

Welcome! We will start the meeting at 7PM.

Video Credit: Ryan Osborne Photography





Rezoning Franklin Center for economic growth and diverse housing opportunities



Public Forum #1

March 7, 2022

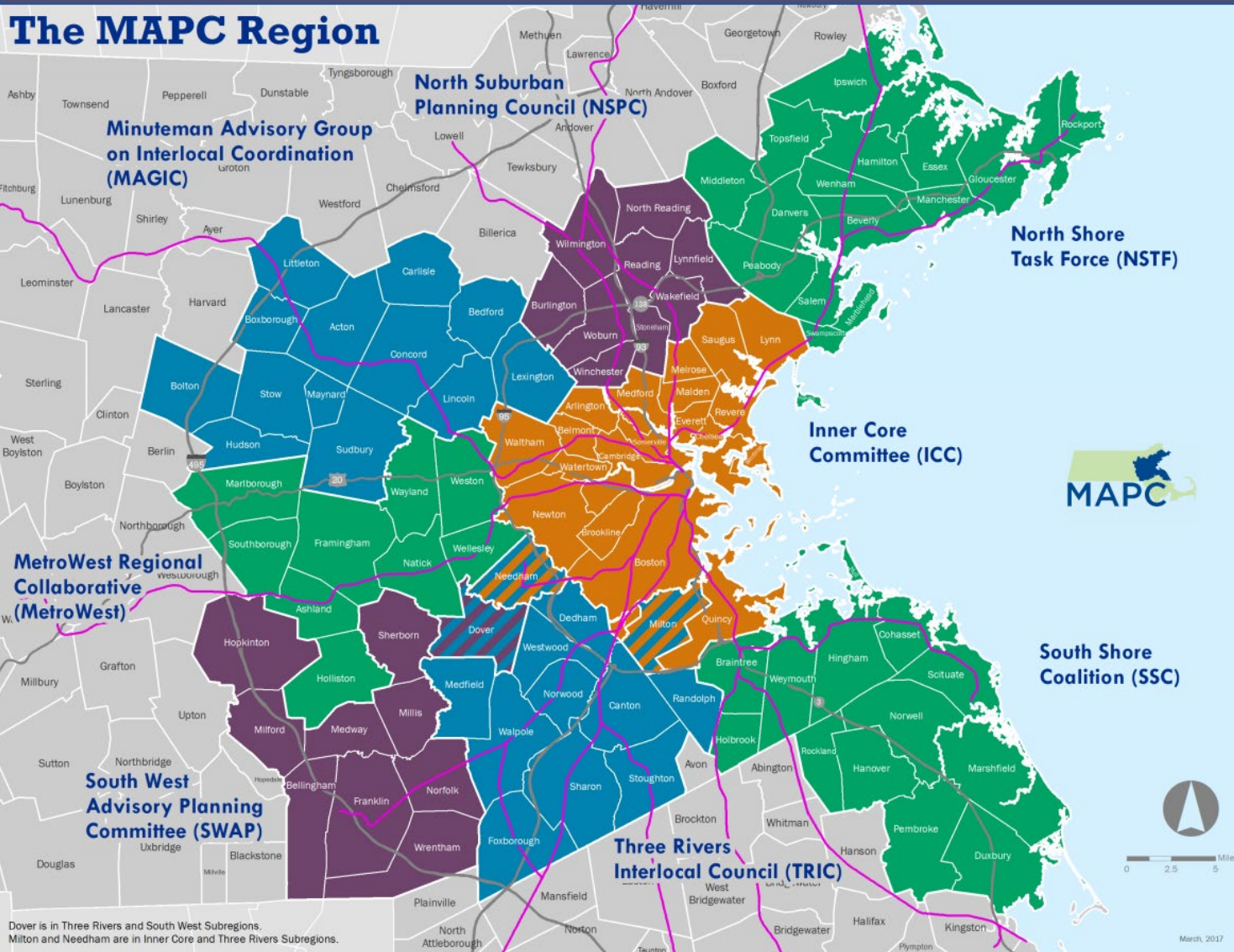
Forum Agenda

- Project Overview
- Existing Conditions in Franklin Center
- Zoning as a Tool to Enhance Franklin Center
- Visioning Survey
- Q & A
- Next Steps

Format for Tonight

- This meeting is being recorded
- All virtual meeting attendees are muted with videos on
- Please save your questions for the Q&A portion of the evening
- Feel free to leave comments in the Zoom chat box or on notecards if you are attending in person

Role of MAPC



- Mission-driven
- Focus on smart growth, equity, and sustainability
- Regional perspective

Project Manager:
Emma Battaglia, Senior
Housing & Land Use
Planner at MAPC

Steering Committee

City Council Economic Development Committee:

- Melanie Hamblen
- Glenn Jones
- Cobi Frongillo
- Patrick Sheridan

Zoning Board of Appeals:

- Bruce Hunchard

Planning Board:

- Gregory Rondeau
- Beth Wierling

Project Overview

Background

- MAPC was hired by the Town of Franklin to lead a community-driven process to establish a vision for Franklin Center and make recommendations for rezoning the area to best achieve the vision
- Overall purpose of project is to **unlock development** that will:
 - Expand housing choices
 - Support local business
 - Take advantage of new infrastructure
 - Provide community benefits
 - Foster a vibrant mixed-use neighborhood

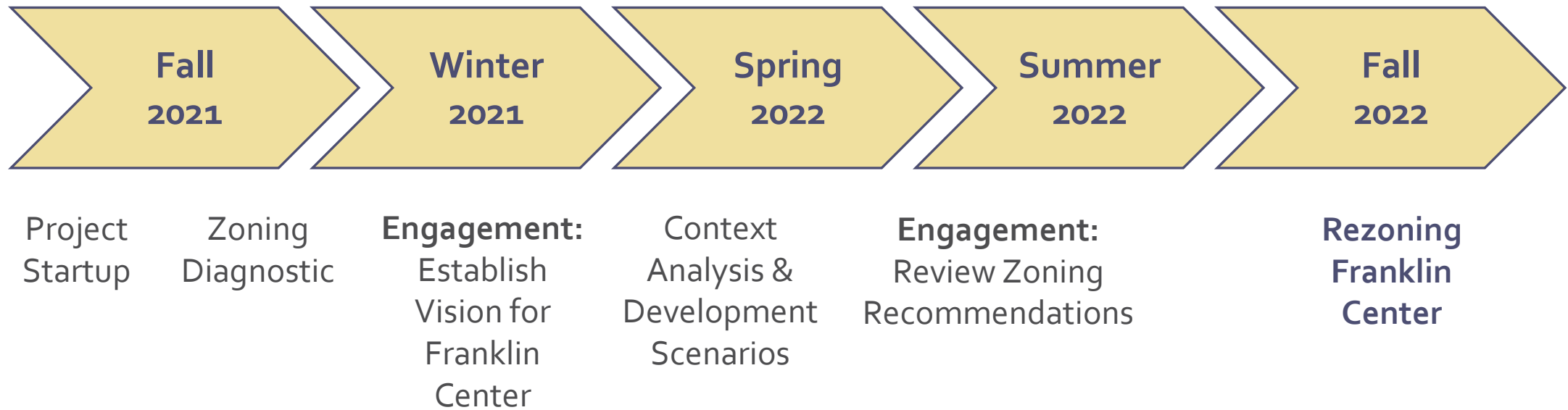
Background Continued

- This project builds on considerable past planning work, including the recent Housing Production Plan, 2019 Economic Development/Market Study, 2013 Master Plan, 2008 Downtown Parking Study, and 2003 Franklin Center Plan
- Significant time and resources have also been devoted to enhancing the area with a focus on improving vehicular circulation and safety, improving roadways, fostering a pedestrian environment, improving the overall appearance of downtown, and stimulating private sector investment



Looking to build on Franklin Center's existing assets and overcome barriers that are preventing the area from fully realizing its potential as a vibrant, mixed-use destination

Project Timeline

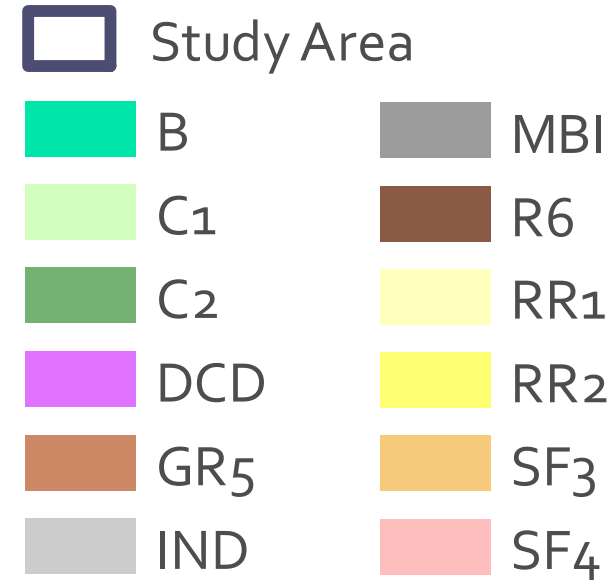
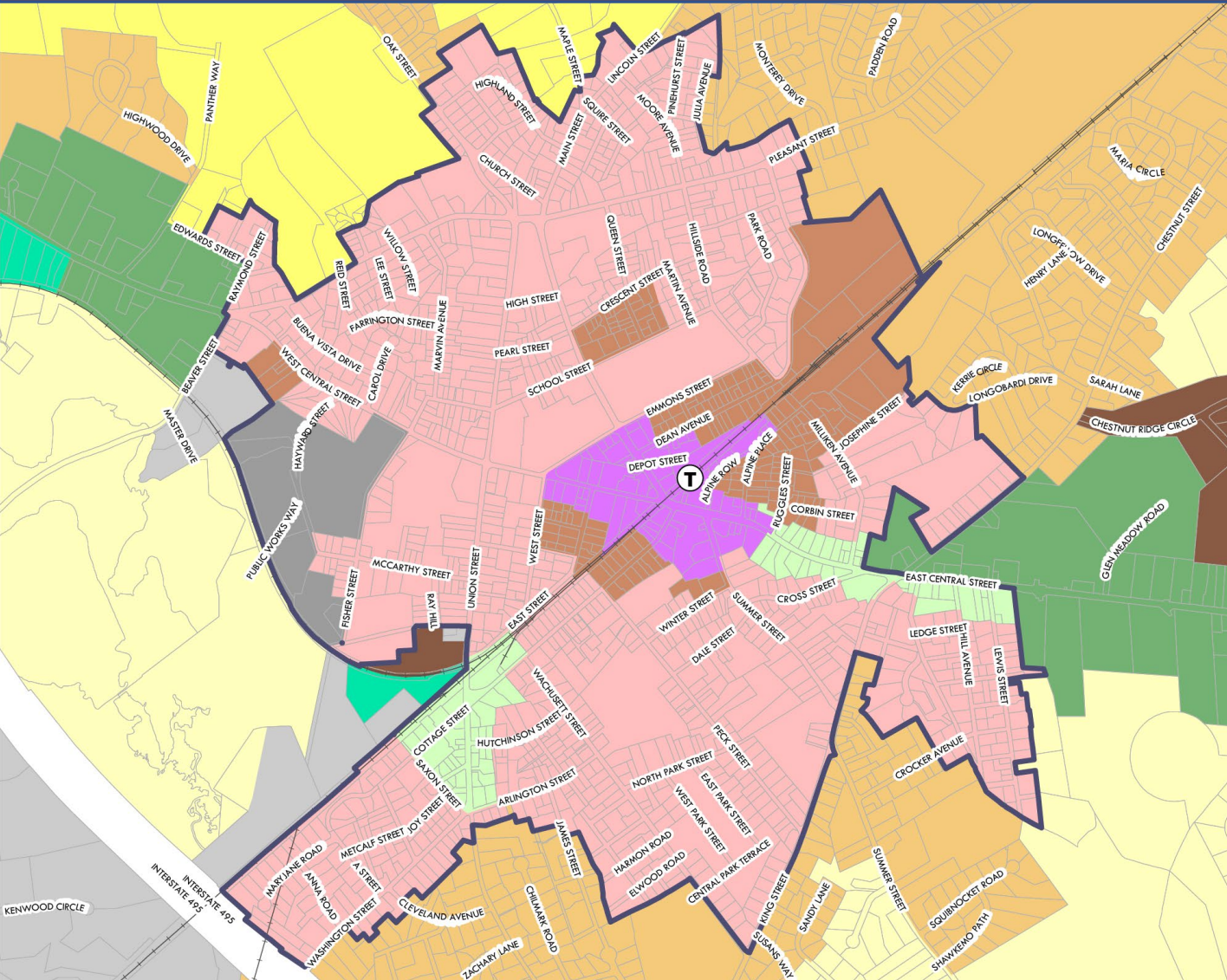


Community Engagement

- Steering Committee meetings
- Engagement with Town staff and leadership
- Targeted focus group meetings
- Public forums
- Project webpage
- Community survey
- Communications materials
- Email contact list
- Potential for additional engagement opportunities



Existing Conditions in Franklin Center

Zoning Districts

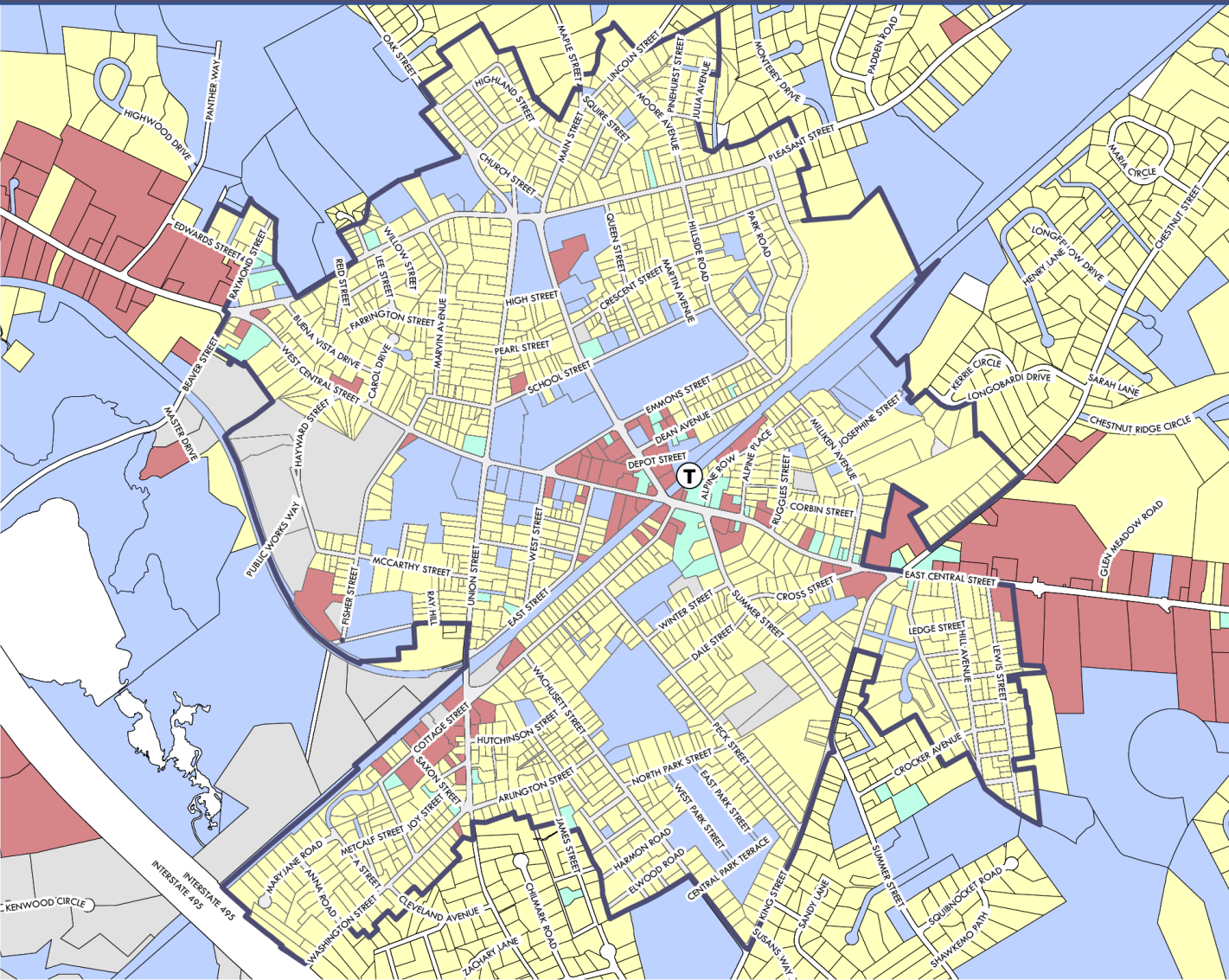


Open Space



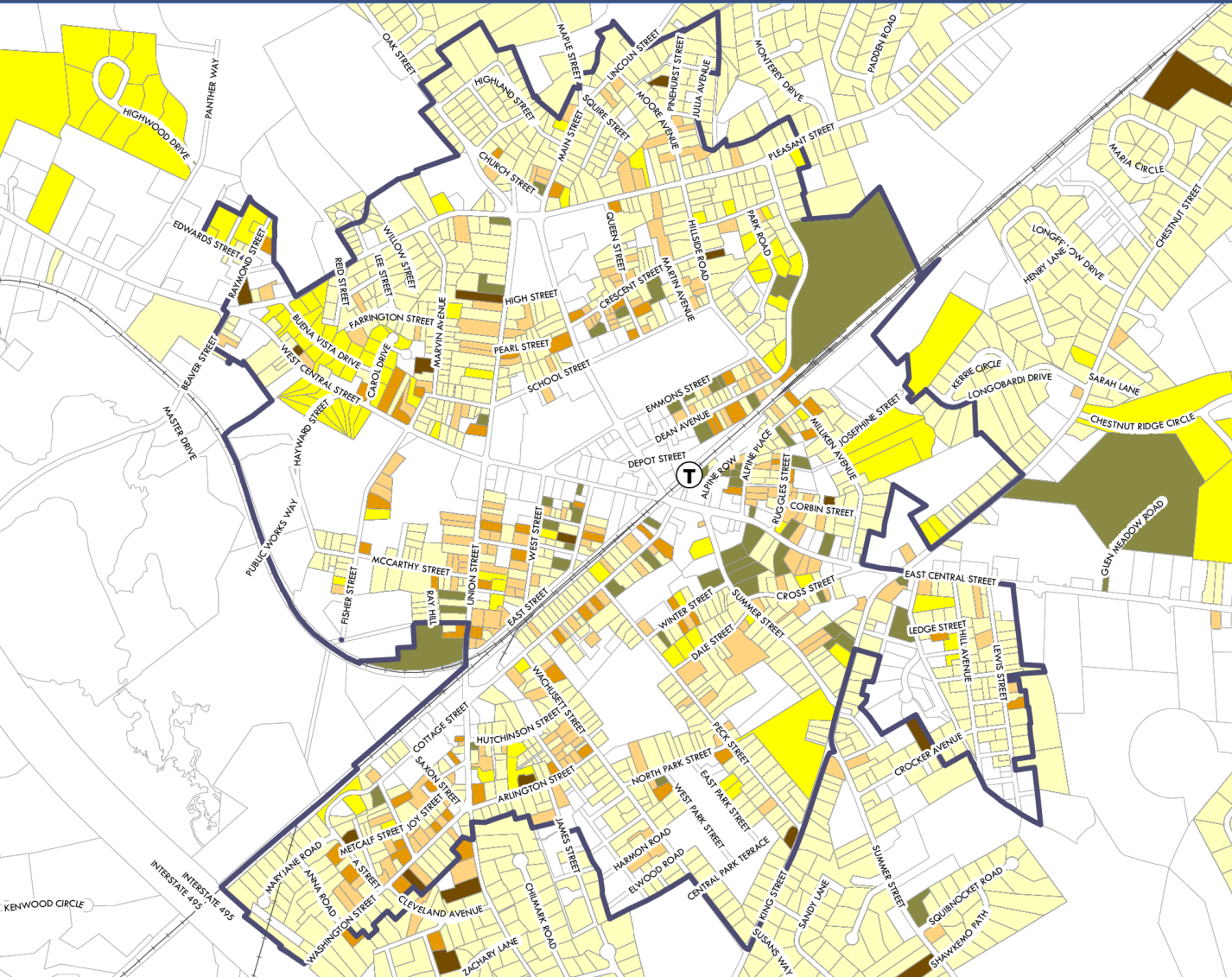
-  Study Area
-  Open Space









Land Use



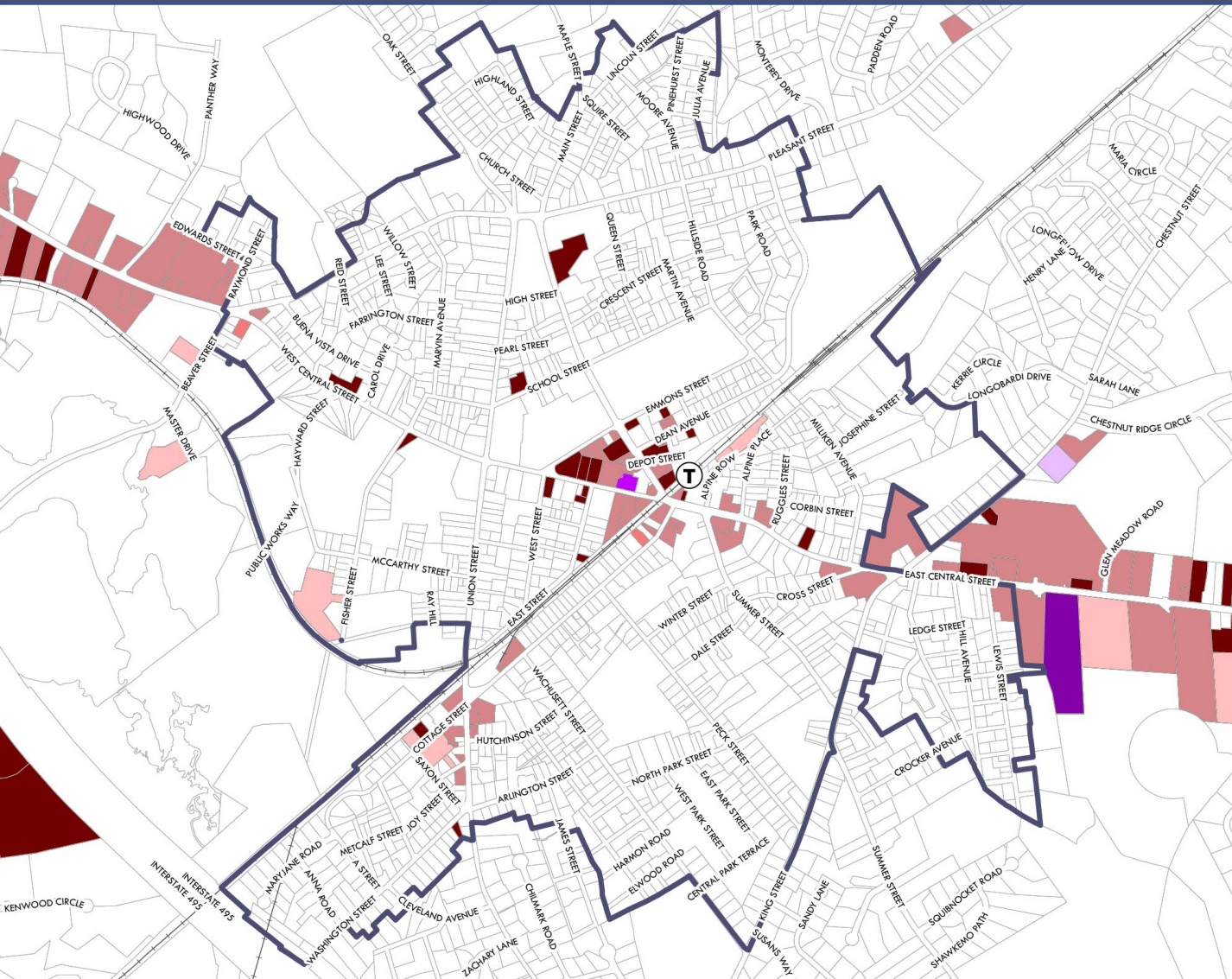
- Study Area
 - Mixed-Use
 - Residential
 - Commercial
 - Industrial
 - Institutional/Government









Residential Land Uses



-  Study Area
-  Single-Family
-  Condo
-  Two-Family
-  Three-Family
-  Multiple Per Parcel
-  Apartments
-  Other Housing

Commercial Land Uses



-  Study Area
-  Retail Trade
-  Office Building
-  Cultural Establishment
-  Indoor Recreation
-  Public Service Properties
-  Transient Quarters
-  Storage/Warehousing

Existing Strengths of Franklin Center

- Historic architecture
- Retail/restaurant options
- New pedestrian/roadway infrastructure
- Public transportation (Commuter Rail & GATRA bus service)
- Public sewer system
- Cultural institutions (museum, theater, library, etc.)
- Dean College
- Large events that bring people to the downtown
- Franklin Downtown Partnership

Existing Challenges in Franklin Center

- Not enough housing options to meet community need (especially Affordable options)
- Not enough of certain businesses/service options within walking distance to meet needs of those living in Franklin Center (i.e., no grocery store)
- Limited property turnover
- Traffic issues
- Parking issues
- High land costs and rents
- Vacant storefronts
- Permitting process can be long and difficult

Housing Affordability Challenges

- Despite 40% of households in Franklin earning \$150k or more, compared to 23% state-wide, more than a quarter of households are considered “low-income”
 - \$70,750 for a single-person
 - \$101,050 for a family of four
- 31% and 12% of households are cost-burdened and severely cost-burdened, respectively
- 4% of the population lives in poverty
- Franklin and region are in a crisis where the supply of housing has not kept up with demand, leading to skyrocketing rent/sales costs

Housing Affordability Challenges

- HPP identified need for new and diverse housing types to meet the needs of Franklin's growing population, particularly for:
 - Seniors looking to downsize
 - Young professionals and families
 - Low-income households

"Given [that] the majority of very low income, low income, and moderate income families cannot afford new single family homes on large lots in Franklin, the Town's zoning regulations may need modification in order to increase the number of lower cost housing units."

Zoning as a Tool to Enhance Franklin Center

What is Zoning?

- Zoning sets requirements/incentives for land use and provides the legal framework for what can and cannot be developed on a parcel
- Regulates everything from where a building is located on a lot, how big it can be, open space, parking, design standards, and more
- Well-crafted zoning should tell the private sector about what kind of development the Town wants to see and where, and make the approval process as straightforward as possible
- Important to create a vision through a public process and to allow desired uses and densities by right or at least with fewer approvals

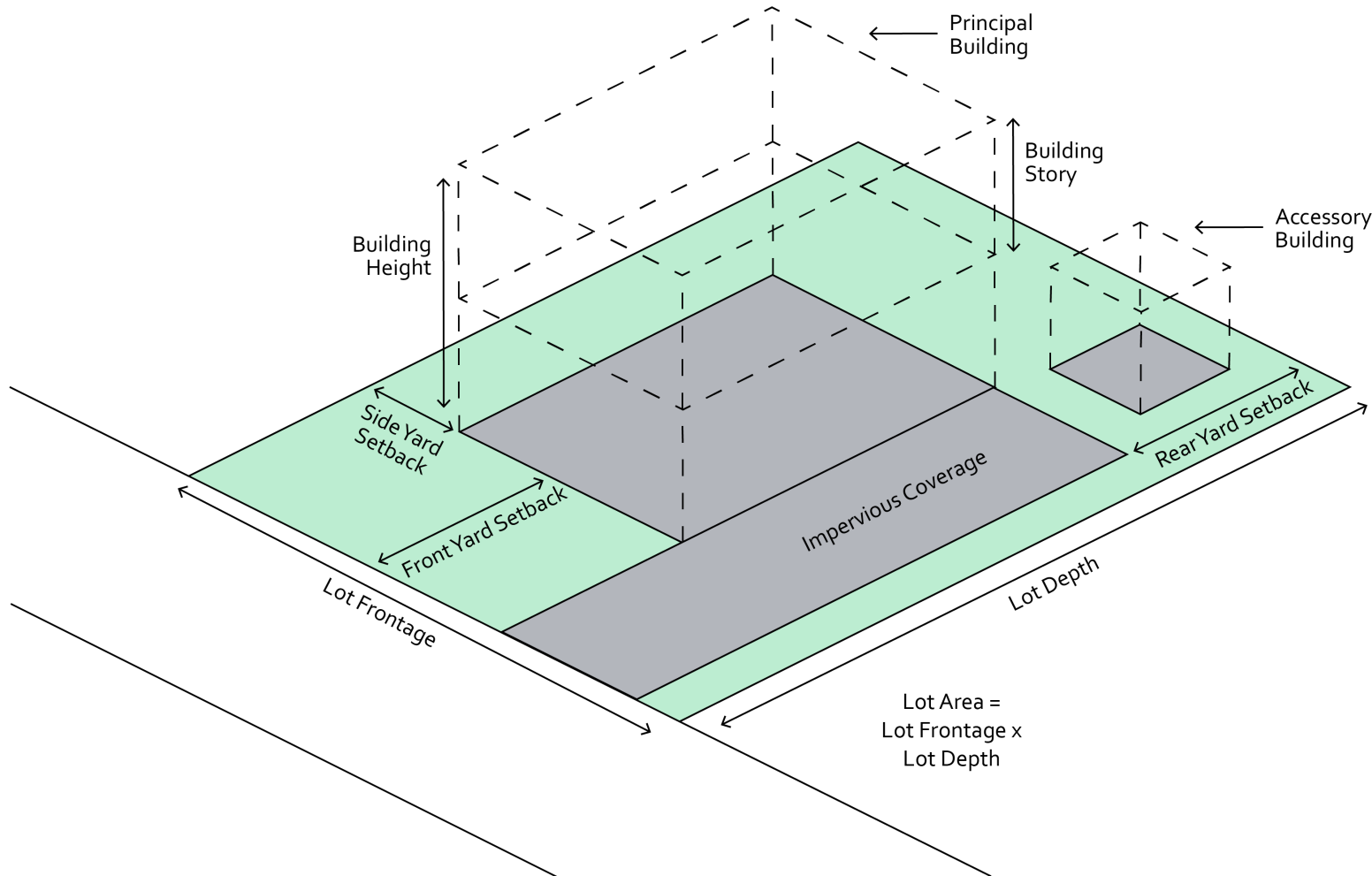
History of Zoning in Franklin

- Franklin's zoning code and associated districts were first adopted by the Town's Planning Board in 1930
- Almost two-thirds of structures in Franklin Center were built before zoning was adopted
- Many of the most beloved buildings in Franklin Center could not be legally built today because of dimensional or use restrictions in the zoning regulations
- Car ownership/dependence has increased substantially since 1930, and zoning regulations have evolved to cater to motorists



Main Street in Franklin during late 19th century

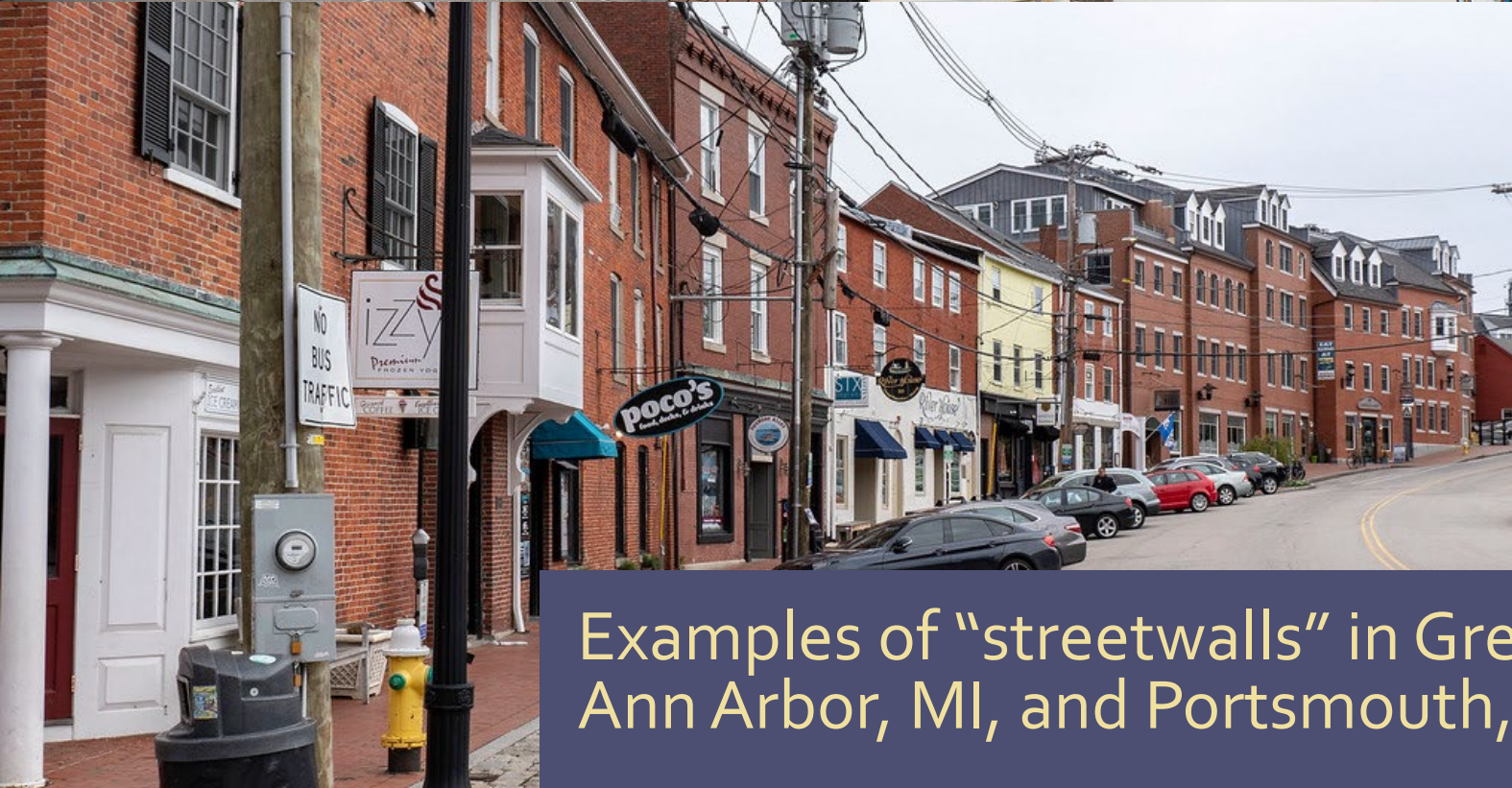
Dimensional Regulations



- Regulations in the study area differ by zoning district, with the least restrictive regulations in the DCD and CI districts where more density is encouraged

Dimensional Regulations

- Dimensional regulations impact the “look and feel” of an area
- Large minimum lot size, frontage, and setback requirements tend to conflict with historic development patterns which current zoning would not allow but which contribute to overall vibrancy
- Requirements make small infill developments difficult and restrict existing parcels from redevelopment without zoning relief
- Smaller lot area and frontage requirements encourage walkability
- “Streetwalls” create visual interest and encourage people to stop and interact with their surrounding



Examples of "streetwalls" in Great Barrington, MA, Keene, NH, Ann Arbor, MI, and Portsmouth, NH (clockwise from top left)

Use Regulations

- Use regulations dictate what can be built in each zoning district, and they differ depending on the district:
 - DC District allows multifamily and mixed-use by right
 - CI and GRV Districts allow multifamily and mixed-use by Special Permit
 - MBI District allows light industrial/commercial uses by right but no residential uses
 - SFIV District allows for single-family by right and two-family in some cases
- Use regulations keep certain uses separate from one another, like residential and heavy industrial uses

Use Regulations

- However, by separating uses too much, we are also separating where we live, work, and play
- These regulations can prevent the creation of vibrant neighborhoods and encourage vehicle use
- A mix of uses in a downtown area, including residential, retail, office, and even light-industrial, helps to foster a wider variety of housing options and create a built-in customer base for businesses

Parking and Traffic Considerations

- Parking and traffic go hand and hand, as requiring more parking for new development encourages more people to drive and thus contributes to increased traffic
- All districts in study area require either 1.5 or 2 spaces per unit
- Important to strike the right balance to not overload on-street parking while also reflecting the transit-oriented nature of the area
- While developers in Franklin have identified high parking requirements as a barrier to redevelopment, business owners concerned about a lack of parking in the downtown area

Incentives & Community Benefits

- Zoning can be structured in a way that incentivizes the private market to provide community benefits for Franklin, such as Affordable Housing, public open space, indoor community space, and more
- These incentives usually come in the form of “density bonuses,” whereby a developer can build more units if they provide desired community benefits
- Negotiations related to incentives and benefits can happen during the site plan review process

Role of Permitting Process

- Why does it matter if a developer needs to obtain a Special Permit or Variance to build something on their property?
- Needing zoning relief introduces uncertainty into the development review process and may discourage investment as these projects are harder to obtain financing for
- Desired uses and building typologies should be allowed by-right or with limited approvals to stimulate the development process
- Site plan review process still gives Planning Board ability to influence what ultimately gets built

Impact on Housing Costs

- Zoning regulations that unreasonably constrain what can be built on a site are directly tied to increases in housing costs
- Setbacks make developable part of a property smaller than its area
- Height restrictions limit how much floor area can be generated out of the same amount of land area
- Parking minimums mean valuable space that cannot be built on
- Together, these things (along with market forces and personal preferences) make development more costly

Zoning to Drive Economic Development

- Zoning can help create destination districts, clustering economic development activity that entices people to want to hang out there
- By creating the right mix of commercial and residential activity, zoning can create a built-in customer base for businesses
- Zoning can capitalize on Franklin Center's existing assets and anchor institutions to ensure that those assets are best set up for success by encouraging complimentary adjacent land use
- New development generates additional tax revenue for the Town

Visioning Survey

Visioning Survey

- To create a vision for Franklin Center, we need to hear from you!
- We have launched an online visioning survey where you can provide your feedback on the proposed study area, offer your priorities for the future of Franklin Center and what it should look like/allow, and tell us what we should consider as we start crafting zoning recommendations
- Visit **mapc.ma/franklin-for-all-survey** to access the survey any time between now and Friday, April 1
- You may pause and start again as you please

Q & A

Q & A Format

- If you are on Zoom, please use the “raise hand” function
- If you are attending in person, please physically raise your hand
- We will go back and forth between remote and in-person attendees
- When it is time to select a question from a remote attendees, Sasha Parodi from MAPC will call on you and will unmute you to speak
- When it is time to select a question from an in-person attendees, Bryan Taberner from Franklin will call on you and you can ask your question into the microphone

Next Steps

Next Steps

- Based on what we hear tonight and from the visioning survey, we will start formulating potential development scenarios, including visualizations and build-out figures
- MAPC will determine the range of zoning approaches appropriate for the study area and draft initial zoning recommendations
- We will hold another public forum in May or June to present the development scenarios and zoning recommendations
- Recommendations will be finalized based on public feedback
- Actual rezoning process likely to happen in the fall

Thank you!

mapc.ma/franklin-for-all-survey

mapc.org/franklin-for-all



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