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# **GOLDEN TRIANGLE PLANNING STUDY**

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**November 2018**

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**A joint study for the municipalities of**

**Natick & Framingham**

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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\* At noon on January 1, 2018 the Town of Framingham became the City of Framingham. Adoption of the recommendations in this Report will require attentiveness to the political dynamics of this government transition.

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# **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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The Executive Summary summarizes each of the report chapters. A complete list of all of the recommendations for implementation is included at the end.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## INTRODUCTION

The Golden Triangle (The Triangle), is a critical economic engine for both Framingham and Natick. Located strategically off Exit 13 of the Massachusetts Turnpike/I-90 (MassPike), The Triangle is a regional hub for businesses, shoppers, and travelers (Fig. ES.1). It is home to a dynamic mix of mature companies and emerging startups, including The TJX Companies (TJX), Meditech, IDG, Heartware, and MathWorks. It is also known as New England’s premier retail shopping center. Encompassing Route 9, Route 30, and Speen Street, it is home to many leading retailers housed at Shoppers World, the Natick Mall, and other shopping plazas.

However, the successful, but largely uncoordinated, development of the area to date has created some significant challenges, including:

- Serious traffic delays, especially at the MassPike Exit 13, the Route 30/Speen Street intersection, and the Route 9 corridor;
- Superblocks and disconnected street patterns that add to traffic delays and impede circulation within The Triangle;
- The lack of effective transportation/mobility alternatives to car-based transit;
- Underutilized land defined by surface parking lots;
- Properties that straddle municipal boundaries and are split zoned; and
- Obsolete zoning.

Most recently, the national decline in retail has increased the urgency for rethinking the existing uses and development patterns in The Triangle. Shopping centers around the country are closing, leaving owners and municipalities struggling to find new uses for these aging properties. At the Natick Mall, J.C. Penney recently closed and Sears is downsizing. Toys R Us recently announced that they are closing the Shoppers World store.

**The stakes are high. The continuing retail decline will reduce property values in The Triangle and the revenues that both municipalities depend upon. This window in time, while The Triangle has not seen more widespread closures and property values are still high, presents Natick and Framingham with the rare opportunity to plan for the future and re-envision The Triangle to adapt to 21st Century market realities.**

**The opportunity to continue and encourage the dynamic evolution of The Triangle into a mixed-use hub of commerce, with the inclusion of multi-modal transportation accommodations according to the Complete Streets policies of each municipality, is crucial to the future of The Triangle. At the same time, safe and efficient access to Exit 13 on the MassPike is essential to municipal and regional growth.**



Figure ES.1: Bird's eye view of the Golden Triangle looking north, with Route 9 near the bottom of the photo and the MassPike near the top. As defined for this Study and shown on Figure 1.6, the boundaries of The Triangle are roughly Route 126 (Concord Street) on the west, one block south of Route 9 to the south, the Cochituate Rail Trail and the MassPike to the northeast. The western boundary jogs to the east to avoid the residential neighborhood east of Route 126 on the west side of the Triangle. These boundaries encompass approximately 940 acres or 1.5 square miles.

At the same time, the suburban office market is seeing rising competition from urban centers. In November, 2017 Bose Corporation announced that they will be opening their first office in Boston (their headquarters will remain in Framingham).

THE STUDY: PURPOSE AND GOALS

In 2013, the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) and the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) initiated steps to address traffic congestion in the area, particularly around the MassPike Exit 13/Route 30/Speen Street area.

This Golden Triangle Planning Study (the Study) was commissioned by Framingham and Natick to examine and understand the area’s future development potential and the transportation/mobility and infrastructure improvements necessary to support that development. Information from this Study will provide important input to the MassDOT and MPO analyses.

This Study is intended to provide Natick and Framingham with a clear and achievable future vision for The Triangle, with specific focus on the Route 30, Route 9, and Speen Street corridors, as well as access to and from Exit 13 of the MassPike. This coordinated Study will help the two municipalities realize the desired development, anticipate impacts, and pursue solutions with regard to:

- Traffic, transportation, and walkability
- Zoning and land use
- Infrastructure
- Cohesive development
- Connectivity to nearby neighborhoods
- Tax revenues
- Schools

The vision is supported by a recommended implementation action plan for the two municipalities to follow. The Study includes recommendations for:

- Development Vision and Urban Design
- Transportation and Infrastructure Improvements
- Zoning and Regulatory Changes

This is a long-term vision for The Triangle that could take up to 20 years to realize. Therefore, flexibility is key to successful implementation. The vision has to have the flexibility to adapt to the changing retail environment as well as to changes in market conditions, transportation modes and technologies, and lifestyle choices. Today’s complex retail market is experiencing changes, including the rise of internet shopping and the desire for “experience retail”. And, an increasingly competitive office market must serve employees who prefer urban, walkable, live/work/play environments.

## PUBLIC OUTREACH

Implementation of the Study recommendations will require public/private support and participation. The public process outlined below was designed to ensure that the public was well informed on the Study, and had the opportunity to review recommendations and comment and ask questions along the way, in order to garner broad based consensus.

- **A Steering Committee** (the Committee) composed of representatives from both Natick and Framingham was convened to review progress and provide guidance at key points in the Study. Members of the Committee included municipal officials and staff, as well as local property owners and businesses.
- Early in the process, the Consultant Team also held a series of one-on-one meetings with a number of **Stakeholders**, including property and business owners and their representatives, as well as local realtors. These meetings provided further insight into The Triangle and an understanding of stakeholder ideas and concerns, as well as their future plans.
- Framingham and Natick established an **on-line platform** (coUrbanize at [www.courb.co/golden-tri](http://www.courb.co/golden-tri)) to provide an easy way for residents and businesses to provide feedback. The on-line forum includes updates on project progress and products and allows participants to submit written comments and place site-specific comments on an area map.
- The municipalities held a series of **community meetings**, including one joint open house, as well as separate community meetings in Natick and Framingham, to familiarize the communities with the project and to solicit feedback.

## EXISTING CONDITIONS

A detailed analysis of existing conditions provided background information on the history of The Triangle, planning and urban design; market conditions, zoning; transportation, and infrastructure. This information provided the basis for defining and analyzing alternative development scenarios.

BUILD-OUT ANALYSIS

In order to understand the impacts of future development on the transportation system, different development scenarios were analyzed. These outputs were then used as inputs to the transportation model to better understand what transportation improvements would be needed to accommodate land use changes in the future.

Within The Triangle’s boundary, there is just over 10.3 million square feet of existing development. Approximately 4.6 million square feet (45 percent) is on the Natick side, and 5.7 million square feet (55 percent) is on the Framingham side. An analysis of the build-out potential of The Triangle under existing zoning showed a difference of only 50,000 square feet when comparing existing development to what could be developed under the existing zoning. Adding in the potential development allowed with the overlay districts resulted in an additional five million square feet of development potential above what is currently built on parcels that fall within the overlay districts. This indicates that the overlay districts are vastly underutilized from a build-out perspective. The total development capacity of parcels covered by the overlays, as well as parcels that fall only under a base zoning district, is just over 15.3 million square feet.

FUTURE SCENARIO MODELING

The Consultant Team also modeled three scenarios which looked at how the future land use mix in The Triangle could potentially change over time and what impact that might have on future tax revenue, jobs, housing units, and population:

- **Decline in Retail:** It is assumed that some retail spaces will transform over time, likely shifting to a mix of uses which could include additional office, entertainment, and residential. This shift has already occurred on the Natick side of The Triangle with the introduction of the Nouvelle at the Natick Mall and the Wegmans grocery store currently under construction. Declines of 8 percent, 10 percent, and 15 percent in retail square footage were modeled, based on a low, medium, and high vacancy rate that are typically seen in declining or underperforming retail markets.

- **Mix of Uses:** As the redevelopment and repositioning of built space occurs over time, it is likely that the use mix will shift away from single use structures to more of a mixed-use approach. This is evidenced by the new development proposal on the former Sam's Club (PACE Membership Warehouse, Ford Distribution) site in Natick where the site of a single use building is being transformed to accommodate residences and a hotel. This set of build-out scenarios assumed the same retail decline figures as noted above, but takes into account a five percent increase in overall built square footage in The Triangle, allocated evenly across office, residential, and indoor entertainment/recreation uses
- **Growth in The Triangle:** New development and redevelopment in The Triangle is likely to increase the overall square footage of built space over time. Growth scenarios of 10 percent and 20 percent were modeled to help both municipalities understand what improvements might be necessary to accommodate that growth so there can be requests and advocacy for those improvements over time.

It is estimated that 10 percent growth would generate between \$3.5 and \$3.7 million in additional tax revenue for the two municipalities over time. It is estimated that 20 percent growth would generate between \$7.2 and \$7.4 million in additional tax revenue.

The Consultant Team used the results of the modeling exercise for existing conditions, 10 percent growth, and 20 percent growth as inputs into the transportation model. The build-out model also was used to calculate potential changes in population, employment, housing units, property tax revenue, and service costs to both municipalities. While increases to tax revenues are important, both communities wanted to ensure that municipal service costs would not outpace potential revenues. Service costs increase with additional development, but net tax revenue from The Triangle still outpaces municipal service costs.

VISION AND URBAN DESIGN

The Vision for The Triangle is that of a vibrant mixed-use district that attracts residents, shoppers, employees and employers to live, work, shop, and play in a well-connected environment that encourages walking and bicycling between destinations and minimizes the need for auto usage (Figs. ES.2 and ES.3). A series of design principles for future development, a connections and open space framework, and a series of hypothetical development concepts for parcels representing different development opportunities was developed. The principles, connections framework and development concepts represent a long-term view of the future of The Triangle, and are intended to provide a structure for working with property owners on development opportunities as they emerge over time. The recommendations in this chapter were developed to accommodate phased implementation, with the idea that, in many cases, public realm improvements would be implemented with adjacent development projects.

Design principles include:

- Ensure that new development is sensitive to adjacent neighborhoods in Natick and Framingham and improves the quality of life for residents of both municipalities.
- Expand mixed-use development, including retail, office, residential, entertainment, and open space.
- Create an attractive, safe/convenient pedestrian and bicycle environment with good pedestrian, bicycle, vehicular, and transit connections between destinations.
- Create new amenities (e.g., open space, Cochituate Rail Trail and other greenways, entertainment, transit) and take advantage of those amenities when planning and marketing new development.
- Site buildings to define the street edges.
- Create development sites that are flexible to accommodate multiple uses as the market changes over time and to accommodate a variety of phasing sequences.
- Site lower scale buildings at neighborhood edges to provide a buffer.



Figure ES.2: Assembly Row in Somerville, MA: a recent example of a vibrant, mixed-use district with retail, office, residential, and entertainment uses; and an attractive, walkable pedestrian environment.



Figure ES.3: Recent example of a vibrant, mixed-use district with retail, office, residential, entertainment uses; an attractive, walkable pedestrian environment and a central open space in Storrs, CT.

The conceptual redevelopment plans on the following pages were prepared to illustrate how the design principals and Connections and Open Space Framework could be accommodated on a variety of parcel types. The selection of individual parcels does not imply imminent redevelopment of any of these parcels. Conceptual plans were developed by the Consultant Team in discussion with the Client, but did not involve the individual property owners.

- Site retail in locations with good visibility (e.g., Routes 9 & 30 and Speen Street).
- Site corporate office parks along MassPike.
- Expand and clarify a transit shuttle route.

**The Aspirational Connections and Open Space Framework Plan** (The Framework Plan) shown in Figure ES.4 provides the framework for mobility (vehicular, pedestrian, bicycle and transit) and a development parcelization grid sized and configured to accommodate multiple forms of mixed-use development.

This Framework Plan represents the aspirational vision for the future of The Triangle and should be used to guide development and the creation of improved connections throughout The Triangle. Individual development proposals, while not necessarily exactly replicating the Framework Plan, should allow for, and contribute to, the realization of a similar open space and connections network. Development proposals should be required to clearly detail how they accommodate and/or provide new, pedestrian-friendly streets and site buildings to reinforce the street edges.

The components of The Framework Plan are:

- A continuous north-south and east-west greenway system utilizing existing open space (i.e., the central wetlands – Bannister’s Meadows, the Cochituate Rail Trail and Wonderbread Spur, the pathway around the Natick Mall and other identified wetlands) in combination with the patchwork of wooded areas bordering and linking the wetlands as well as a perimeter path around the central wetlands. These two major greenway corridors will include a wide multi-use path and pedestrian boardwalks through Bannister’s Meadows.
- New continuous east-west pedestrian-friendly “complete streets” (shown as green streets on The Framework Plan) between Route 9 and Route 30, and north of Route 30. Streets that are likely to happen in the longer-term are labeled “future street.” These new streets would function as active front door streets for new mixed-use development – walkable streets that link housing to jobs, retail, and entertainment and that have nodes of gathering spaces.

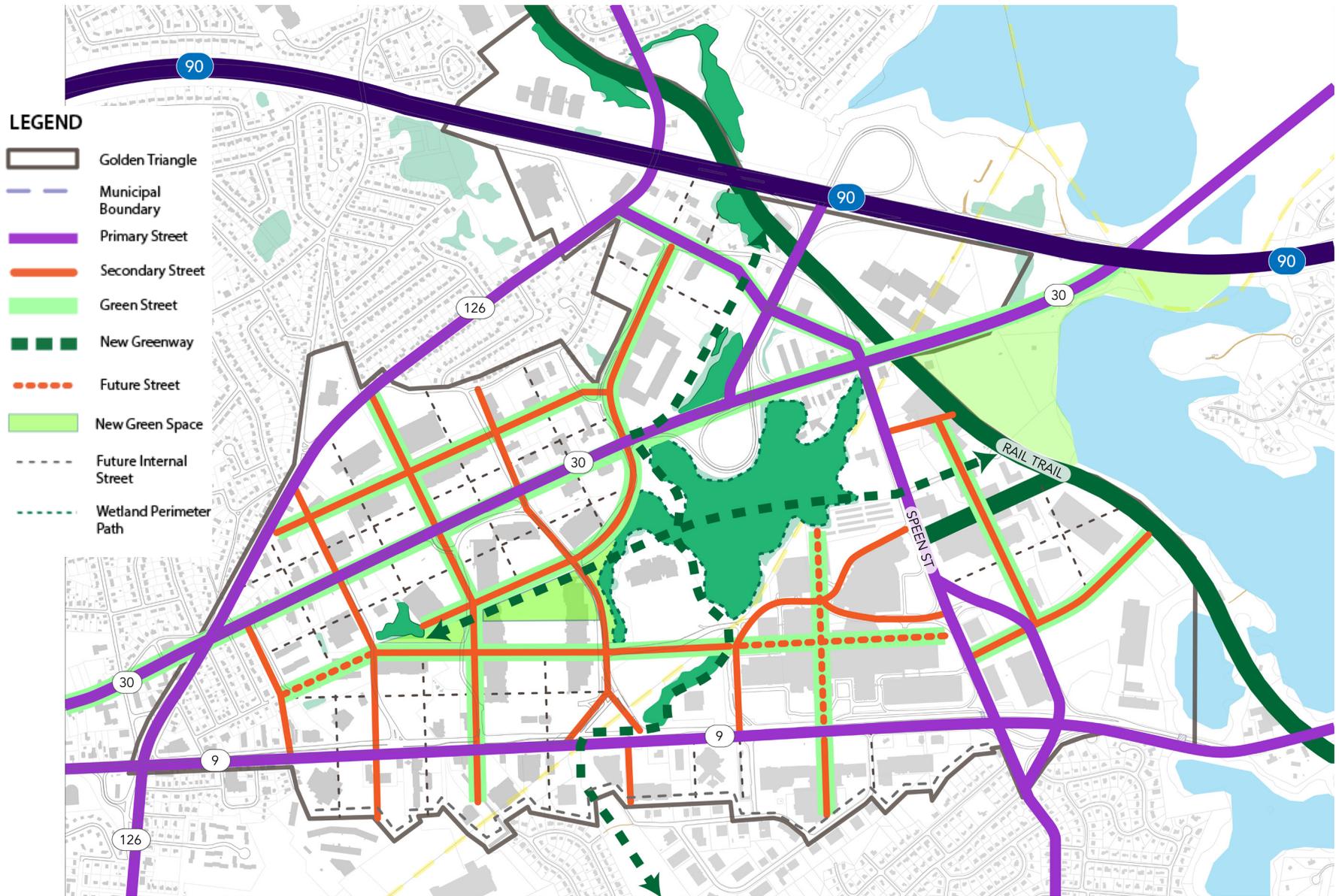


Figure ES.4: Aspirational Connections and Open Space Framework Plan.

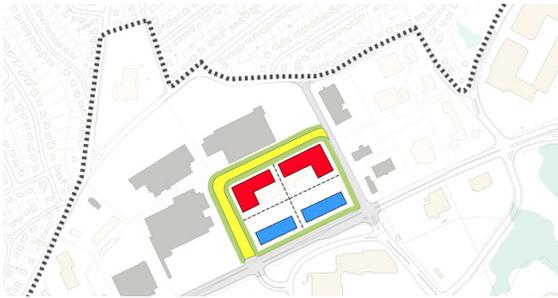


Figure ES.5: Potential Phase 1 redevelopment of parcel with new east-west street connecting to north-south street.



Figure ES.6: Potential redevelopment of four big box parcels with a continuous new east-west street.

LEGEND	
	COMMERCIAL (Retail, Restaurant, Entertainment)
	OFFICE
	RESIDENTIAL
	EXISTING BUILDINGS
	OPEN SPACE
	NEW ROAD
	FUTURE INTERNAL STREET
	EXISTING ROAD
	GOLDEN TRIANGLE BOUNDARY

- Redefined parcels lining the new streets of a size and geometry that can accommodate various building typologies – in other words, conventional city blocks.

Conceptual redevelopment plans for properties representing three parcel typologies were prepared to illustrate how the design principles and Connections and Open Space Framework could be accommodated on a variety of parcel types. The selection of individual parcels does not imply the imminent redevelopment of any of these parcels.

**Big Box Parcels Connectivity and Potential Redevelopment Sequence:** These single-owner big box parcels tend to have one or only a limited number of tenants. They are therefore less complex and more likely to change in the short-term than either the larger multi-use parcels or the small parcels that would require consolidation for an efficient redevelopment.

The plans provide a hypothetical example of how a new mobility and parcelization system, consistent with the design principles, could be developed incrementally as individual property owners make redevelopment plans. In this example, one of the big box parcels (Target) is positioned for the first phase of redevelopment with a mix of retail, restaurant, office, and residential uses (Fig. ES.5). This pattern is extended to the adjacent parcels, with smaller scale residential development (2-3 story townhouses) shown by the existing adjacent residential neighborhood (Fig. ES.6). A new east-west street links and creates new pedestrian-friendly street frontage. The new east-west street could be created with an easement along the rear of the existing parcels. An incentive or density bonus zoning provision could be used to encourage developers to build the road, to grant easements for the construction of connecting internal streets, and/or to pay into a fund that could be used by the municipalities to build connecting streets.

**Medium Size Strip Commercial Center Potential Redevelopment:** The Cloverleaf Mall is a good example of a medium size strip commercial center. If, over time, the Speen Street sites of Home Depot and the Cloverleaf Mall are redeveloped, a street and parcelization plan could be developed incrementally to create a new “urban village.” The centerpiece would be a new north-south “complete street” (a pedestrian-friendly two-lane street with parking, in-street bike lanes, and wide sidewalks) linking the MathWorks and TJX campuses. The new north-south street is shown lined with buildings

sized for commercial uses (office, retail and entertainment) on the west, with housing facing the lake and the Cochituate Rail Trail on the east (Fig. ES.7).

**Large Transformative Parcel Potential Redevelopment:** A conceptual redevelopment plan was prepared for the Shoppers World site to illustrate the potential for redeveloping an existing single-use superblock site with minimal pedestrian amenities into a mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly development. While redevelopment of a large transformative parcel would have the greatest impact on The Triangle, the scale of the parcel and number of tenants makes the redevelopment complex, and less likely to redevelop in the near-term.

The conceptual redevelopment plan was designed to be easily phased to provide the owner with greater flexibility. A three-phase development sequence, in which the phases could happen in any order, was developed (Fig. ES.8). The key elements of the plan include:

- Two new east-west pedestrian-friendly streets lined with active mixed-use development (buildings sized for housing over retail) and connecting the far western section of The Triangle with Flutie Pass and Burr Street and the eastern side of The Triangle, and a new north-south internal street (Fig. ES.9). The new north-south street provides a pedestrian connection from Routes 9 and 30 to the new open space. The two new east-west roads and the new north-south road divide the Shoppers World property into six large blocks which can be developed independently in multiple sequences.
- Commercial and office uses fronting on Route 9 and Route 30.
- Surface and structured parking in the interior of the parcels.
- The land use scenario in the central block is scaled for housing over retail, with much of it facing into a new village square or common.
- The major new open space terminates the east-west greenway connections to the Cochituate Rail Trail. Outdoor entertainment uses could complement the AMC Theatre to the east.

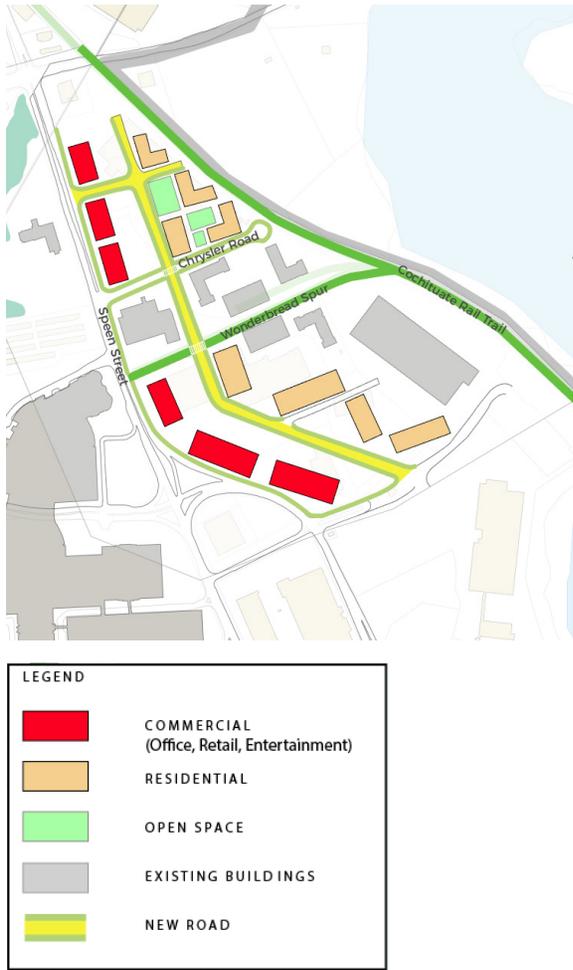


Figure ES.7: A hypothetical redevelopment of the Cloverleaf Mall and Home Depot includes a new pedestrian-friendly north-south street, from TJX to MathWorks, lined with mixed-use development.

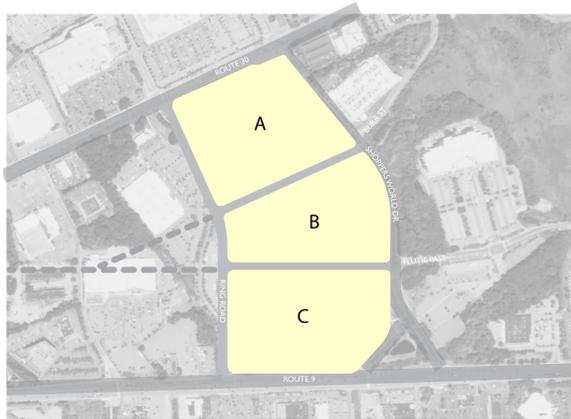


Figure ES.8: Potential redevelopment blocks within the Shoppers World site.

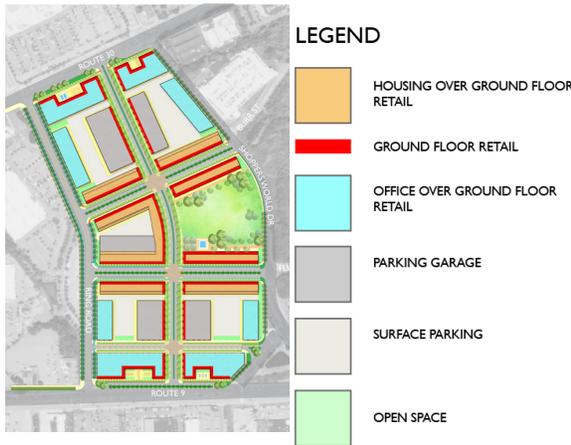


Figure ES.9: Potential mixed-use redevelopment of the Shoppers World site.

The sum could be a lively mixed-use district with three new pedestrian and bicycle friendly streets, a major new open space framed by housing with ground floor retail and opening out toward Bannister’s Meadows and its series of paths and boardwalks.

**Frontage Road Parallel to Route 9 and Route 30:** The redevelopment option for parcels facing Route 9 and/or Route 30 involves creating a more pedestrian-friendly environment by siting new commercial buildings further from these busy roads with a separation zone that includes a landscaped setback, a narrow frontage road with on-street parallel parking, and a wide sidewalk with a curbside tree lawn (Fig. ES.10). This design has the advantage of creating a greater buffer between pedestrians and traffic on busy streets, providing additional space for plazas and pedestrian amenities, and reducing the need for drivers to exit onto Routes 9 and 30 to reach other nearby destinations. The exact design of the frontage road will need to be developed in greater detail and will need to be flexible to accommodate different site conditions and redevelopment plans.

Future redevelopment on the south side of Route 9, where possible, should include the frontage road configuration. However, because redevelopment on a number of parcels may not happen for many years, the potential for an east-west access road connecting all or most of these parcels at the rear of properties was examined. While several factors, including changes in elevation, building location and irregular rear lot lines, complicate the introduction of such an access road, there are opportunities for a series of short east-west streets connecting some of the parcels to one another and to one of the north-south streets that have a signalized intersection at Route 9. At a minimum, as parcels redevelop, property owners should be encouraged to create these connections, as well as to consolidate curb cuts. The Study also recommends assessing the issues involved in extending public ownership of Mercer Road to its intersection with Route 9, and formalizing the existing path from Essex Road to Mercer Road to provide improved pedestrian and bicycle access for the neighborhoods south of Route 9.

TRANSPORTATION

Transportation recommendations were developed for the 10 and 20 percent growth scenarios. Traffic congestion is a problem today, and it is recommended that implementation of the improvements outlined for the 10% growth level should begin in the short-term to accommodate existing traffic as well as future growth. With redevelopment at the **10 percent growth** level, the following infrastructure changes will be required:

- A displaced left turn lane configuration at Route 30 and Speen Street which separates the northbound left turn to the west of the intersection (Fig. ES.11). The displaced left turn design removes the conflict between the heavy northbound left turn from Speen Street onto Route 30 and the southbound through volumes along Speen Street. Removing that conflict allows more vehicles to be processed at one time reducing delays at the intersection.



Figure ES.10: Street level view of potential new mixed-use development on Route 9 at existing Shoppers World site. The rendering illustrates a one-way frontage road separated from Route 9 by a tree row. The frontage road, parallel parking, bike lane, and tree row buffer pedestrians from Route 9 traffic. Active store fronts and a small plaza with cafe tables and trees enhances the pedestrian environment.

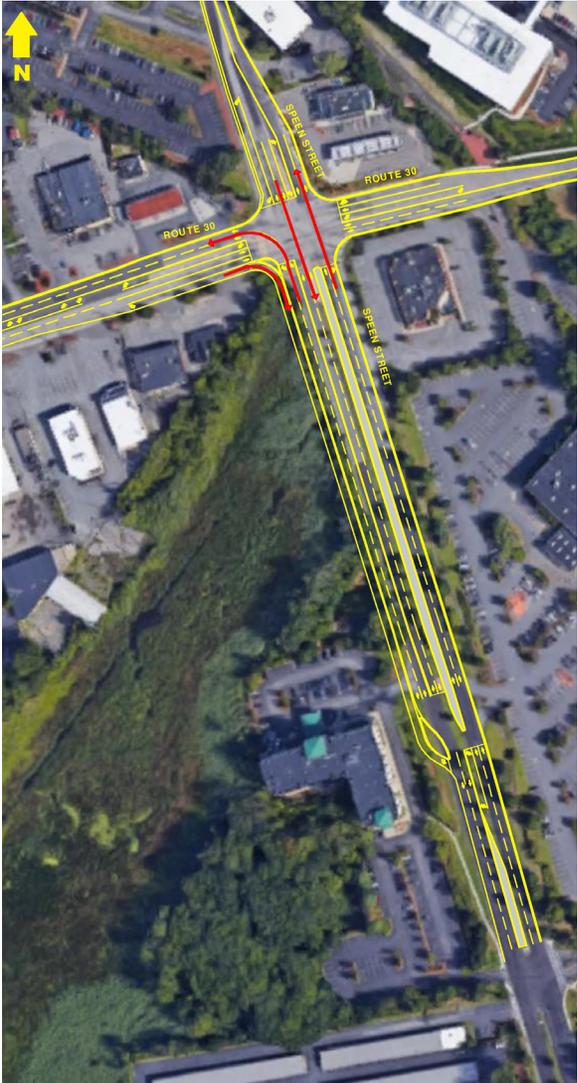


Figure ES.11: Concurrent Traffic Movements at Displaced Left Turn. This drawing represents a very conceptual layout; the final layout and right-of-way would be determined during future design phases.

- Mixed-use redevelopments that capture trips internally (both future development trips as well as trips between existing uses and future uses).
- Connections between parcels within The Triangle to accommodate vehicles, pedestrians and bicyclists as shown in the Framework Plan.
- Incorporation of transit amenities into redevelopment projects as well as at existing demand locations.
- Provision of a new commuter shuttle connecting to the Commuter Rail with limited stops.

In order to accommodate the **20 percent growth** scenario, all of the tools described above will continue to be required. In addition, to accommodate the future traffic growth, the following recommendations also will need to be implemented:

- An interchange redesign of MassPike Exit 13 would need to be considered. A concept that includes ramp connections to Speen Street while maintaining a grade separated connection over it to reach Route 30 would ensure that the traffic volumes at Route 30 are reduced enough to contemplate an at-grade intersection. If Speen Street were relocated so that it crossed the MassPike ramps alignment approximately 375 feet further to the south, full access to both directions of the Massachusetts Turnpike ramps would be accommodated (shown in the Framework Plan). This design would better serve bicycle and pedestrian traffic and open up potential development parcels. This shifting of alignment would require significant land acquisition, design and construction costs as well as significant political support. The benefit of accommodating traffic to and from Speen Street at Speen Street would be a reduction in traffic at the intersection of the ramps with Route 30.
- Transit opportunities in The Triangle will need to be continually expanded as development comes on line. Evaluation of routes and headways, stop locations and amenities, and pedestrian connections to potential destinations will need to be evaluated periodically to ensure that transit is a viable alternate mode for employees, residents and visitors to The Triangle.

UTILITIES

As properties are redeveloped, the following recommendations for utility improvements should be implemented:

- All redevelopments will need to comply with local and state regulations to ensure that adequate water supply is available and that capacity exists for the resulting wastewater.
- When projects are redeveloped in the area of Route 30 and Speen Street, as well as other areas prone to flooding, special attention should be given to the stormwater in light of existing flooding occurrences.
- When possible, underground power, cable and telephone should be considered.

ZONING

A series of zoning principles was developed to help guide the creation of new zoning language that clarifies zoning and supports desired developments across both municipalities:

- Encourage and allow a more diverse mix of uses.
- Break up large blocks or parcels into smaller walkable segments.
- Concentrate height and density in specific locations.
- Create Transition Zones between high and low intensity development to lessen the visual impact on neighboring residents in Framingham and Natick and to open up transportation access and connectivity to adjacent neighborhoods in Natick.
- Create building envelopes using dimensional standards and move away from dictating density through Floor Area Ratio numbers.
- Establish building setbacks that relate to the type of street on which the parcel fronts.

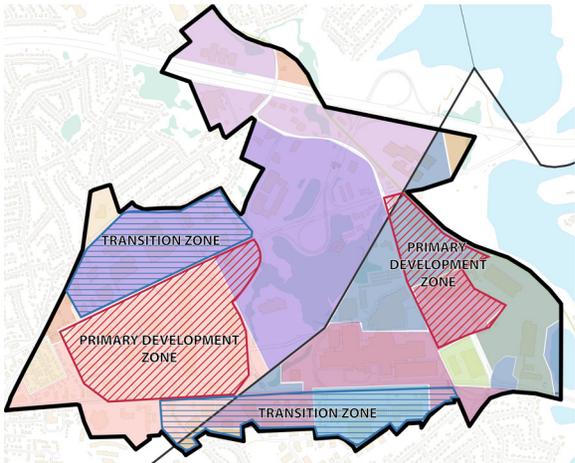


Figure ES.12: Proposed location of Primary and Transition Zones.

Implementation of this Plan could take up to 20 or more years, necessitating long-term attention to the framework of Development Vision & Urban Design, Transportation, and Zoning & Regulatory Changes.

Over that long-term, both communities must remain committed to working together, and with property owners, in order to succeed. Community engagement and process, as well as inter-municipal and public-private partnerships will be required for full implementation.

Report illustrations of transportation improvements and potential redevelopment are very conceptual and will require a much more detailed level of design to proceed. These concepts are intended to be a starting point for discussion, but are anticipated to be refined through the design process and in response to opportunities that arise with changing retail and commercial markets.

- Encourage front yard setbacks to be used for landscaping, sidewalks, shared use paths, pedestrian spaces, or a frontage road along Routes 9 and 30 and move away from only have parking in the front setback.

Two new zoning districts are recommended (Fig. ES.12):

- **Primary Development Zones** are focused around the Shoppers World and Caldor Road area in Framingham, and between Superior Drive and Route 30 in Natick. This second area encompasses two large retail establishments - Home Depot and the Cloverleaf Mall. Review of development proposals will need to consider the traffic impacts of changes in land use and whether traffic improvements, such as the displaced left turn on Speen Street, have been implemented. These two areas hold a great deal of redevelopment potential, could support larger-scale mixed-use development, are well-connected to the transportation system and are further from nearby residential neighborhoods. Alternatively, the Primary Development Zone in Natick could be in the area around Sherwood Plaza (the area described in the plan as a Transition Zone – see below). Development in this location potentially could have less of an impact on Speen Street traffic, but would place development closer to a single-family residential neighborhood. The Primary Development Zones are intended to be the higher intensity redevelopment districts within The Triangle, similar to what was envisioned through the existing Regional Center Overlay District.
- **Transition Zones** are areas of The Triangle that also have redevelopment potential, and tend to be single use structures (primarily retail), but abut nearby single-family neighborhoods. The proximity to these neighborhoods necessitates a different approach to the zoning, where transitions in use and development intensity change as one moves from the primary travel corridors of Routes 9 and 30 toward the abutting neighborhoods.

Both Primary Development Zones and Transition Zones are intended to be created as new base zoning districts to remove any possibility of future redevelopment utilizing the existing underlying zoning.

The Study does not recommend rezoning the entire Golden Triangle at this time. It is important to focus development in specific areas to marry desired land use changes with future transportation

changes to ensure proper mitigation of traffic issues is planned and executed alongside new development opportunities. As The Triangle redevelops and transportation improvements occur, both municipalities should monitor progress and make determinations over time with regard to rezoning additional portions of The Triangle.

While many uses currently allowed in the base zoning districts for The Triangle remain desirable, there are some additional uses both municipalities should consider allowing in the future. The changing nature of the retail market and opportunities to support residential, mixed-use and cottage industries necessitate a new flexibility with uses that may not have been considered fifty or sixty years ago when development of retail space first started in The Triangle. One of the most effective ways to unify a district like The Triangle is through visual cues that transition seamlessly across municipal boundaries. The location of parking, placement of public amenities and a consistent landscaping plan are all site planning elements that can help create a consistent look and feel across parcels.

## IMPLEMENTATION

Implementation of this Plan will require a number of actions from both municipalities as well as from the Commonwealth and private property owners, and developers. Implementation actions detailed throughout this report are summarized below.

### VISION AND URBAN DESIGN

- Ensure that new development is consistent with and helps to implement the Framework Plan. Development proposals should be required to clearly detail how they accommodate and/or provide new, pedestrian-friendly streets that create new connections through The Triangle with buildings sited to reinforce the street edges.
- Review new development proposals for consistency with this Report, including inclusion of mixed-use, connections, open space, placemaking elements, driveway consolidation, pedestrian and bicycle facilities, zoning and design principles.

- Encourage mixed-use development including retail, office, entertainment and residential uses.
- Work with property owners and developers to facilitate desired development.
- Finalize and adopt the zoning recommendations in Chapter 6.
- Pursue funding for the design and construction of the greenways through the wetlands.
- Design and implement a wayfinding and signage program throughout The Triangle.
- Work with property owners and developers to develop a continuous north-south and east-west greenway system utilizing existing open space (i.e., the central wetlands – Bannister’s Meadows, the Cochituate Rail Trail and Wonderbread Spur, the pathway around the Natick Mall and other identified wetlands) in combination with the patchwork of wooded areas bordering and linking the wetlands, including a wide multi-use path and pedestrian boardwalks through Bannister’s Meadows.
- Consider opening discussions with Eversource regarding building trails under Eversource power lines, both north and south of Route 9.
- Conduct a more detailed study to determine the feasibility of a perimeter pathway around Bannister’s Meadows, including the availability of relatively flat land for constructing the path, permitting issues, and future ownership and maintenance responsibility.
- Consider providing an incentive or density bonus zoning provision to encourage developers to build connecting roads, to grant easements for the construction of connecting internal streets, and/or to pay into a fund that could be used by the municipalities to build connecting streets.
- Encourage developers to incorporate the frontage road concept for new development on parcels facing Route 9 and/or Route 30. This involves creating a more pedestrian-friendly environment by siting new commercial buildings further from these busy roads with a separation zone that includes a landscaped setback, a narrow frontage road with on-street parallel parking, and a wide sidewalk with a curbside tree lawn.
- On the south side of Route 9:

- Work with property owners to study the feasibility of, and implement, segments of a connecting road at the rear of parcels, as well to consolidate driveways.
- Explore options for defining the legal status of the pedestrian path from Essex Street to Mercer Road with the intention of creating a more definitive connection.
- Encourage the introduction of a frontage road as properties are redeveloped.
- In the short-term, consider developing a short cycle track on Route 9 that connects via the Natick Mall path on the west side of Speen Street to the Wonderbread Spur and Cochituate Rail Trail on the east and to Ring Road or Shoppers World Drive on the west. In the long-term, as obstacles are removed by future redevelopment the potential redesign of MassPike Exit 13, consider developing a continuous cycle track on both Routes 9 and Route 30.

## T R A N S P O R T A T I O N

- Property owners will need to become major players in transit improvements, including lobbying MassDOT and the MWRTA for improvements, providing employee incentives for commuting by transit and providing on-site transit amenities.
- Work with MassDOT and the legislative delegation to secure funding for the infrastructure that is needed to reach the desired growth. Specifically, MassDOT should be approached regarding:
  - Providing bus pull outs and shelters along Route 9 and Route 30 in order to encourage use of transit. Incorporating the transit accommodations into any infrastructure projects.
  - Providing funding for the proposed commuter route which will provide a first mile/last mile transit connection from the Commuter Rail to the Golden Triangle.
  - Accommodating pedestrians and bicyclists in infrastructure projects.
  - Committing to snow removal to allow for safe passage during all seasons. The municipalities should work with private property owners to ensure that public paths on private property are also cleared.

- Designing and constructing the displaced left turn concept at the intersection of Route 30 and Speen Street.
- Interchange improvements required to meet the goals of this study, including providing more direct access to Speen Street in order to reduce traffic at the ramp connection to Route 30 resulting in an intersection at Route 30 that is not grade separated.
- Evaluate transit routes and headways, stop locations and amenities, and pedestrian connections to potential destinations periodically to ensure that transit is a viable alternate mode for employees, residents and visitors to The Triangle.
- Work with MassPort to incorporate additional parking capacity onto the existing Logan Express site.
- Continue to monitor changes in transportation technology to ensure that the transportation system accommodates new technologies and traffic operations in The Triangle remain as efficient as possible.
- The municipalities should include zoning that allows for the mixed-use types of projects that will result in lower exterior trip generation.
- When permitted, projects should be required to include pedestrian, cyclist and transit accommodation as well as provide appropriate connections to adjacent properties, either through constructing those connections as described in detail in Chapter 5, or providing easements and paying into a fund to allow them to be constructed at a later date when adjacent properties are redeveloped.
- Development projects should be required to join the Transportation Management Association (TMA) which joins together employers and then uses that larger employment base to support transit, carpooling and other tools to reduce single occupant vehicular traffic.

## UTILITIES

- All redevelopments will need to comply with local and state regulations to ensure that adequate water supply is available and that capacity exists for the resulting wastewater.
- When projects are redeveloped in the area of Route 30 and Speen Street, and in other locations where flooding has been observed, special attention should be given to the stormwater in light of existing flooding occurrences.
- When possible, underground power, cable and telephone should be considered.

## ZONING

- Coordinate on limiting the granting of Variances and Special Permits to ensure that the intent of the Master Plan is not undermined.
- Create and adopt new zoning for Primary Development Zones:
  - Allow up to six stories in height for new development. Consider allowing taller buildings by Special Permit, particularly for a larger office project or a project that is considering structured or underground parking as a way to increase allowable development on a given site. If Special Permits are granted for taller buildings, consideration should be given to tying density bonuses back to an increase in public amenities, transportation connectivity and landscaping requirements.
  - Encourage parcel consolidation and larger, more coordinated development projects, by setting a higher minimum lot size (than in the existing zoning).
  - Set both a minimum and maximum front yard setback and vary those requirements by the type of street on which the parcel fronts.
  - Create a building frontage requirement to ensure there is an ample amount of building wall along the frontage of the property.

- Require a high percentage of transparency in ground floor facades along streets to create a more interesting pedestrian environment.
- Step back provisions for upper stories above the second or third floor for buildings that have frontage on secondary streets should be considered on an individual basis.
- Create and adopt new zoning for Transition Zones:
  - Allow buildings up to three to four stories in height and create a transition provision in the zoning that heights step down within a certain radius of single-family residential neighborhoods.
  - Set minimum lot sizes in a way that does not discourage individual property owners from investing in or redeveloping their land, but also encourages parcel consolidation where appropriate.
  - Set both a minimum and maximum front yard setback and vary those requirements by the type of street on which the parcel fronts.
  - Set a deeper rear yard setback where commercial properties abut surrounding residential neighborhoods to provide a larger well-landscaped buffer.
  - Create a building frontage requirement to ensure there is an ample amount of building wall along the frontage of the property.
  - Vary the allowable uses in the transition zone to shift the focus more toward neighborhood-scale retail, office, residential, and entertainment/civic uses. These might include small restaurants, neighborhood services, professional offices, art galleries, coffee shops, fitness and wellness, and residential uses such as townhomes, duplexes, and smaller-scale multi-family dwellings.
- Both Primary Development Zones and Transition Zones are intended to be created as new base zoning districts to remove any possibility of future redevelopment utilizing the existing underlying zoning. Prior to removing or changing existing base zones and/or overlay districts, both municipalities should check with legal staff with regard to any payments received under the existing overlay districts and how those may be impacted by any proposed zoning changes.

- Create an incentive or density bonus provision to encourage developers to grant easements for the construction of connecting internal streets or to pay into a fund that could be used by the municipalities to build connecting streets.
- As The Triangle redevelops and transportation improvements occur, both municipalities should monitor progress and make determinations over time with regard to rezoning additional portions of The Triangle.
- Modify allowable uses within Triangle to encourage to support today's residential, mixed-use and cottage industries.
- Adopt parking recommendations:
  - Unify parking requirements for the new zoning districts. Consider using Natick's parking requirements as a starting point as they are lower than Framingham's.
  - Consider parking maximums in The Triangle. Retail and office developers may want to build more parking than is required under zoning.
  - Allow shared parking for mixed-use developments. Consider a 10 percent reduction in overall parking for uses that do not have overlapping times of parking demand.
  - Regulate the placement of parking to limit it to the rear and sides of buildings.
  - Encourage shared access to adjacent parking lots and the closure of curb cuts where possible, particularly along primary travel corridors.
  - Establish bike parking standards for residential and mixed-use development, at a minimum.
  - Allow for parking reductions if the applicant provides transportation demand management solutions such as car sharing, land banked spaces, joining the MetroWest TMA, subsidizing transit passes, etc.

- Adopt recommendations for landscaping and public amenities:
  - Develop a unified set of landscaping requirements that includes the types (e.g., columnar, high canopy), size and caliper of street trees, bushes and other plantings with a preference toward native or hybrid species.
  - Develop a unified set of design guidelines and imagery that represent the placement, clustering and types of landscaping that is desired in The Triangle.
  - Vary the minimum landscape requirements for the primary development zone and the transition zone. While the overall density of plantings and the percentage of open space may vary between the primary and transition zones, there should be visual consistency between the two.
  - Ensure the front setback in both districts is wide enough to accommodate an ample amount of landscape buffer between the road and the building with room for sidewalks, shared use paths, or a frontage road if desired.
  - Consider varying landscape and public amenity requirements by the size of the development, where larger-scale development provides more and smaller-scale development provides less. At no point should the minimum requirements detract from the overall landscape and public amenity plan for The Triangle. Consistency across parcels is the goal, but standards and amounts can vary based on the size of the development project.
  - Consider varying sidewalk/pathway widths and public amenity space (pedestrian gather spaces, plazas, etc.) by the roadway on which the parcel fronts.

## MUNICIPAL COORDINATION

- To improve cross-municipal coordination between Framingham and Natick, consideration should be given to creating a district-wide entity such as a Business Improvement District (BID) to ensure coordination between municipal staff, governing bodies, property owners, and businesses in The Triangle. The BID would have dedicated staff who could focus on both public and private needs and serve as an intermediary to negotiate and advocate for improvements in The Triangle.

- The two municipalities should consider the idea of establishing a District Improvement Financing (DIF) district as a way to help fund public infrastructure and improvement projects in The Triangle. The DIF district would use incremental property tax gains as an vehicle for funding future infrastructure enhancements. Further study would be needed to determine if a DIF could serve two municipalities together, where the district boundaries would be drawn, how tax revenue and cost share would be determined, and how projects would be selected for DIF funding.
- The two municipalities should continue to inform each other of development proposals, zoning changes, infrastructure improvements, and similar issues. This practice should be codified in any new zoning for The Triangle where the zoning district boundaries span the municipal boundary between Framingham and Natick. This would be similar to how the Regional Center Overlay district works today.