

# Powder Mill Road Corridor Initiative



Joint Planning Board Meeting | Towns of Acton and Maynard

September 19, 2023



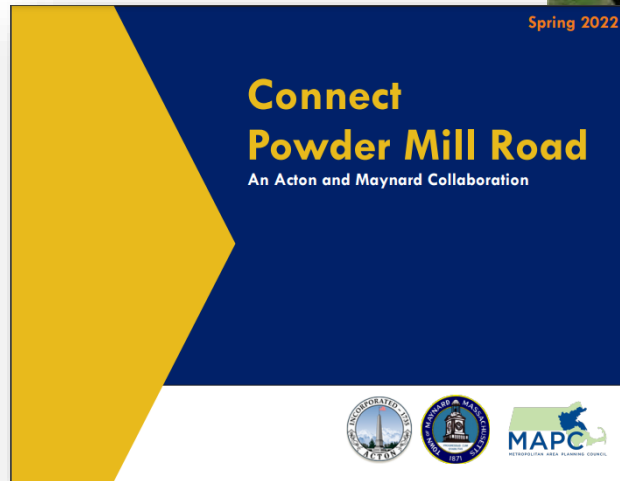
# Agenda

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- 1 Project Recap
- 2 Community Engagement Findings
- 3 Zoning Framework
- 4 Zoning Standards
- 5 Discussion

# Project Recap





# Phase I Redevelopment Strategy



# Redevelopment Strategy Scope

## Market Analysis

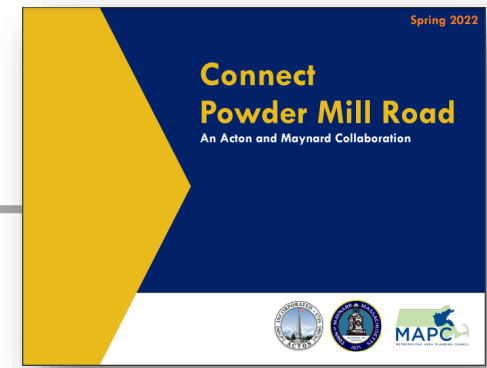
- Slightly lower retail & industrial market rents, but higher office rents
- High commercial vacancy rates (35% retail and 73% office) but very low industrial vacancy rate
- Retail Opportunity Gap Analysis

## Zoning Analysis

- Multiple districts with different intents result in lacking sense of place
- Limited housing types are allowed
- Parking and other zoning requirements encourage auto-oriented development
- Non-conforming parcels

## Community Engagement

- More access to Assabet River
- Safety improvements (crosswalks, sidewalks, bike lanes)
- Affordable housing options
- Support for new and existing businesses



Read the full plan and see  
Phase I materials here:  
[mapc.ma/powdermillcorridor](https://mapc.ma/powdermillcorridor)

# Redevelopment Strategy Recommendations

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Create an **overlay zoning district** to shape future development



Improve access to and environmental quality of the **Assabet River**



Incorporate “**Complete Streets**” features to make Powder Mill Road safer



Design **future transportation projects** to advance safety and environmental goals

# Phase II Scope

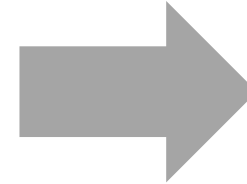
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**Technical Assistance  
Grants** awarded from  
Metropolitan Area  
Planning Council  
(MAPC)  
and Executive Office  
of Energy and  
Environmental Affairs  
(EEA)

**Overlay Zoning District  
(Draft Bylaw)**

**Streetscape  
Design Guidance**

**River Access  
Design Guidance**



Create a more  
walkable, safe Powder  
Mill Road  
neighborhood where  
people want to live,  
visit, work, and spend  
time



# Community Engagement Findings



# Fall Public Forum

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- Held on September 28, 2022
- 56 people attended
- 90 people registered and joined the project mailing list
- Poll questions helped understand attendees' preferences



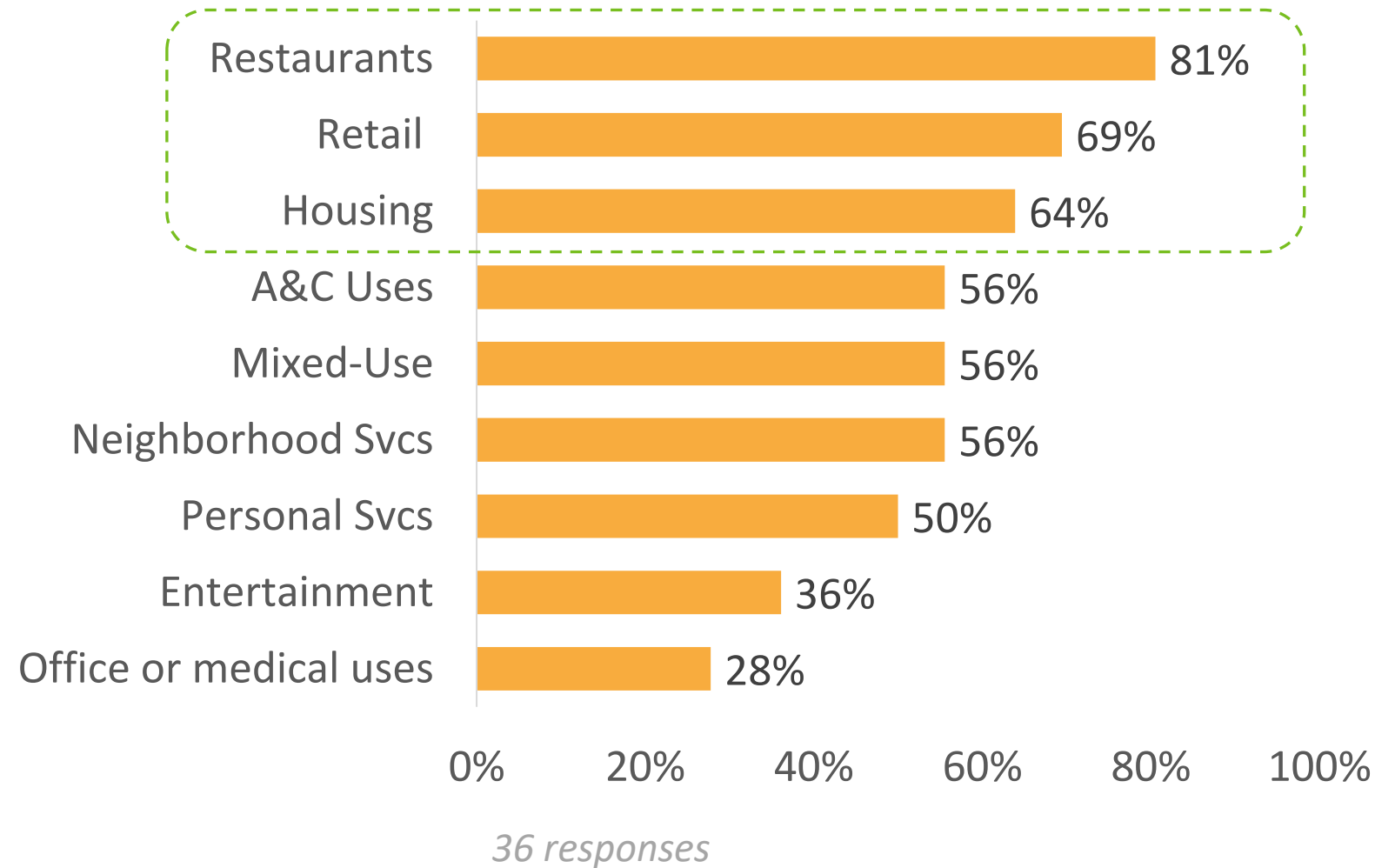
**1:1 Outreach**



**Project  
Website**

# Community Feedback

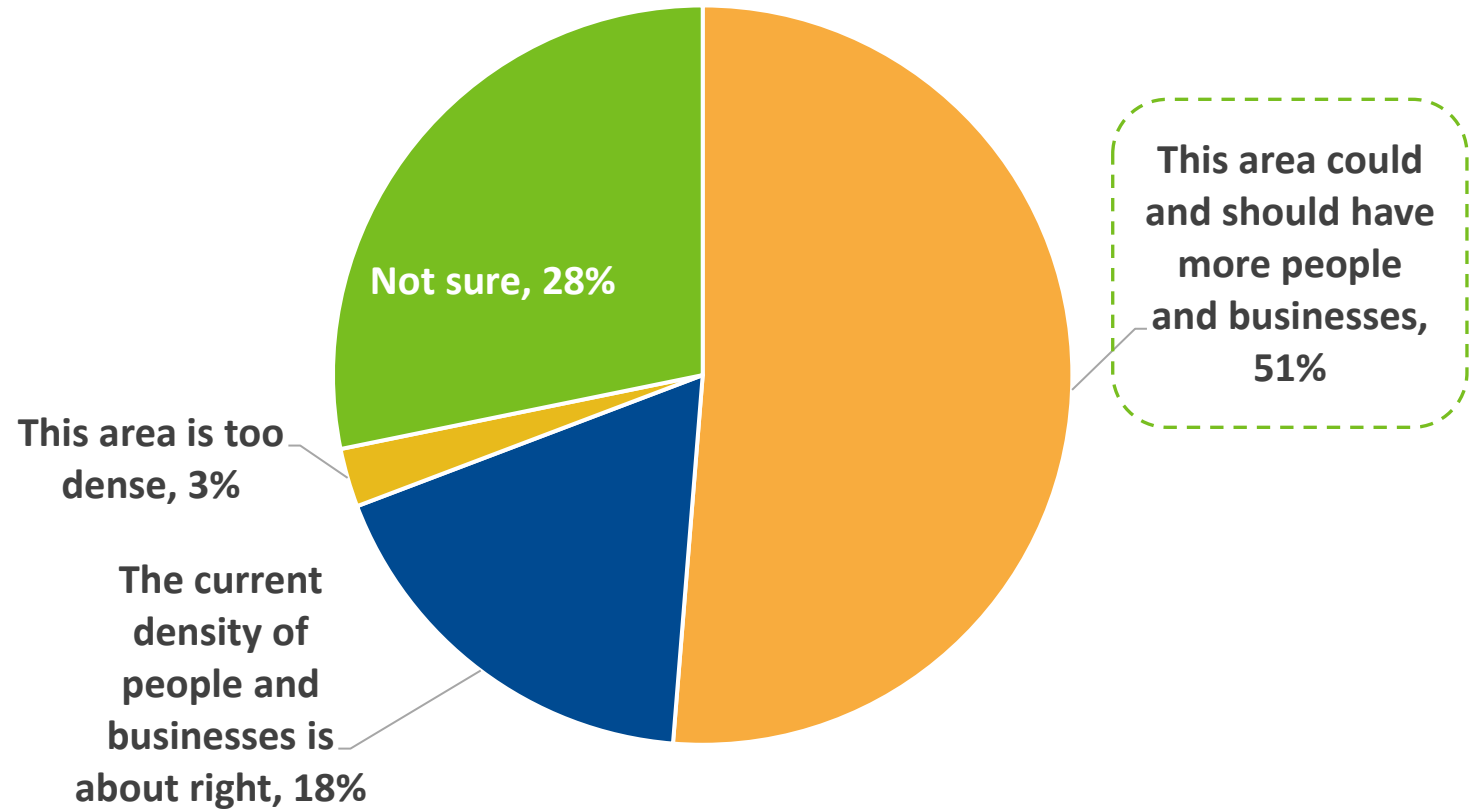
**What kinds of  
uses would  
you like to see  
along Powder  
Mill Road?**



# Community Feedback

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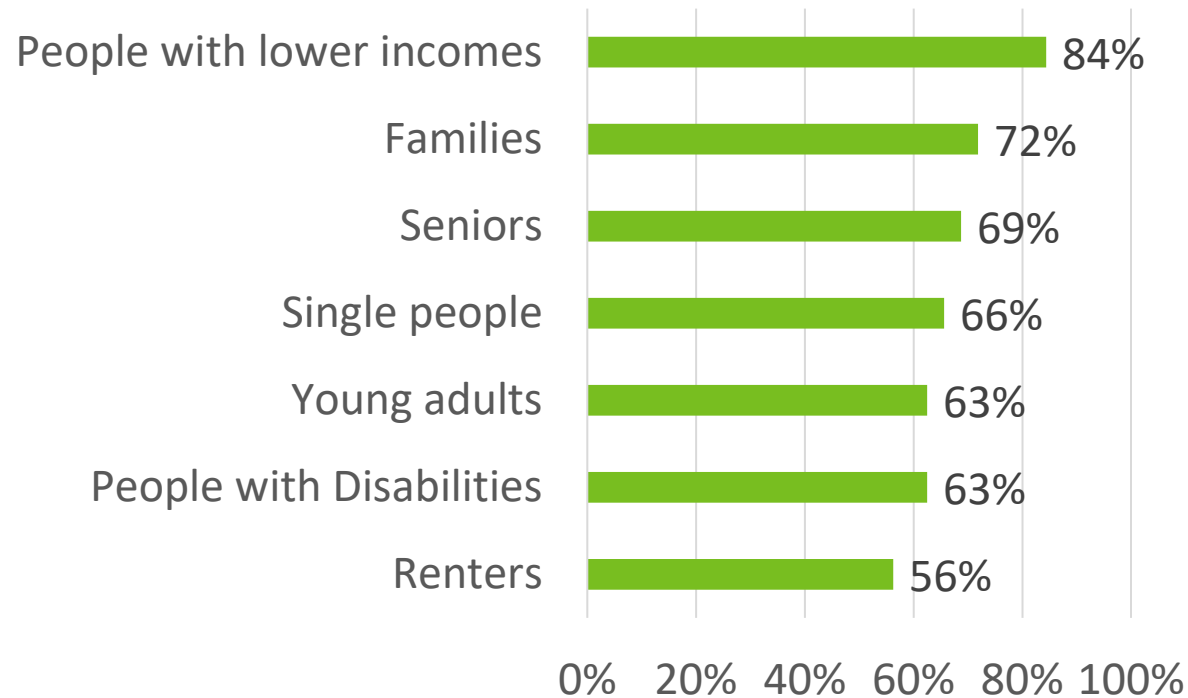
What do you think about **existing development patterns** along Powder Mill Road?



*39 responses*

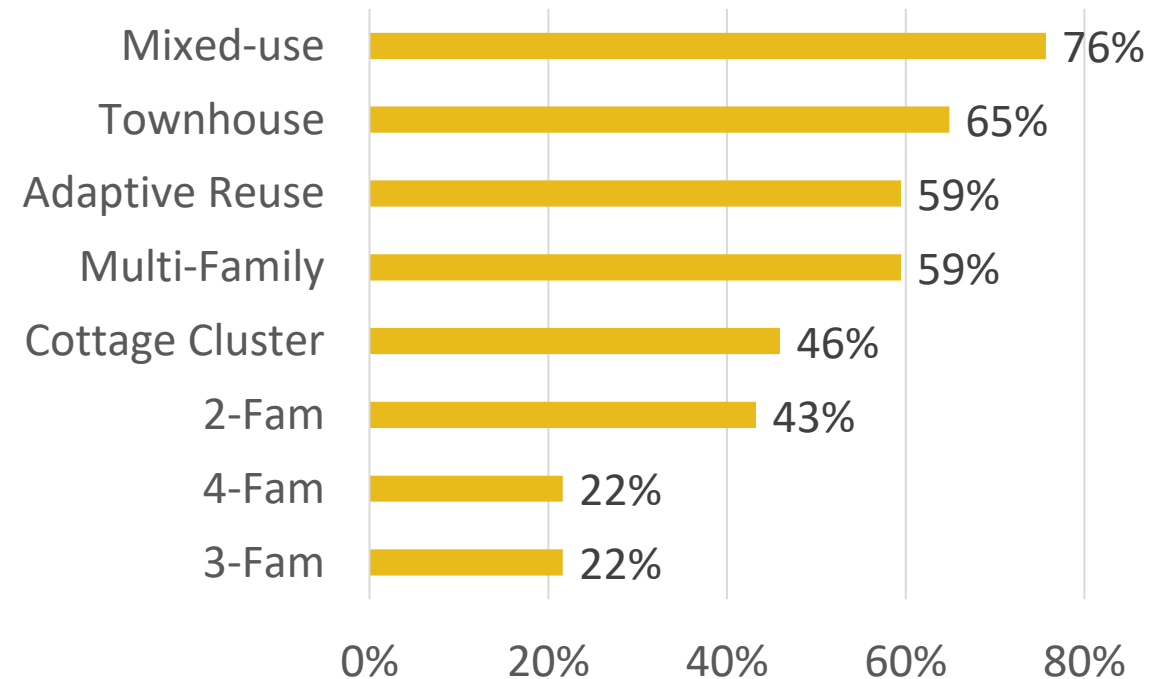
# Community Feedback

## Perceived Housing Need



*32 responses*

## Desired Housing Options



*37 responses*

# Community Feedback

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Majority of people “liked” or “loved” these development examples



# Community Feedback

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**Less people  
supported  
these  
development  
examples**





# Focus Groups

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## Businesses

- 5 people attended
- Participants owned a range of business types in Acton & Maynard
- General discussion about challenges and opportunities

## Residents

- 19 people attended
- Participants included Powder Mill residents, members of Town boards, and other volunteers from Acton & Maynard
- General discussion about challenges and opportunities

## Complete Streets + River Access

- 13 people attended
- Participants included Powder Mill residents, members of Town boards, and businesses along the corridor
- Focused discussion on named topics

# Businesses Focus Group Feedback

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- Powder Mill is already a destination, but can be enhanced
- Suggested uses include: sit-down restaurant, destination retail, residential, consumer businesses, park/playground
- Support for establishing a river walk using property easements
- Consensus that businesses need more resources and support, including permitting checklists, help with start-up costs, and market studies
- By-right zoning and predictable permitting processes are key

## Discussion Themes

- Zoning (12)
- Ideal Uses (11)
- Resources (9)
- Design (6)
- Destination (6)
- Infrastructure (5)
- Parking (4)
- Complete Streets (3)

**"The vision is there; the goal isn't that lofty."**

# Resident Focus Group Feedback

- Interest in having experiential businesses (e.g., climbing gym, escape room) along with small businesses, retail, and parks/playgrounds
- Providing access to and highlighting the river will support existing businesses and draw new businesses to the corridor
- Suggestion to prioritize development at the ends of the corridor to draw people in and create a riverfront walkway
- Support for incentivizing sustainable new development that is sensitive to the riverine environment
- Zoning needs to be sensitive to existing residential areas through thoughtful setbacks, buffers, landscaping, and lighting standards

## Discussion Themes

- Sense of Place (8)
- Environment (8)
- Economic Development (6)
- Complete Streets (5)
- River Access (4)
- Recreation (4)
- Shared Parking (4)
- Lighting (4)
- Infrastructure (2)

**“The development of the riverfront is an important thing to do.”**

# Complete Streets Focus Group Feedback

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- Consensus that walking and biking on Powder Mill Road feels unsafe
- Support for a connected sidewalk network that brings people along the corridor and to the river
- Frequent curb cuts pose a safety challenge
- Public realm improvements include: trees, shade structures, benches, pocket parks, outdoor dining, wayfinding, bus stop, street furniture

**"I live and work just off the corridor. I won't bike or walk on it; it feels too unsafe. I would love to be able to walk it though. I could walk to the grocery store."**

## Discussion Themes

- Safety (12)
- Sidewalks (8)
- Walking (7)
- Public Realm (7)
- Biking (5)
- Crosswalks (3)
- Transit (3)
- Traffic Calming (3)
- Cost (1)

# River Access Focus Group Feedback

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- Accessing the river should be a priority, not an afterthought
- Support for a trail along river that connects businesses and residents, also connects across river
- Ideal uses include: multifamily housing, retail, commercial, mini golf, activity-based centers, restaurants and cafes, electric vehicle charging
- Elks Lodge parking lot identified as an opportunity site for a park and canoe launch
- Suggestion to improve sewer along corridor

## Discussion Themes

- Physical Access (13)
- Environmental Quality (12)
- Recreation (11)
- Ideal Uses (9)
- Visibility + Education (6)

**"[The Assabet River] is an entirely undervalued asset."**

# Acton OSRP Survey Results

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## Key Takeaways

- Improve and increase existing sidewalks
- Value of trails
- Increase communication about open space and recreation
- Value of water highlighted for both use and recreation

## Priorities with Significant Support

- Kayak/canoe/small non-motorized boat launch
- Riverside boardwalks
- Bird/wildlife viewing

### High School Input

- 6/66 respondents mentioned water recreation (e.g., boating, kayaking, swimming)
- Support for environmentally-sustainable design standards
- Strong demand for sidewalks and bike lanes/paths



# Zoning Framework

# Process to Develop Zoning

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# Overlay Zoning District

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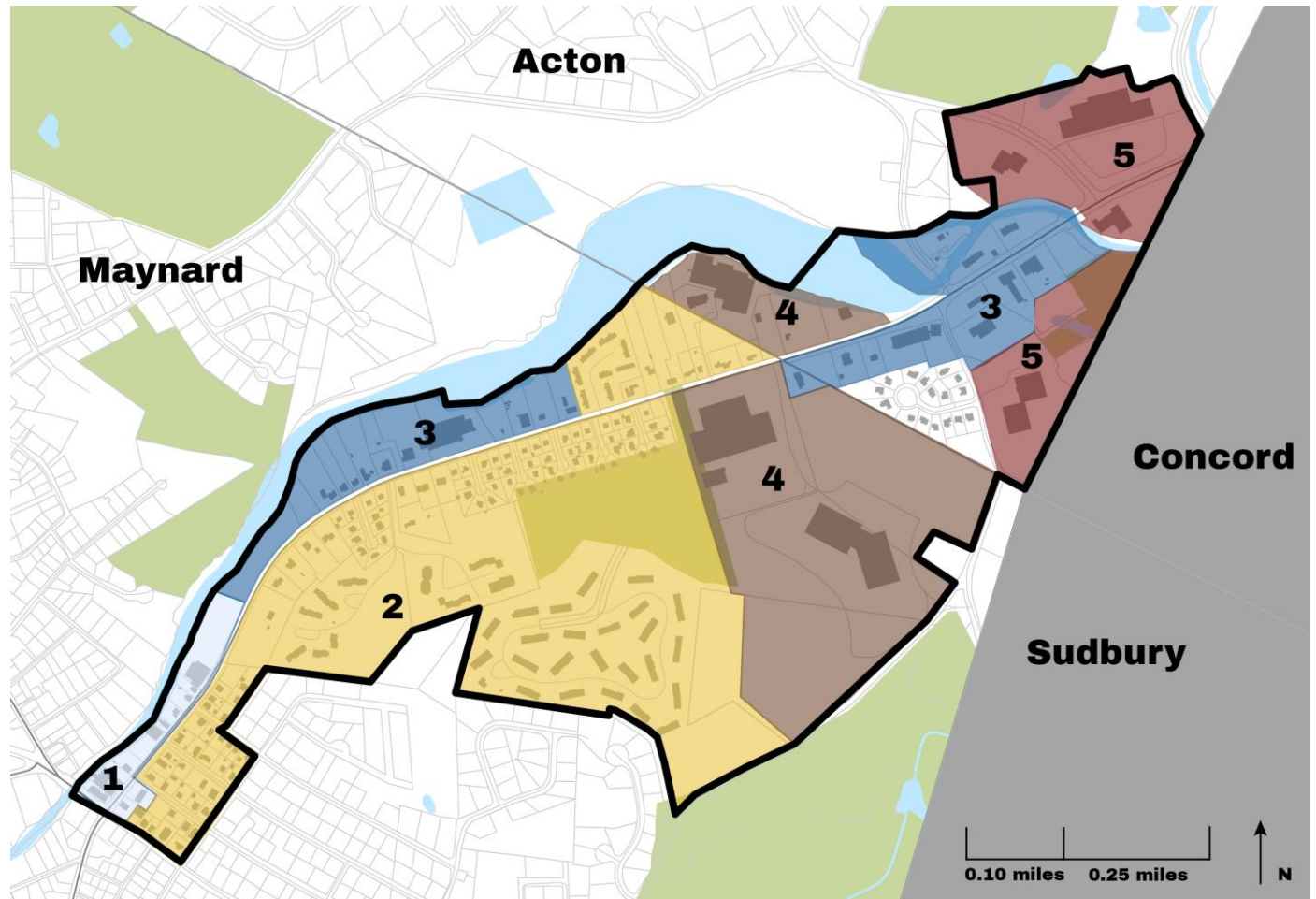
- Optional overlay zoning that property owners can choose to follow
- Standards will integrate form-based code principles to guide form and massing of buildings
- Standards will be coordinated between towns to ensure cohesive development along the corridor

## Goal

Incentivize development that strengthens the Powder Mill Road Corridor as a **destination** that allows residents and visitors to safely **shop and eat locally** and **access the Assabet River**

# Proposed Overlay Zoning Subdistricts

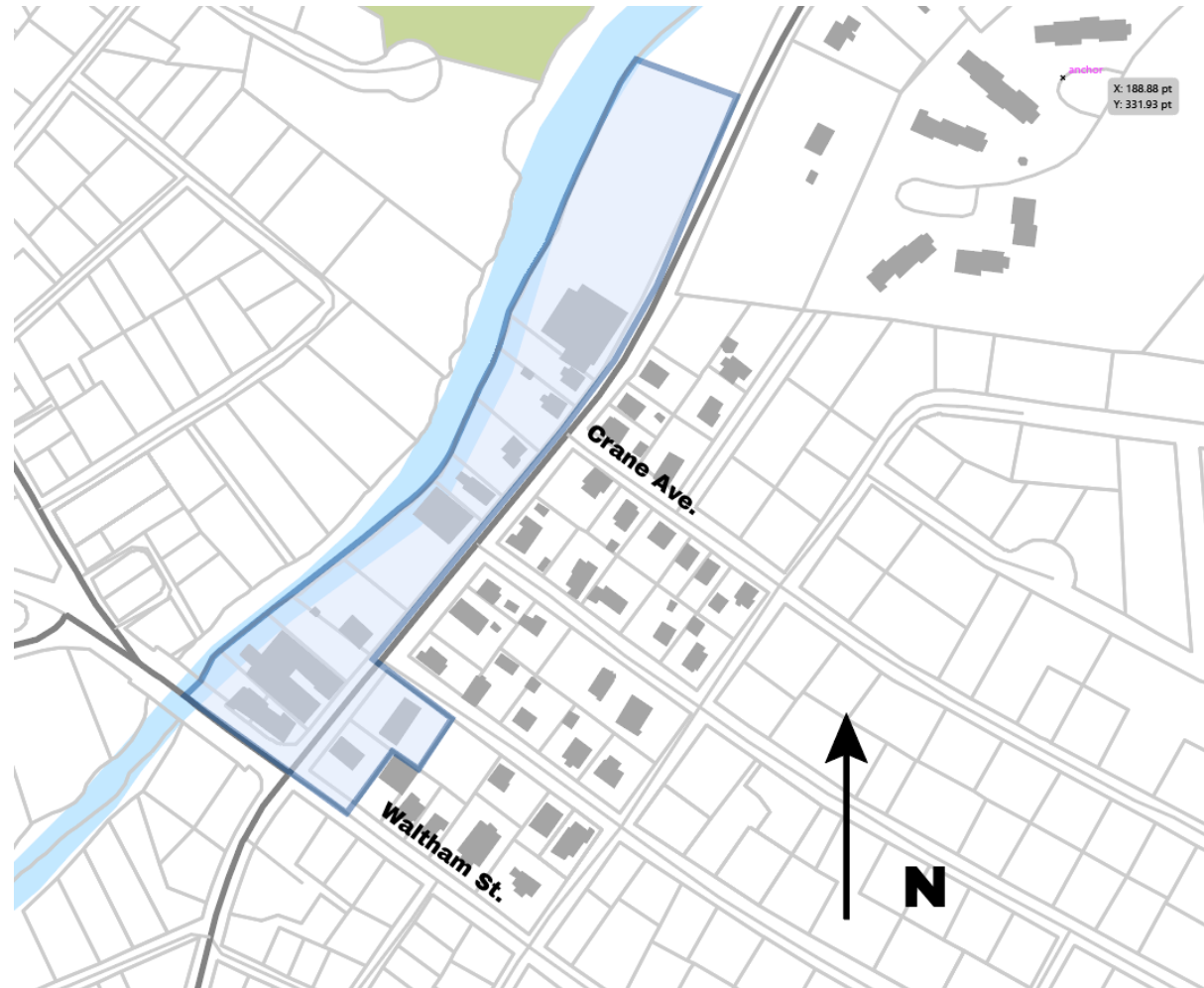
- Subdistricts are smaller areas within the overlay district that allow zoning to be tailored to unique neighborhood conditions
- They balance desire to respect existing conditions in some areas while promoting redevelopment in others



# Subdistrict 1: Village Center

## Maynard

- Connect Downtown Overlay District to Powder Mill Road corridor
- Promote compact, mixed-use development on small lots
- Allow compatible commercial uses that encourage foot traffic (e.g., retail, personal services)



# Subdistrict 2: Neighborhood Residential

## Maynard

- Bring existing properties into conformity with zoning
- Allow diverse housing types in keeping with existing patterns of smaller-scale residential development
- Maintain residential feel while allowing for home occupations and community amenities





# Subdistrict 3: Neighborhood Business

## Maynard + Acton

- Foster smaller-scale mixed use with first-floor commercial to encourage pedestrian activity and connection with the river
- Promote commercial uses that are compatible with the riverfront
- Incentivize green infrastructure and environmentally-sensitive redevelopment



# Subdistrict 4: Multifamily Housing

## Maynard + Acton

- Leverage redevelopment potential to create sustainable, environmentally sensitive redevelopment
- Allow for higher density residential that engages with street, blends into surrounding neighborhood, and supports commercial activity along corridor
- Ensure compliance with 3A



# Section 3A – MBTA Communities Multi-Family Zoning Requirements

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- Must have at least one zoning district that allows multi-family housing by-right (defined as three or more units)
- Minimum gross density of 15 units/acre
- Both Acton and Maynard must comply, though the required land area and unit capacity differs by town
- Both towns plan to locate compliant zoning districts along the Powder Mill Road corridor

## PURPOSE

Encourage production of **multi-family housing near transit** and other smart growth locations to **address housing affordability and supply** issues

# Subdistrict 5: Commercial Center

## Acton

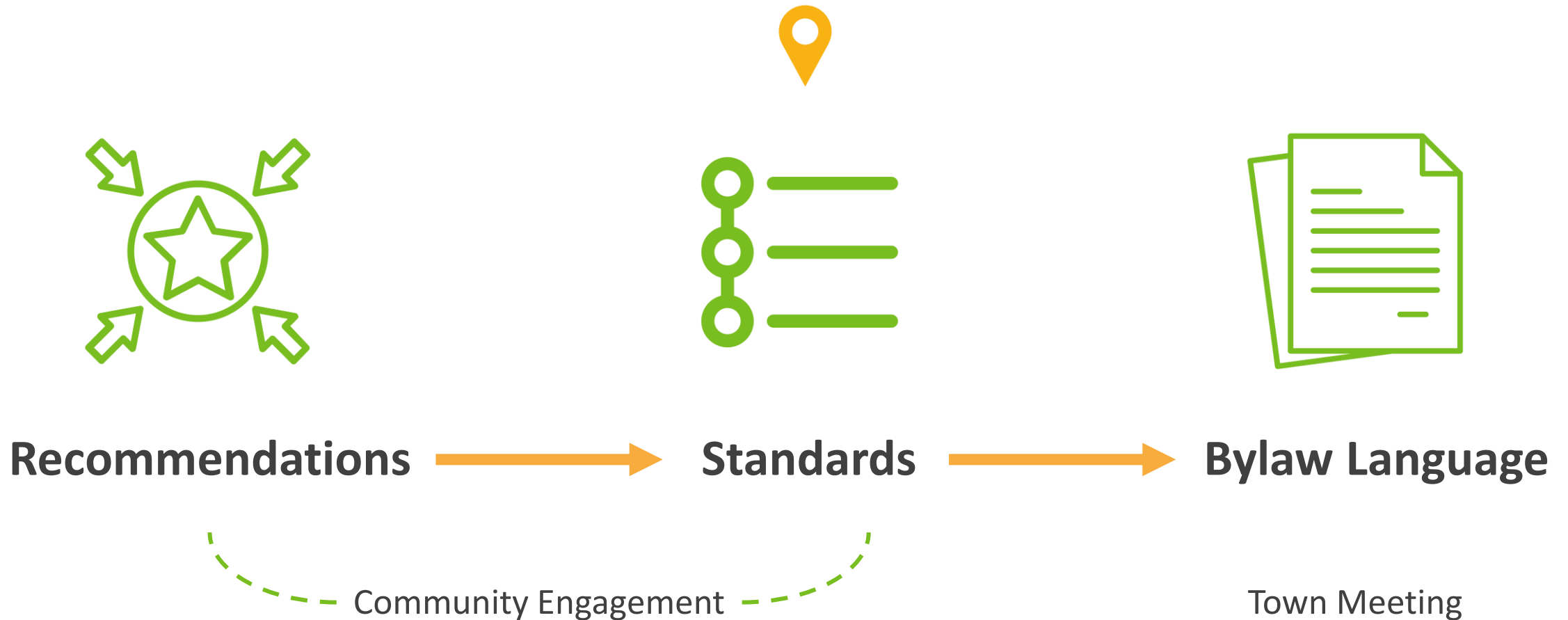
- Allow commercial buildings with large footprints that incorporate pedestrian-friendly design
- Support economic development goals for creating sustainable employment opportunities
- Encourage uses that meet needs of Powder Mill residents as well as surrounding neighborhoods



# Zoning Standards

# Process to Develop Zoning

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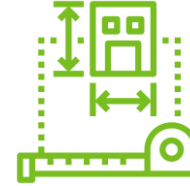


# Overlay Zoning District Components

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**Use Regulations**



**Dimensional Standards**



**Housing Affordability**



**Design Guidelines**



**Parking**



**Environment**

# Proposed Subdistrict Standards



## Subdistrict 1

Village Center  
(Maynard)

## Allowed Uses

By-Right	Special Permit
Two-family, multifamily	Entertainment uses
Assorted retail and restaurant	Public market
Personal services	Veterinarian office

## Dimensional Standards

Min. lot area	3,900 sf
Min. open space	10%
Max. height (flat/pitched)	56'/62'
Max. stories (flat/pitched)	3/3.5

Setbacks (min./max.)	
Front	0'/10'
Rear	15'/none
Side	10'/none

# Proposed Subdistrict Standards



## Subdistrict 2

Neighborhood  
Residential  
(Maynard)

## Allowed Uses

By-Right	Special Permit
Two-family, garden apartment	Assisted living, elderly housing
Most home occupations	Live/work unit
Agricultural, recreational uses	Municipal facilities

## Dimensional Standards

Min. lot area	3,900 sf
Min. open space	20%
Max. height (flat/pitched)	35'/38'
Max. stories (flat/pitched)	2/2.5

Setbacks (min./max.)	
Front	15'/20'
Rear	10'/none
Side	10'/none

# Proposed Subdistrict Standards



## Subdistrict 3

Neighborhood  
Business  
(Maynard, Acton)

### Allowed Uses

By-Right	Special Permit
Mixed-use housing	Hotels, inns
Assorted retail and restaurant	Private club
Personal services, professional office	Commercial kennel

### Dimensional Standards

Min. lot area	7,000 sf
Min. open space	20%
Max. height (flat/pitched)	40'/45'
Max. stories (flat/pitched)	3/3.5

Setbacks (min./max.)	
Front	10'/20'
Rear	15'/none
Side	0-10'/none

# Proposed Subdistrict Standards



## Subdistrict 4

Multifamily Housing  
(Maynard, Acton)

## Allowed Uses

By-Right	Special Permit
Multifamily, townhouse	Nursing home
Child and adult day care centers	Retirement community

## Dimensional Standards

Min. lot area	1 acre (43,560 sf)
Min. open space	40%
Max. height (flat/pitched)	56'/62'
Max. stories (flat/pitched)	4/4.5

Setbacks (min./max.)	
Front	35'/50'
Rear	25'/none
Side	50'/none

# Proposed Subdistrict Standards



## Subdistrict 5

Commercial Center  
(Acton)

### Allowed Uses

By-Right	Special Permit
Office, scientific	Manufacturing, warehouse
Health care facility	Hospital, medical center
Retail, restaurant, services	Multifamily dwelling

### Dimensional Standards

Min. lot area	30,000 sf
Min. open space	30%
Max. height (flat/pitched)	45'/40'
Max. stories (flat/pitched)	3/3.5

Setbacks (min./max.)	
Front	25'/40'
Rear	50'/none
Side	25'/none

# Additional Recommendations

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## Housing Affordability

### **Naturally-Occurring Affordable Housing**

- Legalize existing non-conforming housing on small lots to enable homeowners to add minor additions

### **Inclusionary Zoning**

- Required in Multifamily Housing subdistrict

### **Accessory Apartments**

- Allow by-right in all subdistricts to expand supply of small housing stock and provide homeowners with a source of income



# Additional Recommendations

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## Design Guidelines

### Building

- Articulation standards to reduce the visual impact of large buildings and avoids monotony
- Building stepbacks for taller buildings
- Ground-story glazing and active uses

### Site

- Integrated, adjacent public and private spaces (e.g., planting zones, seating areas)
- Incorporate Complete Streets standards for sidewalks and bike facilities

# Additional Recommendations

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## Parking

### Parking Minimums

- None

### Parking Maximums

- Cap the amount of allowed off-street parking on site
- Per unit for residential and per 1,000 square feet for commercial

### Other

- Require EV infrastructure, bike parking, and landscaping
- Incentivize shared parking to limit curb cuts

# Additional Recommendations

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## Environment

### **Landscaping**

- Incentivize green stormwater infrastructure
- Tree protection

### **Signage + Lighting**

- Clear and consistent standards for businesses
- Design and location that promotes feeling of safety

### **River Access**

- Visual, physical, and environmental access

# Discussion

# Next Steps

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- Fall 2023
  - Refine zoning standards with town planning staff
  - Get feedback on proposed zoning standards at public open house (November 15)
  - Finalize zoning standards
- Winter 2024
  - Develop zoning bylaws
- Spring 2024
  - Town Meeting adoption

# Feedback

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- How can the proposed zoning best meet the project's goal?
- Do you have suggested improvements to the proposed...
  - ...allowed uses?
  - ...dimensional standards?
  - ...subdistrict boundaries?
- What else should the zoning cover?

## Goal

Incentivize development that strengthens the Powder Mill Road Corridor as a **destination** that allows residents and visitors to safely **shop and eat locally** and **access the Assabet River**

# Thank You!

MAPC contact:

Sarah Scott, Regional Land Use Planner II  
[sscott@mapc.org](mailto:sscott@mapc.org)

Maynard contact:

Bill Nemser, Planning Director  
[bnemser@TownofMaynard.net](mailto:bnemser@TownofMaynard.net)

Acton contact:

Kaila Sauer, Assistant Planner II  
[ksauer@acton-ma.gov](mailto:ksauer@acton-ma.gov)



Project webpage: [mapc.ma/powdermillcorridor](http://mapc.ma/powdermillcorridor)