

# BOXBOROUGH 2030

## A RURAL, ENGAGED COMMUNITY FOR ALL



## Annual Progress Report of 2025

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# Contents

Introduction.....	3
Past Progress .....	3
2025 Progress Report .....	4
Ongoing Projects and Completed Actions.....	5
Delayed or Unreported .....	5
2024 Recommendations .....	5
Emerging Themes .....	6
Implementation of Staff Support .....	6
Opportunity for Technical Assistance .....	6
Housing, Equitability, and Accessibility .....	6
Grants for Success .....	6
Internships and Studio Projects .....	6
Recommendations.....	7
Closing Statement.....	7

# Figures

Figure 1: 2023 Progress Snap Shot.....	4
Figure 2: 2023 Actions Engaged .....	4
Figure 3: 2024 Progress Snapshot .....	5
Figure 4: 2024 Actions Engaged .....	5

## Introduction

Nine 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 five 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 staff turnover these past nine 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 the 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.

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. As of the 2024 progress report, this metric had remained static, at 60%, with 10% of data uncollected. The 2023 data measures a successful plan that is well under way; especially when recognizing that no master plan is ever fully completed.

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 2025, we can now evaluate current conditions and the upcoming year of work to advance the remaining goals.

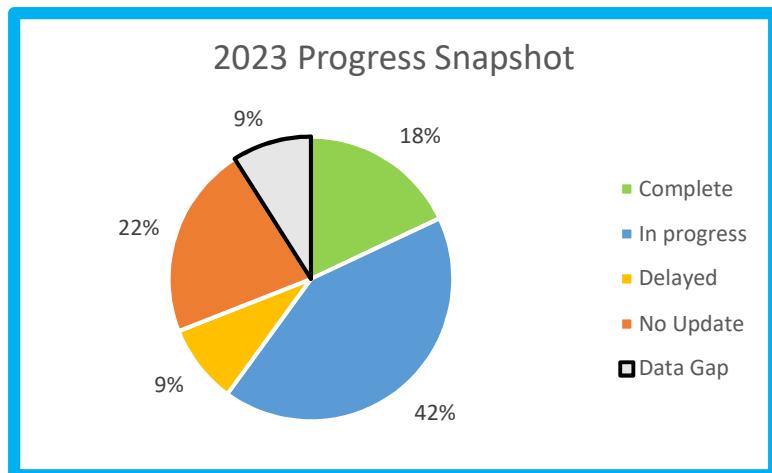


Figure 1: 2023 Progress Snap Shot

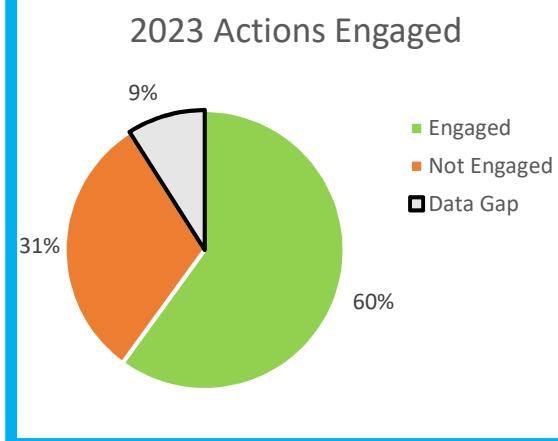


Figure 2: 2023 Actions Engaged

## 2025 Progress Report

In 2024, the Office of Land Use and Permitting welcomed its first Associate Town Planner. The Associate Town Planner was tasked with data collection and assisted multiple boards with reporting. The Town Planner further assisted in the preparation of report forms. The hiring of an Associate was pivotal in complete data collection, with no data gaps present in this year's report.

## Ongoing Projects and Completed Actions

The metrics of in progress and completed actions drastically increased through 2024. This is due in large part to the Town's designation as a green community, completion of the Strengthening Police and Community Partnership program, and the launch of public transit in Boxborough. A quarter of all actions can now be deemed complete, with an additional 58% of actions now reported in progress. This totals to 82% of all actions engaged in or complete, a rise of 22% from the previous year.

A margin of 80% actions engaged is a fantastic metric. This demonstrates active pursuit of the plan, either through conscious action or continuing pursuit of past goals.

2024 Progress Snapshot

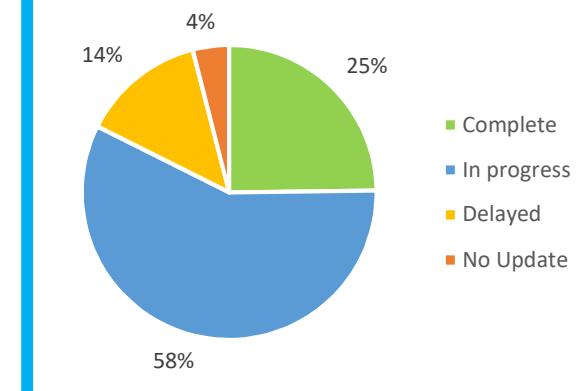
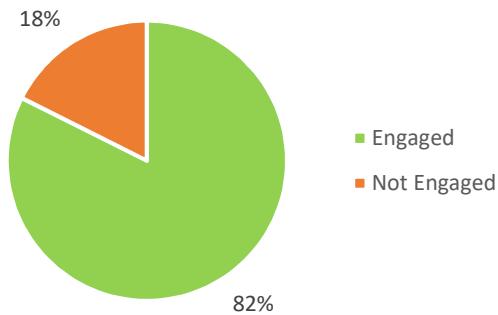


Figure 3: 2024 Progress Snapshot

2024 Actions Engaged



## Delayed or Unreported

Boards, committees, and Town officials took significant strides towards the implementation of the Master Plan, with only 18% of actions reported as delayed or with no update given. Of the actions reported as delayed, approximately 33% can be accomplished through greater study or consulting. The remaining 66% were noted by the lead as either not relevant or not a priority.

There was no data gap in completing this 2025 progress report, due to the utilization of staff support to complete reporting. The Conservation Commission, Planning Board, Recreation Commission, and Select Board all utilized available staff to both implement

Figure 4: 2024 Actions Engaged  
and report on progress in 2024. This has resulted in increased productivity and higher quality data, due to reduced burden on volunteers.

## 2025 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. With the successful hiring of an Associate, the Planning Department has been able to onboard and better assist otherwise unsupported boards and committees. This is mirrored by other boards who are now better utilizing staff support. Notably, the Office of Human Services has promoted from within to designate a Recreation Services Coordinator. The

coordinator significantly contributed to this year's reporting, and intends to initiate delayed action items in the coming year.

## **Emerging Themes**

To make recommendations, we must first explore emerging themes in the data. Wherever feasible, we look to use technical 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, and based on a comparative analysis of the past report and current report.

### *Implementation of Staff Support*

In preparing this report, it has become evident that staff are providing a greater volume of support to boards and committees. This marks significant growth in 2024, and maximizes available resources to volunteers. Based on this report, more work is being completed and the Town has made significant progress towards implementing its Master Plan.

### *Opportunity for Technical Assistance*

Of the few unreported or delayed actions, many can be addressed through technical support and study work. 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.

### *Housing, Equitability, and Accessibility*

Of the delayed or unreported items, a housing production plan and evaluation of equitability in legislation are both outstanding. This past year, the need for an updated housing production plan has become evident, exacerbated by compliance with the MBTA Communities Act. The Master Plan calls for regular completion of a housing production plan, and evaluation of local regulations for equitability and accessibility. A housing production plan would complete multiple action items, and support many more.

Further, a design or planning professional can be retained to evaluate both accessibility and equitability in our legislation. This will build off the ADA Self-evaluation being conducted in 2025, and can build off of the recommendations made in a housing production plan. Completion of these two exercises will contribute significantly to making Boxborough an accessible community to all.

## **Grants for Success**

In 2024, the Planning Department raised significant grant funding to reach compliance with MBTA Communities Program and to complete an ADA self-evaluation. In addition, the Office of Land Use and Permitting celebrated the ribbon cutting of Perkins Woods, another project that came to fruition through grant funding. We will continue to leverage grant funding to complete projects. While we did not need the assistance of matching funds in 2024, we may seek matching funds in 2025 or 2026.

## **Internships and Studio Projects**

The Office of Land Use and successfully leverage the support of two interns in 2024. We look forward to a Tufts Urban and Environmental Policy field project, and hosting a summer internship in 2025. This is an exceptional approach to completing work at low cost, while maximizing available staff time.

## Recommendations

Recommendation	Action Fulfilled	Description
<b>Prepare a Housing Production Plan</b>	Greater than 5 Actions	The Town Planner recommends that the Housing Board prepare a housing production plan, commencing in 2025. This plan should evaluate the prevalence of teardowns, incorporate results of the traffic study to recommend areas appropriate for new growth, evaluate the number of non-conforming lots, and explore ways to utilize the Affordable Homes Act. The Planning Department can be assigned this task, if the board would prefer
<b>Prepare an Economic Development Plan</b>	Greater than 5 Actions	The Economic Development Committee has prepared a scope of work for an economic development plan. This plan will synthesize past ED exercises, and prepare an action plan to reevaluate areas for commercial growth. Work can be conducted with MAPC, and can be done in 2025.
<b>Continue to Invest in Educational Partnerships</b>	Greater than 5 Actions	In 2024, the Land Use office employed two interns who launched a business database, assisted in the EDC grant program, and completed a total revision of the CPC Plan. These remain a cost-effective way to assist in the completion of projects. In 2025, the Town has partnered with Tufts Urban and Environmental Policy Students to complete the Climate Action Plan.
<b>Revitalization of the Complete Streets Program</b>	Greater than 5 Actions	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
<b>Complete the Climate Action Plan</b>	5.1.4.1	The Town Planner and the Sustainability Committee have commenced this action, and is working with Tufts University to complete the work. This plan will further guide sustainability in Boxborough, and go beyond the benefit of the Green Communities designation.

## Closing Statement

In 2024, the Town took significant steps forward in the implementation of the Boxborough 2030 Master Plan. This years progress report calls for fewer, but more specific recommendations. The Town Planner, Associate Town Planner, and many Town staff look forward to building off the success of 2024, and continuing to make Boxborough a rural and engaged community for all.