

Town of Northborough Master Plan – Glossary of Terms

Affordability: There are typically two ways of addressing housing affordability in Massachusetts cities and towns. The first relates to the state-issued target of 10 percent low-income affordable housing units, mandated under Massachusetts General Law Chapter 40B. The second examines general housing affordability within a community for people and families of moderate income who do not otherwise qualify for state or federal housing programs and subsidies.

Architectural Access Board (AAB): a state government entity that develops and enforces regulations designed to make public buildings accessible to, functional for, and safe for use by persons with disabilities.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA): a civil rights law that prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in all areas of public life, including jobs, schools, transportation, and all public and private places that are open to the general public.

Accessory Housing/Dwelling Unit: a smaller, independent residential dwelling unit located on the same lot as a standalone (i.e., detached) single-family home.

Agricultural Preservation Restriction: a voluntary program by Massachusetts Department of Agriculture intending to offer a non-development alternative to farmers and other owners of “prime” and “state important” active agricultural land who are faced with a decision regarding future use and disposition of their farms. Towards this end, the program offers to pay farmland owners the difference between the “fair market value” and the “agricultural value” of their farmland in exchange for a permanent deed restriction which precludes any use of the property that will have a negative impact on its agricultural viability.

Business Improvement District (BID): a special assessment district in which property owners vote to initiate, manage and finance supplemental services or enhancements above and beyond the baseline of services already provided by their local city or town governments. A special assessment, or common area fee, is levied only on property within the district. The assessments are collected and expended within the district for a range of services and/or programs, including marketing and public relations, improving the downtown marketplace or city/town center, capital improvements, public safety enhancements, and special events.

Chapter 61: a voluntary current use program designed by the Massachusetts Legislature to tax real property in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts at its undeveloped, current use value rather than its highest and best use (development) value if the landowners are willing to commit to keeping some or all of their land undeveloped for a specified period of time. In addition, the municipal government of the town in which the enrolled property is located has a right of first refusal should the landowner put the land up for sale while it is enrolled in the program. There are three different Chapter 61 programs, Chapter 61 for forestry, Chapter 61A for agriculture, and Chapter 61B for open space and recreation.

Cost of Community Services Study: a case study approach used to determine the fiscal contribution of existing local land uses.

Community Preservation Act (CPA): a Massachusetts state law (M.G.L. Chapter 44B) passed in 2000 that enables adopting communities to create a local, dedicated fund for open space and historic resource preservation, development of affordable housing, and the acquisition and development of outdoor recreational facilities.

Conservation Restriction: a legally binding agreement between a landowner and an agency or organization. The landowner retains title to the property, but extinguishes certain development rights to the property. Lands with conservation easements are often granted local property tax relief.

Complete Street: a transportation policy and design approach that requires streets to be planned, designed, operated, and maintained to enable safe, convenient and comfortable travel and access for users of all ages and abilities regardless of their mode of transportation. Complete Streets allow for safe travel by those walking, bicycling, driving automobiles, riding public transportation, or delivering goods.

Density Bonuses: a zoning tool that permits developers to build more housing units, taller buildings, or more floor space than normally allowed, in exchange for provision of a defined public benefit, such as a specified number or percentage of affordable units included in the development.

Density Transfer Credit: the value of development potential transferred from an area to be conserved/protected (the “sending” area) to an area intended for additional development (the “receiving” area).

District Improvement Financing (DIF)/Tax Increment Financing (TIF): economic tools that promote redevelopment by use of public/private partnerships. DIF channels tax dollars into targeted redevelopment districts, while TIF offers tax breaks to developers.

Green Communities Designation (and Grant Program): an initiative of the Green Communities Division of the Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources (DOER), provides funding to qualified municipalities for energy efficiency and renewable energy initiatives once designated as a Green Community.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions: Greenhouse gases are gases that trap heat in the atmosphere. The primary sources of greenhouse gas emission include electricity production (fossil fuel burning), transportation (fossil fuel burning), industry (fossil fuel burning and certain chemical reaction), commercial and residential (fossil fuel burning, use of certain products that contain greenhouse gas, and the handling of waste), and agriculture (livestock, agricultural soils and rice production).

Green Infrastructure: Green infrastructure uses natural hydrologic features such as vegetation, soils, and natural processes to manage water and provide environmental and community benefits. At the scale of a city or county, green infrastructure refers to the patchwork of natural areas that provides habitat, flood protection, cleaner air, and cleaner water. At the scale of a neighborhood or site, green infrastructure refers to stormwater management systems that mimic nature by soaking up and storing water.

Inclusionary Zoning: a tool that can be used by municipalities to ensure adequate affordable housing is included in the normal course of real estate development. It requires a portion of the housing units in certain real estate developments to be reserved as affordable to low- and moderate-income households.

MassDOT: Massachusetts Department of Transportation, overseeing roads, public transit, aeronautics, and transportation licensing and registration across the state.

MassWildlife: Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, responsible for the conservation of freshwater fish and wildlife in the Commonwealth, including endangered plants and animals. MassWildlife restores, protects, and manages land for wildlife to thrive and for people to enjoy.

Missing Middle Housing: medium-density housing types such as cottage cluster housing and courtyard apartments that are in keeping with the character of existing single-family neighborhoods. These types provide diverse housing options along a spectrum of affordability to support walkable communities, locally-serving retail, and public transportation options.

Mixed-Use Development: a type of pedestrian-friendly development that blends two or more residential, commercial, cultural, institutional, and/or industrial uses into one building, block, district, or entire neighborhood.

Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP): a state grant program that provides support for cities and towns in Massachusetts to begin the process of planning for climate change resiliency and implementing priority projects. The state awards communities with funding to complete vulnerability assessments and develop action-oriented resiliency plans. Communities who complete the MVP program become certified as an MVP community and are eligible for MVP Action grant funding and other opportunities.

National Register of Historic Places: the official list of the Nation's historic places worthy of preservation. Authorized by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, the National Park Service's National Register of Historic Places is part of a national program to coordinate and support public and private efforts to identify, evaluate, and protect America's historic and archeological resources.

Priority Development Areas (PDAs) and Priority Preservation Areas (PPAs): PDAs are areas that are appropriate for increased development or redevelopment due to several factors including good transportation access, available infrastructure, an absence of environmental constraints, and local support. PPAs are areas that are important to protect due to the presence of significant natural or cultural resources, including endangered species habitats, areas critical to water supply, historic resources, scenic vistas, and farms, etc.

Right to Farm Community: a community that has adopted the Right to Farm laws that deny nuisance lawsuits against farmers who use accepted and standard farming practices and have been in prior operation even if these practices harm or bother adjacent property owners or the general public.

Sense of Place: the experience of how a person senses, relates to, and assigns concepts and values to a particular place through physical, visual, social, and economic interactions with the environment of this place.

Wayfinding: a term used to refer to the user experience of orientation and choosing a path within the built environment, and it also refers to the set of architectural and/or design elements that aid orientation.