action: Seek assistance from MassDevelopment to carry out a visioning process and technical review of opportunities and constraints for the use and development of land at Salerno Circle.

Open Space, Pedestrian and Bicycle Access







<u>Timelines:</u>	2005-2006 2009-2011	<u>Estimated Cost:</u>	\$8,500
<u>Implementation Tier:</u>	1		

Actions: (1) Remove the chain-link fencing and gates that presently exist at Harvard Depot Road and Old Mill Road, and replace them with attractive wooden posts, signs and kiosks such as those found at the trail entrances to many conservation areas, thereby encouraging people to walk through and enjoy the open space at Devens. (2) Complete conceptual design plans for a bicycle path to connect Harvard Center, Ayer Road and Devens, in 2009-2011. (Budget for action #2 is not included in “estimated cost,” above.)





## Major Recommendations

-  Improve-enhance open space access
-  Strengthen scenic corridor policies
-  Provide goods, services and employment
-  Protect Bare Hill Watershed
-  Encourage Mix of Residential Uses
-  Protect Agricultural-Historic Resources

### Ayer Road

Develop mixed-use village center  
Encourage variety of housing  
Protect open space "by design"  
Preserve agricultural uses  
Conduct corridor study  
Protect water supplies

### Town Center

Encourage balanced mix of uses  
Address common wastewater needs  
Promote pedestrian, bicycle access  
Protect/reuse historic buildings

### Oak Hill-Agricultural Area

Encourage farmland preservation  
Promote planned residential development  
Strengthen scenic corridor controls  
Protect accessory & agricultural outbuildings  
Calm traffic

### Prospect Hill-Still River

Protect scenic views, open space  
Preserve historic properties  
Promote planned residential development  
Strengthen scenic corridor controls  
Recognize wetland, wildlife interests

Community Opportunities Group, Inc.

Harvard Master Plan (2002)

# Land Use Policy Map

0 1 2 Miles

Map by J. A. Barrett 10-02

Data Sources: MassGIS, ENSR, Harvard Assessor's Office, Berg-Dempsey, PLANNING FOR HARVARD'S RURAL LANDSCAPE (1997), Harvard Open Space Committee, OPEN SPACE & RECREATION PLAN (1996).

