

## **CHAPTER 3 INTRODUCTION AND TOWN HISTORY**

### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

#### **Process and Participation**

The last Master Plan of Reading was issued in 1991 and was the output of a 4-year focused effort, with profound results on the image of the Town today. In its conclusion it stated the following:

“A periodic review of the Mater Plan should take place approximately at the beginning of each decade. Those reviewing the Master Plan should not hesitate to make such revisions as they genuinely perceive necessary in order to keep the Plan up-to-date and realistic in light of changed perceptions and conditions in the Town and the surrounding Region.”

In Month, 2000 Reading was granted \$30,000 in planning services to create a Community Development (CD) Plan, pursuant to Executive Order 418. The CD Plan, which followed standards issued by the State Executive Office of Environmental Affairs (EOEA), focused on four elements: Natural Resources and Open Space, Housing, Economic Development and Transportation. To facilitate the planning process by the consultant hired to prepare the CD Plan - the Metropolitan Area Planning Council -, the Board of Selectmen formed a Master Plan Advisory Committee (MPAC). As the CD Plan developed between 2001-2003, it elicited wide community involvement in numerous visioning sessions and a significant level of community research. The CD Plan was presented to the Town and the State in April 2004.

In July 2004, the MPAC tenure was extended by the BOS until the end of 2005, with the task to incorporate the information of the CD Plan into a Town Master Plan set for completion by December 2005. In parallel, three new elements were to be developed in an attempt to incorporate a larger inventory of issues and concerns. Over the course of 2004 and 2005, MPAC held numerous meetings to: (a) update un-addressed components of the 1991 Master Plan, (b) re-examine the four elements of the CD Plan, where the Committee felt that a deeper focus on Town issues was required and (c) identify new elements for review and inclusion.

The value of this public process lies in the fact that the actual source of all information included and analyzed was, in a broad sense, the Town itself. The MPAC consists of Town staff, the full CPDC, members of boards, committees and organizations and residents, whose motivation has been to accurately depict current conditions, concerns and strategies.

Upon issuance of the Final Draft in August 2005, the MPAC engaged in an outreach campaign to publicize the 2005 Master Plan. This effort included presentations to boards, committees and organizations, the design and management of a web-page dedicated to the Plan and, finally, circulation and statistical analysis of a Town-wide questionnaire requesting residents input for the Plan's priorities.

The 2005 Master Plan went into effect upon formal adoption of the finalized Plan by the Community Development and Planning Commission – it went through further MPAC and public review. It was presented to the Selectmen and Town Meeting at the November, 2005 Town Meeting.

### **Land Use Summary**

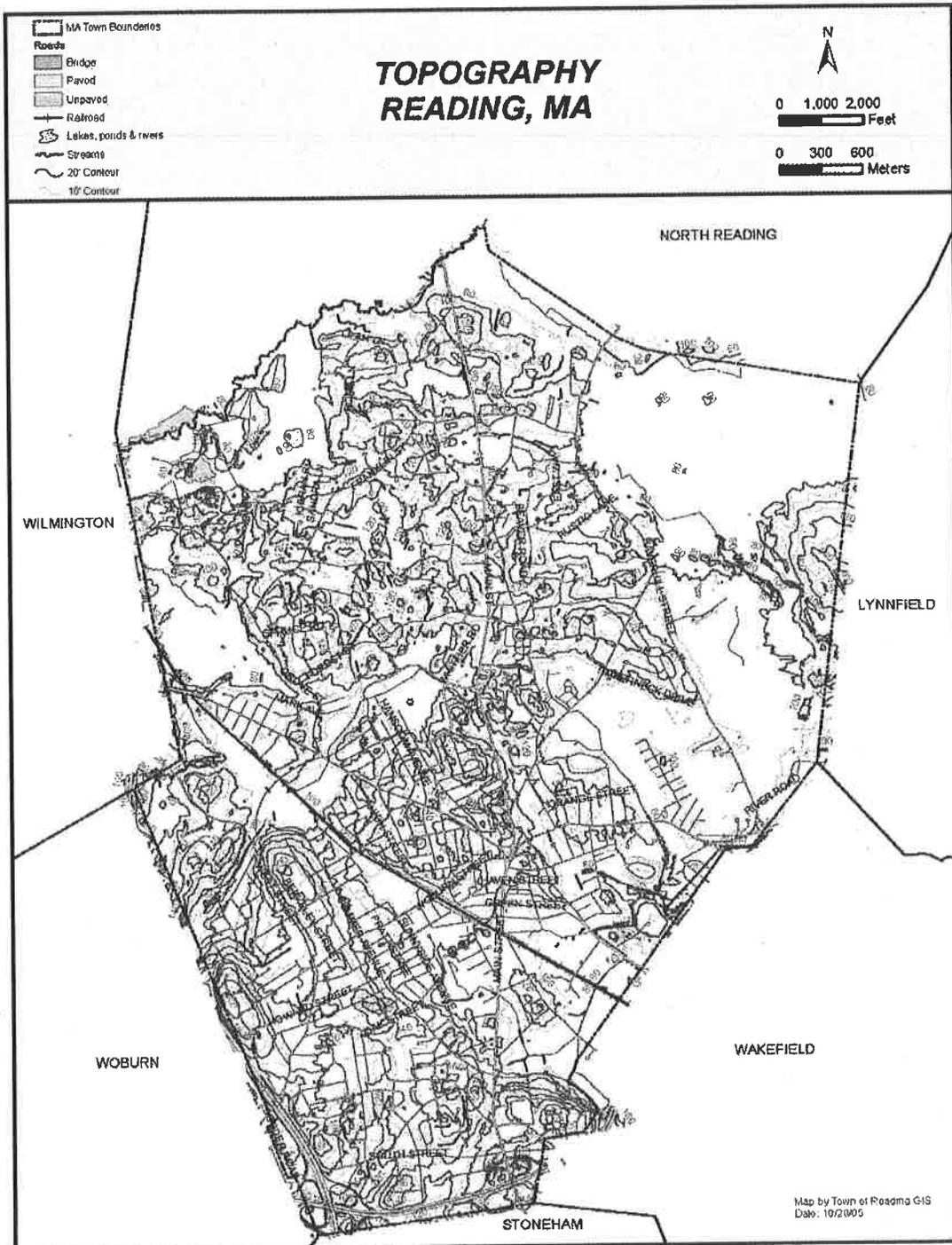
Between 1951 and 1981, Reading's land use changed from 68% non-urban (agricultural, forest, wetlands) to 51% urban (industrial, commercial, residential, transportation), while the population increased from 14,006 to 22,678 and the number of housing units increased from 3,962 to 7,486. By 1990, this change had continued, with the number of housing units further rising to 8,104. Adjoining municipalities have experienced the same kinds of changes, increasing the impact of their development on Reading. Since 1990, the population has increased 5.19%.

Along with this growing urbanization within both the Town and the region, the extent of conflicts between land uses has accelerated. There are significant conflicts, stemming from their different physical characteristics, purposes, and operations, between commercial and residential land uses, especially where they abut. These conflicts may include traffic, noise, drainage, and visual impacts. In generating more traffic and by using up much of the remaining open uplands, new residential development can conflict with existing neighborhoods. Regional traffic impacts can impair the functioning and safety of local streets.

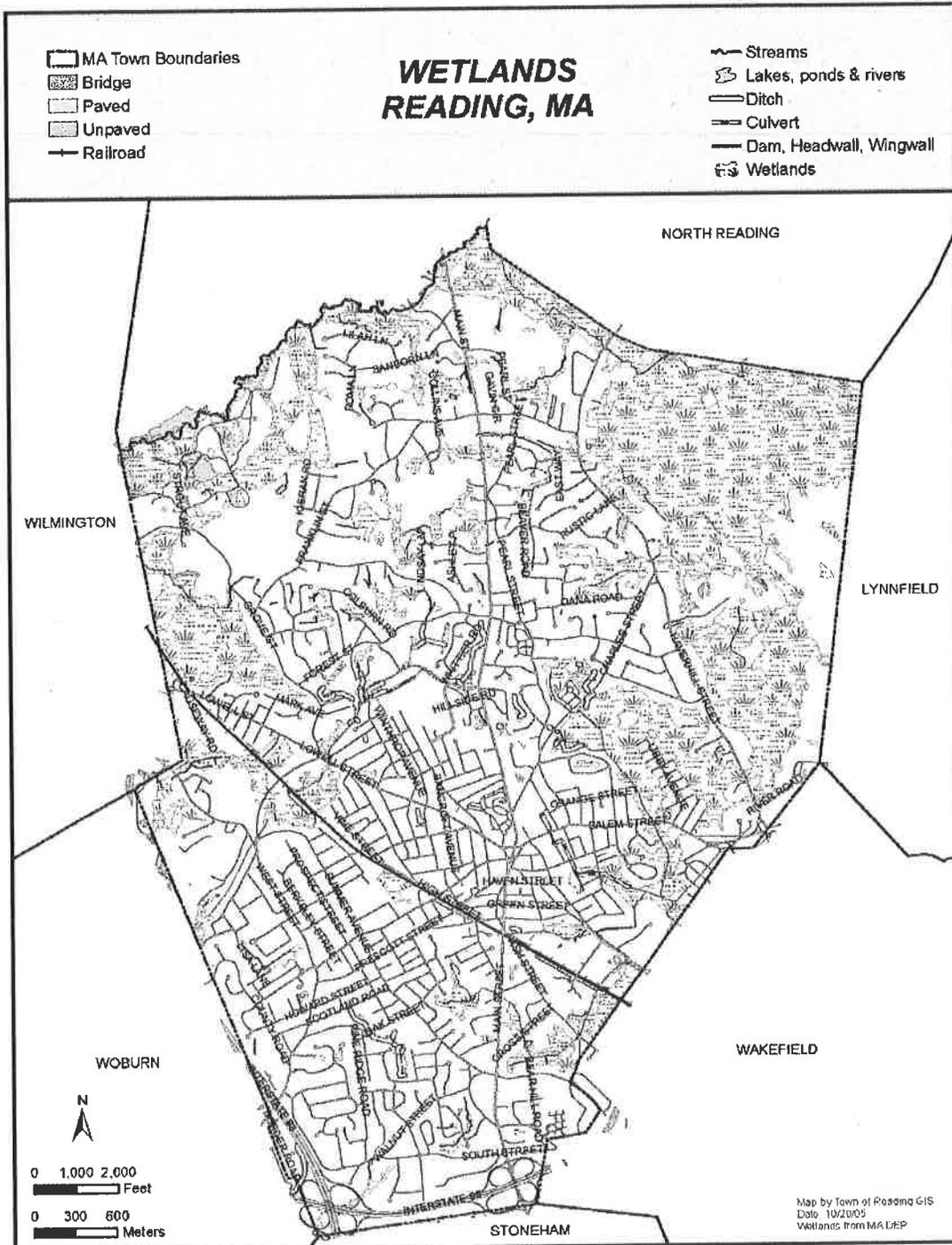
Changing demography, economics, and technology contain sources of new conflict as well, in such matters as:

- housing: affordability, multi-family and secondary dwelling units, home occupations, and cottage industries,
- business: regionally and nationally based corporations seeking to promote non-local uniform standards and competing with locally owned businesses, and
- professional, office, and industrial: differential market changes in demand for office, research, assembly, wholesaling, and large retail space.

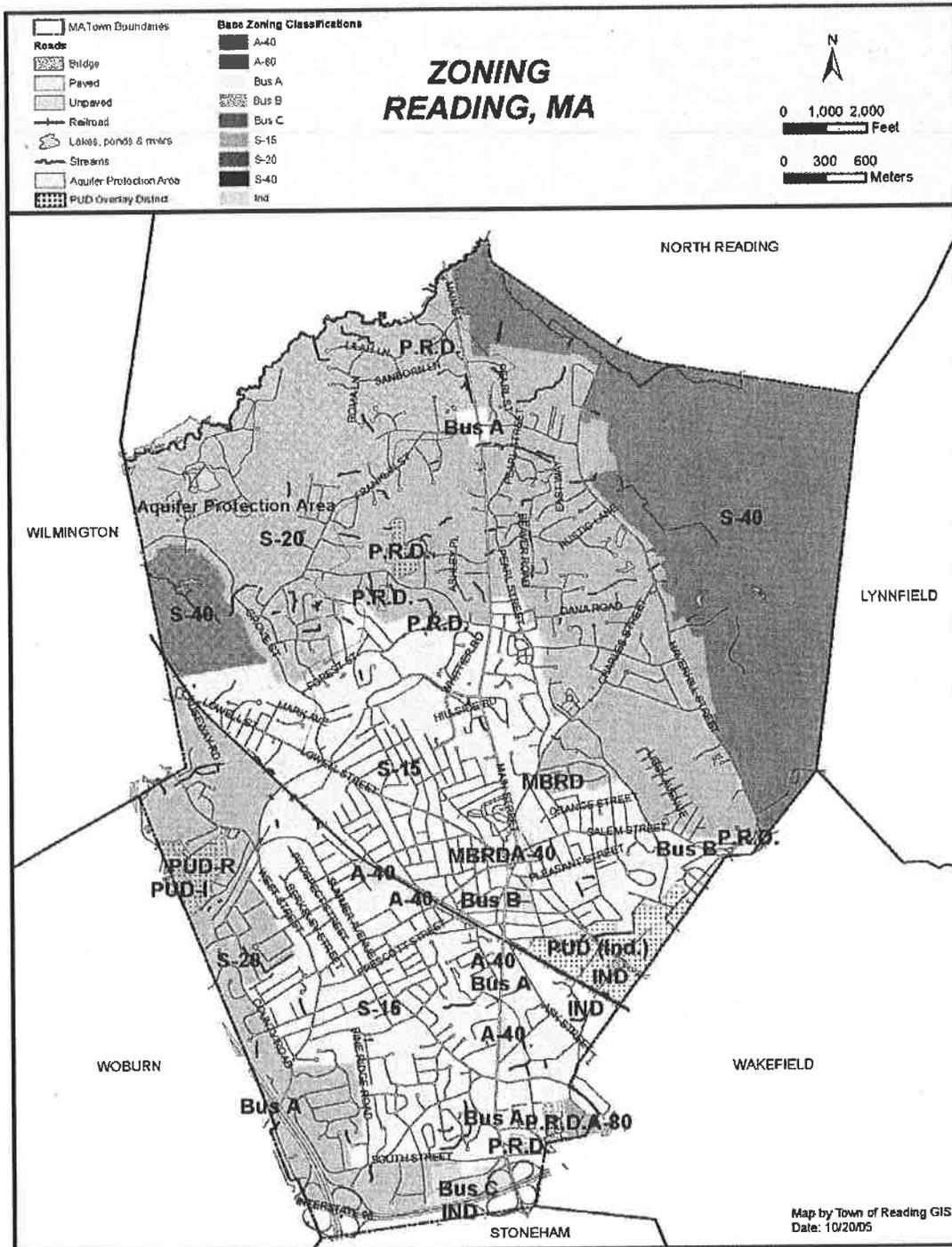
### Map 1 Topography



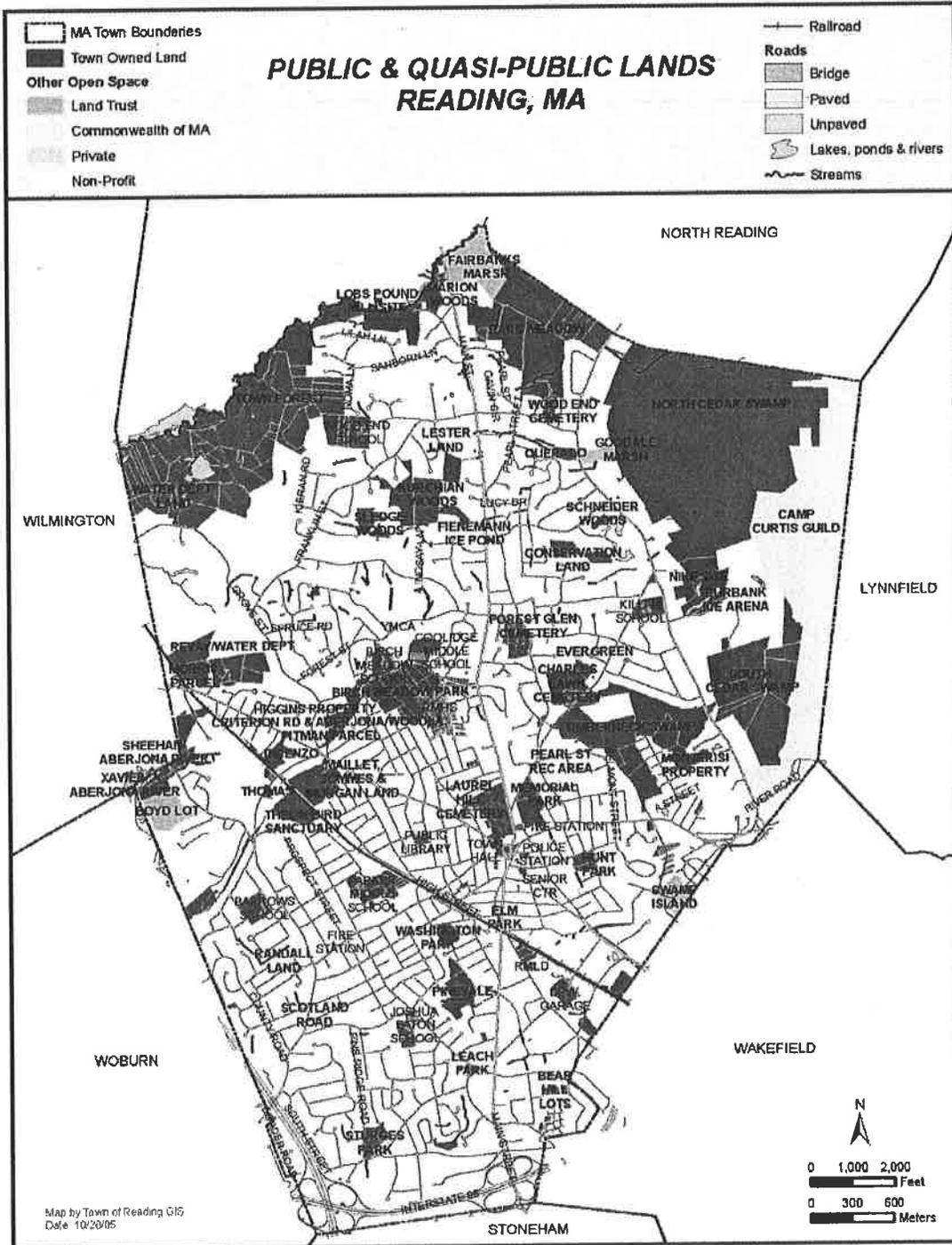
### Map 2 Certified Wetlands



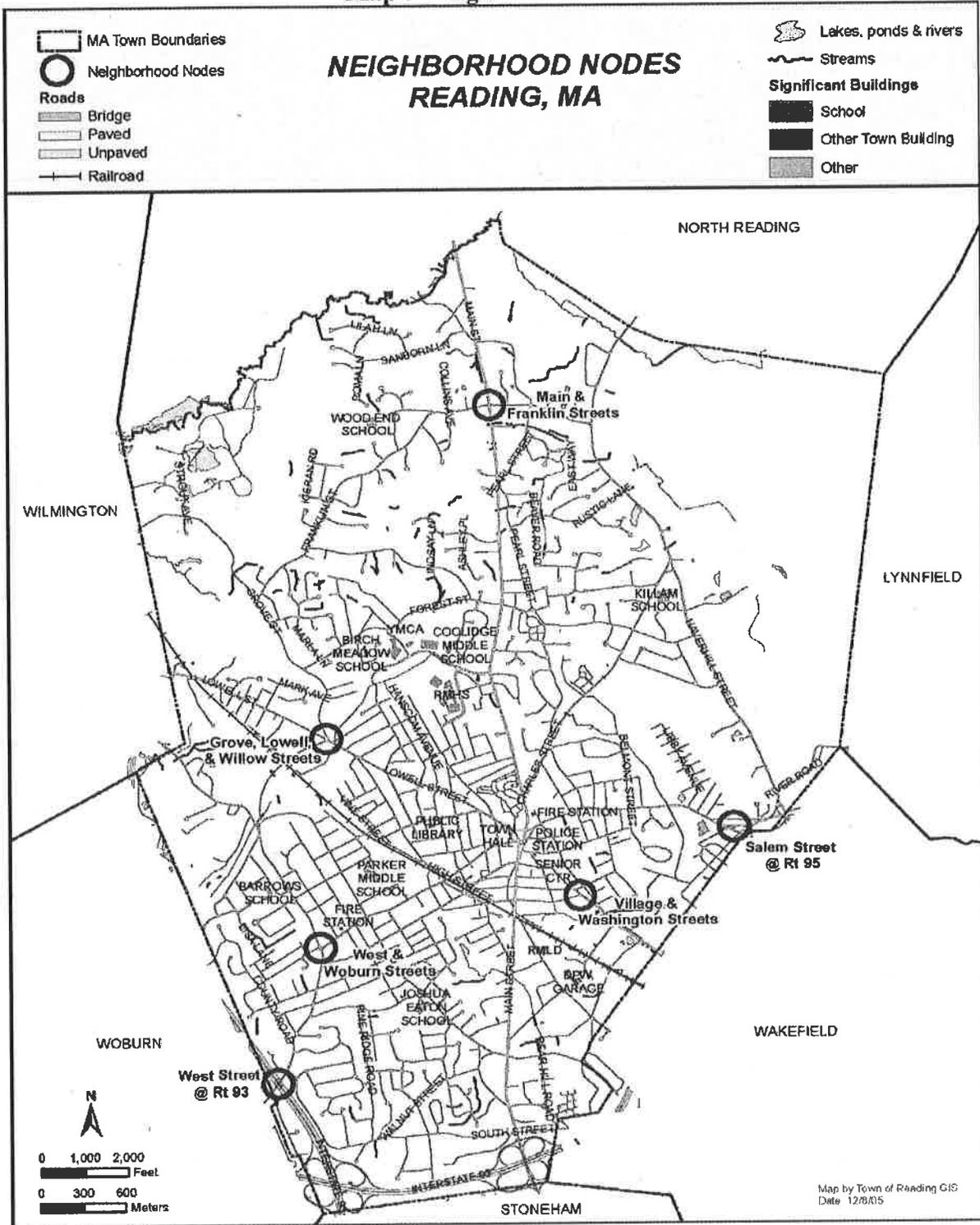
### Map 3 Zoning Districts



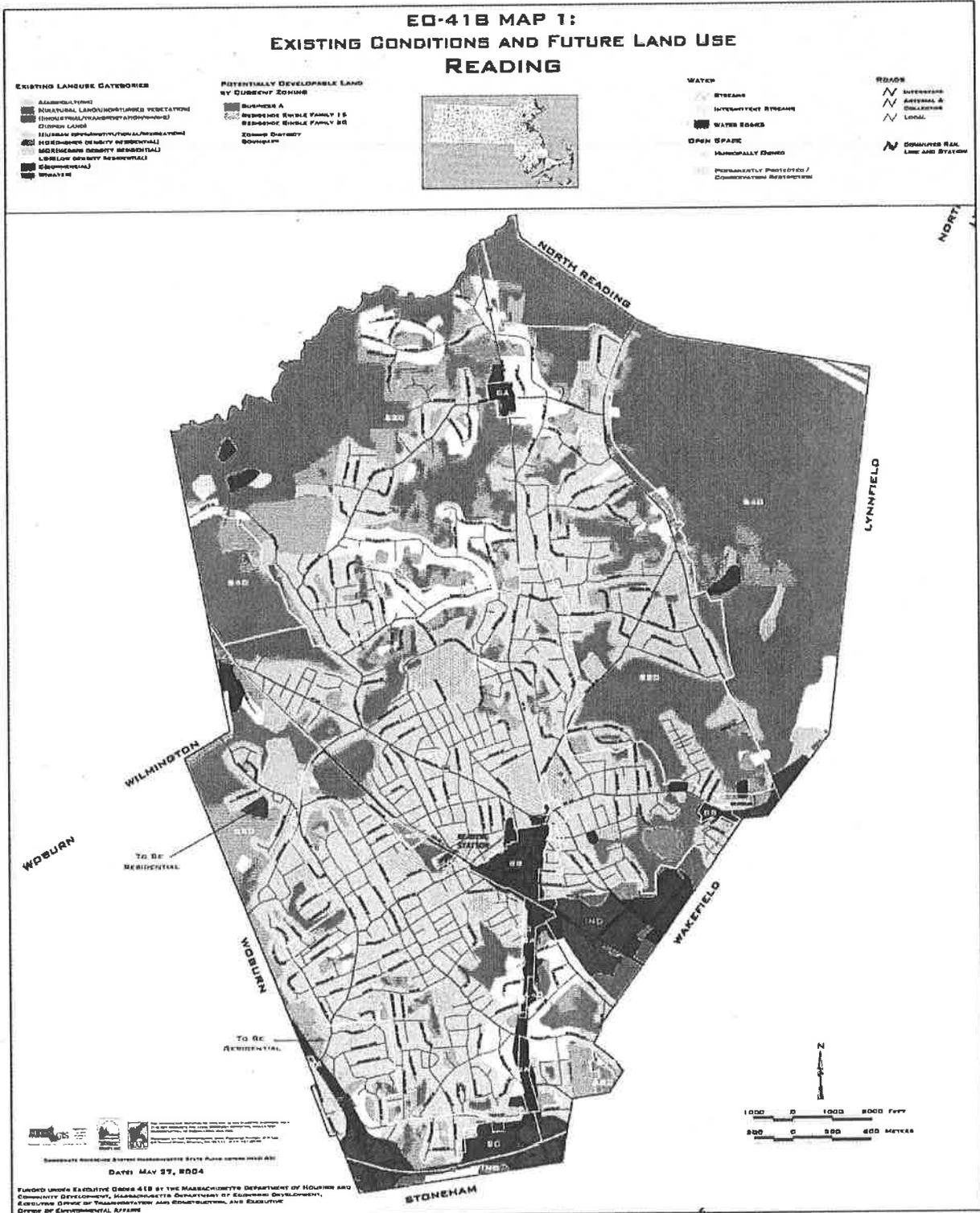
### Map 4 Public and Quasi-Public Lands



### Map 5 Neighborhood Nodes



### Map 6 EO-418 Map on Future Land Use



Overall, the change from general non-urban to urban presents continuing conflicts between the demand for buildings with their attendant infrastructure improvements on the one hand, and, on the other hand the need and desire for supporting natural resource and open space protection and the preservation of the character of the community.

### 3.2 ANALYSIS

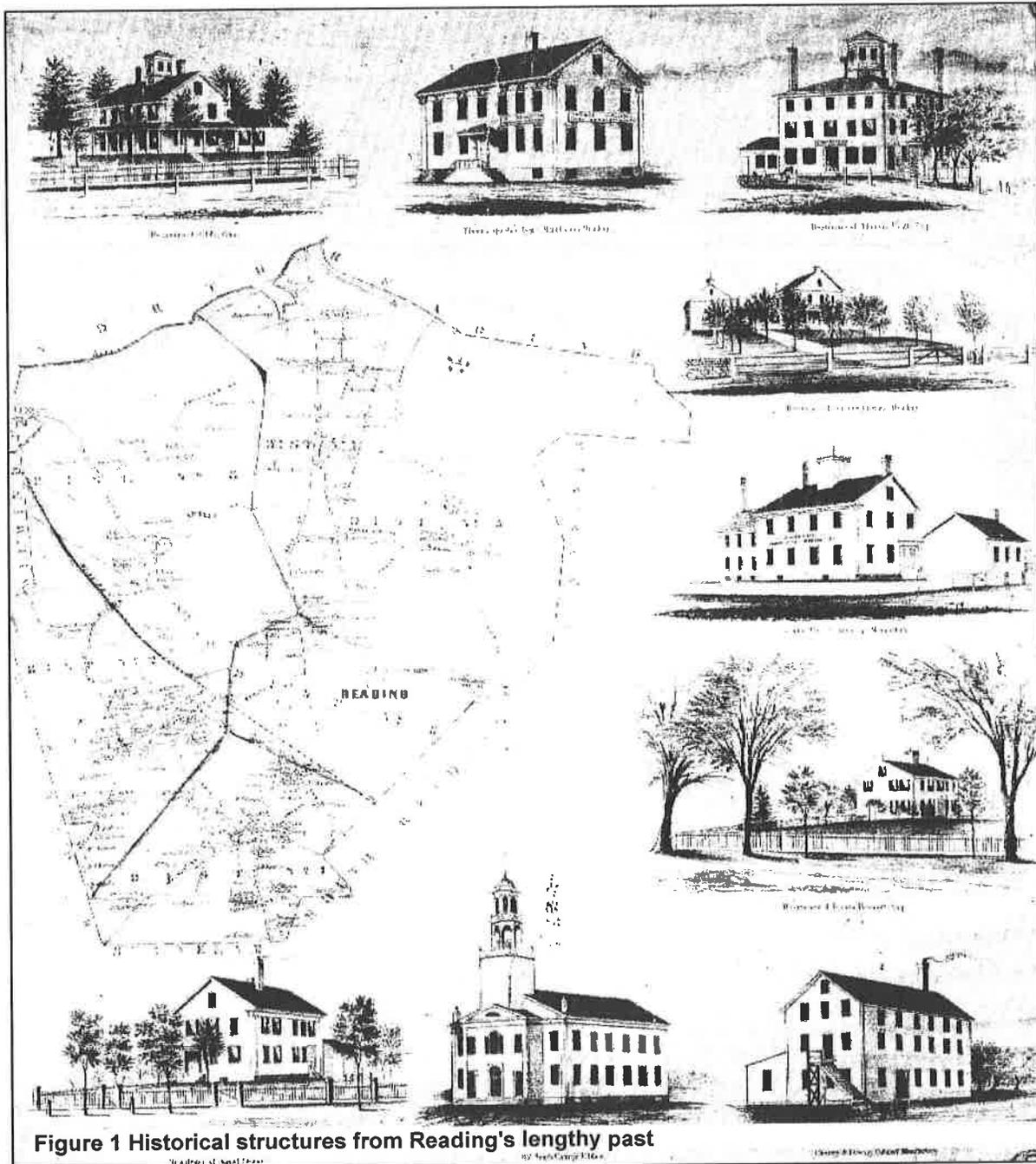
Reading's original settlers came from England in the 1630's to the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Many arrived through the ports of Lynn and Salem. In 1639 some citizens of Lynn petitioned the government of the colony for "place for an inland plantation." The general court granted them six square miles, then an additional four. The first settlement called Lynn Village was on the south shore of the great pond, what is now known as Lake Quannapowitt. On June 10th, 1644 the settlement was incorporated by the house of deputies as the Town of Reading, taking its name from Reading, England. The first church was organized soon after the settlement, and the first parish, later known as South Reading, became Wakefield in 1868. A special grant in 1651 added land north of the Ipswich River to Reading. This area in 1853 became the separate Town of North Reading. During its early years, the area which is currently the Town of Reading was known as Wood End, or Third Parish.

In 1693, town meeting voted to fund public education in Reading. The funding consisted of "four pounds for three months school in the town, two pounds for the west end of the town, and one pound for those north of the Ipswich River." Within the present Town, the Parker Tavern is the oldest remaining seventeenth century structure, built in 1694. This property is currently owned and operated by the Reading Antiquarian Society, which is a non-profit corporation. In 1769 the meetinghouse was built in what is now Reading. It was constructed in the area which is currently the Town Common; a stone marker commemorates the site.

Reading played an active role in the American Revolutionary War. Minutemen were prominently involved in the engagements pursuing the retreating British Red Coats after the skirmish at Concord Bridge. Dr. John Brooks, captain of the "fourth company of minute" remained in the army for eight years of distinguished service, including White Plains and Valley Forge. He later became the ninth governor of Massachusetts. Only one Reading soldier was killed in action during the revolution; Joshua Eaton died in the Battle of Saratoga in 1777.

In 1791, sixty members of the "West Parish" which is the current Town of Reading, started the federal library. This was a subscription library with each member paying \$1.00 to join, and annual dues of \$.25. The Town's public library was created in 1868.

The Andover-Medford turnpike, a private corporation, currently Main Street or Route 28, was built in 1806-7. This provided the citizens of Reading with a better means of travel to the Boston area. In 1845, the Boston & Maine Railroad came to Reading and improved the access to Boston and the southern markets. During the first half of the Nineteen Century, Reading became a manufacturing town. Sylvester Harnden's furniture factory, Daniel Pratt's clock factory and Samuel Pierce's organ pipe factory were major businesses. By the mid 1800'S, Reading had



**Figure 1 Historical structures from Reading's lengthy past**

thirteen establishments that manufactured chairs and cabinets. The making of shoes began as a cottage industry and expanded to large factories. Neckties were manufactured here for about ninety years. During and after civil war the southern markets for Reading's products declined and several of its factories closed.

Reading members of the Richardson Light Guard of South Reading fought at the first battle of Bull Run. The second company was formed as part of the grand army of the Potomac, and a third company joined General Bank's expedition in Louisiana. A total of 411 men from Reading

fought in the Civil War, of whom 15 died in action and 33 died of wounds and sickness. A memorial exists in the Laurel Hill Cemetery commemorating those who died in the Civil War.

Following the Civil War, Reading became a residential community with excellent commuting service to Boston. Industrial expansion during that time included the precursor of General Tire & Rubber Company off Ash Street. Additional businesses created after World War I included the Boston Stove foundry, Ace Art, and several other companies. The business community currently consists of a number of retail and service businesses in the downtown area, as well as the Analytical Sciences Corporation (TASC).

The governmental structure of the Town has evolved since its creation in 1644. Initially, the government consisted of a Town Meeting and a Board of Selectmen. During Reading's early years, this governmental structure was adequate for the needs of the community. As the Town grew and the needs of its population evolved, Reading adopted the representative town meeting. This form of government replaced the open town meeting in 1944. More recently, the residents of Reading adopted the Reading Home Rule Charter in March 1986. This form of government focused the policy and decision making function in a very few elected boards and committees, and provided for the creation of the Town Manager position to be responsible for day to day operations of the local government. In 1994, Reading celebrated its 350th anniversary of incorporation as a town.

### **3.3 VISION**

Reading's excellent school system, residential neighborhoods, proximity to Boston, small-town feel, Town services, scenic ways and abundant open space will continue to create a strong sense of pride in its residents and businesses. This sense of pride, which results in residents' willingness to serve as volunteers and take leadership roles, contributes to Reading's strong sense of community.

Reading will retain and enhance its rich stock of natural resources, open space, and recreation. The Town will build upon its existing green spaces by improving or creating path systems and maintaining and expanding the Town Common and parks. The Town will expand its greenery to the streets with street trees. Reading will continue to protect its critical water supply through open space protection and exploring options for a back-up supply. Reading residents will be aware of the Town's numerous parks and forests and access to them will be convenient. Reading will provide a variety of housing types for a diverse population. Such housing will integrate well with existing neighborhoods. Elderly, renters, first-time homebuyers, empty-nesters, and others, will be able to find housing to match their needs. Providing these housing types, including affordable housing, will be accomplished in part by improving the Town's regulations to more easily allow certain types of housing, such as townhouses, multi-families and accessory apartments. The Town's historic housing will be re-used and renovated, with incentives offered to owners to do so. The Town will work to retain units as affordable through deed restrictions in perpetuity.

Reading will expand and enhance its infrastructure to support housing, based on feasibility and the extent that resources are available. Potential traffic impacts that can accompany new housing

will be reduced by allowing mixed uses and by locating housing in areas convenient to existing or future public transit. A Housing Committee will work to accomplish these goals.

The Town will convey a business-friendly atmosphere, with streamlined permitting for desirable types of uses. The public will be well-educated regarding the benefits of economic development and participate in determining the best types of businesses for Reading. The result will be an increased commercial and industrial tax base.

Downtown Reading, including South Main Street, will be improved to increase the Town's commercial tax base, to re-instill pride, and to ensure that the downtown is a vibrant, aesthetic center that provides services to residents and meets their retail needs.

The Downtown Streetscape Improvement Project will be implemented. The improvements will include a pedestrian-friendly design and circulation enhancements, further attracting businesses, including higher end retail and restaurants. The needs of pedestrian and car access to the downtown will be balanced by improving sidewalks and streetscapes, creating convenient parking locations including multi-level parking garages, encouraging infill development along transit routes, and exploring the potential for shuttle bus service.

With a particular emphasis on land use and municipal governance, this document will serve as a comprehensive guide for Reading to achieve and maintain all of these objectives in a proactive, cost effective and inclusive manner, with ongoing input from and accountability to the citizens of Reading.