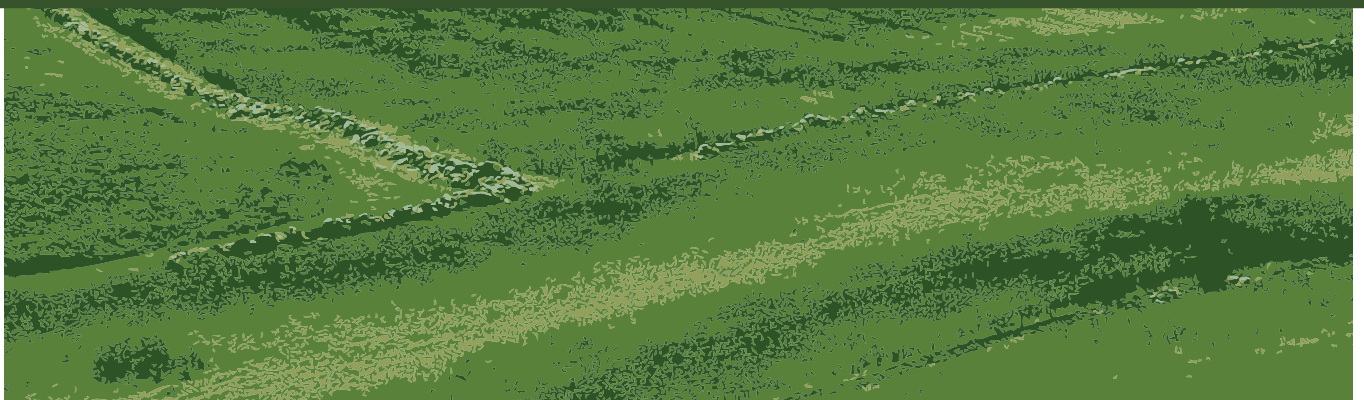


SECTION 1

UNIQUELY DARTMOUTH



Chapter 1 | Community Character

An introduction to Dartmouth. The Master Plan process. Basic demographic information.

Chapter 2 | Community Voices

The planning process as a reflection of community members' input.

Chapter 3 | Community Goals and Policies

The core community principles in planning for the future.



CHAPTER 1

COMMUNITY CHARACTER

Life in Dartmouth, Massachusetts

Dartmouth, the third largest community by land area in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, contains beautiful coastal and historic rural landscapes within its borders, as well as all of the modern conveniences that would be expected in a first-rate regional commercial center and university town.

Located on Buzzards Bay, Dartmouth has approximately 47 miles of coastline dotted with inlets and harbors, sizeable farm acreage, intact historic village areas, and scenic rural roadways. It is the location of the University of Massachusetts – Dartmouth campus, and contains a large commercial center. Situated midway between Providence, Rhode Island and Cape Cod, Dartmouth is bordered by Westport on the west, Fall River and Freetown on the north, New Bedford on the east, and Buzzards Bay on the south.

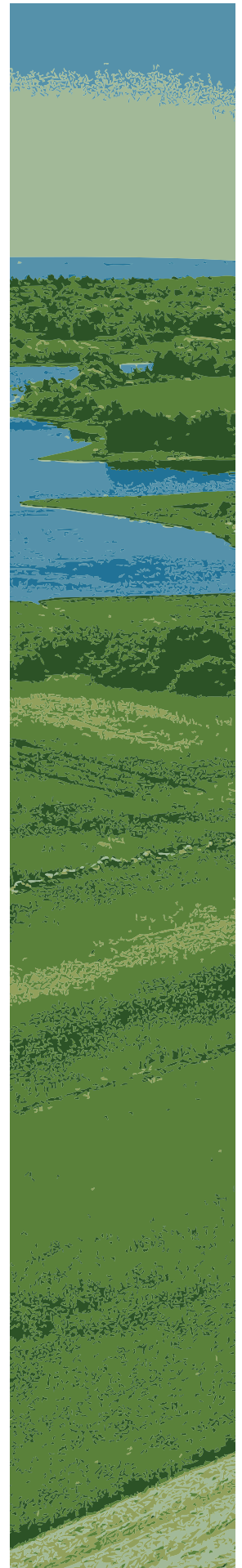
The community has evolved from a territory of the Wampanoag tribe to a colonial haven for Quakers and Baptists in the 17th century, to a sleepy agricultural town, to a bedroom community for the cities of Fall River and New Bedford, and more recently, a regional center for commercial, residential, recreational, and institutional endeavors.

While these overviews provide a window into the diversity and variety of qualities and opportunities in Dartmouth, they only begin to tell the story of the daily experience of residents as they navigate their hometown. What are residents proud of in the Dartmouth community? What aspects of life here keep residents, businesses, property owners, visitors, and local institutions tied to this town, and what about life in Dartmouth inspires joy? Are there problematic aspects of life in Dartmouth that citizens can identify and address together as a community? These questions are at the heart of developing the vision, goals, and strategies in this Master Plan.

The Role of Dartmouth's Community Master Plan

A Master Plan can significantly contribute to a community's understanding of itself. It has a narrative component, describing the story of Dartmouth's history and the experience of living and working in town today. It has a technical component that considers population trends and land use changes over time to chart where the town is now and where trends may be taking it in the future.

The Master Planning process is an opportunity for a community to take stock, to examine what its optimal vision of the future is, and to suggest policy changes at the local level that will assist the town in arriving at that intended future.





Master Plans are often described as roadmaps, because their action item recommendations and goals and objectives can be used by the town to guide local decision making. Choices and options for town action, such as those often debated at town meeting, or made by town officials, boards and commissions, can be compared against the objectives and vision within the Master Plan. While Dartmouth's Master Plan is not a zoning by-law, a subdivision regulation, a budget or a capital improvement program, it should be the basis for the preparation of those documents, and those documents should be consistent with the Master Plan's guiding principles, goals, and recommendations.

Built from community input, the core values articulated in the Dartmouth Master Plan can help the town to navigate new circumstances, weigh potential policy trade-offs, and make decisions that reflect community priorities.

While it may be tempting to say that the goal in any community should be to “stay the same,” it is often noted that the only constant in life is change. Changes in technology, energy, climate, security, national and global economics, and global crises like the COVID-19 pandemic all directly or indirectly modify our state, our region and our community. Individual and collective decisions are made every day that affect the character, environment, infrastructure and economy of Dartmouth. Built from community input, the core values articulated in the Dartmouth Master Plan can help the town to navigate new circumstances, weigh potential policy trade-offs, and make decisions that reflect community priorities.

Planning Boards are required to make a Master Plan that “shall be a statement, through text, maps, illustrations or other forms of communication, that is designed to provide a basis for decision making regarding the long-term physical development of the municipality” (MGL Chapter 41, Section 81D). Mandatory elements (chapters) are goals and objectives, land use, housing, economic development, natural and cultural resources, open space and recreation, services and facilities, circulation (aka transportation), and an implementation section. Given its coastal location, this Master Plan also includes a Climate Change and Resilience element.

Dartmouth's previous plan was adopted in 2007. It is typical for Master Plans to cover a 10-year time horizon. This plan carries forward recommendations from the previous plan if they are still relevant in town today, but provides significant updates, a reconsideration of priorities, and new recommendations to fit the current and foreseeable needs of Dartmouth through 2030.

Each Master Plan chapter contains all of the data and background information needed to explore and address its subject matter, introduced in a **“KEY PLANNING DATA”** section that summarizes existing conditions. Next, each chapter includes a **“ROADMAP TO THE FUTURE”** section with goals that can solve issues or promote opportunities, and strategies for goal achievement, with important details on the steps involved, the lead party in its advancement, required time and resources, and recommended programs and partnerships.

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Dartmouth Demographics

The most recent U.S. Decennial Census was undertaken in 2020. As of the writing of this plan, only the highest-level overall total population and housing unit counts have been released for each local jurisdiction. These data report a 2020 population count of 33,783 persons in Dartmouth and a total housing unit count of 13,188 units. Eventually, data from the 2020 Census will be processed and report on more detailed findings, such as the count of persons in each age range category, household size averages, and similar. Unfortunately, these finer-grained datasets are yet to be released. Limited by that reality, this plan relies on the next best available source of data as of March 15, 2023, which is the American Community Survey (ACS) estimates for Dartmouth from the period 2015-2019. Even if the full set of 2020 census data was currently available, some datasets are only ever collected and published via the American Community Survey process. Questions on topics like household income, job type, and similar questions used to be asked as part of every decennial census. This “long form” census questionnaire practice stopped after the year 2000 and many of these questions transitioned to the ACS process - which is different since numbers reported are an estimate/ extrapolation based on a small dataset versus decennial census data which is a count. Throughout the plan, ACS figures are referenced as estimates, as is the correct practice differentiating these datasets from census counts.

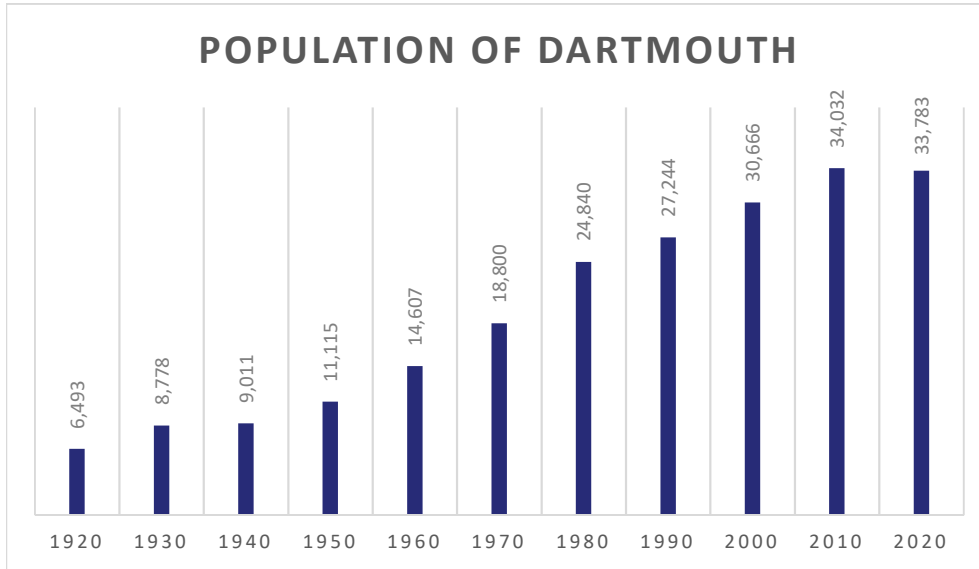
Understanding Dartmouth's demographic makeup provides important information for developing recommendations in its community Master Plan. For example, a town experiencing a boom time and significant population growth is likely to form vastly different policies on housing, land use, and facilities planning than a town with a steady or declining population. In addition to overall quantities, demographic information on the composition of town population can also have implications for policy and goal development, such as highlighting the needs of seniors or traditionally underserved populations. The details on four key demographic factors; population, age, household composition and race and ethnicity, are explored below.

Population Trends

The count from the 2020 Decennial Census indicates that Dartmouth's population is pretty consistent with its 2010 figure. The population of Dartmouth in 2010 was 34,032. According to US 2020 Decennial Census, the population has decreased to 33,783 persons, a decline of 249. Part of this decrease may be explained by the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, which occurred during the 2020 census, when there were no students living at the University of Massachusetts's Dartmouth campus. According to the town's draft 2021 annual report, the Town Clerk's tabulation of the local population as of January 1, 2020 is lower than the 2020 Census figure, at 30,881 persons. According to local data, Dartmouth's population peak occurred in 2012, when there was 36,261 people living in town. As Figure 1 demonstrates, current numbers represent the first population decrease in Dartmouth since 1920.

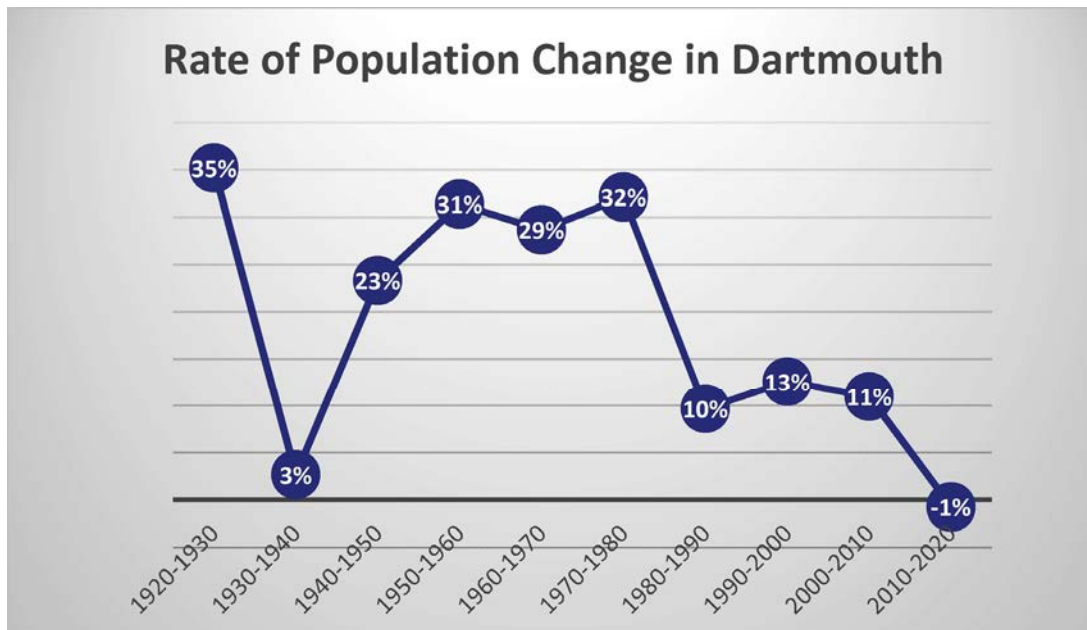


Figure 1.1: Overall Population of Dartmouth, 1920-2020



Source: US Decennial Census

Figure 1.2: Rate of Population Change in Dartmouth, 1920-2020

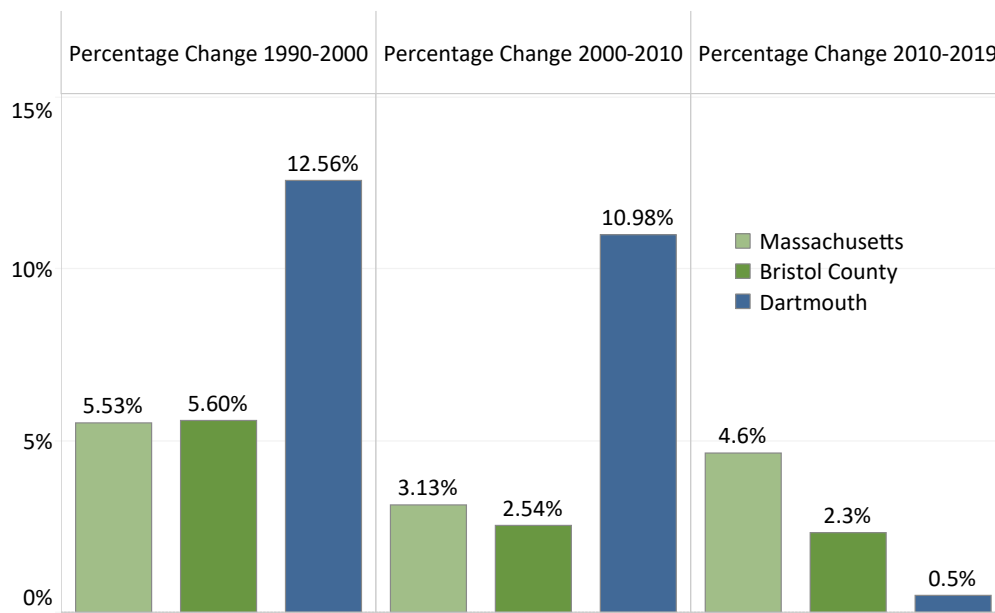


Source: US Decennial Census backed calculations

The rate of population change has varied over time. The population increased rapidly from 1940 to 1960, stayed high from 1960 to 1980, hovering around a 30% increase both decades. Growth rates have decreased to around 10% per decade from 1980 to 2010. Population from the 2020 Decennial Census suggest a swing to a negative, decreasing rate of change.

As demonstrated in Figure 3, the rate of population change in Dartmouth in recent decades has exceeded the rate of change on Bristol County and Massachusetts, but this trend has reversed in recent years.

Figure 1.3: Comparative Rate of Population Change



Source: U.S. Census Bureau Decennial Census; American Community Survey (ACS) 2015- 2019 5-year estimates

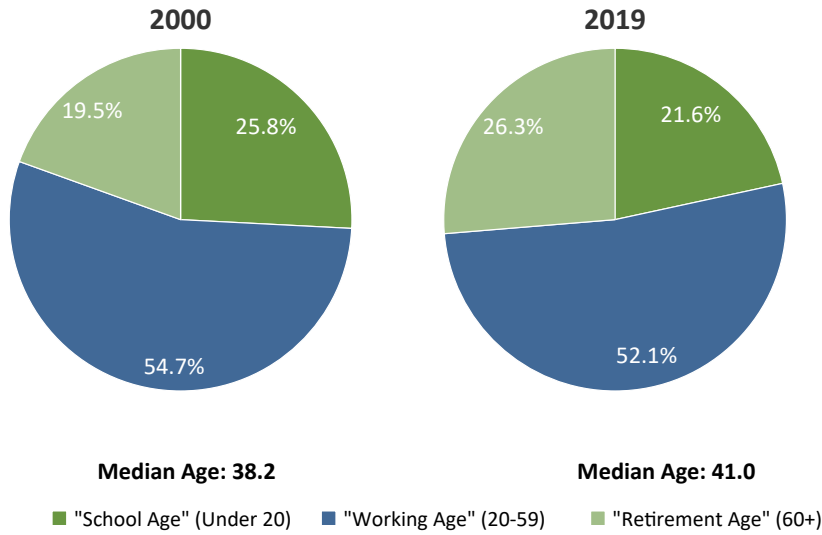
Age Trends

Similar to many communities throughout the country, Dartmouth is experiencing an aging trend whereby seniors represent a larger portion of the overall population. Median age increased from 38.2 in 2000 to an estimated 41.0 in 2019. In 2000, seniors (those 60 age and over) accounted for 19.5% of the population. In 2019, it is estimated that this proportion increased to 26.3% of the overall population.

The proportion of working-age population (20 to 59) is estimated to have decreased from 54.7% to 52.1%, while the proportion under 20 is estimated to have decreased from 25.8% to 21.6%. The decrease in this final category is also reflected in data tracking school enrollments, which has been declining overall since 2009, with slight bumps in 2014 and 2017.

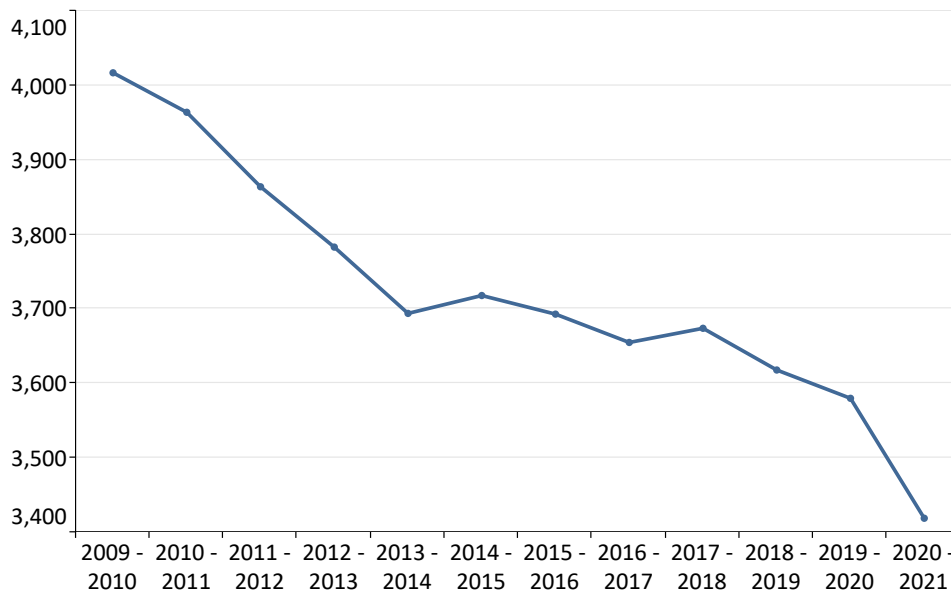


Figure 1.4: Relative Age Distribution in Dartmouth, 2000 and 2019



Source: U.S. Census Bureau Decennial Census; ACS 2015- 2019 5-year estimates

Figure 1.5: Dartmouth School Enrollments, 2009-2021



Source: Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education

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Household Composition Trends

Changes are also occurring in the composition of Dartmouth's households. Average household size decreased from 2.6 in 2000 to 2.54 in 2010, and was estimated at 2.52. In 2019, 29.0% of households were estimated to include children under 18, a decrease of 5.6% since 2000. It is estimated that in 2019, 24.4% of households are single-person households, and that of those single-person households, approximately 64.7% are over the age of 65.

Race and Ethnicity

Examining trends in race and ethnicity are difficult to discern in Dartmouth. The category of "white" decreased substantially from 2010 to 2020. In 2010, the vast majority of the population identified as white, with those identifying as black, Asian or pacific islander, or Hispanic (of any race) accounting for 3%, 3% and 4%, respectively.

Population Projections

In some ways, the key unknown in planning for the community's future is the knowledge of exactly how Dartmouth's population will change in the next ten years. While no one can predict this exactly, planners take a best guess by examining recent past trends of community expansion or contraction in the context of how much remaining capacity a community has to grow and develop given physical realities and existing regulations.

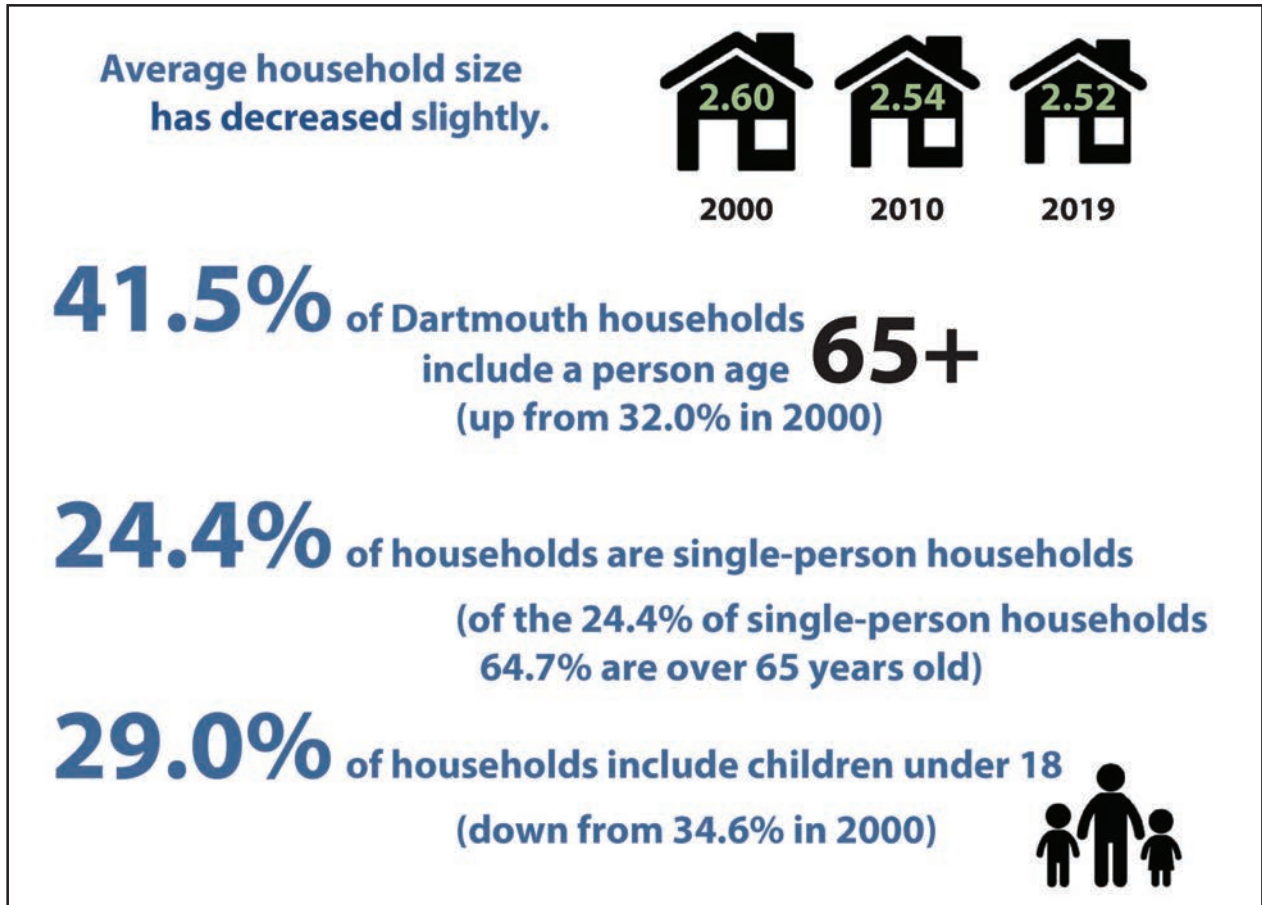
Multiple methods of population projection yield very different results. The cohort component approach, utilizing regional or statewide trends in births, deaths, and in- and out-migration within age cohorts results in a prediction of 39,280 persons in Dartmouth in 2030, and increase of 5,248 people over the last official 2010 census figures. Alternatively, a linear projection that applies the average household size and average building permits per year from the last decade would indicate a lower projection of around 600 additional persons in 2030. Yet another approach of applying the average household size to a linear projection of changes in total households over the past decade would predict and even smaller increase of around 200 persons.

Southeastern Massachusetts is at an unpredictable turning point with the realization of South Coast Rail. Communities where stations are located are not the only communities that will be affected. Part of an Economic Development Bill enacted in January 2021 created a new Section 3A of M.G.L. c. 40A (the Zoning Act). This new section requires that an MBTA community – including MBTA adjacent communities - shall have at least one zoning district of reasonable size in which multi-family housing is permitted as of right, with a minimum gross density of 15 units per acre, and with no age restrictions. Dartmouth is not in the initial round of affected communities, but this rule is almost certainly likely to be applied to the town once the New Bedford and Fall River stations are complete and operational. Such land use requirements, should the mandatory zones be built out, will certainly increase population. Under current program guidance, Dartmouth will be required to institute a zone that can accommodate a minimum of 1,319 new housing units. Multiplying this figure by the most current average household size, of 2.52 these housing units could represent an additional 3,324 persons.

All this to say that prediction cannot be relied upon as fact. It is likely that Dartmouth's population will continue to grow, but the scale of that change is unknown. The Master Plan cannot account for all future predictions, but it does frame the locations, character and options that represent communal preferences for absorbing future growth at any level.



Figure 1.6: Notable Household Characteristic Trends



Sources: US Decennial Census 2000 and 2010; American Community Survey 2015-2019 5-year estimates

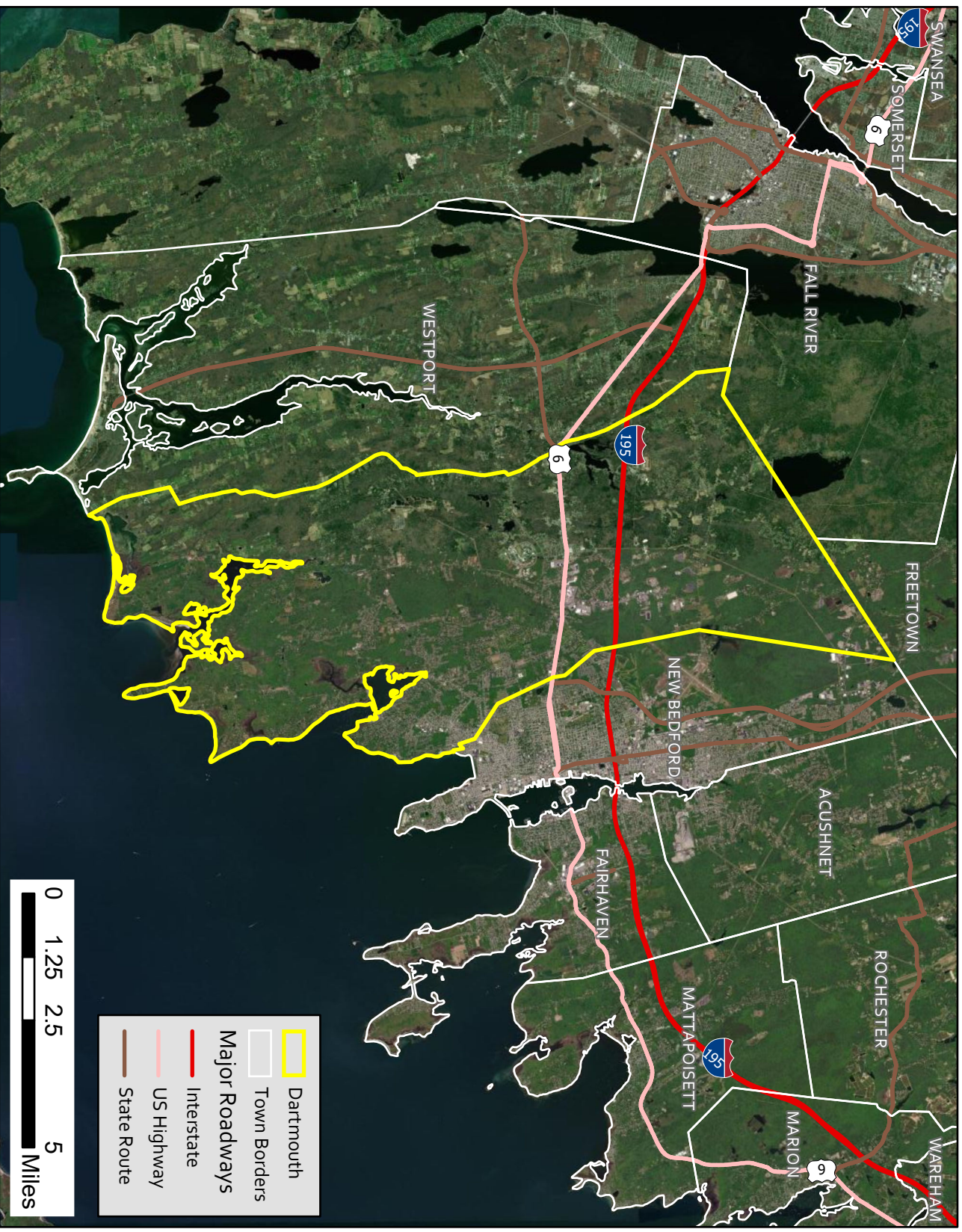
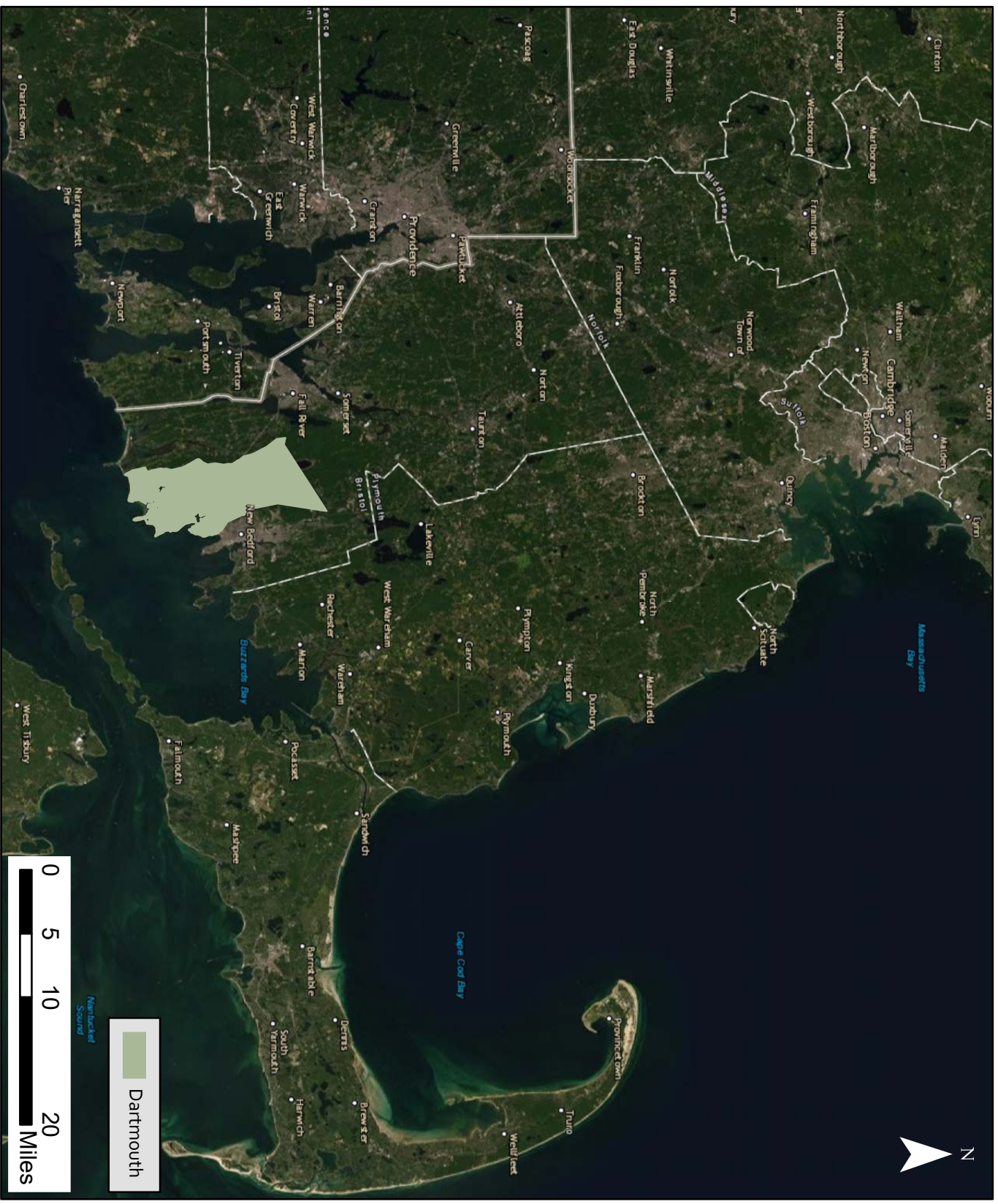
Figure 1.7: Race and Ethnicity in Dartmouth, 2010 and 2020

Race	2010	Percent of Population 2010	2020	Percent of Population 2020	Change 2010-2020	
					Number	Percent
White	30,802	91%	28,600	85%	-2,202	-7%
Black	824	2%	1016	3%	192	23%
Asian or Pacific Islander	648	2%	854	3%	206	32%
American Indian and Alaska Native alone	48	0%	39	0%	-9	-19%
Two or More Races	579	2%	1586	5%	1,007	174%
Other Race	326	1%	328	1%	2	1%
Hispanic Origin (of any race)	805	2%	1360	4%	555	69%
Total Population	34,032	100%	33,783	100%		

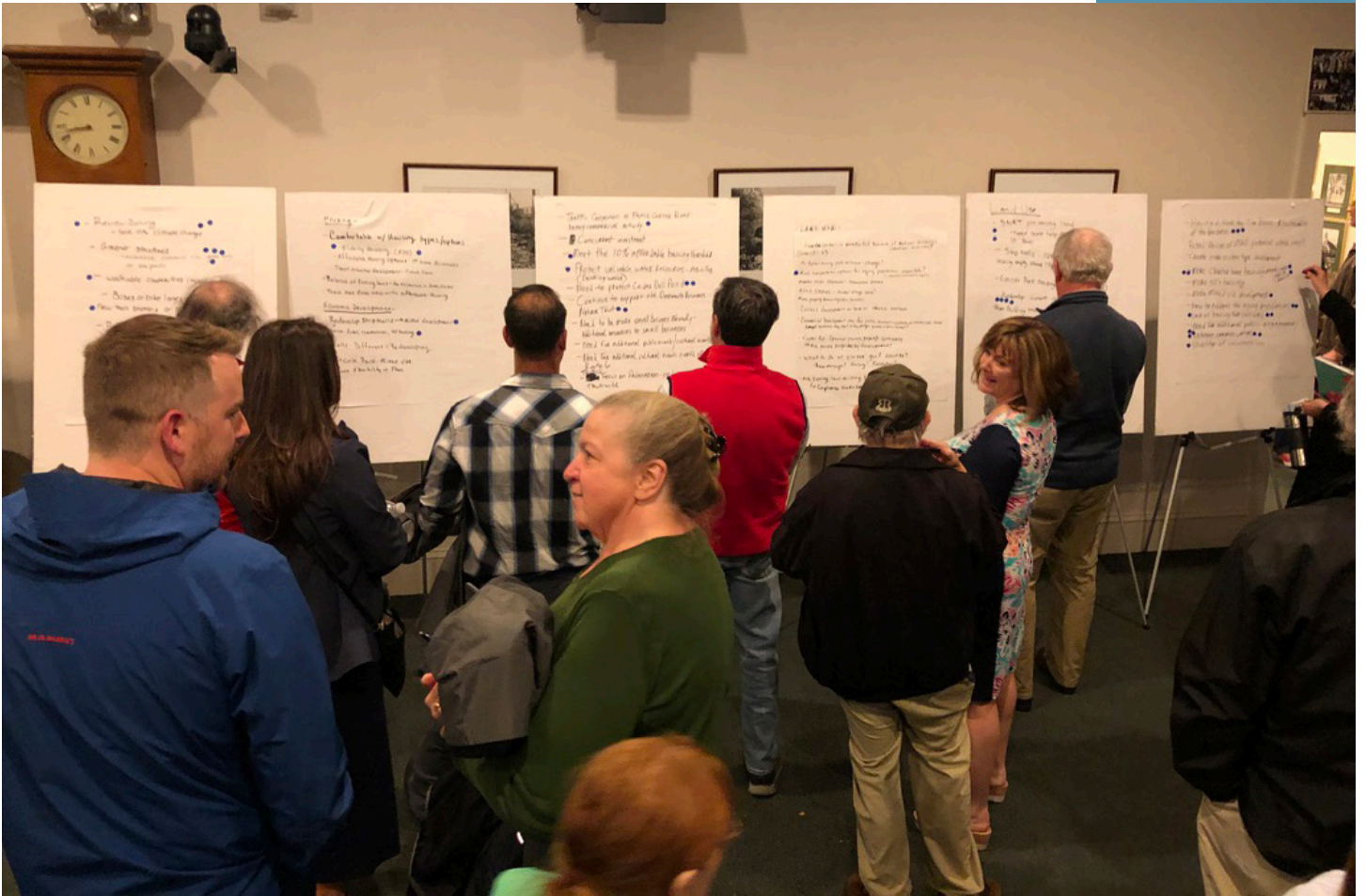
Sources: US Decennial Census 2010 and 2020

Community Overview Map

Source: Esri, HERE, Garmin, (c) OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS user community, Source: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, USGS, AeroGRID, IGN, and the GIS User Community, MassGIS







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CHAPTER 2

COMMUNITY VOICES

Master Plan Development Process

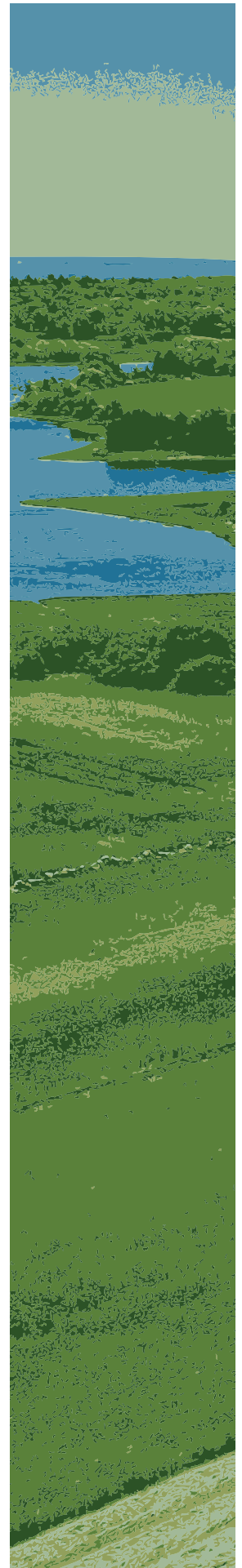
Dartmouth residents and other stakeholders such as local officials, business owners, and workforce members are the experts on life in town. With that clear reality in mind, the Master Plan process incorporated a heavy public engagement component and sought to include opinions from as many local voices as possible.

At the beginning of the planning process in 2019, after the town contracted with Southeastern Regional Planning and Economic Development District (SRPEDD) to facilitate plan development and preparation, the Dartmouth Planning Board and Planning Department staff began serving as the Master Plan Steering Committee, and have guided the preparation of this document. SRPEDD began the process of working with the Steering Committee to develop project branding, collect necessary data, review previous planning documents, and establish a project webpage to serve as a portal to all Master Plan information, including a series of interactive maps.

Dartmouth has a deep history of public engagement on many fronts, including committees dedicated to open space preservation, recreation, and agricultural preservation, active historical societies, and a passionate core of citizens dedicated to water quality and the conservation of Buzzard's Bay. Many hours of effort from residents who care about the community have gone into the development of this Master Plan. The policy directions and specific actions outlined reflect much thoughtful discussion and enthusiasm for implementation.

A program of public engagement with five public meetings was held from June 2019 to March 2021. The first three workshops occurred in person in the town of Dartmouth. Meetings paused for a period and were shifted to a digital format after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic for the final two workshops. All meetings were advertised in local papers, on the Town website, on the SRPEDD website, and on Facebook. Each workshop was recorded and live-streamed by local broadcast television through DCTV. The topics covered in each meeting and a summary of their structure is described in the subsequent section.

In addition to public meetings, effort was made to advertise the Master Plan process during community events, such as the Padanaram Village Summer Festival on June 4, 2019, and with tabling outside of Dartmouth's Town Meeting. The Dartmouth Planning Director sought local official stakeholder engagement directly through a series of one-on-one interviews in the fall and winter of 2019-2020.





Public Engagement Events

Most importantly throughout the planning process, Master Plan staff listened to the comments and observations of Dartmouth residents. This active pursuit of input took place at six public workshops over the course of the two-year project period:

JUNE 13, 2019 – Master Plan Discovery Workshop

This introductory workshop presented the summaries of data and basic maps (current versions of which are featured throughout the Master Plan). The event also featured in-depth introductions about participant's relationship to their favorite aspects of life in Dartmouth, and break-out groups that discussed each Master Plan element in detail.

These discussions resulted in numerous comments and culminated in a voting exercise that identified priority themes.

OCTOBER 30, 2019 – Land Use, Economic Development, and Housing

This workshop presented extensive land use, housing and economic information particularly focused on town zoning and the types of housing and uses allowed. Staff executed a development chip game to get a sense of what types and locations of housing and land uses that residents felt were missing and would be beneficial for Dartmouth.



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JANUARY 29, 2020 – Open Space, Recreation, and Natural & Cultural Resources

Once again, staff presented specialized information on this topic. Input was recorded through break out groups in a sticker mapping exercise where participants indicated the location of an open space, recreation or natural and cultural issue or opportunity on the map and staff recorded corresponding comments.

JANUARY 28, 2021 – Climate Change and Resilience – via ZOOM

After a public workshop hiatus due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Dartmouth Master Plan public workshop series resumed with the climate change and resilience meeting via Zoom, and with opportunities for self-paced engagement in a digital platform on a dedicated webpage. First, staff presented a wealth of specialized information on anticipated climate change impacts in the Buzzards Bay watershed. After the presentation, participants were split into breakout rooms to discuss several topics, including which climate change impacts most concerned participants, and which strategies the town should pursue to adapt to and mitigate climate change and increase community resilience.

MARCH 18, 2021 – Transportation, Services, and Facilities – via ZOOM

Similar to the climate change and resilience workshop, the transportation, services and facilities workshop took place remotely over Zoom, with extra surveys and a digital Crowdsourc Reporter application that enabled self-paced digital participation over an extended timeframe. The public workshop started with a presentation of existing transportation and services and facilities conditions, and then transitioned to into rotating breakout rooms, each of which centered on a particular theme, which included automobile travel, bicycle travel, pedestrian pathways, transit, and community facilities and services.

December 8, 2022 – Maser Plan Open House Culminating Workshop

The final, culminating public workshop of the Master Planning process was a chance for the Town and the project team to ask – “did we get it right?” After a years-long process and multiple public workshops on the Master Plan chapter topic areas, it was essential to have one final opportunity to check in and verify that the Master Plan accurately reflects the community sentiments shared throughout the planning process. This workshop, held at the Dartmouth Town Hall from 6:30 PM to 8:00 PM, began with a presentation of the goals that had come out of the planning process for each Master Plan process, followed by an open house style period of time that allowed for workshop attendees to engage with the particular Master Plan strategies of most interest to each individual.



CHAPTER 3

COMMUNITY GOALS AND POLICIES

Community Values

In the 2007 Master Plan, the Dartmouth community articulated the following set of values. In its capacity as Master Plan Steering Committee, the Planning Board reviewed these value statements. Many are included again in these Master Plan as they continue to reflect the intentions and principles of town residents and stakeholders:

WE value the rural character of our Town. The farmland, coastal interface, forests, wetlands, scenic vistas, and historic coastal and countryside village centers all contribute to this shared appreciation. Progress should not diminish or detract from the features that define the nature of our Town.

WE value the great natural beauty of our community. Dartmouth's inland waters, coastal marshes, deciduous forests, meadows, and other natural areas should be adequately protected from encroachment and degradation related to development.

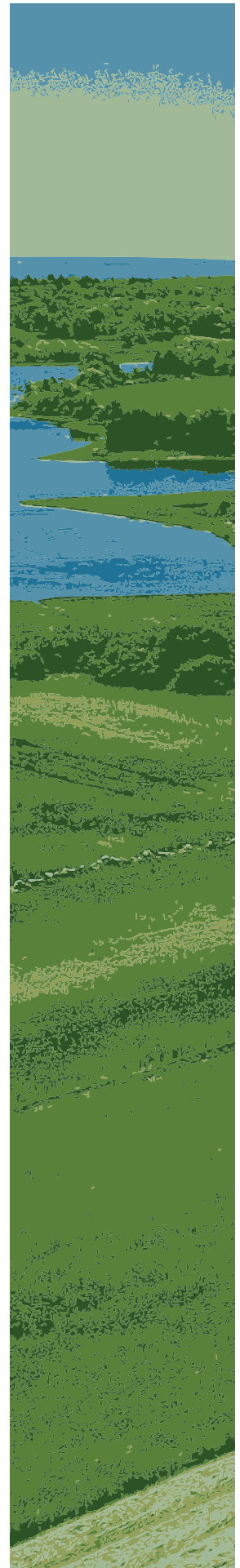
WE value the quality of municipal services this community provides in particular the schools and library system. Our local budget needs to be managed in a manner to maintain the level of municipal services as we grow.

WE value traditional local industries with ties to our natural resources. Farming, fishing and marine industries have long provided jobs for residents and rooted the community in a harmonious relationship with the land and sea. These industries should be supported—Dartmouth would not be the same without them.

WE value the civic involvement of residents. Our many Town Boards and Commissions, volunteer Fire Departments, Representative Town Meeting, and nonprofit interest groups, all work with the best interest of Dartmouth in mind. The continued and lively participation of residents will lead to better choices.

WE value the small town feel that endures within a community that has gained big town attractions. Attention must be paid to the delicate balance of these two traits, with new development integrated in a manner that doesn't sacrifice small town connections.

WE value access to goods and services. Such convenience, however, should not come at the cost of congestion, buildings that lack character, and intrusion into residential areas. Growth in commercial areas should be well-managed and meet high standards for safety, accessibility, compatibility, and aesthetics.





WE value the varied water resources that set this Town apart. The abundance of fresh and saltwater bodies—beaches, rivers, streams, and ponds—provide clean water for drinking and opportunities for recreation.

WE value our historical roots. Our heritage includes buildings and significant natural features that link us across time and enrich our community. Preservation of our historic built and natural landscape should be pursued.

WE value the diversity of experiences that are available within this Town and the region of which it is a part. Dartmouth provides accessibility to academic, cultural, recreational, commercial, and employment opportunities, all of which add to our quality of life. We must reconcile our desire for such offerings with our desire for the maintenance of a rural lifestyle.

To those statements, we now add in 2023:

WE value that Dartmouth is a diverse and welcoming community. A range of housing types and residential opportunities should be pursued that allow young adults who grew up in Dartmouth to stay in Dartmouth, that attract other young families that keep the town vibrant, as well as providing opportunities for senior residents looking to downsize but stay in town.

WE value our traditional landscapes, but recognize that Dartmouth will be impacted by climate change. We will work towards both climate change adaptation and mitigation, aligning our built environment to be in balance with and support the natural beneficial functions of our natural environment. In particular, we will seek to minimize conflicts between our community and our special and beloved waterways.

Community Vision

One of the most illuminating initial exercises in understanding Dartmouth through the eyes of its residents were the answers that Discovery Workshop participants gave when asked: “what is your favorite thing about life in Dartmouth?” As can be seen in Figure 7, Dartmouth residents prize the nature, water, outdoor areas, schools, farmland, and general tranquility of their town.

The breakout group discussions at the Discovery Workshop also set the tone for the issues that would come up repeatedly and in more specific ways throughout the full planning process. Five broad themes are:

1. **Avoid suburban sprawl.** Dartmouth residents want to shape any growth that may occur in a way that is least impactful to the environment and preserves the rural qualities of the town. “Smart Growth” techniques such as cluster development, higher relative densities where appropriate, expanding housing options, adjusting bylaws to allow for low-impact development are all methods that can be pursued to accommodate both growth and conservation. Smart Growth techniques are planning tools that promote the efficient use of land to minimize landscape disturbance and maximize locating development near areas with infrastructure. Other comments related to this theme included:
 - a. Continue to support town, non-profit, and privately-motivated land preservation efforts.



- b. Redevelop current commercial areas rather than building new.
 - c. Encourage development with respect for natural resources and significant natural communities.
2. **Develop a clear and understandable plan for business development to achieve a healthy and sustainable tax base.** Dartmouth residents would like to encourage a coordinated approach to Economic Development in town.
 3. **Protect the Harbor Area and Dartmouth’s waterways.** Working through the Padanaram Harbor Management Plan Advisory Committee, Dartmouth residents recently worked with UMass Boston to develop the Padanaram Harbor Management Plan. Many ideas for advancing this theme are contained therein. Residents also voiced support for strengthening resident ties to waterways even further by increasing and promoting public access to the waterfront.
 4. **Enhance communication from the Town.** Residents would like to see the town promote policies and proposals so that citizens can take informed action and voice their support in forums like Town Meeting. There was also a strong sense that the town can specifically encourage civic engagement from the youth population, with greater coordination with UMass Dartmouth one potential avenue to pursue.

The body of the Master Plan will refer to these themes again in the chapters that follow.

Figure 3.1: Wordcloud: My Favorite Thing about living in Dartmouth is...



Source: Feedback from participants at Dartmouth Master Plan Discovery Workshop

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