

Natick 360

Honoring Our Past. Planning Our Future.



Natick Value and Vision Statements Proposed Draft, Ver. 2, December 5, 2006

Strategic Planning Overview

Natick, along with many other communities in the region, faces serious challenges regarding growth, development and finance. The future will continue to bring new proposals for growth and development, and Natick will face difficult decisions about the types and level of municipal services offered under increasing financial constraints.

Developing a long-range strategic plan through broad participation of community members, and under the authority of elected and appointed boards, will help Natick prioritize investment of limited resources in the context of a long-range vision for the town. It will also help increase civic participation in Natick's local government, and identify outside funding sources to leverage tax dollars.

Natick 360 is the Town of Natick's long-range strategic planning process. It is sponsored by, and run under the authority of, the Town's Board of Selectmen, Planning Board, Finance Committee, Conservation Commission and School Committee. In April 2006, Town Meeting appropriated funds to implement the *Natick 360* process. These funds have been supplemented by private donations from generous corporate sponsors.¹

Five major benefits accrue to the Town of Natick through this planning process. The *Natick 360* planning process will:

- Assemble a rich source of information about the Town's history and current condition;
- Identify what residents value in the community and their hopes for the future;
- Provide information to help boards set priorities and advance collaboration, identifying areas for shared resources and complementary efforts;
- Promote Natick as a desirable community for investment and identify areas of leverage to attract additional resources (businesses, investors, outside funding); and
- Increase public participation and develop a pool of future civic leaders.

The *Natick 360* planning process will be developed over 16 months. The final plan document, including specific actions and estimated costs, will be submitted for approval at Fall Town Meeting in October 2007. The sponsoring boards may call for a committee to be formed to review progress against the Strategic Plan halfway through the projected five-year implementation period.

The *Natick 360* planning process is managed by the Strategic Planning Oversight Committee (SPOC). The nine members of the oversight committee, made up of one designee from each of the sponsoring boards and 4 members of the community-at-large, are:

¹ As of publication of this document, corporate sponsors for *Natick 360* are Middlesex Savings Bank, Natick Federal Savings Bank, Eastern Bank, and WebReply, Inc.

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- Rosemary Driscoll, designee of the Natick School Committee
- Terri Evans, community-at-large
- Matthew Gardner, designee of the Conservation Commission
- John Heerwagen, community-at-large
- David Parish, Co-Chair, designee of the Board of Selectmen
- George Richards, designee of the Planning Board
- Craig Ross, Co-Chair, designee of the Finance Committee
- Harlee Strauss, community-at-large
- Fred Witte, community-at-large

The SPOC is charged with managing the planning process, recommending professional consultants and overseeing their work on the project, engaging the public to participate in the process, and coordinating involvement by the sponsoring boards. The SPOC is only a facilitation committee. Final authority for all outcomes of the process rests with the sponsoring boards and with Town Meeting.

The *Natick 360* planning process has four phases:

- Phase I – Our Community Yesterday and Today
- Phase II – Our Shared Vision for the Future
- Phase III – Our Strategic Options
- Phase IV – Our Strategic Choices

Phase I (June-September 2006) produced a report that describes Natick's history and the current conditions in the community. This report describes the baseline conditions in Natick that should be recognized in planning for the future.

Phase II (October-December of 2006) focuses on current attitudes and future hopes: developing a set of shared visions and values for the Natick community. The cornerstone of the visioning process was the "Vision for the Future Weekend" on October 27-29, 2006. During the weekend, members of the public met with skilled facilitators to discuss current community values and hopes for the future. This information, and information drawn from focus groups, on-going surveys, community meetings and meeting with the sponsoring board and committees, has been consolidated in this Values and Vision report.

During Phase III, the elected and appointed boards in Natick will work with experts to develop a number of strategic options – different scenarios for establishing policies or programs that could be implemented in each strategic focus area. The various strategic options will be presented in a report "Natick: Our Strategic Options" in April 2007.

Finally, in Phase IV, the public will be invited to prioritize the various strategic options that will shape Natick's future. The results of these community meetings will be tested by a scientific sample survey of the community at large.

The final Strategic Plan will be created by the sponsoring boards, after consideration of the results of the Phase IV priorities and the scientific sample survey. The final strategic plan report will be submitted for approval by Town Meeting in the fall of 2007.

Introduction to Natick's Vision for the Future

Some communities allow the future to happen to them. Successful communities recognize the future is something they can create. These communities take the time to produce a vision of the future they desire and employ a process that helps them achieve their goals.

The Community Vision and Strategic Planning Handbook
National Civic League, 2000

Creating Vision and Value Statements

Good strategic plans are built upon a clear understanding of the desired end goals. Phase II of *Natick 360* is designed to produce a community-wide vision for the future of Natick.

In order to gather information from the public to create Natick's vision for the future, *Natick 360* conducted a "Vision for the Future Weekend²" event on October 27-29, 2006 at Wilson Middle School. A total of 327 citizens participated during the weekend event, speaking to facilitators about what they valued about Natick and their hopes and dreams for the future of the community.

In addition, *Natick 360* offered a series of surveys to businesses, community organizations and citizens, both in paper form and on-line at the *Natick 360* website (www.natick360.org). More than 200 survey responses were received. In total, more than 500 residents participated in creating the following set of value and vision statements.

Community input was consolidated by the strategic planning consultants into a series of categorized lists. The sponsoring boards for *Natick 360*, as well as a group of volunteers from the public, then went through the consolidated list of public input and identified area of consensus.

The results of the work sessions with the public and the sponsoring boards were then further consolidated into the vision and value statements included in this document.

The Structure of Vision and Value Statements

Although distinctions between value and vision may be subtle, the *Natick 360* process has defined a value as a current attribute of Natick that people treasure and hope to preserve. A vision is a hoped-for future attribute of Natick that may or may not exist today.

The vision and value statements are crafted as complete sentences that can be independently evaluated. Although consolidating a series of complex ideas expressed by more than 500 people into a simple set of sentences is difficult, we believe these statements capture the essence of what was communicated by the public and the sponsoring boards. Recognizing the benefit of examples and exposition, we have included a section that contains additional detail for each vision and value statement.

² Sponsors for the Vision for the Future Weekend included the *Natick 360* sponsors (Middlesex Savings Bank, Natick Federal Savings Bank, Eastern Bank, and WebReply, Inc.) and additional support from Middlesex Savings Bank, Fair & Yeager Insurance Company, The Frame Shop and Gallery, The Center for Arts in Natick (FCAN), The Walnut Hill School, Belkin Lookout Farm, Starbucks Coffee, Roche Brothers, Stop and Shop, BJ's Wholesale Club, and Entenmann's Outlet Store.

Putting Vision and Value Statements to Work

Vision and value statements are the foundation of our strategic planning effort. They provide a stable point of reference and a test for future actions.

Vision statements may appear unrealistic or contradictory. However, we are often guided by goals that may initially appear unachievable. If a family dreams of sending its children to college without a clear understanding of how they will afford the expense, their hopes and dreams for their children are not invalid.

Since vision and value statements are a point of reference, they do not prescribe specific actions. Instead, the vision and value statements describe outcomes which may result from actions taken. The next phase of the planning process, Phase III, Natick: Our Strategic Options will outline a series of actions that might be taken to address Natick's vision for the future.

Phase III of the planning process will create a series of options: different actions that the town may take to move it closer toward its future vision, while preserving its current values.

The actions proposed in Phase III need not be the responsibility of Town government alone, nor do they need to be achieved all at the same time. By communicating a clear vision, Natick may attract outside resources that share in the common vision for the future. Phase IV of the Natick strategic planning process will allow for the prioritization and phased implementation of desired actions.

Natick residents like Natick. The town is not divided by competing factions or controversy; instead, residents generally agree about their values and hopes for the future. For many residents, a desirable future would simply be an extension of the present. Natick's greatest challenge for the future may be to build effectively upon current success.

Executive Summary

A summary of Natick's Vision and Value Statements follows. More detail for each statement is provided in the next sections.

As citizens of Natick, we value:

- Natick's tradition of volunteerism, and its contribution to a vibrant community;
- Natick's "small town" sense of community;
- That Natick is a community of communities, with varied neighborhoods and villages and extensive social networks that create a multitude of connections among citizens;
- That Natick is a safe community;
- Natick's abundant and diverse open spaces and natural resources;
- The diversity of Natick's citizens;
- That Natick is affordable for people of diverse economic circumstances;
- High quality education for our children and continuing educational opportunities for all;
- Natick's clean water resulting from careful stewardship of our aquifer;
- A vibrant Natick Center, a focal point of our community;
- Our abundance of cultural, recreational, and educational facilities and services that contribute to our high quality of life;
- A variety of businesses that create a diversity of jobs and provide support to the community in many ways;
- Our location in the region, with access to major transportation routes, mass transit, and proximity to Boston; and,
- Our community history, heritage, and traditions.

As citizens of Natick, we aspire to create a future in which:

- Natick is a socially and economically diverse community, home to a mix of businesses that provide jobs to people with a wide range of skills;
- Natick's natural resources, including rivers, lakes, ponds, wetlands, forests and wildlife habitat, are preserved and accessible to the community;
- Natick is a community of neighborhoods and districts with distinct identities, connected by a network of sidewalks, walking trails, bike paths, and public transit;
- Natick's buildings and infrastructure are environmentally responsible and efficient and promote good health; they are designed to fulfill their function to the satisfaction of the community, and are maintained in good order;
- Natick is a regional destination for recreational, social, cultural, and educational activities for all age groups;
- Natick Center is the vibrant core of the community, a unique destination for commerce, community and culture, day and night;
- Natick's schools are among the best;
- Natick's Town government is representative of the diverse population, is fiscally sound, transparent in its governing practices, and communicates effectively with the public;
- Citizens are knowledgeable about, and actively participate in, Natick's volunteer-based local government and its many service and social organizations;
- Natick is a leader in developing and encouraging solutions to regional issues that increase efficiencies and enhance the quality of life;
- Natick is a healthy community with clean land, water and air and affordable access to affordable local healthcare services; and,
- Natick's government and citizens plan well for the future.

Value Statements in Detail

As citizens of Natick, we value Natick's tradition of volunteerism, and its contribution to a vibrant community.

Natick's government and many service and social organizations function through the efforts of many volunteers. Natick citizens point to the high level of involvement by volunteers as a key contributor to Natick's sense of community and small-town feel.

Natick's volunteer-based, representative Town Meeting form of government is an effective framework for residents to address and resolve issues facing the Town. It instills a sense of community and ownership, with opportunities for all residents, regardless of background, to engage each other with respect, and to affect issues that concern them. The Town Meeting form of government helps make Natick's government open, accessible, accountable and representative.

As citizens of Natick, we value Natick's "small town" sense of community.

Many citizens point to Natick's "small town" feel as something very special. The small town feel may mean different things to different people, but in general people discussed the enjoyment of running into friendly faces around town, feeling safe, knowing local business owners, having access to local government, and the relatively small scale of the community.

Many citizens felt that the small town feel resulted from interconnections throughout all aspects of Town life. Natick citizens are seen as nice and friendly, and connect with each other across a wide spectrum of backgrounds through the Town's volunteer-based representative government, schools and educational programs, events and day-to-day activities.

As Citizens of Natick, we value Natick as a community of communities, with varied neighborhoods and villages and extensive social networks that create a multitude of connections among citizens.

Natick residents value living in identifiable, cohesive neighborhoods with distinct identities. These neighborhoods are the basis for Town organization, scaled to fit the needs of children and families, with access to open space and recreational facilities throughout the community.

In addition to clearly identified residential neighborhoods, Natick has well defined commercial districts and an historic downtown. People expressed interest in finding more ways to connect the distinct neighborhoods, districts, and villages of Natick with physical infrastructure, transit and social networks.

As citizens of Natick, we value that Natick is a safe community.

Natick is a safe community, where crime is rare and adults feel their children are safe playing in their neighborhoods.

As citizens of Natick, we value Natick's abundant and diverse open spaces and natural resources.

Natick residents value abundant open spaces reflecting its diverse geography, with clean-water lakes, rivers, ponds, wetlands, wildlife habitat, trees, forests, open fields, farms and parks. Residents enjoy these spaces in a variety of ways ranging from individual meditation to family outings to organized recreational activities.

As citizens of Natick, we value the diversity of Natick's citizens.

Citizens clearly identify the diversity of Natick's citizenry as a core strength. Natick residents accept and value differences among themselves in terms of socio-economic position, age, political outlook, religion, national origin, culture, ethnicity and race, regardless whether they are Natick natives, long-term residents or newcomers. Interconnections among people of different backgrounds strengthen the Town's social, governmental, economic and business environments.

As citizens of Natick, we value that Natick is affordable for people of diverse economic circumstances.

Natick residents value that the town is affordable across a wide range of income levels. Natick's affordability helps to preserve its socio-economic diversity. A large percentage of residents perceive that this aspect of Natick is at risk, as long-time residents are priced out of the community due to escalating real-estate values, as homes are sold at higher prices to more affluent buyers.

As citizens of Natick, we value high quality education for our children and continuing educational opportunities for all.

Natick residents value educational excellence in their schools, meeting the individual needs of all learners. Natick public schools strive for excellence through a culture of continuous improvement involving parents, teachers, administrators and policy-makers, strong curriculum content in diverse course offerings delivered by highly-effective teachers, a constructive educational environment, and town-wide pride in the schools' academic, sports and extracurricular programs.

As citizens of Natick, we value Natick's clean water resulting from careful stewardship of our aquifer.

Natick protects the source of its drinking water, its groundwater aquifer and recharging surface water systems, as one of its most valuable natural resources.

As citizens of Natick, we value a vibrant Natick Center, a focal point of our community.

Natick Center is a vibrant focal point for community activities, arts and cultural activities, commerce, housing and transit. It preserves Natick's small-town feel and historical heritage through the Common, compatible architecture, diverse locally-owned businesses and burgeoning arts and entertainment communities.

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As citizens of Natick, we value our abundance of cultural, recreational, and educational facilities and services that contribute to our high quality of life.

Natick citizens take advantage of the abundance of local cultural, recreational, and educational opportunities. Natick's Parks and Recreation Department has an extensive array of youth and adult education, recreation, and cultural programs. The Center for Arts in Natick (ICAN) and the Walnut Hill School are cultural institutions that draw arts patrons from Natick as well as the greater MetroWest Boston region. Natick's libraries host an active schedule of activities and the Natick Historical Society operates a unique museum with artifacts that date to pre-Federal times.

As citizens of Natick, we value being home to businesses that create a diversity of jobs and provide support to the community in many ways.

Natick citizens appreciate having many different businesses located in the community to provide local jobs. Local businesses have provided support to the community in many other ways as well: supporting local non-profits, providing services to support local efforts, contributing staff as volunteer help, and contributing capital to support public facilities.

As citizens of Natick, we value our location in the region with access to major transportation routes, mass transit, and proximity to Boston.

Citizens often choose to live in Natick because of its proximity to public transit, its placement at the intersection of major east-west and north-south roadways, and the variety of retail, commerce, and services that are all within a short distance.

As citizens of Natick, we value our community history, heritage, and traditions.

Natick's citizens take great pride in its long and rich history. The historical character of the community is preserved in the architecture of buildings around the community. Many annual events have become social traditions including Natick's big Fourth of July parade, Natick Days and the running of the Boston Marathon through Natick Center.

Vision Statements in Detail

As citizens of Natick, we aspire to create a future in which Natick is a socially and economically diverse community, home to a mix of businesses that provide jobs to people with a wide range of skills.

Natick continues to be affordable across a wide range of economic levels, including young adults and families establishing first homes, Town service employees, and seniors who wish to remain in their homes. Natick's extends its affordability to its local tax rates, governmental services, variety of housing choices at multiple cost levels, diverse and competitive business environment and range of local and regional employment options. Natick's affordability helps to preserve its socio-economic diversity and the ability of people of different economic means to participate fully in society.

Natick meets the housing needs of key populations by accommodating options for people of limited means, young families, Town employees and seniors, using available development controls to encourage a wide range of housing choices in appropriate locations, including single-family homes, condominiums, apartments, retirement centers and assisted living facilities.

Natick maintains a small town feel while welcoming newcomers, fostering religious, ethnic, and cultural diversity and providing services to those in need.

Natick continues to develop its diverse economic base, with local businesses, entrepreneurial start-ups, national chains, government facilities, major employers and others who bring a wide variety of local employment and share Natick's "sense of community."

As citizens of Natick, we aspire to create a future in which Natick's natural resources including rivers, lakes, ponds, wetlands, forests and wildlife habitat are preserved and accessible to the community.

Natick supports responsible stewardship of its natural resources, including its open spaces, forests and trees, farms, parks, lakes, aquifer and views; Natick adopts policies and practices to reduce pollution of air and water, increase energy independence and support preservation of available open spaces within the Town.

As citizens of Natick, we aspire to create a future in which Natick is a community of neighborhoods and districts with distinct identities connected by networks of sidewalks, walking trails, bike paths, and public transit.

Natick continues to be a community of communities. It controls the character of its growth by emphasizing small, mixed-use, community cores providing basic services to neighborhoods within effective walking and biking distances, and linking these cores to each other and to Natick Center through networks of trails, bike paths and roads. Natick works proactively and cooperatively with developers to implement this vision, and to mitigate the impacts of development on transportation systems, natural resources, the environment and the Town's fiscal stability.

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Natick has efficient transportation systems that increase connections among residents, reduce dependence on automobiles and make getting around town easier. Sidewalks connect neighbors with each other, and link neighborhoods together and to schools. Walking trails and bike paths connect open spaces, recreational venues, shopping areas, schools and community cores, and link them all to Natick Center. Local transit serves seniors, teens and others by connecting shopping, entertainment and recreational areas, government facilities, schools and community cores.

As citizens of Natick, we aspire to create a future in which Natick's buildings and infrastructure are environmentally healthy, efficient and responsible; they are designed to fulfill their function to the satisfaction of the community, and are maintained in good order.

Natick's facilities which no longer fulfill their function to the satisfaction of the community are modified or replaced. Natick invests in the maintenance of its facilities to keep them operating in good order and to extend the usable life of the facilities. Natick's facilities are built or modified to be energy efficient, to minimize environmental impacts, to be free of pollutants and toxins and to contribute to the overall good health of the community.

As citizens of Natick, we aspire to create a future in which Natick is a regional destination for recreational, social, cultural, and educational activities for all age groups.

Natick's many cultural and recreational institutions coordinate events and activities to achieve leverage and visibility. Natick increases the scope and scale of activities to become an arts and culture magnet for the region, and Natick Center achieves recognition as the hub of this regional arts and culture economy.

As citizens of Natick, we aspire to create a future in which Natick Center is the vibrant core of the community, a unique destination for commerce, community and culture, day and night.

Natick Center is a vibrant, beautifully renovated and maintained, primary hub for government, community activities, local commerce, dense housing options, transit, arts, culture and entertainment. It blends unique local restaurants, shops, and businesses with residences and company headquarters. Activities on the Common complement shopping, commerce and public services during the day, while arts and cultural events support restaurants and entertainment venues on weekends and in evenings. Effective use of walking and biking paths, local and metro transit reduce the need for automobile traffic in Natick Center. For those residents and visitors who drive to Natick Center, parking is available and well-marked.

As citizens of Natick, we aspire to create a future in which Natick's schools are among the best.

Natick is the home of America's finest schools. Natick provides educational excellence in meeting the diverse needs and learning styles of students at all levels. It achieves world-class results and delivers high educational value for money spent by retaining and recruiting the most qualified and effective teachers, strengthening its curriculum, broadening its course offerings, emphasizing critical thinking, increasing integration with the greater Natick community, integrating state-of-the-art technology and creating modern and functional environments that contribute to effective learning.

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School administrators manage and maintain school facilities to optimize their use and operational lifespan, and make school facilities available to compatible community uses.

As citizens of Natick, we aspire to create a future in which Natick's Town government is representative of the diverse population, is fiscally sound and transparent in its governing practices, and communicates effectively with the public.

The Town of Natick government is representative of a wide diversity of citizens. Citizens are knowledgeable about government finances and have access to government financial and other information. Citizens are knowledgeable about government decision-making processes and have access to information that will keep them informed about government activities.

As citizens of Natick, we aspire to create a future in which citizens are knowledgeable about, and actively participate in, Natick's volunteer-based local government and many service and social organizations.

Natick citizens have easy access to information about the activities of social and service organizations. They find activities which align with their interests and actively participate in the many organizations which build community in Natick. Natick as a community-of-communities extends to the social fabric of the town with many connections between groups.

Natick's complement of Town Meeting seats are all occupied and citizens campaign and compete for election or appointment to volunteer government positions.

As citizens of Natick, we aspire to create a future in which Natick is a leader in developing and encouraging solutions to regional issues that increase efficiencies and enhance the quality of life.

On regional issues that impact the quality of life for Natick's citizens, Natick takes the lead in organizing regional and state resources to find solutions. Natick works with regional resources to create efficient transportation systems that increase connections among businesses, regional medical facilities, shopping centers, customers, and employees; reduce dependence on automobiles; and make getting around easier and more environmentally friendly.

Natick participates in regional solutions that achieve financial leverage for local tax expenditures; using grants for innovative programs with regional impact, and gaining efficiencies in delivering services.

As citizens of Natick, we aspire to create a future in which Natick is a healthy community with clean land, water and air and affordable access to local healthcare services.

Natick adopts a community-wide commitment to good health, diet and wellness, and freedom from substance abuse and domestic violence. Natick's hospital serves the Town's general medical and emergency needs, with seamless connections to nearby regional specialty facilities.

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As citizens of Natick, we aspire to create a future in which government and citizens plan well for the future.

The Natick community reaps the abundant benefits of long-range planning, including smart development, coordination of resources to achieve efficiencies, financial leverage from outside funding, and increased civic engagement.