

## *PART TWO: CONTEXT FOR PLANNING*

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*TOWNSCAPE*

*CONTEXT FOR  
PLANNING*

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*Introduction*

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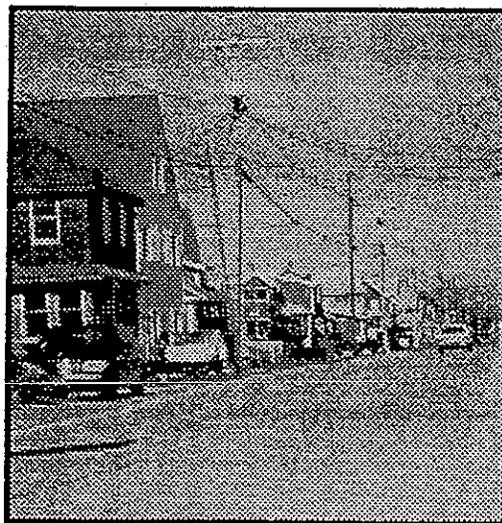
The Town of Marshfield is at an important point in its evolution as a community. There are approximately 2900 acres of land that can still be developed for housing, 70 acres for commercial and 100 acres for industrial use. Marshfield has reached approximately 80% of its ultimate residential buildout. Therefore, Marshfield is at the beginning of the final stage of its community building process. If

the current rate of development continues, all the homes that can be built, will be built within the next 25 years. This means that as citizens of Marshfield, we must look at the next 10 years as a critical period in which we will make lasting decisions over how our Town will look and function for both ourselves and those who follow us. This Plan is intended to guide those decisions.

## *Town Character*

The broad land use patterns that shaped our Town were shaped by four trends:

- The first trend was the colonial and subsequent 18th century agricultural and early industrial development of Marshfield. From the Town's settlement in 1632 through to the 1800's, Marshfield was a farming and ocean oriented community. This period left its permanent mark on Marshfield through the establishment of several villages, the winding road system, farms and fields, and the historic homes and civic buildings found throughout Marshfield. It is this historic community development pattern that lends Marshfield most of its charm and character.
- The second development trend which shaped the Town was the early 20th century building of vacation subdivisions and associated vacation oriented businesses along the beach. This development occurred at sufficiently high densities and in such a thorough manner along Ocean Street that there have been few subsequent changes in the overall character of that area. Seasonal homes are being converted to year round housing and improvements are occurring in the business areas, but the basic land use pattern of single family homes on small lots in the beach areas remains and will remain into the future.



*Vacation homes along the beach have contributed to Marshfield's land use pattern on Bay Avenue.*

- The third community shaping trend was the construction of Route 3 and the increasing suburbanization that this highway access brought to our Town. We became a commuting town to the Boston metro area in the 1960's and will continue to be a commuting town for the foreseeable future.
- Finally, we zoned our town in a manner that created two long commercial corridors extending generally from the Pembroke line to Rexhame, and we zoned the majority of our outlying land for single family homes on lots ranging from 1/4 acre to 1 acre in size. In recent years, we have reduced the size of the commercial strip zone but much still remains. This commercial area provides space for most of the businesses serving Marshfield residents.

Thus, the broad character of our Town was defined by the actions of builders combined with the policies set by residents. The historic settlement pattern of a working harbor, small villages, and farms in the interior left a clear mark on the character of our town and these are features that most townspeople wish to preserve. Beyond these features, the remainder of the Town's character was shaped by our land use decisions over the last 40-50 years.

#### General Distribution of Land Uses, 1996

Land Use Categories	# Acres	%
Residentially Used	6702	41
Vacant Residential Zoned*	3086	19
Commercially Used	369	2
Vacant Commercial Zoned*	106	<1
Industrially Used Land	71	<1
Vacant Industrial Zoned*	253	1.5
Agricultural Land Uses	253	1.5
Public Lands/NonProfit	4700	29
Other Lands (utilities, roads)	612	4
Total	16,152	100

\* Note: Not all "vacant" land is developable

Given that the primary land use patterns are already in place, do we wish as a community to radically change those patterns? The residents at this time certainly have no desire to create areas of much higher density housing or to build new major roads lined with either industrial parks or new commercial areas. In fact, due to the dispersed nature of the housing that exists today, along with natural factors such as wetlands, we have few options before us to adopt dramatically new land use patterns.

Our community survey performed for this Comprehensive Plan tested this issue by asking questions about whether the Town should seek to build faster, or to allow multifamily housing or to pursue greater amounts of commercial or industrial development. The ma-

majority of the respondents who answered the survey clearly said that they favor improving the villages, improving the downtown, slowing residential growth, managing (but not necessarily slowing) commercial growth to minimize traffic impacts and enhance appearance and buying more open space. The message from the public survey is to keep the basic character of the town intact, but improve and strengthen that character.

Therefore, we will largely continue to be the Town that we are today. The question is whether there are planning strategies we should pursue—at a scale smaller than major townwide patterns—that can address concerns or improve our Town. The majority of this plan attempts to address this question.

## *External Forces of Change*

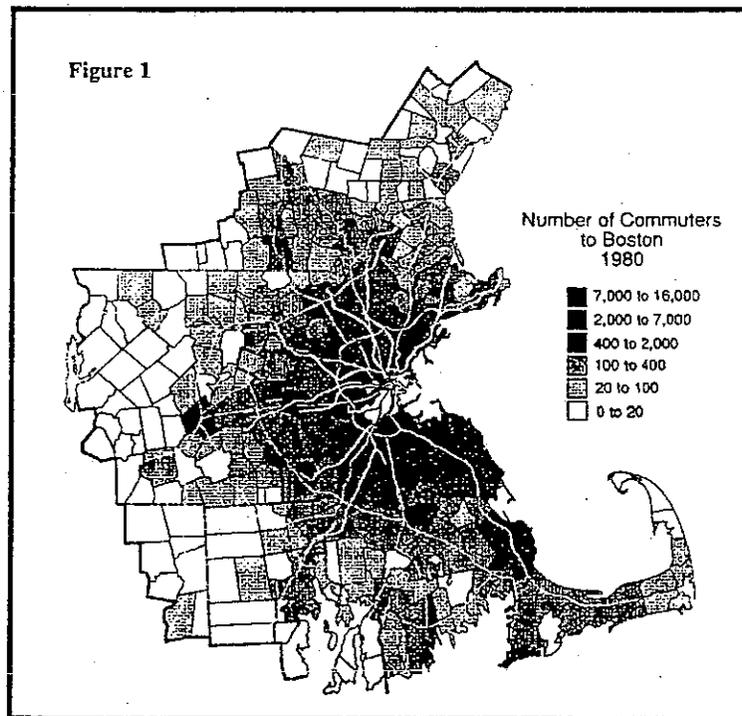
Along with internal patterns of development and decisions that residents make about the shape of their community, there are also external factors that will push the development process. The following discussion identifies three external trends that are likely to influence how Marshfield develops in the coming decades. Three questions need to be answered about these trends: Which trends can be marshaled for the benefit of the community? Which trends must be resisted in some manner? and, Which trends are so large and pervasive that accommodating strategies must be sought?

- **External Trend #1: The Continued Metropolitanization of the South Shore.** In New England, we are very aware of the boundaries that separate our cities and towns and define our local political systems. If one compares a bird's eye view of the metro Boston area today with that of 1962 when the first Marshfield comprehensive plan was prepared, one trend is clear. There has been a massive increase housing density, commercial and industrial development and all the associated and related infrastructure extending southward from Boston along the Route 3 corridor.

While many of the towns along the South Shore will maintain their rural or exurban character — including Marshfield — they will be towns within a region that is continually becoming more urban. Plymouth stands as a good example of a community that has been growing rapidly and is becoming a regional center for the South Shore. Route 3 will become continually more developed along its boundaries and interchanges. The towns to the east and west of this highway will offer varying degrees of urban, suburban and rural living choices. Marshfield will be one option within the range of small towns lying to the east of Route 3. This trend is important to acknowledge because it will continue to exert a steady pressure on Marshfield to provide more housing and because the recreational resources of Marshfield's coast will be under steadily increasing demands from the growing South Shore population.

- **External Trend #2: Route 3 Widening and the Old Colony Rail Restoration.** A good example of the above urbanization process is the transportation improvements proposed along the Route 3 corridor. The extension/return of rail service to the South Shore will make the area even more appealing for Boston commuters who want to avoid the traffic jams of the Southeast Expressway. While both of these transportation improvement projects are intended to address current

problems and increase capacity, the projects will without a doubt bring more growth pressure to South Shore communities. Route 3's initial construction in the 1960's caused similar growth. They will link communities more closely to each other and to Boston. In addition, there will be pressure for higher density residential and commercial development near rail stations and intermodal transportation facilities along the highway.



Source: "TRANSREPORT," *The Boston Metropolitan Planning Organization Newsletter, Special Edition, June 1990.*

- **External Trend #3: The Aging of the Baby Boomers.** While the exact ramifications of this demographic trend on communities like Marshfield are not entirely clear, several possibilities are likely. First, the demand for large single family houses may decline and perhaps go flat. This has been the predominant form of housing construction in towns like Marshfield over the last decade, but the oncoming retirement of baby boomers will mean that smaller homes requiring less maintenance may be preferred. There may be an increased demand for alternative housing arrangements such as housing cooperatives, condominiums, assisted living and life care facilities that are targeted to the senior population.

Associated with this trend will be declines in the number of school children per household. A baby boomlet has been occurring across the country, but this boom will subside within the next five years. The current blip on the age charts will pass through the system over the next 15 years and will not likely be repeated to the same magnitude within the life of this Plan. Therefore, school costs will not rise as dramatically, school construction will be less prevalent and town departments may find they must provide more senior services. Neighborhoods with businesses

and health care services within walking distance will be popular. Towns offering light public transit services will be appealing to aging Americans.

These three trends - South Shore urbanization, South Shore transportation improvements and the aging of the baby boomers - appear to be the major external regional forces that will bring continued change to Marshfield. Unlike many communities in the U.S., Marshfield does not face the problem of being located in a region that is declining economically or which faces severe barriers to its ability to accommodate growth. Its location between Boston, the Bay and Cape Cod will make it appealing to families and retirees for many years to come.

Not all Marshfield residents will welcome these trends. The most serious problems cited by survey respondents were population growth and Route 139 traffic. Sixty two percent of all respondents see the traffic on Route 139 as a critical problem. Sixty-one percent feel that residential development is already occurring too fast. Both of these problems may be exacerbated by regional growth and transportation improvements. The third trend of an aging population, may slow traditional residential development but encourage new development forms that differ from current single family housing projects.

## *THE FRAMEWORK FOR GROWTH: A REVIEW OF CRITICAL TOWN SYSTEMS*

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A thorough review was performed of Marshfield's growth potential, housing challenges, transportation system, infrastructure, economy, cultural resources and open space needs. The analysis papers prepared for these elements can be found in a separate standing report entitled, *Background Analysis Report for the 1997 Marshfield Comprehensive Plan*.<sup>1</sup> Excerpts from these background papers are presented below to provide an overview of the Town's planning challenges.

## Summary of Growth Potential

Analysis was performed on the land base and fiscal structure of the Town in order to understand how much land could still be developed and what impacts this land base is likely to bring to Marshfield.

A review of past population growth trends highlights an important fact for this Plan: the growth Marshfield experienced in the past was significantly higher than what the Town is experiencing today. From 1980 to 1990, the Town's population grew by 615 persons; from 1990 to 1996, the population grew by 893 persons. Compare these rates to the period from 1960 to 1970, when 8475 new persons were added to the population, and from 1970 to 1980, when the population increased by 5693 persons.

Those past population increases were driven by high birth rates, but also by high housing construction rates that exceed today's levels (e.g. 700 building permits, many of which were apartments, were issued in 1970.) Construction levels boomed with the opening of Route 3 as a major arterial to Boston. Surveys of the population conducted in 1988 and in 1996 indicated that most people feel that residential growth rates are too high. Of the 2500 respondents in the 1996 survey, 89% said that residential growth rates were too high and that they support efforts to slow growth.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Popu- lation</u>	<u># Change</u>	<u>% Change</u>
1930	1625	—	—
1940	2419	794	49
1950	3267	848	35
1960	6748	3481	107
1970	15,223	8475	126
1980	20,916	5693	37
1990	21,531	615	3
1996	22,424	893	4

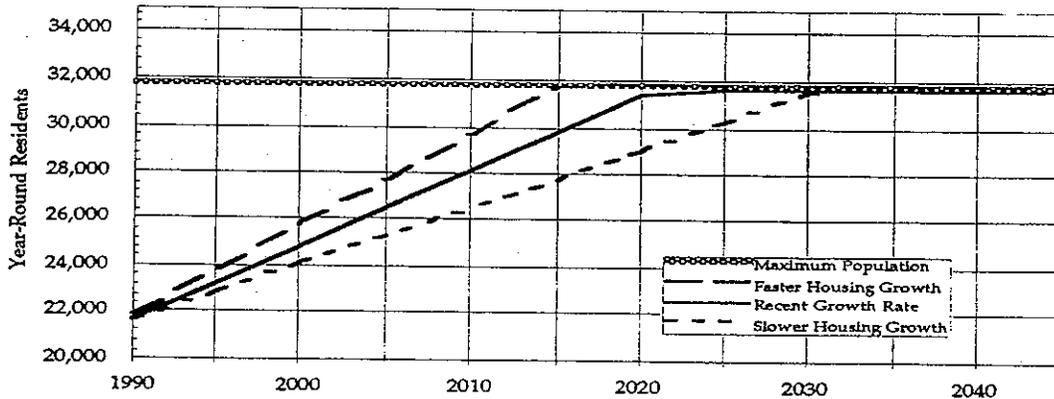
*Seven decades of Marshfield's population history*

Marshfield's population will continue to grow as the town builds out. The rate of growth will not be as substantial as it has been in past decades but it will be significant. Population at buildout is expected to be approximately 30,000. The number of housing units will also increase. The total number is expected to be 11,500-12,000 units by the year 2015 or 2020.

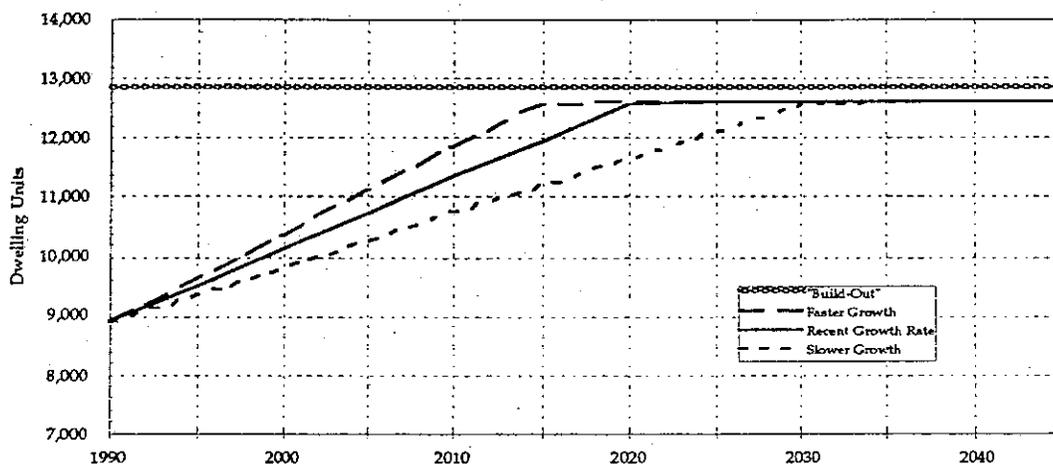
A buildout analysis was performed for the Town which sought to define how much more additional development could occur in the future. Two methods were used for the analysis. First, town officials reviewed parcel maps with the consulting team to identify large

parcels (>10 acres) that could be developed. Estimates were made of the degree to which each parcel could be developed and the number of potential single family housing units that would result. The second method was to analyze the Town's assessors' files to identify all buildable, vacant residential parcels of less than 10 acres in size and estimate the number of potential units from this group. The details of this analysis, as well as other information pertaining to the buildout, are contained in the Land Use Inventory and Analysis Paper.

Projected Population Growth and Build-Out



### Projected Housing Unit Growth And Build-Out

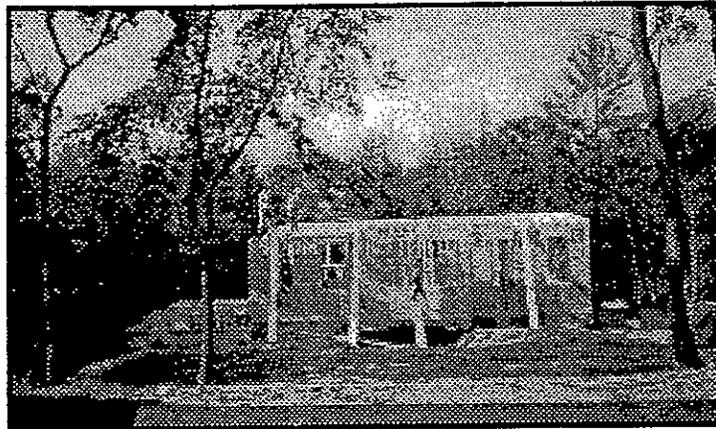


The highlights of the buildout analysis are as follows:

- Homes in 1996: Approximately 9700 of which 8500 are year-round dwellings.
- Average development rate for the last 15 years: 133 certificates of occupancy per year.
- Remaining vacant residential land: 4550 acres
- Remaining developable residential land: 2931 acres
- Developable land in tracts of 10 acres or more: 2027 acres with the equivalent of 1300 single family lots
- Developable land in tracts of less than 10 acres: 904 acres = 550 single family lots
- Total remaining potential residential lots: 1800-2000 lots
- Estimated buildout number of total residential units: 11,500-12,000 units
- Population at buildout: 28,000-30,000
- School children estimated at buildout: 4800-5200
- Current commercially used acres: 368
- Current industrially used acres: 72
- Estimated buildout commercial acres: 438
- Estimated buildout industrial acres: 172
- Current residential tax base without vacant land included: \$1,351 million
- Estimated buildout residential tax base in current dollars: \$1,351 + \$200 = \$1,551 million
- Current commercial and industrial tax base: \$93 million
- Estimated buildout C & I tax base: \$93 + \$135 = \$228 million
- Current tax base ratio residential to commercial: 14.5 to 1
- Buildout tax base ratio residential to commercial: 6.8 to 1

This information suggests that Marshfield will see another 1800 - 2000 homes built within the next 20-25 years. This will result in a total of approximately 12,000 housing units, up from today's total of approximately 9700, for a 20% increase.

Approximately 70 additional commercial acres could be used. This estimate does not include the amount of increased commercial density that could result from intensification of existing commercial properties. On the industrial side, there are approximately 100 more acres of industrially zoned land that could be used in the coming decades.



*Marshfield can expect another 1800-2000 new homes within the next 20-25 years.*

## *Key Issues for Growth Management Planning*

Several issues from the above discussion are relevant for future planning.

- The end of development is in sight, so to speak. That is, the full buildout of the community will be achieved within the next 20-30 years. This suggests that decisions regarding land resources must be made soon. After the majority of land has been built on, it will be more difficult to expand the open space system or site new public facilities.
- Growth will continue. There are many trends that will support continued growth and these trends - barring major economic recessions - will steadily push Marshfield toward its buildout.
- The basic land use pattern established by the community is solid and will not change dramatically. Therefore, there is no cause for concern that the character of Marshfield as a whole will radically change; instead, the focus for planning work should be on managing change at the neighborhood or site specific scale.