



Downtown Framingham Transit Oriented Development Action Plan

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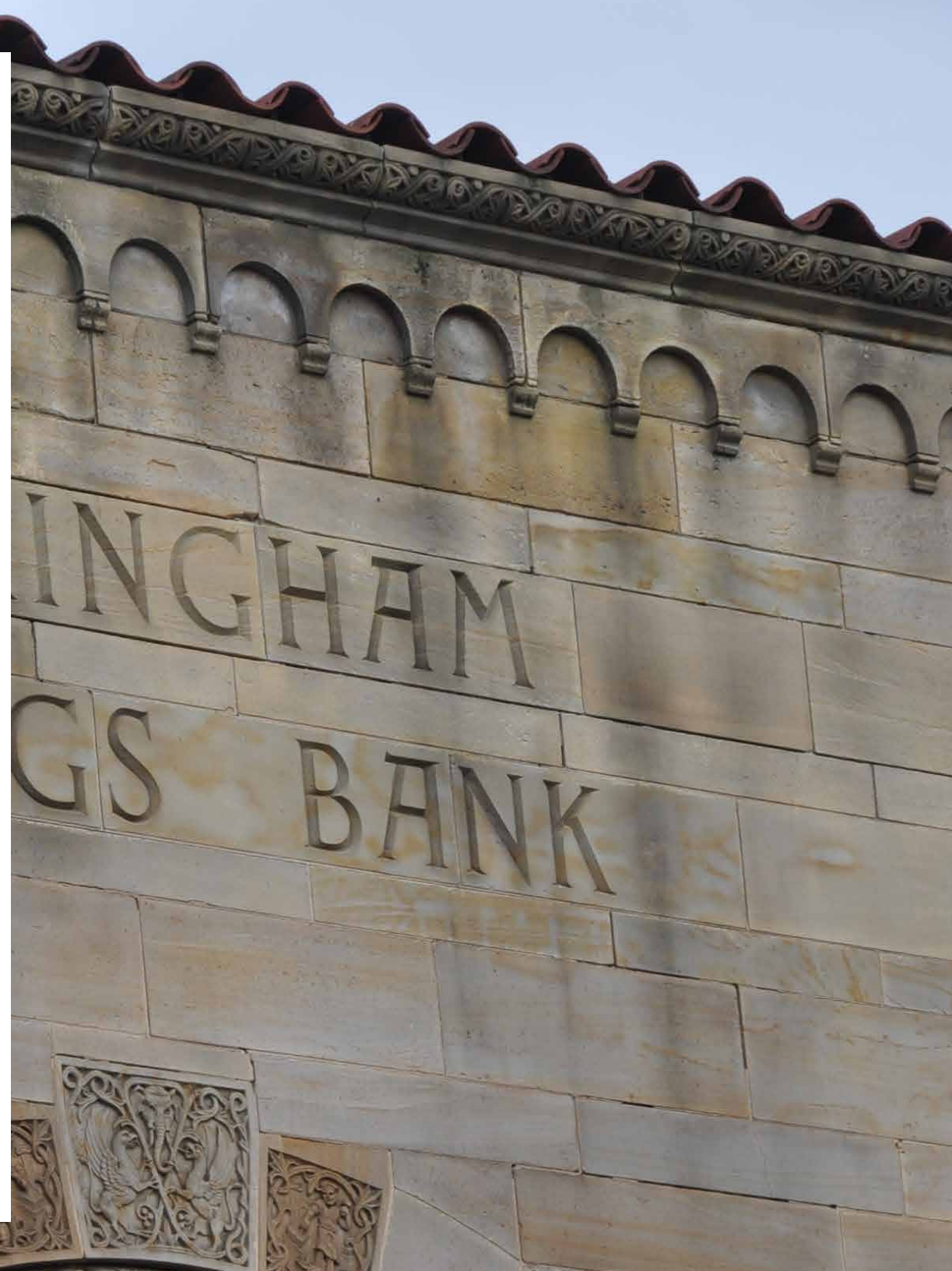
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2014 Downtown Framingham Vision Statement as developed by the TOD Roundtable:

Optimize land uses by encouraging higher density, transit-oriented development (TOD) in Downtown to take better advantage of existing infrastructure: especially Framingham MBTA commuter rail service from Downtown Framingham to Worcester and Boston and the MWRTA public transit system.

Support the multi-cultural businesses to strengthen a unique urban experience in Downtown that provides for residents and visitors by encouraging a mix of uses while respecting the character of the historic buildings and urban fabric.

Promote reinvestment and redevelopment of existing housing stock and create opportunities for new investment to increase housing in Downtown and provide more residential types for a diversity of incomes.

Provide increased tree canopy, passive open space, and active parks, and enhance linkages to natural resource areas including Farm Pond and Cushing Park.

Executive Summary

Now is a critical time for Downtown Framingham

Market preferences are shifting along with our region's demographics which is setting up a scenario where both younger and older residents want to live in walkable, urban, active, transit oriented locations. These types of places are unique and less common than the suburban auto-oriented corridors our cities and towns have been focused on for the last 50 years.

Recognizing these shifts in preference, the Town of Framingham in partnership with the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) and the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) embarked on an 8 month study to lay out a series of recommendations and action steps that a variety of public and private stakeholders could take to achieve the vision of enhancing Downtown Framingham and making it a more vibrant, walkable, transit oriented, economic hub.

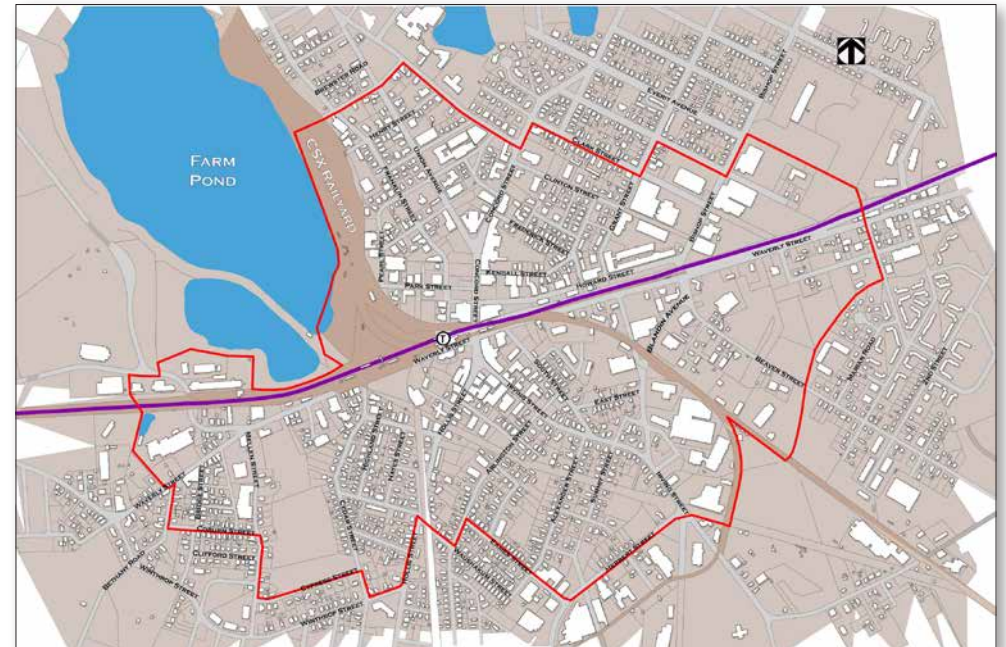
The study focused on the area within about a ten minute walk of the Framingham commuter rail station. The station is at the core of the Downtown with varying degrees of urbanism radiating out from that core. The project team, led by MAPC, was tasked with understanding the opportunities and challenges in Downtown and recommending ways the Town could capitalize on Downtown's unique position.

"We want to make Downtown Framingham a vibrant, urban, diverse, multi-cultural center that can really be a hub of economic activity in the MetroWest region."

- Summary Vision Statement for Downtown



Project Study Area Map



Opportunities in Downtown Framingham

Downtowns all across the Greater Boston region are experiencing a resurgence, especially ones that benefit from having quality transit service. The concept of transit oriented development, or higher density mixed-use development in close proximity to transit, is drawing private sector investment resulting in the production of new housing units and jobs in these locations. Across MetroWest, a number of communities are taking advantage of their downtowns and capitalizing on a market shift back to downtown living. Municipalities like Natick and Marlborough are making investments in transportation and enacting new zoning that will allow the additional development of housing, retail, and office space to take place.

Downtown Framingham is also well positioned to take advantage of these market trends and capitalize on their opportunities for future investment. In order to prepare the Town to take action, the project team undertook four different analyses as part of the Downtown plan with each element building on the findings of the previous one. These included a residential and commercial market analysis, a development feasibility analysis, a comprehensive zoning analysis, and an analysis of the current transportation network.

The different pieces were also informed by a significant public outreach process that included specific meetings with Downtown businesses and residents, as well as a larger public engagement effort to reach people town-wide. Those meetings provided input on key opportunities and challenges with developing in Downtown Framingham, and helped the project team understand resident and business concerns that need to be addressed as plans move forward.

Downtown Framingham has many assets that if positioned and leveraged correctly can create the environment for innovation and revitalization. The action steps laid out in this report are critical to improving upon the current foundation of Downtown. The time for action is now.

Downtown Framingham Planning and Analysis Steps

1 UNDERSTAND THE MARKET FOR NEW DEVELOPMENT to determine what changes may be needed to encourage additional residential and commercial investment.

2 DETERMINE FINANCIAL FEASIBILITY of new development to better understand size, scale, and parking needs to ensure zoning changes are not a barrier to new development.

3 CRAFT NEW ZONING that supports the financial feasibility model and promotes mixed-use and residential development consistent with the historic character of Downtown.

4 INVEST IN INFRASTRUCTURE that promotes walking, biking and transit use and eases the burden on visitors and employees who may be driving to Downtown.



Keys to Unlocking Downtown's Potential

Zone for What's Desired

Current suburban-style zoning regulations do not support the vision for a mixed-use, walkable, downtown core. A change to the current Central Business District zoning will help support a stronger and more active Downtown.

- > Expand the current Central Business (CB) District zone to encompass more parcels in Downtown.
- > Allow mixed-use and multifamily development in the Downtown, and reduce Special Permit requirements for all allowable uses in the CB District.
- > Update dimensional standards to reflect urban development patterns instead of suburban development patterns. Reduce setbacks, increase building heights, and increase lot coverage.
- > Reduce parking requirements in the Downtown for residential development. Offer incentives for shared parking agreements, proximity to public parking lots, or spaces for car sharing.
- > Create design standards that reflect the historic character of Downtown to help guide the design of new development.
- > Develop a separate Site Plan Review process for Downtown that is less onerous for smaller projects.

Invest in Transportation that Serves All Users

The infrastructure in Downtown is oriented to a car dominated place. The Town should invest in specific improvements that will make Downtown more pedestrian and bike friendly while respecting the needs of transit users and drivers.

- > Reconstruct sidewalks and stripe crosswalks along key corridors that connect the Downtown to surrounding neighborhoods.
- > Add roadway markings for cyclists and locate bike parking at key destinations in Downtown.
- > Work to open up access to the aqueduct trail network and facilitate an easier connection between Downtown and nearby Farm Pond.
- > Work with CSX to limit freight train crossings during morning and evening peak travel times. Request that trains limit the sounding of their horns as they approach and cross through Downtown.
- > Extend streetscape improvements planned for Concord Street to all other connecting roadway corridors to create a sense of arrival in Downtown. This must include pedestrian-scale lighting along all corridors.
- > Invest in wayfinding signage to direct both pedestrians and vehicles to parking locations and amenities in the Downtown.
- > Develop placemaking and programming strategies for public spaces to draw residents and visitors to Downtown. This can be done cheaply and easily with temporary events and activities.



Keys to Unlocking Downtown's Potential

Capitalize on the Market

Downtown Framingham is poised to take advantage of the shifting market and demographics in the region.

- > The market for residential development lies primarily with multifamily rental units with higher end finishes and building amenities to attract younger and older tenants.
- > The market for commercial development is limited. The current spending power in the area could possibly support another 11,000 - 26,000 square feet of retail space in the Downtown, and possibly another 5,000 - 12,000 square feet of office space.
- > Residents want to see more restaurants, shops, cafes, high end bars, and artist space in Downtown.
- > Downtown could be greatly enhanced from a market perspective by the pending decision of MassBay Community College to locate a campus in Downtown.

Public and Private Partnership

The Town must look for opportunities to partner with private sector developers to re-energize Downtown.

- > The costs of developing mixed-use and residential buildings in Downtown are close to exceeding potential profit, making development only marginally profitable.
- > The residential market has not been tested with new product in some time. It may take a few smaller residential projects to prove the market in Downtown.
- > Parking requirements are too high for residential development in Downtown. Parking costs can be lowered by adjusting parking requirements through zoning changes.
- > The Town should look for ways to partner with developers to help with the financial feasibility of projects. This could occur through tax incentives, infrastructure assistance, or land assembly.

Illustrative Rendering of a Hypothetical Redevelopment Scenario at Pearl Street





Visualizing Change in Downtown Framingham

The report that follows goes into more detail on the four elements and key recommendations mentioned above. If the Town is successful in implementing the recommendations in this report, it will set up the Downtown for future success and take it one step closer to the realization of the vision.



Images Courtesy of Fuss & O'Neill



1

Introduction

Introduction and Purpose

For years, Downtown Framingham has been talked about as a place that could be, and should be, the center of activity for MetroWest. The Downtown area has easy access to commuter rail, bus routes, interstates, and state highways. Many of these transportation routes provide direct access between Framingham and Boston to the east and Worcester to the west. Framingham itself is also a destination for employment within MetroWest with large employers located in the 9/90 and Tech Park clusters, as well as significant retail and service sector jobs spread across the town. Different land uses and building types can be found in the Downtown from historical 3-4 story mixed-use buildings, to industrial and light manufacturing, to single family homes. The Downtown also offers a unique and burgeoning market for ethnic restaurants, shops, and services catering to a diverse range of residents and visitors.

Unfortunately, a previous generation of devaluation of downtown environments and devotion to the automobile resulted in many anchor tenants moving out of Downtown Framingham and settling in lower-density pockets of commercial and residential development elsewhere across town. This migration out of Downtown created a legacy of surface parking lots and underutilized properties. The Downtown reflects a lack of investment since the manufacturing industry began its decline in the 1980s. Capital dollars for improvements in Downtown had to compete with requests from other locations in the town.

This led to disinvestment in the infrastructure that once supported a walkable and active center.

As a whole, Downtown Framingham contains many of the pieces needed to support a thriving, economically viable, and active center. National trends and market preferences for urban living have made their way to cities and towns in Massachusetts. Communities like Natick, Lowell, and Lawrence are seeing great changes because of their Downtown character and access to transit. From a market perspective, Downtown Framingham is at the edge of transition and requires thoughtful investment and a collaborative set of partners to push into a new era of revitalization and economic activity.

The **Downtown Framingham Transit Oriented Development Action Plan** was developed to provide background on current economic, regulatory, and infrastructure opportunities and barriers in the Downtown and recommend specific steps various stakeholders could take to maximize the potential of this critical asset. The plan lays out current conditions, explores various options for improving the current conditions, and recommends action steps necessary to realize the transformation of Downtown Framingham over time. This plan provides a road map for the Town to follow as it proceeds with focusing efforts on creating a downtown where people can live, work, shop, and play in close proximity to public transit options.

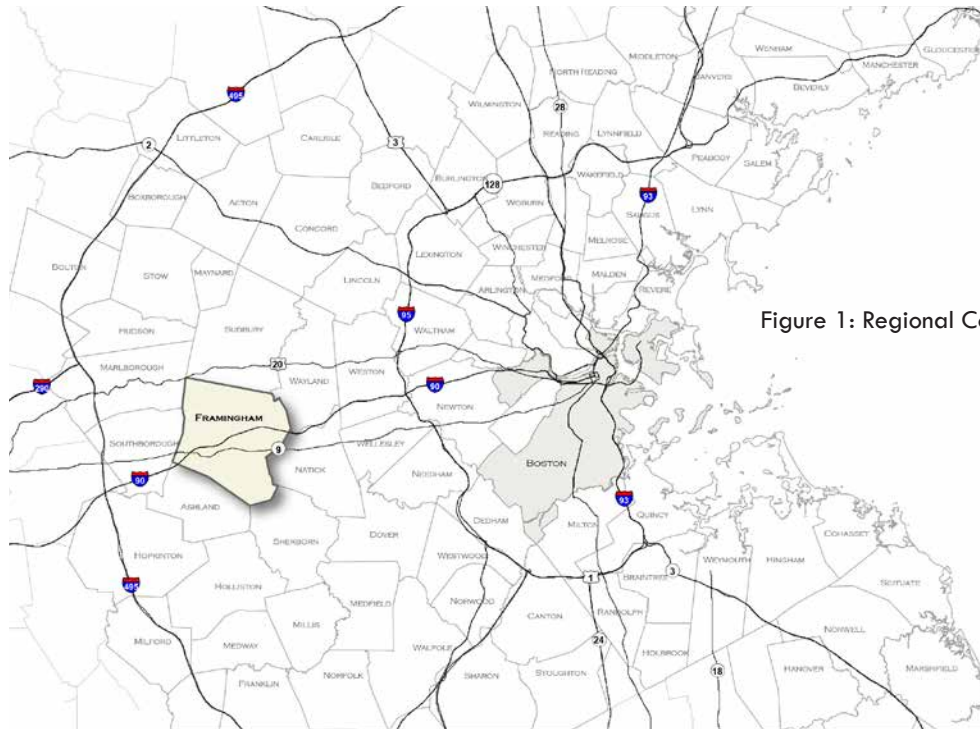


Figure 1: Regional Context Map

Building on the Vision

In 2008/09, the Town of Framingham hired BETA Group (in association with The Cecil Group and FXM Associates) to complete a Downtown Study which laid out the vision for connecting transportation and land use changes over time. The study focused attention on the issues and potential solutions to improving the intersection of Routes 126 and 135 and the at-grade railroad crossing. The land use scenarios developed for Downtown were also analyzed based on the potential transportation solutions to the at-grade crossing.

The conclusions reached at the end of that planning process were to pursue a mixed-use development vision that:

- Revitalized existing historic building stock.
- Reduce the number of underutilized parcels through infill development.
- Increase the amount of new development along Route 135.

The mixed-use development scenario was also coupled with a preferred transportation scenario which recommended depressing Route 135 under Route 126. This alternative was deemed to have the least impact on existing building stock, future development options, and pedestrian/bicycle connectivity north and south in Downtown.

Unfortunately, as this study concluded the country plummeted into the worst economic conditions since the Great Depression. This not only curtailed any development plans for Downtown Framingham, but also placed a halt on almost all major development plans in our region.

As the market bounced back, a renewed interest was placed on urban living with particular focus on places with access to public transportation. The transit oriented nature of these places appeal to the younger and older generations

who are looking to live in walkable, bikeable, active, and amenity-rich urban environments with easy access to transportation options. It is this renewed interest that is driving the resurgence of downtowns across the Commonwealth, and will drive the resurgence of Downtown Framingham if the Town and other public and private partners work in concert to achieve the goal of making Downtown a mixed-use, walkable center.

Figure 2: 2008 Downtown Vision Plan's Preferred Land Use Scenario Map



Continuing the Conversation

In 2013, recognizing the market had mostly recovered and renewed interest in downtown locations, the Town of Framingham created a Downtown Transit Oriented Development (TOD) Roundtable. This group brought together key stakeholders from town boards, town staff, Downtown business owners and property owners, residents, developers, community colleges, and many more. The Roundtable met for several months and worked in coordination with Fuss & O'Neill, a consulting firm hired by the Town, to explore the question **"Why hasn't TOD materialized in Downtown Framingham?"**

The work done by Fuss & O'Neill with direct input from area developers revealed that the Town's regulations and policies were not promoting the type of development consistent with TOD principles. Key takeaways from their work included:

- A need for density to create critical mass and justify aggregation of parcels for development.
- A need for less restrictive off-street parking regulations reflecting the proximity to public transit and other amenities.
- A need for flexibility in land uses and ability to meet changing market demands.

A healthy mix of uses that incorporates additional housing Downtown coupled with regulatory changes that make it easier for the private sector to invest in Framingham are key pieces to realizing the TOD vision. Questions still remained as to the steps necessary to catalyze action from both public and private sector actors.

Downtown Framingham TOD Action Plan

In the Spring of 2014, the Town and the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) contracted with the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) to bring together a team of experts in planning, economics, and engineering to recommend action steps the Town could take to implement the vision for Downtown. Over the course of about eight months, the team worked with the Town, the TOD Roundtable, and the public to put together the action plan. The following chapters explain the major findings and recommendations for implementing the vision for Downtown.

"We want to make Downtown Framingham a vibrant, urban, diverse, multi-cultural center that can really be a hub of economic activity in the MetroWest region."

- Summary Vision Statement for Downtown



Conceptual rendering of what new infill development could look like in Downtown Framingham. Image Credit - Fuss & O'Neill



2

CREATION

Proving the Market *in Downtown Framingham*



danforthART
MUSEUM | SCHOOL

Who Lives and Works Here?

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. In fast-growing downtown areas, residents today tend to be younger, more diverse, increasingly educated, and underemployed. Creating a place that supports this demographic, but also serves the needs of the existing community is critical. This section provides an overview of the demographic make up of the Downtown area and how it compares to a larger capture area that covers a majority of the Town. More detailed information can be found on the project website in the Downtown Housing Report Supply and Demand Report.

Population Demographics

The statistics presented in this section will focus on the area within a half-mile of the Framingham Downtown commuter rail station and compare that to a three-mile capture area around the commuter rail station. The half-mile area is consistent with the study area for this project, and will be used for comparison purposes. Overall, total population in the half-mile area grew by about 26% (837 people) from 1990-2010. By comparison, the three-mile area's population increased by about 5% (3,031 people) during the same time period. Nearly all growth in the half-mile area occurred between 1990 and 2000, whereas most growth for the larger area occurred between 2000-2010.

Table 1: Population Change 1990-2010, and Estimates for the Year 2019							
Study Area	1990	2000	2010	% Change 1990-2000	% Change 2000-2010	2019	% Change 2010-2019
Half-Mile	3,235	4,072	4,079	25.9%	0.2%	4,083	0.1%
Three-Mile	58,200	61,231	64,222	5.2%	4.9%	69,472	8.2%
Source: ESRI 1990-2000 Comparison Profile, 2010 Census Profile							

Population by Age

Overall, the average age of residents in the half-mile area is lower than the average for the three-mile area. About 22% of the population in the Downtown are young professionals (ages 25-34) and 33% are experienced professionals (ages 35-54). There are very few seniors (ages 65+) in the Downtown area which contributes to the lower average age. The three-mile area has twice as many seniors as the Downtown area. Population growth by age cohort shows growth in school-age children as well as growth in the 55+ cohort, which is consistent with regional population growth projections due to Baby Boomers aging in place. Downtowns across the Greater Boston region are seeing an up-tick in the number of young professionals and middle-aged/seniors who are seeking a more urban lifestyle with access to public transportation.

33.7

Average age of residents in the half-mile area.

37.3

Average age of residents in the three-mile area.

Source: ESRI, 2014

Population by Race/Ethnicity

Downtown Framingham has a very diverse population which has helped support and grow the niche marketplace for ethnic restaurants, shops, and grocery stores. In 2010, 53% of the population in the half-mile area self-identified as non-Hispanic White, while 47% self-identified as a minority*. The half-mile area has become significantly more diverse over the last 20 years, which is consistent with changes that have occurred in many of the region's larger city and town centers. Changes in racial and ethnic composition across the three-mile area also saw changes similar to the half-mile area but not as significant.

*The US Census classifies minorities as those who identify as Black, Asian, American Indian, Pacific Islander, Other Race, or two or more races.

Educational Attainment

Educational attainment for residents in the half-mile area has been increasing steadily since 1990, with about 45% of residents having completed some college or more as of 2010. This was up from 41% in 1990. The number of residents obtaining a bachelor's degree is up 4.5% over that same period of time. Compared to the three-mile area, the half-mile area educational attainment is significantly lower. For example, in 2010 16.6% of residents attained a bachelor's degree in the half-mile area compared to 28% in the three-mile area. Information on attainment in the half-mile area can be see in Figure 3.

Employment

The unemployment rate in the half-mile area was nearly four percentage points higher compared to the three-mile area. In 2014, unemployment in the half-mile area was around 9%. Higher unemployment rates in the downtown area could be the result of lower levels of education and therefore not as many job choices, resulting in lower incomes for residents. Overall unemployment across the Town of Framingham was about 6% in 2014. Many areas across the Commonwealth are still recovering from job losses as a result of the Great Recession, therefore these unemployment levels could rebound.

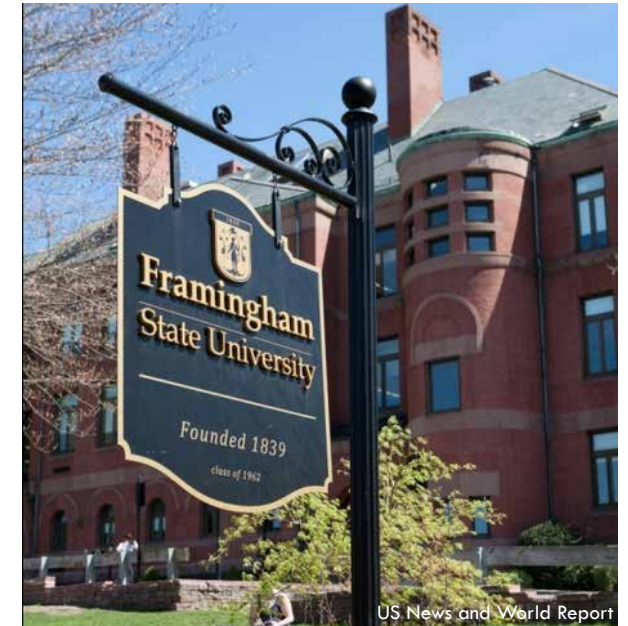
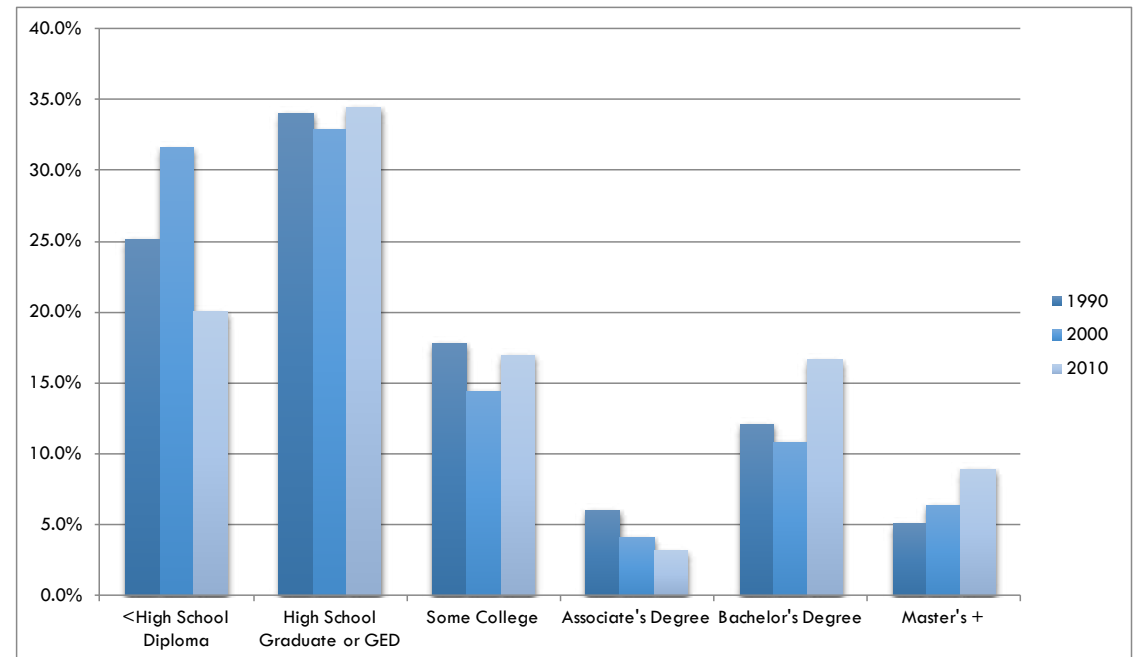


Figure 3: Educational Attainment in the Half-Mile Area (1990-2010)



Source: ESRI 2014

The Market for Downtown

In order to develop a strategy for positioning Downtown Framingham as a place for investment, it is important to understand the types of uses and level of development that might be expected to locate here. As part of the planning process, RKG Associates and LDS Consulting undertook a residential and commercial market analysis. These two pieces provide some projections for what could occur in Downtown if the right conditions are set by the Town and the private sector responds favorably. The market studies also provide some price point comparisons, especially on the residential side, to show what other similar developments are leasing or selling units at. The market analysis is also helpful for informing zoning recommendations. For example, ensuring that commercial development is not over-prescribed as part of the zoning regulations.

Similar to the demographic analysis, the market analysis concentrated on three market areas: a quarter-mile radius around the train station (primary market area), half-mile radius (secondary market area), and three-mile area (tertiary market area). The primary and secondary areas cover a majority of the Downtown study area, while the tertiary area provides a wider view of what is happening in the housing and commercial markets, as well as helping to understand what additional revenue could be captured in Downtown Framingham by attracting visitors from outside. The following sections outline the findings from the market study. More information can be found on

the project website in the Downtown Market Analysis report.

Residential Market

The primary (PMA) and secondary (SMA) market areas have an older housing stock, mostly rental units, and cater to younger professionals ages 25-40 which reflects existing housing conditions and the availability of smaller rental units at a variety of price points. It may also reflect the desire of younger people to live in a downtown environment, as suggested during the team's interviews with landlords and property managers. Compared to the tertiary (TMA) market area, the PMA and SMA contains a population that is far more diverse, racially and culturally, than the population of the town as a whole. This too may be driving some of the demand for rental housing in the Downtown area.

The market team also examined units rented in the last 12 months via MLS listings to better understand product availability and price points. Units rented in the last 12 months in the Downtown area tended to be older, did not include utilities in the rent, and had fewer amenities keeping rent levels lower than a new amenity rich product. Overall, the team found a strong Downtown rental market with essentially 100% occupancy across all product types (95% occupancy is an indicator of demand). Reportedly, there is low turnover in the Downtown and no incentives were being offered to prospective tenants.

The team also looked at average rents by unit type for one- and two-bedroom rental units to better understand price points for different types of apartments with varying degrees of amenities. The cost comparison revealed that the newer Dennison Triangle apartment building in Downtown Framingham, which was renovated in 2007, is bringing in rents for one-bedroom units at \$1,600 per month and two-bedroom units between \$1,788 and \$1,913 per month. These units are some of the newer product on the market, and are located in a building with more amenities. The high occupancy rate (100%) and higher rents show that with the right product, higher income professionals will locate in Downtown Framingham.

It is also worth noting that residential building permit activity in the Town is up over the last 2^{3/4} years, showing that residential development is happening on a smaller scale in the Downtown area.



Dennison Apartments, Downtown Framingham

Residential Market Opportunities

Based on the research undertaken by the team, Downtown has needs for all types of housing and at a variety of price points. Given the success of newer residential developments like the 1 Kendall Street apartments and VTT's multiple projects in the Downtown, there is a particular need for more quality rental stock. The proximity of Downtown to area colleges and universities may also play into demand for rental housing. During discussions with representatives from Framingham State University, they noted there are forty-eight units currently under construction in the Downtown area, and stated a need for thirty additional units.

In addition, the successful reuse of the Dennison building as high-end rental apartments in a healthy economy and the high-end condominiums at 23 Beech Street suggest that higher-income households want to live closer to the Downtown. While it is difficult to predict exactly how many households will want to live within walking distance to the commuter rail station, all the elements are present in the Downtown to attract a transit oriented consumer. Nonetheless, the team anticipates a need for moderately-sized rental developments (20-40 units) with one and two bedroom units and moderately sized condominium developments (8-12 units) in either townhouses or flats. As these initial smaller projects develop and are successful, they will help pave the way for larger mixed-use and residential projects that could add a more significant number of housing units in the Downtown.

The current challenge in Downtown Framingham is the market has not been tested in decades with a larger development project, which leaves questions unanswered about the ability of new construction to be profitable at today's costs and achievable rent levels. To get development kick-started, it may take a few smaller projects with less risk to prove higher rents can be achieved in this location. The development feasibility analysis will provide additional information on this topic later in the report.

Commercial Market

The market team also performed an analysis to capture the existing commercial market, as well as potential future demand for both retail and office development in Downtown. As part of the initial data collection, the team completed an inventory of businesses within a quarter-mile of the commuter rail station. The in-field and supplemental on-line research identified approximately 211 businesses in that area. The businesses inventoried were mostly small-sized, averaging 5 employees each. The most prevalent types of businesses in the Downtown are restaurants, hair salons, insurance agencies, law offices, tax preparation centers, money transfer services, banks, convenience stores, travel agencies, furniture and clothing stores, churches/religious organizations, dentists, and social service agencies/organizations. The businesses that employ the highest number of persons are food related such as restaurants, bakeries and small convenience stores. In addition, there are several large social service

organizations and one large insurance company in the Downtown. Overall, the sizes and types of businesses in Downtown Framingham are similar to what may be found in many other downtowns across the region. However, the businesses in Downtown Framingham cater to a very diverse clientele which provides a

Diversity of businesses in Downtown Framingham



unique marketing proposition for the businesses and the Town. Downtown Framingham could capitalize on the diversity of the businesses and market the Downtown as a place to find unique and interesting food options, grocery stores, and retail establishments. It could be this marketing angle that may set Downtown Framingham apart from other downtowns in MetroWest and draw visitors from all over the region. Retaining this diversity is important for maintaining existing businesses and marketing the Downtown. If rents do increase over time, the Town and developers could consider rent subsidies tied to the commercial spaces themselves. These could be subsidized through tax incentive programs, a rent subsidy/grant program, or a lower rent charge by the developer to support local business owners.

Retail Market Opportunities

The market team reviewed household spending demand and retail sales within each of the three radii of the Downtown study area, resulting in estimates of sales leakage (local demand not being captured by local merchants). Sales leakage could be recaptured by attracting local demand to stores in Downtown instead of those local dollars being spent in other municipalities. The potential recapture of a portion of retail sales leakage could serve to increase the sales of existing merchants in Framingham, possibly by making them aware of missed opportunities requiring a change in merchandising, marketing or operations. Additionally, a potential recapture of sales leakage could also encourage new

retail development to fill gaps in the retail venues or to capitalize on existing strengths, including additional grocery and restaurant uses. Improved marketing, product and service delivery, and bringing more people to the Downtown will all help with recapture for local and out-of-town spending.

Assuming sales leakage recapture rates of 3 percent to 7 percent, Downtown Framingham could potentially support an additional **11,400 SF to 26,600 square feet (SF)** of retail space, notably for smaller, niche retail rather than broad based consumer goods. Estimated sales data for the existing Downtown businesses indicates average sales of \$235,000 (legal services); \$150,000 (repair and service shops); \$225,000 (business services); \$80,000 (personal services); \$125,000 (general retail); and \$360,000 (dining and drinking establishments). The market team considers these sales borderline to support new retail development, but could be supported well within the current average rent range for retail in Downtown Framingham (\$8 to \$12/SF). This suggests a need for mixed-use development or possible renovations and/or repositioning of existing space. Similar to the residential market findings, the current retail rent levels in Downtown Framingham are likely not high enough to support the construction of new retail space unless that new space is part of a larger development with a mix of uses.

Office Market Opportunities

Based on historic trends and projected

employment gains for Framingham, at nearly 5,800 jobs in selected industry sectors by 2022, the market team projects a town-wide annual demand for 181,000 SF of non-residential building space, mostly in the health care industry sector. Much of this demand could likely be accommodated by existing vacancies, projects under development or increased utilization of existing space. Some demand would be reflected in a desire for new development, particularly for owner-occupants or tenants with specialized needs, such as medical space.

Assuming conservative capture rates (3 percent to 7 percent) of the annual demand for office space indicates an opportunity for additional occupancy of **5,400 SF to 12,700 SF** in the Downtown. The greatest opportunity, as reflected by employment growth, is for finance, insurance and other professional services and health care services, with the latter also reflecting a strong location quotient for Framingham relative to the Metro South/West WIA. The proximity of Downtown to the MetroWest Medical Center is also a plus. Most of the existing Downtown commercial space, consisting primarily of older Class B and Class C space, is rented at lease rates averaging \$8 to \$12/SF, which would not typically support speculative development. In the team's opinion, it is possible that new commercial space may be developed as part of a mixed-use project, partnered with residential development in order to augment construction expenses and would require lease rates at or above prevailing rates.

Future Market Opportunities

Throughout this planning process, several opportunities arose that could have an impact on market demand in Downtown Framingham. The most notable being the possible location of a downtown campus to support MassBay Community College. Currently, the college is seeking anywhere from 2 to 9 acres of land in Framingham for a downtown campus to include 50,000 to 100,000 square feet for academic programming space and a potential need for 550 parking spaces. During our discussions with representatives from MassBay, they indicated an anticipated growth in student population from the current 1,800 up to 2,500 students. While MassBay is a commuter-oriented institution, it is possible that some students may seek housing in Downtown Framingham which could help with residential demand. This could also offer up opportunities for partnerships between MassBay, the development community, and the Town to support the needs of the college while bringing new residents and business patrons to Downtown. Bringing in a new daytime and evening population to Downtown Framingham would not only lend support to new housing development, but would also bring additional spending power to support existing and future business in the Downtown. A younger, college-age population will likely be looking for many of the things we have heard from the public at large; coffee shops, restaurants, cafes, a small grocer, pubs, and support for the arts. Some of these businesses already exist in Downtown, but could be supported by additional uses that are not here today.

A second opportunity, related to the MassBay proposal, is the Town-owned land submitted as part of the MassBay request for potential campus locations. The Town, as part of the package, offered the Memorial Hall building, the Danforth building, and the Pearl Street parking garage. As of the issuance of this report, no decision has been made by MassBay on their preferred location. However, if the Town-owned sites were to be selected it would open up opportunities to not only support the MassBay campus but also opportunities for a public/private partnership to develop new town facilities in the Downtown. For example, if the Memorial Building were to be taken over by MassBay the Town would need to find a new location for their employees. The Town could partner with a developer and sign a lease to

be a major anchor tenant as part of an office development or a mixed-use development in the Downtown. This would provide a developer with a long-term stable tenant to anchor a new development.

The final opportunity worth noting in the Downtown area is the CSX rail yard along the east side of Farm Pond. While this would be a long-term opportunity to support housing and economic development in Downtown Framingham, it is unlikely that the rail operations will be relocated anytime soon. The Town should continue to pursue conversations with CSX, MassDOT, and other state agencies to determine the best course of action over time to open this area up for open space and development.

Figure 4: Location of Town-Owned Land for MassBay Downtown Campus



Recognizing it's Time for a Change

In addition to quantitative analysis on market supply and demand and reviewing the Downtown area demographics, the project team also conducted a series of public meetings to gain insight and feedback from residents, business owners, property owners, and regional stakeholders on the future of Downtown Framingham. While there were concerns noted during our discussions with the public, there was optimism, hope, and excitement about the future of Downtown. Many people recognized that Downtown has many of the features of other successful downtowns in the region, it is a matter of enhancing and improving those features to make them more attractive to both private investment and people who may want to live, work, and shop in the Downtown. There are many perceptions that need to be clarified with the public and key decision makers to enable change to occur in Downtown. Bridging this divide between perception and reality is necessary to bring all decision makers to the table and create a common understanding of what the real opportunities are and what real challenges must be overcome.

Summary of the most frequently mentioned opportunities and challenges in Downtown Framingham

Opportunities

- Keep Downtown unique with local businesses, and build on their success
- Roadway project along Concord Street will help with pedestrian safety and streetscape improvements
- Bring public art into the Downtown
- Renovation of older building stock is important
- Open up access to Farm Pond
- Infill development can help plug holes in the street frontage
- Opportunity for more housing, people can walk to what they need
- More bike infrastructure
- Make Downtown a place where people of all ages want to come and take advantage of the commuter rail

Challenges

- Zoning regulations have been an impediment to new development
- Traffic and rail crossing cause congestion
- Difficult to know where to park
- Need safer pedestrian crossings
- Street lighting is limited
- Create a cohesive streetscape that ties Downtown together
- Perception that there are public safety issues
- Taxes are high for small businesses
- Bridging the divide between north and south sides of Downtown

7

TOD Roundtable Meetings

A group formed by the Town to help guide the development of the plan and action items in Downtown. This group acted as a steering committee for the project and was comprised of Framingham residents and business owners, as well as local and regional developers.

1

Downtown Business Meeting

A meeting with local Downtown business owners to better understand the opportunities they see for the Downtown area and what challenges need to be overcome.

3

Downtown Resident Meetings

Meetings with residents of the Downtown area to better understand the opportunities they see for the Downtown area and what challenges need to be overcome.

1

Open House Event

Large public event to share the project team's analysis and recommendations with the public.

*More information on the public outreach process can be found on our website, www.mapc.org/framinghamTOD

In November 2014, the project team in partnership with the Town of Framingham hosted an open house event at Memorial Hall in Downtown Framingham to share initial findings and recommendations with the public. The project team was on hand along with Town staff to walk people through a series of interactive exercises intended to solicit feedback on a number of key opportunities and challenges in the Downtown area. These ranged from important transportation enhancements, to opinions on fixing zoning issues, to what types of new businesses would they like to see Downtown. The open house was attended by over 150 people representing all corners of Framingham. Some of the results from the meeting are shared below. A more thorough summary of the event can be found on the project website.

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Queremos ouvir sua opinião!

Plano de Implementação do Centro de Framingham



Odia Sejam vindos! Já open house para a apresentação do Plano de Implementação do Centro de Framingham!

Esta reunião será interativa e inclusiva. Organizaremos diversas atividades, para que você receba informações sobre o projeto, faça perguntas aos membros da equipe e compartilhe suas comentários e opiniões sobre o Centro de Framingham (Downtown Framingham).

A open house será logo, das 17:30 às 20:30. Será de uma vontade para passar tempo tempo quiser em cada uma das estações e se open house. Abaixo você encontrará instruções detalhadas sobre cada estação.



Estação 1: Onde você mora e trabalha, e como chega lá?
 Utilizando os mapas disponíveis na estação, nós mostre mais ou menos onde você vive, trabalha e como chega lá.

Estação 2: A Visão para o Centro de Framingham
 Para nossa estação e saiba mais sobre as ideias contidas no plano de visão como isso moldará o futuro do Centro.

Estação 3: O que é o Plano de Implementação do Centro?
 Semáforo, rubrica, o que os fluxos de ovoides e veja uma rápida apresentação explicativa do projeto.

Estação 4: Qual é a demanda por um novo desenvolvimento no Centro?
 Visite esta estação e conheça-nos que tipo de comércio e serviços você gostaria de ver no Centro.

Estação 5: Onde deve ocorrer o novo desenvolvimento no Centro?
 Usando os mapas disponíveis na estação, mostre-nos onde você acha que seria melhor que ocorresse o novo desenvolvimento.

Estação 6: Regras para regulamentar o desenvolvimento do Centro.
 Ore uma coleção de imagens, que não ajuda a compreender como você quer que sejam a aparência e o ambiente do Centro.

Estação 7: Os Meios de Transporte e o Centro
 Usando os mapas disponíveis na estação, mostre-nos quais são suas prioridades para o Centro, em relação aos meios de transporte.



Para obter mais informações e seguir o projeto online, visite:

www.openhouseframingham100.com



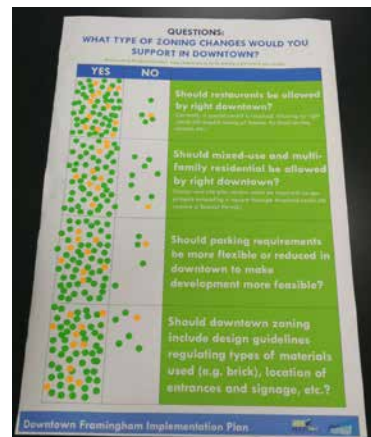




70% of attendees drive to work.



92% of attendees thought parking regulations should be more flexible.



23% of attendees believe opening up access to Farm Pond is the highest priority.



*Not all attendees chose to participate in each of the exercises.

The demographic information, market analysis, and input provided by the public throughout the process were all helpful and necessary pieces to building a set of action steps and recommendations for positioning Downtown Framingham for future success. The remaining sections of the report will focus on the opportunities to enhance Downtown, challenges and barriers that exist, and a set of recommendations and action steps that different stakeholders can act upon to help the Town realize its vision for Downtown Framingham.



A photograph of the Framingham Fire Department building, a red brick structure with a triangular pediment. The pediment features the words "FRAMINGHAM FIRE DEPARTMENT" in stone. Below the pediment is a large arched window, and on either side are two smaller rectangular windows. Each window contains a colorful mural. The left mural shows a person's face, the center mural shows a landscape with stars and a rainbow, and the right mural shows a person's face. A large blue number "3" is overlaid on the left side of the image.

3

Attracting Investment

in Downtown Framingham

ACTION STEPS - Attracting Investment

The Town of Framingham is exploring the type of changes that link transportation infrastructure improvements and land use decisions to further the vision of a transit oriented downtown. Looking ahead, innovative steps can be undertaken to set the stage for a combination of public and private investment that will take advantage of the transit and multimodal qualities of Downtown Framingham. For this community, transportation can serve as one of the catalysts for attracting and supporting reinvestment that is needed to revitalize the heart of Framingham. A vital, active and attractive downtown is central to defining the identity of the Town of Framingham and the MetroWest region while creating a walkable amenity-rich center that provides an alternative to automobile-oriented commercial corridors nearby.

The assets of Downtown Framingham have an increased attractiveness as demographics and living preferences shift toward walkable and transit oriented locations. The Downtown has an historic urban fabric that creates a strong sense of place based upon a walkable scale and block structure and active ground floor uses. Decades of suburban development across Framingham left Downtown in a relatively stagnant state. With the shift in market preferences, the time to reawaken Downtown has come.

Downtown Framingham needs more of a critical mass of activity to attract the type of uses that residents would like to see. A mix of uses that would be supported, in part, by residents of Downtown. New redevelopment must help create that critical mass and attract new residents who want a walkable environment and transit adjacency.

In order to attract this new investment, there are a number of steps the Town and other key stakeholders will need to take to maximize the opportunities in Downtown. It will require an understanding of the relationships between market demand, development feasibility, zoning regulations, and public infrastructure to set forth a series of actions that could bring about the outcomes the Town is seeking. The remaining sections in the report will outline those relationships, discuss current challenges, and offer recommendations and action steps for stakeholders to consider. The first of these sections will explore development feasibility and the opportunities and challenges of attracting private sector investment.



Development Feasibility

The market analysis provided an indicator that under the right conditions, there is demand for additional residential and commercial development in the Downtown. The market analysis also indicated that a majority of the demand would likely stem from new multifamily residential development. Using these projections, teams from RKG and The Cecil Group tested redevelopment scenarios on three parcel assemblages in the Downtown to glean a better understanding of the intensity of development it would take to make a building (or set of buildings) financially feasible for a developer. This section will walk through that analysis and provide some of the key findings.

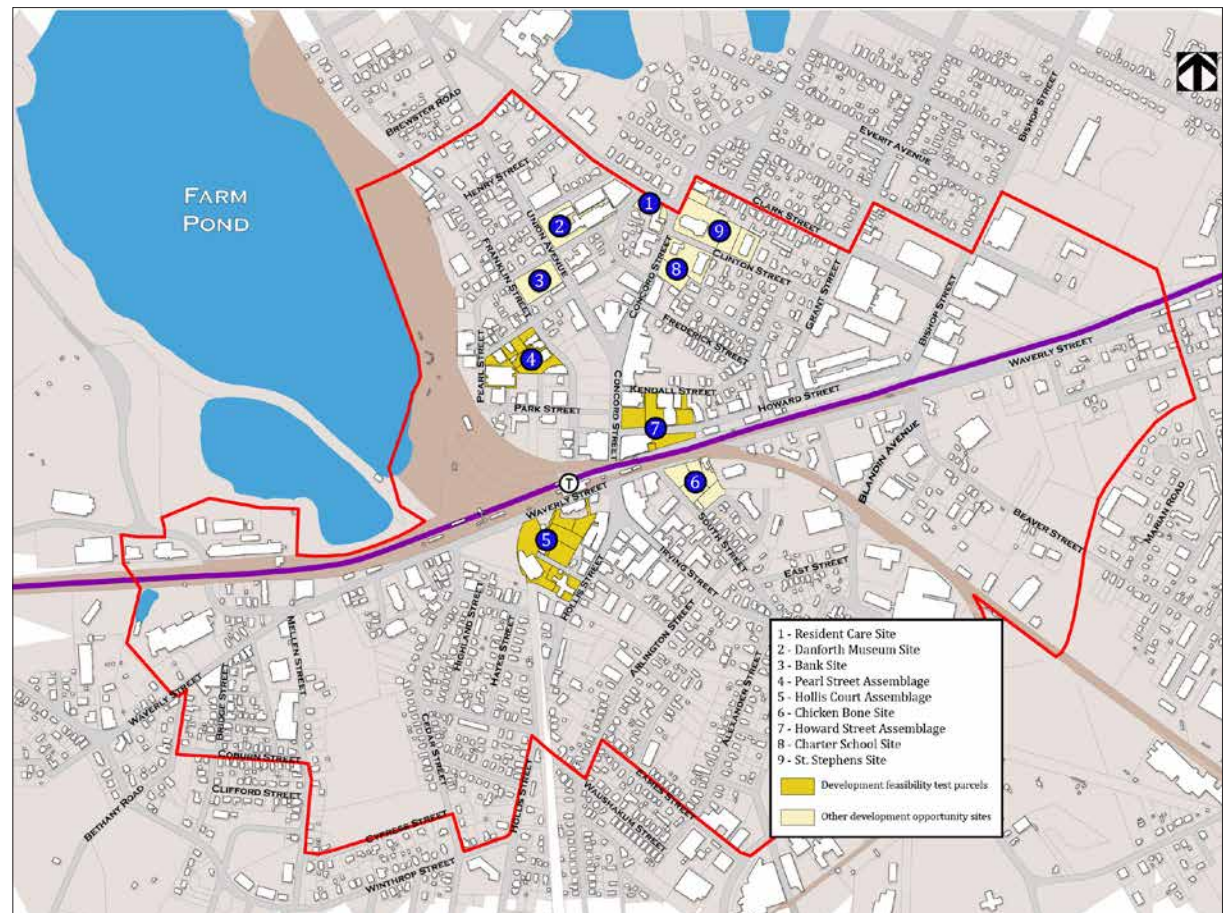
Identifying Redevelopment Sites

The exploration of redevelopment sites began with review of the alternatives prepared during previous transportation and land use studies to confirm the key characteristics associated with the limits of potential rights-of-way, transportation network implications, and relationships with existing parcels, uses and development. The team reviewed data and mapping information from previous studies in Downtown, completed field observations and created maps and data to form updated base plans.

Several key redevelopment sites had been identified by the Town through the work completed with Fuss & O'Neill in early 2014. A number of these sites, the Pearl Street

Assemblage, Howard Street Assemblage, South Street Assemblage and Hollis Court Assemblage were tested and explored for redevelopment concepts by Fuss & O'Neill in the Spring of 2014. Based on analysis and discussion in the context of this study, several of the same sites were used to dive deeper into the financial feasibility of development. Those sites included the Pearl Street Assemblage, Howard Street Assemblage and Hollis Court Assemblage (as shown in Figure 5). These sites were selected based on a more realistic opportunity for redevelopment over time. Each of the three sites vary in character which provided the team with opportunities to test different conditions and analyze the implications of each development scenario on the transportation network.

Figure 5: Map showing the three development feasibility test parcels and other opportunities in Downtown



Opportunities for Redevelopment

Downtown Framingham has many core strengths and assets that are opportunities for redevelopment and points of leverage for future improvements which include:

Existing Downtown Core

As with many historic New England town centers, Downtown Framingham is the beneficiary of its historic development pattern that has left a walkable commercial district at the core of the Town. Historic buildings are aligned with street edges on compact blocks that highlight distinctive architecture, ground floor uses, a network of sidewalks, and a distinctive sense of place. Each new investment should be used to reinforce these patterns while increasing the activity and vitality in Downtown.

Transportation Resources

Downtown Framingham is a critical regional crossroads for transportation with regional connections created by Route 126, Route 135, the MWRTA transit system and MBTA commuter rail service. Convenient alternatives to driving provide visitors, employees and residents of Downtown with choices for how they travel. This is a competitive advantage for Downtown Framingham relative to other locations in the MetroWest region. Efforts to improve the convenience and connectivity of all modes of transportation (transit, vehicular, bicycle and on walking) will reinforce this competitive advantage.

Constraints on Redevelopment

Downtown Congestion and Rail Crossing

The traffic conflict between the at-grade rail crossing and the vehicles traversing the intersection of Routes 126 and 135 result in substantial backups and delays, compounded during rush hour. The traffic congestion in the Downtown contributes to a negative perception and reinforces the notion that it is inconvenient to live, work, visit, or shop in Downtown. The rail corridor also disrupts the continuity of the Downtown pedestrian environment. The solutions to this issue are complex and costly.

Lack of Investment

Downtown Framingham is continuing to overcome decades of disinvestment. Downtown has been neglected as development expanded to other areas of the Town. The overall character and quality of the Downtown environment is improving with more active and well-maintained storefronts that contribute to activity along the street. The visible presence of vacant space and

surface parking lots in prominent locations are disruptive to the continuity of Downtown and may act as a deterrent to prospective patrons.

Critical Mass and Pedestrian Environment

In creating a lively downtown environment, the notion of a critical mass of activity is an important foundation. A downtown that has a diversity of businesses, restaurants and quality housing offers convenience and choice. An expanded range of active ground floor uses contribute to a thriving pedestrian environment, but active ground floor uses must be supported by local customers. Building the residential capacity and population directly within Downtown enables growth in the critical mass and brings more support to local businesses. Downtown Framingham has many locations in which new residential density could be added to help support a critical mass of activity.

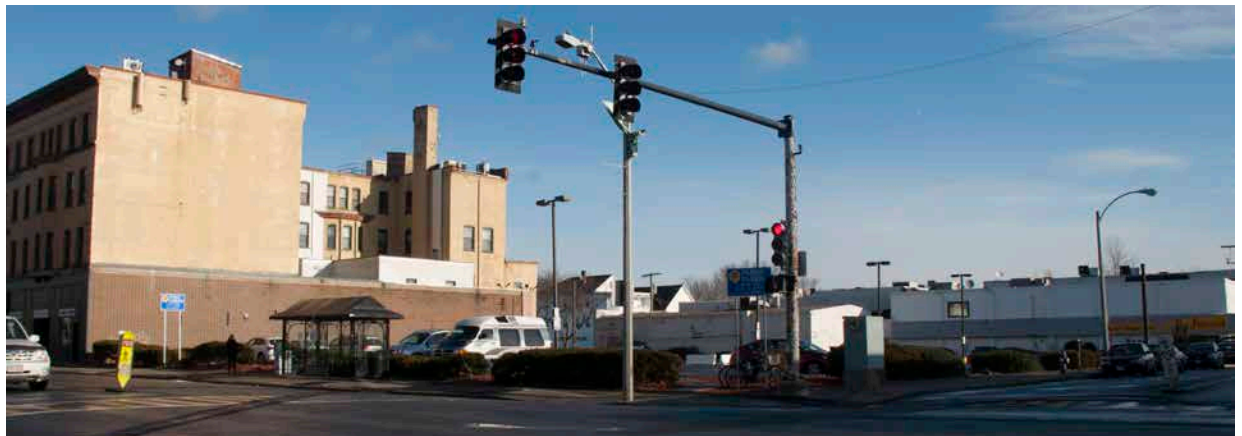


Photo from Concord Street looking at the Howard Street assemblage

Redevelopment Scenarios

The dynamics of feasibility were explored with several redevelopment scenarios using a computer model of the Downtown. A set of 3-D diagrams was used to explore and indicate relevant characteristics for redevelopment and new construction in the context of transportation changes and enhancements in Downtown. These diagrams reflect the input of the economic consultant, RKG Associates, MAPC and the Town relative to feasibility and urban design goals, and are accompanied by a discussion indicating the implications for:

- Different use types
- Development programs (square footage, units)
- Massing and scale
- Assumptions for parking demand based on a transit oriented scenario
- Relationship between new development and preservation of historic resources and open space assets in the Downtown area
- Public and private ownership identification for each key parcel, and noting which may be candidates for redevelopment or improvement

The test sites* that were been selected for these hypothetical scenarios were the:

- Pearl Street Assemblage
- Howard Street Assemblage
- Hollis Court Assemblage

The methodology for creation of the scenarios includes using a set of assumptions for land use, residential unit size and parking requirements to test the fit of hypothetical buildings based on development and construction conventions to determine a potential development program for each of the three sites. The scenarios reflect the maximum amount of development that could physically fit on the sites while providing enough surface parking to support the uses. It is possible to increase development intensity on the sites if structured parking was accommodated or parking ratios were further reduced. The team did not think these were realistic assumptions at this point in time.

The massing diagrams and redevelopment scenarios are hypothetical and intended to test the overall scale of potential redevelopment, potential feasibility and potential implications of that redevelopment.

The hypothetical development programs are derived from the building volumes that have been shown diagrammatically with a focus on testing physical fit and financial feasibility. The overall massing diagrams and stylizations are not intended to depict a particular architectural style, but to provide an overall visualization of how redevelopment may contribute to the Downtown. All depictions are hypothetical and diagrammatic and would require public and private actions on public and private property to implement. The diagrams are not endorsed by the owners of any of the properties.

Residential Density

Residential density is a term that is often used when discussing development projects, zoning, or the size and scale of development in an area. Density numbers are important, but the term has garnered mixed feelings from residents and boards in many communities. Residential density can be influenced by a number of different factors:

- The land area being measured: one parcel, a group of parcels, a whole neighborhood.
- The dimensions of the building: height, setbacks, lot coverage.
- Unit size can effect density: you can fit more studios apartments on a parcel than you can two bedroom units.

Many times when residential density is being discussed, misconceptions arise about what higher density numbers actually look like. Some examples of residential densities are shown below. The example of 53 units per acre from the Back Bay neighborhood in Boston is achieved with four story buildings.



Source: Visualizing Density

*A map of the parcel assemblages can be seen back in Figure 5

Pearl Street Assemblage

The Pearl Street block is bounded by Pearl Street to the west, Park Street to the south, Franklin Street to the north and Proctor Street to the north. The block is adjacent to the block that fronts along Concord Street with its concentration of main street activity. The block is also adjacent to the Downtown Common, a central open space in the Downtown. The block is comprised of 13 individual parcels that when combined form a 5 acre assemblage. Figure 6 shows the existing make up of the Pearl Street assemblage (shown in red). The buildings shown in orange are ones that would be redeveloped under this scenario. The buildings in yellow would remain as they are today.

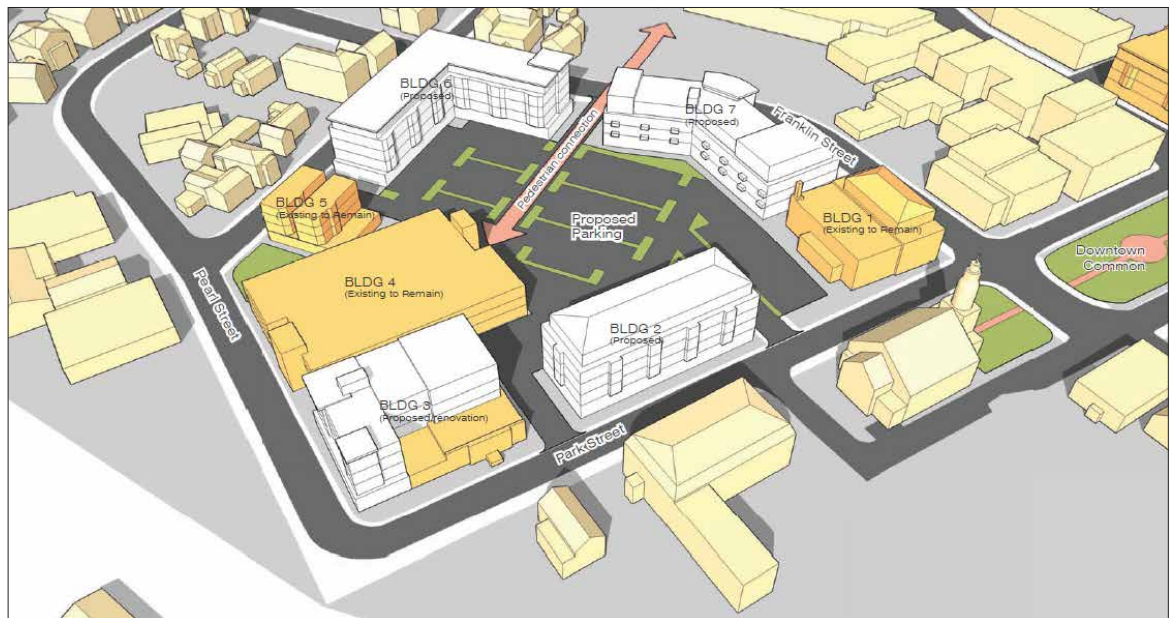
Pearl Street Assemblage - Scenario

The disposition of new construction in the redevelopment scenario is intended to frame street frontages of the block. This places buildings closer to the street and conceals views to a large surface parking area at the interior of the block. The parking area would meet the demands of the existing buildings and new development with approximately 240 spaces on site and would be landscaped to help break up the paved surface. A parking ratio of 1 space per dwelling unit was used for this scenario. The new construction would include buildings of between four and five-stories resulting in approximately 250,000 gross square feet of area. In this location, the development program focuses on residential density to support other uses in Downtown and to take advantage of nearby public transit. This scenario could accommodate about 230 new residential units and reflects the size and scale of development necessary to create a profitable scenario for a developer.

Figure 6: Existing Development on the Pearl Street Assemblage



Figure 7: Redevelopment Scenario on the Pearl Street Assemblage



Pearl Street Assemblage - Scenario

As redevelopment of the block occurs, several public realm improvements would also benefit the Downtown and pedestrian environment. All perimeter sidewalks of the block should be improved with regular continuous concrete walks with curbing at the street and regular street trees. A pedestrian connection internal to the block from the Pearl Street Structure northeast to the Concord Street pass-through should be reinforced to better connect parking to the main street activity. As parking is consolidated at the center of the block, existing parking areas such as the corner of Pearl and Proctor Streets could be translated into a small neighborhood park or plaza.

Figure 8: Illustrative Rendering of the Redevelopment Scenario on the Pearl Street Assemblage



- ① Parking is consolidated and accommodated in a central surface parking lot shielded from the street by surrounding buildings.
- ② Pedestrian connections are key to promote park once and walk concept.
- ③ Prominent buildings with historic character should remain.
- ④ Streetscape must include improved sidewalks, street trees, lighting, and street furniture to encourage a safe and comfortable pedestrian space.
- ⑤ The upper stories of taller buildings can be stepped back from the street.
- ⑥ Pearl Street parking garage would remain a key asset in the Downtown.

Howard Street Assemblage

The Howard Street block is bounded by Howard Street to the south, Concord Street to the west, and Kendall Street to the north. The block fronts along Concord Street with its concentration of main street activity and is across the street from the Downtown Common open space. This block is highly visible and has a direct impact on the physical and visual flow along Concord Street. The block is comprised of 9 parcels that when combined form a 3.4 acre assemblage. Figure 9 shows the existing make up of the Howard Street assemblage (shown in red). The buildings in orange are ones that would be redeveloped, with buildings in yellow remaining under this scenario.

Howard Street Assemblage - Scenario

The disposition of new construction in the redevelopment scenario is intended to take advantage of the assemblage's location at the center of Downtown. Figure 10 shows a new building at the corner of Concord Street and Howard Street framing the Downtown Common across the street and framing a complimentary new open space on the redevelopment block. A second building creates frontage along Howard Street and Kendall Street. A surface parking area would support the development with approximately 100 spaces integrated with streetscape and landscape improvements. The new construction would support 3-story buildings resulting in approximately 80,000 gross square feet of area. The building along Concord Street is assumed to be a mix of uses, with commercial space on the ground floor with approximately 80 residential units split between that building and the one behind. If structured parking could be supported financially on the site, it may be possible to support a higher intensity build out.

Figure 9: Existing Development on the Howard Street Assemblage

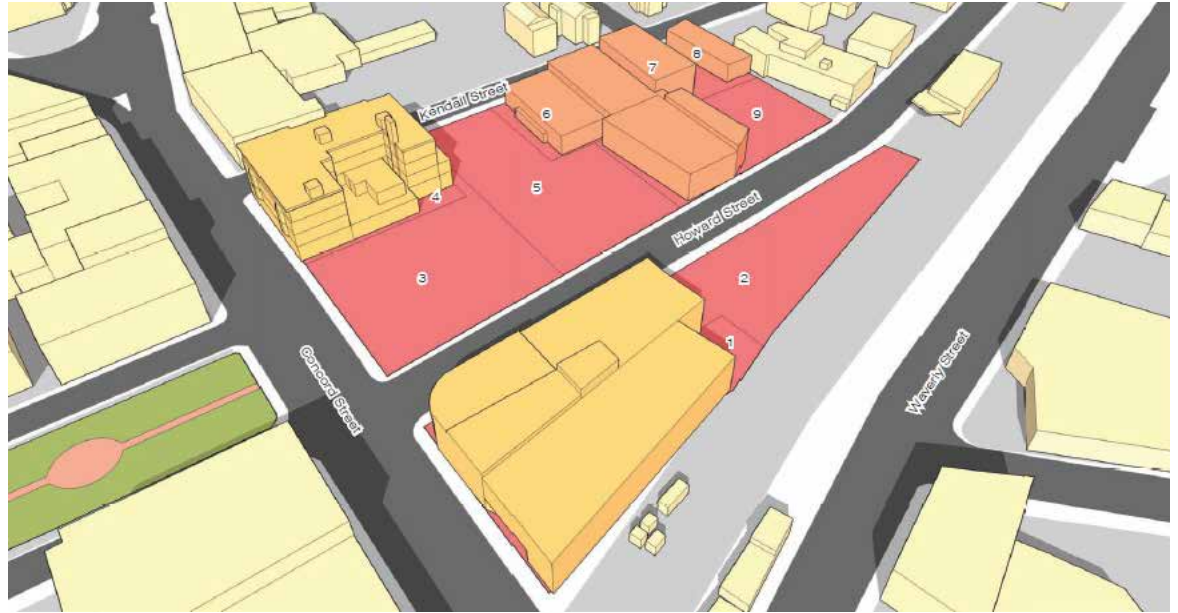


Figure 10: Redevelopment Scenario on the Howard Street Assemblage



Howard Street Assemblage - Scenario

As redevelopment occurs, several public realm improvements should accompany the development program. All perimeter sidewalks of the block should be improved with regular continuous concrete walks with curbing at the street and regular street trees. The streetscape on Howard Street should be reinforced to create a pedestrian connection to the east. A new proposed open space could add a complement to the Downtown Common enhancing the space available to pedestrians at the center of Downtown. Figure 11 shows a scenario, that includes structured parking (*Point #3*) which is likely only feasible if larger buildings are proposed to make up for the added cost of structured parking.

Figure 11: Illustrative Rendering of the Redevelopment Scenario on the Howard Street Assemblage



- ① Existing 4 story building to remain which helps with scale and continuity along Concord Street.
- ② New residential building would front both Kendall and Howard Streets.
- ③ Parking would likely be contained in a surface parking lot. If financially feasible, parking could also be contained in a structured garage.
- ④ Salvation Army building remains under this scenario, but could offer a redevelopment opportunity in the future.
- ⑤ New mixed-use building with ground floor commercial space fronting along Concord Street.
- ⑥ Mirror the Downtown Common across Concord Street with a new open space.

Hollis Court Assemblage

The Hollis Street block is bounded by Waverly Street (Route 135) to the north, Hollis Street (Route 126) to the east, Hollis Court to the south and a railroad right-of-way to the west. The block fronts along Hollis Street with its concentration of main street activity. The block is also adjacent to the railroad right-of-way and the MBTA commuter rail station on the other side of Waverly Street. The block is comprised of 18 parcels that when combined form a 6.3 acre assemblage. Figure 12 shows the existing make up of the Howard Street assemblage (shown in red). The buildings in orange are ones that would be redeveloped, with buildings in yellow remaining under this scenario.

Hollis Court Assemblage - Scenario

The disposition of new construction in the redevelopment scenario is intended to frame street frontages of the block and reinforce a new street connection on Hollis Court to Waverly Street. This places buildings in a location to define the public realm and conceal views to a large surface parking area at the interior of the block. The parking area will meet the demands of the existing buildings and new development with approximately 285 spaces. A proposed parking deck would be used for MBTA commuter rail parking, which could be built as a partnership between the MBTA, Town, and developer. The new construction would include buildings of four and five- stories resulting in approximately 300,000 gross square feet of area. In this location, the development program includes ground floor retail space and an emphasis on residential development to support the retail uses. The resulting residential development includes approximately 230 housing units.

Figure 12: Existing Development on the Hollis Court Assemblage



Figure 13: Redevelopment Scenario on the Hollis Court Assemblage



Hollis Court Assemblage - Scenario

As redevelopment of the block occurs, all perimeter sidewalks of the block should be improved with regular continuous concrete walks with curbing at the street and street trees. New public realm improvements to frame and connect Hollis Court through to Waverly Street is an important concept to unlocking redevelopment potential and enhancing connectivity. A new public open space adjacent to the MBTA parking structure may also be a desirable improvement along with a highly visible pedestrian crossing (at-grade or elevated) that links the parking structure directly to the rail station platforms.

Figure 14: Illustrative Rendering of the Redevelopment Scenario on the Hollis Court Assemblage

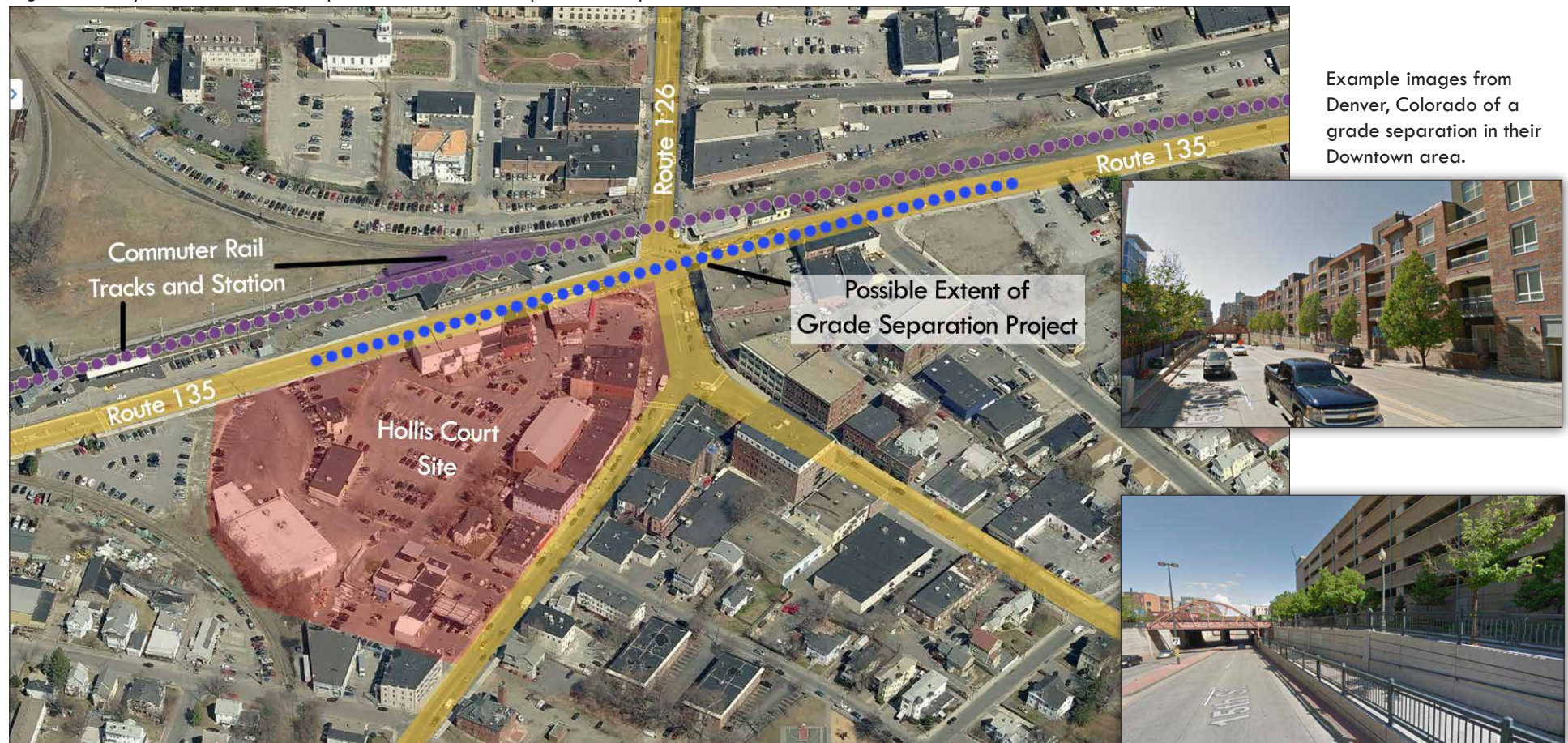


- 1 New roadway connection linking Hollis Street to Waverly Street and the commuter rail station.
- 2 Parking garage to support the MBTA parking needs and development parking.
- 3 Improve pedestrian crossing by better defining the intersection.
- 4 New mixed-use buildings would have ground floor commercial space and upper story residential development.
- 5 Central parking lot located in the middle of the development complex.
- 6 New buildings would continue to frame Hollis Street to the south.

Hollis Court and the Grade Separation

The project team reviewed the grade separation option of depressing Route 135 under Route 126 to determine what, if any, impacts that solution may have on development sites. Overall, the grade separation project would have some impacts to parcels that front along Route 135, primarily the Hollis Court assemblage. However, these impacts could be mitigated by setting any new development back about 30 feet from the current right-of-way in order to not preclude any future depression of that roadway. If that setback is required by the Town, it may have an impact on the redevelopment scenario shown for this assemblage. Development would need to be pushed back further onto the site bringing buildings closer together and likely necessitate the need for structured parking because the number of parking spaces required may not be able to be accommodated in a surface parking lot. The need for a parking garage will add to development costs, and could create a situation where development may not be financially viable given current market constraints. The Town should also encourage wider sidewalks, street trees and lighting to create a more pedestrian friendly environment along Route 135, similar to the changes taking place now along Route 126. Figure 15 shows the approximate location of the grade separation alternative and the impact it may have on parcels fronting Route 135.

Figure 15: Projected Location and Impact Area of Grade Separation Project



Is Development Financially Viable?

In addition to testing different redevelopment scenarios on the three parcel assemblages discussed above, RKG Associates developed a financial pro forma to test whether or not the different development scenarios might be profitable for a developer. This is a very important question when planning for redevelopment in a downtown environment. Costs are typically higher than they might be for suburban or greenfield development because land costs are higher, accommodating parking is more challenging, the review process is often longer, construction costs are higher, and development is generally more complicated.

Looking back at the market analysis, we discussed the challenges of new construction in the context of the Downtown Framingham market. Overall, Downtown has not seen a lot of new construction of either residential or mixed-use development. The market and price points for both residential and commercial rents are relatively untested. New higher-end rental product was tested with the Dennison development, and with the upswing in the economy, is renting at higher price points than surrounding properties. This example lends some credibility to Downtown Framingham being able to attract residents that could afford higher rents or sales prices. Without a few additional developments to serve as comparisons for both developers and lending institutions, it may be difficult for a developer to finance a substantial development project.

Pro Forma Assumptions

To test the financial viability of development in the Downtown, the project team had to make certain assumptions about the financing and development program for each of the sites. The assumptions were refined with the assistance of several regional developers who have decades of experience completing developments in downtown locations across the Greater Boston region. The following is a list of some of the assumptions that the development program for each assemblage site was run through.

- The average gross size of each housing unit was assumed to be 950 square feet. Some will be smaller, some will be larger, but the average was 950 square feet.
- Building heights were assumed to be between 4 and 5 stories.
- Assumes an average of 1 parking space per residential unit. Larger units may have more, smaller units may have less, but the average was 1 per unit.
- The cost for each parking space in a structured garage was assumed to be \$25,000, and \$5,000 for a parking space in a surface lot.
- Costs for constructing residential development was assumed to be \$86 per square foot, and \$58 per square foot for commercial space.
- Average rent for residential development was assumed to be \$2.00 per square foot.

Key Findings

After running each development program for each of the three sites through the pro forma process, the project team uncovered some important findings:

- Development in Downtown Framingham is **marginally** feasible from a financial standpoint. Net revenue is minimal (1.8% - 4%) depending on the assemblage. This is likely not enough on its own to attract a larger developer to Downtown.
- The rents required to support construction costs for both residential and commercial development are higher than the rents currently found in the Downtown. Any new product in the Downtown would be testing the market at a higher price point than is currently being achieved today.
- Assembling parcels can be challenging and costly for a private developer to do on their own. This can take time and substantial patient capital to hold parcels.
- Current zoning regulations do not allow for the type of uses, building dimensions, or parking tested in the development scenarios.
- The amount of parking required has substantial impacts on the financial feasibility of a project. Parking is expensive, not easily recouped, and requires long-term maintenance. Parking is also something the municipality can directly control through zoning.

Recommendations

Although there are some hurdles to development in Downtown Framingham from the financial and regulatory side, there are ways in which those could be overcome with time and coordination. The project team developed a set of recommendations and action steps to address these hurdles

- **Adopt changes to the Central Business District zoning.** This should include an updated list of allowable uses, more flexible parking regulations, flexible dimensional requirements for new buildings, and a streamlined permitting process. This will be discussed in more detail in the zoning chapter.
- **Leverage Town and State funding sources to assist developers with infrastructure costs.** The pro forma completed by the project team did not include unknown costs like infrastructure or site clean up. These added costs can make or break a development. The Town should look for local and state resources to assist with costs related to development where needed. The State's MassWorks program can be an excellent source of funding for these types of projects.
- **Promote success through incremental projects of varying size.** As was noted earlier, the market for new development in Downtown is relatively untested. The Town should work with local developers on adaptive reuse projects in existing buildings or smaller redevelopment

projects in the 20-40 unit size to build up critical mass in the Downtown and prove the market exists for the higher priced rents needed to support new development. Assistance could come in the form of easing permitting requirements, or promoting smaller project through new zoning regulations.

- **Look for unique opportunities to partner with public and private entities.** If new development at the Hollis Court site requires replacement parking for MBTA commuters, the Town should look for opportunities to leverage that need to the benefit of the Town, the MBTA and the developer. Parking garages can be shared by multiple users, especially if the users have different demands by time of day. For example, MBTA commuters will use the garage during the day while residents and business patrons will likely use it in the evening and overnight. Setting up a partnership can help share costs and reduce the burden on the developer.

The other opportunity for partnering on a development could be with MassBay Community College if they decide to utilize the Town's land for their downtown campus. Under that scenario, Memorial Hall would be utilized fully by MassBay leaving the Town without a space for their employees. This could open up an opportunity for the Town to partner with

a developer and become a long-term anchor tenant of a new development in Downtown. The certainty of the Town becoming a long-term tenant could provide additional financial stability to a development program.

- **Incentivize development with local programs.** The financial feasibility analysis showed that development in Downtown today is marginally feasible. In order to create a climate in Downtown where developers feel more comfortable taking financial risk, the Town may want to consider some incentive programs to ease that risk. These incentive programs could come in the form of infrastructure financing, tax incentives, local and state bonding programs, or tax credits. These programs are reviewed in more detail in the next section on partnerships and assistance.

Partnerships and Assistance

Fortunately, there are several local and state assistance programs available to help municipalities in Massachusetts attract private investment to redevelopment areas. In general, the types of public programs that might be utilized in Framingham include tax supported bonds, tax credits, coordination services, direct loans and payments, and indirect assistance and support. The following provides a brief summary of the recommended programs applicable to Downtown Framingham.

District Improvement Financing (DIF): A funding program under Chapter 40Q to help stimulate private investment. It is administered by the Massachusetts Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development under the auspices of the Economic Assistance Coordinating Council. Under an approved DIF program, a community can ‘capture’ the incremental property taxes within a defined development district and use the new revenue to pay debt service on bonds for a wide variety of capital improvements. A DIF program can include multiple properties including those not directly part of a proposed development that might otherwise benefit from the investments.

The project team believes this may be a critical first step toward generating funding that can be put back into the Downtown in the form of public infrastructure. If a DIF is established before property values begin to rise in the Downtown, the tax increment captured from new development and rising property values on existing development can be used by the Town to invest in new streetscape, sidewalks, lighting, parking facilities, and many other public investments. These investments can also be leveraged to spur additional private sector development on parcels that may need infrastructure investment to get off the ground. As the Downtown tax base grows, so do the revenues for the DIF. Lower revenue generation in the early years can be banked and invested later on as the increment grows.

Tax Increment Financing (TIF):

Regulated under 40Q, a TIF allows a community to exempt property taxes on specific development properties within a defined district, essentially providing a level of financial support to the private developer. In essence, the Town becomes a passive investor in the development project by using tax reductions to help the development succeed. As was revealed in the development feasibility analysis, development in Downtown is marginally feasible from a financial perspective. A small tax incentive through a TIF may be what is needed to tip the scale turning a once infeasible project into a feasible project. The project team believes that granting these tax incentives for some of the first movers in Downtown will be an important initial step to help reduce risk and improve financial feasibility.

Framingham could consider designing a locally tailored tax incentive program to catalyze investment in the Downtown area. Though not pursued very often in Massachusetts, communities can use the home rule petition process to create programs that are not specifically provided for in the general laws. For example, both Provincetown and Truro have special legislation that allows them to waive property taxes for any property owner who rents a home to a low- or moderate-income resident on a year-round basis. In these two communities, year-round housing at affordable prices is a critical economic development issue and there was no effective remedy in the

general laws. Amherst is currently considering a home rule version of the Urban Center Housing-Tax Increment Financing (UCH-TIF) program authorized under M.G.L. c. 40, Section 16. Pursuing a home rule alternative would allow the Town to target the program geographically in a different way than the general laws allow, to run the program independently (without having to seek state approval of every TIF agreement), and to approve special tax assessments for longer periods than allowed by the general laws, if necessary for large or complicated projects.

Infrastructure Investment Initiative (I-Cubed):

A state-funded bonding program that utilizes net new income and sales taxes generated within a defined project area to pay debt service on bonds issued to fund new public infrastructure. The I-Cubed program is overseen and regulated by the Executive Office of Administration and Finance in concert with the Department of Revenue and MassDevelopment. Approval is based on an application submitted by a developer in cooperation with a community, which must prove that new employment (and related taxes) and sales generated by the project are new to the Commonwealth. Unlike other programs, the I-Cubed projects cannot utilize other state funding or assistance.

The I-Cubed program could be useful in Downtown Framingham if a large project were proposed that required investment in larger

scale public infrastructure and generated a significant number of new jobs. I-Cubed could be used if a new out-of-state employer was looking to locate in Downtown Framingham or if a large mixed-use project was proposed that generated enough net new tax revenue to make it worthwhile for the Town and developer to pursue I-Cubed funding.

Coordination and Leadership

An Economic Development Industrial Corporation (EDIC) – is an entity created under General Laws Chapter 121C or by home rule petition (as in Framingham) to implement planned local economic development projects. Although no direct funding is provided, an EDIC has broad authority to undertake projects and provide ongoing technical and financial assistance. Among the various entities that may be created under state law, EDICs enjoy the strongest development powers, usually including the ability to:

- Create plans for economic activity;
- Acquire and hold property by negotiation or eminent domain in accordance with an economic development plan;
- Dispose of property
- Borrow or invest money, issue bonds;
- Receive grants, loans, or advances;
- Manage projects or enter agreements with other private or public entities.

These wide-ranging powers can greatly benefit a community by having a central coordinating entity for economic development. Framingham has an opportunity to expand its Downtown development toolbox by making more effective use of the EDIC. Sometimes ensuring the best possible outcome for a key property requires communities to do more than meet their traditional regulatory and capital improvement responsibilities. The ability to gain site control can make a crucial difference for priority development sites, but municipalities cannot step in and acquire real estate without conducting a lengthy public procurement process. An EDIC can fill this need, oversee the disposition of property for commercial or mixed use development (if its special legislation is written broadly enough), and provide development capacity for the community and private property owners. The Town should review the EDIC's existing home rule legislation (Chapter 124 of the Acts of 1995) and update it, as needed.

Short-Term Action Steps for Partnerships and Assistance

There are numerous programs available to cities and towns in the Commonwealth which can be overwhelming when trying to consider which are best suited for a particular situation. The project team recommends the Town consider the following options in the short-term to assist in attracting private investment to Downtown:

1. Establish a TIF. Based on the development feasibility analysis, it appears that one of the most immediate needs for the development community to act in Downtown is financial assistance. One way the Town could assist would be through the establishment of a TIF District. This could be established for certain properties in Downtown, or for a larger district. This tax incentive will help with the financial feasibility of development, and is something the Town can enact with an affirmative vote at Town Meeting. In 2005, Town Meeting members voted to enact an Urban Center Housing Tax Increment Financing Program (UCH-TIF) for 16 acres of Downtown. The Board of Selectmen authorized the first TIF agreement for the “Arcade Building” at 111 Concord Street. Framingham has a history of using financial assistance tools to jump start investment in the Downtown.

2. Establish a DIF. To help capture new tax revenue increments over time in the Downtown, the Town should establish a DIF District. The funding generated from the new tax increment can be reinvested in Downtown Framingham in the form of public infrastructure projects like streetscape, roadway improvements, sidewalks, lighting, parking, and more. The DIF revenues could also be used to leverage infrastructure investments that could catalyze new development and increase the tax increment over time.

3. Strengthen the current EDIC in

Framingham. If zoning recommendations do not achieve the desired parcel assembly in Downtown, the EDIC can act as a redevelopment entity and serve as a coordinator, facilitator, and point of contact for Downtown development activity. This could help relieve some duties of Town staff who are responsible for all sections of Framingham, not just Downtown. In order for the EDIC to function in this way, the Town would need to hire at least one EDIC staff person. It is critical that this staff person work closely with Town departments to ensure coordination on all Downtown efforts.

4. Determine points of contact within Town Government for all things Downtown.

Along with the recommendation of hiring an EDIC staff person, existing Town staff in the key departments should identify a staff person who will be a point of contact for all items related to Downtown. This could include planning, community and economic development, public works, health department, and parks and recreation. Reoccurring meetings should be established between Town department contacts and the EDIC to ensure close coordination on all on-going and upcoming projects in the Downtown. Coordinating is key to establishing a consistent message, making sure projects are not in opposition with the goals of

Downtown, and moving developments through the review process in a timely manner. This could be done quickly, easily, and at little cost to the Town.

5. Apply for MassWorks to assist with infrastructure investment in Downtown.

The final recommendation is to apply for infrastructure dollars through the state's MassWorks program. This annual apportionment by the Legislature provides a competitive pot of funding for municipalities seeking to stimulate housing and economic development through infrastructure investment. Downtown Framingham would make an excellent candidate for this program given the infrastructure and streetscape needs. The Town could form a stand-alone application for a part of the Downtown, or could partner with a developer if there was a catalytic project in the Downtown that was forthcoming. The Town has been successful in the past with MassWorks, most recently securing a \$1 million grant for the Danforth Green housing development along Riverpath Drive.

These five short-term recommendations are just a few of the options available to the Town. As developers come forward with projects for Downtown, the Town should remain open and flexible to other programs, ideas, and partnerships that will help propel development forward in this part of town.

EDIC Model

A number of municipalities in Massachusetts have very active, strong, and staffed Economic Development & Industrial Corporations (EDICs). These EDICs have a role in planning, technical assistance, supporting economic development and local business, and creating and implementing incentive programs for development.

City of Lynn EDIC

The City of Lynn, MA has an active EDIC that serves many different functions. They handle planning for the Downtown, infrastructure support and development, arts and culture, promoting business, and overseeing incentive programs for both existing and new development. The EDIC is overseen by a seven member board. More information can be found [here](#).

City of Marlborough EDC

The City of Marlborough, MA also has an active EDC serving many different functions. The organization deals with local planning and zoning issues, organizing transportation and infrastructure investments, and supporting small and large businesses in the City. The EDC is overseen by a 25 member Board of Directors. More information can be found [here](#).



4

Zone for What You Desire
in Downtown Framingham

Zone for What You Desire

Establishing land use regulations that reflect the values and development vision of the community is key to revitalizing Downtown. Zoning is a powerful tool that is controlled by a municipality at the local level and can be used by a municipality to make changes to an area and directly impact future development. Zoning can be used to encourage different types of uses, building dimensions, building design, site layout, and much more.

Creating a zoning district in a downtown is different than creating one for a suburban or rural section of town. New development needs to fit in with the existing character of the Downtown, and must enhance the walkable urban feel. That typically means buildings are pulled closer to the street with parking located to the side or rear of the parcel. Buildings are often taller and are designed with higher quality materials such as brick or masonry finishes. The first floors of buildings, especially along key commercial corridors, are active with large storefront windows and attractive building entrances as to be inviting to pedestrians. If the zoning is not set up in a way that reflects these characteristics of the Downtown, it may result in development that is out of scale and character leaving the town with a less desirable development pattern.

Informing Zoning Using Development Feasibility

The development feasibility analysis described in the previous chapter produced a set of findings for each of the three parcel assemblages that can be used as input when formulating zoning recommendations. The test scenarios on each of the assemblages revealed the size and scale of building necessary to attract private sector interest. Zoning is the mechanism to control the size and scale of development in the Downtown. Therefore, as the Town develops any new zoning changes in Downtown they should take into consideration the results of the feasibility analysis as to not preclude or deter the components needed to make development financially feasible. Table 2 below highlights some of the findings from the feasibility analysis that should be considered as part of any zoning updates the Town may undertake.

Assemblage	Area	Future Commercial SF	Future Number of Housing Units	Future Max. Building Height	Proposed Parking Spaces	Proposed Floor Area Ratio (FAR)
Pearl Street	5 Acres	11,299	227	5 stories	241	1.71
Howard Street	3.4 Acres	34,427	81	4 stories	146	1.10
Hollis Court	6.3 Acres	56,231	238	5 stories	286	1.26

From the development feasibility analysis, we can see that building heights, lot dimensions, and parking ratios will need to be reviewed to determine if they are compatible with what will be needed in the future. The next section of this chapter will review the current zoning regulations in Framingham with an eye toward identifying potential barriers to new development.

Existing Zoning Review

As a complimentary component to the development feasibility analysis, the project team reviewed the existing zoning for the districts that comprise the Downtown Framingham study area to gain a better understanding of regulations governing development. The study area is comprised of five zoning districts:

- Central Business (CB)
- Business (B)
- Manufacturing (M)
- General Residential (G)
- Office/Professional (P)

The CB district makes up the core of the Downtown study area, with the other districts comprising the remainder of the area around the CB core. Figure 16 on the proceeding page shows the study area and the five zoning districts.

While it is important to understand the regulations for each of the districts, the project team focused our efforts on analyzing the CB District because it makes up the primary core of Downtown and has regulations that most closely reflect the vision for Downtown. If the Town wanted to make changes to the zoning in Downtown, the CB District would also present a natural starting point likely requiring fewer changes compared to surrounding zoning districts.

The following section will summarize some of the key challenges associated with the CB District as it relates to implementing the desired development vision for Downtown.

Uses and Special Permits

In general, the CB District provides a wide range of by-right uses that would be supportive of a transit oriented vision, including some types of residential and most non-residential uses. However, the extent to which Special Permits are required for many common uses and structures often found in downtown environments is likely acting as an impediment to investment within the downtown area. Generally, in a downtown district a municipality should promote housing, particularly multifamily housing, to help create critical mass to support current and future businesses and provide housing options for those looking for access to the elements found in a more urban setting. It should also be easy to construct and open up commercial space in a downtown, especially restaurants which are a key factor in having an active and vibrant center.

Multifamily Residential

Although allowed in the past, the current Framingham Zoning Bylaw does not allow for multifamily residential development by-right in any zoning district. Multifamily is only allowed by Special Permit in the following instances:

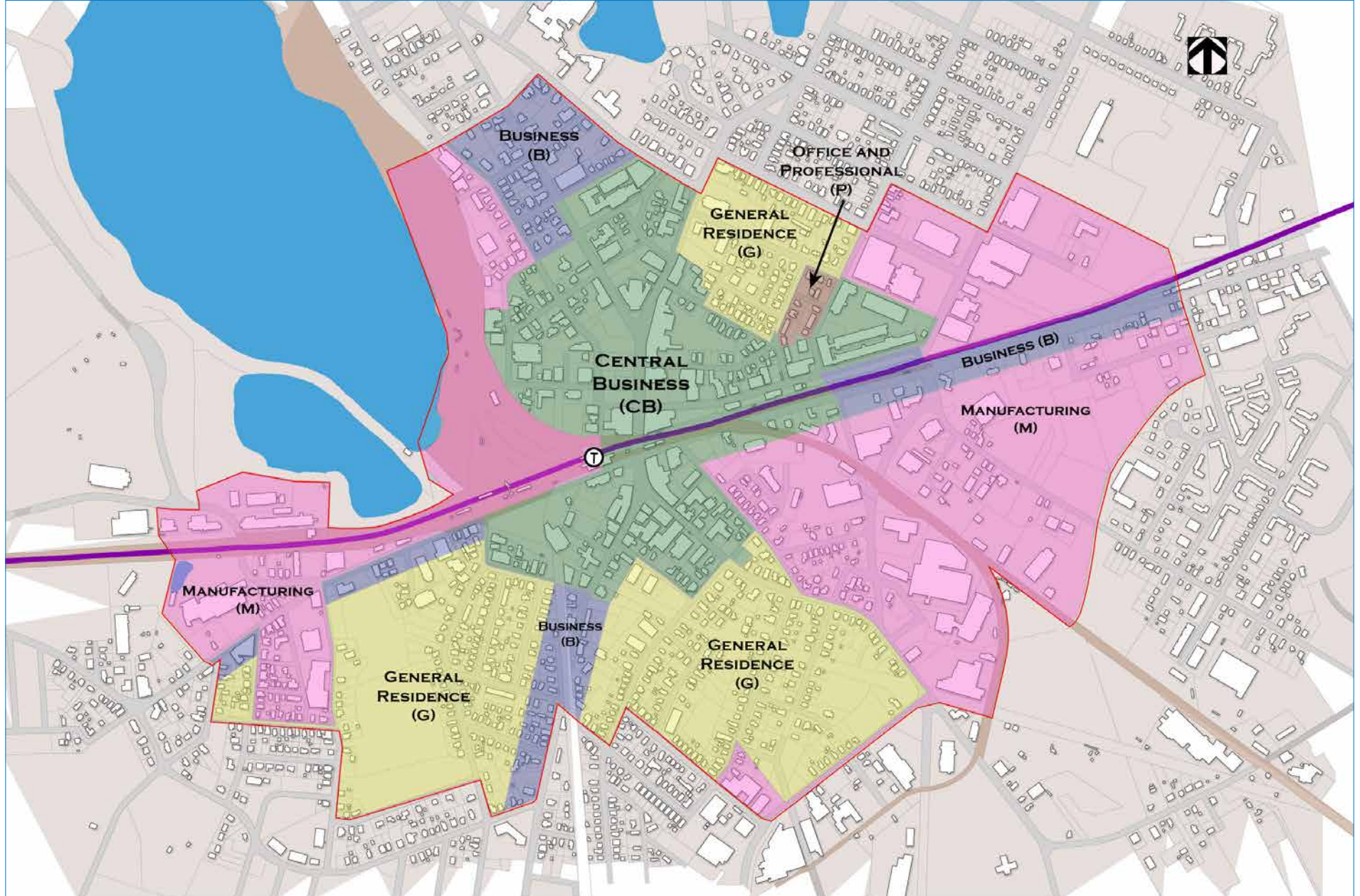
- CB District by Special Permit, but only as part of a mixed-use development. A stand alone residential development cannot be constructed.
- Historic Reuse for structures 50 years or older located on parcels 20,000 square feet (SF) or more in size. However, units are limited to condominiums. Rentals are not allowed.

- Within a Planned Unit Development District (PUD).

Mixed-use and Mixed-use Complex

Within the Framingham Zoning Bylaw both a “Mixed-Use” development and a “Mixed-Use Complex” require a Special Permit from the Planning Board. According to the Bylaw, a Mixed-Use development is defined as “a building containing residential uses on any floor above the ground floor of a building combined with an allowed non-residential use or uses on the ground floor and other floors of the building”. Furthermore, a Mixed-Use Complex is defined as “a parcel or contiguous parcels (whether or not in common ownership) of at least 5 acres with adaptive reuse of historic manufacturing structures for multifamily residential and allowed non-residential uses within existing historic structures. Such Mixed-Use Complex shall have shared parking and integrated facilities and infrastructure. Residential and non-residential uses may be in the same or separate buildings, provided however that neither the total residential uses nor the non-residential uses shall exceed 80% of the gross floor area of the buildings in the Mixed-Use Complex, excluding parking facilities”. Requiring a Special Permit for all mixed-use development in a downtown setting can add time and cost to the approval process. However, Special Permits could still be considered for mixed-use development of substantial size.

Figure 16: Existing Zoning Districts within the Downtown Study Area



Restaurants

Restaurants (full service or fast food) are not allowed in any zoning district without a Special Permit from either the Planning Board or the Zoning Board of Appeals, depending on the size of the restaurant. For example, within the CB and B Districts, a restaurant under 8,000 SF requires a Special Permit from the Zoning Board of Appeals, while a restaurant over 8,000 SF requires a Special Permit from the Planning Board. Requiring a Special Permit regardless of restaurant size may be an impediment to new restaurants opening in the Downtown and could add time and costs to restaurant owners looking to open up a business.

Special Permits for Structures Over 8,000 SF

Within all study area zoning districts (CB, B, G, M and P), no structure exceeding 8,000 SF in gross floor area is allowed to be constructed by-right. A Special Permit must be granted by the Planning Board. This is extremely limiting for a downtown location where buildings are typically constructed at a larger scale, which is confirmed by the development feasibility analysis in the previous chapter. None of the buildings shown in those scenarios could be built by-right, not even if they were phased in over time and built in smaller pieces. Requiring developers to go through the Special Permit approval process for small projects can add time and money, and can be particularly challenging for smaller developers looking to construct smaller projects on tighter margins.

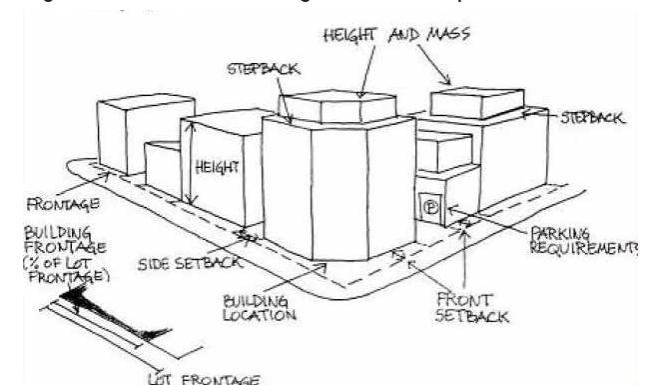
Site Plan Review

Under Section IV.I.2.c., a Site Plan Review is required for any new structure or group of structures (no matter their size) under the same ownership on the same lot or contiguous lots. Site Plan Review is also required for any significant change or alteration to an existing structure that results in development of any off-street parking or loading areas, except for residences that require fewer than 5 new parking spaces (single- and two-family homes). The site plan review includes a review of a detailed site plan, as well as isometric drawings, building elevations and other criteria. It also requires a Development Impact Statement that includes a traffic impact assessment, environmental impact assessment, a fiscal impact assessment, a community impact assessment, and a parking impact assessment. Per the guidelines, the Planning Board must render its decision within a maximum of 155 days of receipt of the application from the proposer. The impact assessments alone add significant cost, especially to smaller developments that likely will not have a significant impact on the downtown. Development review time periods should also be decreased to provide a timely decision for developers who are accruing land holding costs and interest costs while awaiting decisions on their proposals. These all add up to valuable expenses that can make or break a project that may already be marginally feasible (as noted in the previous chapter).

Dimensional Requirements

In the Zoning Bylaw, dimensional requirements dictate where the building and other elements on the site are placed. They dictate site requirements like setbacks, heights, and lot coverage. These elements are very important to creating the character and feel of the built environment in each zoning district. Generally speaking, dimensional requirements for residential and non-residential uses within the study area are consistent across the five zoning districts. This is problematic given that the purpose of different zoning districts is to provide the dimensional requirements and use allowances to create different building characteristics. Thus, a downtown area should have different requirements than suburban retail or a single-family residential area. For example, among the stated purposes of the CB District is to “promote a livable urban Downtown environment” and “to promote pedestrian flow by preserving unbroken block facades.” This may not be applicable in a single family neighborhood.

Figure 17: Dimensional Regulations Example



Floor Area Ratio (FAR)

FAR is a ratio of built square footage of buildings to the overall lot size (or area). For example, a 10,000 square foot building on a 10,000 square foot lot would have an FAR of 1.0. A 20,000 square foot building on the same lot would result in a 2.0 FAR. The FAR in the CB District is 2.0 for commercial or mixed-use buildings and unlimited for residential buildings. According to the development feasibility analysis, the FAR tested on each assemblage would not exceed 2.0, but the Town may want to consider increasing the FAR to 3.0 for smaller infill developments on smaller lots.

Minimum Lot Area and Lot Coverage

In downtowns, lot sizes are typically smaller and lot coverage is typically higher because buildings tend to take up a majority of the parcel. In the CB District, maximum lot coverage is low at 35% for residential and 60% for other uses. In a downtown, it is typical to see lot coverage in the 80% range or higher to maximize investment on expensive land.

Setbacks

The existing minimum 30' front and 10' side yard requirements, along with 35% maximum lot coverage for any residential use in the CB district (all of which are consistent with requirements in the General Residence district) would break up the pedestrian environment considerably. It will also severely constrain what could actually be built on a parcel, especially a small parcel. The setbacks, lot coverage, and parking requirements all constrain the building envelope. In downtown locations, it is best to ease those constraints to maintain good urban design where buildings are closer together and are pulled up to the main streets.

Minimum Open Space Requirement

It is important to have some open space associated with larger development, but in downtowns it may make more sense to utilize shared open spaces. A minimum of 30% open space for residential development may be too high to accommodate on site unless the Town allows developers to count balconies, courtyards, plazas, and rooftop common spaces.

A standard of 15-20% maybe be more appropriate. The 5% open space requirement for commercial uses is appropriate, but the Town may consider increasing that for mixed-use buildings where residential units will be a component of the development program.

Maximum Height

Height is another important dimensional factor that impacts project feasibility. As was demonstrated in the development feasibility analysis, heights of at least 5 stories will likely be needed to make a project marginally feasible. The current height restrictions limit residential buildings to only 3 stories (40') which may impact the Town's ability to attract multifamily developers. The 6 story (80') restriction for all other uses in the CB District is more consistent with our findings in the previous chapter. The Town should consider adopting higher maximum height standards for residential development in the CB District.

Table 3: Existing Zoning - CB Dimensional Requirements, Town of Framingham

	Max FAR	Min lot area	Max lot coverage	Setbacks			Min lot frontage	Min open space ratio	Max. Height
				Front	Side	Rear			
Central Business District (CB) – any residential use	None	8,000	35%	30' or more	10'	None	65'	30%	3 stories (40')
Central Business District (CB) – any other principal or Mixed-Use	2.0	None	60%	10'	None	None	None	5%	6 stories (80')

Parking Requirements

There is no uniform parking standard within the study area zoning districts, as minimum parking requirements in Framingham are determined by particular use, using thresholds based on both square footages and employees/occupants. A recent parking assessment for the Town recommended new parking regulations to streamline calculations across the range of uses and promote shared and satellite parking as part of a “park once” strategy for Downtown. The streamlined calculations coupled with decreased parking requirements will help promote infill development and reuse of current existing building stock. The parking assessment also notes that parking exemptions in the CB district are possible for adaptive reuse of existing buildings, new buildings that exceed 8,000 SF in size, and expansions above the existing square footage of the current building through a Special Permit process.

Figure 18: Howard Street Site Existing Conditions



Challenges with Existing Zoning Regulations

By way of hypothetical example, if a developer were to put forward a proposal to construct a mixed-use building on the Howard Street assemblage (corner of Howard Street and Concord Street) it would require a number of variances from the Town’s boards in order for the development to be approved. This development would likely require setback relief since it does not meet the front yard setback requirement. Depending on the size of the lot and building, it may require relief from the minimum lot coverage requirement of 60%. The development would also likely require parking relief from the 2 spaces per dwelling unit regulation. Although this style of building would be a welcome addition to Downtown, the financial feasibility, zoning regulations and permitting process are not set up in a way that encourages developers to propose larger scale projects here.

Figure 19: Howard Street Site Rendering of Future Scenario



Key Issues, Recommendations, and Action Steps

With relatively modest changes to the existing zoning regulations in the CB District, the Town of Framingham could set a course for encouraging the type of development consistent with the vision for Downtown. Changing the zoning to be more deliberate and easing permitting requirements can be a cost-effective way of sending a message to the development community about what the Town wants and where. The project team has outlined a few key issues that should be addressed with any future zoning changes and some recommendations for how to accomplish those changes.

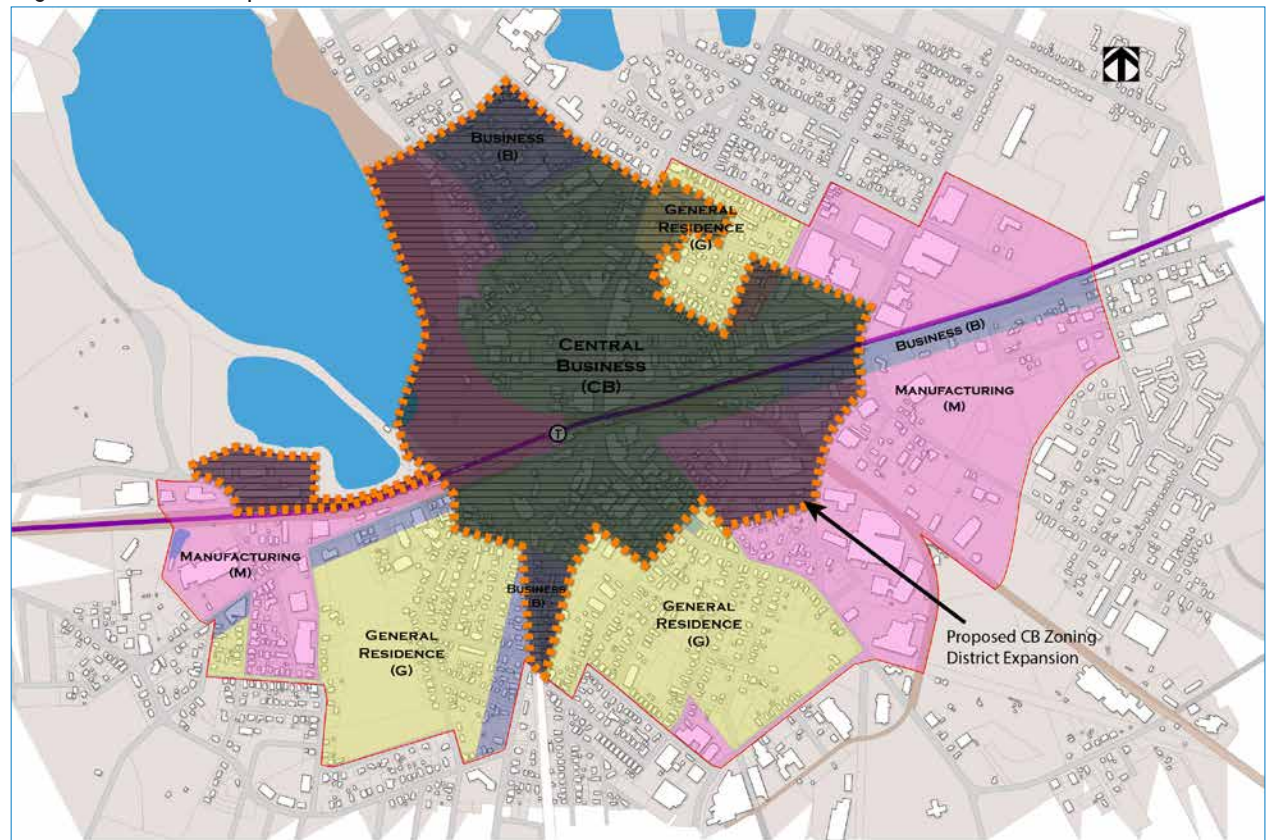
Expand the CB District

The current CB District boundary (shown back in Figure 16) is limited to the core of Downtown and does not capture some of the key redevelopment sites in the greater Downtown area. Expanding the boundary of the current CB District would allow the Town to encourage more mixed-use and multifamily development within close proximity to the commuter rail station and build a more walkable vibrant core. The project team is recommending expanding and updating the existing CB District instead of an overlay district because the bones of the CB regulations work, they just need to be updated to reflect market conditions and today's consumer preferences. The Town is in the process of doing a comprehensive overhaul of the existing Zoning Bylaw which will help streamline the document, update tables, clarify definitions, and make the Bylaw more user-friendly. We

see this as the perfect opportunity to incorporate some additional changes to the CB District while Town boards and Town Meeting members are already getting familiar with the comprehensive look at the current Bylaw. It is important to stress that the changes needed to update the current CB District regulations are not significantly different than what exists today. It is simply small changes that will help guide development in Downtown as to be consistent with the vision the Town has set forth through their prior planning efforts.

The Town may also want to consider implementing zoning regulations that permit higher densities in the core of Downtown, and slightly lower densities on the periphery as to not have a negative impact on nearby residential areas. This can be accomplished through the zoning by setting different height maximums based on the distance from adjacent zoning districts.

Figure 20: Possible Expansion of the CB District



Allow Multifamily Housing in Downtown

The Town of Framingham currently allows multifamily units only in reuse or mixed-use projects by Special Permit. New construction of multifamily-only housing is not allowed, even by Special Permit. This creates a barrier to achieving the desired amenity-rich, walkable, downtown environment. This could also be a challenge to achieving a higher number of customers in the immediate Downtown area that may be needed and desired to support existing and new businesses.

The project team suggests allowing multifamily-only development either by-right or Special Permit (particularly on secondary streets and corridors) to bring in new households to support businesses in the Downtown and to provide the diversity of unit types needed to support an active downtown environment. Similar to the Mixed-Use regulations, 3-bedroom units must be allowed to be in compliance with Massachusetts Fair Housing rules. These are currently not permitted at all in the Zoning Bylaw. Allowing multifamily housing in the CB District would require a simple change to the use table in the Zoning Bylaw.

Encourage Restaurants in Downtown

The Zoning Bylaw currently requires a Special Permit for any type of restaurant. For smaller restaurants, this can be an extra step in the process that may deter them from wanting to locate in Downtown. Restaurants are often the reason patrons come to a downtown, and municipalities should be encouraging them to open where appropriate. We suggest eliminating the Special Permit requirement for restaurants up to 5,000 square feet in size, and requiring a Special Permit for those that exceed the threshold. This would still provide an added level of review for larger restaurants that may have a direct impact on parking, traffic, and aesthetics in the Downtown. The Special Permit requirements for restaurants can also be changed by updating the use table for the CB.

Dimensional Regulations that Encourage Good Urban Form

As was discussed earlier, the current CB District dimensional regulations (particularly for residential-only buildings) do not encourage the historical style development typical of Downtown Framingham's core. In order to bring buildings closer to the street, maximize limited building envelopes, and encourage slightly higher development intensity, the project team recommends the following changes be made to the CB District dimensional table:

- Change minimum lot area for residential only development to 5,000 SF.
- Reduce front yard setback for residential only development to 10 feet.

Table 4: Existing and Proposed Zoning - CB District Dimensional Requirements, Town of Framingham

	Max FAR	Min lot area	Max lot coverage	Setbacks			Min lot frontage	Min open space ratio	Max. Height
				Front	Side	Rear			
Existing Central Business District (CB) – any residential use	None	8,000	35%	30' or more	10'	None	65'	30%	3 stories (40')
Existing Central Business District (CB) – any other principal or Mixed-Use	2.0	None	60%	10'	None	None	None	5%	6 stories (80')
Proposed CB Dimensions - any residential use	3.0	5,000	80%	5	0	0	65'	20%	6 stories (70')
Proposed CB Dimensions - mixed use	3.0	5,000	80%	5	0	0	65'	5%	6 stories (70')

- Reduce minimum open space requirement for residential only development to 20%.
- Allow up to 50% of the open space requirement to be located on balconies, or on the roof of the structure as common space.
- Increase maximum building height for residential only development to 6 stories or 80 feet.
- Consider setting a minimum height requirement of 2 or 3 stories (25'-35') for new development to discourage single story buildings in the Downtown.
- Increase maximum lot coverage to 80% for all allowable uses.
- Increase Floor Area Ratio (FAR) to 3.0 for all allowable uses.

Adopt Downtown Design Standards in the Zoning

Site plan and design considerations in an urban downtown environment are different than what may be appropriate in a suburban auto-oriented corridor. Therefore, Downtown should require its own Site Plan Review that incorporates a Design Review component with specific guidelines in the zoning that reflect the character of Downtown. Incorporating design standards into the Zoning Bylaw that specifically relate to the CB District can provide developers and their teams with guidance as to what the Town is looking to achieve through new development. Design standards can regulate built elements such as:

- Building articulation and massing
- Roof form and screening of mechanicals
- Building entrance locations and design
- External materials and window treatments

Having some level of design criteria is important to maintaining the historical New England character that exists along the primary corridors in Downtown Framingham. New development should respect the historical nature of those buildings and mirror the features that make Downtown unique.

In addition to including design standards directly in the CB District zoning language, the Town should also produce an accompanying document that can be used as guidance for developers and Planning Board members as discussions on design take place for specific projects. This accompanying document can get into more specifics than what is appropriate for the Zoning Bylaw and can include photos, diagrams, and figures providing examples expanding on the standards in the Bylaw.

Revise Special Permit Granting

While many uses consistent with transit oriented development are allowed by-right in the Downtown, some uses (e.g. mixed-use structures and restaurants) require a Special Permit from either the Planning Board or Zoning Board of Appeals. In addition, requiring a Special Permit for any development over 8,000 SF adds significant risk to developers or property owners interested in developing larger projects

because there is no guarantee the project will be permitted in a timely manner or permitted at all. This added risk factor, coupled with other challenges developers may face in a downtown setting, could be hampering development potential.

We suggest changing the use regulations so that mixed-use projects are allowed by-right with Site Plan and Design Review within the expanded CB District. Development square footage thresholds triggering a Special Permit should be revised upwards depending on the zoning district, development type, and abutting uses. For example, projects in the CB District that exceed 50,000 SF would require a Special Permit. Projects under that threshold would be allowed by-right but would still have to go through a Site Plan Review process for approvals. The Town may choose to lower that threshold, but the project team recommends a threshold somewhere between 30,000 - 50,000 SF which is in line with findings from the development feasibility analysis and a mock build-out analysis on the three parcel assemblages. Many communities in Massachusetts have thresholds that trigger Special Permit. For example, the City of Marlborough recently adopted zoning that includes a trigger for Special Permit for buildings exceeding six stories in height.

Additionally, the Town must consider allowing 3-bedroom units (which are currently prohibited in Mixed-Use developments per Section IV.N) to provide a diversity of unit sizes and come

into compliance with Massachusetts Fair Housing rules.

Revise Site Plan Review Criteria

The Town of Framingham currently requires any new development, with the exception of single-family residential projects, to go through a Site Plan Review. This can add up to 155 days of review time to any project. The review, in particular the requirement of a Development Impact Statement even for smaller projects, increases pre-development costs to all development proposals, and additional risk to developers of projects over 8,000 SF given the requirement of a Special Permit.

The project team suggests that Site Plan Review requirements be reduced in the CB District to lower pre-development costs for proposed projects. This could include setting gross square feet (GSF) thresholds that trigger a Site Plan Review (e.g. larger projects above X GSF) or to eliminate the requirement of the Development Impact Statement, except for larger projects most likely to have impacts (thresholds to be determined by zoning district). A flexible range could be set up for Site Plan Review, which could be broken down further in a Minor and Major Site Plan Review process depending on project size. MAPC recommends that projects under 20,000 square feet trigger Minor Site Plan Review process, while projects over 20,000 square feet trigger Major Site Plan Review.

We also recommend that the Town consider a Site Plan Review process for the CB District, with

a Design Review component that would help ensure the vision and character of development for Downtown is achieved.

Incentivize Parcel Assembly

Recognizing that the Town's involvement in parcel assembly may be a longer-term solution to creating opportunity for catalytic projects, MAPC recommends setting incentives through the zoning that allow larger projects to occur if land is assembled. Setting thresholds by parcel size is one way of accomplishing this. For example, if a property owner/developer has a parcel(s) less than 20,000 square feet in size that person would be able to develop a smaller project as of right that would still fit in with the character of Downtown. If a property owner/developer was able to assemble one or more parcels equal to or greater than 20,000 square feet, that person would be granted additional density, building height, lower open space requirements, and increased lot coverage.

If the project on the larger lot exceeded the 50,000 square foot building threshold, it would still trigger a Special Permit and the requirements that go along with that. It is highly unlikely that a larger development project will occur in Downtown Framingham without some degree of parcel assembly. There are very few large parcels in the Downtown that do not already have existing development on them. Parcel assembly is time consuming and expensive, and if it is not incentivized through the zoning, it could stifle development activity.

Flexible Parking Regulations

As evidenced by the development feasibility analysis, the parking ratios for multifamily residential development are too high for a Downtown location. The proximity to public transportation and short walking distance to a number of nearby amenities warrants a reduction in parking for residential uses. The project team recommends reducing the current parking ratio of 2 spaces per residential unit, and creating flexible minimums and maximums.

For example, new parking minimums and maximums should be based on the unit size (e.g., number of bedrooms in a unit) rather than a blanket regulation tied to a unit regardless of size. A studio unit is likely to have fewer people and cars than a three bedroom unit.

We recommend the following as a starting point for parking ratios:

- Studio Units - 0.5 space/unit minimum to 1.0 maximum.
- 1 Bedroom Units - 0.5 space/unit minimum to 1.0 maximum.
- 2+ Bedroom Units - 1.0 space/unit minimum to 1.5 maximum.

We feel these new parking ratios are achievable if they are paired with additional parking options. The Downtown area has an abundance of public and private parking available, but each parking lot has different users with different demands during the day. The Town should look at a specific

shared parking bylaw for the CB District that encourages sharing parking among parties that have different needs based on time of day. For example, a bank parking lot is empty from 5PM-8AM, which may coincide with the needs of a residential building. Sharing these parking assets can be a way to reduce the burden on new development where land is at a premium and should not be taken up by surface parking.

The Town should also consider eliminating parking requirements for ground floor commercial uses in mixed-use buildings along key corridors like Concord Street and Hollis Street. This is a practice followed in many municipalities and would relieve some of the parking burden on new mixed-use development in Downtown. The could also adopt parking reductions for developments that provide car sharing spaces as part of their parking management plan. This will be particularly important for households who do not have access to a vehicle by choice or necessity. Additional parking recommendations are explained in more detail in the transportation chapter.

Maintaining Affordability

As Downtown attracts private sector investment in the future, it is critical that there are affordable housing units among the mix of new market rate units. The Town has an inclusionary zoning policy that states 10% of the units in a residential building must be set aside for affordable housing. In the early stages of redevelopment, 10% may be acceptable. If development takes off in Downtown, the Town should consider increasing this to 15%-20% for new development to ensure current and future residents of all income ranges are able to live in Downtown and take advantage of the close proximity to services and public transportation. While this may seem like a large number of changes to the CB District, the changes are relatively easy to make and only require adjustments to the existing zoning language. The challenge will be communicating these changes in a coordinated message to the boards, committees, and Town Meeting members who are responsible for vetting the regulations and eventually voting on them. These changes are critical to the success of the Downtown and sending a message to the development community that Framingham is ready for new investment. New projects do need to go through an approval process and should be vetted through the Town's boards, but the process can be streamlined to save time and money on both sides. Bringing in additional housing and commercial development will add vibrancy, activity, and a built in customer base for existing and future businesses.



5

Improving Mobility *in Downtown Framingham*

Transportation and Public Space

The idea of reinvigorating Downtown Framingham is not a new one. For many decades the desire to eliminate traffic congestion resulting from the complicated intersection of regional transportation corridors, both vehicular and rail, at the heart of Downtown has dominated the public narrative. In recent years this conventional approach has led to the advancement of various noted infrastructure investment alternatives to relieve traffic congestion. However the public narrative has shifted. Complete streets and the need to view transportation systems through a lens of public safety, health, economic vitality, and quality of life must now be considered in conjunction with easing traffic delay. 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 choices at hand in Downtown require a thorough understanding of how regional and local interests are juxtaposed, and the ability of local leaders and community members to clearly articulate a unified transportation vision. In many ways the Town of Framingham has articulated its values. With formal beginnings in the Town's 1988 Master Plan, the concept of defining an economically viable active Downtown district along Route 126 (Concord Street), centered around the MBTA Commuter Rail Station, has been a consistent theme in the master planning for Framingham.

In September 2012, the Planning Board commissioned an updated Master Plan with a discernible shift from a vehicle-centric focus to an all-encompassing multi-modal plan. In January 2015, the Town adopted a Complete Streets Policy which solidifies the Town's commitment to creating a safe transportation network for users of all ages and abilities regardless of travel choice.

The Master Plan's Vision Statement on transportation relates to goals around walking, biking, public transit, signage, accessibility to open spaces and parking, and utilization of the rail station which are all components of revitalization in the Downtown. The challenge in Framingham is to marry these values with the desire to address the complicated traffic congestion concerns resulting from the confluence of two regional vehicle corridors (Waverly Street/Route 135 & Concord Street/Route 126) and the adjacent rail corridor servicing MBTA Commuter Rail, Amtrak Passenger Service and CSX freight operations.

It is the intent of this study to produce recommendations that are specific to multi-modal improvements that will help connect new development opportunities to the rest of the Downtown transportation network. To that end the investments identified herein do not preclude the ability to address regional transportation objectives as envisioned by the depression of Route 135.

This chapter will discuss different transportation investment options for Downtown, as well as other types of public space improvements.

Looking south along Route 126/Concord Street.



The intersection of Routes 126 and 135.



Transportation Context

From a transportation connectivity perspective, Downtown Framingham is very well positioned. With access to a commuter rail station in Downtown, riders can get to Worcester or Boston in under an hour with multiple options for express trains from Framingham to Boston. The Downtown is also a short drive from both Route 9 and I-90. The Downtown also serves as a hub for the MetroWest Regional Transit Authority (MWRTA) which has several bus routes anchored in Downtown providing access to many surrounding MetroWest communities.

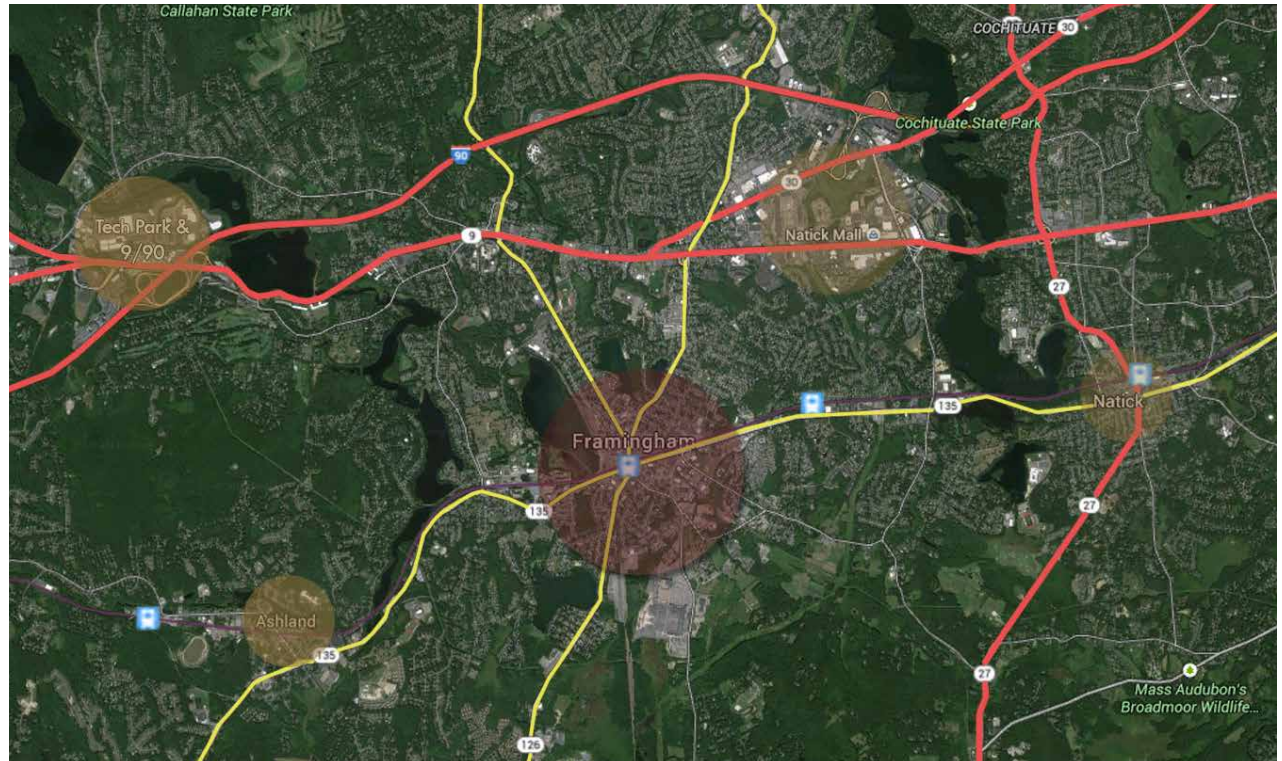
The Downtown also acts as a confluence point for a number of regional roadways connecting Framingham to nearby municipalities like Ashland and Natick. Regional vehicular traffic (both cars and trucks) use these roadways to access job centers, shopping centers, downtowns, and connections to major roadways and transit facilities. The challenges in Downtown Framingham are compounded by the at-grade rail crossing of the Framingham/Worcester Line which serves MBTA commuter rail service, Amtrak trains, and CSX freight operations. The Downtown is flanked by three active rail yards to the north, south, and west which provide switching and storage space for rail freight carriers. With the closing of the Allston Yard in Boston and movement of freight operations to Worcester, freight activity in Framingham has increased. This causes more frequent closures of Route 126 as trains pass through the Downtown.

Previous studies have indicated this roadway could be closed upwards of 20% of the time during peak weekday commuting hours. As part of the data collection effort for this study, the transportation team from GPI collected traffic volume counts at three locations in the Downtown. This information was collected to compare to previous traffic counts completed in 2009 to determine if volumes have increased over time. GPI found that volumes have increased over the last five years, which is consistent with findings from other parts of the Greater Boston region. Traffic issues are shared between many partners including the Town, the State, the MBTA, and freight rail operators.

Pedestrian Counts

Interestingly, pedestrian crossings at the intersection of Routes 126 and 135 are quite substantial with about 250 pedestrians crossing Route 135 to walk north or south along Route 126 during the weekday peak hours (4PM-6PM). It is important to note that as design progresses for the depression of Route 135, accommodating pedestrians in a safe and efficient manner will be critical.

Figure 21: Regional Transportation Context Map



Bicycle Counts

Bicycle access in the Downtown is limited. In the team's assessment of Downtown, the only bike infrastructure noted were bike racks at the commuter rail station. Interestingly, those racks were all full signaling bike activity is present in the Downtown with specific emphasis on connections to the commuter rail station. None of the roadways in the Downtown have dedicated bike lanes, shared lane markings, or signage indicating bikes may be present on roadways. As such, the team witnessed many cyclists biking on the sidewalks which is dangerous for both cyclists and pedestrians. Bike counts were conducted at the same locations as the pedestrian counts. The results of those counts can be seen in Figure 23.

Figure 22: Vehicular Traffic Counts from 2014

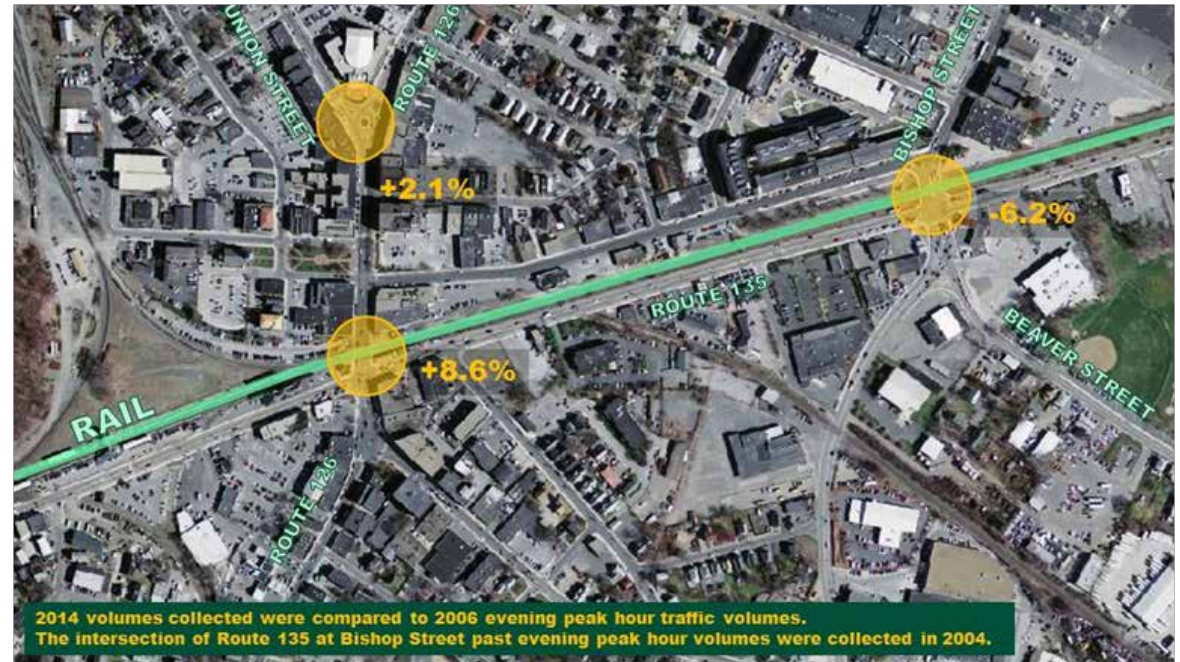


Figure 23: Bicycle Counts from 2014

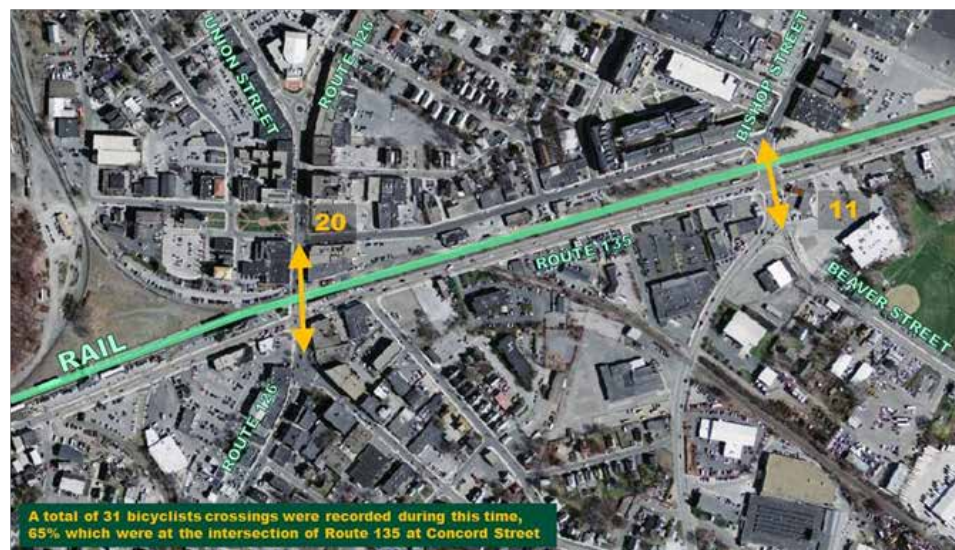
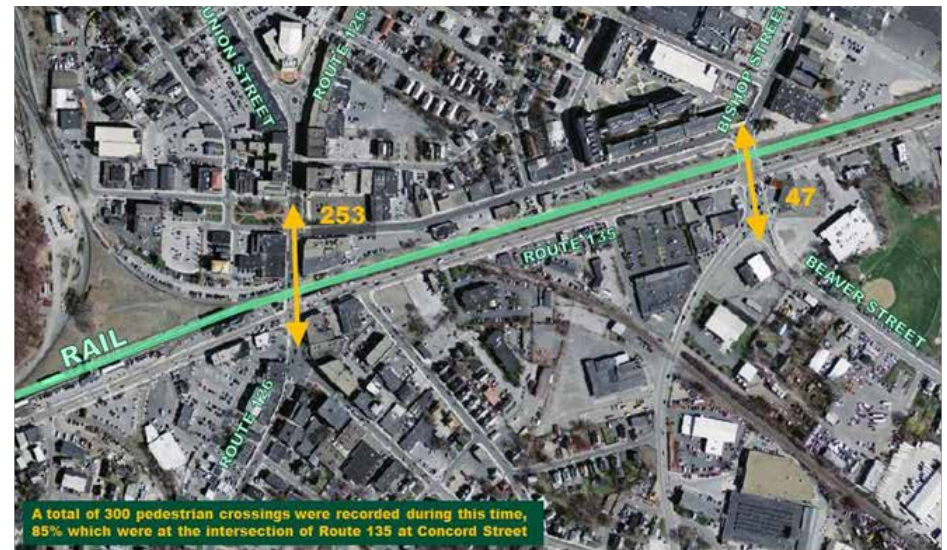


Figure 24: Pedestrian Traffic Counts from 2014



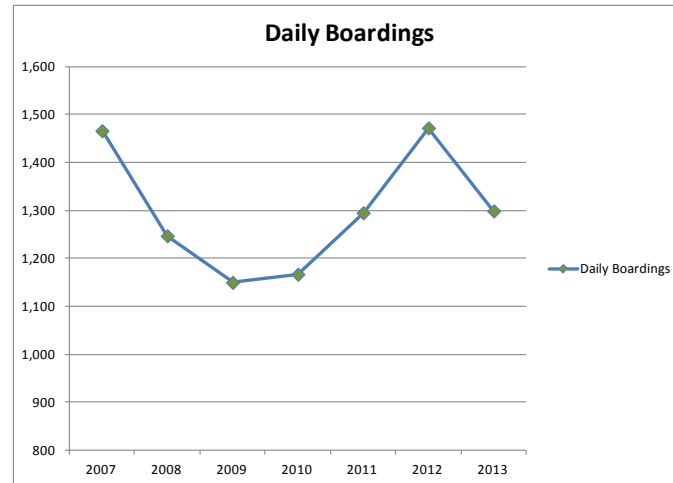
Public Transportation

Downtown Framingham is served by a robust public transportation system. The MBTA Framingham/Worcester Commuter Rail line provides both inbound and outbound service approximately hourly throughout the day, with more frequent stops during peak commuting hours. Train service between Framingham and Downtown Boston takes a little less than an hour on regular service trains, and about 30-35 minutes on express trains. Figure 25 shows average daily boardings at the Framingham Commuter Rail station. Boardings have been increasing steadily since a low in 2009 during the Great Recession. This pattern was common across most of the commuter rail system during that time period.

Framingham is also served by the MetroWest Regional Transit Authority (MWRTA), whose central hub is currently located along Waverly Street just east of the Downtown core. The MWRTA operates eight Downtown routes linking Downtown Framingham with other nearby attractions and additional transit options. The MWRTA is currently in the process of constructing a brand new facility along Blandin Avenue a few blocks southeast of Downtown Framingham. The new facility will serve as a connection hub, customer service center, maintenance facility, and vehicle storage for the agency. Along with the new facility, the MWRTA recently re-routed some Downtown routes to make a more explicit connection to the commuter rail station. This has already helped connect those transit options and boosted ridership. Figures 26 and 27 show the previous and current Downtown routes.

Amtrak also provides passenger rail service along the Lake Shore Limited (connecting Boston and Chicago) twice daily through Framingham.

Figure 25: Average Daily Boardings at the Framingham Commuter Rail Station



Source: 2014 MBTA Blue Book

Figure 26: Previous MWRTA Routes in Downtown Framingham



Figure 27: Current MWRTA Routes in Downtown Framingham



Safety Challenges

The safety of all roadway users is a concern within Downtown Framingham. It is an area of proven elevated safety issues for motorists, pedestrians and bicyclists. The intersection of Waverly Street and Concord Street, at the heart of Downtown, is ranked #45 on the State's latest Top 200 high crash locations. Waverly Street at Bishop Street is ranked #92. The core of Downtown is also a documented safety concern for all users given its higher than average crash frequency for vehicles, pedestrians and bicyclists. It should be noted that much of the area along Concord Street is currently being reconstructed as part of a state funded Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) project which will improve safety conditions (project discussed later in this chapter).

Figures 28-30 show the high crash locations from the most recent MassDOT safety report from 2012. The corridor along Route 126 has high crash clusters for vehicles, pedestrians and cyclists. Creating a safe and accessible downtown for all modes needs to be a priority for Framingham if the Town wants to attract businesses, residents, customers, and visitors. While the improvements planned along Route 126 will help catalyze some safety enhancements, more needs to be done on secondary corridors that connect to the main streets in Downtown. These secondary corridors include Howard Street, Union Street, Pearl Street, Kendall Street, and Irving Street. These corridors will be vital to supporting walking, biking, and connecting parking assets to the business core along Concord Street.

Figure 28: HSIP Vehicle Crash Cluster Locations in Downtown



Figure 29: HSIP Bicycle Crash Cluster Locations in Downtown



Figure 30: HSIP Pedestrian Crash Cluster Locations in Downtown



Route 126/Route 135 Grade Separation

The grade separation project is one that has been discussed in Town for decades. There have been many studies of the intersection of these two regional roadways and their interaction with the rail crossing in Downtown. In 2009, the BETA Group prepared a comprehensive investigation of conditions in Downtown with a specific focus on developing several alternatives for this transportation project to help relieve some congestion. Four alternatives were showcased in that report, and after careful analysis where other options were proved less feasible, the Town chose the depression of Route 135 underneath Route 126. The Town has a long-standing commitment to improving this crossing, and is actively pursuing funding through the Boston MPO's Long Range Transportation Plan. Figure 30 provides a conceptual drawing of the roadway layout associated with that project. (For additional information on the grade separation alternatives, see the 2009 Downtown Master Plan prepared by BETA Group)

For the purposes of this Downtown Action Plan, the project team used the Route 135 depression project to better understand any potential impacts it may have on development opportunities in the Downtown. Depressing Route 135 will have some impact on parcels (and existing buildings) that have frontage along that roadway. This includes the Hollis Court assemblage discussed in the development feasibility chapter, which is one of the prime redevelopment opportunities.

Of particular importance to note is the fact that development in Downtown consistent with the vision of creating a mixed-use, walkable, urban center will not be precluded by the future plans of a grade separation project. Although parcels may be impacted by the project, there are ways to plan development in a way that reserves right-of-way for the future should it be needed. New development plans along Route 135 should include a setback of about 30 feet from the roadway to reserve that right-of-way

should the depression move forward. In the short-term, that 30 feet can be used as public space with wide sidewalks or a shared use pathway for pedestrians and cyclists. It could be used for streetscaping to provide a buffer zone between the cars on Route 135 and the buildings. That area could also be used as public space with small plazas, seating areas, or outdoor cafe space depending on the first floor uses.

Figure 30: Route 135 Depression Grade Separation

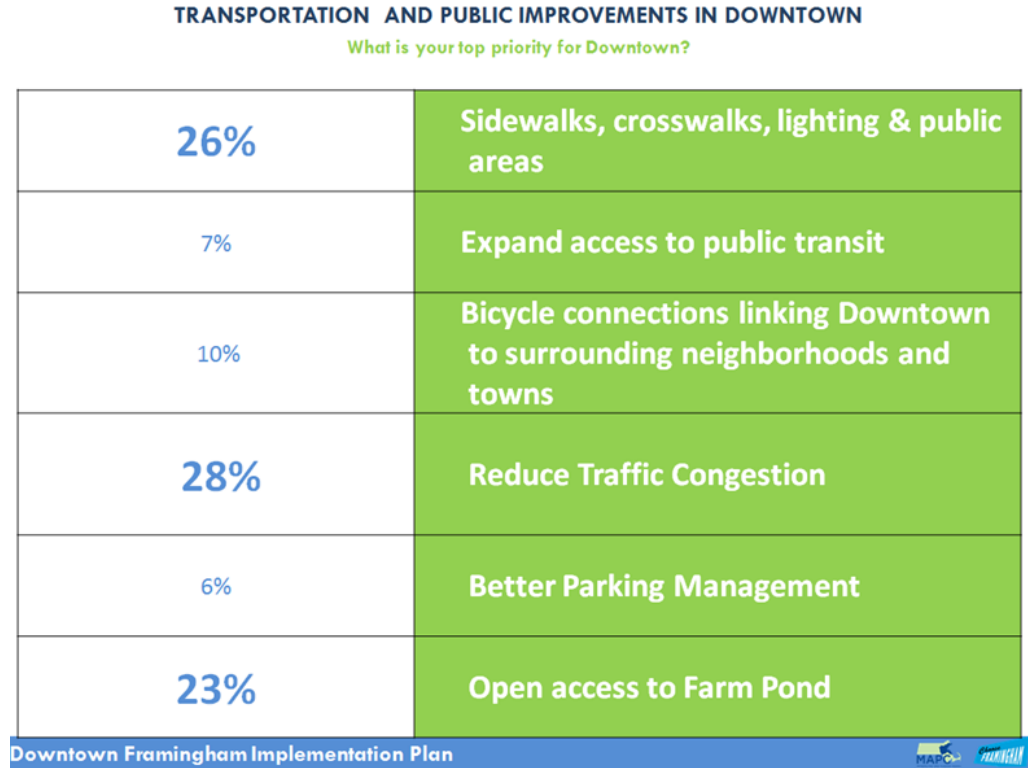


Creating a Multi-Modal Downtown

With so much focus on the car-dominated conversation around the grade separation, the project team thought it appropriate to ask people in Framingham about their top three transportation improvement preferences at the November 2014 Open House event. We had over 150 people participate in the open house, and of those who cast their votes preferences were evenly split among pedestrian improvements, congestion relief, and access to open space.

This exercise provided important insight into the preferences of the people who live, work and visit Downtown on a regular basis. While traffic congestion is certainly an issue, people care about being able to walk safely on well lit sidewalks and having access to assets like the Downtown Common and Farm Pond. If the Town focuses all of its efforts on funding and constructing the grade separation, short-term projects that make improvements for pedestrians, cyclists, and transit users will be missed. Arguably, these types of improvements may have a larger benefit to catalyzing development and helping businesses thrive than a multi-million dollar roadway project that only benefits people driving through the Downtown to get to other destinations inside and outside of Framingham. The Downtown should be a place where vehicles can move through at safe speeds, but ideally want to stop, park, and walk to multiple destinations in the Downtown. The following section will lay out some short- and long-term recommendations for improvements that will help connect new development opportunities in Downtown, as well as improve the overall transportation network.

Figure 31: Results from the November 2014 Open House



Cracked sidewalks, faded crosswalks, missing sidewalks, and curb ramps that do not meet ADA standards can be found throughout the Downtown.



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Pedestrian Improvement Options

You cannot have a walkable, vibrant, and active downtown environment without the walking component. Pedestrian comfort and safety is critical for creating this type of environment. To that end, an \$8.8 million roadway reconstruction project along Concord Street began in late 2014. This project (shown in Figure 32) intends to rehabilitate the roadway, add turning lanes to improve traffic flow, improve sidewalks, curbing and streetscape. In addition the project will replace the existing roundabout at the Concord Street/Union Street intersection with a modern traffic signal, signalize the intersection of Hollis Street/Irving Street, improve the technology controlling the rail crossing safety systems and implement state of the art adaptive signal technology throughout the corridor.

This project will provide a pedestrian-friendly spine on both sides of Downtown Framingham and will provide a design theme for secondary corridors to mimic as other improvements are implemented. While this is a great start for Downtown, there are other pedestrian improvements that will help connect future development opportunities to the new improvements along Concord Street.

Pearl Street Assemblage

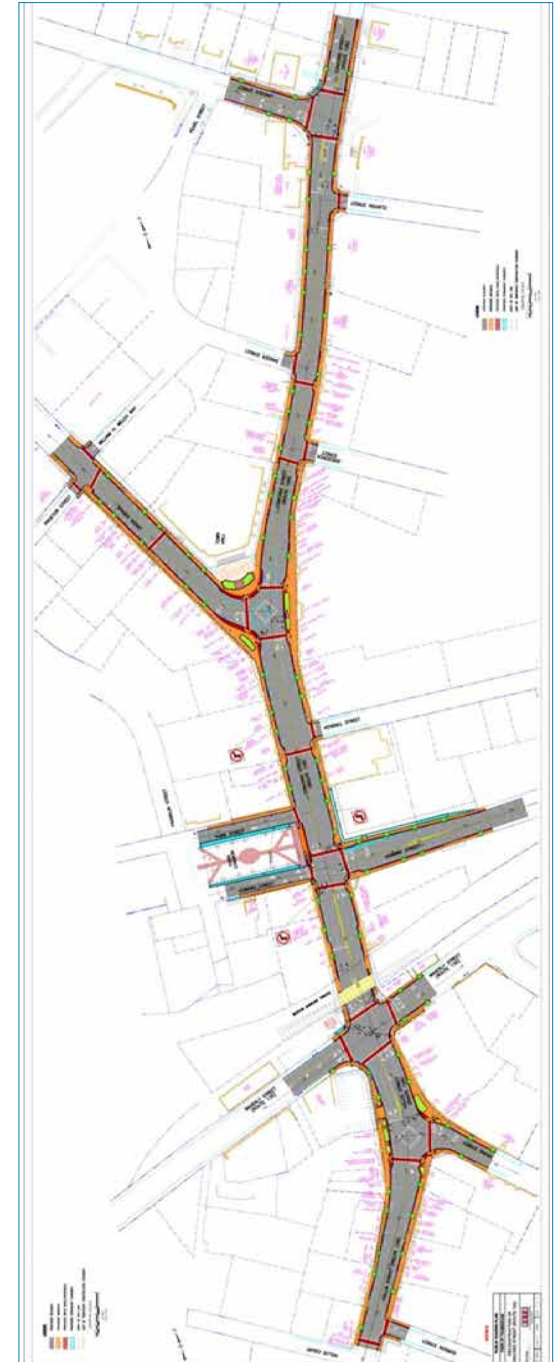
In addition to pedestrian walkways associated with new development and parking facilities at this assemblage, additional improvements are needed. For example, the frontage along Proctor Street is missing a sidewalk on one side. Constructing 600' of new concrete

sidewalk and curbing would cost the Town approximately \$60,000. In addition, there are missing crosswalks at the intersection of Franklin Street and Proctor Street. Putting in an ADA compliant crosswalk at this location would cost approximately \$30,000. While seemingly small improvements, these pedestrian enhancements would go a long way to enabling the vision of a walkable Downtown Framingham.

Pedestrian improvements needed along Prospect and Franklin Streets.



Figure 32: On-Going Improvements Along Concord Street



Pedestrian Improvement Options Cont.

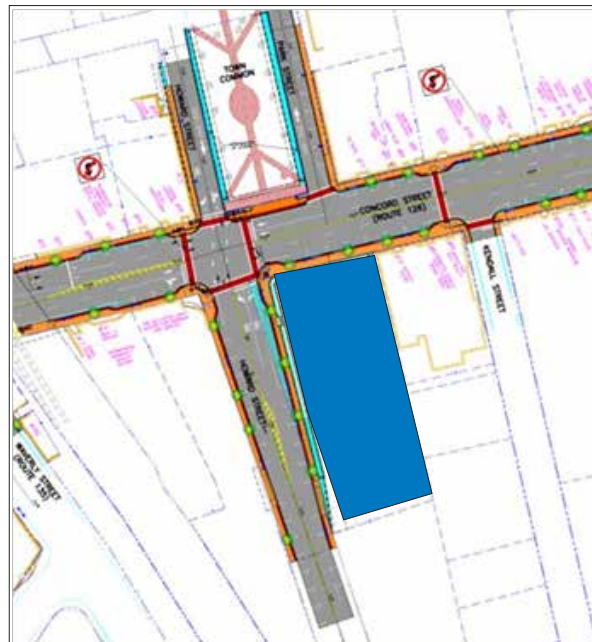
Howard Street Assemblage

The Howard Street assemblage will be a direct beneficiary of the improvements taking place along Concord Street with new sidewalks, lighting, and streetscape. To build off the momentum of that project, the Town should consider extending these improvements along Kendall Street to the east. Resurfacing the roadway, reconstructing sidewalks, and adding in some streetscape elements would cost approximately \$250,000 depending on the level of amenities included. The Town may also want to consider extending improvements further down Howard Street to connect the Dennison complex to the Downtown and the commuter rail station. That residential and commercial complex is within a close walking distance to the Downtown core and could benefit from improved conditions along that stretch of road.

Hollis Court Assemblage

Similar to the Howard Street scenario, Hollis Court would benefit from the Concord Street project which will rehabilitate its Hollis Street frontage. In addition, the Town is currently constructing a new crosswalk of Waverly Street to the development site. This includes a refuge island within Waverly Street itself. The crosswalk will serve to better connect this site to the MBTA commuter rail station. A conservative estimate of the construction cost for this crossing is \$50,000.

Figure 33: Howard Street Site and Concord Street Project



Kendall Street looking east toward Concord Street



Potential mid-block crosswalk along Waverly Street



Cyclists riding along the sidewalk on Waverly Street



Bicycle Improvement Options

As was noted under the existing transportation section, Downtown Framingham has no bike accommodations other than some bike parking at the commuter rail station. In general, there are opportunities throughout the Downtown to add shared lane markings on roadways at a minimum. These markings should be accompanied by signage signaling to drivers that cyclists should be expected on Downtown roadways and all users should share that right-of-way appropriately. Examples of shared lane markings and signage are shown to the right.

Bike parking is an easy improvement the Town could make in Downtown to signal a more bike friendly environment. Mandating bike parking as part of new development is an easy way to get those improvements incorporated as part of new projects, but the Town should also look for locations to place bike racks at existing destinations. These could include Town Hall, Downtown Common, and long sidewalks near popular restaurants and shops. Examples of preferred bike parking are shown to the right.

Pearl Street Assemblage

Currently there are no bicycle accommodations along Franklin Street. Adding shared lane markings to promote a sharing the road costs approximately \$11,000 per mile.

Howard Street Assemblage

Currently there are no bicycle accommodations on either Howard Street or Kendall Street. As these roadways are improved and striped, it

will be important to stripe shared lane markings at a minimum. This would cost approximately \$11,000 per mile.

Hollis Court Assemblage

Waverly Street currently provides no bicycle accommodations even though it has excess width and links to the MBTA commuter rail station which offers bicycle racks. To add bike lanes along Waverly Street in both directions would cost conservatively \$500,000 for the extent of its limits as part of this study. This includes moving curb in some location. If curbing does not have to be moved this cost could be significantly reduced.



Post and Loop and Inverted-U bike racks are easy to install in urban areas.



Shared lane markings and share the road signs

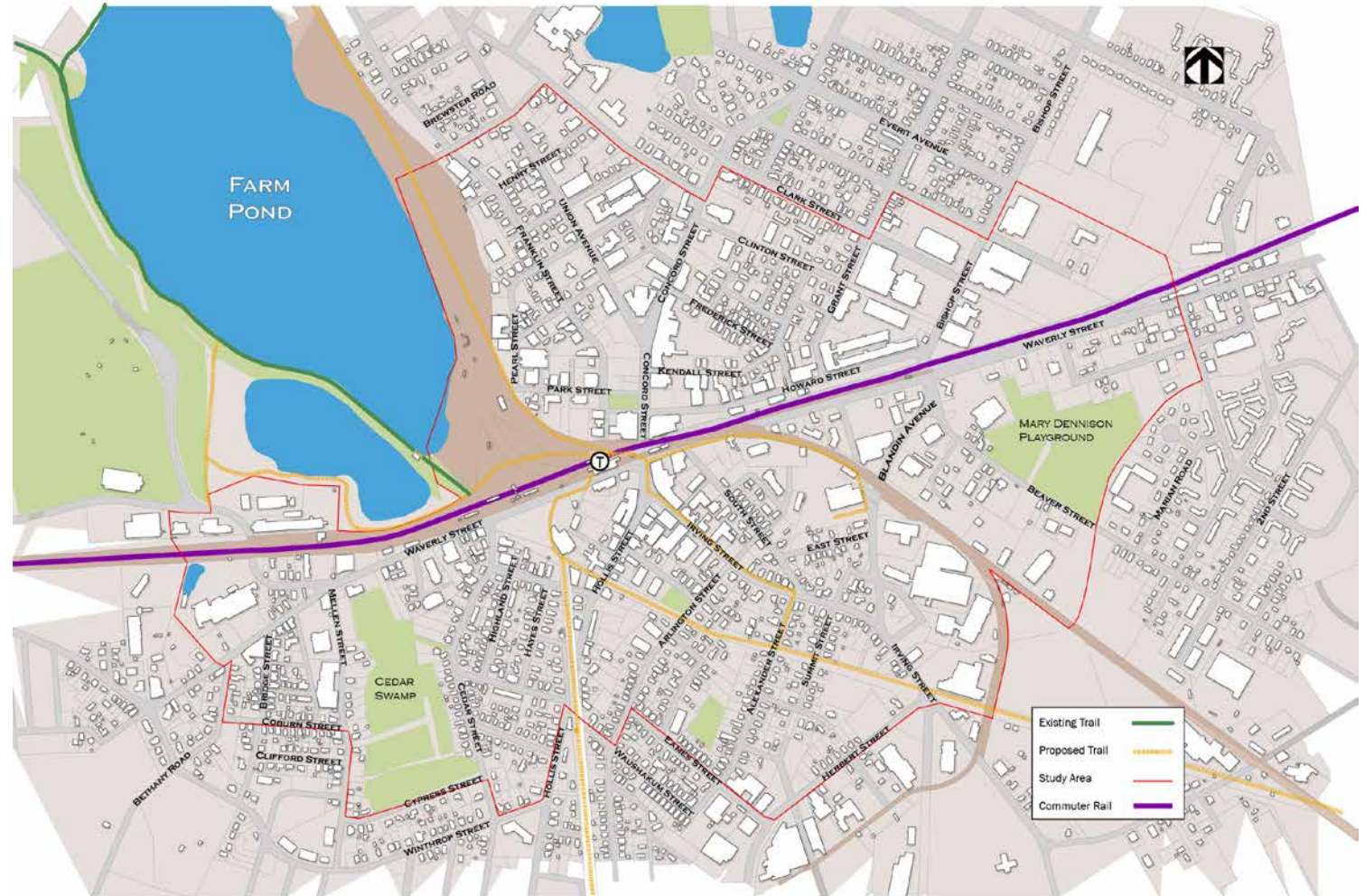


Regional Trail Connections

Downtown Framingham is uniquely situated at the confluence of a regional trail network of off-street walking and biking pathways. The Town, MAPC, and the MWRA have been working to open up access to the regions aqueduct trail network for recreational uses. One of the aqueduct trails comes along Farm Pond from the north, but is currently blocked by an old gatehouse which requires a pedestrian walkway to be constructed to go around the gatehouse and connect to Route 135. The MWRTA is also planning a trail connection from their new facility along an old railway line that would connect into Downtown and the commuter rail station providing pedestrian and cyclists with a direct connection to both modes of transit. There are also a number of regional rail-trails opportunities on old rights-of-way that are being explored by different regional and state partners. These include the Upper Charles Trail and the remainder of the aqueduct lines.

The Town should work with local, regional, and state partners to open up these trail opportunities. This could serve as a recreational use for Downtown residents, but also as a marketing opportunity for the Town since so many of these regional trails connect in Downtown. Residents and visitors would be drawn to this attraction and could help boost spending in the Downtown to the benefit of local businesses. Figure 34 shows some of the potential trail connections that come together in Downtown Framingham.

Figure 34: Proposed Regional Trail Network



Freight Challenges

The presence of CSX and their rail yards that flank Downtown creates challenges for transportation and development connectivity in Downtown. The activity along the rail line and in the rail yards has intensified since the closing of the Allston Yard in Boston. It is unlikely in the short-term that CSX would be willing to consolidate operations in the Nevins Yard to the west of Downtown. It is also unlikely that a grade separation option that involves depressing the train tracks will be considered because of complicated track alignments, disruption to current operations, and the exorbitant cost of a project of that magnitude.

In the short-term, the Town should continue to work with CSX on limiting freight crossings in Downtown to off-peak travel times (early mornings or late evenings). This would help alleviate some of the vehicular congestion at peak times. The Town should also work with CSX to stop sounding the train horns in close proximity to Downtown. This will be disruptive to anyone who lives in the Downtown, and could be a deterrent for new residential development.

In the long-term, the Town should seek leverage at the state and federal level with legislators and transportation agencies to try to consolidate CSX's freight operations in the Nevins Yard or elsewhere outside of Framingham. This would help free up valuable land in Downtown and facilitate an easier connection to Farm Pond.

Congestion Improvement Options

As was discussed earlier, the on-going project along Concord Street will create opportunities to help relieve some congestion in Downtown. The project will replace old outdated signal systems with new signals that can be timed and coordinated to respond to traffic demands. New modern controls and adaptive signal technology at the rail crossing and along the corridor will help with traffic flow. The project will also replace the roundabout in front of Town Hall with a signalized intersection that will also be coordinated with others along the corridor.

The longer-term solution the Town will continue to pursue is the depression of Route 135, or some variation of that grade separation project. However, without a solution to the train crossing at Route 126, the real problem for north/south travelers will not be solved. One recommendation is for the Town to continue pursuing the longer-term solution to the grade separation through the Boston MPO Long Range Plan process, while simultaneously looking for short-term improvements in the Downtown that would promote a walkable, bikeable, transit-friendly place. Both of these options will cost money, but the Town, in partnership with the State and private sector investment, should pursue the short-term opportunities to set the stage for successful redevelopment in the Downtown while awaiting funding decisions on the longer-term grade separation project.

Public Transportation Options

The new MWRTA bus facility on Blandin Avenue will be a huge improvement and boost for Downtown bus service. The new routes that are planned to connect to and through the commuter rail station will provide a more direct connection point for transit users switching between bus and rail modes.

In the short-term, the Town should support the MWRTA wherever possible by ensuring bus shelters can be located at key development locations along proposed routes and bus stop signs remain highly visible for users. Any streetscape projects along bus route roadways in Downtown need to include pedestrian scale lighting and well-lit bus stops/shelters. The Town should also make sure people are not parking in front of bus stops blocking access for transit vehicles. The Town may also want to consider placing bike parking at the busier stops along the Downtown bus routes to establish connections between those modes of transportation.

Parking in Downtown

Parking is an important topic when balancing needs within downtown settings. Generally speaking, transitioning to a more walkable, transit-orientated place typically comes with a consideration of reduced parking requirements for new development (as was discussed in the zoning chapter). Parking ratios, policies, and strategies need to work together to support residences and businesses, yet not over supply the Downtown with free easily accessible parking that will encourage people to only drive more.

Often times in downtowns, the parking supply far outweighs the actual demand. The perception of business owners and residents though is often that there is no available parking or it is difficult to find available parking. This can mean different things in different places, but it is often more a question about policies and management than it is about building more parking.

The project team conducted a two day assessment of parking during the mid-day hours to better understand parking demand and occupancy for both on-street spaces and off-street parking lots and garages in Downtown Framingham. In total, we counted over 2,700 public and private parking spaces in the core area of Downtown. During the hours of 11:30AM - 3:30PM an average of 1,200 spaces (45%) were available for parking. This is not much different than what was found during the 2009 Downtown Master Plan where

about 43% of parking was being utilized. Currently within the half-mile radius around the commuter rail station, 20% of the land area is being used for surface parking. That is a large amount of valuable land to dedicate to an asset experiencing relatively low utilization.

While many of these spaces are owned and maintained by private property owners, the availability of parking shows there are opportunities to share parking assets across developments in the Downtown. A district-wide approach to parking solutions would greatly benefit the Downtown. Thinking about parking holistically regardless of public or private ownership will be important to ensuring there are places for people to park who choose to drive to Downtown. The key will be managing the parking, assessing changes in parking demand over time, and having a clear and consistent marketing plan for letting everyone know where they can find parking. The following section contains observations and recommendations for maximizing the current parking assets in the Downtown.

Develop a Parking Management Plan

Having a base line for parking availability, utilization, and turnover in Downtown can be an important tool for managing parking effectively. We recommend the Town of Framingham complete a parking study and management plan for the Downtown study area to better understand the assets, how they are being used today, and how they could be

Surface parking behind Franklin Street looking toward the Pearl Street garage.



On-street parking availability along Waverly Street.



Off-street parking lot for Santander Bank along Union Avenue



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leveraged to support additional development opportunities in the future. The parking management plan can recommend placement of signage, creating shared parking opportunities, pricing on- and off-street parking if needed, locating employee parking areas, and looking for opportunities to connect sidewalks and crosswalks to parking areas.

Look for Shared Parking Opportunities

With 20% of the land currently dedicated to surface parking lots, there are many opportunities for sharing parking assets. Shared parking concepts work best when users have opposite hours for parking demand. For example, a bank needs their parking available during business hours (say 9AM-5PM). A residential development in the area may only need parking availability in the evenings from 6PM-8AM when residents are at home and not at work. These two different peak demand times for parking would work well in a shared parking scenario.

Shared parking calculations and policies can be written into the Zoning Bylaw. There can be specifications about a percent reduction in total parking for uses that can share parking, or a new development could reduce their parking requirements if they are within a certain proximity to a shared parking lot or parking garage. These types of shared parking policies can help reduce parking demand from new development and better utilize existing parking in Downtown.

Improve the Pearl Street Garage

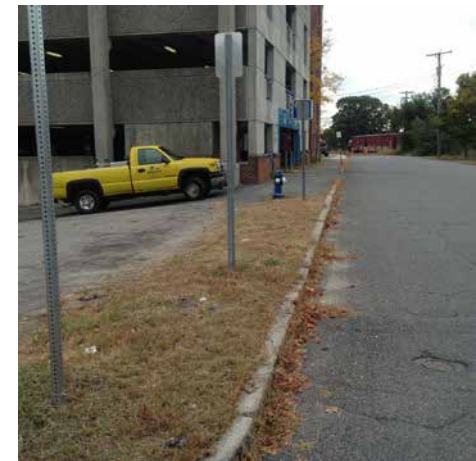
The parking garage on Pearl Street in Downtown contains over 250 spaces and is a terrific asset to have for long-term parking, employee parking, or leasing parking spaces for new development. Having a publicly owned parking garage in a downtown location provides the municipality with a lot of flexibility to support existing and future businesses without placing that burden on existing on- and off-street parking infrastructure.

That said, the Pearl Street garage is not located in a highly visible prominent location in Downtown. It is tucked away along Pearl Street, and difficult to find if you do not know it is there. The garage's secluded location also enforces the perception that it is an unsafe place to park and walk. Low lighting in the garage and along the surrounding streets is a challenge, and the graffiti, broken windows, and trash re-enforce the safety perceptions. The Town should consider making streetscape improvements along Park Street, Pearl Street, and Proctor Street to add pedestrian-scale lighting and ensure sidewalks and crosswalks are in good condition to encourage visitors to use the garage and walk to destinations in Downtown.

Add Signage and Market Parking

To make parking more visible to the public, parking signage can go a long way. Traditional blue "P" parking signs with or without arrows are well recognized and would provide clear direction for where Downtown visitors should

Missing sidewalks along Pearl Street do not encourage pedestrians to park and walk to Downtown.



Parking sign examples for Downtown



park. In combination with parking signage, the Town may also want to update and publish the parking map they created for Downtown. This map is currently available on the Framingham website, but the Town may want to work with businesses to promote the parking map by having them in storefront windows or in visible locations inside businesses. The more parking is promoted, the easier it will be for visitors to find available parking locations if parking in front of their destination is not available.

Pricing Parking

A parking study and management plan will be able to discern whether or not metering or pricing parking is necessary. Based on the limited data collection completed by the project team, it does not look like pricing is necessary at this point in time in Framingham. Current utilization rates across the Downtown do not signify a major parking shortage. In locations where parking utilization is above 90%, pricing may be a necessary step to encourage turnover of spaces. Pricing of on-street spaces along major corridors may be desired to promote turnover if cars are parked for long periods of time. This can also be determined through a parking study in Downtown. It will be important to monitor parking availability over time, especially if new development occurs in the Downtown. Monitoring and assessing parking on a regular basis is the best way to keep track of trends and be able to respond to parking issues in a timely manner.

New Development Will Have Parking

Throughout this process we heard concerns about the future of parking assets if new development occurs in Downtown. While we are recommending the Town reduce residential parking requirements for new multifamily residential development, we are not recommending a complete waiver of parking. New development will need to build some parking to accommodate new residents in the Downtown. The goal of lowering parking ratios is two-fold:

1. Reducing parking requirements lowers construction costs for developers, thereby making new development more financially feasible than it may be with higher parking requirements. This was a key finding coming from the development feasibility analysis, which was informed by input from the development community.
2. Building less parking in the Downtown will encourage people to move to Downtown who do not have more than one car. We know younger professionals are delaying getting a driver's license and buying a car in lieu of living in transit accessible walkable locations. If Framingham promotes the construction of large amounts of parking in the Downtown, there will be no disincentive to drive. If a resident wants to live in a location where parking is available in abundance, there are other options in Framingham for those residents.

Parking is a tricky topic, but with good management and sound parking policies the Town should have no problem balancing the needs of drivers with the vision of a walkable pedestrian friendly downtown core. Monitoring parking and making changes to policy and infrastructure are key to turning and auto-oriented downtown into one that is well balanced and meets the needs of all users.

Public Space Improvements

Streetscape Improvements

Along with improvements to the transportation system and the built environment, there are certain intangibles that make Downtowns inviting and welcoming places where people want to spend time. Public spaces and programming are two important pieces of enlivening a Downtown. The Concord Street project is going to add streetscape elements such as street trees and lighting along this main thoroughfare. The Town should consider investing in trash receptacles, branding banners, and bench seating along this corridor to provide additional amenities for pedestrians. Once a streetscape pattern is developed, it can be expanded to many of the secondary corridors that connect the core of Downtown to surrounding neighborhoods. This will create a consistent, cohesive, and inviting experience for all users of the transportation network. It also helps to define the Downtown district and provide a sense of arrival for those who may be visiting from outside Framingham.

Placemaking and Programming Public Space

Cities and towns across the country are turning to innovative and engaging measures to bring people to their downtowns. Quick and short-term events, programming, and temporary improvements can be ways to attract positive attention to a downtown. In Framingham, the Framingham Downtown Renaissance (FDR) could be a perfect organization to help organize these types of events with backing from the Town. FDR already organizes events at Farm Pond and a farmer's market in Downtown.

Streetscape element examples



Short-term temporary programs, events, and infrastructure improvements can be a great way to draw attention to opportunities in a Downtown and create buy-in for innovative concepts.

Placemaking and Programming Public Space Cont.

Testing concepts with temporary changes, modifications, and adjustments can be a great way to see if new transportation improvements would work or be well received by businesses and residents. The great part about temporary interventions is they can be easily removed if they do not work. Curb bump outs, sidewalk extensions, bike lanes, and outdoor seating can be temporarily tested to see how it works before investing in permanent changes.

Many cities and towns are also installing temporary and permanent “parklets”, or parking spaces that are re-purposed into public spaces. The parklets might contain bike parking, seating, plantings, a place for a business to sell products outdoors, a food vendor, etc. These can be pop-up installations that last a day or an entire season. They provide great places for outdoor seating where sidewalks are too narrow to accommodate sidewalk cafes.

The key to placemaking and short-term interventions is to test, test, and test again. Cones, paint, chalk, and tape can go a long way to showing the public what a concept looks and feels like in Downtown before investing in expensive permanent changes.



Farm Pond

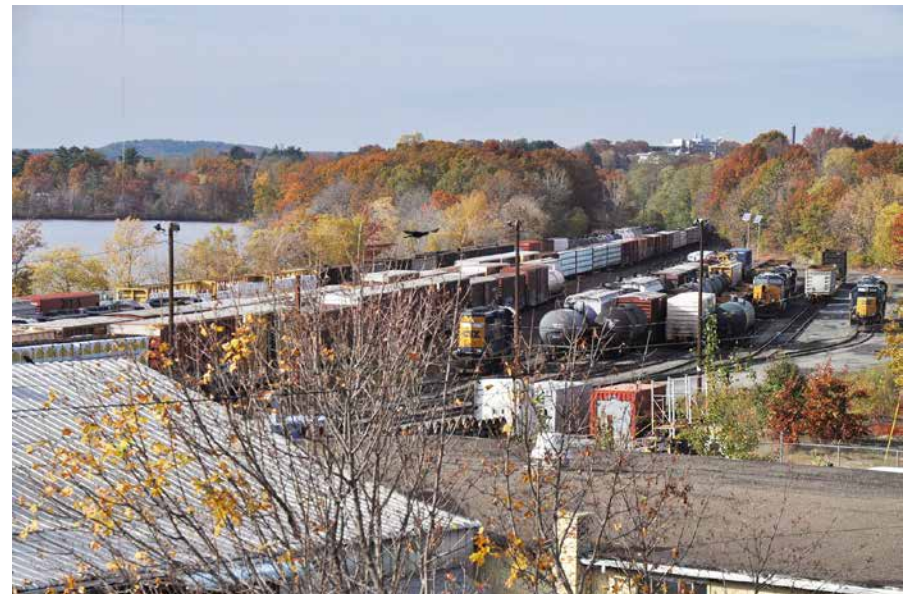
One of the few large open spaces in close proximity to Downtown, Farm Pond offers a unique opportunity to connect residents of Downtown to a beautiful nature feature. Unfortunately, the east side of Farm Pond is currently inaccessible because of CSX's north rail yard which cuts the pond off from Downtown. The west side of the pond is accessible and open to the public and is only a short walk from Downtown. The Town should work to establish a well-signed connection to Farm Pond from Downtown. The connection could be made along Waverly Street heading west then using Fountain Street and Dudley Road to access the west side of Farm Pond. Once the aqueduct trail is fully accessible around the gatehouse that currently blocks pedestrians, a connection could be made on the southeast side from the end of Park/Pearl Street crossing the CSX property, then heading south to the end of the aqueduct trail at the south side of the pond. This would only require a pedestrian to cross a single freight track. The Town could work with CSX to develop a dedicated walking trail on the short segment of their property. Once on the aqueduct trail, pedestrians could walk north and have access to the west side of Farm Pond.

As was noted in the freight section, the Town should continue to pursue conversations with CSX to have them consolidate rail operations to the Nevins Yard or move operations out of Framingham to free up the land currently occupied by the North Yard on the east side of Farm Pond. The decommissioning of the North Yard would open up the land on the east side of Farm Pond for development and open space opportunities. At that point, a trail connection could be easily established through any new development and around Farm Pond connecting to the aqueduct trail.

A view from the west side of Farm Pond



A view from the east side of Farm Pond over the North Yard



Bringing It All Together

Downtown locations are precious commodities in a world of suburban development and auto-oriented commercial centers. It is critical that municipalities with historical town centers and downtowns take advantage of these places and turn them into active, vibrant, walkable, revenue generating places that can be the centerpiece of the community. The vision for Downtown Framingham set by the Town is achievable if it is followed by good policy, the sound economics, and strategic infrastructure investments.

At the same time, Downtown is a puzzle with many different pieces that need to come together to form the picture that is representative of the vision. If each piece of the puzzle is not in place, there will be holes in the end product. It is likely that changes made in the Downtown will be incremental and occur over time, which makes it all the more imperative to use an iterative planning approach. An approach that tests concepts and monitors actions and progress consistently over time to judge what is working and what may not be working. This is true for zoning changes, financial incentives, and infrastructure investments.

Demographic and market shifts are signaling the time is now for Downtown Framingham to act on the vision that has been discussed for many years. Pragmatic zoning changes coupled with economic incentives and multi-modal transportation improvements will chart the course for Downtown, and signal to the development community that Framingham is truly ready to re-energize its core.

Downtown Framingham TOD Action Plan

