

## **CHAPTER II**

# **REGIONAL SETTING/LAND USE**

### **Introduction**

Abington is a suburban town adjacent to the City of Brockton and the towns of Holbrook, Weymouth, Rockland and Whitman. It is a suburb of both Brockton and Boston, and the recently-restored commuter rail service to Boston has made the Town a desirable location for people who commute to Boston for work. The Regional Location Map, II-1 shows that State Routes 18, 58, 139 and 123 connect Abington to surrounding communities and to the region's limited access highways, Routes 3, 24, and 128, (which are all one-town distant) making the Town reasonably accessible by road as well as by rail. Abington is 10.14 square miles in area and in 2008 had a population of 15,344.

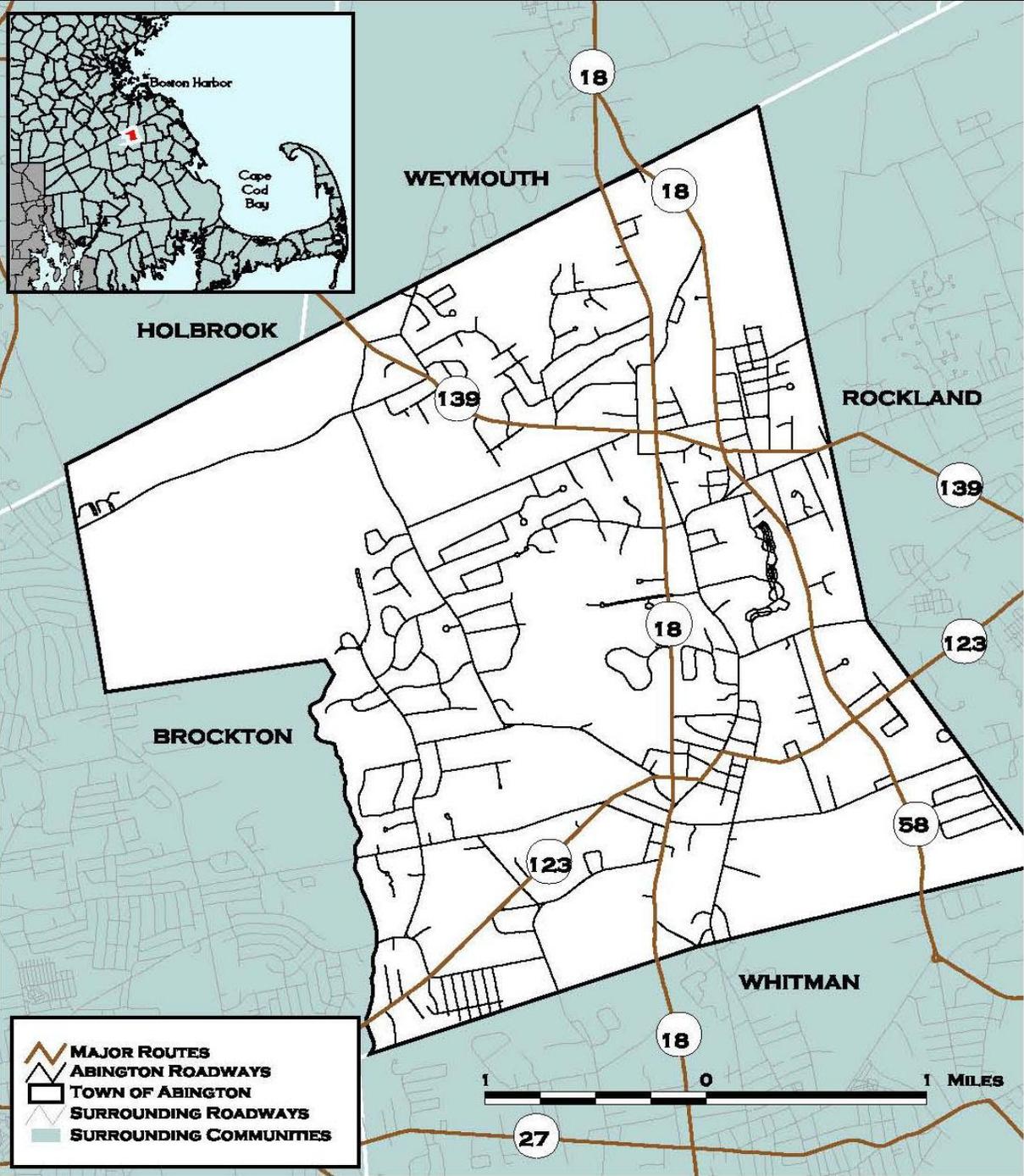
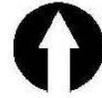
The town is almost entirely within the Taunton River Basin and is largely drained by the Shumatuscacant River and Beaver Brook and their tributaries. These flow to the Taunton River via Poor Meadow Brook in Hanson and East Bridgewater, the Satucket River in East Bridgewater, the Salisbury Plain River in Brockton, and the Matfield River in Bridgewater. A small area along the eastern edge of the town drains to the South Coastal Basin via French Stream in Rockland, the Drinkwater River in Hanover, and ultimately the Indian Head River and the North River. The town is at the top of each basin, as it includes the mapped headwaters of Beaver Brook and the Shumatuscacant River and is very close to the beginning of French Stream in Weymouth. Accordingly the streams are small and flows are limited.

The large Cleveland Pond in the Park currently prohibits swimming, but a popular resource used by other communities is the swimming area at Abington's jewel, Island Grove Park on the Shumatuscacant River. The pedestrian bridge reaching this Park from Lake St. in Abington is in need of significant repairs and continues to be a priority need.

The streams and water bodies include Beaver Brook and the Shumatuscacant River, and their tributaries and impoundments. The major impoundments on Beaver Brook are the small, very scenic Cushing Pond just north of Chestnut St. and just south of the Holbrook line, the large Cleveland Pond within the State park, and the small, tranquil secluded Hunt's Pond on the Abington / Brockton border, just above Mill St.

Impoundments on the Shumatuscacant River include a small pond between the Frolio School and the Mount Vernon Cemetery, and the much larger downstream Island Grove Pond and its spring-fed swimming area. From here the River flows freely through the Abington–Rockland Joint Water Board's Meyers Ave. well field and on to Whitman's Hobart Pond. The many impoundments offer possibilities for coordinated storm water management and groundwater recharge.

# MAP II - 1 REGIONAL LOCATION MAP



OLD COLONY PLANNING COUNCIL, 70 SCHOOL STREET, BROCKTON, MA 02301  
GIS DATA SOURCES: MASSGIS, EOTPW

NOVEMBER, 2008

Abington has extensive open space and recreation resources that include the Ames Nowell State Park and town holdings along the Beaver Brook at Diane Circle adjacent to the City of Brockton's extensive Beaver Brook Reservation. Island Grove Park along with other parcels land of the Park and Recreation Commission, Conservation Commission land along with the considerable open space land resources owned by the Abington Rockland Joint Water Board all contribute to give the town a distinct low density character. An important open space resource is the 128 acre Pohorecky Farm extending from within the State Park, around Cushing Pond, and into the town of Holbrook abutting the Holbrook Sportsmen's Club. The town authorized the purchase the Pohorecky Farm property through a vote of the Town Meeting, but the actual acquisition has been stalled by litigation.

### **History of the Community**

The Town of Abington was founded in 1712 and developed its agricultural base until the mid-1800's when it became an important center for the manufacture of shoes. With the decline of the shoe industry, the population of the town stabilized and varied little until after World War II. Abington was impacted by rapid residential growth and development after the war and into the 1970's. In the period 1950 to 1970 the Town grew by 72 percent. The growth rate moderated from the 1970's to the late 1990's. Growth then accelerated in Town when commuter rail service was restored on the Old Colony Line and a new rail station was built. The availability of commuter rail service in Abington has spurred increased residential growth in the community largely in the form of condominium and apartment development.

The additional residential growth strained the Town's infrastructure and placed heavy demands on governmental services. The inability to offset residential development with commercial and business development placed a heavy reliance on the residential property tax base. Today, the town can be described as a small bedroom community of over 15,000 people with a number of small and medium sized businesses. Its primary residential character is a distinct departure from its manufacturing and agricultural past. Although the town has experienced a substantial amount of residential growth over the recent past it still maintains a comfortable small town atmosphere.

Recently, the Town has attracted an influx of new residents who commute to jobs in the Boston area and as indicated in the Economic Base element of the Master Plan Update, the majority (35.7%) of the resident labor force is employed in Management, Professional and related occupations; another (28.9%) are employed in Sales and Office occupations. Service occupations, which include healthcare support and protective services such as fire and police, along with Production, Transportation and Material Moving are proportionally the next highest occupational categories of the Abington labor force

### **Population**

The U.S. Census of Population reported that the Town of Abington population in 1990 had reached a level of 13, 817. By the year 2000 the town population had grown to 14,605, a 5.7 percent increase. The Town of Abington census places the population of the town at 15,344 in

2008, a 5.1 percent increase since 2000. The most recent population projection for Abington by the Old Colony Planning Council, the Town's regional planning agency, has projected growth of 13.9% from 14,605 in 2000 to 16,638 by 2020 and expects a level of 17,038 by the year 2025. This would be a 16.66 percent increase in the population from the 14,605 level in the year 2000. The Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC), the OCPC counterpart agency that plans for the Boston metropolitan region projected slower growth with the population of Abington reaching 16,082 persons by the year 2030. These population estimates for Abington are based upon past trends of population growth; population migration; local land development policies; and, upon assumptions of what growth is reasonably expected to occur in the future. The population estimates are close in projecting an Abington population of 17,000 persons by the year 2029 and it is the estimated population number used in the Master Plan Update for the twenty year planning period.

An Abington population of 17,000 persons by 2029 implies that considerable pressure will be placed upon the town's remaining undeveloped land, particularly if growth continues to consume land at the current rate of development; which is approximately one acre of land per household. The growing population is expected to result in an increased demand for town services, i.e., recreation, education, police, fire, etc. For the Town of Abington, the youngest and oldest age groups have increased the most. From 1990 to 2000 the young population (under age 17) had grown by 17.5%, and had increased from 3,468 to 4,076. The population 17 years and under represented 27.9 percent of the total population in 2000. At the same time from 1990 to 2000, the number of persons age 60 and over increased by 850 persons or 38% percent to 3,083 and represented 21.1% of the town's population. This compares with an overall percentage increase in the Town population of 5.7 percent during the 1990-2000 ten-year periods. The most recent town census indicates that the 2008 population of the Town of Abington is 15,344, an increase of 5.1 % consistent with the projected increase to the year 2029.

Income statistics reported by the U.S. Census for 1990 and 2000 indicate that Median Family Income (MFI) for Abington residents was higher than that for the state and the OCPC Region in both census years. In 1990 the MFI for Abington was \$48,889 and in the year 2000, \$68,826; a 40.8 percent increase. A comparison of the statistics for the state for the same time shows that the Massachusetts MFI was \$44,367 in 1990 and \$61,664 in 2000. This resulted in an increase of 38.9 percent in the MFI for the state for the ten year period. The OCPC region of which Abington is a member community also out-paced the state in MFI in both census years. The OCPC MFI in 1990 was \$47,273 and in 2000, \$67,331, a 42.4 percent increase.

However, according to the U. S. Census, per capita income in the Town in 1990 and 2000 was below that of the State and the OCPC region. In 1990 the per capita income in Abington was \$16,379 while the state was \$17,224 and for the OCPC region \$16,710. Similarly, in the year 2000 the per capita income in Abington was \$23,380; below the per capita income of \$25,952 recorded for Massachusetts; and, less than the \$24,032 for the OCPC region. These income statistics strongly suggest that Abington continues to be a strong middle income community, but not an affluent community.

Of the total Abington labor force of 8,130 in the year 2000, over 35 percent or 2,833 were employed in management, professional and related occupations. In addition, another 2,293 Abington residents (28.9 percent) were employed in sales and office occupations. Changes in labor force participation and place of work statistics indicate that the vast majority of Abington residents commute to jobs outside of the community.

It was reported by the State Department of Employment and Training that in 2004 there were 345 establishments in Abington employing 3,985 persons. This statistic does not include those employed by the Town or others in government service. The largest employers in Abington are the Wal-Mart and Target department stores that employ 232 persons and 150 persons respectively.

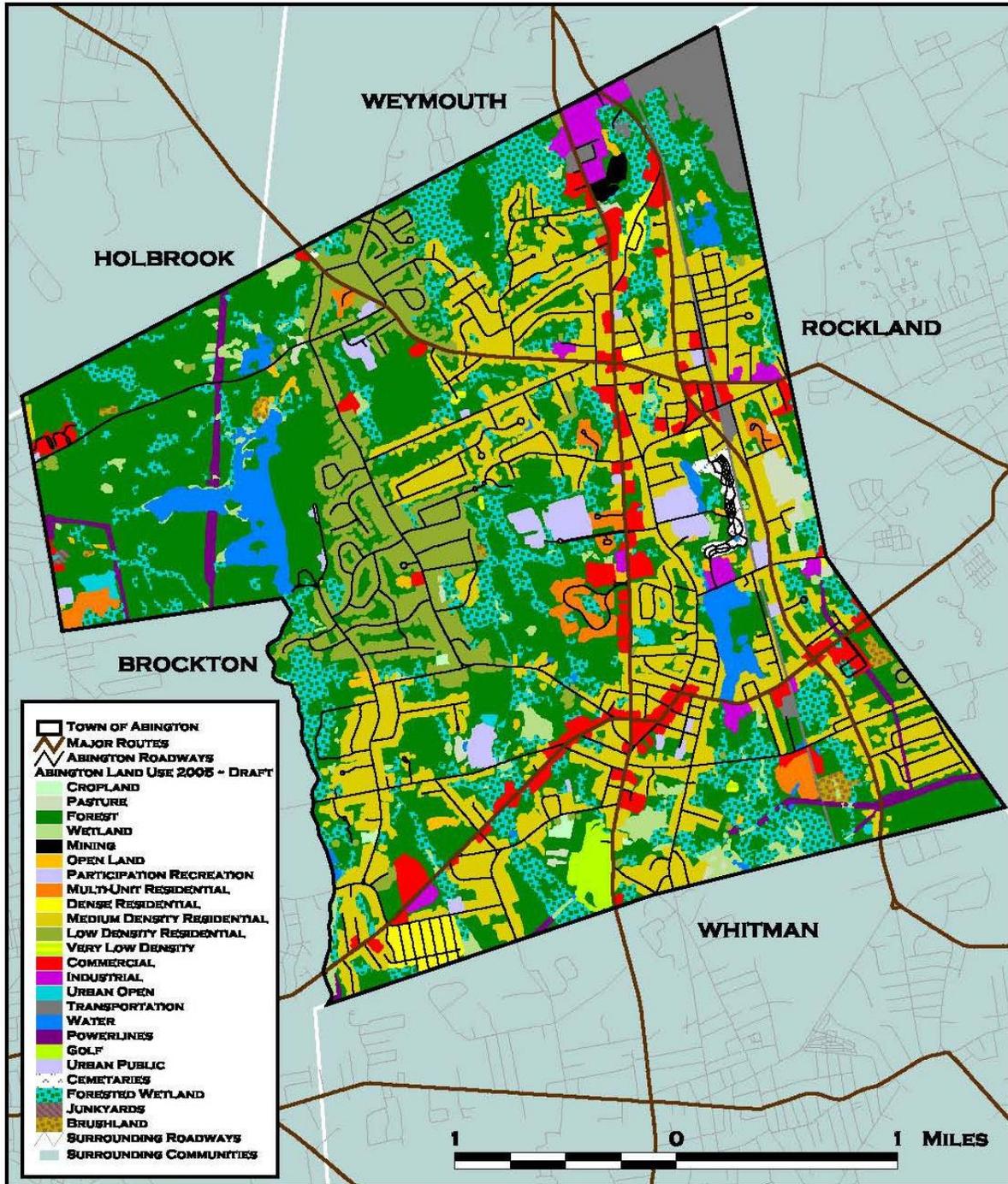
Changing population characteristics in Abington have significant implications for Town government in trying to serve the diversity of needs. For example, the increased number of elderly in the general population and demand for a broader range of elderly programs and services emphasized the need for a Senior Center in Town. While population groups are well-mixed town-wide, the youngest and oldest age groups are growing the most, as noted above. The growth of these age groups is expected to continue and the Town can expect pressure for more programs to serve these population groups.

### **Growth and Development Patterns**

The town's primary land use is residential and the greatest proportion of this is in the form of detached single family home development. Abington's town-wide sewerage system has allowed development in areas which were previously constrained by soils that were unsuitable for on-site septic systems. However, the Abington Sewer Commission has imposed restrictions on new connections to the system which is limited under an agreement with the City of Brockton for sewerage treatment. On the following page is Map III-2 Existing Land Use 2005. The map is significant in showing the general development pattern of Abington which one can see is predominantly residential, clustered around the major arterial streets of the town. Abington has two older established commercial districts; Abington Center and North Abington Center, plus strip commercial development along Routes 123 and 18. Information developed as part of the build out analysis completed for the Town by the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs and MASSGIS in 1997 showed that the development from 1991 to 1997 had been mostly in the form of subdivisions that filled in land adjacent to older established neighborhoods. In addition, the 1999 Abington Master Plan found that this trend had continued and that there was a potential for 1,335 to 1,550 additional new single-family homes and up to 183 acres of non-residential space under the then zoning.

The land development pattern noted in the 1997 build out analysis has continued to the present with new single family developments filling in land adjacent to older neighborhoods. However, the Town experienced a spurt of multi-family development as a result of the restoration of commuter rail service on the Plymouth Branch of the Old Colony Rail Line in 1997 that made Abington a popular community for persons working in the Boston area.

# MAP II - 2 EXISTING LAND USE



OLD COLONY PLANNING COUNCIL, 70 SCHOOL STREET, BROCKTON, MA 02301  
GIS DATA SOURCES: MASSGIS, EOTPW

NOVEMBER, 2008

Recent residential development in Abington has been more intensive and includes the 192 unit Woodlands at Abington Station apartment complex on Summer Street proximate to the Old Colony Commuter Rail Station and the 180 unit Abington Woods apartment development on Bedford Street. With the restoration of commuter rail service, the Town of Abington became a popular location for persons working in and commuting to jobs in the Boston core area. Commercial uses in Abington are found in the two established Town Centers in North Abington and Abington Center and along Routes 139 and 123. Wal-Mart selected a site on the west side of town at the Brockton line along Route 123 for a new Wal-Mart store. Stop and Shop located its super store on the east side of town on Route 123 adjacent to the Rockland town line. Recently, the Town approved plans for Target Corporation to develop a store next to the Super Stop and Shop.

### **Land Use Determinants**

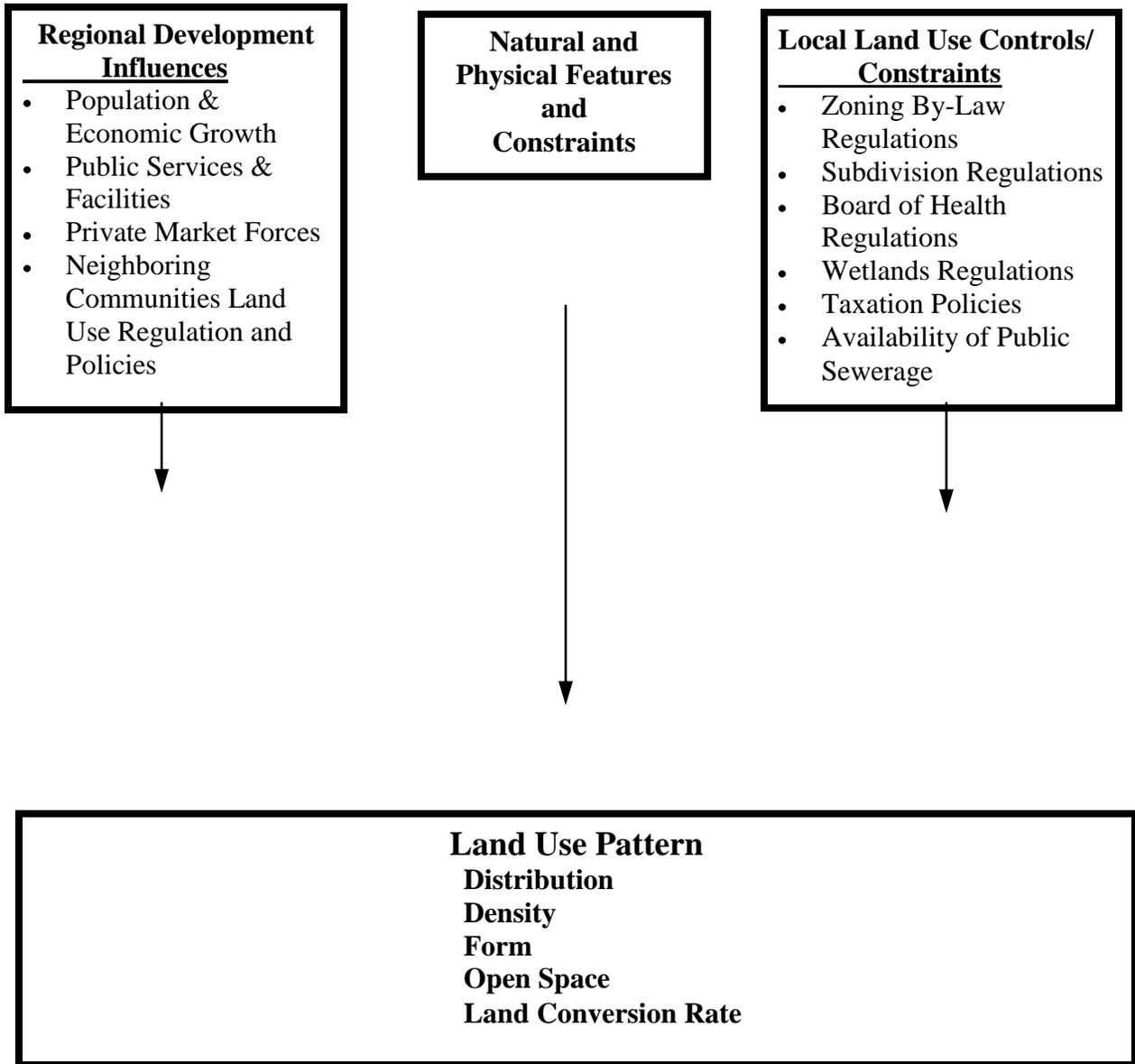
The Town of Abington's development pattern has been shaped and influenced by a number of factors including its location in eastern Massachusetts; its relationship and proximity to Boston, New England's largest city; and, the transportation network and facilities. Natural features and constraints have also been major factors in determining whether and how land may be used. Local land use controls including the Abington Zoning By-law and Abington Subdivision Rules and Regulations along with the availability of public water and sewerage services have a great influence on how land is developed. These and other forces, events and regulations have all contributed to some extent in shaping the built environment in the Town of Abington.

A diagram titled "Abington Land Use Determinants/Land Use Relationship" was included in the 1999 edition of the Abington Master Plan and is again shown here to illustrate how these land use determinants interact to shape the town's present and future land use pattern. Although the local zoning by-law is the primary determinant of land use, it is one of several factors that influence how land will ultimately be developed. Regional development influences including population and economic growth, public services and facilities, private market forces including money market interest rates, neighboring community land development regulation and taxing policies combine to also influence growth and development in Abington.

### **Regional Development Influences**

Southeastern Massachusetts has been the fastest growing area of the Commonwealth for the past forty years. The availability of relatively inexpensive and abundant land coupled with improved highway access and transportation facilities has expanded the Boston housing market to include the Brockton area and much of Southeastern Massachusetts. The town's future growth will be shaped to a large extent by the pressures that are exerted by the regional housing market as the demand for housing grows and land becomes more scarce and expensive. Other external factors influencing Abington's development include: mortgage interest rates; state transportation policies; land use, utility and taxing policies in neighboring communities; federal and state housing programs; and, state and regional economic trends.

## Abington Land Use Determinants/ Land Use Relationship



## Natural and Physical Features and Constraints

Abington's existing land use pattern has also been influenced by the nature of its physical and natural features. Factors such as the drainage, soil characteristics, wetland areas, ponds and streams have all contributed to shaping the land use pattern of the town. Development in Abington prior to the availability of public sewerage was dependent upon on-site sewage disposal and soil conditions played a major part in determining where development could take place. The situation has changed markedly in the last few years and although much of the town is served by the Abington Sewer System there is a restriction on new tie-ins to the system. Much of the remaining land available for development in Abington has poor soils conditions and although Title 5 regulations very permeable sandy soils with few limitations for sewage disposal - except perhaps excess porosity as discussed under Natural, Open Space and Recreation Resources.

## Local land Use Controls and Constraints

The Abington Zoning By-Law is the Town's principle means of shaping its pattern of development. The town's zoning determines what, where and how new development may be allowed in a given areas and at what height and density. It is therefore, vitally important that the town's zoning reflects its land use goals and objectives. To a somewhat lesser extent, the community's subdivision control regulations; Board of Health regulations; wetlands regulations; and, taxation policies influence the degree and form of development. In particular the subdivision rules and regulations set standards for access to new lots, road construction, drainage and utilities.

## Land Use Trends

The Town of Abington has witnessed significant changes in land use over the time and seen the Town evolve from its agricultural beginnings, to a major industrial and shoe manufacturing center and finally into a popular suburban community. The changes in land use over the past forty six year period are shown in Table II-1, Abington Land Use Trends 1962-2008. The land use changes document the gradual transformation of Abington from a town that had a rich historical past as a manufacturing center into an attractive suburban community strategically located in the Greater Boston/South Shore area.

As can be seen from the Table, the amount of acreage developed as residential use has more than tripled over the 46 year period increasing from 1030 to 3180. In more or less the same period, specifically the 48 year period from 1960 to 2008 the population of Abington grew by 44.7 percent from a level of 10,607 to 15,344. Of particular note is the substantial increase in the increase in multi-family land use which increased from 88 acres in 1997 to 782 acres in 2008. The low density development pattern in Abington is typical of the development that has taken place in other suburban communities in southeastern Massachusetts in the last forty years that has consumed much of the land available for development in the region.

As also can be seen from the Table, Abington has had reasonably good success in keeping and attracting businesses to the community. Land devoted to Commercial land use has increased

since 1997 from 290 acres to 305 in 2008 while acreage devoted to Industrial use has decreased slightly from 58 acres to 54. The success of business retention over the recent past can be attributed to the local tax policy and a business friendly environment. Abington's uniform tax rate policy and the town's willingness to work with large business firms such as Wal-Mart, Target and Lowe's with success is evidence of its being welcoming to business development. Also of importance to a business is its location in relation to its customer base, market area and its accessibility to needed goods and services.

The Town of Abington is well positioned in the eastern Massachusetts and the Greater Boston market area and served by state highway routes 58, 123 and 139. These state routes tie the community to the regional limited access highway network that includes routes 3, 24 and 128. The Town is also served by commuter rail service on the Old Colony Line and is therefore a good location for many commercial and/or industrial businesses that serve the immediate market area or that do not require limited access highway availability.

**Table II-1  
Abington Land Use Trends  
1962, 1975, 1997 and 2008**

<b>Land Use Category</b>	<b>1962 Acres</b>	<b>1975 Acres</b>	<b>1997 Acres</b>	<b>2008 Acres</b>
<b>Residential</b>	1030	1667	2316	3180
<i>single family</i>	N/A	1619	2218	2398
<i>multi-family</i>	N/A	48	88	782
<b>Commercial</b>	77	214	290	305
<b>Industrial</b>	34	98	58	54
<b>Public</b>	833	1094	1296	1640
<b>Semi-Public</b>	79	151	103	246
<b>Streets &amp; Railroad</b>	336	400	421	480
<b>Utilities</b>	70	29	40	40
<b>Agriculture</b>	N/A	157	3	0
<b>Vacant</b>	3922	2571	1982	564
<b>Total</b>	<b>6381</b>	<b>6381</b>	<b>6509</b>	<b>6509</b>

Source: University of Massachusetts, Department of Forestry and Wildlife Management, McConnell Remote Sensing Land Use Program. The data for 1997 was made available through the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs, MassGIS for the Town of Abington. The data for 2008 was furnished by the Abington Assessor's Office from land records compiled by the office. The difference in the total acres for 1962 and 1975 is inexplicable and is as reported.

## **Future Land Use Challenges and Opportunities**

The major land use challenges facing the Town of Abington in the long term center on its ability to respond to changing conditions that present themselves with the development of Southfield on the site of the former South Weymouth Naval Air Station, market conditions and regional development influences. The Town of Abington has limited acreage available for development and the Southfield development will have an edge in attracting new and large scale development as market conditions improve. The emphasis should be for the Town to reinforce the small town character that has made Abington a popular location for small business enterprise by redeveloping the historic North Abington and Abington Business Districts as small town shopping and service centers and by striving to attract quality development and continuing to provide business location opportunities along routes 123, 18, 139 and 58; the major arterial streets to serve vehicular oriented businesses.

## **Land Use Goals and Objectives**

- **To manage and guide development in the Town of Abington so that new development will have a positive impact on the tax base; preserve and protect the town's character and amenities; accommodate needed housing and employment opportunities; provide for commercial and business growth; and, meet other community development needs.**
- **To provide for balanced community development that will preserve the town's character and amenities while providing opportunity for residential, commercial, and industrial development.**

The strategy for accomplishing the Land use goals and objectives of the Master Plan are principally embodied in the Zoning Map and in the provisions of the Zoning By-law but are also contained in strategies and/or objectives cited in other elements of the Master Plan. The Abington Zoning Map which is shown as Map II-3 presents the future pattern of land use that the Town is planning to accomplish over the twenty year planning period. The Abington Planning Board should continue to monitor how well the Zoning By-law and Map are accomplishing the land use objectives and make changes where necessary during the planning period.

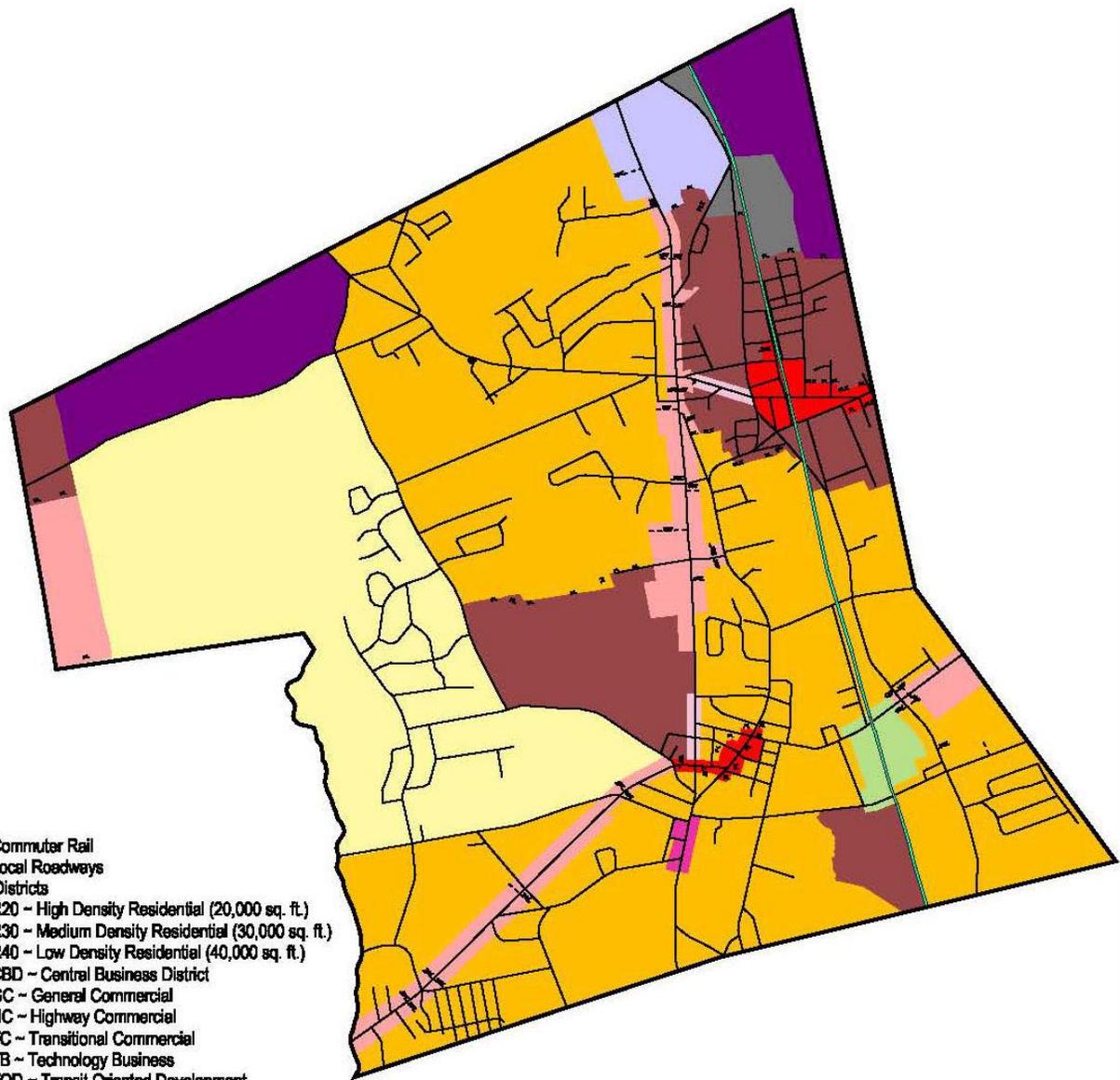
The following is a brief description of the Abington Zoning Districts contained in the Abington By-law:

High Density Residential, R-20 - To encourage compact residential development.

Medium Density Residential, R-30 - To provide areas for a reasonably spacious residential environment.

Low Density Residential, R-40 - To provide areas for a particularly spacious residential environment.

# MAP II - 3 ABINGTON ZONING



- Commuter Rail
- Local Roadways
- Zoning Districts**
- R20 - High Density Residential (20,000 sq. ft.)
- R30 - Medium Density Residential (30,000 sq. ft.)
- R40 - Low Density Residential (40,000 sq. ft.)
- CBD - Central Business District
- GC - General Commercial
- HC - Highway Commercial
- TC - Transitional Commercial
- TB - Technology Business
- TOD - Transit Oriented Development
- I - Industrial
- MUPDD - Multi-Use Planned Development District



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**Dated February 3, 2003**

GIS Data Sources:  
 MassGIS, MHD Road Inventory, and the Town of Abington

Amended April 8, 2005, & April 25, 2007

General Commercial, GC - To primarily establish compact business centers which do not include noxious or land expansive uses and which are centrally located, have adequate vehicular access, and are designed for pedestrian shoppers as much as possible.

Highway commercial, HC - To primarily provide locations for businesses which cater to a traffic-oriented market or which need large expanses of land and would not be appropriate in compact general commercial centers.

Industrial, I - To reserve areas for the development of industry that will be compatible with the Town and the immediate area.

Flood Plain and Wetlands Protection, FW - To protect and preserve the marshes, bogs, ponds, water courses and their adjoining wetlands; to reduce the hazards of floods upon the public health, safety and general welfare; to protect flood plain occupants from a flood that is or may be caused by their own land use and that is or may be undertaken without full realization of the dangers therein; to protect the public from the burden of extraordinary financial expenditure for flood control and relief; to protect the capacity of flood plain and wetland areas to absorb, transmit and store run-off; to assure retention of sufficient floodway area to convey flows which can reasonably be expected to occur.

Technology Business, TB – To encourage the development of computer technology, internet business, and other technology related businesses and which does not include noxious land uses.

Watershed Protection District, WPD – To protect existing and future water resources

Transit Oriented Development, TOD – To encourage the development of land uses that compliment both the existing commuter rail line and the established residential areas surrounding the station, by providing for a mix of small uses on well buffered sites to support commuters and adjacent residential development, encourage the continued use of rail service, increase the number of pedestrian and bicycle trips, while decreasing the number of automobile trips within the Town.

Central Business District, CBD – to allow for the reasonable use, enhancement, expansion and redevelopment of the North Abington and Abington Business areas of the Town that are currently developed in a building intensive manner where parking is available on-street as well as in common lots.

Multiple Use Planned Development District, MUPDD – To provide for the overall planned development of land with mixed-uses within the designated area. The District attempts to accommodate low-impact activities in an overall low density but with intensive use clusters, making use of natural features and vegetation, screening and setbacks to have minimal impact on surrounding land uses.

Transitional Commercial District, TCD - to preserve the residential character of existing development along thoroughfares that are undergoing pressure for commercial development by providing for the transition to more intensive but compatible uses and emphasizing the preservation and use of existing structures. The TCD also provides for buffers and uses compatible with nearby residential areas; provides for property owners in such transitional

areas an additional opportunity to use their land without severely diminishing the amenity and residential value of other properties; and allowing limited, low-traffic generating non-residential uses which can operate in adapted/expanded existing houses or compatible new small-scale office/ retail buildings.