

Executive Summary

Ayer Master Plan

Plan Elements:

1. Land Use
2. Housing
3. Economic Development
4. Resources
5. Transportation and Circulation
6. Infrastructure
7. Municipal Services and Facilities
8. Implementation Plan

Public Participation:

- 3 Surveys
- 1 Public Forum
- Bi-weekly/Monthly Steering Committee Meetings
- Interviews
- 3 Working Groups
- Department Heads Roundtable
- 4 Public Editing Sessions

Process:

2015: MPSC Formation
2016: Public Outreach
2017: Plan Preparation
2018: Plan Adoption

Introduction

The purpose of a Master Plan is to engage in a public process that results in the creation of a document designed to guide the future actions of a community. It presents a vision for the future, with long-range goals and objectives for all activities that affect the local government. This includes guidance on how to make decisions on public and private land development proposals, the expenditure of public funds, availability of tax policy (tax incentives), cooperative efforts and issues of pressing concern, such as economic development or the rehabilitation of older neighborhoods areas. This is Ayer's fourth master plan, with prior plans written in 1969, 1997, and 2007. This plan is written as a guide for the next ten years of Ayer's future, and should be updated in 2027.

A Master Plan provides the following:

Continuity. The plan provides continuity across time, as staff and volunteers change, so too does institutional knowledge. The plan leaves a guide for future policy leaders.

It is the means by which a community can balance competing interests. Within any community, there is pressure to perform certain duties and functions that are occasionally at odds with one another. There are also limited resources to address all needs. A master plan helps establish priorities and resolves conflicts by establishing a single vision moving forward.

It allows communities to plan development in a way that protects valued resources. Ayer is a resource-rich community with sensitive environmental and ecological habitats. Protecting these habitats while enabling growth is of paramount concern in upcoming years.

Through public dialogue, citizens express a collective vision for the future. Last, but certainly not least, the planning process provides citizens an opportunity to brainstorm, debate and discuss the future of their community. A plan developed through a robust public input process enjoys strong community support. Subsequent decisions that are consistent with the plan's policies are less likely to become embroiled in public controversy.



The plan is organized into eight (8) topical elements: Land Use, Housing, Economic Development, Resources (Natural, Cultural, Historical, Recreation, and Open Space), Transportation and Circulation, Infrastructure, and the Implementation Plan.

The Implementation Plan, arguably the most important part of any master plan, sets forth the goals and actions to be accomplished in support of the subject area of each topical element. Some actions repeat across elements as they serve more than one objective. To ensure that the plan is implemented, it is advisable to form an implementation committee, and for each department to complete their Implementation Checklist, found in the Appendix of this Master Plan. With annual review of goals and actions during the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) and Budgetary Processes, Ayer will stay on track to achieve its goals.

During the Master Plan process, the Master Plan Steering Committee (MPSC) first established a comprehensive list of values the plan should support. They then developed a mission statement. And finally, a list of five goals were developed that were intended to guide and provide the framework for every other goal and strategy found within the Master Plan.

Values

These values encompass the spirit with which future policy decisions will be made in Ayer:

ACCESS

We recognize that access to goods, services, employment, housing, transportation, natural, and cultural resources and opportunities are what make us a stronger and more resilient community.

CHARACTER

We value our neighborhoods, commercial centers, recreation and conservation areas, public facilities, and historic sites and strive to protect, promote, maintain, and conserve all of the places that are important to us as a community.

COMMUNITY

We will maintain our “micro-city” feel through the support of small businesses, quality schools, community events, an accessible government, and by investing in our citizens, neighborhoods, local businesses, infrastructure, and amenities.

CONNECTION

We seek to connect residents both physically and socially. We will improve physical connectivity through the promotion of complete streets by incorporating pedestrian and cycling infrastructure into our streetscapes and through the provision and upgrades to multi-modal transportation systems. We will promote social connections through the provision of information and growth of information resources, communication venues, and community building events.



DIVERSITY

We seek to foster our tradition as a demographically diverse and inclusive community by continuing to welcome residents of all walks of life and offering a range of housing and economic opportunities that sustain and serve the needs of the collective good.

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

We will be a Town that values and retains its existing business community and high quality commercial corridors. We strive to be a community that businesses seek out as a place to grow and succeed. We seek to foster meaningful economic opportunities for people of all ages and skill levels and to solidify a diverse tax base and continued fiscal health for the community.

ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY

We will ensure that our ponds, streams, beaches, open spaces, parks, playing fields, recreational areas, wetlands, and wildlife corridors and habitats are protected for the use, enjoyment, and resiliency of future generations.

GOVERNANCE

We value a government that is efficient and accessible and guided by transparency, honesty, diversity, mutual respect, openness, on-going evaluation, celebration, and a commitment to stakeholder participation.

IDENTITY

We will foster a feeling of community spirit, inclusion, and promote a sense of full citizen participation, guaranteeing an opportunity for everyone to share in the activities, duties, responsibilities and benefits of life in Ayer.

QUALITY OF LIFE

We will accommodate the needs of a diverse population and provide a high quality of life to all residents. By offering a wide range of housing options available to households with different income levels, high quality schools, a diverse labor force and job market, multi-modal transportation access, community events, open spaces and recreation programs and facilities, social services, and a vibrant downtown, Ayer can serve the needs of residents of all ages and abilities.

SUSTAINABILITY

We will be a Town that seeks out new ways, methods, and technological advances to be a socially, environmentally, and a fiscally sustainable community.



Vision Statement

AYER'S PLACE AS THE "GREAT JUNCTION" ENDOWS THE COMMUNITY WITH ITS HERITAGE, PEOPLE, BUSINESSES, NEIGHBORHOODS, NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES. THESE ASSETS PROVIDE THE FRAMEWORK FOR AYER TO BE A DIVERSE AND INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY WELCOMING PEOPLE TO LIVE, LEARN, WORK, AND CONNECT.

Goals

1. Increase the Town's ability to efficiently and effectively manage Ayer's services and facilities in a fiscally sustainable and environmentally responsible manner to encourage a high quality of life for residents and an advantageous environment in which businesses can prosper.
2. Actively protect, conserve, and preserve Ayer's natural resources, heritage, and supporting infrastructure to protect critical environmental habitats, drinking water supplies, recreational areas, and open spaces.
3. Encourage the comprehensive redevelopment of Downtown Ayer to better accommodate housing opportunities, for both renters and owners at all income levels, and to provide for a vibrant downtown through the creation of new high-quality public gathering places, increased pedestrian access, new commercial space, and an enhanced visitor experience.
4. Expand and upgrade equitable multimodal transportation opportunities, including sidewalks, paths, trails, and rails in addition to roadways, to ensure that residents, workers, and business transportation needs are efficiently met.
5. Enact creative strategies to actively and effectively engage Ayer residents of all ages and walks of life in the Ayer public realm.

Plan Summary

The following pages offer a snapshot of critical demographics, regional position, economics, and housing information. The data tells an important story about where Ayer has been and where it is going in the future. The town is evolving rapidly from its military past to its future as a micro-city that offers high-quality housing, jobs, open spaces, recreational opportunities, public gathering spaces, maintained infrastructure, and government services. Ayer will be fiscally responsible, responsive to the changing needs of its residents and business, environmentally sustainable, and will work cooperatively to address its challenges while building upon its assets.

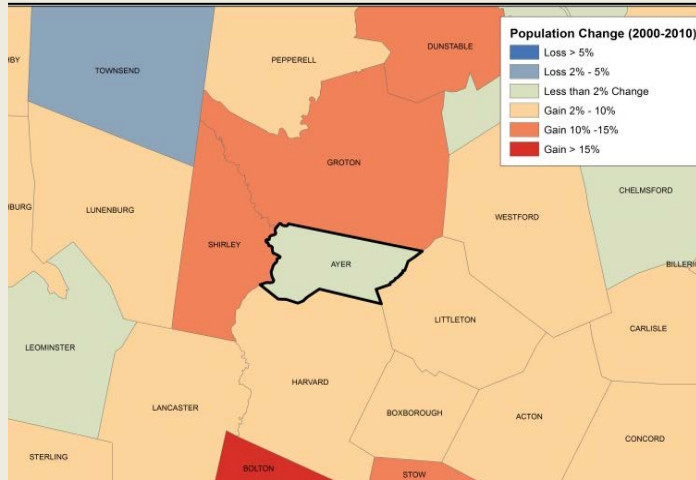


AYER'S DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

Who We Are

Overview (2010)

- Total population: 7,427
- Total households: 3,118
- Average household size: 2.3
- Median age: 39.8
- Non-White population: 16%
- Population density: 770 persons per square mile



Education of population age 25 and over (2014)

- Completed a 4-year college: 24%
- Graduate level education: 12%

Households (2010)

- Family households: 58% (1,831)
 - With children under the age of 18: 29% (888)
 - Single parent households: 10% (314)
- Nonfamily Households: 41% (1,287)
- With persons aged 65 and older: 22% (683)
- Individuals living alone: 34% (1,048)
 - Individuals living alone over age 65: 11% (353)

Income (2014)

- Median household income: \$67,110
- Median family income: \$83,882
- Median nonfamily income: \$49,231
- Households earning over \$200,000: 7%
- People below the poverty level: 13%

Source: 2010 U.S. Census;
2009-2014 American Community Survey

How We Are Changing

Between 2000 and 2010 significant changes in Ayer's population occurred:

- The population age 50-64 increased by 59%.
- The population declined among all other age groups.
- Median household income increased by 21%.

Over the next two decades, Ayer's population and the number of households are expected to remain stable.

- **Ayer will continue to see an increasing share of older adults and retirees.**

People over the age of 50 will comprise 42% of the population in 2030.

- **Average household size will continue to decline, as there are fewer families with children and more individuals living alone.**

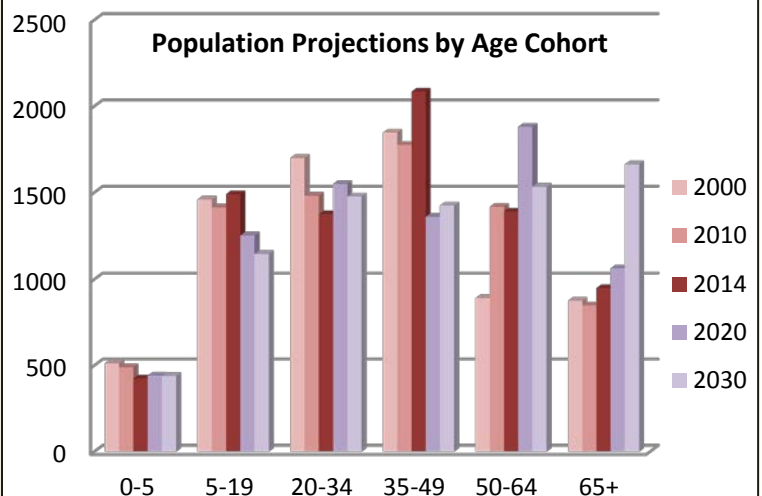
The number of school-aged children is expected to decline by 23% by 2030, while the number of seniors is expected to grow substantially.

Ayer currently has 3,462 housing units. This number is expected to increase to 3,764 housing units by 2030 with 34% of housing units located in multi-family buildings.

Population Projections

	2000	2010	2014	2020	2030
Population	7,287	7,427	7,716	7,546	7,685
Households	2,982	3,118	3,229	3,331	3,524
Household Size	2.29	2.30	2.32	2.27	2.18

Source: MAPC "Strong Region" Scenario



AYER'S REGIONAL PROFILE

Location

- Central Massachusetts community 35 miles northwest of Boston in Middlesex County.
- Developed around railroad transportation, Fort Devens.
- Served by MA Routes 111 and 2A, MBTA commuter rail & Montachusett Regional Transit Authority.

Population

- Ayer has a comparable population to neighboring communities, less than Groton and Littleton.
- Very slight gain in population between 2000 and 2010. Shirley had most growth.
- High proportion of individuals living alone.
- Relatively low median household income.

Economic Base

- Relatively large commercial tax base: nearly 37% CIP.
- Employment hub: more jobs than workers who live in Ayer.
- Average weekly wage equates to \$53,000 per year.
- 27% of Ayer jobs are in manufacturing.

	Commercial-Industrial (CIP) Tax Base	Jobs/Workforce Ratio	Average Weekly Wage
Ayer	36.69	1.15	\$1,025
Clinton	15.60	0.54	\$997
Hudson	30.56	0.99	\$1,219
Littleton	20.32	1.51	\$1,781
Maynard	12.17	0.47	\$1,365
Shirley	10.58	1.00	\$1,212

EOWLD 2014, MA Division of Local Services 2015

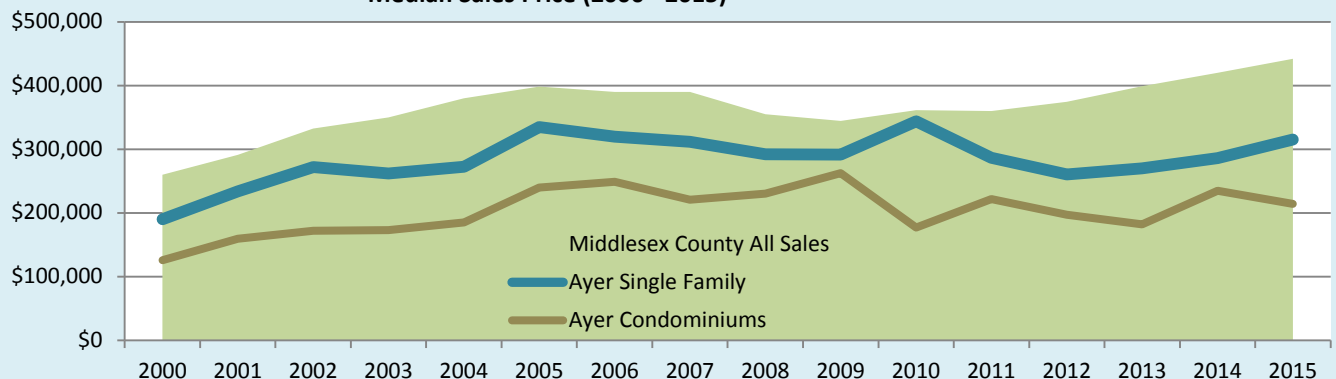
	Population 2010	Population Density	Population Growth 2000-2010	Non-White Population	Living Alone	Median Household Income	Median Sales Price	Single Family	Owner Occupied
Ayer	7,427	833	2%	15.7	33.6	\$67,110	\$310,000	42%	59%
Groton	10,646	291	11.5	5.0%	19.4	\$116,686	\$413,500	85%	83%
Harvard	6,520	182	9.0	9.7	16.0	\$131,563	\$537,500	93%	91%
Littleton	8,924	540	9.0	6.7	22.0	\$111,652	\$428,250	84%	85%
Shirley	7,211	455	13.1	13.8	24.5	\$66,453	\$310,000	58%	74%
Middlesex Cty		1,838	2.3%	20.0%	27.8%	\$83,488	\$442,000	49%	62%

US Census. ACS 2009-2014

Housing

- Median home prices lower than average for the region.
- Diverse housing stock; more than half are attached or multifamily units, and 40% are renter-occupied.

Median Sales Price (2000 - 2015)



The Warren Group, 2016

AYER'S ECONOMIC SNAPSHOT

Of the 100 largest employers in Ayer:

- Nashoba Valley Medical Center is the largest employer with more than 500 employees.
- 39 are located in Devens, including 8 of the 18 largest businesses (employing >100 workers)
- 8 are public agencies.
- 4 are fast food restaurants, 3 are restaurants, at least 4 are manufacturers; 0 are grocers.

Industrial Concentrations of Largest Employers in Ayer

Number	Industry
23	Manufacturing
13	Wholesale Goods
11	Accommodations and Food Service
8	Healthcare
8	Public Admin
6	Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services
5	Transportation and Warehousing
5	Educational Services
4	Retail (Auto Related & Food)
3	Information (Publishing + Other)
3	Real Estate and Rental and Leasing
2	Construction
2	Other Services (Laundry + Non-profit)
1	Utilities - Water, sewage, etc.
1	Finance and Insurance
1	Arts, Entertainment, & Recreation
1	Other

Access

Vehicle: Routes 2A & 111, near Route 2

Rail: 3 Freight, 1 Commuter Line

Air: N/A

Ayer's Labor Force

Year	Labor Force	Employed	Unemployed	Unemployment Rate
2015	4,055	3,834	221	5.5
2014	4,021	3,771	250	6.2
2013	3,952	3,670	282	7.1
2012	3,927	3,633	294	7.5
2011	3,881	3,560	321	8.3
2010	3,901	3,542	359	9.2

Source: ACS 2010-2014

Median Earnings by Educational Attainment (2014)

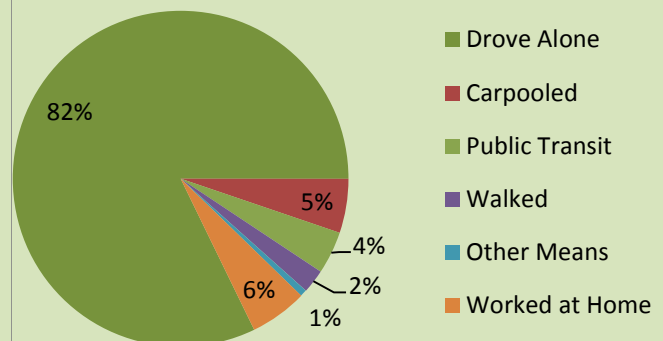
Less than high school graduate	24,598
High school graduate/GED	30,545
Some college or associate's degree	45,739
Bachelor's degree	67,461
Graduate or professional degree	81,862

Source: ACS S1501, 2014

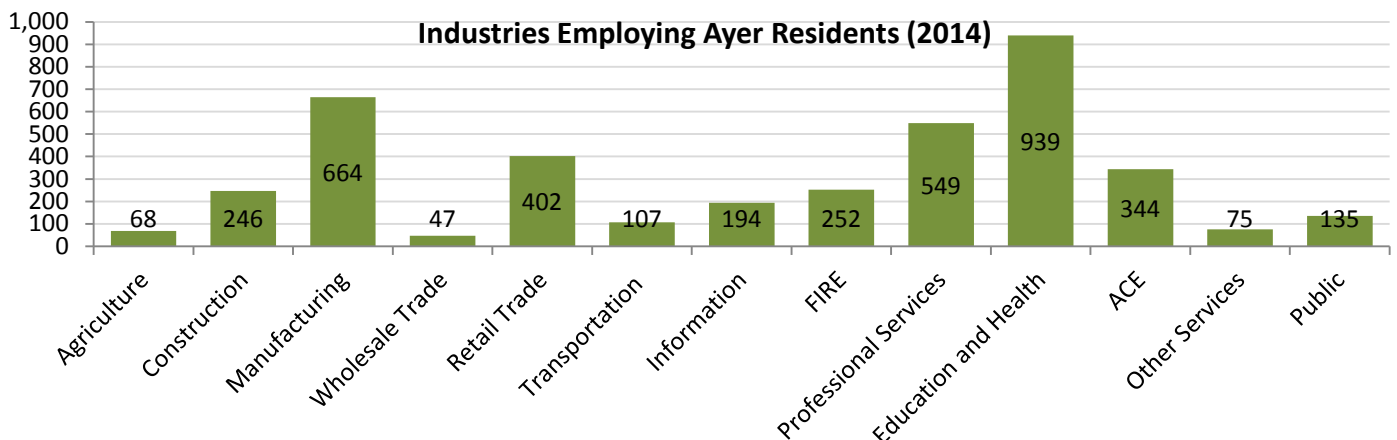
Labor Force

- 93% of Ayer residents have graduated from High School or equivalent
- 36% of Ayer residents have completed a Bachelor's degree or higher

Commuting Characteristics of Ayer Residents



Industries Employing Ayer Residents (2014)



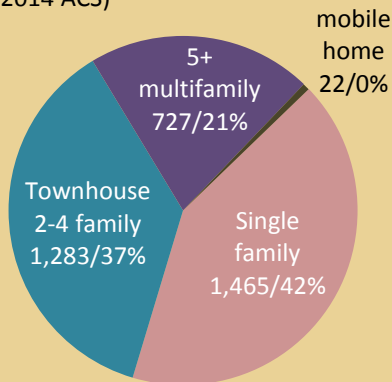
AYER'S HOUSING SNAPSHOT

WHERE WE LIVE

Ownership (2014 ACS)

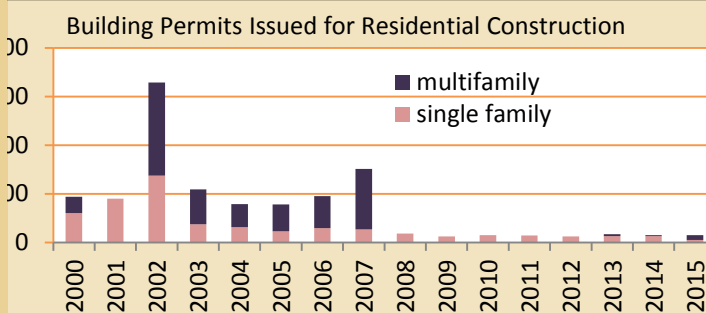
- 59% of units are owner occupied.
- 41% of units are renter occupied.

Total Units: 3,497 (2014 ACS)



Condition & Age

- 29% of Ayer's housing was constructed before 1940.
- 39% of Ayer's housing was constructed after 1980.
- 88 building permits were issued between 2010 and 2015, averaging 15 units per year.
- 591 multifamily homes were constructed between 2000 and 2010.
- 8% of Ayer's housing is vacant (5% in Middlesex County).



Housing Size (2014 ACS)

- Average of 6.1 rooms per owner-occupied unit.
- Average 3.9 rooms per renter-occupied unit.
- 56 % of housing units have 1-2 bedrooms.
- 44% of housing units have 3+ bedrooms.

Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI)

- State threshold for Chapter 40B 344 units (10%)
- Ayer SHI units: 290 units (8.43%), including ___ rental and ___ ownership
- Approximately ___ units are affordable (restricted to low/moderate income households).

HOUSING CONCERNS

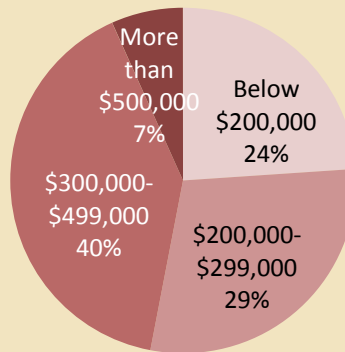
Housing Cost

- Median single family home sale price 2015: \$315,000
- Median condominium sale price 2015: \$214,000
- Average single family assessed value:
- Median rent: \$919 (2014 ACS)

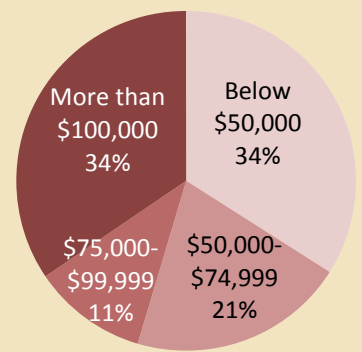
Housing Affordability – change between 2000-2014

- increase in median value of a single family home: 69%
- Increase in median household income 45%

Home Values



Household Incomes



2010-2014 ACS

Housing Demand/Population Characteristics.

- 12% of Ayer's population are age 65 and over, compared with 14% in Middlesex County.
- 17% of Ayer's population are between the ages of 20 and 34, compared to 22% in Middlesex County.
- 27 % of households in Ayer are people living alone.
- 29% of Ayer households have children under 18.

Median Household Income (ACS 2010-2014)

	All	Families	Seniors	Living Alone
Ayer	\$67,110	\$83,882	\$36,786	\$40,650
Middlesex County	\$83,488	\$105,827	\$46,198	\$39,003

Housing Cost Burden

- 1,113 households in Ayer spend more than 30% of their income on housing, including 26% of homeowners and 48% of renters.

DHCD SHI 2015	
Ayer	8.4%
Groton	5.4%
Harvard	5.5%
Littleton	12.5%
Shirley	2.5%