

Economic Development Subcommittee Meeting Minutes

May 16, 2022

EDC Members:	Councilor Melanie Hamblen, Chair; Councilor Cobi Frongillo, Vice Chair; Councilors Glenn Jones & Patrick Sheridan
Other Members of the Steering Committee:	Bruce Hunchard, Zoning Board Chair; Greg Rondeau, Planning Board Chair; Beth Wierling, Planning Board Clerk
Other Participants:	Emma Battaglia & Sasha Padrodi (via Zoom), MAPC

Agenda:

1. EDC + Steering Committee Discussion: MAPC "[Franklin For All](#)" zoning reform project for Franklin Center, including the Downtown Commercial District and surrounding neighborhoods.

A Public Forum regarding the "Franklin For All" rezoning project. Emma Battaglia with MAPC gave a presentation [attached] which was followed by a Q&A section and an Open House section.

A link to the recording of this forum is available on the "[Franklin For All](#)" website and here is a direct link: [May 16, 2022 Public Forum - Franklin For All](#)

This is a meeting of the Franklin Town Council Sub-Committee; under the Open Meeting Law, this subcommittee is a separate "public body" from the Town Council. Therefore, unless the Town Council has separately noticed and posted its own meeting, Councilors who are not members of this subcommittee will not be permitted to speak or otherwise actively participate @ this meeting, although they may attend and observe. This prohibition is necessary to avoid the potential for an Open Meeting Law Violation



Rezoning Franklin Center for economic growth and diverse housing opportunities



Public Forum #2

May 16, 2022

**Thank you to The Black Box for
donating the use of their space for
tonight's public forum!**

Forum Agenda

- Project Overview
- Findings from Visioning Process
- Proposed Zoning Approaches
- Q & A
- Open House

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

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

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



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

Section 3A Compliance

- MBTA Communities Multifamily Zoning Requirement (Section 3A)
- Minimum gross density of 15 units/acre allowed by-right, calculated as total units divided by total land area in the district
- Density can vary across subdistricts
- 50% of district must be within ½ mile of commuter rail stop
- Minimum unit capacity: 1,883 units (15% of current units)
- Unit capacity includes existing units (not net new units possible)
- If Franklin does comply with Section 3A, the Town will no longer be able to access crucial sources of state funding

Community Engagement to Date

- Steering Committee meetings
- Engagement with Town staff and leadership
- Targeted focus group meetings
- Public forum
- Community survey
- Communications materials
- Project webpage and email contact list

Findings from Community Survey

- Highest priorities are for supporting local businesses, creating opportunities for new businesses, and providing new public spaces where people can sit and gather
- Participants most want to see mixed-use development in the DC, CI, and MBI Districts, single-families in the SFRIV District, and a range of mid-density housing types in the GRV District
- Priority commercial uses in the DC District are retail shops, restaurants/bars, art galleries, and maker spaces; priority for offices, service-related businesses, grocery stores, and fitness/gym

Findings from Community Survey

- Respondents think that the DC, CI, and MBI Districts could and should have more people and greater density, while the density in the GRV and SFRIV Districts is just about right
- Strong preference for traditional-style buildings, though a subset feels that that the style is less important than the quality of design
- Most want to prioritize walkability over immediate parking access in the downtown
- A majority feel that we are including the right locations in our Franklin Center study area

variety Cultural Fun
Accessible Community
Inclusive Thriving Diverse Parkable
Welcoming spaces options Small Retail Engaging Inviting
Parking Family More Quiet Historic traffic
Easy Gathering feel Beautiful
activities Less Stop Charming cream attractive Upscale Interesting
Bustling Unique Culture use
Food Modern Walkable Affordable
Historical good Social businesses housing Active low Open Mixed Entertainment
Clean space Art Alive Busy Useful Ice Trees oriented Sustainable
Vibrant Pedestrian business buildings Safe
Quaint Lively town Relevant area creative apartments walking Shopping
Shops Destination Arts
appealing Green stores friendly
Entertaining

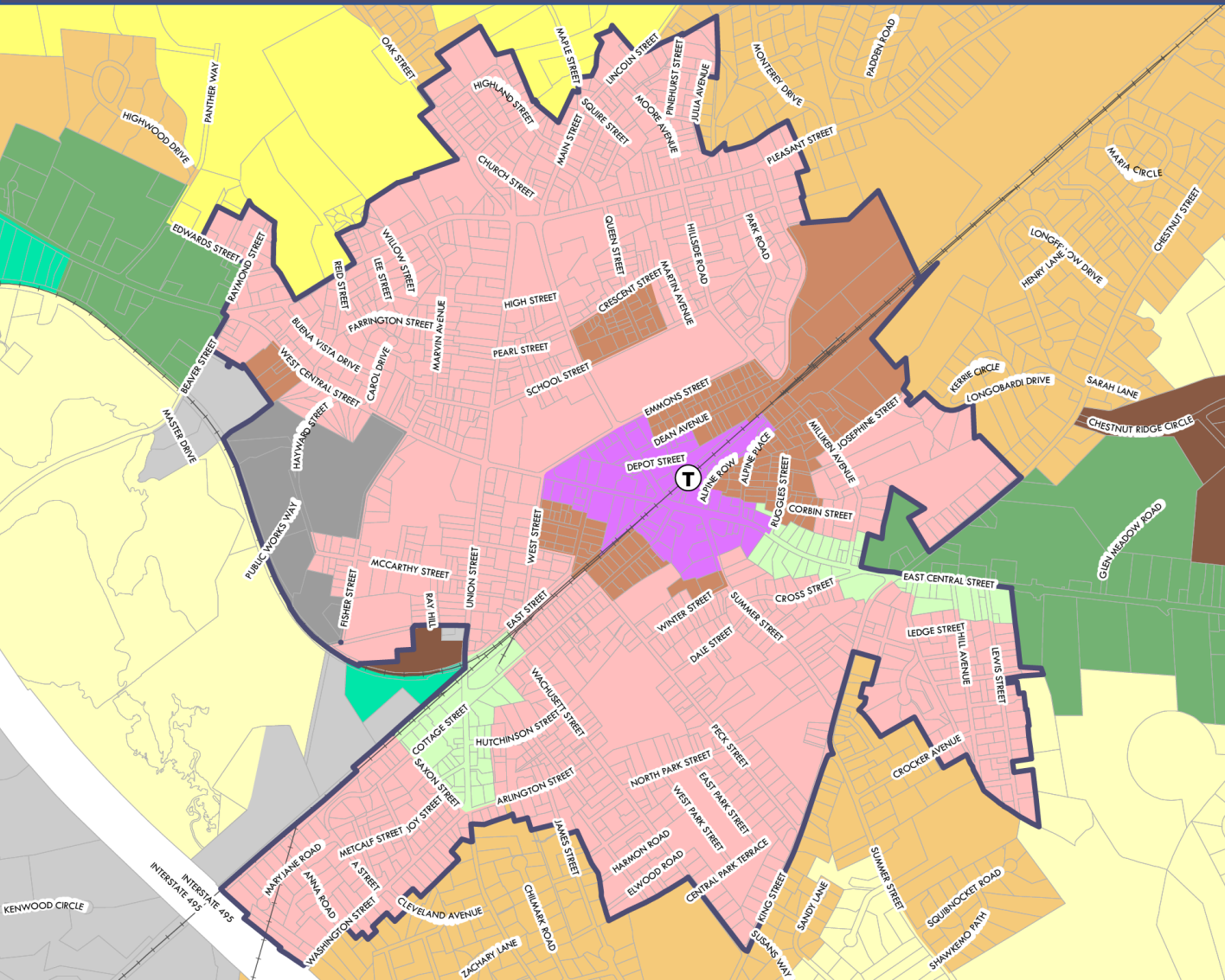
Draft Vision for Franklin Center

In the future, Franklin Center will have a vibrant downtown area with appropriate levels of residential density to support local businesses and benefit from the area's many amenities, including its walkability, transit connectivity, accessibility, and numerous destinations. With its diverse array of shops, restaurants, cultural events, and entertainment options, Franklin Center is a destination for residents and visitors alike. There is an optimal amount of parking to serve both residential and commercial needs without sacrificing the pedestrian experience. The look of Franklin Center is inviting, safe, and clean, and it is a place where people of all ages can gather.


Draft Vision for Franklin Center

New development in Franklin Center has a high quality of design that honors the area's traditional New England architecture and is the right density for each neighborhood. Sustainable features are integrated into the design of buildings and public spaces. Zoning laws are more in line with historic development patterns, making it easier for landowners to improve their properties and reducing the number of zoning nonconformities. There are a range of housing types in Franklin Center to serve households at a range of incomes, including low-income households.

Study Area



 Study Area

 B C₁

 C₂

 DCD

 GR5

 IND



R6

RR₁

RR2

 SF₃

 SF₄

Approach to Rezoning

- Chapter 40R Smart Growth Overlay District for the downtown core that balances density with high-quality design and the need for Affordable Housing, and meets the Section 3A requirements
- Supplementary Town-wide Affordable Housing requirements
- Land use permitting changes to base zoning districts to better incentivize desired commercial uses and housing types
- Programming to manage parking and support small business and property owners
- Additional incentives for outstanding projects

RECOMMENDATION 1:

Establish a Chapter 40R Smart Growth Overlay District with Design Standards that includes properties in the Downtown Commercial, Commercial I, and General Residential V Districts.

Recommendation 1

- MGL Chapter 40R encourages the creation of dense residential and mixed-use zoning overlay districts that include Affordable Housing units (20% required) and are located close to public transit
- 40R Districts must allow densities of eight units/acre for single family homes, 12 units/acre for townhouses, and 20 units/acre for condominiums and apartments
- Projects must be developable as of right or through a limited review process like site plan review and must be reviewed in 120 days
- Detailed Design Standards are allowed that projects must adhere to

Recommendation 1

- In exchange for adopting a 40R Smart Growth Overlay District and streamlining the development review process, Franklin can receive between \$10,000 and \$600,000 in state funding, depending on the net increase in as-of-right units allowed
- There is an additional bonus of \$3,000 for every new unit created
- Communities with a 40R District can receive a higher state match for new school buildings and are considered more favorably when applying for state grants

Recommendation 1

The following would be specified in the zoning for a 4oR District:

- Allowed and prohibited uses
- Dimensional requirements
- Off-street parking requirements
- Affordable Housing requirements
- Plan approval procedures
- Waivers of dimensional requirements or design standards, particularly for projects providing community benefits, such as sustainable buildings, publicly-accessible open space, preservation/rehabilitation of historic properties, etc.

Recommendation 1

The following could be specified in the design standards:

- Building types and architectural styles
- Materials and colors
- Type, proportions, and glazing of windows and doors
- Bays, projections, parapets, roof forms, and other architectural features
- Lighting styles
- Signage, awnings, and canopies
- Mechanical service areas and enclosures
- Awnings and canopies
- Street, sidewalk, parking, and infrastructure standards
- Natural site features and landscaping

Recommendation 1

- In adopting a 40R Smart Growth Overlay District that covers the Downtown Commercial, Commercial I, and General Residential V Districts and allows densities of 20 units/acre as of right, Franklin would be able to meet its requirement for multifamily zoning (Section 3A) as an MBTA community
- Despite eliminating the special permit for multifamily and mixed-use developments in the 40R District, the design standards would promote a high quality of design, and the Planning Board could still deny a project if it were not meeting standards

Recommendation 1

- Establishing a 40R District sends a strong message to developers that Franklin would like to prioritize development in this location, and it sets clear standards for developers to follow as they design their projects
- Regulations could be structured in a way that avoids the need for any variances, creating much more certainty for developers
- Funding that the Town gets from the state for establishing the district and creating new units could be utilized for public amenities or streetscape improvements in Franklin Center

Recommendation 1

- Almost 40 communities in Massachusetts have established 40R Smart Growth Overlay Districts since the legislation enabling the districts was passed in 2004
- Municipalities with successful 40R Districts include Reading, Northampton, Natick, Haverhill, Easton, Newburyport, Belmont, Westborough, and more



Ace Flats in Reading



Village Hill in Northampton



Westborough Village



Franklin Center Commons on E. Central St. is 20 units/acre

RECOMMENDATION 2:

Adopt an inclusionary zoning policy that is Town-wide and creates a minimum threshold for Affordable Housing in new development.

Recommendation 2

- An inclusionary zoning policy sets a requirement for the minimum number of units in a development that must be designated as deed-restricted Affordable Housing
- Percentage requirements amongst communities usually ranges between 10% and 20% of all units
- The trigger for implementation of inclusionary zoning is usually between five and ten units
- Many municipalities allow for a “payment in-lieu” of providing units that goes towards the Affordable Housing Trust Fund

Recommendation 2

- Franklin should consider implementing a Town-wide inclusionary zoning policy as a supplement to the 40R District to provide additional avenues to create Affordable Housing and establish a more level playing field between affordability requirements
- Given that Affordable Housing requires a large subsidy from a developer, many places include density bonuses in their policies to help offset costs
- This may include allowing a bonus market-rate unit for every Affordable unit required or other flexibility regarding dimensional standards or parking requirements

RECOMMENDATION 3:

Create a new definition in the zoning bylaw for “mixed-use development” and allow the use by-right in the Downtown Commercial and Commercial I Districts, and by special permit in the Mixed Business and Residential District.

Recommendation 3

- Franklin's Zoning Bylaw does not include a definition for mixed-use; residential and commercial uses are defined individually and treated separately, which can create undue confusion
- If both residential and commercial are allowed by-right in a particular zone, the project can be approved by-right, otherwise it must get a special permit (if allowed) for the uses not allowed by-right
- Mixed-use buildings are allowed by-right in the DC District and by special permit in the CI District
- Mixed-use should be easier to build if that is what people want to see

Recommendation 3

- Most participants in the visioning process indicated that mixed-use buildings were their desired typology for the DC, CI, and MBI Districts
- While the MBI District does not currently allow mixed-use development at all, the Town should consider allowing it by special permit given the potential for a project that combines residential and commercial uses in an innovative way
- To maintain the priority for commercial uses in the MBI District, the Town could decide to require that more than half of the square footage is designated for commercial use

RECOMMENDATION 4:

Consider requiring a special permit for first-floor offices and personal service-related businesses in the Downtown Commercial District to incentivize commercial uses with vibrant and interactive storefronts.

Recommendation 4

- Participants in the visioning process identified retail shops, restaurants/bars, art galleries, and artisanal/craft maker spaces as their preferred commercial uses for the DC District
- Currently, there many personal service-related businesses (salons, tailors, optical stores) and offices (banks, law firms, real estate agents) on the ground floor of commercial and mixed-use buildings on East Central, Main, and Depot Streets
- These kinds of uses do little to activate the street and draw visitors to the downtown

Recommendation 4

- To better incentivize the kinds of commercial uses that the community wants to see in the DC District, Franklin could consider requiring a special permit for personal service-related businesses and offices on the first floor of buildings
- These uses would still be allowed by-right if they are located on a story above the first floor
- There would be no penalty for existing first-floor service-related businesses and offices, but new proposals for these uses would require additional zoning relief

RECOMMENDATION 5:

Create a new definition in the zoning code for “three-family” and allow the use by-right in the Commercial I and General Residential V Districts, and potentially by special permit in the Single-Family Residential IV District.

Recommendation 5

- Currently, the definition for multifamily use in Franklin includes any building with more than two units
- As such, three- and four-unit buildings are grouped in the same category as buildings with dozens or hundreds of units
- Allowing three-families by-right in the CI and GRV Districts would enable these typologies in areas where buildings at a higher density would require approval under the 40R District
- Allowing three-families by special permit in the SFIV District would enable this use in appropriate areas that already have many three-family homes that were constructed before the creation of zoning

RECOMMENDATION 6:

Allow new single-family uses by special permit instead of by-right in the Commercial I District in order to better incentivize higher densities.

Recommendation 6

- Given the desire for higher density mixed-use and multifamily buildings in the CI District, Franklin should consider allowing the least dense housing option—single-family homes—by special permit rather than by-right
- DC District does not allow single-family by-right or by special permit
- This would not impact existing single-family properties in the CI District, but it would prevent the creation of new single-family homes or the conversion of a multi-unit structure to a single-family without zoning relief

RECOMMENDATION 7:

Create a new definition for “accessory dwelling units” (ADUs) and allow them by-right on single-family parcels in the General Residential V and Single-Family Residential IV Districts.

Recommendation 7

- Accessory dwelling units (ADUs) may be attached to the existing home or detached in a small, separate building, such as a converted garage or a new building designed to match the built context
- ADUs provide a way to incrementally increase housing density in a way that is appropriate for existing neighborhoods
- They may help homeowners to stay in their homes because they are able to generate additional income by renting out the ADU
- ADUs are a particularly good housing typology to meet the needs of seniors and people with disabilities

Recommendation 7

- Franklin currently allows ADUs by-right in the GRV District and by special permit from the ZBA in the DC, CI, and SFVI Districts
- However, there is no specific definition for ADUs, and they are referred to as a “two-family by conversion” in the use regulations
- Without a clear definition and guidance for regulating ADUs, owners may be unaware that an ADU could be allowed on their property
- Allowing ADUs by-right in the SFVI District (in addition to the GRV District) would allow for subtle increases in density without impacting the character of single-family neighborhoods

RECOMMENDATION 8:

Establish a shared-use parking program for the City-owned parking lots in Franklin Center and, if possible, negotiate with the owners of private lots to allow shared-use parking.

Recommendation 8

- Concerns about a lack parking were voiced repeatedly during the visioning process, and they were mentioned as a reason why some oppose higher density residential uses in the downtown
- At the same time, people want to prioritize walkability, and they indicated that they would be willing to walk a few minutes from their car to their destination
- Establishing a formal shared-parking program can maximize the use of City-owned lots, and potentially privately-owned lots as well (such as the large parking lot that Rockland Trust owns)

Recommendation 8

- Between the five Town-owned lots, there are about 186 parking spaces in the downtown that could be used for overnight residential parking through a shared-use parking program (they would remain prioritized for commuters/commercial uses during the day)
- In reviewing project proposals for the downtown, the Planning Board could allow developers to count a portion of spaces in the public lots towards their off-street parking requirement
- Franklin would want to establish an overnight residential parking permit to track the number of residents utilizing the lots at night

RECOMMENDATION 9:

Establish a façade improvement program for small-business and property owners in the downtown.

Recommendation 9

- Stakeholders during the visioning process mentioned that many buildings in the downtown need “sprucing up,” and this contributes to a perception of unsafety (even if the area is actually safe)
- Creating a program to provide loan or grant funding to small-businesses and property owners could provide an incentive for owners of existing buildings to make façade improvements like new signage, awnings, painting, etc.
- To fund this program, Franklin could use payments from the 40R District or from in-lieu fees through inclusionary zoning

RECOMMENDATION 10:

Consider applying for Municipal Vacant Storefront District designation from the state to assist small business owners with moving into vacant storefronts.

Recommendation 10

- During this process, many noted the challenge with vacant storefronts in the downtown
- In part, this is due to high rental costs that make commercial spaces unaffordable, especially to small-business owners
- Providing financial assistance to small-business owners could help incentivize desired commercial uses in Franklin Center
- Filing these vacancies is important for downtown vibrancy and local economic development
- The Massachusetts Vacant Storefronts Program (MVSP) was created in 2018 to encourage new occupancy of vacant storefronts

Recommendation 10

- Municipalities may apply to the Economic Assistance Coordinating Council (EACC) for certification to designate a downtown area as a Certified Vacant Storefront District
- After achieving such designation, businesses or individuals may apply to the EACC for refundable Economic Development Incentive Program tax credits of up to \$10,000 for leasing and occupying a vacant storefront in that district
- Municipalities must provide a source of matching funds
- 16 communities have been designated to date, including Attleboro, Clinton, Gloucester, Greenfield, and Westborough

RECOMMENDATION 11:

Utilize Tax Increment Financing (TIF) for new businesses and development that provide outstanding community benefits, prioritizing projects in the Smart Growth Overlay District.

Recommendation 11

- Tax-Increment Financing (TIF) utilizes tax increments, the difference between the current assessed value of a property and the assessed value over time as improvements to the district take place
- The Assessor calculates the tax on the added value of the new construction and rehabilitation
- With TIF, the Town would grant property tax exemptions to landowners of up to 100% of the tax increment for a fixed period
- This provides up-front benefits to developers in the form of tax relief that helps pay for a project's construction costs

Recommendation 11

- Given the Town's reliance on property taxes to fund the local budget, TIF should be utilized in special circumstances where a new business or development project would bring great community benefits to Franklin Center
- This could be for a brewery, food market, movie theater, a development with substantial public open space or Affordable Housing units, and more
- Franklin has utilized TIF four times in the past within the Town's industrial Economic Opportunity Areas

Q & A

- 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

Next Steps

- Based on the community feedback from tonight's forum, we will refine the draft recommendations and produce diagrams visualizing the types of buildings the proposed zoning would enable
- These will be presented at the Strawberry Stroll for public feedback and will be accessible on the project webpage
- From there, zoning recommendations will be finalized and released
- The actual rezoning process is likely to proceed in the early fall

Thank you!

mapc.ma/franklin-for-all

MAPC Project Contact:

- Emma Battaglia,
ebattaglia@mapc.org

Franklin Project Contact:

- Bryan Taberner,
planning@franklinma.gov



Rezoning Franklin Center for economic growth and diverse housing opportunities