

5. Economic Development

Introduction

The economic conditions in a town are largely driven the wealth of its households, the size and structure of its commercial and industrial base, and the uses allowed on its land. The local economy operates within a larger regional marketplace of cities and towns connected by pools of workers and consumers and clusters of industries. Economic regions are usually defined by similar physical characteristics, utility connections, and transportation infrastructure and services.



EMD Serono Laboratories, one of Hingham’s major employers, at Technology Place in South Hingham.

The term “economic development” is often thought of as developing commercial or industrial property to expand the tax base, but economic development is also about creating economic opportunities. In the past 20 years, the number of employers in Hingham increased 22 percent and total employment, 43 percent. These changes occurred because of significant commercial investment in Hingham, much of it happening only a few years after the Planning Board finished the 2001 Master Plan. Just as major new development opportunities were anticipated at the time, Hingham foresees new, transformative opportunities today, mainly in South Hingham.

However, Hingham is in a different place in 2020 than it was in 2000. The last year of this Master Plan process coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic. Massachusetts retailers, restaurants, and other businesses closed for many weeks. Schools sent children home in March 2020 to finish the year on distance education platforms. Churches looked to social media for online worship. As the state gradually loosened restrictions on indoor gatherings, shuttered stores at the Shipyard and Derby Street reopened to socially distanced customers in face masks. Hand sanitizer stations stood in the doorways of grocery stores. By September, with COVID-19 still spreading and school buildings unable to accommodate all 4,300 students safely, Hingham children and their parents adapted to a “hybrid” plan with alternating days in the classroom and days with in-home learning. Meanwhile, many businesses had acclimated to the new world of telecommuting, raising questions about the regional office market – both in Boston, where many Hingham residents work, and locally along the Route 3 corridor. Nowhere have these concerns been more obvious than the dramatic drop in ridership on MBTA commuter lines and the region’s private bus services, all of which stood in some degree of jeopardy in October 2020.

While the pandemic cannot determine Hingham’s long-term destiny, it will continue to influence near-term economic conditions, revenue, and municipal and school services. It will have an undeniable impact

on the Town’s ability to implement big initiatives promoted by this Master Plan or by parallel planning work underway by various town departments, boards, and commissions. A critical task for this Master Plan is to help guide the Town’s response to new – perhaps distant – opportunities for jobs, taxes, and public benefits to support current and future residents.

Existing Conditions

The **labor force** of any city or town includes all civilian residents over the age of 16 who are either currently employed or are actively seeking employment. Hingham’s labor force includes 10,643 people, and until March 2020, the town had a remarkably low unemployment rate: 2.6 percent, or a little less than one percentage point lower than the unemployment rate for Massachusetts as a whole. The advent of COVID-19 has had an undeniable impact on jobless and business health in Hingham, as highlighted in Table 5.1. and explored more later in this section.

Master Plans in Massachusetts Required Economic Development Element

G.L. c. 41, § 81D(3)

Economic development element which identifies policies and strategies for the expansion or stabilization of the local employment base and the promotion of employment opportunities.

TABLE 5.1. LABOR FORCE CHARACTERISTICS: 2018, 2020

	2018 Labor Force	2018 Labor Force - Employed	2018 Labor Force - Unemployed	Unemployment Rate	
				2018 Unemployment Rate	June 2020 Rate
Cohasset	4,165	3,922	243	5.8%	11.5%
Weymouth	33,625	31,375	2,250	6.7%	19.2%
HINGHAM	11,054	10,643	411	3.7%	12.2%
Hull	6,350	5,921	429	6.8%	17.5%
Norwell	5,810	5,575	235	4.0%	15.2%
Rockland	10,347	9,979	368	3.6%	20.2%
Scituate	10,004	9,593	411	4.1%	14.8%

Source: American Community Survey (ACS) 2018, Massachusetts Department of Unemployment Assistance, and Barrett Planning Group LLC.

Hingham’s labor force is well-educated (see Housing, Fig. 4.5), with 70 percent of local residents having a bachelor’s degree or higher. The **employed labor force** is concentrated in three higher-wage industries: professional services, information, and finance and real estate. These concentrations can be seen in the high industry quotients (>1.100) in Table 5.2, which compares the percentage of Hingham residents employed in major industry sectors to percentages of the employed labor force in Greater Boston area.¹ Industry quotients matter because they illustrate the competitive employment strengths of a community’s residents and, by definition, their earnings potential. The quotients also matter because they

¹ For purposes of this section, the labor market area includes most of Eastern Massachusetts to the New Hampshire border in a statistical entity known as the Boston-Cambridge-Nashua New England City and Town Area (NECTA), Massachusetts part, i.e., excluding the portion that extends into Southern NH.

can help to identify gaps, if any, between the knowledge and skills of local residents and the opportunities they have to work in their own city or town.

TABLE 5.2. INDUSTRIES THAT EMPLOY HINGHAM RESIDENTS

Industry	Hingham	NECTA	Industry Quotient	Median Earnings
Total Employed Civilian Population 16+	10,643	2,437,087	N/A	N/A
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing	0.0%	0.2%	N/A	N/A
Construction	5.4%	5.5%	0.993	\$97,534
Manufacturing	4.5%	8.2%	0.547	\$135,179
Wholesale Trade	1.1%	2.1%	0.534	\$64,236
Retail Trade	9.4%	9.6%	0.973	\$50,521
Transportation, Warehousing, Utilities	2.0%	3.6%	0.553	\$100,865
Information	3.1%	2.6%	1.178	\$94,643
Finance, Insurance, Real Estate	21.5%	8.1%	2.662	\$167,845
Professional, Scientific, Management	19.7%	15.7%	1.256	\$175,872
Education, Health Care, Social Assistance	21.0%	27.8%	0.755	\$81,500
Arts, Entertainment, Recreation, Accommodations	6.8%	8.3%	0.822	\$97,269
Other Services	2.2%	4.5%	0.491	\$87,250
Public Administration	3.3%	3.7%	0.890	\$68,281

Sources: U.D. Census Bureau, 2018 American Community Survey, and Barrett Planning Group LLC. "NECTA" means New England City and Town Area, an economic region similar to a metropolitan statistical area.

Hingham has a large percentage of its residents employed in education and health care, too, but those industries also employ a large percentage of residents throughout the labor market area and the state as a whole. Hingham stands out for its very high labor force ratios in three industries and low ratios (<0.60) in four (transportation, manufacturing, wholesale trade, and "other services"). None of the industries with high labor force quotients are among the highest-risk industries for unemployment and job loss since the economy began to feel the effects of COVID-19 in March 2020.

Over half of Hingham's employed residents work in just two locations: the town itself, and Boston, up from 43 percent when the last master plan was completed in 2001.² It is little wonder that a very high percentage of Hingham households (almost 20 percent) take public transportation to work, most likely to Boston, with its abundance of lucrative professional, scientific, academic, and finance employment. The rest of the town's residents commute to a variety of nearby places and regional centers where similar industries tend to cluster. The overall picture of employment destinations has changed very little over time, yet due to the pandemic, many market analysts and demographers predict a long-term shift in the work-at-home population even after the public health crisis subsides. The "journey to work" future for many Hingham residents will likely change even if the location of their employers does not.

² Hingham Master Plan (2001), 2-3, and U.S. Census Bureau, Commuting (Journey to Work), 2011-2015 5-Year ACS Commuting Flows, Tables 3 and 4. See also, Chapter 2, Transportation.

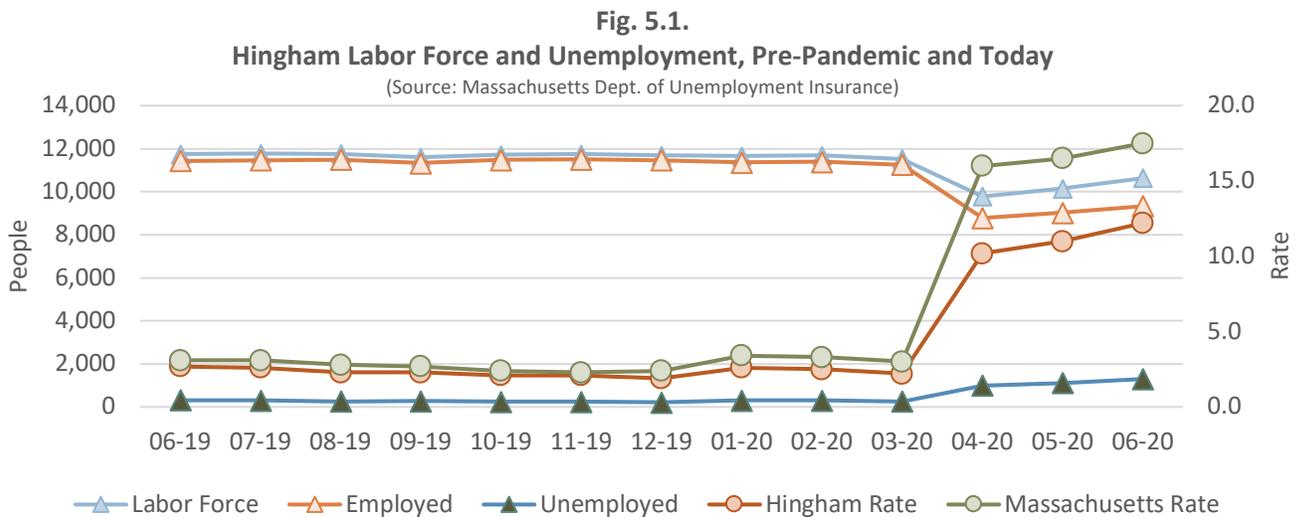
Traditional ways of measuring a community’s **labor force participation rate** are less than optimal for Hingham. Table 5.3 shows that Hingham has the lowest rate of all towns in the immediate area, with just 62 percent of the population 16 and over in the labor force. This is because age-restricted developments like Linden Ponds, the large retirement community off Whiting Street, generate an unusually high percentage of people over 65.

TABLE 5.3. LABOR FORCE AND UNEMPLOYMENT

	Population 16 and Over	2018 Labor Force	Labor Force Participation Rate	Labor Force Statistics			
				Employed	Unemployed	Unemployment: Annual 2018	Unemployment: June 2020
Cohasset	6,270	4,165	66.4%	3,922	243	5.8%	11.5%
Weymouth	47,077	33,625	71.4%	31,375	2,250	6.7%	19.2%
HINGHAM	17,814	11,054	62.1%	10,643	411	3.7%	12.2%
Hull	9,236	6,350	68.8%	5,921	429	6.8%	17.5%
Norwell	8,296	5,810	70.0%	5,575	235	4.0%	15.2%
Rockland	14,678	10,347	70.5%	9,979	368	3.6%	20.2%
Scituate	15,092	10,004	66.3%	9,593	411	4.1%	14.8%

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, 2018 American Community Survey (hereafter, 2018 ACS) and Massachusetts Dept. of Unemployment Insurance.

Table 5.3 also shows that until recently, Hingham enjoyed a very low average unemployment rate of 3.7 percent. Low unemployment tends to go hand-in-hand with high educational attainment and high household wealth. On a month-by-month basis, unemployment in Hingham fell as low as 2.2 percent in March 2020. The spike in April 2020 reflects the impact of the pandemic, as illustrated in Fig. 5.1.



Many Hingham residents work for themselves. As is often the case in wealthy towns, the percentage of self-employed people is relatively high: 13 percent in Hingham, compared with 9 percent both statewide

and across Plymouth County. Even before the pandemic, Hingham had an unusually large percentage of employed residents working all or part of the week at home.³ These qualities often correlate with high educational attainment and high household wealth, too. Some industries lend themselves well to remote work or telecommuting, but this is generally not the case for many lower-wage jobs.

TABLE 5.4. SELF-EMPLOYMENT TRENDS

	Employed Labor Force	Self-Employed	Percent	Work at Home	Percent
Cohasset	3,922	500	12.7%	365	9.3%
Weymouth	31,375	2,039	6.5%	1,017	3.2%
HINGHAM	10,643	1,366	12.8%	932	8.8%
Hull	5,921	727	12.3%	380	6.4%
Norwell	5,575	758	13.6%	349	6.3%
Rockland	9,979	505	5.1%	304	3.0%
Scituate	9,593	1,239	12.9%	911	9.5%

Source: 201 ACS, retrieved from Social Explorer, A09005, A09001.

Since mid-March 2020 when the governor declared a public health emergency due to COVID-19, about 800 Hingham residents have filed unemployment claims each week. The number of new claims began to fall near the end of June and slowly declined, only to tick upward again in the fall. Not surprisingly, residents working in the retail, health care, and accommodation and food services industries dominate the unemployment roster. While health care workers have gradually regained jobs, recovery has been much slower for retail and food service employees. And, women have been especially affected by the slump in employment. There have been 1.6 unemployment claims from women living in Hingham for every single claim filed by men.⁴

EMPLOYMENT BASE

The industries that make up Hingham’s **employment base** are not well aligned with the industries that employ local residents. Not surprisingly, there are more jobs in Hingham than residents to fill them, so the town imports labor from the region. People commute to Hingham from over 100 cities and towns, and over time the geographic reach of its workforce has grown significantly. In the past, most people working in Hingham traveled from cities and towns along the coast between Boston and Marshfield, but today, it is more common to find Hingham workers commuting from towns to the west and southwest. It is not surprising that so many Hingham residents lament traffic congestion on local roads, for in addition to an absolute increase of some 5,000 jobs since 2001, people are also commuting by car from just about every direction.⁵

³ Social Explorer, Table A09005, Means of Transportation to Work, citing American Community Survey (ACS) 2018 (5-Year Estimates); and U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 2018, Table C24070, Industry by Class of Worker.

⁴ Massachusetts Division of Unemployment Insurance (DUI), “Claims Data by City and Town,” August 8, 2020.

⁵ Hingham Master Plan (2001), 2-3, and U.S. Census Bureau, *Commuting (Journey to Work)*, 2011-2015 5-Year ACS Commuting Flows, Tables 3 and 4.

Location Quotient

A location quotient compares the industrial makeup of a city or town's economy to that of a larger reference economy. It reveals unique local qualities and provides a snapshot of "export" industries, or industries that bring money into a community.

Table 5.5 reports the **location quotients** for Hingham's employment base. It shows that Hingham's strongest industries – at least until recently – include the construction trades, retail sales, finance and insurance, and arts, entertainment, and recreation. The town's strength in these sectors seems to reflect Hingham's very strong housing market; the retail/restaurant centers and cultural establishments Downtown, at Derby Street, and the Shipyard; the presence of numerous financial institutions; and major employers in the insurance industry, notably Blue Cross Blue Shield. These industries serve as significant generators of direct and induced jobs and property tax revenue. They tend to be strong industries elsewhere on the South Shore as well.⁶

TABLE 5.5. HINGHAM EMPLOYMENT BASE: LOCATION QUOTIENTS

Description	Hingham Jobs	Avg. Weekly Wages	(NECTA) Labor Market Jobs	Location Quotient
Total, All Industries	15,745	\$1,128	2,560,975	
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, Mining	0.0%	\$1,168	0.18%	0.163
Construction	6.3%	\$1,793	4.58%	1.370
Manufacturing	3.3%	\$1,594	6.38%	0.524
Wholesale Trade	2.6%	\$1,941	3.35%	0.763
Retail Trade	13.7%	\$692	9.01%	1.524
Transportation, Warehousing, Utilities	0.7%	\$1,336	2.93%	0.237
Information	0.8%	\$1,108	3.20%	0.245
Finance, Insurance, Real Estate	20.4%	\$1,540	6.81%	2.989
Professional, Scientific, Management	18.0%	\$1,881	18.97%	0.948
Education, Health Care, Social Assistance	18.7%	\$930	26.76%	0.700
Arts, Entertainment, Recreation	2.6%	\$519	1.87%	1.375
Accommodation & Food Services	9.2%	\$482	8.47%	1.087
Other Services	2.3%	\$629	3.41%	0.665
Public Administration	1.5%	\$1,561	3.74%	0.397

Sources: Executive Office of Labor & Workforce Development, Employment & Wages ES-202, Annual 2018; and Barrett Planning Group LLC.

The strongest industries are not always those with the highest paying jobs. Moreover, the overall **average weekly wage** reported for Hingham is somewhat less than that of the labor market area or the state as a whole, and mainly because retail makes up such a large share of Hingham's employment base.⁷ Table 5.5

⁶ University of Massachusetts Donohue Institute, "Massachusetts Economic Growth and Challenges," January 2020, prepared for South Shore Chamber of Commerce

⁷ Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development, Employment and Wages Report (ES-2020), 2018, Hingham, Boston NECTA, Commonwealth of Massachusetts. See also, South Hingham Study Group Report (2017), 10-11.

shows that in Hingham, the highest-wage industry is wholesale trade, followed by the construction trades and professional, scientific, and management sectors. While construction is both high-wage and regionally competitive, wholesale trade is not, and the professional, scientific, technical, and management sectors are roughly on par with the larger labor market area. Among industries that provide jobs to a large number of Hingham residents, the information industry has a limited role in the local economy, but it is likely that some residents working in finance, insurance, and real estate also work in Hingham because the supply of jobs can support them.

EMPLOYERS

Like most suburbs, the Town itself is among the largest employers in Hingham, with approximately 984 municipal and school employees. For the past ten years, however, Blue Cross Blue Shield has ranked first of all establishments in terms of jobs. According to the Town’s 2019 *Comprehensive Annual Financial Report* (CAFR), Blue Cross’s payroll has increased significantly, from 990 jobs in 2010 to 1,485 in 2019. Linden Ponds has gained almost 100 workers since 2010 as well. Other major employers reporting 10-year job growth include Harbor House and Eat Well. Russ Electric and Stop & Shop employ fewer people today than 10 years ago, but the most noticeable changes have occurred at EMD Serono Laboratories, where employment has dropped 27 percent, and Talbot’s, down 20 percent.⁸

TABLE 5.6. TRENDS IN MAJOR EMPLOYERS: 10-YEAR SNAPSHOT

	2019 Employment	Rank	2010 Employment	Rank	Jobs +/-	Percent Change
Blue Cross	1,485	1	990	1	495	50%
Town of Hingham	984	2	989	2	(5)	-1%
Linden Ponds	853	3	767	3	86	11%
Talbots	470	4	590	5	(120)	-20%
Serono Laboratories	436	5	600	4	(164)	-27%
Harbor House	245	6	215	7	30	14%
Whole Foods	227	7	220	8	7	3%
Russ Electric	221	8	265	6	(44)	-17%
Stop & Shop	190	9	210	9	(20)	-10%
Eat Well	168	10	145	10	23	16%
Total	5,279		4,991			
Percent All Jobs	47.5%		48.9%			

Source: Town of Hingham Finance Department, CAFER 2019, 141.

The profile of large employers in Table 5.6 bears some similarity to the profile reported in the 2001 Master Plan, so Hingham benefits from having some long-term establishments.⁹ Yet, significant changes have occurred, too. Talbot’s employed more than twice the number of people in 2001, and the legendary Building 19 still operated on Derby Street. Neither Derby Street Shops nor Blue Cross Blue Shield’s 329,000

⁸ Town of Hingham, *Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR)*, 141.

⁹ John Brown Associates, et al., *Hingham Master Plan (2001)*, 2-6.

sq. ft. facility on Technology Park Drive existed at the time. EMD Serono Laboratories was relatively new in 2001, with just 100 employees, and Linden Ponds had just been approved by the Board of Appeals. Though it was foreseen in the last Master Plan, The Launch at Hingham Shipyard came later. In short, the amount of commercial development in Hingham has increased significantly in 20 years, resulting in a 21 percent increase in the number of employer establishments operating in the town. These changes have fueled growth in Hingham’s employment base, tax base, traffic volumes, and housing demand.

TAX BASE

Hingham’s tax base reflects its high housing values, prestigious coastal location, and zoning. Over the past five years, the town’s residential property values have grown 23 percent and commercial values, 8 percent. While industrial values have dropped slightly, the value of personal property (the movable assets of a business) has increased 9 percent. Clearly, while the commercial tax base has gained value, it is the value of Hingham’s housing stock that drives the size and structure of the town’s tax base. This can even be seen in the Town’s recent “Proposition 2 ½” tax levy calculations because housing has accounted for anywhere from 75 to 90 percent of all “new growth” revenue added to the tax levy in any given year.¹⁰

TABLE 5.7. ASSESSED VALUE TRENDS, HINGHAM, FISCAL YEARS 2016-2020

	Residential	Commercial	Industrial	Personal Property	Total	Residential Percent	C/I/P Percent
2016	5,411,453,260	495,113,900	170,024,500	98,762,540	6,175,354,200	87.63	12.37
2017	5,665,777,460	521,896,100	176,387,600	101,728,750	6,465,789,910	87.63	12.37
2018	6,086,543,946	539,513,614	171,822,200	102,140,530	6,900,020,290	88.21	11.79
2019	6,289,130,546	535,949,214	168,725,700	103,779,490	7,097,584,950	88.61	11.39
2020	6,652,412,754	533,509,206	168,948,850	107,749,420	7,462,620,230	89.14	10.86
% Change	22.9%	7.8%	-0.6%	9.1%	20.8%		

Sources: Massachusetts Department of Revenue, Municipal Data Bank.

Hingham residents pay the third highest average single-family tax bill of the communities around it, i.e., less than Cohasset and Norwell and more than Scituate, Hull, Rockland, and Weymouth. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2020, Hingham ranked 29 out of 351 cities and towns for average tax bill, so residential taxes here are relatively high compared with most Massachusetts communities. Since the last master plan was prepared, Hingham’s state rank has fluctuated very little, from a high of 26 (1998) to a low of 37 (2011).¹¹

¹⁰ MA Department of Revenue, Municipal Data Bank, “New Growth Analysis, FY 2003-Present.”

¹¹ Municipal Data Bank, “Assessed Valuation,” “Tax Rates by Class,” and “Average Single-Family Tax Bill.”

TABLE 5.8. TAX BASE COMPARISON WITH SURROUNDING TOWNS

Municipality	Total	Single-Family Percent	Total Residential Percent	CIP Percent	FY 2020 Tax Rate	Average Single Family Value	Average Single Family Tax Bill
Cohasset	3,088,266,742	78.0%	93.2%	6.9%	\$12.97	\$1,005,283	\$13,039
HINGHAM	7,462,620,230	72.2%	89.1%	10.9%	\$11.53	\$866,222	\$9,988
Hull	2,370,224,330	75.6%	95.8%	4.2%	\$12.82	\$472,929	\$6,063
Norwell	2,761,557,059	80.5%	85.4%	14.6%	\$16.63	\$650,268	\$10,814
Rockland	2,229,139,590	57.0%	80.4%	19.6%	\$17.50	\$333,884	\$5,843
Scituate	4,875,051,680	84.0%	95.7%	4.3%	\$13.50	\$601,671	\$8,123
Weymouth	8,648,131,460	62.2%	85.6%	14.4%	\$12.50/\$18.70	\$400,382	\$4,773

Sources: MA Department of Revenue, Municipal Data Bank, Assessed Valuation, Tax Rates by Class, and Average Single-Family Tax Bill.

COMMERCIAL AND INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT

Despite the amount of new commercial development in Hingham, the town has a fairly small amount of land used or available for nonresidential purposes. The property database maintained by the Hingham Assessor classifies 418 parcels with a combined total of about 1,600 acres as commercial or industrial land (Map 5.1), or roughly 12 percent of the town’s land (excluding roads).¹² Almost all the existing nonresidential development can be found in three areas: Hingham Square/Hingham Harbor, the Shipyard/Route 3A, and South Hingham.¹³ Pockets of nonresidential and mixed uses also exist in West Hingham, Hingham Center, and Queen Anne’s Corner, where Hingham and Norwell converge. Table 5.9 provides a snapshot of development in these locations. It should be noted that some properties classified as commercial or industrial are likely nonconforming uses or lots.



Hingham Square business district.

¹² One of these parcels is actually classified for assessment purposes as an exempt use. Blue Cross Blue Shield qualifies as a non-profit organization. Nevertheless, the active land use on the property is commercial/office.

¹³ The town’s total land area is approximately 14,208 acres, excluding land under water.

TABLE 5.9. EXISTING NONRESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT

	Parcels	Total Area	Avg. Parcel (Developed)	Built Sq. Ft.	Eff. FAR	Median Year	Total Value	Vacant Acres
Downtown/Harbor	79	49.29	0.62	304,470	0.142	1930	\$57,259,800	0.23
Hingham Shipyard/Route 3A	58	158.19	3.85	868,983	0.156	1986	\$245,979,500	30.04
Hingham Center	12	3.06	0.22	31,305	0.275	1936	\$6,151,700	0.45
South Hingham	241	1,108.95	3.88	3,568,171	0.088	1982	\$530,842,300	174.07
Other	28	315.74	11.21	278,473	0.020	1902	\$36,344,700	1.77
Total	418	1,635.22		5,051,402	0.081		\$876,578,000	206.55

Sources: Hingham Assessor’s Database, 2019, and Barrett Planning Group LLC.

Notes: (1) The tax-exempt parcel controlled by Blue Cross Blue Shield in South Hingham is included in this table as nonresidential development and the value of its property is also included in the “total value” column.

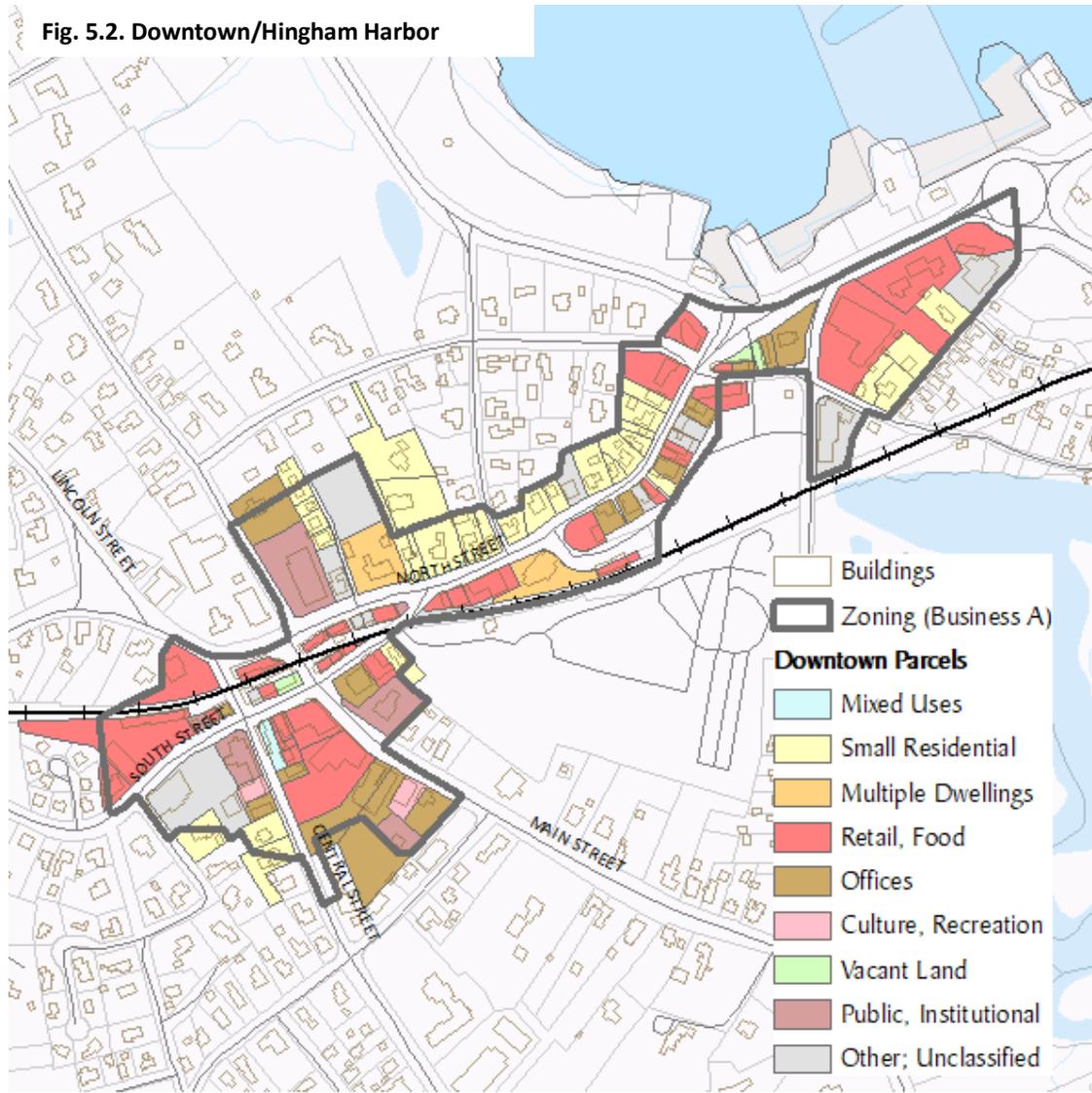
(2) “Effective FAR” is a simple expression of the intensity of use in Hingham’s nonresidential areas. It is calculated against the land area in developed parcels only, i.e., vacant commercial or industrial land is not included.

Downtown/Hingham Harbor

The Downtown/Hingham Harbor area (Fig. 5.2, next page) is an attractive town center with specialty shops, food services, and office space mixed with institutional uses and some housing as well. It serves as Hingham’s civic, social, and cultural hub, and from community meetings for this Master Plan, it is clear that Hingham residents value the Downtown/Harbor area and all that it has to offer. The development pattern found in Downtown Hingham and the vicinity of Hingham Harbor has early roots, for the buildings are organized around narrow roads in a tightly organized frame bound by Main, North, and Water Streets. This linear, compact development pattern, concentration of institutional uses (religious, educational, public), and “organic” walkability does not exist anywhere else in Hingham. Today, the Town is working with the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) on a vision plan for the Downtown/Harbor area.



Fig. 5.2. Downtown/Hingham Harbor



Hingham Shipyard/Route 3A

Hingham Shipyard/Route 3A is a gateway setting for regional travel between Hingham and Weymouth where Route 3A (Lincoln Street) crosses the Weymouth Back River. Today, this section of town features a large mixed-use development north of Lincoln Street known as “The Launch,” with retail development and services, a private marina, and a public transportation facility at the Shipyard, together with mixed-income apartments and a senior care residence. Unlike Downtown, the Shipyard/3A commercial area is relatively large with long, through roads, relatively large parcels and large buildings, and in some cases tall buildings by Hingham standards. The Launch offers walkability “by design,” i.e., with storefronts, offices, and restaurants abutting wide sidewalks and parking areas situated behind the main buildings. South of Lincoln Street (Fig. 3) is Lincoln Plaza, a shopping center with a supermarket, clothing store, and miscellaneous financial and personal services, and a co-work facility. The headquarters of Talbot’s, the

specialty clothing store founded in Hingham decades ago, occupies a large, now underutilized site east of the shopping center. Over time, multifamily housing (rental and ownership) has developed nearby along Beal Street, bringing additional customers and workers to Shipyard businesses.

The Shipyard/3A commercial area is both a business/mixed-use center and a major water-dependent transportation resource. When operating, the Boston Harbor ferry service at the Hewitt's Cove terminal has carried over 5,000 commuters a day. It has played a crucial role in transforming this part of Hingham from a World War II shipbuilding yard to a busy population and employment center. A private boating facility, Hingham Shipyard Marinas, operates next door. Along the outer edge of the Shipyard/Route 3A area is extensive open space and parkland facing the Back River.

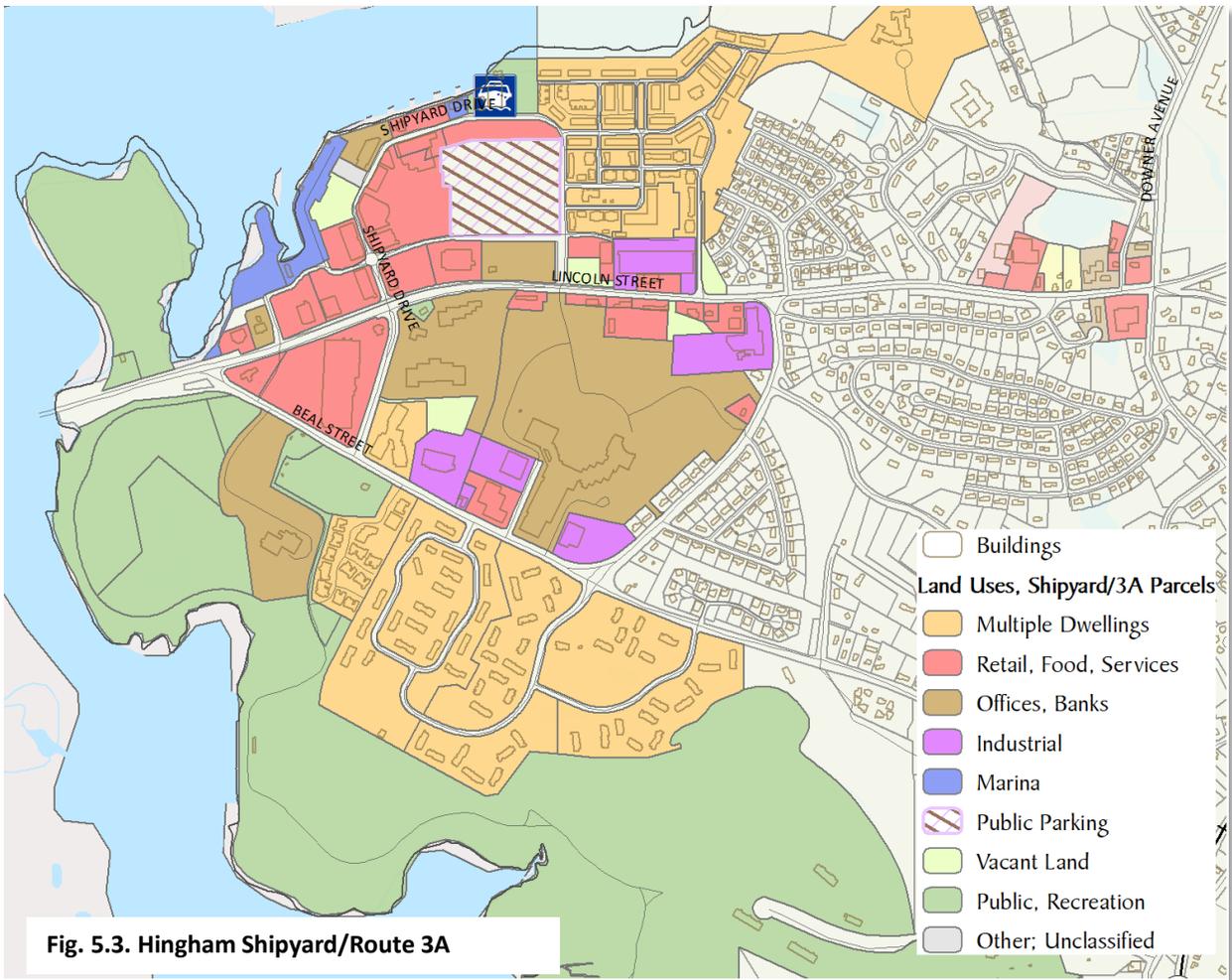


Fig. 5.3. Hingham Shipyard/Route 3A

South Hingham

Hingham is well aware of the potential that exists for transformative development in **South Hingham**. It contains more land zoned for high-value industrial and commercial development than any other part of town, yet it also presents significant barriers to growth: lack of wastewater infrastructure, water supply constraints, aging public safety facilities, and traffic hazards. The absence of sewer service remains the most significant impediment to realizing South Hingham’s potential as a source of jobs, housing, and tax revenue.

In 2017, the **South Hingham Study Group** produced a report on its assessment of development potential in South Hingham. The 2017 study area (900 acres) was very similar to the South Hingham land use map shown in Fig. 5.4, though it focused on the Office Park and Industrial Park districts south of Whiting Street and extending to the Weymouth and Rockland town lines. When the report was completed, the South Hingham study area had 3.3 million sq. ft. of commercial, industrial, office, institutional, and residential development. The Study Group concluded that South Hingham has capacity for 1.5 million to 3.6 million sq. ft. of nonresidential and residential floor area (some of it replacing existing space), and potentially more if all properties exercised their as-of-right development potential. These outcomes could yield anywhere from \$3.9 million to over \$10 million in gross revenue per year (2017 values and tax rate assumptions).¹⁴ Ample market strength exists to support significant growth in South Hingham, too. A 2015 presentation to the Select Board reported over 2.3 million sq. ft. of new development in South Hingham over 12 years, though about 76 percent of that growth depended on access to water or sewer service from adjacent communities.¹⁵



Bikeshare at Blue Cross Blue Shield.

There is considerable interest in the possibilities for economic growth in South Hingham and the tax revenue it may bring. Ten years ago (2010), Town Meeting voted to create a South Hingham Sewer District and a preliminary study to connect the district to the Massachusetts Water Resource Authority’s (MWRA) sewer system. The Town subsequently found that connecting to the MWRA system would be cost prohibitive. Support for solving South Hingham’s wastewater needs has been reinforced since then, however, including funds to initiate design of a wastewater treatment facility (WWTF) in the South Hingham Industrial District. Nevertheless, limited progress has been made toward identifying a feasible, long-term solution. While this Master Plan process was underway, the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) and South Shore Chamber of Commerce collaborated to locate sites along the Route 3 corridor (Weymouth to Hanover) that could support expanding water and wastewater infrastructure.¹⁶

¹⁴ South Hingham Study Group Final Report, (2017), 54, 65.

¹⁵ J. Seelen, “Infrastructure and Development in South Hingham” (January 2015).

¹⁶ South Shore Chamber of Commerce, South Shore 2030 Update (August 4, 2020).

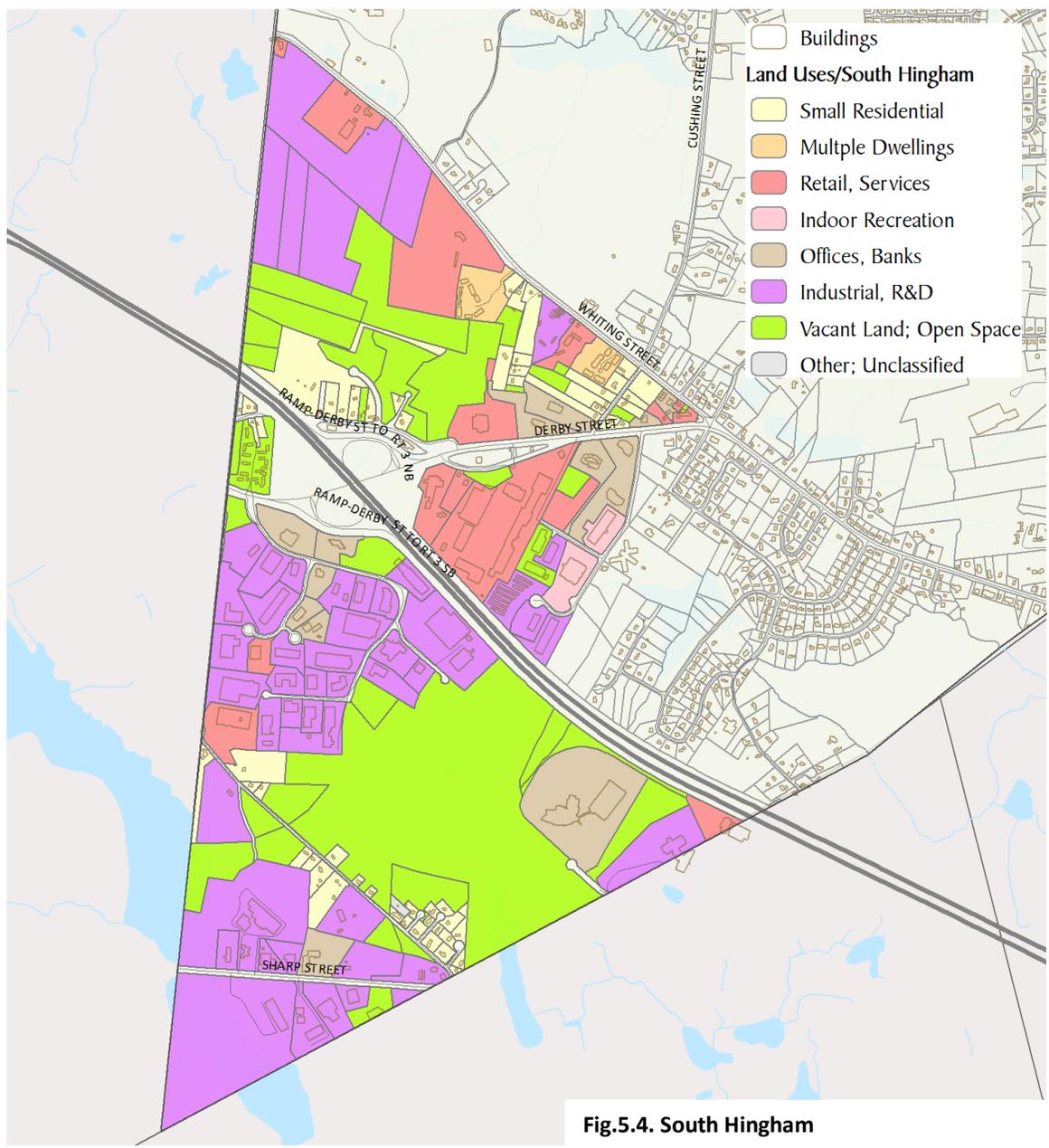


Fig.5.4. South Hingham

The Town has known for several years that A.W. Perry, owner of South Shore Park, wants to reinvest in and reposition existing properties and develop new projects on the available vacant land. In 2010, Hingham Town Meeting voted to designate South Shore Park as a Priority Development Site under G.L. c. 43D, though it is not included in the Interagency Permitting Board's (IPB) list of 43D-approved locations. Echoing industry trends toward a mixed-use reinvention of older office parks, A.W. Perry hopes to add commercial/office, industrial, multifamily residential, and some retail uses to South Shore Park if infrastructure and regulatory (zoning) limitations can be addressed. The project would boost the tax base and create live-work opportunities for a younger workforce than what is generally served by housing costs and jobs on the South Shore. The constraints of water and wastewater, and to some extent transportation

and traffic safety, remain significant challenges in South Hingham. In addition, the zoning in place in this part of town would not allow the kind of mixed-use reinvention of South Hingham called for in projects like A. W. Perry's plans.

Vacant Commercial Land

The amount of vacant, potentially developable commercial and industrial land in Hingham is limited: less than 300 acres, according to the assessor's database (not including acres classified as undevelopable). Absent rezoning a sizeable amount of land for new nonresidential purposes (an idea that may not appeal to many people in Hingham), the town's future economy will depend on efficient use of the remaining vacant land, reuse of existing built assets, and infill activity in established areas. These kinds of approaches to economic development will hinge on adequate infrastructure and utilities in priority locations.

HINGHAM'S TAX BASE

With relatively little land developed for commercial or industrial purposes and much of it underutilized, it is not surprising that Hingham's tax base remains overwhelmingly residential. As Table 5.10 illustrates, new commercial development in Hingham on the eve of the last recession triggered an uptick in the proportion of the tax base comprised of commercial, industrial, and personal property (CIP). However, housing values have accelerated rapidly in Hingham – trending upward at about 4 percent per year over the past decade. Commercial values, though strong compared with many South Shore towns, have not kept pace with the rate of appreciation in home values in Hingham.

TABLE 5.10. ASSESSED VALUES BY CLASS OF PROPERTY IN HINGHAM, 2005-2020

Year	Assessed Values					Percent	
	Residential	Commercial	Industrial	Personal Prop.	Total	Residential	CIP
2020	\$76,702,319	\$6,151,361	\$1,947,980	\$1,242,351	\$86,044,011	89.1%	10.9%
2019	\$74,274,632	\$6,329,560	\$1,992,651	\$1,225,636	\$83,822,478	88.6%	11.4%
2018	\$71,638,622	\$6,350,075	\$2,022,347	\$1,202,194	\$81,213,239	88.2%	11.8%
2017	\$69,405,774	\$6,393,227	\$2,160,748	\$1,246,177	\$79,205,926	87.6%	12.4%
2016	\$67,589,051	\$6,183,973	\$2,123,606	\$1,233,544	\$77,130,174	87.6%	12.4%
2015	\$64,702,074	\$6,109,108	\$2,150,280	\$1,209,106	\$74,170,568	87.2%	12.8%
2014	\$60,766,274	\$5,712,368	\$1,949,725	\$1,266,972	\$69,695,339	87.2%	12.8%
2013	\$58,437,075	\$5,406,377	\$1,942,228	\$1,228,438	\$67,014,119	87.2%	12.8%
2012	\$56,387,197	\$5,162,708	\$1,952,554	\$1,157,607	\$64,660,067	87.2%	12.8%
2011	\$53,617,898	\$5,332,094	\$2,020,045	\$1,072,637	\$62,042,674	86.4%	13.6%
2010	\$52,593,165	\$5,118,167	\$1,966,885	\$1,022,636	\$60,700,853	86.6%	13.4%
2009	\$47,803,243	\$4,619,270	\$1,822,427	\$879,616	\$55,124,556	86.7%	13.3%
2008	\$46,014,332	\$4,261,811	\$1,760,090	\$637,016	\$52,673,250	87.4%	12.6%
2007	\$43,924,117	\$3,815,111	\$1,743,871	\$670,276	\$50,153,374	87.6%	12.4%
2006	\$41,745,055	\$3,530,155	\$1,894,098	\$601,359	\$47,770,666	87.4%	12.6%
2005	\$39,529,519	\$2,463,003	\$1,578,229	\$617,299	\$44,188,051	89.5%	10.5%

Source: Massachusetts Department of Revenue, Municipal Data Bank.

Over time, the town’s average single-family tax bill has inched upward, as has its state tax bill rank, from 37 out of 351 cities and towns in 2011 to 31 in 2020. Multifamily rental and condominium developments have absorbed some of the residential burden, for aggregate value of single-family property as a percentage of total residential value has dropped slightly, from 83 to 81 percent, but clearly, it is the value of Hingham’s single-family real estate that drives the tax base.

TABLE 5.11. AVERAGE SINGLE-FAMILY TAX BILL HISTORY

Year	Single Family Values (Aggregate)	Single Family Parcels	Average Single- Family Home Value	Single Family Tax Bill	State Rank
2020	\$5,391,362,700	6,224	\$866,222	\$9,988	
2019	\$5,148,138,600	6,227	\$826,745	\$9,764	31
2018	\$5,019,280,800	6,226	\$806,181	\$9,489	32
2017	\$4,661,710,100	6,216	\$749,953	\$9,187	34
2016	\$4,471,588,300	6,205	\$720,643	\$9,001	30
2015	\$4,289,113,600	6,192	\$692,686	\$8,679	31
2014	\$4,052,662,700	6,186	\$655,135	\$8,228	33
2013	\$3,985,833,700	6,159	\$647,156	\$7,973	31
2012	\$3,963,099,200	6,160	\$643,360	\$7,650	37
2011	\$4,000,363,900	6,136	\$651,950	\$7,224	37

Source: Massachusetts Department of Revenue, Municipal Data Bank.

Hingham has wisely kept a uniform tax rate, currently set at \$11.53 per \$1,000 of assessed value. This practice is common throughout the South Shore, excluding Braintree and Weymouth, as shown in Table 5.12.

TABLE 5.12. TAX RATE PRACTICES IN ROUTE 3 CORRIDOR COMMUNITIES

Town	Year	Residential & Open Space	Commercial	Industrial	Personal Prop.
Braintree	2020	\$9.86	\$21.81	\$21.81	\$21.73
Weymouth	2020	\$11.92	\$18.70	\$18.70	\$18.70
Hingham	2020	\$11.53	\$11.53	\$11.53	\$11.53
Rockland	2020	\$17.50	\$17.50	\$17.50	\$17.50
Norwell	2020	\$16.63	\$16.63	\$16.63	\$16.63
Hanover	2020	\$16.31	\$17.07	\$17.07	\$17.07
Pembroke	2020	\$14.49	\$14.49	\$14.49	\$14.49
Marshfield	2020	\$13.33	\$13.33	\$13.33	\$13.33
Duxbury	2020	\$14.66	\$14.66	\$14.66	\$14.66
Kingston	2020	\$16.28	\$16.28	\$16.28	\$16.28
Plymouth	2020	\$16.35	\$16.35	\$16.35	\$16.35

Source: Massachusetts Department of Revenue, Municipal Data Bank.

ZONING FOR COMMERCIAL AND INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT

Hingham regulates nonresidential development in numerous zoning districts, including **use districts** and **overlay districts**. Converting the Zoning Map to an area table shows that over 90 percent of the town is residentially zoned (five districts) or located in a protective district for open space and public land uses (Official and Open Space), leaving about 10 percent of Hingham’s land available for business and industrial uses – much of it without sewer infrastructure. Table 5.13 reports the approximate acreage in each use district.¹⁷

TABLE 5.13. AREA IN NONRESIDENTIAL ZONING DISTRICTS

District	Approximate Acres
Business A	43.4
Business B	53.6
Business Recreation	164.3
Industrial	191.0
Industrial Extending into Waterfront	59.4
Industrial Park	770.3
Limited Industrial Park	21.3
Office Park	224.2
Waterfront Business	1.9
Waterfront Recreation	9.5
Land Zoned for Nonresidential Uses (Subtotal)	1,539.1
Residential & Open Space	<u>16,364.7</u>
Total Area	17,903.8
Sources: Town of Hingham GIS, Barrett Planning Group LLC.	

In addition to the ten nonresidential use districts listed in Table 5.8, Hingham has established two overlays specifically for purposes of economic development: the South Hingham Development Overlay District with 868 acres and a Downtown Overlay District, 25 acres.

In some cases, there are very few differences between use districts. For example, Business A (downtown) and Business B (pockets along Route 3A and 53) are almost identical except for the limited allowance of hospitals, commercial outdoor recreation, warehouses, and storage containers in Business B. The four industrial districts also have similar use regulations, save for differences such as where take-out food services, auto repair businesses, boat sales and storage, or “light industry” uses are allowed, and the type of approval process varies as well. A remarkable number of nonresidential uses require special permits in Hingham’s nonresidential districts, but the same can be said for most single-family residential suburbs.

The more noteworthy differences in Hingham’s commercial and industrial zones can be found in the Town’s density and dimensional regulations. For example, the Industrial District calls for a minimum lot of 80,000 sq. ft., and the Office Park requires a tract of at least five acres. The Industrial Park and Limited Industrial Park both require at least two acres per lot, and where retail uses are allowed in an industrial or office zone, the minimum area is much larger. Different requirements apply to amount of development

¹⁷ Hingham GIS. Acres are approximate.

allowed in various districts, too. They are determined by coverage ratios and floor areas ratios (FARs), and unusually low maximum building heights of 40 feet or less. The Town has an unusual lot regularity rule, i.e., that a perfect square equal to 80 percent of the minimum lot frontage can be placed within each lot, with at least one point touching the front lot line. Hingham also requires deep setbacks (100 feet) both for buildings and associated parking adjacent to residential districts in all of the industrial districts, excluding Office Park. Very low size thresholds trigger Site Plan Review, and since so many uses in Hingham require a special permit from the Board of Appeals, in many cases commercial or industrial projects may need approval from both boards.

Other zoning regulations affect the amount of development allowed on nonresidentially zoned land in Hingham, too. Minimum parking requirements in most suburbs exceed best practices today, and Hingham is no exception. Some noticeably high off-street parking requirements include one space per unit in assisted living facilities, five spaces per 1,000 sq. ft. for retail, one space per three seats in restaurants, and 30 spaces per 1,000 sq. ft. for fast-food establishments. Though a detailed zoning audit is beyond the scope of a master plan, the land use, dimensional, and parking requirements that apply in Hingham are noteworthy because the Town has so many concerns about tax revenue.

The overlay districts ostensibly create additional opportunities, but with restrictions. The South Hingham Development Overlay District applies to land in the Industrial and Office Park districts south of Route 53. If approved by the Board of Appeals, building heights within the overlay can be as high as 60 feet and five stories where the underlying district is Office Park, or 48 feet if the underlying district is Industrial District. In exchange for some additional development privileges, the South Hingham Development Overlay District imposes fees (assessments) to mitigate the impact of growth on South Hingham's traffic and other infrastructure improvements. The Downtown Overlay creates opportunities for mixed-use (commercial and residential) buildings by special permit. Some residents say that downtown's chief downfall is its shortage of parking, which they say discourages people from visiting the downtown area to shop, dine, and socialize. Others say the main problem is lack of parking enforcement.

Development Approval Process & Permitting

Residents and other participating in the community engagement process for this Master Plan gave mixed reviews to Hingham's zoning policies and permitting procedures for economic development. Residents seemed to have mixed feelings about waterfront-oriented development, with some suggesting that the area's vulnerability to sea level rise raises serious questions about how much development to promote in the "interface between sea and land." Some business and property owners described Hingham as one of the "hardest towns to build in," yet local officials bristle at comments like these, ascribing them to a limited number of people. Still, interviews with businesses in Hingham's commercial and industrial zones revealed similar misgivings about the town's land use regulations and what they perceive as a negative attitude toward businesses, and permitting challenges that may reflect a shortage planning, development, and inspectional services staff. While business owners and developers give high marks to Town staff, they lament the fragmentation that exists in the permitting process and between town departments. Many communities with such differing perspectives about the relationship between business and government have economic development staff to improve communications, gather and report market data, provide

information to site search and site selection professionals, promote entrepreneurship, but Hingham has not invested in this kind of capacity.

ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Several groups and organizations are actively involved in planning for and promoting economic development in Hingham. They include:

- The **Hingham Development and Industrial Commission (HDIC)**, an eight-member Town board appointed by the Board of Selectmen. By law (G.L. c. 40A, §8A), a Development and Industrial Commission's focus is industrial and commercial development, though the kinds of activities it can undertake are quite broad: research, marketing and promotions, and coordinating a community's approach to economic growth.
- **Hingham Downtown Business Association (HDA)**, a collaborative effort of 70 local businesses and organizations operating or interested in the Downtown/Harbor area. The HAD coordinates special events, networking, and advocacy for downtown vitality. It is currently helping to promote a parallel planning activity in Hingham, a downtown-harbor vision plan led by MAPC.
- **South Shore Chamber of Commerce (SSCC)**, based nearby in Rockland, plays a prominent role in advocacy for regional economic development throughout the South Shore, from Braintree to Plymouth. In 2017, the SSCC and its subsidiary, the South Shore Economic Development Corporation (SSEDC) released a regional economic development plan, South Shore 2030, which seeks to build on the region's strengths by addressing barriers to economic growth (housing, transportation, infrastructure, leadership).

Challenges and Opportunities

Hingham has so much going for it as a desirable place for living and working, yet there are impediments, too – some of them in the Town's control and others, well beyond Hingham's power and financial means to address. Situated along a stretch of Route 3 that is arguably the South Shore's best opportunity for economic growth, Hingham has prestige, high property values, high household wealth, excellent schools, and an active waterfront and scenic coast. It has both direct access to Route 3 and Route 3A, and it has neighboring communities that are working to enhance their economic future. Opportunities for regional collaboration exist, supported by the capacity that comes with regional resources, yet Hingham – like most South Shore towns – has limited *local* capacity for economic development.

The South Hingham Study Group included a report card-like assessment of Hingham's strengths and weaknesses for economic development. Though focused on South Hingham, the opportunities and challenges assessment they produced bears repeating, in part, because much of it applies to the Town as a whole. Other needs exist that are not identified in the South Hingham report, as outlined below.

HINGHAM'S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRENGTHS & OPPORTUNITIES

Economic Characteristics

- Highly educated, highly skilled, competitive labor force
- High median household income with considerable disposable income
- Excellent schools, public and private
- Family-oriented town
- Support for local businesses

Location

- Prestigious coastal town that attracts both businesses and residents
- Hingham Harbor
- Direct access to Route 3, the South Shore's primary opportunity corridor
- Access to Route 3A along north part of town
- Vacant and underutilized land available for commercial and industrial development

Public Services & Facilities

- South Shore Regional Emergency Dispatch Center
- Responsive, well-trained public safety personnel
- Emergency medical service
- Municipal electric utility
- Hobart Street substation can accommodate growth, including in South Hingham
- Municipally owned water utility (recently acquired)
- Public sewer service supporting downtown, Shipyard economic growth (through adjacent towns)

Transportation

- MBTA Commuter Rail
- Boston Commuter Ferry Service
- Key roadway improvements, notably Derby Street

Government/Public Policy

- Town leadership supportive of economic growth
- Knowledgeable volunteers on boards and commissions
- Uniform tax rate for residential and nonresidential property

HINGHAM'S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT WEAKNESSES & CHALLENGES

Economic Characteristics

- Limited supply of housing affordable to workers in local establishments
- Aging population
- Low-wage employment (and jobs vulnerable to economic downturn) dominate recent job growth
- Expensive housing, very high land values
- High commercial rents
- Limited inventory of space for large office users

Location

- Regional developments, some of which may compete with Hingham's interests:
 - Union Point
 - Hanover Crossing (mixed-use redevelopment of Hanover Mall)
 - Queen Anne's Corner in Norwell

Public Services

- Lack of wastewater solutions for South Hingham
- Costly solutions to infrastructure needs
- Water Management Act constraints on water withdrawal
- The South Fire Station need to be replaced and relocated to serve future South Hingham development
- Growth will require Hingham to increase capacity in Police, Fire, other departments

Transportation

- Pandemic has made future of MBTA service very unclear
- Lack of public transportation in South Hingham
- Lack of intra-town public transportation serving all of the business districts and Harbor
- Additional traffic and traffic mitigation improvements may affect the residential character of collector streets in South Hingham

Government/Public Policy

- Hingham does not have a professional economic development director, unlike many towns of similar size, demographics, and tax base
- Zoning policies that need to be updated
- Need to evaluate the organizational structure of planning, zoning, conservation, and permitting and inspections