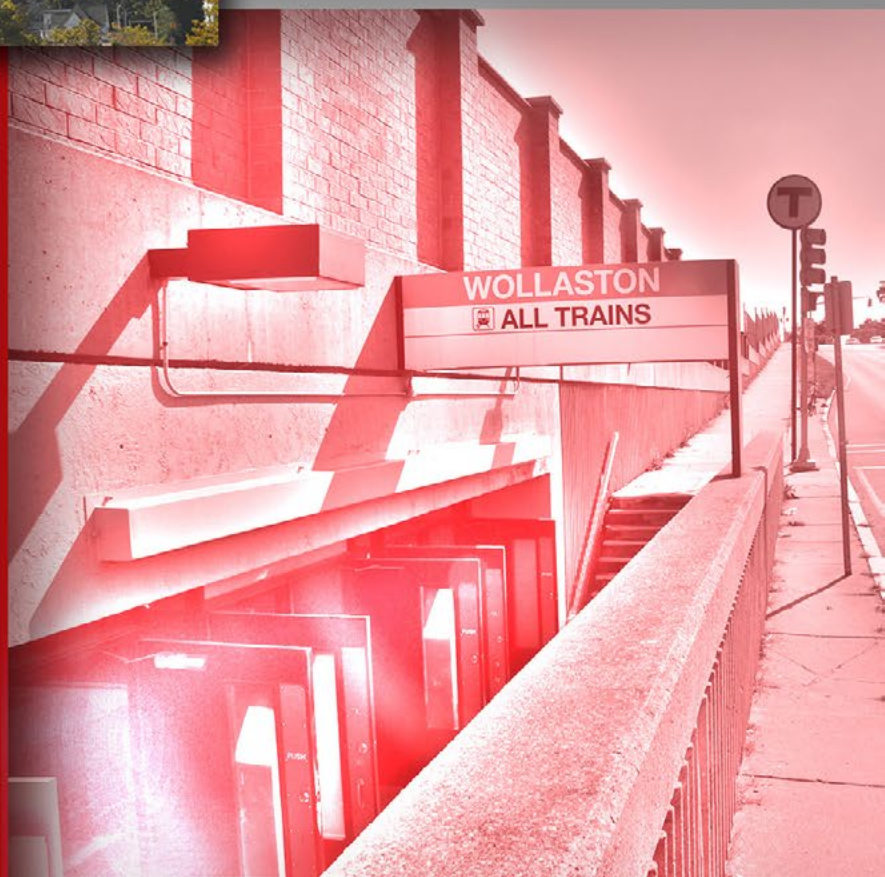
Re-Envisioning Wollaston

A Station Area Plan for Wollaston Center



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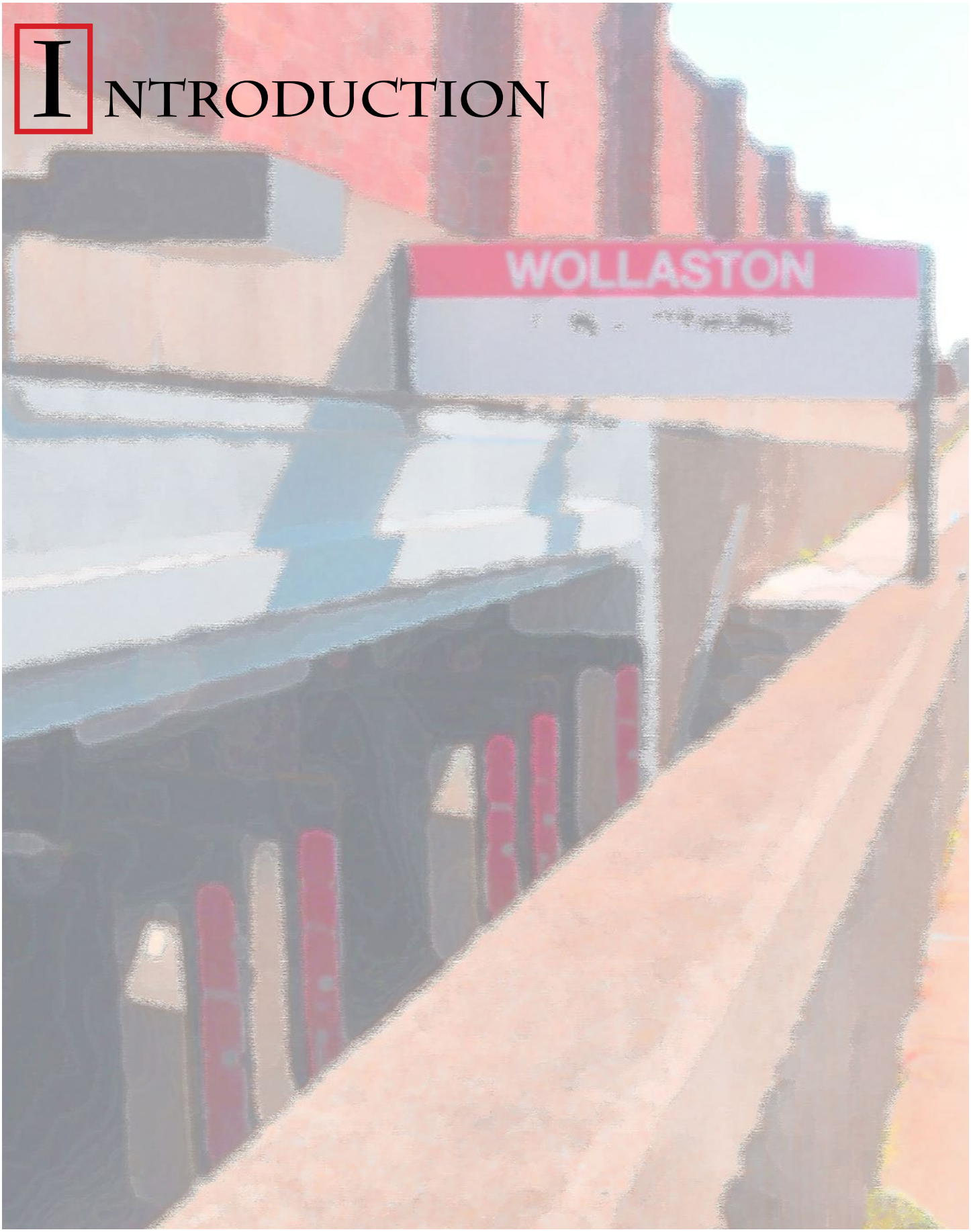
Executive Summary

This section will be updated prior to the final report being completed.

Introduction



Introduction

In the Greater Boston region, the half-mile transit station areas within the MBTA system comprise approximately 5% of the total land area, yet they are currently home to 25% of the region's housing units and 37% of the region's employment[1]. This highlights the importance of planning within station areas to ensure housing, jobs, shopping, and recreational opportunities are located within walking distance to transit. Focusing efforts on these natural hubs of activity places critical daily needs within close proximity to an affordable transportation option, and reduces reliance on personal automobiles.

MAPC, in conjunction with the City of Quincy, undertook an effort in the Wollaston neighborhood of Quincy to develop a station area plan around the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority's (MBTA) Wollaston Red Line station. This planning effort focused on key opportunities and impediments to creating transit oriented development in this station area and enlivening a neighborhood center through new housing opportunities, bolstering the existing business district, and connecting surrounding neighborhoods to transit through improved walking and biking infrastructure.

The focused planning and development efforts, as part of the Quincy Center redevelopment project, has led to a renewal of interest across the City for a new look at other neighborhood centers and business districts. Wollaston is one of these districts, adjacent to the Red Line and surrounded on all sides by a diverse residential neighborhood.

Planning Process

Over the course of approximately six months, local residents, business owners, and property owners worked with the City and MAPC to outline a vision for Wollaston Center, understand the opportunities, and develop solutions to overcoming the impediments. In addition to engaging the local community, the process involved coordination with MBTA staff as well as meetings with development firms working on transit oriented development projects in the Greater Boston region.

The planning process included two public meetings, as well as briefings with the Wollaston Business Partnership and regular meeting with City of Quincy staff. The following is an outline of the planning process:

- Collect and analyze existing conditions data
- Public Meeting #1 - *Identifying the Vision*
- Articulate community's vision for the area
- Develop land use, zoning, development, and transportation concepts
- Public Meeting #2 - *Share Concepts with Community*
- Refine concepts based on public and City feedback
- Prepare final plan document

This planning process follows on the heals of two other projects in Quincy: the on-going Quincy Center redevelopment project and the NoQuWo community planning exercise in North Quincy/Wollaston. Both of these projects focused on what improvements could be done to bring new energy into these key Quincy neighborhoods. The first, the Quincy Center project, is a large redevelopment that will completely transform Quincy's Downtown with a lively mix of uses and easy access to the Red Line station in a walkable and active setting. The second, NoQuWo, was a community engagement platform looking to uncover what improvements neighborhood residents wanted to see in North Quincy and Wollaston. Many of the things mentioned throughout that process are similar in nature to the recommendations found in this report.

Station Area Context

For the purposes of this study, MAPC focused on two defined areas within the City of Quincy. The first was the traditional half-mile transit shed around the Wollaston Red Line station (see Figure 1.1), and the second was a smaller focus area defined by the City and referred to throughout the process as Wollaston Center (see Figure 1.2).

The half-mile transit shed around the Wollaston Red Line station was used to gather demographic and economic information to help inform study recommendations, as well as looking at how to better connect surrounding neighborhoods to the transit station and the Wollaston Center business district. The majority of existing development within the half-mile transit shed is residential with pockets of commercial and office development closer to North Quincy and along most of Hancock Street. The Wollaston neighborhood is in close proximity to Wollaston Beach,

[1] MAPC, Growing Station Areas Report, June 2012.

Figure 1.1 - Wollaston Center and the Half-Mile Radius

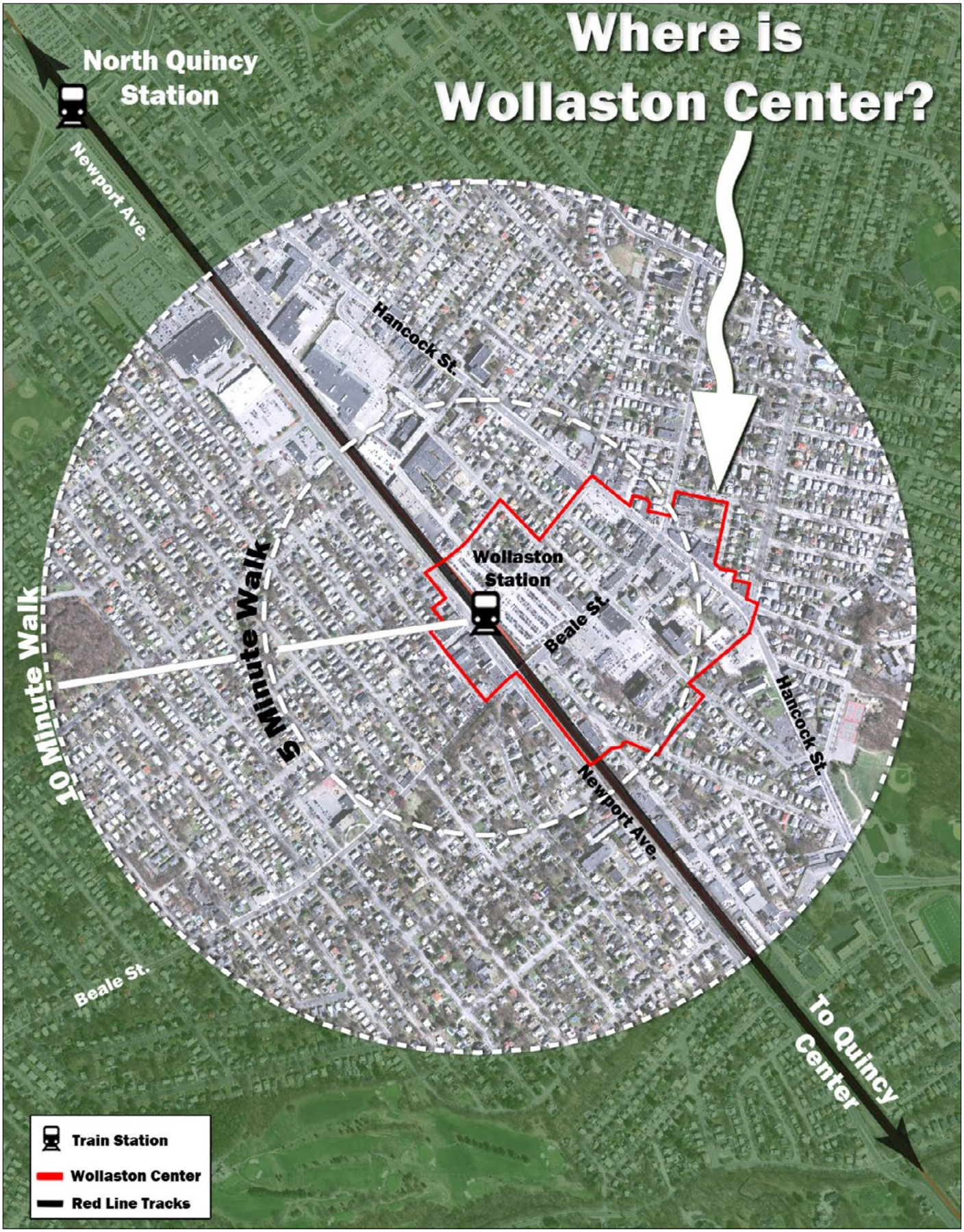


Figure 1.2 - Wollaston Center Focus Area Map

a one-stop train ride from the planned Quincy Center revitalization project, and a 20-25 minute ride on the Red Line to Downtown Boston. The proximity of Wollaston to these major employment and activity nodes makes the area an attractive location for new investment. A portion of the growth and change in the Wollaston neighborhood over the last ten years is a result of the area becoming more diverse, due to a large increase in the Asian population.

The Wollaston Center study area is the neighborhood's commercial node and core and surrounds the Wollaston Red Line station. The predominate commercial corridors of Newport Avenue, Beale Street, and Hancock Street are home to a variety of businesses that serve the surrounding neighborhoods. Local retailers, bars and restaurants, daily needs services (pharmacy, coffee shop, banks, nail salons, barber shops,etc.), and professional offices line these corridors and provide services to the neighborhood within a close walking distance. Just beyond each of these commercial corridors are residential neighborhoods that contain a mix of single family and two to three family homes, and some larger scale apartment buildings.

One of the largest parcels of land in Wollaston Center is the MBTA's surface parking lot that serves Wollaston station. The 5.5 acre parking lot contains 550 parking spaces and according to Fiscal Year 2012 MBTA parking data the lot is filled past capacity (102%) Monday-Friday. The surface lot represents one of the largest development opportunities in Wollaston Center, but balancing the parking needs of MBTA customers and the costs of new development is a significant challenge.

Transportation Network

Wollaston Center benefits greatly by being located on the Red Line which provides rapid rail service between Braintree and Alewife Station in Cambridge. From the Wollaston transit station, a rider can reach Downtown Boston in about 20-25 minutes. Trains arrive at Wollaston station every 9 minutes during the rush hour services, every 14 minutes during midday service, and every 12 minutes during evening service. On Saturday and Sunday, trains arrive once every 14-16 minutes.

Daily weekday ridership numbers from 2009 indicate that an average of 4,350 people board the Red Line at Wollaston station every weekday. Approximately 60% of riders arrive at the station by walking, followed by 32% who drive to the station and park in the lot, and another 7% are dropped off at the station by another driver[2].

Wollaston Center is also connected to the larger region by several MBTA bus routes that run along the major roadways. Several bus routes that run along Hancock Street and Beale Street connect riders north to Fields Corner and Ashmont Station, as well as south to Quincy Center. Although this area is served by several different bus routes, only about 0.2% of people use buses to access the Wollaston Red Line station.

The sidewalk network within and around Wollaston Center is complete with sidewalks on both sides of almost all major and minor roadways. Most of the major intersections in the area have striped crosswalks and pedestrian signals. Bicycle infrastructure is lacking in Wollaston Center with no striped or signed routes connecting to the station. There are also few existing bicycle parking locations. The bicycle parking located at the Wollaston station is antiquated and does not protect bikes during inclement weather.

Demographics

The demographic make up of an area is a critical component to the success of development around transit stations. The Dukakis Center at Northeastern University recently published research that links five specific demographic characteristics to transit ridership[3]. These characteristics include:

- People of Color
- Recent Immigrants
- Renters
- Lower-Income Households
- Zero-Vehicle Households

Overall, the population in the half-mile station area around Wollaston increased from 2000-2010 by approximately 2,000 residents. When we look at the population changes by age category, the biggest gains in population can be found in the 18-24, 25-34, 45-54, and 55-64 age groups. This indicates that young professionals and young families are locating in Wollaston, as well as a rapidly growing aging population. The close proximity to transit, relatively affordable housing prices, and walkable business district are all attractive features that could be drawing these groups to Wollaston. Figure 1.3 shows the change in population by age group from 2000-2010.

The Wollaston station area is also becoming more racially and ethnically diverse over time, particularly with the increase in Asian residents. Between 2000 and 2010 the Asian population has increased by 18%. The higher level of diversity in the Wollaston station area is also reflected in the businesses that have opened in and around the station, many of which are owned and operated by Asian business owners. Figure 1.4 shows population by race/ethnicity in the half-mile station area.

Figure 1.3 - Population by Age 2000 and 2010

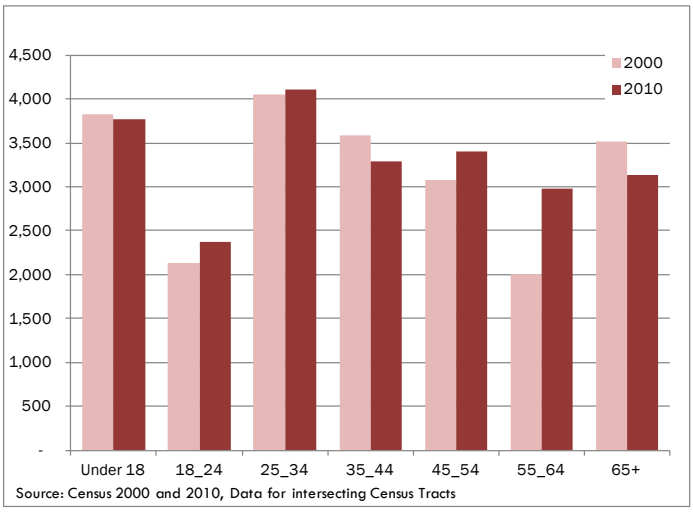
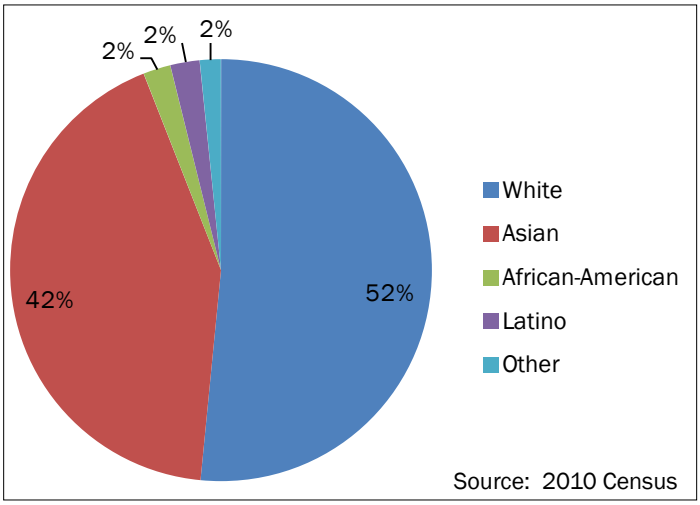


Figure 1.4 - 2010 Population by Race/Ethnicity

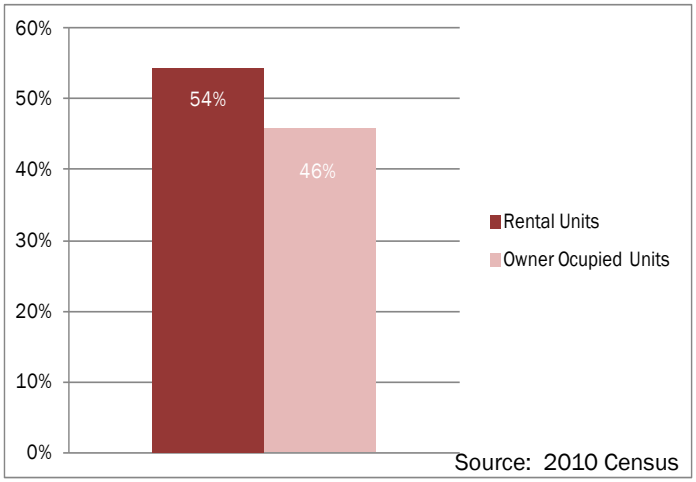


[2] MBTA Blue Book, 2010

[3] Dukakis Center for Urban and Regional Policy. ETOD Score. Dec. 2012

Household characteristics within a station area is another excellent predictor of transit use. Station areas with a higher percentage of rental housing units tend to have higher transit ridership than owner-occupied housing units. This could be a function of household income or a function of the age and career position of the residents in the household. Renters may be young professionals who are starting out in their career and looking for ways to save money by taking transit instead of owning a car. Renters in the Wollaston area may also be seniors living in the Clay Street senior housing developments. Seniors are more likely to take transit because many no longer own a vehicle or are able to drive but still need to get to appointments and to shopping centers. Figure 1.5 compares the number of rental and owner-occupied housing units in the Wollaston station area.

Figure 1.5 - 2010 Housing Tenure in Half-Mile Transit Shed



The cost of taking transit for job commutes, shopping trips, or general trips is more affordable than paying for and maintaining a personal vehicle, especially for households that are below the area median income level. Money saved on transportation costs can be put toward housing costs, education, goods and services, or toward savings. This correlation is why lower-income households tend to be higher frequency users of the transit system than higher income households. In the Wollaston station area, 20% of households make less than $25,000 per year and 39% make less than $50,000 per year. The median household income for the Wollaston station area is $63,478 per year[4].

Access to a vehicle is another significant predictor of the likelihood that a person or members of a household use transit. Station areas that have a higher number of households without access to a personal vehicle are far more likely to have higher transit ridership than those with high percentages of vehicle access. Approximately 19% of the households in the Wollaston station area do not have access to a personal vehicle, and 44% of households have access to only one vehicle[4]. Households without access to a vehicle may be a reflection of household income, or it could reflect a growing trend of people making the choice to not own a vehicle. Living and/or working in close proximity to transit is a significant benefit to households without a vehicle.

One way to increase transit ridership in Wollaston Center and reduce the number of vehicle trips is to orient new development toward these populations. The groups described above are more likely to take transit, drive less, and shop locally.

[4] 2006-2010 American Community Survey

Transit Oriented Development

Transit oriented development (TOD) is a strategy to integrate a mixture of housing, office, retail and other daily needs in a walkable neighborhood within close proximity to quality public transportation. TOD is usually accomplished through higher intensity, mixed-use, mixed-income development close to the station area with decreasing intensity as one gets further from the station. Successful examples of TOD include a mixture of housing types at varying price points, ensuring that those who need to live near transit and those that choose to live near transit can be accommodated.

The ability of residents and employees to walk and bike to and from the station area is also extremely important. A safe and well connected walking and biking network helps connect residents to local businesses, jobs, recreation areas, and the transit station itself. More trips taken by cyclists and pedestrians can help reduce auto traffic on local and regional roadways, improving congestion and air quality.

The demographic characteristics of Wollaston Center in conjunction with access to rail and bus transit options make this station area an ideal location for pursuing a transit oriented development strategy. The growing diversity of the area and expanding rental market provide a foundation for supporting transit as well as existing and future development in Wollaston Center.

By coordinating investments in transportation and existing and future development, the City of Quincy can greatly improve the quality and ease of life in Wollaston Center. TOD has a number of benefits for a community depending on the type and quality of the transit service available.

Boston, MA

Maple Hurst Builders

What is Transit Oriented Development?

A type of development that includes a mixture of housing, office, retail, and other amenities integrated into a walkable neighborhood and located within a half-mile of quality public transportation.

- Reconnecting America

Newton, MA

Benefits of Transit Oriented Development

TOD can provide transportation choices - TOD provides transportation for young people, the elderly, people who do not drive, and those who choose to or cannot afford to own a car.

TOD can increase transit ridership - TOD improves the efficiency and cost effectiveness of transit investments. New development around transit stations can increase transit ridership by 20 to 40 percent, which would increase revenue for the MBTA.

TOD can reduce reliance on automobiles - By creating neighborhoods where housing, jobs, and shopping are within walking distance to transit, reliance on driving can be reduced. TOD can reduce annual household rates of driving by 20 to 40 percent.

TOD can reduce air pollution and energy consumption With more pedestrian, bike, and transit travel taking place, reductions in driving can ease congestion and improve local air quality. TODs can reduce rates of greenhouse gas emissions by 2.5 to 3.7 tons per year for each household.

TOD can increase households' disposable income - Housing and transportation costs are the number one and two highest expenses households have to account for. Some estimates show that reducing household driving costs can help save $3,000-$4,000 annually. This can greatly increase a household's disposable income and ease overall household cost burden.

TOD can bolster the local economy - Constructing housing in walking distance to existing or future business districts means local businesses can be supported by the surrounding neighborhoods.

TOD can increase the municipal tax base - New development around the transit station can add to the municipal tax base without large infrastructure costs. This can mean new investments in schools, municipal services, or parks and recreation.

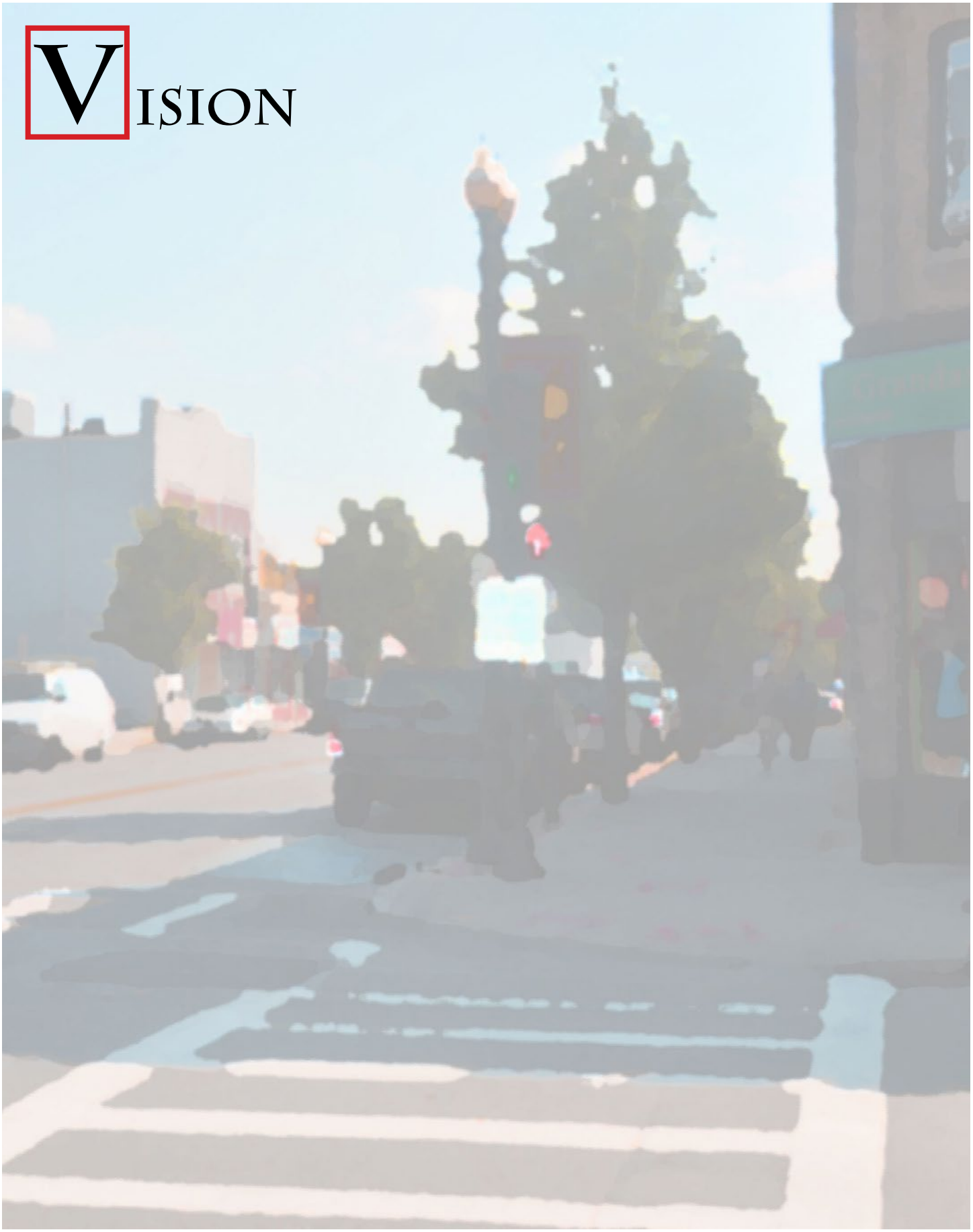
TOD can contribute to more affordable housing - By reducing household expenditures on transportation costs, more disposable income is available to be spent on housing costs. New development around transit stations should also include deed restricted affordable housing units for households making below the area median income.

Source: http://tod.drcog.org/what-are-benefits-tod

Boston, MA

Medford, MA

Vision



Re-envisioning Wollaston was not only an identification of the opportunities and impediments to bringing new investment to the neighborhood, it was also an opportunity for the community to describe and discuss how they would like to see the neighborhood transform over time. MAPC and the City held two public meetings during this planning process. The first meeting provided space for community members to discuss their vision for Wollaston Center, as well as locations where they would like to see additional housing, new businesses, and transportation improvements. MAPC captured comments through an idea wall and small group discussions during the meeting.

What We Heard From You

Image Credit: Sarah Dimon

"What I like best about Wollaston is its neighborhood feel. I like that I can walk to the Wollaston business district for dinner at Fuji or to catch a game at the Hancock Tavern and feel safe. I also like that basic needs are within walking distance, like a pharmacy, post office, library, and food market. The proximity to the beach, the T to Boston, and great open spaces like Merrymount Park also make living in Wollaston great!"

- Anne Bastoni, Wollaston Resident

What Do You Like Best About Wollaston?

Wordle Image Capturing Community Input

The input received from the community during the first meeting centered around several themes for what the vision of Wollaston Center should be going forward, which included:

- Maintaining a convenient, walkable, transit-friendly, safe, diverse, and historical neighborhood
- Constructing new development on the MBTA parking lot, above first floor retail along Beale and Hancock Streets, and on the CVS parcel
- Bringing in additional family-friendly restaurants and pubs, a neighborhood grocer, and community space
- Extending streetscape improvements throughout Wollaston Center
- Improving bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure within Wollaston Center and connecting to surrounding neighborhoods

These elements of the vision for Wollaston Center were presented in a map at the second public meeting, along with other recommendations that will be explained later in this report. Members of the community were asked to provide feedback to MAPC and the City on the vision for Wollaston Center. The final vision map can be seen in Figure 2.1 including a brief explanation of the different vision elements.

Members of the public providing input on MAPC's recommendations for Wollaston Center.

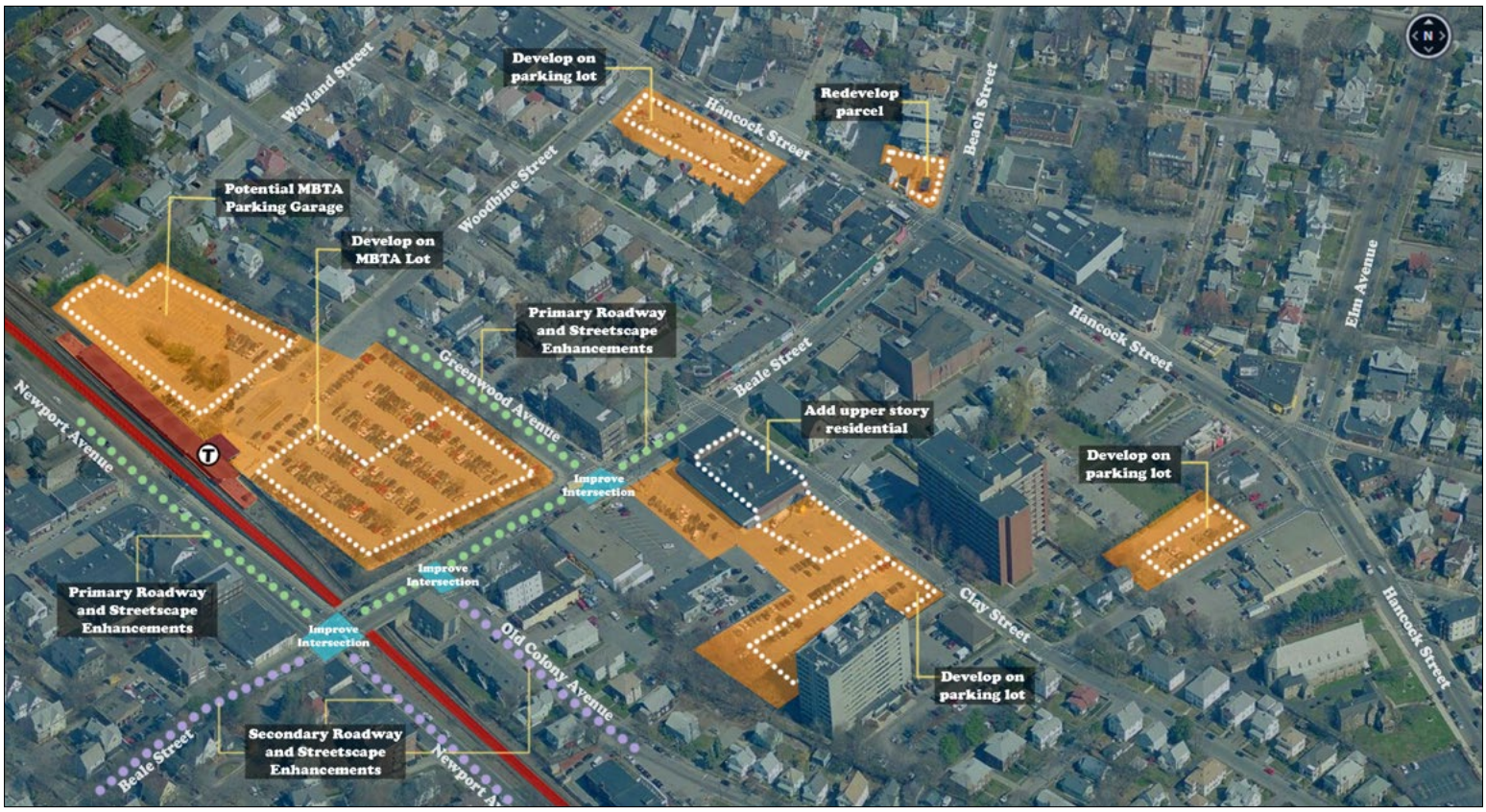
"My vision for Wollaston would be to improve its overall look to a more cohesive look, matching awnings, facades or planters. To grow in a way that retains the neighborly feel, but increases the number of residents that will bring more foot traffic to the local businesses. I would like to see the Wollaston theatre become a centerpiece for performing arts/movies similar to Coolidge Corner or Davis Square."

- Angela Ponte, Wollaston Business District Partnership Chair

"I would like to see Wollaston Center add more housing to attract key missing businesses and with more public spaces grow a modest street life as well as minimize the intrusion of traffic. Things that will encourage me and others to relax, socialize, and stay awhile."

- Pablo deTorres, Wollaston Resident

Figure 2.1 - Vision for Wollaston Center



The vision focused on incorporating new mixed-use development within Wollaston Center to bring in additional housing units as well as some new retail space in key locations. The parcels highlighted in orange in Figure 2.1 are the five parcels with the highest potential for development or redevelopment. Most of the parcels, with the exception of the parcel at the corner of Hancock Street and Beach Street, are surface parking lots which could be used to support additional development. New buildings constructed in Wollaston Center should be brought up to "meet the street" with parking in the rear, and an active facade that engages pedestrians as they walk along the sidewalk. New development should also help to draw commuters out of the MBTA station and into Wollaston Center to shop, eat, and relax before or after work.

In order to make the main commercial streets (Beale, Hancock, and Newport) feel more connected and create a sense of arrival, the streetscape elements currently found along Hancock Street and portions of Beale Street should be extended. These "primary" roadways, as noted in Figure 2.1, are the main people movers and activity corridors in Wollaston Center. Improvements to the building facades, sidewalks, benches, street trees, light posts, trash receptacles, banners, and other elements could help tie Wollaston Center together. The "secondary" roadways are those that act as connectors to Wollaston Center from surrounding neighborhoods. Roadways like Old Colony Avenue, Beale Street southwest of Newport Avenue, and the portion of Newport Avenue southeast of Beale Street are important connectors for pedestrians, cyclists, transit users, and drivers. Bridging the gap between the neighborhoods and Wollaston Center will help encourage more people to come to Wollaston Center, as well as use the Red Line.

Throughout this process, many community members noted they would like to see improved bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure in Wollaston Center. This ranged from wider sidewalks, to on-street bike lanes, to safer crossings at key intersections. With approximately 2,600 people walking to the Red Line station each morning, safer pedestrian crossings and upgraded sidewalks are a priority in the neighborhood and could encourage even more people to walk to the Red Line station and businesses in Wollaston Center. Recommendations and potential implementation steps are explained in further detail throughout the remainder of the report.

Components of the Vision

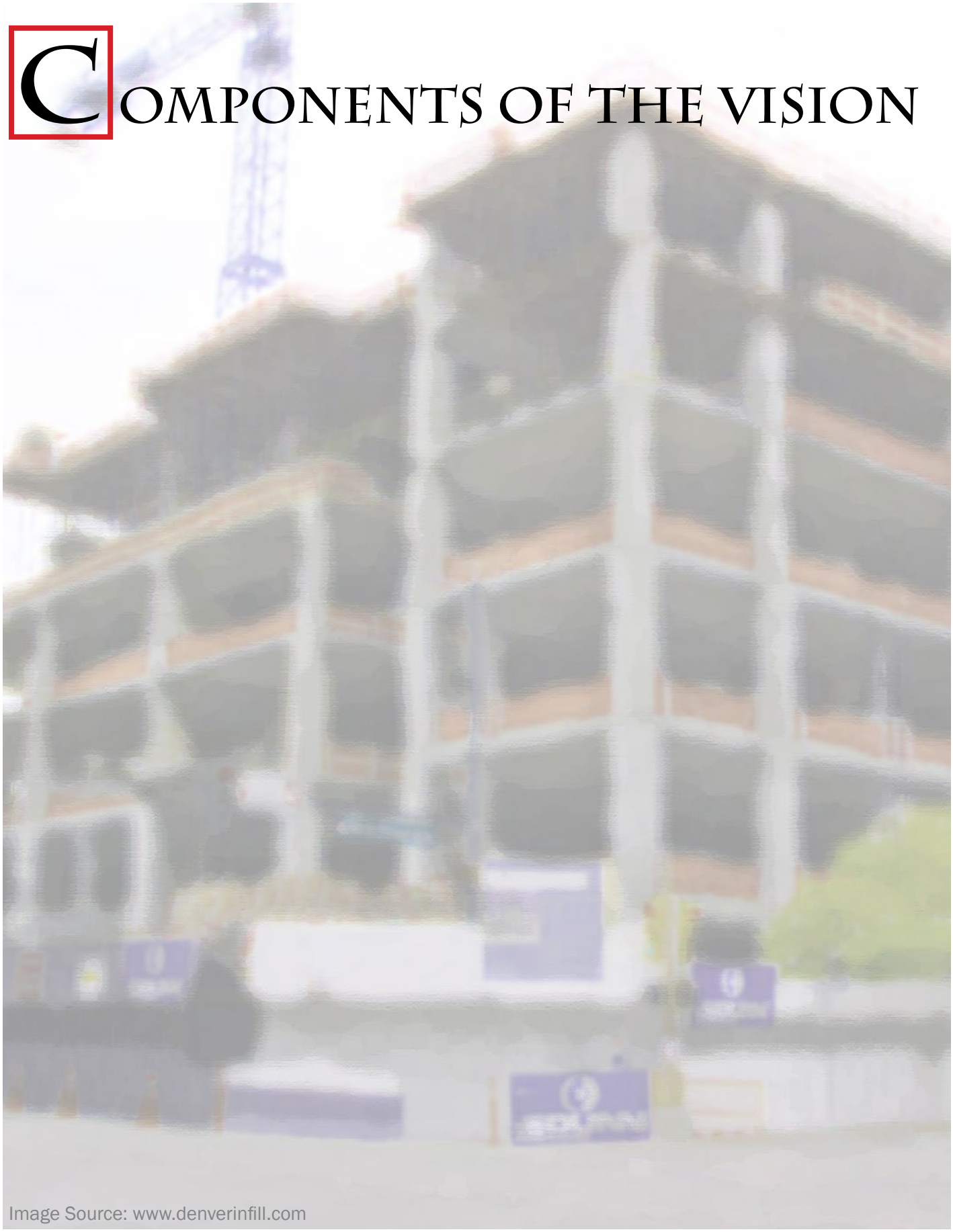


Image Source: www.denverinfill.com

The community's identified vision was an important step toward understanding the trajectory of Wollaston Center and helps shape the recommendations needed to actually get from vision to implementation. As part of this process, MAPC was tasked with identifying the key impediments or barriers to implementing the vision and developing recommendations that would help the City, businesses, developers, agencies, and the community as a whole overcome those barriers. MAPC's recommendations generally focus on four specific components:

1. Market Analysis
2. Land Use and Zoning
3. Development Feasibility
4. Transportation and Public Realm Improvements

These components cannot and should not be considered on their own in a vacuum. Each component may be unique, but they all play a vital part in creating and understanding successful transit oriented development. By identifying the impediments and recommending strategies to remove some of the barriers to seeing more development around transit in Wollaston, the community's vision for a more vibrant neighborhood center becomes more realistic and achievable.

Market Analysis

The first step in putting together a realistic and achievable plan for development around transit is to understand the market for new development. An analysis of market demand for residential, retail, and office development can help a community identify specific parcels that may accommodate future development, understand the level of development that may be possible in an area, and help inform changes to zoning. MAPC hired RKG Associates to complete a market analysis for the Wollaston neighborhood which included demand estimates for rental and owner-occupied residential units, retail space, and office space. This section will highlight the major findings from the market study, and talk about potential opportunities and impediments to development from a market perspective. The full market analysis report can be found in the Appendix to this report.

Residential Market Analysis

RKG completed a residential market analysis for the entire City of Quincy to look at current housing supply and demand as well as looking out over a five year time horizon at future demand. Given the amount of housing development that has taken place, and is planned to take place in Quincy, it's important to analyze housing demand across the entire city. Major housing developments like Munroe Place, Ten Faxon, and Neponset Landing have added hundreds of new multi-family residential units in the City. The planned redevelopment of Quincy Center is a very significant project that will transform Quincy's downtown adding over 1,400 new residential units by the year 2020.

Since much of the new development in Quincy over the last decade has come from multi-family condominiums and rental units, the focus for new housing in Wollaston will likely be on multi-family rental units. This is also the direction a large sector of the housing market in Greater Boston is taking in the wake of the housing bubble burst and recession.

According to RKG, the multi-family rental housing market in Quincy over the next five years is fairly strong. Estimates show there is an absolute demand of around 530 units per year over the next five years in Quincy. This housing would likely be marketed to those age 35 and under with a household income over $75,000 per year. Households at this income level could afford rents ranging from $1,750 per month for a one bedroom and $2,070 for a two bedroom unit. These rent levels are in the range of what a developer would likely need to achieve to make a new multi-family rental project financially feasible. Any new residential rental development constructed in Quincy would need to absorb about 20% - 40% of the available residential demand in order to lease up in a timely fashion.

There is also a significant demand for rental units affordable to households making under $60,000 per year. This equates to rents in the $1,500 per month range and under. Potential demand for these units is close to 1,000 units per year over a five year period. Land and construction costs create a challenge for developers to construct units at these price points and still make the development financially feasible. Units at these price points may be assisted through federal, state or local subsidies or including affordable units as part of the overall proforma of a market rate development project.

While there is demand for additional residential development in Quincy, it's important to consider the competition across the City for people who will be filling

these units. The Quincy Center redevelopment project will absorb a significant number of residential units on an annual basis for the next 6-8 years, but there are also other developments across the City that are in the pipeline and will be competing with any future development in Wollaston for residents. It is also important that any future residential development in Wollaston include some amenities that will make it competitive with other existing and planned projects across the City. New developments need to have amenities like city or water views, high quality finishes, and building amenities like a gym or common space.

Retail Market Analysis

Understanding the retail market as part of a station area plan is very important. First floor retail as part of a mixed-use development scenario is one of the key parts to creating an active and engaging street frontage. Being conscious of retail market demand is also important from a zoning perspective as well. In station areas where market demand for retail may not be as strong, municipalities may not want to require first floor retail for all buildings and may want to be more strategic about where retail is placed. Over-zoning for retail can lead to vacancies and actually hurt a business district.

RKG completed a retail demand analysis by estimating the average annual retail spending demand of a hypothetical additional 500 residential units in Wollaston Center[5]. Based on this additional potential spending power in Wollaston Center, RKG estimates these 500 units would generate $14 million annually in retail spending, and this spending power could support approximately 37,600 square feet of retail space. A majority of this retail demand would be absorbed by existing retailers in Wollaston Center, as well as regional retailers like shopping plazas and malls or big box retailers that offer goods and services not found in Wollaston Center.

Of the 37,600 square feet of retail space, the new spending power generated could support up to 10,000-15,000 square feet of new retail space in Wollaston Center. While this is not a large amount of new retail space, it is enough to potentially support a small market, some new restaurants, or new merchandise retailers.

[5] The 500 unit estimate is a planning level number used to generate a hypothetical retail demand scenario.

Office Market Analysis

Finally, RKG completed an office market analysis for Wollaston Center which showed demand for additional office space in this location is not strong. In 2012, the City of Quincy had a 20% vacancy rate city-wide for existing office space. That, combined with the upcoming development of 1 million square feet of new office space as part of the Quincy Center redevelopment creates little demand for additional office space in Wollaston. If office development does occur in Wollaston it will likely be constructed with a specific end-user already lined up and it is likely to be small spaces for professional offices instead of a large corporate office development.

Opportunities and Impediments - Market Analysis

The market analysis completed for Wollaston Center identified the potential for additional housing and a limited amount of retail development over the next five years. RKG highlighted several opportunities in Wollaston Center as part of the market analysis:

- There is a market for additional residential development in Quincy, especially rental units, and the proximity of Wollaston Center to the Red Line and Quincy Center makes this area a strong candidate for new development.
- If existing zoning is changed, it could encourage new development in Wollaston Center.
- New housing development in Wollaston Center will bring added spending power to existing businesses and the potential to add new retail space.

RKG also noted a number of potential impediments that could make additional development challenging in Wollaston Center from a market perspective:

- Any new residential development in Wollaston Center will be competing with existing and future residential developments throughout Quincy. New development will need to absorb 20 - 40% of the market demand to lease up in a timely manner.
- Land and construction costs in Wollaston Center will likely result in rent levels that are on the high end for the neighborhood. Although demand is present, achievable rents compared to construction costs is a potential challenge.
- Replacement parking costs on the MBTA parking lot may hinder development on that site.
- Current zoning in Wollaston Center constrains development potential, especially on the MBTA parking lot.

The remaining components of the vision address specific recommendations for how the City of Quincy and other partners could increase the marketability of Wollaston Center as a location for new transit oriented development.

Zoning Assessment

One of most important components of the vision, which the City of Quincy has jurisdiction over, is the zoning in Wollaston Center. The existing zoning was identified as an impediment to new development by RKG in the market analysis, as well as by MAPC in our analysis of zoning and development feasibility. This section describes the existing zoning characteristics in Wollaston Center, identifies the impediments, and offers recommendations to improve the zoning and make it more flexible to allow for the type of development identified by the community in the vision.

The Wollaston Center study area consists of three zoning districts: Business C, Business B and Residential B. Business C is the primary zoning district with very small portions of the study area in the other two zones. Figure 2.2 shows the existing zoning districts within the study area and adjacent areas.

In general, both the Business B and C districts provide for a wide range of uses that would be supportive of transit oriented development, including residential uses (single-, two- and multi-family, though there are different permitting requirements in each district as discussed below); retail uses, with small projects (0-5,000 square feet) allowed by right and projects 5,000-20,000 square feet requiring a Planning Board special permit[6]; restaurants; customary exempt and institutional uses; and industrial uses appropriate for a business district such as office or retail combined with a storage warehouse and lab/research facilities.

Provisions for multi-family development in these districts are slightly unclear. According to the Table of Uses (Appendix A in the City of Quincy's Zoning Ordinance), Business B allows single-family and two-family residential uses by right, while multi-family development requires a Planning Board special permit.

For the Business C district, Appendix A lists single- an two-family residential uses as prohibited and multi-family uses by right.

However, in Notes to the Table of Dimensional Regulations (Quincy Zoning Ordinance Section 4.1.2.2) Business B and C require a Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) special permit for mixed-use development, which conflicts with Appendix A. The City is aware of this conflict and plans to revise the regulations.

Mixed-use development (defined as "a combination of residential and nonresidential uses in one development or building)," is also allowed in both Business B and C districts, and both require a ZBA special permit. Additionally, Section 4.1.2.2 requires different dimensional requirements for mixed-use, multi-family residential and other uses as described below.

Dimensional Standards and Parking Requirements

While the Zoning Ordinance does not specify height in terms of feet for each zoning district, it does put an absolute cap on residential buildings of 60 feet above average grade and 80 feet for commercial buildings. This means it would be possible under the current zoning to propose a commercial building in the Business C district with six stories at 80 feet in height depending on building design.

Section 4.1.2.2 sets forth different dimensional requirements for certain uses in Business B and C, as noted in Table 2.1. For Business B, residential buildings and uses requiring a special permit conform to Business C requirements. In the Business C district, multi-family or mixed-use buildings conform to a different set of requirements, also presented in Table 2.1. Notably, the minimum lot size for multi-family or mixed-use buildings in Business C is 42,000 square feet—nearly an acre—which presents barriers to smaller-scale developments of this nature.

An additional requirement for Business C multi-family or mixed-use development is that setbacks are one quarter the height of the building. This means the taller the building, the greater the setbacks on all sides, which pulls buildings away from the street and reduces the development envelope.

[6] Interviews with City staff indicated these thresholds seemed to work well and did not contribute to an unduly difficult development review or permitting process. City of Quincy Planning and Inspection Services staff, Interview by Metropolitan Area Planning Council, January 3, 2013.

Figure 2.2 - Existing Zoning in Wollaston Center

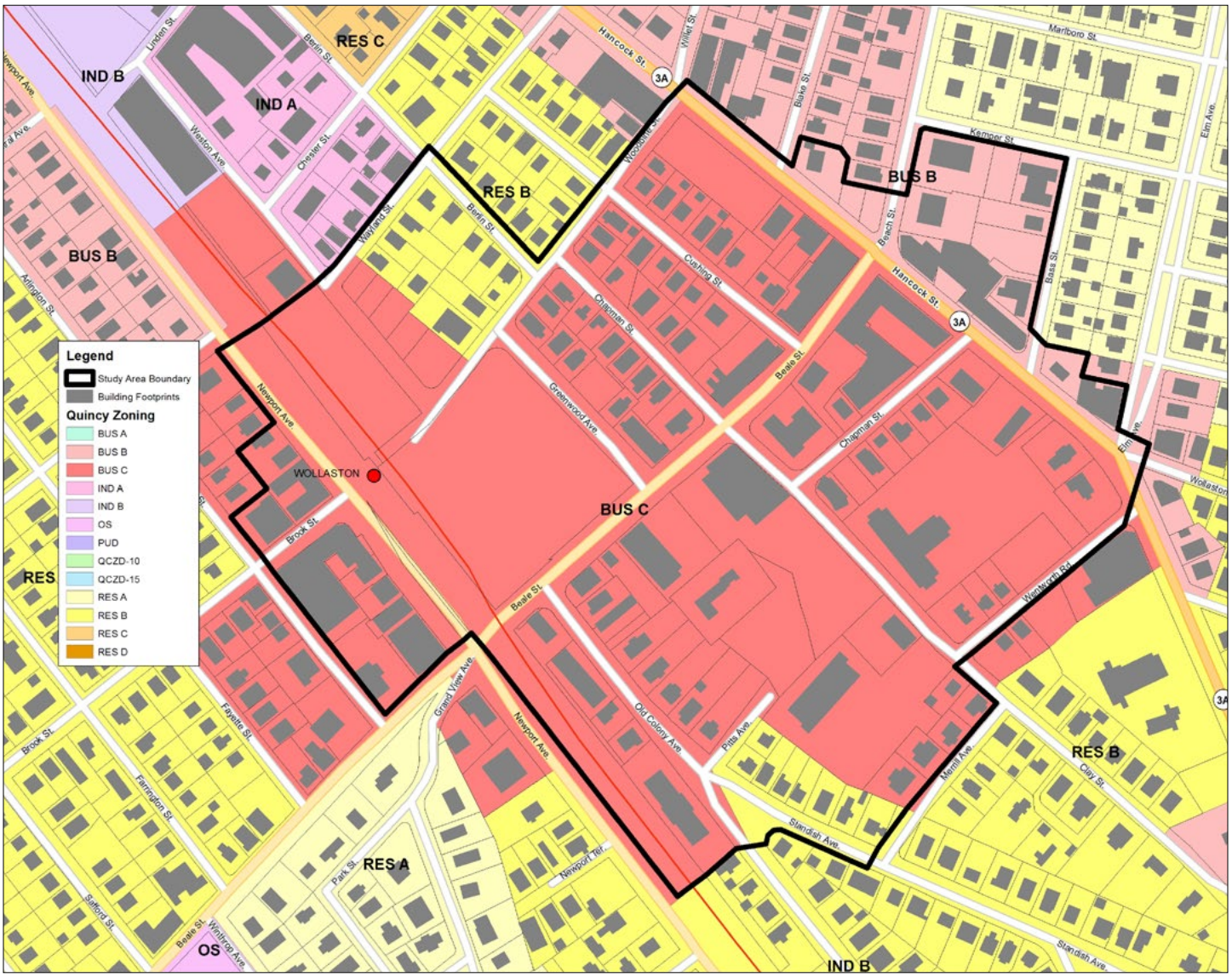


Table 2.1: Business B and C Dimensional Requirements, City of Quincy									
	Max FAR	Min lot area (sf)	Min lot area/DU	Setbacks			Min lot frontage	Min open space/DU (sf)	Height (max. stories)
				Front	Side	Rear			
Business B	1.5	5,000	None	15’	15’	20’	60’	None	4
Business C	3.5	5,000	None	None	None	20’	60’	None	6
Business B residential or SP uses	3.5	5,000	None	None	20’	20’	60’	None	6
Business C MF or mixed-use	3.5	42,000	500	See *	See *	See *	100’	100	6
* One quarter the height of the building.									

Parking is a critical component to transit oriented development and can be an asset or a hinderance to the success of development around transit. The goal of transit oriented development is to provide options for travel that do not rely solely on personal vehicles. Limiting parking around transit stations is one way to ease traffic congestion and promote more walking, biking and transit use as part of new development.

The parking requirements in Quincy are measured on a per residential unit basis or on a square footage basis for retail and office development. Interviews with City staff raised the question of whether some parking requirements are too high. There may be the opportunity to reduce the residential parking requirement to a standard more consistent with other TOD provisions. The office and retail requirements are not particularly high, with the exception of the Business B retail requirement which might be more appropriate at one space per 250 sf. However, changing these requirements would affect other Business B and C districts across the City which poses consequences that we cannot evaluate within the scope of this project. The current parking regulations for residential, retail and office development in the Business B and C districts are show in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2: Business B and C Parking Requirements, City of Quincy

	Residential	Office	Retail
Business B	1.5 spaces/ unit	1 sp/300 sf	1 sp/200 sf
Business C	1.5 spaces/ unit	1 sp/600 sf	1 sp/400 sf

Opportunities and Impediments - Zoning

There are several parts of the existing Zoning Ordinance regulating development in Wollaston Center that offer opportunities for encouraging development around transit, as well as parts that are potential impediments to this type of development. This section will mostly focus on the Business C district since this district regulates the main commercial corridors of Newport Avenue, Beale Street, and Hancock Street where much of the development potential lies. However, these opportunities, impediments, and recommendations could be applied to parcels along the northeast side of Hancock Street that are currently zoned Business B.

Opportunity: Floor Area Ratio (FAR) - The FAR in the Business C district is 3.5, creating a large building envelope for new development in Wollaston Center.

Opportunity: Building Height - The maximum allowable building height in the Business C district is 6 stories (60' for residential buildings, 80' for commercial buildings). These heights allow for development that would match the existing character of Wollaston Center and allow for additional housing and retail space along the commercial corridors.

Opportunity: Setbacks - There are no required front and side yard setbacks in the Business C district which allows new buildings to be pulled up to the sidewalk creating active first floor frontage.

Opportunity: Lot Size - The minimum lot size of 5,000 square feet in the Business B and C districts would allow development (other than multi-family and mixed-use) to take place in Wollaston Center where many lots are between 5,000 and 15,000 square feet in size.

Opportunity: Parking Ratios - The parking ratios for office and retail development in the Business C district are currently at a level consistent with development around transit. Wollaston Center has a number of public and private surface parking lots as well as free on-street parking.

Even though the FAR, building heights, and setbacks allow for larger scale development in the Business C district, in practice there are several impediments that limit a developers ability to construct buildings consistent with the vision for Wollaston Center. MAPC completed a build-out for several parcels in Wollaston Center to gain a better understanding of how the current zoning regulations impact development. The recommendations for each impediment were also tested to see if they allow for greater flexibility and development consistent with the vision for Wollaston Center.

The three areas that restrict development the most are minimum lot size, setbacks, and parking requirements. Figure 2.3 illustrates how a parcel of land developed at the maximum FAR (3.5 in this case) is constrained by setbacks and parking requirements.

Impediment: Minimum lot size for multi-family and mixed-use buildings - While the minimum lot size for other uses in the Business B and C districts is 5,000 square feet, the regulation for multi-family and mixed-use buildings is 42,000 square feet. This creates a barrier to potential small-scale redevelopment opportunities in Wollaston Center where there are very few parcels over 42,000 square feet.

Recommendation: Decrease the minimum lot size for multi-family and mixed-use development in the Business C district to be consistent with the minimum lot size for other uses in the district – currently 5,000 square feet.

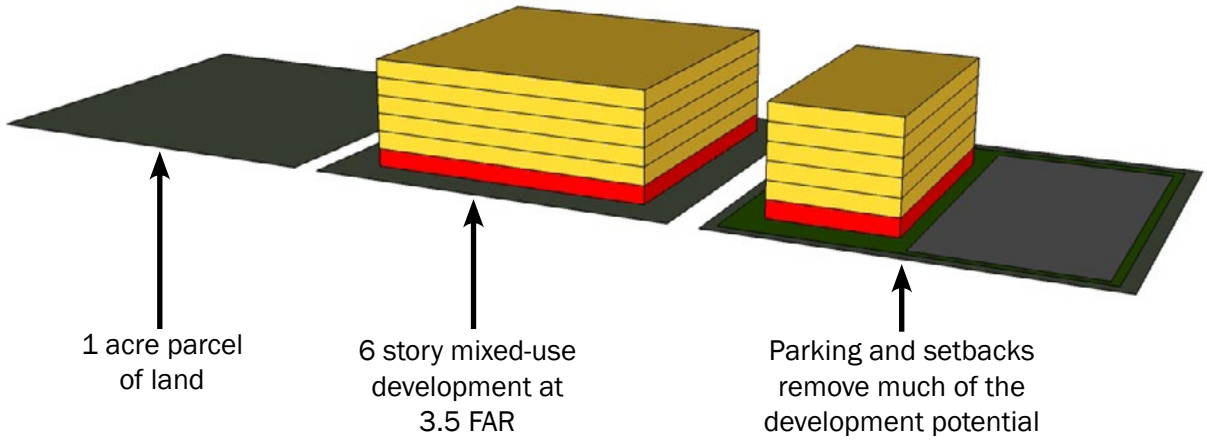
Impediment: Setbacks for multi-family and mixed-use development - The setbacks for Business C multi-family or mixed-use developments are set at one quarter the height of the building. This effectively pulls buildings away from the street in proportion to the height and also diminishes development potential. Both of these are at odds with the vision for this area. Dimensional regulations should create a tighter urban feel, with at least the first or second stories at or very close to the lot line. Additionally, diminishing development potential can impact the market viability of development sites.

Recommendation: Similar to the minimum lot size impediment, existing dimensional regulations for other uses in the Business C district provide a good starting point for alternative setback requirements. Currently, Business C requires no front or side setbacks and the minimum rear-yard setback is 20 feet. MAPC recommends changing the setbacks for mixed-use and multi-family development to mirror that of the existing Business C requirements of a zero-lot line approach since these create a tighter urban fabric.

Impediment: Residential parking requirement - At 1.5 spaces per unit, the residential parking requirement for the Business B and C districts is higher than what is typically recommended for a TOD area. Lowering the required parking would increase development feasibility and residential density in Wollaston Center.

Recommendation: Implement a 0.5 space per unit parking minimum and a 1.0 space per unit parking maximum. This allows developers flexibility to respond to market demand while ensuring there are an adequate number of spaces for each unit.

Figure 2.3 - Impact of Setback and Parking Regulations on Development



Impediment: Implementing Zoning Changes - There are two basic options for changing the zoning requirements outlined above: one option is to adjust the current zoning district regulations in the Zoning Ordinance to reflect these changes, the second is implementation through an area-wide overlay district. While the former obviates the need for an additional district, it runs the risk of changing requirements elsewhere in the City where such changes may not be appropriate or welcome. An overlay district would change requirements for a specific area – for example, a specifically defined area in Wollaston Center. Adding an overlay district does create more regulatory clutter for a relatively small number of changes. This is especially true if the City also wishes to consider an additional overlay district for specific TOD sites, as discussed later in this report.

Recommendation: Since it may not appropriate to make the changes recommended above to the Business C district city-wide, MAPC is recommending implementing the changes through an overlay district specific to Wollaston Center. The City can then work with residents, business owners, and property owners to define the boundaries of the overlay district as well as engage in further discussion on the recommendations in this report.

MBTA Parcel Feasibility Analysis

Throughout the Re-Envisioning Wollaston process, the 5 acre MBTA surface parking lot at the corner of Beale Street and Greenwood Avenue has been one of the primary potential development sites in Wollaston Center. The vision from the community is to see additional mixed-use development occur on the portion of the site along Beale Street and Greenwood Avenue to create a continuous street frontage and act as a gateway to Wollaston Center from Newport Avenue.

While potential development on the MBTA site offers a huge opportunity, it comes with significant impediments. To better understand the opportunities and impediments on the MBTA site, MAPC undertook a basic development feasibility analysis working closely with MBTA staff and staff from Transit Realty Associates (TRA). MAPC wanted to better understand what it might take from a developers perspective to create a mixed-use development on a portion of the MBTA site.

Parking and Policy

In order to understand the development possibilities on this parcel, it was important to understand the parking at the station and MBTA policies dealing with parking. Currently, the 550 space surface parking lot at Wollaston Station is over 100% occupied Monday through Friday, and generates on average $13,700 a week in revenue for the MBTA. This is an almost guaranteed revenue stream for the MBTA that can be budgeted year after year with a high level of confidence. The surface parking lot also comes with minimal operation and maintenance costs on an annual basis. In terms of revenue sources, this parking lot provides a steady stream of reliable revenue for the MBTA.

In order for development to occur on the 3 acre piece of the MBTA parking lot that runs along Beale Street and Greenwood Avenue, the MBTA is likely to require a one for one replacement of any parking lost as a result of development. The need to replace lost parking is tied to policies and financing mechanisms at the MBTA. Parking revenue is not only a source of income for the MBTA, it also provides securitization for bonds. Parking is also part of the customer experience, especially in cities and towns outside the Inner Core of the MAPC region.

From a developer's perspective, the financial feasibility of a development on this site becomes challenging when factoring in the cost of replacing 550 parking

spaces in what would likely have to be a structured parking facility. The rough cost estimate to construct a 550 space parking structure is around $15 - $20 million. That is a significant burden on a developer, who under current zoning is only able to construct a building with a maximum of six stories plus parking for their own residential and retail units. That size development would not be able to cover the cost of the parking garage, nor the cost of the actual development in full.

MAPC tested three different development scenarios to understand how the current zoning and parking replacement policy impacts the financial feasibility of the site. The first scenario assumed development under the existing Business C zoning and a full replacement of the MBTA parking. Figure 2.4 illustrates how much of the parcel would need to be dedicated to surface parking in order to accommodate a six story mixed-use building. Much of the site is restricted by the surface parking, building height, and setback requirements. Developing this site under existing zoning would not be financially feasible.

If a developer were to construct a building and replace the 550 parking spaces for the MBTA in a structured garage, the building would need to be on the order of 12-15 stories and support hundreds of new residential units. A development of this size would not be allowed under current zoning, and is not consistent with existing neighborhood character. Figure 2.5 illustrates the level of development that would likely be needed.

The third scenario tested what if the MBTA reduced the total amount of parking at Wollaston Station by 200-300 cars to lower the cost of the parking structure. Under this scenario, it is more likely that a developer could make a project work, but would still need some zoning relief for height, mixed-use, and parking. This building would likely need to be on the order of 6-8 stories in height. This development scenario is illustrated in Figure 2.6.

Figure 2.4 - Development Under Current Zoning

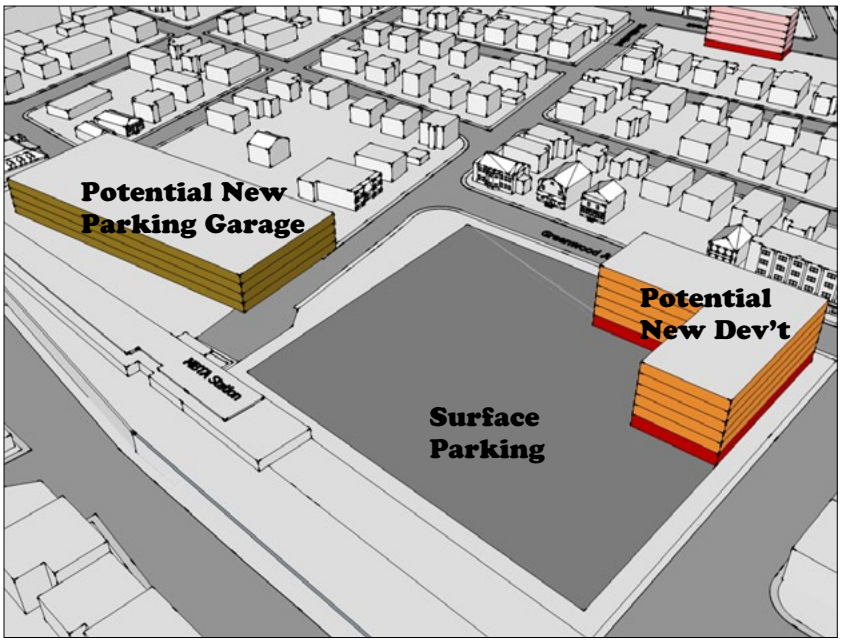


Figure 2.5 - Amount of Development Needed to Pay for Parking Structure

Figure 2.6 - Amount of Development Needed to Pay for Smaller Parking Structure

Opportunities and Impediments - MBTA Parcel

Although development on the MBTA site is challenging, there are still a number of opportunities the City and the MBTA could take advantage of.

Opportunity: Development on the Parcel - The MBTA parcel is one of the most catalytic development opportunities in Wollaston Center. It is one of the few publicly owned parcels in the study area, and if developed, would fill a hole in the street frontage and act as a gateway for people coming to the station and to Wollaston Center.

Opportunity: More Residential Development to Activate Wollaston - If this parcel is developed with a residential component, new residents and additional spending power would bolster local businesses and create new activity in Wollaston Center.

Opportunity: Added Ridership and Revenue - By placing more residential development in close proximity to the Wollaston Red Line station, more people will use the Red Line increasing ridership and thereby increasing fare revenue for the MBTA.

Opportunity: Land Lease Option - If the MBTA is able to work out a land lease deal for a piece of the 5 acre parking lot, as well as have full or partial replacement of their parking spaces, the parking revenue plus the land lease revenue would likely exceed the amount of revenue currently generated by the parking alone. This, along with new revenue from added ridership, would help to boost overall MBTA revenue which can be invested back into the transit system.

Opportunity: Additional Tax Base for Quincy - Development on the MBTA parking lot would also bring added property and sales tax revenue to the City. This added revenue could be captured and reinvested back into Wollaston Center, or be invested in other areas of the City.

The MBTA site is one of the few publicly owned parcels of land in Wollaston Center. This creates a unique opportunity for a public-private development partnership between the MBTA, the City and a private developer. In order for development to happen on the site, MAPC has noted several potential impediments, as well as possible recommendations for overcoming these impediments.

Impediment: Replacing MBTA Parking - As noted in the previous section, one of the single biggest impediments to development on the MBTA parcel is the requirement to replace parking. The cost of a structured parking garage is a significant impediment to the financial feasibility of a development on the site. Balancing the need for commuter parking and revenue with the desire for development is a challenge.

Recommendation: The MBTA should determine the amount of replacement parking needed at Wollaston should a development proposal ever move forward. Dropping the number of parking spaces, even by 100, could make a difference in the financial feasibility of a development. The MBTA could also consider entering into a shared parking agreement with a developer so that parking not used by the development during the day could be used for MBTA commuter parking. This could help lessen the total amount of parking needed by both the development and the MBTA.

The MBTA could also consider raising the price of daily parking at Wollaston by an additional $2.00 per day, making the cost $7.00 instead of $5.00. The Braintree, Quincy Adams, and Quincy Center (before it closed) stations are all priced at $7.00 per day. While these three stations are all covered garage locations and Wollaston is not, increasing the price could help redistribute vehicles to other parking locations along the Red Line where there is excess capacity. Redistributing vehicles to other lots as well as increasing the price could help mitigate any loss of parking at the Wollaston lot as a result of new development.

If the MBTA determines that 550 spaces are needed at Wollaston station and any future development on the site would need to provide replacement parking, the City, MBTA and private developer could explore potential cost sharing agreements with the possibility of paying back the cost through a value capture mechanism. There is also the possibility of seeking federal or state

funding to help with pay the partial or full cost of the parking garage. Federal and state funding streams are subject to changes, cuts, and are very competitive creating a level of uncertainty.

Impediment: Existing Zoning - The other key impediment to development on the MBTA parking lot is the existing zoning regulations controlling development. As noted earlier in this report, the existing regulations under the Business C zone create constraints for mixed-use transit oriented development. These constraints are exasperated on the MBTA parcel where in order to absorb the cost of replacement parking, the developer would need a set of flexible zoning regulations that may exceed what is currently allowed or what is appropriate in other parts of Wollaston Center. Specifically, the parking requirements for residential development, the setback requirements, and the height restrictions may be too constraining for a developer to program a profitable project for this site.

Recommendation: Since the MBTA parcel is a unique development opportunity with it's own set of challenges, it may require it's own set of regulations that are specific to this site and do not regulate adjacent parcels. To provide added flexibility, MAPC is recommending the City consider implementing a targeted overlay district that could be applied to this parcel. This could be similar to what was done for the redevelopment of Quincy Center, but at a different scale and scope. This targeted development overlay would allow the City to work closely with the MBTA and the developer to ensure development on the site is feasible, well designed, and meets community expectations. Due to the uniqueness of the area, site and market, it would be most beneficial for the City to consider the particulars of the overlay if and when it receives developer interest in the parcel.

To better understand the specific components of a targeted overlay, MAPC tested several different development scenarios on the MBTA site to determine how adjusting pieces of the existing Business C zoning regulations could create more flexibility and ultimately encourage development on the site. Parking requirements had the most immediate impact on the size of the development envelope. Table 2.3 shows how adjusting the parking ratio for the residential component impacts the size of the development.

Table 2.3: MBTA Site Development Potential and Parking Requirements

Residential Parking Ratio	**1.5 spaces/unit**	**0.75 spaces/unit**	**0.5 spaces/unit**
Total buildable sf*	132,690	190,342	222,578
Retail	22,159	31,787	37,170
Residential	110,531	158,555	185,407
Units @ 1,500 sf/unit	74	106	124
Total footprint	22,159	31,787	37,170
Total parking spaces	221	198	186
Total parking (sf)	92,902	83,321	77,964
Building footprint/parking	24%	38%	48%
Effective FAR	0.92	1.32	1.55

*Based on 3.5 FAR for all three scenarios.

Combining lower residential parking requirements with increases in allowable building height and reduced setbacks will help create added flexibility on the site as well as a more financially feasible development. At this time, MAPC feels that the understanding of how parking, height, and dimensional requirements impact a site's development feasibility may be more important than recommending specific changes to these three regulations. If the City and/or MBTA is approached by a developer, it would be appropriate to craft the specific regulations at that point working with the community and developer.

Parking regulations and availability was a consistent theme heard throughout this process, MAPC also recommends the City undertake a comprehensive parking analysis in Wollaston Center. This should cover both public and private parking, on-street and off-street. Understanding the current parking inventory, availability, regulations, and turnover, will help provide additional information the City can use to adjust parking regulations in the zoning ordinance and develop a comprehensive strategy for dealing with the needs of short-term and long-term parking in Wollaston Center.

Housing Recommendations for Wollaston Center

New development in Wollaston Center would provide additional housing, ideally setting forth infrastructure and related improvements in the surrounding neighborhood. Major infrastructure investments, like comprehensive street and sidewalk improvements, can spur other revitalization and investment that creates amenities that benefit residents of all income levels. At the same time, however, increased property values can have an adverse impact: the escalation of housing prices, which may lead to the displacement of low- and moderate-income households. The City of Quincy can guide development in Wollaston Center by continuing to provide and expand existing City programs and policies to mitigate neighborhood changes - change that may result in the loss of neighborhood diversity and limit housing choices.

The following will not only explain how to incorporate affordable housing on-site, but also how to mitigate potential displacement and provide background information on tools and techniques to ensure new development is beneficial to the site and the neighborhood.

Key Recommendations:

- Provide Financial or Zoning Incentives for Higher-Density Mixed-Income, Mixed-Use Development
- Preserve Existing Affordable Rental Housing
- Create and Preserve Affordable Homeownership Opportunities
- Coordinate Long-Term Planning

Provide Financial or Zoning Incentives for Higher Density Mixed-Income, Mixed-Use Development

The market analysis prepared by RKG stated that the housing demand in the City of Quincy could support 2,560 households annually, of which 12% would be new growth. The analysis suggests that new housing could serve three specific markets: potential owner households with a gross annual household income at or above $100,000, potential renter households with a gross annual household income at or below $60,000, and potential renter households with a gross annual income at or above $75,000. It was noted in RKG's analysis that creating rental housing for households with gross annual household incomes at or below $75,000 could be challenging and may require developer subsidies.

The market analysis suggests a number of reasons why certain types of housing development may or may not be feasible in Wollaston Center. MAPC's housing recommendations will assume that development moves forward on any of the identified sites and includes a component related to affordability both on site and addresses affordability in the surrounding Wollaston neighborhood.

The City already has in place a number of programs and policies to preserve and create affordable housing opportunities. The City should consider minor modifications to those programs and policies. The City might also consider providing a special development opportunity for the MBTA site and ensure that the developer build 15% affordable units on-site. This could be accomplished by adding this requirement to any special development regulations applied to this site. Community Preservation Act (CPA), HOME or Affordable Housing Trust funds might be leveraged to offset development costs.

Preserve Existing Affordable Rental Housing

Preserving housing units and developments with an expiring affordability restriction ("expiring use") has been, and continues to be, a priority for the City. Rising property values in areas undergoing large-scale investments in transit and other infrastructure can threaten the continued affordability of existing rental homes and lead to property tax increases that make it difficult for low-income homeowners to afford their housing costs. Rising property values can also make it cost-prohibitive to replace newly developed affordable homes lost due to the expiration of affordability restrictions. Local communities can take steps to preserve existing affordable rental homes and create new homeownership and rental opportunities that will remain available to low- and moderate-income households over the long term.

The area around Wollaston station is heavily residential, but includes commercial and other uses. Preservation of existing affordable housing in this area is critical, as well as potentially acquiring or rehabilitating and preserving new affordable housing. HOME funds can be used for these activities – both housing rehabilitation and tenant-based rental assistance. Preservation of units ensures that housing is affordable to low- and moderate-income households by protecting the units in a deed restriction.

Whenever property values rise, there is a danger that owners of properties with federal housing subsidies may choose to opt out of their subsidy contracts and that owners of unsubsidized affordable rentals may raise rents or sell the buildings in preparation for conversion to condominiums or higher-priced housing units. The City can adopt a preservation strategy that specifically targets location-efficient areas to help stem the loss of affordable rental homes in strong market neighborhoods, particularly around transit.

A preservation strategy may include the following elements:

- Creating a "preservation catalog" to identify and track subsidized housing near transit stations that are at the highest risk of loss;
- Prioritizing the use of Low Income Housing Tax Credits and other funding sources to recapitalize and modernize location-efficient affordable homes; and
- Creating tax incentives to encourage the preservation of affordable rental housing.

Create and Preserve Affordable Homeownership Opportunities

"Shared equity" programs, such as the City's First Time Homebuyer program, funded through federal HOME funds, bring the cost of homeownership within reach of low- and moderate-income households by using a formula to balance long-term affordability goals and individual asset accumulation. These programs provide an initial subsidy to lower the cost of a home and then split any price gains realized upon home resale between the seller and the City or a housing program sponsor, such as a local nonprofit affordable housing developer. The sponsor's appreciation share may either remain with the home to ensure affordability for the next qualified buyer (this is essentially a transfer of the deed restriction at the time of sale), or the appreciated value is returned to the program sponsor who might collect these funds into a larger pool to benefit other future lower-income buyers.

Homeownership programs that incorporate shared equity mechanisms are particularly useful for creating and preserving affordable homes in areas where new transit stations or other neighborhood improvements are expected to contribute to long-term home price increases. Shared equity homeownership includes deed-restricted housing. Quincy can take steps to ensure that existing low-income homeowners can afford to remain in their homes as property values increase.

As the demand for neighborhoods around transit areas grows, existing residents may see a sizable increase in their assessed home values, leading to increases in required property taxes. Those living on a limited or fixed income may be unable to find room in their budgets to cover these added costs. "Circuit breaker" programs provide tax relief by freezing the assessed home value at an earlier level or freezing or reducing the overall tax bill to prevent dramatic increases. While these programs commonly target households with disabled or elderly homeowners, some communities have broadened eligibility to include all low- income households[7].

Coordinated Long-Term Planning

The effective coordination of the City's Consolidated Plan with surrounding community plans and MetroFuture, the Regional Housing Plan, Long Range Transportation Plan, and Transportation Improvement Program is critical for the long-term success of many of the aforementioned programs and policies. For example, the city's HOME consortium recently expanded to include Braintree, Milton, and Holbrook. This has enabled the city to expand affordable housing opportunities and provide technical assistance in and to those new communities. To City should continue to coordinate with surrounding communities and MAPC on their Consolidated Plan.

Among other things, such coordination should involve consideration by City housing, economic development and planning officials responsible for submitting the Consolidated Plans of:

- The impacts of planned transportation investments on housing affordability;
- How the plan advances regional housing affordability goals;
- How the plan will help to reduce the combined costs of housing and transportation for low- and moderate-income households, in light of the accessibility and affordability of transportation options near planned housing investments;
- How the plan ensures that low- and moderate-income households have access to permanently affordable rental housing and homeownership within close proximity to public transit stops, job centers and other essential destinations; and

[7] Information about Massachusetts Circuit Breaker Tax Credit Program can be found at: http://www.massresources.org/circuit-breaker-tax-credit.html

- How plans for both housing and economic development investments align with local and regional transportation investments.

The City's 2010-2014 Consolidated Plan Housing Strategies include the following select strategies:

- "Continue support for Inclusionary Zoning Ordinance (IZO) and work towards the creation of additional affordable housing units in the City.
- Leverage money acquired in lieu of unit creation from the IZO with other funding sources for the creation of affordable housing.
- Continue to work towards acquiring more affordable rental units for low- and moderate-income individuals and families (particularly for families with more than one child and the elderly) using the City's U.S. Department of HUD funding sources (CDBG, HOME, and McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance funds).
- Promote the creation of new housing in the several "village centers" found throughout the City.
- Support the creation of new housing units near the City's transit stations (Red Line, Commuter Rail, and Ferry).
- Review zoning regulations and explore changes that would encourage redevelopment and in-fill development due to the lack of undeveloped residentially zoned land."

Overall, programs and policies appear to be in place to stimulate development in Wollaston Center. Minor modifications of the existing Affordable Housing Ordinance and improved targeting of City funding, may help mitigate change and ensure that there is an affordable component of any future development. Further, continued coordinated planning and implementation of housing and economic development activities will help position Quincy within the Greater Boston region and improve market competitiveness.

Transportation and Public Realm Improvements

The City of Quincy is the direct beneficiary of four rapid rail stations along the MBTA's Red Line, providing several excellent opportunities for additional development around transit. From Wollaston's station, transit riders have direct access into Downtown Boston and points beyond. While transit plays a significant role in attracting people and increasing development potential, transportation connectivity and the public amenities play an important role in creating the place around the station. If walking and biking is or feels unsafe or challenging, people may be less likely to come to an area to utilize the transit services. This in turn may increase the number of people who choose to drive to/from the area which may increase congestion and the need for parking. This section offers some suggestions for how additional transportation and public improvements can further increase the attractiveness and functionality of Wollaston Center.

Walking and Biking Infrastructure - Opportunities and Impediments

Wollaston Center has a very well connected sidewalk network with sidewalks on both sides of almost all the streets within the business district, as well as on streets connecting to the surrounding residential neighborhoods. During the public engagement process for this project, many residents and business owners expressed interest in seeing improvements to sidewalks, pedestrian crossings, and bike infrastructure in Wollaston Center.

Opportunity: Pedestrian Connectivity - Improving pedestrian connections and safety in Wollaston Center will create more walking trips to the transit station and to local businesses. More foot traffic in Wollaston Center will help enliven the district and encourage people to stay, shop and explore. Wollaston Center already has a well connected sidewalk network, but small changes could make it even better.

Opportunity: Right-of-Way - In Wollaston Center, there are several locations where streets are wider than necessary and right-of-way could be reallocated to other users. In some locations, on-street bike lanes and wider sidewalks could help narrow the roadway making it safer for all users.

Opportunity: Public Health Benefits - With changes to the existing transportation network, additional walking, biking and transit trips will be encouraged. This not only has the benefit of decreasing congestion and improving local air quality, but will help more people choose active modes of transportation combating obesity and related cardiovascular disease.

Opportunity: Reduced Parking Demand - If more trips in Wollaston Center are taken by pedestrians, cyclists and transit users, the demand for parking may decrease over time. This has benefits for existing and new development by freeing up existing parking supply and creating less of a need for parking associated with new development.

Opportunity: Walking or Biking to Transit - Improving bicycle and pedestrian connectivity to Wollaston Station could help ease the parking pressure at the station and make the case for lowering parking to support development on the MBTA parking lot.

In order to better connect the walking, cycling and transit network in Wollaston Center, there are several impediments that need to be addressed. MAPC has identified these impediments as well as potential solutions that would create the types of improvements noted throughout this process by members of the community.

Impediment: Pedestrian Crossings - There are several locations where pedestrian crossings could be improved to help connect pedestrians from surrounding neighborhoods to Wollaston Center. The image below shows a pathway on Newport Avenue northwest of Beale Street where people are walking absent of a sidewalk.

Recommendation: Improve the crossing at Newport Avenue and Brook Street to encourage people to cross at the traffic signal instead of walking down Newport Avenue and having to cross where there are no safe crossings. Ensure pedestrian signals at this location are timed to minimize pedestrian wait times, and add crossing signs so vehicles are aware that people exiting the station on Newport Avenue may be crossing.

Improving the crossing at Brook Street could cut down on the number of people walking along Newport Avenue where there is no sidewalk.

Recommendation: Improve the crossing at Newport Avenue and Beale Street. This crossing was noted as a major barrier to walking from those who live in the neighborhood south of Newport Avenue. In the short term, repainting the crosswalks and stop bars and adding crossing signs at the intersection would help to create higher crossing visibility. The City should also make sure pedestrian signal timing is maximized to provide enough time for pedestrians to cross the

intersection. In the longer term, extending the concrete medians into the crosswalks would provide pedestrian refuge for those who do not, or are unable to, make the full crossing in one light cycle. If lane widths are reduced along either Newport Avenue or Beale Street, the City should consider widening sidewalks and adding curb bump outs to reduce crossing distances.

Wide crossing at the intersection of Newport Avenue and Beale Street.

Recommendation: Improve the crossing at Old Colony Avenue and Beale Street. Many pedestrians cross at this intersection to get from the MBTA station to the neighborhood and businesses on the southeast side of Beale Street. This mid-block crossing does not have a crosswalk and the traffic signal located there does not assist pedestrians crossing the street. Beale Street is at it's widest width at this location and is sloping downhill from Newport Avenue creating sight distance issues for drivers who may not be expecting pedestrians to cross here. In the short term, the City should consider striping a high visibility crosswalk at this location and adding crossing signs on the sides of Beale Street as well as flexible post crosswalk signs in the center line on Beale Street.

Longer term solutions at this location could include shortening the crossing distance along Beale Street by widening sidewalks, reducing travel lane widths, and adding bike lanes. The City could also consider adding a pedestrian only signal at this location if pedestrian crossings are high enough to warrant that treatment. The pedestrian signal would be triggered by a crossing pedestrian and stop traffic traveling along Beale Street.

Pedestrian running to cross at Old Colony Avenue and Beale Street.

Recommendation: Improve the crossing at Greenwood Avenue and Beale Street. This intersection is also a high pedestrian crossing location because Greenwood Avenue connects the surrounding neighborhood to the MBTA station and Wollaston Center business district. In the short term, crosswalks should be re-striped and crossing signal timing maximized for pedestrians. Striping on-street bike lanes along Greenwood Avenue and a portion of Beale Street would also help shorten crossing distances.

In the longer term, crossing distances could be shortened by adding curb bump outs or extensions at each corner of the intersection. The presence of on-street parking provides the space to add bump outs without having them protrude into the travel lanes. If the sidewalks are widened along Beale Street in the future, this would also help to shorten crossing distances.

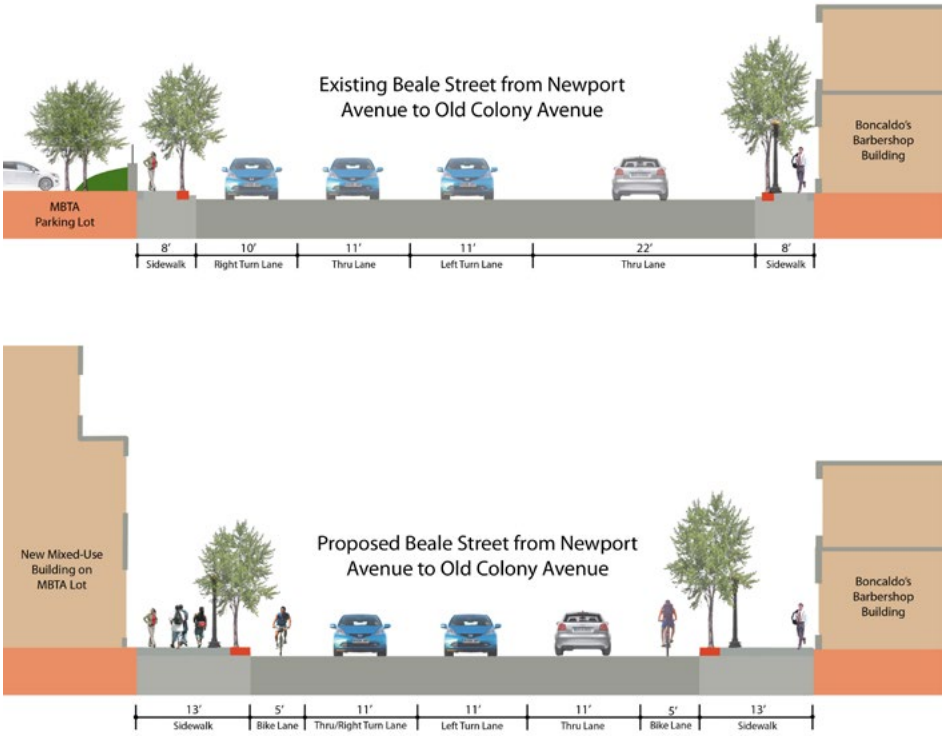
Crossing at Greenwood Avenue and Beale Street.

Impediment: Wide Streets - Portions of Beale Street are currently wider than they need to be. Reallocating the right-of-way to accommodate wider sidewalks and bike facilities will help promote more walking and biking within Wollaston Center and help connect people to the transit station.

Recommendation: Reallocate right-of-way along Beale Street to accommodate wider sidewalks, bike facilities, on-street parking, and travel lanes. Figures 2.7 through 2.10 show before and after cross sections of how Beale Street could be changed to accommodate all modes of transportation.

Figure 2.7 - Beale Street from Newport Avenue to Old Colony Avenue.

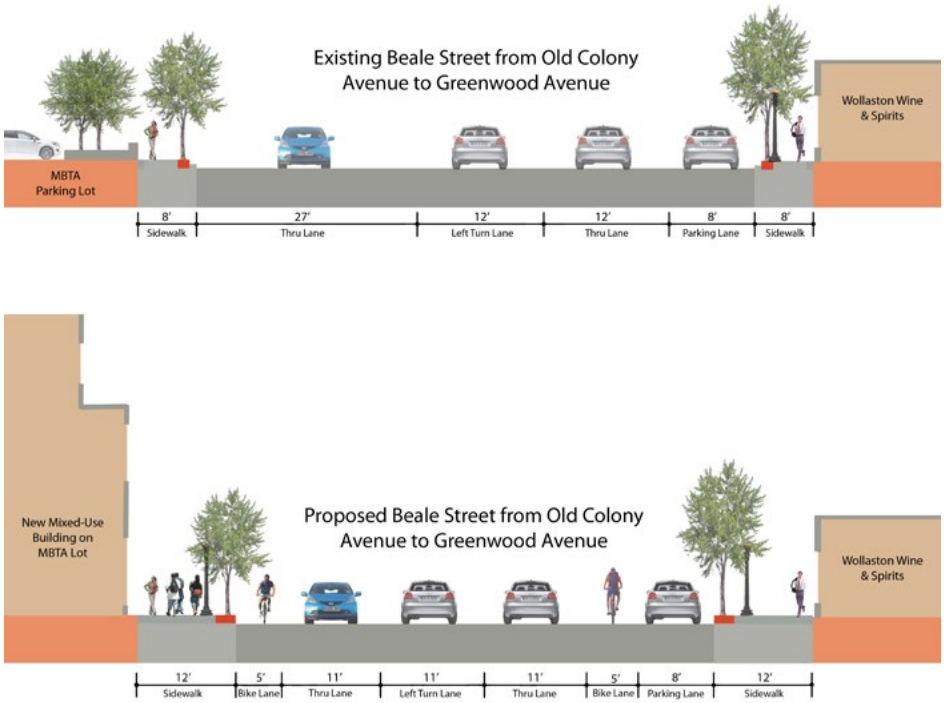
By reducing the width of Beale Street, wider sidewalks and bike lanes could be accommodated. The City should evaluate the traffic impact of removing the dedicated right turn lane at the Beale/Newport intersection.



Before and after renderings of Beale Street which include wider sidewalks, bike lanes, streetscape improvements, and the development of a building on the MBTA parking lot.

Figure 2.8 - Beale Street from Old Colony Avenue to Greenwood Avenue.

By reducing the width of Beale Street, wider sidewalks, bike lanes, and on-street parking could be accommodated. This cross section keeps the dedicated left turn lane from Beale Street onto Greenwood Avenue.



A rendering of Beale Street at Greenwood Avenue with wider sidewalks, bike lanes, streetscape improvements, public space, and additional development on the CVS lot.

Figure 2.9 - Beale Street from Greenwood Avenue to Chapman Street.

By reducing the width of the travel lanes on Beale Street from Greenwood to Chapman, bike lanes could be accommodated. From Greenwood Avenue to Hancock Street, Beale Street narrows quite a bit.

Figure 2.10 - Beale Street from Chapman Street to Cushing Street.

The width of Beale Street from Chapman to Cushing is not wide enough to accommodate on-street bike lanes. MAPC is recommending the City stripe these lanes as shared lanes for cars and cyclists.

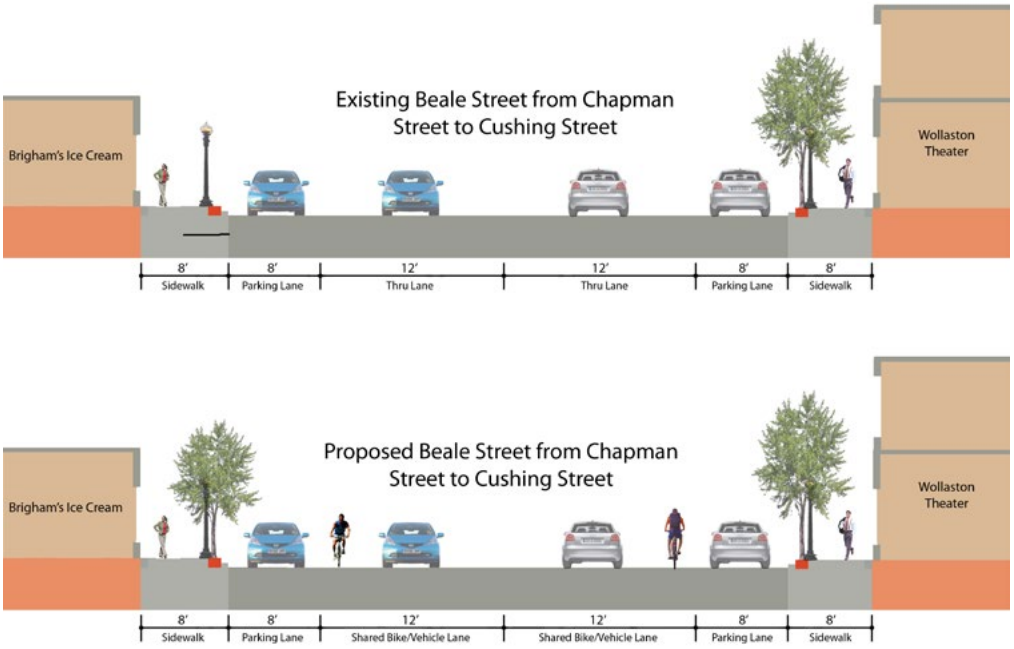
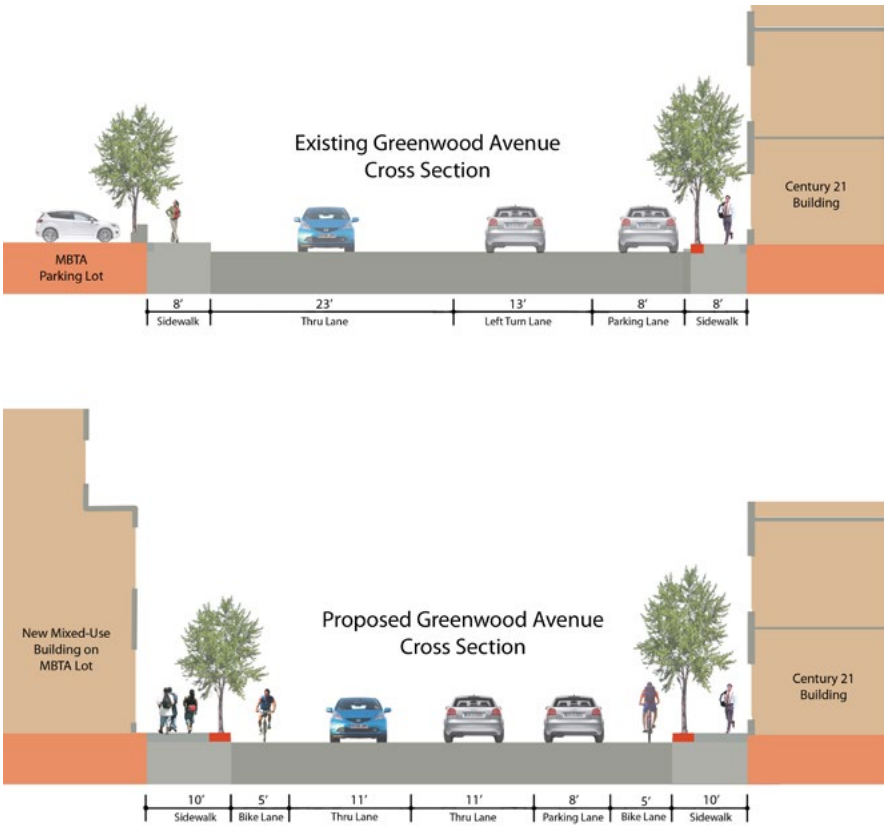


Figure 2.10 - Greenwood Avenue from Beale Street to Woodbine Street.

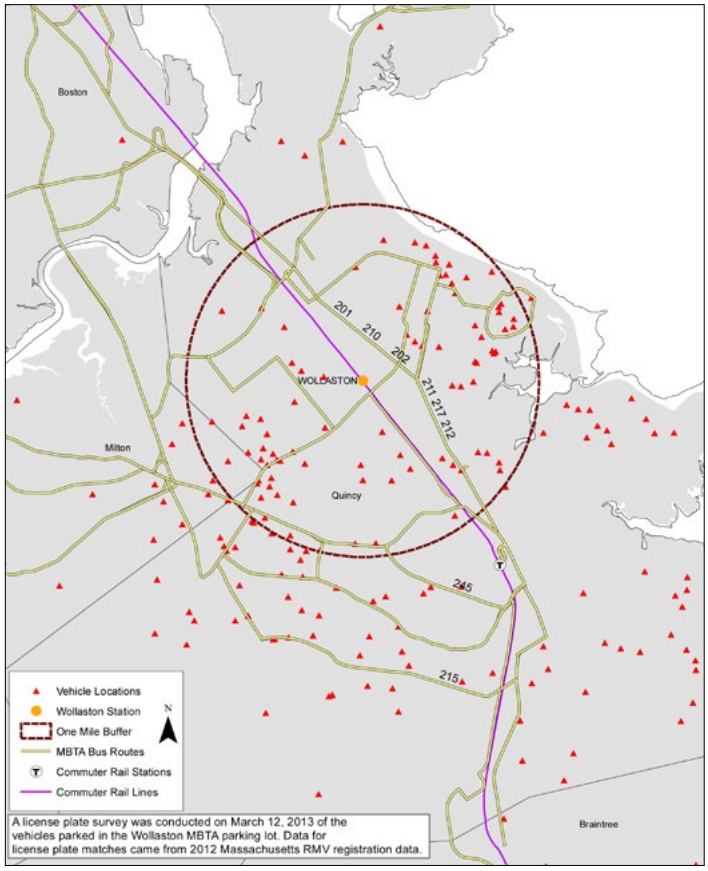
By reducing the width of Greenwood Avenue, wider sidewalks and bike lanes could be accommodated. Greenwood Avenue also acts as a primary access point to the MBTA station.



A rendering of Greenwood Avenue with wider sidewalks, bike lanes and streetscape improvements.

One of the additional benefits of improving pedestrian and bicycle access to and from Wollaston station is the ability of people to walk or bike from their place of residence instead of driving and parking at the MBTA lot. MAPC completed a parking survey of all cars parked in the Wollaston MBTA parking lot on March 12, 2013 to find out where they were coming from. Based on this data, approximately 20% of cars parked in the lot came from within 1 mile of the station, and 55% came from within the City of Quincy. Improving bike and pedestrian connections to the station could help reduce the number of drivers to the station and provide the MBTA with justification to lower the amount of replacement parking required if a portion of the lot was to be developed. Figure 2.11 shows the garaged location of vehicles parked in the lot on the day MAPC did the parking survey. Many of the vehicle locations in Quincy are also located in close proximity to bus lines that connect to the Wollaston and Quincy Center Red Line stations.

Figure 2.11 - Garaged Locations of Vehicles Parking in the Wollaston MBTA Parking Lot.



Parking

Throughout the public engagement process, MAPC and the City heard from residents and business owners that parking in Wollaston Center is challenging. Parking, in the context of transit oriented development, is a complex issue. New development, especially residential, in close proximity to high quality transit does not need as much parking as a development not easily accessible by transit. The premise behind TOD is people will walk, bike or take transit for a majority of their trips and access to a personal vehicle is not a priority. That said, there are still some parking issues in Wollaston Center that if addressed could benefit the business district as a whole.

Impediment: Need to Understand Parking Availability and Utilization - A comprehensive parking study of Wollaston Center has not been completed to date. A parking study would be able to help determine the total number of on- and off-street parking spaces, availability of spaces, utilization of spaces, and the regulatory constraints on spaces. This information can be collected on weekdays and weekends to determine peak utilization hours and turnover rates.

Recommendation: Complete a parking study for Wollaston Center.

Impediment: Need for Long-Term Employee Parking - Some business owners noted that there is a need for long-term parking for employees. Currently employees have to park on street, or some businesses have small parking lots that may not be able to accommodate all their employees.

Recommendation: One short-term solution may be to approach the CVS owner and negotiate the use of the parking spaces they currently hold for paid daily parking for the MBTA lot. Instead of the CVS charging MBTA commuters to park there, employees or employers could pay the $3.00 a day to park there. The CVS wouldn't lose the revenue, and employees would have a long-term parking option each day. This would also keep on-street spaces open for customers of the businesses in Wollaston Center.

Public Realm Improvements

During the public engagement process, MAPC and the City heard from the community that Wollaston Center needed to be enlivened. Wollaston Center needed a face-lift and a more cohesive feel to it. Short and long-term improvements to the public realm by way of additional public spaces, neighborhood events, streetscape improvements, and facade improvements are ways to bring more people, business and excitement to the area. This section contains a series of short and long-term recommendations for improving the vitality of Wollaston Center.

Impediment: Need for More Public Space - Many residents noted that there aren't many, if any, public gathering spaces in Wollaston Center where people could spend time alone, or gather with friends and family.

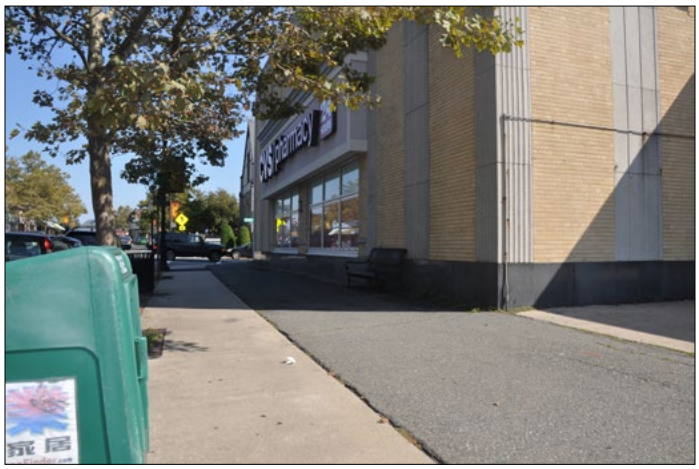
Recommendation: Short-term Public Improvements. There are several locations where short-term low-cost improvements could turn a small plaza area, green space, or wide sidewalk into a place of public activity. One example is the wide sidewalk and entrance plaza outside the CVS along Beale Street. The wide sidewalk along Beale Street is a great place for added outdoor seating and the alcove entrance could be used for outdoor food vendors, public art, or outdoor games (chess, checkers, dominos, etc.). Many of these short-term improvements can be done at a low cost and organized through volunteer efforts.

Impediment: Lack of Identity - When walking, biking, or driving in and around Wollaston Center there is no indication that you have arrived in this neighborhood business district, nor that you are a few hundred feet from a Red Line station. Wollaston Center needs some branding and signage to signify to people they have arrived.

Recommendation: Brand Wollaston Center. Creating a brand for Wollaston Center as a neighborhood business district with access to the Red Line could go a long way in helping to attract people and investment. Banner signs that hang off the street lamps, wayfinding signs, information kiosks at the Red Line station, and more prominent signs for the Red Line station would all help in branding and identifying Wollaston Center.

Portions of Beale Street and Hancock Street already have common elements of a streetscape with ornate lamp posts, street trees, benches, and trash receptacles. These elements are indicators that this is a district or neighborhood, and if extended to other parts of Beale Street, Old Colony Avenue and Greenwood Avenue, could help create the feel of a larger more comprehensive business district.

Impediment: Facades of Existing Buildings - Many of the facades of existing buildings along Beale Street and Newport Avenue are in need of improvement. Chipping paint, outdated materials, large and outdated signage, and cluttered window dressings make for an uninteresting and unappealing pedestrian experience.



A before and after rendering of possible public realm improvements outside the CVS along Beale Street. Public art, sidewalk treatments, movable tables and chairs, and outdoor games can bring a space to life.

Recommendation: Create a Facade Improvement Program. Updated signage, awnings, window treatments, and facade materials would add an updated and more cohesive look to Wollaston Center. This could be implemented through a city-run facade improvement program or through the creation of a business improvement district or Main Streets organization. Wollaston already has the beginnings of a business association through the Wollaston Business District Partnership. Moving to an assessment-based business improvement district could be a mechanism of funding these lower-cost short-term improvements that could help liven up the district and attract new investment without burdening city resources.

Impediment: Need for More Activities - There was an expressed want for more activities by the residents in Wollaston. They are looking for more reasons to visit and spend time in Wollaston Center, as well as activities that will attract people from outside Wollaston to the area.

Recommendation: Create a Program of Events. Work with residents, business owners and local groups (artists, hobby groups, non-profits, etc.) to develop events in Wollaston Center that will bring people to the area and create a buzz. Events could be organized around the diversity of Wollaston, history of the area, clean up events, or events around arts and culture. If the Wollaston Theater is improved and re-opened, that could be an excellent location for hosting events in Wollaston Center.

The transportation and public realm improvements noted in this section are just some of the short- and long-term items that could bring more investment and attention to Wollaston Center. These improvements will have benefits for both residents and businesses by helping connect surrounding neighborhoods to Wollaston Center and the MBTA station, and also create more vibrancy and activity in a location where much has remained the same for decades.

Action steps

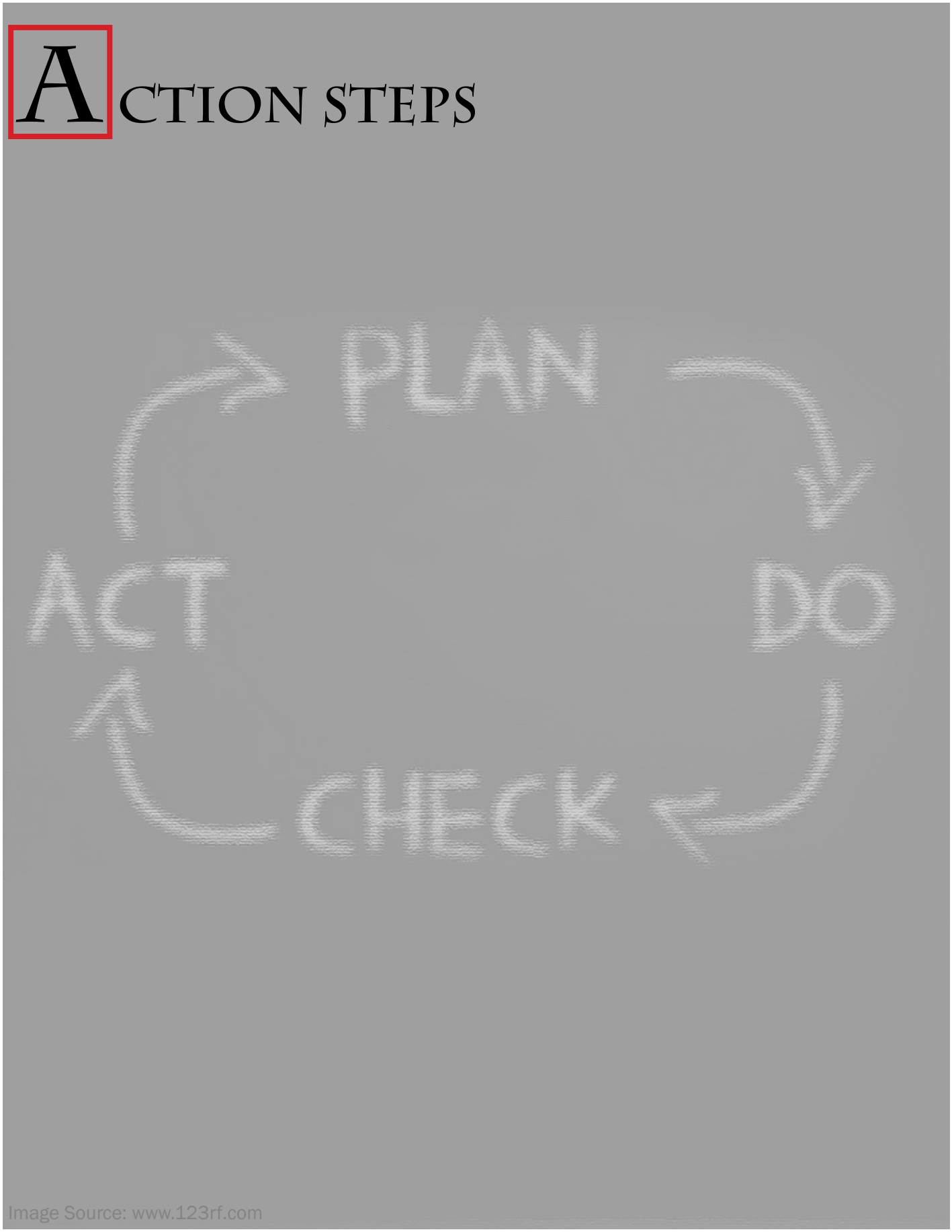


Image Source: www.123rf.com

Short- and Long-Term Action Steps

The impediments and recommendations discussed in the prior sections of this report are not all meant to be completed simultaneously, nor do they all require the same amount of time, effort, or investment. Many of them are designed to build upon this visioning process to continue momentum and not lose sight of the larger goal of seeing additional development around transit take place in Wollaston Center. This section describes some of the short-term and long-term action steps and the entities that could take ownership over seeing pieces of the vision for Wollaston Center become a reality.

Short-Term Action Steps

1. The City should consider forming a working group for Wollaston Center that is made of up a city staff person, Ward Councilors for the area, business owners, property owners, and residents. The working group could assist the City in keeping momentum moving and spearheading educational efforts within the community as changes begin. The working group could also help organize short-term public realm improvements and establish programs and events in Wollaston Center.

2. One of the first immediate action steps the City should take is the completion of a parking study for Wollaston Center. The parking study will help determine current and future parking needs and can be a key tool in the creation of parking requirements in the new overlay district. It may also identify short-term parking improvements that can be done at little cost to the City.

3. Once the parking study is completed for Wollaston Center, the City can work on implementing the recommended zoning changes through an overlay district to provide more flexibility for the creation of new transit oriented development. The City should work with property owners to determine which properties will and will not be considered part of the overlay district.

4. Addressing the transportation improvements in the short-term can be accomplished through temporary changes to the street to test whether or not reallocating the roadway for other users is effective. Cones, tape, removable paint or striping, barriers, and signage can be used to delineate wider sidewalks, bike lanes, or adjusted travel lanes on the street. If these temporary improvements do not work well, they can be easily removed and the street can go back to functioning as it did before. If the improvements work well, the City can pursue means to make the improvements permanent.

5. Other short-term, but permanent, transportation improvements such as crosswalk re-striping or signage improvements should be made by the City through their annual maintenance programs.

6. Public realm improvements can also be accomplished through simple, quick, and cost-effective means. Efforts to improve a plaza or green space for public use can be done through temporary measures as well. Temporary benches, planter boxes, tables, chairs, public art installations, plantings, etc. can be constructed from recycled materials like pallets or scrap wood. Temporary plantings could be donated by a local landscaping business. Public art could be constructed or painted by local artists or temporarily borrowed from an artist from outside the area. If a working group is established for Wollaston Center, the group could solicit ideas from the community for how best to improve public spaces and what elements would best benefit businesses and residents alike.

7. In concert with the public realm improvements, events and programs could be planned for Wollaston Center to engage the community and bring people together. These events could be arranged around constructing the short-term public improvements or a day to explore the temporary transportation network changes. Events like a bike rodeo, or a Wollaston Center sidewalk sale could bring people to the area and have them engage with the transportation changes first hand. Other events, like a clean-up day, could also benefit the area.

8. Funding for these short-term improvements may not be able to come from the City. In this case, it may make sense to consider creating a business improvement district (BID) for Wollaston Center that could be formed from of the existing Wollaston Business District Partnership. An assessment-based organization like a BID could help pay for both short-term and long-term improvements that would directly benefit businesses in Wollaston Center.

Long-Term Action Steps

1. Development on the MBTA parking lot is one of the more critical long-term action items for Wollaston Center. It is likely that development interest and a subsequent development agreement are long-term planning objectives that will require a significant amount of coordination between the MBTA, the City and any future developer for the site. At the time of developer interest, it would be best for the City to engage in dialogue with the developer and community on how best to craft a separate zoning overlay district for the MBTA site.

   The financing of new transit oriented development on the MBTA parcel, as well as other parcels in Wollaston, may be challenging as well. MAPC, in partnership with GLC Development Resources LLC, developed a gap analysis for TOD projects with a specific focus on the gaps in financing for these projects. The resulting analysis found that gaps in funding resources existed for predevelopment work, the funding of retail in mixed-use, funding for infrastructure related to the development, and funding for parking. If development on the MBTA site is to move forward over the long term, the City and the MBTA may want to look at forming a strategic partnership or funding mechanisms for assisting the developer in these specific areas. A public/private partnership can help leverage resources and share a portion of the development and infrastructure costs across multiple entities.

2. Due to the nature of historic development patterns in Wollaston Center, many of the long-term redevelopment opportunities may require parcel consolidation of properties with multiple owners. This type of development is challenging and costly for a developer to accomplish. The City may consider creating a system for monitoring property sale or redevelopment interest of parcels in Wollaston Center. If several adjacent properties have interest in redevelopment or sale, it may indicate an chance for multiple owners to pool property to create a more feasible redevelopment opportunity versus selling off individual small parcels of land.

3. If temporary changes to the roadway configuration along Beale Street and Greenwood Avenue prove to be successful, the City should pursue permanent changes through roadway construction projects. This may require moving curb, utilities, adjusting traffic signals, extending medians, and new roadway striping. The City could consider several different funding sources for this work including City transportation improvement funds, state funding through a program like MassWorks, or federal funding through the Boston MPO.

4. Extending streetscape elements such as decorative lamp posts, street trees, benches, bike racks, and trash receptacles will help create a cohesive look and feel throughout Wollaston Center. This could be completed through a partnership between the City and businesses, possibly through a business improvement district that could help fund streetscape improvements.

Conclusion

The Re-Envisioning Wollaston process identified several excellent opportunity sites for transit oriented development, but also identified the key impediments that may be standing in the way of realizing the community's vision for Wollaston Center. This report outlines action steps that can be taken by the City, residents, business owners, and property owners to breath life back into a one of Quincy's neighborhood centers. While there is no guarantee that implementing these measures will automatically lead to a renewed business district, not following through will guarantee that the district will continue to remain the same. The combination of market forces, updated zoning, increased transportation access, and an improved public realm will signal to the development community that Wollaston Center is open for business.