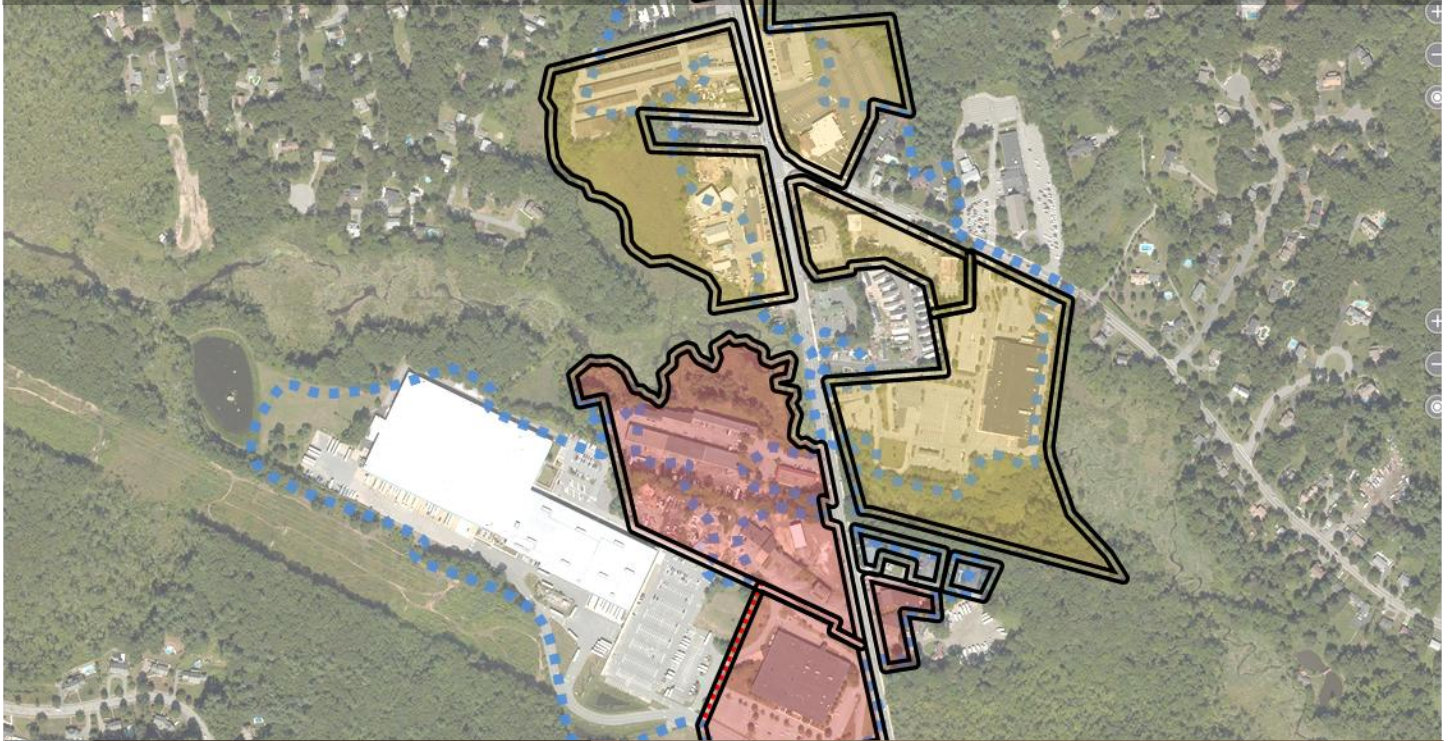


# TOWN OF NORTH READING MAIN STREET (ROUTE 28 AT 62) SHORT TERM 2016 - 2021 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY



*Technical assistance provided by the  
Metropolitan Area Planning Council  
(MAPC)*

**PREPARED FOR:**

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# I. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The North Reading Main Street (Route 28 at 62) Short-Term 2021 Economic Development Strategy was developed based on feedback from advisory committee meetings and a community workshop. It was also informed by a five-year horizon 2015-2020 market analysis for attracting potential residential, retail and office redevelopment for a segment of the Town's Main Street along Route 28 at 62. Thank you to all who participated throughout the process.

Both analyses were conducted with funds from the State of Massachusetts' District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA) program. Such funding enables the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) to achieve its mission in providing towns and cities with assistance in achieving equitable local smart growth that also benefits the greater Boston region. MAPC is grateful to the Governor and the Legislature for their support and funding of this program.

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Special thanks to the workshop and other participants who provided feedback.



## II. TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>I.</b>	<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>III.</b>	<b>LIST OF FIGURES .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>IV.</b>	<b>OVERVIEW OF PURPOSE &amp; STUDY AREA .....</b>	<b>6</b>
	A. PURPOSE & PROCESS .....	6
	B. STUDY AREA .....	7
<b>V.</b>	<b>STUDY AREA CHALLENGES .....</b>	<b>11</b>
	A. LOCATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE LIMITATIONS .....	11
	1. Distance from the highway, lack of town name on exit sign, and No transit service .....	11
	2. existing septic limits development use and amount of square footage .....	11
	3. decision on wastewater treatment infrastructure will affect character of the entire district too .....	12
	4. Roadway speeds, design and frontage for development .....	12
	5. Lack of recognizable gathering space or landmark .....	13
	B. ENVIRONMENTAL FEATURES .....	14
	1. Floodplains and wetlands .....	14
	2. Wellheads and drinking water .....	14
	3. Soils and highwater tables .....	15
	C. ZONING ISSUES .....	16
	1. Discourages residential .....	16
	2. Unclear business climate .....	16
	3. DIMENSIONAL and PARKING REGULATIONS .....	16
	D. TAX RATE .....	18
	E. LIMITATIONS TO MARKET SUPPORTABLE DEVELOPMENT .....	18
<b>VI.</b>	<b>STUDY AREA OPPORTUNITIES .....</b>	<b>21</b>
	A. COMMUNITY FEEDBACK .....	21
	B. OPPORTUNITIES .....	24
	1. Buildout & zoning analysis: allow compact, walkable environment .....	25
	2. Infrastructure investment: beyond septic, better sidewalks & crossings, activity center .....	26
	3. Marketing and awareness, local partners .....	27
<b>VII.</b>	<b>RECOMMENDATIONS .....</b>	<b>29</b>
	A. INFRASTRUCTURE & PUBLIC INVESTMENT .....	29
	B. REGULATORY & MARKETING .....	30
<b>VIII.</b>	<b>APPENDIX A – MARKET ANALYSIS .....</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>IX.</b>	<b>APPENDIX B – WORKSHOP INPUT .....</b>	<b>34</b>

### III. LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 Study Area in Red in Relation to Town Boundary in Black.....	7
Figure 2 Study Area Predominant Land Uses Within Highway Business Zoning District Boundary .....	7
Figure 3 Study Area Boundary in Yellow .....	9
Figure 4 Market Analysis Trade Areas Surrounding Study Area and Town.....	10
Figure 5 Study Area Relative to Highway .....	11
Figure 6 Aerial View of Part of the Study Area.....	13
Figure 7 Areas in Green Outside Floodplain Zones.....	14
Figure 8 Study Area in Red Outside Public Groundwater Supply Recharge Area.....	14
Figure 9 Brief Summary of Soils.....	15
Figure 10 Tax Rates for Town and Surrounding Area .....	18
Figure 11 Brief Summary of Housing Market Analysis .....	19
Figure 12 Brief Summary of Retail Market Analysis .....	19
Figure 13 Brief Summary of Office Market Analysis.....	20
Figure 14 Example of Community Workshop Informational Boards.....	22
Figure 15 Photos from Community Meetings & Parcel Groupings for Poll on Where to Cluster Development	23
Figure 16 Examples of Real Projects that Could Physically Fit and Are Market Supportable by 2020 .....	24
Figure 17 Parcel Groupings & Predominant Use Assumptions for Buildout Analysis.....	25
Figure 18 Workshop Example of Main Street Roadway Improvements Attracting Development .....	26
Figure 19 Example of the Project for Public Spaces' "Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper" Placemaking Best Practice	27
Figure 20 Example of the Project for Public Spaces' "Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper" Placemaking Best Practice	28

## IV. OVERVIEW OF PURPOSE & STUDY AREA

### A. PURPOSE & PROCESS

The Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) provided technical assistance to the Town of North Reading to analyze how a  $\frac{3}{4}$ -mile segment of its main commercial corridor could be improved in the next five years to attract jobs, services, revenue and housing. The purpose was to develop a short-term economic development strategic plan identifying actions the Town can take to set the right conditions to attract development around a cluster of underutilized parcels at the two intersections of Route 28 at Route 62. Currently, the development potential<sup>1</sup> for the study area (see Figures 1 and 3) is limited primarily due to environmental constraints and the absence of sewer infrastructure (along with limiting zoning and streetscape issues). The Town has long-term plans to invest in a sewer system. The short-term economic development strategic plan analyzed what can be done in the interim to provide jobs and services, and increase the Town's tax base.

The economic development plan was developed through a community planning process that engaged the Town, an Advisory Committee and the community at large. The initial phase of the process involved an MAPC market analysis to quantify how much retail, housing and office development could realistically be supported by the market in the study area by the year 2020. The market analysis was followed by a build-out analysis to assess how much development the study area could hypothetically fit. This analysis assessed existing Town land use, parking and dimensional regulations to identify recommendations that will allow the creation of a place with slower area traffic where people will want to walk, live and shop. As a participating Advisory Committee member, and a commercial real estate broker both stated during the planning process, it will allow the Town to “put a there, there.” Both analyses are discussed in more detail on pages 16-19 and 23, and reveal that only one-fifth of what is physically possible to build within the study area is market supportable by the year 2020. The economic development strategic action plan takes these analyses into account and recommends a set of recommendations related to zoning, public investment and infrastructure improvements aimed at attracting development to the area within the next five years.

In addition to MAPC's analyses, the planning process included the following:

- two Advisory Committee meetings on October 22, 2015 and March 15, 2016,
- a community workshop on January 13, 2016,
- Town staff and Advisory Committee review of the draft plan, and
- a final plan presentation before the Community Planning Commission on May 17, 2016.

<sup>1</sup> Explained in section IV.E. on pages 18-19.

## B. STUDY AREA

The study area is comprised of approximately 96 acres clustered along a  $\frac{3}{4}$ -mile segment of the Town's main commercial corridor along Massachusetts State Route 28, and known locally as Main Street (please see Figures 1 and 3). The spine of the study area is formed by the two main vehicular thoroughfares that traverse it (Routes 28 and 62) and form two main intersections known locally as Main Street at Lowell Road and at Winter Street. These 96 acres represent about 1.1% of the Town's land area, and house approximately 70 residents out of the Town's 15,000 residents. From a transportation standpoint, the study area (and the Town) does not have bus or commuter rail transit service, and is located approximately 2.5 miles from the nearest highway exit (exit 40 off of Interstate 93). From a land use perspective, it is predominantly commercial with some industrial uses and small pockets of residential, and is zoned Highway Business (see Figure 2). From an environmental standpoint, most of the study area is outside of the floodplain zone but is characterized by large swaths of urban land soil conditions or high water table which can pose development challenges.

For the purposes of putting the study area into the context of the Town, North Reading has a population of approximately 15,000 residents over 13.5-square miles. Its population is 98% white, has a median household income of \$77,000 and a median family household income of \$86,000. Additionally, it has an 87% residential tax base with a residential/commercial tax rate of \$16.61 that is higher than that of adjacent communities and the State median. From an MAPC regional context, the Town is designated as an established maturing suburb with mostly single-family homes, and limited vacant land for new development.

The MAPC buildout analysis was limited to quantifying how much could hypothetically be constructed under existing zoning and modified smart-growth zoning scenarios within the 96 acres of the study area. The buildout analysis model excluded the residential parcels as well as acreage in the floodplain areas. The market analysis that was also done as part of the planning process defined additional "trade and market area" boundaries that

Figure 1 Study Area in Red in Relation to Town Boundary in Black

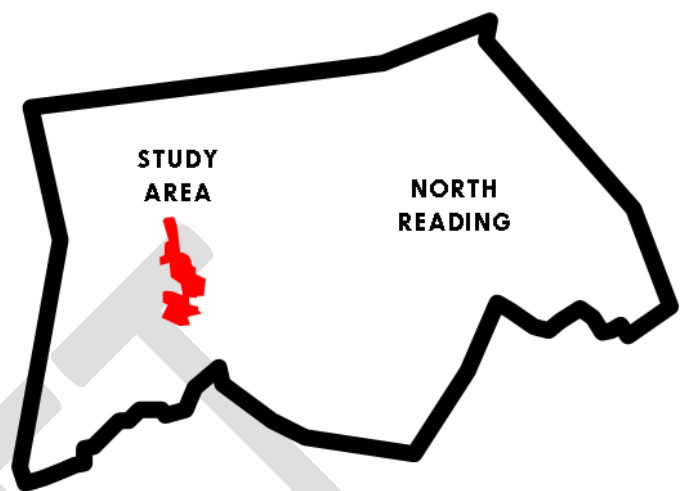
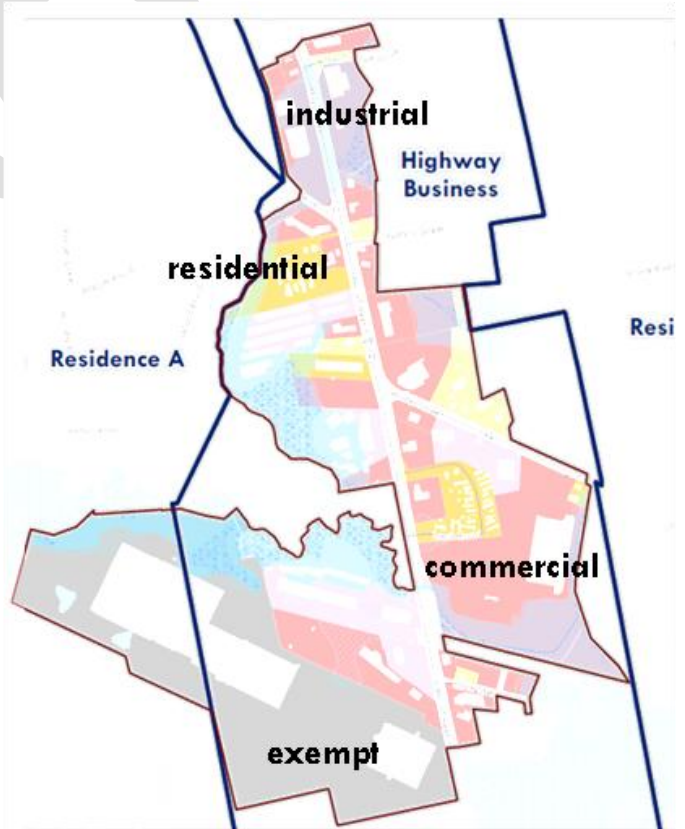


Figure 2 Study Area Predominant Land Uses Within Highway Business Zoning District Boundary



are much larger than the study area. Each of the retail, housing and office components of the market analysis had its own area defined as a larger surrounding area. The amount and type of development that the analysis anticipates for the smaller study area is predicated on factors such as untapped disposable spending income, demographic projections, and office market inventory and trends. These areas are also outlined in Figure 4 to give context to the smaller study area shown in Figure 3.

The retail market analysis defined two trade areas. There are almost 8,000 people living within a five minute drive time of the study area (about half of the Town's population), and 47,000 people within a 10-minute drive. The map in Figure 4 defines the larger 10-minute drive boundary in red. The housing market was defined by the seven surrounding towns as outlined in the green boundary on the same map. Lastly, the office market area was defined by a national industry leader (Jones Lang LaSalle [JLL]) as the "Boston North" office market, which is outlined in the blue boundary.

DRAFT



Figure 3 Study Area Boundary in Yellow

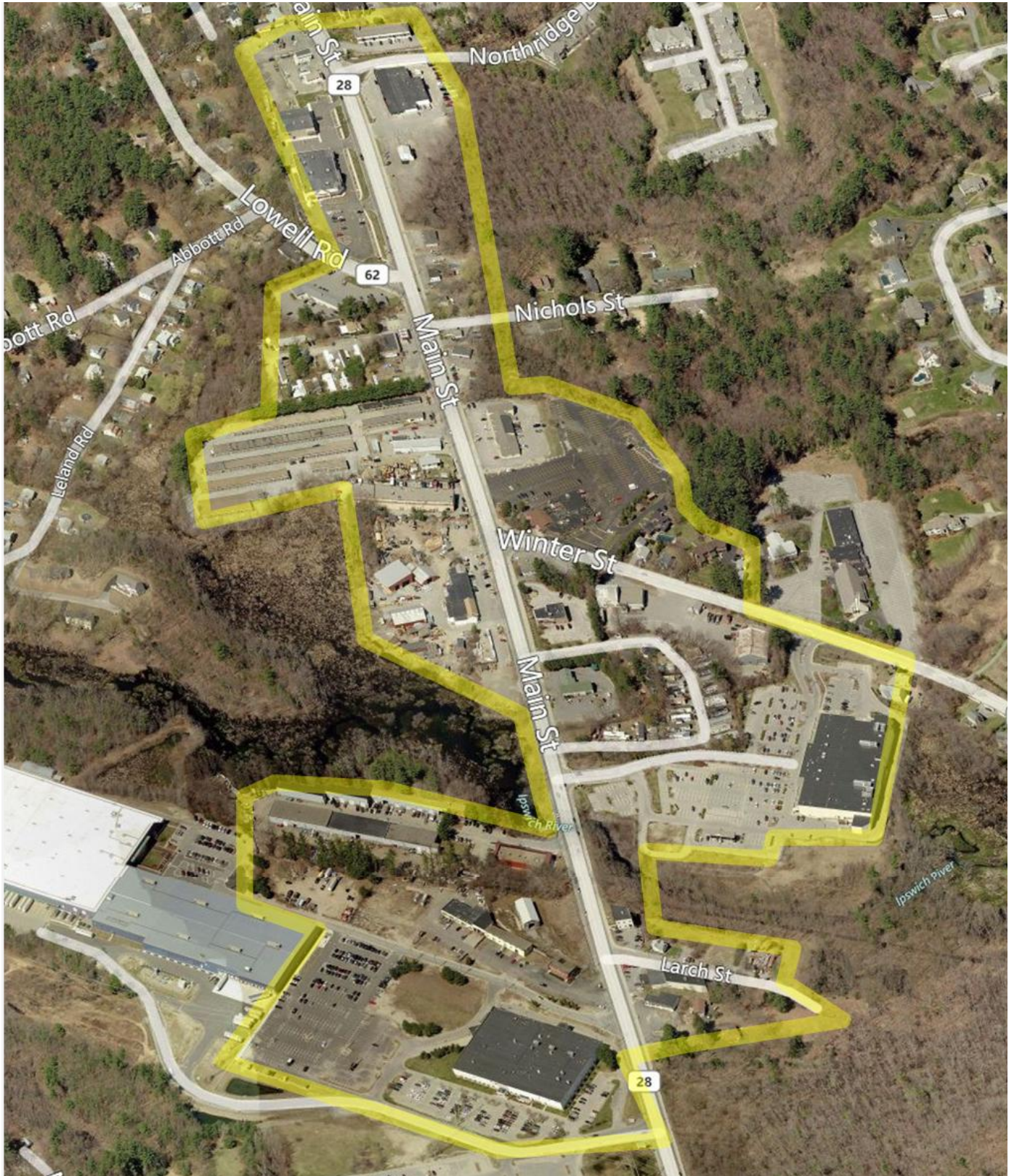
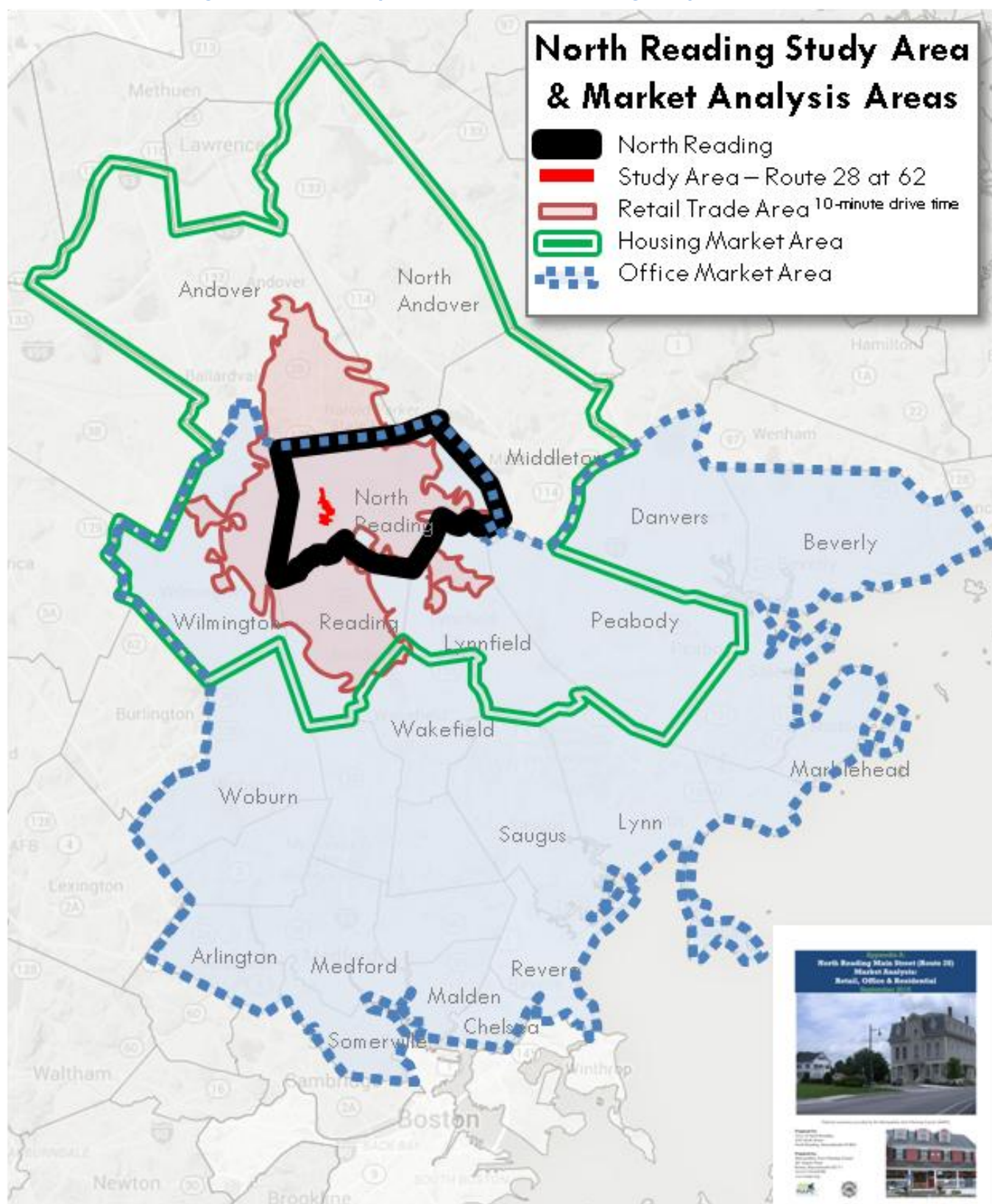




Figure 4 Market Analysis Trade Areas Surrounding Study Area and Town



## V. STUDY AREA CHALLENGES

### A. LOCATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE LIMITATIONS

#### 1. DISTANCE FROM THE HIGHWAY, LACK OF TOWN NAME ON EXIT SIGN, AND NO TRANSIT SERVICE

The Town of North Reading does not have any direct highway access to Interstate-93. This is a factor that limits the development potential of the study area. The study area is approximately 2.5 miles from Interstate-93's exit 40 via Massachusetts State Route 62 which traverses North Reading from west to east, and connects to the study area when it intersects with Route 28.

Figure 5 Study Area Relative to Highway



Additionally, the name of the Town does not appear on the exit sign, which only identifies the following: “62 North, Reading, Wilmington”. The fact that the Town is not identified on the highway sign might also be another contributing factor to the redevelopment potential for the study area. The study area happens to be closer to the highway exit than approximately two-thirds of the Town, and the Town could consider getting some form of name recognition on the exit sign for its developing “North Reading Business District”.

Lastly, in terms of access to the study area, the Town as a whole and the study area does not enjoy any mass transit service. The nearest commuter rail station is located to the south off of the Haverill Line in downtown Reading. Similarly, the nearest MBTA bus routes are located in downtown Reading (routes 136 and 137 to Malden Center). The lack of transit service to the study area also informs the amount and type of redevelopment potential for the study area to be dependent on car access.

#### 2. EXISTING SEPTIC LIMITS DEVELOPMENT USE AND AMOUNT OF SQUARE FOOTAGE

Individual developments within the study area presently rely on their own private septic systems to treat their wastewater. Septic systems can treat a maximum of 10,780 daily gallons of wastewater, and this limits the amount of potential development to about 50 daily gallons for 1,000 square feet of retail and 220 daily gallons for a two-bedroom dwelling unit. The buildout analysis MAPC completed determined that desired, market-supportable, mixed-use projects are unlikely to be developed on individual septic systems due in large part to these limitations. In particular, reliance on septic limits the type and amount of development, especially for restaurants and residential developments, which generate more wastewater than needs to be treated.

### **3. DECISION ON WASTEWATER TREATMENT INFRASTRUCTURE WILL AFFECT CHARACTER OF THE ENTIRE DISTRICT TOO**

Reliance on septic systems not only limits the redevelopment potential in the study area but also the likelihood for mixed-use developments that are compact and could potentially encourage an attractive, walkable environment. As section V. E. of the economic development plan report will state in greater detail, the market analysis MAPC completed reveals that many of the desired uses the Town wants for the study area, fare better when in close proximity to each other since the uses reinforce each other. Retail depends in part on residents in nearby homes and office workers. Office developers seek out “amenity rich” locations for their workers to be able to make convenient commute-time and lunch-hour purchases.

Development on septic is more likely to happen as single-use, smaller-scale, low-rise projects that oftentimes dot the streetscape in the form of linear strip mall developments. The separation of these developments from each other creates longer, unwalkable distances. The capacity limitation of 10,780 daily gallons makes it unlikely to achieve enough development of uses that rely on each other to be in close proximity. Ideally, these uses would be housed on the ground floors and upper stories of the same buildings for more efficient use of the land. When this pattern of compact development is replicated on adjacent parcels on both sides of a streetscape, the cumulative effect could be the creation of something akin to a traditional New England village center or main street business district or node.

### **4. ROADWAY SPEEDS, DESIGN AND FRONTAGE FOR DEVELOPMENT**

Presently, the Town’s Main Street has more of a highway character with high speed traffic, limited sidewalks and crossings that do not make it safe or pleasant for pedestrians to cross. This presents another challenge toward achieving a higher-level of redevelopment in the study area. Anything that can be done to reduce the reliance on getting into a parked vehicle to have to go to an adjacent development or one across the street will also help with reducing traffic generation and congestion. If it were more pleasant and safe to walk along Main Street and to cross it, one could imagine that that same street frontage would be attractive for outdoor seating for restaurants or stores.

The Town’s segment of Route 28 is under the control of the Massachusetts Highway Department of Transportation. Calming the traffic volumes and speed along the Town’s Main Street will be a challenge but can be achieved by either petitioning to take control over it or as is recommended in sections VI.B2 and VII.2.1 of the economic development plan by redesigning it to encourage slower traffic speeds.



## 5. LACK OF RECOGNIZABLE GATHERING SPACE OR LANDMARK

Throughout the planning process, Advisory Committee members and other stakeholders mentioned the lack of a recognizable social gathering space or landmark along the Town's Main Street. Figure 6 below shows a partial aerial view of the study area, which is largely characterized by surface parking lots. While the Town does have a civic node around its Town Common located at the intersection of Park and Haverhill streets, it lacks a significant concentration of retail. It was noted that Town Hall is neither located within the town's civic node nor along its Main Street in the study area. There is a challenge in promoting growth and development in the study area either by: making a public investment to carve out a modest but visible place around which to anchor private development, or pooling together required open spaces to create a gathering space. If done effectively, such an indoor and/or outdoor space could benefit the social landscape of the Town as well as help support local businesses.

**Figure 6 Aerial View of Part of the Study Area**



## B. ENVIRONMENTAL FEATURES

### 1. FLOODPLAINS AND WETLANDS

Most of the study area is located outside of the floodplain as seen in Figure 7 below. The parts that are located within the floodplain limit the installation of septic systems and in turn may have also impacted the development potential of the study area. The Town does allow development within the floodplain but requires a special permit before determining whether to approve a project or not. Additionally, from a development permitting standpoint, the Town does not allow fill within the floodplain zone<sup>2</sup>. Other challenges to redevelopment within these areas include: (a) the feasibility to construct basements and the placement of HVAC (heating, ventilation and air-conditioning) mechanical equipment within them, (b) the feasibility to construct below grade parking, and (c) the height of the first floor grade in order to avoid potential flooding<sup>3</sup>.

Figure 7 Areas in Green Outside Floodplain Zones

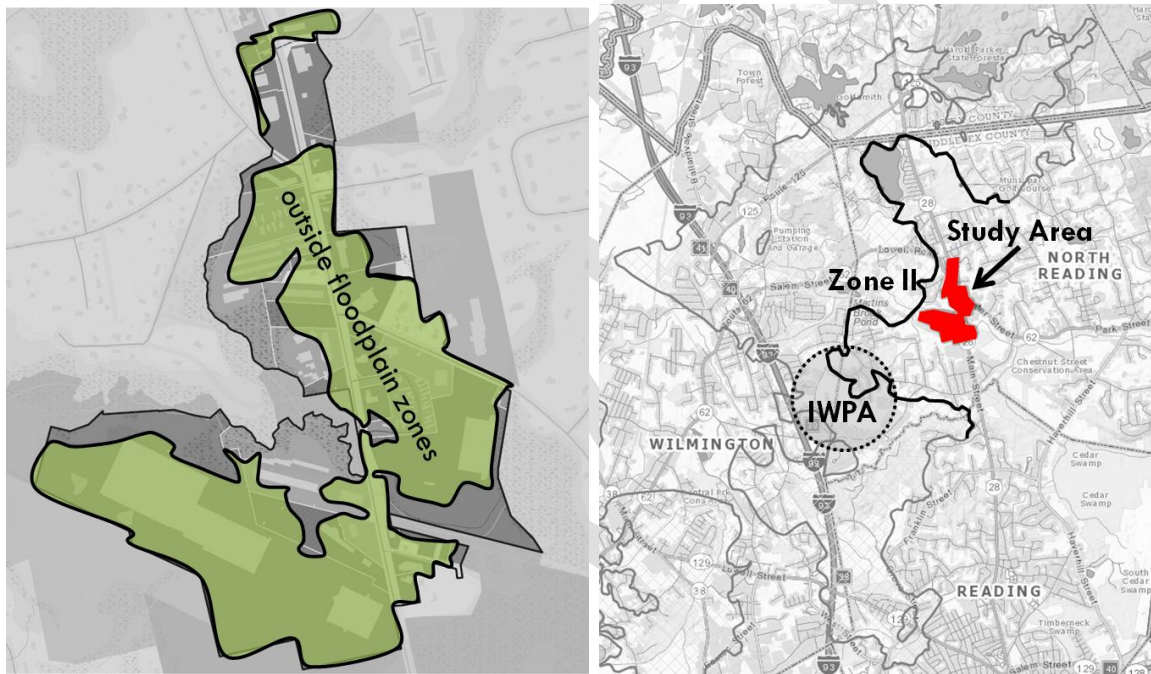


Figure 8 Study Area in Red Outside Public Groundwater Supply Recharge Area

### 2. WELLHEADS AND DRINKING WATER

One of the ways Massachusetts protects the recharge area around Public Water Supply (PWS) groundwater sources is by establishing and regulating Wellhead Protection Areas (WPA)<sup>4</sup>. The entire study area is located outside of the Zone II and Interim wellhead protection areas, and there are no foreseeable restrictions to redevelopment. Please refer to Figure 8 above..

<sup>2</sup> No fill or alteration that would elevate water table and adversely impact stormwater management §196-9A(2)(e)4

<sup>3</sup> Lowest floor of all new structures including any substantial improvements are above the one-hundred-year flood elevation as shown on the FIRM maps per §200-44

<sup>4</sup> 310 CMR 22.02

### 3. SOILS AND HIGHWATER TABLES

Lastly, as part of the environmental features that MAPC considered that could make development trickier or costlier, MAPC examined the soil conditions in the study area. Certain soil types can impact construction and limit development. Hydric soils are also associated with the presence of high water table beneath the land and can affect the construction of basements and below grade parking. Large swaths of the study area are located either in “urban land soils” or have high water table soils. Urban land soils are variable or are undetermined in type, and require on-site investigation. High water table soils generally indicate the presence of the water table within 0 to 0.5 feet of excavation. Please refer to Figure 9 below for the specific soil types.

Figure 9 Brief Summary of Soils

BRIEF SUMMARY OF SOILS		
<b>HIGH WATER TABLE SOILS</b> generally 0 to 0.5 feet <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Freetown muck, ponded</li><li>• Freetown muck</li><li>• Swansea muck</li><li>• Scarboro mucky fine sandy loam</li><li>• Saco mucky silt loam</li></ul>	<b>SUITABLE SOILS FOR DEVELOPMENT</b> more than 6 feet <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Canton-Charlton-Urban land complex</li><li>• Windsor loamy sand</li><li>• Hinckley loamy sand</li><li>• Merrimac-Urban land complex</li><li>• Merrimac fine sandy loam</li></ul>	<b>ONSITE INVESTIGATION RECOMMENDED</b> variable or undetermined <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Urban land</li><li>• Udorthents, sandy</li><li>• Udorthents-Urban land complex</li></ul>
<b>SOURCES:</b> (1) MassGIS Data - NRCS SSURGO-Certified Soils, November 2012; and (2) USDA – Soils Survey of Middlesex County 1998-2001-2005		



## **C. ZONING ISSUES**

### **1. DISCOURAGES RESIDENTIAL**

The study area is presently zoned as a Highway Business district and under the use regulations in the Town Zoning By-Laws, Section 200-39 forbids residential uses<sup>5</sup>. The stated intent and purpose of that zoning district is for intensive or mixed uses of a neighborhood to regional scale with desirable amenities. As an urban planning profession smart growth best practice, residential uses are a key component to many mixed-use development areas since residents help support businesses, can become stewards of nearby streets and parks, and can help minimize traffic generation by walking and biking locally. Also, in the same vein as the retail market industry tenet and old adage, “retail follows rooftops”, the ability to support desired retail uses depends on how many households within a realistic distance will want to travel to the study area. Increasing the number of residents within the study area increases the spending potential to help support those shops, and can potentially minimize vehicular trips (in tandem with other measures recommended in the plan).

The challenge will be not only to allow residential development within the study area but to allow residential as part of mixed-use developments with upper-story housing; and in a manner that preserves ground-level roadway frontage for commercial/retail uses that depend on visibility for potential shoppers. Lastly, allowing a sufficient number of new households to help support retail will require allowing multifamily dwellings within the study area.

### **2. UNCLEAR BUSINESS CLIMATE**

In order to bolster the redevelopment potential of the study area, the regulations need to be very clear to prospective businesses reading the zoning by-laws without the need for additional clarification assistance. Presently, the regulations in Section 200-39 could be clarified to expedite the development review and permitting process for desired uses. Mixed-use developments are required to undergo site plan review through the Community Planning Commission or obtain a special permit. It is unclear the difference between the two options and whether one is shorter than the other. Additionally, there are confusing land use regulations where under one section “hotels and other lodging” are allowed but in another section “hotels/motels” require a special permit.

### **3. DIMENSIONAL AND PARKING REGULATIONS**

MAPC examined the existing zoning dimensional and zoning regulations in order to determine if any of them could potentially be discouraging or limiting the potential development of a compact, walkable environment with good urban form. Generally speaking, good urban form entails dedicating more land for people, usable open space and buildings, and a less land for parking lots so that they are not the predominant feature of the streetscape. Overall, most of the existing dimensional and parking regulations assessed that were relevant to promoting a compact, mixed-use development program were not found to be limiting factors to attracting market-supportable uses. The existing regulations for building heights (maximum 4 stories and 60 feet), floor-to-area ratio

<sup>5</sup> Section 200-39 explicitly forbids the following residential uses: private households, apartments, operators of dwellings other than apartments, residential mobile homes.



(maximum 2.0 FAR), parking ratios, and setback requirements seemed reasonable and not detrimental to creating a walkable environment.

There were some regulations that might pose a challenge. The parking ratio for “mixed-use development” (Section 200-69-A.16) seemed to be confusing with two different standards, and what seems to be an implied addition of 1 parking space per 600 square feet of mixed-use development beyond the “sum of various uses computed separately.” The existing regulation as written could be expressed more clearly and it seems that an additional parking space is being required unnecessarily for the type of development the Town would want to incentivize. Requiring an additional space eats away at the parcel of land that could be dedicated for usable building space for people to occupy or for open space. Mixed-use developments oftentimes do not need more spaces but rather less since certain uses can share the same parking spaces for daytime versus nighttime parking, and weekday versus weekend parking needs.

The maximum building coverage on the lot is presently stated in the zoning as 70%, which implies a minimum open space requirement of 30%. For the purposes of the analysis, MAPC employed three different standards for minimum open space to create a pleasant walkable compact village center: 30% for townhouses, 20% for mixed-use/multifamily residential, and 10% for retail/office.

The maximum by-right FAR of 2.0 is high enough to achieve four-story developments that can also accommodate surface parking based on the MAPC buildout analysis<sup>6</sup>. However, there is a “parking bonus” that needs clarification and that allows an additional 1.5 FAR in building square footage in exchange for a 20% surplus of the required parking. The denominator for the calculation needs to be clarified. If it is a 20% surplus parking of the required spaces for a development with a 3.5 FAR then the requirement is counter to good urban form and only encourages dedicating more land to asphalt instead of dedicating it to buildings, people and open space. If the denominator is based off of the building square footage resulting from a maximum 2.0 FAR in exchange for 20% more of the required parking spaces, then there additional usable development square footage that does not eat up additional land for parking. This approach however might run the risk of not providing enough spaces unless a shared parking strategy for optimal and complementary uses is part of the development program approval. It is also unclear whether additional FAR can be achieved with the existing maximum four stories of building heights although the maximum building in feet might be achievable.

Lastly, while the rear setback of 20 feet is very reasonable, flexibility with the minimum 25 foot front setback might be needed to create a streetwall to encourage pedestrians along storefront façades. Similarly, flexibility with the minimum 20 foot side yard requirement in order to potentially minimize distances between adjacent developments could help create of a village center feel that is human scaled.

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<sup>6</sup> The buildout analysis revealed that the study area can accommodate mixed-use development with and without residential components in four-story buildings with “effective FARs” between 0.53 and 0.82, which are well below the existing Town zoning maximum FAR of 2.0. The “effective FAR” calculation incorporates not only the ratio of gross building square footage on all floors to amount of parcel square footage, but also the amount of land needed for surface parking spaces with parking aisles and a minimum percentage of open space for setbacks.

## D. TAX RATE

As mentioned in the market analysis report, and also mentioned by commercial brokers and some Advisory Committee members, the Town of North Reading has a high, uncompetitive tax rate. It has an 87% residential tax base and a 2015 residential/commercial tax rate of \$16.61 that is higher than that of adjacent communities (see Figure 10 below). Compared to surrounding communities, it has the highest residential tax base (11% to 35% higher) but a lower and competitive commercial tax rate. Most of the surrounding communities charge a higher commercial tax rate than their residential rate. The Town's tax rate is also 6% higher the statewide median of \$15.69. The challenge for the Town will be to see if it can decrease the tax burden on its residents and increase its commercial rate enough without deterring business investment.

Figure 10 Tax Rates for Town and Surrounding Area

NORTH READING 2015 TAX RATES COMPARED TO SURROUNDING COMMUNITIES		
City/Town	Residential Tax Rate (per \$1,000 of assessed value)	Commercial Tax Rate (per \$1,000 of assessed value)
North Reading	\$16.62	\$16.62
Andover	\$14.97	\$24.77
Reading	\$14.70	\$14.70
Lynnfield	\$14.49	\$17.28
North Andover	\$14.39	\$20.29
Wilmington	\$14.37	\$32.74
Middleton	\$13.78	\$13.78
Peabody	\$12.30	\$24.30

## E. LIMITATIONS TO MARKET SUPPORTABLE DEVELOPMENT

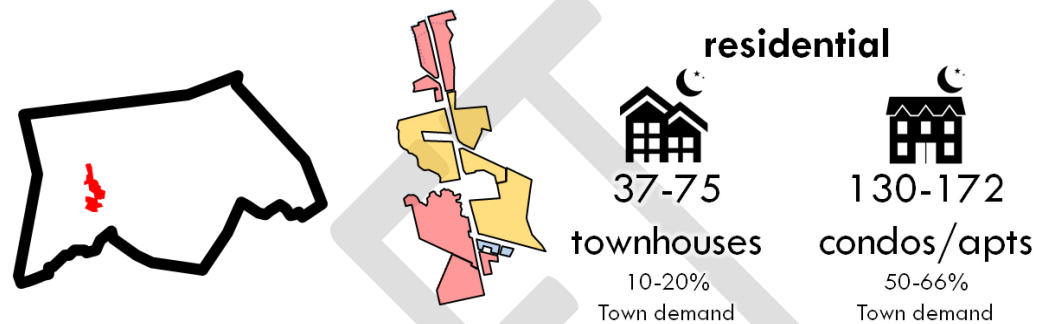
In addition to looking at how existing infrastructure, zoning and environmental conditions may be affecting the potential to promote the economic development of the study area, MAPC's market analysis estimated the demand for potential supportable uses and building square footage for them. The estimated demand is based on current and projected trends, and is a snap shot in time of market attractiveness and patterns. It is intended to help the Town identify and attract specific types of development that can be reasonably supported by the market. If the Town can overcome the challenges mentioned in the previous section, it can position itself better to minimize competition from neighboring towns and trade areas, and capture its estimated share of market demand. The opportunities section of the plan on page 20 will explain how the Town can prepare, invest and market itself to compensate for challenges such as indirect highway access.

The market analysis looked at housing, retail and office uses, and indicates that only one-fifth of what is physically possible to build<sup>7</sup> within the study area is market supportable by the year 2020. Please see Appendix A for the full market analysis report for greater details.

<sup>7</sup> The MAPC hypothetically possible physical buildout analysis revealed the study area can physically accommodate 1.6 million square feet of development on the majority of the parcels in four-story mixed-use buildings including residential uses where appropriate with surface parking and 10-30% of open space depending on the predominant use-mix by parcel groupings. The calculations were done on net developable parcel square footages, and excluded existing residential properties, the US postal sorting facility, and an estimated area-wide wetland percentage of 10%. The market analysis revealed the Town-wide demand was for between 686,000 and 804,000 square feet of potential residential and retail development, and that the study area could potentially accommodate between 199,000 and 353,000 square feet of the Town-wide demand which is approximately 1/5th of the what the study area can physically accommodate under the compact, mixed-use buildout assumptions.

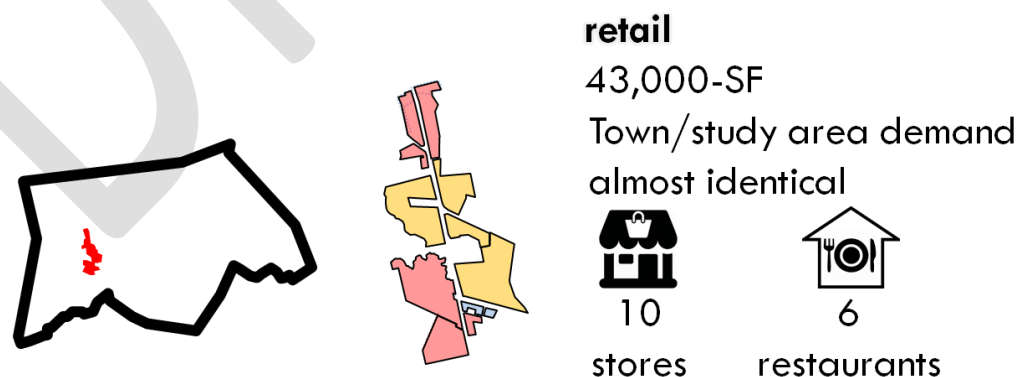
The **HOUSING MARKET ANALYSIS** findings were that the entire Town can capture 10% of the regional housing market representing 634 new homes (374 single family and 260 multifamily dwellings). Of this Town-wide demand, the study area was better suited to reasonably accommodate a larger share of the multifamily demand (50% to 66% resulting in 130 to 172 dwelling units) and a smaller share of the land should be used single-family uses in the form of for-sale, attached townhouses (10% to 20% resulting in 37 to 75 dwelling units).

**Figure 11 Brief Summary of Housing Market Analysis  
with Study Area in Town Context, and Buildout Analysis Parcels**



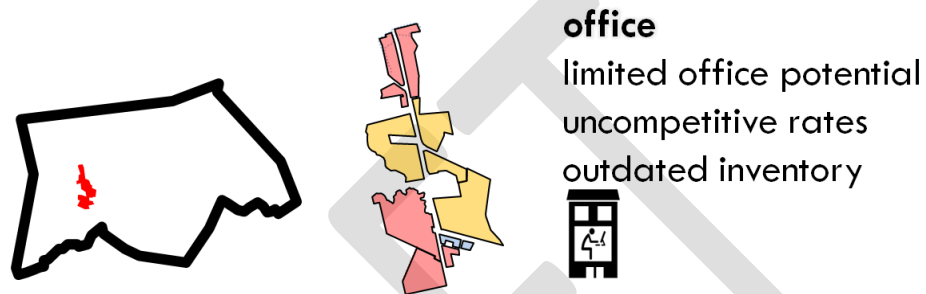
The **RETAIL MARKET ANALYSIS** identified 43,000 square feet of potentially supportable retail uses including 10 stores and 6 restaurants. The retail spending gap analysis looked at whether there was any untapped spending potential of households within a 10-minute drive, and converted that untapped spending potential for specific types of retail into average sales per square foot to estimate the number of potential new stores. Within a 10-minute drive, there are 47,000 residents with untapped spending potential, and can support about 12 retail establishments. Additionally, the analysis looked at how much local workers could reasonably spend in the area to support more retail, and estimated an additional 4 retail establishments.

**Figure 12 Brief Summary of Retail Market Analysis  
with Study Area in Town Context, and Buildout Analysis Parcels**



The **OFFICE MARKET ANALYSIS** looked at existing inventory and trends, and found that the Town has some major competitors in the office market: mainly Woburn, Burlington and Cambridge. It concluded there was limited potential for additional office due to outdated inventory composed of 75% Class B space, and with uncompetitive rates \$16 to 22 per square foot versus \$12 per square foot. Its Class A rates were competitive at \$11 per square foot versus \$16 per square foot but the inventory of available space was small. The Town and Chamber of Commerce should focus on its two strongest office sectors: the information industry, and finance/insurance.

**Figure 13 Brief Summary of Office Market Analysis  
with Study Area in Town Context, and Buildout Analysis Parcels**



Additionally, the analyses also indicate that the clustering of adjacent uses and developments is crucial to the success of desired uses such as retail shops, restaurants and offices. The idea of clustering uses is intended to help inform other decisions the Town could make regarding zoning and infrastructure investments.

Specifically, many types of retail depend on “the roofs” of nearby households in order to tap into unspent disposable household income. Additionally, office uses are not only influenced by the quality of the interior space of the buildings but also by the amenities in the immediate area such as restaurants for its workers to go to lunch, and retail shops for convenience purchases during commutes and lunch hour breaks. Conversely, restaurants and retail rely not only on the spending from residents but also from these office workers.

Housing, retail and office uses benefit from being in close proximity, and especially when integrated vertically in mixed-use developments where the land is used more efficiently and distances are shortened between them. In other words, the potential for these market supportable uses to thrive is less if they are developed separately in single-use, stand-alone buildings with individual parking lots.



## VI. STUDY AREA OPPORTUNITIES

### A. COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

Throughout the process, MAPC presented the Advisory Committee members and workshop participants with a summary of the market and physical buildout analyses, examples of mixed-use projects (see Figure 16), and the challenges and opportunities to attracting growth. The community provided feedback through a discussion framed by the seven following key questions about the multiple actions that need to happen in concert, in order to attract short term development to the area:

- On which 5 blocks do you want to see development happen sooner?
- Would you support multifamily residential as an allowed, by-right use in this district?
- What building height ranges would you be comfortable with?
- Should the Town or property owners address lack of wastewater capacity through a shared “sewer package treatment plant”?
- Should the Town redesign its segment of Route 28 to make it into a slower-speed, walkable Main Street?
- Do you support providing incentives for properties sharing/minimizing access points along Route 28, and sharing access between their rear/side parking lots to minimize localized traffic?
- Should the Town invest in “putting a there, there” by creating a public, civic indoor/outdoor gathering space around which private development could cluster?

In short, participants and the Advisory Committee members indicated they were interested in creating a place or, as some expressed, “putting a there, there”, where people could walk, live and shop safely with slower area traffic. The following is brief summary of the key findings:

- **CLUSTER DEVELOPMENT** around the parcels south and west of Main Street’s intersection with Winter Street (blocks 5-9 and 11 on the map in Figure 15 on page 23). This could suggest where to focus on pedestrian and other infrastructure improvements that could also benefit neighboring businesses such as Kitty’s Restaurant, which is one of the Town’s larger employers.
- **ALLOW MULTIFAMILY RESIDENTIAL BY-RIGHT**<sup>8</sup> in the study area to support more retail uses and create a compact walkable shopping district. The majority supported this zoning amendment but there were comments and concerns about the impact of such development on school and Town facilities, the need for senior housing and accessibility, limiting the amount of rentals, and concerns with traffic and the character/design of the buildings. Coupled with the matter of clustering development, allowing multifamily could suggest only rezoning the portion of the HB zoning district that coincides with the six priority blocks, instead of the entire study area. Advisory Committee members added that multifamily should be included as part of mixed-use developments instead of solely residential in order to accommodate commercial/retail uses that can provide services and expand the tax base.
- **CONSIDER INCREASING BUILDING HEIGHTS BY ONE-STORY**<sup>9</sup>, potentially in exchange for other public benefits to creating a walkable Main Street streetscape. There was almost equal consensus for 3 to 4 story buildings as there was for 4 to 5 story buildings. There were very few workshop votes for going

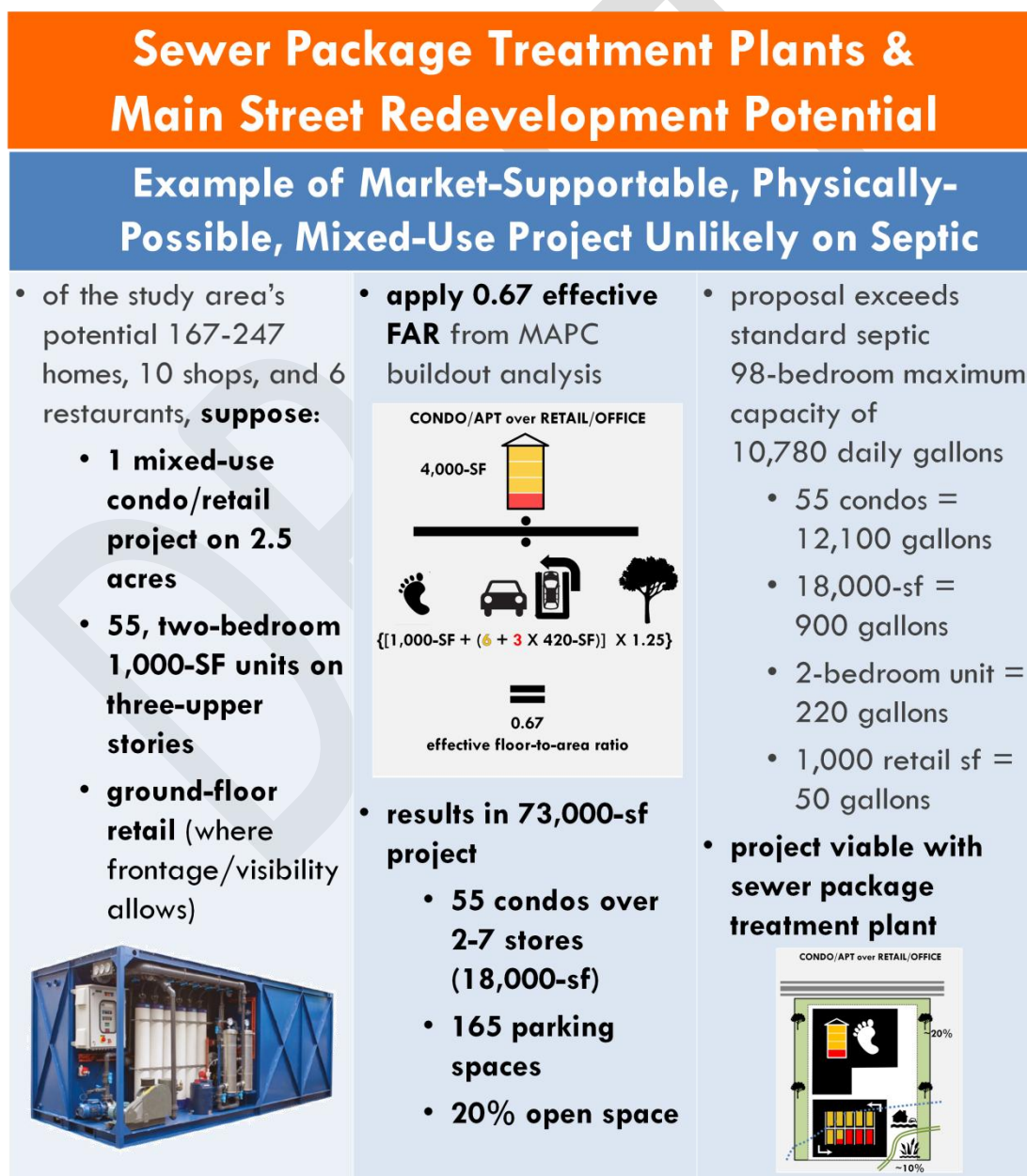
<sup>8</sup> The Advisory Committee members added that zoning recommendations related to this matter should be pursued as soon as possible (possibly October 2016 Town Meeting) to spur interest in private investment even before any wastewater infrastructure or street redesign decisions are made.

<sup>9</sup> Ibidem.

beyond 5 stories. Advisory Committee members further discussed that the existing 60 foot maximum building height is adequate and that specifying the number of stories is not necessary.

- **PURSUE SEWER PACKAGE TREATMENT PLANTS** to address lack of wastewater capacity to support desired level of development, services, and facilitate a walkable village center. Package plants are pre-manufactured facilities that treat wastewater for smaller areas of a community. They have capacity limitations when compared to a larger municipal sewer treatment plant but provide more capacity than individual septic systems. They also afford a greater potential for mixed-use development. There was overwhelming consensus for the Town to proactively advocate for or sponsor these treatment plants instead of waiting for 10-15+ years for Town sewer to provide capacity. See Figure 14 below for a photo example and how such treatment plants can help support development.

**Figure 14 Example of Community Workshop Informational Boards**  
Explaining How The Buildout Assumptions Relate to Wastewater Infrastructure Capacity



- **REDESIGN ROUTE 28 INTO A SLOWER-SPEED, WALKABLE MAIN STREET** to incentivize, influence and complement adjacent redevelopment. There was consensus the Town should advance the findings of a concurrent roadway redesign study and implement streetscape improvements. Advisory Committee members added that sidewalks and slower traffic is good for businesses and pedestrians, and that the Town needs a defined downtown area.
- **PROVIDE INCENTIVES FOR SHARING/ MINIMIZING ACCESS POINTS ALONG ROUTE 28, AND SHARING ACCESS BETWEEN REAR/SIDE PARKING LOTS**<sup>10</sup> to minimize localized traffic. The majority of participants supported the idea. There were concerns about liability as well as making it a requirement instead of providing incentives for it.
- **INVEST IN A PUBLIC, CIVIC INDOOR/OUTDOOR GATHERING SPACE** around which private development could cluster. The majority of workshop participants supported this idea to leverage public investment to create a useful space and create attractive development frontages to frame and attract development. Ideas included moving town hall, a community parking lot, a dog park, and some sort of an assembly place such as a senior or cultural center.

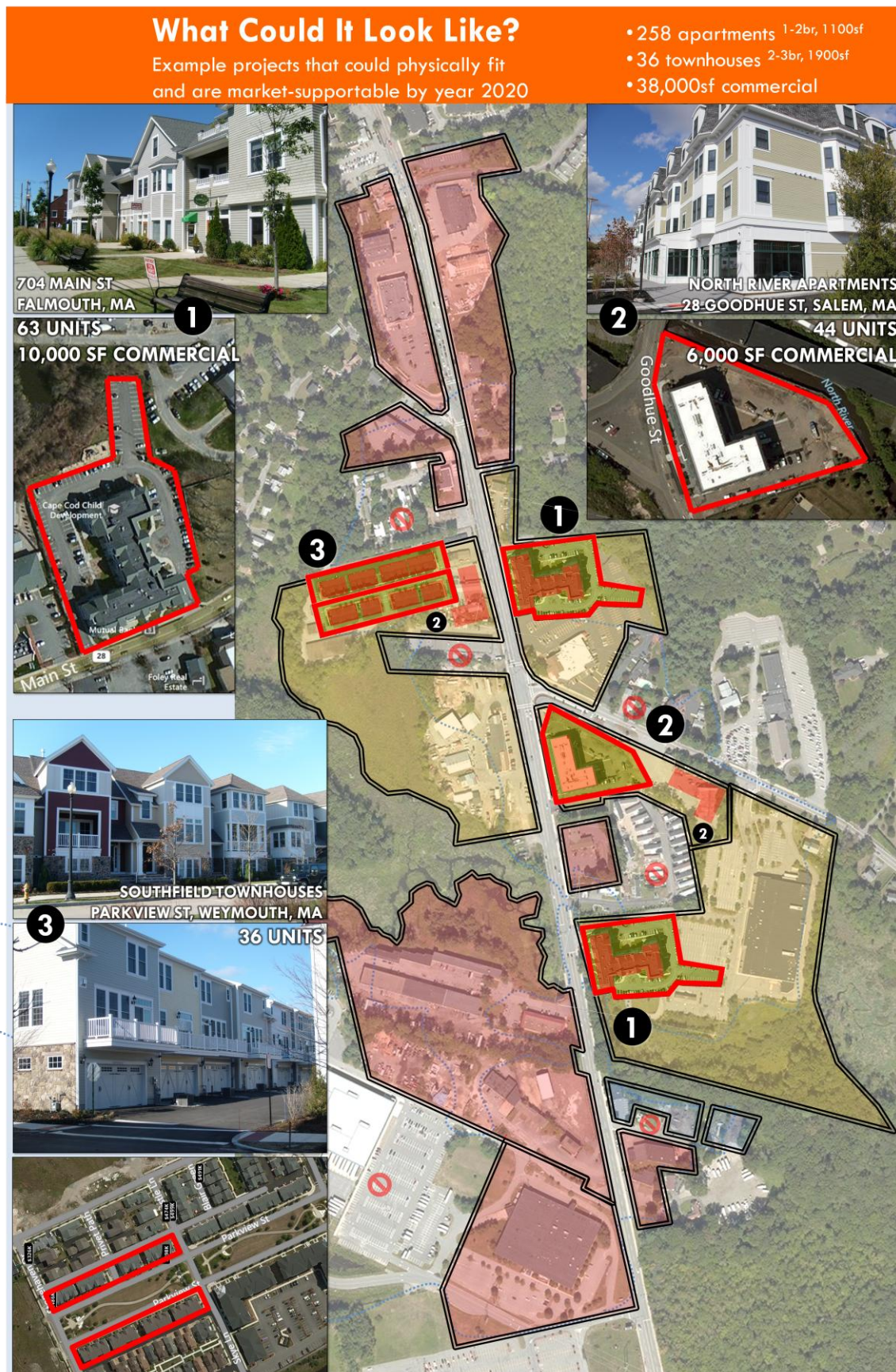
**Figure 15 Photos from Community Meetings and Parcel Groupings for Poll on Where to Cluster Development**



<sup>10</sup> Ibidem.



Figure 16 Examples of Real Projects that Could Physically Fit and Are Market Supportable by 2020





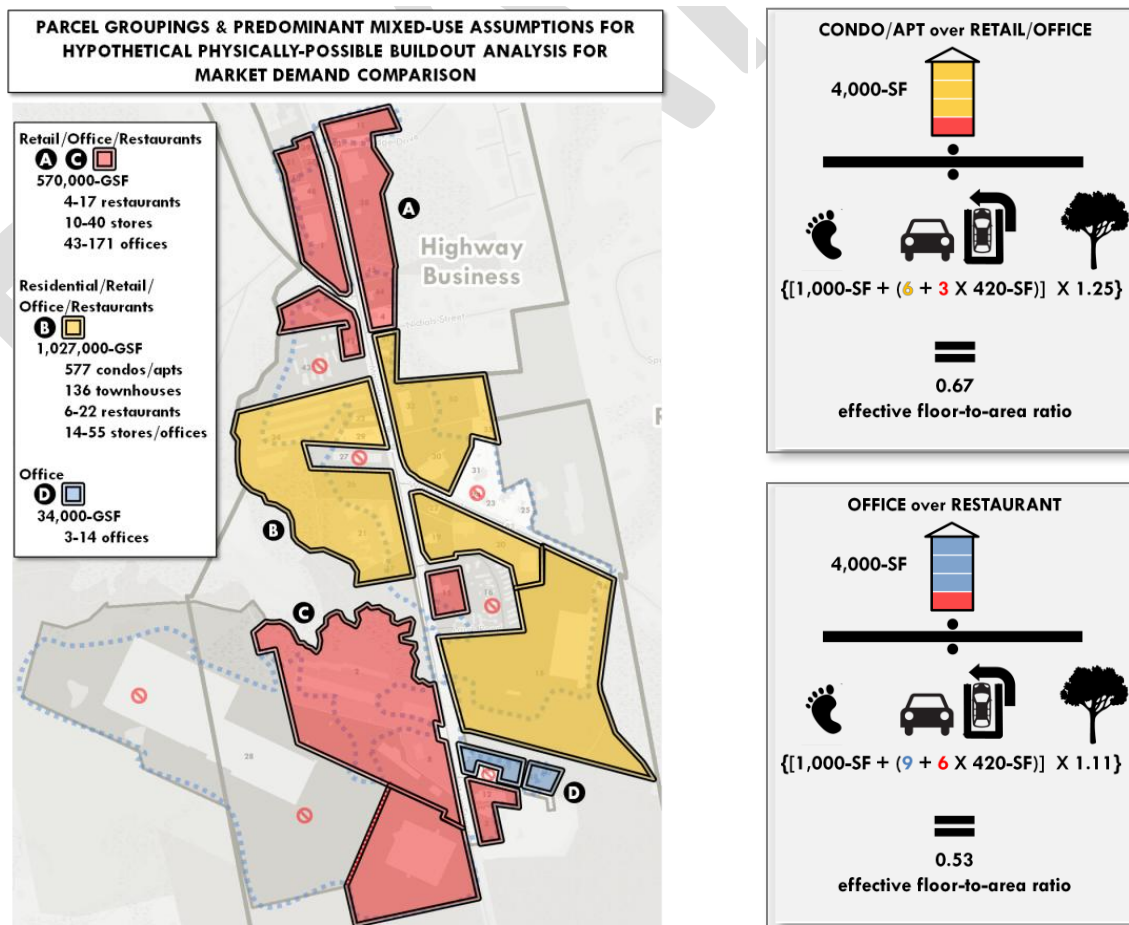
## B. OPPORTUNITIES

### 1. BUILDOUT & ZONING ANALYSIS: ALLOW COMPACT, WALKABLE ENVIRONMENT

The analyses indicate that study area can physically accommodate a reasonable share of market supportable housing, retail and restaurant development (and to a lesser extent office uses) within the study area. Figure 17 below shows the parcel groupings and predominant use assumptions for the physical buildout analysis that was used to compare with the market demand analysis. The figure also shows two examples of the use, height, parking and open space assumptions used in calculating the effective FAR. There is an opportunity to create a clustered, compact walkable environment by making certain zoning amendments. The recommended zoning changes on pages 30 and 31 in and of themselves might not spur the desired type of development but are necessary as part of multifold strategy. Some of the opportunities in addition to attracting jobs, services and tax revenue by creating a walkable downtown/village center include:

- Allow **HOUSING CHOICES** and Town residents the **ABILITY TO AGE IN PLACE** by allowing multifamily residential in the study area.
- Create a streetwall and **STREETSCAPE** where people, buildings and open space are prominent, and **PARKING IS NOT THE DOMINANT FEATURE** by amending certain dimensional and parking regulations.

**Figure 17 Parcel Groupings & Predominant Use Assumptions for Buildout Analysis with Examples of MAPC Effective FAR Calculations that Include Building Footprints, Surface Parking Areas, and Open Space**



## 2. INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT: BEYOND SEPTIC, BETTER SIDEWALKS & CROSSINGS, ACTIVITY CENTER

There is an opportunity for the Town to make the study area significantly more attractive for private investment by:

- investing in (or spearheading the creation of) a **SHARED SEWER PACKAGE TREATMENT PLANT** to create needed wastewater capacity to support development,
- investing in the **REDESIGN OF THE STREETScape** to slow down traffic, create pleasant sidewalks and crossings, create an arrival gateway or landmark, and physically transform the roadway frontage so that it will add value to adjacent properties and entice them to provide amenities such as outdoor seating. An example of this can be found in the Town of Millis in Massachusetts where the town completed street improvements together with zoning amendments and transformed its Main Street with mixed-use development between 2008 and 2015 (see Figure 18). The Town of North Reading may also be able to receive **STATE FUNDS FOR THE IMPROVEMENTS** through a MassWorks Infrastructure Program (formerly known as the Massachusetts Public Works Economic Development (PWED) program).

**Figure 18 Workshop Example of Main Street Roadway Improvements Attracting Development**



- Investing in the creation of a **PROMINENT PUBLIC CIVIC FACILITY AND/OR OPEN SPACE** around which private development can cluster to create a Town/village center for social gatherings and commerce. Alternatively, the Town could provide for incentives for two adjacent properties to jointly consolidate their open space requirements to create a hardscape plaza or square along the streetscape.



The sum of these three types of infrastructure investment could very well be the creation of new Town center where public activities and new residents support jobs and services in neighboring shops.

### 3. MARKETING AND AWARENESS, LOCAL PARTNERS

The Town has an opportunity to leverage local partners to bring awareness to the study area's enhanced development potential. The Town together with the Chamber of Commerce and a potential Implementation Committee could publicize zoning changes/incentives, and other potential infrastructure improvements to property owners, developers and brokers. Additionally the Town could also work with the Chamber of Commerce to reach out to office developers/property managers to upgrade some of the existing inventory to be more competitive.

The Town also has an opportunity to drum up interest in the study area by creating interest sooner before the larger public investments are made. Nationwide, there are communities that have implemented innovative placemaking "best practices" to bring attention to the need for more permanent urban planning solutions for an area. The Project for Public Spaces (PPS) non-profit organization headquartered in New York City has an online case study inventory of such practices known as "Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper" (LQC) solutions. MAPC presented two examples at the community workshop (see figures 19 and 20). The premise is that "people attract people" and sponsoring social gatherings can bring foot traffic to existing businesses while also bringing awareness to the pending or needed public investments to improve the study area.

Figure 19 Example of the Project for Public Spaces' "Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper" Placemaking Best Practice

## Creating Interest Sooner

**People attract people**

- foot traffic for existing businesses
- social gatherings

**Lighter, quicker, cheaper (LQC) solutions now**

- before larger public investments
- best practices & case studies

LQC example 1

**Burnside Park  
Providence, RI**

- 2008 PPS placemaking workshop
- \$85,000 first-year programming
- newly energized space
- book readings & family activities



Figure 20 Example of the Project for Public Spaces' "Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper" Placemaking Best Practice

## Creating Interest Sooner

LQC example 2

### Community Street Quilt Montclair, NJ

- 2015 “patchwork” of painted intersections
- traffic speed concerns near schools
- petitioned Township study
- installed 4-way stop
- 4 months, ~\$5,000





## VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

### A. INFRASTRUCTURE & PUBLIC INVESTMENT

#### 1.1 SEWER PACKAGE TREATMENT PLANTS

The Town of North Reading and a recommended Implementation Committee should proactively reach out to property owners and the Chamber of Commerce in order to inform them of the benefits of a modular and expandable sewer package treatment plant for the study area. The Town should seriously consider crafting a public/private partnership where it can provide seed money toward treatment plant large enough to service two or more adjacent or nearby properties to spur development. Additionally, the Town could spearhead an association for area property owners with an agreement for the maintenance, operation, expansion of capacity, and procedure for other property owners to connect to it and/or start another treatment plant to service/jumpstart another cluster of adjacent development properties.

#### 2.1 ROADWAY REDESIGN

The Town of North Reading should make a decision based on the planning and conceptual redesign study done in 2015 by the Cecil Group consultants, in order to make its segment of Route 28 into a slower-speed, safer typical Main Street where it is safe for pedestrians, shoppers and adds value to nearby private properties. Ideally, a redesigned roadway will include one or more prominent crosswalks connecting development, safe sidewalks, potentially bicycle paths, arrival gateway improvements, and create frontages attractive and safe enough to make outdoor seating conceivable as part of future redevelopment proposals.

The MassWorks Infrastructure Program<sup>11</sup> can help towns fund transportation infrastructure projects that stimulate economic development. The program is administered through the Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development (EOHED) in cooperation with the Department of Transportation and Executive Office for Administration & Finance. It is intended to provide funding for public infrastructure to:

- Complement existing centers of development.
- Include a mix of commercial and residential development or contribute to a mix of development within an area (with an emphasis on multi-family or small lot single-family residential development).
- Be consistent with regional land use and development plans; and
- Provide for transportation improvements which enhance roadway safety in small communities.

More information can be found at [www.mass.gov/hed/massworks](http://www.mass.gov/hed/massworks).

<sup>11</sup> Formerly known as the Massachusetts Public Works Economic Development (PWED) program.

### 3.1 TOWN INVESTMENT IN INDOOR/OUTDOOR NODE AROUND WHICH TO ANCHOR DEVELOPMENT

It is recommended that the Town of North Reading invest in attracting development by creating an indoor civic facility and/or outdoor public space around which private development could cluster to create a sense of place and a defined downtown/village center of activity. Ideas mentioned by participants that could serve as an anchor include: a relocated town hall, a community parking lot, a dog park, or a senior or cultural center. This type of direct public investment can send a strong message to private property owners to invest in an area. It can not only transform the physical landscape for the better but also depending on the use, it can attract additional visitors to an area that in turn can bring additional customers to businesses.

As an alternative to direct public investment, the Town could provide development incentives such as additional building story heights in exchange for the joint development of two adjacent properties that could pool together their open space requirements into an open space or hardscaped plaza. This approach assumes that the other recommendations in the plan such as zoning and sewer package treatment plants will be in place to allow the desired development projects. While it does not require the Town to provide public funds for creating a node, it does result only in a privately owned common space that is publicly accessible and would not provide the benefits that the other types of ideas could. The Town already has a zoning by-law that might be applicable to furthering this approach. Section 200-50-B(4)b states: "In any case where the common open space is not conveyed to the North Reading Conservation Commission, a legally enforceable restriction under M.G.L. c.184, §§ 31-33, shall be recorded with the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds, providing that such land shall be kept in an open or natural state and not be built upon or developed for accessory uses such as parking or roadways."

## B. REGULATORY & MARKETING

### 4.1 ZONING AMENDMENTS

The Town should amend its zoning to allow the type of desired development it wants for the study area. The following amendments should be done as soon as possible in order to start setting favorable conditions for growth:

- **ALLOW MULTIFAMILY RESIDENTIAL** dwellings including mixed-use development projects.
- **ALLOW ATTACHED TOWNHOUSE** dwellings.
- Consider either a **REDUCED MINIMUM FRONT YARD** setback (presently 25 feet), a maximum front yard setback of 25 feet, or a flexible range with a minimum and maximum in order to encourage pedestrians to walk along facades and storefronts. Similarly, consider a **FLEXIBLE SIDE YARD REQUIREMENT** of 10 to 20 feet in order to potentially minimize distances between adjacent developments could help create of a village center feel that is human scaled.
- Amend zoning to require that a majority of the required **PARKING BE LOCATED TO THE REAR** of developments. The zoning could specify a percentage range to provide flexibility (such as 50% to 66%) in the site layout review process.
- Amend zoning to include parking layout and design guidelines to **MINIMIZE THE PROMINENCE OF PARKING FROM THE STREETScape** and make parking lots more pedestrian friendly. Ideas include

landscaped islands and prominent pedestrian paths (potentially partially curbed) to building entrances.

- Provide **DENSITY BONUSES** such as an additional story of building height in exchange for:
  - **SHARED ACCESS POINTS ALONG STREETS** for adjacent properties to minimize curb cuts and points of potential traffic congestion.
  - **SHARED MULTIMODAL ACCESS POINTS BETWEEN ADJACENT PARKING LOTS** to minimize unnecessary car trips on Main Street to nearby properties, and encourage walking to an adjacent development once already parked.
  - **CONSOLIDATING ADJACENT LOTS** that do not meet the minimum lot size requirement of 20,000 square feet.
- Provide **DENSITY BONUSES** such as an additional two stories of building height for clustered development on blocks 5-9 and 11 on the map on page 23 in exchange for the **CREATION OF A USEABLE PASSIVE RECREATION OPEN SPACE WITH SEATING** along the streetscape that is publicly accessible. The open space should be created in addition to the following recommended minimum open space requirements intended to accommodate for property setbacks.
- **AMEND THE MINIMUM OPEN SPACE REQUIREMENTS** to reflect the following: 30% for townhouses, 20% for mixed-use/multifamily residential, and 10% for retail/office.
- **POTENTIALLY AMEND THE EXISTING “PARKING BONUS”** that “allows an additional 1.5 FAR in building square footage in exchange for a 20% surplus of the required parking” in order to clarify the denominator for the calculation and ensure that it is not encouraging excessive parking or inadequate parking for a compact walkable mixed-use district with shared parking
- Amend the zoning to **INCLUDE OR BOLSTER SHARED PARKING STRATEGIES** for certain complementary uses that can share the same parking spaces for daytime versus nighttime parking, and weekday versus weekend parking needs.
- Amend the parking ratios to be clearer. The parking ratio for “mixed-use development” (Section 200-69-A.16) seemed to be confusing with two different standards, and what seems to be an implied addition of 1 parking space per 600 square feet of mixed-use development beyond the “sum of various uses computed separately.” The existing regulation as written could be expressed more clearly and it seems that an additional parking space is being required unnecessarily for the type of development the Town would want to incentivize.
- **CLARIFY THE REGULATIONS** in Section 200-39 to expedite the development review and permitting process for desired uses. Mixed-use developments are required to undergo site plan review through the Community Planning Commission or obtain a special permit. It is unclear the difference between the two options and whether one is shorter than the other.
- Amend the land use regulations that list under one section that “hotels and other lodging” are allowed but in another section “hotels/motels” require a special permit.
- Potentially clarify the following parking ratio with a footnote to make understanding and comparing parking requirements easier for potential developers since many are listed as the number of parking spaces per an increment of square feet.
  - The restaurant parking requirement is presently stated as 1 parking space per 4 seats of seating capacity, which for the purposes of the MAPC buildout analysis was converted to 6 spaces per 1,000 square feet.

## **5.1 CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, AWARENESS, OFFICE INVENTORY UPGRADE , IMPLEMENTATION COMMITTEE, HIGHWAY EXIT SIGN**

The Town should form an Implementation Committee to assist Town staff with pursuing and implementing the recommendations. Ideally the committee will include members from the Advisory Committee, Town staff, and the Chamber of Commerce for the purpose of familiarity and continuity. A Town administrative assistant could be assigned with scheduling the meetings for the implementation committee with a frequency of several times a year that is not too burdensome for the members and allows sufficient time for actions and decisions to be made.

The Implementation Committee can work on advocating for and implementing the recommendations. Additionally, it can bring awareness to the study area, publicize zoning changes and infrastructure improvements, and work with the Chamber of Commerce and office developers/property managers to make its office inventory more competitive. As part of bringing awareness, the committee can drum up interest in the study area by sponsoring activities such as the ones mentioned on page 25. Lastly, the Implementation Committee could work with MassDOT to see if the Town can get some form of name recognition and visibility off exit 40 on Interstate-93 to promote its developing business district.



## VIII. APPENDIX A – MARKET ANALYSIS

*The following appendix is a **MARKET ANALYSIS REPORT** that was completed by MAPC in September 2015 to inform the short-term 2021 economic development strategy completed in April 2015.*

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## IX. APPENDIX B – WORKSHOP INPUT

*The following appendix is a **SUMMARY OF THE COMMUNITY INPUT** from community workshop held on 13 January 2016.*

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