

## **Goals of the June 2001**

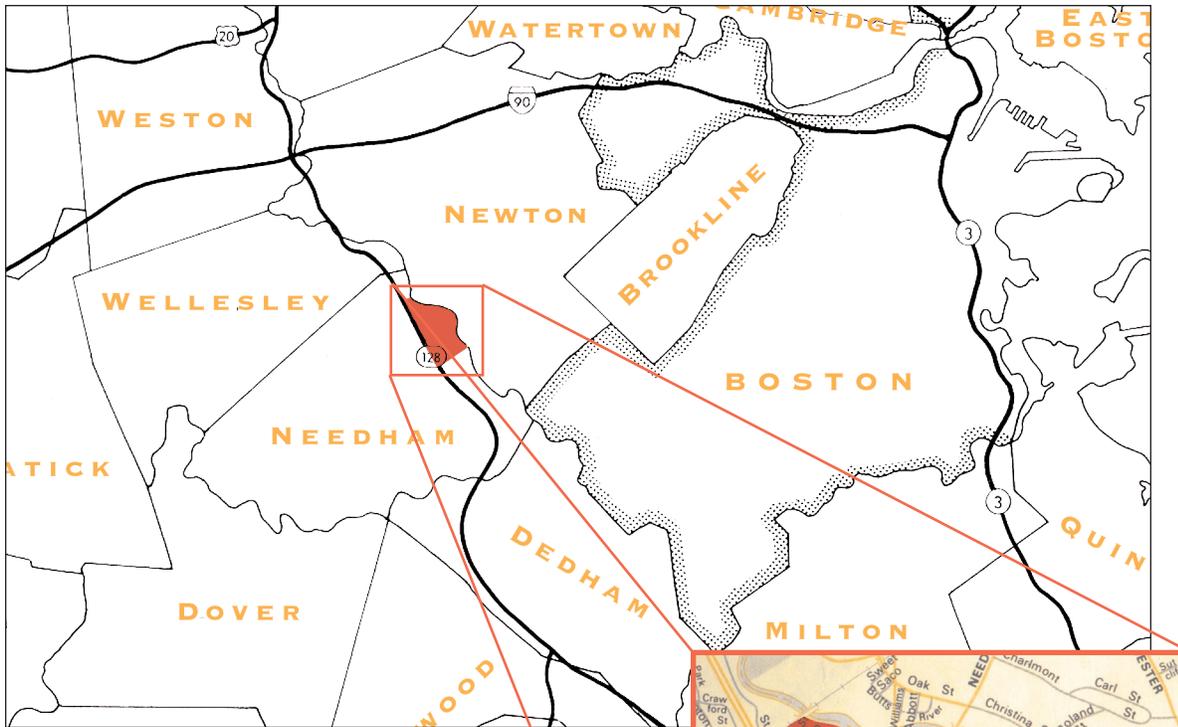
### **New England Business Center, Highland Avenue Corridor, and Wexford/Charles Street Industrial District Plan**

Adopted by the Planning Board on December 11, 2001

In an era of increasing employer, consumer and household mobility, Needham has emerged as a community of choice for families and businesses in the Boston metropolitan region. The town's location, welcoming residential neighborhoods, low commercial tax rates, and pleasant green spaces have made it a highly desirable place to live and work. As a result, the town has experienced increasing development pressure over the past decade. Current projections suggest that the town's population will increase by ten percent from 1990 to 2020; employment is projected to rise by nearly twelve percent over the same period.

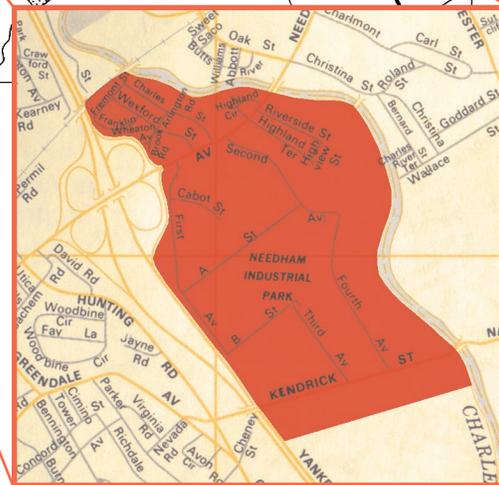
## 1 Introduction





**SITE LOCATION**

As a largely residential community, Needham relies on a limited number of commercial areas for its nonresidential tax revenue. Among the most important of these is the New England Business Center/ Highland Avenue Corridor/ Wexford Charles Street Industrial District, located on the eastern edge of town between the Charles River and Route 128. The 215-acre site comprises a mix of industrial, office, and retail uses; it represents 8 percent of the town's total assessed valuation and yields approximately 12 percent of all property tax revenue. Managing growth in this emerging office district is essential, as the pace of development threatens to overwhelm the site's capacity for traffic, parking and infrastructure.



The need for coordinated and comprehensive planning is given added urgency by the convergence of residential neighborhoods, open space, industrial, commercial and office uses in a compact space that also serves as a major thoroughfare and key entryway to the town.

The overarching goal of the plan is to unlock the site's economic potential and create significant benefits for town residents, business and property owners, and employees. At the same time, the plan seeks to control the impact of development on adjacent neighborhoods and to address increasing regional traffic on major roadways. To achieve this, the plan and zoning are designed to:

- give the town greater control over development;
- create new funding to help resolve long-standing traffic problems;
- provide incentives for the private sector to create public benefits;
- improve environmental quality;
- create an attractive gateway to the town; and
- develop a unified sense of character for each of the districts and sub-areas within the site.

## 2 Project goals

### **Zoning**

The zoning plan should first and foremost give the town more control over future development. To achieve this, the Planning Board should be given greater authority to evaluate development applications based on potential impacts and benefits. The

zoning should also create a dedicated funding source to improve traffic conditions in and around the site.

The zoning should establish new regulations for land use, density, site and building design that will contribute to

creating the desired build-out and associated infrastructure improvements over time. In order to trigger redevelopment of existing properties, the zoning should create opportunities to increase property values significantly through changes in land use and density. The zoning should also create incentives for parcel assembly, particularly in the Wexford/ Charles Street district.

In addition to governing density and land use, the zoning should reflect the desired scale and character of new development. Building height, massing, setbacks, parking regulations, and open space requirements should be designed to encourage a pedestrian-friendly environment with a coherent sense of identity and character. The zoning should include sufficient incentives for granting public roadway and open space easements on private property, since many of the potential public realm improvements are contingent on cooperation with private landowners.

### **Traffic**

The core traffic objective is to ensure that new development is accompanied by traffic improvements that increase the accessibility of business properties while relieving the impacts presently affecting residential neighborhoods. Recognizing the impact of development in the study area on adjacent neighborhoods, the plan seeks to provide a strategy and financing mechanism for both site-based and neighborhood improvements.

The plan should also encourage continued and increased use of traffic-demand-management measures such as carpools, transit passes, and shuttle buses. Over a ten-year period, efforts should be made to increase the public transit mode share to ten percent of all trips.

### **Street Improvements**

Street improvements are essential to creating a more attractive visual environment and a safer, more comfortable experience for drivers, pedes-



trians, and cyclists. Street improvements should help to create a stronger sense of place and orientation through the treatment of sidewalks, crosswalks, landscaping and lighting. The plan should support a street layout that contributes to improved vehicle, pedestrian and bicycle access through the re-orientation of existing streets and the addition of new streets. The new street network should provide better access to the river and proposed open spaces. Existing and new streets should be designed to create a hierarchy of regional roads, frontage roads, secondary roads, and boulevards that give a

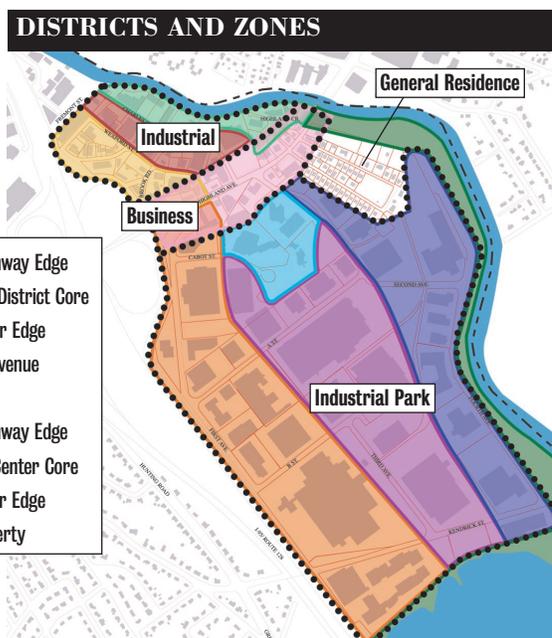


STREETSCAPE IMPROVEMENTS CAN CONTRIBUTE TO A MORE ATTRACTIVE ENVIRONMENT THROUGHOUT THE PROJECT AREA.

greater sense of character and identity to each of the sub-areas within the site. Wherever possible, improvements in existing streets should be achieved within the existing rights-of-way. New streets should follow existing property lines or split properties into usable parcels to retain land values.

### Urban and Landscape Design

The design of buildings, lots, streets, and open spaces should contribute to defining three core districts and smaller sub-areas within the site. Each of these districts and sub-areas has unique characteristics and development opportunities, and should be treated accordingly. At the same



time, the study area as a whole should retain a unity and continuity of design. The key design goals for the districts and sub-areas follow.

### DISTRICT I: NEW ENGLAND BUSINESS CENTER

- Create a high-quality office park that meets the space and infrastructure needs of the regional office market.
- Create a “campus-like” character for the district through the design of buildings, streets and public spaces.
- Increase the amount of pervious surface and green space throughout the district.
- Improve pedestrian access and views to the Charles River and Cutler Lake.
- Design streets and open spaces to create a “sense of address” in each of the sub-areas:



along Route 128, in the center of the site, and along the river.

- Locate parking garages on the interior of blocks and away from public open spaces.
- Design sidewalks, landscaping, lighting, signage, and street furnishings to create a unified sense of character and define a clear hierarchy of streets throughout the district.

### SUB-AREA 1A: SOUTH HIGHWAY EDGE

- Create a consistent edge to the district that provides an attractive face to Route 128.
- Permit taller buildings with massing and height appropriate to the scale of the highway.
- Create spaces between buildings that allow views into the site from Route 128.

### SUB-AREA 1B: BUSINESS CENTER CORE

- Develop a new gateway entrance to the business center from Kendrick Street.
- Improve north-south and east-west connections through the site.
- Create a campus-like environment with mid-



THIRD AVENUE COULD BECOME A TREE-LINED BOULEVARD, CREATING A NEW GATEWAY TO THE BUSINESS CENTER FROM KENDRICK ST.

rise buildings framing streets and open spaces.

- Create a signature open space at the heart of the business center.
- Create smaller courtyards to the rear of buildings.

### SUB-AREA 1C: SOUTH RIVER EDGE

- Develop a permeable edge to the river with increased vehicle and pedestrian connections.
- Improve the existing walking path along the river and create more visible access points.
- Develop new playing fields adjacent to the river for use by workers and residents.
- Reduce the height and massing of buildings adjacent to the river and residential neighborhood.
- Encourage the creation of small courtyards fronting the river edge.

### SUB-AREA 1D: HILLSIDE

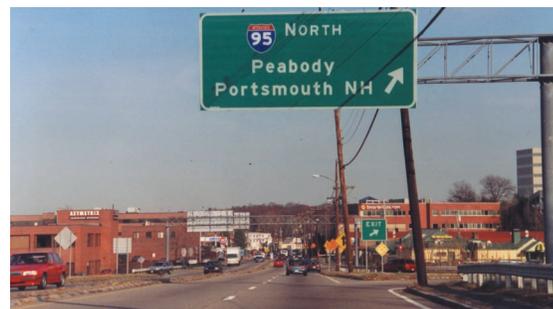
- Improve vehicle and pedestrian access to the hillside.
- Create a new park and overlook on the south side of the hill to take advantage of the excellent views.

### DISTRICT 2: HIGHLAND AVENUE CORRIDOR

- Create a safe and pedestrian-accessible street with a mix of commercial uses including



HIGHLAND AVENUE IS A MAJOR COMMERCIAL CORRIDOR THAT SERVES BOTH THE BUSINESS CENTER AND THE REGION.



office, retail, services, and restaurants.

- Maintain low- and mid-rise buildings along most of the avenue.
- Create larger “gateway” buildings adjacent to the river and the highway.
- Encourage uses that serve local workers and residents.
- Encourage active ground floor uses (e.g., retail, restaurants, cafes)
- Consolidate curb cuts to reduce traffic conflicts.
- Locate surface and structured parking behind buildings where possible.
- Use sidewalks, landscaping, lighting, signage, and street furnishings to create a unified and visually appealing streetscape.

### DISTRICT 3: WEXFORD/ CHARLES STREET

#### INDUSTRIAL DISTRICT

- Create incentives to develop a lively and walkable district with a mix of uses including office, retail, light manufacturing, services, restaurants, and multifamily housing.
- Create a pedestrian character for the district with buildings that line the sidewalks and



NEW DEVELOPMENT IN THE WEXFORD/CHARLES STREET DISTRICT SHOULD INCLUDE A VARIETY OF USES, SUCH AS OFFICES, STORES, RESTAURANTS AND HOUSING.

include active ground-floor uses.

- Encourage uses that serve local workers and residents.
- Improve access and views to the Charles River.
- Create small informal open spaces linked to the river.
- Improve traffic circulation patterns.
- Use sidewalks, landscaping, lighting, signage, and street furnishings to create a unified streetscape and define the public right-of-way.



PARKING LOTS ALONG THE CHARLES COULD BE TRANSFORMED INTO A NEW PUBLIC PATHWAY NORTH OF HIGHLAND AVENUE.

### SUB-AREA 3A: NORTH HIGHWAY EDGE

- Create a consistent edge to the district that provides an attractive face to Route 128.
- Permit taller buildings with massing and height appropriate to the scale of the highway.

### SUB-AREA 3B: INDUSTRIAL DISTRICT CORE

- Improve entrances from Highland Avenue.
- Create a small park at the heart of the district.

### SUB-AREA 3C: NORTH RIVER EDGE

- Encourage high-quality residential development along the river edge, including affordable housing.
- Develop a new public pathway along the river with access for pedestrians and cyclists.
- Develop a permeable building edge adjacent to the river, with multiple access points for pedestrians.



### RIVER EDGE AND CUTLER LAKE

- Create a maintenance fund for walking paths and open spaces.
- Maintain the existing natural setting of the river's edge and preserve the riparian corridor.
- Create well-marked entrances to walking paths.
- Create new river overlooks.
- Install appropriate directional signage.
- Develop recreational amenities along the river (e.g., canoe and kayak rental).

THE EXISTING M.D.C. WALKING TRAIL IS A VALUABLE AMENITY FOR WORKERS AND TOWN RESIDENTS.