



# Major Parcel Study

TOWN OF BROOKLINE

MARCH 2018

SASAKI RKG



# Contents

Executive Summary	4
<b>1 Introduction</b>	<b>6</b>
Letter from the Town	
Overview of the Major Parcel Study	
<b>2 Community Goals &amp; Priorities</b>	<b>16</b>
Strategic Asset Plan	
Market Analysis	
Zoning Capacity Analysis	
<b>3 Major Parcel Study</b>	<b>34</b>
Overview of Major Parcels	
Table of Major Parcels	
Selected Examples of Potential Build-out	
<b>4 Town Action Plan</b>	<b>66</b>
Town Objectives & Action Options	
General Action Options & Test Fits	
Concluding Thoughts & Next Steps	
<b>Appendix</b>	<b>87</b>
Zoning Reference Sheets	
Open Space and Conservation Map	
Historic District Map	
Examples of Right of First Refusal By-law	
Notes on Land Bank Model	

# Executive Summary

The Town of Brookline has contracted Sasaki Associates and RKG Associates to create the Major Parcel Study (MPS) that provides data and analysis of large parcels of public and private land in the Town. The MPS will give Brookline a better understanding of the current conditions, regulatory and physical constraints and development possibilities of these parcels to support planning for the future.

The MPS forecasts potential future changes with information provided by local zoning, a market assessment and feedback from property owners. Ultimately, the MPS will help the Town build relationships with major parcel owners and will support planning for long-term needs. The analysis and options outlined in this report will serve as a toolkit, allowing the Town to respond more quickly, comprehensively and creatively to land opportunities as they arise. In order to remain up-to-date and accessible, the parcel information in this report will be integrated with existing Town databases.

Developed in coordination with the Strategic Asset Plan (SAP), the specific goals of the Major Parcel Study are to:

- 1) Clearly and objectively identify all major public and private parcels that contribute to the character of Brookline;
- 2) Understand the existing and future plans of owners of each major parcel in the context of growth and development trends; and
- 3) Provide a set of potential options that may be beneficial to the community and to property owners in the future, given current public and private objectives and market direction.

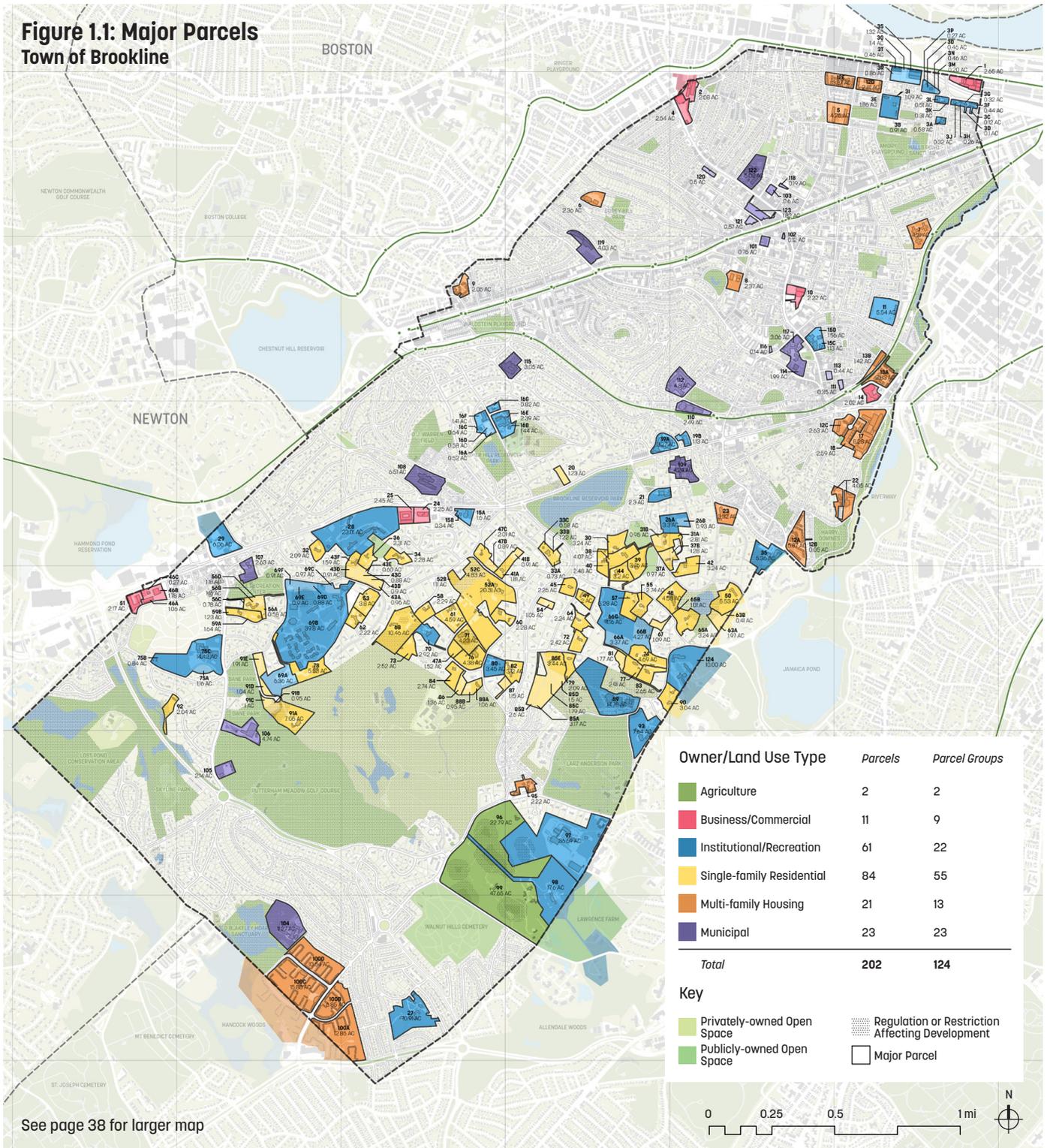
Brookline has a unique character and development pattern defined by a diversity of building types and densities, by its landscape and community amenities, and by the presence of historic institutions. Many large parcels significantly contribute to the character of the Town. The MPS studied large publicly and privately-owned parcels of land, over two acres in size. For the purposes of this study, major parcels also included smaller municipally-

owned properties adjacent to major public parcels; smaller parcels identified for study through other recent planning efforts; and clusters of smaller parcels under the same ownership that together comprise a total area of two or more acres. Users of this report will learn about these “major parcels,” including their existing conservation or other restrictions, development metrics and potential for change under existing zoning.

Key findings of the MPS include:

- A total of 124 major parcel groups, or 202 distinct parcels exist across Brookline. The majority of these sites are located in South Brookline; however, municipal, high-density residential, institutional and commercial sites can also be found in North Brookline.
- A large proportion of Brookline’s land is dedicated to institutional uses. In total, institutional uses currently comprise 556 acres or 15% of the total land area of Brookline. The major parcel list includes 61 institutional parcels and amounts to 52% of all major parcel acreage.
- Discussions with private property owners indicate that few owners have any plans for large-scale changes to their properties. The Town will continue to have ongoing conversations with major parcel property owners to stay apprised of any future changes.

Despite the built-up nature of Brookline, the Town has significant capacity for future development. A zoning analysis indicates that an additional 5,571 residential units can be accommodated under existing zoning in S, SC, T and M zoning districts. Additionally, in commercial zoning district G-2.0, an additional 1,961,978 square feet of commercial space is permitted as-of-right. Investigation into



existing deed and other restrictions indicated that not all restrictions are permanent nor do they protect sites from change. This study will support a more informed response by the Town and property owners to limited restrictions.

The Major Parcel Study includes options that enable the Town to act on land opportunities as they arise. These options include potential zoning changes, new planning initiatives, public-private partnerships, changes

in policy as well as possible programming and financing mechanisms. These options will require further study by the Town in consultation with the community. They offer myriad ways to collaborate with major parcel owners to achieve outcomes that support Brookline’s long-term vision for the future.





# Introduction

Letter from the Town  
Overview of the Major Parcel Study

9  
11





# Town of Brookline

## Massachusetts

### Planning Board

#### Strategic Asset Plan Subcommittee

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Robert Cook, Chair  
Carla Benka  
George Cole  
Betsy DeWitt  
Linda Roseman  
Neil Wishinsky

March 7, 2018

Dear residents of Brookline:

For many years now, planning for future facilities and services in Brookline has been embodied in the creation of the annual Capital Improvement Program (CIP), a budgetary process that projects Town expenditures for the next five years. Over the past five years, dramatically changing public school enrollment projections have triggered a need for a longer-term planning horizon of fifteen to twenty years in addition to the short-term CIP.

The Director of Planning and Community Development, along with residents serving on Boards and Commissions, called for a special planning effort unrelated to schools, to address two essential questions about the future. First, will existing Town facilities that support current services to its residents be sufficient for the longer-term future or will new facilities be required to maintain and improve this level of service? Second, under current zoning, how are parcels of land greater than two acres and with common ownership likely to change in the future in ways that might fundamentally alter the unique character of the Town?

To answer these questions, the Town contracted a team of two firms, Sasaki Associates and RKG Associates, to create two planning documents: the Strategic Asset Plan and the Major Parcel Study. The Town asked its Planning Board to establish a Subcommittee of six individuals to supervise this project. As a member of the Planning Board, I was appointed Chair of the Subcommittee and I worked closely with Kara Brewton, Economic Development Director.

Throughout the project, questions and comments were solicited from Town staff and from many residents of Brookline through interviews and public hearings. Together these two documents will provide the Town with a strategy for future facility management and a comprehensive set of land use planning tools to guide policy and zoning-related discussions about the future of Brookline.

Sincerely,

Bob Cook

Planning Board member, Strategic Asset Plan Subcommittee Chair



## Introduction

# Overview of the Major Parcel Study

The Major Parcel Study is an information-gathering, analytic study meant to provide information to the Town of Brookline that can be used in future planning and development processes to advance the Town's goals, meet community needs, and inform future discussions about development, conservation, and community-town partnerships.

## Purpose of the Major Parcel Study

Brookline is a dynamic town with a diversity of landscapes, variety in its development pattern, and ever-changing community needs that are influenced by its proximity to Boston and its location in the region. These forces, both internal and external, are putting pressure on the Town to change and adapt. Within this context, the Town has begun taking proactive steps toward understanding current conditions, looking forward to future trends, planning for longer-term capital and service needs, and seeking to better understand the capacity and potential for change in larger properties within Brookline. This proactive approach to planning has led the Town to undertake a Major Parcel Study (MPS) and Strategic Asset Plan (SAP).

Brookline is known as a community with a high quality of life and excellent public services. These companion studies seek to provide information, analysis, and a toolkit for the Town to ensure it can continue to provide great service to the community amidst growth and change. The purpose of the SAP is to evaluate existing municipal facilities and identify new facilities that will be needed in the next five to fifteen years for programmatic and service goals. The results of that study can be found in a separate report on the Town's website.

The SAP is a companion report that provides an assessment of Brookline's municipally-owned buildings, facilities, and properties as well as the identified needs of the Town's departments to understand whether current facilities and operations meet short- and long-term needs. This baseline set of information identifies current and

future gaps in facilities, personnel, and services. It also suggests a set of proactive steps the Town could take to begin addressing needs through capital and budgetary planning processes. This report presents a mix of smaller- and larger-scale investments the Town should consider when planning for capital needs to support staff and the continuation of high quality service delivery. The SAP dovetails with the concurrent MPS such that solutions requiring additional land resources are identified in the SAP first, and potential locations for future facilities are identified in the MPS.

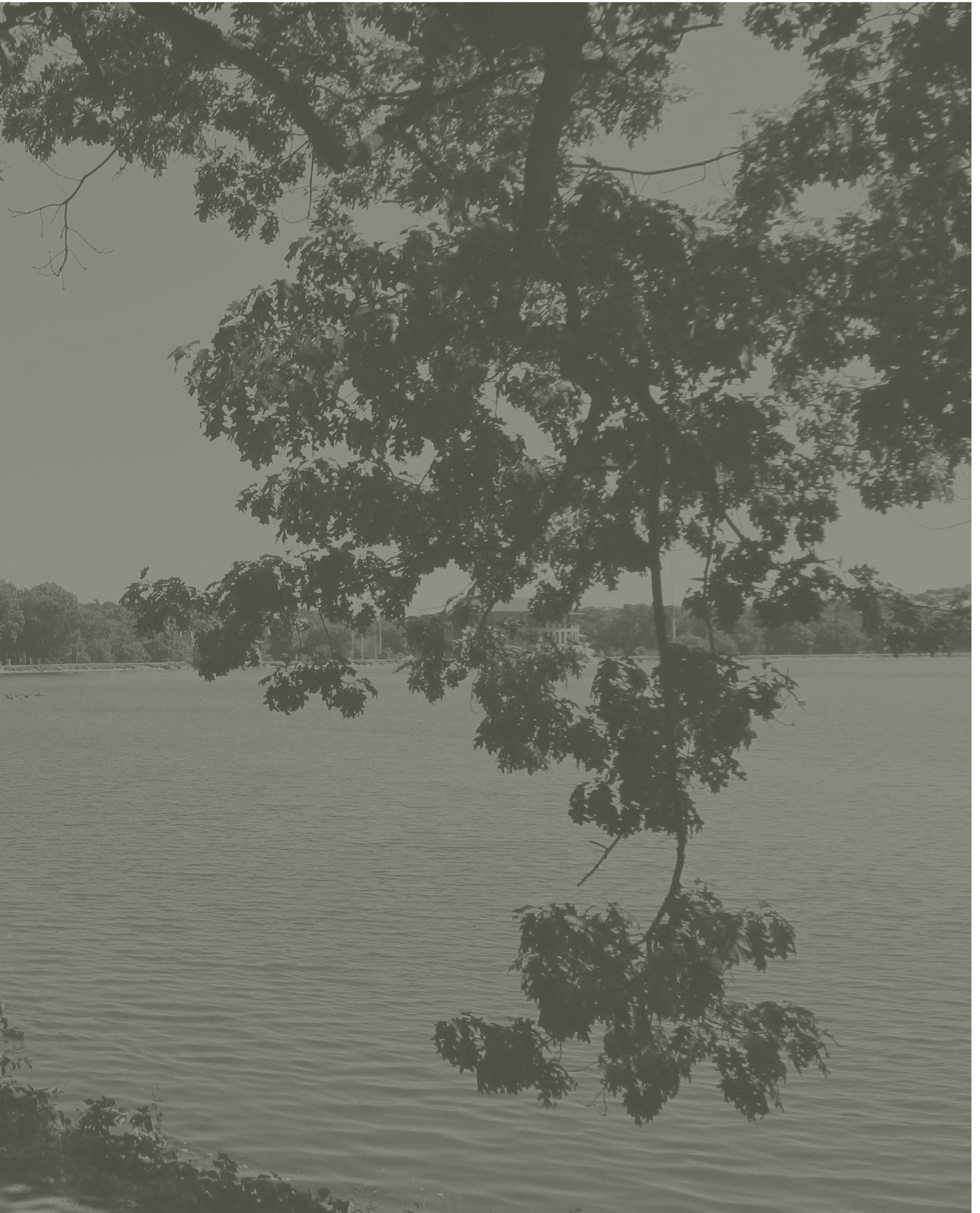
The MPS is both related to and distinct from the SAP. The MPS builds on the SAP recommendations by studying public and privately-owned parcels of more than two acres of land in Brookline. The MPS examines these two-plus-acre parcels for their potential build-out under current zoning, environmental, and regulatory constraints, opportunities to satisfy the Town's known needs, and potential for change in the future. The goals of the MPS are as follows:

- 1) Clearly and objectively identify all major public and private parcels that contribute to the character of Brookline;
- 2) Understand the existing and future plans of owners of each major parcel in the context of growth and development trends; and
- 3) Provide a set of potential options that may be beneficial to the community and to property owners in the future, given current public and private objectives and market direction.

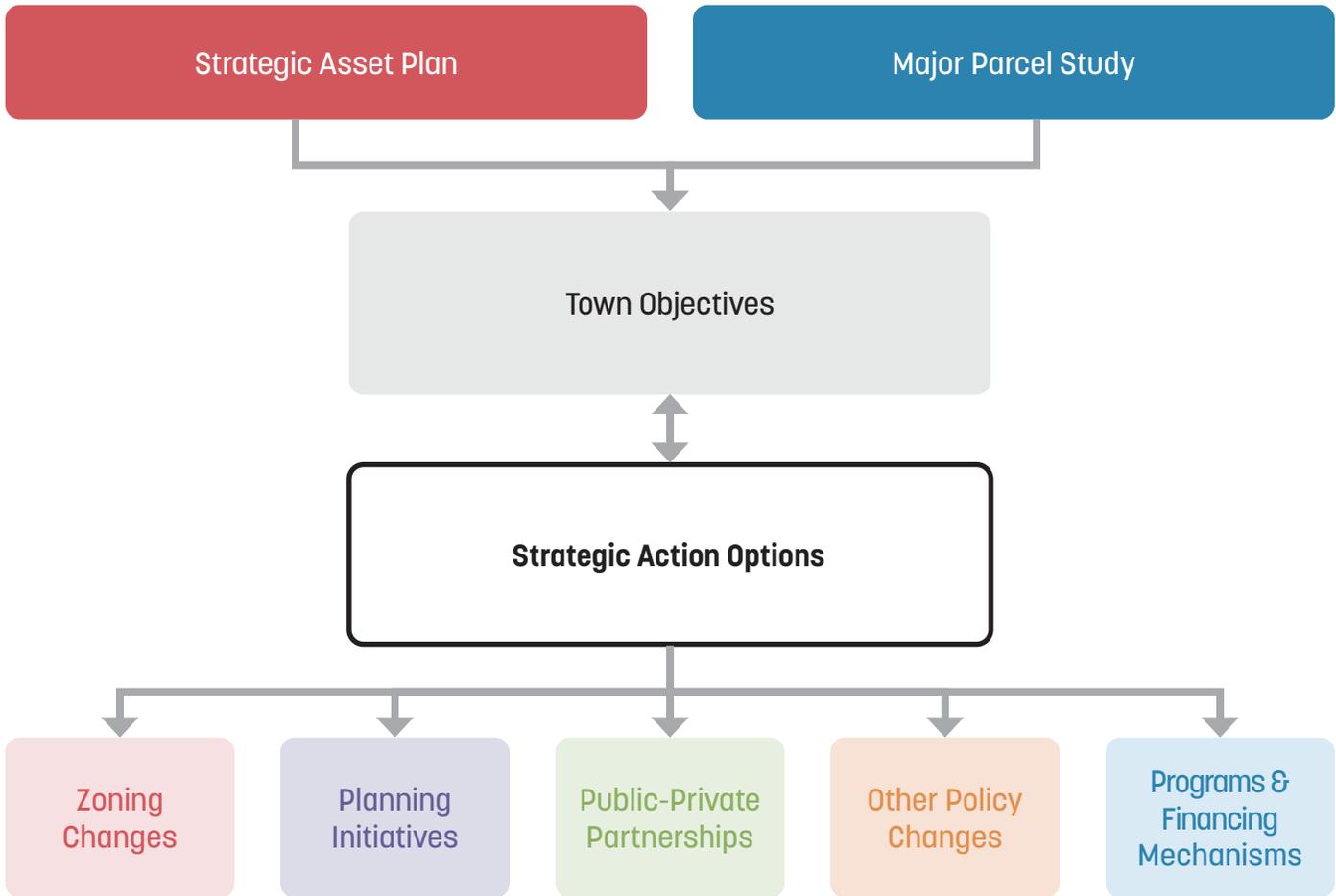
Given the number of large parcels owned by the Town, the MPS evaluates whether the current uses of these parcels

# What is a Major Parcel?

- Any parcel over two acres in gross area (and any vacant parcels over one acre), excluding parcels with significant conservation restrictions
- municipally-owned properties adjacent to major public parcels
- parcels identified in other recent planning reports
- clusters of parcels under the same ownership that together comprise two acres or more of gross area



**Figure 1.2: Overall Structure**



best serve the longer-term needs of Brookline and what alternative options it might consider. In addition, in recent years the Town has experienced multiple examples of large private properties that have been converted to single family home sites in an unpredictable fashion. Through the study of all existing public and private large parcels, the MPS provides a comprehensive assessment of possible future options.

Readers of the MPS document can expect this study to accomplish the following:

- Briefly summarize the Town’s space needs and priorities (more information can be found in the SAP)
- Summarize existing and anticipated residential and commercial market conditions in Brookline
- Numerically and illustratively describe the Town’s potential build-out under existing zoning
- In partnership with private landowners and public input, provide a toolkit of options and their impacts for the Town to use in the future to inform any needed actions on a major parcel in Brookline

## Major Parcel Study Process and Methodology

### Data Sources

The study used available geospatial and regulatory information to create the major parcel list, including the Town of Brookline and State of Massachusetts GIS databases. Both the Town and Massachusetts maintain robust, up-to-date spatial databases. The Brookline GIS database provided information on parcel assessments, open space and conservation restrictions, historic districts, delineated wetland areas and buffers, building footprints and site development, current zoning, and existing land use. The MassGIS data augmented the data with other state restrictions.

(Left) St. Mary of the Assumption Church, an example of a major institution in Brookline that is represented within the Major Parcel Study



## Engagement Process

The MPS is an information-gathering, analytic study meant to provide information to the Town that can be used in future planning and development processes to advance the Town's goals, meet community needs, and inform future discussions about development, conservation, and community-town partnerships. As such, community engagement was not a central part of the process; rather, this study is intended to provide a baseline of information that can be used in the Town's future efforts, each including its own engagement process.

The MPS team conducted outreach to inform the Town with research to make the material most relevant and useful. The Town established a Planning Board subcommittee to guide the process and make key decisions. It met six times during the combined SAP and MPS process, reviewed and edited report drafts, and provided important links to the Planning Board and the Town Select Board, as well as neighborhood associations. The subcommittee includes: Planning Board – Bob Cook, Select Board – Neil Wishinsky, Previous Board of Selectmen – Betsy DeWitt, Building Commission – George Cole, Advisory Committee, Capital Subcommittee – Carla Benka, and Brookline Neighborhood Alliance – Lynda Roseman. Public Planning Board meetings gave residents and property owners an opportunity to provide input on the process.

Finally, the Town led interviews, initiated through this process, with all major parcel owners. All 124 owners identified in the process were contacted via mail, notified of the process, and invited to participate in an interview. When possible, one-on-one interviews were conducted between town staff and property owners to discuss their future vision and needs for each site.

Throughout engagement with Brookline residents and major parcel owners, it was clear that, while many applaud the Town's proactive approach, sensitivities exist about examining private parcels. At each forum, Brookline residents and parcel owners preferred one-on-one conversations to share information about their intentions for their property and raise any concerns about studies that identify individual parcels. Ultimately, the feedback from the public and property owners helped to both open up dialogue and to shape the outcomes of the study. The discussions led the study to move away from speculative illustrations of potential futures toward more limited representations of current zoning build-out scenarios. The future of change in Brookline is ultimately made through a variety of residents and stakeholders, and the MPS provides tools through which to understand and guide this change. The MPS is one step of many to continue conversations about future change in the community.