

Boxborough 2030 Master Plan Progress Report of 2026

[Cover page to be published]

Prepared by:
Alec Wade,
Director of Land Use and permitting/Town Planner

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Introduction

One decade ago, the Town of Boxborough established its vision for 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 these aspirations, an action plan was developed, with goals, strategies, and specific actions to meet the overall vision. 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. Joint meetings were held, reports were made, and the data has since been memorialized on the Town's website for public consumption. By 2022, of the 125 actions proposed in the 2030 Master Plan, 10% could be considered complete. This is a deceptively small percentage, when framed by the several actions that will never be completed. Many of the plan's 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, including acquisition of land for a strategic purpose, maintenance of parks and conservation land, and supporting at need populations.

The success of a Master Plan can be better measured by the number of actions complete and in progress. These metrics drastically increased through 2024, with a quarter of all actions deemed complete and an additional 58% of actions reported in progress. By December of 2024, 82% of all actions engaged in or complete, a rise of 22% from the previous year. This was due in large part to the Town's designation as a green community(2023-2024), completion of the Strengthening Police and Community Partnership program(2023-2024), and the launch of public transit in Boxborough(2024).

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.

Actions not engaged are often due to low capacity or failed attempt. As one example, the Historic Commission has consistently reported hesitation to pursue action item 1.1.1.5 - Consider additional protections for local historic resources in consultation with the Massachusetts Historical Commission. As the Commission reports, three failed attempts to pass a locally regulated historic district have led to the conclusion that the Town has no appetite for addition local regulation. However, with addition staff support the Town Planner contends that the Commission could explore other avenues for local protection. Three years of masterplan progress reporting has demonstrated the substantial effect of staff support in implementation, with additional staff support consistently leading to improved engagement of action items.

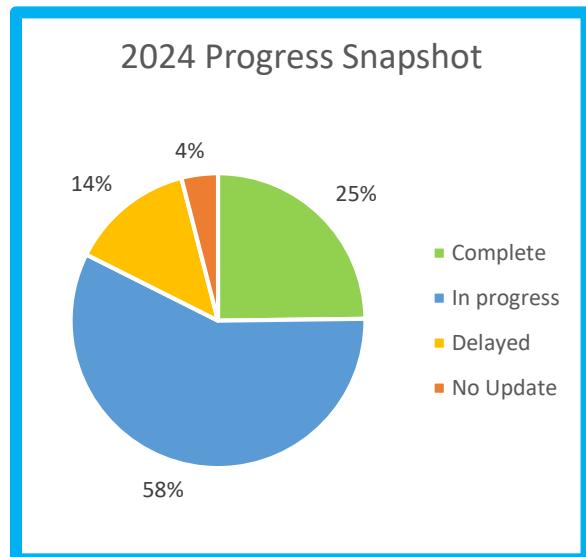


Figure 1: 2024 Progress Snapshot

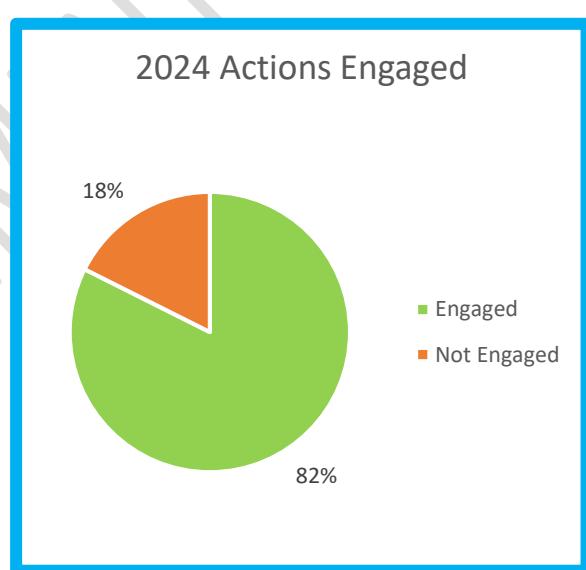


Figure 2: 2024 Actions Engaged

2026 Progress Report

In 2025, the Town continued to see progress towards a fully implemented plan. Planning staff were engaged in housing reform, plan review, and state compliance work. Planning Staff also saw trends in application review, that has spurred investment in previously unimplemented action items.

Ongoing Projects and Completed Actions

In 2025, an additional 4% of action items were acted upon, continuing progress toward implementation. This progress comes, in part, from the Housing Board's agreement to prepare a Housing Production Plan in 2026. The lack of a Housing Production Plan was a reported hinderance in the preparation of an MBTA Communities District, with the lack of a Plan contributing to the Town's paper compliance approach to the state's multi-family housing law.

Additionally, the Town Planner has begun working with the Design Review Board, to fund revisions to the Town's design guidelines. Through recent applications for permitting, and the Economic Development Committee's work in the village center, there has been a universal interest in more appealing building façade. This action has not yet been fully funded.

Delayed or Unreported

In 2025, the Planning Office notes a significant shift in reporting. Nearly all action items were reported on, or are currently being addressed by Town staff. As shown in Figure 4, a response was received or generated for 123 of the 125 action items, with only 2 action items receiving a "No Response" designation. This trend in reporting capacity mirrors the trend of continued implementation, with additional staff resources leading to greater reporting. Items not reported on were from the Public Celebrations Committee and the Trail Stewards.

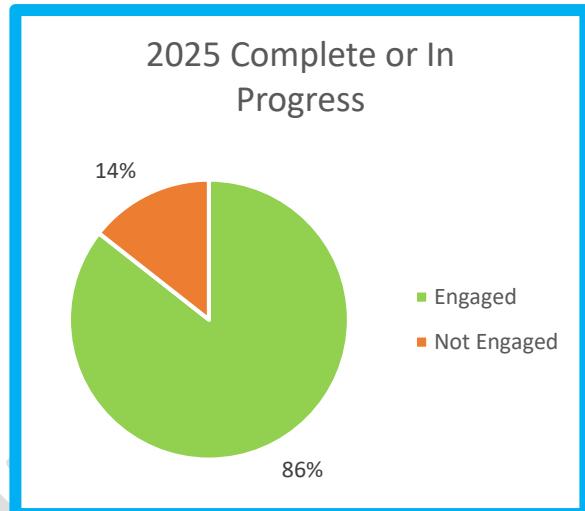


Figure 3: 2025 Actions Engaged

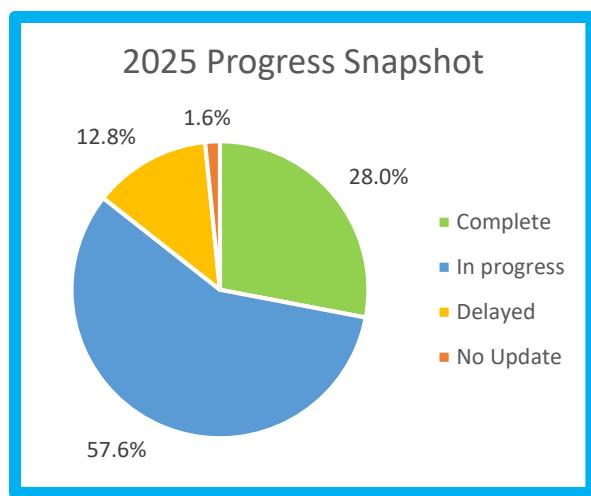


Figure 4: 2025 Progress Snapshot

2025 Areas of Success

Before moving ahead to recommendations of 2026, the Town should reflect on its areas of success. In 2025, the Economic Development Committee and Sustainability Committee continued to lead the way in implementation. Further the Sargent Memorial Library continues to offer a welcoming and beloved space for the community.



Figure 5: Thinking Flower Ribbon Cutting

Economic Development Committee

With successful funding of an economic development plan through \$75,000 in regional and state grant awards, the Economic Development Committee continues to build off previous success generated from the Boxborough Business Improvements Grant and the village center study. In 2025, awardees of the Grant program implemented their cumulative \$102,000 of grant funding, which contributed 12 new jobs to the local economy. In addition, the Economic Development Committee hosted its Village for a Day. This merchants fair celebrated business in Boxborough, while modeling a walkable village center. This event is estimated to have been attended by approximately 200 participants.

Sustainability Committee

As of 2025, the Sustainability Committee has implemented or taken action on all of the action items assigned to them. This was achieved, in large part, through the Climate Action Plan scheduled to be adopted in 2026. The Sustainability Committee continues to take significant strides in waste reduction and reduction of energy consumption. In 2025, the committee launched the long awaited Swap Shed, a volunteer operated space within the transfer station.

This space facilitates the reuse of lightly used goods, and serves as an informal community gathering space.



Figure 6: The Boxborough Swap Shed

Sargent Memorial Library

The Planning Department owes particular gratitude to the Sargent Memorial Library, which opened its doors on multiple occasions for Public Engagement events. This included the Fall Town Meeting Info Session, a new model for community engagement that saw attendance by more than 40 participants, of which an estimated 50% were new to local government. This pales in comparison to Diwali fest, hosted at the Sargent Memorial Library, which was attended by over 1700 people in 2025.



Figure 7: Diwalifest 2025

The Sargent Memorial Library continues to be the Town's most welcoming and inclusive space, and Library Director Peishan Bartley continually takes steps to improve the space. In 2026, the library will rearrange the layout to improve the use of existing space. The Library has established itself as a valuable partner for events, local programming, and projects through collaborations and joint projects with local organizations.

2025 Recommendations

Recommendation	Action Fulfilled	Description
Prepare a Housing Production Plan	Greater than 5 Actions	The Associate Town Planner has begun scoping this project with the Housing Board. In December, the Town Planner will meet with the Board to discuss financing and Grant Applications.
Complete the Economic Development Plan	Greater than 5 Actions	In 2025, the Town partnered with its regional council of governments and applied for funding to complete an Economic Development Plan. Now fully funded, this plan will guide policy and development areas in the coming decades.
Preparation of a Green House Gas Inventory	Greater than 5 Actions	To commence implementation of the Climate Action Plan, Town staff or a consultant will assist the Sustainability Committee in the preparation of a GHG Inventory. Investigation by the Associate Town Planner indicates such a project may be eligible for a MVP Action Grant. This will inform other areas of policy investment, and compliment municipal efforts through the Green Communities program.
Seek funding to revise the Town's Design Guidelines	Greater than 5 Actions	Recent trends in application review have indicated public and board displeasure in the existing building materials of Boxborough. With support of the Economic Development Committee and the Planning Board, the Design Review Board should be aided in a full revision of the Town's guidelines.
Convene a Local Historic Preservation Summit	1.1.1.5	The Town Planner recommends a focus group of officials be convened. Such a summit would include the Design Review Board, the Historic Commission, and the Steel Farm Advisory Committee, with the purpose of planning for historic resources and updates to be made to existing policy documents. This is a no-cost exercise that will help catalyze future preservation efforts.

Implementation by Staff Support

In 2026, Planning Staff will assist in the preparation of a Green House Gas Inventory and convening a Local Historic Preservation Summit. These two recommendations will guide future decision making, and require consensus building and data gathering that can be done at a local level. In addition to Town Hall Staff, technical assistance will be used to support staff time and advance projects.

Technical Assistance

In 2026, the Town will continue to work with the Metropolitan Area Planning Council, and will further engage technical assistance in the preparation of revised design guidelines. The Metropolitan Area Planning Council will be retained specifically for the economic development plan, and may be further engaged in the design guidelines and housing production plan. Alternatively, the Design Review Board and Housing Board may seek additional funding to work with an independent consultant.

In hosting a Local Historic Preservation Summit, the Town Planner may further consult with Preservation Massachusetts. Preservation Massachusetts is a state-wide non-profit offering circuit rider technical assistance and advocacy. The Preservation Massachusetts expertise may provide greater insight on emerging trends and areas of opportunity.

Grant Funding

Three of the five recommendation herein are immediately eligible for grant funding;

Design Guidelines – Regional DLTA funding may be an avenue for planning support, however the support of an outside consultant would require funding through the State's Community Planning grant program.

Housing Production Plan – Regional DLTA Funding can be used as a grant match for State Community Planning grant program or State Rural Development program.

Green House Gas Inventory – Regional DLTA funding could cover the cost of this project in full, however this project would also be eligible for several programs under the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs or the Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness grant program. Following the adoption of the Climate Action Plan, a funding avenue can be selected.

Closing Statement

2025 marked another successful year of Master Plan implementation, with another 4% of action items currently engaged. With the conclusion of planning for MBTA Communities Act compliance, Planning staff will have far greater capacity in 2026. The recommendations here in are expected to address an additional 4% or more of the action items, bringing the plan up to 90% implementation.

In 2026, the Town Planner will further seek to convene a subcommittee of the two boards, to begin planning for the next Long Range Comprehensive Plan. From 2026-2027, the Town will need to begin its scoping and planning to fund the next plan. A timeline for the planning process is as follows:



2026 Strategizing

Selecting a preliminary list of chapters and public engagement strategies will allow us to plan for cost.

2027 Financing

With our scope of work in hand, we will begin application to state funding agencies. Other financing strategies may be explored.

2028 Launch

Our next Long Range Planning Commission will be selected and begin engagement with the Consultant.

2029 Drafting

The final year of planning is spent drafting the plan and seeking adoption from the Planning Board.

January 1, 2030

With successful adoption, our new plan will take effect and the old plan will be memorialized.