

GREATER BOSTON CHURCH PLANTING PROFILES

Cities of Reading, Stoneham, and Wakefield, Massachusetts

GEOGRAPHY

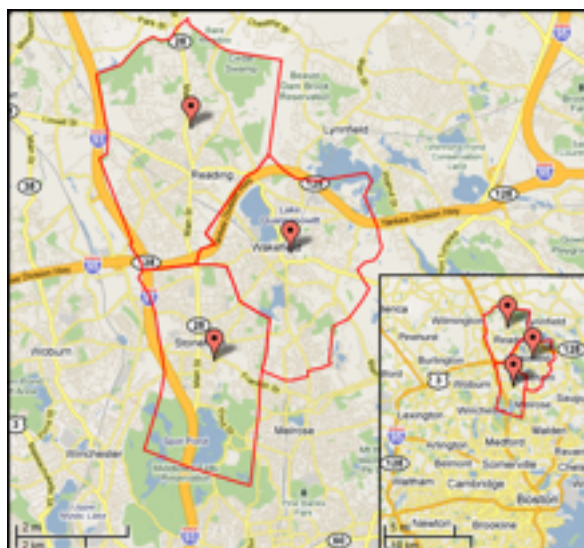
Reading, Stoneham and Wakefield are a cluster of three suburban towns located about 10 miles north of Boston. Together these communities comprise a total of 25 square miles and have a population of 70,000.

HISTORY

The area that is now Reading, Wakefield, and Stoneham was first settled in 1639 as an “inland plantation” by English settlers from the coastal towns of Lynn and Salem who were searching for farmable land. The new settlers first populated the southern shore of what is now Lake Quannapowitt and called their town Reading. Near the same time period, another group of settlers came north from the city of Charlestown and began the town of Stoneham just southwest of Reading. As the population in this area grew, new land north of the lake was added to the town of Reading. During the colonial period, the area remained primarily agricultural, with the population clustered in towns in order to provide opportunities for education and church.

By the mid-nineteenth century, the Industrial Revolution brought dramatic changes to the area. In 1806-7 a private company built the Andover-Medford Turnpike, now state route 28, making travel to Boston more efficient. The construction of the Boston and Maine Railroad further opened the area for development, and new industries sprung up. In particular, furniture making and shoe production thrived in the area, and ice was harvested from Lake Quannapowitt and sold and shipped to other localities. The towns themselves benefited greatly from these new industries. Services like libraries, banks and newspapers developed. The southern section of Reading containing the original settlement became the separate town of Wakefield in 1868.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century the areas industries began to decline. At the same time, advances in transportation meant that it was no longer necessary for people to work and live in the same town. This fact defined the area throughout the remainder of the twentieth century. The Boston and Maine Railroad was eventually taken over by the state transportation network and to this day it provides regular commuter service to downtown Boston. As the interstate highway system developed, the area became well connected to both neighboring



suburbs and Boston by car. Today the area is largely a bedroom community for both downtown Boston as well as commercial office centers in other nearby towns.

NEIGHBORHOODS AND POINTS OF INTEREST

Although no longer the economic engines they once were, the towns of Reading and Wakefield still revolve around their historic town centers. Today these areas are comprised mostly of services, restaurants and retail stores, and largely they retain their pedestrian scale. In both cities the commuter train service stops near the town centers, giving them continued importance as transportation hubs.

Lake Quannapowitt is a popular recreational area, with biking and walking trails. On the southern border of the lake is Wakefield Common, a public park where events take place throughout the year. Middlesex Fells Reservation, in south Stoneham, is a regional recreational area with miles of hiking and biking trails. Nearby Stone Zoo is a popular family destination.

Residential neighborhoods in the area are a mixture of old and new development. Newer neighborhoods were built with automobile transportation in mind, but the neighborhoods near town centers are retain a small scale not common in American suburbs, with retail and restaurants within easy walking distance.

¹ www.wikipedia.org

DEMOGRAPHICS²

About 70,000 people live in Reading, Stoneham and Wakefield. 95% of these people are white³ (non-Latino). Relative to the U.S. average, this area is distinctly not ethnically diverse. 94% of the population over 25 years old has a high school diploma, and 51% of the population over 25 has a bachelor's degree or higher – almost twice the national average. One-third of all families have children under 18 living at home with them.

The median household income in the area is \$91,000 per year, and the median family income is \$109,000 per year. The average home price is \$430,000 (2008), more than double the national average. 78% of all homes are single family homes, and three quarters of homes are owner-occupied. Fewer than 3% of the population lives below the poverty line – less than a quarter of the national average.

TRANSPORTATION

Reflecting national trends in suburban development over the past half century, links to local and regional transportation systems have played a central role in the growth of Reading, Stoneham and Wakefield. Two major interstate highways intersect the area. Interstate 95/128, Boston's 'beltway', runs east to west through Reading and Wakefield, linking the area to other suburban employment, retail, and population centers. Interstate 93 runs along the western boarder of Reading and through Stoneham, providing direct access to Boston's urban area. The regional commuter rail system providing service to Boston has two stops in Wakefield and one in Reading, and for many is the easiest way to access the employment and cultural offerings of the city of Boston.

RELIGION

Approximately 25 churches worship in Reading, Stoneham and Wakefield. This includes several Roman Catholic parishes and a number of mainline Episcopal, Congregational and Methodist churches. A handful of small to mid-sized evangelical Baptist and Congregational churches serve the area.

CHURCH PLANTING OUTLOOK

For most, life is generally comfortable in these suburban Boston towns. Their residents have a high standard of living. Some have established wealth and others are up-and-coming. A church planter will need to understand how to identify and engage the cultural idols of these communities and challenge them with the gospel.

A church plant here will need to be multi-generational and family-oriented. It will need to offer a picture of gospel renewal that goes beyond "being good"—where people are turned "inside out" spiritually, socially, and culturally as they respond to the good news.

Our prayers and church planting efforts would be well-directed toward the end of seeing His Kingdom come in these northern suburbs.

Contact:

Bob Sawyer bobsawyer@ctkboston.org

² Factfinder.census.gov, metrobostondatacommon.org. Info based on 2008 estimates unless noted.

³ Based on 2000 census, up to date estimates not available.