

# BOXBOROUGH 2030

A RURAL, ENGAGED COMMUNITY FOR ALL

[www.boxborough-ma.gov/boxborough2030](http://www.boxborough-ma.gov/boxborough2030)



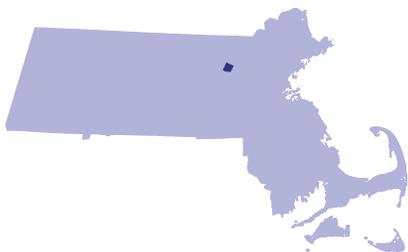
## A Master Plan for the Town of Boxborough, Massachusetts

Prepared by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council  
Adopted January 2016



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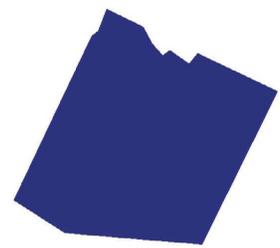
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Massachusetts



MAPC Region



Boxborough

# *A Letter from Your Town Planner*

Dear Boxborough Community Members,

After more than a year in the making, the Town of Boxborough will embark on the next decade guided by Boxborough2030, a visionary Master Plan aimed to maintain the town's traditional values as a rural, engaged community for all. This sentiment was voiced by you, the community, in the public forums, meetings, and surveys conducted during the Master Plan Update process. Throughout the process residents, property owners, and business owners assisted the Master Plan Update Committee, Town staff, and the Metropolitan Area Planning Council in identifying not just the community's strengths and opportunities, but also its weaknesses and potential threats, to develop a plan to capitalize on town assets and address potential future challenges.

It is easy for a well-rounded community such as Boxborough to simply sit on its laurels and enjoy the lifestyle which is currently being provided, but without a plan for the future and public involvement, the preferred quality of life will not last. Change is inevitable in every community and if we want to keep Boxborough the way it is, we have to plan for its future to maintain the aspects of the town which make it the rural, engaged community that we all enjoy. Boxborough2030 not only speaks to preserving the town's rural landscape, educational system, and conservation lands, but it also addresses many other topics which are less often contemplated such as housing, economic enhancement, energy efficiency, and transportation. All of these items greatly impact the way we live, but they are often overlooked as simple background aspects of a community when in actuality they are the factors that directly determine its quality of life.

Boxborough2030 is not the end of the process, or even the beginning of the end of the process. It is the end of the beginning for the future of Boxborough. It is a plan in which you, the community, have realized where the town is positioned today on a variety of town-wide issues and where you want the community to be on these issues in 10 to 15 years. However, in order to get there and maintain the quality of life the town currently enjoys, continued public involvement on all of these issues is needed. Boxborough2030 can easily be viewed as the heart of the community, the basis from which all initiatives should spawn and be consistent, and your involvement is the critical next step to its success and fulfillment.



Adam L. Duchesneau, AICP  
Town Planner



# Executive Summary

## **Boxborough's Vision: A Rural, Engaged Community for All**

Boxborough shall maintain its traditional values of rural open space, a first-rate educational system, agricultural and conservation lands, and historical roots, while fostering a balanced economic environment and enhancing a close-knit sense of community for all generations.

The Boxborough2030 Master Plan provides an excellent opportunity for our town to develop a long-term vision for the community and to create steps for implementing this vision. The last Master Plan for Boxborough was completed in January of 2002. After 13 years it was time to update it. Town staff, the Master Plan Update Committee (MPUC), and the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) have produced an updated Master Plan for the Town entitled Boxborough2030. This updated Master Plan will serve as Boxborough's planning guide for the Town over the next fifteen years, through 2030. Moreover, it will help Boxborough achieve and maintain its vision of "A Rural, Engaged Community for All."

Through public outreach and community sensing throughout the Boxborough2030 process, the MPUC learned that residents are mostly happy with the state of the town. Key elements of a Master Plan vision developed in 2009 were confirmed and found to still be valid today:

- Keep the small-town, rural atmosphere and maintain our character and sense of community;
- Protect the openness of the landscape and quality of environmental resources;
- Maintain the high quality of public services and the school system.

These persistent values are embodied in the succinct vision adopted for Boxborough2030, which has been organized around a set of high level community aspirations.

During community sensing and outreach, a few themes and suggestions consistently emerged. The community takes great pride in the excellent Acton-Boxborough Regional School system. In June 2013, Town Meeting voted to join Boxborough's Blanchard School to the region which now includes grades K through 12. Support for education and youth recreational needs continues unabated. Most often, we heard that people feel strongly about maintaining the rural quality of the town. Residents are passionate about our protected lands, trails, and natural resources; we would like bikeways on selected roads; we should consider new recreational facilities for all. There were differing opinions about the need to attract more commercial development, but the consensus is that development which enhances quality of life is more important than the pursuit of commercial tax revenue. All suggestions from community members were taken into account as we developed this plan.

The most significant planning guidance embodied in Boxborough2030 for potential future action can be summarized as follows:

- Encourage economic development which will improve the quality of life for residents, such as supporting development of a village-like area with restaurants, pubs, shops, fitness and health services, and other amenities. Economic development should not be pursued simply to increase the commercial tax base.



- Increase transportation infrastructure and mobility, including providing designated bicycle and pedestrian travel lanes on selected Town roads.
- Plan for long-term water resource management and protection.
- Establish strategies for energy conservation, carbon footprint reduction, and climate change resiliency.
- Address community needs pertaining to social services, modestly priced housing, recreational facilities, and open space for all ages.
- Explore improving municipal facilities.

Boxborough2030 is meant to be a living planning tool, not a dusty document filed on a shelf. To this end, we have adopted a new approach to implementation. The Board of Selectmen and Planning Board will regularly host a joint status review of the plan where all stakeholders, boards and committees, and residents can participate. The town boards and committees will carry out the tactical work within their purview. It is intended and hoped this collaborative review process will facilitate the kind of complex cross-organizational activities that promote the vision and key strategies.

The full plan, detailing over a year of research about Boxborough’s existing conditions, a critical community engagement process, and in-depth recommendations with implementation steps is available online at [www.boxborough-ma.gov/boxborough2030](http://www.boxborough-ma.gov/boxborough2030). Boxborough2030’s website serves as an excellent repository of information about the town and is meant to be accessible and interactive for those interested in learning more about Boxborough, the Town’s master planning process, and the recommendations for meeting the Boxborough2030 Vision. The website is intended to be actively used as Town staff, boards, and commissions work to implement the plan over the next fifteen years.

The Town would like to thank the Master Plan Update Committee members as follows who devoted countless hours of time and energy to help to create Boxborough2030:

**Voting Members**

- Marie Cannon, Board of Health
- Bryon Clemence, Agricultural Commission
- David Follett, Conservation Commission
- Les Fox, Board of Selectmen
- Mitzi Garcia-Weil, Recreation Commission
- John Markiewicz, Planning Board
- Rebecca Morris, Energy Committee
- Al Murphy, Housing Board
- Frank Powers, Council on Aging

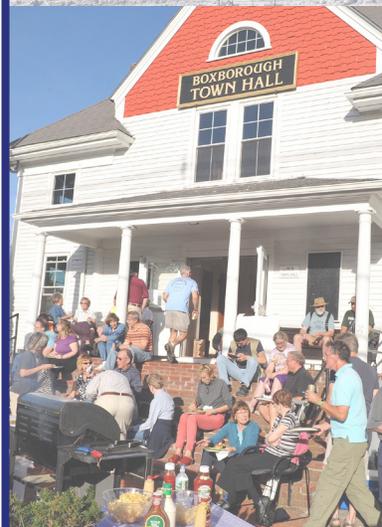
**Ex-Officio Members**

- Steven Ballard, Finance Committee
- Dmitry Bykhovsky, Local Business Owner
- Adam Duchesneau, Town Planner
- Tom Garmon, Public Works Director
- Kevin Mahoney, Historical Commission
- Maria Neyland, School Committee
- Warren Ryder, Police Chief
- Randolph White, Fire Chief
- Selina Shaw, Town Administrator

John Markiewicz  
MPUC Chair

Les Fox  
MPUC Vice Chair

To get involved with the implementation of Boxborough2030, please participate in the public status reviews or contact Town Planner Adam Duchesneau, AICP at [ADuchesneau@Boxborough-MA.gov](mailto:ADuchesneau@Boxborough-MA.gov) or 978-264-1723. We look forward to your interest and involvement with making Boxborough2030 a reality.



# PROJECT



Town of Boxborough approves MAPC's Master Plan scope and contract

Public Kickoff and Visioning Forum is held at Town Hall

Third MPUC meeting held

Boxborough2030 website launches and fifth MPUC meeting held



October 2014

December 2014

February 2015

April 2015

September 2014

November 2014

January 2015

March 2015



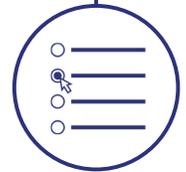
Board of Selectmen appoint Master Plan Update Committee (MPUC) members and first meeting held



Boxborough2030 Vision approved by Planning Board and Board of Selectmen; second MPUC meeting held



MAPC staff interviews local businesses and fourth MPUC meeting held



Online Economic Development survey ends and sixth MPUC meeting held

# TIMELINE



Seventh MPUC meeting held

Ninth MPUC meeting held

Tenth MPUC meeting held

Twelfth MPUC meeting held



June 2015

August 2015

November 2015

January 2016

May 2015

July 2015

October 2015

December 2015



Boxborough2030 booth at Fifer's Day and eighth MPUC meeting held

Boxborough2030 Master Plan and website are completed

Eleventh MPUC meeting held

Thirteenth and final MPUC meeting held; Master Plan approved by Planning Board and Board of Selectmen

# Local Input

Community input was critical to the success of Boxborough2030. These are some of the ways we gathered this input.

# 1

## Public Kickoff and Visioning Forum



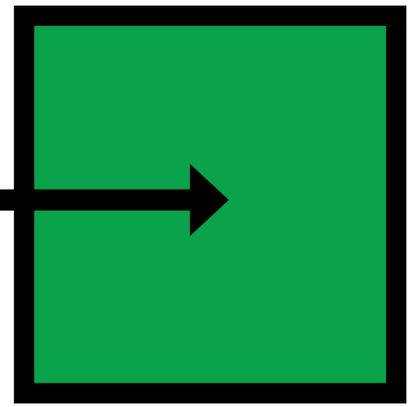
MAPC held a Public Kickoff and Visioning Forum for Boxborough residents at Town Hall on November 19, 2014. Participants viewed maps and posters about Boxborough while providing MAPC with input on their own experiences in town. Maps were marked up with dot stickers; brown paper, markers, and sticky notes were used to capture responses to a variety of questions.



The nine members and nine ex-officios on the MPUC were people with expertise and interest in the various topics within the Master Plan and they represented a variety of community decision makers and constituencies in town. The MPUC met monthly with the Town Planner and MAPC to discuss plan topics and drafts, brainstorm community outreach strategies, and receive updates from MAPC on the plan's progress.

## Monthly Master Plan Update Committee Meetings

# 2



# 3

## Economic Development Community Survey

MAPC conducted in-person interviews with local business owners and employees, and created an online survey for community members to take. The purpose of both the interviews and the survey was to learn about the community's sentiment towards economic development.



# 4

## Interviews with Local Business Owners



Engaging community members in the planning for Boxborough's future culminated at Fifer's Day on June 20, 2015. The MPUC's Boxborough2030 booth included data posters, a timeline of the planning process, and three fun and thought-provoking activities. The activities allowed participants to rank their favorite aspirations for Boxborough, suggest action steps for achieving the aspirations, and prioritize goals for the Town.

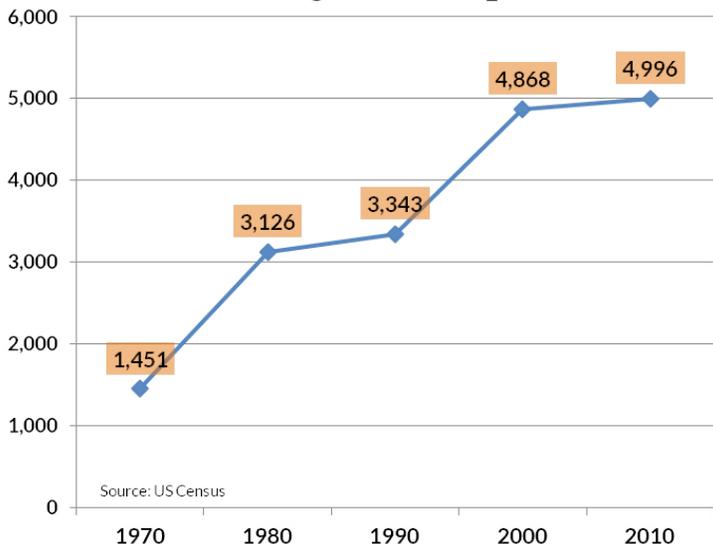
## Boxborough2030 Booth at Fifer's Day

# 5

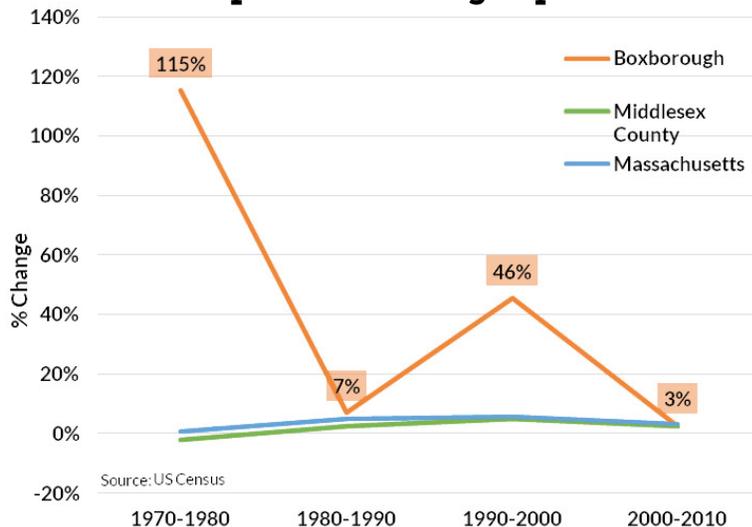
# BOXBOROUGH BY THE NUMBERS

## Past, Present, and Future Population

### Boxborough Total Population

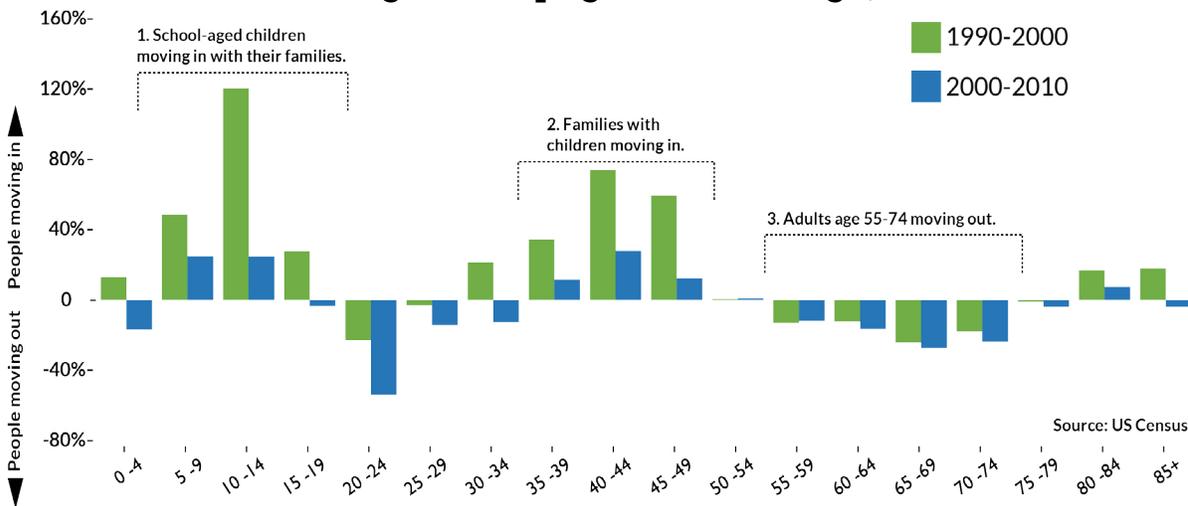


### Population Change by Decade



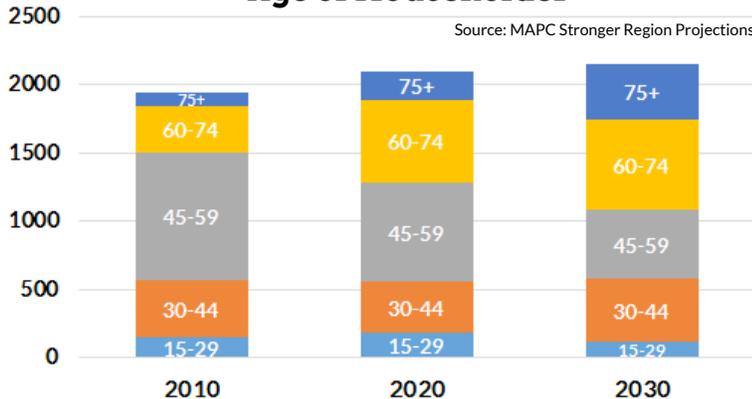
Boxborough grew rapidly during the 1970s and 1990s, but grew much more slowly during the 1980s and 2000s. Boxborough has generally grown faster than Middlesex County and Massachusetts, which have grown relatively slowly over the same time period.

### Net Migration by Age in Boxborough, 1990-2010



The largest segments of the town's population consist of adults between the ages of 40 and 60 and children under 18. While attractive to family households raising children, migration data trends from the US Census reveal that Boxborough's elder population, or those aged 55 and above, may be moving out of town.

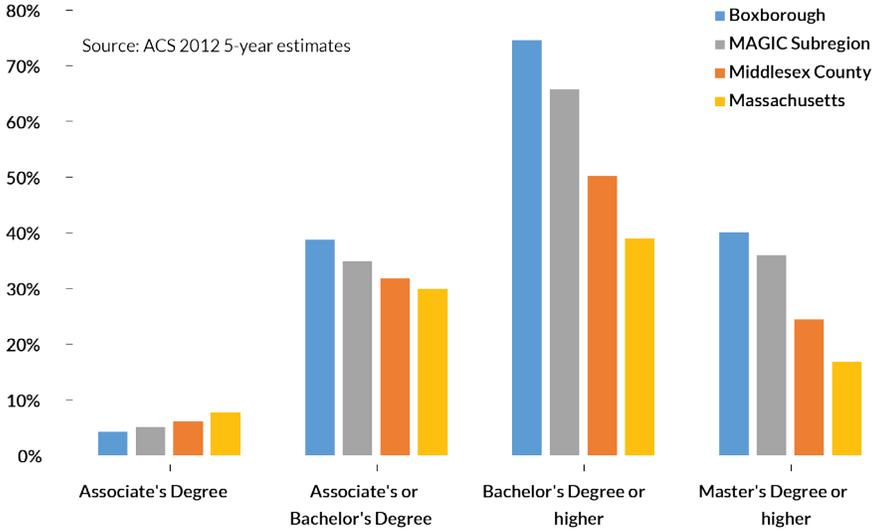
### Household Projections by Age of Householder



MAPC projects that Boxborough's population will decrease by 5% between 2010 and 2030. However, the total number of households will increase as the age make-up changes. By 2030, 47% of residents in Boxborough will be older than 60 and transitioning from larger to smaller households.

# Demographics

## Educational Attainment



Boxborough's population is well-educated. 78.5% have a Bachelor's degree or higher level of educational attainment, which is about 1.5 times the rate in Middlesex County and twice that of Massachusetts as a whole. Educational attainment is also noticeably higher than throughout the MAGIC Subregion, 13 communities including Boxborough northwest of Boston.

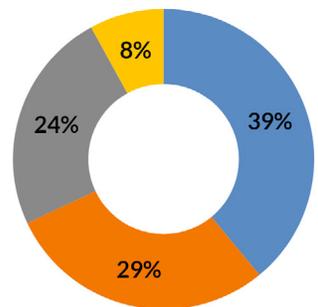
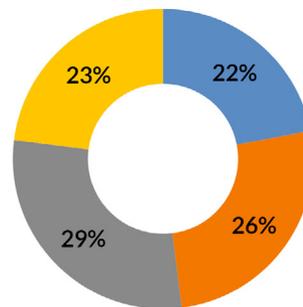
The median household income (\$101,502) of Boxborough residents is higher compared to the county (\$82,090) and the state (\$66,866). While only 8% of Massachusetts residents make over \$200K a year, almost a quarter of Boxborough residents do so.



## Income

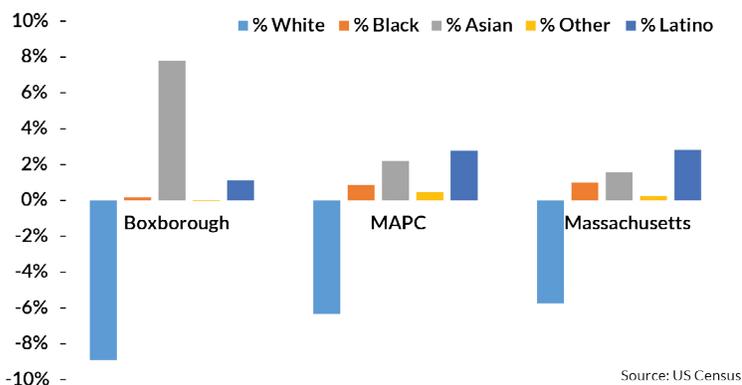
### Boxborough

### Massachusetts

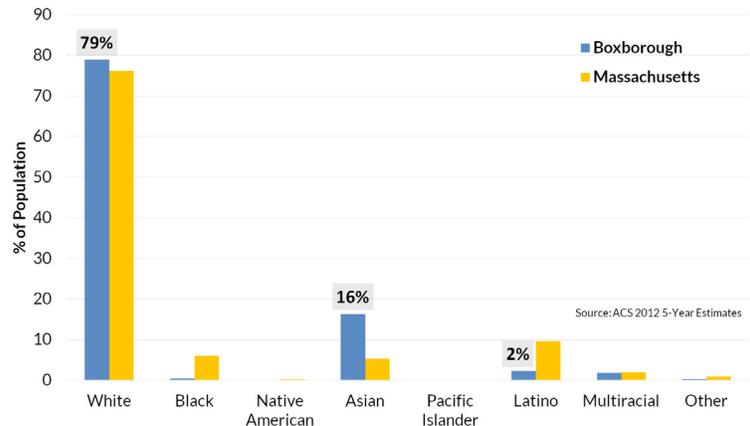


Source: ACS 2013 5-Year Estimates

## Change in Racial and Ethnic Share, 2000-2010



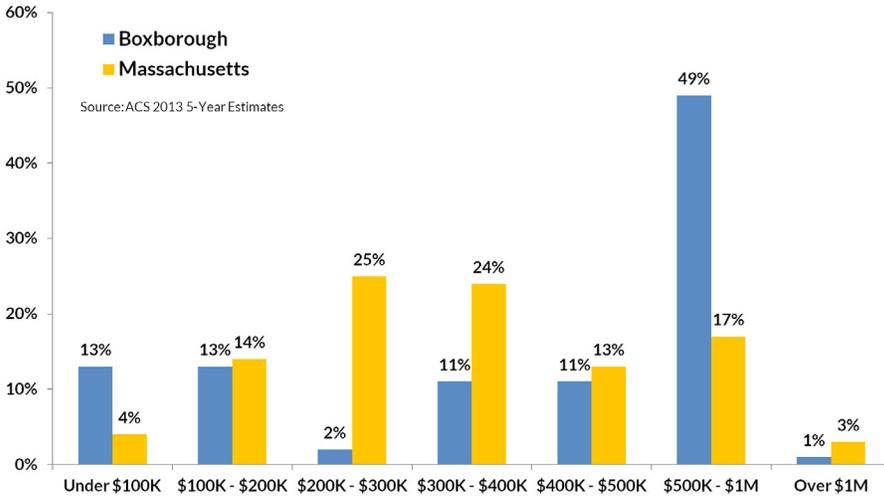
## Racial Makeup



Between 2000 and 2010, Boxborough became more racially and ethnically diverse. The share of Boxborough's population that identified as White on their US Census form decreased by 8.9%. Like its neighboring communities, the majority of Boxborough's population is White (79%). However, the town's proportion of Asian population (16%) is among the highest in the state, which has an overall Asian population of 5.3%.

# Living, Working, and Getting Around

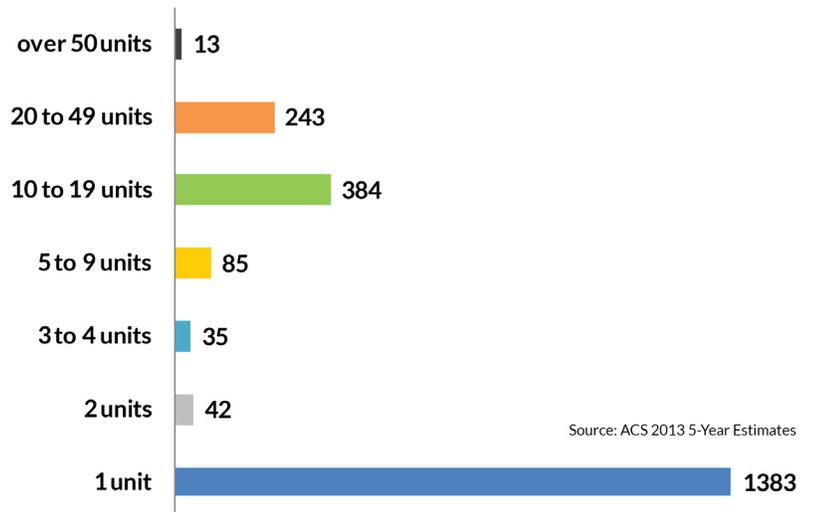
## Value of Owner Occupied Housing Units



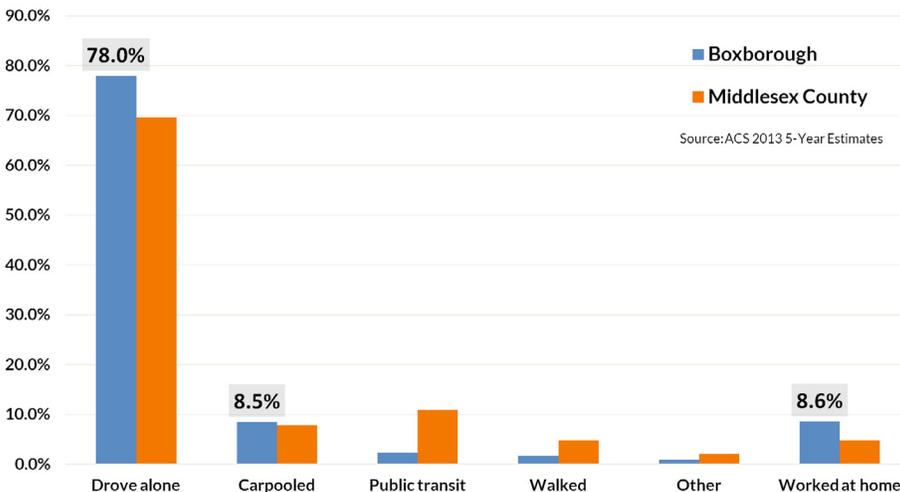
Associated with Boxborough's high level of income and educational attainment is a high value of owner occupied housing units. The median value of owner-occupied housing units in Boxborough is about \$492,700. This is about 25% higher than the rest of Middlesex County, where the median value was \$398,200 and about 1.5 times the amount for Massachusetts, which was about \$330,100.

Of Boxborough's total number of housing units, the largest majority belongs to single-family homes: about 63% of the town's 2,185 housing units. The next most common building type are those with 10 - 19 units which represent about 18% of Boxborough's total dwelling units. The least common housing structure in town are those containing 50 or more units. For structures with over 20 units, they are almost exclusively condominiums. Only 20% of the housing units in Boxborough are renter-occupied; owners occupy the other 80%.

## Number of Housing Units in Structure

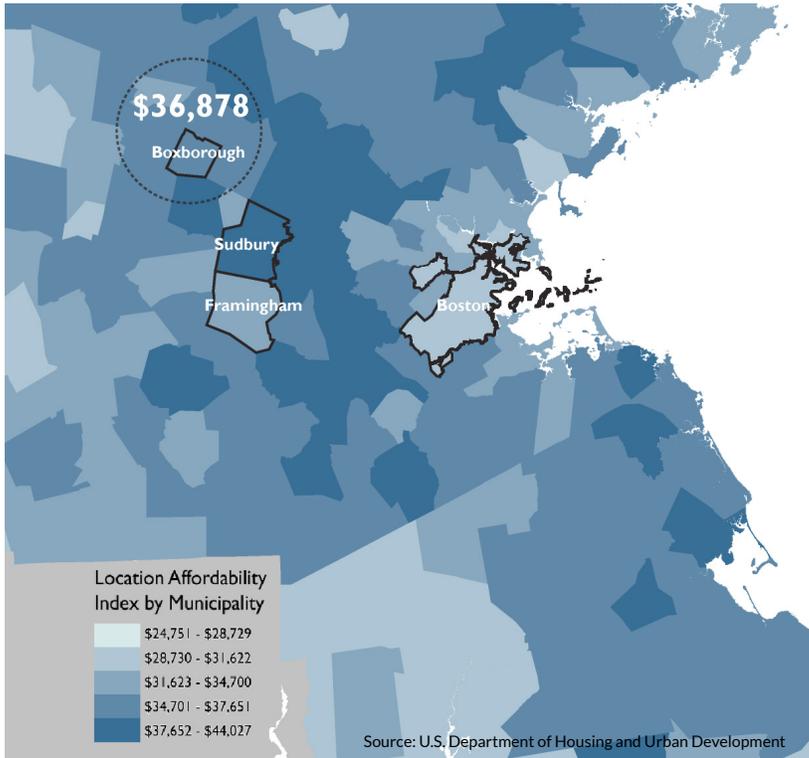


## Means of Transportation to Work



78% of Boxborough workers age 16 and over drove alone to work, roughly 9% carpoled, and roughly 9% worked from home. Boxborough residents work primarily in Boxborough and in communities along the Commuter Rail/Route 2 corridor into Boston, such as Acton, Concord, Waltham, and Cambridge. Of all the people who work in Boxborough, about one in seven also live in Boxborough.

## Location Affordability Index

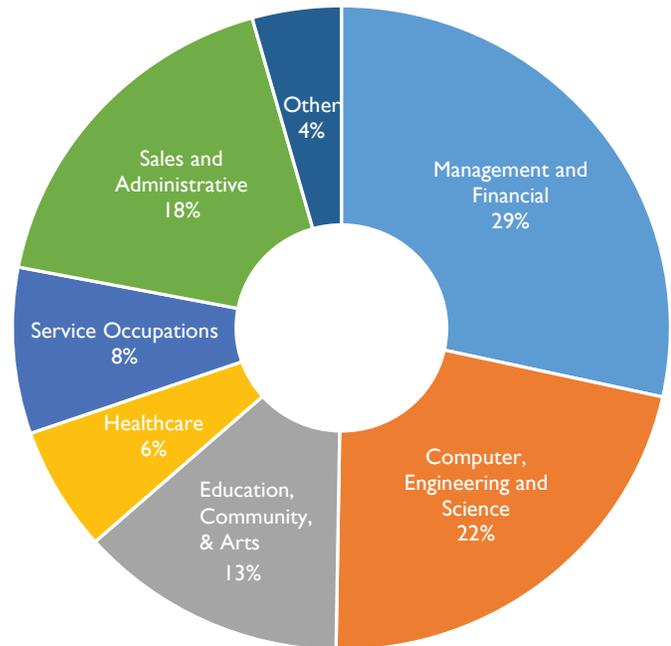


The Location Affordability Index (LAI) is the average combined cost of housing and transportation. In Boxborough, the LAI for a 2-person household is roughly \$36,878 per year. By comparison, the cost in Sudbury is \$41,812, the cost in Framingham is \$34,229, and the cost in Boston is \$31,267. That is, while Boxborough's affordability is comparable or lower than nearby towns, it is well above that of Boston and other inner metro communities.

Boxborough's unemployment rate of 4% as of 2014 is comparable to Middlesex County and slightly lower than Massachusetts (5.5%). Over half of the reported occupations in Boxborough are management, finance, computer engineering, and science.

## Reported Occupations

Source: ACS 2012 5-Year Estimates



## Key Takeaways

As a community, Boxborough is affluent and well-educated. While residents that can afford to live in Boxborough benefit from its rural character and low density, it is important that housing options exist which allow the town to be both racially and socioeconomically diverse. Further, like many other towns in the region, Boxborough's population is aging. In order for residents to grow old in Boxborough, the town must have accessible and affordable housing options other than its large stock of single-family homes. Boxborough should embrace its rural character and valuable open spaces while offering housing, transportation services, and other resources that benefit a diverse population.

# Boxborough 2015

In order to provide recommendations and a plan for implementation to achieve the Boxborough2030 Vision, it was important to understand the “lay of the land” today. MAPC undertook substantial research to learn about Boxborough in 2015 as it pertains to local government, housing, economic development, and much more. Visit [www.boxborough-ma.gov/boxborough2030/pages/boxborough-2015](http://www.boxborough-ma.gov/boxborough2030/pages/boxborough-2015) to find detailed information about each of the following categories.

## *Boxborough Today*



Drummer at Fifer's Day

Boxborough is located in Middlesex County along the Interstate 495 corridor and about 30 miles northwest of Boston. The majority of the town consists of a rural mix of farms and subdivisions, with limited commercial areas and a technology cluster anchored by Cisco Systems, Inc. near I-495. Boxborough's main arterial road is Route 111, though the town does not have a clearly defined town center and many Boxborough residents obtain goods and services in nearby communities. Boxborough is governed by the open Town Meeting legislative body with a five member Board of Selectmen representing the Town's executive branch. There are over 30 boards and committees in Town as well.

## *Population Characteristics*



Residents at Kickoff Forum

Boxborough is a small, rural town that experienced a recent population boom in the 1990s. As of 2013, the town's population is approximately 5,000 residents. About 1 in 3 households have children aged 18 or under and 75% of all Boxborough households are married couple households. While the town is predominately White, it has become more ethnically and racially diverse in recent years; about 23% of the population speaks a language other than English at home. Boxborough residents, on average, are considerably more educated and affluent than those in the rest of Middlesex County and Massachusetts. The town has a low unemployment rate and a majority of residents are employed in knowledge-based sectors.

# Community Assets



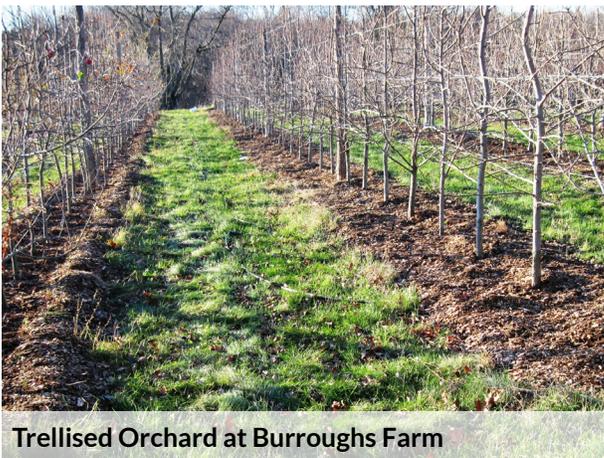
Boxborough's heritage, rural character, and community resources are part of what make it unique and contribute to the quality of life in town. Open space, recreation, historic properties and landscapes, and cultural resources are enormous assets for this small community. An Open Space and Recreation Plan was recently completed and describes valued open spaces like Steele Farm, Flerra Meadows, and Fifer's Field. Over 30% of land in town is established as conservation land. There are many historic properties in Boxborough such as the early 1900s Richardson Ice House and the Victorian Era Town Hall building. Festivals such as Fifer's Day and WinterFest provide cherished opportunities for community gathering.

# Local Services and Facilities



For a small town, Boxborough boasts many local services and facilities that contribute to the safety and community fabric of the town. Highly utilized and necessary facilities and services include Boxborough Town Hall, the prized Acton-Boxborough Regional School System, Police and Fire Departments, medical and emergency resources, and Sargent Memorial Library. The Department of Public Works operates the transfer station and maintains the local roadways, Town buildings and grounds, cemeteries, and conservation land. The Town recently created a Community Services Coordinator position that provides social services to Boxborough residents. A constraint on the town is the lack of a municipal water supply or wastewater facilities.

# Land Use



Boxborough is primarily a residential community. Approximately 40% of the town's land area is devoted to residential use. About a fifth of the town's land area consists of office parks, where many high-technology and light manufacturing firms can be found. The majority of the Town of Boxborough's tax-exempt land consists of tracts of open space, many of which are owned by the Town. Boxborough has a total of seven zoning districts that closely reflect its existing land use patterns, with only the Town Center district allowing mixed-use developments by right. Further growth and development in the town is limited by infrastructural, environmental, and regulatory constraints, as well as a reticence toward increased development.

# Housing and Neighborhoods



Hill Road Senior Housing

About 80% of Boxborough residents moved into their current home in the 1990s or more recently. Most of the town consists of high-valued, single-family homes with a high rate of home-ownership. In most cases, Boxborough residents identify with the road they live on or closest to, rather than identifying with specific neighborhoods. There are a few parts of town which are known by their subdivision or development project name, and can function like neighborhoods, such as Boxborough Meadows and Applewood Village. The Boxborough Housing Board was established in 2000 to manage and encourage the production of affordable housing in town. The Town recently completed a Housing Production Plan that also promotes the Board's goals.

# Economic Development



Blue Coat - Tech Central

For a primarily residential community, Boxborough has an unusually strong office sector and job base. Unlike surrounding rural communities, Boxborough has large commercial areas that serve as a significant regional employment center, especially for high-wage jobs. Firms such as Cisco, Setra Systems, and AMD can be found along I-495 and Route 2. As of 2013, 189 business establishments are based in Boxborough (employing more than 4,000 people). About 15% of all businesses are small and home-based. MAPC sought local perspectives on economic development through one-on-one interviews with local businesses and by conducting two online surveys. Detailed survey results can be found at [bit.ly/box2030-survey](http://bit.ly/box2030-survey).

# Transportation



South Acton Train Station

As a primarily rural and residential community, Boxborough lacks the dense networks of multimodal transportation options that are present in more urban communities; however, Boxborough has avoided the traffic congestion that plagues many other communities. Interstate 495 and Route 2 are key highways that border Boxborough and connect it to Boston and the rest of the region. While there is no MBTA service within Boxborough, the Commuter Rail Fitchburg Line stops in neighboring Littleton and Acton. Seniors and people with disabilities can take advantage of a van service provided by Montachusett Area Regional Transit. While the town has many walking trails, sidewalks are few in Boxborough.

# Energy



Cisco Systems Carport Solar Panels

Boxborough consumed around 148 million kWh of electricity in 2013. The commercial sector alone was responsible for 124 million kWh (83%) of this consumption. The three largest businesses accounted for 82% of the town's commercial and industrial load. Boxborough's residential sector is conducive to the adoption of energy efficiency and renewable energy measures, particularly due to its high median household income and high percentage of owner-occupied units. These figures imply that residents have the means and vested interests to explore energy improvements for their homes. The Town's municipal energy consumption is dominated by the School Department for the Blanchard Memorial Elementary School.

# Environmental Conditions



Flerra Meadows

While Boxborough's open lands provide great value to the community in terms of recreational opportunities and a strong rural character, they also come with conditions and constraints for their protection. This is particularly true for the town's water wells, wetlands, brooks, and aquifers. The Town has established a ground water monitoring program via a cooperative venture with the Littleton Water Department. In addition, there are a number of environmental challenges that residents, businesses, and property owners have to address. Some of these challenges include development impacts, hazardous waste sites, forestry issues, invasive species, environmental equity, chronic flooding, and ground and surface water pollution.



# Boxborough2030

The Boxborough2030 Vision was adopted in December 2014. From this, using conversations with the Master Plan Update Committee, input from public forum participants and from community surveys, and data from existing planning documents such as the recently completed Housing Production Plan and Open Space and Recreation Plan, MAPC outlined a list of seven community aspirations. These seven aspirations then each have goals, strategies, and specific action steps that can serve as the roadmap for Boxborough2030.



## Organization of Recommendations – From Vision to Action

**Vision:** The vision is a statement of what the community wants Boxborough to be as it approaches the year 2030.

**Aspirations:** What do we value? These are the community values and ambitions elicited by the vision, broken down into categories that each evoke a distinct theme. The plan recommendations will be organized by aspiration.

**Goals:** What do we want to achieve?

**Strategies:** How do we get there?

**Actions:** What specific steps do we need to take?



## **The Boxborough2030 Vision: A Rural, Engaged Community for All**

Boxborough shall maintain its traditional values of rural open space, a first-rate educational system, agricultural and conservation lands, and historical roots, while fostering a balanced economic environment and enhancing a close-knit sense of community for all generations.

## Community Aspirations: Boxborough...



**1. Maintains its rural character and celebrates its heritage:** Boxborough cherishes its rural heritage. Preservation of the ecological, agricultural, historic, and scenic resources that contribute to the community's rural character is of critical importance to the community. New development and redevelopment of existing structures will be physically designed to blend with the town's rural landscape.



**2. Is engaged and welcoming:** Boxborough residents have many options for becoming more involved in the community and have a great deal of pride in their community. An even larger share and more diverse mix of residents will regularly participate in municipal policymaking, attend local events, and frequent local destinations.



**3. Is thoughtfully developed:** The community will build on and maintain its existing assets. Economic development will be focused in existing commercial areas supported by responsible use and management of water resources with provisions for adequate wastewater treatment facilities. The community's agricultural assets will be leveraged for economic development and to enhance quality of life. Transportation options will continue to improve in order to ensure a pleasant and safe travel experience for various modes of transportation, including walking and bicycling.



**4. Provides quality services and amenities:** Boxborough is known for offering a high quality of life for its residents. The community endeavors to provide a balanced mix of housing, businesses, and services to enhance this high quality of life. Boxborough residents prize the community's regional school system and excellent municipal services.



**5. Is conscientious about consumption:** The community is conscientious about its energy consumption and climate change resiliency. It seeks to reduce its carbon footprint through improvements in energy efficiency, high standards for building practices, reductions in its communitywide energy usage, and reduced reliance on fossil fuels.



**6. Is affordable and accessible:** The community will work to ensure that local policies, housing supply, and housing prices support the ideal of a more inclusive, welcoming Boxborough so that current and prospective residents at all income levels, abilities, and in all stages of life can live here.



**7. Is regionally well-connected:** Boxborough sees itself as part of a regional economy with goods, services, employment, and gathering places nearby – sometimes in town, and sometimes in neighboring towns. Convenient access to regional transportation systems, including transit options, will help ensure efficient commuting options for Boxborough residents. Boxborough's municipal government, including Town boards and committees, will collaborate with surrounding communities and regional entities.

# Top Priorities

These six priorities were chosen by the Master Plan Update Committee, along with many other Town boards and commissions, as those of highest importance for implementation. Visit [www.boxborough-ma.gov/boxborough2030/pages/recommendations](http://www.boxborough-ma.gov/boxborough2030/pages/recommendations) for the complete list of goals, strategies, and actions associated with each of the seven Boxborough2030 aspirations.

Encourage **economic development** which will improve the **quality of life** for residents, such as supporting development of a **village-like area** with restaurants, pubs, shops, fitness and health services, and other amenities. Economic development should not be pursued simply to increase the commercial tax base.

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Increase **transportation infrastructure** and **mobility**, including providing designated bicycle and pedestrian travel lanes on selected Town roads.

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Plan for long-term **water resource management** and protection.

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Establish strategies for **energy conservation, carbon footprint reduction, and climate change resiliency.**

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Address community needs pertaining to **social services, modestly priced housing, recreational facilities, and open space** for all ages.

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Explore improving **municipal facilities.**

# Acknowledgments

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