

Franklin For All

Rezoning Franklin Center for Economic Growth & Diverse Housing Opportunities

This project has been funded through grants provided by the Department of Housing and Community Development, Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, and Town-appropriated funds. The following documents are enclosed:

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FRANKLIN FOR ALL

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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

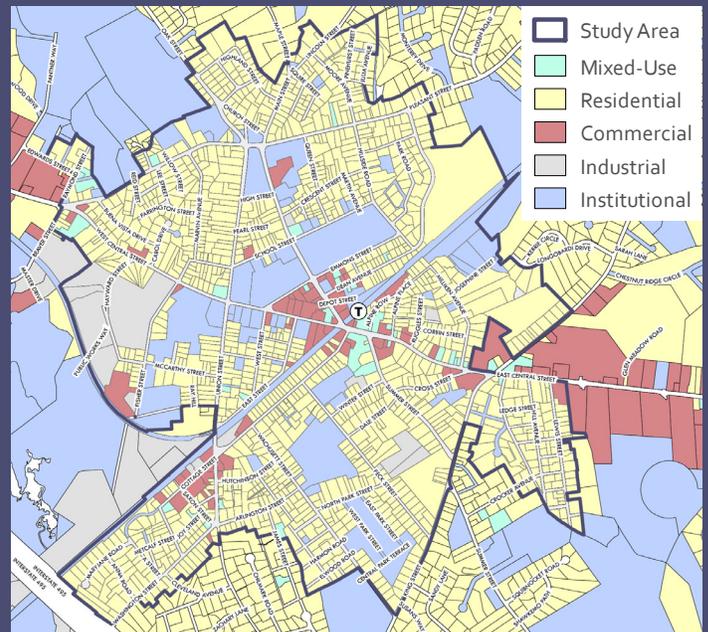
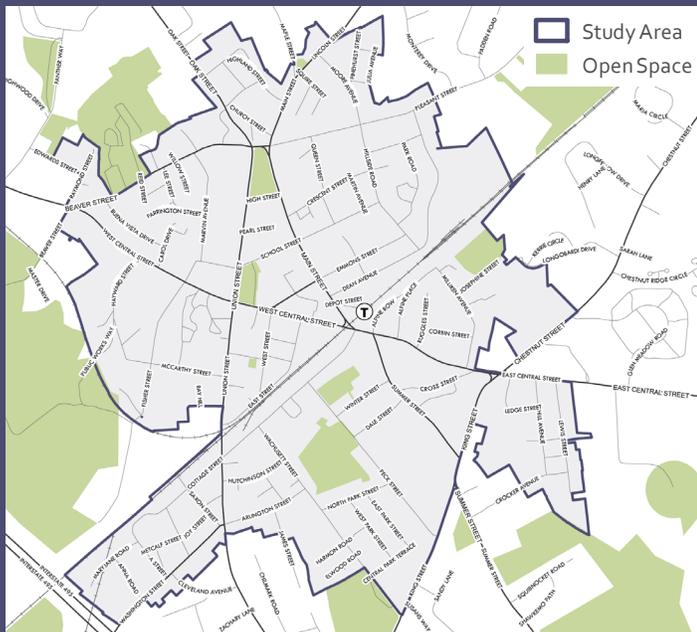
Franklin For All booth at Strawberry Stroll on June 10, 2022

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

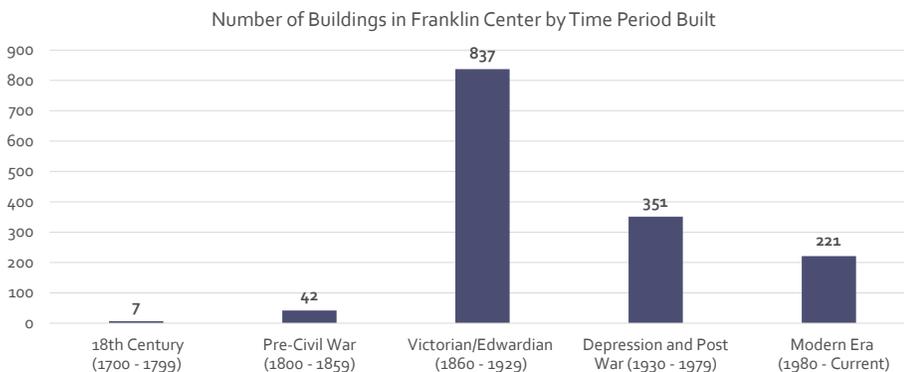


Franklin Center Today

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.



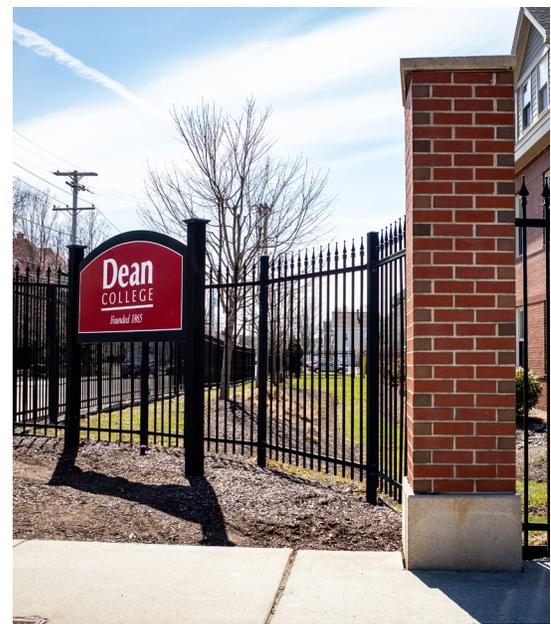
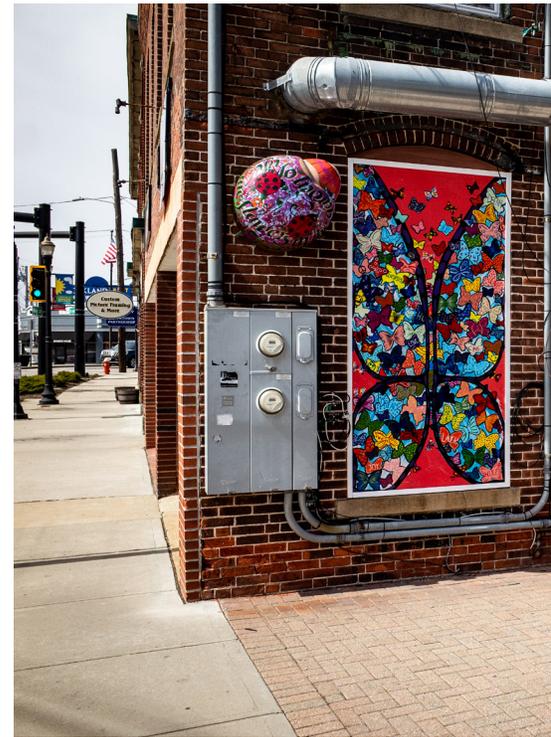
This project builds on considerable past planning work, including the recent Housing Production Plan, 2019 Economic Development/Market Study, 2013 Master Plan, 2008 Downtown Parking Study, and 2003 Franklin Center Plan. Significant time and resources have also been devoted to enhancing the area to stimulate 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.



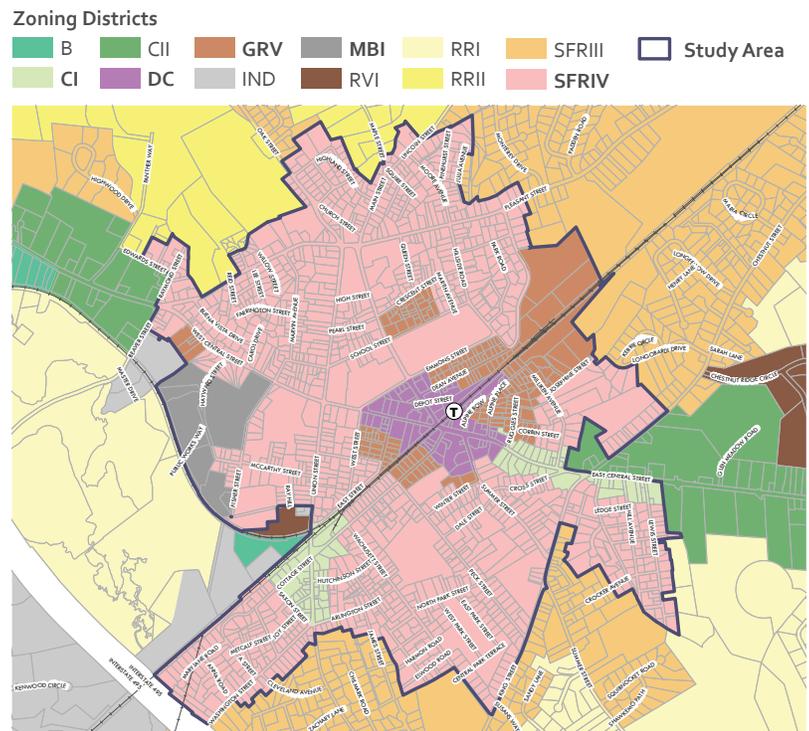
Zoning Diagnostic

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.

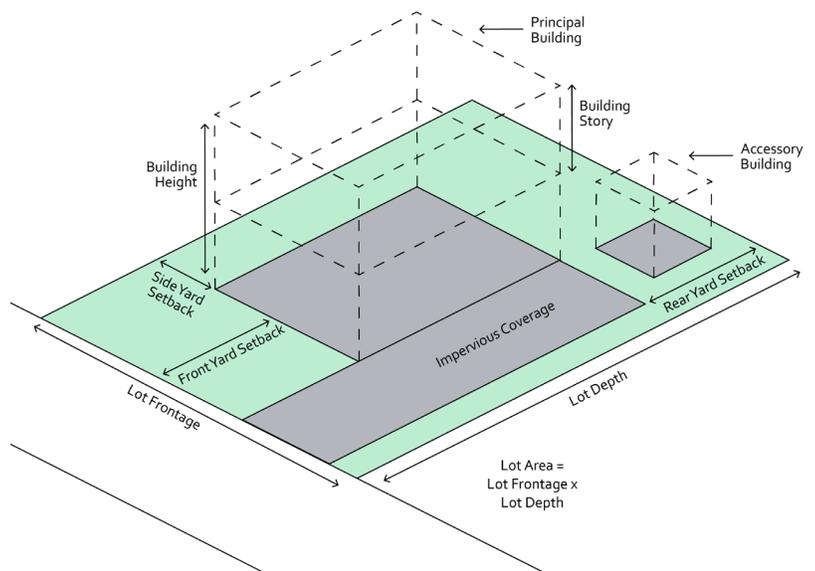
Franklin’s zoning code and associated districts were first adopted by the Town’s Planning Board in 1930, after almost two-thirds of structures in Franklin Center were built. Many of the most beloved buildings in Franklin Center could not be legally built today because of dimensional or use restrictions 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.

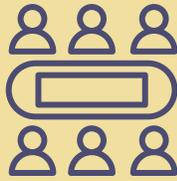
Visioning Process

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

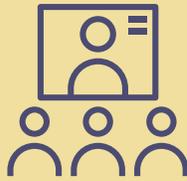
In order to establish a vision for Franklin Center, the Franklin For All team heard from hundreds of community members across a variety of engagement opportunities:



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.

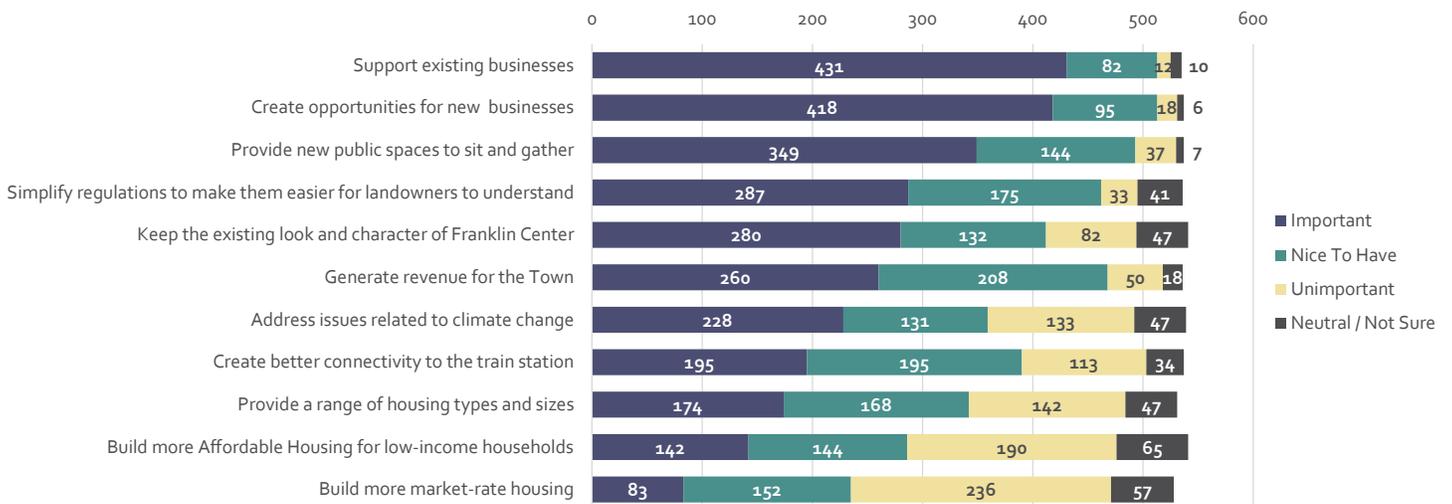
Though there are considerable concerns about Franklin Center changing, many residents also spoke about areas of improvement. They discussed amenities that had been part of the downtown in decades past, including an ice cream shop and a movie theater, and a desire to see the street life from that time 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:



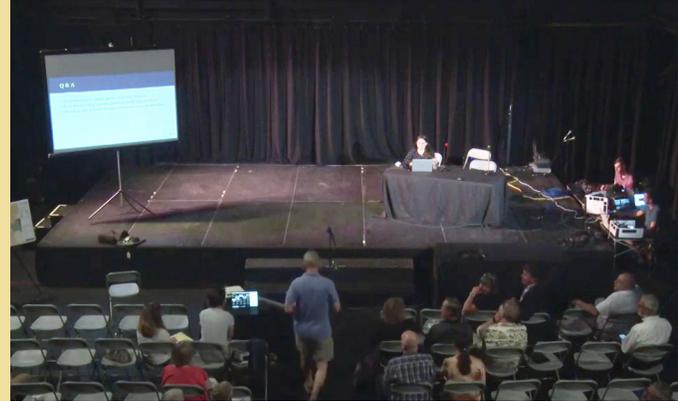
According to the survey, most participants want to see mixed-use development (commercial first floor with residential above) in the Downtown Commercial and Commercial I Districts. Participants would like to see mixed-use buildings and a variety of commercial uses in the Mixed Business and Innovation 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.



www.mapc.org/franklin-for-all



mapc.ma/franklin-for-all-news



Rezoning Franklin Center for economic growth and diverse housing opportunities

Franklin For All

Summary Memo #1
Zoning Diagnostic
December 17, 2021



Project Boundary

The boundary should include all parcels in the following zoning districts: Commercial I (CI), Downtown Commercial (DC), Mixed Business Innovation (MBI), Single-Family Residential IV (SFRIV), and General Residential V (GRV). It should also include any parcels within a half-mile of the Commuter Rail station and pockets of other zones where it makes sense.

In discussion with the Steering Committee, we should decide if the goal of the rezoning is to concentrate efforts on the downtown or expand walkability and downtown character. If the answer is the former, we probably want to keep the boundaries relatively tight. We should present the proposed project boundary at the first public forum before we finalize it.

A map of the proposed study area is included at the end of this document.

Parking & Dimensional Regulations

Parking Regulations

Based on conversations with the Town, local developers seem to identify high parking requirements as a barrier to redevelopment and minimum parking requirements is one of the more common places zoning relief is sought. On the other hand, business owners complain about a lack of parking in the downtown area. It is important that the right balance is struck to not overload on-street parking while also reflecting the transit-oriented nature of the area.

The Planning Board appears to generally grant parking waivers. While encouraging less parking is a good thing from a smart-growth perspective, it should be codified in a way that is clear upfront. One option is to include parking requirements in an inclusionary zoning program by which a developer can provide less parking if they include Affordable Housing units in their development. This would serve dual purposes of promoting less parking and increasing affordability. Research also shows that residents of buildings with Affordable Housing units tend to utilize less parking than market-rate buildings.

There are other non-zoning ways to manage parking in Franklin Center. Utilizing wayfinding signage and shared parking programs can go a long way at making use of existing parking. The parking lot behind Rockland Trust in particular has potential to support parking for residential units during the evening hours when most businesses in the downtown are closed.

District	Residential Uses	Nonresidential Uses
DC	1.5 spaces per unit in mixed-use developments	1 space per 500 SF GFA
CI	1.5 spaces per unit	1 space per 500 SF GFA
Other Districts	2 spaces per unit	Varies by use

Lot Area

Minimum lot areas vary widely depending on the zoning district, ranging from 5,000 SF in the DC and CI Districts to 40,000 SF in the MBI District. A 5,000 SF lot area is an ideal number for a downtown area with multifamily and mixed-use. Larger lot size requirements are likely to conflict with historic development patterns which current zoning would not allow but which contribute to overall vibrancy.

District	Lot Area
DC	5,000 SF
CI	5,000 SF
MBI	40,000 SF
SFRIV	15,000 SF
GRV	10,000 SF

Based on the review of recent ZBA cases, it appears that there have been no requests for lot area relief so this may not be much of a barrier to redevelopment.

Minimum Frontage

Minimum continuous frontage requirements also vary widely, ranging from 50 ft in the DC and CI Districts to 174 ft in the MBI District. Like with large lot areas, large frontage requirements make small infill developments difficult and would restrict existing parcels in Franklin Center. A 50 ft frontage is an ideal number for a downtown area.

District	Frontage
DC	50 ft
CI	50 ft
MBI	175 ft
SFRIV	100 ft
GRV	100 ft

It appears that there has been only one recent ZBA case where applicants sought frontage relief. The ZBA denied the Variance but that was for a single-family home, not a multifamily or mixed-use building. Like with minimum lot area, this may not be much of a barrier to redevelopment.

Minimum Setback Dimensions

Setbacks are prohibitively restrictive across the board in terms of encouraging multifamily and mixed-use redevelopment. A downtown area can theoretically support properties with no setbacks at all, especially if there is little to no onsite parking.

Front setback requirements are overly onerous in every district other than the DC District when it comes to creating an active streetwall in a downtown area. The setback in the DC District works because it effectively extends the sidewalk. Any setback larger than that will reduce the pedestrian experience.

Side yards over 10 ft should be discouraged in a downtown area in order to optimize the pedestrian experience and reduce walking time between buildings.

Rear yard requirements for all districts seem to assume that there will be parking in the rear of a building. This may not be the case if there is no onsite parking or the parking is under the building. Parking under the building is generally a positive thing from a density and urban design standpoint but is not being encouraged.

District	Front Yard	Side Yard	Rear Yard
DC	5 ft on first floor only	0 ft, 20 ft if abutting a residential district	15 ft
CI	20 ft, but not deeper than existing yard	10 ft but only on one side, 20 ft on abutting side of residential district	15 ft
MBI	40 ft	30 ft, increases by building height if it abuts a residential district	30 ft, increases by building height if it abuts a residential district
SFRIV	30 ft	20 ft	20 ft
GRV	20 ft	15 ft	20 ft

Maximum Height/Stories of Building

A Special Permit from the Planning Board is required to construct a building with more than three stories in any district. Based on conversations with the Town, applicants do not want to have to file a Special Permit for building height and would prefer if this were by right. Given these anecdotes, building height requirements appear to be a barrier to new multifamily and mixed-use development.

Maximum heights of 50 ft encourage four-story buildings with tall first floor ceilings, and it appears that areas of Franklin Center can support this typology. Increasing the maximum allowable height as of right may encourage more redevelopment if there was more certainty around the development process. If the Town does not want to “give away” extra height, this could be a good element of an inclusionary zoning program. That is, a developer would be able to build to 50 ft tall if their project included a minimum number of Affordable Housing units.

The 15-foot front setback required for 50-foot buildings in the DC District seems to be particularly restrictive given that this is the downtown core and should have the most pedestrian activity.

District	Stories	Height	Notes
DC	3	40 ft	Up to 50 ft allowed by SP if front setback is 15 ft
CI	3	40 ft	Up to 50 ft, regardless of stories, allowed by SP
MBI	3	40 ft	Up to 50 ft, regardless of stories, allowed by SP
SFRIV	3	35 ft	
GRV	3	40 ft	

Maximum Impervious Coverage

Maximum impervious coverage requirements appear to be overly onerous for a downtown area where density is encouraged. Instead of requiring considerable open space on each privately-owned site, it may be preferable to identify common areas for open space that can be accessed publicly.

Density is especially limited in the SFRIV and GRV Districts because of very low coverage maximums.

District	Impervious Coverage (Structures + Paving)
DC	90%
CI	90%
MBI	80%
SFRIV	35%
GRV	35%

Use Regulations

Multifamily Use

Multifamily use is defined as everything over two units, so three- and four-unit buildings fall under the same use restrictions as large multifamily buildings. Creating a separate definition for three- and four-unit buildings could provide an opportunity for slight increases in density in residential areas just outside of the downtown area where multifamily use is currently not allowed at all, such as the MBI and SFRIV Districts.

The lot area restrictions associated with multifamily uses are overly prohibitive in the downtown core and may be restricting development. This could be another item to incorporate into an inclusionary zoning program, whereby the lot area restrictions are not applied if the building contains Affordable Housing units.

District	Multifamily Allowed?	Notes
DC	Allowed by right	DUs must be above first floor, each DU requires 2,000 SF of lot area but more allowed by SP
CI	Allowed by Special Permit	Each DU requires 1,000 SF of lot area
MBI	Not allowed	
SFRIV	Not allowed	
GRV	Allowed by Special Permit	Each DU requires 1,000 SF of lot area

Mixed-Use

The Zoning Bylaw does not include a definition for mixed-use. Residential and commercial uses are defined individually and treated separately. If both residential and commercial are allowed by right in a particular zone, the project can be approved by right, otherwise it must get approval for the non-by-right uses. This seems to overly complicate the process.

It is confusing trying to determine if mixed-use is allowed in a specific district because there are many commercial uses and different districts allow different uses. A developer might not know what commercial business will be occupying the first-floor space until that building has been constructed. The Town should consider creating a specific definition of mixed-use and then determine what districts it should be allowed in. Given that mixed-use development is what is sought in the downtown, it should be much easier to build.

The definition of mixed-use should be clear about what commercial uses are allowed in mixed-use developments. For example, the Town has noted that the downtown is flooded with service-related businesses. In order to incentivize the establishment of retail stores and restaurants, the Town may choose to exclude commercial establishments such as offices or salons from the by right definition. Instead, they could be allowed by Special Permit.

It appears that only the DC District is the only one that allows mixed-use by right, as long as the estimated water consumption for the project does not result in an increase in of more than 15k gallons per day. The CI District allows mixed-use by Special Permit while the MBI, SFRIV, and GRV Districts do not allow it at all.

District	Multifamily Allowed?	Retail or Restaurant Allowed?
DC	Allowed by right	Allowed by right, but Special Permit required if project results in water consumption increases above 15k gallons per day
CI	Allowed by Special Permit	Allowed by right, but Special Permit required if project results in water consumption increases above 15k gallons per day
MBI	Not allowed	Allowed as part of a commercial mixed-use development; stand-alone restaurants and retail establishments are not allowed
SFRIV	Not allowed	Not allowed
GRV	Allowed by Special Permit	Not allowed

Accessory Dwelling Units

According to the Town, zoning relief for Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) is almost always granted. ADUs are a great "missing-middle" housing option to increase density outside the downtown core and have not posed issues in the past. The Town should consider allowing them by right in desired districts.

Process & Roles of Town Boards

Land use policy seems to be reactive to developer requests rather than proactively advancing a vision for the area. The Town should zone for what it wants to see and then let developers build that. The vision created through the public process will be particularly important for this reason. Based on the vision, zoning should be modified to allow those desired uses and densities by right or at least with fewer approvals.

Many communities require applicants to obtain approvals from both the Planning Board and ZBA for the same multifamily or mixed-use project. Developers likely expect this and it is not an issue in and of itself. However, it needs to be very clear what zoning relief is required from what board, otherwise it could pose a barrier to new development.

There should be more of a dialogue/consensus between the two boards about the roles they fill and how they can work together to support high-quality projects in good locations. If the Planning Board has a lot of design expertise, then the ZBA could defer to that expertise when determining what Variances to grant. It may be beneficial for the Planning Board to make a recommendation to the ZBA during their review process for multifamily and mixed-use projects to promote consensus early on in the process. Hopefully the Steering Committee, with members on both the Planning Board and ZBA, can help with this.

Potential Rezoning Directions

The Town may decide to move forward with one or a combination of the following potential zoning directions. This is only the beginning of the list of options. Ideally the public process will elucidate more potential avenues for rezoning.

Inclusionary Zoning

Despite there not being much enthusiasm for inclusionary zoning in the past, the tide may have turned with the election of new Planning Board members. Inclusionary zoning can serve multiple purposes, the most obvious being that it leads to the creation of new Affordable Housing units. A good inclusionary zoning program can also introduce flexibility into the development review process by allowing more density in exchange for more affordability. Though flexible, it is also proactive and not reactive on a case-by-case basis.

Chapter 40R Smart Growth Zoning Overlay District

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. A district around the Commuter Rail station could certainly meet the requirements for a 40R Smart Growth District if that were a desired approach. 40R Districts must allow densities of 8 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.

In exchange for adopting a 40R Smart Growth District and streamlining the development review process, the Town can get between \$10k and \$600k in state funding, plus an additional \$3,000 for every new unit created. Under the Chapter 40S companion legislation, qualifying communities will be reimbursed for the net cost of educating students living in new housing in smart growth districts.

Standard Overlay Zoning District

The Town may decide to create a standard overlay zoning district covering the desired downtown area as opposed to going the 40R route. This could allow a more tailored approach, but the Town would lose out on the 40R financial incentives.

Having a single zoning overlay district encouraging smart growth development could help decrease barriers to redevelopment and allow the Town to dictate exactly what it wants new development in Franklin Center to look like. This would also allow the inclusion of some but not all parcels in the base zoning district.

DIF/TIF

Both DIF and TIF utilize 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 DIF, the Town would pledge all or a portion of tax increments to fund district improvements over time. DIF provides financial benefits to developers by providing infrastructure and surrounding amenities to support their projects and minimizing risk. 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 the project's construction costs.

Urban Renewal Plan

This is one of the more extreme avenues but could be an option if landlords cannot be motivated to redevelop dilapidated properties in the downtown. Urban Renewal allows municipalities to address "disinvested and underutilized neighborhoods and substandard, decadent and blighted conditions" by promoting growth and private investment. An Urban Renewal Plan would first need to be prepared for the area and approved by DHCD. If it is approved, the municipality (most likely via a Redevelopment Authority) would be able to take private property by eminent domain and dispose of it to another private entity for redevelopment.

Franklin For All

Summary Memo #2

Findings from Visioning Process

April 25, 2022



Introduction

MAPC and the Town of Franklin organized a variety of engagement opportunities to capture the community's vision for Franklin Center and understand the perspectives of various stakeholders. Four focus group meetings were hosted with groups most likely to be impacted by any proposed zoning changes, including business and property owners in Franklin Center, service providers and housing advocates, local developers and other real estate professionals, and residents living in and around the downtown area. Project staff also hosted a hybrid public forum and online survey to gain feedback from the wider Franklin community. Lastly, MAPC met with various Town staff to understand challenges and opportunities associated with rezoning Franklin Center and enabling new development. Through this engagement, MAPC has drafted a vision for Franklin Center that will help guide future zoning recommendations.

Focus Groups

Business and Property Owners

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.

Reasons why participants like owning a business or property in Franklin Center include its New England small-town appeal, access to the Commuter Rail, walkability, and strong downtown partnership organization. Dean College is also great asset and students help support businesses in the downtown. However, there are real challenges that prevent the area from realizing its true potential.

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. This detracts from Dean

College students wanting to leave campus and frequent downtown, even though having a college in the downtown ought to be a sell. Work should be done to spruce up the buildings that already exist (paint them, but new awnings up, etc.), which could be supported by community grants to update facades.

Parking and traffic issues were also cited during the focus group meeting. There is a perception that there is a lack of parking in the downtown, though Rockland Trust's parking lot is mostly empty throughout the day, as are the MBTA parking lots since the COVID pandemic. An attendee mentioned that commuters using the downtown station do not frequent the area unless they are walking through it. Because of this, traffic going to the station is not contributing to the downtown environment, and more should be done to push traffic outside of the downtown (for example, to Forge Park).

The group discussed the strong desire amongst people to live in the downtown area. A developer explained that he almost never has a vacancy and has no problem selling luxury condos. Many seniors want to downsize from their large homes and live in smaller spaces with access to downtown. There is a real need to figure out the Affordable Housing piece because, if you want to have a vibrant downtown, you also want a stable labor force where workers can afford to live nearby. Representatives from Dean College spoke about faculty and staff not being able to afford to live in town anymore, with some staff commuting two hours into work.

Priorities for Franklin Center varied amongst participants, with some supporting added density downtown more than others. In general, they would like to see the historic New England feel remain with more done to create an inviting and safe look (well-lit, clean, vibrant colors, etc.) There is a need for more services, a grocery store in particular, to truly have a walkable downtown where people do not need a car. Until those things are in place, people will still need a car and will still need a place to park. A developer mentioned the benefit to being in a Commercial 1 zone, and it may be beneficial to expand access to this zoning to additional parcels. There are also opportunities for collaboration between different entities, such as internships for Dean College students with downtown businesses.

Service Providers and Housing Advocates

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.

The group discussed the lack of Affordable Housing options in Franklin, especially in the center of town where one can easily access public transportation. Franklin should avoid the approach of other communities who have done a lot of development in the center, but only created luxury apartments. In particular, there is a need for Affordable senior housing in Franklin as the waiting lists are years long.

A lack of grocery outlets in the downtown area was mentioned as an impediment to creating a walkable downtown area with affordable food options. Grocery stores that offer affordability, like Shaw's and Stop & Shop, are not walkable from the downtown. However, it is unlikely that a small-business grocery store (like there was years ago) would survive in the downtown because of the large grocery stores on both ends of town. Other essential services, such as primary care doctors, have moved out of the center. As such, there is also a need to address transit access within Franklin itself (for example, by expanding/enhancing GATRA service).

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. A public awareness campaign could be helpful for communicating this message to various stakeholders and promoting an inclusionary zoning policy. It is important not to alienate the developers, but more can be done to bring all parties together to get to a mutually beneficial end, and the Town of Franklin should be driving that conversation.

The former Clark Cutler site in the MBI District and the Davis Fairs School were both mentioned as potential sites for new housing, particularly Affordable Housing. There is also a need to serve those who do not qualify for Affordable Housing but also cannot afford market rate housing (80-120% AMI). An inclusionary zoning policy could have a carve-out to support these populations. In addition, Franklin should issue more Section 8 vouchers as they can provide additional affordable options to those with low-incomes. That being said, there is quite a stigma which needs to be combatted.

Developers and Real Estate Professionals

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).

There are a number of reasons why participants choose to develop (or support development) in Franklin. It has a lot of things that people are looking for when they buy a home, such as highway access, Commuter Rail access, well-performing schools, and good shopping options. It was recently voted as the second safest town in the country. There has been a market shift towards multifamily development in suburban communities, and Franklin has untapped potential and could use more people. Franklin's status as a city also helps it to be developable: a developer can get in front of Council early and not have to wait until a Town Meeting and it has a good regulatory framework to be responsive to development needs.

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.

Though there is a huge market in apartment living for people 40 and under and baby boomers, the public is often unsupportive of larger developments and believe it is not needed in Franklin. While the City may be ahead of the curve in terms of promoting this kind of development, it is still hard to get support from abutters and other members of the community. However, there are opportunities to incorporate the residents in the vision for a project and show them how it will help them. A developer gave an example of a 250-unit transit-based development in Franklin that had considerable opposition from neighbors due to concerns about traffic and noise. The concerns ended up being unfounded and went away after the project was built.

The group discussed the need for more housing in order to support the community's desire for more businesses and services in Franklin Center. The phrase "If you build it, they will come," does not work anymore. For example, the big restaurants are not choosing Franklin because there is not a local population to support them. They do not think a grocery store downtown will ever happen, in particular due to the parking challenges associated with a grocery store big or small. Outside of the pizza shops, the Dean College population does not support the local downtown businesses. Mixed-use buildings are really what is needed to get more activity within the downtown.

There were a number of comments related to challenges with the permitting process. While Franklin rarely denies special permits, the process can still drag on and kill a deal with time. There are also concerns around subjectivity when dealing with what the actual permitting requirements are. Things need to be spelled out and objective. An incentive to preserve historical facades of old buildings could help keep existing town character while enabling increased density.

Franklin Center Residents

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. While existing business are great, they are clearly not enough, but rents are too high for other businesses (especially small businesses) to move in. Downtown needs more businesses that are open after 4PM and on the weekend. Mortgage companies and insurance agencies do not add life to the downtown. A small market,

bakery, brewery, and more entertain options would all be great additions. Dean College students are an untapped market.

Participants agree that there needs to be a critical mass of people living near downtown to support any new businesses. Density is critical to making businesses successful and there should be apartments for a wide mix of people. Mixed-use is a great option as you get density with commercial on the ground level. Accessory dwelling units (ADUs) and triple-deckers were also mentioned as opportunities for incrementally increasing density.

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.

Public Forum

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.

During the Q&A session, many residents had comments and questions about the process and why it came about. Many were unfamiliar with what MAPC is, and its role in both this process and wider Boston region needed to be explained. Other 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.

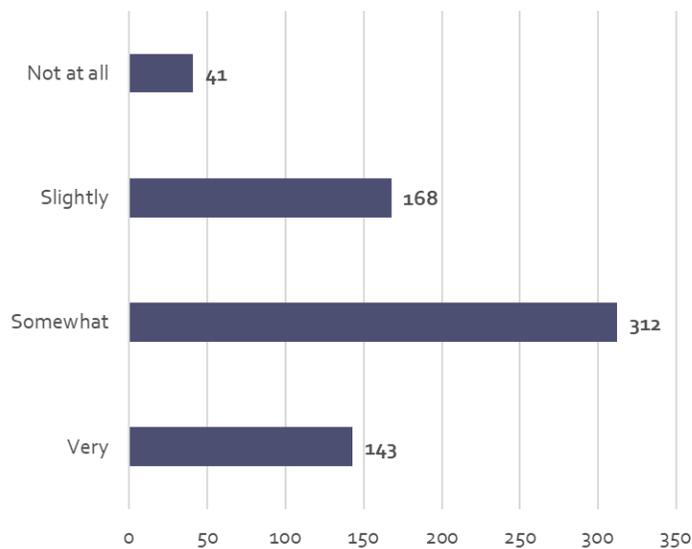
Though there are considerable concerns about Franklin Center changing, many residents also spoke about areas of improvement. They discussed amenities that had been part of the downtown in decades past, including an ice cream shop and a movie theater, and a desire to see the street life from that time 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 Survey

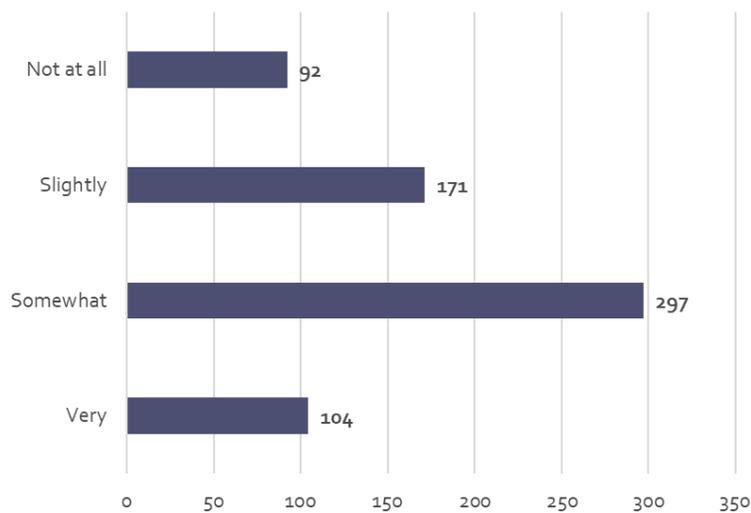
The community survey was launched at the March 7 public forum and closed on April 1, 2022. During this time the survey was accessed by approximately 800 people, 682 of which submitted results to questions (though not everybody answered questions). Among the survey participants, 246 people attended or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

Respondents were first asked about their familiarity with zoning, both as a general concept and also its impact on new development in Franklin. For both questions, a majority feel somewhat familiar, though generally more people feel familiar with zoning as a general concept compared to its role in Franklin specifically.

How familiar are you with zoning as a general concept?

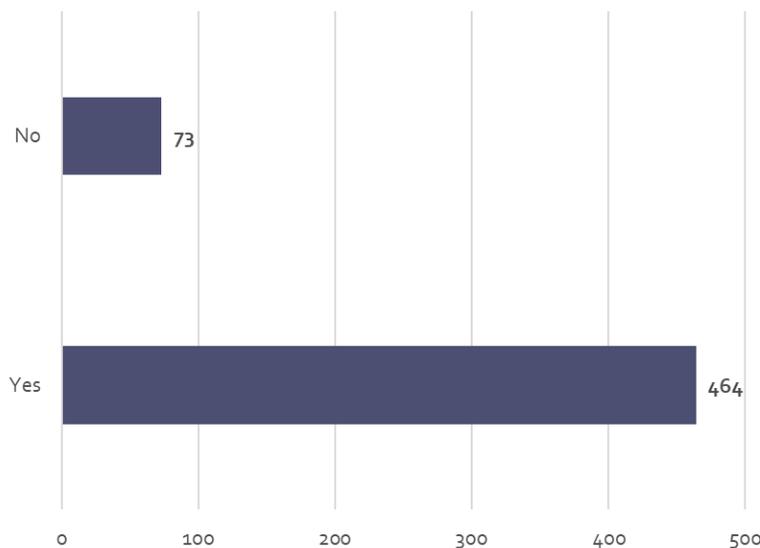


How familiar are you with zoning and its impact on new development in Franklin?



When asked about the locations in the study area, the vast majority of respondents indicated that we are capturing the right locations. Those who answered “no” were asked what they would change about the study area and what locations they would want to add or remote. Many of those who selected “no” did not answer the question, rather, they responded about being against anything different changing in the town or promoted misconceptions around the capacity of utilities/services. Many noted that expanding the area to include East and West Central Street further out would make sense, either to increase density and mixed-use in the commercial districts, or to potentially redevelop strip malls in those areas. There was a mix of opinions about whether the study area (and eventual zoning changes) should focus entirely on the Downtown Commercial District or include the broader area.

Are we capturing the right locations in our study area?



Respondents were asked to imagine their ideal version of Franklin Center in the future and to write down five words that describe this future. The following were the most common responses given:

- Walkable (143)
- Parking (119)
- Vibrant (101)
- Accessible (76)
- Restaurants (61)
- Diverse (60)
- Safe (56)
- Friendly (47)
- Small (46)
- Shops (42)
- Family (38)
- Clean (37)
- Community (36)
- Inviting (35)

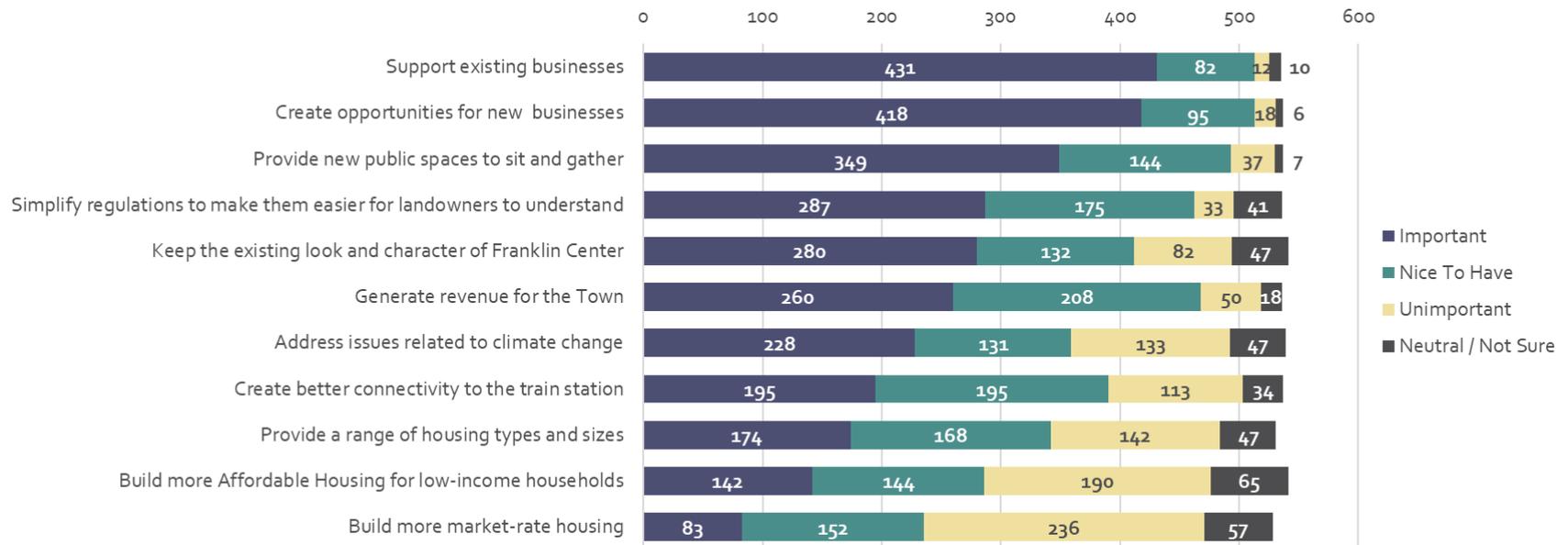
The word cloud image below shows all the responses mentioned at least five times, with the most common responses in bigger letters.



WordItOut

Next, participants were given a list of priorities and asked to indicate how important they feel those priorities are. 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.

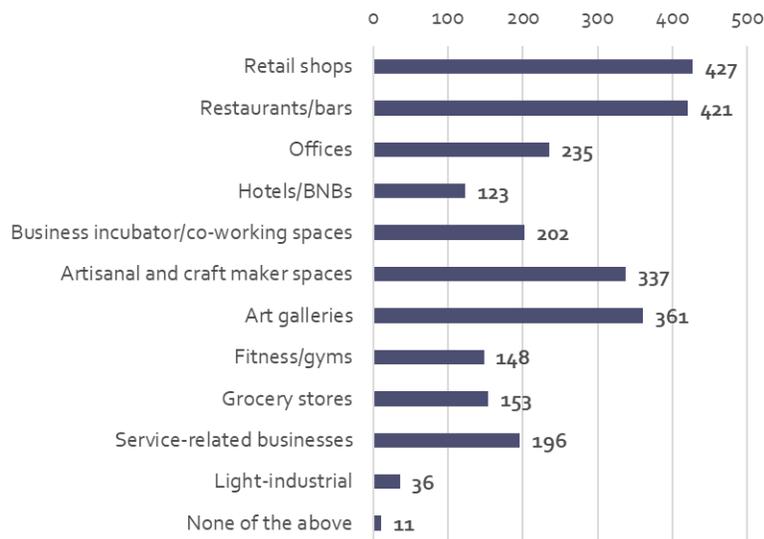
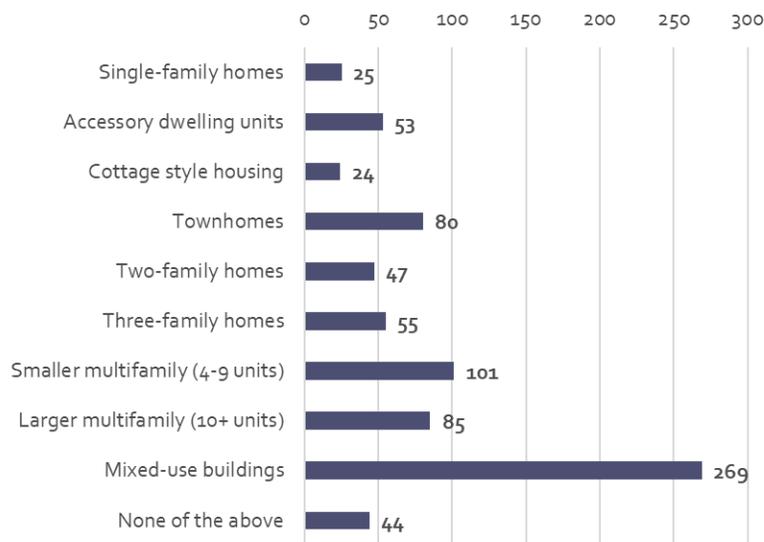
Please indicate how important you feel the following priorities are:



For each of the zoning districts in the study area, participants were asked to identify the housing types and commercial land uses that make the most sense.

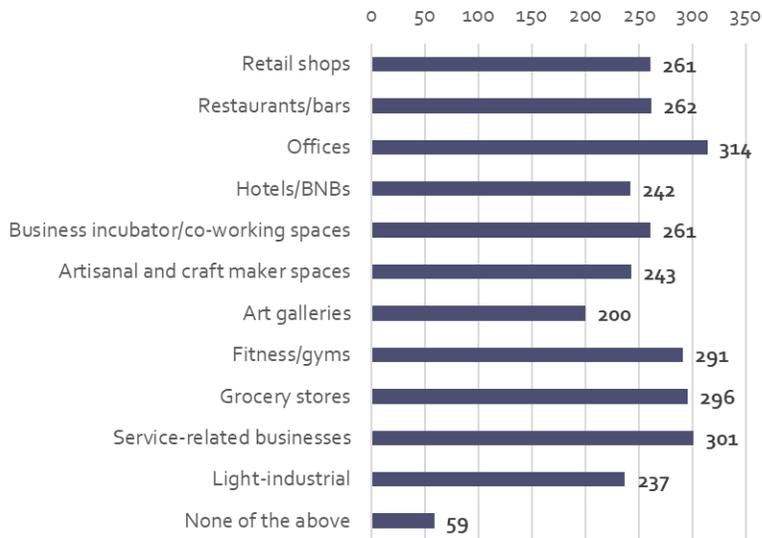
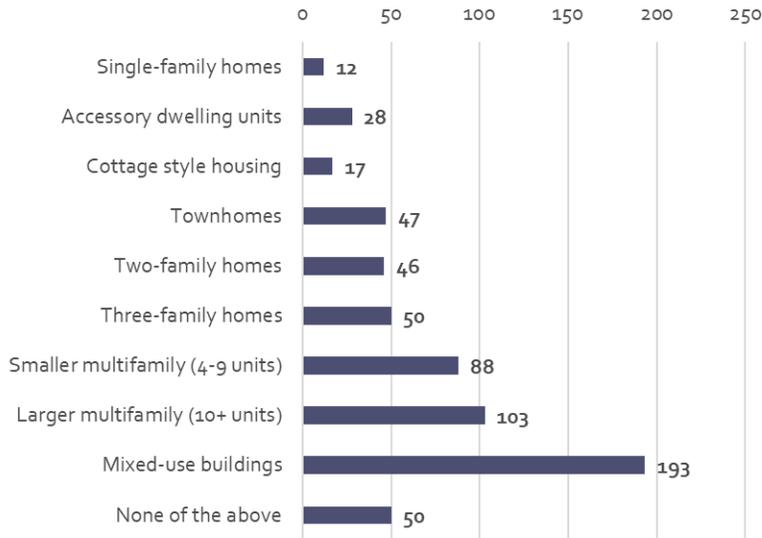
In the Downtown Commercial District, most people would want to see housing in mixed-use buildings with retail on the first floor, followed by smaller multifamily buildings with four to nine units. The most commonly cited commercial uses include retail shops, restaurants/ bars, art galleries, and artisanal and craft maker spaces.

Which of the following housing types/commercial land uses make the most sense for the Downtown Commercial District?



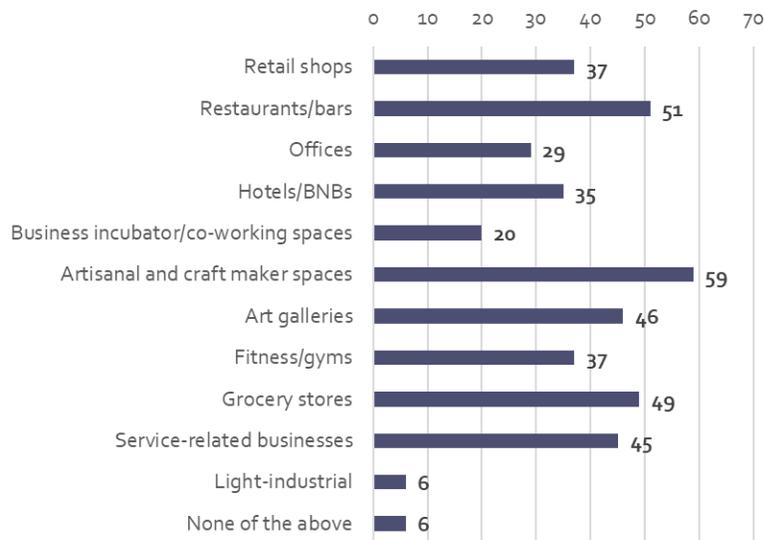
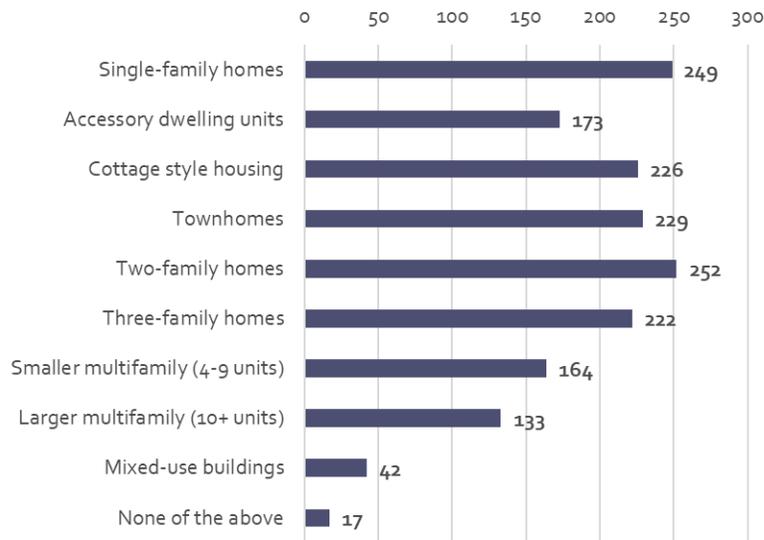
For housing in the Commercial I District, most respondents would also want to see mixed-use buildings, followed by larger multifamily buildings with ten or more units. They would like to see a wide range of commercial uses, with offices, service-related businesses, grocery stores, and fitness/gyms most commonly cited.

Which of the following housing types/commercial land uses make the most sense for the Commercial I District?



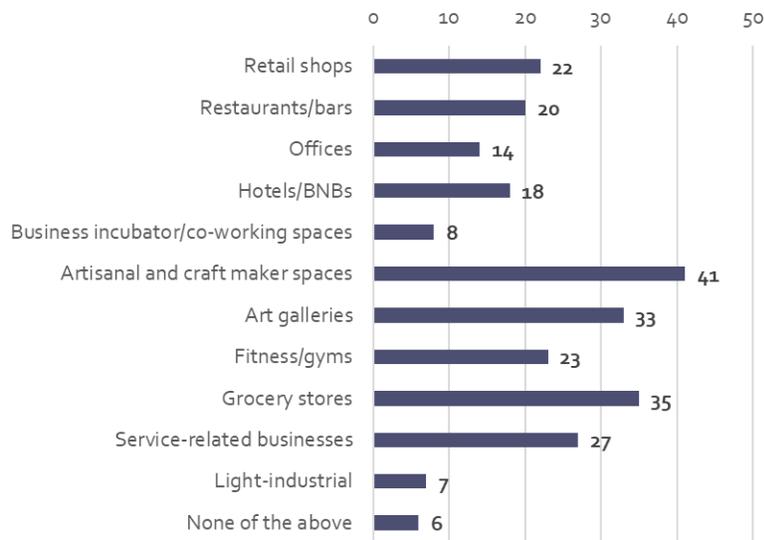
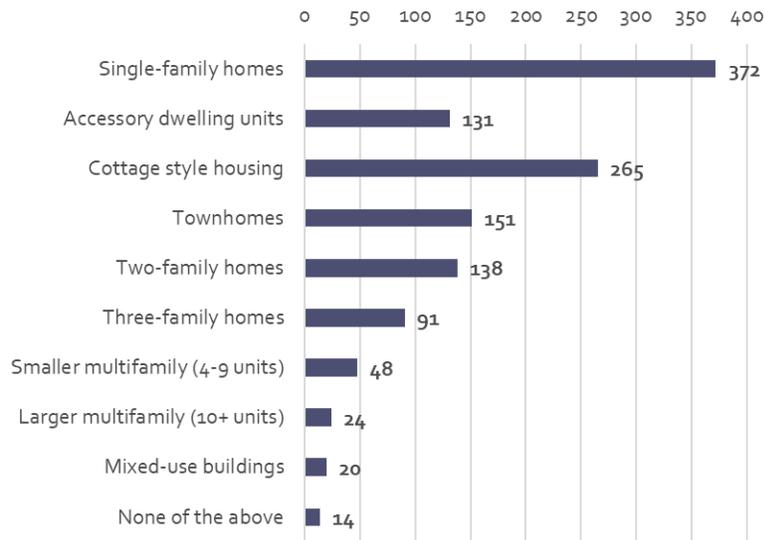
Respondents think a variety of housing types would make sense in the General Residential V District. The most mentions were for single-, two-, and three-family homes as well as for townhomes and cottage-style housing. As this is a residential district, there were less responses related to commercial uses. Of those who voted for commercial uses, artisanal and craft maker spaces, restaurants/bars, and grocery stores were mentioned most.

Which of the following housing types/commercial land uses make the most sense for the General Residential V District?



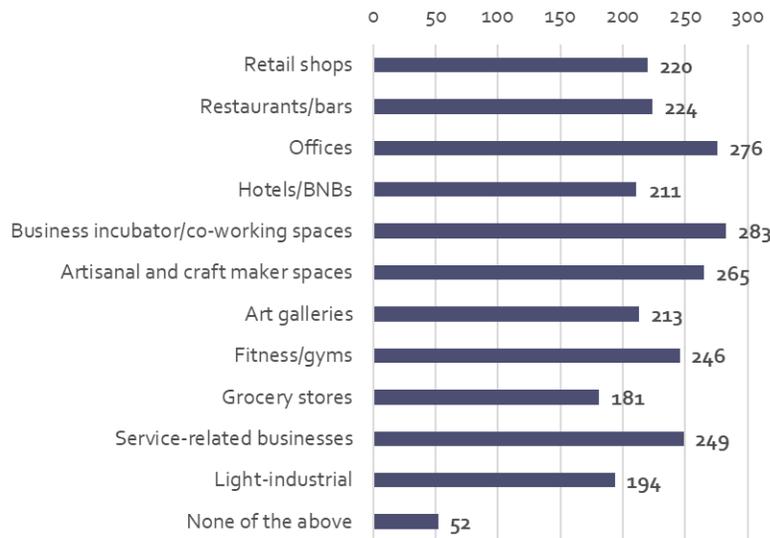
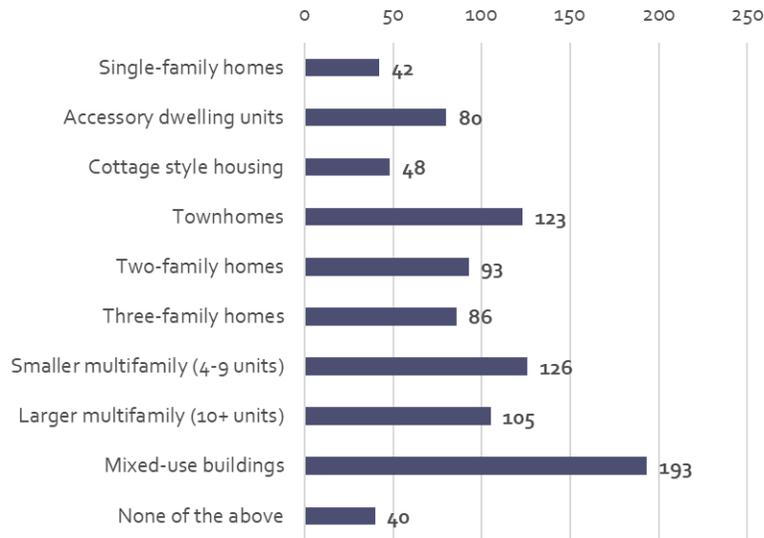
For the Single-Family Residential IV District, respondents think that single-family homes are the most appropriate, followed by cottage style housing. Even less people identified commercial uses compared to the General Residential V District. The most common responses were for artisanal and craft maker spaces, grocery stores, and art galleries.

Which of the following housing types/commercial land uses make the most sense for the Single-Family Residential IV District?



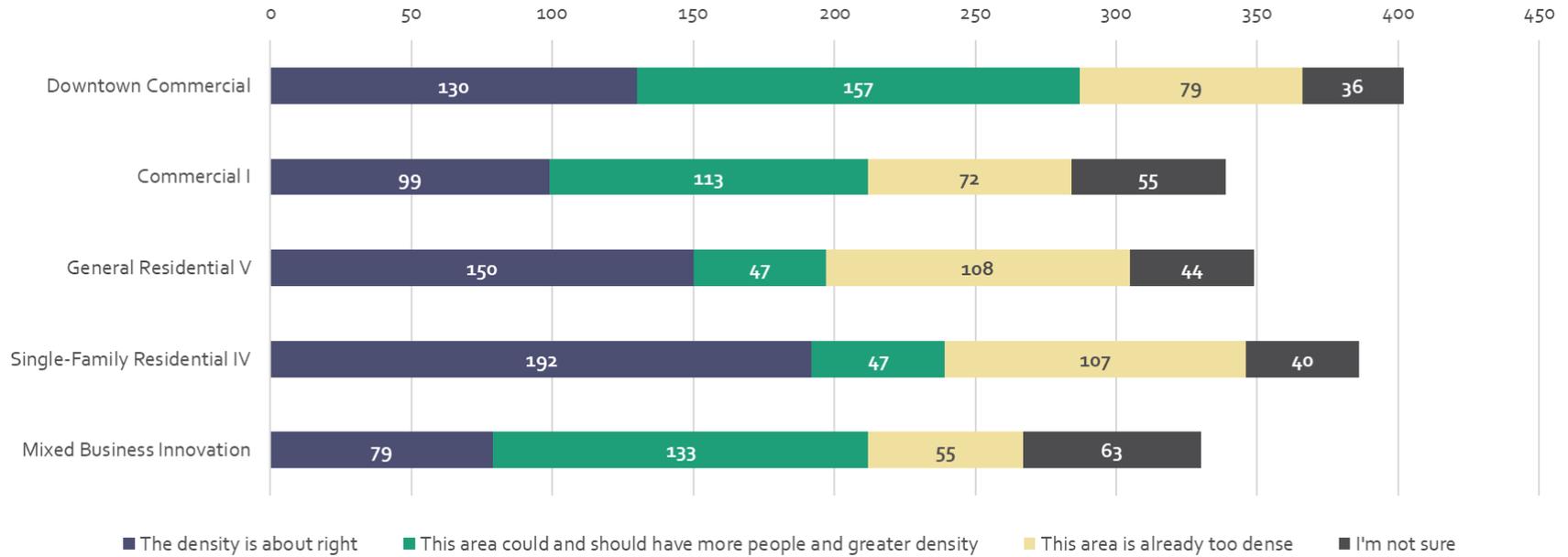
Within the Mixed Business Innovation District, the most common housing type response was for mixed-use buildings that have a commercial component. This was followed by smaller multifamily buildings and townhomes. Participants think a variety of commercial uses would be appropriate for the district, with business incubator/co-working spaces, offices, artisanal and craft maker spaces, service-related businesses, and fitness/gyms receiving the most votes.

Which of the following housing types/commercial land uses make the most sense for the Mixed Business Innovation District?



Participants were then asked about their thoughts regarding density in the five zoning districts. The most common response for the Downtown Commercial, Commercial I, and Mixed Business Innovation Districts is that the districts could and should have more people and greater density. A majority of respondents think that the density is about right in the General Residential V and Single-Family Residential IV Districts. There is no district that a majority of respondents feel is already too dense.

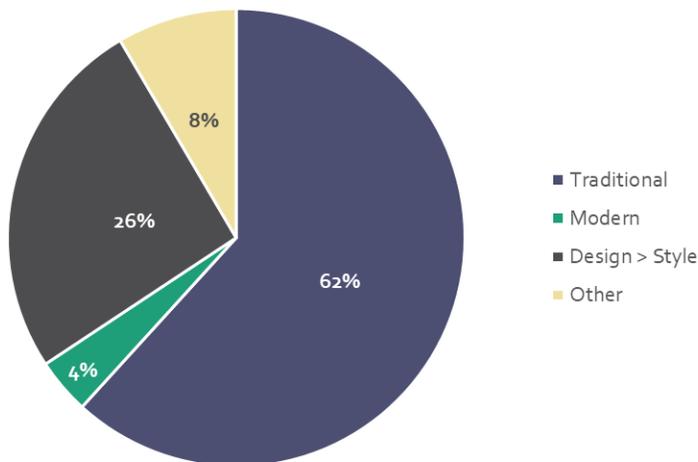
For each zoning district in the study area, what are your thoughts about density?



Almost two-thirds of respondents feel that new buildings in Franklin Center should have a traditional style to match the existing historic fabric. Just over a quarter are less concerned with the style as long as the building is designed well. Few would like to see modern buildings with a modern look.

Most of the comments for the people who answered “other” to this question were more related to promoting an appropriate form/massing vs. specific architectural design standards. Many feel that Franklin has a bit of a mixed architectural style and would like to see modern and traditional aesthetics blended. Suggestions included using a mix of setbacks, traditional buildings at the ground level with more modern residential styles above, and new designs that are respectful of the area’s historic character and small-town feel. There were also comments around the need for sustainability/ energy-efficiency to be incorporated into building design.

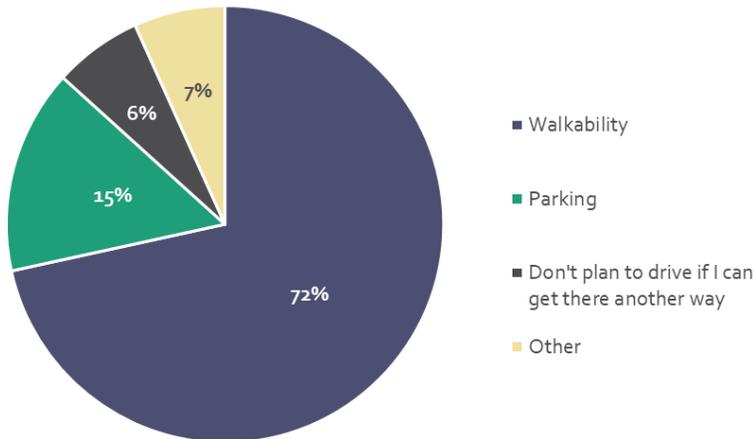
What should new buildings in Franklin Center look like?



Participants were asked about their priorities when balancing parking and pedestrian experience. Almost three-quarters of respondents indicated that they care most about walkability and what it feels like when they visit Franklin Center. They are okay with a short walk from where they park (less than three minutes). About 15% care most about parking convenience and would want to park as close as possible to their destination, even if it is a less pleasant pedestrian experience.

Respondents who answered “other” to this question spoke about their desire to travel freely within the area but feel that there need to be more pedestrian and bike safety improvements. There were many comments about the need for a parking garage in the downtown to support local businesses and allow more people to take the MBTA Commuter Rail. In addition, respondents commented around the need for ADA accessibility for curbs, parking, and at the MBTA station.

What are your priorities when balancing parking and pedestrian experience in Franklin Center?



When asked about Franklin Center’s strengths, respondents noted that the downtown is a good size and is not too big or too small. The train station is a great amenity and there is good walkability. There are fun cultural events and festivals that bring people to the downtown. Places that respondents like to visit include the library, The Black Box, the Irish pub, and Dean College. Residents appreciate the New England small-town feel and historic character. Some like things “the way they are” and do not want Franklin to turn into a “a large MetroWest community” or Boston.

Challenges within Franklin Center include a lack of shops, casual eateries, and nightlife. Many feel that there is a lack of parking. Some describe the downtown area as run-down and in need of “sprucing up.” Another challenge is that commercial rents are too high to allow small businesses to move in. There is also no available affordable housing as market-rate rents are very high.

Respondents noted a number of opportunities that could enhance Franklin Center. The Town should work to establish greater connectivity with Dean College and access to their amenities. Other opportunities including making use of vacant spaces downtown, diversifying business and entertainment options, and providing greater placemaking options for teens and families. There were also suggestion around integrating more sustainable features, such as green infrastructure, bike racks, electric vehicle charging stations, and more.

The survey asked respondents to name other communities with great downtowns that they like to visit. The most common responses were for eastern Massachusetts towns with historic downtowns that have a mix of commercial and residential uses. Top responses included:

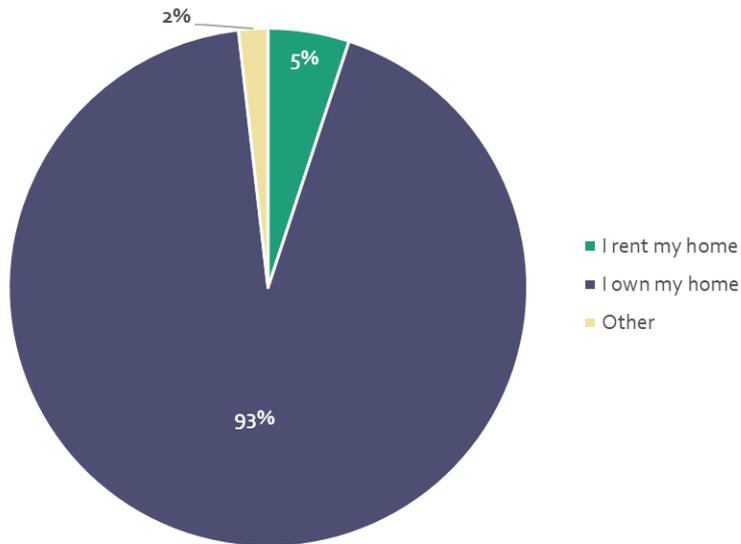
- Hudson, MA (45)
- Wellesley, MA (44)
- Falmouth, MA (28)
- Natick, MA (28)
- Norwood, MA (26)
- Needham, MA (26)

- Concord, MA (25)
- Newburyport, MA (17)
- Medfield, MA (16)
- Salem, MA (16)
- Chatham, MA (15)
- Lexington, MA (12)
- Portsmouth, NH (12)
- Rockport, MA (12)
- Stockbridge, MA (12)
- Holliston, MA (12)
- Hyannis, MA (12)
- Dedham, MA (12)

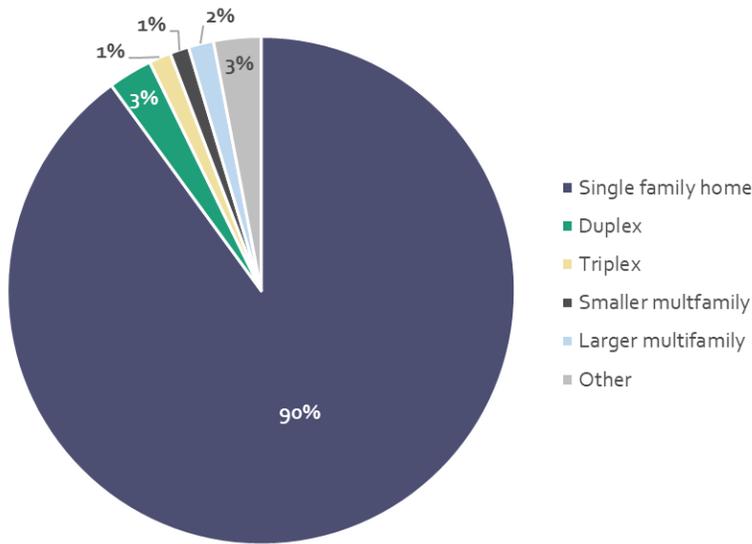
The last section of the survey asked respondents about their demographic information (all questions were optional). This was so the project team could compare the breakdown of survey respondents to Franklin’s population as a whole.

The vast majority of respondents own their homes and live in single-family houses, more so than in Franklin as a whole. While about 81% of Franklin households own their homes, that number rises to 93% for survey respondents. Approximately 75% of housing units in Franklin are one-unit (either detached or attached), though 90% of survey respondents live in a single-family home.

How would you describe your living situation?

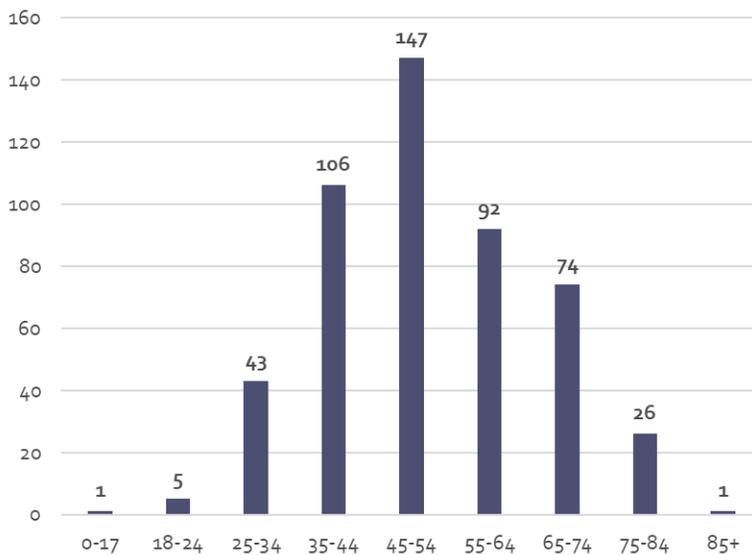


What kind of housing do you live in?



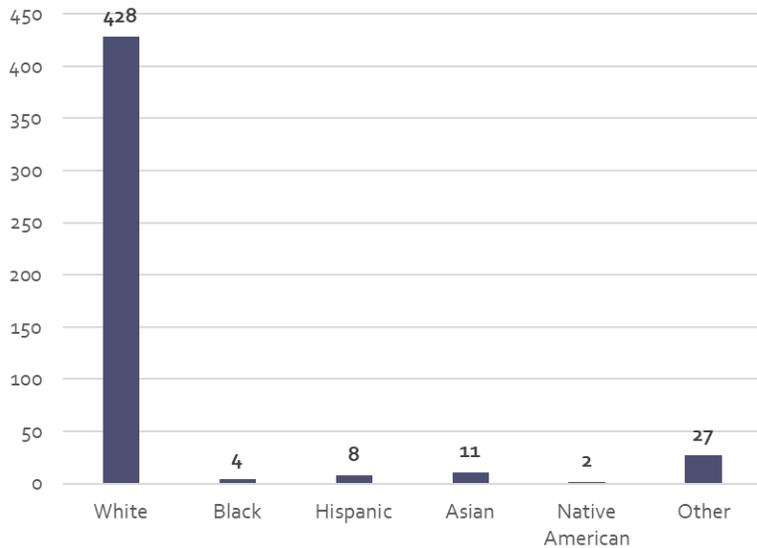
The ages of survey respondents generally skew older than Franklin’s population as a whole. For example, one-third of Franklin residents are under the age of 25, compared with only 1% of survey takers. Just over a quarter of residents are above the age of 55, compared with almost 40% of survey respondents.

How old are you?



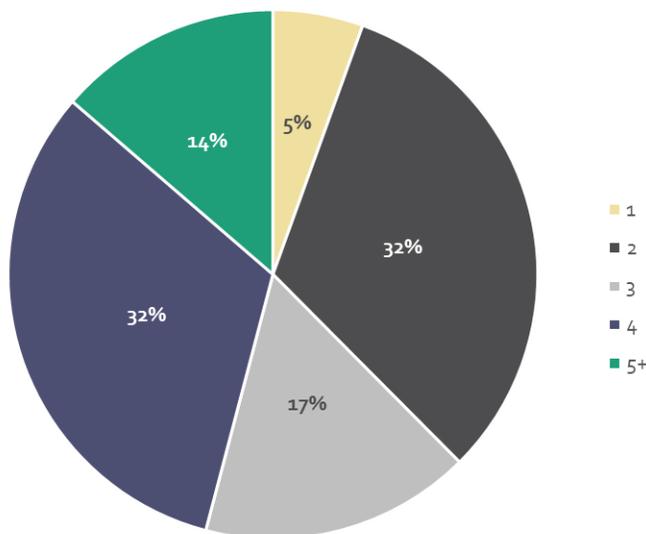
Survey respondents are slightly less racially diverse when compared to the larger population. About 89% of respondents identify as White, compared with 83% of Franklin residents.

Which categories best describe your racial/ethnic identity?



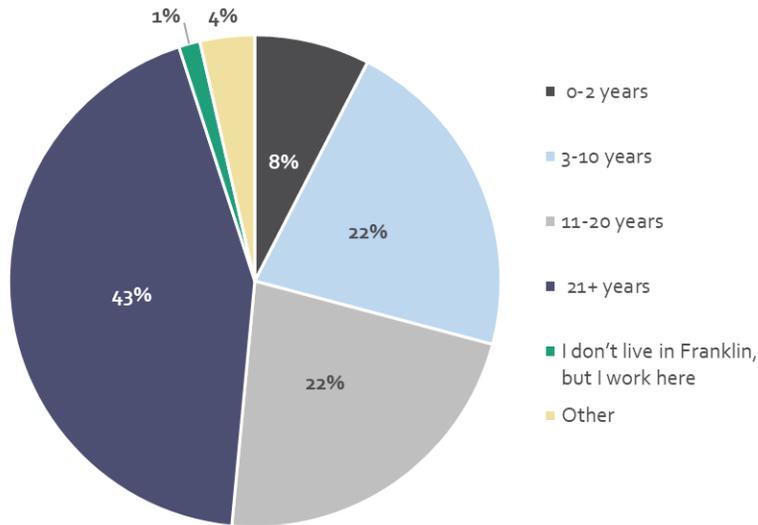
Household sizes amongst survey respondents are larger than in Franklin generally. Only 5% of respondents live in a one-person household, compared to 22% of residents. Almost half of those who took the survey live in a household with more than four people, compared to a quarter of Franklin's household.

How many people live in your household?



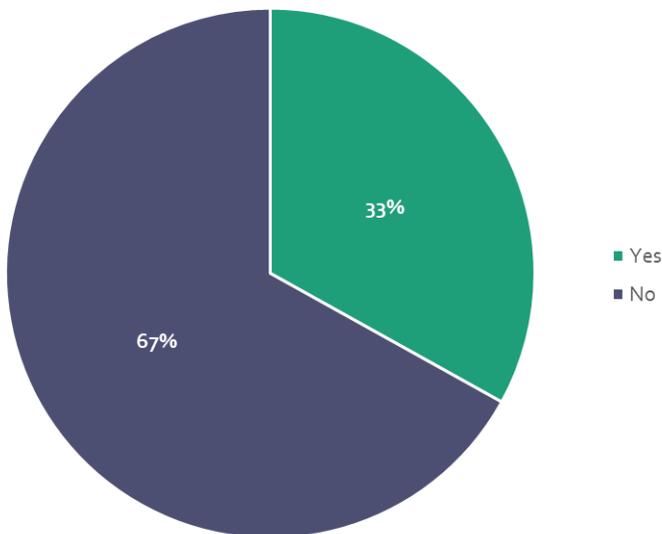
About 43% of survey respondents have lived in Franklin more than 21 years, followed by 22% who have lived in Franklin 3-10 years and another 22% who have lived there for 11-20 years. While Census categories do not match up the same as those in this question, 30% of households moved to Franklin two or more decades ago.

How long have you lived in Franklin?



Lastly, respondents were asked if they live in the Franklin Center study area. One-third of respondents live in the study area compared to two-thirds who do not.

Do you live in the Franklin Center study area?



Town Staff Engagement

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 with Department of Public Works staff, the Building Commissioner, and the Town Assessor to ask more specific department-related questions.

Department of Public Works

MAPC inquired with DPW staff about the capacity of local infrastructure systems. They have no concerns about capacity issues and 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. The main water pumping station will need upgrades in roughly 10 years as a result of regular maintenance. If demand gets high, it may speed up that timetable, but those upgrades will happen regardless of new development or not.

According to DPW, Franklin's wastewater systems could handle another 20% of their total capacity before it becomes a concern. The engineers note 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. As such, 20% more units or people could be comfortably added to Franklin Center and there still wouldn't be any concerns around capacity. The water supply system could also handle another 20% of its current capacity easily. Lots of work has been done to improve capacity that had been lost to infiltration as a part of Town maintenance.

Franklin belongs to the Charles River Pollution Control District and takes up 69% of that collection system's capacity. As part of the agreement to be in the 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.

In terms of traffic, the entire 140 corridor has issues with capacity. There is no ability to widen the roads without demolishing buildings, so the system cannot be changed much. In rush hour and when school lets out, it can take up to 15 minutes to get from one side of town to another. This is not terribly long, but many residents primarily travel on rural roads that move fast so it is a challenge for them. One of the worst intersections to navigate during these times is at King and Chestnut Streets. A concern of residents is that many people bypass the main roads and use side streets.

Additional capital improvements are planned for the study area. More sewer main lining will occur over the next few years and a new water main/line is planned for Hillside Road. There are a few streets where infrastructure may need to be replaced, such as main replacements on Arlington and North Park Streets (which will be followed by roadwork). They are also working

on a Complete Streets project. Roadwork has already been completed largely at this point for the downtown there are no concerns around utilities.

Historically, property owners have handled snow removal in the downtown and DPW will take care of it once a certain depth of snow has fallen. COVID has unfortunately impacted this. After 18 inches had fallen, it took three to four days for the parking spaces and sidewalks to get cleared out. Highway 140 and routes for kids walking to school are prioritized for snow removal. A good partnership could consist of businesses owners or a Community Improvement District pushing the snow into the street where DPW can come collect it.

There are not any particular issues related to stormwater in the study area, but any new development will have to comply with regulations. Local bylaws encourage green infrastructure such as rain gardens. A project cannot increase flows to the system and must maintain existing flows offsite. Franklin has a stormwater utility that was established a few years ago but with no fee. The Town is in process of establishing a rate to fund the utility.

The main concern related to increased density in the downtown involves where people would park. This varies depending on if a project has a mix of uses and is a draw for outsiders. There may be the possibility of turning a parking lot into a parking garage, such as on the upper lot next to the Commuter Rail station that the Town owns.

Building Commissioner

The Building Commissioner spoke about the benefit of zoning that enhances the ability of property owners to make their property better. There are a lot of nonconforming properties in the study area and it would be beneficial to bring them into zoning compliance. There may be opportunities to focus on areas outside of downtown because there is room to grow and a lot of larger lots.

There are a number of bad actor landlords who own buildings with no smoke alarms, gas leaks, carbon monoxide leaks, etc. Many homes are more than 100 years old and landlords are not doing what they need to do in order to make the properties safe and bring them up to code. This is often an issue with multifamily buildings and tenants complain to Town departments. Landlords need encouragement to not be neglectful. When there are minor concerns, an "unsafe structure" sign goes up on the building.

According to the Building Commissioner, the building permitting process works well and permits are issued quickly. There are concerns amongst property owners over building costs, such as adding sprinkler systems. These owners could benefit from additional incentives to improve the look and safety of their properties, and the downtown as a whole. Seasoned developers tend to operate better as they understand the bottom line.

Town Assessor

According to the Assessor, older, higher-end homes are increasing in value more rapidly than new homes. A positive is that homes once marginal in condition are now desirable for a starter home and being fixed up. Since the COVID pandemic, there have been increases in property values all across the board, with values rising residentially rising faster than commercial values. Since commercial leases are longer (5 to 10 years), it takes longer for values to rise.

The Town of Franklin has a uniform tax rate that is fairly stable in value and rate; regionally they are very competitive. There has been discussion about implementing split rates in the past. Approximately 80% of Franklin's tax base is residential, with 20% commercial and industrial. The Assessor has started to see some growth in value for industrial, though he would want to see more of the commercial tax base growing. It is important that it is "quality" commercial with uses that are desirable for an area like Franklin Center that prevent economic leakage. There would be a moderate increase in tax revenue if residential density were to change as a result of new zoning.

Franklin offers a property tax exemption program for seniors in the community. According to the Assessor, veterans are the largest users of the program. Only about 40 households qualify for the highest exemption (\$1,000 a year), with about 80 households qualifying for a lower amount. There are income restrictions to get the full amount and many have incomes that do not qualify them.

There have been about four Tax-Increment Financing (TIF) Districts in Franklin, and two are still active. A District Improvement Financing (DIF) District could potentially work for Franklin Center. In the Assessor's opinion, the best answer is less restrictive zoning. It would help to work around some of the more common zoning issues to avoid the need to go before the Zoning Board of Appeals. Story height should be assessed to avoid shadow lines on people's property. The Town has open space visions for the area and eliminating greenspace would be a big deal. Walkability and bicycle connectivity should be incorporated into plans.

Draft Study Area Vision

Based on the considerable amount of public feedback generated, MAPC has drafted the following vision for the Franklin Center study area. This community vision will set the direction for future zoning recommendations.

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. From mixed-use buildings in the Downtown Commercial and Commercial I Districts to single-family and cottage-style homes in the Single-Family Residential IV District, there are a range of housing types in Franklin Center to serve households at a range of incomes, including low-income households.

Franklin For All

Summary Memo #3

Development Build-Out & Infrastructure Analysis

June 28, 2022



Background & Context

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.

With a focus on improving vehicular circulation and safety, increasing emergency response time, improving roadways, fostering a pedestrian environment, and improving overall appearance, significant time and resources have been devoted to enhancing Franklin Center in order to stimulate private sector investment. The next phase of the process to bring investment to Franklin Center—this current work to update zoning regulations and remove restrictions which may be holding back high-quality projects in Franklin Center—also coincides with a new state requirement for multifamily zoning around MBTA stations.

Multi-Family Zoning Requirement for MBTA Communities (“Section 3A”)

The 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. Housing must also be suitable for families with children and have no age restrictions.

The term “as of right” refers to development which can proceed without the need for a special permit, variance, or other discretionary approval. An as of right project can still be subject to site plan review to confirm that it conforms with local zoning regulations and meets other local objectives. Site plan review may regulate pedestrian and vehicular safety, open space and landscape features, architectural design, and other matters. It cannot be used to deny a project that is allowed as of right. In addition, conditions cannot be imposed upon an approved project that would make it infeasible to proceed with.

Draft guidelines promulgated by the Department of Housing & Community Development (DHCD) require the multifamily district to have a unit capacity—the number of housing units that can be developed as of right in the district—equal to or greater than a specified percentage of total housing units within the community. The percentage differs based on the type of transit service in the community. For municipalities like Franklin with commuter rail service, this percentage is 15%. With 12,551 housing units as of the 2020 Census, Franklin is required to have a minimum multifamily district unit capacity of **1,883 units**.

It is important to note that the Multi-Family Zoning Requirement for MBTA Communities is neither a mandate to construct a certain number of housing units, nor a production target. Rather, the law requires only that each MBTA commuter has a multifamily district of a reasonable size. There is no expectation that a district will be built-out to meet the unit capacity figure of 1,883 housing 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). To comply with Section 3A, the Town of Franklin must adopt a zoning amendment for the multifamily district no later than December 31, 2024. By December 21, 2022, the Town of Franklin must either submit a request for determination of compliance with Section 3A or notify DHCD that there is no existing district that fully complies with guidelines. Franklin would submit a request for determination if it has adopted the zoning amendment before December 31, 2022. Otherwise, the Town will need to submit an action plan with a timeline for activities it intends to undertake in order to adopt a compliant multifamily district by July 1, 2023.

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. These are all crucial sources of grant funding that the municipality relies on to pay for infrastructure upgrades without increasing local property tax rates. For example, the Town of Franklin was awarded \$2.2 million from the MassWorks Infrastructure Program in 2021 to undertake intersection and roadway improvements along Grove Street. The Town also received \$201,000 in FY2021 from the Housing Choice Community Capital Grant to fund engineering services related to the evaluation and design of a new booster pumping station and water main extension, as well as the removal of an outdated water pumping station.

Build-Out Analysis

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 that includes properties within the Downtown Commercial (DC), Commercial I (CI), and General Residential V Districts. The following suggested dimensional, use, and parking regulations for the 40R District were used to create density assumptions for each base zoning district.

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		

Methodology

The following methodology was used to calculate total build-out units:

1. Assign each parcel its corresponding zoning district.
2. Exclude ineligible parcels. These include parcels smaller than 5000 sq ft, and publicly owned land (as defined by land use codes beginning with 9).
3. Eliminate any protected open space.

4. Assign density assumptions for the Commercial I, Downtown Commercial, and General Residential V Districts using the following formula:

a. $(\text{parcel area} * \text{efficiency factor}) / ((\text{gross floor area per unit} / \text{number of residential floors}) + (\text{parking spaces per unit} * 400 \text{ square feet per space}))$

b. To populate the formula, MAPC used the following assumptions by zone:

Zone	Number of Residential Floors	Parking Spaces per Unit	Square Footage per Space	Gross Floor Area by Unit	Parcel Area	Efficiency Factor
CI	2.5	1	400 SF	1,200 SF	43,650 SF	80%
DCD	2	1	400 SF	1,200 SF	43,650 SF	80%
GRV	3	1.5	400 SF	1,200 SF	43,650 SF	50%

5. Multiply density by buildable area to produce unit capacity.

Results

The build-out methodology and assumptions yielded the following results:

Total = 3,352 housing units
 Commercial I = 1,099 housing units
 Downtown Commercial = 862 housing units
 General Residential V = 1,391 housing units

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. Given that the housing unit build-out and study area acreage larger than the Section 3A requirements, the Town of Franklin has flexibility to further refine the boundaries of a potential Chapter 40R Smart Growth Overlay and create a somewhat smaller district.

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.

Zone	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.

Generally speaking, parcels with the highest unit capacity are the most likely to be redeveloped. With the high cost of land and construction (labor and materials), a certain level of density is usually needed for a project to be feasible. This stands true in Franklin Center, as most of the parcels with the highest unit capacity are the ones that have been redeveloped in recent years. These include the properties listed below.

Commercial I District:

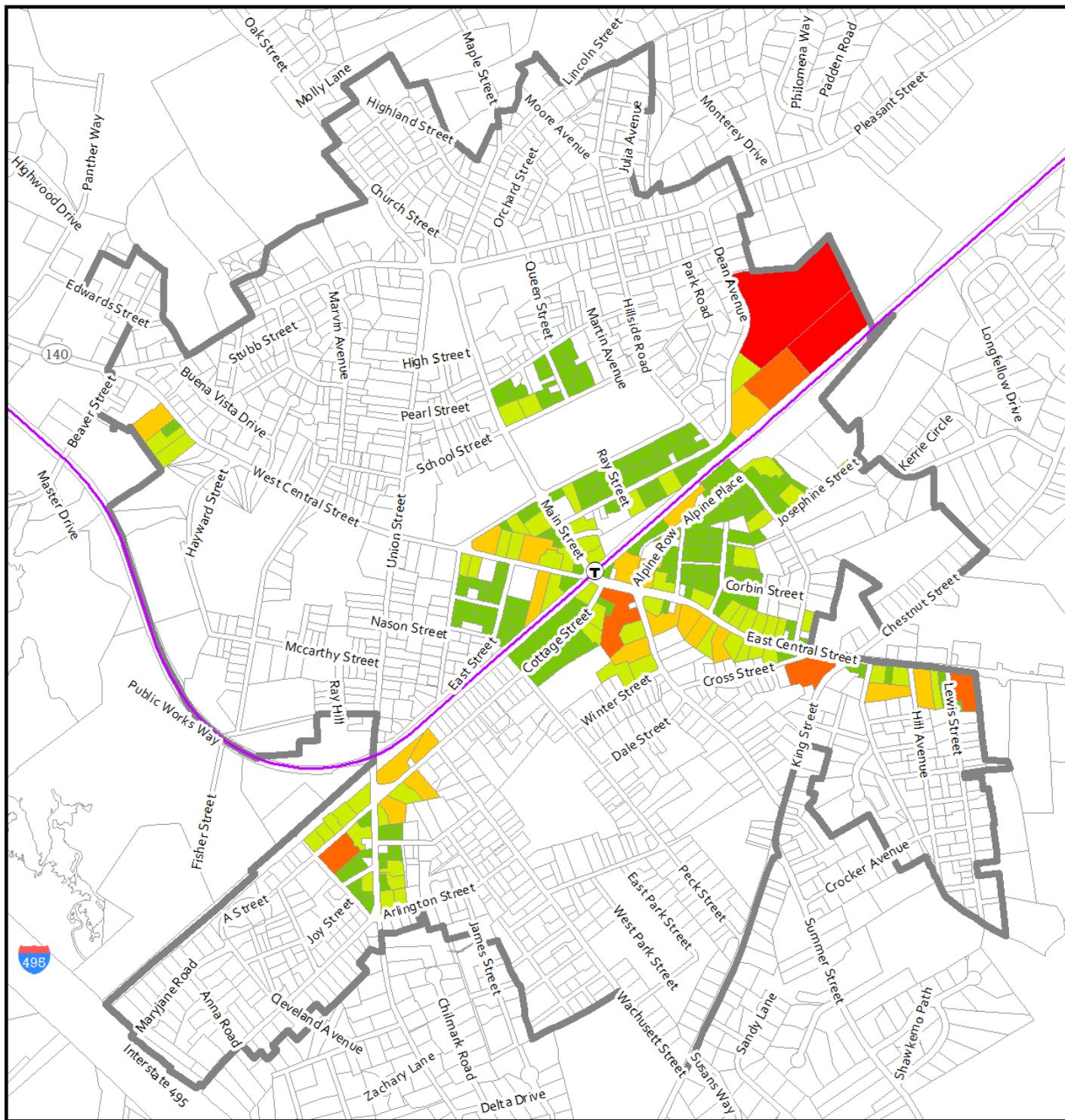
- Walgreens at 160 East Central Street (built in 2010)
- Shell gas station at 140 East Central Street (built in 2000)
- Three-family home at 89 East Central Street (built in 2001)
- Office building for oil company at 241 Cottage Street (built in 2000)

Downtown Commercial District:

- Mixed-use building with 12 housing units at 70 East Central Street (built in 2018)
- Shopping center and residential buildings with 29 housing units at 38 East Central street (built in 2008)
- Mixed-use building with 20 housing units at 33 East Central Street (built in 2007)
- Shopping center at 150 Emmons Street (built in 2016)
- Franklin Fire Headquarters at 40 West Central Street (built in 2008)

General Residential V District:

- Multifamily building with 257 housing units at 119 Dean Avenue (under construction)
- Single-family home at 106 Alpine Place (built in 2004)
- Single-family home at 46 East Street (built in 2010)



Housing Unit Capacity by Parcel

- 0
- 1 - 10
- 11 - 25
- 26 - 50
- 51 - 100
- 101 - 266

■ Franklin Center Study Area



0 0.125 0.25 0.5 Miles

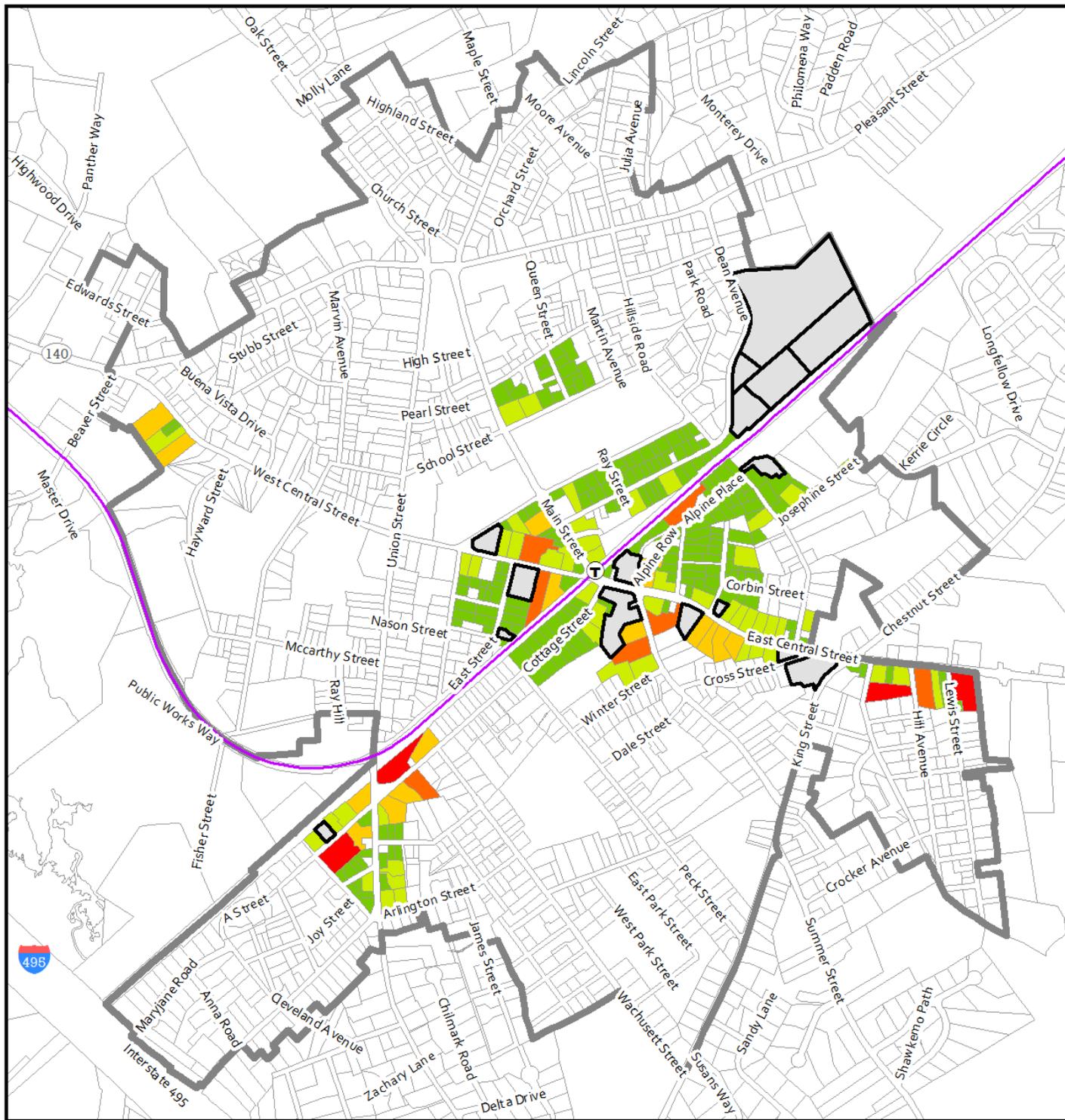


The information depicted on this map is for planning purposes only. It is not adequate for legal boundary definition, regulatory interpretation, or parcel-level analyses.

Produced by: Metropolitan Area Planning Council

Data Sources: MAPC, MassGIS, MassDOT

June 2022



Housing Unit Capacity by Parcel

- 0
- 1 - 10
- 11 - 20
- 21 - 30
- 31 - 40
- 41 - 53

- Parcels Developed Since 2000
- Franklin Center Study Area



0 0.125 0.25 0.5 Miles



The information depicted on this map is for planning purposes only. It is not adequate for legal boundary definition, regulatory interpretation, or parcel-level analyses.

Produced by: Metropolitan Area Planning Council

Data Sources: MAPC, MassGIS, MassDOT

June 2022

Infrastructure Capacity & Needs Analysis

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. After assessing water, sewer, stormwater, transit, roadway, and pedestrian infrastructure, MAPC has identified potential solutions that the Town could implement in order to unlock development and mitigate undesirable impacts.

Water, Sewer, & Stormwater Systems

Franklin's 2013 Master Plan states that the community services offered by the city should increase the water and sewer supply as needed to accommodate new industrial development, as well as strengthening the Town's "economic and social infrastructure." As such, the Town uses a portion of Chapter 90 funds for water and sewer line replacement as roads and sidewalks are reconstructed. Industrial development is suggested to be a higher concern than additional residential or commercial development for sewer system expansion and matters related to the system capacity.

MAPC inquired with Department of Public Works (DPW) staff about the capacity of local water and sewer systems. They have no concerns about capacity issues and 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. The main water pumping station will need upgrades in roughly ten years as a result of regular maintenance. If demand gets high, it may speed up that timetable, but those upgrades will happen regardless of new development or not.

According to DPW, Franklin's wastewater systems could handle another 20% of their total capacity before it becomes a concern. The engineers note 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. As such, 20% more units or people could be comfortably added to Franklin Center and there still wouldn't be any concerns around capacity. The water supply system could also handle another 20% of its current capacity easily. Lots of work has been done to improve capacity that had been lost to infiltration as a part of Town maintenance.

If we translate 2,510 net units under the total build-out 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, MAPC does not believe that the increase in population as a result of Franklin For All's proposed zoning and overlay changes will result in capacity concerns for the Town's water and sewer supplies.

Approximately 75% of the town is part of the public sewer system. There are still undeveloped parcels that are eligible for extensions or tie-ins to the existing system, should they be

developed. There are close to 140 miles of sewer pipe, 3,400 manholes, and 23 pump stations. The sewer system is in good condition, with a few areas of maintenance identified to keep the system operating as intended.

Franklin belongs to the Charles River Pollution Control District (CRPCD) and takes up 69% of that collection system's capacity. CRPCD operates the treatment facility that supports the Town's sewer system as well as seven other nearby communities. As part of the agreement to be in the 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.

The Town is working to address weak points in the water supply delivery system where water travels from the 12 groundwater supply wells to the 90% of Franklin that is serviced by the public water supply. There is nothing to suggest that there is a need to rapidly expand or repair the system in order to accommodate growth.

Franklin requires all new development to maintain at least the same rates of groundwater infiltration as existed prior to the land being developed. All redevelopment projects must meet stormwater standards to the maximum extent. When that is not possible, retrofitting or expanding existing management systems must be done to improve existing conditions.

The Town has created a stormwater management guidebook, which has been codified as official policy. There are three stormwater management performance standards that are applied to all new development projects:

1. Post-development peak discharge rates from the site shall not exceed pre-development peak discharge rates from the site.
2. Annual groundwater recharge from the post-development site shall approximate annual recharge from the pre-development site.
3. The stormwater management system shall remove at least 80% of the average annual load of total suspended solids (TSS) from the post-development stormwater created on developed site.

Transportation Overview

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.

Based upon a projection of 2,510 net units across the Commercial I, Downtown Commercial, and General Residential V Districts, MAPC Transportation staff calculated trip generation figures across three different modes: vehicle trips, transit trips, and walking/bicycle trips. The table below shows total weekday daily trips under two potential mode share scenarios. Other scenarios can be calculated by adjusting the mode share percentages. If 75% of all trips are by vehicle, there would be a vehicular trip generation figure of 14,201 additional trips per weekday. If the number of vehicular trips were to drop to 50%, there would be a vehicular trip generation figure of 9,467 trips per weekday.

	Vehicle Trips	Transit Trips	Walking/Bicycle Trips	Total Trips
Mode share	75%	15%	10%	
Number of trips	14,201	2,840	1,893	18,934
Mode share	50%	30%	20%	
Number of trips	9,467	5,680	3,787	18,934

These figures were calculated by applying a formula devised by the Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE) for Land Use Code 220, which is defined by ITE as “Low-rise multifamily housing [including] apartments, townhouses, and condominiums located within the same building with at least three other dwelling units and that have one or two levels (floors).”

While ITE tends to overestimate vehicular trips, their model nonetheless can help the Town of Franklin begin to estimate the transportation impacts of new development, as well as associated mode share scenarios. All ITE figures should be considered high level. Any new developments proposed in Franklin will need more detailed and nuanced analyses of trip generation impacts, as well as potential Transportation Demand Management (TDM) measures to mitigate and reduce vehicle trips.

MAPC Transportation staff also conducted a site visit to Franklin Center and adjoining areas on Tuesday, June 14, 2022. The local intersections surveyed and the corresponding zoning districts are as follows:

- Beaver Street and Union Street
- Main Street and Pleasant Street
- Union Street and West Central Street
- Emmons Street and West Central Street
- Main Street, Cottage Street, and East Central Street

- Main Street and Dean Avenue
- Main Street and Emmons Street
- Kings Street and East Central Street
- Union Street and Cottage Street
- Union Street and Washington Street



The memo sections that follow describe transportation observations and recommendations for infrastructure improvements at these specific locations, as well as more general transportation observations and recommendations that will enable the Town of Franklin to help meet the above projections for future growth.

Walkability and Pedestrian Infrastructure

Downtown Walkability

The heart of downtown Franklin has a pleasant and pedestrian-friendly streetscape with a variety of small businesses near the MBTA commuter rail station. The Town of Franklin should explore opportunities for creative placemaking at and around the station. The Town should also consider developing a system of downtown map kiosks and/or pedestrian wayfinding signs that show walking routes and times to key destinations. Such measures can encourage more pedestrian circulation and better connect commuter rail riders to the downtown.

MAPC online survey results for the Franklin Center rezoning indicate that walkability in the downtown is a top priority for respondents. The intersections of Main Street/Cottage Street/East Central Street, Main Street/Dean Avenue, and Main Street/Emmons Street in particular are characterized by well-marked and well-maintained crosswalks with a stamped brick pattern and accessible ramps, well-timed pedestrian signals that provide “WALK” countdowns and audible signals for the visually impaired, wide and accessible sidewalks in good condition, curb extensions that enhance pedestrian visibility and calm traffic, and attractive amenities including benches, bike parking, public art installations, vegetation for beautification, and trash receptacles. These infrastructure elements were installed as part of a recent Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) project in the downtown.

The pedestrian island in the middle of the Main Street/Cottage Street/East Central Street intersection is an unremarkable concrete expanse with a few large planters, but this area could be enhanced through creative placemaking interventions. The island is separated from the downtown pedestrian realm by a right-turning slip lane from Main Street onto West Central Street. A change in paving material on the roadway indicates that this slip lane used to be wider, so narrowing the slip lane certainly represents an improvement. Closing the slip lane entirely would present additional opportunities for improving and extending the pedestrian realm in downtown Franklin. The Massachusetts Department of Transportation’s (MassDOT) Shared Streets and Spaces grant program can help the Town of Franklin explore this option.

At the nearby intersection of Emmons Street/West Central Street, sternly worded signs exhort the following “You must press the button and wait for the WALK signal. It’s the law!” While this intersection was also upgraded as part of the downtown TIP project and thus shares some positive attributes with the other downtown intersections (including well-marked and accessible crosswalks and pedestrian signals that provide WALK countdowns and audible signals), a brief survey quickly reveals why users might not be inclined to wait for the WALK signal: pedestrians face long waits for a WALK signal (upwards of 60 seconds) after pressing

the button, and when the WALK signal does come, it only provides 17 seconds of crossing time with traffic stopped in all directions in an exclusive WALK signal phase. This is barely enough time for pedestrians to cross one leg of the intersection, let alone both legs, so if pedestrians are to fully comply with the WALK signal cycle, it can take them more than three minutes to cross the intersection in full.



The Emmons Street/West Central Street intersection is further characterized by a wide turning radius that enables drivers to turn right from Emmons Street onto West Central Street at high speeds without slowing down. This safety hazard to pedestrians is compounded by the fact that the crosswalk is set back from the intersection, which prevents drivers from seeing pedestrians in the crosswalk. A diamond-shaped pedestrian sign with blinking lights at this location is intended to address this challenge. Similar to the intersection of Main Street/Cottage Street/East Central Street, a concrete pedestrian island is separated from the attractive and adjoining Horace Mann Square by a right-turning slip lane from West Central Street onto Emmons Street. A change in roadway paving material again indicates a narrowing of the slip lane.

Recommendations to improve pedestrian safety at Emmons Street/West Central Street include the following:

- Update pedestrian signals to provide a WALK signal cycle that is automatic (pedestrians do not have to push a button to get a WALK signal), as well as adequate pedestrian crossing time and short wait times between WALK cycles.
- Increase the volume of the audible pedestrian signal.
- Install in-street pedestrian delineators to improve crosswalk visibility.
- Install a curb extension at the northwest corner of the intersection to create a more perpendicular intersection geometry and calm traffic. (Curb extensions can be installed in the near term at low cost using paint, plastic flex posts, and/or planters.)

- Explore opportunities (such as MassDOT’s Shared Streets and Spaces program) to close the slip lane and extend the pedestrian realm.

Walkability Outside Downtown

Outside downtown Franklin, several intersections present similar challenges for pedestrians as the Emmons Street/West Central Street intersection does. In some instances, these challenges are further magnified by additional infrastructure deficiencies. At the intersections of Beaver Street/Union Street, Main Street/Pleasant Street, Union Street/West Central Street, and Kings Street/East Central Street, pedestrians also face long waits for the WALK signals after pressing the buttons (up to 60-90 seconds), and when the WALK signals do come, they only provide 20-22 seconds of crossing time with traffic stopped in all directions in exclusive WALK signal phases. Once again, this is barely enough time for pedestrians to cross one leg of the intersection, let alone both legs, so if pedestrians are to fully comply with the WALK signal cycles at these intersections, it can take them more than three minutes to cross the intersections in full.

Like the intersections in downtown Franklin, the intersections of Beaver Street/Union Street and Main Street/Pleasant Street feature a stamped brick crosswalk design, as well as modern pedestrian signals that provide WALK countdowns. The intersections of Beaver Street/Union Street, Main Street/Pleasant Street, and Union Street/West Central Street are characterized by wide turning radii that enable drivers to turn at high speeds without slowing down. The intersection of Main Street/Pleasant Street also includes a right-turning slip lane from Church Street onto Main Street, which further enables fast-moving vehicular traffic at the expense of pedestrians who seek to access the attractive Franklin Town Common. The intersection of King Street/East Central Street includes right-turning slip lanes on both sides of the intersection, creating an even more unsafe and unattractive pedestrian realm at that location.

The intersections of Union St/West Central St and King St/East Central St are further characterized by additional crosswalk and pedestrian signal deficiencies. While some of the crosswalks at these locations utilize a visible “ladder” or “zebra” perpendicular striping design, the other crosswalks utilize a less visible design with just two parallel lines. The pedestrian signals at these locations are outdated and do not provide WALK countdowns.



Recommendations to improve pedestrian safety in Franklin Center outside downtown include the following:

- Update pedestrian signals at Beaver Street/Union Street and Main Street/Pleasant Street to provide WALK signal cycles that are automatic (pedestrians do not have to push a button to get a WALK signal) and concurrent with traffic flow (pedestrians cross the street parallel to moving traffic), as well as adequate pedestrian crossing time, short wait times between WALK cycles, leading pedestrian intervals (pedestrians get a several second “head start” crossing before the traffic light turns green), and audible signals for the visually impaired.
- Upgrade pedestrian signal technology at Union Street/West Central Street and Kings Street/East Central Street to provide pedestrian countdowns and audible signals for the visually impaired. Ensure that upgraded WALK cycles are automatic and concurrent with traffic flow, while also providing adequate pedestrian crossing time, short wait times between WALK cycles, and leading pedestrian intervals.
- Install curb extensions at the intersections of Beaver Street/Union Street, Main Street/Pleasant Street, and Union Street/West Central Street to narrow curb radii and calm traffic. Curb extensions can be installed in the near term at low cost using paint, plastic flex posts, and/or planters.
- Install curb extensions at the intersection of King Street/East Central Street to create a more perpendicular intersection geometry, narrow curb radii, and calm traffic.
- Upgrade all crosswalks at Union Street/West Central Street and King Street/East Central Street to utilize a more visible “ladder” or “zebra” perpendicular striping design.
- Install in-street pedestrian delineators at all crosswalks.
- Explore opportunities (such as MassDOT’s Shared Streets and Spaces program) to close the slip lanes at Main Street/Pleasant Street and King Street/East Central Street and extend the pedestrian realm.

Complete Streets & Bicycle Infrastructure

Complete Streets are streets that accommodate all travel modes (walking, biking, transit, and driving), as well as all ages and abilities (including children, seniors, and people with disabilities). The Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) has developed a comprehensive Complete Streets program, under which municipalities that pass local Complete Streets policies become eligible for up to \$38,000 in planning funds and \$400,000 in infrastructure funds to advance related roadway projects. The Town of Franklin implemented a Complete Streets policy in April 2021 and developed a Complete Streets prioritization plan in November 2021.

Bicycle infrastructure in Franklin is currently limited; there are some painted on-street sharrows in the downtown to indicate the road is shared with bikes, but no dedicated bike lanes. Outside of downtown, some narrow roadway shoulders that can accommodate bikes exist, but they do not constitute proper bike infrastructure. The Town's Complete Streets prioritization plan does list several projects that will install bicycle facilities in Franklin, and the pedestrian safety improvements described in the previous section of this memo will also help the Town advance its Complete Streets goals. Several projects on the Town's prioritization plan focus on locations that MAPC Transportation staff surveyed as described above; these projects are listed and summarized below for reference.

- Emmons Street at Main Street: This intersection has STOP control at two of three approaches. Add a STOP sign on the Main Street northbound approach. Remove the existing crosswalk signage. Utilize existing pole for new STOP sign. Include three "ALL WAY STOP" plaques. Include street signage – there are currently no identifying street name signs. The project will improve safety for all users.
- Dean Avenue at Main Street: Add eight new detectable warning panels at each location where they are missing. Include detectable warning panels at the sidewalk segment adjacent to the post office mailbox driveway pullout. The project will improve safety for people with disabilities.
- Intersection of East Central Street, King Street, and Chestnut Street (at Levia Pieriega Square): Expand the pedestrian refuge islands at the northeast and southwest approaches of this intersection so that they nearly fill the space within the current striped area. This will slow turning traffic through this intersection and provide more protection for pedestrians. The project includes:
 - 12 new detectable warning panels
 - Two expanded concrete raised refuge islands (existing triangular islands are 13 feet by 19 feet on one side, and 9 feet by 19 feet on the other side)
 - Eight new countdown pedestrian signal heads
 - The removal of dead signal lenses on the King Street northbound approach and the Chestnut Street southbound approach

Parking Management

Current zoning regulations in Franklin call for 1.5 parking spaces per residential unit in DC and CI Districts and 2.0 parking spaces/residential unit in all other zoning districts. MAPC has proposed zoning recommendations that would reduce these figures to 1.0 space/unit and 1.5 spaces/unit, respectively. Based upon these proposed parking ratios, the table below provides an overview of the number of parking spaces that may be needed to meet the unit capacities in each zoning district.

Zone	Existing Units	Unit Capacity	Net Units	Existing Parking Spaces	Spaces to Meet Unit Capacity (Existing Zoning)	Spaces to Meet Unit Capacity (Proposed Zoning)	Potential New Spaces (Existing Zoning)	Potential New Spaces (Proposed Zoning)
CI	101	1,099	998	532	1,649	1,099	1,117	567
DC	140	862	722	1,220	1,293	862	73	-358
GRV	601	1,391	790	973	2,782	2,087	1,809	1,114
Total	842	3,352	2,510	2,725	5,724	4,048	2,999	1,323

Under the existing zoning, the Town of Franklin may need as many as 2,999 new parking spaces (a more than doubling of the current 2,725 parking spaces) to accommodate future growth. Under the proposed zoning on the other hand, the Town may only need as many as 1,323 new parking spaces – a 56 percent reduction compared to what is called for under current zoning. It is also worth noting that there is already excess parking capacity in the DC District today—a surplus of 358 spaces—that can more than accommodate a full future buildout under the proposed zoning. The projected figures in the above table should be considered high-level. Any new developments proposed in Franklin will need more detailed and nuanced analyses of parking options and impacts.

While our data suggest that additional parking will be needed in the CI and GRV Districts to accommodate future growth under the proposed zoning, it is also worth noting that mode share scenarios that place a higher emphasis on walking/biking/transit can reduce the amount of parking that is needed, and that off-street parking is often overbuilt at multifamily housing developments. MAPC’s Perfect Fit Parking research on the latter topic collected overnight residential parking data from nearly 200 apartment and condo buildings throughout Metro Boston.¹ The study found that three out of ten spaces sit empty during peak demand and that the key factors that drive parking demand are parking supply, transit accessibility, and the percentage of deed-restricted units. Providing more parking than is needed reduces transit ridership and the number of housing units provided, while also increasing overall housing and development costs, vehicle trips, traffic congestion, and greenhouse gas emissions. For all

¹ <https://perfectfitparking.mapc.org/>

these reasons, MAPC encourages the Town of Franklin and private developers to reduce the amount of new parking provided to the fullest extent possible, especially in transit-rich areas like the downtown.

While a detailed analysis of current parking utilization, occupancy, and turnover in Franklin Center is beyond the scope of this memo, MAPC Transportation staff observed high numbers of vacant on-street and off-street parking spaces in and around the downtown on a Tuesday afternoon between 12 pm and 2 pm. This is consistent with our finding that there is already surplus parking capacity in the DCD zoning district. Most on-street parking in and around the downtown is 2-hour restricted between 8 am and 2 pm and some on-street parking on outlying streets is 2-hour restricted between 6 am and 10 am. Parking in 2-hour restricted spaces on side streets was highly underutilized compared to parking in 2-hour restricted spaces on main streets. To encourage more parking turnover, the Town should consider extending the 2-hour limit in the downtown core to 4 pm, 6 pm, or 8 pm (depending on peak parking demand times) and/or installing parking meters.

Seventy-two percent of online survey respondents indicated that downtown walkability was a higher priority than downtown parking. Many survey respondents also indicated their willingness to park a short walk away from their final destinations. However, many visitors to downtown Franklin may not know that ample on-street and off-street public parking is available within a short walk of the downtown. The Town of Franklin currently has a downtown parking brochure that shows the location of several nearby public parking lots. This resource should be updated to also show on-street public parking locations (including on nearby side streets), as well as walking routes and distances between those locations and the downtown. These routes should include existing pedestrian walkways across off-street parking lots and between buildings that provide shortcuts between Main Street and West Central Street.

An expanded downtown Franklin walking and parking map—combined with an online and offline distribution strategy in partnership with local businesses—can help increase local pedestrian circulation, increase utilization of existing public parking that is currently underused, and reinforce a potential system of on-street map kiosks and/or pedestrian wayfinding signage (and vice versa). Exploring shared off-street parking arrangements with private businesses can also improve parking management in downtown Franklin. Any private off-street parking lots that can be utilized for public parking should also be included in an updated downtown walking and parking map.

The Commercial I District along Union Street also presents opportunities for improved parking management. There is ample on-street parking along this corridor, yet there are no signs indicating any sort of parking restrictions. Introducing signage with a 2-hour parking limit along Union Street will clarify the regulations for members of the public and increase awareness of this roadway as another parking option in town.

Transportation Demand Management

Transportation Demand Management (TDM) refers to a package of policies and programs that are designed to reduce drive-alone trips and enable the transportation system to function more effectively and efficiently through measures that shift passengers from single-occupancy vehicle (SOV) travel. Specifically, TDM encourages using alternative travel modes (bicycling, walking, and transit) and promoting alternatives to SOV travel (work from home, ridesharing). These measures underlie transit-oriented development, Complete Streets programs, as well as livability and sustainability initiatives and can be applied in support of a variety of development patterns, ranging from urban to rural.

The TDM Guide produced by MAPC includes recommendations and examples of TDM measures implemented by municipalities.² For example, Franklin could require new development to include TDM measures such as on-site bicycle storage, providing information on local transit options for residents and workers, mitigation payments for local pedestrian, bicycle, and transit initiatives, and requirements for joining a Transportation Management Association (TMA) that coordinates on behalf of members TDM programs such as such as ridesharing, vanpooling, and even operating local shuttles. The TDM measures can also reduce the parking requirements under Town zoning.

Public Transit

The Town of Franklin has two different public transit options that provide limited transit services the MBTA and GATRA.

There is an MBTA Commuter Rail line named for the Town of Franklin, where the “Franklin Line” terminates at the opposite end of the City of Boston. Franklin is served by two MBTA stops: one near downtown, and the other along West Central Street at Forge Park (west of interstate 495). Travel distance from downtown Franklin to downtown Boston on the MBTA takes roughly one hour. While the area within blocks of the downtown MBTA station is already zoned for mixed-use development, there are many other areas within a half-mile of the station (a 10 minute walk), where zoning does not allow for the kind of denser development that would be suitable so close to public transit.

Prior to 2020, the Town was served by GATRA fixed route bus service connecting Franklin to Wrentham and Bellingham. In December 2020, GATRA suspended fixed route transit services in Franklin, Norfolk, Wrentham, and Foxborough, and replaced them with GATRA Go United, an on-demand pilot transit service that riders can hail to go anywhere those municipalities.³ The service operates similar to ride-hailing services such as Uber and Lyft, with riders able to hail the services and pay the fares via a smart phone app. At this time, GATRA has no plans to reinstate the fixed-route bus services and will likely continue with the GATRA Go United on-demand transit service.

² http://www.mapc.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/TDM-FINAL-REPORT-7_15_0.pdf

³ <https://www.gatra.org/gatra-go-united/>

The lack of fixed-route transit may have implications on development, particularly mixed-use and multifamily. With few places to develop housing along or near a bus line, assuming the bus line reactivates at some point in the future, development opportunities will need to be carefully targeted to maximize available parcels. However, the on-demand GATRA Go United service may provide more connection options for new development.

Franklin For All

Summary Memo #4

Vision & Zoning Recommendations

June 8, 2022



Vision for Franklin Center

The vision for Franklin Center is meant to be a picture of what new zoning, when implemented, can achieve for the area and the community as a whole. It is aspirational but realistic given the market for development and constraints. It was crafted based on the feedback received during a substantial public engagement process, including two public forums, a community survey, four focus groups with targeted stakeholders, meetings with the Steering Committee, and conversations with Town staff and leadership. The following vision statement will help guide future decisions, and zoning changes should be prioritized that can best advance the vision.

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. There are ample public realm amenities such as plazas, outdoor seating, art, green space, lighting, and bicycle parking.

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, public spaces, and transportation systems. 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.

Zoning Recommendations

Zoning is a key tool used at the local level to shape a municipality through requirements and incentives for land use. It provides the legal framework for what can and cannot be developed on a parcel of land, including the types of uses that are allowed, size and siting of structures, amount of required parking, open space considerations, and more. Well-crafted zoning should tell the private sector about what kind of development the Town wants to see and where. In general, desired uses and building typologies should be allowed by-right or with limited approvals to facilitate the development process.

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 Manager, Town of Franklin staff, and Franklin Downtown Partnership.

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 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 1, and General Residential V District.

Massachusetts General Law Chapter (MGL) 40R encourages the creation of dense residential and mixed-use zoning overlay districts that include deed-restricted Affordable Housing units 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 may accompany the zoning language for the district that projects must adhere to.

At least 20% of all units permitted in the 40R District must be deed-restricted Affordable Housing. These are units that, by law, can only be rented or sold to low-income households without these households paying more than 30% of their income. Affordable Housing has restrictions on its deed that preserve affordability for decades or in perpetuity, ensuring that income-eligible households can stay in their communities. Eligibility to live in Affordable Housing is based on income status, which is determined by comparing a household's total pre-tax income and the number of people in the household to the Area Median Income (AMI). AMI is the median income for households across the Greater Boston region, including Franklin, and is \$140,200 for the year 2022. A household is considered "low-income" if its annual income is 80% or less of the AMI, which is \$78,300 for a single person and \$111,850 for a family of four.

There are a number of financial incentives associated with adopting a 40R Smart Growth Overlay District and streamlining the development review process. Depending on the net increase in as-of-right units allowed, Franklin can receive between \$10,000 and \$600,000 in one-time state funding. There is an additional bonus of \$3,000 for every new unit created. Communities with a 40R District can also 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 as an MBTA community under MGL Chapter 40A, Section 3A. 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.

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 and their funding sources. Payment 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:

- Purpose of the 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.

The table below 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.

	Smart Growth Overlay District		
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		

Design standards may include the following:

- 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

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 that have been built out entirely or in part include Reading, Northampton, Natick, Haverhill, Easton, Newburyport, Belmont, Westborough, and more.

The following action items would need to occur in order to implement a 40R District:

Action Item	Lead on Action Item
1. Draft zoning language and design guidelines for the Chapter 40R Smart Growth District that reflect the Franklin Center vision. For the zoning regulations, there will be a new section in Special Regulations (Article V) and also an update to the Zoning Map and Table of Zoning Map Amendments. The design guidelines will be a stand-a-lone document that is referenced in the zoning language.	DPCD with consultant
2. Produce communication materials to educate the public about 40R Districts and the benefits to Franklin associated with creating a district.	DPCD with consultant
3. Present draft zoning amendment to establish the 40R District at a Franklin For All Steering Committee for review.	DPCD and Franklin For All Steering Committee
4. Hold a Planning Board public hearing on the draft zoning amendment.	Planning Board with support from DPCD
5. Submit a preliminary application to DHCD to determine if the district is eligible under the 40R Program. DHCD will issue a letter of eligibility within 60 days.	Town Manager with support from DPCD
6. Hold an additional Planning Board public hearing(s) and vote to adopt the zoning amendment.	Planning Board with support from DPCD
7. Hold Town Council public hearing(s) and vote to adopt the zoning amendment.	Town Council with support from DPCD
8. Formally apply for 40R District designation with proof of local adoption. DHCD will issue a letter of approval within 30 days of receiving the application.	Town Manager with support from DPCD
9. After approval, submit an Incentive Payment application for the expected number of net new units in the 40R District.	DPCD
10. Submit an Annual Update to receive a Certification of Compliance for the 40R District. The Annual Update is meant to verify that the district is being developed in a manner that reasonably complies with the requirements of	DPCD

Action Item	Lead on Action Item
<p>40R and that the plan approval is not unreasonably denying plans for compliant projects. There is a different Annual Update form for districts in active development, future districts, and mature districts substantially built out.</p>	
<p>11. To receive a Density Bonus Payment of \$3,000 for each bonus unit, submit for each project an application to DHCD detailing the number and type of new units, including a copy of the building permit(s) issued and other relevant documentation.</p>	<p>Building Commissioner with support from DPCD</p>

Recommendation 2: Adopt an inclusionary zoning policy that is Town-wide and create 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 (defined in Recommendation 1). Amongst communities in Massachusetts, the requirement typically ranges from 10% to 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 would provide funding for the Affordable Housing Trust Fund. A payment in-lieu option should be generally equal to the cost of building an Affordable Housing unit.

Franklin should consider adopting a Town-wide inclusionary zoning policy as a supplement to the 40R Smart Growth Overlay District to provide additional avenues to produce Affordable Housing and establish a more level playing field between affordability requirements across the community. Given that Affordable Housing requires a large subsidy from a developer to provide, 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.

Affordable Housing can also be deed-restricted for moderate-income households making between 80% and 120% of the AMI. Though the Subsidized Housing Inventory only tracks units available to those making less than 80% of the AMI, Franklin is already eligible for “safe harbor” under Chapter 40B. This gives the Town some flexibility in structuring its inclusionary zoning policy and providing Affordable Housing options at different income levels. The Town may decide to require that a portion of Affordable units should be designated for low-income households and another portion should be designated for moderate-income households.

The following action items would need to occur in order to implement a Town-wide inclusionary zoning policy:

Action Item	Lead on Action Item
1. Conduct additional housing market research, including quantitative data collection and interviews with local real-estate professionals, to determine the financial feasibility of an inclusionary zoning policy in Franklin.	DPCD with consultant
2. Draft amendment to establish a Town-wide inclusionary zoning policy by creating a new section in Special Regulations (Article V).	DPCD with consultant
3. Produce communication materials to educate the public about inclusionary zoning and its benefits.	DPCD with consultant
4. Present draft zoning amendment at a Franklin For All Steering Committee for review.	DPCD and Franklin For All Steering Committee
5. Hold Planning Board public hearing(s) and vote to adopt the zoning amendment.	Planning Board with support from DPCD
6. Hold Town Council public hearing(s) and vote to adopt the zoning amendment.	Town Council with support from DPCD

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 only allowed by-right in the Downtown Commercial District and by special permit in the Commercial I District. Mixed-use should be easier to build if that is the building typology people want to see.

Most participants in the visioning process indicated that mixed-use buildings were their desired typology for the Downtown Commercial, Commercial I, and Mixed Business Innovation 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 desirable 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.

Even if mixed-use developments are allowed by-right in the Downtown Commercial and Commercial I Districts, the Town will still maintain oversight of the design and layout through the site plan review process. In order to obtain a building permit for development of anything other than a single- or two-family dwelling, the applicant must obtain site plan review approval from the Planning Board.

The following action items would need to occur in order to implement this zoning amendment:

Action Item	Lead on Action Item
1. As a part of a larger package of dimensional and use changes, draft a zoning amendment to establish and regulate mixed-use development in Franklin Center. This will involve updating the Use Regulations Schedule (Part VI); Schedule of Lot, Area, Frontage, Yard and Height Regulations; and Definitions (Section 185-3).	DPCD with consultant
2. Present draft zoning amendment at a Franklin For All Steering Committee for review.	DPCD and Franklin For All Steering Committee
3. Hold Planning Board public hearing(s) and vote to adopt the zoning amendment.	Planning Board with support from DPCD
4. Hold Town Council public hearing(s) and vote to adopt the zoning amendment.	Town Council with support from DPCD

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 Downtown Commercial 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.

The following action items would need to occur in order to implement this zoning amendment:

Action Item	Lead on Action Item
1. As a part of a larger package of dimensional and use changes, draft a zoning amendment updating the Use Regulations Schedule (Part II) to require a special permit for first-floor offices and personal service-businesses in the Downtown Commercial District.	DPCD with consultant
2. Present draft zoning amendment at a Franklin For All Steering Committee for review.	DPCD and Franklin For All Steering Committee
3. Hold Planning Board public hearing(s) and vote to adopt the zoning amendment.	Planning Board with support from DPCD
4. Hold Town Council public hearing(s) and vote to adopt the zoning amendment.	Town Council with support from DPCD

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. Proposals for three-families in the Commercial I and General Residential V Districts would still be required to receive site plan review approval, but there would be more certainty for the landowner by not needing a special permit for the use. Allowing three-families by special permit in the Single Family Residential IV District would enable this use in appropriate areas that already have many three-family homes that were constructed before the creation of zoning.

In establishing the new three-family use, Franklin should specify appropriate dimensional requirements for the use that are less restrictive than those for multifamily buildings but somewhat more restrictive than those for single- and two-family homes.

The following action items would need to occur in order to implement this zoning amendment:

Action Item	Lead on Action Item
1. As a part of a larger package of dimensional and use changes, draft a zoning amendment to define and regulate three-family uses in Franklin Center. This will involve	DPCD with consultant

Action Item	Lead on Action Item
updating the Use Regulations Schedule (Part VI); Schedule of Lot, Area, Frontage, Yard and Height Regulations; and Definitions (Section 185-3).	
2. Present draft zoning amendment at a Franklin For All Steering Committee for review.	DPCD and Franklin For All Steering Committee
3. Hold Planning Board public hearing(s) and vote to adopt the zoning amendment.	Planning Board with support from DPCD
4. Hold Town Council public hearing(s) and vote to adopt the zoning amendment.	Town Council with support from DPCD

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 Commercial I District, Franklin should consider allowing the least dense housing option—single-family homes—by special permit rather than by-right. This would put the district closer in line with Downtown Commercial District, which does not allow single-family by-right or by special permit. This would not impact existing single-family properties in the Commercial I 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.

The following action items would need to occur in order to implement this zoning amendment:

Action Item	Lead on Action Item
1. As a part of a larger package of dimensional and use changes, draft a zoning amendment updating the Use Regulations Schedule (Part IV) to require a special permit for single-family uses in the Commercial District I.	DPCD with consultant
2. Present draft zoning amendment at a Franklin For All Steering Committee for review.	DPCD and Franklin For All Steering Committee
3. Hold Planning Board public hearing(s) and vote to adopt the zoning amendment.	Planning Board with support from DPCD
4. Hold Town Council public hearing(s) and vote to adopt the zoning amendment.	Town Council with support from DPCD

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.

Also commonly referred to as an “in-law apartment” or “granny flat,” an accessory dwelling unit (ADU) is a secondary dwelling unit on the same lot as a larger primary dwelling unit. The ADU 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. A typical ADU is between 250 and 1,200 square feet and has one or two bedrooms, and detached ADUs are usually required to be between six and ten feet from the primary dwelling unit.

ADUs provide a way to incrementally increase housing density in a way that is appropriate for existing neighborhoods. They can serve as a more affordable option than other new market-rate units, and 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 who seek independence but still need support from family or other caregivers.

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. New zoning regulations should specify the dimensional, parking, and design standards that landowners must adhere to in order to obtain a building permit to construct an ADU. These will ensure that ADUs are only built on properties where they can be appropriately accommodated.

In recent years, a number of communities in Massachusetts have passed zoning amendments to allow for and regulate accessory dwelling units. The municipalities include Lexington, Newton, Reading, Orleans, and Wellfleet. While these towns have made it easier to construct ADUs, none have experienced a large influx of landowners seeking to utilize the zoning tool.

The following action items would need to occur in order to implement this zoning amendment:

Action Item	Lead on Action Item
1. Draft amendment to formally establish and regulate accessory dwelling units in Franklin. This will involve by creating a new section in Special Regulations (Article V) as	DPCD with consultant

Action Item	Lead on Action Item
well as updating the Use Regulations Schedule (Part VI) and Definitions (Section 185-3).	
2. Produce communication materials to educate the public about ADUs and their benefits.	DPCD with consultant
3. Present draft zoning amendment at a Franklin For All Steering Committee for review.	DPCD and Franklin For All Steering Committee
4. Hold Planning Board public hearing(s) and vote to adopt the zoning amendment.	Planning Board with support from DPCD
5. Hold Town Council public hearing(s) and vote to adopt the zoning amendment.	Town Council with support from DPCD

Recommendation 8: Establish a shared-use parking policy 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-use parking policy can maximize the use of Town-owned lots, and potentially privately-owned lots as well (such as the parking lot that Rockland Trust owns), without adding more impervious pavement to Franklin Center.

Between the Library, Depot/Downtown, and Ferrara parking lots, there are about 130 spaces in the downtown that could be used for overnight residential parking through a shared-use parking program. With this program, spaces would remain prioritized for commuters and commercial uses during the day but could be used by residents during the evening hours when spaces are otherwise empty.

In reviewing project proposals for the downtown, the Planning Board could choose to allow developers to count a portion of spaces in the public lots towards their off-street parking requirement. Requests to utilize shared parking should be supplemented with supporting evidence from a traffic engineer that there will not be conflicts between the uses. Allowing shared-use parking by special permit is likely the most appropriate way for the Planning Board to retain its discretion. The Town of Franklin would want to establish an overnight residential parking permit to track the number of residents utilizing the lots at night and ensure that there is not more demand for spaces than there is supply.

Many municipalities in Greater Boston have established shared-use parking programs and policies, including Marlborough, Melrose, Norwell, and Stoneham. Some require special permits for shared-use parking while others allow it by-right for buildings adjacent to or within a certain distance of municipal lots.

The following action items would need to occur in order to implement a shared-use parking policy for Franklin Center:

Action Item	Lead on Action Item
1. Conduct outreach to business owners in Franklin Center to understand their parking needs.	DPCD and Franklin Downtown Partnership
2. Initiate discussions with owners of private parking lots to understand their openness to shared-use parking. Inquire about the compensation and concessions that they would need in order to consider participating.	DPCD and Franklin Downtown Partnership
3. Draft amendment to formally establish and regulate shared-use parking in Franklin. This will involve updating the parking, loading and driveway requirements (Section 185-21) to include a description of shared-use parking and the specifics of the special permit.	DPCD with consultant
4. Present draft zoning amendment at a Franklin For All Steering Committee for review.	DPCD and Franklin For All Steering Committee
5. Hold Planning Board public hearing(s) and vote to adopt the zoning amendment.	Planning Board with support from DPCD
6. Hold Town Council public hearing(s) and vote to adopt the zoning amendment.	Town Council with support from DPCD
7. Set up shared-use parking permit system, including the annual fee, hours of use, and other requirements of the permit system.	Town Clerk and Collector with support from DPCD

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, lighting, and more. To fund this program,

Franklin could use payments from the 40R Smart Growth District or from in-lieu fees generated through inclusionary zoning.

A façade improvement program should be supplemented by design guidelines to ensure that upgrades match the desired aesthetic for Franklin Center. These can be the same design guidelines as those associated with the proposed 40R Smart Growth District, or they can exist as their own document.

The following action items would need to occur in order to implement a façade improvement program for Franklin Center:

Action Item	Lead on Action Item
1. Confirm a dedicated funding source for the façade improvement program. Establishing this program will rely on the implementation of a 40R District or an incentive zoning policy with an in-lieu option unless another source of funding is identified.	See Recommendations 1 and 2
2. Draft policy, with design guidelines, creating a façade improvement program for Franklin Center.	DPCD and Franklin Downtown Partnership
3. Present draft policy at a Franklin For All Steering Committee for review.	DPCD and Franklin For All Steering Committee
4. Hold Town Council public hearing(s) and vote to adopt the policy.	Town Council with support from DPCD
5. Establish account to hold funds designated for the façade improvement program.	Treasurer
6. Create application form for façade improvement program and promote program to local property owners.	DPCD and Franklin Downtown Partnership

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 a designation, businesses or individuals can work with the municipal designee to 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. Community Preservation Act (CPA) funding may be a good option for this local match.

Applications are competitive and are considered factors such as: “the potential synergy with other downtown businesses; commitment to storefront improvements; whether the municipality has made local plans or investments to revitalize the downtown; the amount of matching funds provided by the municipality to the business applicant.”

Since the program’s inception, sixteen communities in Massachusetts have areas designated as Certified Vacant Storefront Districts, including Attleboro, Clinton, Gloucester, Greenfield, and Westborough.

The following action items would need to occur in order to establish a Municipal Vacant Storefront District:

Action Item	Lead on Action Item
1. Conduct outreach to small business owners to understand if they would benefit from and utilize the tax credits offered by the Massachusetts Vacant Storefronts Program if Franklin had a designated district.	DPCD and Franklin Downtown Partnership
2. Identify and secure a source of matching funds, such as the Community Preservation Act.	DPCD and Community Preservation Committee
3. If there is interest among small business owners, submit municipal application for Certification of a Vacant Storefront District.	DPCD
4. Recruit businesses for vacant storefronts and assist with their application to the EACC for refundable tax credits. Up to two businesses in a municipality may receive assistance each year.	DPCD
5. If one or more businesses receive tax credit awards, submit an annual report to the Massachusetts Office of Business Development (MOBD).	DPCD

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 of time. This provides up-front benefits to developers in the form of tax relief that can help pay for construction costs. In accordance with MGL Chapter 40, Section 59, a municipality can enter into a TIF agreement with a landowner for up to 20 years.

It is important to note that TIF provides property tax exemptions *only* on the tax increment that comes from new investments. As such, the Town does not lose revenue as a result of negotiating TIF agreements because it can still collect taxes on the pre-investment property value. After the tax-reduction period, Franklin would receive payments based on the full assessed value of the property.

Massachusetts provides two main avenues for municipalities to establish state-authorized TIF programs. The Economic Development Incentive Program (EDIP) is for commercial properties and is tied to job creation and investment while the Urban Center Housing Tax Increment Financing (UCH-TIF) Program promotes the revitalization of commercial areas through housing development. The UCH-TIF Program has a requirement that 25% of the housing assisted by the exemption will be deed-restricted Affordable Housing for either 40 years or the useful life of the housing, whichever is longer. For use of either program, Franklin would need to create a TIF Plan for the designated area that's adopted by the Town Council and submitted to the appropriate state agency for approval.

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. In these cases, the benefits of the investment should outweigh any foregone tax revenue. This could be for a culturally-stimulating commercial use such as a brewery, food market, or movie theater. It could also be used for a development with substantial public open space, Affordable Housing units, or LEED certification. Franklin has utilized TIF four times in the past within the Town's industrial Economic Opportunity Areas.

The following action items would need to occur in order to utilize TIF in Franklin Center:

Action Item	Lead on Action Item
1. Conduct outreach to existing and prospective landowners in Franklin Center to understand their interest in utilizing TIF for major property improvements.	DPCD, Town Manager, Franklin For All Steering Committee
2. If landowners are interested in moving forward with a TIF agreement, draft a TIF Plan for the designated TIF Zone. At a minimum, this will need to include plans for proposed public and private development projects in the zone and executed agreements with property owners who would be receiving tax increment exemptions.	DPCD, Town Manager, Franklin For All Steering Committee
3. Hold Town Council public hearing(s) and vote to adopt the TIF Plan.	Town Council with support from DPCD
4. Submit locally-adopted TIF Plan to either Economic Assistance Coordinating Council or the Department of Housing and Community Development, depending on the TIF type, for state approval.	DPCD