



07 ZONING

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ZONING

INTRODUCTION

The focus of this chapter is on recommendations for changes to existing zoning to allow and encourage the development actions described in Chapter 5.

ZONING BACKGROUND

Zoning is one of the primary mechanisms municipalities in Massachusetts have for controlling land use and the built environment. For the most part, development in The Triangle has closely followed the intensity, dimensional and use regulations found in the zoning bylaws of both Natick and Framingham. Most parcels tend to have single use, single building structures set back far from the street surrounded by large surface parking lots. More recent redevelopment projects are beginning to see the value in mixing use types, varying the dimensions of new structures and looking at how to integrate structured parking as a way to maximize the development potential of a particular site. Both communities have been working with developers on recent proposals to use setbacks and landscaping to create more pedestrian-friendly pathways that seek to encourage walking between points in The Triangle instead of forcing people to rely on personal vehicles to get to their destination. This is especially important as more development projects and proposals are looking at integrating residential uses in The Triangle, where residents could walk to work, shopping, restaurants and entertainment if safe and comfortable walking routes are established.

CHALLENGES WITH THE EXISTING ZONING

The Triangle is regulated by eleven different base zoning districts and four overlay districts each with their own set of use regulations and dimensional controls (Fig. 6.1). The overlay districts as written today do not include enough incentive to make a more attractive option when compared to the base zoning districts. As was noted in Chapter 4: Build-Out Analysis, The Triangle is largely built-out using the standards established in the base zoning districts while the overlay districts remain underutilized. If the vision for this area is to incentivize improvements to private property and investment in infrastructure and amenities, then zoning should be changed to encourage these actions to occur.

Figure 6.1 shows the location of the base zoning districts and the overlays covering The Triangle today. It is worth noting that several parcels in the Golden Triangle are split by base zoning and/or overlay district zoning boundaries. This creates further confusion and inconsistencies in the development pattern and built environment across The Triangle. A full description of the existing zoning can be found in Chapter 2: Existing Conditions.

One of the underlying challenges with the overlay districts is the use regulations largely mirror that of the base zoning district that lies beneath them. This creates challenges for certain development types like mixed-use and multi-family residential which are critical components to ensuring there is a healthy and sustainable mix of uses that is attractive in today's marketplace. For example, multi-family residential development on its own is not allowed in any of the base zoning districts. Framingham's Business (B) district allows multi-family but only as a component of a mixed-use development. The existing zoning contradicts the new direction both municipalities want to employ in The Triangle, which is to create a place where people can live, work, play, and do business. The very nature of the allowable uses in the base zoning districts make this new concept for The Triangle very difficult.

The other existing challenge with the different base zoning districts in The Triangle is the variations in dimensional controls, particularly along the Natick and Framingham municipal boundary where different base zoning districts abut one another. Setbacks, development intensity, landscaping requirements and allowable height vary across base zoning districts. If a property owner or developer chooses

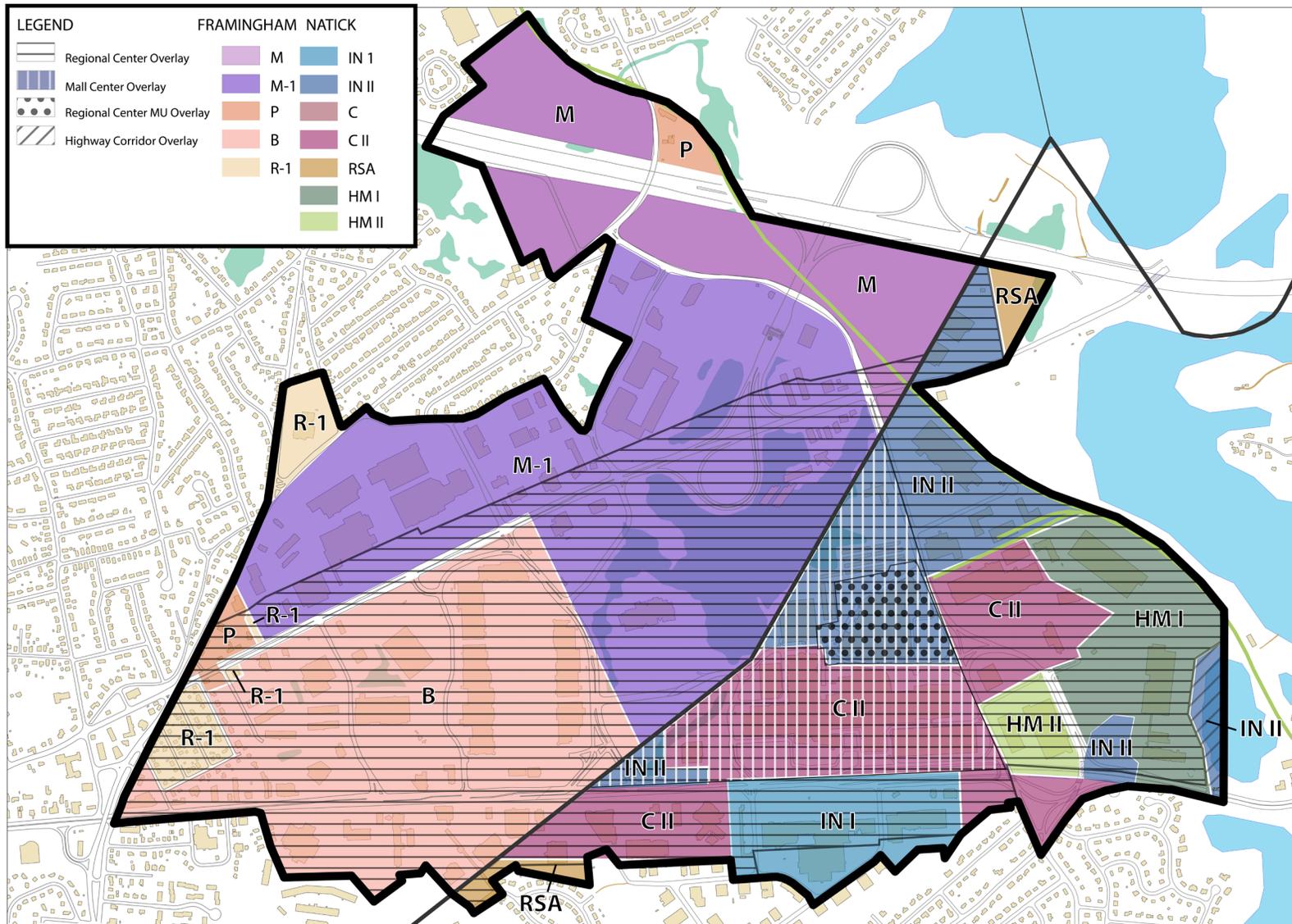


Figure 6.1 Existing Zoning.

not to utilize the Regional Center Overlay, there is little consistency in the built form or placement of structures, parking and landscaping on a given site. Framingham's recent improvements to their base zoning districts in terms of parking, landscaping, and dimensional requirements will help produce some better results for new development that opts to use the base zoning. This still leaves challenges with consistency for parcels adjacent to the municipal border where conflicting base zoning districts remain. To help illustrate the challenge, diagrams of a hypothetical build-out of a 40,000-square foot parcel of land in The Triangle in Framingham's Business zoning district and in Natick's Commercial II district were developed. After taking into account all of the setback, landscaping and parking requirements in Natick's zoning bylaw, the space available for a building footprint is severely limited in size and placement (Fig. 6.2). Framingham's Business zoning district provides more flexibility in front setbacks and height and allows for a mix of uses in the same structure (Fig. 6.3). These two zoning districts are located directly adjacent to one another along Route 9 on the southern side of The Triangle. Under current zoning, these results are plausible and mimic to some degree the development pattern on either side of the municipal boundary line.

NEW ZONING PRINCIPLES

In order to mitigate for some of the unintended consequences that could result from the existing base zoning and overlay districts in The Triangle, a series of zoning principles was developed to help guide the creation of new zoning language across both municipalities.

The goal of the zoning principles is to create a unified look and feel for the entirety of The Triangle so the area looks and acts like a cohesive district, rather than having zoning that divides development at the municipal boundary.

The zoning principles for The Triangle include:

- 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.

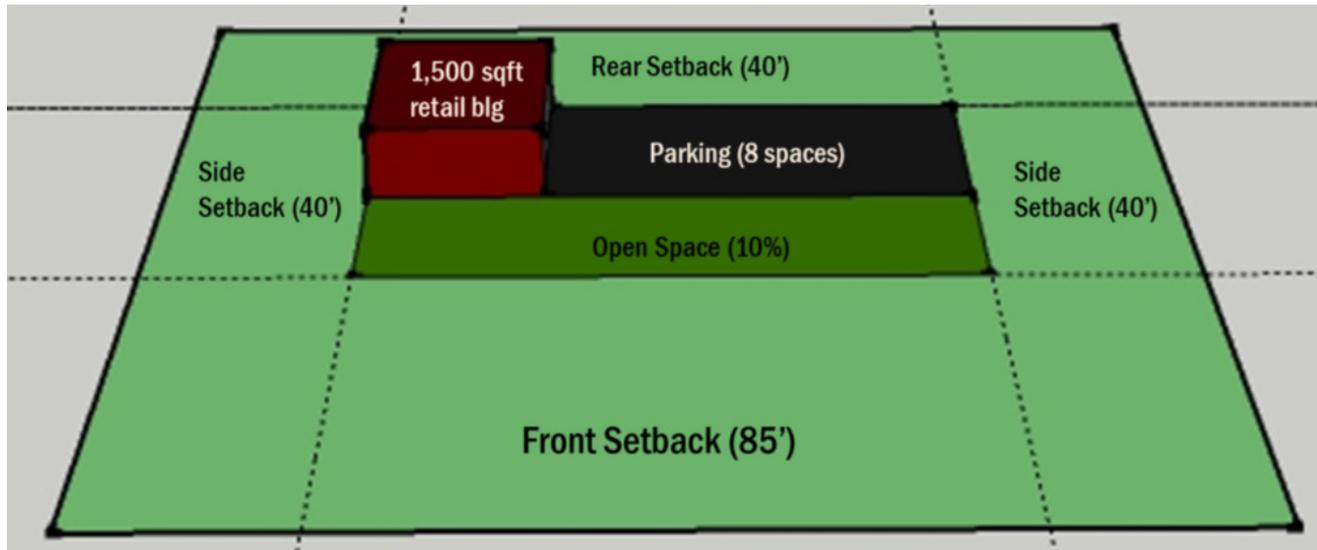


Figure 6.2: Potential build-out of a 40,000 SF parcel in Natick's Commercial II district.

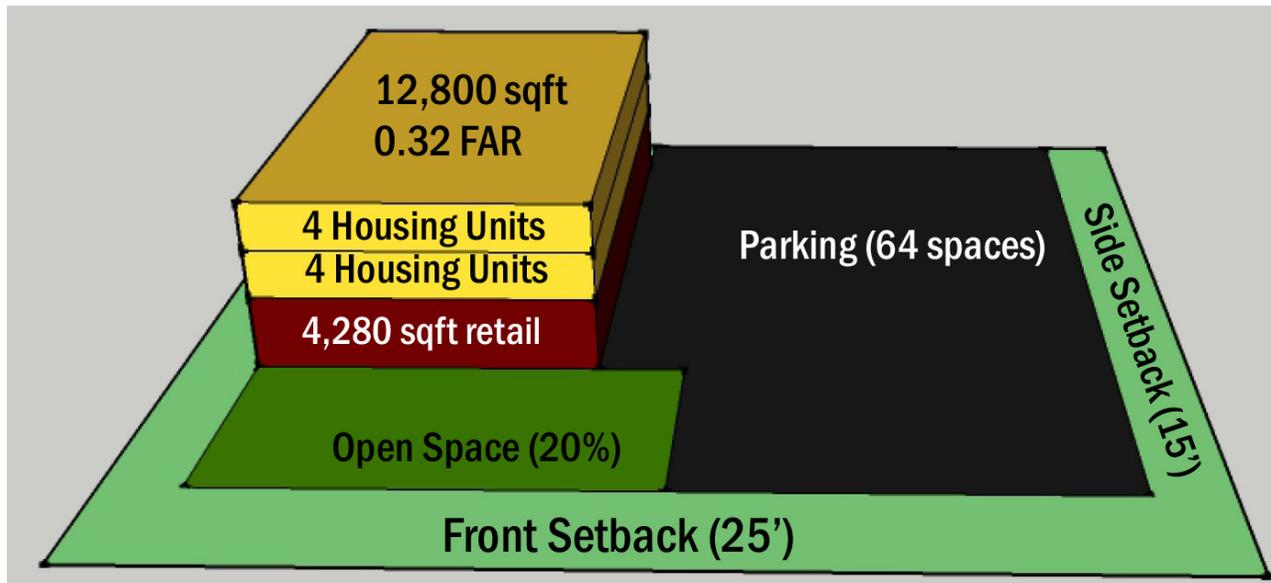


Figure 6.3: Potential build-out of a 40,000 SF parcel in Framingham's Business district.

- 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.
- Consider a form-based zoning approach, creating building envelopes using dimensional standards within which development can occur by-right. Such an approach may move away from dictating density through Floor Area Ratio numbers. (Natick's existing zoning relies on FAR-based regulations; the impact of eliminating FAR regulations will require further study.
- Establish building setbacks that relate to the type of street on which the parcel fronts.
- 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.

These zoning principles establish a set of guidelines with which to develop more detailed zoning language for specific areas of The Triangle where each municipality would like to encourage new investment and/or redevelopment.

ZONING RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the zoning principles, a schematic zoning map was developed to indicate areas where zoning changes could be most effective. Figure 6.5 shows two different types of zoning districts for consideration. 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.

The two additional areas highlighted in Figure 6.5 are Transition Zones. These 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 you move 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. If these new districts were created as another set of overlays, there is always the possibility that a property owner or developer could utilize the existing base zoning which would yield results counter to the vision for The Triangle. The Consultant Team, in consultation with municipal staff and the Steering Committee, purposefully did 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. 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.

PRIMARY DEVELOPMENT ZONES – ZONING RECOMMENDATIONS

The Primary Development Zones are intended to allow for a higher intensity of development. In order to create incentives for property owners to redevelop in the manner desired by both municipalities, a greater allowance in height and flexibility in uses will be necessary. The following recommendations are offered for the Primary Development Zones in The Triangle.

- Allow up to six stories in height for new development. This density is necessary to incent property owners to do something different with their land. Both municipalities could 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) in the Primary Development Zone.
- Set both a minimum and maximum front yard setback and vary those requirements by the type of street the parcel fronts on. Primary travel corridors like Route 9 or Route 30 should have a larger front yard setback than secondary travel corridors or interior streets. The larger front yard setback along these two roadways would encourage the creation of a frontage road in the future to help with access and safety. The minimum and maximum front yard setbacks allow for some variability in building placement, but still ensure enough space is provided to allow for proper landscaping, wider sidewalks or a shared-use path for bicycles and pedestrians, pocket parks, and larger pedestrian gathering areas. The new zoning should stipulate the widths of sidewalks and shared use pathways, and the desired square footage for pedestrian gathering spaces and pocket parks.
- Create a building frontage requirement to ensure there is an ample amount of building wall along the frontage of the property. This concept is especially important along secondary streets where

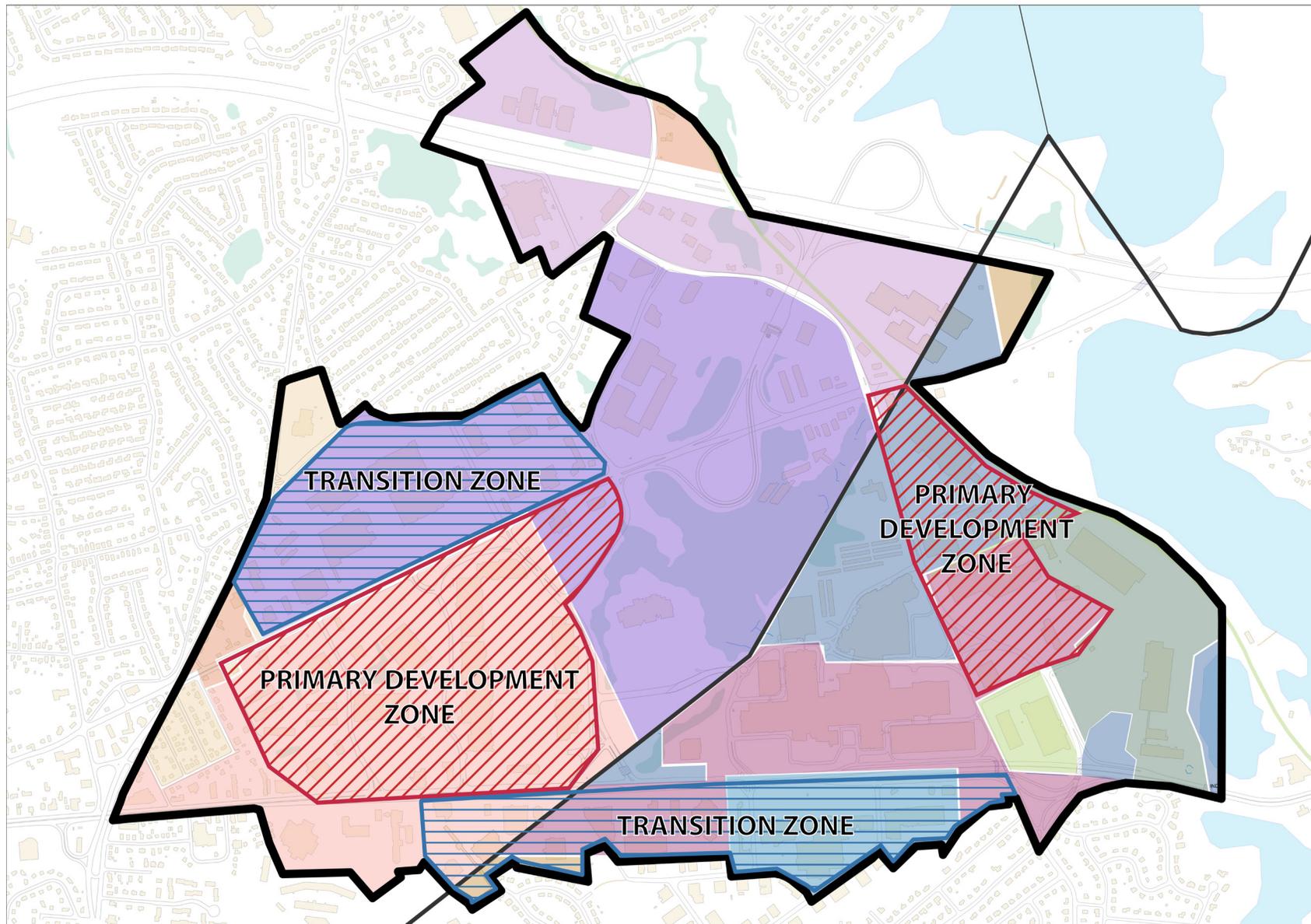


Figure 6. 5: Proposed location of Primary and Transition Zones.

walkability and a visually-appealing street frontage will encourage pedestrian activity. This will help to create a sense of enclosure for pedestrians and create a more interesting street front as people walk along both primary and secondary streets in The Triangle. Varying the facade depths along the face of the building using bump-outs and entryways will help create space for landscaping, public amenities, seating areas, and public gathering spaces.

- 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, depending on the width of the street and sidewalk. This will help minimize the tunnel effect on streets that are only two lanes wide.
- 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.

TRANSITION ZONES – ZONING RECOMMENDATIONS

The Transition Zones are intended to provide for redevelopment opportunities along major transportation corridors while serving as a transition in the intensity of development and types of uses between The Triangle and abutting residential neighborhoods. The Transition Zones should allow for more development intensity than is currently permitted today, but less than the Primary Development Zones. Redevelopment in the Transition Zones may occur in a more organic fashion over a longer period of time, so consistency in dimensional and site planning regulations is important to create a unified look and feel. The following recommendations are offered for the Transition Zones in The Triangle.

- 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. Uses

could also create a transition between commercial properties and nearby residential neighborhoods. For example, town houses could create a buffer area on the backside of commercial properties abutting residential neighborhoods. Taller buildings could be allowed east of Speen Street.

- 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. One way of accomplishing this would be to provide incentives for owners who consolidate property and meet the design goals and vision for The Triangle. This could come in the form of a density bonus, height increase, increase in sign size, fewer Special Permit requirements, etc. Parcel consolidation can be used to create a more regular parcel geometry that can better accommodate a variety of uses. New development on the larger consolidated development site could include pedestrian, bicycle, and vehicular connecting roads.
- Set both a minimum and maximum front yard setback and vary those requirements by the type of street the parcel fronts on. Primary travel corridors like Route 9 or Route 30 should have a larger front yard setback than secondary travel corridors or interior streets. The minimum and maximum front yard setbacks allow for some variability in building placement, but still ensure enough space is provided to allow for proper landscaping and pedestrian/bike facilities. The larger front yard setback along these two roadways would encourage the creation of a frontage road in the future to help with access and safety. The minimum and maximum front yard setbacks allow for some variability in building placement, but still ensure enough space is provided to allow for proper landscaping, wider sidewalks or a shared-use path for bikes and pedestrians, pocket parks, and larger pedestrian gathering areas. The new zoning should stipulate the widths of sidewalks and shared use pathways, and the desired square footage for pedestrian gathering spaces and pocket parks.
- 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. This concept is especially important along secondary streets where walkability and a visually-appealing street frontage will encourage pedestrian activity, consistent

building wall along both primary and secondary streets. This will help to create a sense of enclosure for pedestrians and create a more interesting street front as people walk along both primary and secondary streets in The Triangle. Varying the façade depths along the face of the building using bump outs and entry ways will help create space for landscaping, public amenities, seating areas, and public gathering spaces.

- Create an incentive or density bonus provision to encourage developers to grant easements for the construction of connecting internal streets or pay into a fund that could be used by the municipalities to build connecting streets.
- 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.

USES IN 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. The following uses should be considered as new zoning is crafted for the area:

EXISTING USES THAT SHOULD REMAIN

- Retail
- Professional or Business Office
- Medical Office
- Hotel/Motel

- Restaurants
- Indoor/Outdoor Amusement
- R&D/Lab Space

FUTURE USES FOR CONSIDERATION

- Specialty Foods
- Art Gallery/Creation Space
- Food Trucks
- Mixed-use
- Multi-Family Residential
- Brewery
- Custom Fabrication/Artisan Industrial
- Co-Work Space

PARKING, LANDSCAPING & PUBLIC AMENITIES

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.

PARKING RECOMMENDATIONS

Parking recommendations include:

- 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. The added parking encourages driving, adds impervious surface area, creates greater stormwater issues and is visually unappealing. Parking maximums will help ensure both municipalities set an appropriate amount of parking, yet provide the flexibility for developers to build less if appropriate.
- 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.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LANDSCAPING & PUBLIC AMENITIES

Recommendations for landscaping and public amenities include:

- 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. Consider having a higher landscape requirement for the primary development zone and

focus the placement of landscaping along major roadways and in parking areas to soften the hardscape and create a more inviting pedestrian environment. Consider having a lower landscaping requirement in the transition zone, but focus the placement at the front and rear lot lines to buffer the primary roadway and create a visual buffer between rear property lines and abutting residential neighborhoods. It is important to have some consistency in landscaping standards between the Primary and Transition zones, particularly along roadway frontage in order to keep a consistent streetscape look and feel. 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. Trees and other landscape elements should be pruned and maintained to ensure sight lines and visibility for all roadway users and visibility to ground floor commercial frontage from the roadway.
- 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. For example, a wider sidewalk or shared use pathway may be more desirable along Route 9, Route 30 and Speen Street where a sidewalk may be more appropriate along secondary connector streets. It may be more appropriate or desirable to have pedestrian gathering spaces located along secondary streets where traffic is not as heavy and development can be more easily clustered to create enclosed spaces.

SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

- 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 the parcel fronts on.
 - 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 the parcel fronts on.
- 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 the on which the parcel fronts.