

NATICK CENTER PLAN

2016

Acknowledgments

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Geoffrey Lewis, Senior Planner

MAPC Staff

Chris Kuschel, Project Manager, Regional Planner II

Karen Adelman, Communications Strategist

Renato Castelo, Community Engagement Specialist

Amanda Chisholm, Chief Economic Development Planner

Sarah Lee, Senior Transportation Engineer and Planner

Mark Racicot, Director of Land Use

To request additional copies of this document contact:

Chris Kuschel
ckuschel@mapc.org

Or visit our website:
www.mapc.org/natickcenterplan

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1. Introduction and Executive Summary

Introduction and Executive Summary

Natick Center has witnessed a great transformation over the past 40+ years since the last Master Plan for the community was completed. At that time, the plan for the neighborhood was to utilize 1950s and 1960s-style urban renewal techniques to revitalize downtown through eminent domain, demolition, and reconstruction. Fortunately, those efforts – seen to disastrous effect in other parts of the region – did not come to fruition. Today, Natick Center is rich with revitalized historic and new properties, occupied with a mix of commercial, retail, cultural, residential and civic uses. Adding to the historic center, in the 1990s the Town invested heavily in constructing iconic civic buildings and properties lining East Central Street, creating a center for the community to enjoy both public and private amenities. These properties include the new Town Hall, Police and Fire Stations, and an addition to the historic Morse Institute Library. Natick Center was also recently designated a Cultural District through the Massachusetts Cultural Council – highlighting the Town's commitment to the strength and diversity of Natick Center.

Development and change continues to occur. Indeed, changing demographics and preferences may accelerate the pace of change. The purpose of this plan, therefore, is to examine Natick Center from a holistic perspective and shape upcoming change to best meet the needs of the community. The Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC), the regional planning agency for the 101 communities comprising metropolitan Boston, worked with the Town, Natick Center Associates, property owners, business owners, and citizens to craft a vision for the future of Natick Center. The project engaged the public in a discussion about how Natick Center can support the needs of the residents and businesses today, as well as those who may be there in the future. The goal of this plan is to develop a clear action-oriented path for the Town and other stakeholders that will help maximize the benefits to the Town and take advantage of the Center's proximity to public transportation.

This plan began with three over-arching themes:

1. **A plan that connects past to future.** Natick Center has strong ties to its past with historic architecture, a traditional New England village pattern of development conducive to walking, and a mix of uses. This plan sought to build upon these traits while planning for the future.

2. **A plan that is context sensitive and involves the community.** Unlike the urban renewal plans of the 1960s and 1970s, the plan will harmoniously fit into the context of today's Natick Center and meet the needs of the community. Related to this point, the plan involved extensive public engagement to help formulate both the vision and the recommendations.

3. **A plan that incorporates past planning.** The Town has undergone numerous planning efforts affecting Natick Center. This project builds upon and incorporates relevant aspects into the plan.

Planning Process

The nine month planning process began in September 2015 and concluded in May 2016 with the team working in two primary phases.

Phase 1: Information Gathering

In this phase, the team worked concurrently on two tracts:

1. ***Data collection.*** MAPC: performed site visits; collected GIS data, demographic information and projections, previous planning documents and reports, retail/office/residential data and trends analysis; reviewed existing zoning regulations; and, interviewed Town staff, land owners, and developers.

2. ***Public input.*** Working with the Town, MAPC gathered community feedback on a wide range of topics to help shape the vision and the recommendations.

Phase 2: Analysis and Recommendations

Based upon the data collected and the extensive public input, MAPC began development of a set of preliminary recommendations. The recommendations included strategies to foster economic development, specific zoning changes, recommendations to improve mobility for all users of the road, alternatives to the current angle-in parking configuration on Route 27 (Main Street), and general parking management recommendations. The team then refined and finalized these recommendations based upon additional community feedback.

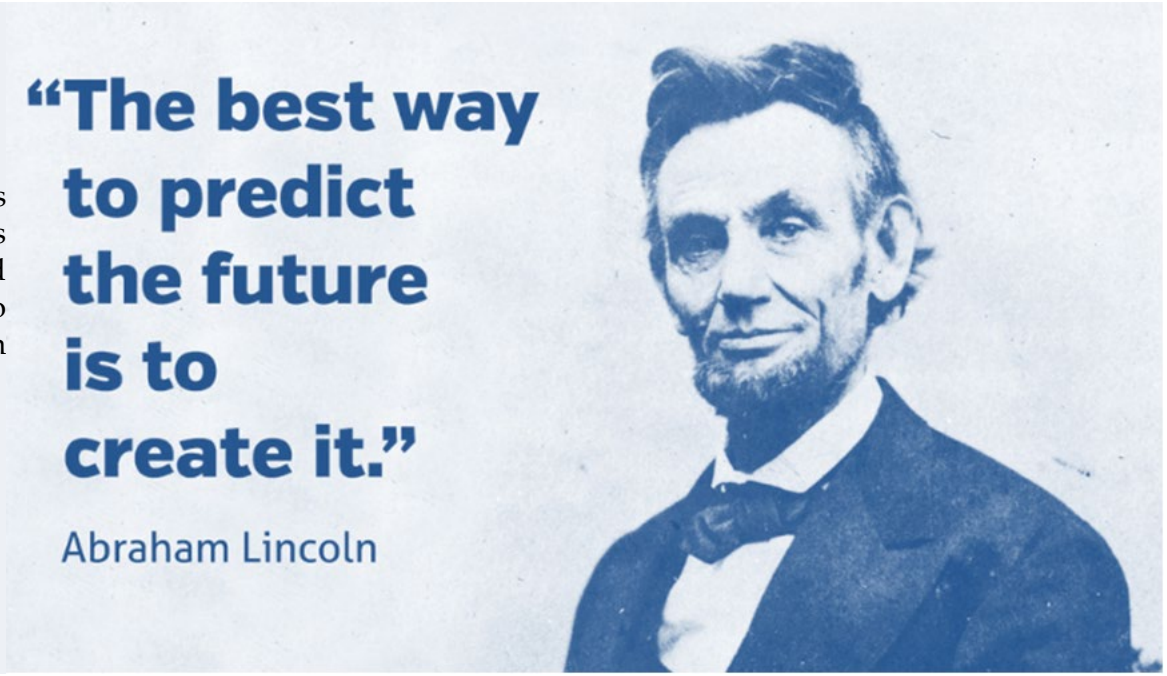
Next Step: Incorporate into Master Plan and Implement

With the finalization of recommendations as a guide for the future, the process should transition into a two-pronged approach:

1. ***Where possible, transition directly into implementation.*** Working towards implementation, e.g., drafting zoning language, will help maintain the momentum built during the planning process, facilitate the progress of ongoing initiatives, and launch new ideas into the realm of reality.

2. ***Incorporate into Master Plan.*** The Town is about to embark on its first master plan update since the 1970s. The Master Plan will guide future development and set priorities for the next twenty years throughout the Town. Relevant aspects from the Natick Center Plan – including recommendations specifically for Natick Center, as well general zoning recommendations – should be incorporated into the Plan. This will ensure continuity and avoid redundancy in recommendations.

This quote, attributed to President Lincoln, exemplifies the purpose of the Natick Center Plan. Change is happening and will continue to happen – e.g., land owners today can develop their parcels according to the existing zoning code – and this plan provides an opportunity to shape that change.



Summary of Recommendations

The recommendations of the Natick Center Plan are organized into four functional categories for achieving the overarching vision.

Economic Development

The first set of recommendations focuses on ways to improve the business environment in Natick Center, especially for small and independent retailers. The recommendations address ways both to attract new retailers and improve existing ones.

- **Expand the market.** Small retailers and restaurants look for locations that have a higher number of residents because it promises a reliable customer base.
- **Market Natick Center.** The neighborhood has many assets that are attractive to customers, commercial establishments, and developers. The Town should implement strategies to take advantage of those assets.
- **Improve existing properties.** The Town can provide support and potential solutions to make existing spaces attractive and viable.
- **Support existing local businesses.** The Town can help businesses institute best practices and connect them to a variety of resources.
- **Ensure permitting and procedures are business friendly.** Opening a business should be as streamlined and intuitive as possible.

Zoning

Zoning is one of the primary tools a community has to shape the built environment. Many in the community do not desire drastic change in Natick Center; rather, it would like to maintain its existing feel, while evolving to meet its future needs. Furthermore, aspects of the existing zoning code do not allow for the type of development that fosters a traditional New England downtown, necessitating alterations to the code.

- **Expand the Mixed Use (DM) and Housing Overlay Option Program (HOOP) districts.** The results of the visual preference and mapping exercises show a strong majority of the community wants a modest expansion of these districts. Expanding the area provides options for additional businesses and residents to thrive in the neighborhood, and is an underpinning need for Natick Center's future success.
- **Make modifications that affect the form of new developments in the DM.** By and large, the community likes the "feel" of Natick Center today; however, current zoning does not reflect the types of development that they would like to continue to see. Changes to parking requirements, lot coverage, frontage requirements, etc. will help ensure the development of high quality buildings.
- **Make modifications to the HOOP.** As with the DM, modest modifications will improve the quality of development. In addition, HOOP developments could allow additional ancillary uses (e.g., café) in addition to residences.

- **Continue to focus on keeping Natick affordable and accessible.** Town-wide zoning changes, such as the creation of an inclusionary zoning by-law, would help ensure people of all means are able to live in Natick.

Mobility

A successful downtown neighborhood requires a transportation system that works for everyone. Most importantly, a downtown must be walkable; that is, it must be safe, comfortable, accessible, and interesting for pedestrians of all ages and abilities. In addition, a downtown should be accessible by bicycles (the fastest growing mode of transportation in the region) and provide associated facilities such as bike parking. Transit, i.e., the commuter rail and the regional transportation bus service, should be comfortable and accessible. Finally, sufficient parking will ensure motorists are able to drive into Natick Center and support the businesses.

- **Install traffic calming measures.** Several residential streets were identified as high-speed cut-throughs that pose a safety risk to pedestrians, especially children. Speed humps and other measures can help ensure that motorists obey speed limits.
- **Examine key intersections.** Intersections along Route 27 from North Avenue to Pond Street should be analyzed to improve pedestrian and bicyclist safety, while also taking into account vehicle traffic flow.
- **Install bicycle facilities and amenities.** Several projects are already planned to improve bicycle safety and comfort traveling to Natick Center. These should be implemented, as well as an examination of the feasibility of bicycle lanes on Route 135 or an alternative east-west route. Bike parking is a key need at the station.

Parking

Although a part of mobility, parking is an important issue that merits its own set of recommendations. MAPC focused on two aspects: first, it examined alternatives to the angle-in parking along Main Street between South Avenue and Route 135. Angle-in parking can be dangerous for both motorists and cyclists, warranting an examination for alternatives. Second, it examined the parking conditions throughout Natick Center. The Town has conducted numerous parking studies in recent years and has recently begun to implement various parking management strategies. It is also exploring options for developing one or two Town-owned lots into a structured parking facility. Because of these factors, rather than performing an additional utilization analysis, MAPC provided additional parking management recommendations.

- **Assess the impact of recent parking changes.** New meters, new meter rates, and new permit zones have all been recently implemented. The Town should examine these changes and modify, as needed.
- **Convert the existing angle-in parking.** In the short-term the Town should pilot "reverse-angle" parking. Over the longer term, the Town may wish to convert to parallel parking, which would result in fewer available parking spaces but allow for wider sidewalks.

2. Existing Conditions and Projections

Historical context

Natick, meaning "Place of Hills," was founded in 1651 as one of several settlements for Native Americans who had converted to Christianity. Although the focus of the settlement began in what is today South Natick, by the 1800s Natick Center was developing rapidly as a focal point for commerce and the Town as a whole. Until the 1830s, the centers of commerce in Natick were to the north (Hartford Street) and the south (Eliot Street). Once Central Street was laid out, and the railroad arrived, what is now considered Natick Center grew rapidly. Unfortunately, in 1874 a great fire in Natick Center demolished 18 business blocks, two shoe factories, the Town Hall, Natick's only fire engine house, and the Congregational Church, as well as many private homes. After the fire, Natick Center rebuilt and continued to expand, and many of today's buildings were built between 1875 and 1900. During this time, three quarters of the Town's 10,000 residents lived within a mile of Natick Center.

In the post-war years of the 1950s and 1960s, industry moved along the Route 9 corridor, which provided access to Route 495 and, especially, the Route 95/128 high technology corridor. During these transitional years to an auto-centric lifestyle, Natick Center struggled with disinvestment. In the historical context, however, this time period proved rather brief, and today Natick Center is once again a thriving neighborhood.

Figure 1: Natick's old Town Hall on East Central Street

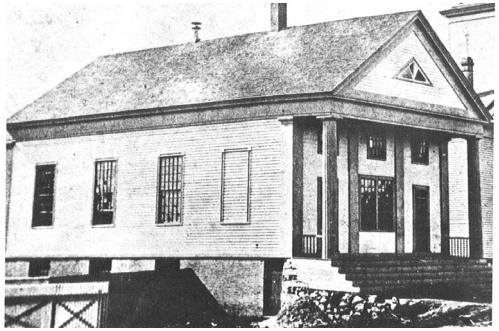
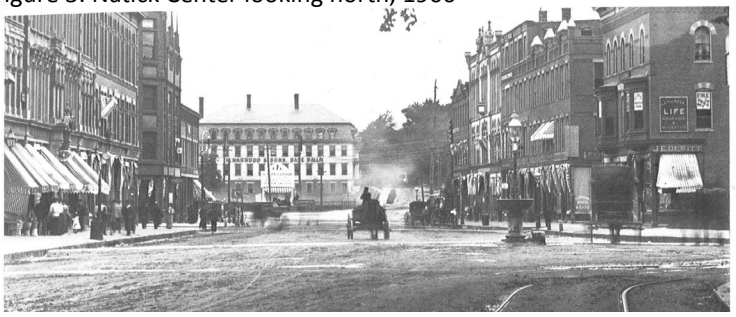


Figure 2: Natick Center building which was burned downtown in the great fire



Figure 3: Natick Center looking north, 1900



The site

Natick Center is centrally located within the Metrowest region, twenty miles west of Boston.

For purposes of this study, MAPC considered the half-mile "walk shed" of the area surrounding the Natick Center MBTA station as the boundaries of "Natick Center."[1] A half mile, which is on average a ten minute walk, is often used as an approximation for the outer boundaries of a neighborhood. While the final recommendations do not include all areas within this boundary, it was used as a guide for areas that could potentially be affected by future development.

Figure 4: Regional Context



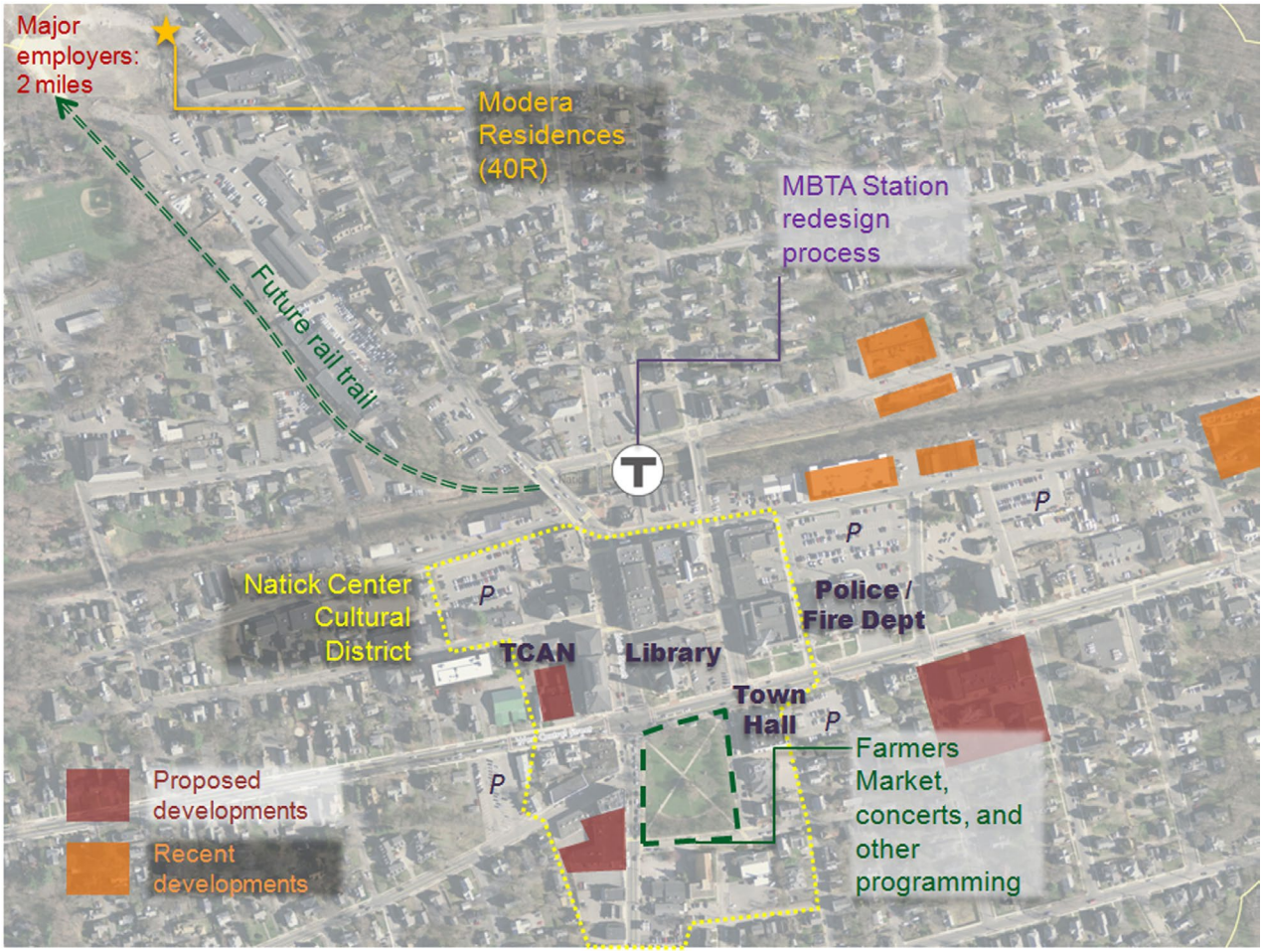
Figure 5: Natick Center site



[1] Studies will often use a circular buffer (as the "crow flies") to determine the ½ mile distance. Using the walk shed takes into account the roadway network and provides a more accurate depiction of the ½ mile distance.

The area today is a bustling downtown in the core of Natick, offering a mixture of retail, commercial, residential, cultural, and civic uses. With easy access to Boston via the MBTA's commuter rail, MetroWest Regional Transportation Administration bus service, and proximate to Route 9 and I-90, Natick Center is an attractive location for residents and visitors. In recent years various developments and initiatives have been planned or proposed. The following diagram highlights several:

Figure 6: Recent and proposed developments and initiatives in NatickCenter



- The Town Common has continued to be a focal point of Natick Center. In addition to being an attractive open space, it hosts numerous popular programs. It is the home of the popular Natick Farmers Market (until the winter, when it moves indoors adjacent to the Common). In the summer the Common also hosts a series of free concerts.

- Natick Center has made a concerted effort to build upon its arts and cultural assets. In 2012 a portion of Natick Center was designated a Cultural District by the Massachusetts Cultural Council. The designation was made based upon the impressive 19th century architecture and numerous cultural offerings, especially the Center for Arts in Natick (TCAN), Morse Institute Library, and proximity to Walnut Hill School for the Arts. TCAN, housed in a 19th century fire station, provides a diverse range of performances and classes. The Morse Institute Library traces its history back to the early 19th century, and in the 1990s an addition was constructed to continue meeting the community's needs.

Existing Conditions and Projections

- In addition to the Morse Institute Library, Natick Center houses other civic uses, including the Town Hall and a combined Fire/Police Station.
- Several developments were recently constructed in Natick Center. On the edge of the neighborhood, the 138 unit Modera Natick Center apartments provide market rate and affordable units within walking distance of the station and other neighborhood amenities. Several other multifamily residences have also been constructed closer to the MBTA station using the Housing Overlay Option Program and Downtown Mixed Use Zoning (discussed in the Land Use + Zoning Analysis section).

Figure 7: Photos depicting Natick Center (pages 14-16)


Town Common


TCAN (Photo credit: www.natickcenter.org)



Farmers Market (Photo credit: Tony Lulek, www.natickfarmersmarket.com)


Town Hall (Photo credit: Jay Bell)


Modera Natick Center Apartments



Recently Constructed Townhouses

- Most recently, a building conversion rehabilitated vacant upper floor commercial space into several residences. The ground floor will remain retail. This building typology (i.e., ground floor retail with housing above) is expected to continue with new proposals, such as the recently approved conversion of the former American Legion building on Route 135. The former Saint Patrick's School is also being considered for a future development along these lines.


Former Saint Patrick's School Proposed Development Site



Recent Conversion to Residential above Retail



Former American Legion Building Future Development Site

Existing Conditions and Projections

- Several plans are under way to improve the mobility of getting to and around Natick Center through multiple modes of transportation. These include plans for bicycle lanes along Route 27 north of the Center, pilots to calm traffic and improve pedestrian safety at the MBTA Station, and plans to reconfigure the intersection at Route 27 and Cottage Street on the southern part of the Center.
- Perhaps the most significant transportation improvement is the future construction of the Cochituate Rail Trail. When completed, this rail trail will span four miles from Natick Center into Framingham (the latter of which was completed in 2015). This trail will provide a vital link between Natick Center and the major employers at Route 9 and on through the employment centers off of Route 90.
- Despite being one of Natick Center's biggest assets, the MBTA Station is one of the few remaining stations in the system that is not accessible to people with disabilities. That, among other reasons, was the impetus to begin a station redesign process. The Town is working with the MBTA on designing and ultimately constructing a new station.
- Finally, parking within Natick Center has been extensively studied. The Town has recently begun implementing several of the parking management recommendations and has also begun exploring the feasibility of constructing one or two structured parking facilities.



Future Rail Trail along Lake Cochituate (Photo credit: www.crtrail.org/photos.php)



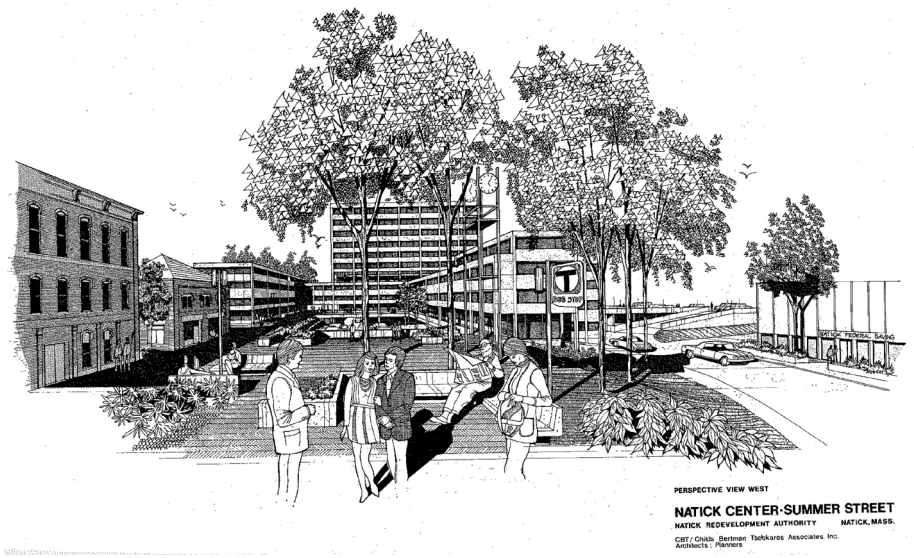
Lack of Accessibility at Natick Center Commuter Rail Station

Previous Planning

As noted above, in the postwar years Natick Center experienced disinvestment, resulting in an urban renewal plan in 1975. The general purpose of the plan seems rather benign, stating that its purpose is to "revitalize the Natick business area, conserve buildings capable of rehabilitation, remove substandard buildings and blighting influence, provide public improvements that will benefit the downtown area, provide land for new or expanded uses… and act as a catalyst for other downtown improvements." But this overall goal belied many of the negative aspects associated with this form of intervention. The plan called for the taking of private property due to reasons such as underutilization and lack of off-street parking. The future, auto-oriented development would bear little resemblance to the historic Natick Center.

Fortunately, the plan of 1975 did not come to fruition. Instead, the Town embarked on numerous planning studies and implementation efforts to work within the existing context and make incremental changes. The following timeline summarizes these efforts.

Figure 8: Rendering of Urban Renewal Proposal



1980s

- Municipal facilities plan saw the implementation of an upgraded Town Common, addition to the Morse Institute Library, new Town Hall, and new Police/Fire Station.

1990s

- Design Master plan
- Market Study to assess opportunities
- First of several parking studies

2000s

- Several parking studies and recommendations for Natick Center. Implementation recently begun.

Today

- Natick Center Plan to incorporate past planning and set a course for the future by holistic view of various factors affecting the neighborhood.

Demographics

In order to plan for an area, it's important to understand the current population and how it has changed, or may change, over time. This section provides an overview of the demographic make-up of Natick today and projections for the future. The section concludes with a summary of why Natick Center plays an important role in accommodating the community's future needs.

There are three key points relevant to planning for the future of Natick Center.

1) Natick's Population is Rising

MAPC's population projections are based on current patterns of births, deaths, and migration, as well as assumptions about how those trends might change in the coming decades. Population, at 35,000, is expected to grow to 33,800 in 2020 and 34,900 by 2030.

Natick's population growth has been driven primarily by the fact that it is an increasingly desirable community to live in. The key factor in Natick's growth over the past twenty years has been due to people moving into Town (see Figure 10).

Figure 9: Natick Actual and Projected Population Growth

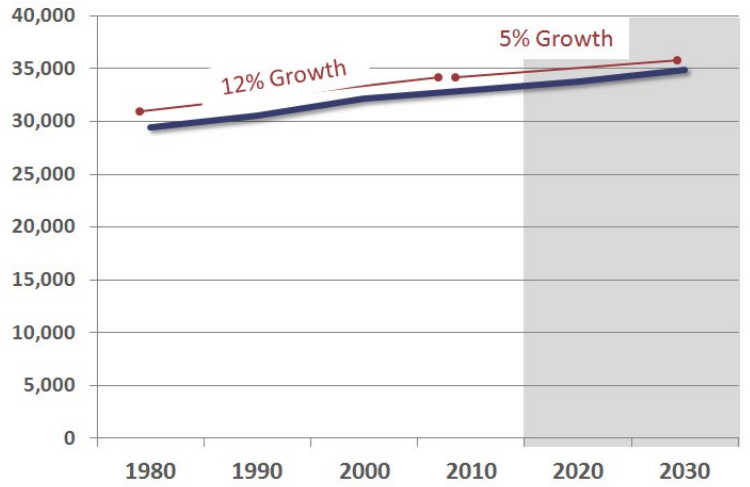
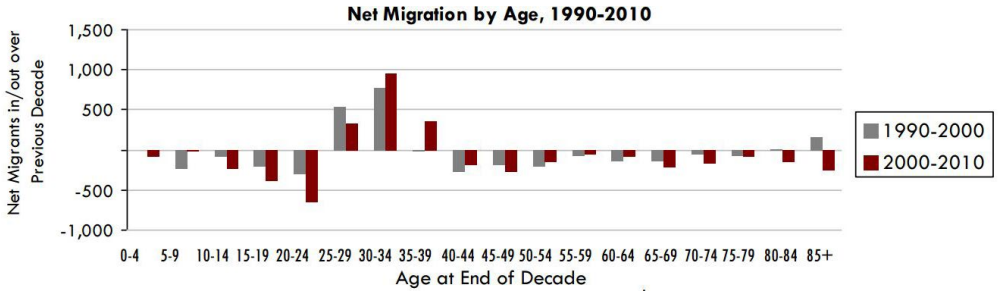


Figure 10: Natick Net Migration by Age



Projections Methodology

The metropolitan Boston region is home to an ever-changing population, shaped by numerous factors. To help plan for this uncertain future, MAPC has prepared a dynamic model of future population, household size, and housing demand for Metro Boston and its municipalities. MAPC's projections include two scenarios for regional growth. Each scenario reflects different assumptions about key trends. The "Status Quo" scenario is based on the continuation of existing rates of births, deaths, migration, and housing occupancy. Alternatively, the "Stronger Region" scenario explores how changing trends could result in higher population growth, greater housing demand, and a substantially larger workforce. Specifically, the Stronger Region scenario assumes that in the coming years:

- The region will attract and retain more people, especially young adults, than it does today;
- Younger householders (born after 1980) will be more inclined toward downtown living than were their predecessors, and less likely to seek out single family homes; and,
- An increasing share of senior-headed households will choose to downsize from single family homes to apartments or condominiums.

Of the two scenarios, Stronger Region is more consistent with the housing, land use, and workforce development goals of MetroFuture and has been adopted by the Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development as the basis for the Commonwealth's multifamily housing production goal. Furthermore, based upon a review of its previous projections, the Stronger Region scenario was the more accurate of the two scenarios. The projections in this section, therefore, rely on the Stronger Region scenario.

Development of these projections was supported by an advisory team comprising academic experts, state agencies, neighboring regional planning agencies (RPAs), and member municipalities. MAPC reviewed reports from other regions nationwide to assess the current state of practice and also reviewed prior projections for its region to assess their accuracy and identify opportunities for improvement. The "Metro Boston" region refers to 164 cities and towns in Eastern Massachusetts, including the entire MAPC district as well as all or portions of five neighboring RPAs. This region coincides with the extent of the travel demand model used by the Boston Metropolitan Planning Organization.

Data sources for the projections include Decennial Census data from 1990, 2000, and 2010; American Community Survey (ACS) data from 2005 to 2011; fertility and mortality information from the Massachusetts Community Health Information Profile (MassCHIP); housing production information from the Census Building Permit Survey database; and MAPC's Development Database. For more information please visit http://www.mapc.org/available-data/projections.

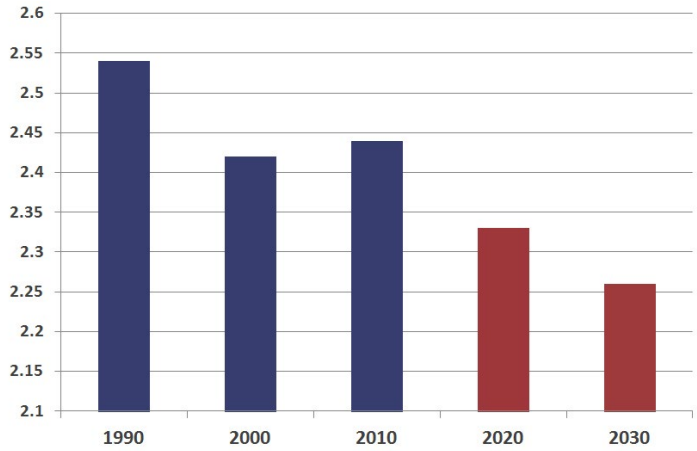
2) Natick Is Getting Older...and Younger

In addition to the population as a whole, the change in specific age cohorts impacts the planning for Natick Center's future. Two groups in particular are expected to grow strongest. First are residents 65 years of age and older. The "baby boomer" generation, the largest cohort, is entering this stage of life; in addition, people are living longer. Through 2030, the 65 years and older population is expected to grow by 69%. Twenty through 34 year olds comprise the second group, sometimes known as "Millennials." This group is projected to grow 15% through 2030.

3) Household Size Is Projected To Shrink

In 1990, household size was on average 2.54. Despite a blip in 2010 (due largely to the Great Recession, which saw young people moving back with their parents), the trend and projection is a fall to 2.26 people per household by 2030. This is because younger people are often waiting longer to have children and older people are living longer.

Figure 11: Natick Actual and Projected Household Size



The Significance of These Trends

The change in demographics, combined with changing preferences and needs for various age groups, suggest several things:

More housing is needed to accommodate the growing population.

- Many seniors wish to "age in place;" i.e., remain in their communities during retirement. Many of these people increasingly do not want or are unable to drive for every trip. As with the younger generation they want access to restaurants, stores, and other amenities.

- Younger people (20-34 year olds) are generally interested in living in a downtown setting, where they can walk to restaurants and other points of interest. They don't want to rely on a car for every time they leave their homes. They also want easy access to transit, such as the commuter rail. For example, according to a recent poll, 76% of Millennials want to live in a transit-oriented neighborhood (i.e., containing the elements listed above).[2] While many would choose to live in the downtown neighborhoods of Boston, Somerville, and Cambridge, as these communities become increasingly unaffordable, suburbs such as Natick become more attractive.

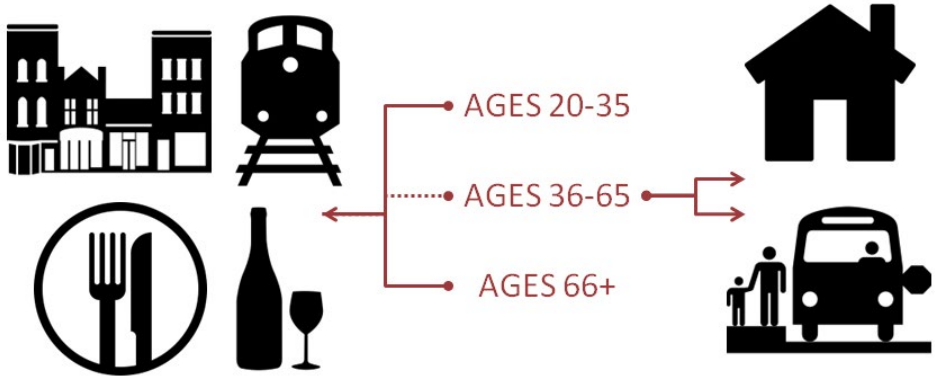
- People entering their mid-30s primarily are interested in living in a community with good schools. As their household sizes increase, they often prefer single family homes with more space. But many would still like easy access to the trappings of downtown settings with restaurants, night life, and a mix of amenities, even if they don't live directly within that type of setting.

[2] 2015 Urban Land Institute Boston/New England and MassINC Polling of 660 Boston area young professionals

These factors imply a need for:

- Additional housing units, particularly smaller units for rent or sale in multifamily buildings.
- A walkable community, containing a mix of uses where people do not need to rely on automobiles for every trip or activity. Being walkable means having places to go in an attractive setting (i.e., the walk must be interesting), as well as being safe and accessible.
- Access to transit, as many young professionals work in or near Boston. Within the broader context of an increasing preference for downtown settings, many employers are relocating to Boston and adjacent communities, making transit access increasingly attractive.
- Within this framework, Natick Center has many of the ingredients to support the changing demographic needs. It is among the most appropriate neighborhoods for multifamily residences. Several restaurants and stores provide a basis for additional retailers. The neighborhood is already highly walkable and contains transit access. Finally, it is more affordable than some neighboring communities, such as Wellesley.

Figure 12: Diagram summarizing generalized priorities by age cohort



Transit-Oriented Development

Natick Center is well-located both within the Town and regionally with a commuter rail station providing direct access to Boston. Transit-oriented development (TOD) is a strategy to integrate a mixture of housing, office, retail and other daily needs in a walkable neighborhood within close proximity to quality public transportation. Natick Center has already developed in this way and this plan provides an opportunity to ensure future development continues in a manner consistent with its past. TOD is usually accomplished through higher intensity, mixed-use, mixed-income development close to the station area with decreasing intensity as one gets further from the station. Successful examples of TOD include a mixture of housing types at varying price points, ensuring that those who want or need to live near transit can be accommodated.

The ability of residents and employees to walk and bike to and from the station area is also extremely important. A safe and well connected walking and biking network helps connect residents to local businesses, jobs, recreation areas, and the transit station itself. More trips taken by cyclists and pedestrians can help reduce auto traffic on local and regional roadways, improving congestion and air quality.

By coordinating investments in transportation and development, Natick can greatly improve the quality and ease of life for its residents. TOD has a number of benefits for a community depending on the type and quality of the transit service available.

Benefits of Transit Oriented Development

TOD can provide transportation choices. TOD provides transportation for young people, the elderly, people who do not drive, and those who choose to or cannot afford to own a car.

TOD can increase transit ridership. TOD improves the efficiency and cost effectiveness of transit investments. New development around transit stations can increase transit ridership by 20 to 40 percent, which would increase revenue for the MBTA.

TOD can reduce reliance on automobiles. By creating neighborhoods where housing, jobs, and shopping are within walking distance to transit, reliance on driving can be reduced. TOD can reduce annual household rates of driving by 20 to 40 percent.

TOD can reduce air pollution and energy consumption. With more pedestrian, bike, and transit travel taking place, reductions in driving can ease congestion and improve local air quality. TODs can reduce rates of greenhouse gas emissions by 2.5 to 3.7 tons per year for each household.

TOD can increase households' disposable income. Housing and transportation costs are the number one and two highest expenses households have to account for. Some estimates show that reducing household driving costs can help save $3,000-$4,000 annually. This can greatly increase a household's disposable income and ease overall household cost burden.

TOD can bolster the local economy. Constructing housing in walking distance to existing or future business districts means local businesses can be supported by the surrounding neighborhoods.

TOD can increase the municipal tax base. New development around the transit station can add to the municipal tax base without large infrastructure costs. This can mean new investments in schools, municipal services, or parks and recreation.

TOD can contribute to more affordable housing. By reducing household expenditures on transportation costs, more disposable income is available to be spent on housing costs. New development around transit stations should also include deed restricted affordable housing units for households making below the area median income.

Source: http://tod.drcog.org/what-are-benefits-tod

TOD concepts can be applied in a context-sensitive manner to fit the character of the community, from small suburbs to urban centers. The accompanying photos are examples of TOD in a variety of community types.



Manchester by the Sea


Newton


Reading



Melrose

3. Public Engagement

Public engagement and feedback are key components of the Natick Center Plan. Working with the Town, MAPC sought the ideas, opinions, and concerns of residents, employees, business owners, Town staff, and other interested stakeholders.

Engagement with the Community began at the project's commencement and ran through its entirety. In October 2015, MAPC staff met with members of the Natick Center Associates (NCA), a private-public partnership representing local merchants, property owners, arts and cultural organizations, artists, and concerned citizens. MAPC introduced the project and gained insight into the cultural programming, economic development initiatives, and other strategies that NCA and other groups are undertaking in Natick Center.

Figure 13: Summary of Public Participation



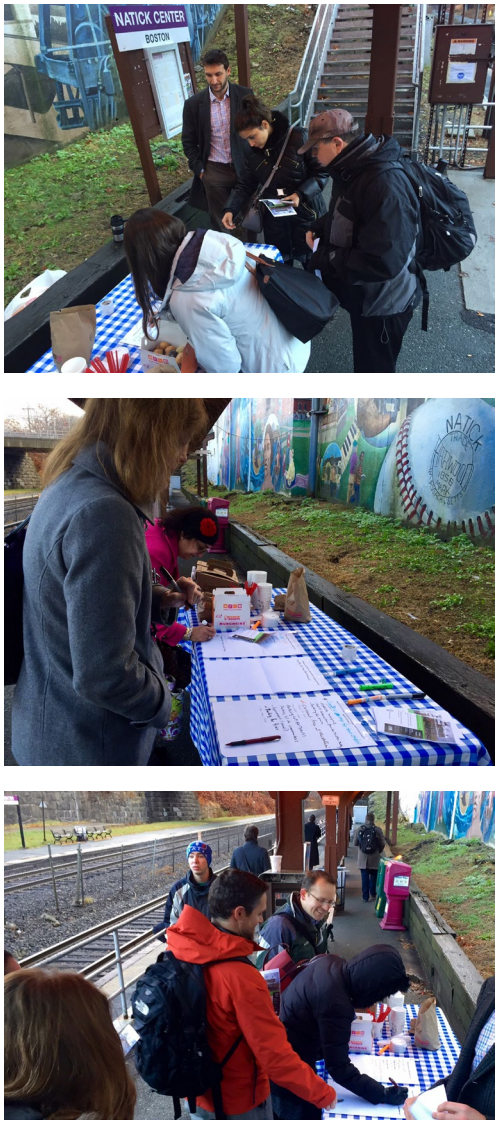
Public Engagement

In early November, MAPC staff then hosted several focus groups with various stakeholders. These focus groups sought insight on specific topics relevant to the various groups. These included:

- Parking Advisory Committee – to understand parking issues from their perspective and the status of requests for proposals/ information for structured parking facilities;
- Stonegate Group – a real estate development and management firm with two proposals for developments containing ground-floor retail with residences above;
- Property and business owners – to understand barriers and opportunities to development and expanding retail options; and,
- Town Department heads – met with directors of Public Health, Communications, Department Public Works, Facilities, and Town Clerk on a wide variety of topics related to strengths, opportunities, impediments, and needs for Natick Center.

In early December, MAPC staff set up a table at the inbound Natick Center station platform during the morning commute. At this informal venue, commuters provided input about aspects they liked about Natick Center, things they would like to see, and things they would like improved.

Figure 14: Photos of outreach at Natick Center Station



These initial outreach opportunities provided valuable, targeted feedback on key areas for various stakeholders. To maximize participation across a wider audience, MAPC engaged in a two-fold process: hosting an interactive public forum and promoting an online survey. Both events aimed to gain community feedback on a wide variety of topics.

The public forum was held in mid December 2015 at Morse Institute Library. The event was heavily promoted through local newspapers, Town website, MAPC project website, various Facebook pages, local businesses, at the commuter rail station outreach event, local houses of worship, the Farmers Market, and through email.

After registering, meeting participants were invited to visit various stations containing relevant information related to general background information, demographics, parking, zoning, and transportation. Participants also provided information on where they were from and how they travel to work (if applicable). This was followed by a brief presentation where the Town and MAPC introduced the project and described the process.

Figure 15: Photos of first Natick Center Plan public forum









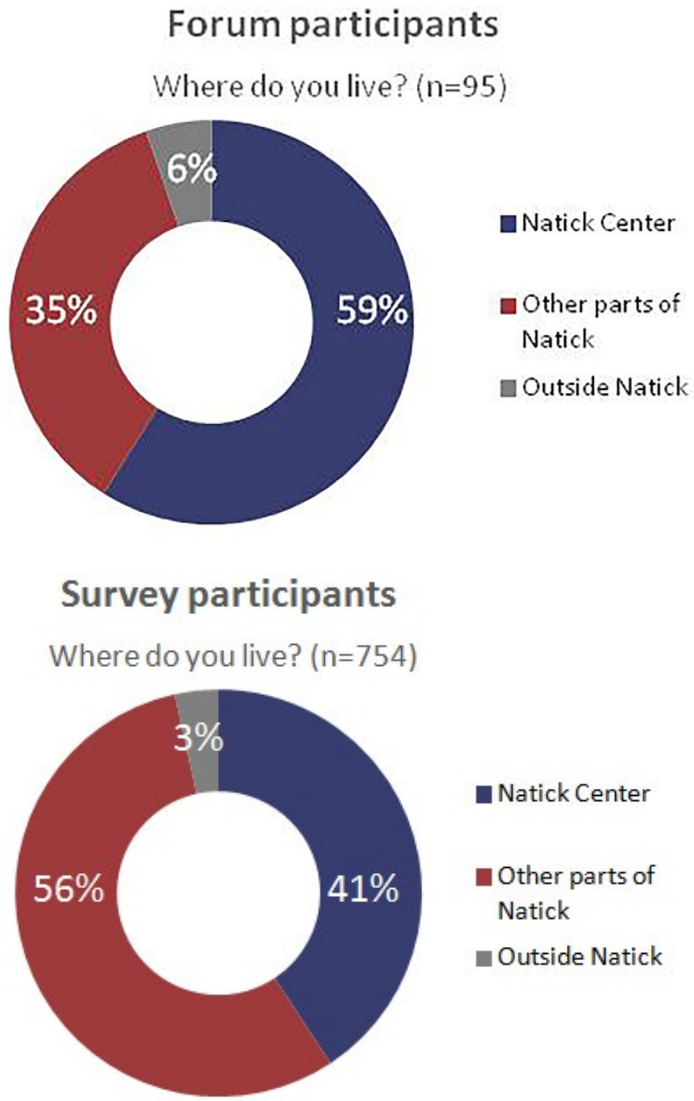
The key component of the forum was in the final hour after the presentation. During this period participants were invited to visit various stations and provide feedback on a variety of areas. The stations included:

- Aspects of Natick Center that participants like today and would like to see in the future;
- The types of businesses participants would like in Natick Center;
- A visual preference and mapping survey to understand the types of uses, types of buildings, and associated locations participants would like to see in Natick Center;
- Various needed transportation improvements; and,
- Options for reconfiguring the angle-in parking along Main Street.

This segment of the forum also provided numerous opportunities for participants to provide general feedback to various Town and MAPC staff. Approximately 130 people attended the forum, with over half living in Natick Center itself.

Following the forum, MAPC developed an online survey for people unable to attend the forum or unable to provide input at all of the stations. The survey attempted, to the extent possible, to provide the similar context and garner the same types of feedback as the forum. It was similarly promoted as the forum and approximately 770 people filled out the survey.

Figure 16: Breakdown of where public forum and survey participants live



The community outreach resulted in comments from over one thousand individuals. While it is unrealistic to expect perfect consensus on any topic, there were strong majorities of thought on most aspects related to the future of Natick Center. Figure 17 provides a graph of the elements that people like best about Natick Center. In both the forum and the survey, the Town Common and its associated programming was the top choice. As noted before, the Farmers Market is an extremely popular and valued asset, as are the summer concerts. The library, the neighborhood's walkability, and the general feel of the neighborhood were the next three most popular choices. Both the commuter rail station and the burgeoning arts scene / cultural offerings were also among the top choices. Furthermore, among forum participants only, the arts scene was the top choice. Other things people liked (tabulated in the "Other" category) include stores, restaurants, the people, and miscellaneous elements.

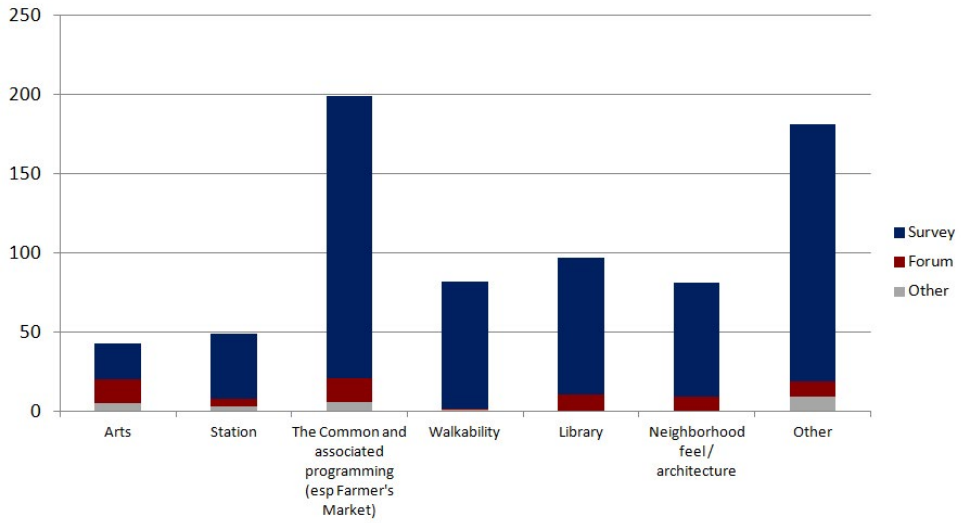
The public outreach also reached a strong consensus for a need for more restaurants with a greater variety of choices. A strong majority saw the need for more housing, including multifamily homes and homes for seniors, although there were several comments by those who wanted to limit or stop residential development. Concerns related to residential development generally related to concerns of school enrollment, increased traffic, and a change of Town character.

As will be discussed in greater detail in the Parking section, many participants voiced opinions on the state of parking in Natick Center. Many thought the neighborhood lacked adequate parking supply, although others noted that the issue was primarily one of parking management (i.e., better use of existing spaces). Other participants did not think parking was an issue at all.

There were numerous other ideas for needs in Natick Center. For example, many participants stated that Natick Center needs bicycle accommodations, such as bike lanes. Others would like to see a dog park and playground. Numerous participants cited the need for a grocery store in Natick Center.

MAPC then held a second forum on February 10 and another follow-up survey. The purpose of this second forum and survey was to present draft recommendations and gather feedback from the community to refine them. Approximately 80 people attended the forum and 740 people filled out the survey. All of the community's comments were considered in creating a vision for Natick Center and the associated recommendations.

Figure 17: What Do People Like about Natick Center?



4. Community Vision

MAPC presented an overall vision for the future of Natick Center at the second public forum and survey. Natick Center has several unique elements that give it a strong sense of place, especially the Town Common (and its associated programming) and the arts scene. Building upon these successes should be a concerted effort to provide more restaurant options and independent retailers. These, along with a base of small businesses, will help ensure Natick Center remains the jewel of the Town into the future. The combination of these elements can create a virtuous cycle that continues to attract additional stores, businesses, and therefore, people.

In addition to these unique elements, stores and other amenities providing everyday needs comprise the backbone of a successful downtown neighborhood. These include stores such as dry cleaners, cafes, pharmacies, and potentially a grocery store, as well as playgrounds and open space.

Getting to and around Natick Center is also a critical element to the vision. Above all, Natick Center must continue to prioritize the needs of pedestrians of all ages and abilities. A walkable neighborhood adds vitality and provides an economic development boost, along with the safety benefits. Biking will become an increasingly important way for residents throughout the Town to arrive at Natick Center and the T station will continue to be an asset, especially for neighborhood residents traveling to Boston. Well-managed parking will utilize that important resource efficiently so that visitors and residents from other parts of Natick can easily visit the neighborhood.

This brings the final element of the vision – the people. To be successful, Natick Center needs people living there, walking its streets every day, using its playgrounds, and taking advantage of its restaurants and stores. For retailers to be successful, they will also need people from other parts of Natick and visitors to frequent the area. The combination of all of these elements will work in tandem to create a successful Natick Center.

Figure 18: Diagram summarizing the vision for Natick Center

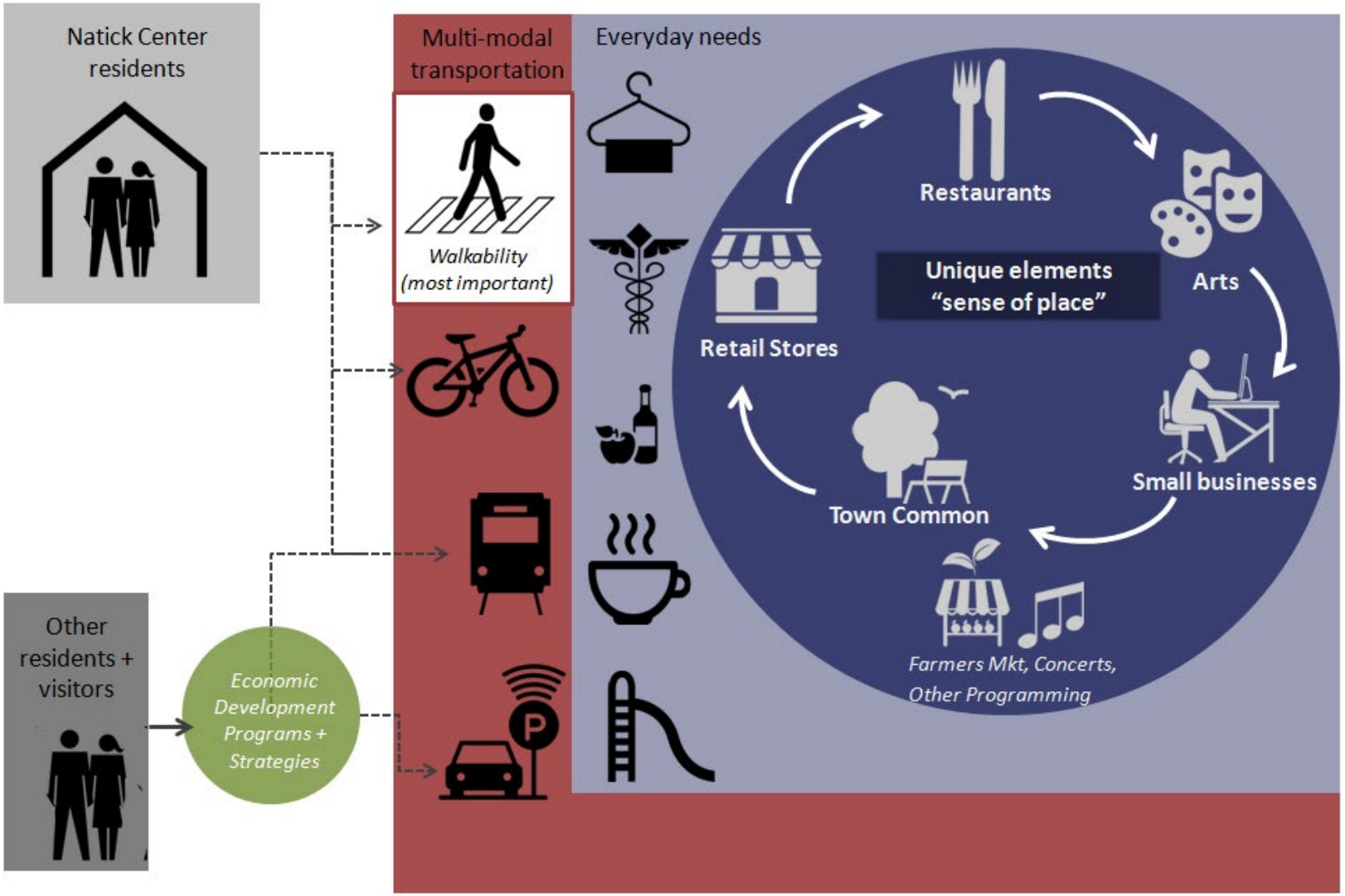


Figure 19: Rendering illustrating potential to build upon the arts scene and activate alleyway (current conditions inset).



5. Economic Development

MAPC performed a market analysis of Natick Center to better understand what the market potential for future residential, retail, and office development is in Natick Center. This information can help inform future planning decisions and development opportunities.

For retail uses, MAPC estimates a potential for 20 additional stores (9 food + drink and 11 other types of retailers), totaling approximately 50,000 square foot of supportable retail space. For office development, Natick Center could support several 20-40 person businesses but would be highly unlikely to be the location for major employers. For residential, Natick Center is a highly desirable location with potential for additional housing, especially multifamily units.

The following sections provide detailed analysis for each of the retail, office, and residential market potential opportunities.

It is important to note that this preliminary assessment of market opportunities is not a prediction of what will occur on the site. It is a representation of what may be possible should policies and market interest align given current data, trends and projections for future household growth, spending potential and employment within and around the Town of Natick over the next five to ten years.

Retail Market Analysis

A strong downtown retail sector can help to attract additional activity and promote a vibrant downtown. In order to assess the current retail environment, MAPC examined existing retail conditions in Natick Center and also analyzed sales and spending power in order to determine how much future retail the market could support in Natick Center.

Natick Center contains several local independently owned stores, including Natick Outdoor Store, Nautique, Five Crows Galley and Hand Crafted Gifts, as well as a few local framing and jewelry stores. Notably, there are a limited amount of eating and drinking establishments and a high amount of personal services including tailors, dry-cleaners, and nail and hair salons. There are also a number of auto repair and service establishments within the neighborhood.

There are some smaller professional offices located downtown, as well, including real estate offices, banks and insurance agencies. Natick Center also contains a few smaller creative firms, including Labor Day Creative and Sundin Marketing Associates. Natick CoWorking Space also recently opened in Natick Center and can accommodate up to about 18 members.

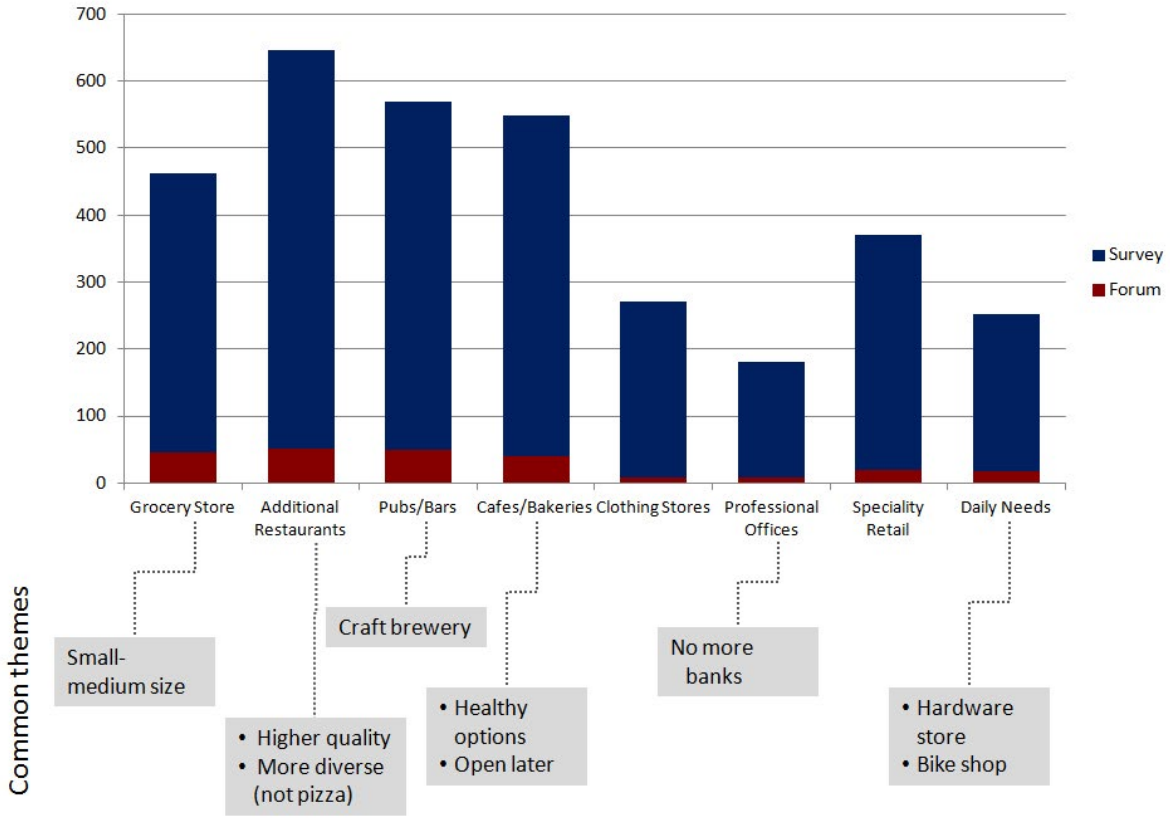
Public Feedback

At the first public forum and follow-up survey, participants weighed in on the types of businesses that they would like to see in Natick Center. Figure 20 summarizes the participants' preferences.

Participants were interested in a small to medium size grocery store, higher quality and more diverse restaurants, a craft brewery, cafes that have healthy options and are open later, as well as a hardware store and bike shop.

In addition to the public feedback, MAPC staff spoke with several business owners, brokers, and property owners in Natick Center. While some retailers had concerns about additional retail and restaurants creating more competition, others were generally supportive of additional retail and believed it would help to draw the critical mass of people needed to support more local businesses. In particular, there was a strong desire for more restaurants, although interviewees expressed concern that restaurants needed a certain kind of space that was not available in Natick Center and that liquor licenses have been restrictive. There was also a strong sentiment that Natick Center needed a strong local anchor such as a grocery store.

Figure 20: Business Preferences in Natick Center



Property owners felt that commercial rents are reasonable and should be attractive to commercial tenants because they are more affordable than nearby towns. They felt that the commuter rail was a strong asset for potential commercial tenants, in particular for quicker food options where commuters could pick up food on their way home from work.

There was also support for additional residential to boost the Natick Center customer base and to facilitate a more lively nighttime and weekend scene in Natick Center.

There was some concern around the additional parking needed for new development and a feeling that there wasn't enough parking currently to serve the needs of the downtown.

Trade Area

In order to estimate the amount of additional retail that Natick Center can support, a first step is identifying a trade area. The trade area is the geographic area from which a retail establishment generates sales. There are many factors to consider when determining a primary trade area including the distance and time that people may be willing to travel in order to reach a destination, any physical or geographic barriers, and regional competition. MAPC considers the "primary trade area" for Natick Center the 5-minute drive time and a "local trade area" of a 10 minute walk time. It is reasonable to assume that people would be willing to travel this distance in order to attain goods and services within the downtown. For comparison and to account for a more regional draw, MAPC also considered a secondary trade area of a fifteen minute drive time.

The five minute drive time is mostly contained within Natick, although it captures a few small portions of Wellesley along Route 9 and Route 135. There are approximately 17,770 people living within a five minute drive time to downtown Natick and about 6,840 households (ESRI ACS 2013).

Drive times and walk times are displayed in the following maps.

Figure 21: Retail Trade Area, Drive Times (source: ESRI Business Analyst)

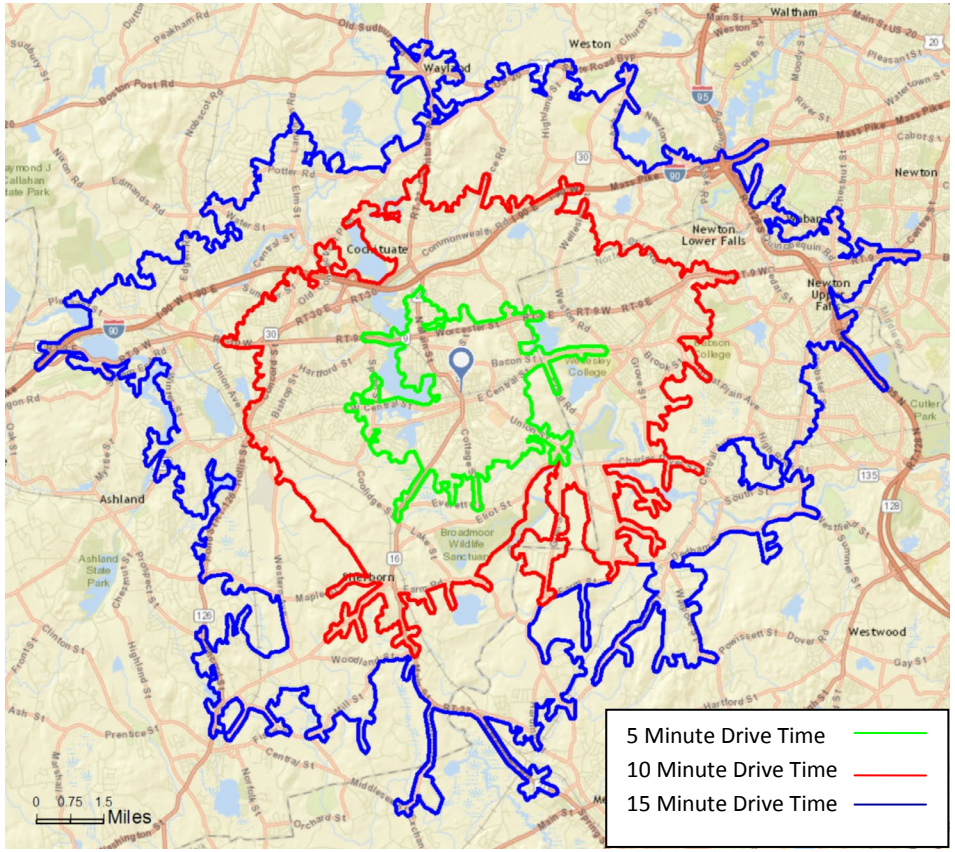
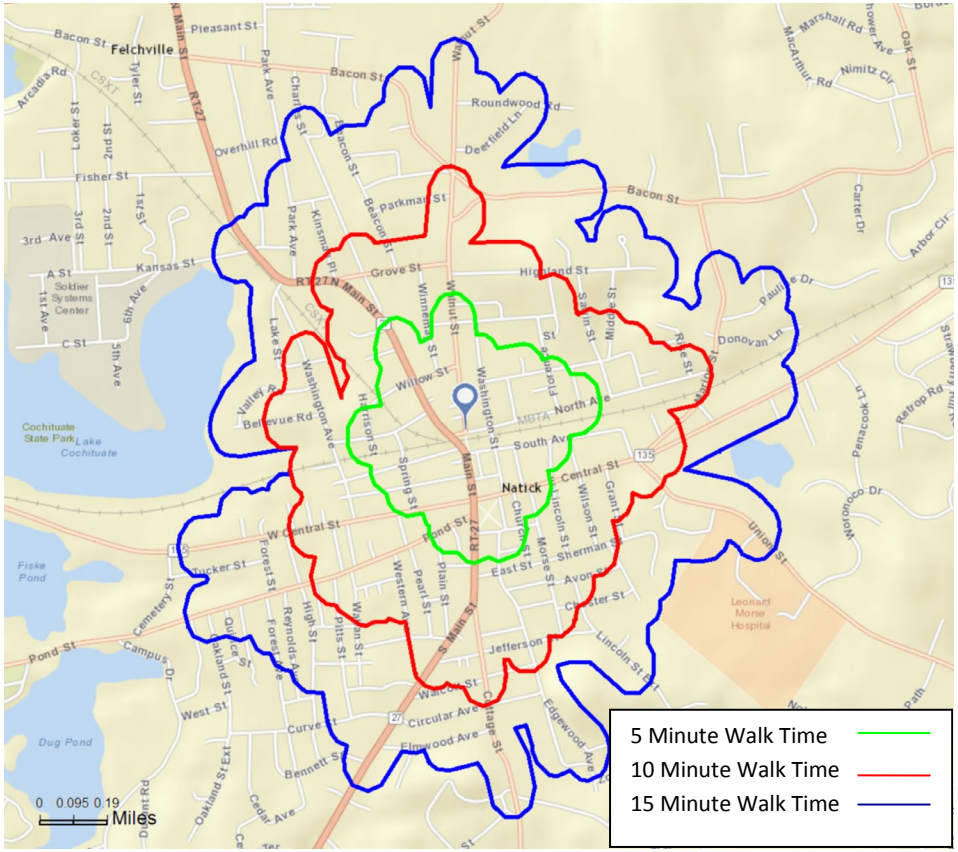


Figure 22: Retail Trade Area, Walk Times (Source: ESRI Business Analyst)



Retail Opportunity Gap Analysis

MAPC then analyzed ESRI Business Analyst data within the defined trade areas in order to conduct a retail gap analysis. A retail opportunity or gap analysis looks at the overall demand for retail goods and services within a designated trade area based on the spending potential of the households (demand), and the actual sales for those goods and services within the market area (supply). The difference between the demand and supply is called the retail "gap." If the demand exceeds the supply, there is "leakage," meaning that residents must travel outside the area to purchase those goods. In such cases, there is an opportunity to capture some of this spending within the market area to support new retail investment. When there is greater supply than demand, there is a "surplus," meaning consumers from outside the market area are coming in to purchase these good and services. In such cases, there is limited or no opportunity for additional retail development. Thus, the retail gap analysis provides a snapshot of potential opportunities for retailers to locate within an area.

Table 1 provides a summary of the retail opportunity gap analysis by industry group and trade area. In addition to information on the primary and secondary trade areas, data on the retail gap for the local trade area (or 10 minute drive time) is also included as a comparison. Figures in parenthesis and red are negative numbers that indicate there is a surplus of sales within the trade area. In other words, there are a significant number of establishments in the trade area within that industry group. Figures in green are positive numbers that indicate a retail gap or leakage and represent potential opportunities for more retail in the area.

Table 1 indicates that the local trade area and primary trade present some of opportunity for additional downtown and mixed-use oriented retail. When considering a 15 minute drive time (or secondary trade area) the ability to support additional retail establishments downtown substantially increases because there is more residential spending power. Focusing on the secondary trade area, however, would increase traffic in Natick Center and exacerbate parking issues. Instead, increasing the amount of residential within the local trade area would help to bolster retail market opportunities.

Table 1: Retail Gap Analysis

Industry Summary	NAICS	LOCAL TRADE AREA 10 minute walk time	PRIMARY TRADE AREA 5 minute drive time	SECONDARY TRADE AREA 15 minute drive time
Total Retail Trade and Food & Drink		$(91,456,002)	$29,736,817	$266,244,432
Total Retail		$(95,490,881)	$1,296,718	$114,338,060
Total Food & Drink		$4,034,878	$28,440,099	$151,906,373
Downtown and Mixed-Use Oriented Industry Groups				
Furniture & Home Furnishings Stores	442	-$1,396,508	-$387,862	-$64,158,996
Electronics & Appliance Stores	443	$4,936,994	$17,301,409	-$49,400,199
Building Materials, Garden Equip. & Supply	444	$2,848,147	$16,538,840	$115,236,764
Food & Beverage Stores	445	-$30,584,165	-$6,826,442	$40,129,509
Health and Personal Care	446, 4461	-$4,358,715	$6,803,712	$19,924,845
Clothing & Clothing Accessories	448	$4,138,253	$21,778,097	-$46,116,426
Sporting Goods, Hobby, Book and Music Stores	451	$504,580	$3,935,270	$8,660,831
Miscellaneous Store Retailers	453	-$2,196,610	$1,818,016	$32,751,582
Food Services & Drinking Places	722	$4,034,878	$28,440,099	$151,906,373

Potential Supportable Retail Square Footage

MAPC used a conservative capture rate to analyze the retail gap and understand the potential for additional establishments. This capture rate acknowledges that any single retail district will never be able to re-capture the full amount of retail leakage. Competition from regional shopping areas such as the Natick Mall, as well as other local districts and online shopping will always draw business away from the study area. When analyzing the market potential within the local trade area and primary trade area, MAPC used a 15% capture rate. When looking at market potential within the secondary trade area, MAPC used a lower 5% capture rate. Using this methodology, the market within each of the trade areas could likely support the industries detailed in Table 2.

It is important to note that the market potential estimates are not a prediction for what will occur in downtown Natick; rather, it is an opportunity or estimate of retail space that could be supported based on the gap analysis figure, average sales per square foot of different store types, average store sizes in

Table 2: Market Potential Estimate

Trade Area	Supportable Square Footage	Total Establishments	Types
Local Trade Area (10 minute walk time)	2,000 sq ft	1	1 Clothing & Clothing Accessories
Primary Trade Area (5 minute drive time)	47,000 sq ft	17	2 Electronics & Appliance Stores, 2 Building Materials, Garden Equipment, & Supply stores, 1 Food & Beverage Store, 7 Clothing & Clothing Accessories Stores, 5 Food Services & Drinking Places
Secondary Trade Area (15 minute drive time)	80,800 sq ft	23	2 Furniture & Home Furnishings Stores, 4 Building Materials, Garden Equipment & Supply Stores, 2 Food & Beverage Stores, 1 Clothing & Clothing Accessories Stores, 5 Miscellaneous Store Retailers, 9 Food Services & Drinking Places

Source: ESRI BAO and MAPC

*Miscellaneous Store Retailers with the greatest opportunity within the 15 minute drive time include florists, office supplies, and used merchandise

downtown areas, and an estimated spending capture within each trade area.

The market within the local trade area is currently limited, but could be increased if more residential units are developed within the ten minute walk time.

The market within the primary trade area can support up to 20 total establishments with the best opportunities being Clothing & Clothing Accessories, and Food Services & Drinking Places.

The market within the secondary trade area could support 23 total establishments with the greatest opportunities being Food Services & drinking Places, Miscellaneous Store Retailers such as florists, office supply stores, and used merchandise, and Building Materials, Garden Equipment, & Supply. Restaurants in particular are a good opportunity when examining the secondary trade area because they often draw a regional customer base and tend to do better when located near one another. They can be marketed collectively as a dining destination and patrons traveling to the area know that they will have several dining options. Multiple restaurants also increase the visibility and convenience of a location.

It is important to note that there are many factors that influence whether or not a retail store or restaurant may want to locate in a particular area. Some of the additional factors that impact the decision to locate a new retail establishment include:

- Availability and quality of the retail space
- Size of the spaces available
- Location of the space, i.e., whether it a place where many people tend to pass by
- Foot traffic
- Rents and terms
- Parking availability and location
- Product or service price points
- Marketing
- Business plan and acumen
- Zoning and other regulations
- Permitting and inspection processes

Although based on the numbers the potential exists for more retail, the amount captured may be less, dependent on the above factors.

Worker Retail Potential

In addition to residents, workers in or near downtown can support additional establishments with their spending power. According to the International Council of Shopping Center, workers spend approximately $100 on food and convenience goods during the work week. Within the local trade area (10 minute walk time), there are approximately 3,020 employees and within the primary trade area (5 minute drive time), there are 16,410 employees. If downtown Natick could capture the spending of some of these workers, local businesses may be able to support additional establishments as seen in Table 3.

There are also many people who pass through Natick Center in order to access the commuter rail station. If the area markets itself effectively to this group of commuters, the Town would have access to increased spending power that could support additional retail establishments and restaurants.

Table 3: Worker Retail Potential

	Local Worker Spending		Potential Supportable Retail	
	# of workers (rounded)	Annual Spending (estimated)	Square footage retail	Number of supportable stores
Workers within ten minute walk time (50% capture rate)	1,509	$1,509,000	5,203	2.6
Workers within five minute drive time (25% capture rate)	4,104	$2,052,000	7,076	3.5

Assumptions: 50 work weeks per year, $20/week spending per Local Trade Area employee, $10/week spending per Primary Area employee

Office Analysis

In order to determine the potential office demand in Natick, MAPC staff analyzed economic trends in Natick, and regional trends in the office market.

Economic Trends

Jobs

Natick had a total of 23,400 jobs in 2014 with about 9,970 people employed in jobs that are office-based (see Table 4). Natick has seen a decrease in the number of jobs (-6%) within Town between 2008 and 2014, losing about 1,400 jobs during this time period. This compares with a 4% job growth rate between 2008 and 2014 for Middlesex County and a 4% job growth rate between 2008 and 2014 for the State. Office-based industries overall in Natick saw a 9% decrease in the number of jobs between 2008 and 2014. However, there are specific office-based industries that have seen job growth. Educational Services has experienced 48% job growth between 2008 and 2014, adding a total of 512 jobs. Administrative and Waste Services has also 10% growth or added 120 jobs. Professional & Technical Services also saw 2% growth, adding 56 jobs between 2008 and 2014. The Town may want to focus on continuing to grow these industries as they consider strategies for attracting additional business and commercial opportunities.

Economic Development: Market Analysis

Table 4: Comparative Employment Analysis

	Natick					Middlesex County					Massachusetts				
	2001	2008	2001-2008 % Change	2014	2008-2014 % Change	2001	2008	2001-2008 % Change	2014	2008-2014 % Change	2001	2008	2001-2008 % Change	2014	2008-2014 % Change
51 - Information	1,324	1,904	N/A	N/A	N/A	47,784	37,704	-21%	40,052	6%	117,751	95,197	-19%	92,060	-3%
52 - Finance and Insurance	547	518	-5%	460	-11%	26,021	26,187	1%	26,176	0%	183,989	179,999	-2%	166,469	-8%
53 - Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	293	292	0%	245	-16%	9,925	9,357	-6%	9,821	5%	44,899	42,454	-5%	43,060	1%
54 - Professional and Technical Services	3,245	2,812	-13%	2,868	2%	106,668	113,405	6%	122,248	8%	247,890	262,502	6%	287,943	10%
55 - Management of Companies and Enterprises	N/A	N/A	N/A	419	N/A	20,916	21,387	2%	23,605	10%	71,925	61,461	-15%	63,519	3%
56 - Administrative and Waste Services	1,329	1,148	-14%	1,268	10%	50,986	45,195	-11%	51,744	14%	170,152	168,860	-1%	173,830	3%
61 - Educational Services	1,122	1,068	-5%	1,580	48%	82,618	89,256	8%	91,998	3%	294,213	318,545	8%	346,140	9%
62 - Health Care and Social Assistance	2,571	3,160	23%	3,131	-1%	83,109	97,742	18%	115,389	18%	429,761	500,348	16%	600,253	20%
Office/Institutional Sectors-Building Type	**10,431**	**10,902**	**5%**	**9971**	**-9%**	**428027**	**440233**	**3%**	**481,033**	**9%**	**1560580**	**1629366**	**4%**	**1773274**	**9%**
44-45 - Retail Trade	6,137	6,688	9%	6,006	-10%	83,144	78,296	-6%	77,326	-1%	359,024	348,176	-3%	350,186	1%
71 - Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	341	431	26%	418	-3%	9,178	10,173	11%	11,841	16%	46,961	54,391	16%	59,942	10%
72 - Accommodation and Food Services	1,355	1,932	43%	2,020	5%	49,758	53,981	8%	59,612	10%	237,739	257,074	8%	288,985	12%
81 - Other Services, Ex. Public Admin	812	800	-1%	710	-11%	25,863	26,445	2%	26,466	0%	113,608	129,707	14%	114,971	-11%
Retail/Commercial & Other Building Type	**8645**	**9851**	**14%**	**9154**	**-7%**	**167943**	**168895**	**1%**	**175245**	**4%**	**757332**	**789348**	**4%**	**814,084**	**3%**
23 - Construction	570	591	4%	674	14%	40,747	36,095	-11%	35,611	-1%	151,270	144,233	-5%	140,314	-3%
31-33 - Manufacturing	2,012	455	-77%	131	-71%	117,656	85,439	-27%	76,014	-11%	389,232	286,458	-26%	250,534	-13%
42 - Wholesale Trade	832	1,491	79%	558	-63%	45,983	40,810	-11%	35,439	-13%	141,086	136,527	-3%	124,109	-9%
48-49 - Transportation and Warehousing	239	152	-36%	174	14%	21,873	20,867	-5%	21,063	1%	113,128	101,241	-11%	101,302	0%
Industrial/Warehousing-Building Type	**3653**	**2,689**	**-26%**	**1537**	**-43%**	**226259**	**183211**	**-19%**	**168127**	**-8%**	**794716**	**668459**	**-16%**	**616,259**	**-8%**
92 - Public Administration	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	24,301	25,445	5%	26,039	2%	140,511	137,140	-2%	136,808	0%
Total, All Industries	23,872	24,816	4%	23,406	-6%	850,289	821,771	-3%	854,760	4%	3,276,103	3,245,755	-1%	3,363,035	4%

Source: MA Department of Labor and Workforce Development

Table 5: Average Weekly Wage Comparison

	Natick					Middlesex					Massachusetts				
	2001	2008	2001-2008 % Change	2014	2008-2014 % Change	2001	2008	2001-2008 % Change	2014	2008-2014 % Change	2001	2008	2001-2008 % Change	2014	2008-2014 % Change
51 - Information	$1,587	$2,123	34%	N/A	N/A	$1,495	$1,973	32%	$2,423	23%	$1,244	$1,590	22%	$1,898	19%
52 - Finance and Insurance	$1,007	$1,176	17%	$1,742	48%	$1,190	$1,585	33%	$2,021	28%	$1,682	$2,286	26%	$2,651	16%
53 - Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	$957	$1,183	24%	$1,163	-2%	$826	$1,109	34%	$1,608	45%	$831	$1,086	23%	$1,400	29%
54 - Professional and Technical Services	$1,417	$1,635	15%	$1,943	19%	$1,582	$2,073	31%	$2,396	16%	$1,428	$1,855	23%	$2,185	18%
55 - Management of Companies and Enterprises	N/A	N/A	N/A	$4,867	N/A	$1,401	$2,169	55%	$2,966	37%	$1,280	$1,934	34%	$2,433	26%
56 - Administrative and Waste Services	$476	$545	14%	$724	33%	$602	$783	30%	$875	12%	$585	$744	21%	$813	9%
61 - Educational Services	$787	$878	12%	$920	5%	$819	$1,069	31%	$1,283	20%	$741	$977	24%	$1,094	12%
62 - Health Care and Social Assistance	$570	$827	45%	$944	14%	$697	$936	34%	$983	5%	$698	$958	27%	$1,023	7%
44-45 - Retail Trade	$487	$531	9%	$602	13%	$524	$551	5%	$594	8%	$477	$532	10%	$578	9%
71 - Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	$256	$397	55%	$369	-7%	$389	$633	63%	$473	-25%	$530	$655	19%	$679	4%
72 - Accommodation and Food Services	$319	$396	24%	$417	5%	$337	$393	17%	$422	7%	$311	$371	16%	$408	10%
81 - Other Services, Ex. Public Admin	$641	$649	1%	$724	12%	$557	$641	15%	$739	15%	$477	$542	12%	$660	22%
23 - Construction	$1,093	$1,159	6%	$1,261	9%	$1,039	$1,246	20%	$1,361	9%	$963	$1,178	18%	$1,311	11%
31-33 - Manufacturing	$1,513	$1,236	-18%	$1,307	6%	$1,287	$1,685	31%	$2,096	24%	$1,047	$1,327	21%	$1,603	21%
42 - Wholesale Trade	$1,526	$2,912	91%	$2,069	-29%	$1,451	$1,765	22%	$1,970	12%	$1,190	$1,479	20%	$1,696	15%
48-49 - Transportation and Warehousing	$749	$877	17%	$550	-37%	$736	$865	18%	$910	5%	$750	$899	17%	$972	8%
92 - Public Administration	N/A	N/A	N/A		N/A	$907	$1,128	24%	$1,346	19%	$861	$1,108	22%	$1,342	21%
Total, All Industries	$910	$1,089	20%	$1,191	9%	$995	$1,255	26%	$1,451	16%	$865	$1,092	21%	$1,233	13%

Source: MA Department of Labor and Workforce Development

Wages

When looking at job growth, it's also important to see how wages within particular industries are changing to ensure that residents and workers in Natick have access to good jobs with wage growth potential. All three of the office-based industries that have seen job growth in Natick between 2008 and 2014 (Educational Services, Administrative & Waste Services, and Professional & Technical Services) have also seen wage growth during that time period. However, when compared with the County and the State, all three of these industries pay lower average wages in Natick. It will be important for the Town to continue to attract companies that provide strong job opportunities with competitive wages in order to most successfully compete with other communities throughout the County and the State.

Largest Employers

MAPC staff also analyzed data on the largest employers to determine which industries are the most represented among this group. Table 6 provides the 12 employers in Natick that employ more than 250 people. As the table demonstrates, the three largest employers consist of businesses in the Health Care & Social Assistance industry and Information industry. Other large employees include those within Retail Trade, Wholesale Trade, and Administrative and Waste Services. The individual industry that is most represented within the largest employers below is Retail Trade (many of which are within the Natick Mall), which is not an office-based sector.

Table 6: Natick Largest Employers

Company Name	Address	City	State	Number of employees	NAICS
Leonard Morse Hospital	Union St	Natick	MA	1,000-4,999	6221
Math Works Inc	Apple Hill Dr	Natick	MA	1,000-4,999	5112
American Medical Response	Tech Cir	Natick	MA	500-999	6219
Soldier Systems Ctr	Kansas St	Natick	MA	500-999	5619
Cognex Corp	Vision Dr	Natick	MA	250-499	4236
Home Depot	Speen St	Natick	MA	250-499	4441
Macy's	Worcester St	Natick	MA	250-499	4521
Neiman Marcus	Speen St	Natick	MA	250-499	4521
Nordstrom	Speen St	Natick	MA	250-499	4521
PB Teen	Worcester St # 3022	Natick	MA	250-499	4421
Roche Bros	W Central St	Natick	MA	250-499	4451

Source: MA Department of Labor and Workforce Development

Employment Projections

Analyzing job projections at a more regional level demonstrates which industries are growing in and around zNatick and where there is the greatest potential for Natick to grow its office market.

The Massachusetts Department of Labor and Workforce Development projects job growth between 2010 and 2020 (+13.4% or 38,705 jobs for traditional office oriented industries) for the Metro South/West Workforce Investment Area.[3] Table 7 provides projected job growth within the Metro South/West Workforce Investment Area in sectors that are most likely to locate in traditional office buildings. It is projected that 38,705 office-oriented jobs will be added within the WIA between 2012 and 2022. Businesses will require office space to house their workers and it is likely that more will be needed than is currently available. It is important to note that a number of municipalities are competing for these jobs, however, and Natick will have to be strategic in order to bring more jobs into Town.

Table 7: Projected Job Growth in Metro South / West Workforce Investment Area

Industry	Employment 2012	Employment 2022	Change Level	Change Percent
Information	**25,886**	**27,099**	**1,213**	**4.70%**
Publishing Industries (except Internet)	15,413	15,241	-172	-1.10%
Telecommunications	3,270	3,029	-241	-7.40%
Data Processing, Hosting and Related Services	1,772	1,798	26	1.50%
Finance and Insurance	**20,358**	**21,535**	**1,177**	**5.80%**
Credit Intermediation and Related Activities	5,902	6,340	438	7.40%
Insurance Carriers and Related Activities	8,863	9,337	474	5.30%
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	**7,207**	**7,653**	**446**	**6.20%**
Real Estate	5,682	5,988	306	5.40%
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	**64,541**	**79,289**	**14,748**	**22.90%**
Management of Companies and Enterprises	**23,152**	**24,745**	**1,593**	**6.90%**
Administrative/Support/Waste Management/Remediation	**31,308**	**32,242**	**934**	**3.00%**
Administrative and Support Services	30,140	31,199	1,059	3.50%
Waste Management and Remediation Service	1,168	1,043	-125	-10.70%
Educational Services	**55,089**	**60,140**	**5,051**	**9.20%**
Health Care and Social Assistance	**61,647**	**75,190**	**13,543**	**22.00%**
Total	**289,188**	**327,893**	**38,705**	**13.38%**

Source: MA Department of Labor and Workforce Development

[3] The Metro South/ West Workforce Investment Area includes Acton, Ashland, Bedford, Bellingham, Boxborough, Brookline, Canton, Carlisle, Dedham, Dover, Foxborough, Framingham, Franklin, Holliston, Hopkinton, Hudson, Lexington, Lincoln, Littleton, Marlborough, Maynard, Medfield, Medway, Millis, Natick, Needham, Newton, Norfolk, Norwood, Plainville, Sharon, Sherborn, Southborough, Stow, Sudbury, Walpole, Waltham, Wellesley, Weston, Westwood, and Wrentham.

Office Market Conditions

MAPC staff also looked broadly at the Boston regional office market to identify the role of Natick within the larger market. Overall, the office market in the Greater Boston region continues to do very well with direct average asking rents reaching above the previous peak for the fifth quarter in a row to $34.40, and total vacancy dipping to its lowest point since 2007 (13.8%). Boston's Downtown and Route 128/Mass Pike submarkets were the most active. The tightening market has led to speculative office developments across the Greater Boston region. Forecasts through 2020 project steady growth to continue at nearly 2% per year for the next two to three years.[4]

Natick is part of the 495/Mass Pike submarket as defined by Jones Lang Lasalle.[5] Characteristics of the 495/Mass Pike submarket are compared with the 128/Mass Pike market (a thriving suburban market) and the overall suburb office market in Table 8.

As shown in Table 8, the 495/Mass Pike submarket is lagging slightly behind the overall Boston suburbs market and the 128/Mass Pike area with a higher vacancy rate and lower average asking rent. The numbers in the above chart indicate that the 128/Mass Pike market is particularly strong, although the 495/Mass Pike market did have a strong year in 2015 and has improved greatly.

The 495/Mass Pike market experienced strong leasing activity and absorption throughout 2015 and recorded over 400,000 square feet of positive absorption through the year, the most annual absorption seen in the market in over ten years. The Class A direct vacancy rate is also 13.3% which resulted from a 3.1% point drop during 2015, another sign that the market had a strong year. 2016 is expected to see this trend continue with over 1.4 million square feet of active tenants touring the market and a current average direct asking rent for Class A space at $20.82 per square foot, the highest seen in the market since 2008. Market tightening is likely to continue in the coming year and rents along Route 128 will continue to increase, pushing some tenants out to the 495/Mass Pike market.[6]

Table 8: Currently Available Office Properties

Address	Space Available (SF)	Rental Rate	Building Size (SF)	Class
16 Tech Circle	3,327-7,151	$19/SF	45,649	B
5 Commonwealth Road	1,680-3,200	$23/SF	26,106	B
42 Worcester Street	2,600	Negotiable	N/A	N/A
209 W Central Street	350-2,579	$19-$20/SF	62,260	B
192 Worcester Street	300-1,428	$18-$20/SF	10,000	A
127 W Central Street	1,000-2,489	$9.64-$13.60/SF	19,220	B
203-205 Union Street	3,882	Negotiable	18,000	N/A
222 North Main Street	1,200	18.5/SF	9,003	B
235 W Central Street	6,075	$14-$16/SF	26,460	B
9 Tech Circle	7,160	$13/SF	20,095	B

Source: Loopnet.com (February 2016 listings)

Office Development Potential

The Town of Natick has the potential to support new office development. However, in recent years, the Town has actually lost a substantial amount of jobs (about 1,400 between 2008 and 2014), so the Town will have to be strategic in order to attract new office development. Office-inclined industries that have added jobs within Natick in recent years and may represent opportunities include Educational Services, Administrative and Waste Services, and Professional and Technical Services. There is projected job growth of 13.38% within the Metro South/West WIA so there is potential for Natick to attract some of these future jobs to the Town.

However, Natick Center itself is likely not going to be the major attractor for large office tenants, which instead has the opportunity to house office space for smaller 20-40 person firms and more local businesses and professionals. The proximity to a commuter rail station is a huge advantage for the downtown because of the additional access that it provides and it should be marketed to firms accordingly.

More and more office workers want to be located in mixed use environments that offer amenities such as retail stores that offer convenience for shopping and running errands and multiple restaurants that offer different options for lunch. Housing nearby to house potential workers would also make for a more convenient commute for many prospective employees. Natick Center already has some of these characteristics and also has great potential to add more.

[4] Jones Lang Lasalle, Q4 2015.

[5] The 495/Mass Pike submarket includes the communities of Natick, Sherborn, Dover, Framingham, Sudbury, Hudson, Marlborough, Southborough, Ashland, Holliston, Hopkinton, Upton, Westborough, Northborough, Berlin, Boylston, Shrewsbury, and Grafton.

[6] Jones Lang Lasalle, Q4 2015.

Residential

One key strategy to bring more activity to Natick Center and more customers to existing stores and restaurants is to add more residential units, particularly over existing ground floor retail or within walking distance of the downtown. Allowing more residents to live in and near Natick Center increase daily activity and can also have a multiplier effect as other people passing through the area identify Natick Center as a shopping and dining destination that they might also like to visit.

Incorporating more housing into Natick Center also has a variety of other benefits including increasing the overall walkability of the area, reducing car trips, and concentrating development near existing infrastructure, shops, and amenities. Residents often become invested in their neighborhoods and could be vocal advocates for their neighborhood, helping to accelerate additional improvements to the downtown area. The goal of the residential market assessment is to explore existing residential market conditions to determine how much additional residential development the downtown can likely support.

Population & Household Projections

As noted in the Demographics section, over the last 30 years, Natick's population grew by 12%, and over the next 20 years it is expected to grow by an additional 5.5%. The majority of this growth is expected to occur among people older than 65, followed by 25-34 year olds.

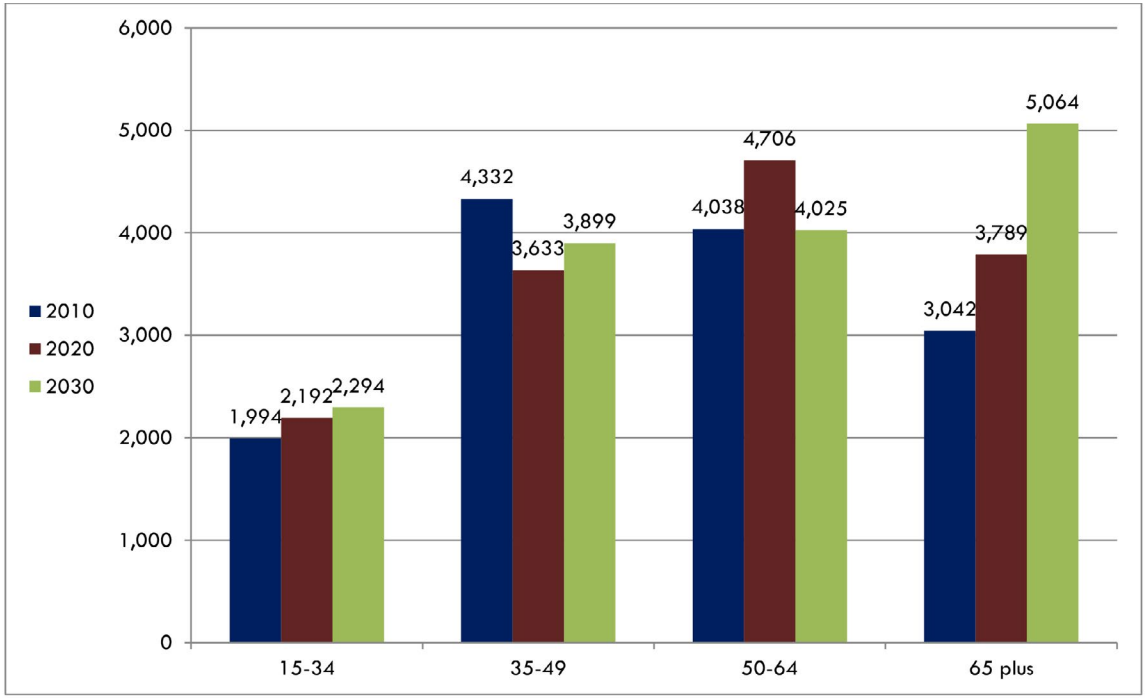
Understanding household composition and trends is more important than the overall population trends because every household resides in one housing unit, no matter the number of people that live in that household. In order to better understand future housing needs within a community, the number of households projected in Natick in the coming years provides more insight into the amount and type of housing that may be needed currently or in the future.

As shown in Figure 23, Natick is expected to gain around 1,800 households between 2010 and 2030. The majority of that growth is projected to be senior headed households (+66%) and younger households age 15-34 in 2010 (+15%). Housing preferences for these groups in many ways align. Both are increasingly interested in residing in pedestrian-oriented environments that offer many amenities and transportation options. Multifamily options in Natick Center would be appealing to both age groups.

Average Household Size

Another important factor in considering the demand for new housing units is changing household size. As the Demographics section discussed, the average number of persons per household is expected to shrink through 2030. As household size shrinks, the demand for units actually increases as the same amount of people now require more units.

Figure 23: Household Projections by Age

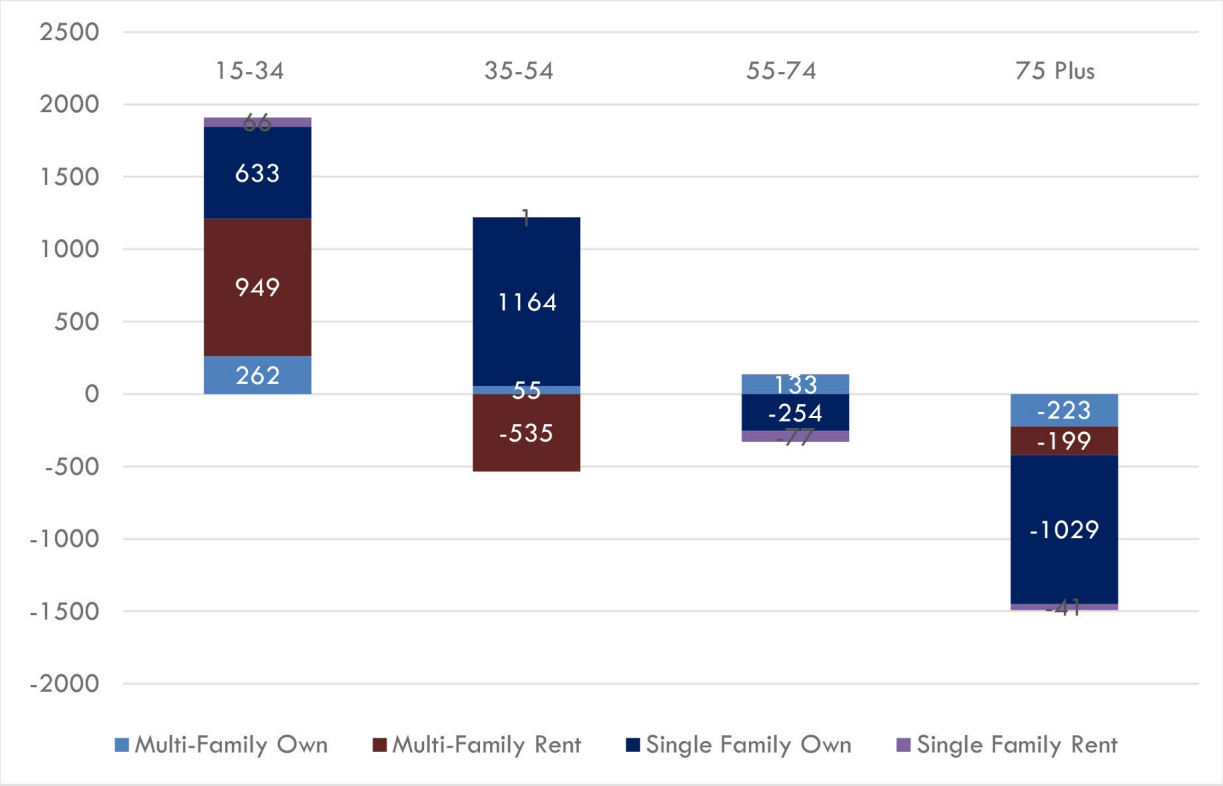


Source: US Census; MAPC Projections

Change in Housing Unit Demand, 2010-2020

Along with population and household projections, MAPC also projects changes in actual housing unit demand through 2020. Figure 24 illustrates that multifamily units are in demand within Natick, especially among 20 to 34 year olds. Single family units are also in demand but much of this demand will be met by existing housing stock freed up by older age cohorts (age 55 plus).

Figure 24: Change in Housing Unit Demand, 2010-2020



Source: MAPC Projections

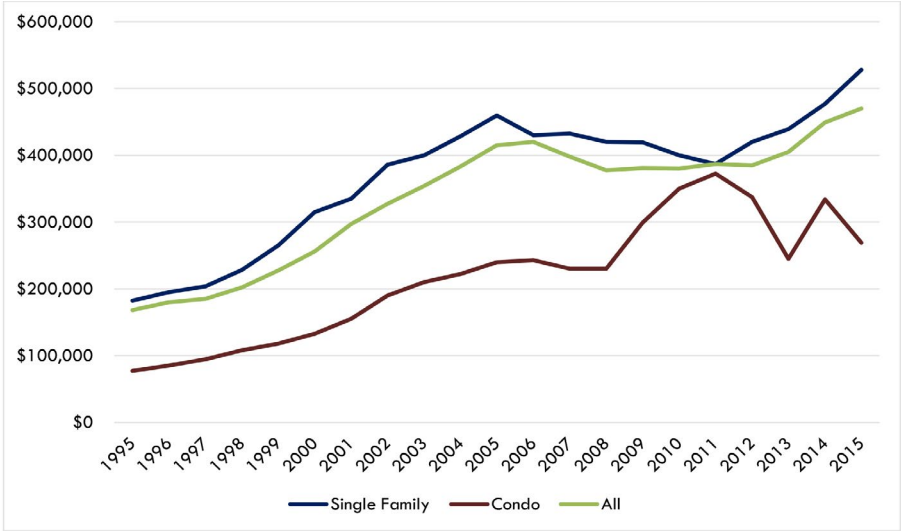
*Age represents age of the head of householder in 2010.

Housing Sales

Natick's real estate market is performing very well and overall, housing prices are on the rise. As Figure 25 depicts, the median sales price for a single family home in Natick in 2015 is $528,000 and the median sales price for a condo is $268,950. Single family home prices are up 32% since 2010 and overall sales prices are up by 24% since 2010. Condo sales prices have fluctuated more recently, which could be due to changes in inventory as condos within the Town are still within high demand. Condos in the downtown area such as those at Castle Courtyard have been selling in the mid to upper $400s (listing from 2014) and luxury condos such as those at 20 South Avenue have sold for more than $500,000. The downtown condo prices are much higher than the median sales price for condos across the Town, reinforcing the desirability of downtown living.

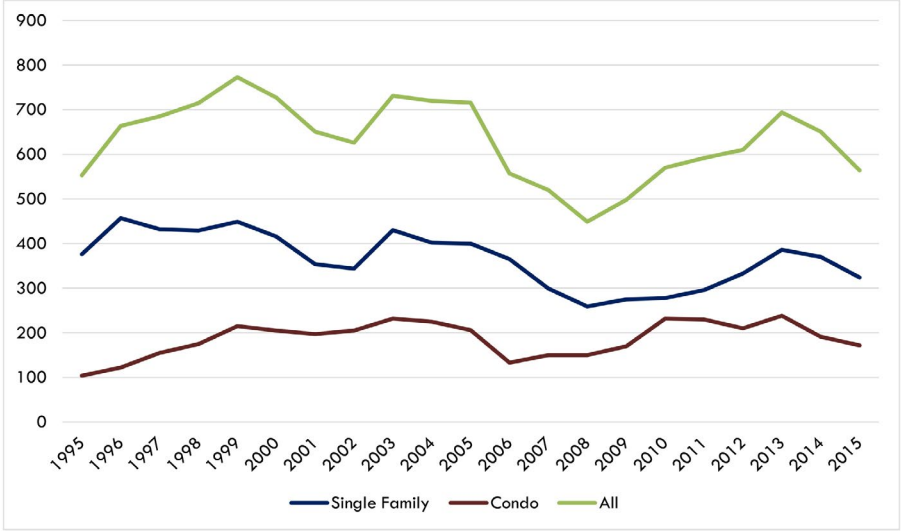
The number of home sales in Natick has actually been decreasing in recent years, which could be the result of a lack of inventory. The housing vacancy rate in Natick is 2.9%. In general, housing markets with a 5% vacancy rate of lower are considered to be tight. Figure 25 shows that there were 324 single family sales in Natick and 172 condo sales in 2015.

Figure 25: Median Sales Price, Natick



Source: Warren Group, 2015

Figure 26: Home Sales, Natick



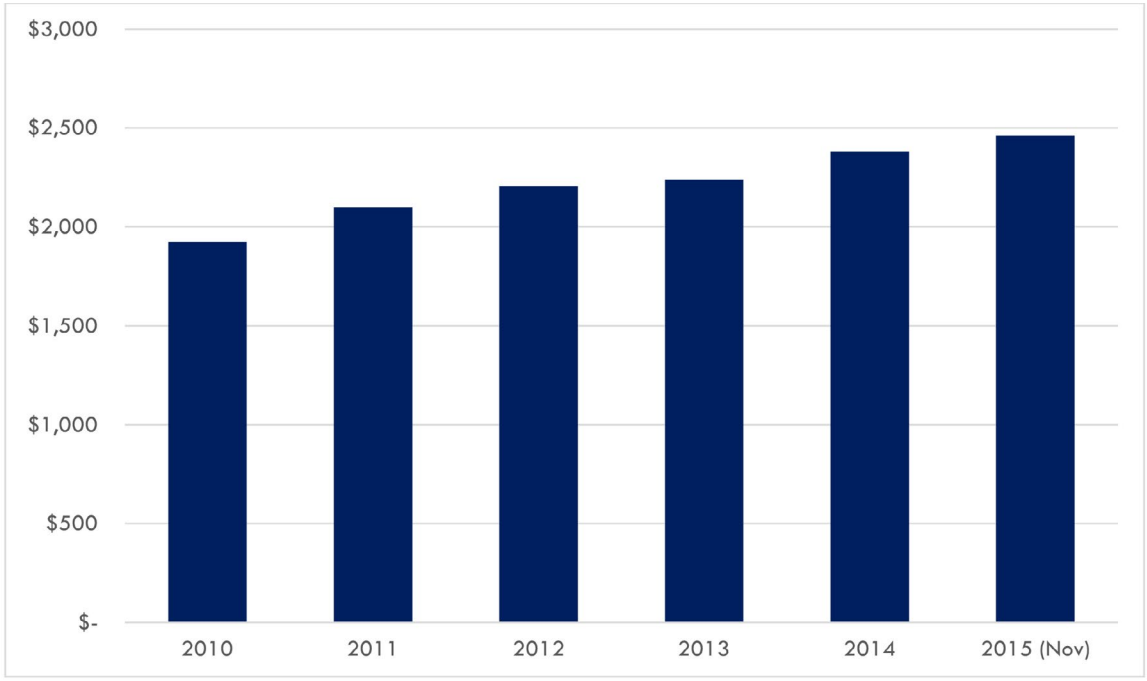
Source: Warren Group, 2015

Rental Housing and Pricing

The rental market across the Town of Natick is also strong. About 27% of housing units in Natick are renter occupied and the median rent has been growing steadily over the last five years. (See Figure 26.) The median rent for the town of Natick in 2015 is $2,462.

Recent rental developments near downtown command high rents; e.g., two bedroom apartments at 58 North Avenue are asking $1,850 and two bedrooms at the new Modera Natick Center are asking $2,650. Modera Natick Center leased very quickly and demonstrates the demand for multifamily living within walking distance of a number of amenities.

Figure 27: Median Rents, Natick



Source: Zillow.com & MAPC Data Analysis

Recent Development

Between 2005 and 2015, 1,373 multifamily (inclusive of both rental and ownership) units were built within the Town of Natick, including many in the downtown area such as the Modera Natick Center, 58 North Avenue, and Castle Courtyard Armory. Several new developments are proposed or in progress in the downtown, including the St. Patrick's project, American Legion, and Town Paint Properties. The St. Patrick's project is currently proposed as a mixed use development with 66 residential units and approximately 13,000 square feet of retail and/or restaurant space. The American Legion building will also include space for commercial on the ground floor along with 11 units of housing above. The Town Paint property will include 32 apartments on upper floors along with about 4,000 square feet of space for shops on the ground floor level. Discussions with developers reinforce the desirability of downtown units in particular for younger professionals and older couples who would like to downsize from a single family home.

Housing Market Demand, 2015-2020

Given existing inventory and demographic changes, it is likely that there is potential to support additional housing units, particularly multifamily units, in the Town of Natick, especially in Natick Center. MAPC's housing projections represent how changing trends in births, deaths, migration, and housing occupancy might result in higher population growth and greater housing demand. In order to assess the market potential for housing within a community, MAPC staff compare these projections with the number of units that have actually been permitted over the past five years to understand how supply is aligning with demand. Because markets cross municipal boundaries, it is important to look at residential supply and demand across multiple communities. A community may actually experience more or less market demand if surrounding communities are either not producing enough or producing significantly more housing than the demand projections indicate. For example, if a community adjacent to Natick is producing very limited housing, Natick may capture more of the regional market demand and thereby lower the individual demand within that adjacent community.

MAPC first identified a broader focus area of housing markets that might reasonably compete with Natick in attracting residents. The focus area included communities within the MetroWest subregion (Ashland, Framingham, Holliston, Marlborough, Southborough, Wayland, Wellesley, and Weston). MAPC then considered projected housing unit demand through 2020 by combining the projected individual demand from each of these communities by both housing type and tenure. Based on MAPC demand projections, an estimated 7,193 units were projected by 2020 within the focus area.

In addition to the projected demand, it is also important to consider the supply, or the number of units that have been permitted since 2011, and that have begun to fulfill projected demand. Based on available building permit data, Natick has captured 84% of permitted multifamily units within the focus area since 2011 and has far exceeded neighboring communities in the permitting of this type of housing. This is indicative of the strong demand for multifamily housing within Town.

Although it is unlikely that Natick will continue to capture multifamily development at this rate, if the Town can capture 20% of the additional expected demand for the focus area through 2020, it could likely support around 580 units and if the Town can capture 30% of the additional expected demand for the focus area through 2020, it could likely support around 870 units.

Within the total focus area there is currently unmet demand for 2,891 multifamily units. Downtown Natick is a particularly well suited location for multifamily units because it is a transit-oriented, amenity rich and walkable area with retail, restaurants, and open space.

In terms of single family housing, the Town of Natick has captured about 13% of the single family building permits within the focus area since 2011 based on permit data. If Natick can capture a similar amount of the additional expected demand for the focus area through 2020, it could likely support between 235 (10% capture) and 350 (15% capture) single family units Town-wide. Some existing single family housing is likely to be freed up by older generations who are looking to downsize, however, so there may not be a need to actually construct this much new single family housing. There is unlikely to be a significant amount of single family housing developed in Natick Center because of a lack of developable land.

Unit Demand Mix

Given the diversity of households interested in downtown-style living, new residential development should include a mix of unit types, including one-, two-, and three-bedroom options. One- and two- bedroom units in larger apartment and condominium developments will be most attractive to smaller households, including downsizing seniors and younger singles and couples, many of whom may wish to access the commuter rail to job opportunities in Boston. Three-bedroom units, either in larger multifamily developments or in townhouse-style properties, would be most appealing to slightly larger households, such as families with children and downsizing households interested in smaller living spaces that still offer guest bedrooms for family visitors (e.g., grandchildren).

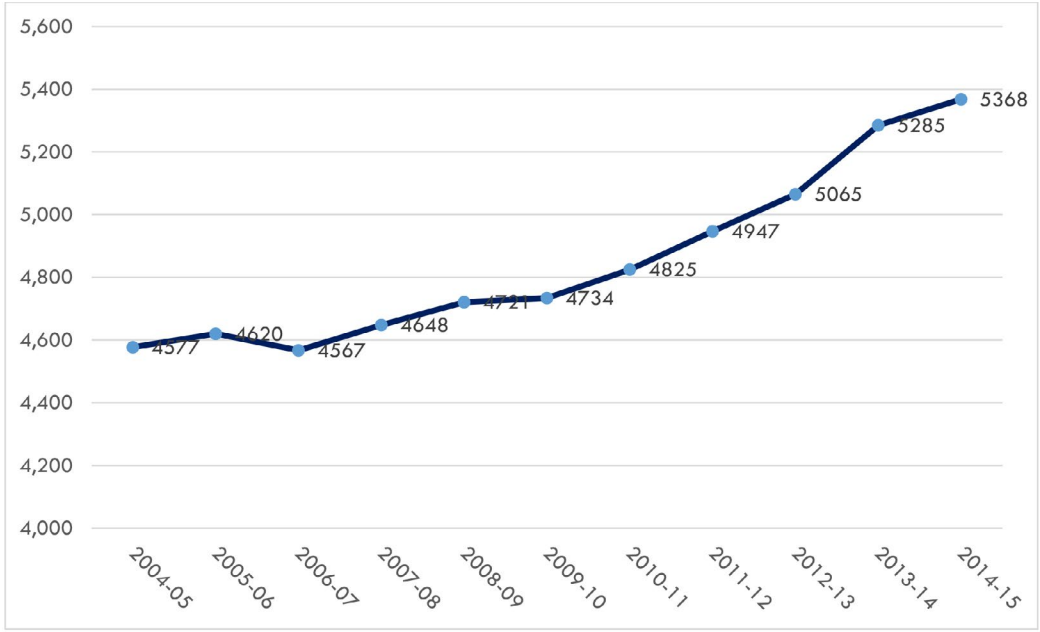
Table 9: Regional Housing Unit Demand

Regional Housing Unit Demand		Capture		Units	
Housing Unit Type	Regional Housing Unit Demand (# of units by next 10 years)	Low	High	Low	High
Multifamily	2,891	20%	30%	580	870
Single Family	2,353	10%	15%	235	350
Total	**5,244**			**815**	**1,220**

Several residents voiced concern that new housing would bring in additional families and school children, adding a strain to an already burdened school system. The most appropriate housing for Natick Center would be multifamily housing, which is more likely to attract young professionals and older couples looking to downsize. This trend has played out in Natick over the past several years.

Over the last 10 years, Natick's school age population grew by about 17% as shown in Figure 27. Newer multifamily developments have contributed 172 new students to the school system as seen below in Figure 28. However, the total student population in Natick is 5,368. Two thirds of housing units in Natick are single family units and 63% of Natick's households are single family households. This means that most current school children are living in single family homes and Natick public schools estimate that the vast majority of their new students are coming from single family homes (75%). Newer multifamily development in the downtown can help to increase the market for additional retail and restaurants, a desire voiced through the public process, while having less of an impact on school enrollment than single family housing.

Figure 28: School Enrollment by Year



Source: MA DESE

Figure 29: Students by Development

Name of Development	Total Units	% 1 Bed	% 2 Bed	% 3 Bed	Projected Students	Actual Students (November 2015)
Natick Modera	150	44%	52%	4%	18	10
South Natick Hills	268	9%	72%	19%	77	39
42 South Avenue	11	0%	82%	18%	2	0
Castle Courtyard	23	22%	52%	26%	5	2
8 Grant Street	24	4%	92%	4%	6	10
Walnut Place 57/58 North Avenue	41	22%	78%	0%	6	10
Natick Mills-60 North Main Street	83	40%	54%	6%	9	29
Cloverleaf	183	54%	46%	0%	7	21
10 & 40 Nouvelle Way	215	21%	63%	16%	5	6
Avalon Natick	407	53%	47%	0%	15	45
20 South Ave	24	0%	50%	50%	5	0
					155	**172**

Source: Natick Public Schools

6. Economic Development: Recommendations

The following recommendations provide strategies for positively impacting economic development, especially for retailers. Note that all of the recommendations in this report, from pedestrian improvements to zoning changes play a role in economic development.

Expand the Market

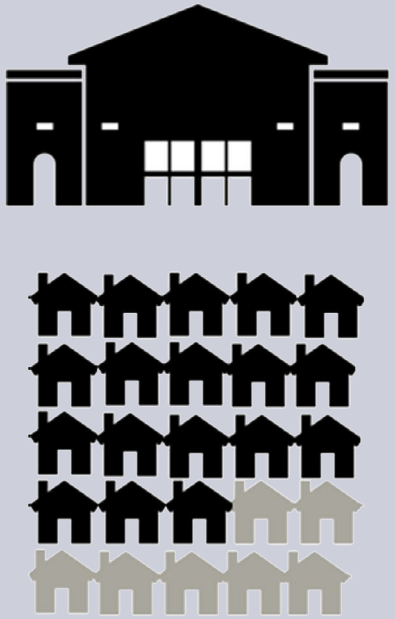
Marketing Campaigns Targeted at Commuter Rail Passengers

Natick Center is fortunate to have an MBTA Commuter Rail stop with a significant amount of passengers passing through the area every day. These passengers represent a potentially untapped market segment that could help to strengthen the market and support existing local businesses. Groups such as the Natick Center Associates and MetroWest Visitors Bureau can help to develop marketing campaigns that are directed towards commuter rail passengers. An example might be a promotion that offers discounts at local businesses for a limited amount of time to those who can show their commuter rail pass when they are making a purchase.

Increase Residences in the Study Area

In order to increase the market opportunities for additional retail establishments, it is important to consider introducing more housing in Natick Center. Retailers often look for locations that have a higher number of residences because it promises a better customer base and the opportunity for higher sales.

Example: Attracting a Grocery Store to Natick Center



Numerous residents stated that they would like a grocery store in Natick Center. A downtown-oriented store is generally around 10,000 square feet and requires $1,750 sales per square foot to be viable. At an average spending of $135 per week on groceries per household, this translates to a need for approximately 2,500 households. Because there are other grocery stores within Natick, it is likely that most of these households would need to reside in / close to Natick Center.
Today, there are 1,800 households in Natick Center. This implies that there would need to be approximately 700 additional households in Natick Center to make a grocery store viable.

*Each house represents 100 households
**This is only an illustrative example to indicate the importance of additional residences in Natick Center. It does not imply that 700 additional residences will guarantee a grocery store would be interested in locating in Natick Center.

Market Downtown Natick To Attract Interest from Developers, Commercial Establishments & Potential Customers

Natick Center already has many assets that are attractive to consumers, commercial establishments, and developers and should work to take the best advantage of these assets. There are also many existing organizations that can help to play a role in many of the recommended actions related to marketing and banding Natick Center. These groups include Natick Center Associates, MetroWest Visitors Bureau, MetroWest Chamber of Commerce, 495/MetroWest Partnership, and the existing Natick Center Cultural District.

Create Cohesive Brand and Marketing Materials for Natick Center

It will be important to emphasize downtown Natick assets including the cultural district, presence of local artists, town programming, Farmers' Market, TCAN, More Library, and concerts on the Common to name a few.

Identify and Recruit Retail Stores That May Be Interested in Opening in Natick Center

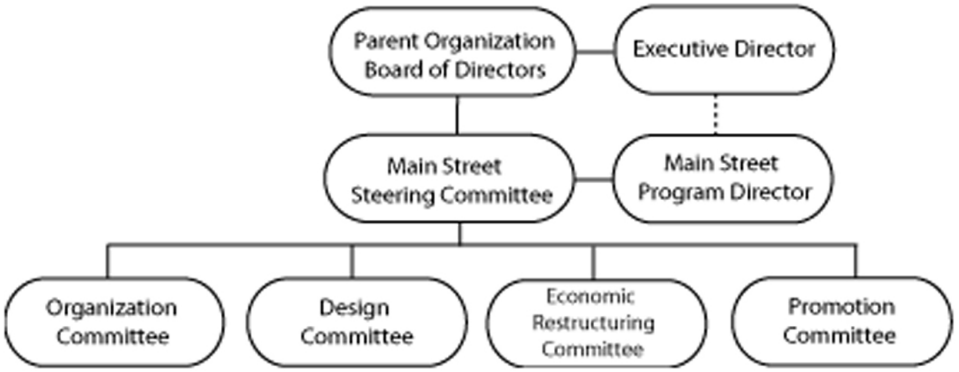
- Create a list of stores in MetroWest that are desirable for Natick Center and actually have someone go and visit those stores, hand them marketing materials, and discuss the possibility of their opening another location in Natick Center.
- The MetroWest Chamber of Commerce can hold networking events for existing and prospective downtown Natick Business Owners.
- Maintain a list of interested/prospective retailers that can be matched up with space in Natick Center once it become available.
- Focus on recruiting restaurants in particular as they are not only highly ranked from the public engagement process, but they are also a top attractor to a new area, consistently cited in studies as a top reason why people want to visit a new place. Restaurants also tend to do better when there are many of them located in one place as they create more of a dining destination that can draw people in.
- Another focus should be on arts-related businesses and entertainment options that can help to boost the cultural district and set Natick Center apart as a unique downtown that people want to visit.

Provide Retail Incentives Programs To Attract Retailers

Incentive programs that offer grants or seed money to new retailers can be an effective way to bring in new business. In Beverly, the Main Streets program granted new retailers a small amount of money for first year rent assistance and also offered free/discounted services (legal, printing, website, light pole banners, etc). Tenants had to agree to certain terms including a longer term lease and applications for the program were based on business type, impact on the downtown, experience of the owner, as well as a number of other factors. This might be an interesting model for groups working in Natick Center to explore.

Natick could consider either establishing a Main Streets Association or expanding the responsibilities and interests of Natick Center Associates. The mission of NCA and a Main Streets Association would overlap, and there is precedent of including a Main Streets Association as a part of an existing organization. If the Town and NCA prefer this route, NCA should add specificity on initiatives such as directly assisting businesses through grant/loan programs, partnering with community banks, helping to facilitate façade programs, etc. This may require hiring a program director who focuses on advancing these direct technical assistance programs and funding opportunities for businesses.

Figure 30: Typical Main Streets Association Structure within an Existing Organization



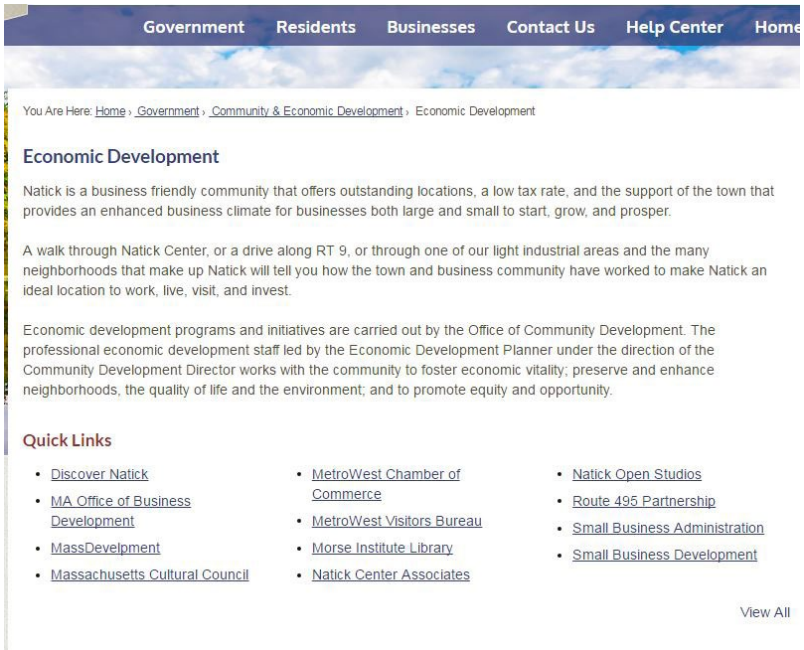
Work with Real Estate Brokers

It is important for real estate brokers to understand the vision and the advantages of attracting particular types of tenants to difference spaces in Natick Center. They are the ones who are showing space to potential tenants. Communicating the benefits of a thriving downtown with quality tenants can help them to more efficiently fill up additional space and attract future tenants. Brokers are a critical partner in helping to revitalize a downtown area.

Utilize Town Website To Post Economic Development Resources

The town should maintain a database of available commercial properties and/or vacant properties that may be available for redevelopment. A copy of the Natick Center Plan, including the market analysis, should also be available for developers and potential tenants to easily access.

Figure 31: Natick's website contains several economic development resources, which could be supplemented with a database of available properties.



Work with Existing Property Owners to Improve Properties

Implement Façade and Sign Improvement Programs

This can be done through the Town or through organizations working to revitalize downtown Natick. Grants to business owners can be reimbursable and can set signage guidelines. Many communities have employed local artists to work on signs. This could be a great way to help to further brand Natick Center as a cultural district. These programs can also be applied block by block as was done by Beverly Main Streets.

Sponsor Workshops and Provide Resources To Existing Property Owners

It is important to work with existing property owners. Understanding why certain property owners may not be re-developing or improving their properties can help the Town and downtown partners to think through how to best address these issues. There are many potential issues that might come up in these conversations including parking, the cost of renovation versus the market rents that property owners can charge, etc.

Figure 32: Example of Facade Improvement Program (Source: Beverly Main Streets)



Support Existing Local Businesses

Work with Current Retailers To Implement Retail Best Practices

There are many resources available that can help individual retailers to employ best practices related to different aspects of their store, including window displays, colors, lighting, and arranging space. The Massachusetts Downtown Initiative often awards technical assistance related to working with individual retailers downtown and would be a good resource for the Town of Natick to follow through on.

Collaborate To Plan Additional Events That Attract New Customers To the Downtown

Natick Center Associates, TCAN, the Merchant's Association, and Library can collaborate to continue to plan events that attract people to Natick Center and help to boost the customer base for existing local businesses.

Encourage Businesses To Take Advantage of Existing Resources

There are many state programs, such as the Massachusetts Downtown Initiative, as well as nationwide marketing campaigns, such as Small Business Saturdays that can provide technical assistance to small businesses.

Ensure Town Permitting, Procedures, and Regulations Are Business Friendly

Create a Streamlined Permitting Process for Opening a Business in Natick Center

The Town of Natick currently has a great webpage for businesses that posts a number of resources. This page should be revisited to make sure that the permitting process is clear and navigable. Many towns have created business guides that go step-by-step through the process of opening a business and the various permits that need to be obtained. It's also important to designate a "go-to person" amongst Town staff who can walk local businesses through the permitting process.

Figure 33: Example of a town's business guide (Source: Town of Dedham)



Consider More Flexibility in Liquor Licenses

The Town of Natick currently has six remaining on-premise licenses reserved for Natick Center. Many restrictions on local liquor licenses relate directly to State law. However, Natick also imposes some local restrictions that could be re-visited and potentially modified such as the current requirement that 65% of gross receipts be derived from sale of food and only 35% allowed from sale of alcohol. More flexibility could lead to greater interest from restaurant/bars that may want to locate in Natick Center.

Allow for Uses Compatible with Vision

The Downtown Mixed Use District, the core of Natick Center, allows for a variety of uses. Any use, however, that is not specified as allowed (by right or by special permit) is instead prohibited. The zoning code should ensure, therefore, that any use that might add to the vitality of Natick Center could be considered. For example, numerous respondents noted that they would like to house a craft brewery, something that has added vitality to numerous other downtowns in the region. While a restaurant is allowed in the mixed use district, an establishment manufacturing beers (or other goods, such as a bakery) would not be allowed even if an associated eating establishment were on premises. See the Land Use + Zoning Recommendations section for additional information.

Figure 34: Breweries such as Medusa in Hudson and Jack's Abby in Framingham have become very popular points of interest in their downtowns.


Source: beersnobsquad.com


Source: Framingham Patch

7. Land Use + Zoning: Analysis and Preferences

Land Use and Zoning Overview

Natick Center contains a mix land uses and building typologies. There are numerous small businesses, restaurants, stores, and artist studios. Civic uses include municipal buildings and churches. There are also over 1,800 dwelling units, housing approximately 4,000 people within the ½ mile walkshed.

Architecturally, the two main axes include a predominately commercial axis along Route 27 and a commercial/civic axis along Route 135. The two corridors meet at the Town Common. Because of the rapid growth that occurred after the fire of 1874, the historic buildings of Natick Center contain architectural harmony through their height, style, material and color. These buildings, built in the High Victorian Gothic, imbue a cohesive 19th century character to much of the neighborhood.[7]

Other buildings in Natick Center vary in quality and size, especially in the periphery of the immediate core. One-story buildings and poor ground floor renovations mar some parts of the neighborhood. Auto-related uses and buildings set back behind parking lots have broken the street edge in certain areas.

Figure 35: Examples of high quality architecture in Natick Center









[7] In 1977 the Town obtained a National Register Historic District designation for the Center, which includes 15 buildings.

Homes in Natick Center come in a variety of typologies, including units above ground-floor retail, townhouses, larger multifamily buildings, modest single family homes, and larger single family homes. Materials and styles vary widely.

Figure 36: Examples of housing in Natick Center













Establishing land use regulations that reflect the values and development vision of the community is key to shaping the future of Natick Center. Zoning is one of the primary tools that a municipality has to shape an area's future by directly impacting future development. Zoning can be used to encourage and shape different types of uses, building dimensions, building design, site layout, and much more. Examples where zoning can impact future development include:

- Types of uses allowed and the mix (or lack thereof) of these uses.
- The size, height, and location of a building within its parcel, such as: total buildable area; number of floors; front, side, and rear setbacks; and maximum lot coverage.
- Parking requirements, such as the amount, location, and landscaping of parking areas.
- Elements related to the exterior of the building, such as entrance locations, materials, architectural elements, and landscaping.

MAPC reviewed the existing zoning for the districts comprising the Natick Center study area. These include:

- Downtown Mixed Use (DM)
- Residential General (RG)
- Residential Single (RSA, RSC)
- Industrial One (INI)

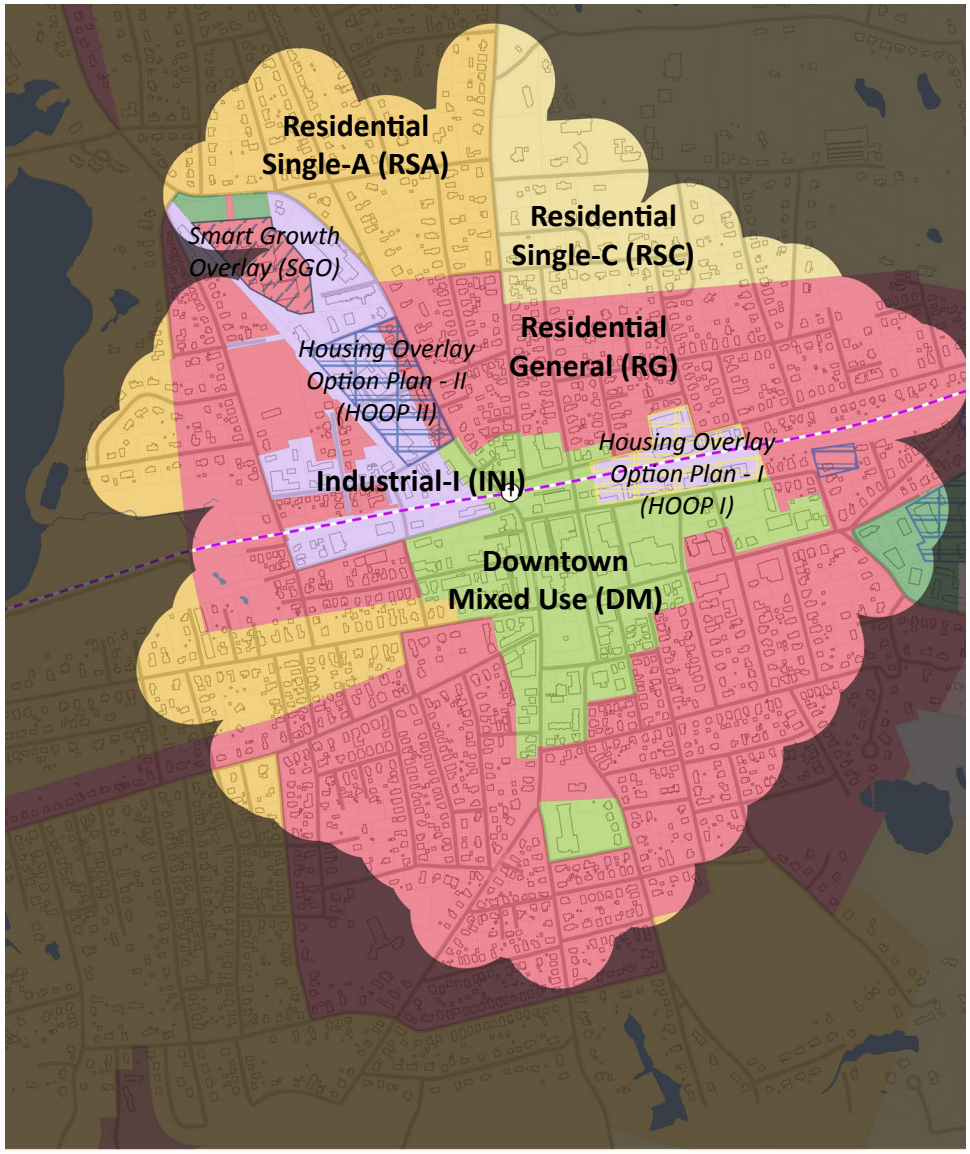
In addition to these base districts, the area contains the following overlay districts:[8]

- Housing Overlay Option Plan 1 (HOOP I)
- Housing Overlay Option Plan 2 (HOOP II)
- Smart Growth Zoning Overlay (SGO)

[8] Overlay districts are superimposed on top of portions of one or more underlying zoning districts to allow application of alternative standards to address a special purpose.

Land Use + Zoning: Analysis and Preferences

Figure 37: Zoning Map



Downtown Mixed Use (DM)[9]

The DM makes up the core of Natick Center and is generally considered the "classic New England downtown." The purpose of this district is to establish a compact, centrally located, and walkable center.

The DM allows for a wide mix of uses by right, and they may be combined within the same structure or lot in any way, assuming other requirements are met. Uses include businesses, professional offices, restaurants, cafes, small warehouses, scientific research and development activities, museums, and other civic buildings. In addition, the DM allows by special permit multifamily dwellings, indoor recreation places, gas and service stations, larger warehouses, hotel, salesroom for motor vehicles, and commercial parking lots.

Residential Districts

The Residential General District (RG) allows for one and two family homes. Multifamily homes of three or more units are prohibited. Other allowable uses by right include:

- A lodge building or other non-profit social/civic use
- A stall or stand selling garden/farm products produced primarily on site
- Greenhouse, nursery, garden

By special permit, buildings in the RG can have a professional office, studio, or workroom if accessory to the residence. Veterinary buildings, nursery schools, day care providers, assisted living facilities, and dog kennels are also allowed by special permit.

The RS districts primarily allow single family homes on larger lots and are generally more restrictive in allowable uses than the RG. Two family and multifamily homes are prohibited. As with the RG, the RS districts allow a stall or stand selling garden/farm products, greenhouse, nursery, and gardens.

By special permit the district allows lodge buildings and other non-profit social/civic uses. They can also have a professional office, studio, or workroom if accessory to the residence.

Housing Overlay Option Plans (HOOP I, HOOP II)

The purpose of the HOOPs is to enhance public welfare by increasing the production of dwelling units affordable to people of low and moderate incomes in a manner consistent with the character of the downtown area. In order to encourage utilization of the Town's remaining developable land in a manner consistent with local housing policies and needs, new developments in the HOOP districts are required to maintain at least 15% of dwelling units at below market rates. These units will remain affordable in perpetuity.

Industrial One District (INI)

The INI allows for a mix of industrial and commercial-related uses. Residential, recreational, and retail uses are prohibited. Light manufacturing uses where noise, smoke, dust, odor, vibration, etc. are confined to the premises are allowed by right. Other allowable uses include business / professional offices/financial institutions,

[9] These subsections provide a summary of allowable uses but are not exhaustive of every potential use.

and municipal/civic facilities.

By special permit service, gas stations, and auto body shops are allowed, as are warehouses and administrative offices.

Smart Growth Overlay District (SGO)

The SGO allowed for the construction of the Modera Natick Center apartments under Chapter 40R of the Massachusetts General Laws. Chapter 40R encourages communities to create dense residential or mixed-use smart growth zoning districts, including a high percentage of affordable housing units, to be located near transit stations, in areas of concentrated development such as existing city and town centers, and in other highly suitable locations. The construction of this development allowed the Town to exceed its ten percent affordable housing goal.

Intensity Regulations

Table 10 summarizes the dimensional requirements for zoning districts within the study area.

As would be expected, the DM allows for the most density and greatest height. Maximum building coverage is 60%, which is lower than often found in a downtown neighborhood; however, because of parking and open space requirements, new developments would most likely be unable to meet even this relatively low maximum.

The HOOP districts utilize formulas based on parcel size to determine the maximum number of dwelling units. In HOOP I this equals the gross area of the parcel divided by 2,500, rounded to the nearest whole number. At least 15% of the total number of dwelling units must be affordable. For HOOP II, the calculation for maximum number of units is gross parcel area divided by 3,500. The Special Permit Granting Authority may grant a bonus in the number of dwelling units for either HOOP district by applying the following calculations:

- HOOP I: gross area divided by 1,500
- HOOP II: gross area divided by 3,000

The criteria to be met provide the SPGA with wide latitude:

- Site Plan offers the Town a landmark project with area-wide benefits;
- Site Plan design is consistent and harmonious with existing Town center character;
- Site Plan includes professional landscaping;
- Site Plan includes pedestrian-friendly, aesthetically pleasing lighting; and,
- Site Plan includes other elements found beneficial by the Design Review Board.

The SPGA may also modify and/or waive strict compliance with any of the regulations if necessary to make a project feasible, provided the resulting conditions are not detrimental.

Table 10: Study Area Zoning Dimensional Requirements

	Minimum Lot Dimensions (Feet)			Minimum Setbacks (Feet)					
District	Area	Cont. Frontage	Depth	Front	Side	Rear	Maximum Building Coverage	Maximum height of building	Open space requirement
DM	10,000	80	120	15', reduced with special permit	10' if abutting residential district; otherwise, none	20	60%	50', 60' if within 200' of existing 60' building. Min. 30'	10%
RG	12,000	100	100	30	12	25	30%	3 stories or 40'	None
RSA	15,000	110	125	30	12	25	25%	2.5 stories or 35'	None
RSC	20,000	120	125	30	12	25	20%	2.5 stories or 35'	None
HOOP I	15,000	100	75	10	5	5	40%	40'	35% or off-site provision
HOOP II	20,000	100	75	10	5	5	40%	40'	45% of off-site provision
INI	20,000	120	150	40	20	20	35%	2 stories or 30'	10%

Parking requirements

Parking is a critical component to downtown development and can be an asset or a hindrance to the success of development in a downtown neighborhood. One of the goals of diversified, mixed-use style development is to provide options for travel that do not rely solely on personal vehicles. Limiting parking around transit or more densely settled, mixed-use areas is one way to ease traffic congestion and promote more walking, biking and transit use as part of new development.

The following table provides parking requirements for a selection of uses found within the study area. These requirements apply across various zoning districts. In some cases the DM has additional requirements, discussed below.

For multifamily dwelling units in the DM the requirements for 1 and 2 bedroom units are 2 spaces and for 3+ bedroom units are 3 spaces (in other districts the requirement is 1 space for 1 bedroom units, 1.5 spaces for 2 bedroom units, and 2 spaces for 3 bedroom units). It is highly unusual for a downtown, walkable neighborhood with strong transit access to have higher parking requirements than other districts in the community.

Conversely, in the DM some commercial uses have lower parking ratios than in other districts. Retail stores/financial institutions/etc. require 1 space for each 500 square feet of gross floor area (vs. 250 square feet in other districts). Restaurants require 1 space for every 25 seats.

Within the DM, parking requirements for residential and commercial can be reduced through a payment-in-lieu function. For residential uses, this Special Permit can reduce the required parking spaces to the standard requirements for other districts (see Table 11). The parking credit schedule is:

- $16,000 mitigation per whole space
- $8,000 mitigation per half space

This fee schedule is subject to an annual 3% increase from the passage of the relevant by-law in 2008. It should be noted that:

- This Special Permit has rarely been utilized by developers, potentially because the mitigation amount is set too high; and,
- This Special Permit only lowers the parking requirements to that of other districts in Town. Typically, a walkable, transit-rich neighborhood should have lower parking requirements than other, more automobile-dependent districts.

For non-residential uses, a developer may reduce through Special Permit the minimum requirements by up to 10%, utilizing the following parking-in-lieu mitigation schedule (subject to the 3% annual increase):

- $20,000 mitigation per whole space
- $10,000 mitigation per half space

If a building is changing in use or expanding a prior use, the SPGA may also reduce the required number of spaces by the amount required by the prior use.

Table 11: Study Area Parking Requirements

Use	Parking Requirement
1 + 2 Family Dwelling Units	2 spaces per dwelling unit
Multiple Family Dwellings	• 1 space for 1 bedroom or studio • 1.5 spaces for 2 bedroom units • 2 spaces for 3 or more bedrooms All spaces must be provided within 300' from the building.
Offices	1 space per 400 sq' of gross floor area
Retail stores, financial institutions, etc.	1 space for each 250 sq' of gross floor area
Restaurants, bars, etc.	1 space for each 30 sq' of public area or 1 space for every 3 seats, whichever is greater
Churches, assembly halls, etc.	1 space for every 3 seats
Libraries, museums, non-commercial art galleries	1 space for each 1,000 sq' of gross floor area
Warehouses, industrial plans, wholesale establishments	1 space for each 2,000 sq' of gross floor area or 1 space for each 3 persons normally employed on the largest shift, whichever is greater

Community Input

Through the first public forum and survey the community provided preferences on building typologies, uses, and locations that helped inform the land use and zoning recommendations. Participants engaged in a two-part process: a visual preference survey, broken down by residential and commercial uses, and a mapping exercise to understand where people envisioned the various types of buildings/uses. The visual preference component provided information on several aspects:

- Building use – for commercial buildings options included stand-alone office, stand-alone retail, mixed-use retail/office, mixed use retail/residential, and automotive uses. For residential buildings options included single family homes, two-family homes, multifamily homes of different sizes, and mixed-use buildings with residences above retail space.
- Building scale and size – building options ranged from one to five stories.
- Building style – a range of architectural styles, building materials, and urban design typologies were provided.

Participants chose their top five buildings for both the residential and commercial components. This information was tabulated to show the most highly preferred building typologies. For residential, most participants were interested in mixed-use buildings with residences above retail. The scale ranged from three to four stories. The architecture varied from classic vernacular architecture to contemporary styles. More important than building style seemed to be an interest in buildings that met the lot line at the sidewalk and had streetscape elements. In addition to mixed-use buildings, participants liked modest-sized single family homes, which is prevalent throughout parts of Natick Center today.

For commercial buildings, participants were similarly interested in mixed use buildings with ground-floor retail and either residences or offices above. The architectural preferences tended to be more traditional in terms of style and materials, but again the more important features seemed to be buildings that met the sidewalk and had streetscape elements.

Figure 38: Public Forum and Survey Top Residential Category Choices



Residential above retail
- Streetscape and seating
- 3 story
- 358 votes



Residential above retail
- Wide sidewalks
- 3.5 story
- 315 votes



Modest-scale homes
- 2-3 story
- 298 votes



Modest-scale homes
- 2-3 story
- 233 votes



Residential above Retail
- 4 story
- 225 votes

Figure 39: Public Forum and Survey Top Commercial Category Choices



Residential above retail*
- Traditional architecture
- 3.5-4.5 story
- 374 votes



Residential above Retail
- Building meets lot line
- 2 story
- 355 votes



Commercial above Retail
- Traditional architecture
- 4 story
- 343 votes



Commercial above Retail
- 3.5 story
- 299 votes



Residential above Retail
- 2.5 story
- 271 votes

*This building was mislabeled "residential above retail" when in reality it is commercial above retail. Because participants voted under the assumption that it is above residential above retail this type of land use preference is reflected in the recommendations.

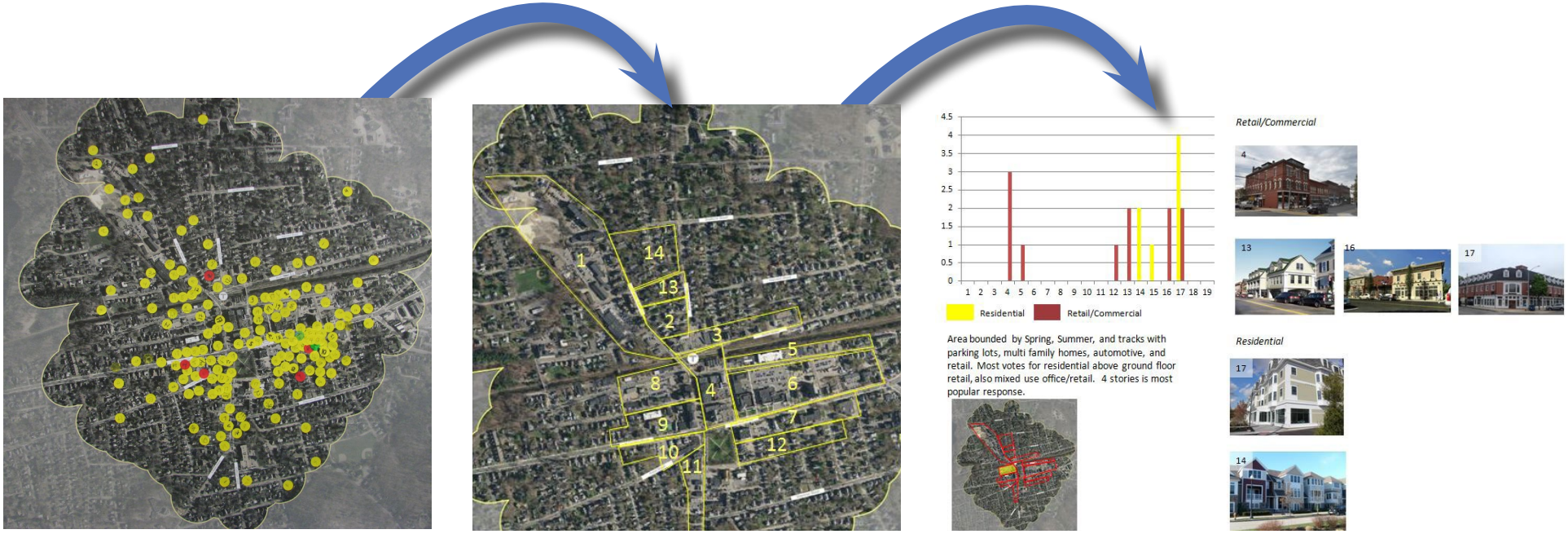
Land Use + Zoning: Analysis and Preferences

The second aspect was to then choose where in Natick Center they would like to see their chosen buildings. Participants at the forum did this by placing dots on a map that were numbered to correspond to the various buildings.[10]

This information was analyzed by:

1. Dividing the site into different sections based upon clusters of dots and existing land use patterns; and,
2. Tabulating the types of buildings chosen for each section.

Figure 40: Process for analyzing the Visual Preference Survey / Mapping Excercise



[10] The online survey lacked the capabilities to perform the mapping exercise. Survey participants were invited to write in the locations for chosen buildings.

This information, combined with numerous comments at the forum and through the survey, yielded valuable information that helped shape land use and zoning recommendations. Summary points include:

- Height and scale of existing zoning is line with what people want.
- Design elements should foster a walkable neighborhood (parking should not be visible from main road, buildings should meet the sidewalk, etc.).
- There was no consensus of architectural style, but building design should be high quality; generally, participants were more interested in contemporary architecture outside core of downtown, especially along train line.
- People are interested in a mix of uses throughout much of Natick Center, although some areas that are residential-only should remain so.
- Not only should the neighborhood be mixed use, but also buildings should be, especially residences above retail.
- Retaining commercial activities are also important, however.
- There was an interest in maintaining modest homes around Natick Center, avoiding the situation of tearing down a smaller home and replacing it with a much larger one.

Build-Out Analysis

Regardless of the community's desires for the types of development it prefers, the zoning code governs the uses and building form that can actually be created. MAPC performed a build-out analysis to understand the type of future development that would be allowed within the area under the current regulations. This analysis can provide insight as to whether a community's vision for the physical form of Natick Center is compatible under the regulations. If the community's goals are not reflected in the buildout analysis, then the community has the ability to make changes to effect an alternative future. MAPC's buildout methodology allows for such alternative futures to be analyzed by changing the analysis assumptions regarding regulations in the DM, RG, and INI districts. Various alterations to setbacks, heights, lot coverage, parking requirements, etc. were then "tested" to help achieve the outcomes preferred by the community.

The Clark Building provides a representative example of this analysis. This building was noted as one of the preferred buildings in both the Forum and Survey. The building, although quite tall, provides a classic New England downtown village feel: the building meets the sidewalk, ground-floor retail activating the space, parking is tucked into the rear of the building, and pedestrians do not contend with any wide open spaces while walking along the site.

Figure 41: The Clark Building is one of the community's most preferred building.





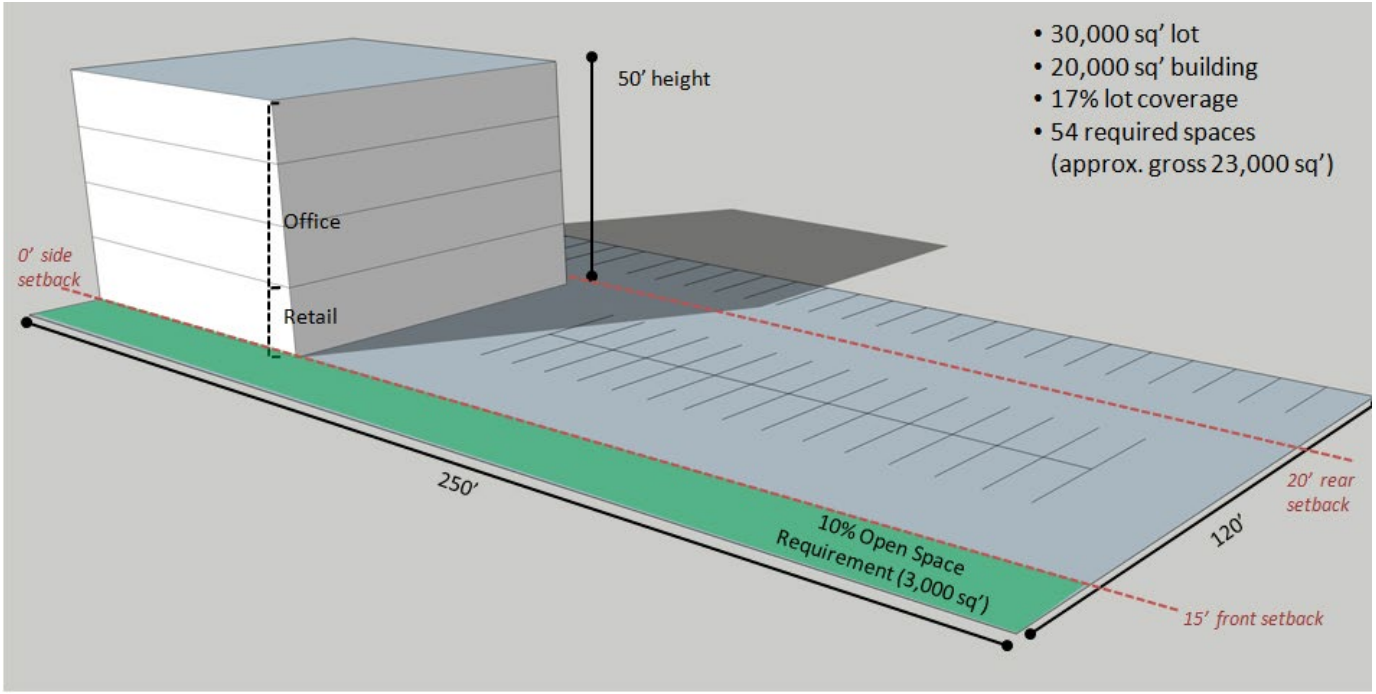
Source: Kensington Investment Company, kicboston.com

Figure 41 provides a diagram of the type of development that would result if a landowner chose to redevelop the Clark Building under the existing zoning regulations. In this example the developer wants to construct ground-floor retail with offices above up to the maximum 50' height (four stories).

Based upon the amount of open space required (10%), required setbacks (0' side; 15' front; 20' rear), and required parking spaces, the build-out calculation results in a building footprint of approximately 5,000 square feet. More than 80% of the site would be used up by surface parking and "open space."

Because the Clark Building is on such a large parcel, the results are quite dramatic. But the principles and results are similar at lots of various sizes throughout Natick Center. At the second forum and survey, residents overwhelmingly agreed that the existing regulations do not achieve the type of development appropriate for Natick Center.

Figure 42: This diagram illustrates the type of development that would occur on the Clark Block under existing regulations.



8. Land Use + Zoning: Recommendations

With relatively modest changes to the existing zoning regulations, the Town of Natick could set a course for encouraging future development in a way that reflects the community's vision. The following sections provide recommendations for future zoning changes.

Development of the Recommendations

The recommendations in this report were developed through a combination of community feedback, technical expertise, and discussions with Town staff. As noted previously, with more than a thousand people providing comments, it is unrealistic to expect complete consensus. The recommendations attempt to find a balance among the various views while especially considering the views of the majority of participants.

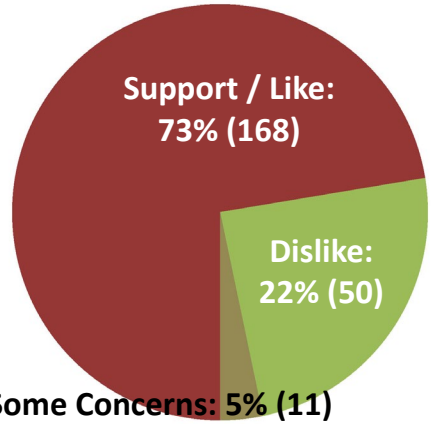
Based upon the first public forum and survey, MAPC and the Town developed a set of draft recommendations related to economic development, land use + zoning, transportation, and parking. MAPC then presented these recommendations at a second forum and online survey. Participants were then invited to provide comments on aspects they liked or would change for each of the recommendations.

The feedback was overwhelmingly positive. People provided comments supporting all aspects of the recommendations, from minor changes (e.g., allowing additional ancillary uses in the HOOP district) to larger ones (e.g., expanding the boundaries of the Mixed Use and HOOP distticts slightly). Some recommendations, such as ensuring a better transition from the mixed use to residential districts and maintaining the existing height limits, were almost universally liked.

The majority of negative responses related to those broadly opposed to any new development, especially additional residential development. These comments were, however, in the minority. For example, more than 3 times as many people (99 versus 31) provided comments supporting the expansion of the DM and HOOP districts versus those who do not want additional development. (This ratio, greater than 2/3 in favor of the zoning changes, is the necessary threshold for Town Meeting adoption.) It should also be noted that stopping all development is not an option, as zoning exists that allows for various types within Natick Center already.

At the same time, efforts were made to take various concerns into consideration. For example, the concept of phasing the the expansion of the DM and HOOP districts was a direct result of concerns related to future impacts on traffic and school enrollment. The phasing will allow the Town to assess the effects of the expanded zones.

Figure 43: Comments Regarding Proposed Mixed Use Expansion and Associated Changes



Expansion of DM and HOOP districts

The current DM is limited to the core of Natick Center and the HOOP covers several parcels, most of which are now built out. Based upon the visual preference survey / mapping exercise, as well as a majority of the community's desire for multifamily housing and more retailers, MAPC recommends expanding the DM slightly and creating additional HOOP overlay areas. (See previous section for additional information). Expanding the boundaries of these districts would allow the Town to encourage more mixed-use and multifamily development within close proximity to the commuter rail station and build a more vibrant core.

Several forum and survey participants voiced concerns over the impact of additional development, especially as they relate to pressures on school enrollment and traffic. Phasing the expanded zoning, therefore, will allow the Town to assess the impacts of any new development.

In the near term, MAPC recommends expanding the DM in two areas:

1. East along Route 135 up to the intersection at Union Street and Marion Street; and,
2. West of the station along Route 27 and north of Middlesex Avenue to Spring Street.

MAPC also recommends adding a HOOP overlay to the existing INI parcels along Middlesex Avenue from Spring Street to 75 Middlesex Avenue (i.e., the parcels zoned for industrial uses). This will provide a better transition from the downtown to the residential district.

Once the effects of the rezoning are assessed, the Town may wish to proceed with a slight further expansion of the DM and HOOP. For the DM, this includes several parcels along South Avenue from Dewey Street to the existing DM. For the HOOP, this includes the parcels west of the commuter rail station from the north side of the tracks along Harrison Street.

Accompanying the expansion should be several modifications to the DM and HOOP (described below), which will help to ensure future development best meets the Town's needs and contributes toward creating a vibrant, walkable neighborhood.

Figure 44: Proposed DM and HOOP expansion areas



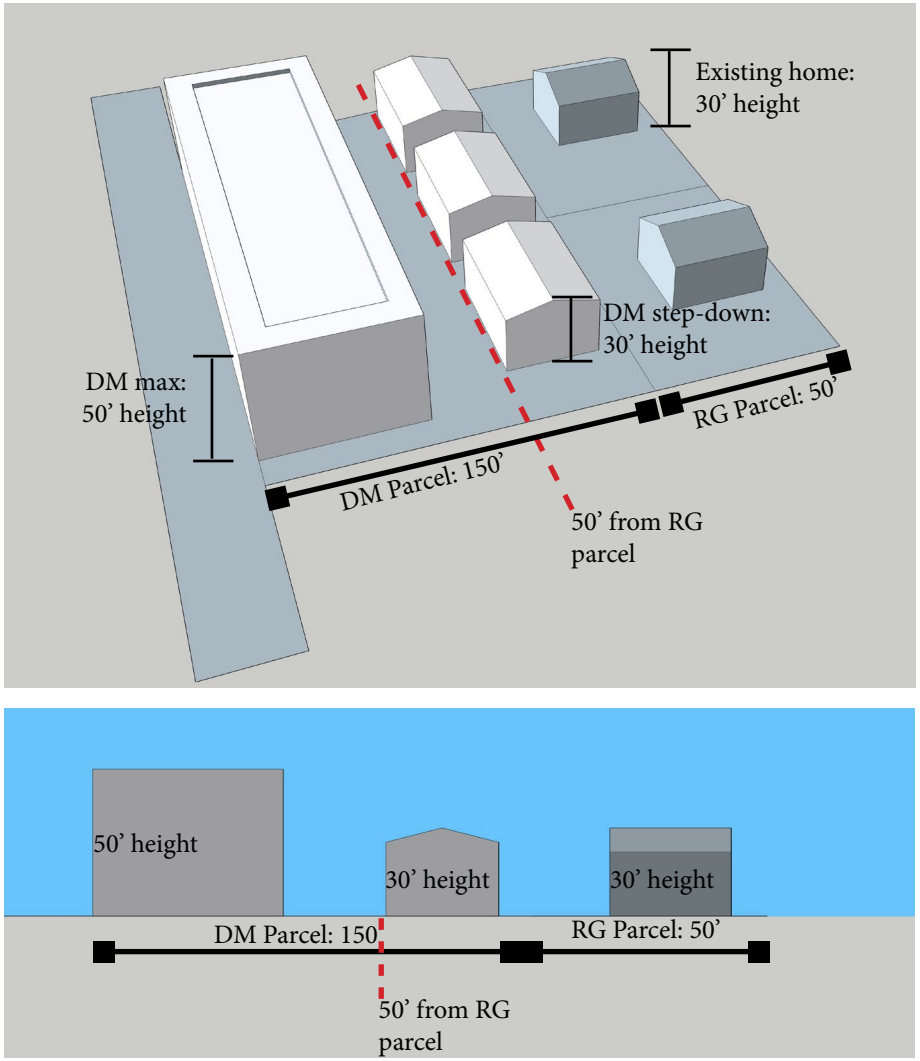
Modifications to the Mixed-Use District (DM)

Ensure a Better Transition To the Residential District

Forum and survey participants were generally content with the existing height regulations of the DM, which is 50′ (60′ if proximate to an existing structure of that height). Some participants preferred taller buildings near the station itself, which could provide an opportunity for developing the Town-owned lots into a structured parking facility along with other development feasible. But because the DM often abuts residential districts, the transition between the two districts could potentially be jarring and/or have negative effects on the residences. Zoning can set a different maximum height based on the distance from adjacent zoning districts.

MAPC recommends that within 50′ of the RG district, building height should be limited to the height of the maximum allowed height in the adjacent residential district. Figure 40 illustrates this transition. In this example, the DM parcel has a 150′ depth and abuts RG parcels with an 80′ depth. The existing homes in the RG are 30′ tall. Development within the 50′ from the RG would be limited to 30′, whereas the remaining 100′ of the parcel would not be subject to this restriction. The building along the main roadway, therefore, would still fit harmoniously with the downtown, while the parcels in the rear would appropriately transition to the single family homes.

Figure 45: Diagrams of Step-Down Requirement Example (Perspective and Section Views)



Dimensional Regulations That Encourage a Traditional Downtown Feel

As previously illustrated, existing dimensional requirements, along with parking requirements, do not always encourage the types of development best suited to a traditional New England downtown. MAPC recommends the following adjustments:

- **Raise lot coverage from 60% to 80%.** Buildings in the DM today range from 55% to 100% lot coverage. In practice, parking requirements often make a lot coverage of even 60% impossible; however, the combination of reducing parking requirements, providing more flexibility for off-site parking, and the potential for underground parking could allow for greater lot coverage in the future.
- **Building must occupy at least 75% of frontage.** This requirement will cause surface parking to be located in the rear of the building, contributing to a more walkable and safer environment for pedestrians.
- **Allow open space payment in lieu.** Existing regulations require 10% of a parcel in the DM be open space. It is often not necessary or desirable for every parcel in a downtown area to have landscaped open space, which in practice can result in "dead" spaces. Instead, the DM could have a payment option, similar to HOOP district requirement, that allows developers to pay for off-site improvements such as trails, parks, and playgrounds. The definition of open space can also be clarified to include outdoor seating (e.g., as part of a restaurant) that would help to activate the space.
- **Reduce front yard setbacks.** Current setback requirements are 15'. This could be reduced to 10, 5, or even zero feet to better encourage a walkable neighborhood. Greater setbacks could be allowed if being used for outdoor seating.
- **Change definition of "Height, Building."** A building's height according to the Town's zoning bylaw is measured to the highest point of the roof. Changing this definition to be measured at the top of highest floor's ceiling will better encourage articulated roofs and architectural features, such as gables.

Adjust Parking Regulations

As noted previously, parking regulations in the DM are actually higher than in the rest of the community. These can be lowered through a payment-in-lieu mechanism but only to the level of other districts in the community. The proximity to public transportation and short walking distance to a number of nearby amenities warrants a reduction in parking ratios.

One consideration for parking requirements reduction is whether the Town develops a structured parking facility on one or two of its lots. Construction of one or two facilities can further relieve parking pressures in the neighborhood, allowing the Town to reduce parking requirements further.

MAPC recommends the following as a starting point for parking ratios:

- Studio/1 bedroom: 0.75 spaces/unit
- 2 bedroom units: 1.25 spaces/unit
- Retail, Restaurant, other business: eliminate minimums, have maximum of 3 spaces/1,000 square feet
- Public assembly uses: no parking required up to 200 people, after that a minimum of 1 space per 6 occupants and max of 1 space per 4 occupants
- $10,000 one-time payment in lieu of on-site parking construction for residential construction

In addition, off-site parking currently must be within 300' of the structure. MAPC recommends relaxing that requirement to allow for parking anywhere within the DM or HOOP districts.

MAPC also recommends creation of a shared parking provisions bylaw, whereby spaces used primarily during the day for one use (e.g., commercial) can be used as parking during the night for a different use (e.g., residential).

Allowing Pub Brewery / Microbrewery within DM

In recent years craft breweries, manufacturing and selling specialty beers and ales, have become extremely popular. Many communities have harnessed this popularity to further their economic development.

Natick should allow pub breweries / microbreweries within the DM. Several communities, including Marlborough and Foxborough, have recently added the following defintion to allow Brew Pubs by special permit:

Restaurants which are licensed by the United States Department of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, under the relevant statutes, to produce and sell beer and/or ale at the location and whose primary business is the sale and preparation of food to be consumed on the premises, but which also produces beer and/or ale on the premises which may be sold wholesale to other establishments, but not more than 20% of the production capacity.

The Town could adjust this language to meet its needs, working

within the parameters of Massachusetts law. Because laws regarding the sale of alcohol can change, Natick should consult appropriate guidance before adopting any final language revisions. Massachusetts General Laws Secion 19D governs pub brewery licenses.

Encourage Additional Multifamily Housing

There are a number of as-of-right uses allowed in the DM, including retail and commercial uses. Residential uses, however, are only allowed through Special Permit. Encouraging housing is a crucial component to achieving the vision, as it will create demand for additional restaurants and other stores, such as a grocery store.

MAPC recommends modifying this requirement to allow as-of-right multifamily housing as part of a mixed-use development when the following criteria are met:

- Development converts uses from an existing building (e.g., office to residential)
- The ground floor is primarily occupied by commercial use(s)

Modifications to the Housing Overlay Option Program (HOOP)

The following modifications are proposed to the HOOP, which would apply to the proposed expanded overlay areas.

Modify Formula for Bonus Dwelling Units

HOOP I and HOOP II have slightly different formulas, affecting the number of allowed dwelling units. Both districts, however, allow through Special Permit a bonus to increase the number of units if certain criteria are met (see Land Use + Zoning Analysis).

MAPC recommends this formula be adjusted to "gross area divided by 1,200." This will allow a slight increase in the number of units, which could make a project more financially feasible.[11]

For example, on an 11,000 square foot parcel, the number of units would rise from seven (under the existing HOOP I bonus calculation) to nine (under the proposed bonus calculation).

Modify Dimensional Requirements

MAPC recommends the following adjustments:

- Reduce minimum lot size to 11,000 square feet. The existing minimum lots sizes are 15,000 square feet (HOOP I) and 20,000 square feet (HOOP II). An 11,000 square foot minimum lot size is conducive to the smaller parcel sizes of the proposed

[11] The Town could structure this as a new HOOP III district or apply it to the existing HOOP districts.

expansion area, while still being large enough to encourage consolidation of small parcels.

- Raise maximum lot coverage from 40% to 60%. This will allow for flexibility to achieve better design and create an appropriate transition between the DM and residential districts.

Allow Additional Uses by Special Permit

Small retailers, such as a café, a dry-cleaner, etc. could be allowed by Special Permit to provide additional amenities to area residents. Criteria such as site design, potential noise impacts, etc. could be considered when granting the Special Permit.

Modifications to the Residential General District (RG)

A majority of forum and survey participants stated that they wanted to retain the modest, starter homes that exist in various parts of Natick Center (e.g., south of Route 135). They do not want these homes torn down in order to be replaced by large "McMansion" style homes.

Most of these lots are smaller than the required minimum; therefore, if a landowner wants to redevelop a property it must go to the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA). The ZBA then determines whether there is an adverse impact before allowing development to proceed.

To date, the issue of tear-downs being replaced with overly large homes has not been an issue. Therefore, MAPC recommends monitoring the situation closely, and if this does occur the Town should take appropriate action. This could potentially include the ZBA considering scale in making its determination.

In addition, MAPC recommends the Town consider creating a bylaw allowing accessory dwelling units and/or family suite provisions. Given the proximity to transit and the increasing need to provide accommodations for seniors to "age in place," this will allow for additional residential options.

Ensure That Affordable Housing in Natick Center is Preserved and Incorporated into New Housing Developments

As mentioned previously, new residential development in Natick Center could help to increase the market for additional retail and restaurants. However, new residential and commercial development can also lead to displacement as rents and home values rise. It is important to ensure that those people who are already living in and around the neighborhood can continue to afford to live there as new development pushes prices upwards. The following are a set of recommendations to create and preserve affordable housing throughout the Town.

The Town's recent Housing Production Plan indicated the need and large demand for affordable rental housing in Natick. The HPP also states that there is a very strong need for housing for seniors at 50% of the Area Median Income and 80% of the Area Median Income. It is especially important for affordable units to be located in areas like Natick Center that offer easy access to amenities and public transportation options.

Create an Inclusionary Housing Bylaw and Consider Repealing the Inclusionary Housing Option Program (IHOP)

IHOP currently applies to the development of parcels creating 10 or more new residential dwelling units and allows developers who apply to receive additional units and relaxation of frontage requirements in exchange for the provision of affordable housing units. To date, there have been no developments that have taken advantage of the Inclusionary Housing Option Program. A better option would be to create an inclusionary zoning bylaw that would require affordable units and ensure that they are part of new developments. The Town could consider a stipulation to allow payments in lieu of housing units to create a fund that could then be used to focus funding affordable housing development in both the downtown and other areas of the Town.

Preserve Existing Affordable Housing

Currently all of the units in Natick Center that are listed on the Subsidized Housing Inventory are preserved in perpetuity, but it is important to ensure that new affordable housing built in the downtown area also maintains this status.

Preserve Affordable Homeownership Opportunities

As cited in the Housing Production Plan, re-establishing a down payment assistance program for first-time home buyers is one strategy to help preserve affordable homeownership opportunities.

As the demand for neighborhoods around transit areas grows, existing residents may see a sizable increase in their assessed

home value, leading to increases in required property taxes. Circuit Breaker Programs can help to ensure that those living on a limited or fixed income are not forced out of their homes because they cannot afford the increased taxes. These types of programs provide tax relief by freezing the assessed home value at an earlier level or freezing or reducing the overall tax bill to prevent dramatic increases. While these programs commonly target households with disabled or elderly homeowners, some communities have broadened eligibility to include all low-income households.

Support Development of Housing for Seniors and People with Disabilities

To meet the needs of the growing senior population and of those with disabilities, the Town should adopt zoning provisions that incentivize development of appropriate housing. Housing types might include:

- Accessible units designed to be occupied by those with physical disabilities, such as single-story, barrier-free homes or those with the main living areas and a bedroom on the main floor
- Assisted living facilities for people at all income levels, which provide nursing care, housekeeping, and other services for elders or people with disabilities

In exchange for this type of development, the Town might provide incentives like density bonus, reduced parking, reduced dimensional requirements, or reduced permitting fees.

Figure 46: Rendering of potential future development along Middlesex Avenue (existing conditions inset)



9. *Transportation + Mobility: Existing Conditions and Analysis*

A neighborhood's roadways can have a tremendous impact on both the character and quality of life of the area. The designs, types of facilities, and streetscape elements can help unify a neighborhood, as well as make it safer, more comfortable, and accessible to all users. A safe and attractive environment for all users requires a high standard of design and should include quality pedestrian facilities and integration with surrounding buildings and activity centers.

In 2015 the Town of Natick's Board of Selectmen adopted a complete streets policy, thereby setting a vision to accommodate all road users by creating a road network that meets the needs of individuals utilizing a variety of transportation modes. Complete streets are a set of principles for roadways that are designed and operated to provide safety and accessibility for all the users of the roads, trails and transit systems, including pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders, motorists, commercial vehicles, and emergency vehicles. They emphasize the needs of people of all ages (including children and seniors) and abilities. Furthermore, complete streets principles contribute toward the safety, health, economic viability, and quality of life in a community by providing accessible and efficient connections between home, school, work, recreation and retail destinations by improving the pedestrian, bicycle and vehicular environments throughout communities.

Natick's complete streets policy states that Complete Streets principles and design elements shall be considered for all publicly and privately funded projects, and incorporated as appropriate. All transportation infrastructure and street design projects requiring funding or approval by the Town of Natick, as well as projects funded by the state and federal government should adhere to the Town of Natick Complete Streets Policy. In addition, to the extent practical, state-owned roadways will comply with the Complete Streets resolution, including the design, construction, and maintenance of such roadways within Town boundaries.

Incorporating complete streets principles is especially important in a downtown setting. The following sections provide a summary of the transportation environment by mode of travel.

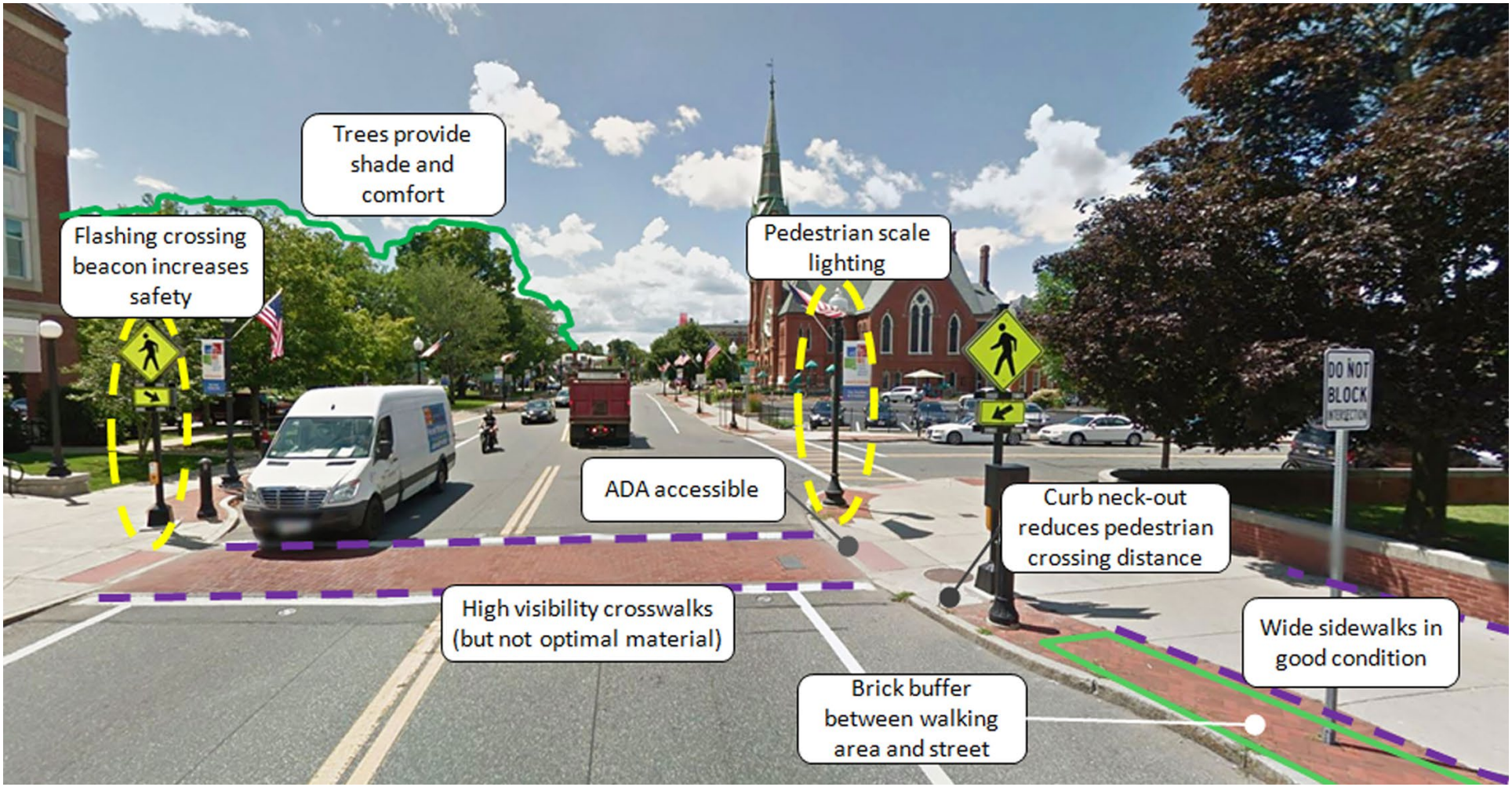
Pedestrian

Overall, Natick Center has a strong pedestrian environment. According to participants of the first public forum and survey "walkability" was the third most cited element people like about Natick Center. Most roads contain a sidewalk on at least one side of the street.

The following annotated photo describes several of the pedestrian-friendly features on Route 135, one of the primary roadways running through Natick Center. These include:

- Wide sidewalks, free of major cracks or holes;
- Tactile curb ramps compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA);
- Crosswalks at intersections and at mid-block crossings with high volumes of pedestrians (however, brick is a less than optimal material due to its uneven surface);
- Curb bump-outs at intersections, which improve safety by reducing crossing distance and raising pedestrian availability;
- A flashing crossing beacon in an otherwise non-signalized intersection, alerting vehicles to crossing pedestrians;
- Pedestrian scale lighting, which is both aesthetically pleasing and improves safety; and,
- Trees, which provide several benefits, including provide several benefits, shade during warmer months, aesthetic improvements to the street, and air and water quality improvements.

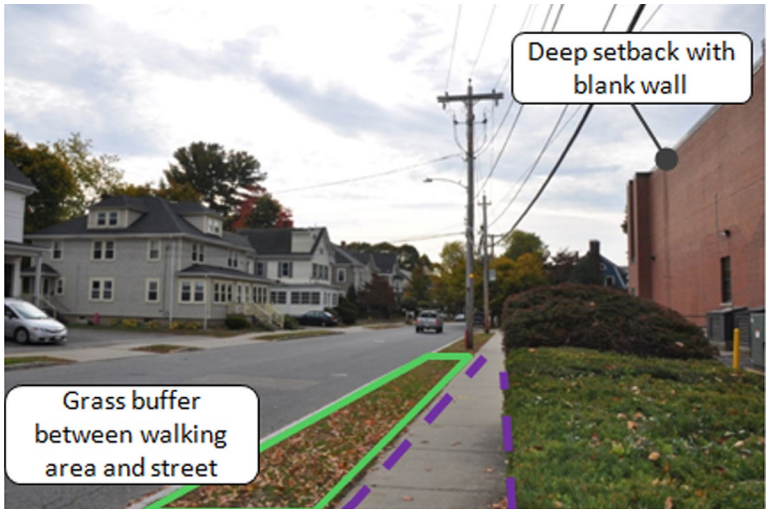
Figure 47: Pedestrian-Friendly Elements along Route 135



The following annotated photographs point out features, both positive and negative, that affect the pedestrian environment on other streets in Natick Center.

Figure 48: Elements Affecting the Pedestrian Experience in Natick Center









Between 2004 and 2013 there were twelve accidents between pedestrians and vehicles. Fortunately, none of these accidents were fatal. But it does suggest that some aspects of the pedestrian environment can be improved upon. Numerous participants in the first public forum and survey described issues with residential streets acting as "cut-through" roadways for speeding vehicles trying to avoid the main roads. The street most often cited was Chester Street. Exacerbating the issue of cut-through traffic is the fact that this street lacks sidewalks and has sports fields adjacent to it.

Figure 49: Chester Street



Other streets were also cited as problem cut-through streets. These include South Avenue, Wilson Street, and Sherman/ East Street. Note that these streets are not necessarily exhaustive of all problem cut-through roadways in Natick Center.

Figure 50: Cut-Through Streets Identified through Public Process



In addition to cut-through traffic, the intersection at Main Street, Middlesex Avenue, and South Avenue by the MBTA station can be a challenge for both pedestrians and motorists. The geometry of these intersections results in wide turning radii, long crossing distances, and confusion among motorists, which may result in unsafe conditions. A similar situation occurs at the intersection of South Main Street and Cottage Street.

Figure 51: The intersections near MBTA Station and at Cottage Street / South Main Street can be a challenge for pedestrians.



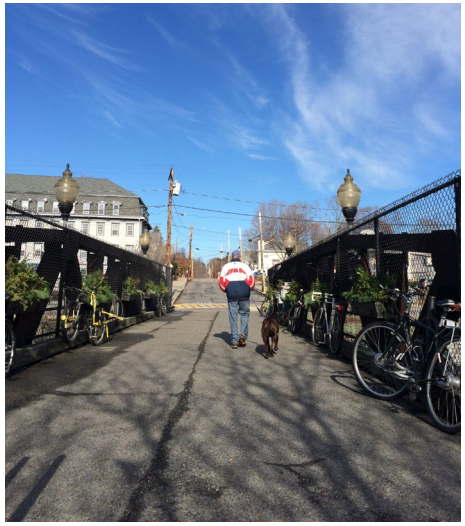
Bike

Throughout the metropolitan Boston region, bicycling is becoming an increasingly popular way to travel and, furthermore, is the fastest growing mode of transportation. The Town of Natick has begun installing bicycle lanes throughout several areas of Town, but to date there are no bicycle facilities within Natick Center itself. The Town has begun installing bicycle parking in areas throughout Natick Center, although the most popular destination for bikes in the area, the MBTA station, does not have any bike parking. Here, bikers tend to lock their bikes to the chain link fence on the pedestrian way above the station platform.

The Town does have plans for both on-road and off-road bicycle facilities. The Recommendations section will summarize these, as well as other recommendations to enhance biking in the area.

Figure 52: Bike parking in Natick Center









Transit

The Natick Center MBTA commuter rail station is a tremendous asset for the Town. Participants in the first public forum and survey cited the station as one of the top five things they like about Natick Center. The station connects Natick to downtown Boston, 18 miles away, in 30-45 minutes throughout the day. (It also connects to Worcester in under an hour.) The presence of transit, especially fixed line transit to Boston, provides a tremendous opportunity for transit-oriented development, where residents do not need to rely on a car for every trip, especially during the morning and afternoon commute times. This can allow for an increase in the number of housing units without the same level of impact on neighborhood traffic as would result if transit were not a viable option.

As Figure 54 shows, after a drop between 2007-2010, ridership has risen strongly, growing 60% from 2010 through 2013 (the most recent year available).[12] Also, it is important to note that a striking number of commuters, 60%, arrive at the station by walking.[13]

Figure 53: Natick Center Station Typical Inbound Weekly Boardings

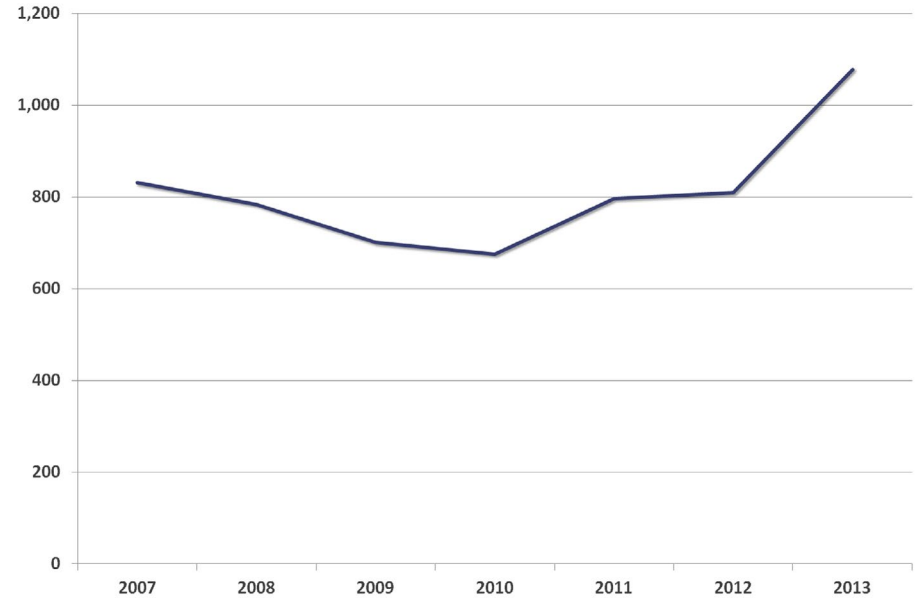
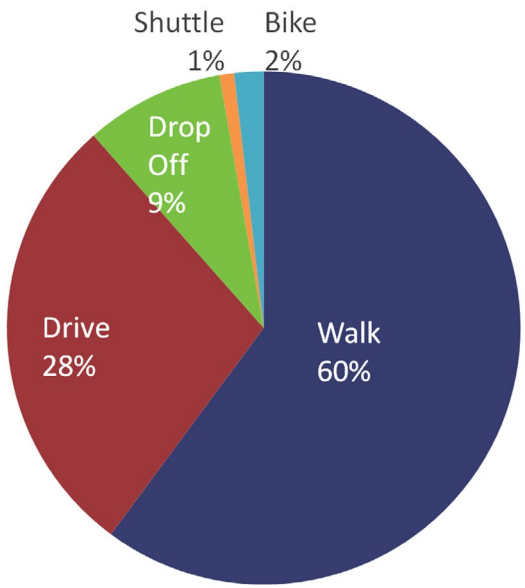


Figure 54: Natick Center Station Access by Mode (2008-2009)



[12] MBTA Blue Book, 2014.

[13] MBTA System-wide Passenger Survey, 2008 2009. CTPS.

Despite its popularity and importance, the Natick Center station is one of the few transit stations in the MBTA system that is not ADA compliant. Station accessibility has been a longstanding goal of the community and was cited in the 2008 Natick 360 Strategic Plan adopted by the Town.

In 2011, the State completed the acquisition of the CSX Main Branch from Boston to Worcester to provide increased passenger service and track/station improvements. And in fall 2012, Natick voted at Town meeting to appropriate $80,000 for a feasibility study and conceptual development of a new Natick Center MBTA station. A year later the Natick Board of Selectmen established the MBTA Station Advisory Committee. The Committee developed a Request for Proposals for consulting and engineering services, subsequently issued by the Board of Selectmen. Three firms responded and McMahon Associates was selected in August 2013. McMahon Associates developed several alternatives to dramatically improve the station, including making it fully accessible. The improvements could also add a dedicated bus stop area for the MetroWest Regional Transit Authority buses that run two fixed routes and an employee shuttle through Natick Center.

The Town's proactive approach has begun to pay off. MassDOT recently released its 2017-2021 Capital Investment Plan (CIP), which identifies all of the spending priorities over the five year period. This most recent CIP has shifted the way it develops priorities into a more strategic, performance-based approach. This new approach develops priorities utilizing a framework that identifies projects based on Reliabity (i.e., maintaining a state of good repair), Modernization (i.e., projects to make the system safer, more accessible, and accomodate growth), and Expansion (i.e., expanding transportation options for communities).

Using this framework, MassDOT allocated $3.5 million for design and partial construction of the Natick Center Station. This represents a tremendous opportunity for the neighborhood to further its ability to take advantage of this asset.

Figure 55: Natick Center Station Existing Conditions





Vehicular

In Natick Center, the two primary roadways are Main Street (Route 27) and West / East Central Street (Route 135), both of which are state-owned roadways. At the intersection of these two arteries, over 10,000 cars pass through in each direction of Route 135 daily.

Pond Street is another primary road that intersects with Route 27 near Route 135 and sees daily traffic volumes of approximately 2,500 in each direction. The location of this street relative to Route 135 increases congestion and was cited by several forum participants as a problem intersection. South Avenue, with approximately 4,500 vehicles traveling each way, is another main roadway running parallel to East Central Street. The other roadways in Natick Center are primarily lower volume and residential streets.

Overall, Natick Center deals with the typical congestion issues of many town centers during rush hour in the metropolitan Boston area. Generally, the roadways in Natick Center are safe, although between 2011 and 2013 the segment of East Central Street between Main Street and Morse Street was ranked as a high crash location with 35 crashes during this time period. Fortunately, none were fatal and only four resulted in an injury.

Figure 56: Aerial of Route 135 / Route 27 Intersection



Figure 57: Intersection of Route 27 at Pond Street



10: Transportation + Mobility: Recommendations

As noted previously, Natick Center must continue to develop a transportation network that works for all users of the road. Whereas previous generations focused almost exclusively on speed and efficiency, today there is a recognition that transportation systems must also be viewed through a lens of public safety, economic vitality, health, and quality of life. These complex transportation systems need to work together, be planned and designed together, and thought of as a system of choices that work for all people regardless of age or ability.

The following are recommendations for improving mobility to and within Natick Center.

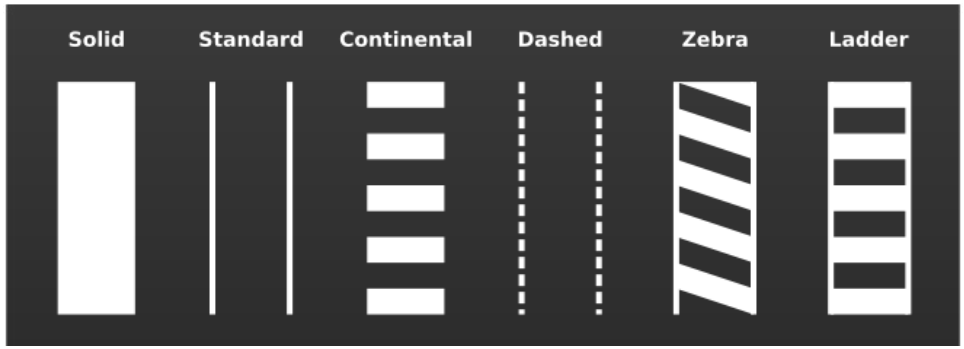
Pedestrian

Sidewalks and Crosswalks

As noted previously, the majority of Natick Center's roadways have sidewalks on at least one side of the street. The Town should ensure sidewalks remain in good condition and look for opportunities to fill in any remaining gaps in the network. In addition, there are several areas, primarily adjacent to automotive uses, where curb-cuts are extremely wide. Wide curb cuts can create an unsafe pedestrian environment. As redevelopment occurs, curb cuts should be kept to a minimum width.

The Town also has crosswalks located at its intersections. In some cases, these crosswalks are paved with brick. Although brick may be aesthetically pleasing, it provides an uneven surface which can make it difficult to walk across. MAPC recommends utilizing the continental style crosswalk, especially at major intersections, as this style tends to provide the highest visibility and does not hinder pedestrians. The ladder style, which Natick often uses, also provides high visibility.

Figure 58: Diagram illustrating various types of crosswalks (source:sfstreetsblog.org)



Traffic Calming Measures

As noted previously, Chester Street, Wilson Street, South Avenue, and Sherman/East Street act as cut-through streets where vehicles tend to speed through. MAPC recommends assessing whether other roadways within Natick Center also act as cut-through streets and installing traffic-calming measures. This is especially important on a street such as Chester Street, which lacks sidewalks but does not have sufficient right-of-way to allow for their construction.

One example of an appropriate traffic calming measure is the installation of speed humps. These are relatively inexpensive to install (approximately $2,100 each) and are appropriate for residential streets. They are designed for vehicles to travel approximately 20 miles per hour over them and plows are able to navigate them with relative ease. Studies have shown that they are able to reduce speeds on a street by 20-25 percent.

Figure 59: Speed hump example



Bicycles

Several initiatives are already being planned or taking place to make bicycling into Natick Center safer and more comfortable. This includes installing bicycle lanes on Route 27 north of the Center. These facilities are included in a reconstruction planned for FY2019 in the state's Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP). The Town is also continuing to pursue funding for the Cochituate Rail Trail with hopes of construction over the next couple years. The Town should continue to explore options for where the trail will terminate with an eventual goal of extending all the way to the MBTA station if feasible. If the trail must end before reaching Natick Center the Town should connect the trail with on-road bicycle facilities to create an integrated network.

The Town should also examine whether bicycle lanes are feasible on Route 135 through the Center. The widths vary along the roadway but a cursory examination suggested that the space could be reallocated with 7′ parking lanes, 4′ bicycle lanes, and 11′ travel lanes. The bicycle lane would be narrower than the generally recommended 5′ but could be considered. The Massachusetts Project Development and Design guide (2006) allows travel lanes as narrow as 11′ on arterials but narrower may be used with a design exception – 10.5′ travel lanes with 4.5′ bicycle lanes would provide more comfort for bicyclists and lower the risk of parked cars opening doors into their path (dooring).

A key need is for bicycle parking at the MBTA station. Providing ample parking for bicycles is an important component of creating an environment that makes bicycling convenient. Providing bicycle parking encourages people to use their bicycles, as they are more likely to do so if they are confident that they will find convenient and secrete parking at their destination.

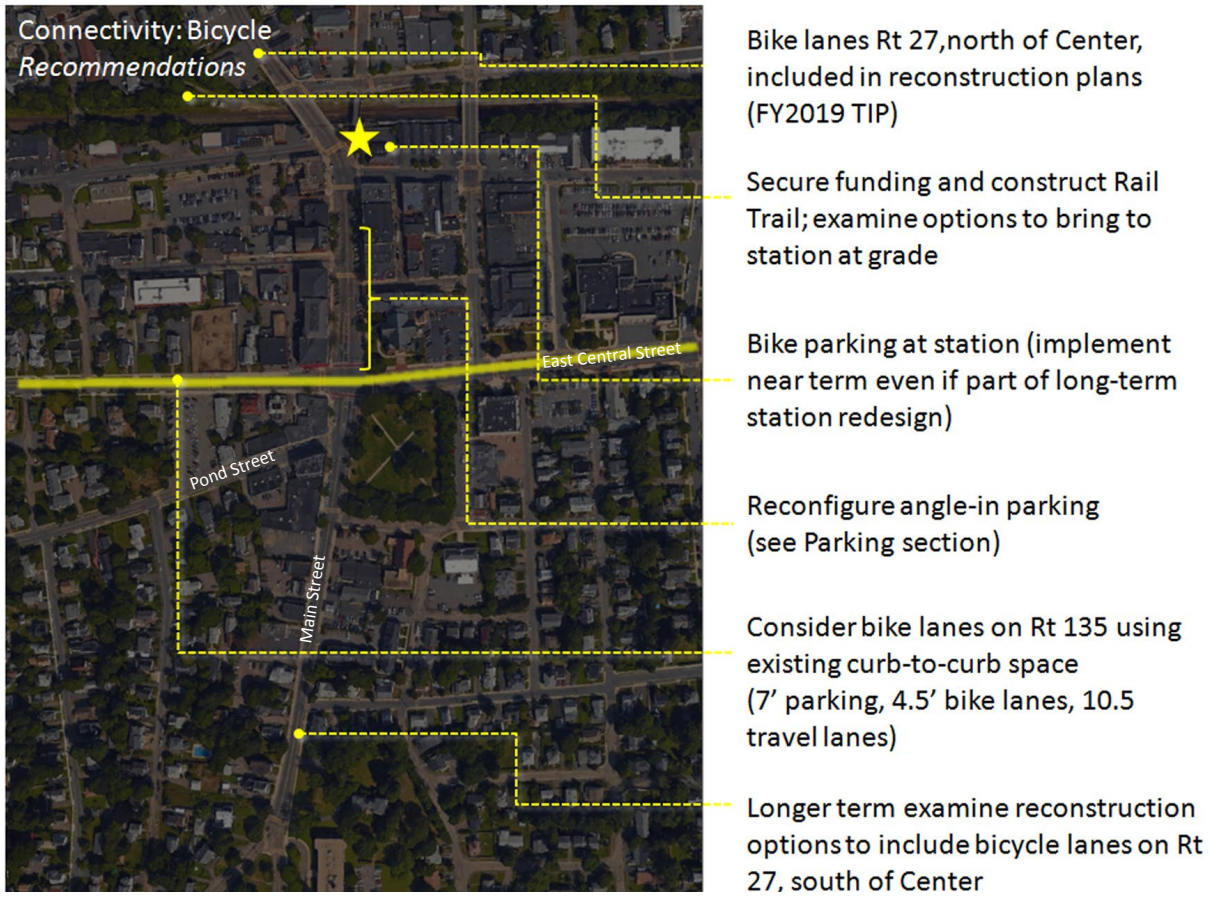
Currently bikers lock bikes against a chain link fence. Although a structured bicycle parking facility may be a part of the longer term reconstruction of the station, in the interim the Town should install bicycle racks to accommodate users. There are a variety of designs for bicycle racks; however, not all racks are created equal. There are a number of features that should be considered when purchasing bicycle racks. In general, MAPC recommends the inverted "U" rack, which is the style that has been recently installed in parts of Natick Center. These have two-point support and can fit a variety of bicycle types. Custom designs and "artistic" racks can be used, provided they meet basic criteria.

Features of strong bicycle racks include:

- Installed on a permanent foundation (e.g., concrete pad) to ensure stability;
- Securely anchored into or on the foundation with tamper-proof nuts if surface mounted;
- Support for an upright bicycle by its frame horizontally in two or more places;
- Keeps both bike wheels on the ground;
- Designed to prevent the bicycle from tipping over;
- Ability to support a variety of bicycle sizes and frame shapes;
- Space to secure the frame and one or both wheels to the rack with a cable, chain, or u-lock; and,
- Diameter of locking pole is no more than 1.5 inches.

Over the longer term, the Town should examine options for reconstructing Route 27 south of the Town towards Sherborn. Finally, reconfiguring the angle-in parking along Route 27 (see Parking Recommendations Section) will dramatically improve the safety of bikers in Natick Center.

Figure 60: Locations of bicycle recommendations



Intersections

Intersections must be designed to foster safety and efficiency for all users of the road. There are several areas where the Town, in concert with transportation engineers, should examine ways to make improvements. This includes the intersections along Route 27 from North Avenue (by the commuter rail station) down to Pond Street. Pond Street meets Route 27 at an irregular intersection, making left-hand turns from Route 27 difficult. It is also near the Route 27 / Route 135 intersection, which forms long queues. Motorists also at times block the intersection as they wait to turn left on Route 27. It is also an area where pedestrians frequently try to cross, as it connects a popular coffee shop with the Town Common. Potential solutions at this intersection could include a signal (if volumes warrant it), a crosswalk across Route 27, and a markings and/or signs alerting drivers not to block the intersection.

On the north side of this corridor, there are opportunities to reduce curb radii and crossing distances at North Avenue (north and south side) and Middlesex Avenue (north side).

Any modifications to these intersections should include an analysis of their effect on the intersection at Route 27 and Route 135.

Further to the south, the Town has also begun conceptual designs for the intersection at Route 27 and Cottage Street. The Town should continue to develop this redesign effort in a way that promotes walkability and safety.

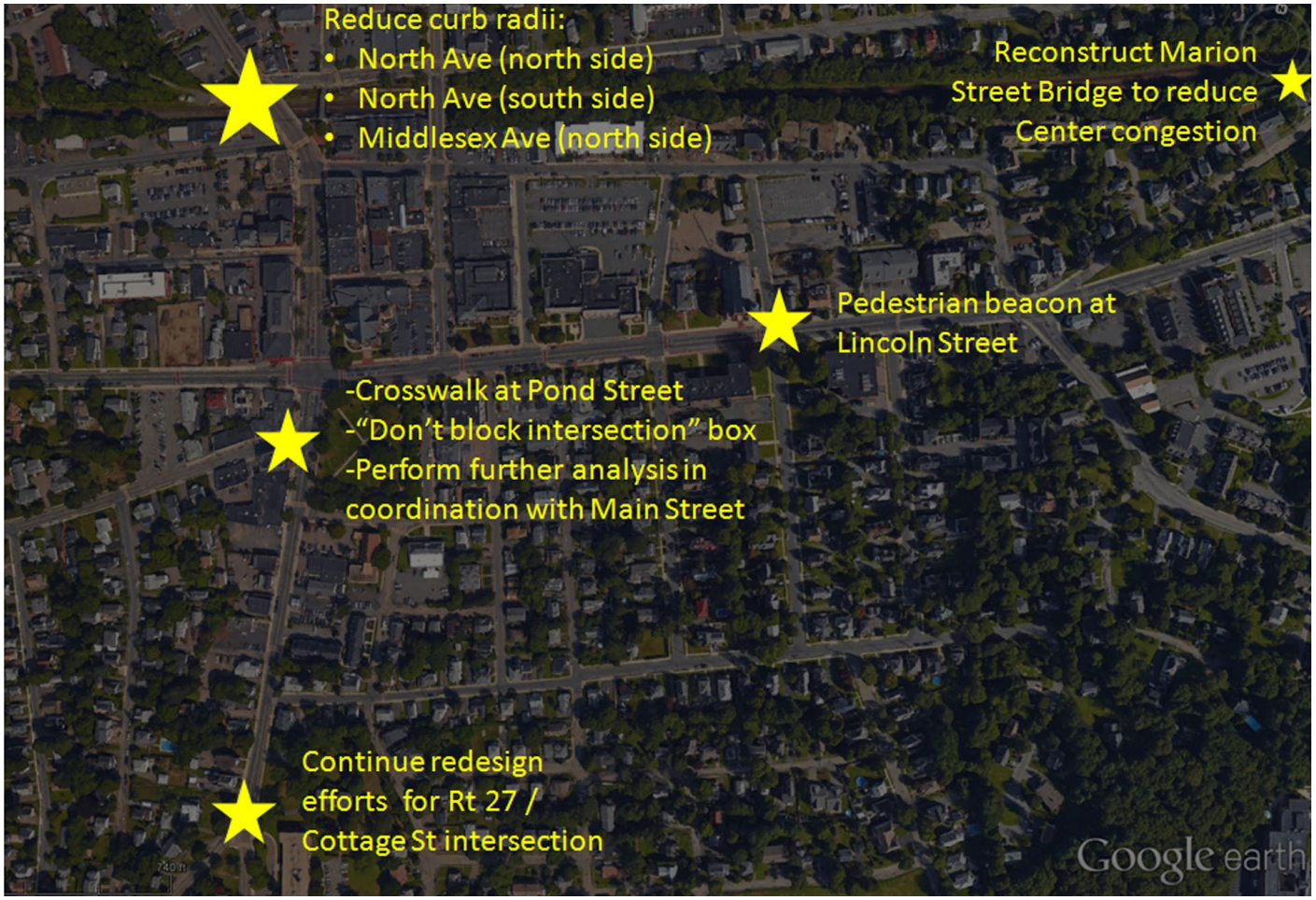
There is currently a pedestrian signal on Route 135 at the Washington Street intersection. Further east at Lincoln Street there is a signal that is generally a yellow flashing light. This light turns red when pedestrians push the signal; however, motorists who habitually drive on the roadway are sometimes not aware of the signal change and continue to drive through. The Town should consider replacing this overhead lighting with a pedestrian signal similar to the one at Washington Street.

Further east, Marion Street intersects with Route 135 and leads northeast up to Bacon Street. The bridge above the train tracks has been closed for several years, closing this route down. This has had the effect of funneling more traffic through Natick Center and Route 27. The Town should continue to advocate for this bridge to be restored to help relieve congestion.

Figure 61: Pedestrian Warning Light on Route 135



Figure 62: Locations of needed intersection improvements



Natick Center Station

As noted previously, the Natick Center MBTA Station is a key asset for the community. The Town has invested resources and been on creating a station redesign. MassDOT has recently allocated $3.5 million for the design and partial construction of the station in the next several years. Station accessibility should be the primary concern with any redesign, and the Town should continue to examine the feasibility of connecting the Cochituate Rail Trail to the station platform.

Figure 63: Center Platform Concept

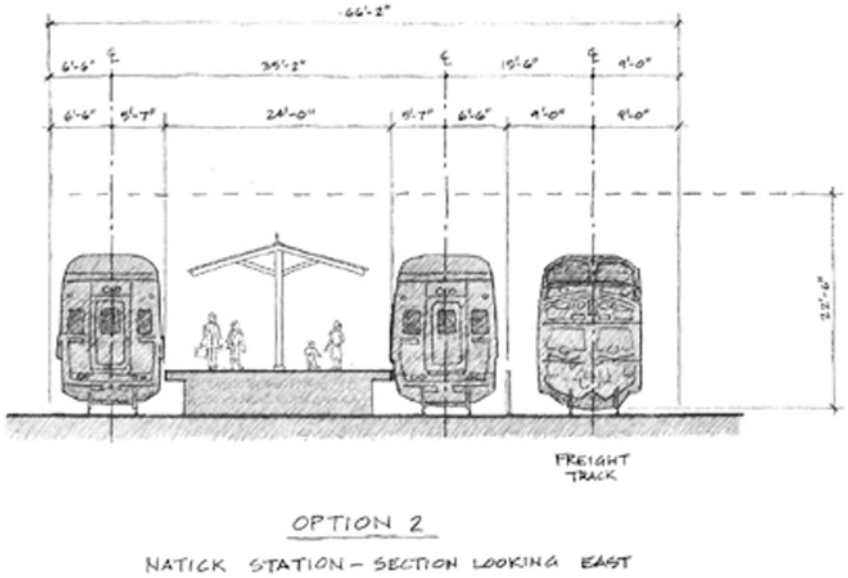


Figure 64: Vertical Access to Station Platform Example



Figure 65: Potential Connection between Station and Rail Trail

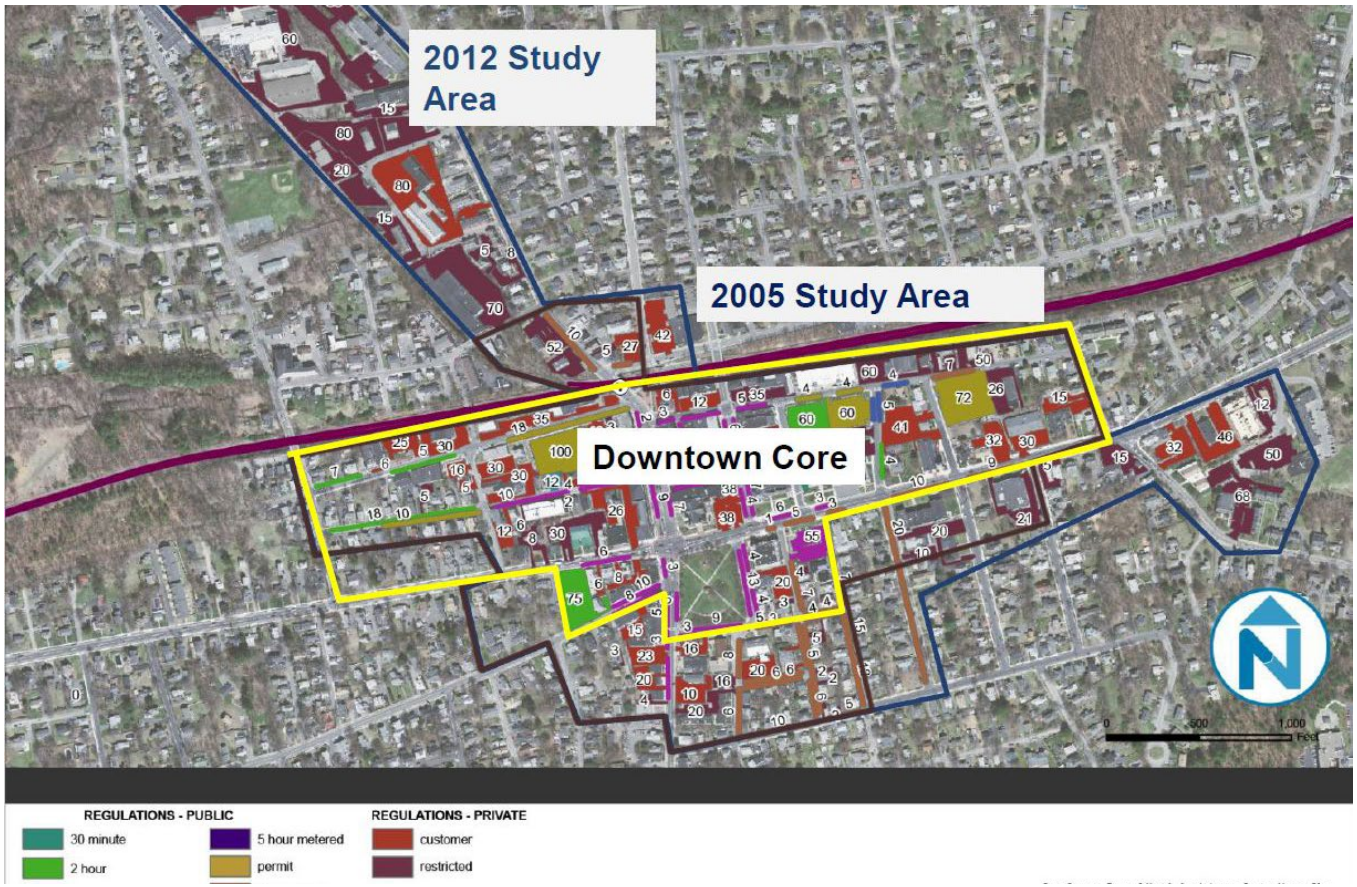


11. Parking: Overview

Parking: Overview

Lack of available parking in Natick Center is often cited as an inconvenience today and a potential hindrance to further development. This perception is not unanimous; indeed, from the first public forum and survey comments ranged from those stating parking was a major problem to those who felt that supply was perfectly adequate. Nonetheless, the Town has embarked on several parking studies, dating back to 2005. In 2012 Nelson/ Nygaard and the Cecil Group performed an updated parking study.

Figure 66: Nelson/ Nygaard Parking Study Area



Parking: Overview

The 2012 Nelson/ Nygaard parking study area contains 456 on-street spaces and 314 spaces in public lots, as well as an additional 1,943 restricted parking spaces. Parking utilization was adjusted from the 2005 study to take into account several changes in the parking supply. The main results of this study were:

- Existing parking supply exceeds demand, although many spaces are further from the core of Natick Center;
- Some blocks within Natick Center were at capacity;
- The Town should focus on parking management methods to enhance efficient use of parking resources; and,
- The construction of two structured parking facilities could be sufficient to absorb the maximum "build out" potential development of Natick Center.

In 2014 a Parking Advisory Committee, appointed by the Board of Selectmen, made additional recommendations related to short and long-term parking solutions in Natick Center. Although the conclusions in some cases differed from the Nelson/ Nygaard study, the recommendations were, overall, similar: first focus on parking management strategies and also pursue the feasibility of constructing one or two structured parking facilities.

Parking management recommendations include new parking meters, new rates, and new permit zones. In 2015, implementation of these recommendations began.

In addition, in late 2015 the Town issued a Request for Information to gauge developer interest and feasibility of constructing a garage on one or two Town-owned lots on Middlesex Avenue and South Avenue.

Figure 67: Location of potential structured parking facility



Angle-in Parking along Main Street

One specific area of concern for the Town is the 42 angle-in parking spaces on Main Street between South Avenue and Route 135. Angle-in parking poses a number of safety issues due to poor visibility when drivers vacate a space. One of the most common causes of accidents is people backing out of standard angled parking without being able to see on-coming traffic.[14] It is especially dangerous for cyclists, as collisions with cars even at low speeds can cause serious injury. The existing roadway also has excessively wide travel lanes and long crossing distances for pedestrians.

The Town, therefore, is considering an alternate parking arrangement, either converting to parallel parking or reverse-angle parking (described below). Through the public forum and survey, participants provided feedback on whether they wanted to keep the existing arrangement or convert to an alternative.

88% of Forum Participants and 67% of Survey Participants would like a change from the angle-in parking

Figure 68: Main Street Preferred Parking Configuration

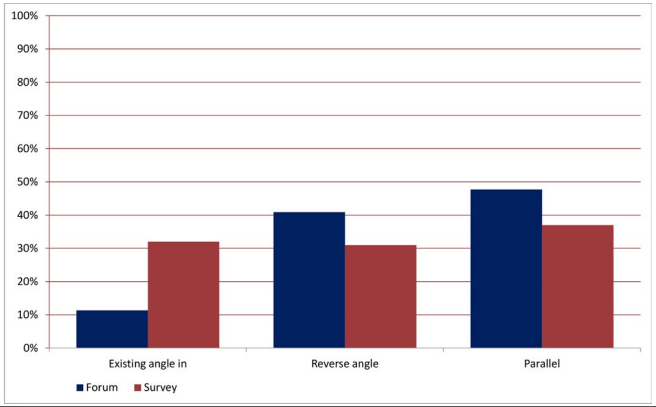


Figure 69: Route 27 Angle-in Parking - Existing Conditions

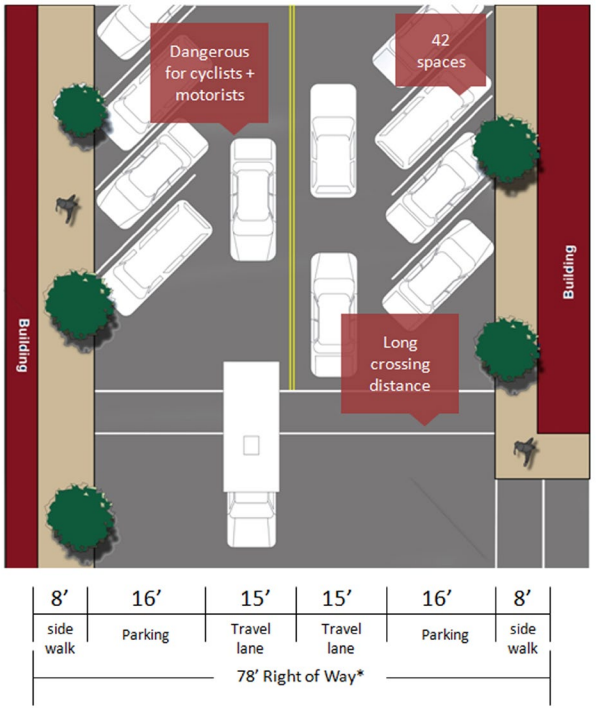


*Diagram is for illustrative purposes and is not to scale

[14]http://www.hampdenhappenings.org/HCC_WEB/Zoning_Pdf/RAP/San_Francisco.pdf

Reverse-angle parking (also known as back-in/head-out diagonal parking) provides numerous benefits over conventional angle-in parking. Both reverse-angle and traditional angle parking have similar dimensions, and therefore there would be no change in parking capacity. But reverse angle parking provides far greater safety benefits due to better visibility when vacating a space. This safety benefit is especially important for cyclists. The driver is able to easily see the cyclist when exiting the stall. Several cities have seen a reduction in number of accidents after implementation of reverse-angle parking.[15] In addition, reverse-angle parking puts loading into trunks on the curb, rather than the street.

The main drawback to reverse-angle parking is that because it is a less common form of parking, some motorists may be confused or have difficulty parking. As with parallel parking, the driver enters the stall by stopping and backing in. Once a driver understands the method, it should be easier than parallel parking as it requires less maneuvering and precision.

[15] http://www.hampdenhappenings.org/HCC_WEB/Zoning_Pdf/RAP/San_Francisco.pdf

Figure 70: Bicyclist's view of reverse-angle parking (Source: T. Boulanger, Transportation Services, Vancouver, WA)



Figure 71: Motorist's view from reverse-angle parking space (Source: T. Boulanger, Transportation Services, Vancouver, WA)



Figure 72: Signage to explain reverse-angle parking (Source: City of Kelowna, British Columbia, Canada)



Parking: Overview

There are several alternatives for implementing the reverse-angle parking on Main Street. Inclusion of bicycle lanes may be possible on the roadway segment, thereby continuing the connection of bicycle lanes being included as part of the planned Main Street reconstruction north of the station. Curb bump-outs can reduce the crossing distance for pedestrians, improving their safety, as well.

Figure 73: Diagrams illustrating various reverse-angle parking alternatives

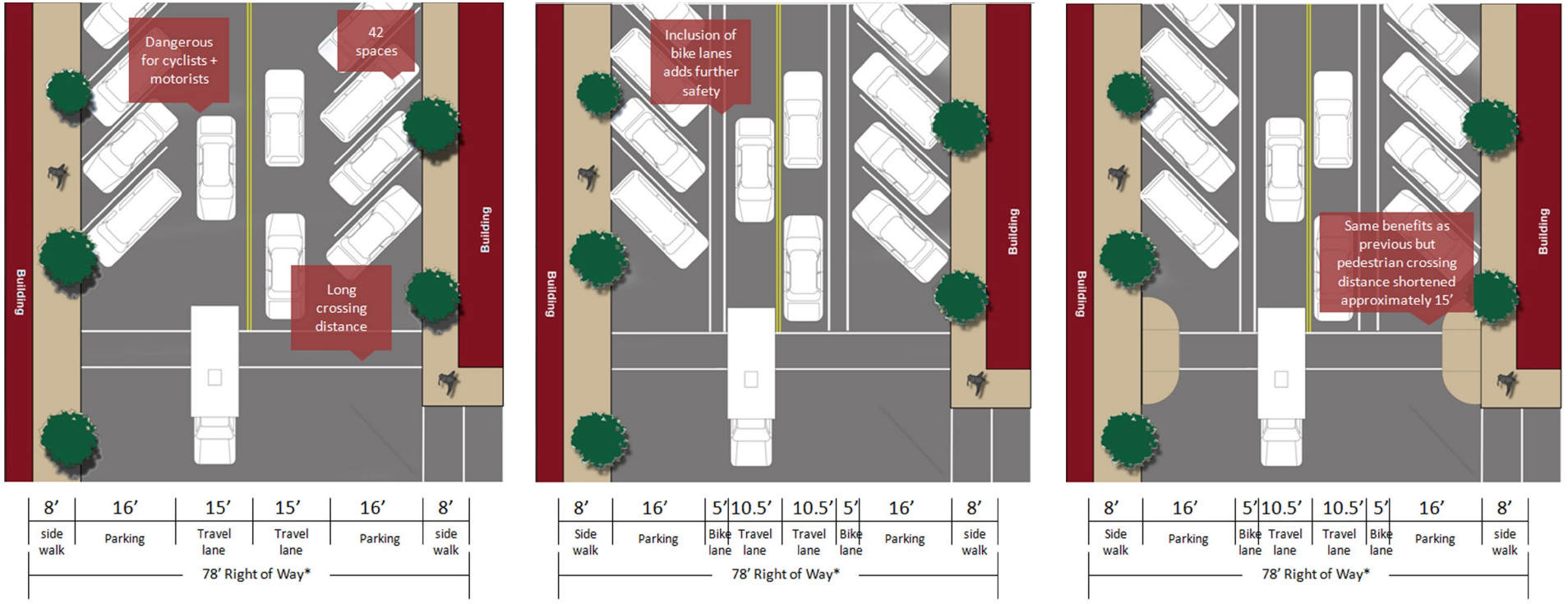


*Diagram is for illustrative purposes and is not to scale

Parallel parking would also provide numerous benefits – in addition to being safer it would provide additional space to widen sidewalks and it could add bicycle facilities. Parallel parking, however, would result in the loss of approximately 11 spaces. An existing covenant with adjacent property owners requires any change of parking in this roadway segment to be replaced in the vicinity. It is also a more expensive arrangement, as it would require design and construction funding to widen the sidewalks and make other improvements.

Figure 74: Route 27 Parallel Parking Alternative

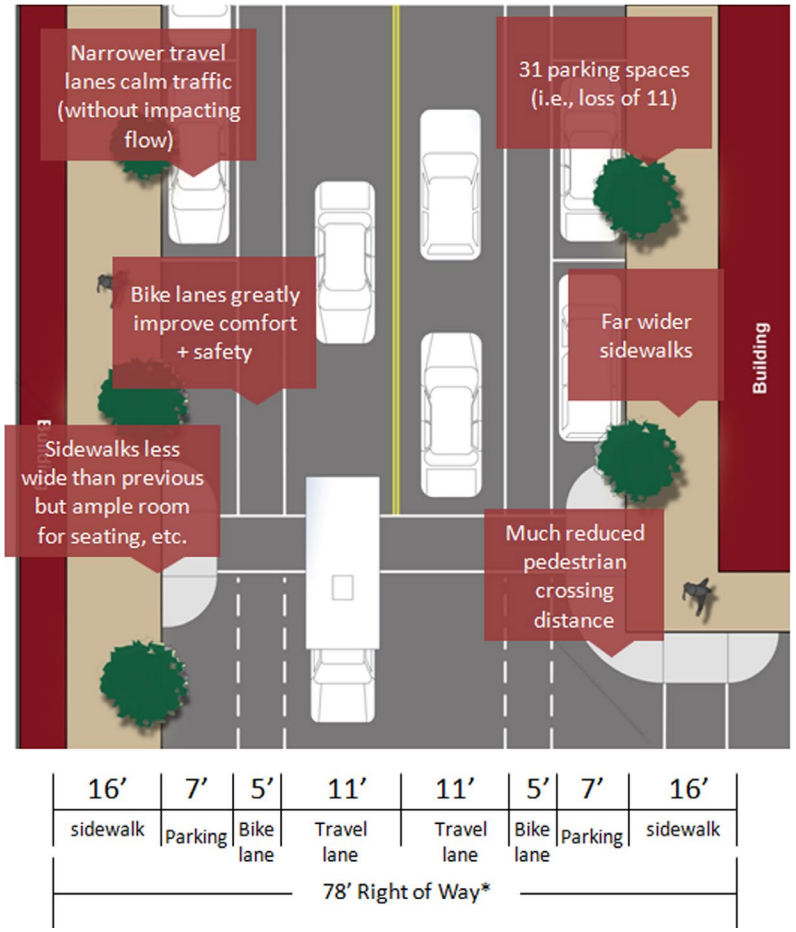


*Diagram is for illustrative purposes and is not to scale

I 2. Parking: Recommendations

General

Because the new meter rates and permit zones were only recently implemented, it is too soon to assess their success in managing parking. The Town should continue to monitor the effects of the new parking regime and make adjustments as needed and practicable.

In addition, the Town should install way-finding signage to assist motorists in finding the various public lots. If visitors to Natick Center do not realize there are potential parking spaces in the vicinity it creates the impression of a lack of adequate parking.

The Town should also review the proposals from the recent RFI to gauge the feasibility of structured parking facilities on one or two Town-owned lots.

Main Street Angle-In Parking

In the near term, MAPC recommends installing curb extensions at the Route 27 and Route 135 intersection. (Curb extensions cost approximately $10,000-$12,000 each.) The Town should also pilot reverse-angle parking. This can be tested on a relatively short-term basis with paint, which typically only lasts a season before needing to be repainted. If space allows, bicycle lanes can be included to further improve bicycle safety. During this period the Town can gather feedback on the success of the reverse-angle parking orientation, based upon driver and bicyclist feedback, as well as a safety analysis. Signage with simple directions and a Town-wide mailing can help educate drivers on how to properly park in this manner. If successful, the Town can transition to the more durable thermoplastic for the parking space striping.

Over the longer term, the Town can assess whether the loss of parking spaces resulting from a transition to parallel parking can be replaced at another site. The Town can also work on a design for the roadway segment, including wider sidewalks. Once funding is secured to implement the design, the Town can convert to parallel parking with wider sidewalks, curb extensions, and bicycle lanes.

13. Next Steps

Next Steps

This report sets forth a vision that builds upon Natick Center's considerable strengths to meet the community's future needs. The recommendations are not intended to all occur simultaneously, and the time, effort, and investment may vary. The Town should proactively work towards implementing the various recommendations, as resources allow. In addition, these recommendations can feed directly into the Town's upcoming master planning process. For example, many of the recommendations related to affordable housing could apply Town-wide.

While the Town cannot do everything at once, it is important to note that success begets success. Change can occur incrementally but the momentum created through this planning process should not be squandered. Furthermore, the recommendations for the various elements that comprise the vision must work together. For example, the participants taking part in this plan overwhelmingly want to see more restaurants. To achieve this several recommendations may need to work in concert:

- A marketing initiative to recruit restaurants;
- A change of zoning to promote more people from living in the vicinity; An adjustment of local liquor licensing rules;
- Additional events that attract customers to Natick Center;
- An expansion of areas that allow for restaurants on the ground floor;
- Pedestrian improvements that make walking to various restaurants safe and enjoyable; and,
- Parking improvements that make it easier to visit Natick Center.

The last several years have seen changes and proposals for future changes in Natick Center, ranging from new developments to multi-modal transportation improvements. As noted previously, change is inevitable in any community. Demographic and market shifts are signaling a break from the types of development and priorities that dominated the recent decades. This plan sets out a vision for the future and a roadmap to help achieve that vision over the short, medium, and long term.