



FRANKLIN FOR ALL

Rezoning Franklin Center for economic growth and diverse housing opportunities

Executive Summary

June 2022



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Thank you to everyone who participated in Franklin For All and helped shape the direction of this process.



A Vision for Franklin Center

Franklin For All has been a community-driven process to establish a vision for Franklin Center and make recommendations for rezoning the area to best achieve the vision and unlock high-quality new development. Based on significant community feedback through an online survey, hybrid public forums, focus groups, Steering Committee meetings, tabling at local festivals, and interviews with Town staff, the Franklin For All team has crafted the following vision statement for the future of the Franklin Center study area.

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.

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. Downtown properties provide enough value and revenue for Franklin to sustain its high-quality of services town-wide.



Project Timeline

Fall 2021

Project Tasks

Background research and analysis of existing zoning to identify barriers that may be limiting development of high-quality projects in desired locations

Public Engagement

Soft launch of Franklin For All at the Harvest Festival on October 2, 2021

Winter 2021 / 22

Project Tasks

Public engagement to establish a vision for Franklin Center

Distribution of communication materials to introduce public to project and promote engagement

Public Engagement

Steering Committee meetings on January 5, February 2, and March 2, 2022

Focus groups on January 31, February 7, February 9, and February 15, 2022

Hybrid public forum and community survey launch on March 7, 2022 in Town Council Chambers and over Zoom

Winter 2022

Project Tasks

Build-out and infrastructure analysis to assess development impacts

Zoning recommendations that align with the Franklin Center vision

Public engagement to review zoning recommendations

Public Engagement

Hybrid public forum on May 16, 2022 at Black Box Theater and over Zoom

Steering Committee meetings on April 6 and June 8, 2022

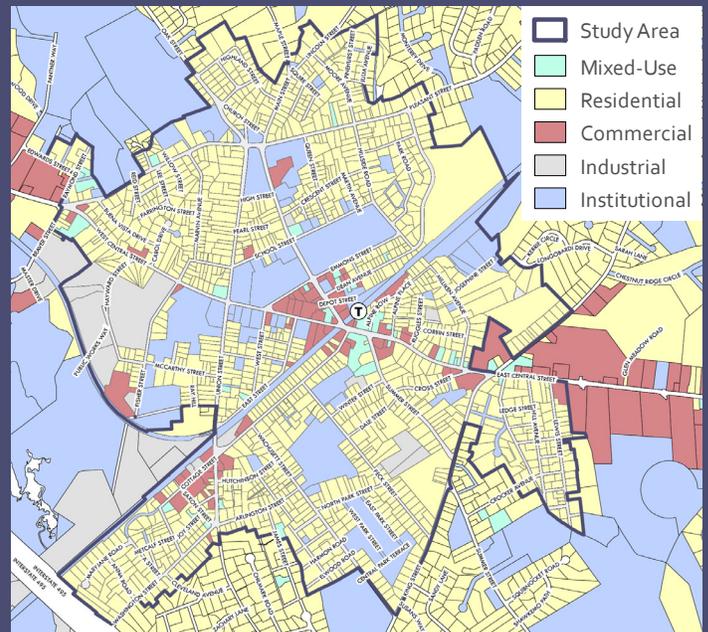
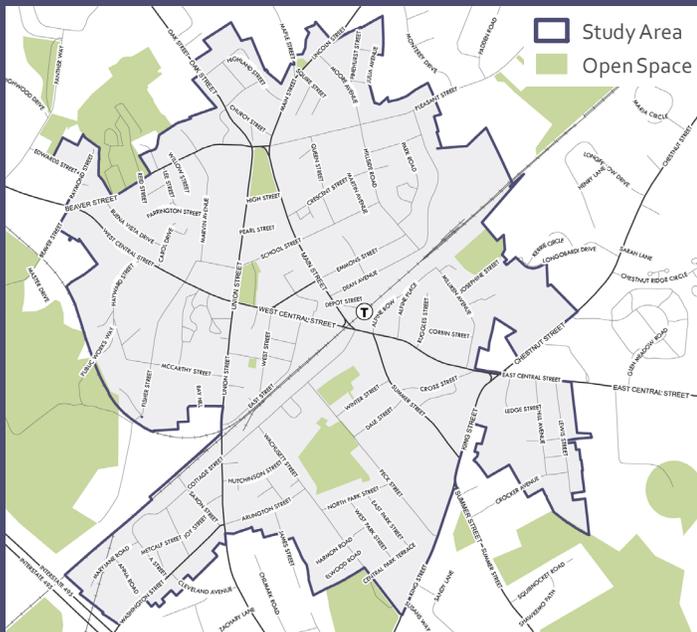
Franklin For All booth at Strawberry Stroll on June 10, 2022

**A future phase of work will consist of the rezoning of Franklin Center*

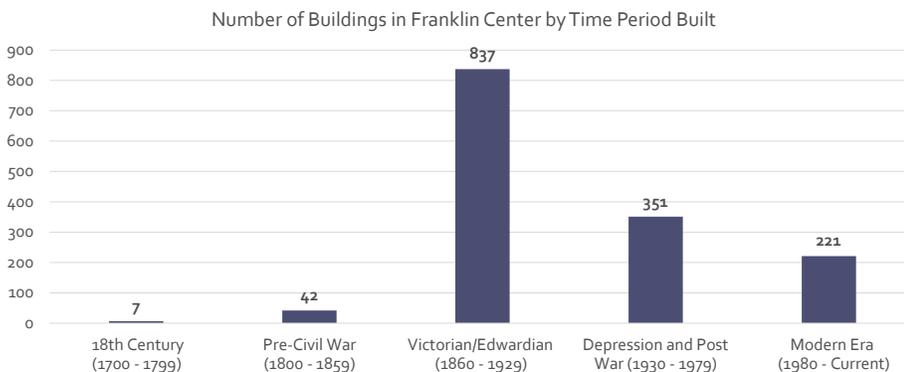


Franklin Center Today

For the purposes of Franklin For All, when we refer to “Franklin Center,” we mean downtown Franklin and the surrounding residential and commercial neighborhoods. With the MBTA Commuter Rail station at the center, the majority of the study area is within a half-mile of the station (a ten minute walk). There are mostly residential land uses in Franklin Center, with commercial and mixed-use properties located in the downtown core and the area around Cottage and Union Streets. There are a significant number of institutional/government parcels as well light industrial uses located off of West Central Street.



The building stock in Franklin Center today is largely historic. Franklin Center was predominantly developed around the turn of the 20th century. Close to 60% of all buildings in the area were built between 1860 and the stock market crash in 1929. Franklin Center has a myriad of historic structures, including private residences as well as religious institutions and commercial buildings.



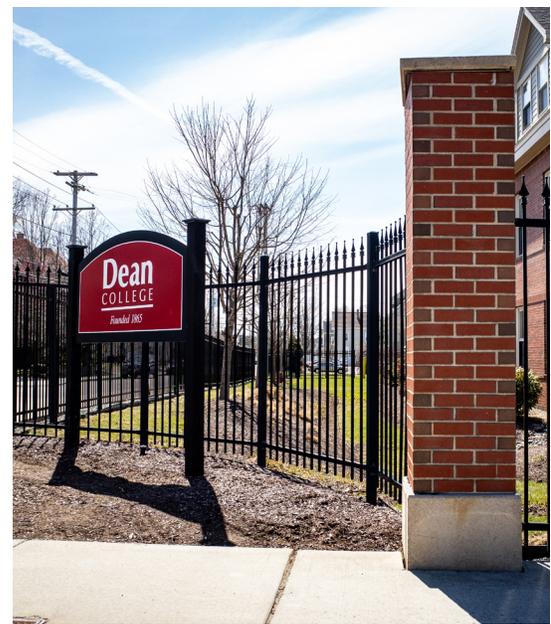
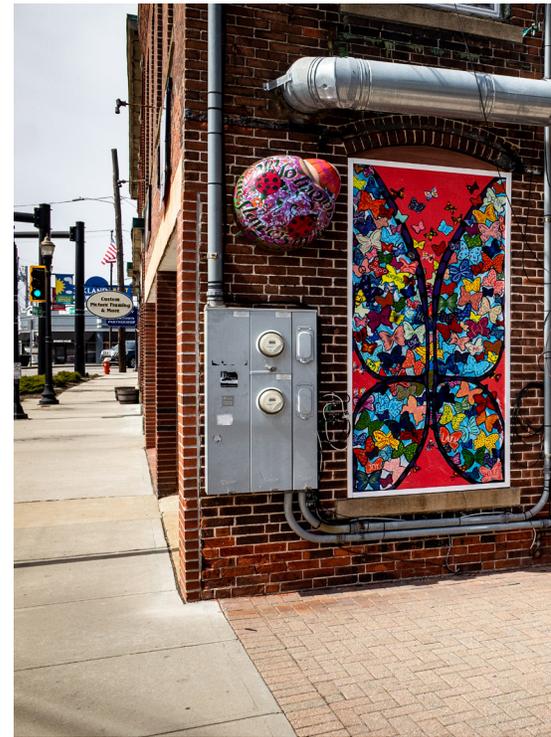
This project builds on considerable past planning work, including the recent Housing Production Plan, 2019 Economic Development/Market Study, 2013 Master Plan, 2008 Downtown Parking Study, and 2003 Franklin Center Plan. Significant time and resources have also been devoted to enhancing the area to stimulate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

Many residents say that their favorite thing about Franklin Center is its historic architecture and New England small-town feel. It is a walkable community, with ample sidewalks and a variety of areas which can be used for civic purposes. Places for people to gather include the Town Common and streetways which are easily blocked off for events like the Harvest Festival and Strawberry Stroll. There are many cultural and institutional amenities, including Dean College, a library, a performing arts school, a performance venue, and considerable public art, all adding to Franklin Center's sense of character. Ample public parking allows business patrons to be in and out of Franklin Center as needed and a commuter rail station provides residents with direct access to Boston's job market.

Despite the charm that Franklin Center boasts, it also faces a wide variety of challenges. Many of the downtown businesses do not attract residents to spend their free time, with many storefronts featuring fee for service businesses and offices. The handful of retail and dining options are not enough for there to feel as though there is sufficient street life in Franklin Center, and it is not uncommon that the only people seen out and about are Dean College students on their way to a destination away from the downtown.

The lack of downtown retail is coupled with a lack of residential options in the downtown area of Franklin Center. There are few multifamily buildings, which leaves limited options for people looking to live in Franklin but unable to purchase a single-family home. As a result, Franklin Center does not see much foot traffic, and the vehicle traffic is largely consisting of commuters who create substantial traffic slowdowns during peak travel hours each workday. Areas outside of the downtown are almost entirely auto-centric.

Franklin and the region are currently in a crisis where the supply of housing has not kept up with demand, leading to skyrocketed rent and sales costs, especially near the downtown. This especially impacts seniors looking to downsize, young professionals and families, and Franklin's low-income households, who make up more than a quarter of all households in town. Approximately 43% of households are cost-burdened, meaning they pay more than 30% of their monthly income on housing expenses, such as rent, mortgage, and utilities. The Town recently completed a Housing Production Plan which made recommendations to increase affordability in Franklin, including by modifying zoning to increase the number of lower cost housing units.



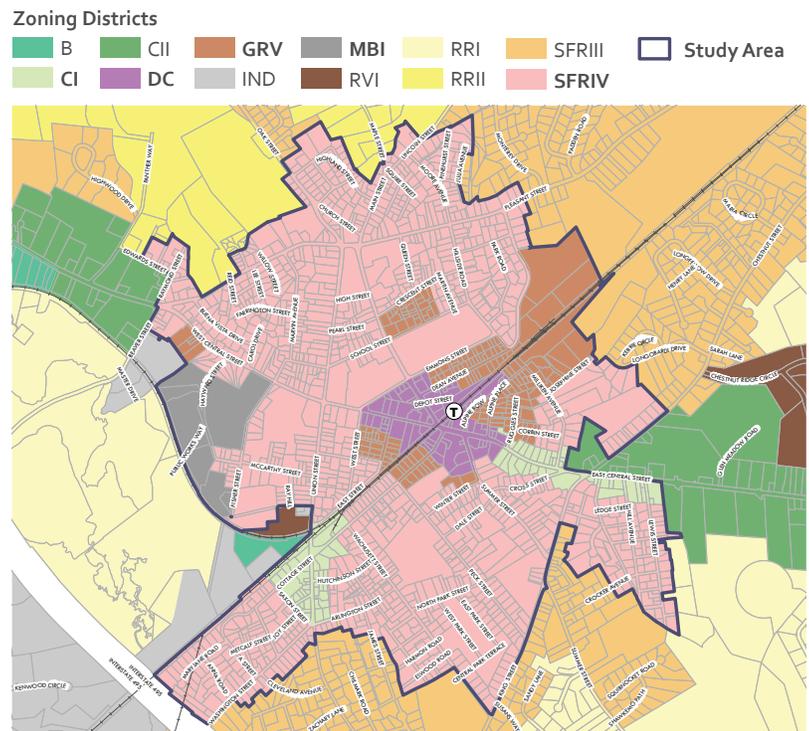
Zoning Diagnostic

For details on zoning in Franklin, please refer to **Summary Memo #1**.

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

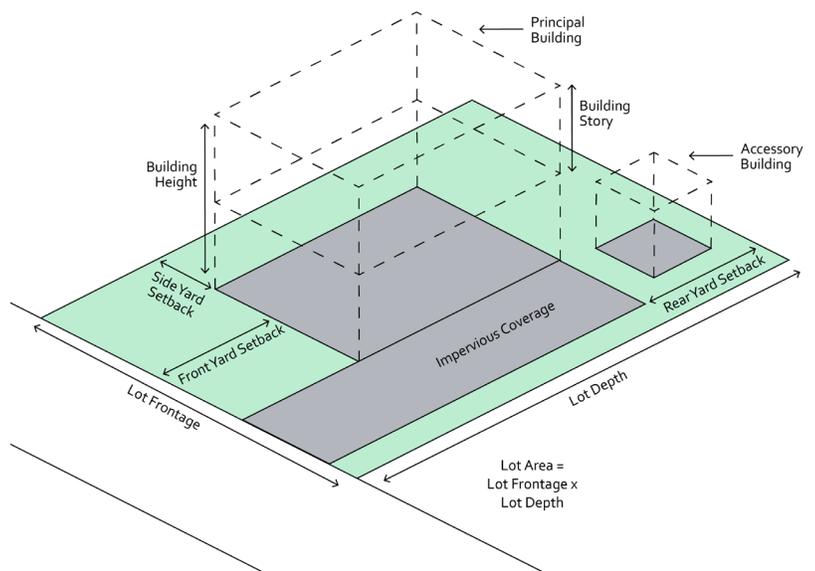
Franklin’s zoning code and associated districts were first adopted by the Town’s Planning Board in 1930, after almost two-thirds of structures in Franklin Center were built. Many of the most beloved buildings in Franklin Center could not be legally built today because of dimensional or use restrictions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

There are 15 total zoning districts in Franklin. The Franklin Center study area consists of the following five zoning districts: Commercial I (CI), Downtown Commercial (DC), General Residential V (GRV), Mixed Business Innovation (MBI), and Single-Family Residential IV Districts.



Dimensional Regulations

Dimensional regulations impact the “look and feel” of an area. Regulations in the study area differ by zoning district, with the least restrictive regulations in the DC and CI Districts where more density is encouraged. Large minimum lot sizes, frontage, and setback requirements tend to conflict with historic development patterns which current zoning would not allow but which contribute to overall vibrancy. These kinds of requirements make small infill developments difficult and restrict existing parcels from redevelopment without zoning relief. On the other hand, smaller lot area and frontage requirements encourage walkability.



“Streetwalls,” which occur when you have multi-story development lining one (or both) sides of the street with little to no setbacks in the front and side, create visual interest and encourage people to stop and interact with their surroundings. Creating an environment where people will want to interact with the surroundings helps to create an area that feels vibrant and active and will also support the local businesses.

Example of a streetwall in Great Barrington, Massachusetts →



Use Regulations

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

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

Zoning’s Impact on Affordability & Economic Development

Zoning regulations that unreasonably constrain what can be built on a site are directly tied to increases in housing costs. Setbacks make developable part of a property smaller than its area. Height restrictions limit how much floor area can be generated out of the same amount of land area. Parking minimums mean valuable space that cannot be built on. Together, these things—along with market forces and personal preferences—make development more costly. Drawn out approval processes are also linked to housing price increases and needing zoning relief introduces uncertainty into the development review process that may discourage investment as these projects are harder to obtain financing for.

Zoning can help create destination districts, clustering economic development activity that entices people to want to hang out there. By creating the right mix of commercial and residential activity, zoning can create a built-in customer base for businesses. It can capitalize on Franklin Center’s existing assets and anchor institutions to ensure that those assets are best set up for success by encouraging complimentary adjacent land use. New development also generates crucial tax revenue for the Town. Because of Prop 2 ½, a municipality in Massachusetts cannot increase the total tax levy by more than 2.5% each year. However, the value of new construction and other growth in the local tax base since the previous year is not subject to this limit. As such, new development is a major funder of local services in Franklin.

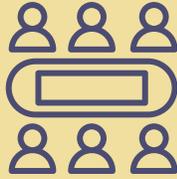
Visioning Process

For details on the visioning process, please refer to Summary Memo #2.

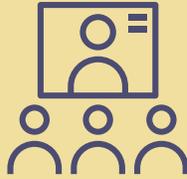
In order to establish a vision for Franklin Center, the Franklin For All team heard from hundreds of community members across a variety of engagement opportunities:



Steering Committee Meetings



Focus Group Meetings



Hybrid Public Forums



Online Visioning Survey



Booths at Local Events



Town Staff Interviews

Steering Committee Meetings

A Steering Committee was established to guide, promote, and take ownership of the Franklin For All project. This committee consisted of Melanie Hamblen, Glenn Jones, Cobi Frongillo, and Patrick Sheridan from the Town Council's Economic Development Committee; Bruce Hunchard from the Zoning Board of Appeals; and Planning Board representatives Gregory Rondeau and Beth Wierling. This committee met five times during the Franklin For All the process.



Focus Groups Meetings

Four focus group meetings were held to gain insights from stakeholders and provide the planning team with the local context needed for Franklin For All to be reflective of the realities and needs of the community.

On January 31, 2022, MAPC facilitated a focus group meeting with 12 business and property owners in Franklin Center. Attendees included small business owners, representatives from Dean College, and developers with properties located in the study area. This meeting touched on strengths and weaknesses of the area, with large portions of the discussion being relevant to the concerns of business owners in and around the downtown. Attendees spoke about the difficulty of trying to lease downtown because of high rents that small businesses cannot afford. These high rents also contribute to a large number of vacancies in the area. While the area is safe, a lack of lighting and uncleaned windows contributes to the impression that the downtown is not safe, especially at night. There has also been vandalism on all the Franklin Downtown Partnership's beautification projects and Dean College students generally do not want to spend time there. There was a strong desire to build additional housing, noting that many people want to live in downtown Franklin.

MAPC facilitated a focus group with seven local service providers and housing advocates on February 7, 2022. Participants represented the Affordable Housing Trust, Franklin Food Pantry, and the interfaith community. In general, Affordable Housing was the main priority amongst participants. Inclusionary zoning was discussed as a necessary way to generate more Affordable units in Franklin Center. The development occurring today

is building what Franklin needs (condos and apartments), but there have been many missed opportunities to incorporate affordability. Developers are not going to build Affordable Housing unless they are required to, and the cost to rent in the downtown is higher than outside of the center. Advocates need to figure out how to promote Affordable housing as a good, decent, and safe way to provide housing to people who really need it without it being a detriment or overload to Franklin's systems. There was a desire to see this Affordable Housing developed near the commuter rail station, as well as a downtown grocer where people could walk.

On February 9, 2022, MAPC facilitated a focus group meeting with seven professionals in the local real estate industry. Participants included developers and consultants who regularly appear before the permitting boards (including an architect and a real estate attorney). The group discussed the market shift towards multifamily development in suburban communities, and Franklin has untapped potential and could use more people. The price of land in Franklin high, which makes development a challenge. This directly translates to higher rents, which are further exacerbated by particularly high construction costs. There are concerns that the permitting process also contributes to higher housing costs as it is expensive and sometime unnecessary. Density and larger projects help to address the construction risk and get more out of the development. Capital is available and interest rates are low, but it is still hard to figure out the affordable side. A disconnect between perception and reality was discussed, as there is substantial market-based evidence to show that there is demand for apartment living, despite the public feeling that such projects are not necessary or that the town is already feeling overcrowded.

The last focus group meeting was held on February 15, 2022, with twelve residents who live in or around the Franklin Center study area. Residents love being able to walk to different destinations downtown from their homes. The walkability is generally good, but could be improved, especially in regard to ADA accessibility and access to the train station. While walking around is nice, there is a "lack of fun things to do" in town and there are lots of empty storefronts. Though existing business are great, they are clearly not enough, but rents are too high for other businesses (especially small businesses) to move in. There is a lack of businesses open past 4pm, and it was suggested that a small market, bakery, brewery, and more entertain options would all be great additions that could potentially reach the untapped market of Dean College students. Housing costs are a serious concern for focus group participants as new market-rate units are not at all affordable. The lack of price-appropriate options keeps seniors from being able to downsize and turn those homes over to younger families with children. ADUs were mentioned a number of times as a great way to create housing opportunities for retirees, as well as for veterans, individuals with disabilities, and others in the Franklin community.

Hybrid Public Forum 1

MAPC and the Town of Franklin hosted a hybrid public forum on March 7, 2022, in the Council Chambers and over Zoom. This was the first big opportunity to present to the general public about the Franklin For All project and the role that zoning can play in enhancing Franklin Center, as well as to give the community the chance to ask questions of the project team. There were approximately 200 people in attendance both in-person and remotely.

Community members expressed fears about their changing town and wanted to make sure that the density around the train station does not mimic the development of other communities, which some have deemed to be undesirable places. They are concerned about traffic and overloading



infrastructure systems. They feel strongly that the small-town character should be preserved while balancing out the needs of the future and expressed concern that any zoning changes are made to accommodate new residents in Franklin, not the existing ones. Comments expressed a vision of a rural, family-friendly small town that is threatened to make way for outsiders.

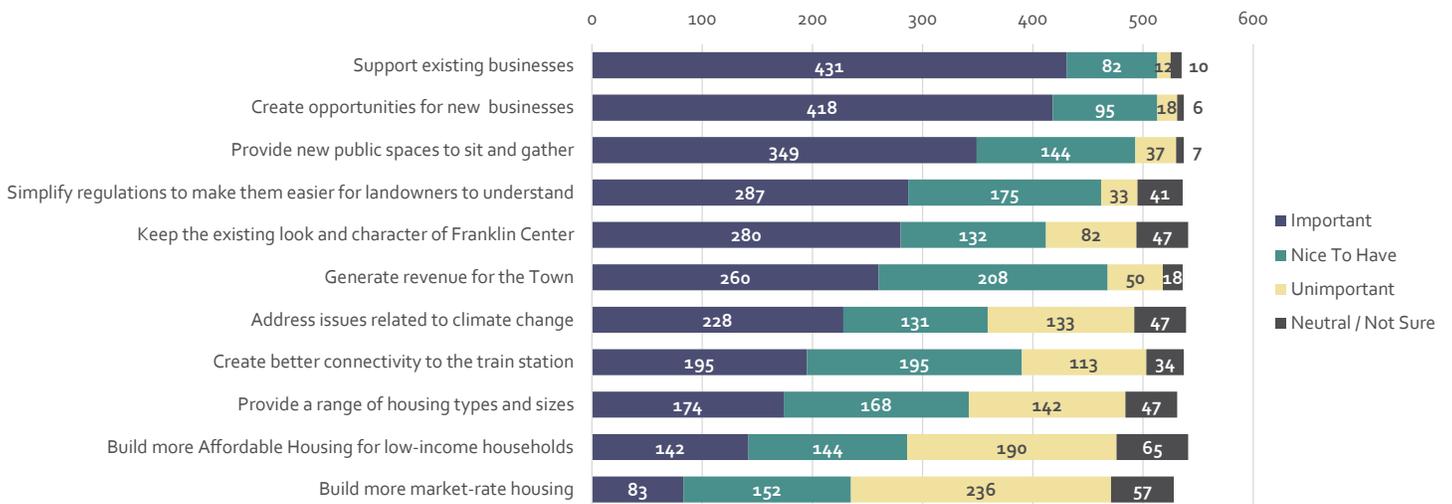
Though there are considerable concerns about Franklin Center changing, many residents also spoke about areas of improvement. They discussed amenities that had been part of the downtown in decades past, including an ice cream shop and a movie theater, and a desire to see the street life from that time return. Others spoke about the negative impacts of landlords in the downtown who are not interested in investing in the appearance of their buildings.

Community Visioning Survey

The community survey was launched at the March 7 public forum and closed on April 1, 2022. During this time the survey was accessed by approximately 800 people, 682 of which submitted results to questions (though not everybody answered questions). Among the survey participants, 246 people attended or later watched the public forum, while 410 people did not.

The priorities identified as most important to respondents include supporting existing businesses, creating opportunities for new businesses, and providing new public spaces to sit and gather. Other important items include simplifying regulations to make them easier for landowners to understand, keeping the existing look and character of Franklin Center, and generating revenue for the Town. Building more market-rate housing was identified as least important.

Please indicate how important you feel the following priorities are:



According to the survey, most participants want to see mixed-use development (commercial first floor with residential above) in the Downtown Commercial and Commercial I Districts. Participants would like to see mixed-use buildings and a variety of commercial uses in the Mixed Business and Innovation District. They feel that these three areas can and should have more people and density. In the General Residential V District, participants would like to see single-, two-, and three-family homes as well as cottage-style housing and townhouses. Most would like to see single-family and cottage-style homes in the Single Family Residential IV

District. In both residential districts, they feel that the density is just about right.

A myriad of other questions helping to guide the process were asked, ranging from questions about parking and building styles to other places that residents enjoy that could be helpful models for Franklin. The full results of the community survey can be found in Summary Memo 2.

Hybrid Public Forum 2

MAPC and the Town of Franklin hosted a second hybrid public forum on May 16, 2022, at the Black Box Theater downtown and over Zoom. The presentation focused on the findings of the community visioning survey as well as the proposed zoning recommendations for Franklin Center. Following the presentation and a question/answer period, in-person and online participants (via Google Jamboard) could provide feedback on each of the recommendations and the draft vision statement, and offer any additional thoughts.



While there were a few sentiments against density in the downtown, the majority of feedback about the recommendations was very supportive. In Franklin Center, participants want to see a more diverse array of housing types (with an amount of parking that is appropriate for a transit-accessible location), Affordable Housing, ADA accessibility, green building, mixed-use development in commercial areas, downtown façade improvements, and more.

Booths at Local Events

Franklin For All was announced to the public at the Harvest Festival on October 2, 2021. Residents could sign up for a listserv to be informed about engagement opportunities.

On June 10, 2022, the Franklin For All team engaged community members during the Strawberry Stroll event. This street festival allowed the planning team to interact with the public and gain additional insights into what people thought of sample development visualizations. These illustrated what density could theoretically look like instead of using terms like units per acre. Visitors to the booth were provided with draft zoning recommendations and ways to follow the remainder of the process moving forward through online channels.



Interviews with Town Staff

MAPC met with Town staff to confirm that the Town's systems could handle a potential increase in new development that results from rezoning. At the beginning of the Franklin For All process, MAPC attended a technical review meeting with Town of Franklin staff to capture their priorities for this process and understand potential obstacles. Later on, MAPC met separately for interviews with Department of Public Works staff, the Building Commissioner, and the Town Assessor to ask more specific department-related questions.

Build-Out & Infrastructure Analysis

For details on this analysis, please refer to Summary Memo #3.

When proposing recommendations that can lead to increased density in an area, it is important to assess the potential impacts from new development and the municipality's ability to serve that new development. A "build-out analysis" is a tool used in urban planning to estimate the amount and location of future growth. This analysis provides a projection of the maximum number of new housing units and other nonresidential square footage that could result if each parcel were to be redeveloped according to proposed zoning regulations. From there, potential impacts can be estimated such as increased population, parking needs, traffic, demand on municipal services, and more. **In general, a build-out analysis provides an overestimation of growth and associated impacts with the understanding that many parcels in a given area will not be redeveloped for any number of reasons.**

The new Multi-Family Zoning Requirement for MBTA Communities, also known as the new Section 3A of Massachusetts General Law Chapter 40A ("Section 3A"), requires communities that are served by the MBTA to have at least one zoning district of a "reasonable size" located within a half-mile of an MBTA station where multifamily housing is permitted "as of right" at a minimum gross density of 15 units per acre. To comply with the "reasonable size" requirement in Section 3A, these districts must be at least 50 acres total with a minimum of 25 contiguous acres. Under the regulations, Franklin will also need to prove to DHCDw that it has multifamily district with a unit capacity—the number of housing units that can be developed as of right in the district—equal to or greater than 1,883 units.

Currently, Franklin does not have a district of reasonable size that complies with all the requirements of Section 3A. The Downtown Commercial District does allow multifamily housing in accordance with Section 3A, but that district is less than the required 50 acres (40.2 acres). If it fails to comply with Section 3A, Franklin will no longer be eligible for state funding from the Housing Choice Initiative, the Local Capital Projects Fund, the MassWorks Infrastructure Program, and potentially other grant sources.

MAPC's Data Services Department conducted an analysis to calculate total build-out units in the Franklin Center study area based on the Town's current zoning and the adoption of new zoning regulations that comply with Section 3A. This analysis assumes the adoption of a Chapter 40R Smart Growth Overlay District (described in detail in the Recommendations section) that includes properties within the Downtown Commercial (DC), Commercial I (CI), and General Residential V (GRV) Districts.

With a total build-out of 3,352 housing units spread out across 174.29 acres, the district-wide gross density would come out to 19.23 units/acre and thus comply with Section 3A. MAPC compared the results of the build-out analysis with existing housing units in the CI, DCD, and GRV Districts to calculate net unit yield.

Zoning District	Build-Out Units	Existing Units	Net Units
Commercial I	1,099	101	998
Downtown Commercial	862	140	722
General Residential IV	1,391	601	790
Total	3,352	842	2,510

The following maps show the distribution of build-out units by parcel. The first map shows all the parcels in the analysis, which is relevant for assessing unit capacity under Section 3A. The second map removes the parcels that have been redeveloped since 2000, with the understanding that these properties are unlikely to be redeveloped again for quite some time. When these parcels are removed, the number of build-out units decreases to 2,856.



Based on recent studies, local data, site visits, and interviews with Town staff, MAPC has assessed infrastructure in the Franklin Center study area to determine to what extent existing infrastructure may be a barrier to new development and redevelopment.

DPW has no concerns about capacity issues in Franklin’s water and sewer systems, and they think that a very substantial amount of development would need to happen in a very short period of time in order for this to be a concern. Both Franklin’s wastewater and water supply systems could handle another 20% of their total capacity before it becomes a concern. DPW notes that the additional 20% does not mean 20% more units or more people, as newer systems are going to be more efficient in water usage and drainage.

If we translate 2,510 net units under the total build-out in the previous section to population, we could expect a maximum of 6,526 new residents given the average household size in Franklin of 2.6. This would be an increase Franklin’s population by a maximum of 17.8%, from 36,745 to 43,271 people. Based on these findings and the fact that the build-out is an overestimation, MAPC does not believe that the increase in population as a result of Franklin For All’s proposed zoning changes will result in capacity concerns for the Town’s water and sewer supplies.

The Charles River Pollution Control District operates the treatment facility that supports the Town’s sewer system. As part of the agreement for Franklin to be in the Charles River Pollution Control District, the State mandates that people may only water their lawns on trash day. This restriction is announced by the Town each year and runs from May to September. Because of this policy, residents have a false perception that the Town’s water supply is stressed and they blame new development for these complaints.

As the Town of Franklin considers new zoning in and around its downtown center, ensuring the provision of adequate transportation infrastructure and multimodal walking, biking, and transit connectivity will be critical to accommodate new growth and development. Under Section 3A, the Town must create a new multifamily zoning district, 50% of which must be located within half a mile of a commuter rail station. With an MBTA station in the heart of its pedestrian-friendly downtown, Franklin is well-positioned to create new transit-oriented housing and commercial opportunities for residents and visitors. However, targeted infrastructure improvements and broader transportation policy changes will be necessary to ensure that the Town maximizes the potential benefits it can realize under Section 3A.

Summary Memo #3 contains transportation observations and recommendations for infrastructure improvements at specific locations in Franklin Center, as well as more general transportation observations and recommendations that will enable the Town of Franklin to help meet projections for future growth.



Recommendations

*For details on the recommendations, please refer to **Summary Memo #4**.*

Based on the feedback from the public process, MAPC has proposed 11 recommendations that can help realize the Franklin Center vision. They are intended to be a starting point for developing appropriate zoning for the area. MAPC and the Town of Franklin will draft and vet the new zoning language during a follow-up phase of work. This phase will include a public engagement process to prepare the new zoning language for local adoption.

Franklin's Department of Planning & Community Development (DPCD) will lead the implementation of these recommendations with support from MAPC or another consultant. Implementation will be contingent upon collaboration with the Franklin For All Steering Committee, Town Council, Planning Board, Town Administrator, and Town of Franklin staff.

The proposed approach to rezoning includes the following:

- A 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 businesses
- 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.

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.

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.

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 deny a project if it were not meeting standards.

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.



↑ *Examples from 40R Districts in Reading (left), Northampton (middle), and Westborough (right)*

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.

The following would be specified in the zoning for a 40R Smart Growth Overlay 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

Design standards for a 40R Smart Growth Overlay District may include the following:

- Building types and architectural styles
- Materials and colors
- Type/proportions/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 standards
- Natural site features and landscaping

The table on the next page provides a summary of the suggested dimensional, use, and parking regulations for the Smart Growth Overlay District. Some elements differ between the three base zoning districts, while others are consistent across all three districts. The exact regulations will be determined during rezoning process.

Base zoning district	Downtown Commercial	Commercial I	General Residential V
Minimum lot area	5,000 square feet, regardless of number of units		
Minimum frontage	50 feet		75 feet
Minimum depth	50 feet		75 feet
Minimum front setback	N/A	N/A	10 feet
Maximum front setback	5 feet		N/A
Minimum side setback	N/A, 10 feet if abutting residential district		10 feet
Minimum rear setback	N/A, 10 feet if abutting residential district		15 feet
Maximum height	40 feet and 3 stories		
Maximum coverage	N/A		50%
Allowed uses	Mixed-use	Mixed-use, multifamily	Multifamily
Parking spaces	1 space per unit	1 space per unit	1.5 spaces per unit
Parking location	Surface parking must be located outside of the required front yard setback		
Affordable Housing	20% of all units		
Waivers	Dimensional and other requirements (such as design standards) may be waived at the Planning Board's discretion		

Recommendation #2: Adopt an inclusionary zoning policy that is Town-wide and creates a minimum threshold for Affordable Housing in new development.

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.

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 Innovation and Residential V Districts.

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.

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.

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.

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 from the Planning Board or ZBA.



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.

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.

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. The 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.

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. They are also a particularly good housing typology to meet the needs of seniors and people with disabilities.

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 Town-owned parking lots in Franklin Center and, if possible, negotiate with the owners of private lots to allow shared-use parking.

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 Town-owned lots, and potentially privately-owned lots as well (like the parking lot that Rockland Trust owns).

Between the three Town-owned lots, there are about 130 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.

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 Smart Growth District or from payment 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.

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. 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.

Since the program's inception, sixteen communities in Massachusetts have areas designated as Certified Vacant Storefront Districts, 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.

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 construction costs.

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.

What kind of buildings would a 40R Smart Growth Overlay District permit in the DC and CI Districts?



Address:	45 West Central Street
Base zoning district:	Downtown Commercial District
Housing typology:	Mixed-use
Parcel Size:	1.077 acres
Number of units:	20
Residential density:	20 units per acre
Number of Affordable units:	4
Commercial square feet:	8,000 gross square feet
Parking:	40 parking spaces located behind the building and in an underground garage



What kind of buildings would a 40R Smart Growth Overlay District permit in the GRV District?



Address:	37 and 39 Ruggles Street
Base zoning district:	General Residential V District
Housing typology:	Townhouse (multifamily)
Parcel Size:	38,889 square feet
Number of units:	15
Residential density:	16 units per acre
Number of Affordable units:	2
Commercial square feet:	N/A
Parking:	30 parking spaces located within individual garages



Next Steps

The next steps in the Franklin For All involve implementation of some or all of the recommendations that have been put forth. Franklin For All's Steering Committee intends to take summer 2022 to discuss priorities and which recommendations they intend to implement first. All recommendations that pertain to zoning will require their own public hearing process where the community will have additional avenues for engagement.

Use the QR codes below to visit our website and sign up for the listserv to stay up-to-date on the Franklin For All process.



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Rezoning Franklin Center for economic growth and diverse housing opportunities