



TOWN OF
READING
MASSACHUSETTS

MBTA COMMUNITIES & READING

Economic Development Summit Presentation 10/25/23

Goals:

- For attendees to understand the new law
- To understand why our zones in Reading don't comply
- What that means for the changes we will need to make
- What staff sees as the best direction based on engagement thus far

In Scope

Regional Context
Definitions of the Law
What are the zoning districts in Reading
History of zoning changes in Reading
Zoning Capacity
Reading's own housing goals
Price & Permitting Data
Survey Results & Interpretation
Business Districts
Workshop Results

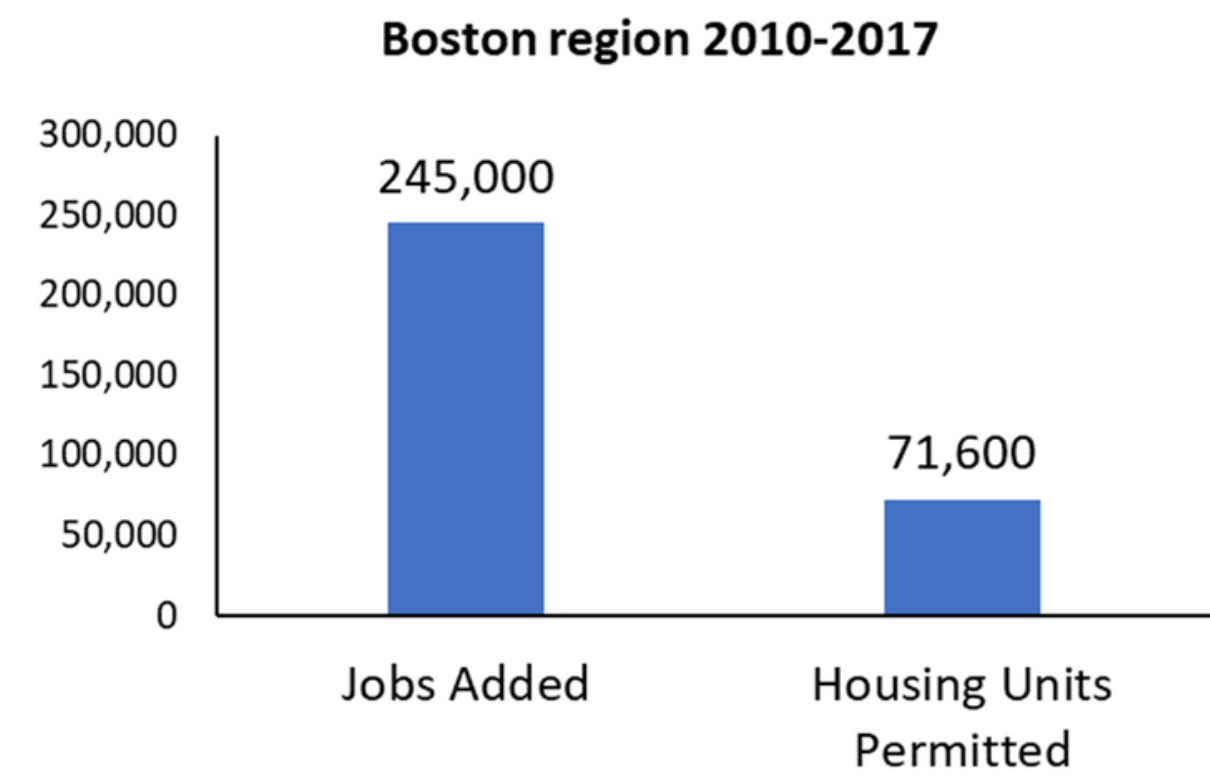
Out of Scope

Debating if we should comply with the law

Arguing against zoning changes without first vetting any proposals



REGIONAL CONTEXT ○ ○ ○ ○



When the supply of housing does not keep pace with growing demand it drives down vacancy rates and drives up prices as there is increased competition for units.

This is also a region that has historically produced mainly single-family homes, and the region will need a range of housing options to meet future needs and multi-family housing is increasingly looked to as the solution to these issues.

-Amy Dain's 2019 State of Zoning for Multi-Family Housing in Greater Boston Report

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 is requiring municipalities to remove barriers to development within their zoning in order to make future development of dense housing close to transit to be possible.

They had to choose a way to confirm that municipalities are complying, so they came up with zoning capacity 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 set number of units of **multi-family housing** 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.

Multi-family housing is any housing with at least 3 units on one lot





3.0

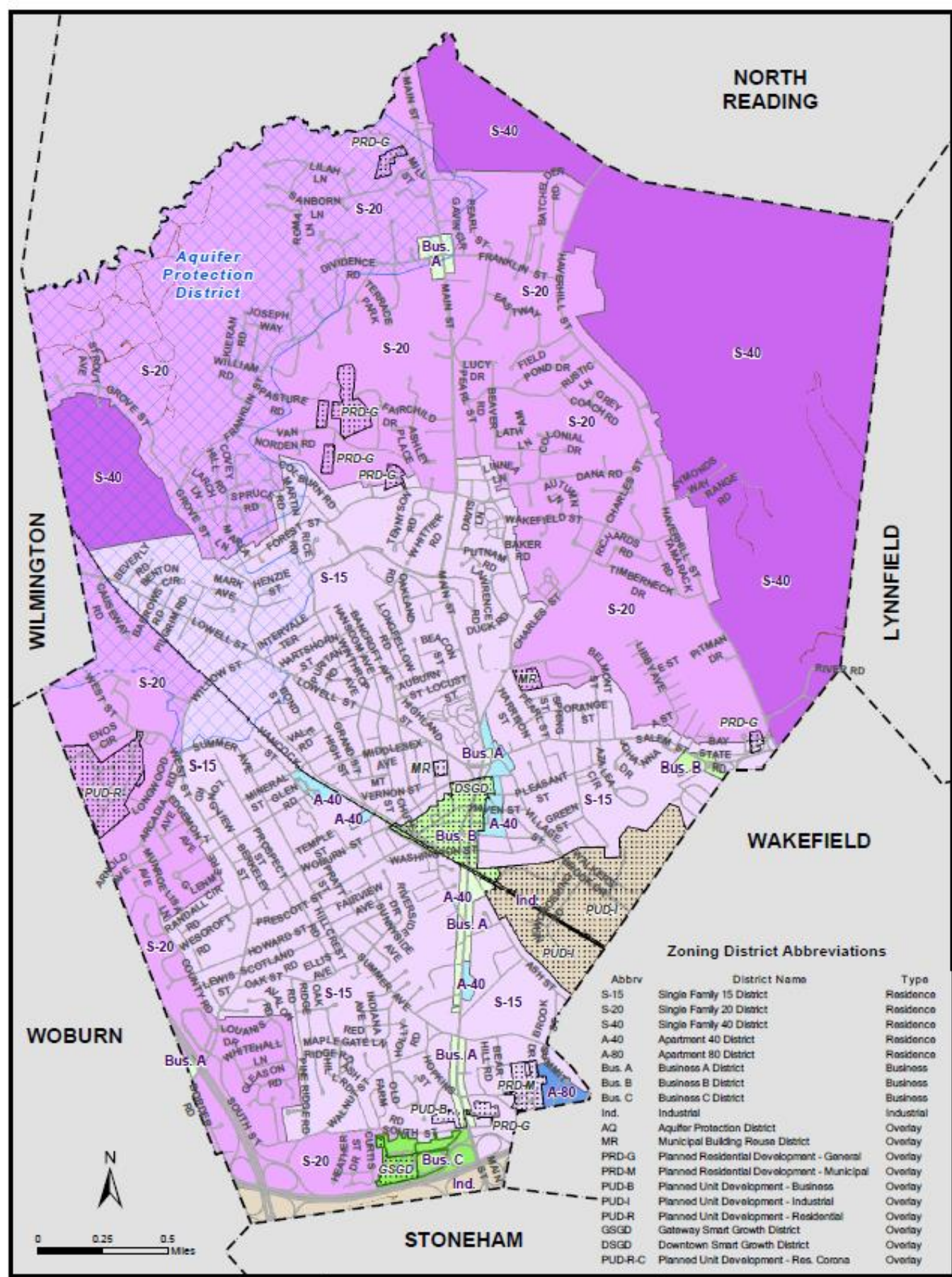
ESTABLISHMENT OF DISTRICTS

3.1 Districts

The Town is hereby divided into the following zoning districts as shown on the Reading Zoning Map:

Type	Full Name	Short Name
Residence	Single Family 15 District	S-15
Residence	Single Family 20 District	S-20
Residence	Single Family 40 District	S-40
Residence	Apartment 40 District	A-40
Residence	Apartment 80 District	A-80
Business	Business A District.....	Bus A
Business	Business B District.....	Bus B
Business	Business C District.....	Bus C
Industrial	Industrial	Ind
Overlay	Flood Plain District.....	F
Overlay	Municipal Building Reuse District	MR
Overlay	National Flood Insurance.....	NF
.....	Flood Management District	
Overlay	Aquifer Protection District.....	AQ
Overlay	Planned Unit Development	PUD
Overlay	Planned Residential Development.....	PRD
Overlay	Gateway Smart Growth District.....	GSGD
Overlay	Downtown Smart Growth District	DSGD

Reading currently has 5 residential districts and 4 business districts



94% of the land in Reading is zoned for single-family homes only

Legend

- Town Boundary
- Railroad
- Roads: Unpaved, Paved
- Overlay Districts: PUD-R-C, Aquifer Protection District, Subdistrict

Zoning

- A-40
- A-80
- Bus. A
- Bus. B
- Bus. C
- S-15
- S-20
- S-40
- Ind.

ZONING MAP

TOWN OF READING MASSACHUSETTS

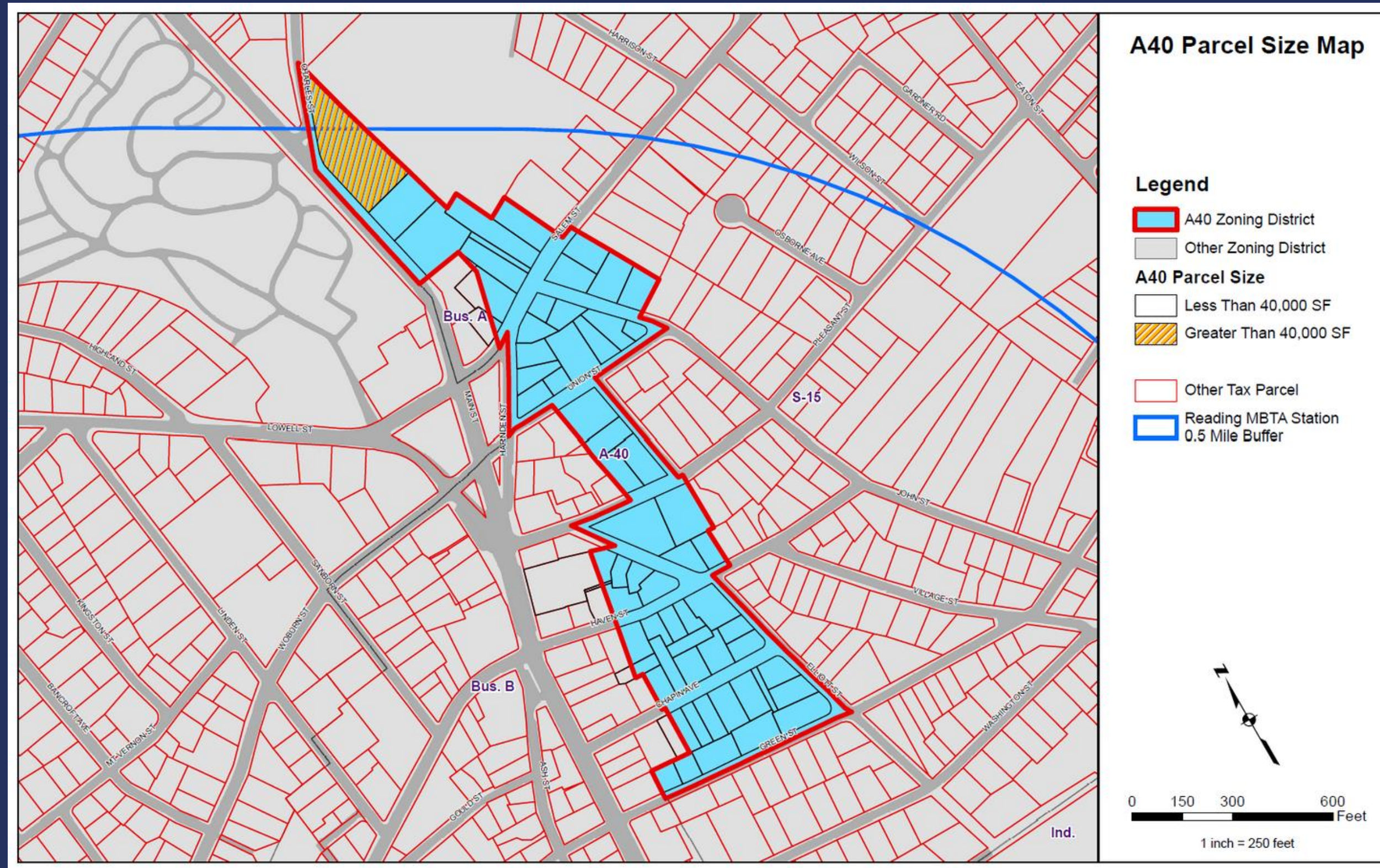


Zoning current as of April 27, 2017.
This map is to be used in conjunction with the Reading Zoning Bylaws and with the Reading Zoning Map approved on 4/8/13. The Town of Reading does not make any warranty, express or implied, for errors, omissions or inaccuracies in the information provided and does not assume any legal liability or responsibility for actions taken or not taken in reliance upon any information or data contained herein.

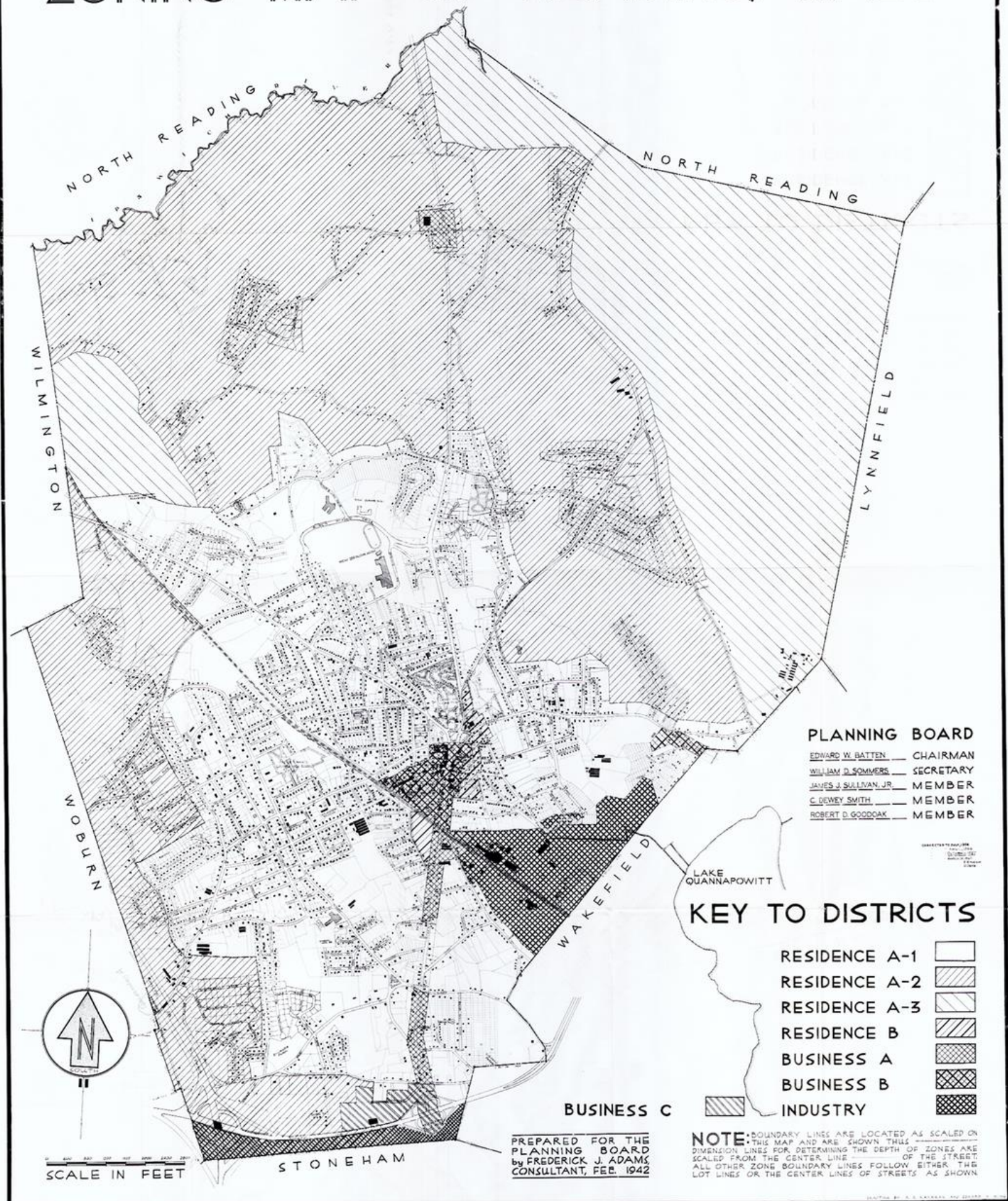


Why would development NOT be by-right?

The lot or use is non-conforming, which means it doesn't meet the current standards of the zone



ZONING MAP OF READING, MASS.



1942 Zoning Bylaw originally passed

1954 Mid-size single-family district (A-2) minimum lot size changed from 15,000 sq ft to 20,000

1967 Creation of new larger apartment zone (B-1)

1969 Residence B district minimum lot size changed from 10,000 sq ft to 40,000

1978 Rename zones to modern names and begin using modern map

1995 Smallest single-family district minimum lot size changed from 10,000 sq ft to 15,000

Planning Board Publishes Zoning By-Law Changes

The Reading Planning Board began this week a cycle of legal advertising of a public hearing which may lead to more restrictive zoning laws for apartment construction.

Planning Board Chairman William Parker announced a proposed by-law changes would be held August 11, at the Community Center.

Selectmen have already agreed to call a special Town Meeting early in September to consider the zoning by-law changes.

The legal advertising cycle requires two consecutive insertions of advertising outlining the changes in the zoning by-laws, and notice of the public hearing on the subject.

Following the public hearing, August 11, the Planning Board must then draft an article for Town Meeting to consider in September. In the interim, however, any building permit issued after the town has published its proposed changes may be subject to those proposed changes if the changes in the zoning by-laws are subsequently passed by Town Meeting.

Chairman Parker outlined the context of the proposed changes by stating it is an attempt by his board to "standardize" requirements for apartment construction in the different building zones in town.

"We have found our by-laws contain different requirements in different zones, and therefore inconsistencies appear. Our analysis of Town Meeting action in recent years has been the people of Reading are against indiscriminate building size and lot size. These changes are in line with what we feel the people want Reading to be," he stated.

Three weeks ago, a group of neighbors in the Minot St.-Edwin St. area precipitated the move by appearing as a group before the Selectmen, the Planning Board and the Appeals Board to voice their objection to proposed apartment construction in their neighborhood.

This same group has now initiated a petition through the

Planning Board to change the zoning in their neighborhood to Residence A to prohibit such construction.

The proposed changes also would require a maximum lot coverage of 12½ per cent by a structure, and a minimum lot size of 40,000 square feet.

Elsewhere, the by-law changes deal with a general "tightening up" of definitions, and deletes many old sections of the law and amalgamates them now under Section 4A. Chairman Parker described Section 4A as now being the "meat" of proposed changes.

An attempt last May to accomplish the same advertising and hearing cycle just prior to a special Town Meeting, failed when the legal time limit expired for two consecutive publications of the proposed changes.

State Law Challenged
The Planning Board also appeared before Selectmen, Monday evening, to call attention to a bill now before the Legislature to which they voiced strong objection.

The bill would allow "special housing developments" for what is described as "low and

moderate income groups" and leave approval or disapproval of such plans up to local boards of appeal.

The Reading Planning Board, backed by the State Federation of Planning Boards, pointed out the bills (there are five versions of it) would by-pass local planning boards, local boards of survey, the local building inspectors and other agencies required to pass on construction permits, and leave extraordinary power in the hands of one local agency.

They also pointed out the bill would give to the Metropolitan Area Planning Council, heretofore an advisory group, powers to regulate housing within individual towns and cities.

The Planning Board also contended in its objection that the proposed law would negate the principle of Home Rule and self determination on which most local building codes are set.

The Planning Board received the support of the Selectmen in their objection, and plans to communicate the feelings of both boards to area legislators and the Massachusetts Federation of Planning Boards.

100-Unit Apartment Gets Green Light

A building permit was issued Tuesday for a \$1,000,000, 100-unit apartment complex at 5 Washington St.

The new apartment complex to be constructed by Washington Park Realty Trust is on land on which is currently located the Reading office Lumber Company, Industrial Heating & Piping Co. and an abandoned coal storage facility. These buildings must be demolished before construction can begin.

Building Inspector Royal C. Jacques issued the permit to Robert Cass, principal in the Washington Park Realty Trust,

after receiving a green light from Town Counsel James W. Killam.

The Board of Public Works, reviewed plans for the proposed apartments, and "were not satisfied" with the plans, specifically noting they wanted to see complete plans showing access to the street, sewer and water connections, and drainage as it affects both abutters and the town.

Town Counsel after consulting with attorneys for the developer, worked out a signed agreement in which the devel-

(continued on page three)

1969

A group of residents living in the South Main & Minot St area, upset by apartments being proposed near them, advocated to have the zoning bylaw changed and the minimum lot size increased in a special town meeting.

A Good Warrant

Town Meeting goes into session Monday night, and has before it an uncommonly good warrant.

This Town Meeting was initiated last June by a group of citizens seeking relief from a condition in their neighborhood which permitted the construction of one apartment building and planning for two more. These citizens, in the South Main St. and Minot St. area, felt apartment projects were not in the best interest of their homes and neighborhood. We agree with them and commend their activism.

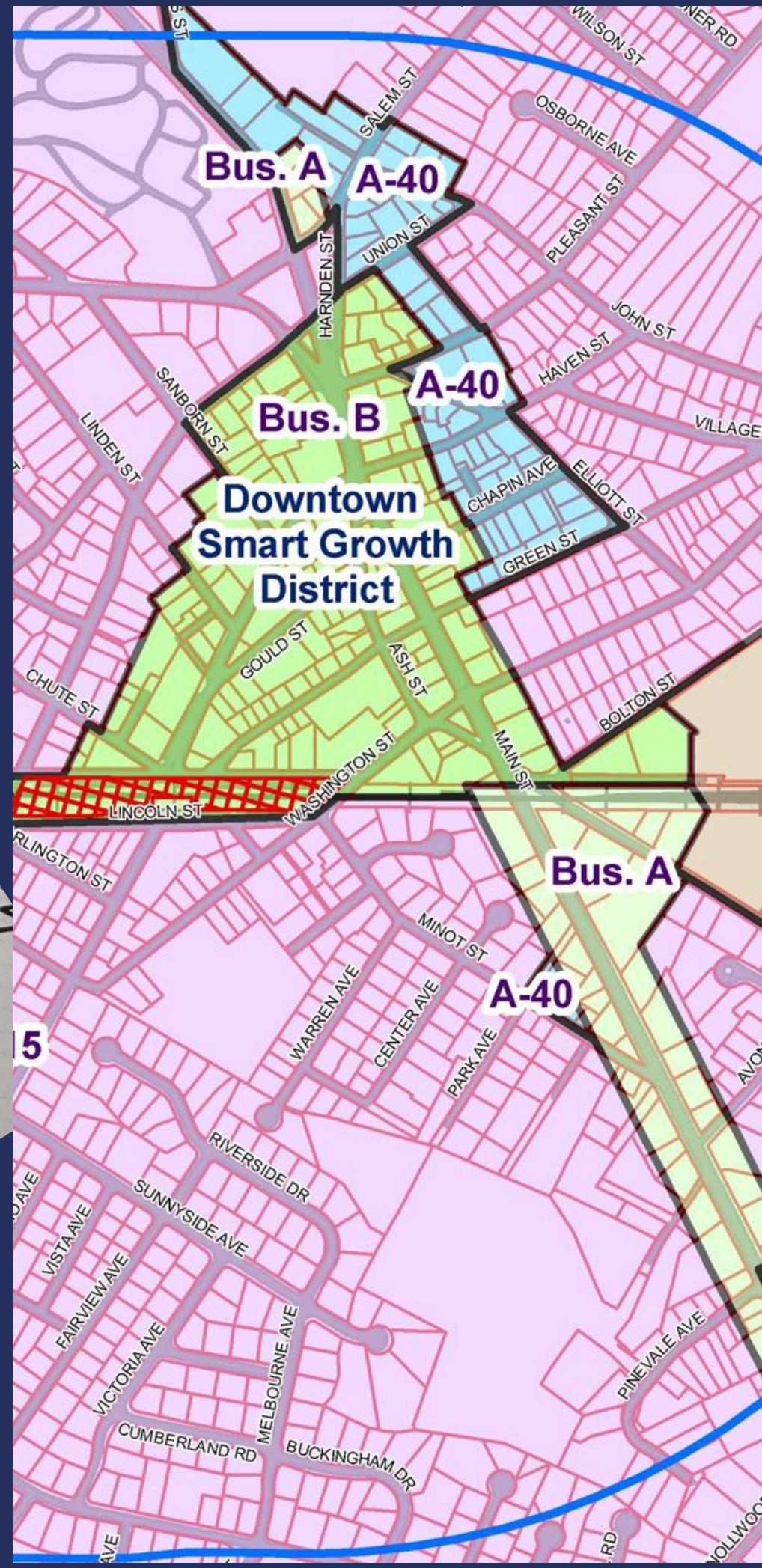
Their objections to haphazard zoning by-laws helped focus attention

sought by the Planning Board on the need for revising the by-laws to restrict land use in Reading by apartment developers.

Apparently, there is no easy way to present proposed changes in zoning by-laws. The language is tedious, and at points, confusing. Town Meeting is probably going to grumble about the presentation of these current proposed changes; it is difficult to understand completely what is being voted out and what is being voted in. All we can do is ask Town Meeting to be patient, deliberate each section of the laws on its own merit, then vote with an eye to protecting Reading residential areas.



1962



Present

Dear Town Meeting Member:

Articles 18, 19 and 20 on the Fall Town Meeting Warrant are attempts to eliminate the existing S-10 Zoning District. If these Articles pass, 90 percent of the lots in the existing S-10 District will become non-conforming. This includes lots with existing houses on them. As a result, if someone wishes to add onto their house or to do any work that requires a building permit, they will be required to go to the Board of Appeals. This results in additional time and cost, with no guaranty that permission would be given to allow the addition to be placed on the home.

While we realize that these Articles are placed on the warrant in an effort to prevent the development of certain land, we have serious concern with changing the S-10 District as a way to do so. Such a change punishes existing homeowners for the perceived abuses by others. There must be better ways to address problems rather than making all of our homes non-conforming and restricting our ability to add onto our houses.

Even if you are not personally in an S-10 Zoning District, we ask you to consider how you would feel if the town were to change the zoning as to your lot to affect your ability to add onto your home.

1994-1995

In 1995 the Town changed the minimum lot size for single-family homes from 10,000 to 15,000 sq ft.

The discussion at the time focused on slowing growth and slowing the building of new homes in Reading.

Time to make it harder to build homes here?

By KEN MAGUIRE

READING - Because of its "increasing concern about overcrowded development" in Reading, the Community Planning and Development Commission is sponsoring Town Meeting articles which will make it harder to build homes.

The CPDC, which will hold a public hearing at 9:30 tonight to hear input from residents on this and other proposed bylaw changes, wants to increase Reading's minimum buildable lot size from 10,000 square feet to 15,000 square feet.

"Because of its location and physical character, Reading has been a very attractive residential community," wrote Town Planner Jonathan Edwards (on behalf of the CPDC) in a recent letter to Town Meeting members. "Hence, its residential market has been very strong and buildable lots are a valuable commodity.

"However," Edwards contin-

ued, "as developable land in town becomes more scarce, the tendency has increased to develop environmentally marginal land and to find creative ways to carve out additional lots."

As a result, "the Commission feels it is now necessary to strengthen the town's zoning controls in order to preserve the very character which makes Reading so attractive," Edwards wrote.

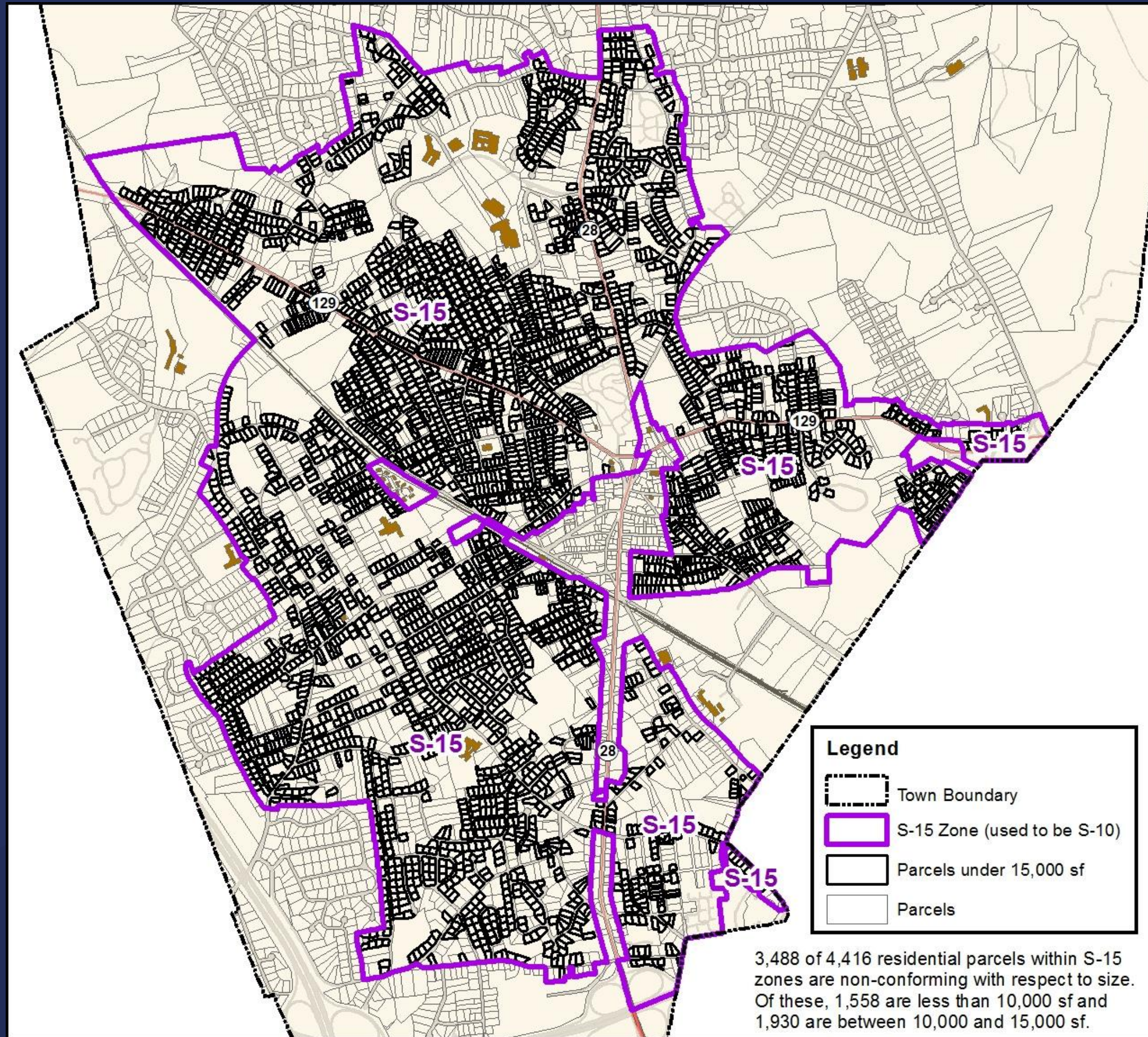
In addition to the proposed increase in minimum lot size, the CPDC is sponsoring many

other articles, including: frontage increase from 60 to 80 feet; wetland and affordable housing definitions; and others. There are 15 in all.

The full text of the articles is available at the Community Development Department in town hall, at the Town Clerk's office in town hall and at the Reading Public Library. Tonight's meeting will be held in the Selectmen's Meeting Room. Residents are encouraged to

Continued on Page 2





Zoning Capacity

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

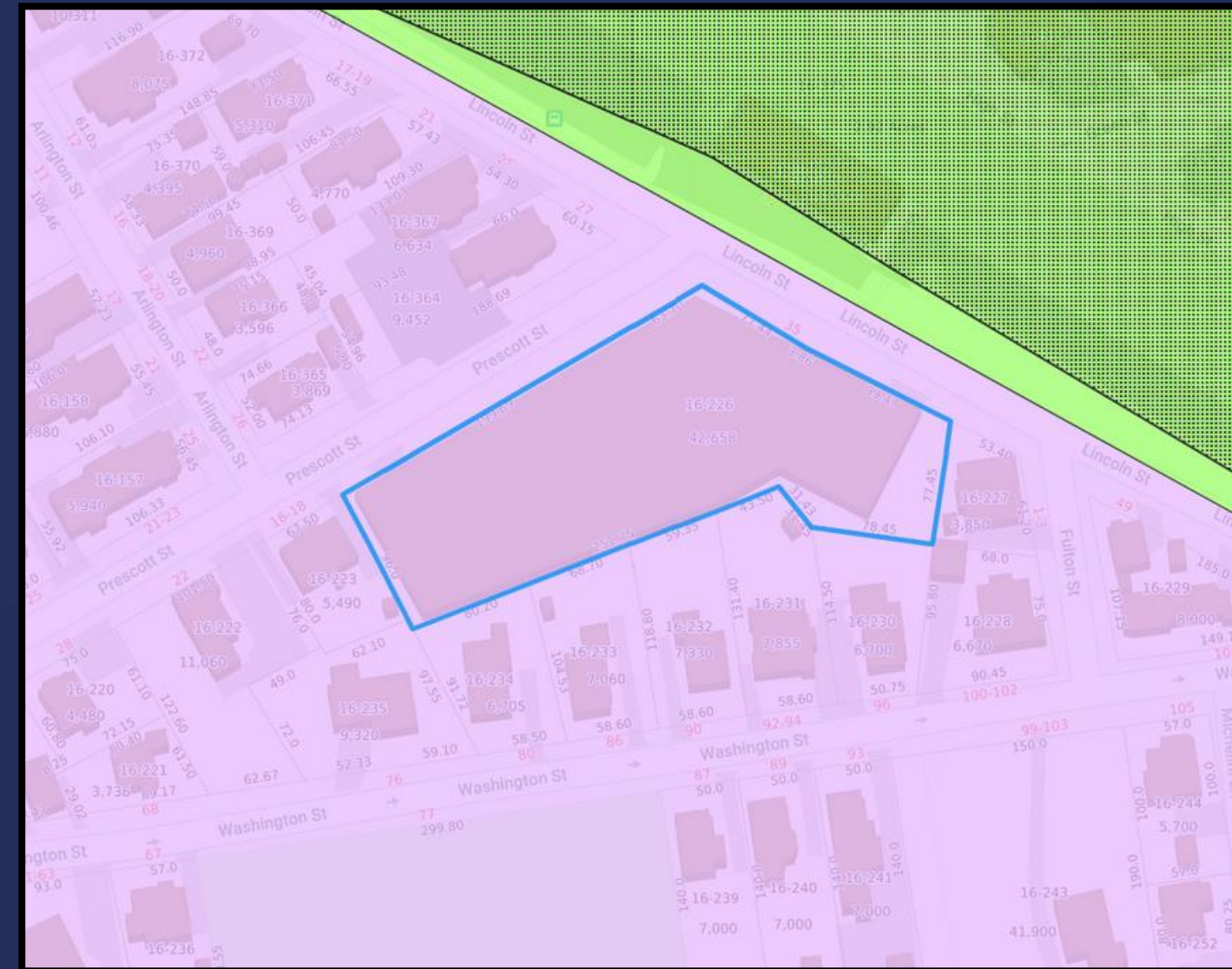
To determine “zoning capacity” you add up how many housing units could maximally be built on every existing parcel in a district, based on what the zoning allows, regardless of what exists on each parcel.



Zoning Capacity in the real world



Reading Village (The Metropolitan) has 68 units.
This building is a 40B development.



The lot it sits on is zoned S-15.
Under current zoning capacity this counts as 1.

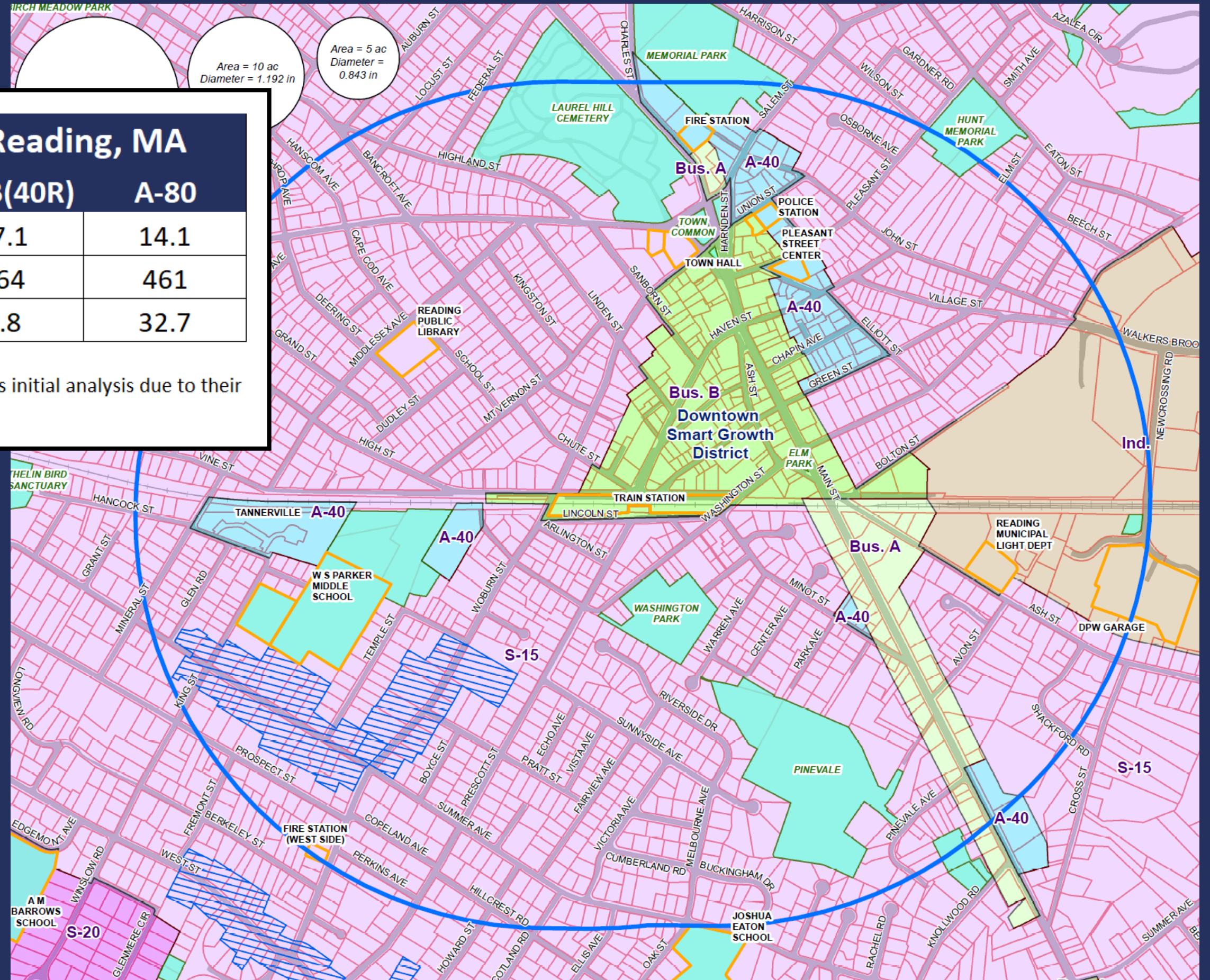
Zoning Capacity in the real world



This house is a single-family house in the A-40 zone.

When we revise the zoning in this district, this lot could count as 4 units or more.

The single-family house can remain as long as the owner wants; zoning does not change what already exists.



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:

- Acreage is too small
- Unit density / capacity 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

2006 Master Plan Goals

Reading will provide a variety of housing types for a diverse population.

Such housing will integrate well with existing neighborhoods.

Elderly, renters, first-time homebuyers, empty nesters, and others, will be able to find housing to match their needs.

Providing these housing types, including affordable housing, will be accomplished in part by improving the Town's regulations to more easily allow certain types of housing, such as townhouses, multi-families and accessory apartments.



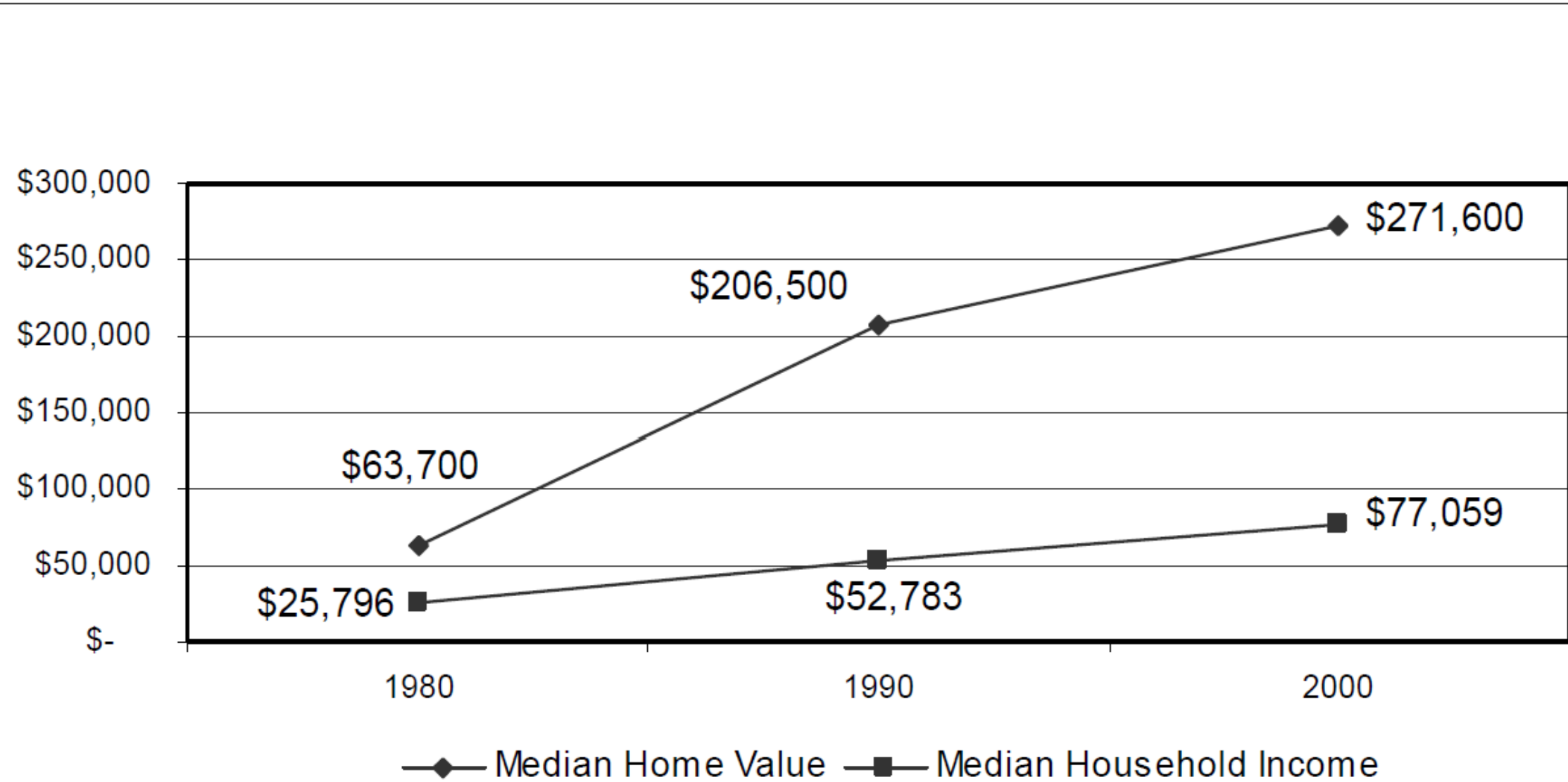
2006 Master Plan

“Although multi-family production has seen temporary increases with periodic real estate booms, based on zoning and the historically low production of other-than single-family units, it can be expected that most of Reading’s future housing production will be single family houses on average half-acre lots.

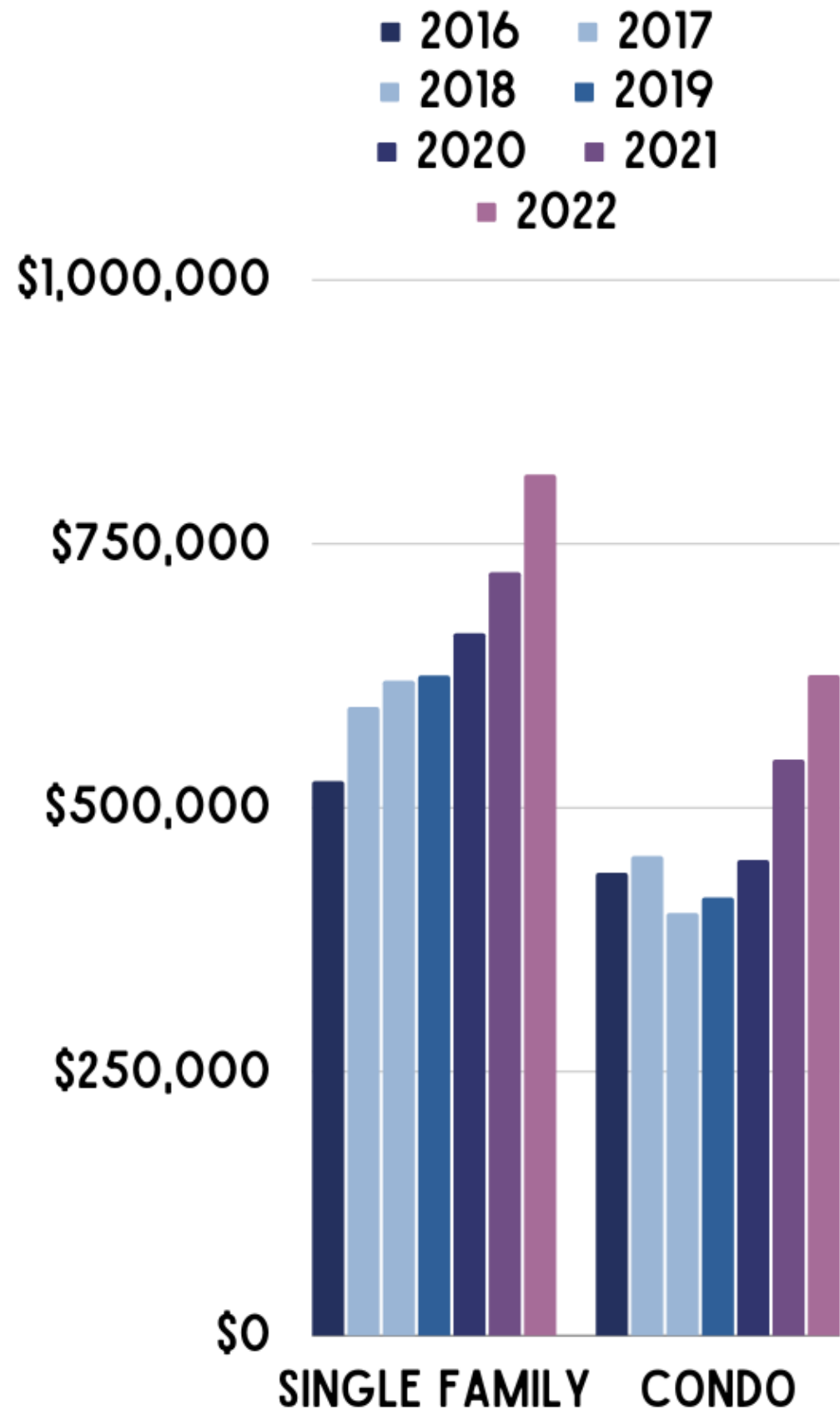
The likely result will be a continuation of high housing costs and fewer opportunities for low to moderate income households, empty nesters, and elderly.”

2006 Master Plan

Figure 12. Housing Affordability Gap in Reading.



Source: U.S. Census



HOME PRICES

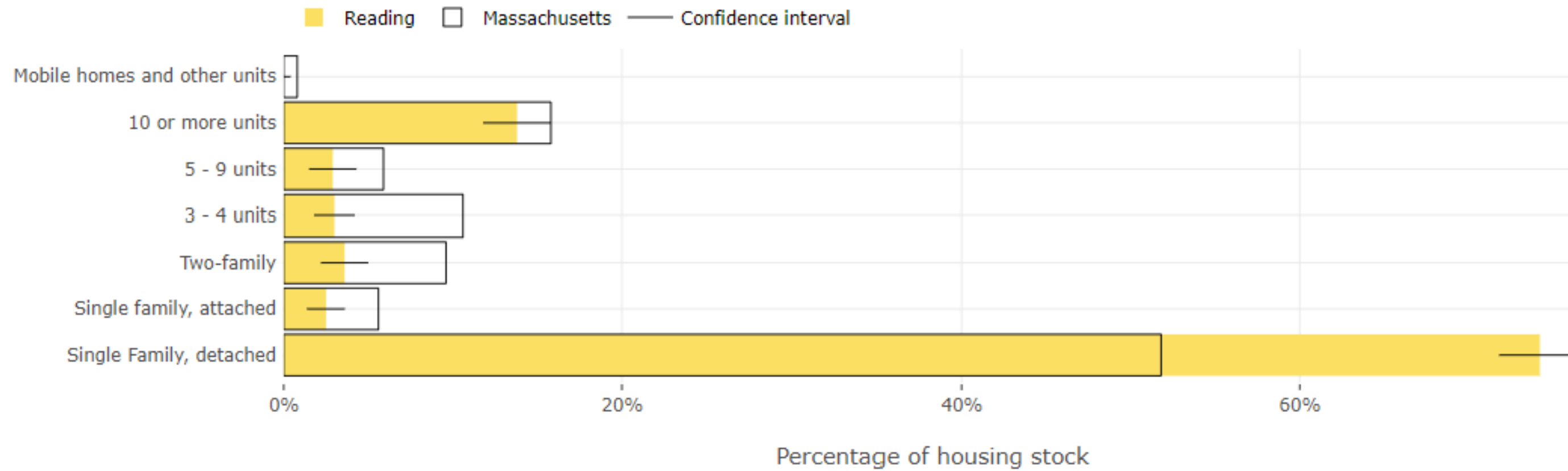
The median single-family home price in 2016 was \$525,000. In 2020 the median single-family sales price was \$665,000, in 2022 the median sales price had skyrocketed to \$815,000. This is an increase of 22.56% since 2020.

Condominium sales followed a similar pattern with a few years of lower prices followed by a steady increase in prices since 2018. In 2020 the median condo sales price was \$450,000, in 2022 the median sales price at year end was \$625,000. Condo sales prices increased by 38.9% from 2020 to 2022.



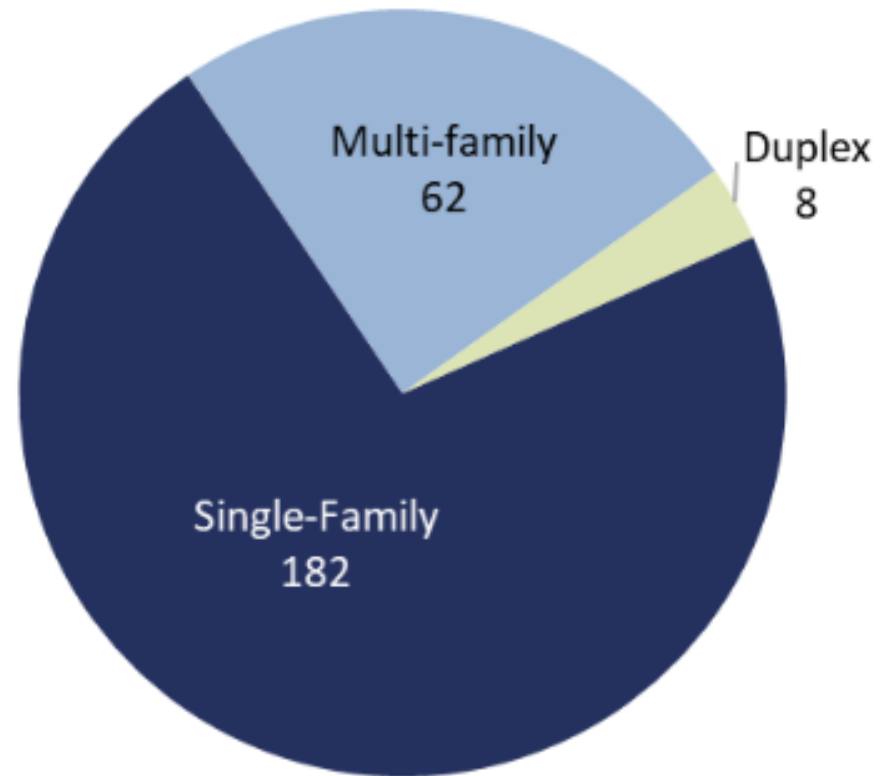
A HOUSEHOLD WOULD NEED TO EARN APPROXIMATELY \$235,000+ TO AFFORD THE MEDIAN HOME PRICE OF \$815,000

Housing units by building type Reading v. State

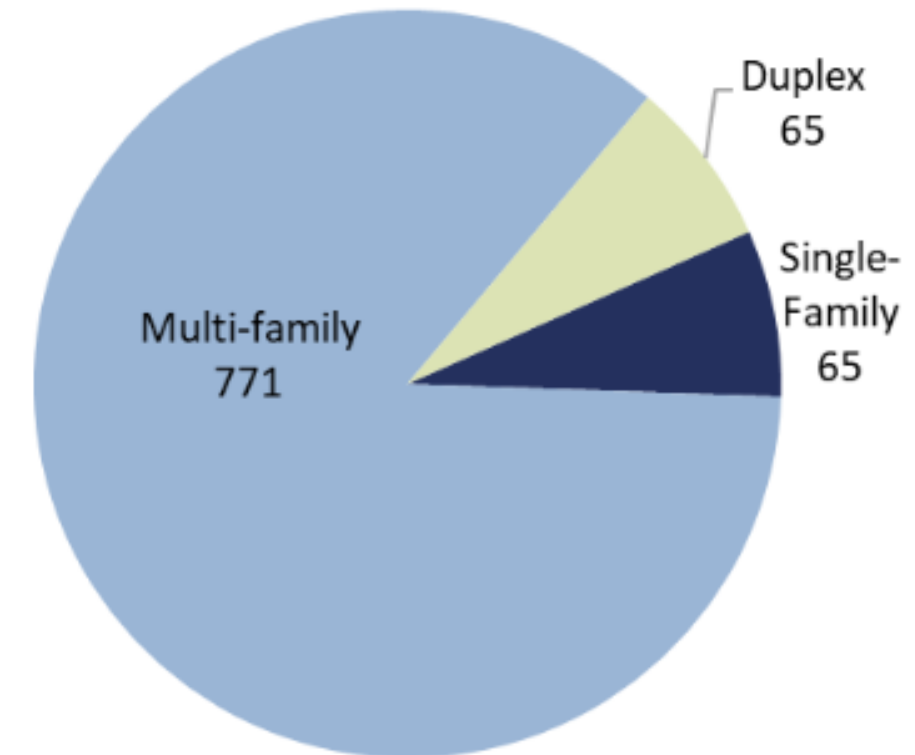


Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2016-2020 5-year estimates
Table S2504: Physical Housing Characteristics for Occupied Housing Units

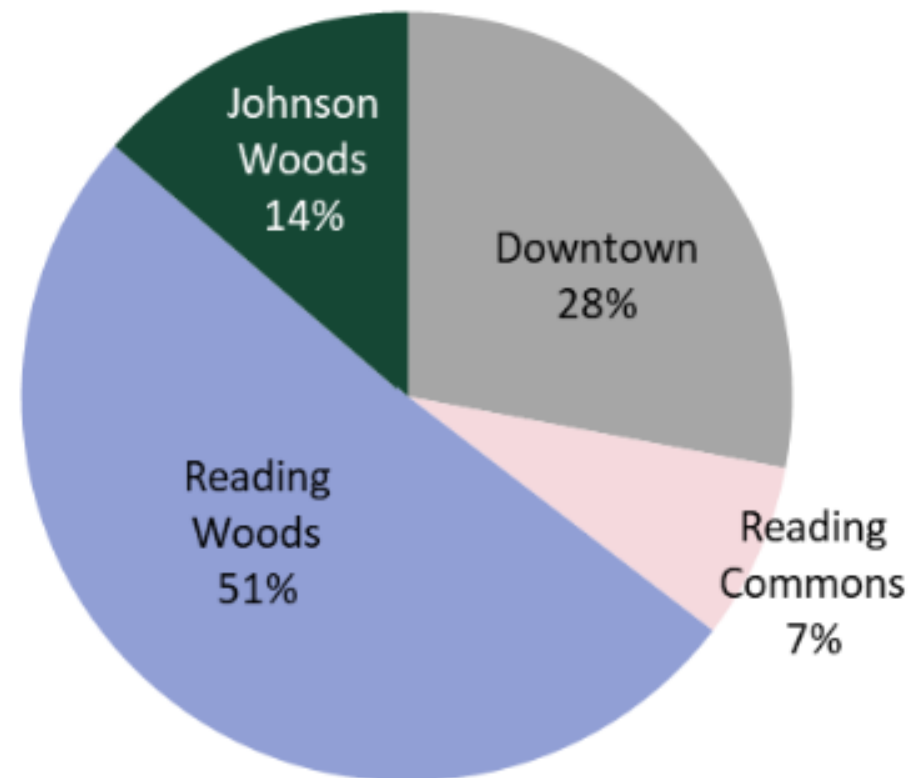
UNITS BUILT IN READING 2000-2010
252 NET NEW UNITS BUILT



UNITS BUILT IN READING 2011-2020
901 NET NEW UNITS BUILT



MULTI-FAMILY UNITS BUILT IN READING
BY LOCATION 2000-2020



THE MAKEUP OF READING'S MULTI-FAMILY HOUSING IS CURRENTLY SKEWED TOWARDS LARGER DEVELOPMENTS, WITH 20+ UNIT BUILDINGS MAKING UP 57% OF THE EXISTING MULTI-FAMILY HOUSING IN READING

MULTIFAMILY UNITS (3+) MAKE UP 21.5% OF READING'S TOTAL HOUSING STOCK



Reading Commons



AN ESTIMATED **1/3** OF
READING HOUSEHOLDS
HAVE INCOMES AT OR
BELOW 80% OF AMI
(LOW/MODERATE INCOME)

12% OF READING RESIDENTS ARE
DISABLED, AND 73% OF THOSE
THAT ARE DISABLED ARE AGE 65+

12%



Source: Reading Historical Commission

MBTA Communities gives us an opportunity to reconsider if, as a Town, we have met our goals.

Have we provided a variety of housing types for a diverse population?

Can a first-time homebuyers or elderly residents find housing to match their needs?

Have we considered our place within the region and what type of community we want to be known as?

In choosing to protect small town character by making development harder, we forfeit our ability to meet other goals.



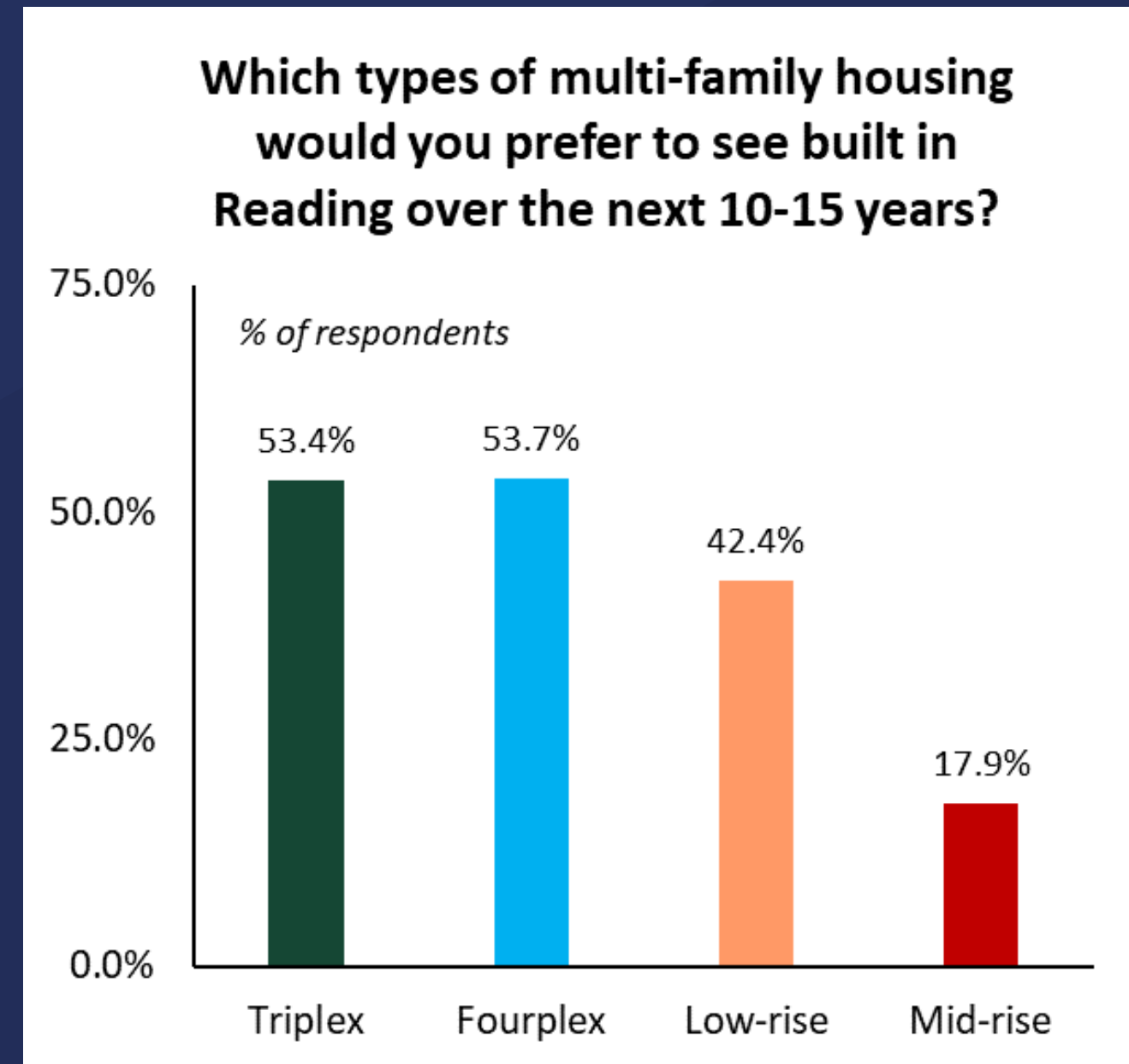
Survey on Multi-Family Housing

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



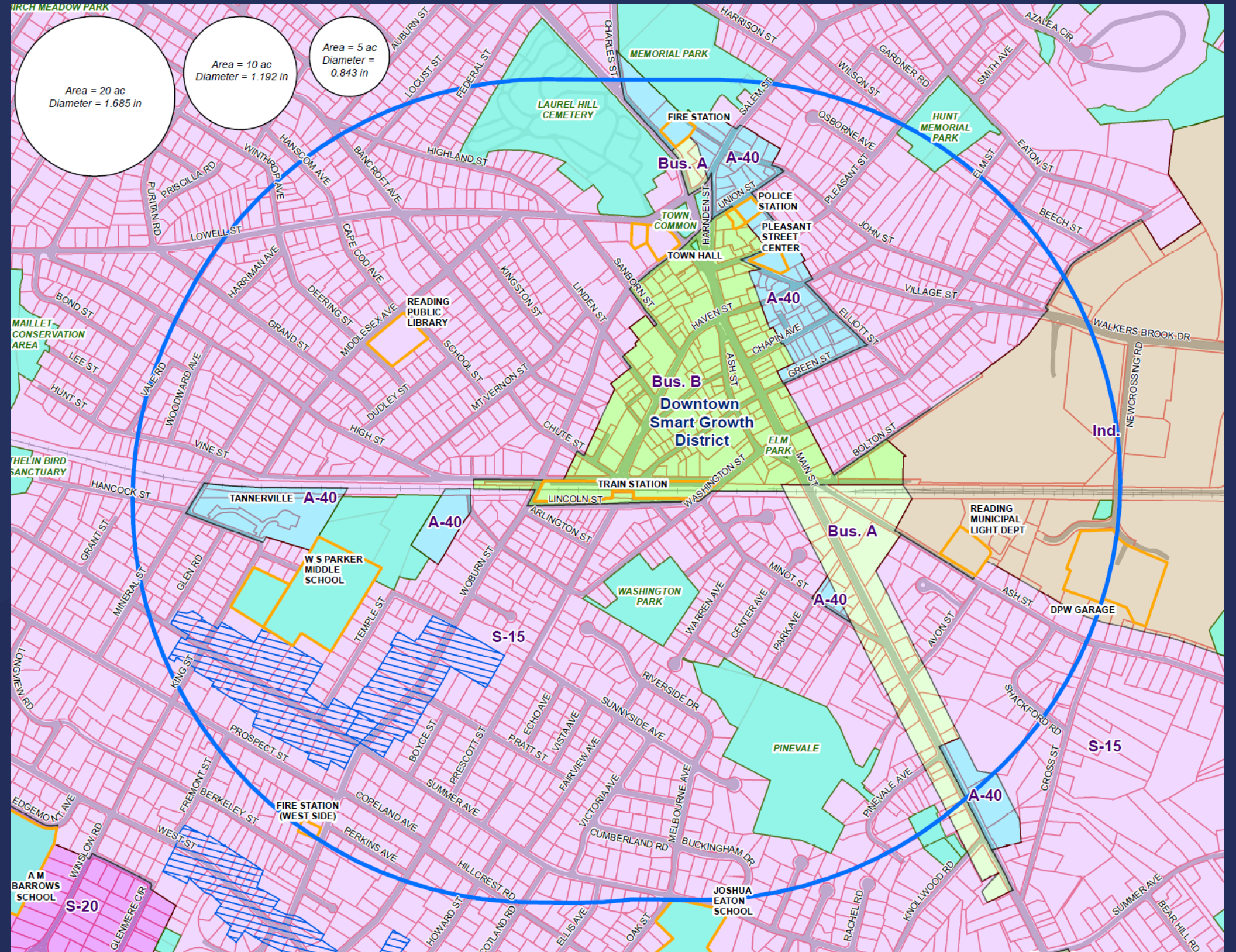


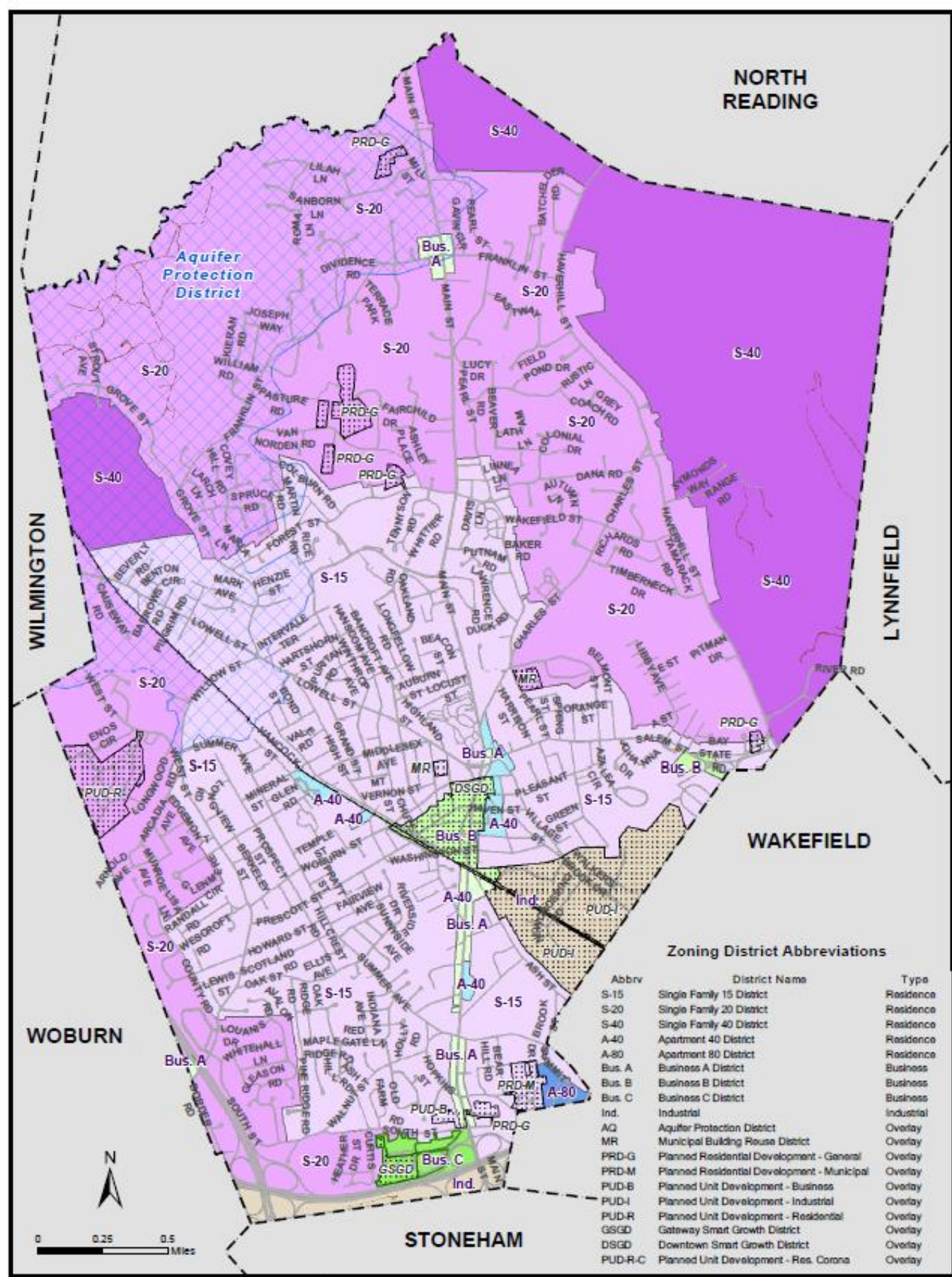
Translating the Results to Reading

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.





5% of the land in Reading is zoned for business uses


Legend

- Town Boundary
- ++ Railroad
- Roads
 - Unpaved
 - Paved
- Overlay Districts
 - Overlay District, PUD-R-C
 - Aquifer Protection District
 - Subdistrict

Zoning

- A-40
- A-80
- Bus. A
- Bus. B
- Bus. C
- S-15
- S-20
- S-40
- Ind.

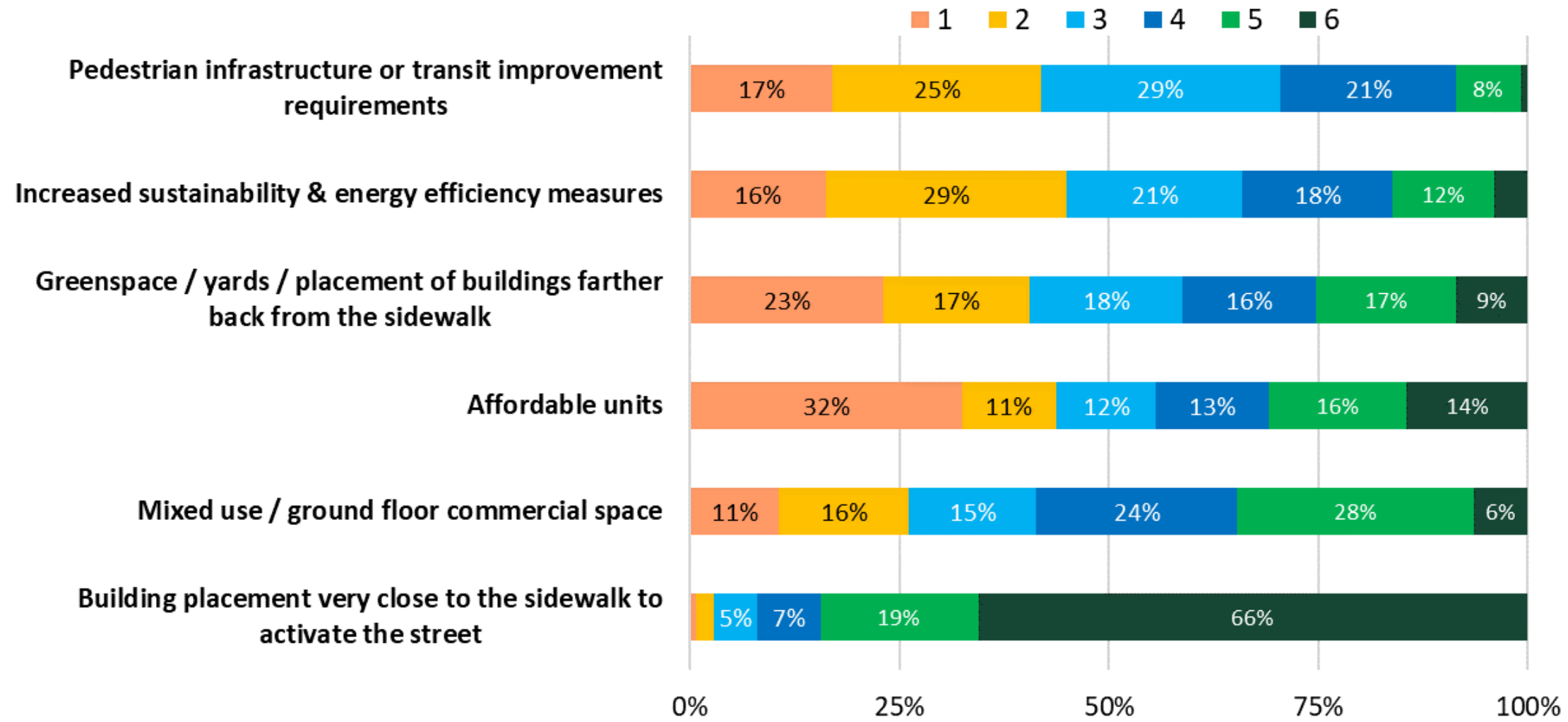
ZONING MAP
TOWN OF READING
MASSACHUSETTS

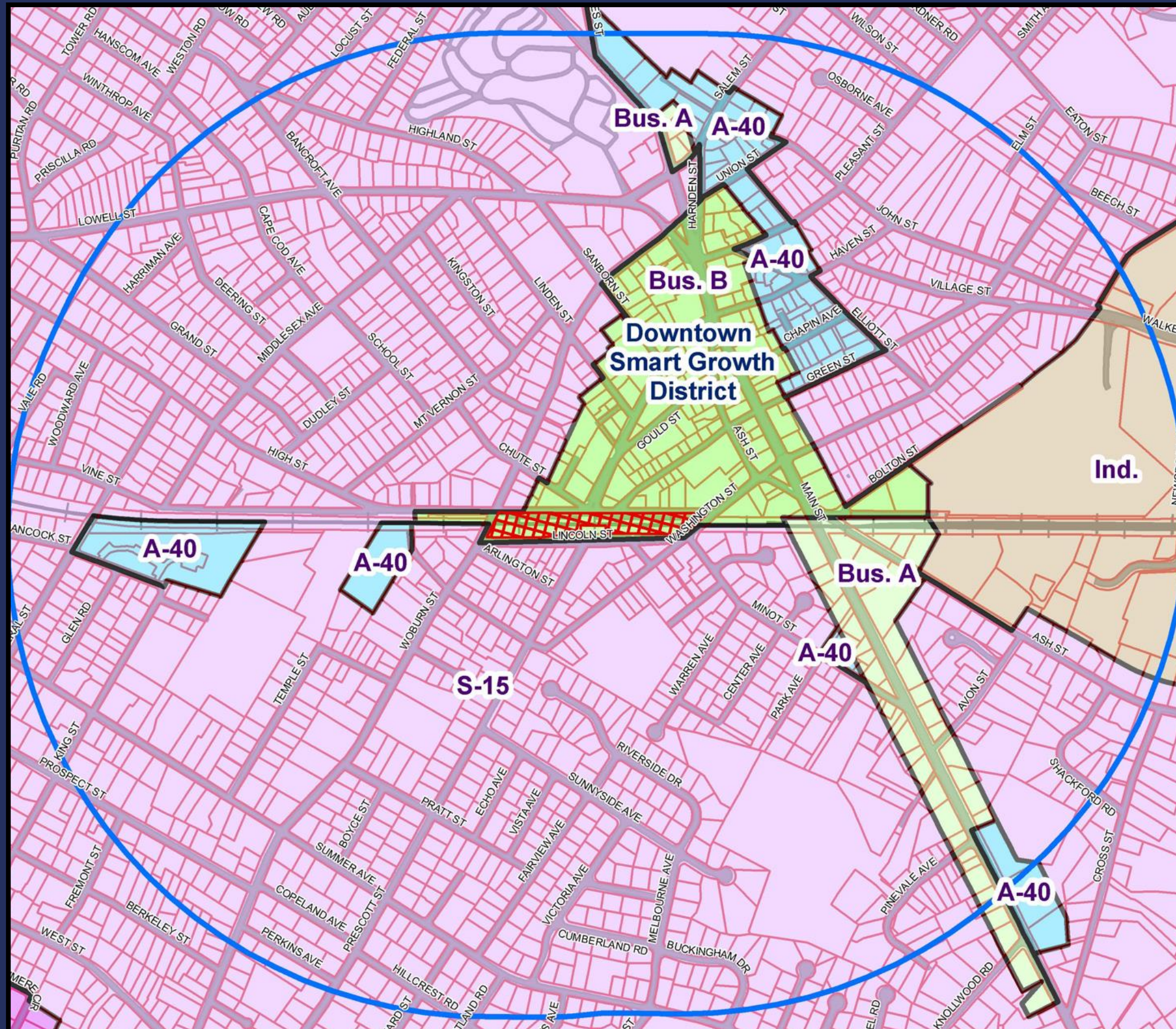


Zoning current as of April 27, 2017.
This map is to be used in conjunction with the Reading Zoning Bylaws and with the Reading Zoning Map approved on 4/8/13. The Town of Reading does not make any warranty, express or implied, for errors, omissions or inaccuracies in the information provided and does not assume any legal liability or responsibility for actions taken or not taken in reliance upon any information or data contained herein.



**What additional characteristics do you feel are important in future multi-family housing?
Rank from 1 (most important) to 6 (least important)**

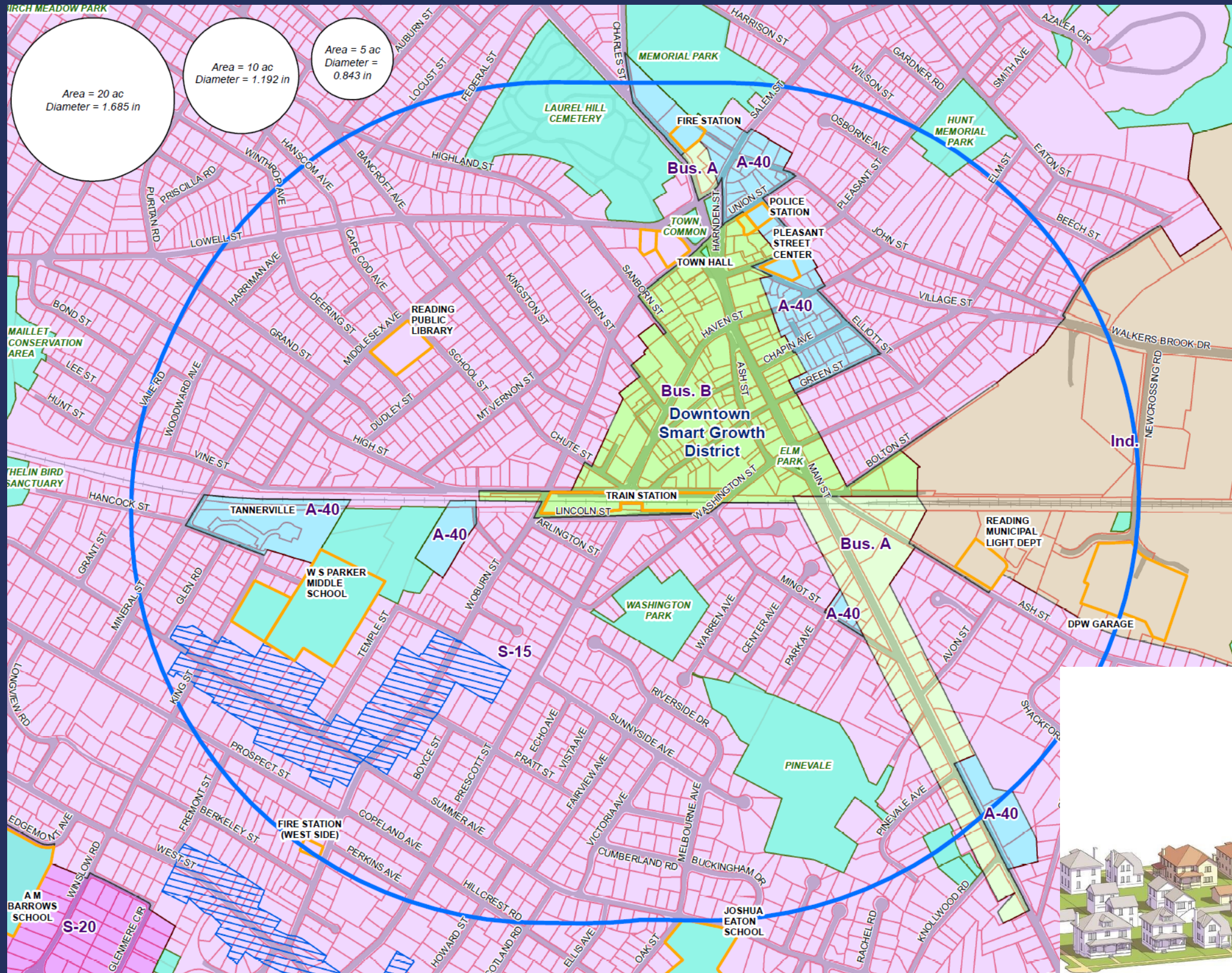




The business district that is in the right location and has the right characteristics is our Business B / 40R Smart Growth District. It does not comply in its current form.

This district was amended at Town Meeting in 2021, and no new projects have been proposed since. In order to make this district compliant we would have to reverse every item passed at that Town Meeting, and then go further in the opposite direction towards greater density.

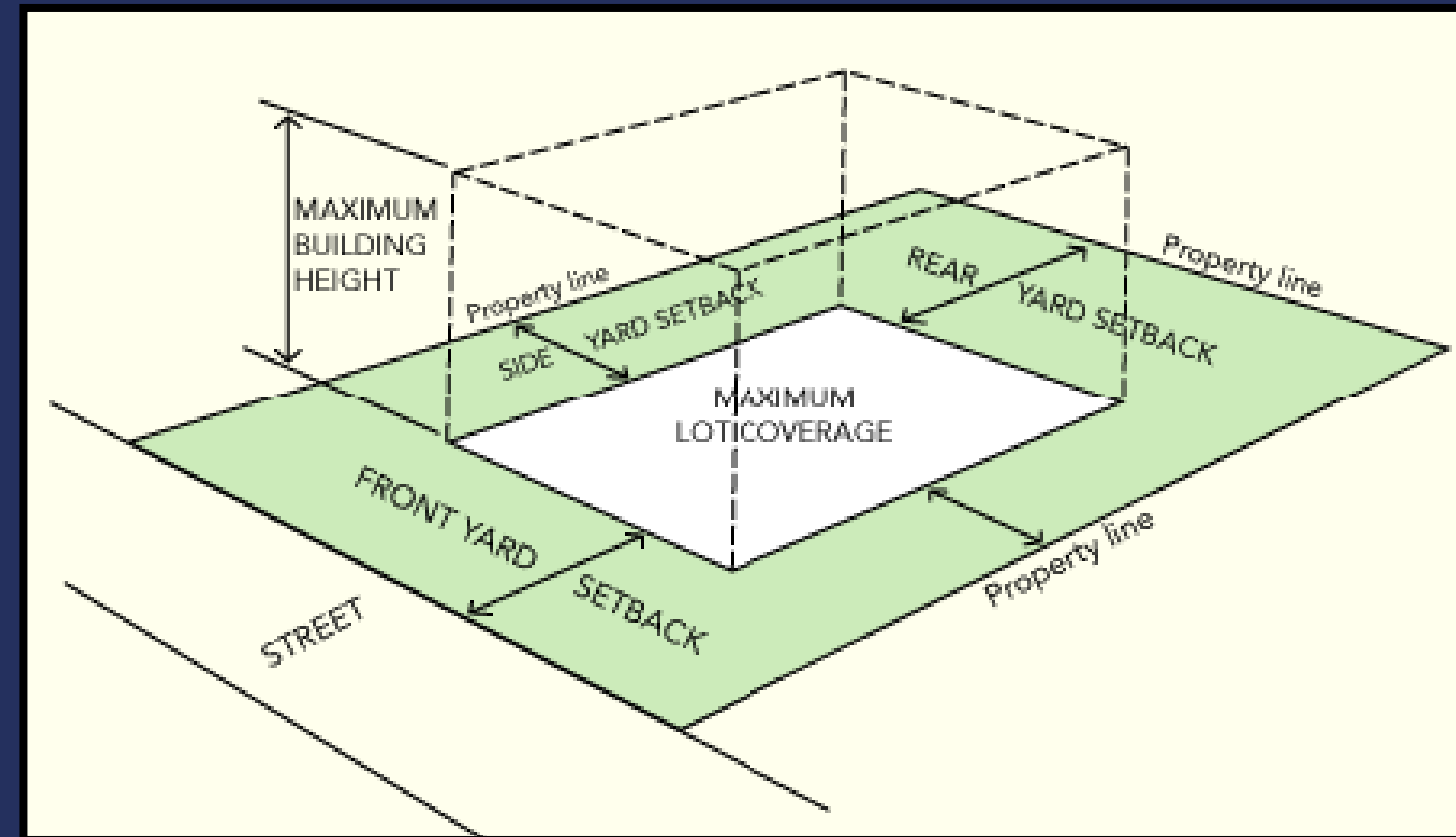
We do not believe this would pass Town Meeting.



We also believe there are benefits from creating tiers of density in walking distance to our businesses in downtown. More residents can support restaurants and shops, it what can hopefully become a virtuous cycle.

We believe placing potential future housing near open spaces, in an area that is walkable and near transit provides many ancillary benefits.





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 ¹ (Feet)	Required Side Yard (Feet)	Required Rear Yard (Feet)	Maximum Coverage % of Lot	Maximum Building Height ² (Feet)
One or Two Family Dwelling								
In S-15 District	60	15,000	100	20	15	20	25	35
In S-20 Districts	80	20,000	120 ³	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 ⁴	10 ⁴	20 ⁴	25	45
Multi-Family Dwelling								
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.

Zoning elements that will be changed

Minimum Lot Sizes



Minimum lot sizes will go down to meet our goal of making 90%+ of lots conforming. The final size will be reverse engineered from the district chosen. Frontage will be chosen in the same way.

At our Workshop on 10/11 we worked through dimensional controls like setbacks, lot coverage, and discussed parking requirements in an interactive exercise.

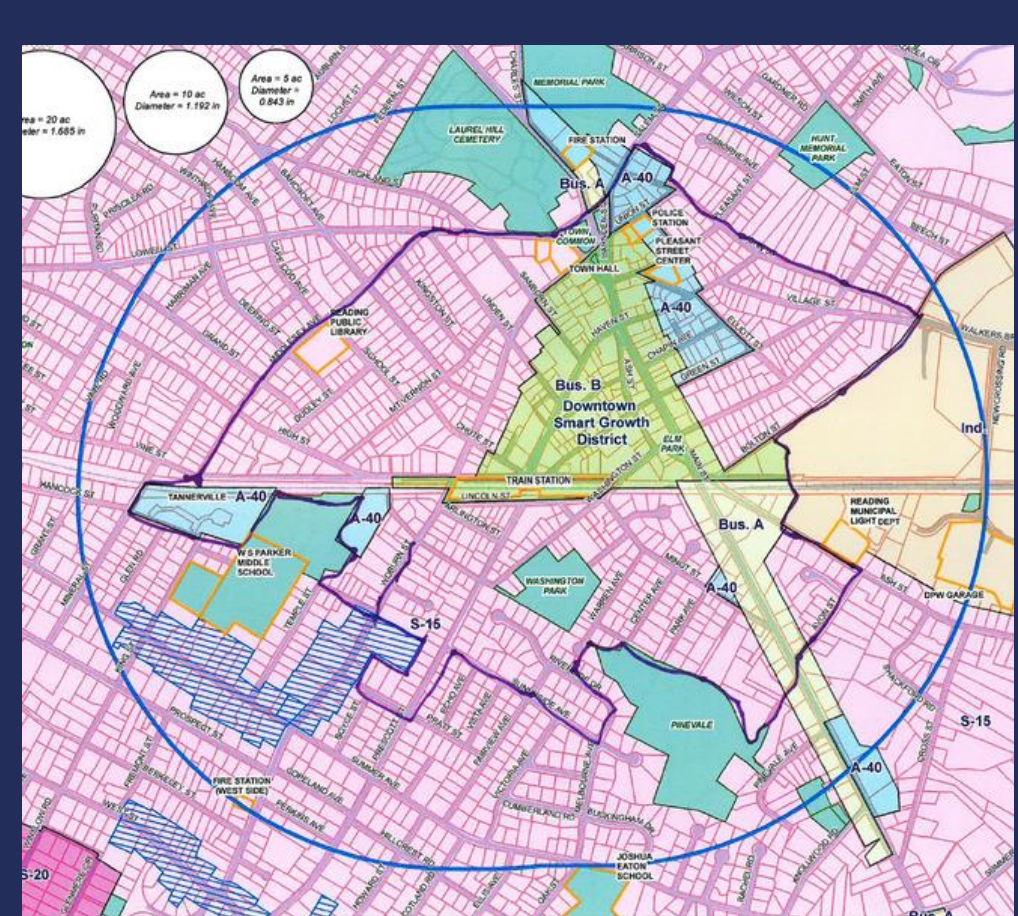
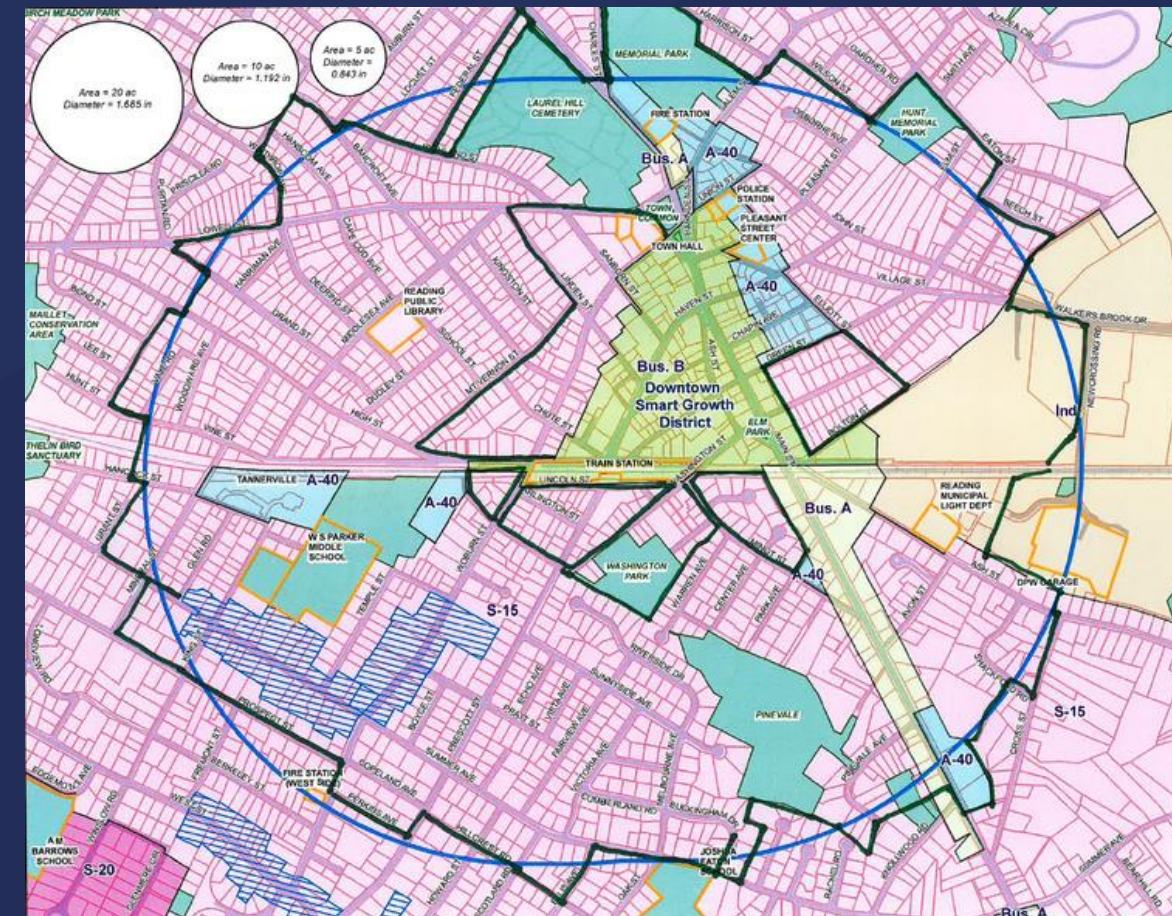
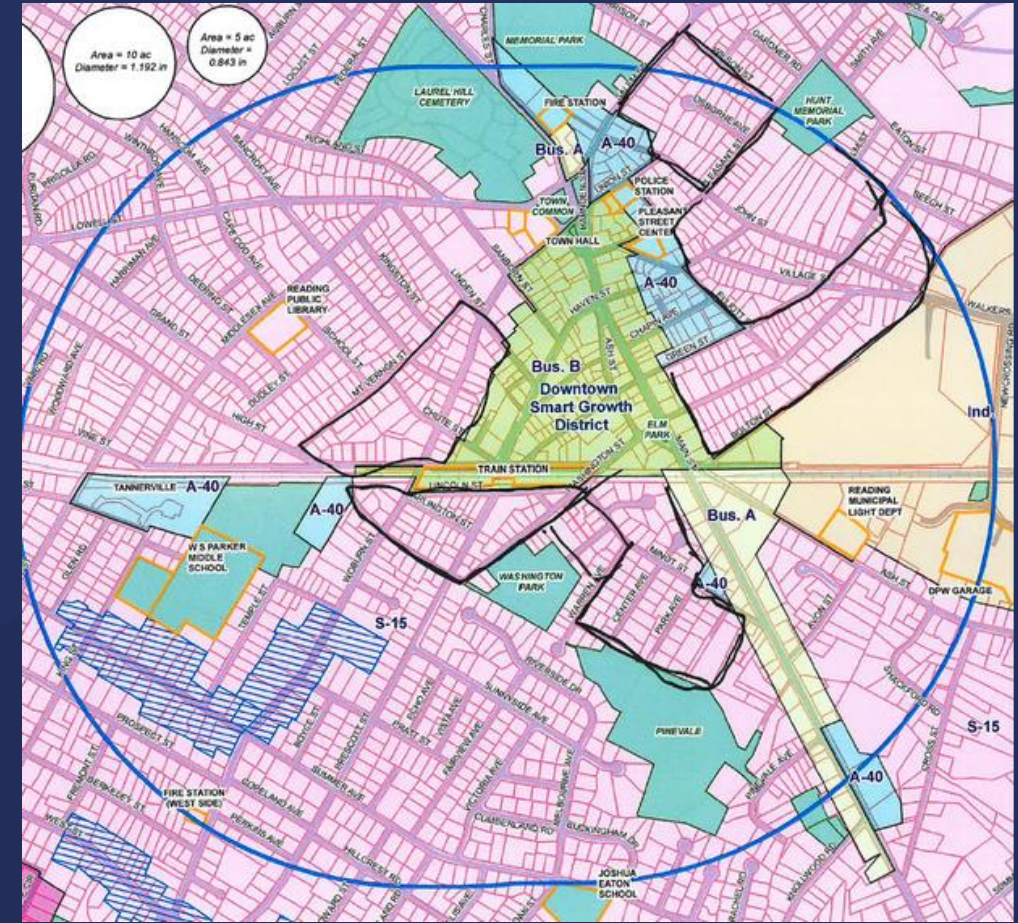
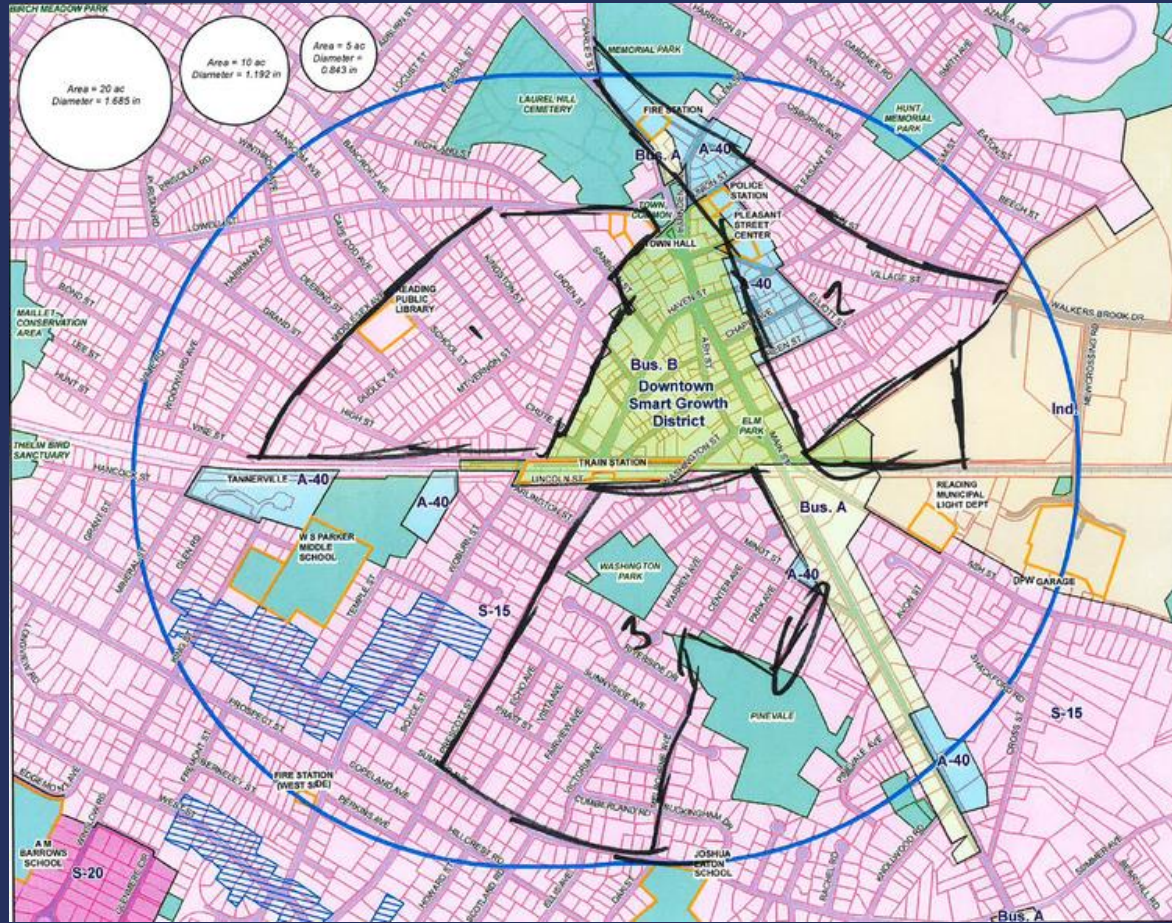
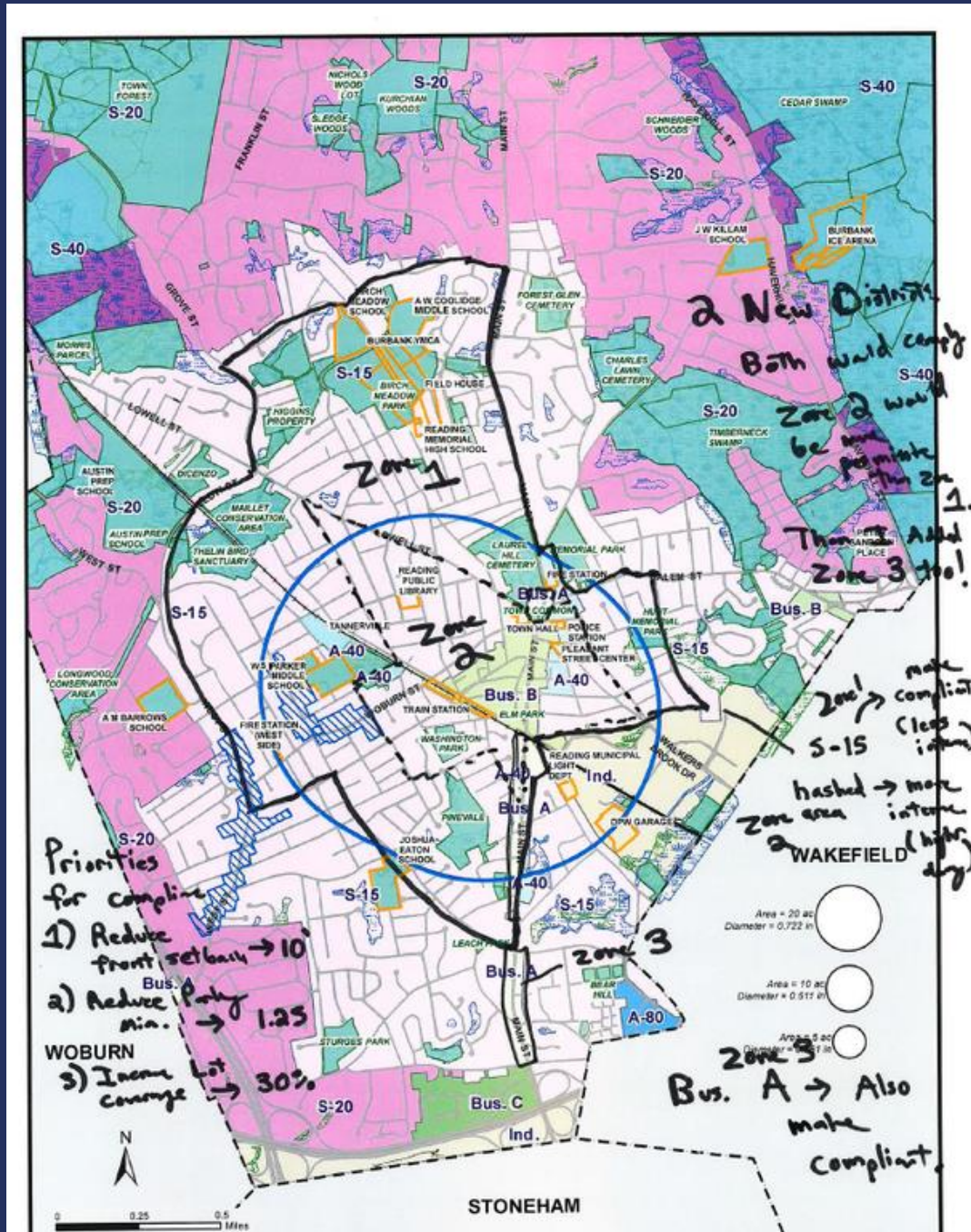
Our takeaways were:

- Reducing minimum parking requirements down to 1.25 spaces required per unit was acceptable
- Slightly reducing required setbacks from our current minimums was acceptable
- Increasing minimum lot coverage from 25% up to 30% was acceptable

10/11 Workshop - "Design a Lot"



Draw the District Exercise



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.

Next steps in our timeline

We are currently crafting dimensional controls that can apply holistically to our proposed new district and meet the state's minimum requirements and are working with RKG on this. We will be presenting compliance scenarios at our next event.

We will be presenting a PRELIMINARY map, informed by our engagement, at our next event on November 8.

Our concept will remain open to revisions up until we start the public hearings required for Town Meeting.

Engage with us now.

Q: When do we have to build the units?

A: We don't. We don't have to build any units. This is zoning only. Unit capacity is not new units, it's a total of what could hypothetically be built under current by-right zoning.

Q: How do we change what is built in order to comply?

A: We don't have to change what is built to comply. This is zoning only.

Q: What kind of housing could be built?

A: That depends on the zoning changes we make. Once the zoning is changed it is up to each individual property owner to decide if they want to sell or develop their property at any point in the future.

Q: Would the Town eminent domain land to comply?

A: No. The Town does not have to build anything to comply. This is zoning only.



Questions?

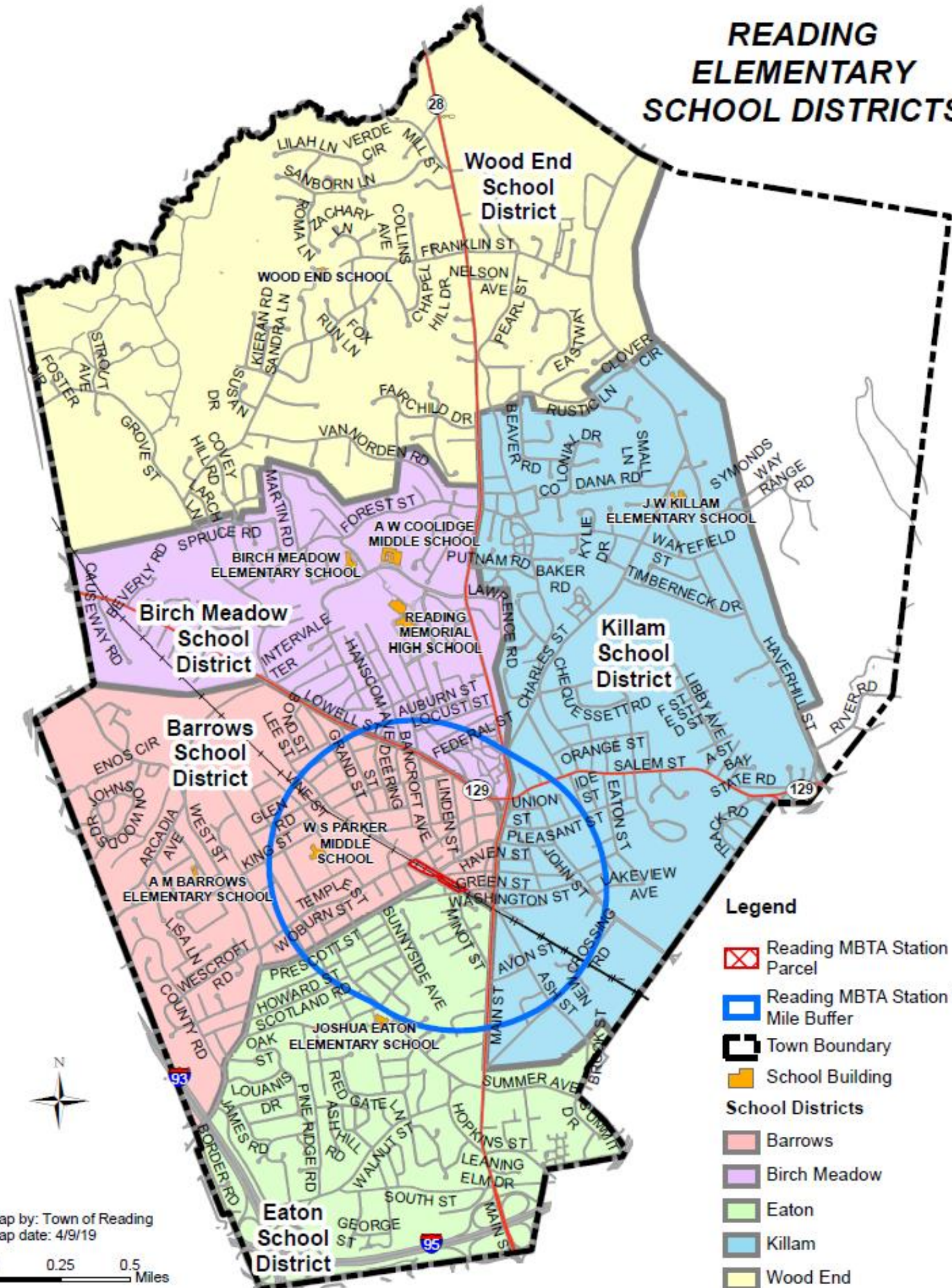
Next Event : Wednesday Nov 8
@ 7pm

Contact Reading's Planning Staff

Andrew MacNichol
Community Development Director
amacnichol@ci.reading.ma.us
781-942-6670

Mary Benedetto
Senior Planner
mbenedetto@ci.reading.ma.us
781-942-6648

READING ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICTS



READING MIDDLE SCHOOL SCHOOL DISTRICTS

