

BOXBOROUGH 2030

A RURAL, ENGAGED COMMUNITY FOR ALL



Annual Progress Report of 2024

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Contents

Introduction	3
Past Progress	3
2024 Progress Report	5
Ongoing Projects and Completed Actions	5
Delayed or Unreported	5
2024 Recommendations	5
Emerging Themes	6
2024 Unreported Data	6
Opportunity for Staff Support	6
Burden of Volunteerism	6
Opportunity for Technical Assistance	7
Grants for Success	7
Internships and Studio Projects	7
Recommendations	8
Closing Statement	9

Figures

Figure 1: 2021 Progress Snap Shot	4
Figure 2: 2024 Progress Snap Shot	5
Figure 3: Staff vs Board Actions	6

Introduction

Eight years ago, the Town of Boxborough set forth to 2030, with the goal of being a rural and engaged community for all. A community already rich in diverse cultures and community has since grown and flourished into a beautiful home for so many. As we look toward the final six years of this Master Plan, we now consider how best to wrap up so many important goals and projects. In 2016, following an engaging and innovative process, the Town put forward a set of aspirations:

- 1. Maintains its rural character and celebrates its heritage;**
- 2. Is engaged and welcoming;**
- 3. Is thoughtfully developed;**
- 4. Provides quality services and amenities;**
- 5. Is conscientious about consumption;**
- 6. Is affordable and accessible;**
- 7. Is regionally well-connected.**

To meet its aspirations, an action plan was developed, with goals, strategies, and specific actions to meet the overall vision. Despite frequent and pivotal staff turnover these past 8 years, the Town has persevered, and continued to complete these various actions. To the staff that have been here through the majority of this time, I commend you for your commitment to this community. To the dedicated, passionate, and engaged members of the community who have helped carry to torch that is this Master Plan, your incredible effort is highlighted in this progress report and your continued quality of life.

This report details our progress to date, and outlines a path forward. Each year, the Town Planner will convene a joint meeting of the Select Board and Planning Board, as described in the Master Plan. Through this joint meeting, the Town Planner will present data collected from the complete spectrum of Boards, Committees, and Commissions, alongside departments and staff. Each joint meeting will provide the Select Board and Planning Board, those boards elected to bring forward policy to the Town, with an opportunity to provide feedback and understand how their community has grown. Following this joint meeting, the Town Planner then sets forward to a year of work, with the task of catalyzing, supporting, and at times directly assisting the community in the completion of the plans various strategies and actions. But to understand our path forward, we must first examine how we've arrived at our current position.

Past Progress

From the years 2020 through 2022, the Planning Board and Town Planner began cataloging these results in a similar manner. Joint meetings were held, reports were made, and the data has since been memorialized on the Town's website for public consumption. Of the 125 actions proposed in the 2030 Master Plan, 10% could be considered complete as of the 2021 progress report. This is a deceptively

small percentage, when framed by the several actions that will never be completed. Many of the plans actions are perpetual, unable to be closed out or completed, and will be continued well into the Town's next Master Plan. These actions are equally important, as they include acquisition of land for a strategic purpose, maintenance of parks and conservation land, and supporting at need populations.

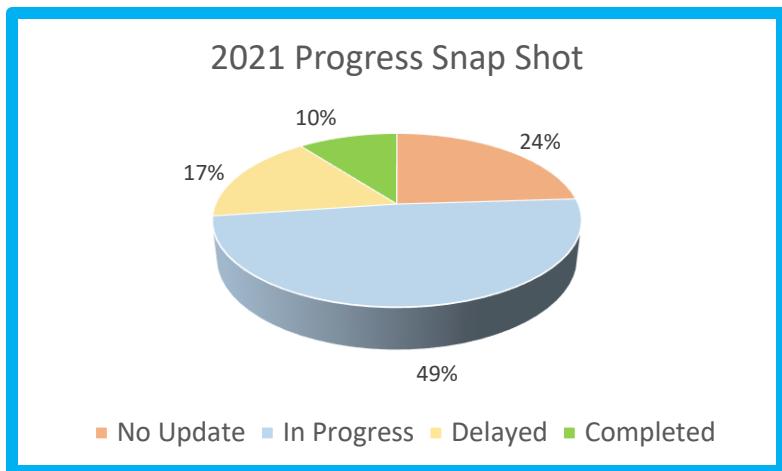


Figure 1: 2021 Progress Snap Shot

As such, the success of a Master Plan can be better be measured by the number of actions complete and in progress. By this measure, 59% of the master plan had been or was being addressed by 2022. The data measures a successful plan that is well under way; especially when recognizing that no master plan is ever fully completed.

Of the actions completed, much of the success is in the form of investigation or study completed. For example, the Agricultural, Conservation, and Recreation Commission all completed studies of physical sites or legislative measures. This study work can point to future projects, but is marked as complete when the initial study is fulfilled. When project leads begin to reach substantial completion or consistent progress in the majority of their actions, they can look toward the results of these studies for new projects. Similarly, the results of these studies may initiate other actions in the plan, catalyzing further success of the Master Plan.

The two other measures that can be assigned are actions delayed or not reported. The remaining 41% of actions fall into these two categories through 2021, with 24% unreported and 17% facing delay. Actions may face delay, either due to a lack of resources or due to non-action of the project lead. In some cases, a project lead may take no action, but a supporting board or staff may take lead over time.

When actions are unreported or delayed, it is often because further support is needed. In these cases, the Town Planner must reengage with the project lead, to learn how best to reengage the project. Reengagement could be in the form of direct assistance by Town Staff, technical assistance by an outside agency or consultant, or technical support through new tools.

In rare cases, delay may be at the recommendation of the lead, when an action is determined to be non-compatible with the Town. For example, in previous updates, the Recreation Commission reported that investigation of a public swimming facility was unlikely, due to a lack of public water supply. This was reiterated in 2023 by the Open Space and Recreation Plan, but addressed as still important to the community at large.

While we celebrate the ongoing progress and completed projects, we must focus on reengaging the delayed or unreported actions. In some cases, we may even be able to address multiple actions through shared direct or technical assistance. Looking toward 2024, we can now evaluate current conditions and the upcoming year of work to advance the remaining goals.

2024 Progress Report

In 2022, the Office of Land Use and Permitting was formed, under the direction of the Town Planner. This was simultaneous to turnover in multiple positions, and a significant increase in permitting before the planning board. This resulted in a one-year data gap. 09% of actions will require further reporting by the Planning Board and Select Board, a data gap caused by the Town Planner's method of data collection. These Boards were not given advanced opportunity to respond. Many of their actions were reported on by the Town Planner or in conference with Town staff, based on readily available knowledge. This will be avoided in future years by early engagement of the two lead boards, simultaneous to engagement with the many of the Boards, Committees, Commissions, and Town Staff. Despite this gap, progress seems to have held steady, based on the 91% of reported data. Of the 91% of data reported, the Town may still evaluate progress and delays in the plan.

Ongoing Projects and Completed Actions

The metric ongoing and completed actions remains static at 60%, however there is a noticeable increase in the number of completed actions. This signals an overall success in implementation of the plan. The success metric of 60% ongoing or complete will likely rise next year, as the data gap is eliminated.

Delayed or Unreported

The delayed or unreported metric represents a combined 31% of all actions. If we assume the data gap mirrors the comparison of both data, a two to one ratio of success versus delayed or unreported, then it can be assumed the actual full metric of delayed or unreported data lies around 34%. The Town Planner will reengage with those boards who did not provide a report in the spring and summer of 2024, to resolve the status of actions.

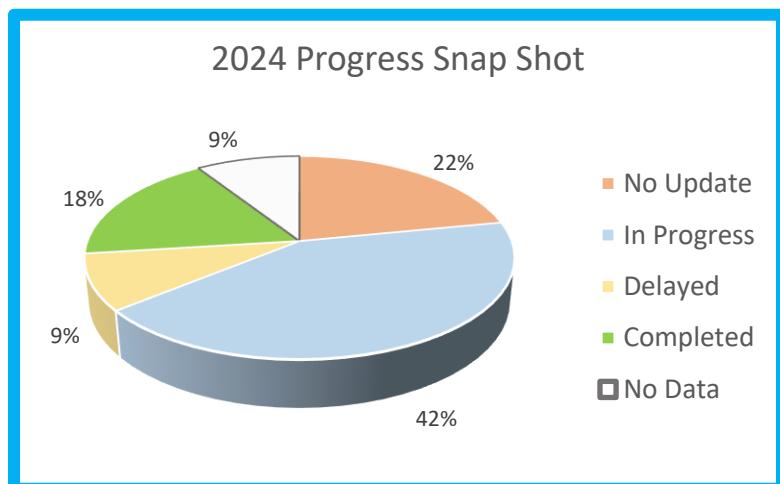


Figure 2: 2024 Progress Snap Shot

2024 Recommendations

A Master Plan progress report is incomplete without the recommendations of a Town Planner. The Town Planner and planning staff are hired to assist in the fulfillment of these actions, however methodology may differ between planners. If the Town is successful in hiring an Associate Town Planner, a portion of the 2025 report will include recommendations from the Associate, which may differ in approach from the Town Planner. For example, one planner may utilize technological

support(*software, hardware, etc...*), while another planner may prefer technical assistance(*consultants, regional planning services, etc...*). Recommendations may also come directly from a project lead.

Emerging Themes

To make recommendations, we must first explore emerging themes in the data. Wherever feasible, we look to combine technical and technological assistance to fulfill multiple actions. For example, one consultant may support two actions, resulting in reduced total billing and maximizing time with the Town. Several themes can be discerned in the 2024 data, based on progress from 2022 to 2024, and based on a comparative analysis of 2024 reports against each other.

2024 Unreported Data

Much of the 2024 Unreported data was previously categorized as in-progress or delayed. This eludes to a plan more complete than current data suggests. The Town Planner may revise the data collection method in 2024, ahead of the 2025 report; in rare cases, data collection may be tailored to a specific board to encourage complete participation.

Opportunity for Staff Support

In evaluating actions that have not progressed in 2024, or gone unreported, it can be immediately noticed that these boards receive no staff support. For example, the Economic Development Committee receives support from the Town Planner and has acquired regular technical assistance. As such, all of their actions have been reported between 2022 and 2024, and over 50% of their actions are reported on in 2024. In contrast, the Agricultural Commission and Recreation Commission were not responsive in 2024, two boards who currently receive no report. This analysis is inclusive of multiple other boards.

Burden of Volunteerism

Building off of the opportunity for staff to support, it should be noted that the vast majority of action items are placed on Boards, Committees, or Commissions. Figure 3(*right*) demonstrates that 94% of all action items have a project lead assigned as either a Board, Committee, or Commission. This is in stark contrast to available work hours. If we assume the average board meets 2 hours per month, compared to the average 32 hour per week employee, who has approximately 128 hours available per month. These action items, are also prone to take a back-seat to more routine activities. An example being, the Conservation Commission may need to prioritize applications during a busy permitting season.

Nearly all boards are comprised of volunteers, who graciously split time between work, personal commitments, and volunteerism. Overburdening volunteer boards leads to reduced momentum, board turnover, and loss of public interest, which limits recruitment after board turnover.

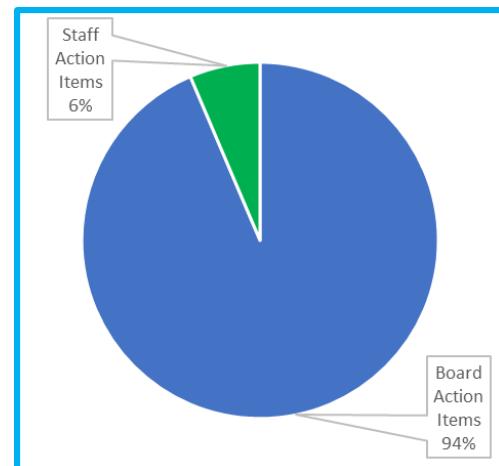


Figure 3: Staff vs Board Actions

Opportunity for Technical Assistance

Several Boxborough 2030 actions could be addressed through technical support, regardless of current status. Actions that include revising legislation, considering amendments or policies, or considering improvements, can all be addressed by professionals in the field. Technical Assistance allows a project lead to manage a consultant, without the commitment of staff or board hours to complete the task. Deliverables remain the same, but this method reduces the burden on available resources.

Grants for Success

In 2022, the Town hired its current Director of Land Use and Permitting, a skilled grant writer with project management experience. In 2023, the Director secured over \$25,000 in technical assistance, which has allowed the Town to advance two action items, to complete Green Communities designation and completion of the Hazard Mitigation Plan. Technical Assistance, while costly at times, is often eligible for grant funding. In part, the purpose of Boxborough 2030 and every Master Plan is to memorialize the need for technical assistance and substantiate the applications that can be submitted.

In 2024, the Town must leverage greater grant opportunities to support these projects. Staff and boards are often left questioning, what should be applied for and when. This plan is meant to guide and dictate that decision making. Based on feedback collected at the joint meeting of the Select Board and Planning Board, the Town Planner will collect feedback on priority recommendations. Following this feedback, the Town Planner will then convene with project leads and determine eligibility for grant applications. With commitment of the project lead, the Town Planner will apply for grant funding and assign hours to complete action items.

Internships and Studio Projects

The Office of Land Use and Permitting is working to develop a partnership with each of the four accredited planning programs of Massachusetts. Internships and class size studio projects can be a low cost method of conducting public engagement, case study research, or technical analysis. The Town Planner intends to host regular internships, partnering an intern with a board to complete a tangible project over 10-12 weeks.

A studio or field project will span an equal length of time, but are reserved for larger projects. These projects will be overseen by a faculty member and include multiple students, tasked with completing a defined scope of work. Regardless of whether a project is listed in this recommendation section, interested boards should contact the Town Planner to discuss project concepts.

Recommendations

Recommendation	Description	Actions/Boards to be Supported	Funding Source
Assign a Board - Staff Point of Contact	To support a variety of boards in the implementation of their action item, the Town should consider assigning Staff liaisons. These personnel would ensure boards are aware of ongoing initiatives, town deadlines, and if nothing else serve as a resource for the chair to bounce ideas off of.	Any board not currently receiving staff support.	Low to no cost, Town budget if additional staff were needed.
Climate Action Plan	In collaboration with the Sustainability Committee, complete action 5.1.4.1 of a Climate Action Plan. Said plan would also inform several other Action items through its recommendation section.	Sustainability Committee, Actions 5.1.4.1, 5.1.4.2	Intern/Studio Project, Town Budget
Design Review Board Consult.	Provide technical assistance or a consultant to the Design Review Board, for the update of Design Guidelines. This consultant could work in conjunction with the Chair and convene meetings for the Board to approve work products.	Design Review Board, Actions 1.1.2.2, 1.2.1.1, 1.2.1.2	TAP/MAPC, Community One Stop for Growth, Intern/Studio Project, Community Compact
Google Engagement Training	Offer staff and Volunteer training on the newly implemented google suite. Specifically tailor training to the use of engagement tools, shared spaces, and how to maximize our new tool for engagement.	Actions 2.3.1.2, 2.3.1.3	Low to no cost, Training Grants
HOPE Program	Assist the Housing Board in the development of the proposed HOPE program. Project Administration needs to be flushed out and an administrator selected.	Action 6.1.1.1	No cost or BAHT
Ongoing Business Grants	Explore the ability to finance a recurring grant program for small businesses, based on the successful utilization of the ARPA funded program.	Actions 3.1.3.3, 3.1.5.3, 3.2.13, 3.2.1.4	No cost to explore, implementation unknown.

Recommendation	Description	Actions/Boards to be Supported	Funding Source
Public Safety OPM	Following a recommendation of the Building Committee, the Committee should assign or hire an OPM for the project. This volunteer or consultant can more rapidly apply for funding, work with consultants, and would serve as the primary point of contact for all	Action 4.2.1.1	No cost or Town Budget, Hazard Mitigation, Community One Stop for Growth.
Revitalization of the Complete Streets Program	The Select Board must decide if they wish to reinstate the complete streets committee or if they wish to consolidate authority for the program under the Town Planner/DPW. The Prioritization Plan is being updated and will be an important capital funding mechanism	Greater than 5 Actions	No cost
Wayfinding Plan	To support the development of a Town "brand" and wayfinding consistency, the Town should complete a Wayfinding Plan via consultant.	Actions 1.1.2.2, 2.2.1.1, 3.1.5.1, 3.2.1.1, 6.1.5.2, 7.1.1.1	Community One Stop for Growth, Community compact Internships/Studio Projects, MassTrails,
Zoning Education Event	To develop an understanding of the many proposed zoning tools from the Plan, a summer forum can be held with presentation given by Adam Costa or another zoning expert, covering multiple zoning tools. Afterwards, boards can recommend which tools the Planning Board should consider.	Planning Board, Greater than 5 action items	Low to no cost

Closing Statement

Since 2016, the Town has taken consistent steps to bring its own future into focus. This progress report process is intended to lay that path forward, and keep record of how best we continue to shape our own future. With the experience of the Town Planner, the feedback and guidance of the Select Board and Planning Board, and with the voice of many citizens, we will continue to make Boxborough a rural and engaged community for all.