



# STOW COMPREHENSIVE PLAN 2035

## ENVISION STOW FOR ALL OF US

### SUMMARY PROFILE OF TRENDS & ISSUES

This report is a summary profile of trends and issues in Stow, Massachusetts, written in Phase I of the comprehensive planning process. This summary profile addresses each of the Commonwealth's required elements as described in M.G.L. c.41, Section 81D.

**Draft for Discussion Purposes Only**

J M G O L D S O N



# THE PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

Phase I of the comprehensive planning process focuses on understanding the community’s physical, environmental, cultural, and demographic characteristics – how has the community developed and changed over time? What are the community’s key issues and opportunities?

This Summary Profile is intended to summarize the trends and issues affecting Stow. It summarizes the project team’s due diligence performed in Phase I of the comprehensive planning project.

(Cover photo)  
Lake Boon  
Photo Credit: Kathy Sferra

## Project Timeline

The Stow Comprehensive Plan will be created in four phases over an 18-month period. Robust community engagement will shape the plan’s priorities.

- 1

September 2023 – March 2024  
STOW YESTERDAY & TODAY
- 2

January 2024 – July 2024  
STOW TOMORROW
- 3

July 2024 – December 2024  
ACHIEVING STOW TOMORROW
- 4

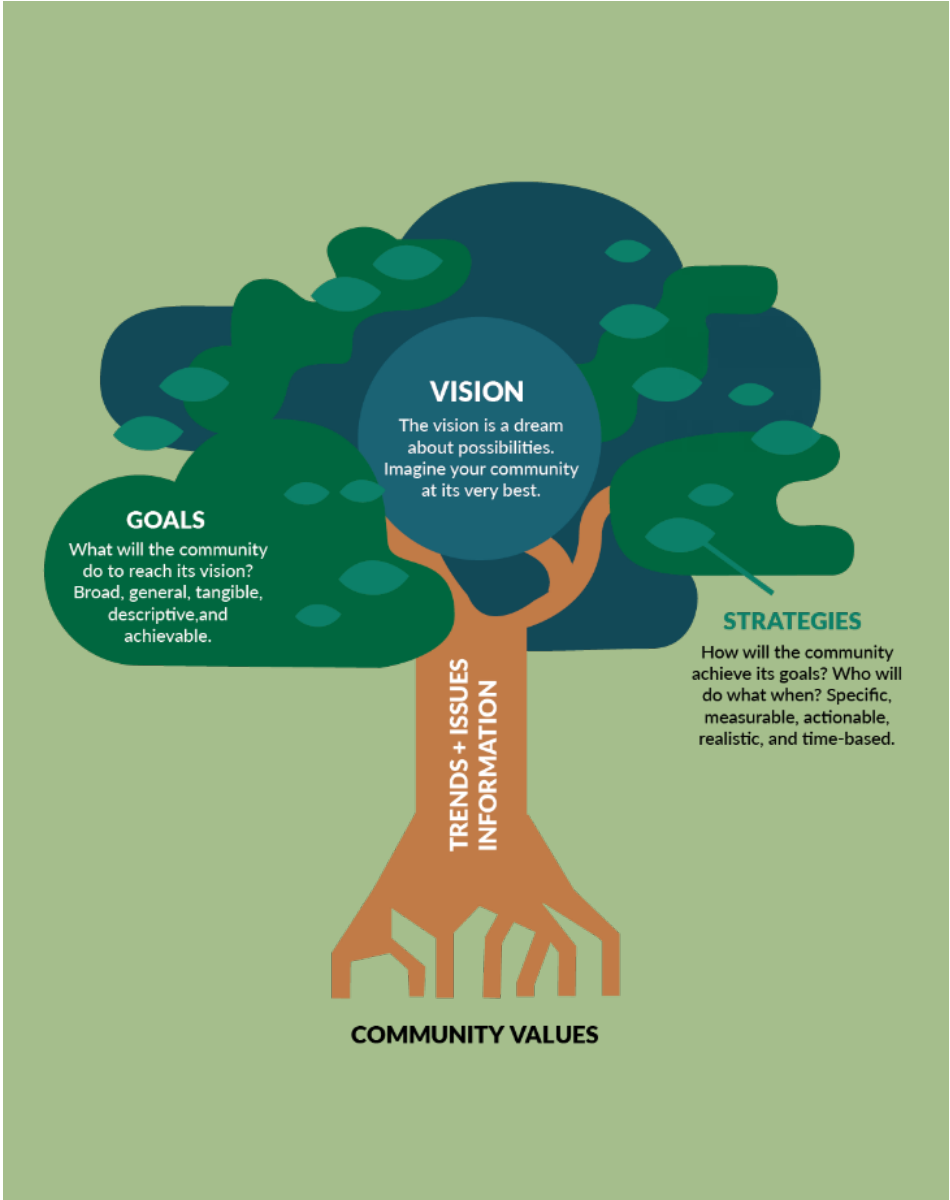
December 2024 – May 2025  
PLAN FINALIZATION AND ADOPTION

## What is a Comprehensive Plan?

A local comprehensive plan helps communities anticipate, shape, and respond to change over time. Comprehensive plans are long-range visionary plans primarily focusing on a community’s physical evolution. Ultimately, a comprehensive plan helps the community imagine—and create—a better and more intentional future.

## Components Of A Comprehensive Plan

A comprehensive plan consists of various components – an understanding of **trends and issues**, a community **vision** for the future, **goals** to help measure progress toward achieving the vision, and **strategies** that can help the community proactively and collaboratively work to achieve the vision. A comprehensive plan sets the stage for the Town’s next steps and supports future policy and resource allocation decisions. To encourage progress, a comprehensive plan includes an implementation plan that assigns specific responsibilities and an oversight structure. As demonstrated in JM Goldson’s tree diagram, the trends and issues provide a foundation for the plan, like the tree trunk provides stability for the canopy of branches and leaves. The tree canopy represents the community vision, the branches represent broad but tactile goals to achieve the vision, and the leaves symbolize the community’s strategies to manifest the vision.





# STOW, AN OVERVIEW

*“The Town of Stow hosts a bucolic blend of natural beauty and community spirit, making it an appealing place to live and visit.”*

Stow, located in Middlesex County, Massachusetts, is a charming and historic community known for its picturesque landscapes and small-town atmosphere. With a population of just over 7,000 residents, Stow retains a sense of tranquility. The Town retains a country feel, with working and historic farmlands and expansive conservation areas.

Stow was formally incorporated in 1683 after 20 years and at least two marked waves of colonial settlement of Indigenous Nipmuc homelands. Historic remnants from this early period and after Stow’s incorporation are evident in the well-preserved buildings and landmarks scattered throughout the Town. The Town Center, for example, showcases Colonial-era and early Federal architecture, providing a glimpse into the Town’s colonial past.

Residents and visitors alike can explore the scenic beauty of Stow through its numerous hiking trails, parks, and outdoor recreational areas, such as Lake Boon, which offers opportunities for boating and fishing.

The Stow community has prioritized the conservation of natural places and carefully integrating development. Open spaces are valued in Stow, and the Town has implemented measures to protect these environmental assets. Stow also nurtures a sense of community through various events, local farm stands, and community gatherings, creating opportunities for social cohesion for residents. Stow’s agricultural resources, including four orchards, are a regional agritourism draw, with thousands of visitors each year to pick apples, enjoy cider, see New England fall foliage, and more.

Stow is a member of the Nashoba Regional School District. The elementary Center School and Hale Middle School serve Stow residents, while the Nashoba Regional High School in Bolton serves all three member towns. Stow’s commitment to education is reflected in the support for these schools and the involvement of parents and community members in the educational process. The Town of Stow hosts a bucolic blend of natural beauty and community spirit, making it an appealing place to live and visit.



Stow Community Gardens  
Photo Credit: JM Goldson



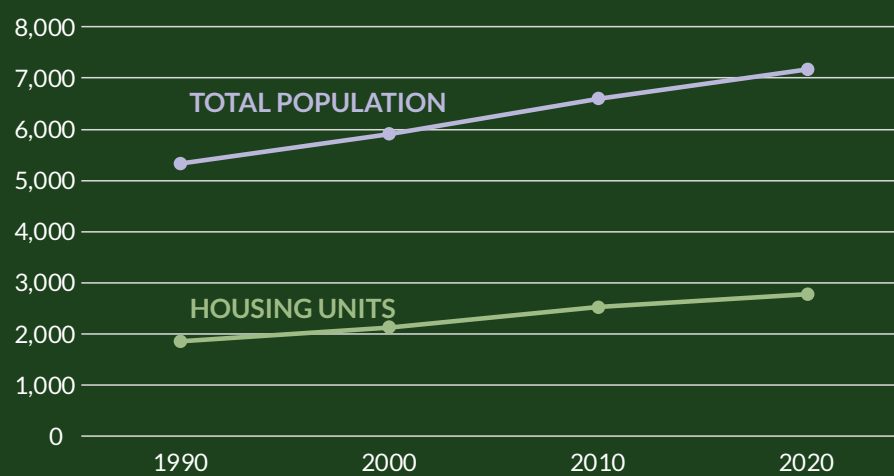
# POPULATION & DEMOGRAPHICS

Over the next three decades, the population in Stow is projected to remain relatively steady.<sup>1</sup> However, there is a notable shift in the age distribution, with the middle-aged population (35 to 64) expected to experience growth from 40 percent of the population in 2022 to 50 percent by 2050.<sup>2</sup> The number of households has increased from 2,429 in 2010 to 2,679 in 2020<sup>3</sup>, while the average household size has remained consistent at 2.7 people<sup>4</sup>. Most households (83 percent) consist of married couples,<sup>5</sup> showing a five percent increase from 2010.

## 7,174

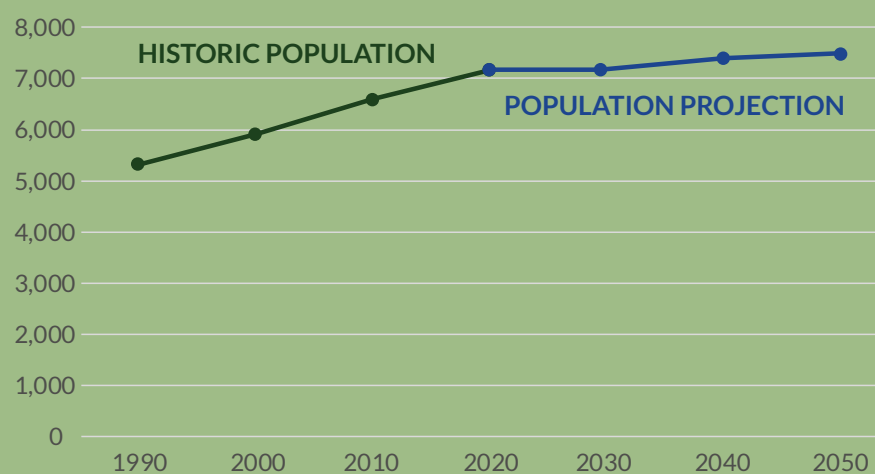
POPULATION OF STOW  
IN 2020

POPULATION AND HOUSING UNITS, 1990 - 2020



Source: US Census (T80, T72, T155, T68, H1)

POPULATION CHANGE



Source: US Census (T1, P1, H1), MassDOT

Stow has witnessed some demographic changes, with the population identifying as “White Alone” falling from 92 to 86 percent between 2010 and 2020.<sup>6</sup> The largest population increases were seen in people who identified as two or more races (which more than tripled), Hispanic or Latino (which more than doubled), or Asian (which increased by 50 percent). The Town’s foreign-born population, at just over nine percent of all residents, is half represented by immigrants from Asia. The Black population in Stow remains below one percent of residents.

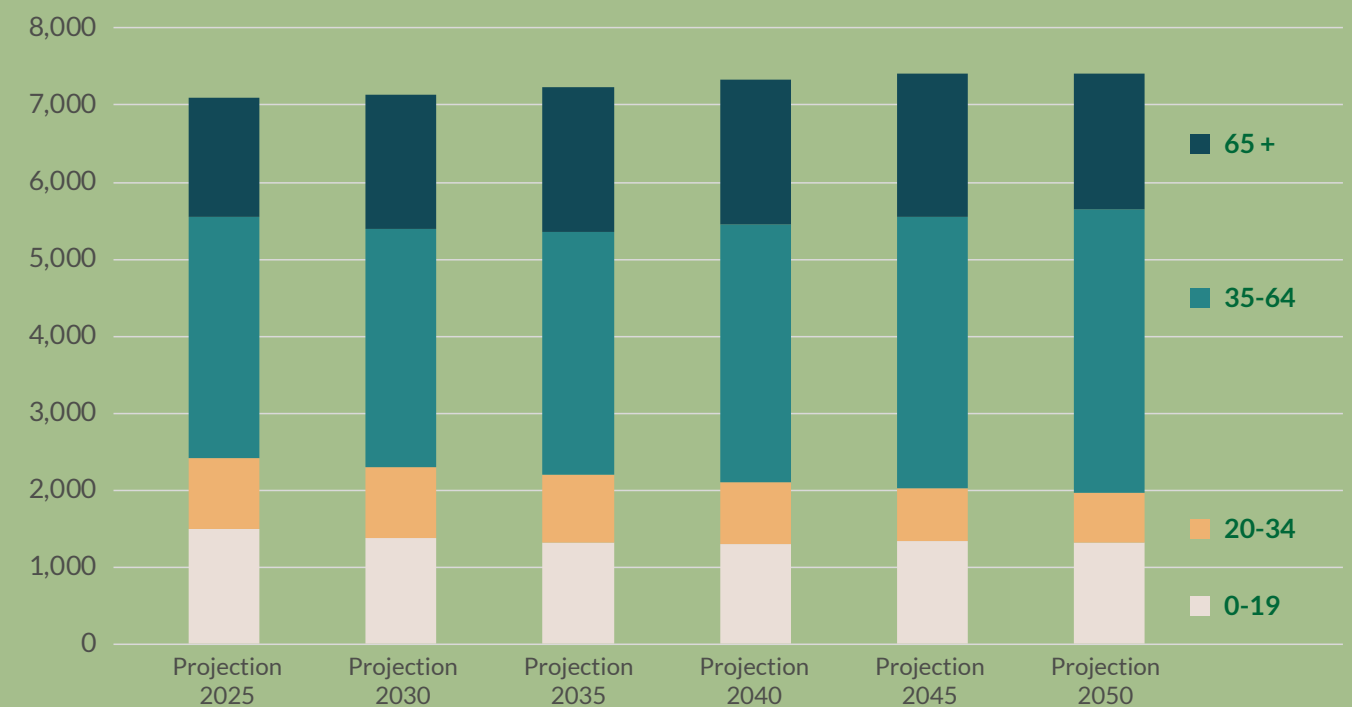
These racial settlement patterns can be understood in the context of settler-colonialism as well as deep racism in federal and local housing policy. These land use

laws, including large lot sizes, forbidding apartments, growth management policies, or racial covenants, were crafted during the twentieth century with explicitly segregationist intent.

In the mid-twentieth century when many African-Americans were leaving the South for northern cities, suburbs in Greater Boston responded by passing such exclusionary zoning bylaws that functioned to exclude non-white residents by using class as a proxy.<sup>7</sup> Primarily white suburbs are a visible effect of systemic inequities in access to housing and resources. These policies reflect a deep legacy that can be traced back to enslavement, underscoring the ongoing struggle for racial justice and equity in land use policy.

*Education levels in Stow are high, with nearly 75 percent of residents holding a bachelor’s degree or higher, well above state and county averages.*

POPULATION PROJECTIONS BY AGE GROUPS, 2025 - 2050

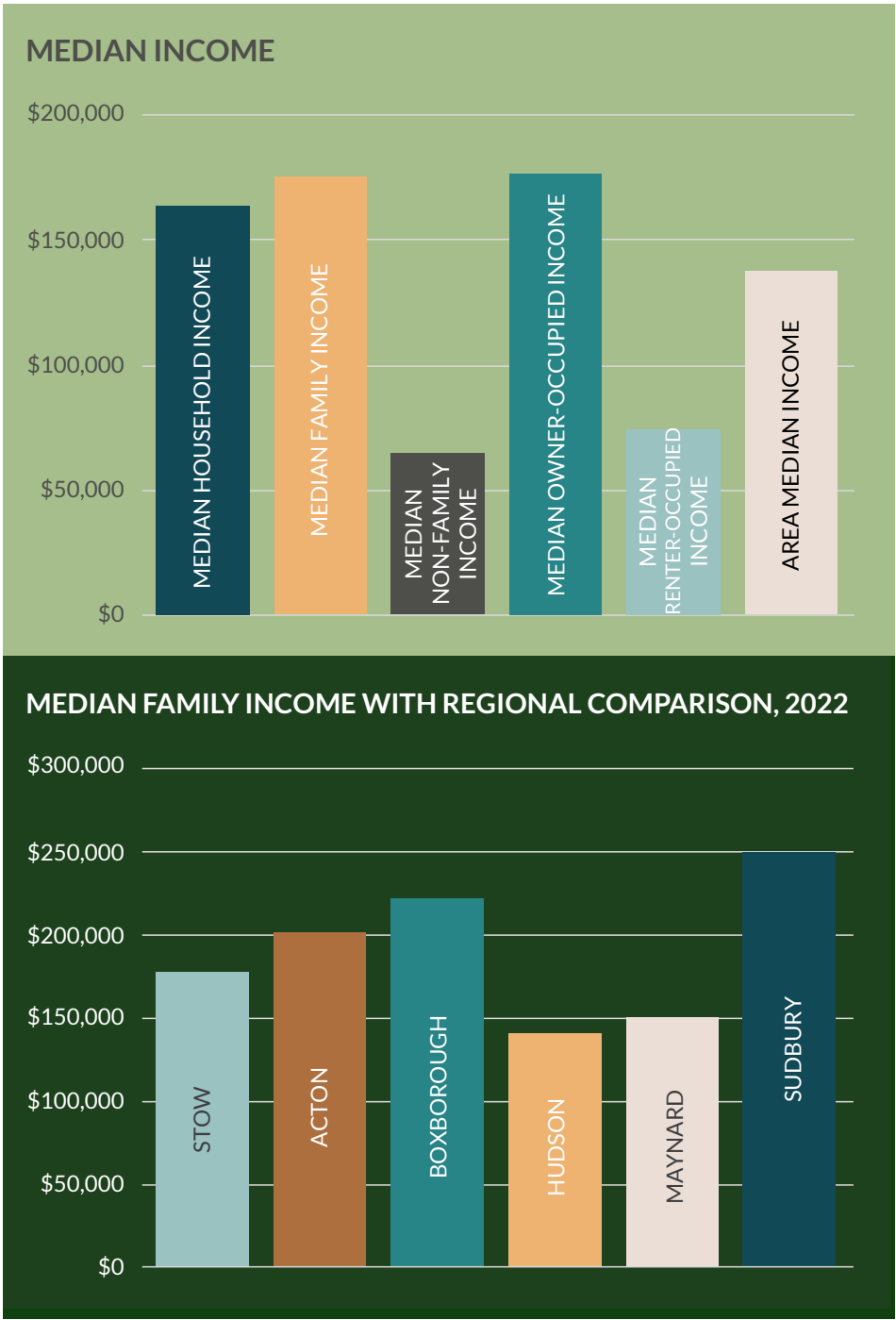


Source: University of Massachusetts Donahue Institute, “Massachusetts Population Projections,” 2022, University of Massachusetts Donahue Institute, <https://donahue.umass.edu/business-groups/economic-public-policy-research/massachusetts-population-estimates-program/population-projections>



The median household income in Stow was \$166,833 in 2022, surpassing that of the Boston metropolitan area. There is a stark contrast between homeowners and renters, with median incomes at \$179,467 and \$75,439, respectively.<sup>8</sup> The share of households earning \$150,000 or more annually is double the state average, highlighting the affluence of many homeowning residents in Stow.

*Stow faces challenges related to an aging population, limited racial diversity, and concerns about housing options and mansionization.*



Source: US Census (T93, T95, T98, T100), ACS (A14006, A14010, A14012, A14015), HUD

Source: ACS (B19113)

### ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The community is exploring ways to become more welcoming and address intergenerational opportunities. The Council on Aging is actively engaged in connecting younger and older residents through skill-sharing initiatives. The Town grapples with regional housing pressure and there are challenges in accommodating creative solutions due to zoning restrictions and high land costs. The issue of mansionization, particularly around Lake Boon, is a concern, emphasizing the need for thoughtful affordability and development strategies.



Stow Open House  
Photo Credit: JM Goldson



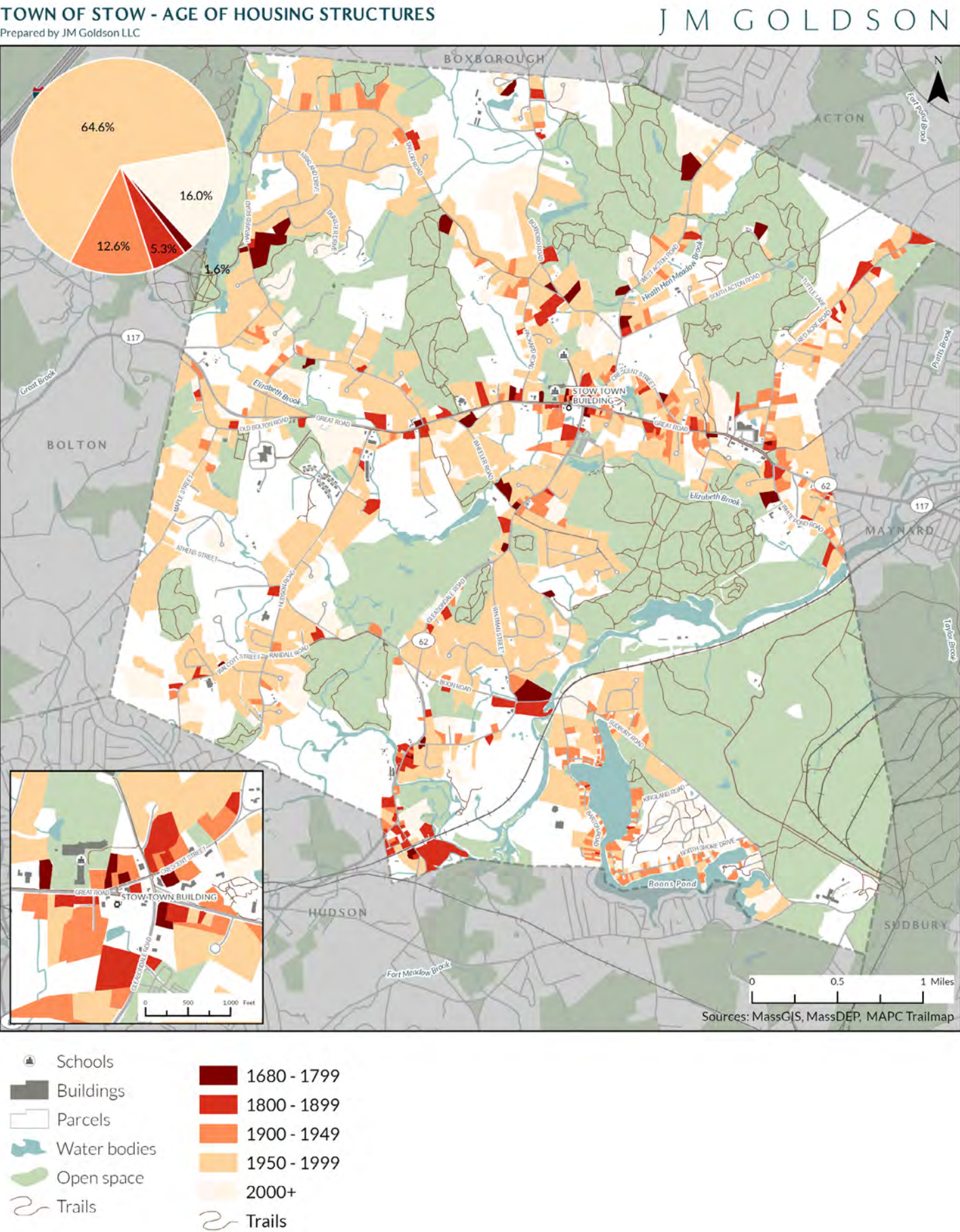
# HOUSING

Stow has witnessed parallel growth in housing units and households, with a 29 percent increase in households and a 30 percent growth in homes between 2000 and 2020. Adding nearly 250 homes to its housing inventory between 2010 and 2020, Stow has experienced development dispersed around the Town’s geography.

*A notable 70 percent (or 1,817)<sup>9</sup> of homes in Stow were constructed in the past sixty years, a result of suburbanizing development patterns.*

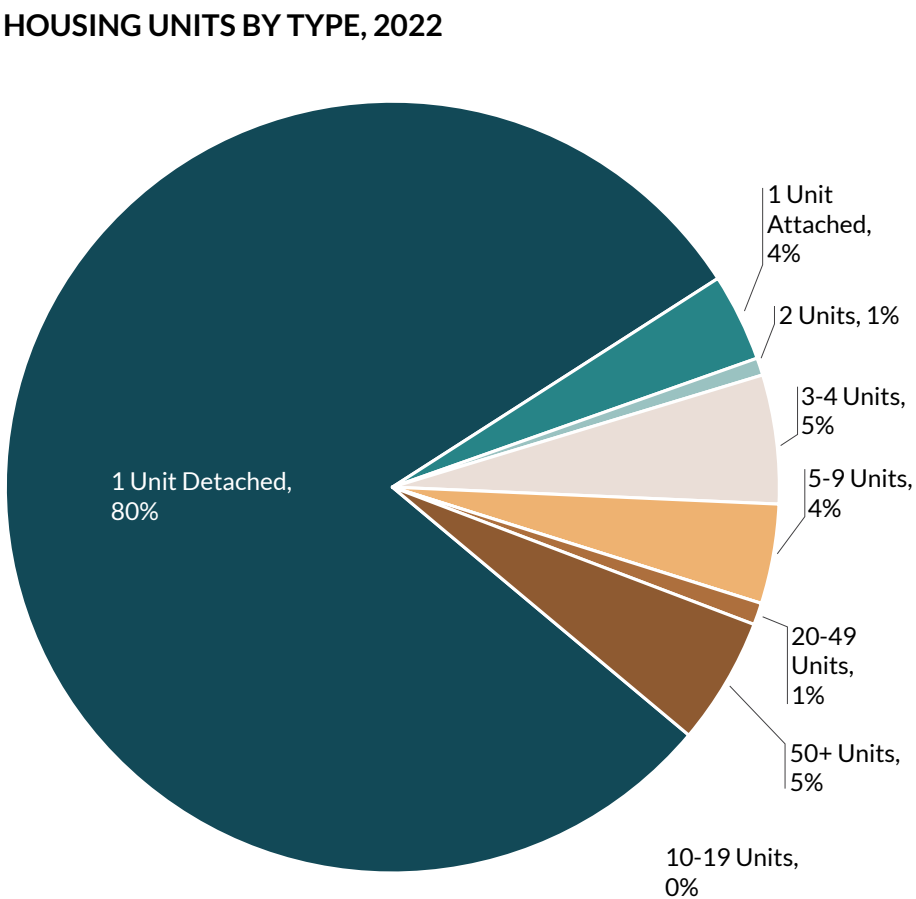


The Villages at Stow  
Photo Credit: JM Goldson





There was notable growth in single-family attached and three to four-unit structures between 2010 to 2022.<sup>10</sup> The number of townhouses doubled from 47 to 96, and clustered units saw a remarkable sevenfold increase, rising from 24 to 141 homes. While most residents in Stow are owner-occupants (90 percent), distinguishing the Town from nearby communities with a more balanced renter-owner split, there has been a slight increase in owner-occupants over the last decade. However, this high level is not unique to Stow, as Sudbury maintains a similar owner-occupancy rate at 88 percent.

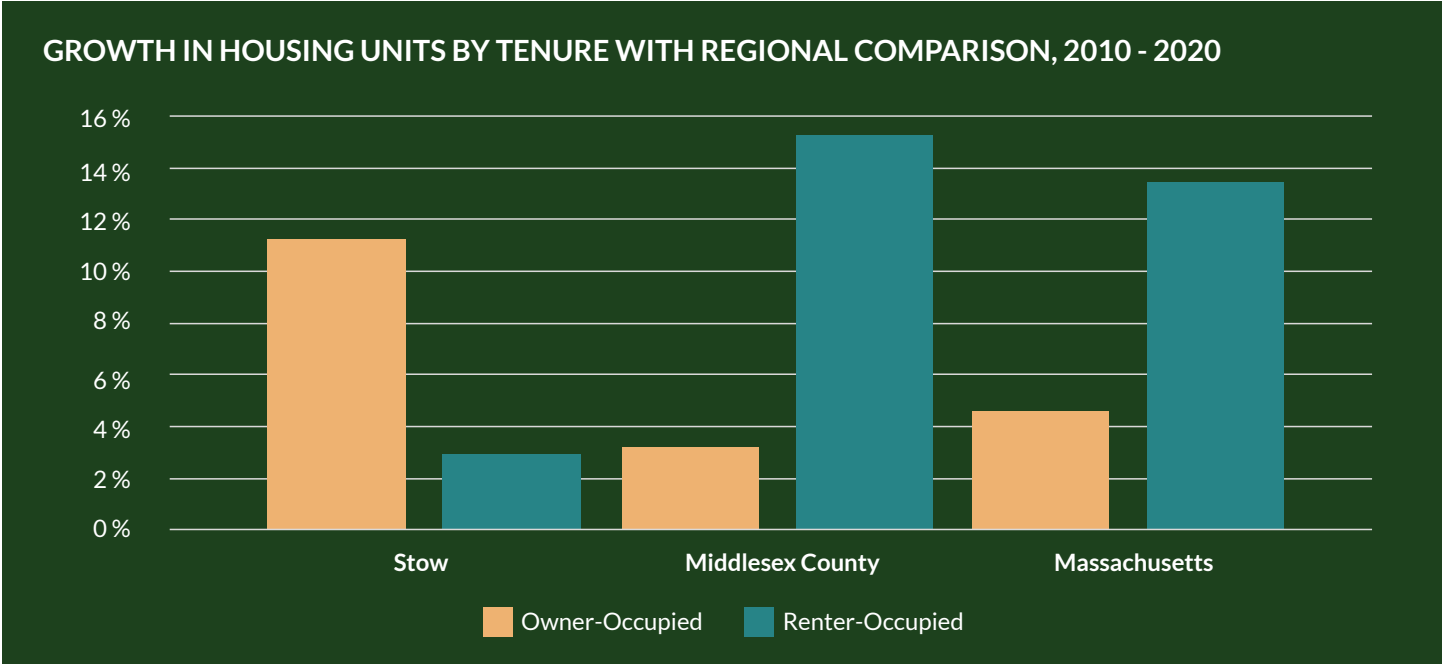


Source: ACS (B25024)

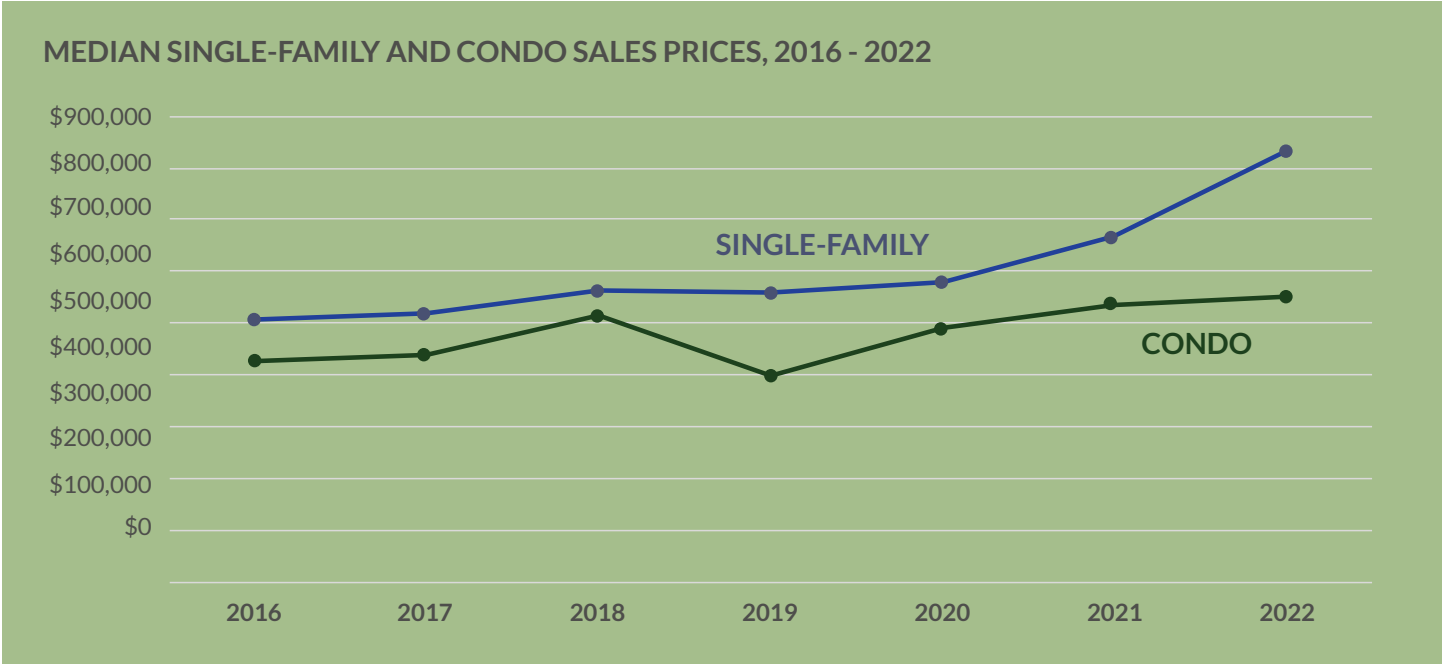
Housing costs in Stow have experienced a significant upswing over the past decade, posing affordability challenges. The median sales price of a single-family home surged by 73 percent between 2016 and 2023, reaching an average of over \$880,000 by the last quarter of 2023.<sup>11</sup> This escalation in costs significantly challenges the affordability of housing for median-income families. The monthly costs of average-sales-price homes are estimated at over \$7,000, while the income of existing residents suggests an affordable monthly payment of slightly over \$4,000. Stow's Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI) as of July 2023 sat at 6.53 percent, and there is a concerted effort of several planned projects aimed at achieving the ten percent compliance under M.G.L. 40B.

Chapter 40B Housing is a program created by the State of Massachusetts that allows developers to override local zoning bylaws to increase the number of affordable homes in municipalities where less than 10% of the housing is defined as affordable. Communities above the 10% threshold have “safe harbor” and can reject 40B proposals, although they can still accept them at their choice. The municipality’s SHI (Subsidized Housing Inventory) and compliance with approved Housing Production Plans are used to determine “safe harbor” status.

The Town of Stow is a member of the Assabet Regional Housing Consortium. This allows staff to participate in a community of practice and in shared housing services, such as monitoring the affordability status of deed-restricted housing units.



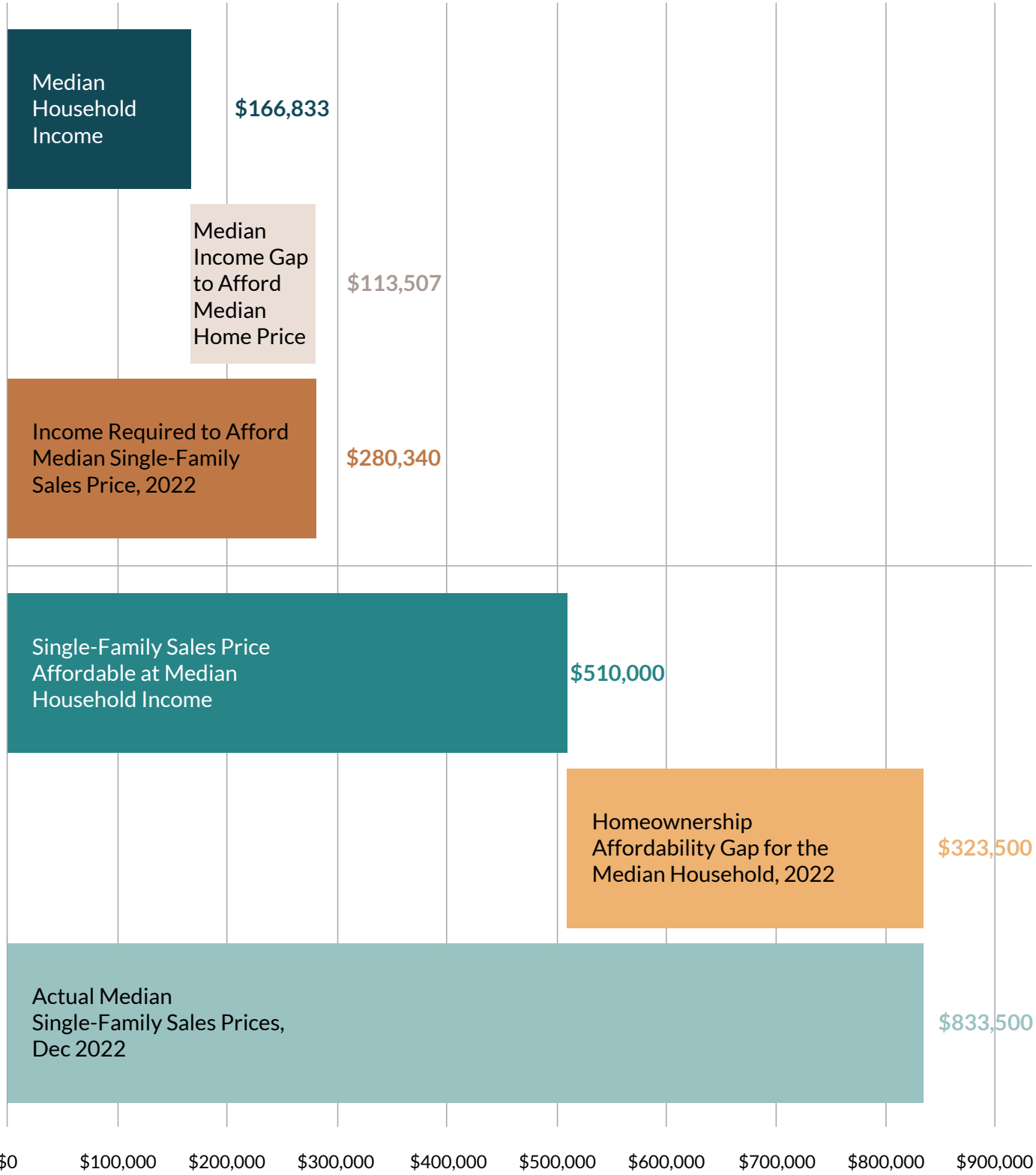
Source: US Census (T69, H4)



Source: Massachusetts Association of Realtors Town Data



HOMEOWNERSHIP AFFORDABILITY



Note: Calculations assume 30% of income allocated to direct housing costs.  
Source: ACS (A14015), Massachusetts Association of Realtors Town Data, DHCD Affordability Calculator Tool

ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The Town of Stow faces critical issues and opportunities in its housing landscape. First and foremost, there is a pressing need to diversify housing opportunities and focus on affordability. While the Town excels in discussing both moderately affordable and affordable housing, the continued shortage of more affordable, dense housing options emerges as a significant and persistent issue. In interviews with Town staff, it was suggested that elevated housing prices in Stow are affecting the Town's ability to operate programs, affordability being a significant barrier to hiring and maintaining staff that can live nearby.

These pressures also add to the lack of representation of socio-economic diverse populations in Stow and are representative of historical patterns of exclusion made possible through restrictive zoning that elevates housing costs. The challenge of affordability underscores the pressing need to reduce barriers to entry for individuals of all ages and backgrounds, and foster a more equitable and inclusive community environment.

Addressing this gap presents both challenges and opportunities for Stow. Exploring zoning adjustments to facilitate the development of smaller homes of greater density and diverse typologies can be an avenue toward building affordability for new neighbors as well as empty nesters looking to downsize. Investment in water and sewer infrastructure in Lower Village could open opportunities for Stow to see more diversity and affordability in housing options, particularly given new allowances for mixed-use development. Strict Board of Health regulations on extensive septic leaching areas also limits development potential to large lots and raises costs.

The potential for Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) permissions at the state level indicates a step toward opening greater possibilities, although historical challenges in getting initiatives like ADUs approved persist. Reaching for consensus is crucial, as the Town looks toward meeting current and future needs. Many factors are at play in housing policy, requiring a cohesive approach to implementation in Stow.

As the Town grapples with regional housing pressures, historically restrictive zoning, and high land costs, exploring novel approaches to connect Stow's experience in conservation land trusts with community land trusts for housing is a key opportunity to grow permanently affordable housing under community control.



# ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

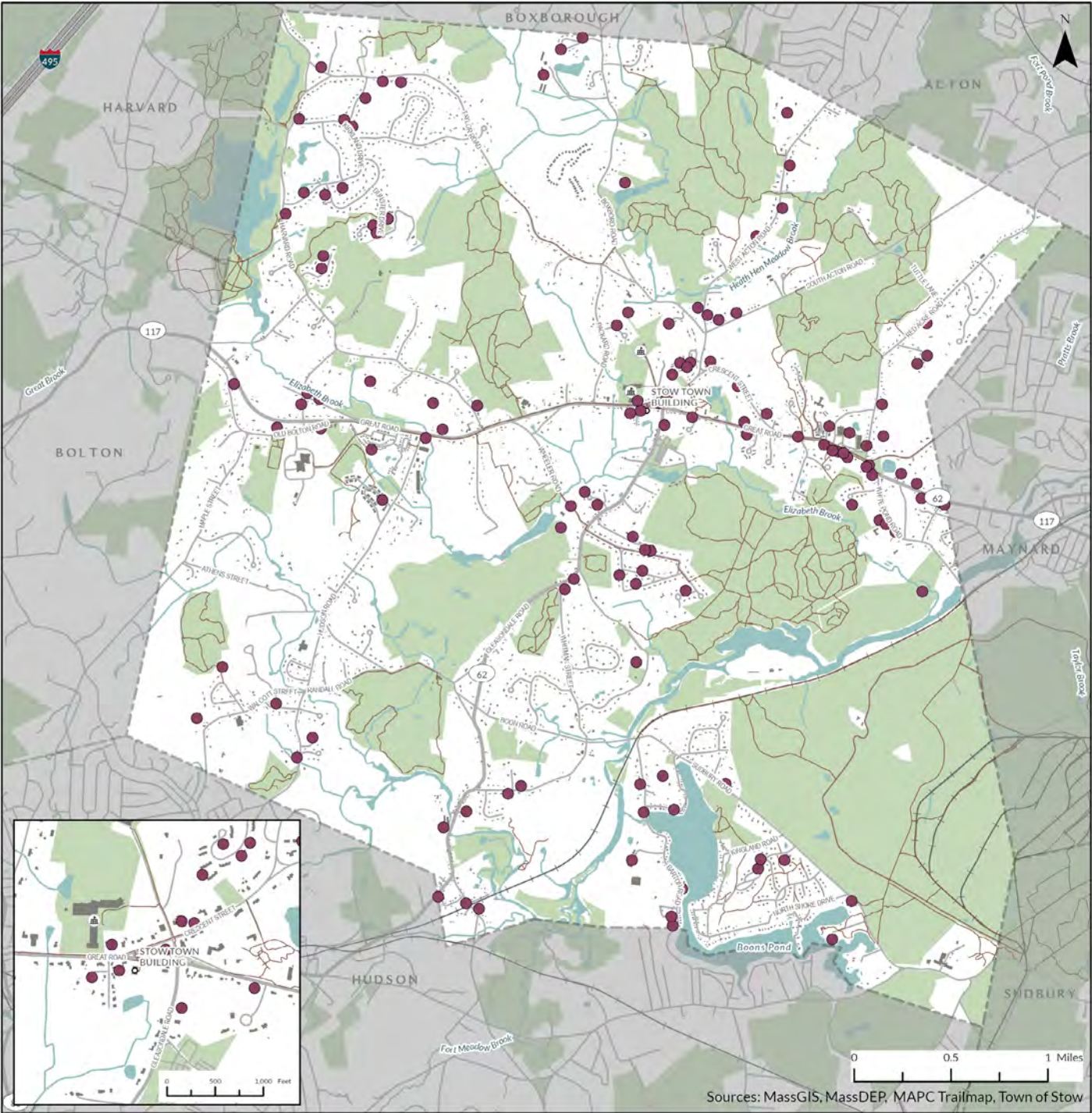
Stow’s economic landscape reflects a well-educated exurban population. Aligned with peer communities, 74.3 percent of residents hold a bachelor’s degree or higher. The Town has a low unemployment rate of 3.7 percent, below the rates in Middlesex County (4.4 percent) and the Commonwealth (5.3 percent). Employment in Stow grew by ten percent between 2012 and 2022, mirroring the growth in Middlesex County. The 2020 Census identified 1,953 jobs in Stow, with manufacturing and public administration being the dominant sectors, comprising 25 percent and 23.5 percent of jobs, respectively.



Stow Shopping Center in Lower Village  
Photo Credit: JM Goldson

TOWN OF STOW - REGISTERED BUSINESSES  
Prepared by JM Goldson LLC

J M GOLDSON

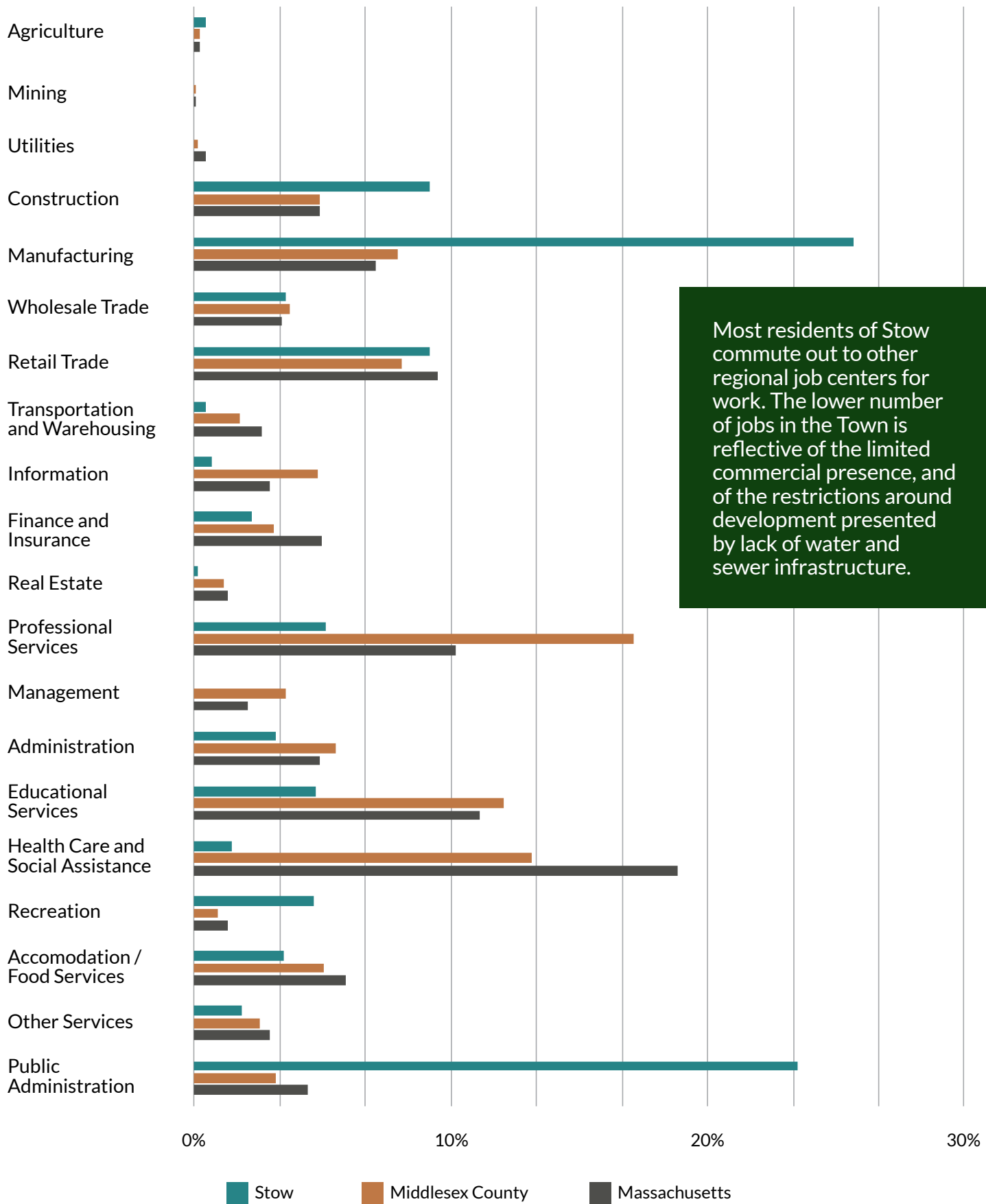


The concentration of businesses in the Lower Village and historic Town Center reflects historical land use trends, showcasing both the slow growth development of an agricultural community center and the postwar suburban shopping center.

Stow’s farms and orchards also serve as a significant draw for agritourism, attracting visitors with the promise of scenic landscapes, fresh produce, and immersive agricultural experiences.



SHARE OF EMPLOYMENT BY SECTOR, 2020



Tax Revenue

Despite its economic strengths, Stow faces challenges. The Town has a higher residential tax rate than most neighboring communities, though Maynard's remains greater. In 2023, Stow levied \$31,160,991 in property taxes, with a minimal 5 percent coming from commercial and industrial properties.<sup>12</sup>

Communities that diversify their tax base by developing more commercial properties have increased opportunities to target property tax rates between the two uses. The Town of Hudson

sees nearly a quarter of their tax revenues come from higher rates on commercial and industrial properties, allowing for the lowest residential tax rate and lowest average single-family tax bill of nearby communities surveyed.<sup>13</sup>

In 2023, Hudson's residential tax rate was \$14.60, while the commercial rate was \$28.88. Stow's average single-family tax bill in 2023 was \$11,617, well below Sudbury's \$15,036, but significantly above Hudson's \$7,274.



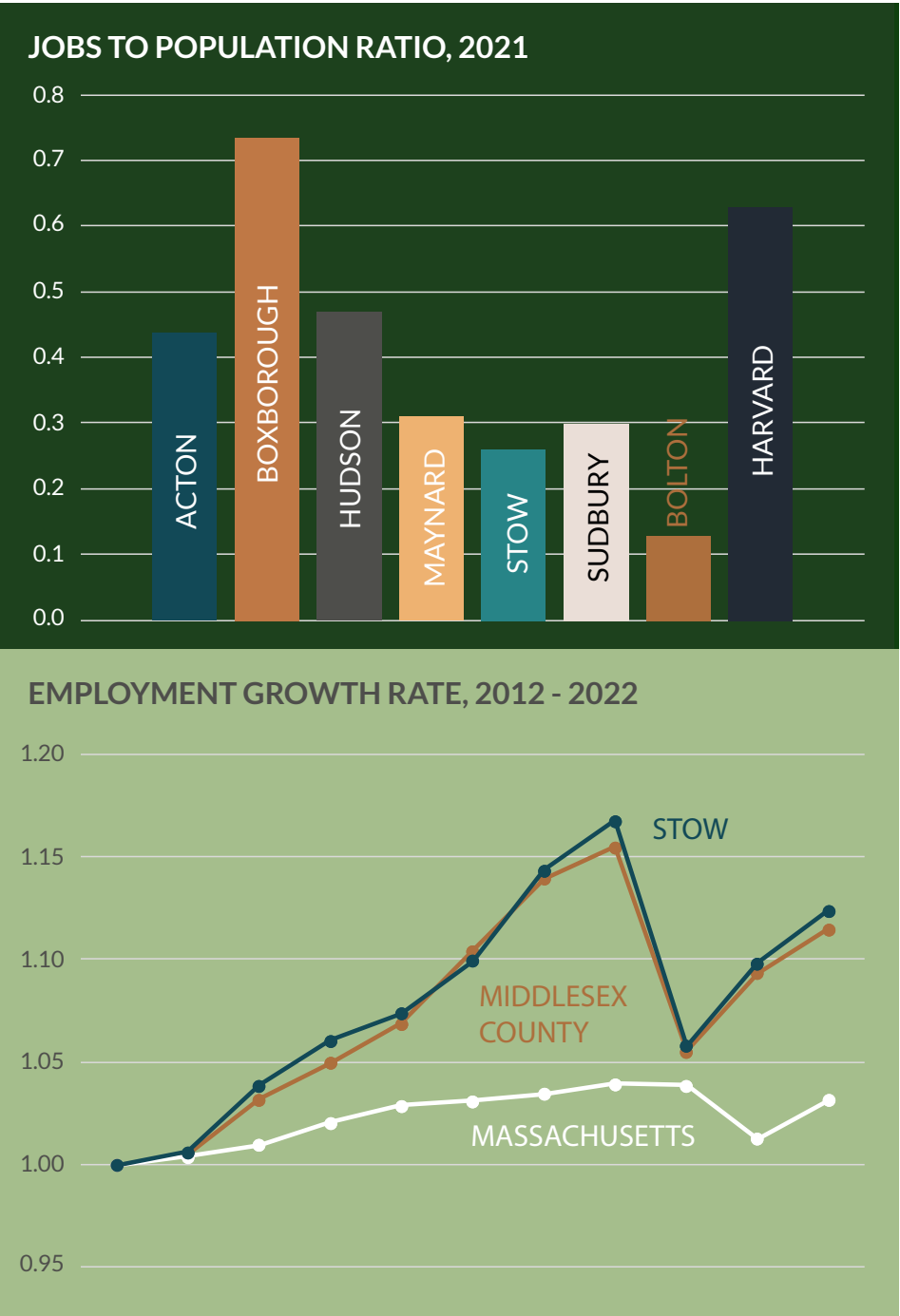
Retail Space for Lease in Stow Shopping Center  
Photo Credit: JM Goldson



*The jobs-to-population ratio in Stow is lower compared to adjacent communities, with only Bolton having a lower ratio.<sup>14</sup>*

Water and sewer infrastructure, along with high land and housing costs, emerge as significant barriers to economic development, particularly in the Lower Village. Interviewees underscored these challenges, noting the impact on business startup costs and hindrance to employee relocation to Stow.

At Town Meeting in 2023, Stow created a new zoning district for Lower Village, allowing businesses and landowners greater flexibility in site design and allowed uses. It was designed to foster a walkable village center.



Source: US Census OnTheMap

Source: Massachusetts Department of Economic Research

### ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Stow faces several challenges and opportunities in its economic development efforts. A key issue lies in the insufficiency of water infrastructure in Lower Village. In an ongoing feasibility study, the Town is grappling with questions about responsibility and maintenance of a potential water supply for the business district. Due to a perception that there isn't sufficient community desire to establish a public water system, the result may rely on business owners. However, the small size of parcels poses challenges, limiting the potential uses to small establishments.

Financial constraints resulting from municipal investments and open space initiatives emphasize the need for economic diversification. Greater opportunities may be opened by continuing to foster the agritourism market, with the potential for more local businesses that can broaden the market for visitors coming to spend money in Stow.

Another challenge lies in the difficulty of opening new businesses in Stow. The Town lacks a dedicated Chamber of Commerce or Town department, and a previous economic development commission was recently disbanded. To address this, there is a need for a clear economic development plan outlining roles and responsibilities for attracting businesses, improving the Lower Village Business District, and fostering ongoing dialogue. Clarifying these aspects, possibly through the addition of dedicated Town staff, will be crucial for effective economic development in Stow.



# TRANSPORTATION

Over the past decade (2012-2022), Stow has witnessed a notable shift in commuting patterns, with a 24 percent decrease in residents driving or carpooling to work. Most of this change (23 percent) may be attributed to an increase in remote work, while those indicating public transportation (including taxi) ridership also saw a modest increase.<sup>15</sup>

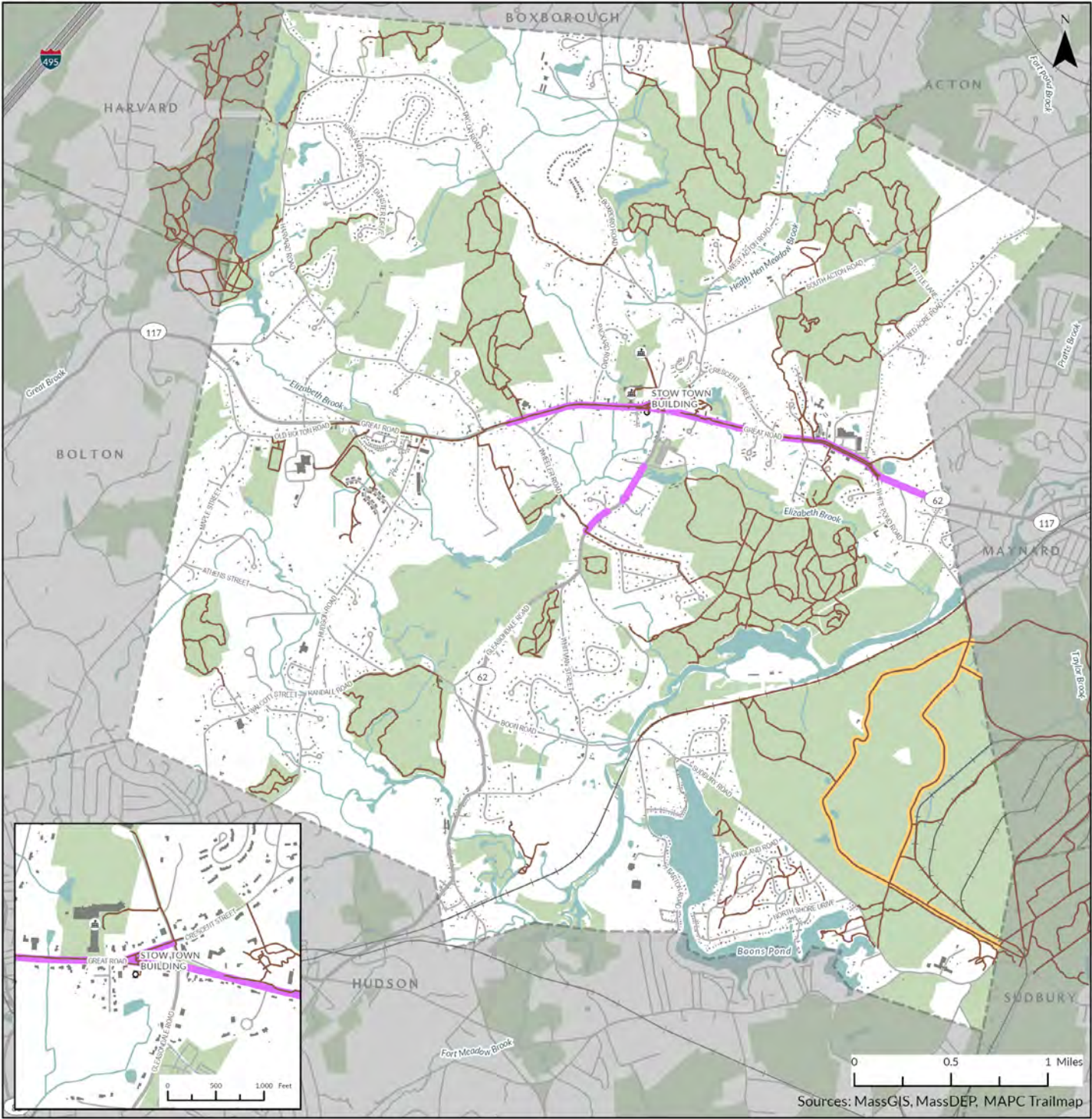
*The Town faces transportation challenges, including an increase in “super commuters” (residents living at least one hour away from their workplace) from seven to twelve percent.<sup>16</sup> The lack of public transit options impacts multiple facets of the Town.*



Great Road Traffic Signal  
Photo Credit: JM Goldson

TOWN OF STOW - BIKE PATHS AND PEDESTRIAN TRAILS  
Prepared by JM Goldson LLC

J M GOLDSON



- Schools
- Buildings
- Parcels
- Trails
- Water bodies
- Open space
- Hiking Trails
- Contemplated Cycling Improvements
- Existing Cycling Facilities



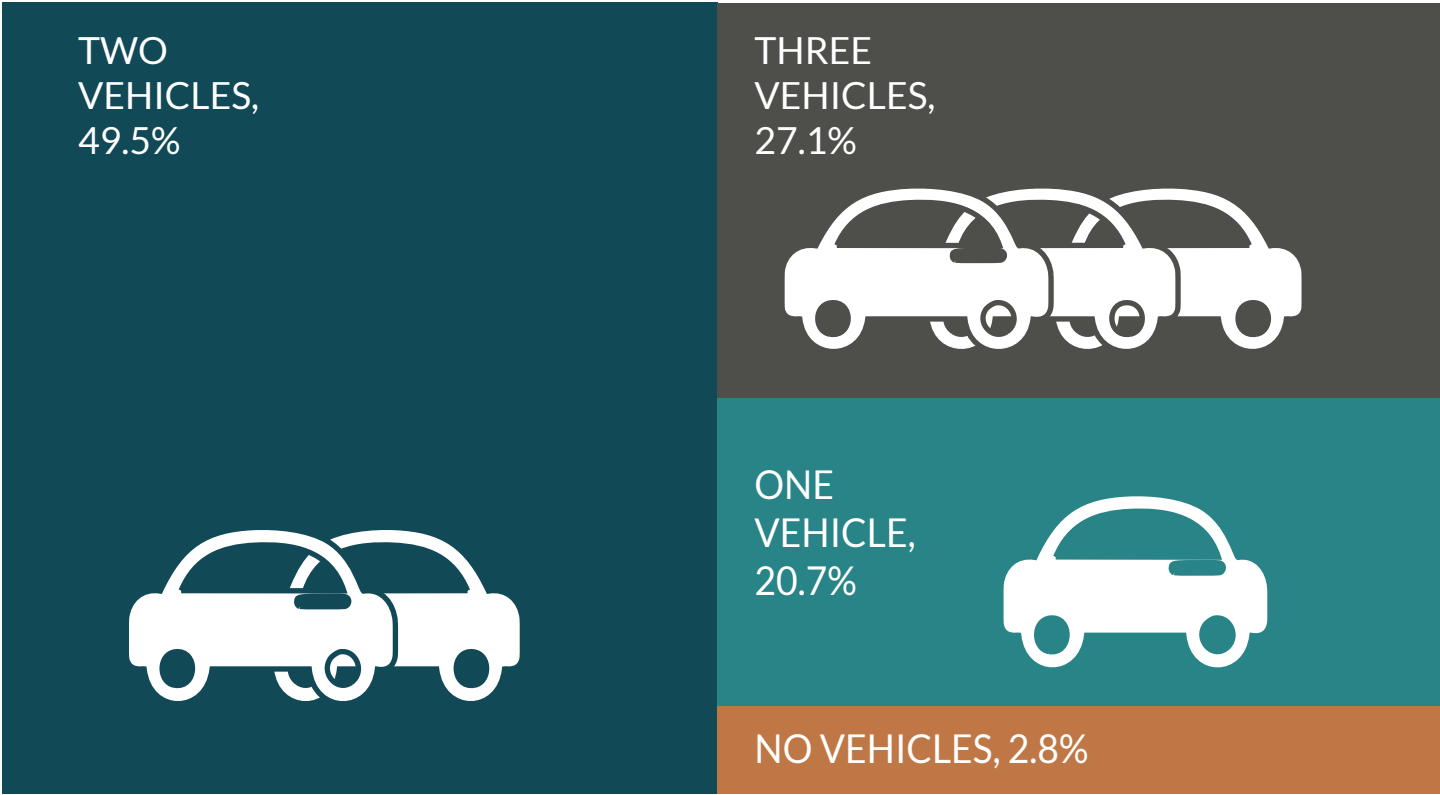
Stow residents own more cars than they have in the past.

Nearly half of households in Stow (49.5 percent) own two vehicles, while the proportion with three vehicles or more increased by seven percent between 2012 and 2022. Interestingly, those without a vehicle also saw an increase to 72 households.



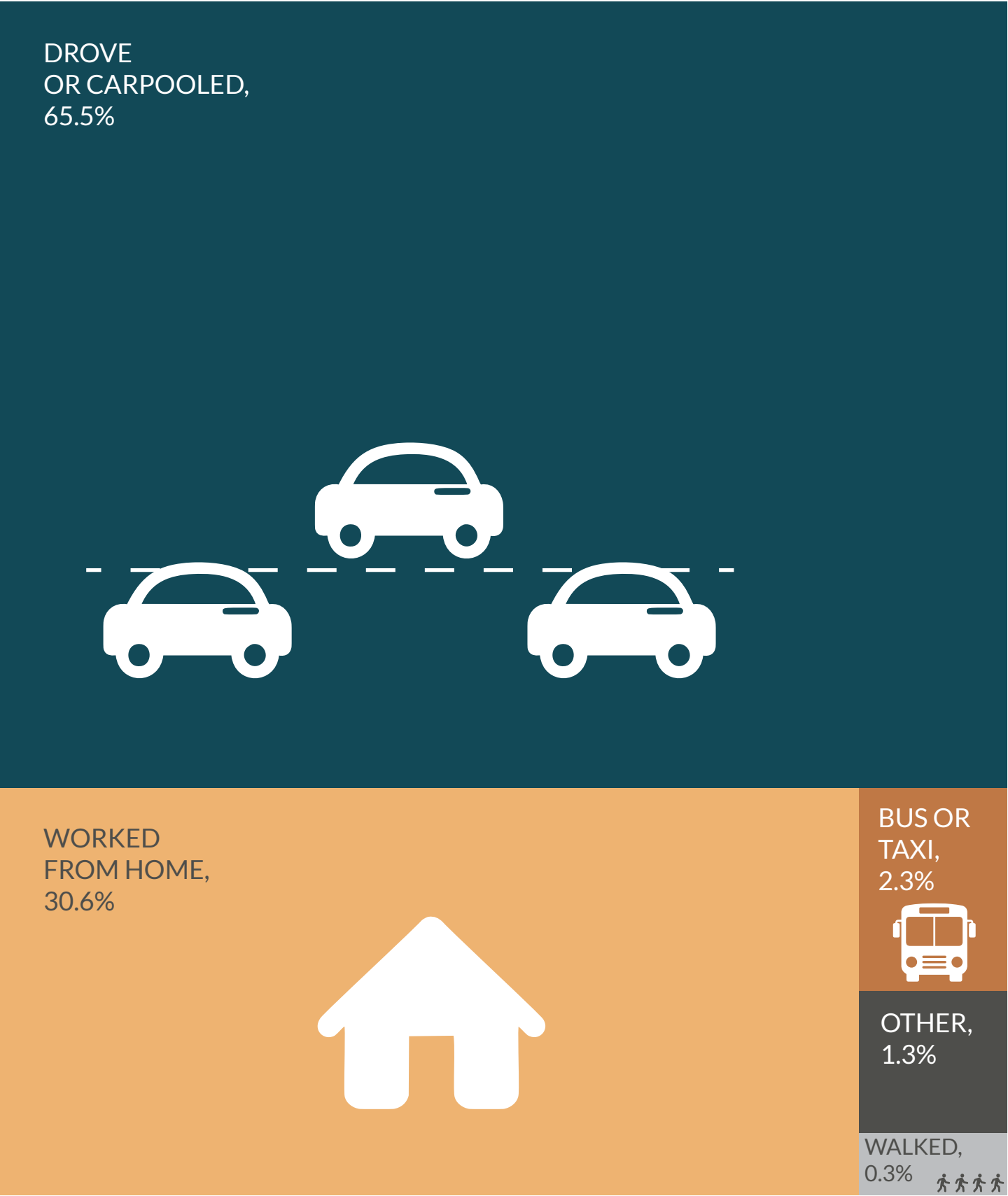
Stow Shopping Center Parking Lot  
Photo Credit: JM Goldson

HOUSING UNITS BY VEHICLES AVAILABLE, 2022



Source: ACS A10030

MEANS OF TRANSPORTATION TO WORK, 2022

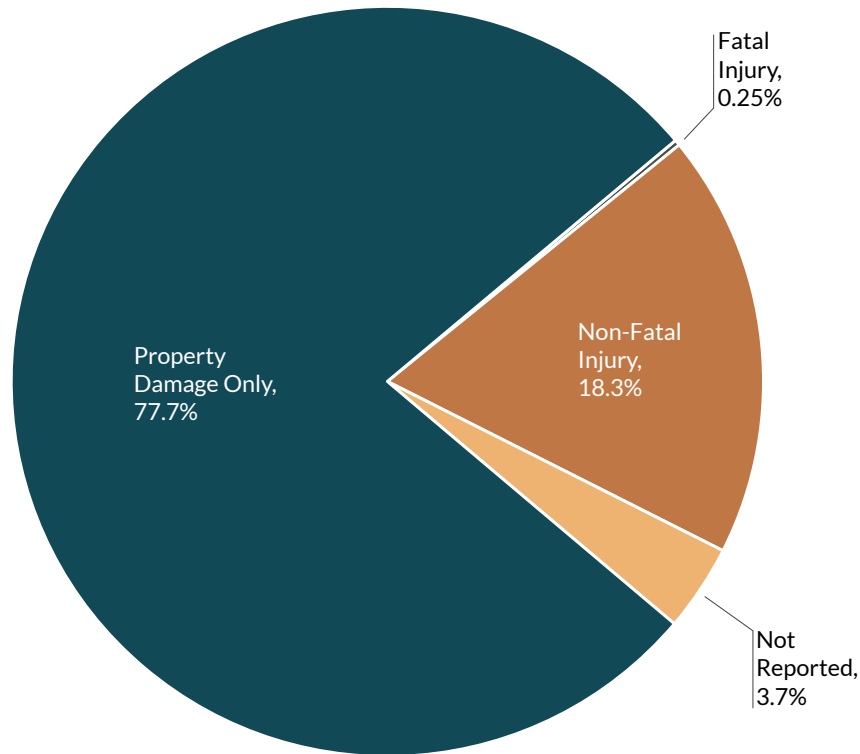


Source: ACS A09005



The Town has experienced traffic-related incidents,<sup>17</sup> with MassDOT recording one fatal crash between 2018 and 2022 at the intersection of West Acton, South Acton, and Boxboro Roads. Another problematic intersection lies at Route 117 and Hudson Road, known for non-fatal and property damage-related crashes, is slated to receive a traffic signal. Stow's Great Road stands out as the busiest thoroughfare, with MassDOT reporting 13,206 average daily vehicles in 2022.

CRASH SEVERITY, 2018 - 2022



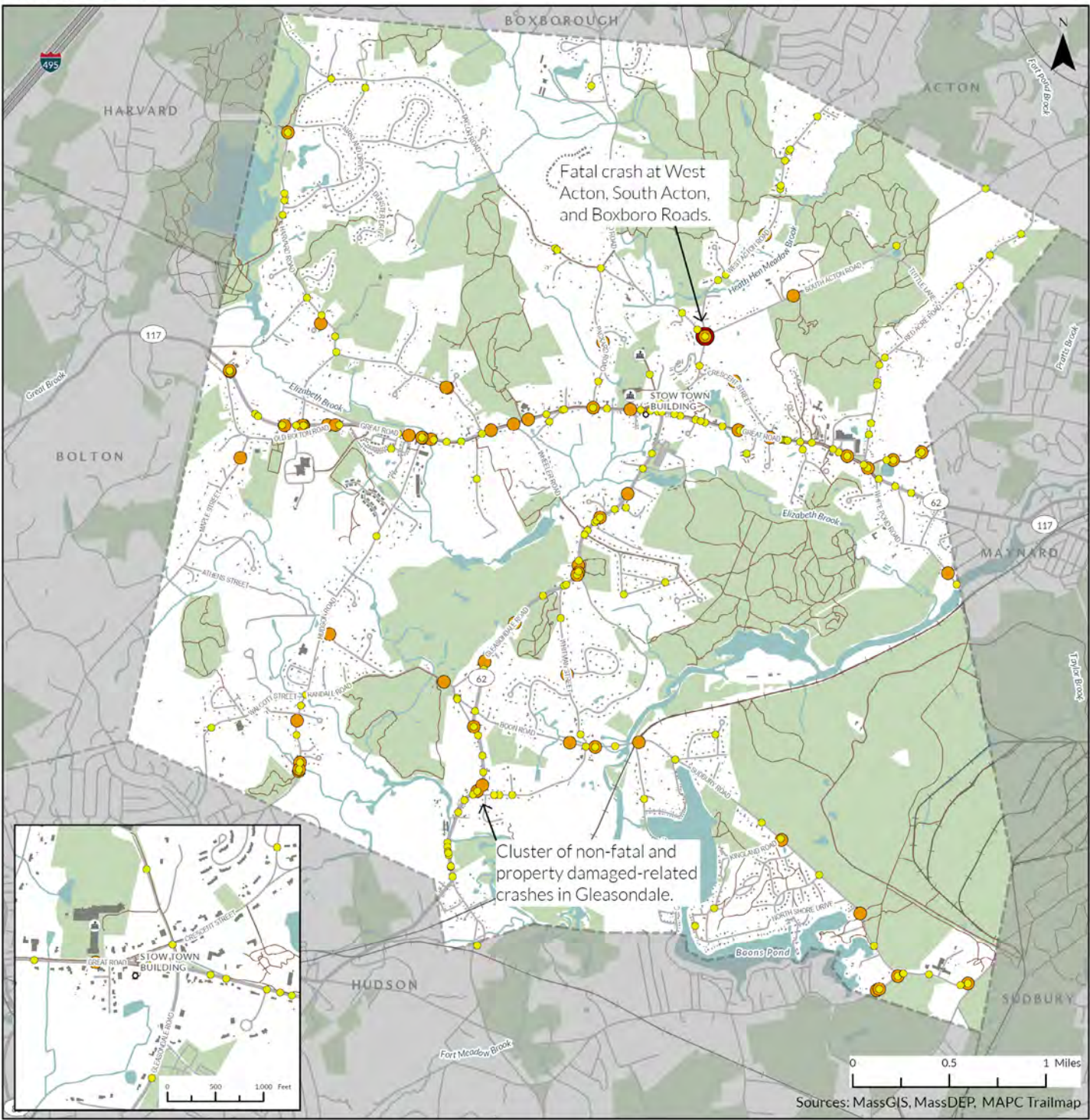
Source: MassDOT IMPACT Crash Data



Honey Pot Traffic  
Photo Credit: Kathy Sierra

TOWN OF STOW - CRASH MAP 2018 - 2022  
Prepared by JM Goldson LLC

J M GOLDSON



Schools

Parcels

Buildings

Trails

Water bodies

Open space

**Crash Severity**

- Fatal injury
- Non-fatal injury
- Property damage only (none injured)

Year	Number of Crashes
2018	84
2019	102
2020	63
2021	73
2022	82



*The community is considering the impact of transportation gaps, as well as possible responses.*

Stow has participated in a handful of pilot projects in order to understand the transportation needs of residents. One such program is the GoStow program, which provided 181 taxi rides to Stow residents through the Council on Aging in 2023. Grant funding for this program supported a

shorter-term exploration and free fares for residents over 50, and long-term options are being considered.<sup>18</sup>

Transportation options like this can open doors for residents that don't own a car or don't wish to drive. Maintaining these programs can present challenges, however. Interviews with Town staff suggested that staffing the Council on Aging's van service has been difficult, potentially threatening this key transportation service for Stow's senior residents.

The Town also launched routes on the MART shuttle to the South Acton Commuter Rail station on weekdays and shopping destinations twice per week. The MART shuttle began service in February 2024, with free fares planned until the first of May, 2024.<sup>19</sup>

The Town actively participates in the MassDOT Complete Streets program, with the 2018 plan outlining projects focused on traffic calming, safety enhancements, and improved facilities for cycling and walking.



South Acton Road  
Photo Credit: Kathy Sferna

ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Stow faces both challenges and opportunities in transportation, many of which are tied to a spread out exurban land use pattern that often requires automobiles for mobility. Aiming to enhance regional connectivity, the Town is exploring new regional transit options like GoStow and the MART shuttle. These programs have used grant funding to improve connections with neighboring towns and facilitate travel to South Acton and commercial destinations.

Recognizing the significance of rail trails for economic development and regional connectivity, Stow has pursued and received federal earmarks for design of potential improvements to a two-mile stretch of Track Road. These potential design options will be something for the neighbors and wider community to consider.

Key transportation projects include addressing the urgent need for Complete Streets improvements in the Gleasondale neighborhood, which is characterized by a lack of sidewalks and high traffic density. Connectivity to the Assabet Rail Trail is a potential enhancement in this area.

Additionally, the Town emphasizes the necessity for more traffic controls, citing the intersection of Hudson Road and Route 117 as a specific example. The concept phase for Complete Streets in The Town Center is also on the agenda.

However, Stow faces challenges in transportation, particularly among seniors who no longer wish to drive, commuters seeking easier access to regional transit, and opening up transportation options to those that commute to Stow for work. Programs like GoStow and the MART shuttle service are strong steps toward opportunity, connectivity, and sustainability for residents, visitors, and commuters alike. Balancing these issues and opportunities, Stow is actively working towards a more connected and accessible transportation infrastructure.



# CULTURAL AND HISTORIC RESOURCES

Stow boasts a tapestry of cultural and historic resources that reflect the area’s evolution. The Town is dotted by well-preserved landmarks and architectural gems, some of which originated earlier than the Town’s formal incorporation. From early colonial agrarian roots to its role in the industrial era and later suburbanization, Stow’s evolution has been woven into its cultural fabric.

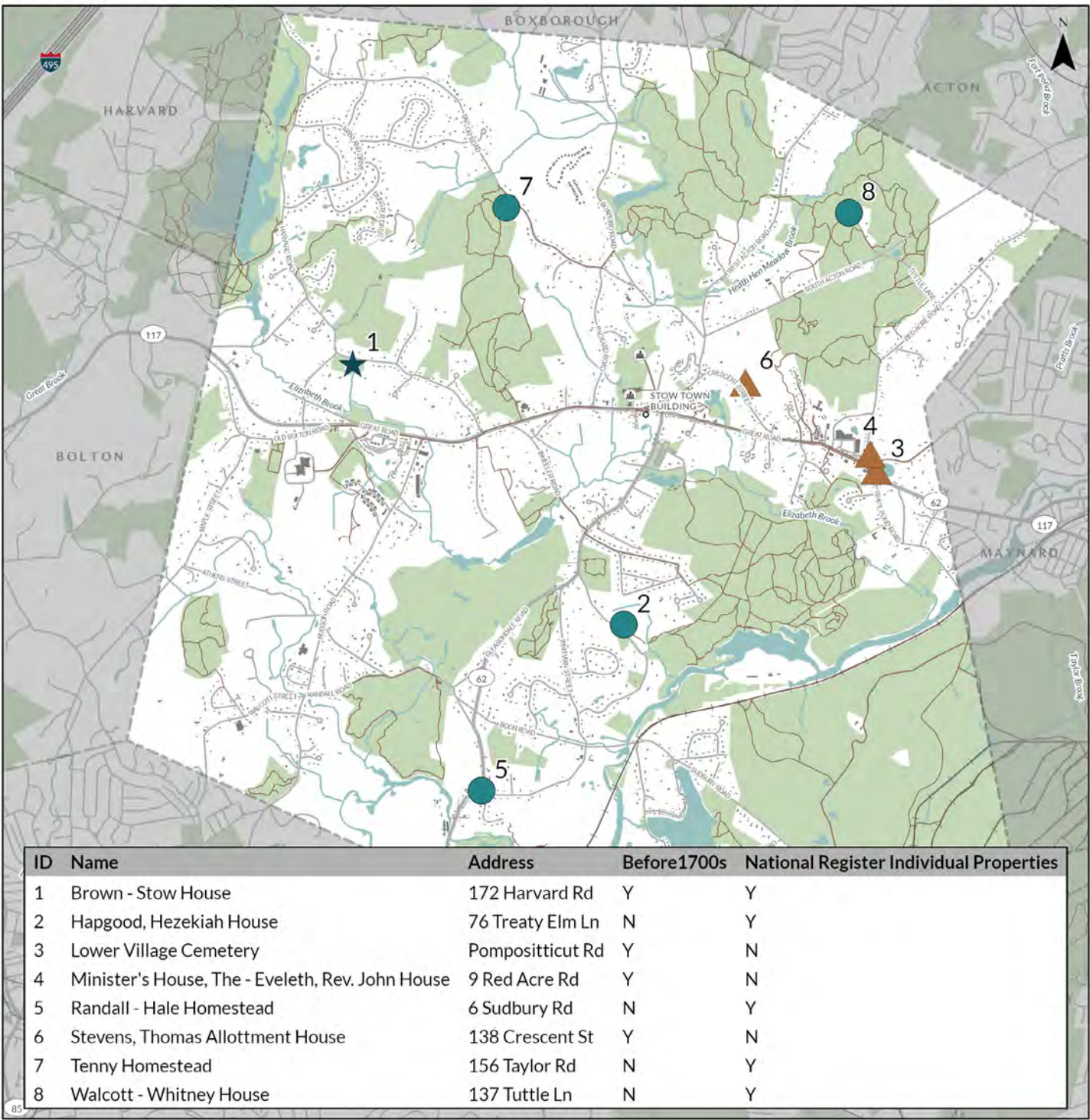
The land that is now called Stow lies on the historic homelands of the Indigenous Nipmuc people. The Nipmuc has the distinction of maintaining stewardship over a 3.5 acre reversion at Hassanamesit in Grafton that was never owned or occupied by non-Indigenous people.<sup>20</sup> The Nipmuc people were denied federal recognition in the 2000s, but are formally recognized by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The Nipmuc Indian Development Corporation, created in 1999, aims to support the community through cultural, economic, and educational services, as well as self-determination through food sovereignty and relationships with their homeland.<sup>21</sup>

*Nearly 90 percent of the historic resources in Stow that are listed on the Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System (MACRIS) are buildings.*

Four MACRIS-listed historic resources originated before 1700 in the early phases of colonization; three of these are buildings, only one of which is registered as a National Register Individual Property. Only one historic resource in Stow is listed as having a Preservation Restriction. Overall, 98.7 percent of the MACRIS-listed historic resources in Stow have no official designation or protections.<sup>22</sup> There are many houses in Stow originating from before 1800.

TOWN OF STOW - KEY HISTORIC SITES  
Prepared by JM Goldson LLC

J M GOLDSON



Schools

Parcels

Buildings

Trails

Water bodies

Open space

Before 1700s and in the National Register Individual Properties

In the National Register Individual Properties

Before 1700s

0

0.5

1 Miles



Stow approved the Community Preservation Act in 2001 with a property tax surcharge of 3 percent. This funding is supplemented by a variable funding match from the Commonwealth and can be dedicated to projects that meet certain criteria.

*To date, 18 percent (\$2,603,662) of CPA funding has been allocated to Historic projects in Stow.*<sup>23</sup>

The Stow Acres Country Club is coming to be understood as a key historic resource in Stow. Due to its history as Mapledale Country Club – perhaps the first African-American-owned and operated Country Club in the country – the Country Club building and grounds are a notable site of African-American history in the United States.<sup>24</sup> The \$1.5 million in CPA funding allocated to the Stow Acres South Course Conservation Restriction in 2021 did not include funding for historic preservation at this site, but there are ongoing efforts to uplift this history.



Stow Acres Country Club  
Photo Credit: JM Goldson

**Stow has diverse cultural resources of varying ages.**

Some resources available to the community have long-standing cultural roots, like the First Parish Church and Stow’s active farms and orchards. Others, like Stow’s noted golf courses and the Minuteman Airfield, have shorter histories but are key cultural sites for the community.



Home in Stow Center  
Photo Credit: JM Goldson



First Parish Church of Stow and Acton  
Photo Credit: Town of Stow



Historical Direction Marker  
Photo Credit: JM Goldson



West School  
Photo Credit: JM Goldson





An image from the Gleasondale Village Revitalization Plan Phase I Inventory and Finding Report

In 2015, the Town completed the Gleasondale Village Revitalization Plan. With a focus on adaptive reuse of the historic Gleasondale Woolen Mill building and improvements to the surrounding streetscape and public realm, this process was designed to envision new possibilities in the historic neighborhood.

**Gleasondale is a key historic neighborhood and cultural opportunity hub.**

The 2015 Gleasondale Village Revitalization Plan is a detailed study of the potential for this historic site and the surrounding area. Affectionately called Rock Bottom by residents and neighbors, this neighborhood hosts historic multifamily workers' housing, and is adjacent to the Assabet River. Opportunities to see new use of the historic mill building and cultural activity in the neighborhood abound.

An historic church building in Gleasondale  
Photo Credit: JM Goldson



**ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

Stow has a strong history of preservation of historic landscapes, but a limited pattern of historic preservation overall. In interviews with Town staff and committee members, the perception that Stow allocated more money to conservation and open space than might be their fair share became a theme. This has historically meant less funding was available for historic and cultural uses, from renovating historic municipal buildings like the Old Town Hall and the Randall Library, to potentially funding historic and cultural wayfinding in historic areas like Gleasondale.

In addition to historic funding for restoration, a desire to support equitable and inclusive historic education was communicated during interviews. Limited private sources of funding and private organizing for these initiatives have meant that it has come to Town Meetings to allocate funding.

Whether relying on public or private funding, the continued uplifting of African-American history and culture at Stow Acres is a key opportunity for the Town. The community also has important opportunities to engage with and support the Indigenous Nipmuc people, such as through land transfers or cultural use easements like those promoted by the Nativia Land Conservancy<sup>25</sup>. Honoring their cultural and historic resources that are foundational to the area's pre-colonization history is a key opportunity for reconciliation and learning.



# OPEN SPACES, NATURAL PLACES, & SUSTAINABILITY

To preserve ecosystem health and biodiversity, as well as prevent further environmental degradation due to sprawl, many jurisdictions and the Biden administration have set the goal of conserving 30 percent of their area by 2030. Stow has set a similar goal of maintaining one third of its area conserved,<sup>26</sup> showing that conservation is a deep and consistent community value.

*Twenty-eight percent of Stow is protected in perpetuity. Most of the protected open spaces are federally-owned, municipally-owned, or under an Agricultural Preservation Restriction.*

Preserving prime agricultural soil is an essential means of providing regional food security in the future. Though the agricultural sector has seen drastic changes over the past half-century on this continent, there may be widespread economic shifts in the future that redirect the world back toward regionalized food production. Preventing development that would degrade prime agricultural soils can help make sure that these parts of the ecosystem retain their quality.

Stow has also forged a working relationship between the Town, the Stow Conservation Trust, a housing developer, and the owners of Stow Acres Country Club to develop a community vision for the future of the golf course. In 2021, Town Meeting voted to purchase a conservation restriction on the 151-acre South Course and buy outright 115 acres of the North Course. Located between the

Assabet River and Elizabeth Brook, this land was identified as a key conservation area.

*Of all the open space in Stow,*

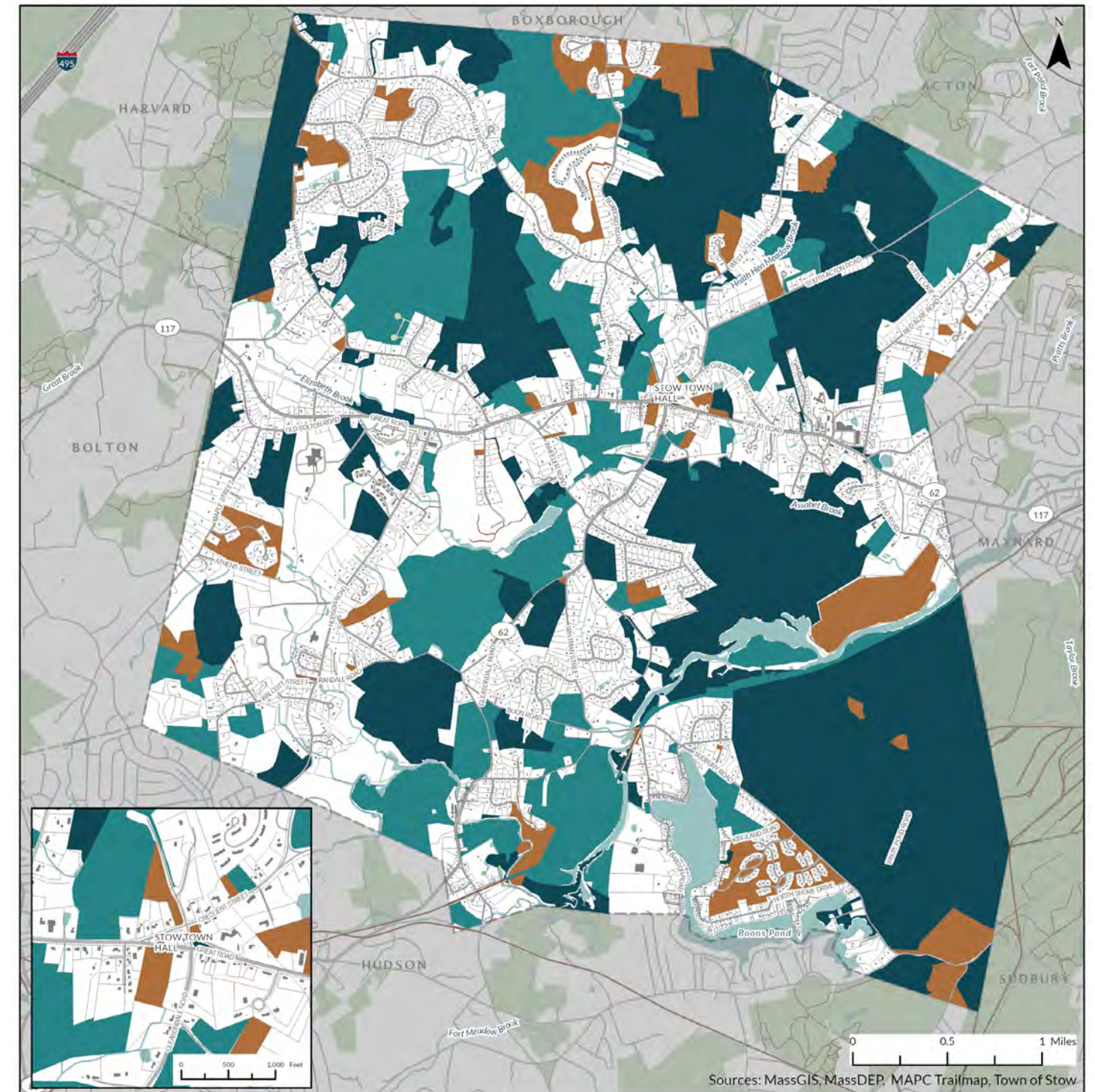
**62.8%**  
*is conserved in perpetuity,*

**29.4%**  
*is open space with limited protection, and*

**7.8%**  
*is unprotected.*

TOWN OF STOW - OPEN SPACE PROTECTION  
Prepared by JM Goldson LLC

J M GOLDSON



- |              |                              |
|--------------|------------------------------|
| Schools      | Protected Open Space         |
| Parcels      | Limited Protected Open Space |
| Buildings    | Unprotected Open Space       |
| Trails       |                              |
| Water bodies |                              |
| Open space   |                              |



# The Assabet River

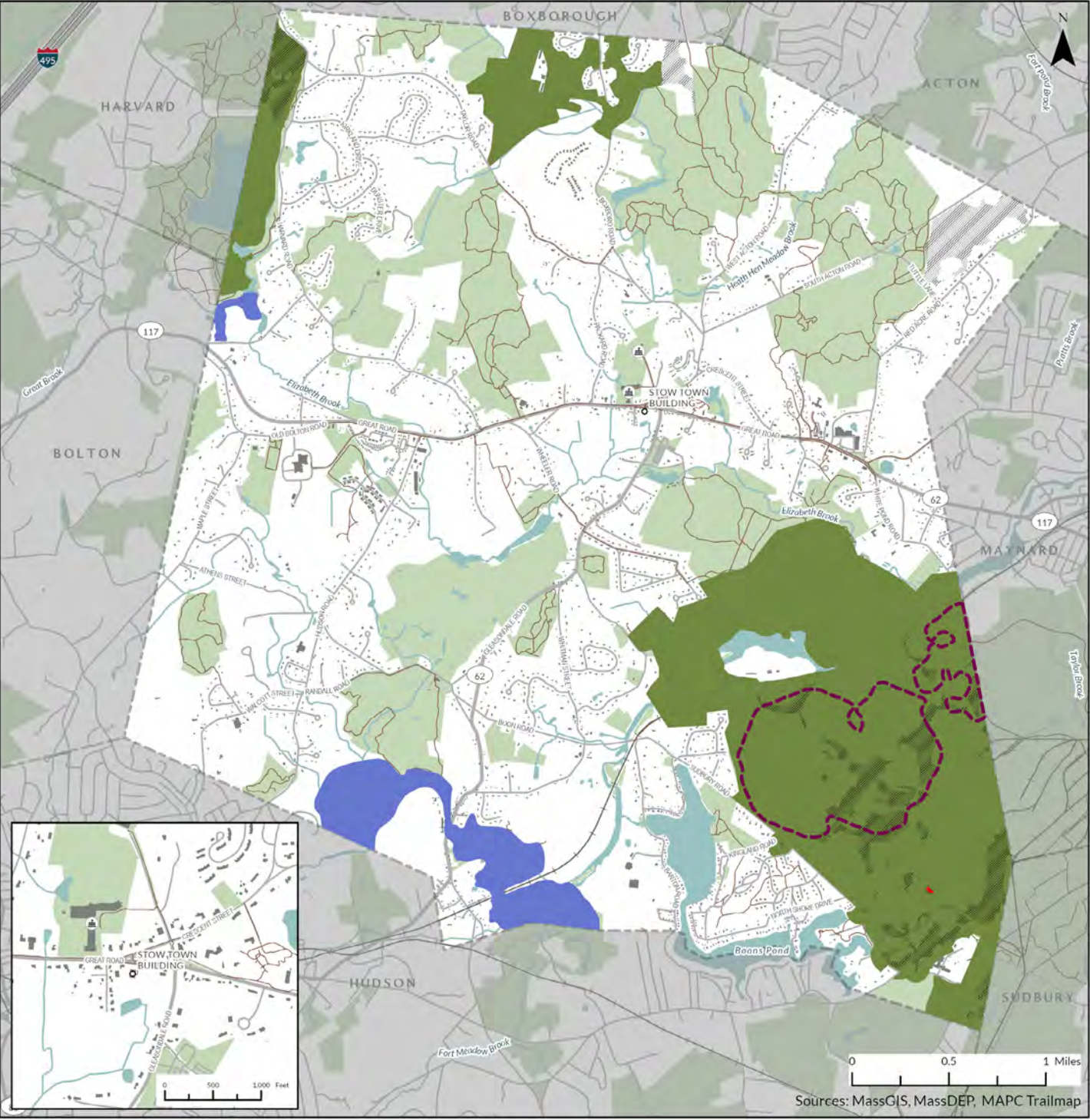
Photo Credit: Town of Stow





TOWN OF STOW - BIOMAP CORE HABITATS  
Prepared by JM Goldson LLC

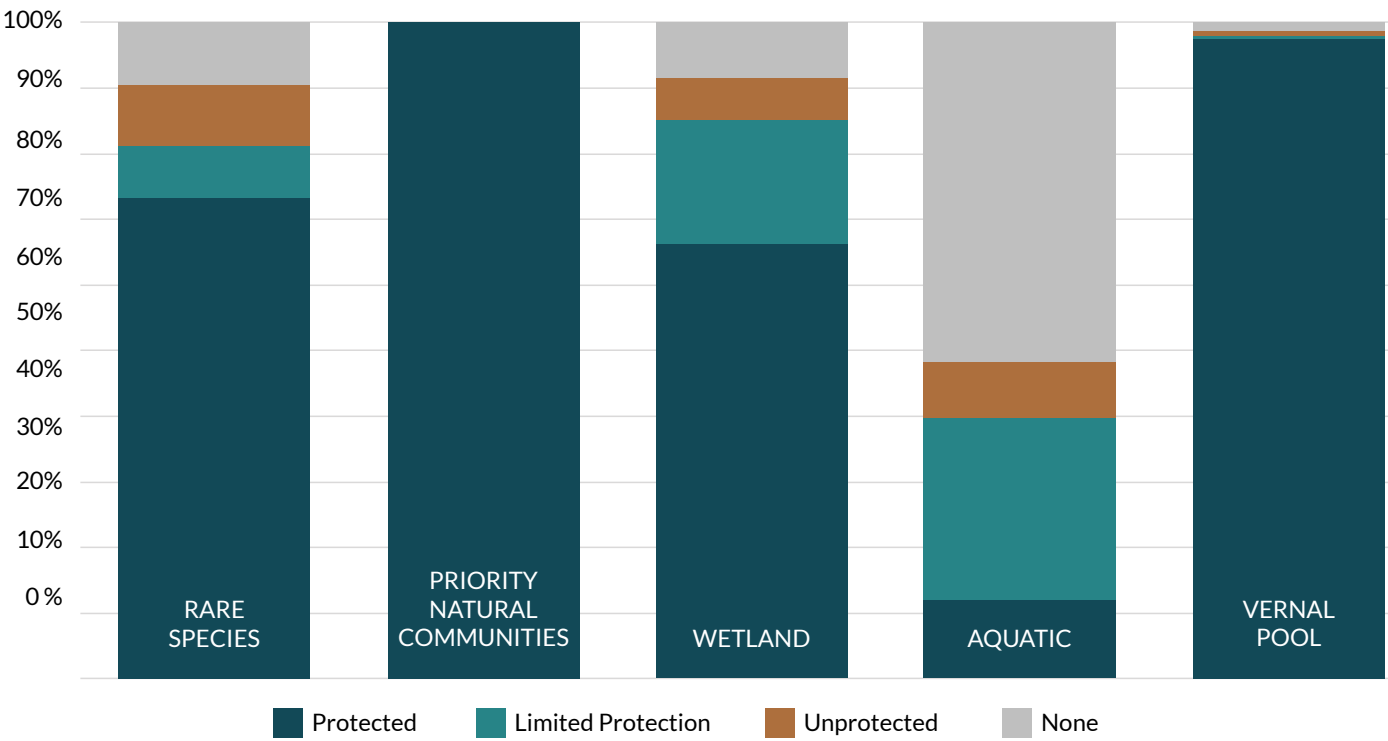
J M GOLDSON



Two-thirds of the BioMap Core Habitat areas in Stow are in protected open spaces.<sup>27</sup>

BioMap Core Habitats are defined as areas that are critical for the long-term survival of rare species, natural communities, and resilient ecosystems. While two-thirds of these areas in Stow are protected, 10 percent of these areas lack protection, and 20 percent are not considered remaining open space.

BIOMAP CORE HABITATS BY PROTECTION STATUS



Source: MassGIS Data: BioMap; The Future of Conservation; MassGIS Data: Property Tax Parcel



**Relevant Municipal Boards and Committees:**

- Conservation Department
- Recreation Department
- Agricultural Commission
- Conservation Commission
- Green Advisory Committee
- Lake Boon Commission
- Open Space Committee
- Recreation Commission

*Ten percent of the Residential District and 20 percent of the Industrial District are overlayed by Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) flood hazard zones.<sup>28</sup>*

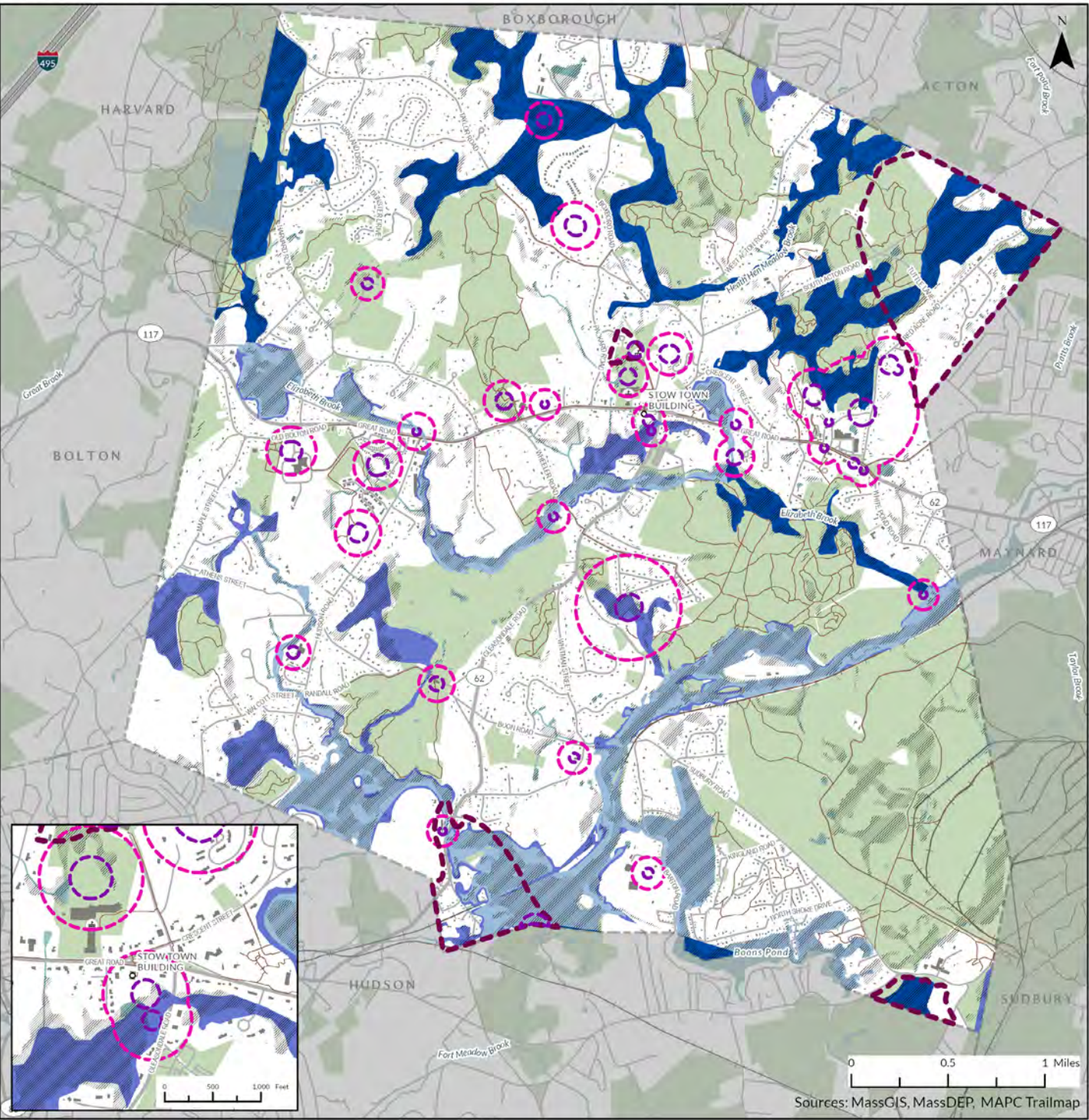
Almost half of the Refuse Disposal District intersects with FEMA flood hazard zones, which could potentially create a public health hazard if the historic disposal facilities flood and contaminate groundwater.



Hallock Point in Lake Boon  
Photo Credit: Kathy Sferia

**TOWN OF STOW - WETLANDS AND FLOODING AREAS**  
Prepared by JM Goldson LLC

J M GOLDSON







Arbor Day Tree Planting in Stow Common  
Photo Credit: Kathy Sferro

## ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The Town has dedicated significant resources toward conservation over the years, and that effort shows in the broad areas of protected land in the Town. To date, just over 28 percent of Stow is protected in perpetuity, coming close to meeting the 30 percent goal set for 2030. As these lands are conserved, ensuring an understanding of the significance of ecosystems in southeastern Stow, as well as the future potential for regionally-significant agricultural land in Stow, is crucial.

The Town has a significant opportunity here to engage with the Indigenous people of the area regarding their millennia of expertise in ecosystem stewardship and sustainable agriculture, as well as their desires for cultural use of Stow’s conservation lands. Conservation that doesn’t yield to the rights and desires of Indigenous people can continue the ongoing legacy of colonialism through deed restrictions that don’t explicitly permit traditional cultural practices; working with Indigenous-led land trusts like the Native Land Conservancy is a key opportunity for the Stow community to lead in giving back.

The absence of a Recreation Needs Assessment raises uncertainties about infrastructure needs and department capacity. Despite these challenges, the Town boasts strengths such as the Pompositticut Community Center, the Pine Bluff Recreation Area and beach, and plentiful access to conservation areas. Opportunities exist in increasing pedestrian and bicycle access to outdoor recreation areas, which would particularly benefit younger and older residents not relying on cars.

The upcoming turnover with at least four retirements in the next few years raises concerns about preserving institutional knowledge. According to interviews with Town staff, there have been increasing conflicts between long-standing and newer residents over recreational space, emphasizing the need for strategic management of these spaces in Stow.



# PUBLIC SERVICES & FACILITIES

Stow faces multifaceted challenges and opportunities across waste management, water infrastructure, recreation, budgeting, and school district participation. The absence of a municipal solid waste program limits waste reduction initiatives, while the lack of public water and sewer impedes growth, especially in the Lower Village. Budget constraints, renovation funding challenges, and staff retention issues further contribute to the complex municipal landscape in Stow.

Stow does not operate a Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) collection program. Private waste hauling is operated through an individual contract with Waste Management. The neighboring towns of Maynard and Hudson operate municipal collection programs with differing fee structures, while Bolton and Boxborough operate municipal transfer stations. Hudson's Department of Public Works notes on their website

that the monthly fees for their MSW collection program are significantly lower than rates available through private haulers.

Stow has no municipal water or sewer service. The 2022 Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Program (MVP) Action Update<sup>29</sup> highlighted this lack, particularly concerning reports of residents' wells running dry in the past and the emerging understanding of PFAS infiltration in groundwater supply. The lack of public water and sewer has also been a long-standing challenge for growth in Lower Village, with the 2019 Lower Village Revitalization Subcommittee Final Report noting that limited capacities on private systems have been a significant hindrance to economic development and other community goals for the area.

*The Town allocated \$100,000 of American Rescue Plan Act funding to a feasibility study for creating a privately managed Public Water Supply in Lower Village; this study is ongoing.*

The ongoing Stow Acres North Course Climate Resilience Master Planning, scheduled through mid-2024, is exploring the possibility of public recreation facilities being added to climate resilience goals. It has been noted during this process that capital and operating expenses, as well as staffing requirements, will be increased if larger recreational facilities are included in the project.<sup>30</sup> This may result in greater fiscal and operation responsibilities for Town facilities and services.

Stow's recreation facilities fall under multiple landholders. Some are Town-owned parks, some are under conservation restrictions, and along the Assabet River is the National Wildlife Refuge. Key sites under the Town's direct purview are the Stow Community Park, the Town Center Park, the Town Forest, and the Pine Bluff Recreation Area.



Pompo Community Center  
Photo Credit: JM Goldson



CPA Funds allocated to the Randall Library Renovation Project  
Photo Credit: JM Goldson



Pine Bluff Recreation Area  
Photo Credit: JM Goldson



The Town has a long-standing history of running a lean budget, which has necessitated funding requests at Town Meetings for department budget items. The Town took advantage of ARPA money during the pandemic, but that funding is now ending. This will likely require returning to the practice of going to Town Meetings with more funding requests.

Some Town staff mentioned in interviews the possibility of increasing staffing to transfer some of the responsibilities of Town Committees and Commissions into the hands of Town staff. This potential increase in staffing would require more substantial department budgets and may involve building upgrades.

**The Pompositticut Community Center has been noted as a key municipal asset in emergency preparedness.**

The facility, reused from a former elementary school, is equipped to serve as a warming center during snowstorms, cooling center during heat waves, water distribution center during drought, and is centrally located near other Town services. As climate change may impact Stow's groundwater stores and increase the frequency of heat waves, residents may rely on the Pompositticut Community Center more in the future.

**The Randall Library, a key public asset, is currently undergoing renovation.**

Due to rising construction and materials costs, the project has been met with bids millions of dollars higher than the Library Building Committee had expected.<sup>31</sup> Plans for this project include a community meeting space with a separate entrance, which will provide a brand-new public space once the renovations are completed. With cost estimates coming in much higher than expected, the project's future is subject to change.

**Municipal staff believe that proactive facilities maintenance has been a long-term issue for the Town.**

The hiked prices of labor and materials coming out of the pandemic have exacerbated these issues and challenged multiple Town renovation projects, including the Randall Library and the Old Town Hall. Beyond the projects already started, Town staff see more facilities that could benefit from renovation or replacement and recommend a comprehensive study of the renovation needs and potential future uses of municipal buildings. Securing funding for these efforts may require a community-wide reallocation of priorities toward municipal services.

**Town staff are proud of their team. Their local experience and expertise allow them to punch above their weight, taking on big projects with limited staff.**

Supporting and maintaining the level of expertise of Town staff was held up as a priority during interviews. Hiring new staff is perceived as a challenge in the coming years, due to shifting patterns in the labor market and education. Further, the lack of public transportation is another barrier to hiring.

**Stow is a member town of the Nashoba Regional School District, which serves Stow, Bolton, and Lancaster.**

After a rise in enrollment between 2002 and 2012, enrollment has been slowly dropping, from a high of 3501 in 2012 to 3031 in the 2023-2024 academic year.<sup>32</sup> The Nashoba Regional School District is in the funding stages on a new school building project to replace the Nashoba Regional High School. As approved, the cost of this project for Nashoba Region towns is almost \$162 million, of which Stow's estimated responsibility will be roughly 35 percent.



Stow Community Gardens  
Photo Credit: JM Goldson



Stow Town Forest  
Photo Credit: JM Goldson



Assabet River Wild Refuge  
Photo Credit: JM Goldson





The Old Town Hall  
Photo Credit: JM Goldson

## ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Stow faces challenges and opportunities across several areas related to facilities and services. In municipal solid waste management, the Town’s reliance on private hauling limits its ability to set its waste reduction targets. The absence of public water and sewer infrastructure poses challenges for economic development and growth in the Lower Village, prompting a Public Water Feasibility Study to address this issue. Water resilience is a long-term concern, with vulnerabilities noted in the absence of a municipal water system.

The Town’s lean budgeting history may lead to increased funding requests at Town Meetings as pandemic relief funding dries up. This will apply pressure on the Town to come up with revised funding structures to support Town services and staff. There is an opportunity to increase staffing to relieve some responsibility from committees and commissions, as well as to increase the capacity of departments to offer greater services in recreation, elder transportation, planning, and more. The Town staff’s expertise is recognized as an asset, but the lack of public transportation and the shifting labor market will likely continue to pose challenges to municipal staffing.

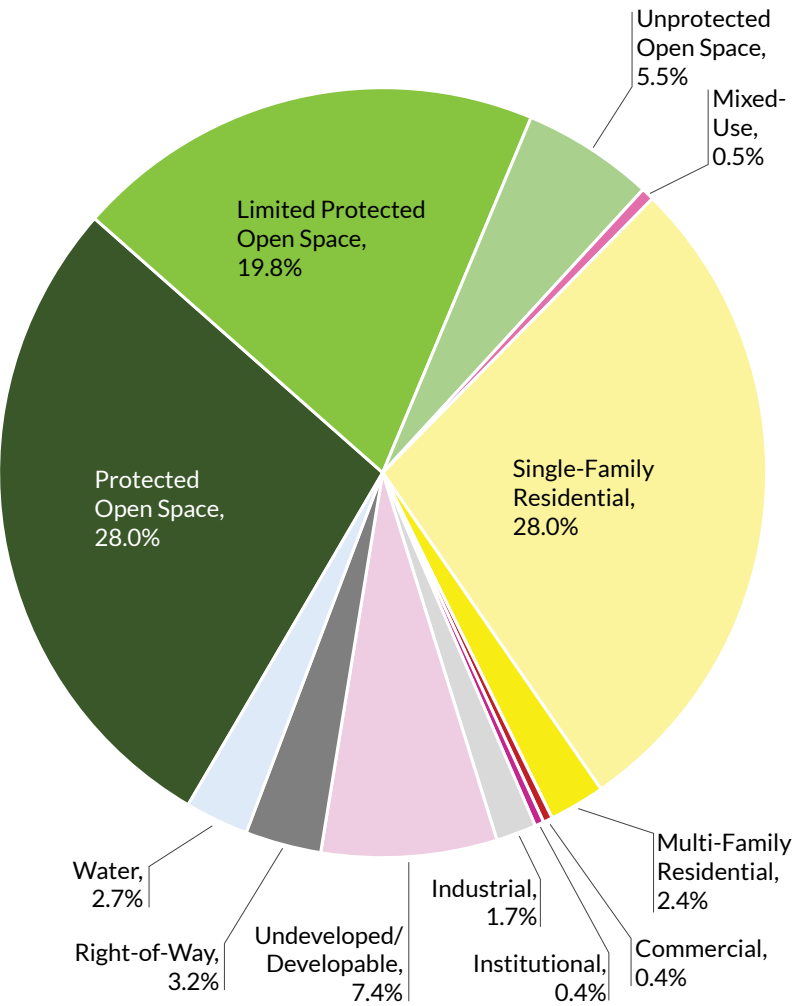
Stow also faces growing needs for facility maintenance. These challenges, exemplified by the Randall Library project’s higher-than-expected costs, emphasize the need for comprehensive studies and community-wide prioritization of municipal facilities projects. Stow’s participation in the Nashoba Regional School District involves significant funding for a much-needed new high school building, even amidst declining enrollments. In addition to maintenance needs, there are opportunities for more recreation facilities in Stow, including family-friendly bike infrastructure, pickleball courts, a gym, and a swimming pool. Increases or additions in these facilities will likely require greater municipal staffing as well.



# LAND USE & ZONING

The Town of Stow aims to maintain a One-Third Land Use Pattern by maintaining one-third of its land as protected open space, one-third as developed areas, and one-third as undeveloped areas. So far, this goal has been met since these ratios are reflected in the Town’s land use.

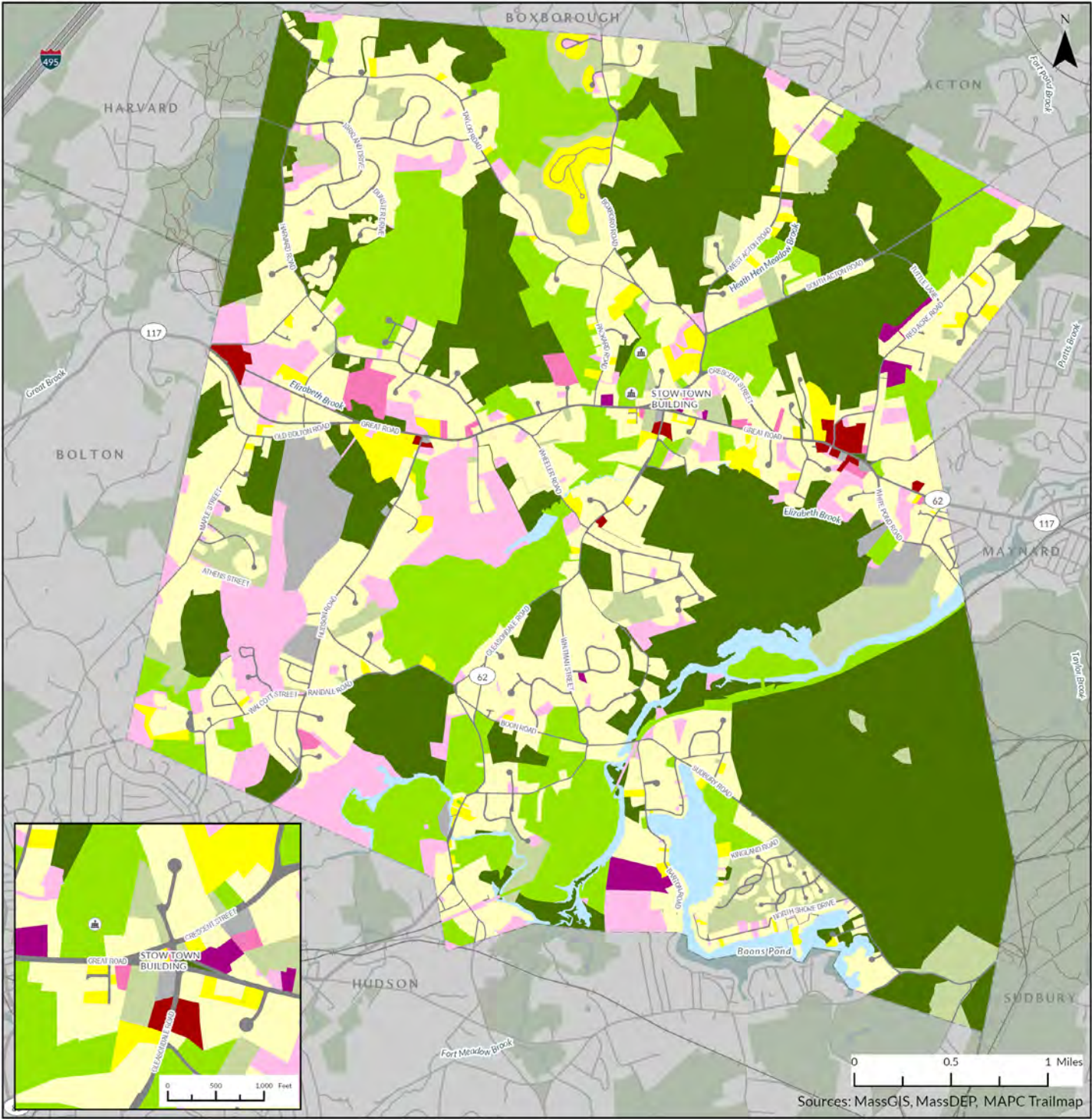
LAND USE



Source: MassGIS Data: Property Tax Parcel

TOWN OF STOW - LAND USE  
Prepared by JM Goldson LLC

J M GOLDSON



Schools

- |                              |               |
|------------------------------|---------------|
| Protected Open Space         | Commercial    |
| Limited Protected Open Space | Institutional |
| Unprotected Open Space       | Industrial    |
| Mixed Use                    | Undeveloped   |
| Residential Single-Family    | Right of Way  |
| Residential Multi-Family     | Water         |



Nearly all of the development since 2001 has happened in the single-family-oriented Residential district.<sup>34</sup>

Stow has seven zoning districts and five overlay zoning districts. Almost 60 percent of Stow’s total area is zoned as Residential, which permits mainly land- and transportation-intensive single-family housing.

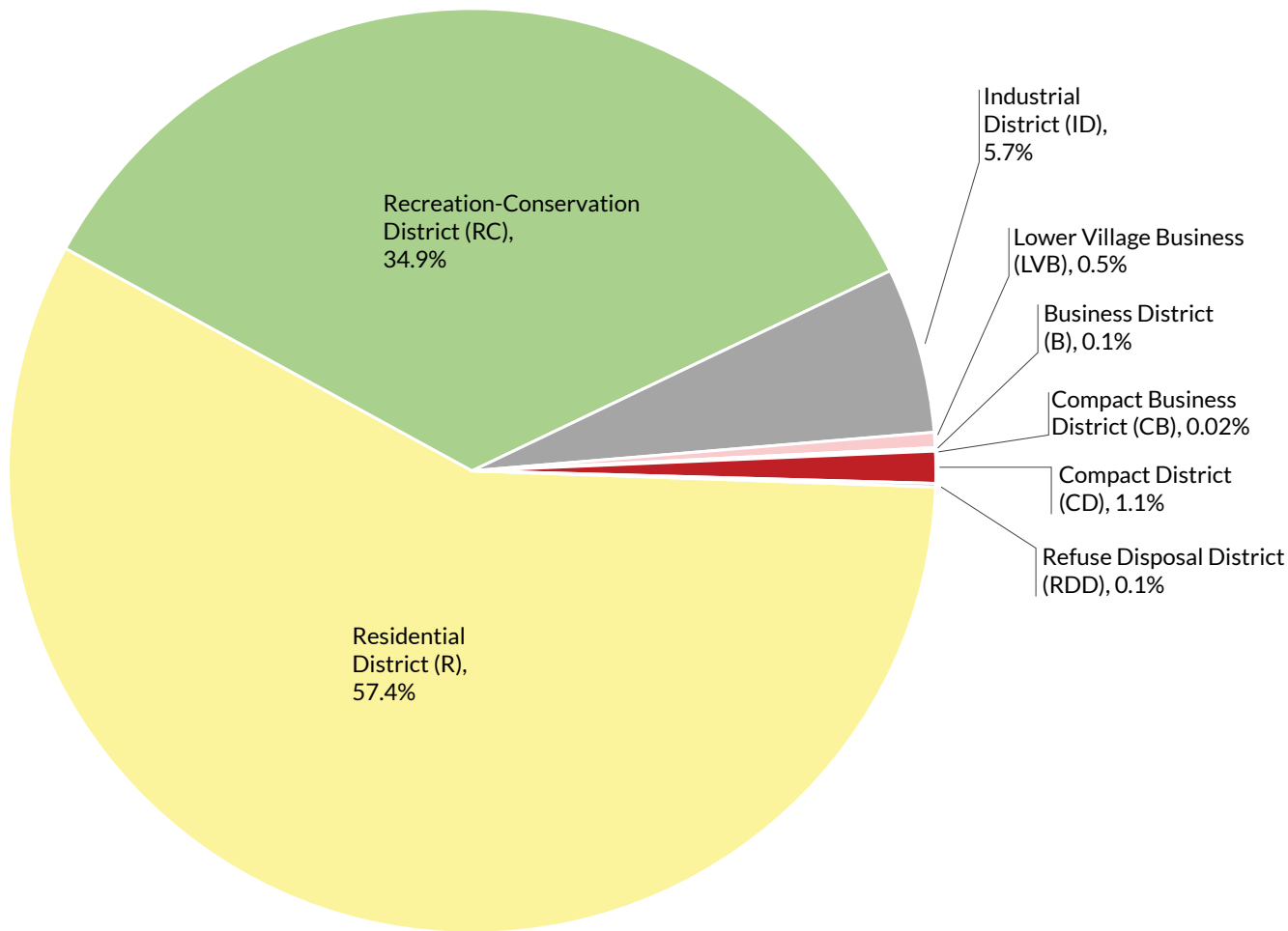
The Town is anticipating the addition of nearly 190 housing units through the Residences at Stow Acres development project. The vast majority of these would be single-family homes, with around 40 rental cottages and 25 age-restricted rental units.<sup>33</sup>

In The Cottages at Wandering Pond, the Town is expecting to see the development of 140 age-targeted homes.

Stow has seen slow, careful zoning reform in recent years.

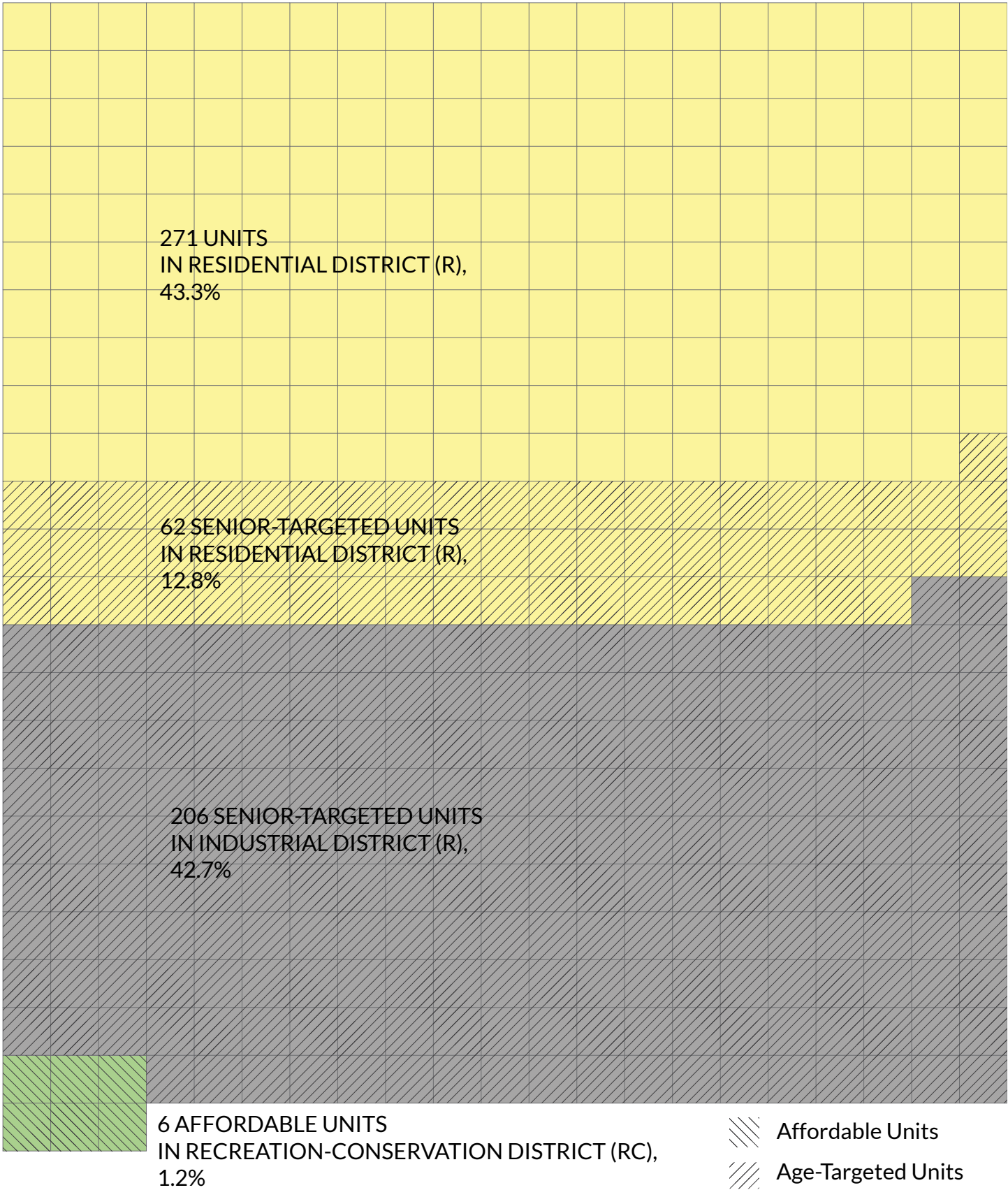
In addition to creating the Lower Village Business District, which provides opportunities for mixed-use development, the Town has worked to revise the Active Adult Neighborhood bylaw in order to better meet Town goals for housing diversity and protected open space.

ZONING



Source: MassGIS Data: Property Tax Parcel

HOUSING DEVELOPMENT PER ZONING DISTRICT SINCE 2010







Constructions in Derby Woods  
Photo Credit: Kathy Sferra

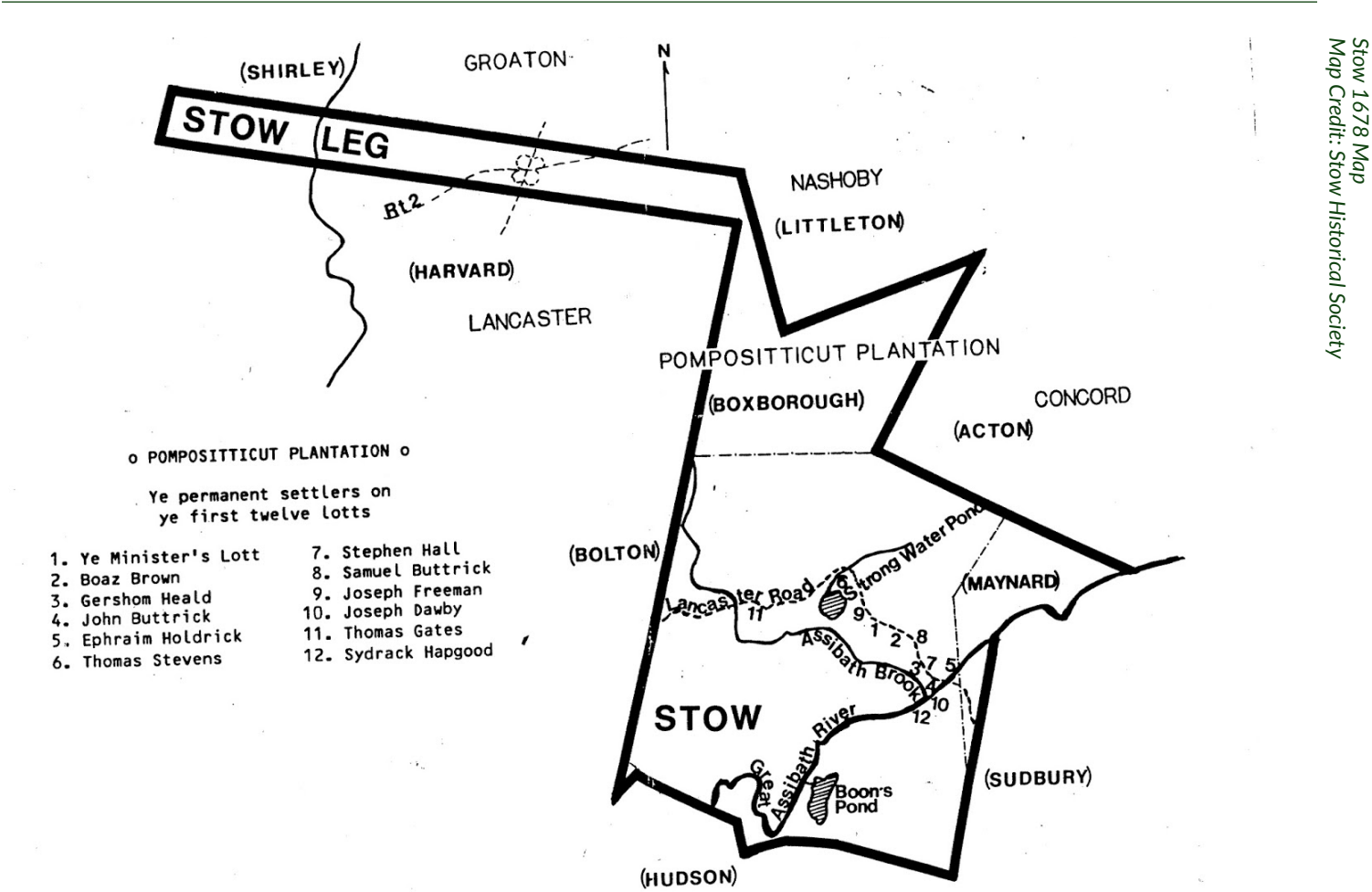
## ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Stow grapples with the delicate balance between land conservation and economic development, navigating the identification of target growth areas while striving for the 1/3 Land Use Pattern goal. The absence of public water or sewer infrastructure hinders sustainable development and housing opportunities, urging the exploration of solutions to foster equitable and ecological growth. Engaging residents in planning conversations is a strength of the community, and leveraging this community engagement is pivotal for effective land use and zoning strategies. The Town’s Planning Staff overseeing transportation projects presents an advantage in aligning these projects with land use planning, though adds to the small department’s workload.

While community outreach efforts are a strength, an opportunity lies in the potential for collaboration with neighboring municipalities to plan for Stow’s regional economic position. Securing funding for housing projects remains a challenge. Trends highlight increasing tension between older and newer residents, coupled with an ongoing shift from volunteer boards to professional staff over the past 15 years. Recognizing the opportunity to professionalize boards, Stow faces the task of navigating these issues and capitalizing on its strengths to guide future planning processes effectively.



# LOCAL PLANNING STUDIES & PLANS



2015 Town of Stow, "Energy Reduction Plan"

2016 Stow Municipal Affordable Housing Trust, Metro West Collaborative Development, "2016 Housing Production Plan Town of Stow"

2017 Metropolitan Area Planning Council, "MAGIC Climate Change Resiliency Plan", Part 1, Part 2

2018 Geosyntec Consultants, "Community Resilience Building Workshop Summary of Findings"

2019 Town of Stow, "Stow Acres", (Ongoing)

2021 Town of Stow, "Master Academy Proposal at former Bose Site"

2022 Town of Stow, "Draft Action Plan for MBTA Communities"

2022 Town of Stow, "Hazard Mitigation Plan Update"

2022 Brown and Caldwell, "Lake Boon Evaluation"

2022 Town of Stow, "Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Program Action Update"

2023 Town of Stow, "Development Constraints and Limitations Draft"

2023 Town of Stow, "Draft Stow Climate Action Plan"

2023 Town of Stow, "Draft Stow Open Space and Recreation Plan Update", Part 1, Part 2, Part 3

2023 Town of Stow, "Stow Housing Needs Assessment Draft"



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

**Comprehensive Plan Committee**

Charles Hartford, At-Large, Chair

Cortni Frecha, Conservation Commission

Dan Petersen, Finance Committee

Hector Constantzos, Select Board

Lori Clark, Planning Board

Marcia Rising, Board of Health

Laurie Burnett, At-Large

**Planning Board**

Lori Clark, Chair

Margaret Costello

Nancy Arsenault

Karen Kelleher

John Colonna-Romano

Debbie Woods

**Select Board**

Cortni Frecha, Chair

Megan Birch-McMichael

Ingeborg Hegemann Clark

Hector Constantzos

John “JT” Toole

**Planning Department**

Valerie Oorthuys, AICP, Planning Director

Michael Slagle, Land Use Planner/GIS Administrator

**Prepared by the Consultant Team at JM Goldson, LLC**

Jenn Goldson, AICP, Project Manager

Kadineyse Paz, Assistant Project Manager

Austin Smith, Primary Project Assistant

Flavio Vila Skrzypek, MCP

Elana Zabar, CNU-A

Noah Harper, MCP

Brenna Trollinger, MUP

Maya Kansky

# ENDNOTES

1 Massachusetts Department of Transportation, “Socio-Economic Projections for 2023 Regional Transportation Plans,” 2023, Massachusetts Department of Transportation, <https://www.mass.gov/doc/projections-final-for-2023-rtps/download>

2 University of Massachusetts Donahue Institute, “Massachusetts Population Projections,” 2022, University of Massachusetts Donahue Institute, <https://donahue.umass.edu//business-groups/economic-public-policy-research/massachusetts-population-estimates-program/population-projections>

3 United States Census Bureau, “Decennial Census Tables T80, T72, T155, T68, H1,” 2020, United States Census Bureau, <https://data.census.gov/>

4 United States Census Bureau, “American Community Survey 2018-2022 Table B25010,” 2023, United States Census Bureau, <https://data.census.gov>

5 United States Census Bureau, “American Community Survey 2018-2022 Table A10008,” 2023, United States Census Bureau, <https://data.census.gov>

6 United States Census Bureau, “Decennial Census Table T003,” 2020, United States Census Bureau, <https://data.census.gov>

7 For more information, see Dain, A. (2023, November). Exclusionary by Design: An Investigation of Zoning’s Use as a Tool of Race, Class, and Family Exclusion in Boston’s Suburbs, 1920 to Today. Boston Indicators.

8 United States Census Bureau, “American Community Survey 2018-2022 Table A14015,” 2023, United States Census Bureau, <https://data.census.gov>

9 United States Census Bureau, “American Community Survey 2018-2022 Table B25034,” 2023, United States Census Bureau, <https://data.census.gov>

10 United States Census Bureau, “American Community Survey 2018-2022 Table B25024,” 2023, United States Census Bureau, <https://data.census.gov>

11 Massachusetts Association of Realtors, “Data & Tools,” <https://www.marealtor.com/market-data/#1707842527413-f963982b-d0af>

12 Massachusetts Division of Local Services, “Tax Levy by Class,” Massachusetts Department of Revenue, <https://dls.gateway.dor.state.ma.us/reports/rdPage.aspx?rdReport=Dashboard.TrendAnalysisReports.TaxLevyByClass>

13 Ibid.

14 United States Census Bureau, “OnTheMap,” 2023, United States Census Bureau, <https://onthemap.ces.census.gov/>

15 United States Census Bureau, “American Community Survey 2018-2022 Table A09005,” 2023, United States Census Bureau, <https://data.census.gov>

16 United States Census Bureau, “American Community Survey 2018-2022 Table A09001,” 2023, United States Census Bureau, <https://data.census.gov>

17 Massachusetts Department of Transportation, “IMPACT Home,” Massachusetts Department of Transportation, <https://apps.impact.dot.state.ma.us/cdp/home>

18 Interview, Town of Stow.

19 Ibid.

20 Nipmuc Indian Development Corporation, “Our Past,” <https://nippi.org/our-past/>

21 Ibid.

22 Massachusetts Historical Commission, “MACRIS: Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System,” 2023, <https://mhc-macris.net/>

23 Community Preservation Coalition, “CPA Projects Database,” <https://www.communitypreservation.org/databank/projectsdatabase/access>

24 Stow Historical Society, “Rediscover Mapledale,” <https://sites.google.com/view/rediscovermapledale/home>

25 Native Land Conservancy, <https://www.nativelandconservancy.org/>

26 Interview, Town of Stow.

27 MassGIS (Bureau of Geographic Information), “MassGIS Data: BioMap: The Future of Conservation,” <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/massgis-data-biomap-the-future-of-conservation>, Accessed November 2023

28 MassGIS (Bureau of Geographic Information), “MassGIS Data: FEMA National Flood Hazard Layer,” <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/massgis-data-fema-national-flood-hazard-layer>, Accessed November 2023

29 Town of Stow, “2022 MVP Summary,” [https://www.stow-ma.gov/sites/g/files/vyhlf1286/f/uploads/2022\\_05\\_12\\_mvp\\_summary.pdf](https://www.stow-ma.gov/sites/g/files/vyhlf1286/f/uploads/2022_05_12_mvp_summary.pdf), accessed December 2023.

30 Town of Stow, “North Course Climate Resilience Master Planning,” <https://www.stow-ma.gov/stow-acres-open-space-recreation-and-housing-page/pages/north-course-climate-resilience-master>

31 Interview, Town of Stow.

32 Massachusetts Department of Education, “School and District Profiles,” <https://profiles.doe.mass.edu/general/general.aspx>

33 MassGIS (Bureau of Geographic Information), “MassGIS Data: Property Tax Parcels,” <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/massgis-data-property-tax-parcels>, Accessed November 2023

34 Town of Stow.