



TOWN OF  
**READING**  
MASSACHUSETTS

# MBTA COMMUNITIES & READING

Presentation 10/11/23 - Knowledge Session #2

## Goals:

- **Residents** understand
  - how aspects of zoning function in the real world
  - the tradeoffs to the decisions we're making
- **Staff** receives guidance from the public before we begin to finalize our proposal

### Zoning Concepts

Setbacks  
Parking requirements  
Frontage  
Height  
Mass  
  
District Mapping

# WHAT IS THE MBTA COMMUNITIES LAW?



In 2019 it was summarized that for the 100 communities within the Boston metro area in the 3 years prior only 14% of multi-family units were permitted by-right.

**The state passed a law in 2021 requiring all the municipalities in the Boston area to remove barriers to development within their zoning in order to make future development of dense housing close to transit to be possible.**

The state had to choose a way to confirm that municipalities are complying, so they came up with zoning capacity and district requirements.



# WHAT IS THE MBTA COMMUNITIES LAW?



Reading is classified as a **commuter rail community** which means at least half of our zoning district must be within a **1/2-mile of the Reading train depot** downtown.

By **December 2024**, Reading must confirm to the State that we have a district with **by-right** zoned **capacity** for a minimum of 1,493 units of **multi-family housing (3+ units)** at a density of 15 units per acre across a district of a minimum of 43 total acres.\*

We do not currently have a zoning district that meets the requirements.

\*For the specific details on how these numbers were calculated by the State please see our project webpage.

# Zoning Capacity

Zoning capacity considers each parcel as empty and asks what could be built on it today under current zoning.

To determine “zoning capacity” you add up how many housing units could maximally be built on every existing parcel in a district, based on what the zoning allows, regardless of what exists on each parcel.

Zoning capacity is not a measure of what will be built, but of what COULD be built based on zoning. Zoning is not construction.





## Current Conditions by Zoning District - Reading, MA

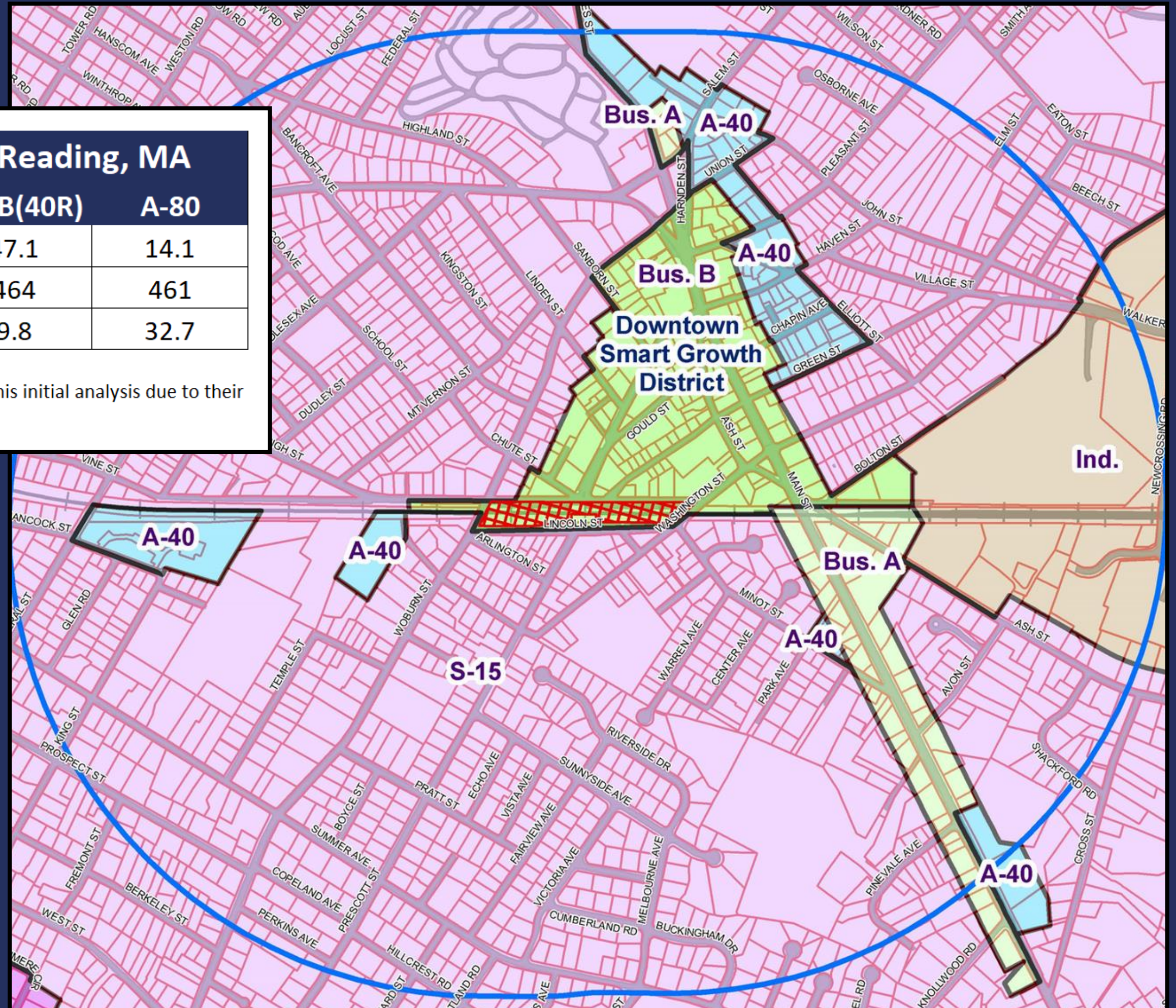
	A-40**	Bus A	Bus B(40R)	A-80
Total Acreage	17.2	42.4	47.1	14.1
Unit Capacity	21	301	464	461
Unit Density/Acre*	1.2	7.1	9.8	32.7

\*calculation removes excluded land

\*\*only the A-40 district north of downtown; others were not included in this initial analysis due to their limited acreage

Reasons why existing zones don't comply:

- Unit density/acre is too low
  - Large number of non-conforming parcels due to smaller lot sizes than the required
  - Maximum lot coverage restrictions
  - Parking ratios require lots of space
  - Waivers required for density
- Acreage is too small or not within the 1/2 mile



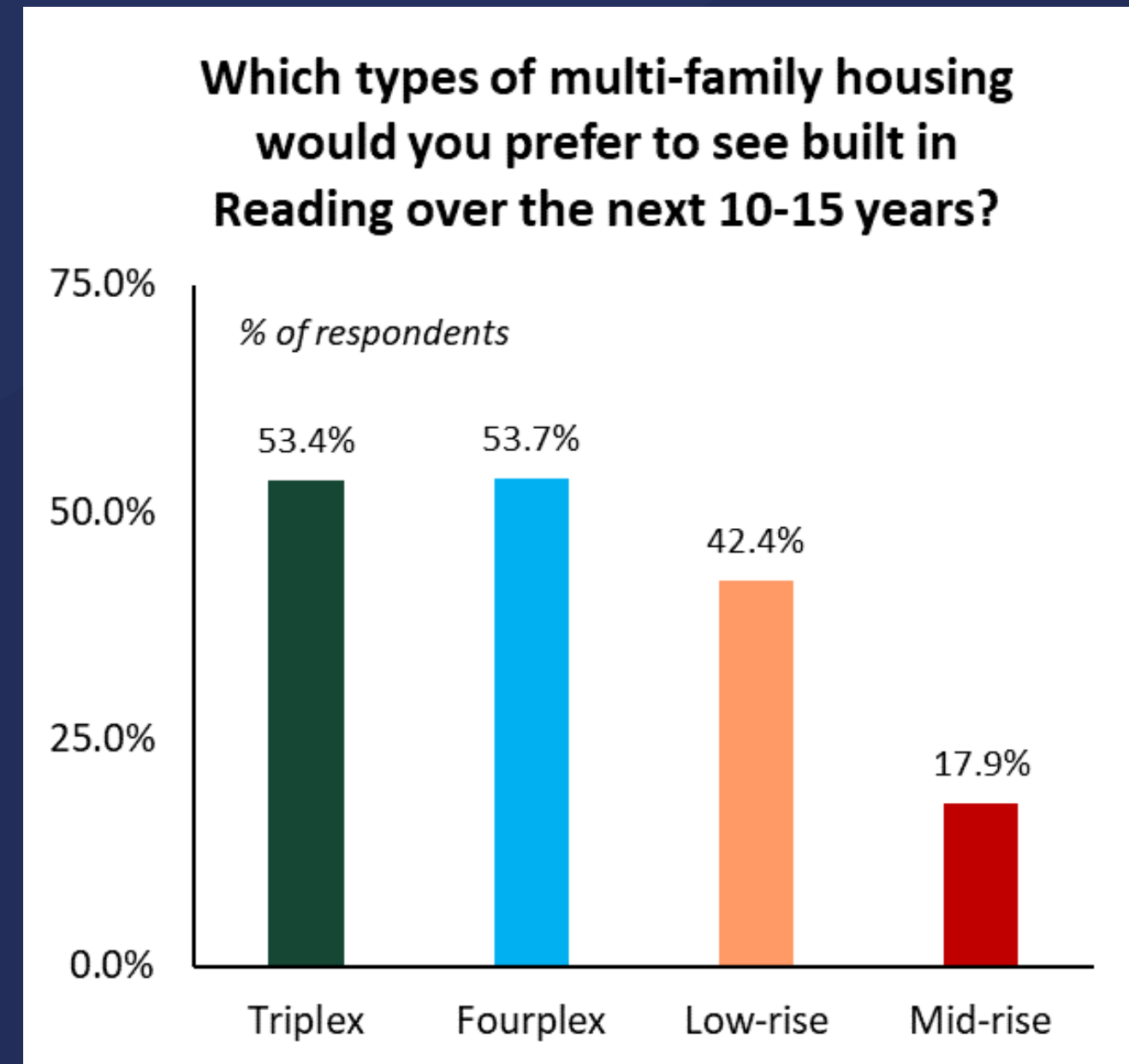
# Survey on Multi-Family Housing

**The goal of the survey was to receive actionable direction from residents as to the preferred types of multi-family housing for Reading.**

The survey was open from June 6 until September 5, 2023 and was publicized on the Town website, Town social media, in the Town Manager Minute, by the Recreation Department, the Library, the Economic Development Director, the Senior Center Staff, to Boards and Committees both via email and at in person presentations, and in person at community events.

We received a total of 758 responses.

The full survey summary report is available on our project webpage.



## Takeaways from the survey

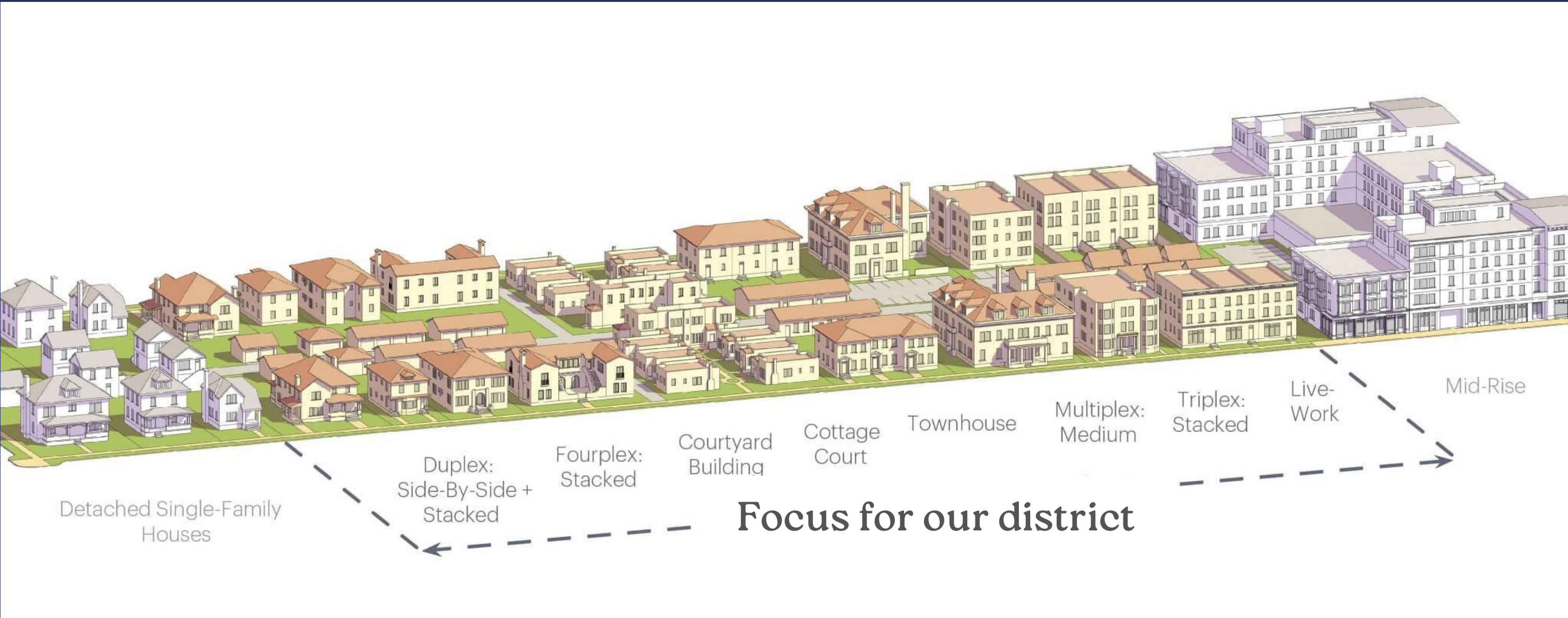
Respondents prefer:

- Multi-family buildings with fewer units
- Smaller buildings with fewer stories
- More “house-like” architectural options

New multi-family units should be near public transit, commercial corridors, and walking distance to pedestrian amenities

Respondents highlighted traffic, open space, and changes to neighborhood character as their top concerns with new multi-family housing.



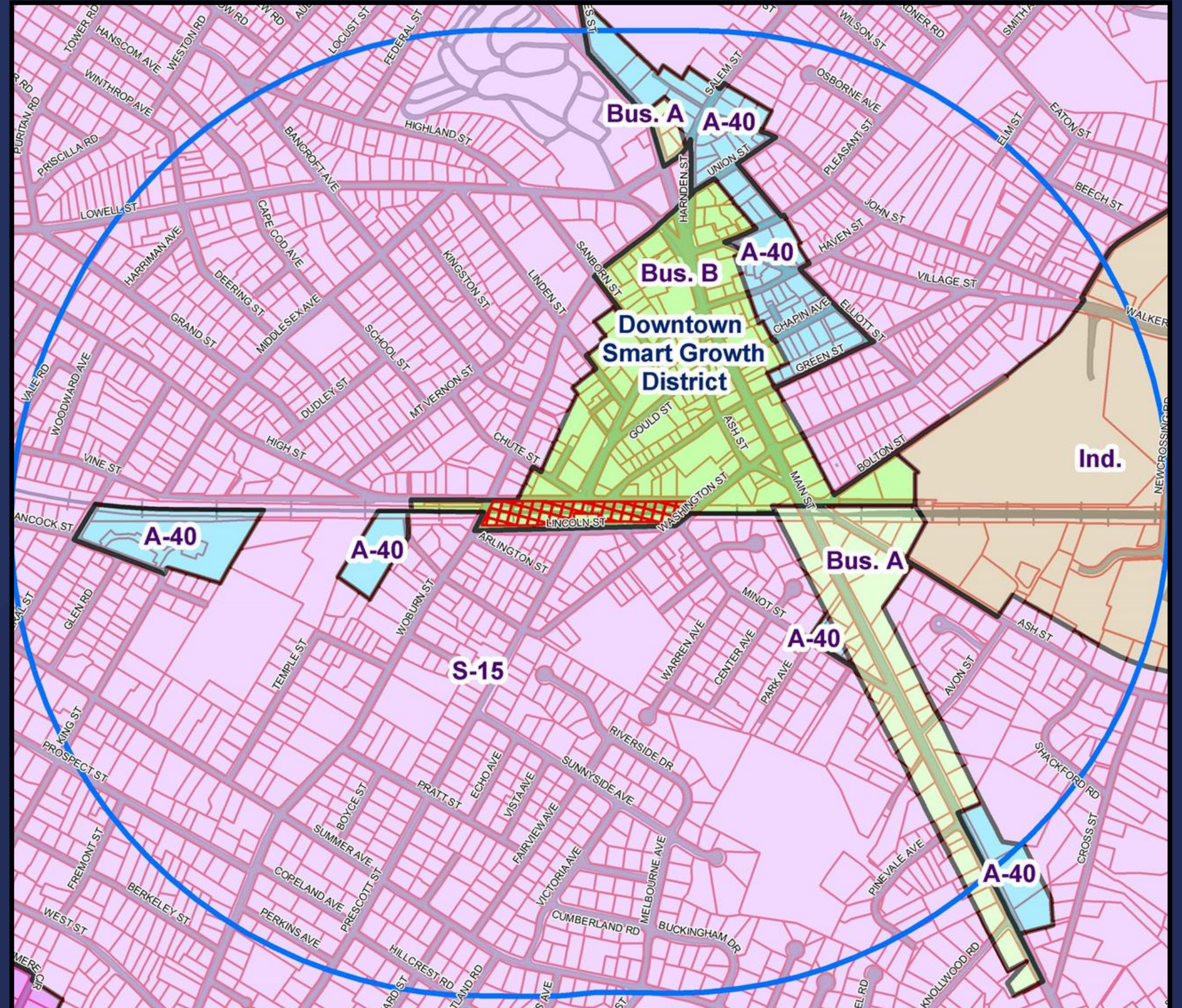


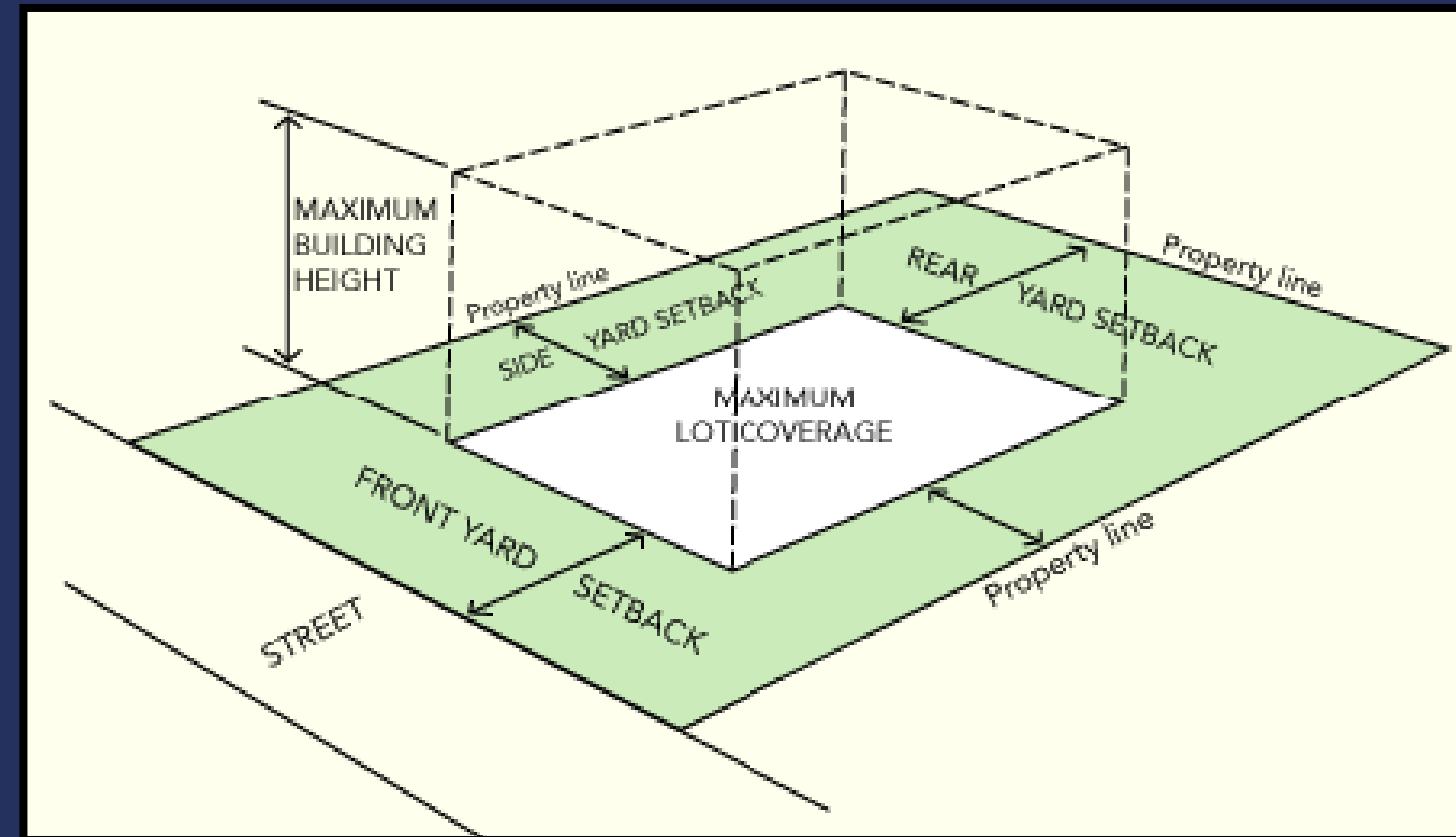
# Translating the Results to Reading

Survey results were clear that multi-family should be near transit / commercial / pedestrian-friendly areas. This directs us to focus the full acreage we are required to zone for to be within or near the 1/2 mile radius.

A-40 is a natural fit given the existing multi-family uses in the district. It does not have enough acreage alone (17 acres). We propose combining A-40 with portions of S-15 to create a new district.

Equal distribution across the 1/2 mile area is important for equal distribution of future service needs (school enrollment, infrastructure) to come from possible construction.





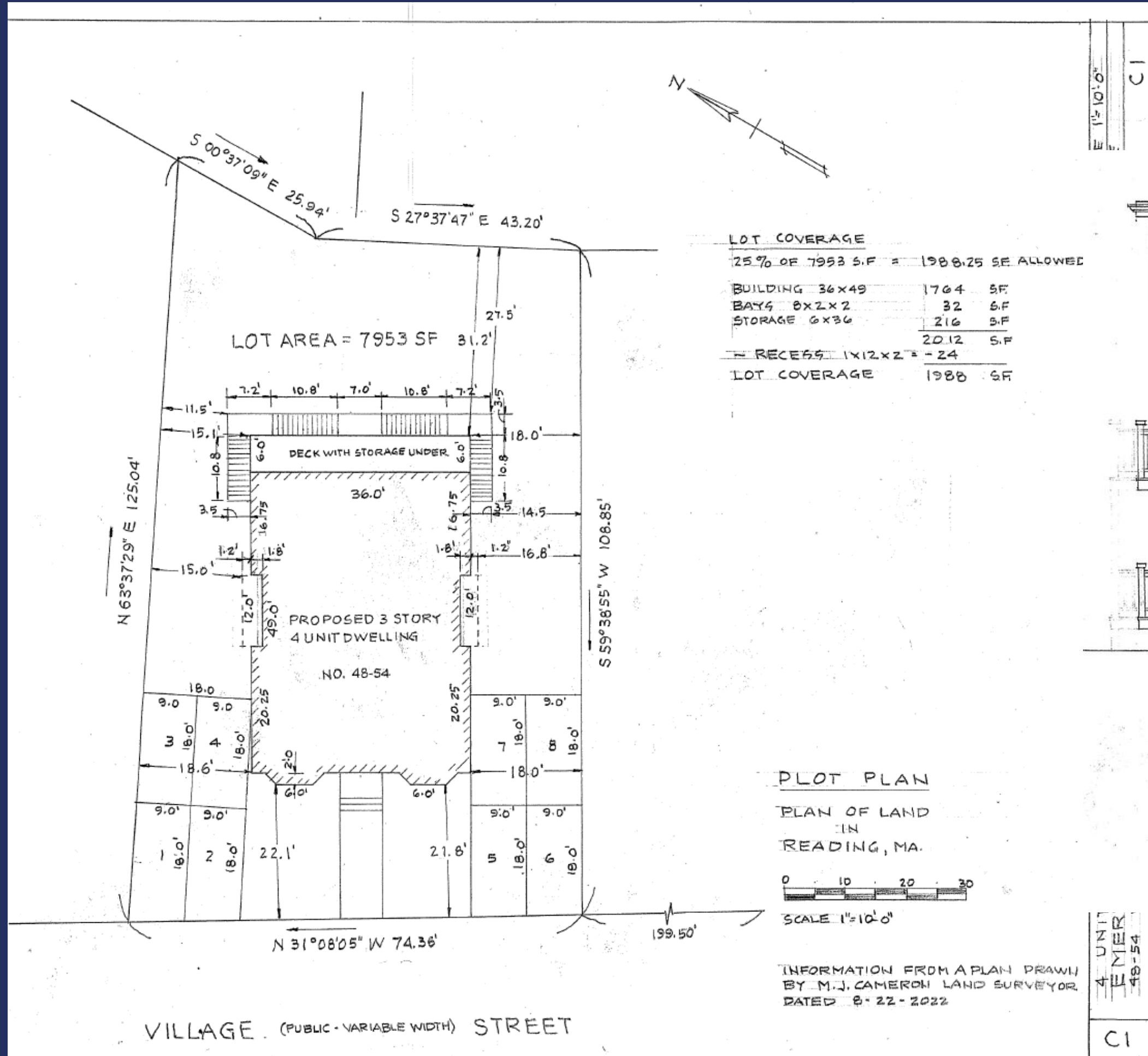
The intention is for the exterior form of any potential new buildings to follow dimensional controls similar to what currently exists now in our single-family districts.

The only difference would be the number of units.

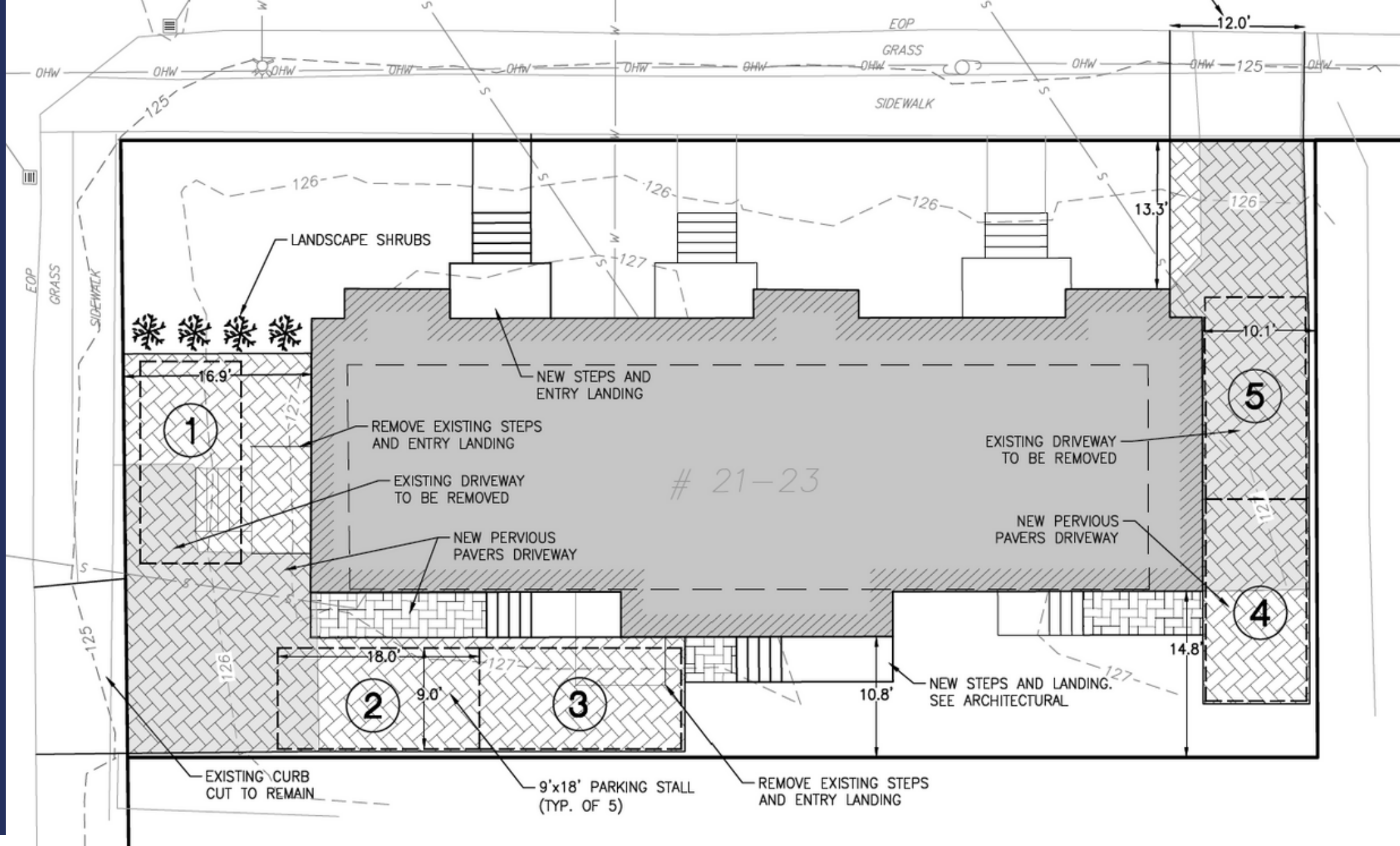
### 6.3 Table of Dimensional Controls

Use	Minimum Lot Width (Feet)	Minimum Area (Square Feet)	Minimum Frontage (Feet)	Required Front Yard <sup>1</sup> (Feet)	Required Side Yard (Feet)	Required Rear Yard (Feet)	Maximum Coverage % of Lot	Maximum Building Height <sup>2</sup> (Feet)
<b>One or Two Family Dwelling</b>								
In S-15 District	60	15,000	100	20	15	20	25	35
In S-20 Districts	80	20,000	120 <sup>3</sup>	20	15	20	25	35
In S-40 Districts	80	40,000	200	20	15	20	25	35
In A-40 Districts		10,000	80	20	15	20	25	40
In Bus-A Districts		NA	NA	15 <sup>4</sup>	10 <sup>4</sup>	20 <sup>4</sup>	25	45
<b>Multi-Family Dwelling</b>								
In A-40 Districts		40,000	80	30	30	30	25	40
In A-80 Districts		80,000	NA	60	60	60	12.5	60
In Bus-A Districts		40,000	NA	15	30	30	25	40

Zoning controls apply to new lots and new development only.



Setbacks can be: open space, parking, other



### ZONING SUMMARY

S-15 RESIDENTIAL DISTRICT  
DIMENSIONAL REGULATIONS FOR MULTI-FAMILY USE

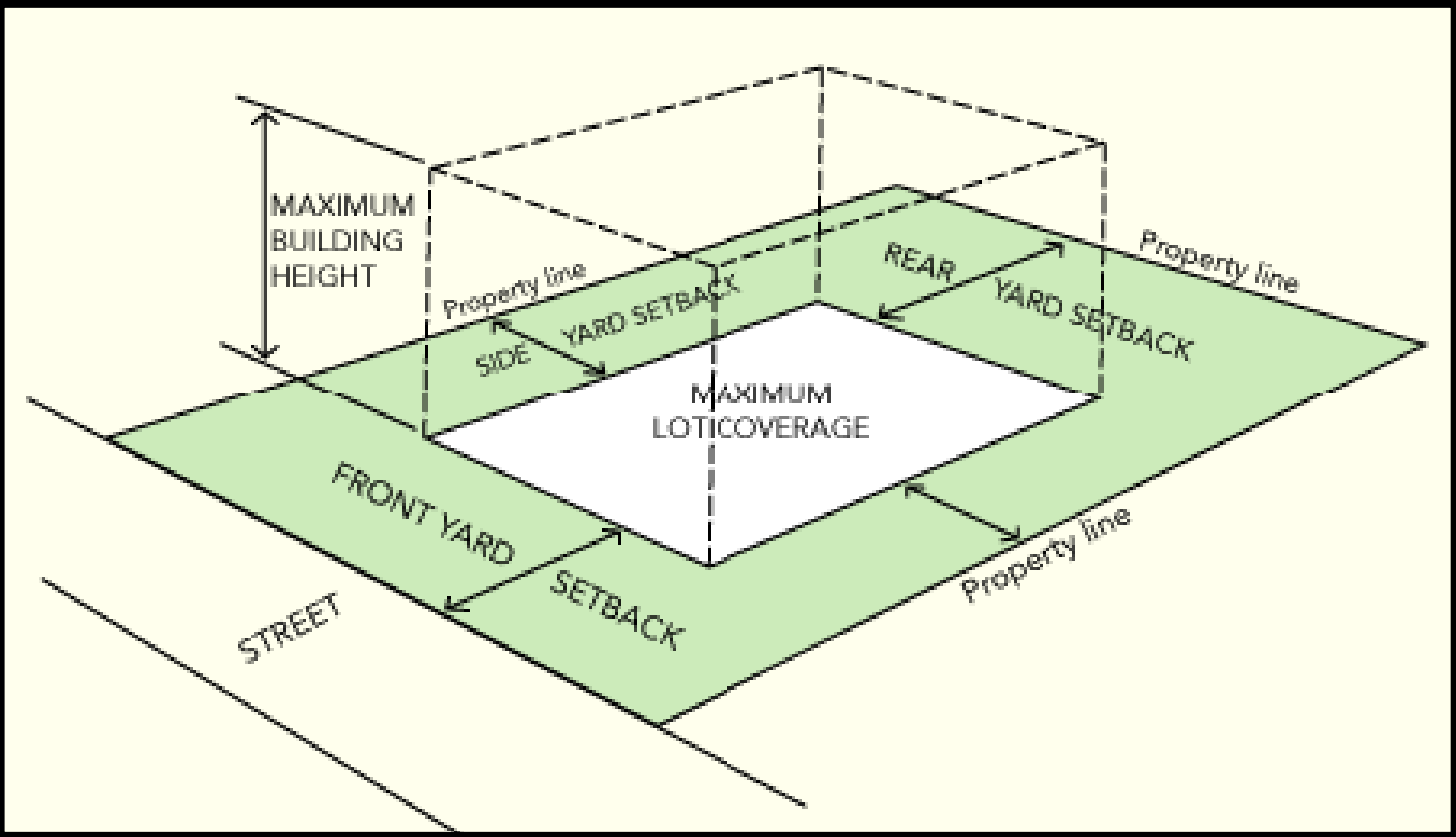
	REQUIRED	EXISTING	PROVIDED	RELIEF REQUIRED
MIN. LOT WIDTH	N/A	-	-	-
MIN. LOT AREA	100,000+ S.F.	5,846 S.F.	5,846 S.F.	Y
MIN. FRONTAGE	100'	106.50'	106.50'	N
MIN. FRONT YARD	20'	13.3'	13.3'	Y
MIN. SIDE SETBACK	15'	10.1'	10.1'	Y
MIN. REAR SETBACK	20'	N/A	N/A	-
MAX. LOT COVERAGE	25%	36.0%	36.0%	Y
MAX. BUILDING HEIGHT	35'	(1)	(1)	(1)

(1) REFER TO ARCHITECTURAL PLANS.





# Design a Lot



## Required yards = Setbacks

	Front	Side	Rear
Current	20	15	20
5' Less	15	10	15
Small all around	10	10	10

## Maximum Lot Coverage

		Lot Sizes in SF		
		5,000	8,000	12,000
Current	25%	1,250	2,000	3,000
	30%	1,500	2,400	3,600
	40%	2,000	3,200	4,800

## Parking

	1.5	1.25	1
2	3	3	2
3	5	4	3
4	6	5	4

Parking can be within your yards

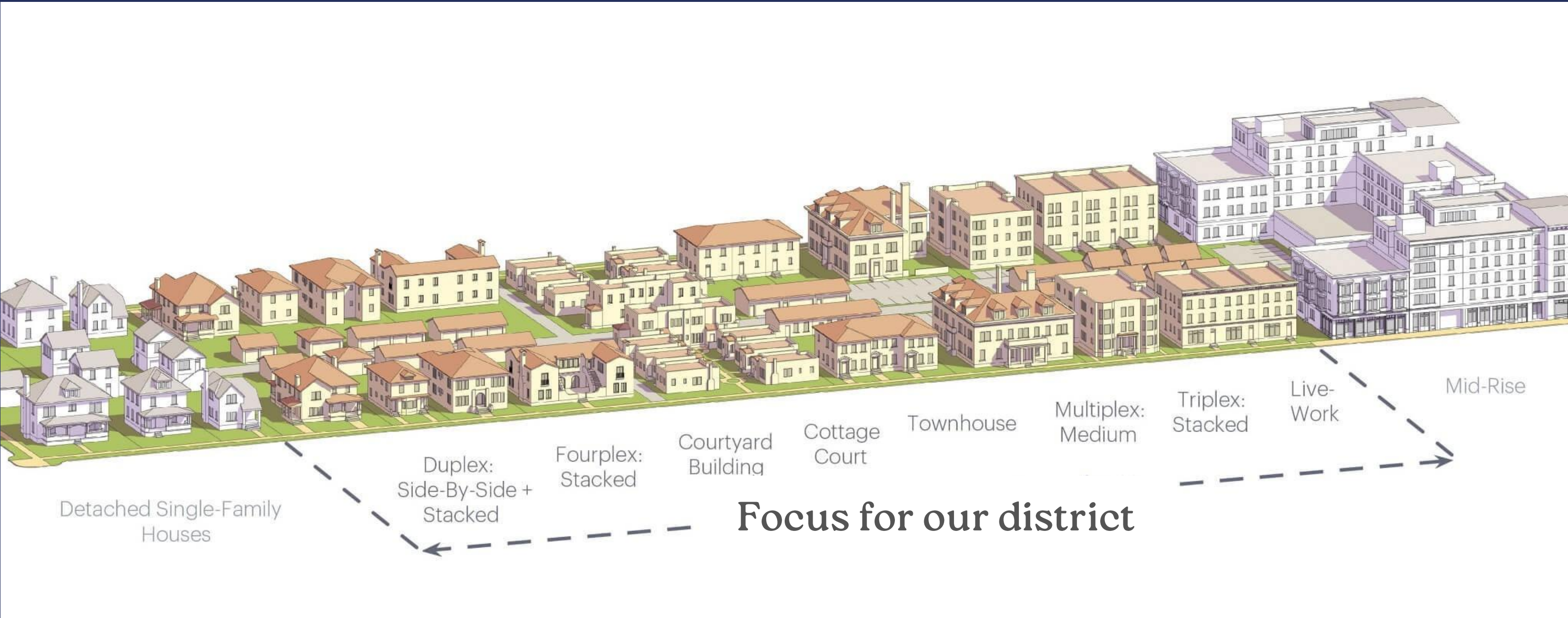
# Compliance is an Equation

For each zoning District that the Town submits to the State, staff has to answer 51 questions.

Minimum Lot Size  
Additional Lot SF Req's per Unit  
Parking Spaces per Unit  
Building Volume / Building Height  
Maximum Lot Coverage %  
Open Space %  
Setbacks  
Lot Area per Unit  
Maximum Units per Acre

Non-Conforming Parcels  
Units within Half-Mile of Transit  
Total Excluded Land  
Open Space Removed/Set Aside  
Total Parking Area  
Units Forgone due to Unit Cap in Zoning

**As we adjust each variable in the blue box, lots will shift in or out of compliance, changing our ultimate unit density/acre.**

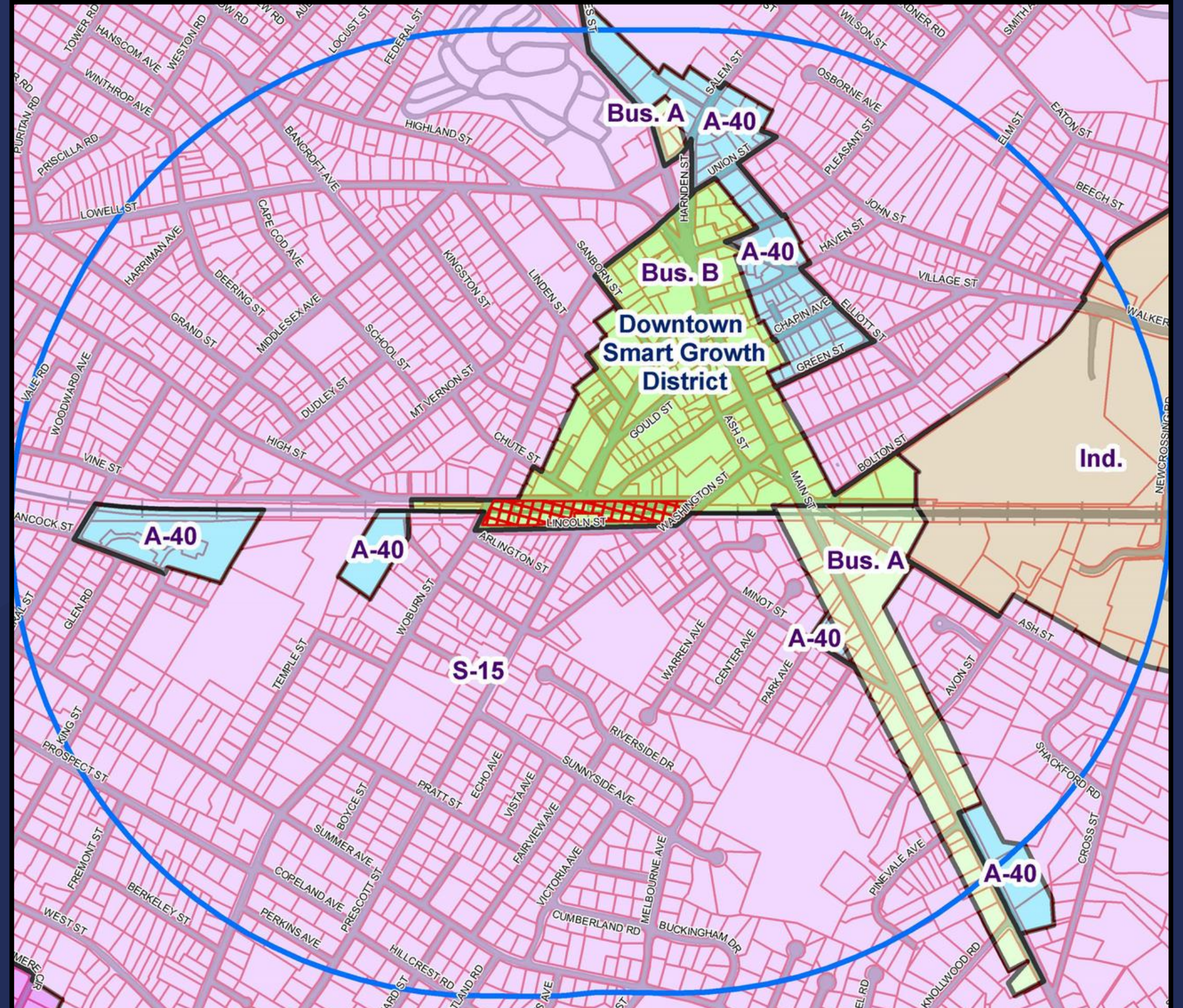


# Where

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# Drawing a District

## Do's & Don't's

### **Do:**

Follow natural boundaries.

Consider the walkable distance from amenities.

Look for equal distribution.

### **Don't:**

Split a lot in half, always follow lot lines or streets.

Worry about it being too big.

### **Remember!**

Each section must be a minimum of 5 acres.

At least 1/2 of your zone(s) must be contiguous (one piece).

At least 1/2 of your zone(s) must be in the 1/2 mile circle.

We've been working with RKG testing possible compliance scenarios

- New lower minimum lot size, new lower minimum frontage, max of up to 6 units on a lot, and dimensional controls similar to our existing single-family
- Goal is to choose a lot size & frontage that brings 90% of lots into compliance

Staff's next steps:

- Using feedback from tonight, develop a preliminary map
- Craft dimensional controls that can apply holistically to the zone and meet the state's minimum requirements



Questions?

Next Event : Wednesday  
November 8 @ 7pm

We will be presenting our  
preliminary district concept.

Contact Reading's Planning Staff

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