

Land Protected/Land Developed

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How much of the Cape is developed? We look around us and continually find wooded lots or old fields converted to housing or new businesses. How much of those wooded fields and open vistas are protected from development? Many now are, either through conservation restrictions, conservation fee ownership, or other limitations that prevent development (such as the presence of wetlands or waterbodies). How much of Cape Cod is remaining to be either protected or developed? Surprisingly little.

The Land Developed/Land Protected Indicator is a snapshot of the percentage of the Cape Developed, Protected and Remaining. The relationship of these figures is a measure of the balance our community maintains between the land where we live, work, and shop, and the natural landscape which protects our water supply, provides wildlife habitat and places to recreate, preserves the character of the Cape landscape, and by extension supports the economy of the Cape which is closely tied to the beauty of and access to our environment.

The 2005 indicator shows a slight change downward in the land developed, which common sense says does not accurately reflect changes in the Cape landscape over the last two years. We know that new homes and businesses have been built on "greenfield" sites (for example, the Barnstable Building Department reports 87 new house permits issued in 2003 and 72 permits in 2004, and the Falmouth Building Department reports 245 new house permits issued in 2003 and 260 in 2004).

Examination of individual towns' data shows that assessors may have reclassified land previously labeled Developed in as many as half the Cape towns. Conversations with assessors indicates that changes in land use may result in what appears to be a reduction in the acreage of developed land. For example, the *acreage* associated with condominiums is typically not tracked by assessors for tax purposes, so as properties convert to condominiums, the acreage may be dropped from the records resulting in an apparent reduction in developed land. The caution offered by one assessor is that assessing data should not be relied on for purposes other than assessing and taxation. However, as more towns acquire GIS capabilities, both parcel acreage data and land use classifications will improve, allowing the use of assessors' data for a wider range of data analysis. As data collection improves, and if analysis of the data spans a longer period of time, we may likely see trend changes that better reflect both our observations and the actual changes in land use.

Sources:

The percentages are compiled from town assessors' data, with adjustments made from GIS MacConnell Data, GIS parcel data, and various town and state reports on governmental ownership.

Method:

2004 Assessors' data is sorted according to town-determined land use codes (state standardized) for each parcel. Land acreages associated with each parcel are summed in each category. Governmental categories need further refinement, and GIS data, town local comprehensive plans, and other town and state reports are used to break government properties down into the appropriate groups. Some individual town data, when compared to data from 2002, shows declines in Developed area, which may be explained as the availability of more accurate data and analysis. We found that the acreages that some town assessors attributed to given parcels were inaccurate, and utilized GIS to determine the acreages according to the assessors' land use codes.

Percentages of Land Developed, Protected, and Remaining on Cape Cod

