

Plan Process

Project Overview

The South Acton Vision & Action Plan is an effort to establish a community vision for South Acton Village and make zoning and design recommendations that can best achieve the vision. This work continues the establishment of key center plans as recommended in the Acton 2020 Comprehensive Community Plan.

This project coincides with new regulations from the State of Massachusetts (Section 3A of the Zoning Act) about how communities with MBTA stations zone for multifamily housing given the regulation require re-zoning within 1/2 mile of the MBTA station. The South Acton Vision & Action Plan is also looking at how Acton could comply with the regulations within the context of the community's vision.

Connection to Recent Planning Efforts

The Acton 2020 Comprehensive Community Plan

- Identifies five “Key Village Centers,” including South Acton, as locations where growth should be concentrated to help to preserve undeveloped land in Acton, and lead to additional housing options for empty nesters, promote economic development, and create livelier, walkable places for families.
- The last time the Town created an area plan for South Acton Village was in 1995.

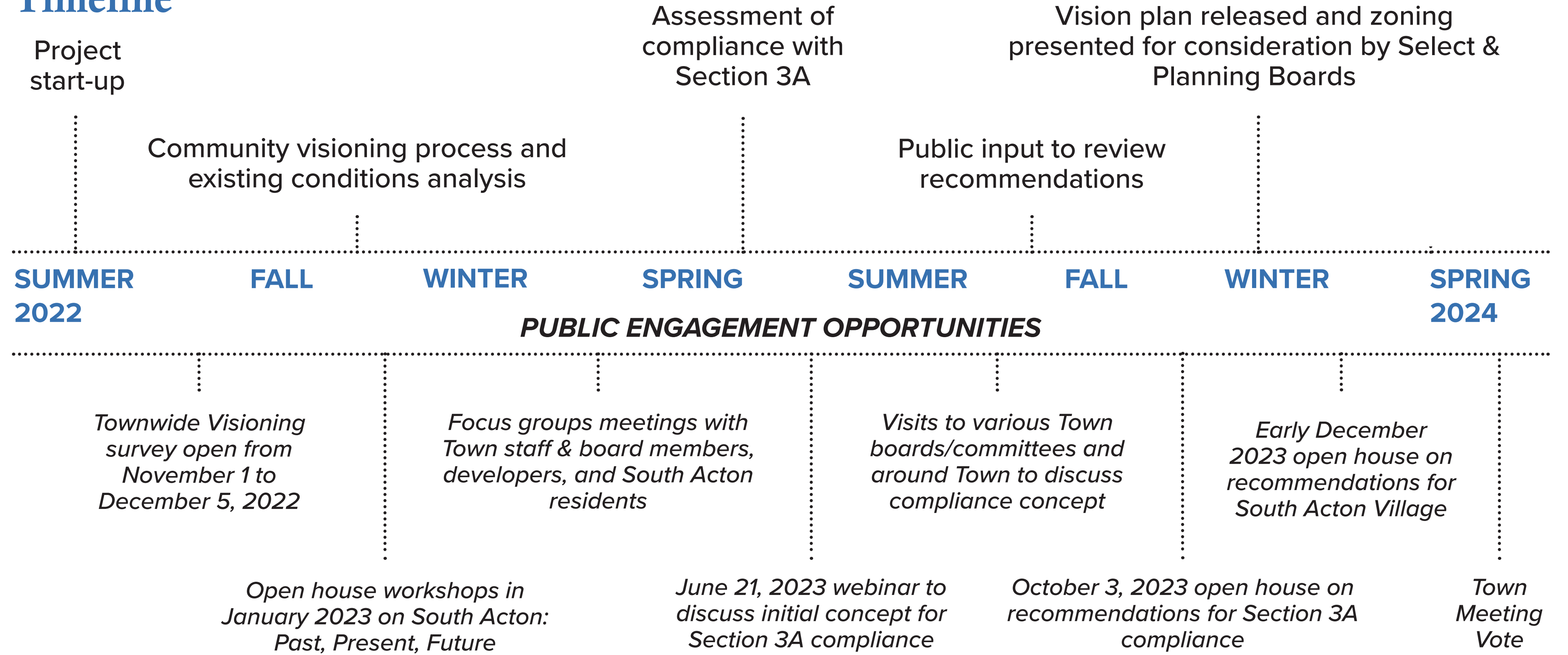
Acton recently completed a Housing Production Plan (HPP)

- Identifies the need for new and diverse housing types to serve Acton’s residents and better match housing supply to demand.
- Goal 5 of the HPP is to “locate new residential multifamily and mixed-use development in and near existing business centers and village districts.”

Climate Action Plan

- Action 1: Pair zoning with sustainability, allowing for broader and more multifamily housing choices and flexible approaches to achieve housing affordability and accessibility.
- Action 2: Explore opportunities for affordable housing and mixed-use development within 1/2 mile of public transit and near existing business centers and village districts.

Timeline



Advisory Group

The advisory group has been working closely with staff from the Planning Division and MAPC on the South Acton Vision & Action Plan. They are a dedicated group of Acton residents representing a wide range of Town boards and committees.

- Janet Adachi, Acton Community Housing Corporation
- Fran Arsenault, Select Board
- John Cappetta, Planning Board
- David Honn, Design Review Board, Historic District Commission
- Adam Nolde, Finance Committee
- Franny Osman, Transportation Advisory Group, Commission on Disabilities
- Catherine Usoff, Economic Development Committee
- Bob Van Meter, Acton Community Housing Corporation

Section 3A Compliance Model and Excluded Land

Unit Capacity for Acton

As a community served by the commuter rail with 9,219 total housing units as of the 2020 Census, Acton's Section 3A district must have a minimum capacity of 1,383 units based on the State's model calculator. Unit capacity is **not a requirement to build any units** nor is it an estimate of how much new housing would be built. Unit capacity refers to the number of units that could be built if every re-zoned parcel was built to its maximum theoretical capacity, without considering lot conditions such as local wetland setbacks, topography, soil conditions and septic capacity.

The compliance model provided by the Executive Office of Housing & Livable Communities generates a unit capacity number for each parcel based on its size and dimensional/density requirements set for the district's proposed zoning. The total square footage of "excluded land," is subtracted from the parcel size which includes:

- All publicly-owned land, except for lots or portions of lots determined to be developable
- All rivers, streams, lakes, ponds and other surface bodies of water
- All wetland resource areas, including a buffer zone around wetlands and bodies of water that equals to the minimum setback required by title 5 of the state environmental code
- Protected open space and recreational land that is legally protected in perpetuity (such as land owned by a local land trust or subject to a conservation restriction), or that is likely to remain undeveloped due to functional or traditional use (such as cemeteries)
- All public and private rights-of-way
- Privately-owned land on which development is prohibited to protect private water supplies, such as Zone I wellhead protection areas and Zone A surface water supply protection areas
- Privately-owned land used for educational or institutional uses such as a hospital, utility, museum, or college



Approximate excluded land area shown in gray

1/2 Mile radius of T station

How can Acton comply with Section 3A?

Draft Proposal for Compliance

The following draft proposal for Acton to comply with Section 3A has been informed by the community engagement conducted to date. The emerging zoning recommendations are:

- Adopt MBTA Communities Overlay District 1, allowing small-scale multifamily housing at a density of 10 units/acre, in context with existing development patterns near South Acton station
- Adopt MBTA Communities Overlay District 2, allowing larger-scale multifamily housing at a density of 25 units/acre in three areas outside of the South Acton core
- Integrate design standards into zoning regulations for both overlay districts
- Adopt inclusionary zoning requirements for 10% of units at 80% of Area Median Income to qualify for the Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI). By adopting this inclusionary zoning, units constructed in the MBTA overlay districts will not impact the SHI.

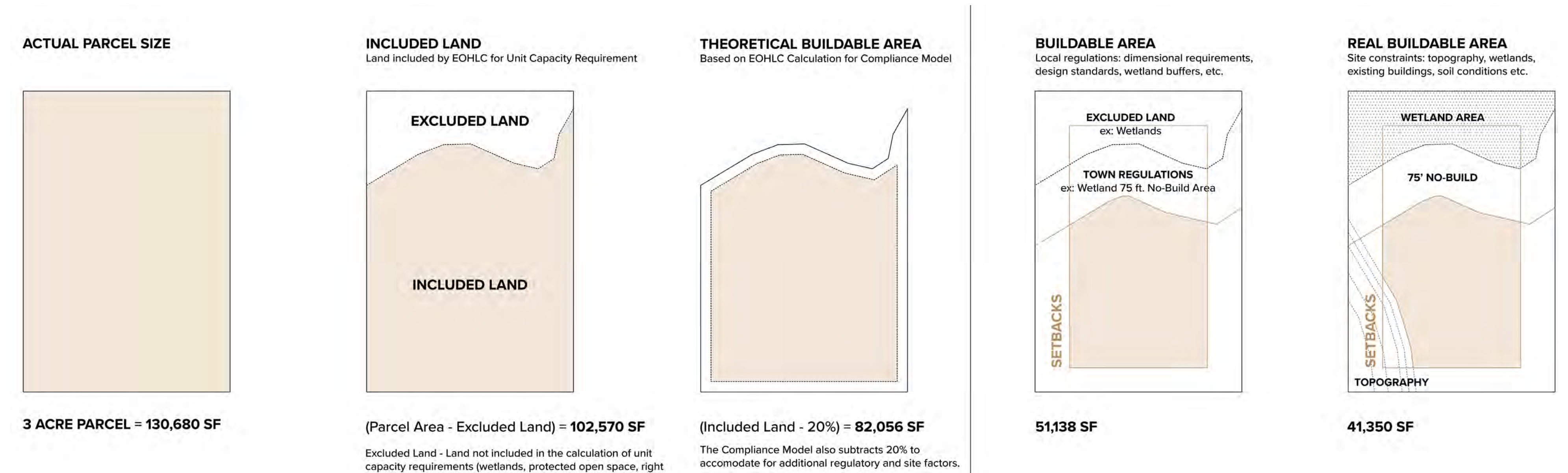
Compliance Model Results

Overlay District	District 1	District 2A	District 2B	District 2C	Total
District Acreage	68.3	27.0	30.0	11.9	137.1 acres
Included Land (Developable)	52.5	20.1	27.2	6.6	106.4 acres

Category	Guidelines Requirement	Compliance Model Results
Minimum multifamily unit requirement	1,383 units	2,215 units
Minimum land area	50 acres	137.1 acres

How does the Compliance Model differ from reality?

The unit capacity numbers that EOHLC's Compliance Model generates substantially overestimates the number of units that could be built on a parcel. This is because the area used to determine unit capacity in the compliance model (the theoretical buildable area) is larger than the real buildable area of a parcel in Acton if you subtract out local regulations like zoning setbacks and wetland buffers, as well as site constraints like topography, soils and septic capacity.



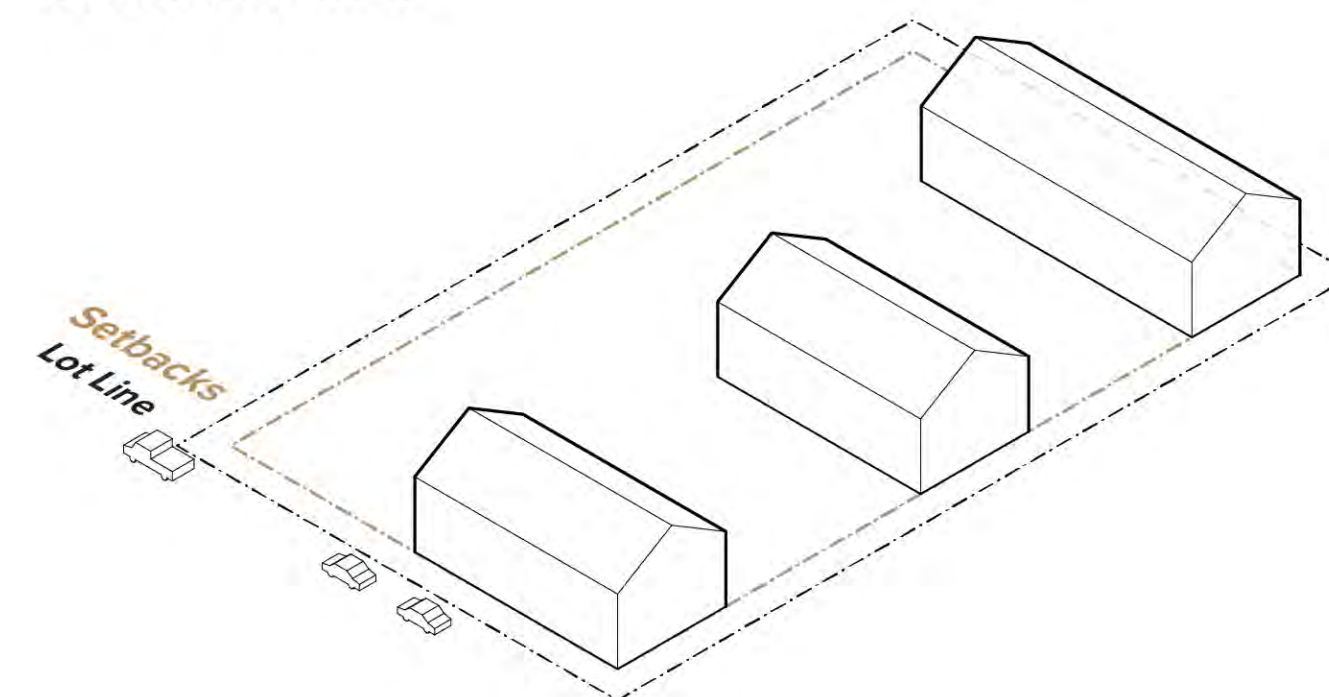
Density Comparison

The following graphic shows the proposed densities of the two overlay districts. As depicted, MBTA Communities Overlay District 1 regulates buildings to be shorter and smaller to accommodate the size of lots and existing architecture, while MBTA Communities Overlay District 2 allows larger, taller building on larger lots and requires greater setbacks and open space.

Overlay District 1

Maximum Density:
10 dwelling units/acre

Maximum Height:
2.5 stories / 36'-0"

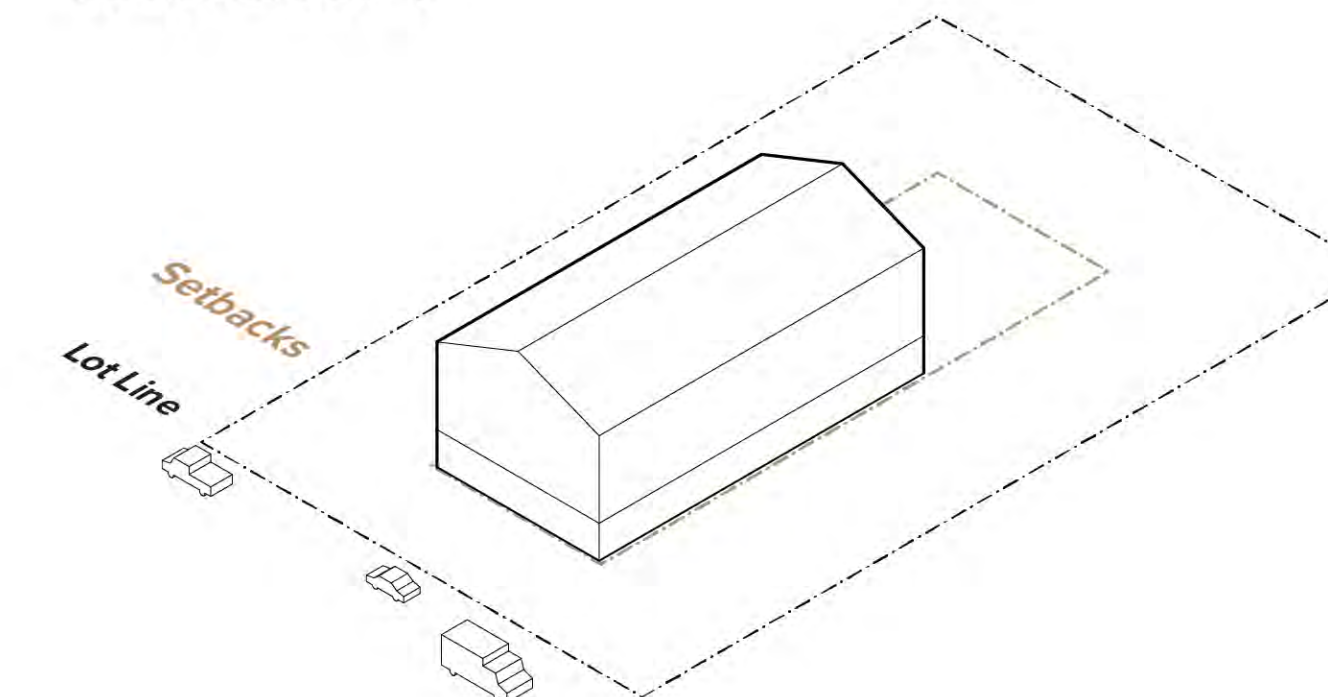


Ex: 10 Townhouse Units

Overlay District 2

Maximum Density:
25 dwelling units/acre

Maximum Height:
4.5 stories / 50'-0"



Ex: 25 Apartment Units

Proposed Draft Approach

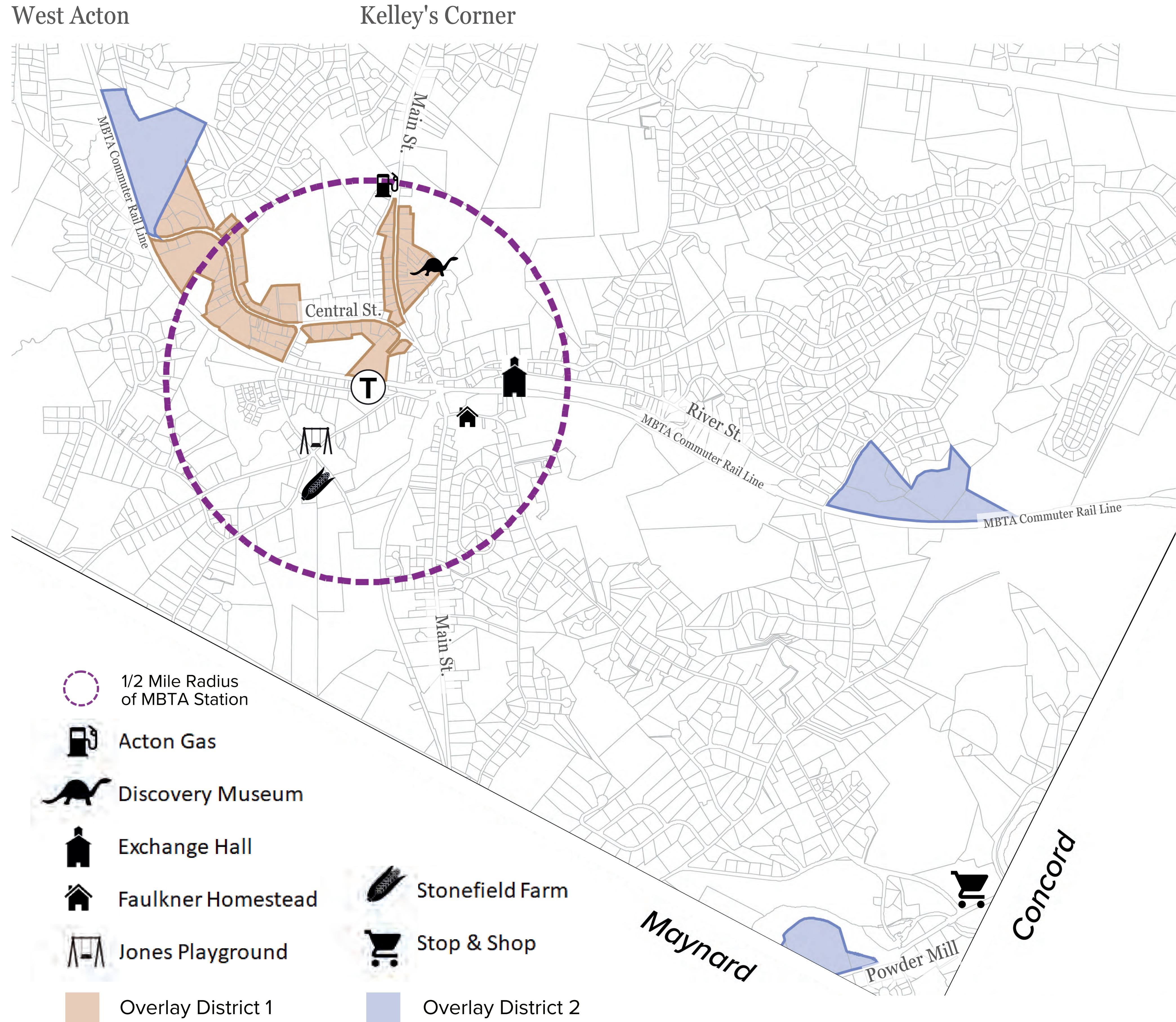
Location Selection

- All locations are **outside the historic district**.
- All locations are outside of **Zone 1 and Zone 2 of the Groundwater Protection District**
- Locations are in keeping with the Strategies of the **Climate Action Plan**, to locate more multi-family housing choices within a 1/2 mile of public transit and near existing village districts.
- Location are in keeping with the strategies of the **Housing Production Plan**.
- Locations are outside of privately owned **South Acton Village Zoning District** parcels. Based on community feedback, commercial uses like restaurants and coffee shops are desired, therefore zoning proposals in the village core will focus on commercial and mixed use incentives.

Create Two New Overlay Districts

Overlay District 1: Would allow for smaller-scale multi-family homes at a scale of **10 units** per acre primarily within the 1/2 mile radius of the train station (shown in brown). This district would also allow mixed use along Main Street.

Overlay District 2: Would allow for larger-scale multi-family homes at a scale of **25 units** per acre on three larger sites that are outside the 1/2 mile radius, but close to village or commercial centers (shown in purple below).



MBTA Communities Overlay District 1 Locations

Draft Approach: Create an overlay district in the area shown below to allow smaller scale multifamily homes. This location would allow multifamily homes at a scale of 10 units per acre and allow mixed use along Main Street.



0 165 330 660 Feet



*Dotted area is excluded land

Examples of this scale in Acton today:



West Acton – Across from True West Brewery



Main Street – Across from Discovery Museum

MBTA Communities Overlay District 1

Zoning Recommendations

Density standards:

- Maximum density: 10 units per acre
- Maximum floor area ratio (FAR): none

Dimensional standards:

- Minimum lot size: 5,000 square feet
- Maximum height: 2.5 stories
- Minimum open space: 20%
- Minimum front yard setback: 10 feet
- Minimum side yard setback: 10 feet
- Minimum rear yard setback: 10 feet
- Minimum frontage: 50 feet

Parking standards:

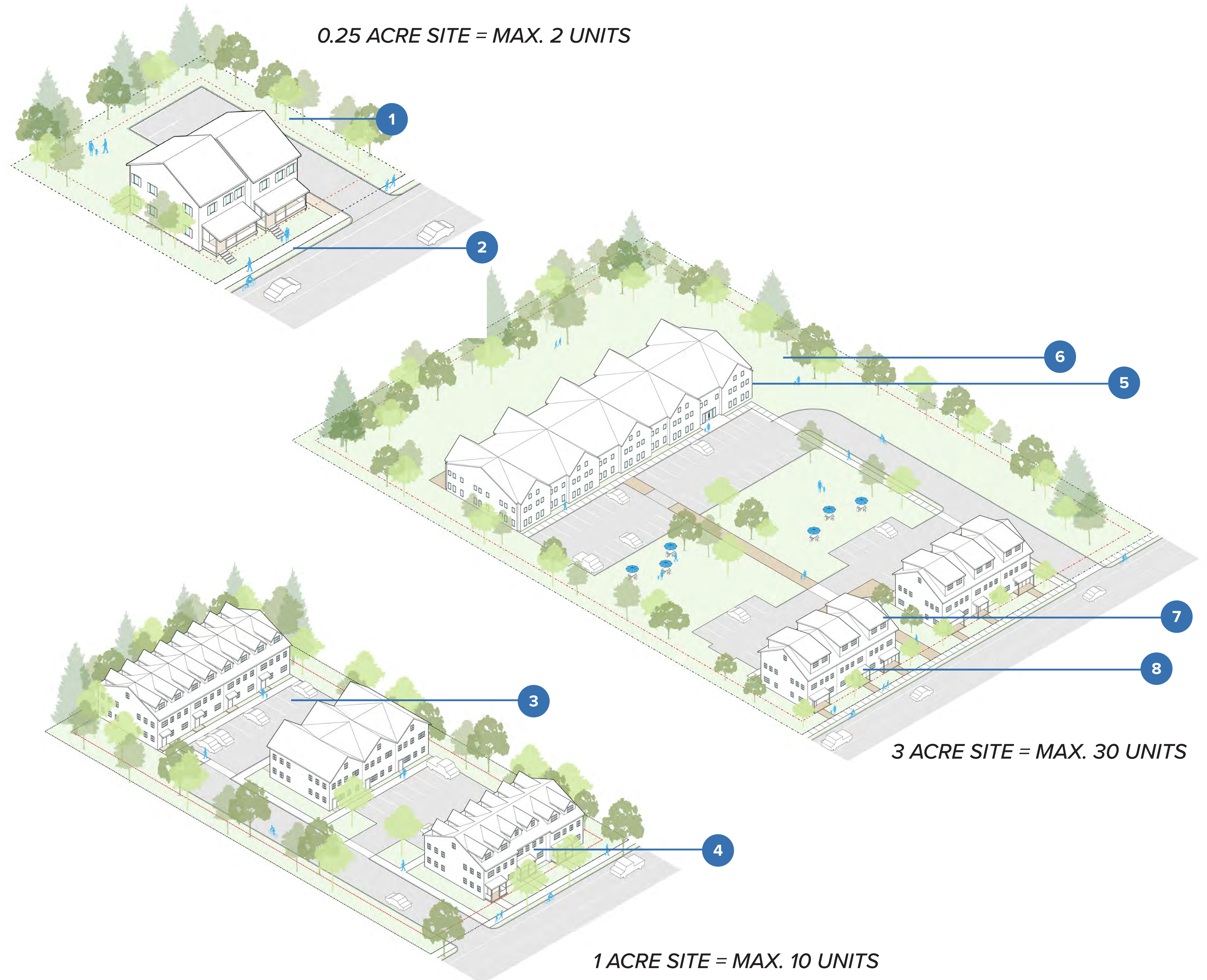
- Maximum parking spaces/dwelling unit: 1.5

Design standards to regulate (examples):

Items are labeled on illustrations to the right

- 1 Landscape screening
- 2 Sidewalk width
- 3 Parking location
- 4 Facade articulation/materials
- 5 Principal entrance design
- 6 Window and door fenestration
- 7 Roof pitch
- 8 Front porch element

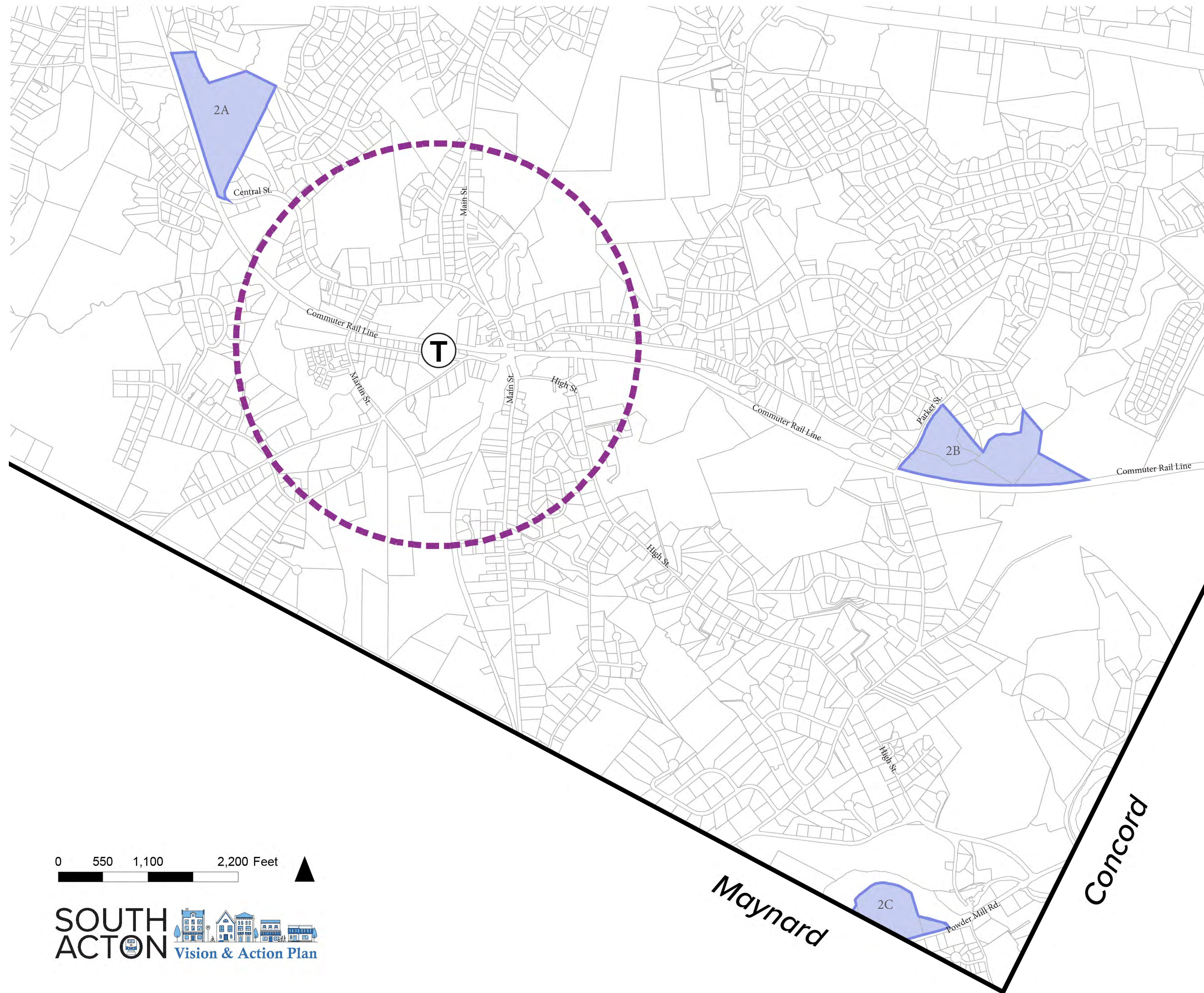
What could new housing in this overlay district look like?



MBTA Communities Overlay District 2

1/2 mile radius from MBTA Station

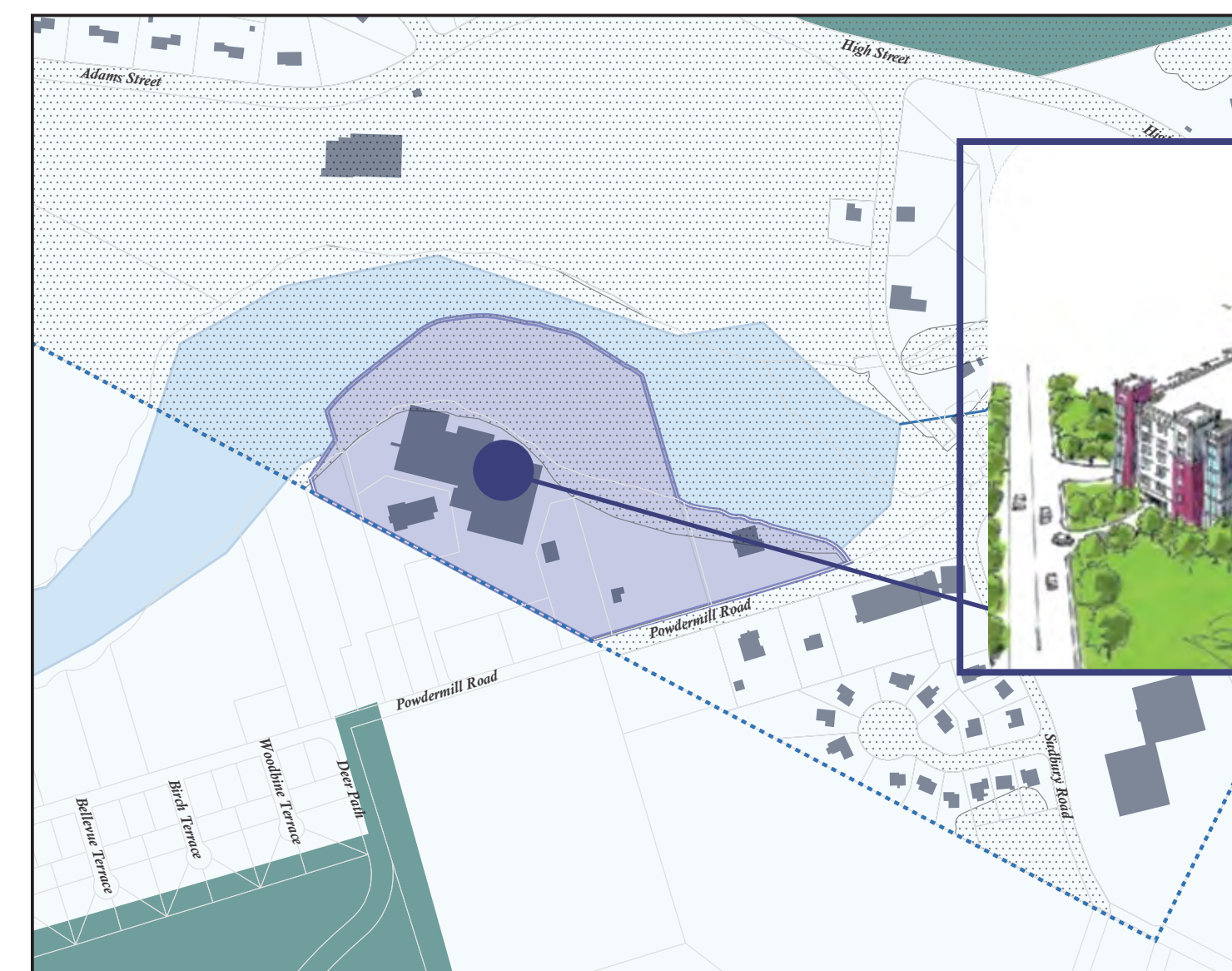
MBTA Communities Overlay District 2 Boundary



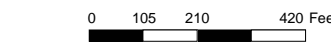
Subdistrict 2A



Subdistrict 2B



Subdistrict 2C



MBTA Communities Overlay District 2

Zoning Recommendations

Density standards:

- Maximum density: 25 units per acre
- Maximum floor area ratio (FAR): none

Dimensional standards:

- Minimum lot size: 43,560 square feet (1 acre)
- Maximum height: 4.5 stories
- Minimum open space: 40%
- Minimum front yard setback: 35 feet
- Minimum side yard setback: 50 feet
- Minimum rear yard setback: 50 feet
- Minimum frontage: 50 feet

Parking standards:

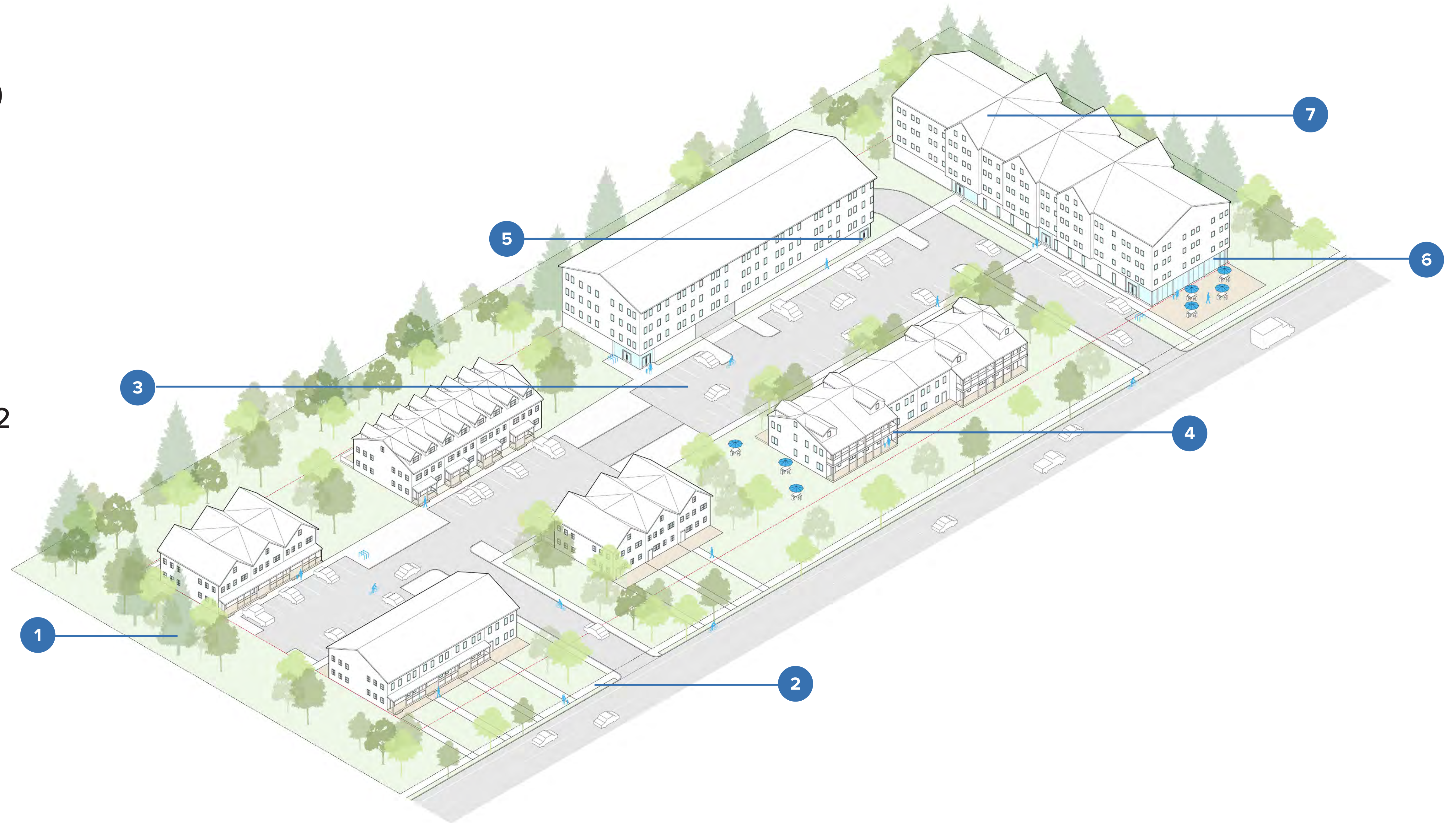
- Maximum parking spaces per dwelling unit: 2

Design standards to regulate (examples):

Items are labeled on illustrations to the right

- 1 Landscape screening
- 2 Sidewalk width
- 3 Parking location
- 4 Facade articulation/materials
- 5 Principal entrance design
- 6 Window and door fenestration
- 7 Roof pitch

What could new housing in this overlay district look like?



5 ACRE SITE = MAX. 125 UNITS