



TOWN OF
READING
MASSACHUSETTS

MBTA COMMUNITIES & READING

Presentation 11/8/23 - Knowledge Session #3

Goals:

- **Residents** to understand how we got to the proposal and to provide direct feedback on the district location and dimensional controls
- **Staff** receives guidance from the public about the suitability of our proposal

Topics for Tonight

Brief background of the law
High-level recap of our process
Detail on lot sizes and frontage
Proposed dimensional controls
Proposed parking requirements
District map proposal
Discussion
Future Steps

We continue to ask attendees at our events to focus on assisting us with refining our proposal and refraining from arguing about the law and whether we should comply.

WHAT IS THE MBTA COMMUNITIES LAW?

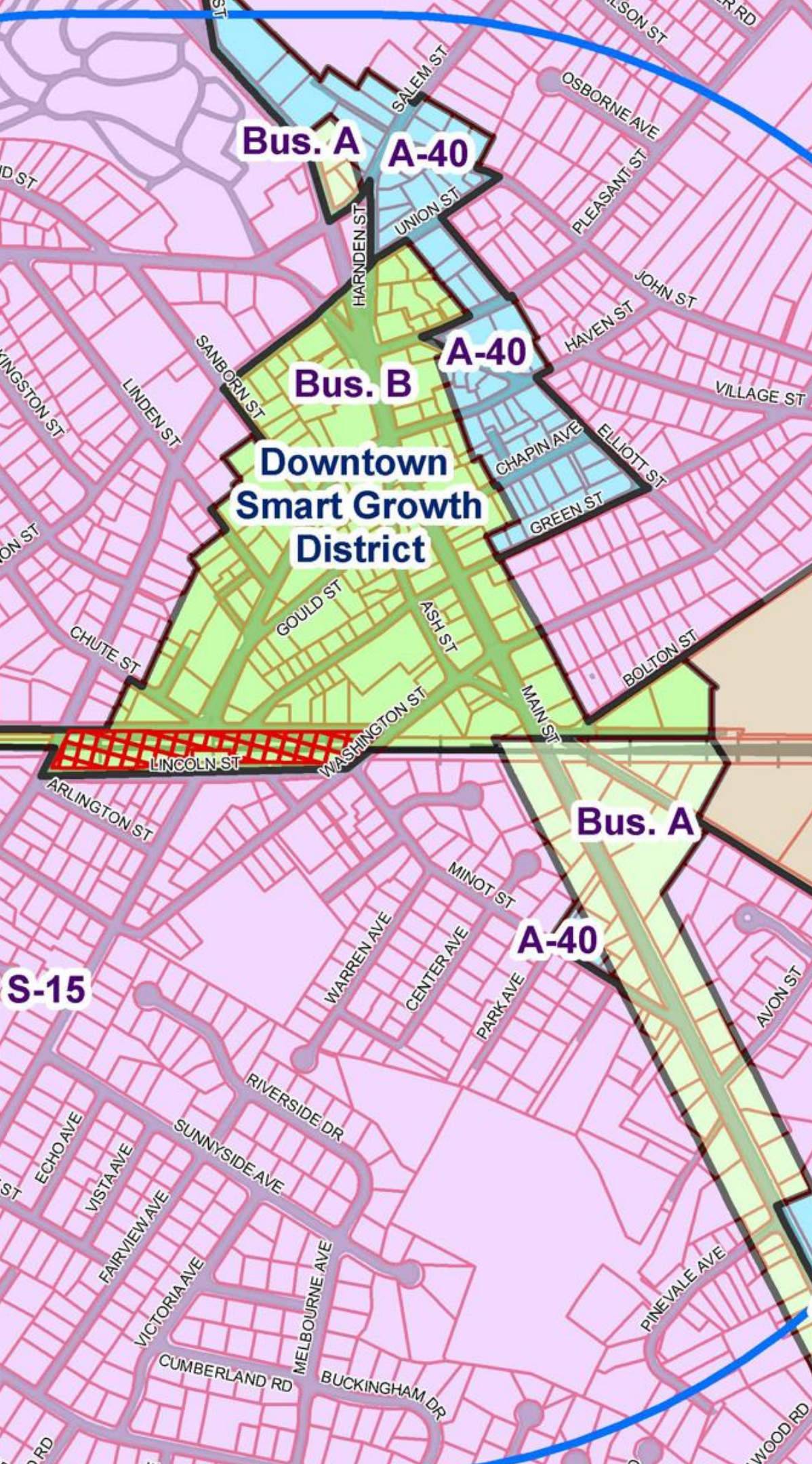


The State government passed a law in 2021 requiring all the municipalities in the Boston area to remove barriers to development within their zoning to make possible the future development of housing close to transit. Under the law every Town/City was classified by the type of MBTA service they have-- rapid transit, commuter rail, adjacent. Each with their own timeline to prove compliance to the State by submitting a zoning district that meets the requirements of the new 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.

Our deadline to prove compliance is by **January 2025**.

We must submit to the State a zoning 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.



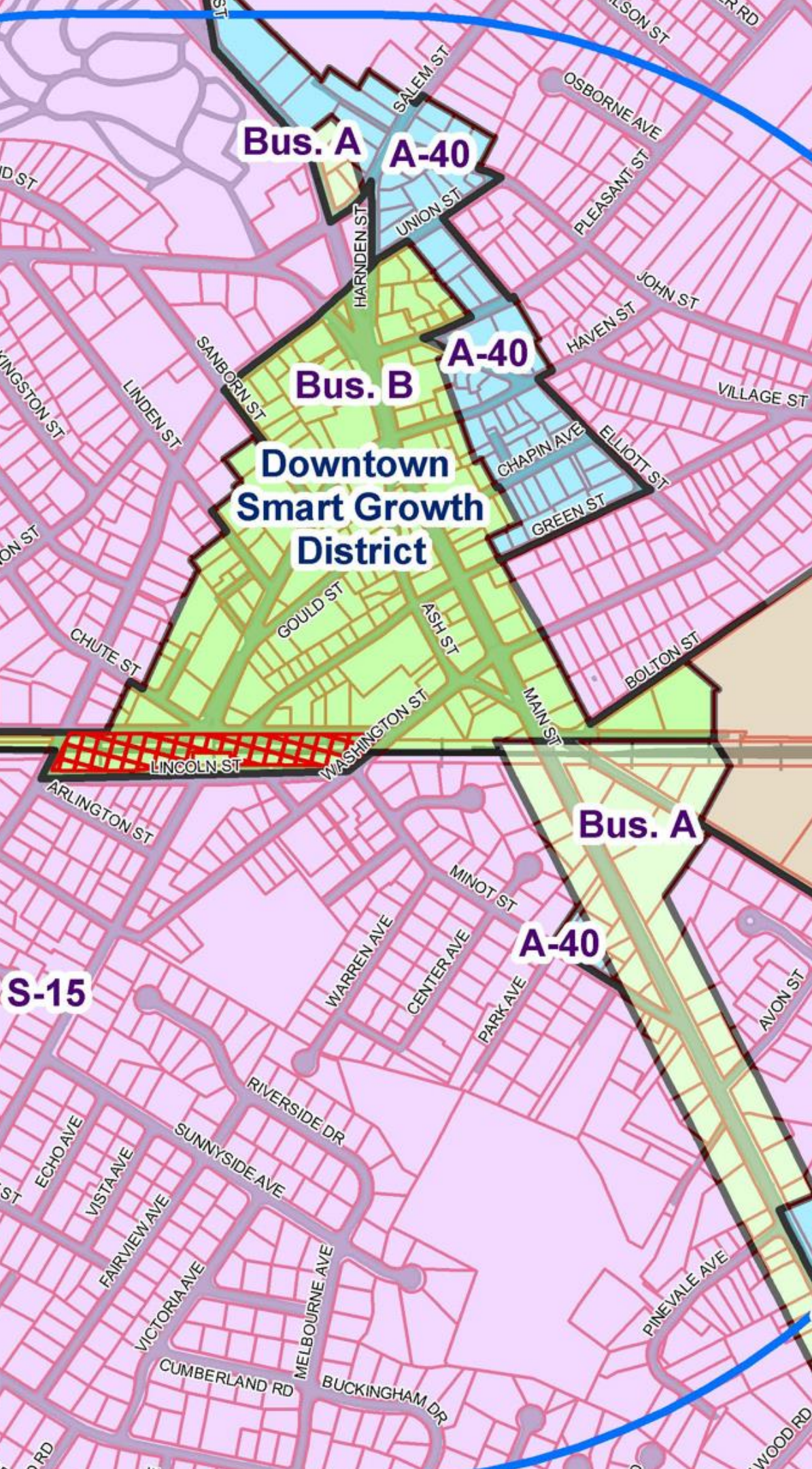
WHY ARE WE DOING THIS?

Because none of our existing zoning districts meet the state's new requirements, we have to propose a new zoning district.

Our compliant district must be approved by Town Meeting, and we will be taking it to Town Meeting in April 2024.

If our proposed district is not adopted and we are not in compliance with the law, we will lose access to grant funding opportunities and open ourselves up to litigation both from the State and from residents or housing organizations. There are only two Towns not currently in compliance and one of them has already been sued.





ZONING, CAPACITY, & CONSTRUCTION

The law requires NO construction, it is zoning only. Zoning is just a rulebook.

Any discussion of units is a projection of what could be built under the proposed revised zoning. The relationship between zoning and construction is not linear. Decisions about any future construction will be made by each and every individual property owner.

Zoning capacity considers each parcel as empty and asks what could be built on it today under current zoning. Zoning capacity is not construction.



Translating our Survey Results into Zoning

Our survey was open from June through August. We received 758 responses.

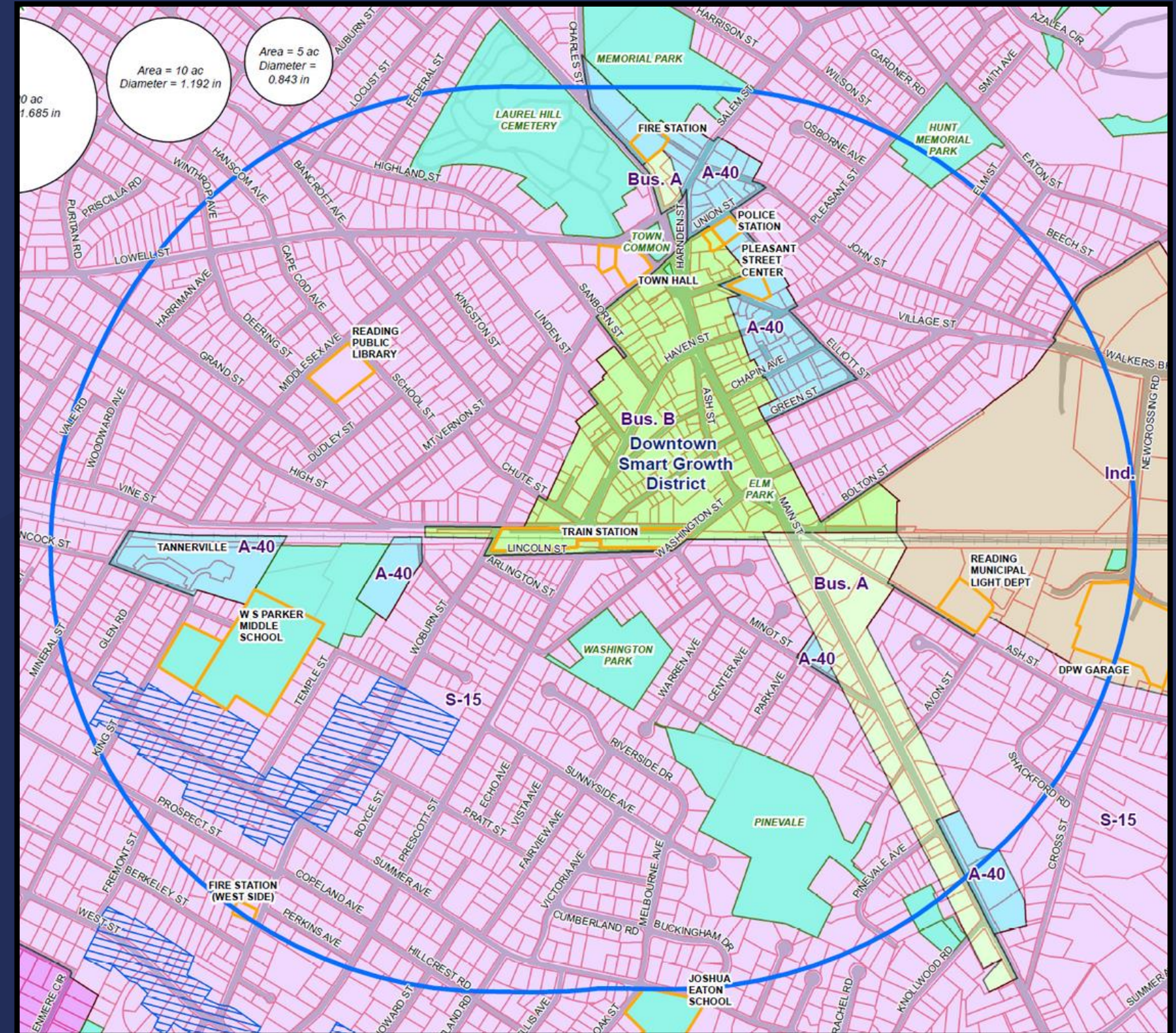
Survey results were clear that multi-family should be near transit / commercial / pedestrian-friendly areas. This directed us to focus the full acreage we are required to zone for to be within or near the 1/2 mile radius.

Respondents preferred:

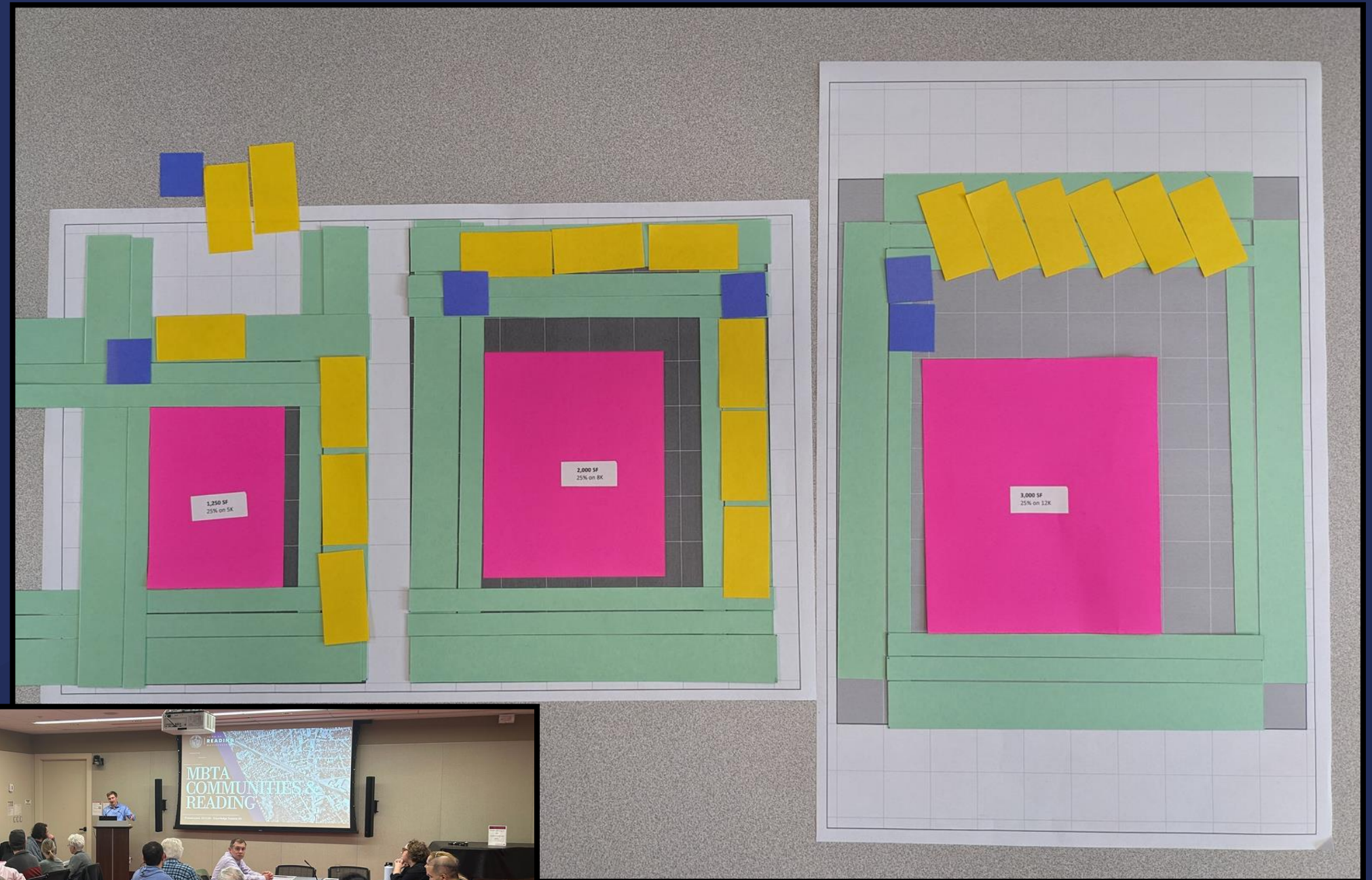
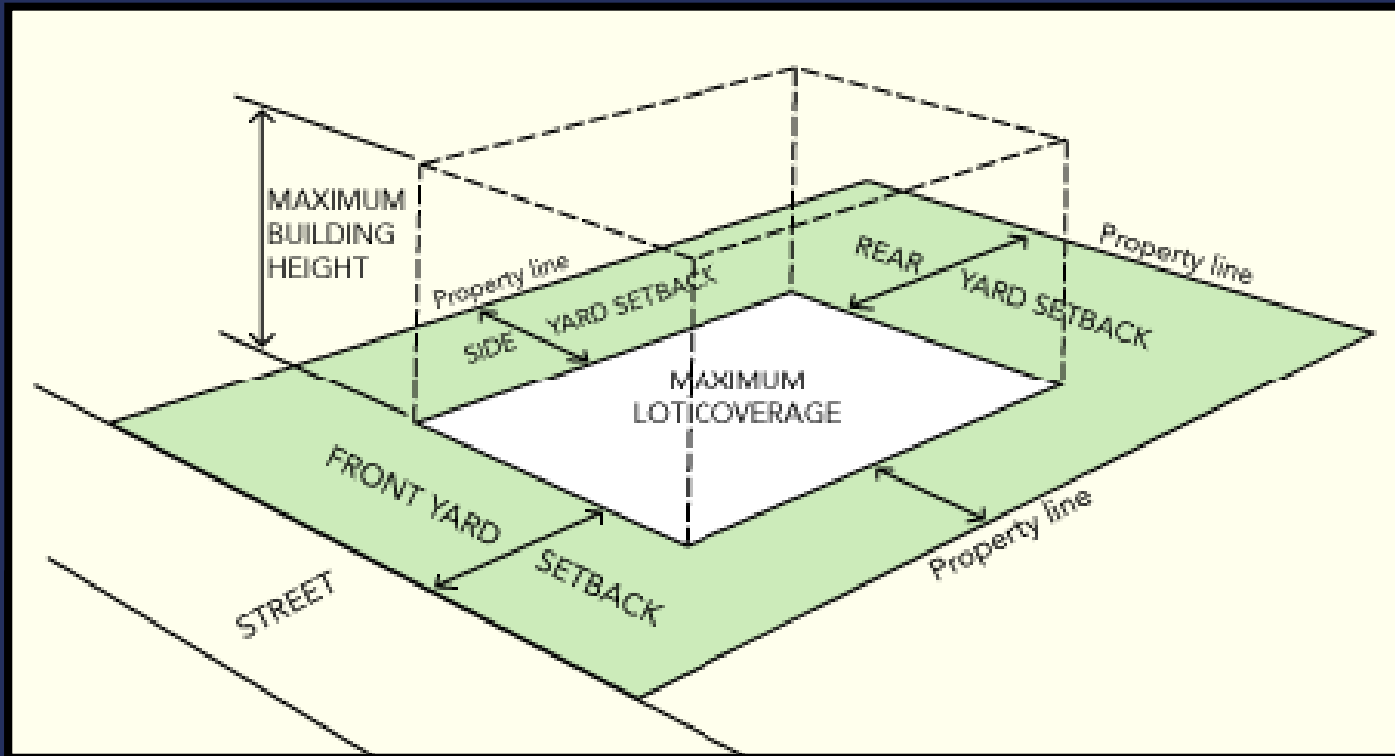
- Multi-family buildings with fewer units
- Smaller buildings with fewer stories
- More “house-like” architectural options

Thus, the exterior form of any potential new building will follow dimensional controls similar to what currently exists now in our single-family districts. The difference would be the number of units.

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.



10/11 Workshop - "Design a Lot"



Zoning elements to change

Minimum Lot Sizes



Lots that do not meet the district minimum lot size cannot be developed by-right, and by-right development is a requirement of the law.

Our goal is 90%+ of lots conforming.

The challenge for our district is in achieving the 15 units/acre density requirement while maintaining building dimensions similar to single-family homes.

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:

- Slightly reducing required setbacks from our current S-15 minimums was acceptable
- Increasing minimum lot coverage from 25% up to 30% was acceptable
- Reducing minimum parking requirements down to 1.25 spaces required per unit was acceptable

We are proposing small-scale multi-family housing, to be allowed by-right in a new district made up of our existing multi-family and single-family zones, encircling downtown with gentle density.



We believe this proposal is a middle of the road proposal.

Reminder: there are a range of views on housing in Reading.

New District Dimensional Controls

	Current S-15	New District Proposed	
Minimum Lot Size (square feet)	15,000	5,000	} These two numbers come from the existing parcels and the need to bring ~90% into compliance for by-right development.
Minimum Frontage (ft)	100	60	
Required front yard (ft)	20	10	} Existing setbacks were too restrictive on small lots, we propose lowering minimums
Required side yard (ft)	15	10	
Required rear yard (ft)	20	15	
Maximum Coverage % of Lot	25%	30%	→ Slight increase for compliance
Maximum Building Height (ft)	35	35	→ Remains the same
Maximum Density	N/A	22 units/acre	→ New!
Multi-family Parking minimum req'd spaces/unit	1.5 spaces/unit	1.25 spaces/unit	→ Slight lowering for compliance

We are proposing a number of adjustments to the S-15 dimensional controls to bring our new district into compliance. The above proposed controls will allow our new district to meet the requirements of the law.

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.

New Minimum Lot Size

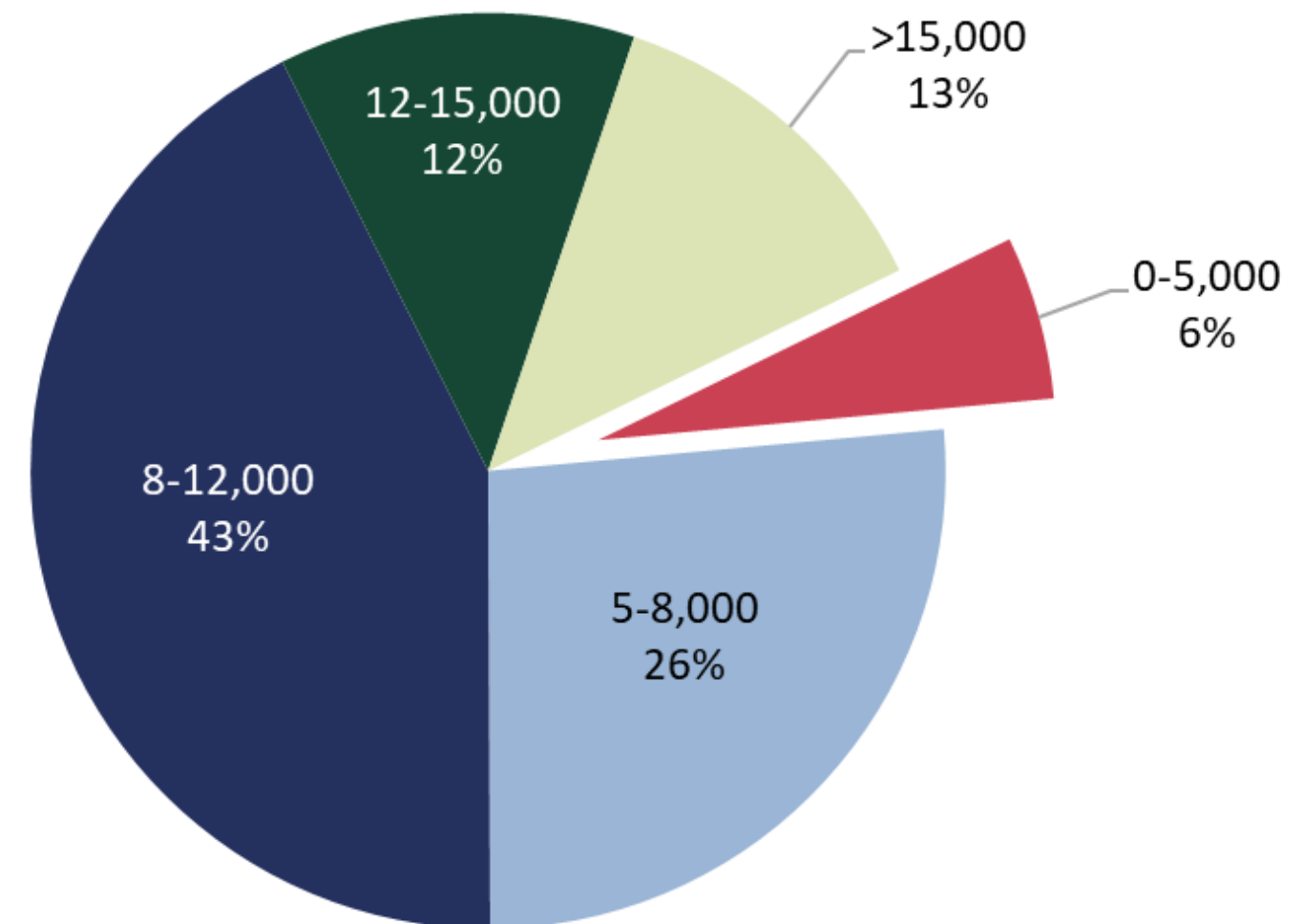
We analyzed the A-40 and S-15 parcels within the 1/2 mile area to find out what new minimum lot size would bring ~90% of our lots into being compliant.

The new minimum lot size for our new district will be 5000 square feet.

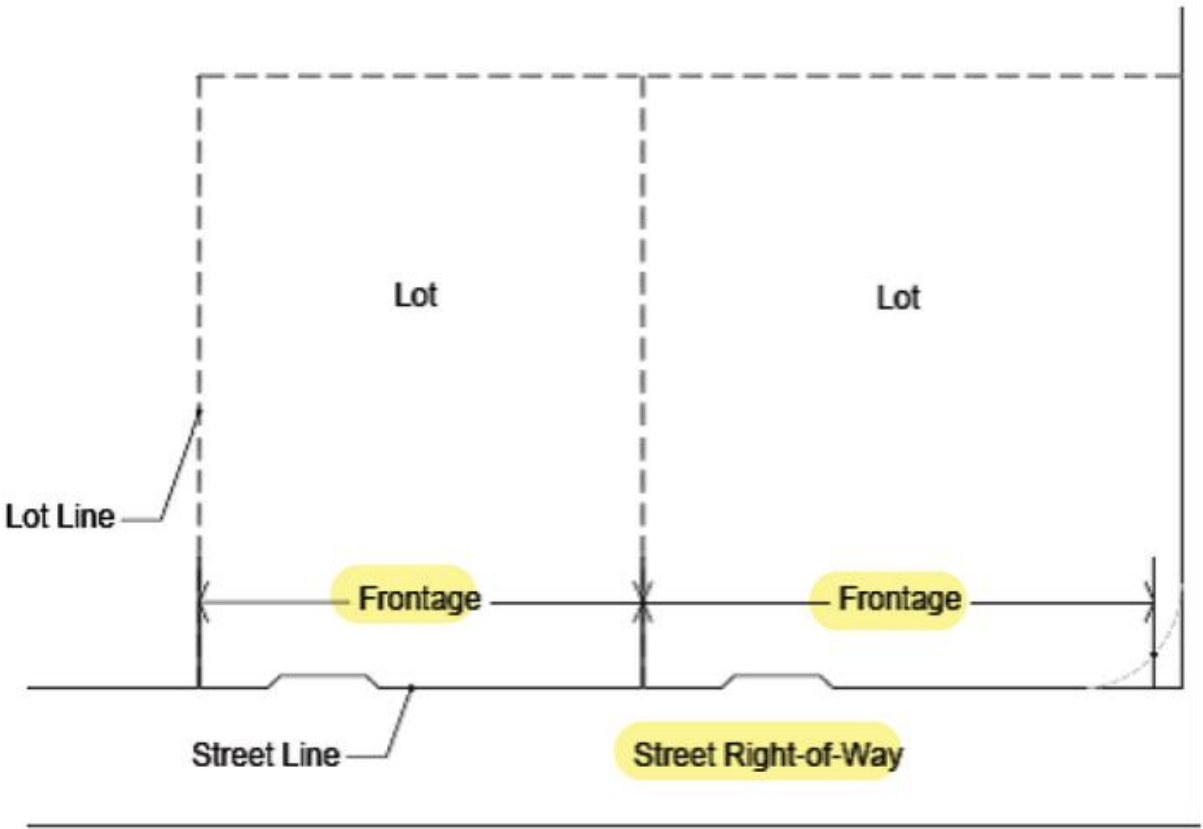
**Existing Parcels in our District
by Lot Size in Square Feet**

0-5,000	49	6%
5,001-8,000	224	26%
8,001-12,000	362	43%
12,001-15,000	107	13%
15,001-21,779	67	8%
21,780-43,560	33	4%
>43,560	6	1%

**Existing Parcels within our New District,
by Lot Size in Square Feet**



New Minimum Frontage



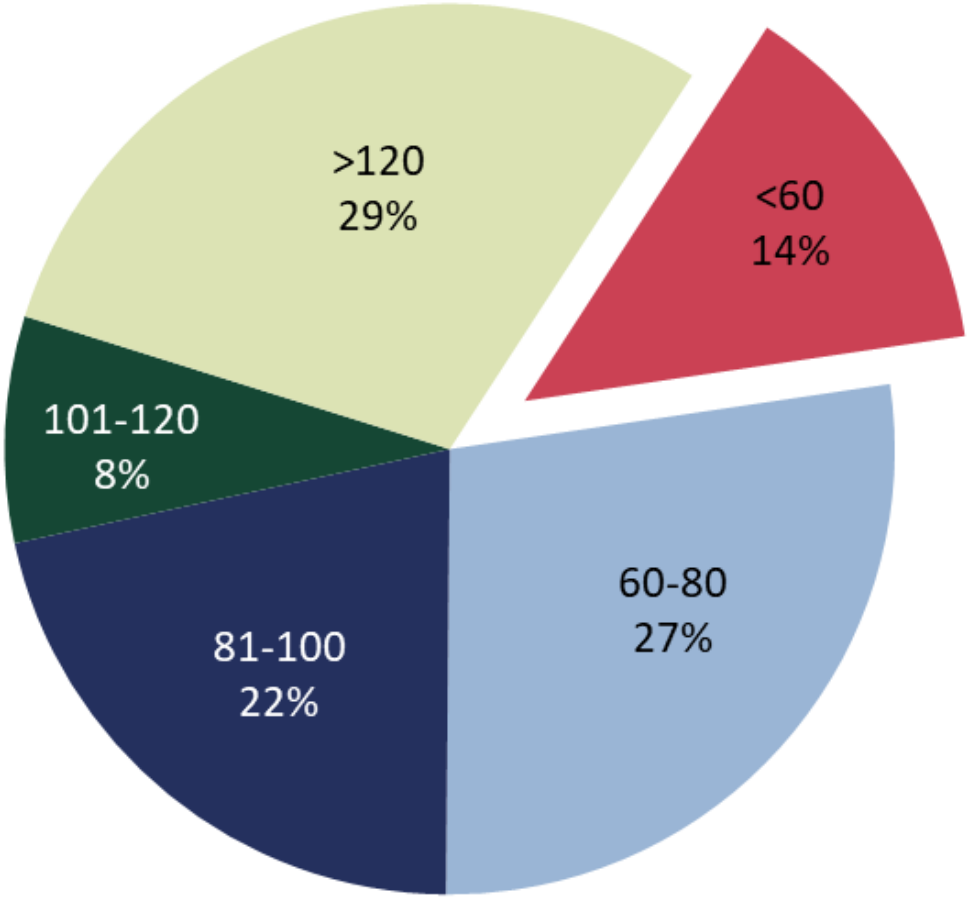
Frontage is the measurement of the portion of the lot that “fronts” the street, shown at left.

The new minimum frontage in our new district will be 60ft, down from 100ft.

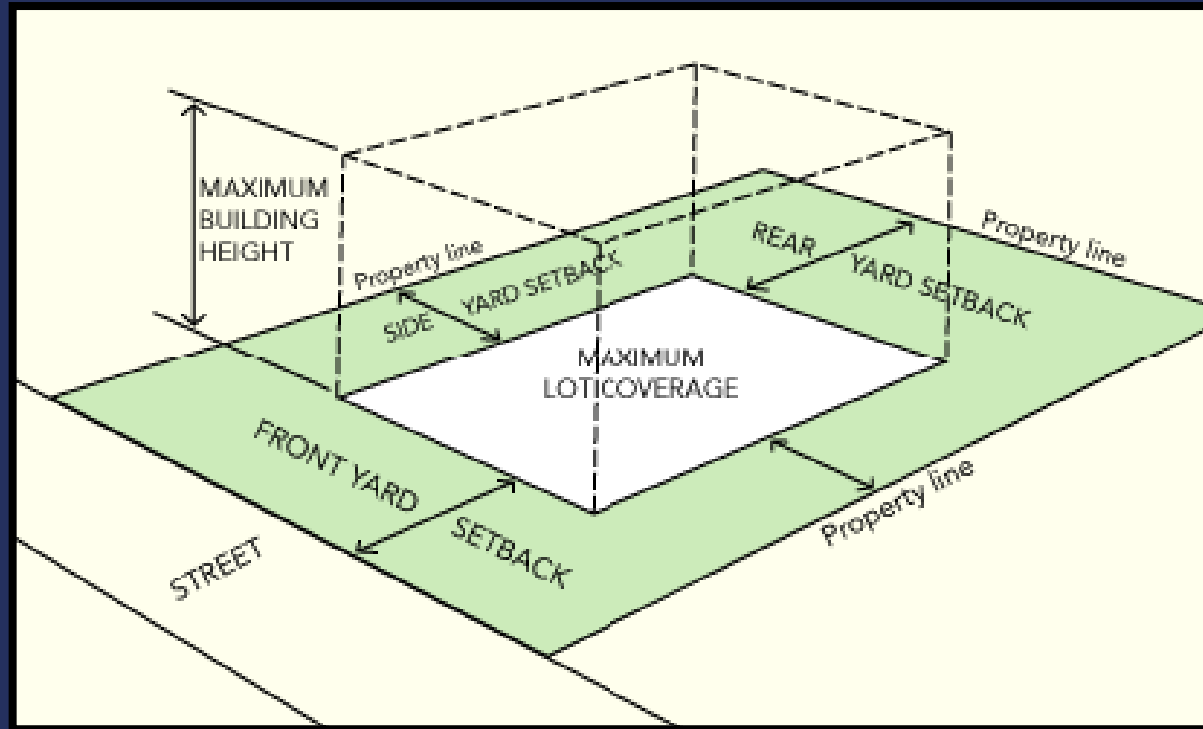
Existing Parcels by Feet of Frontage

<60	115	13%
60-80	234	27%
81-100	183	21%
101-120	70	8%
>120	250	29%

Existing Parcels within our New District, by Feet of Frontage

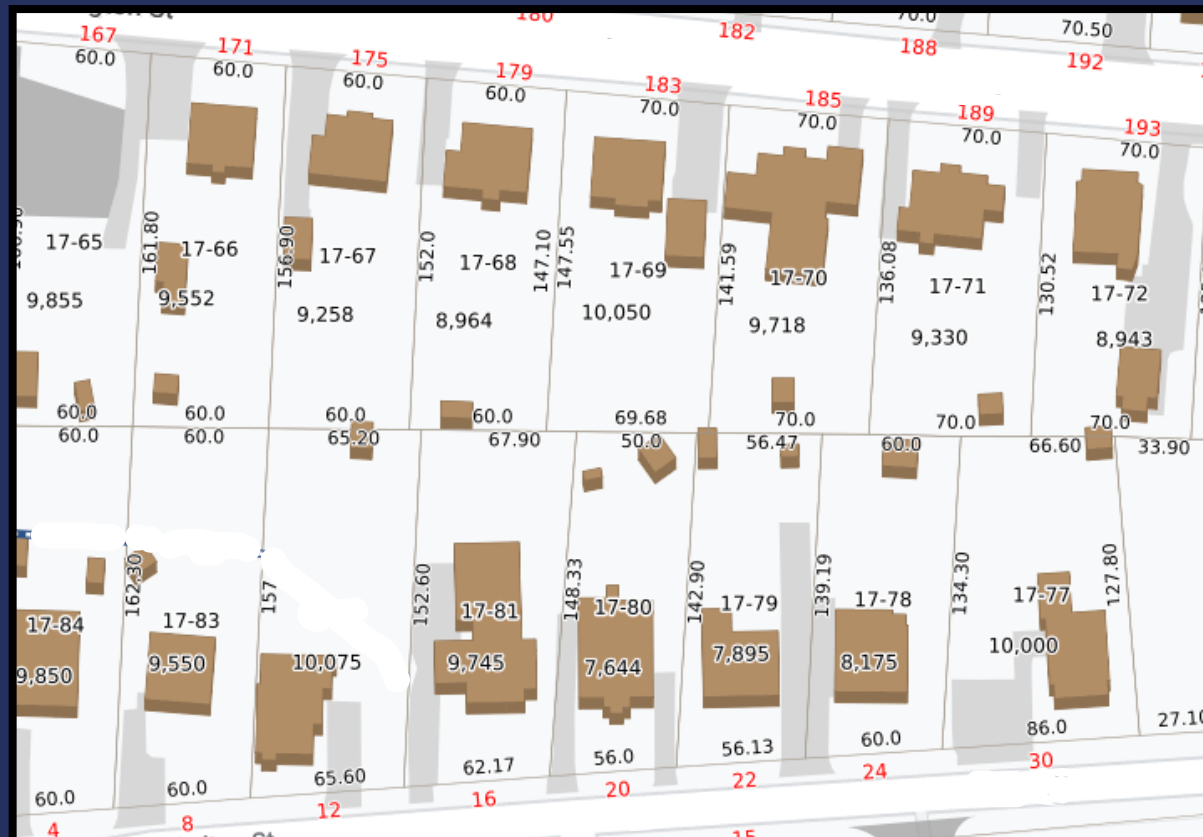


New Minimum Required Setbacks



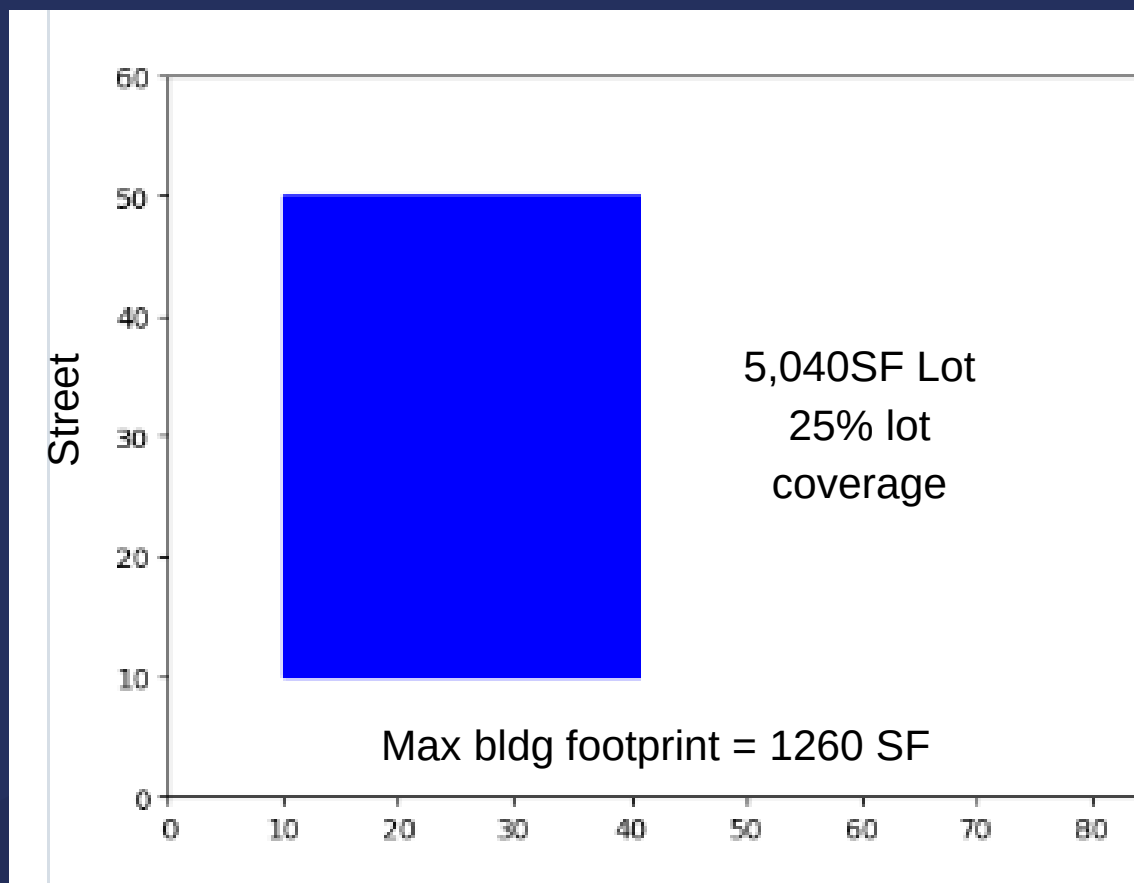
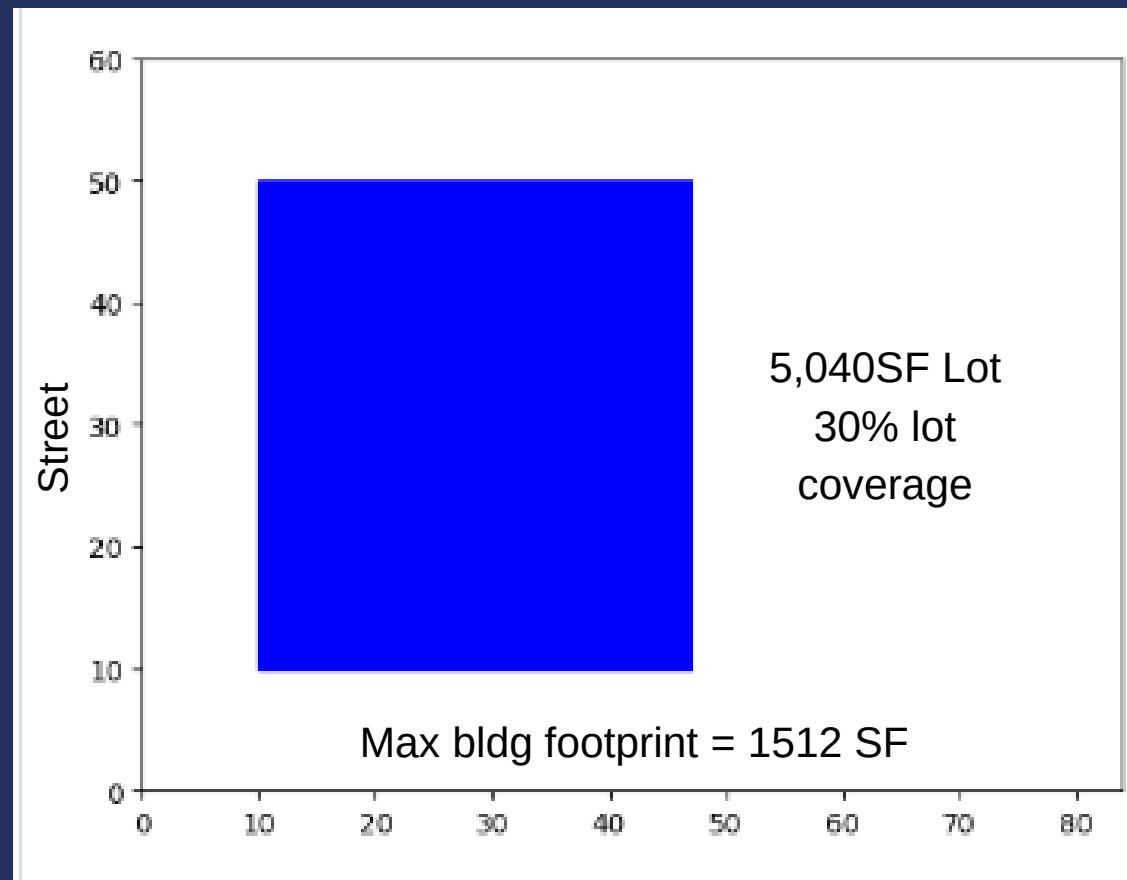
Setbacks are our required minimum yards.

	Current S-15	New District Proposed
Required front yard (ft)	20	10
Required side yard (ft)	15	10
Required rear yard (ft)	20	15



Existing S-15 minimum setbacks are too restrictive on small lots, thus we propose lowering minimum setbacks, particularly on the sides, because of the narrow shape of our existing lots, and on the front, to reflect the existing character of the homes in our new district.

New Maximum Lot Coverage %



Maximum lot coverage is the total area of the footprint of all of the buildings on a lot. Max lot coverage includes a primary building, any detached garages, sheds, or other accessory buildings.

On the left we've modeled our proposed side and front setbacks of 10ft, along with the new proposed maximum lot coverage of 30% and the current of 25% on a 5,040sf lot (60x84), which is similar to the smallest in our new district.

The slight increase in maximum lot coverage assists in bringing our district into compliance while still acting as a powerful limiting factor in reducing the building footprint to reflect a more "house-like" lot design.

New zoning component - Max density per acre

Setting a maximum density in our new district of **22 units per acre** allows the **number of units to scale with the size of the lot.**

We have a wide range of lot sizes in our district. The majority are 10,000SF or less, meaning most lots will be allowed to put 3-5 units on a lot by-right.

There are some larger lots in the district, the allowable unit count scales with the lot, dimensional controls remain the same.

22 units per acre maximum

Lot Area Square Feet	Max units	Lot Area Acres	Est. Max Footprint
5,000	3	0.11	1,500
8,000	4	0.18	2,400
10,000	5	0.23	3,000
12,000	6	0.28	3,600
15,000	8	0.34	4,500
20,000	10	0.46	6,000
25,000	13	0.57	7,500
30,000	15	0.69	9,000
35,000	18	0.80	10,500
40,000	20	0.92	12,000
45,000	23	1.03	13,500

80% of our existing lots fall here

What forms could 6+ units take in our new district?



New Proposed
Parking
Minimum

1.25 spaces/unit

Minimum Required
Parking Spaces

Units	Current	Proposed
	1.5	1.25
3	5	4
4	6	5
5	8	6
6	9	8
7	11	9
8	12	10

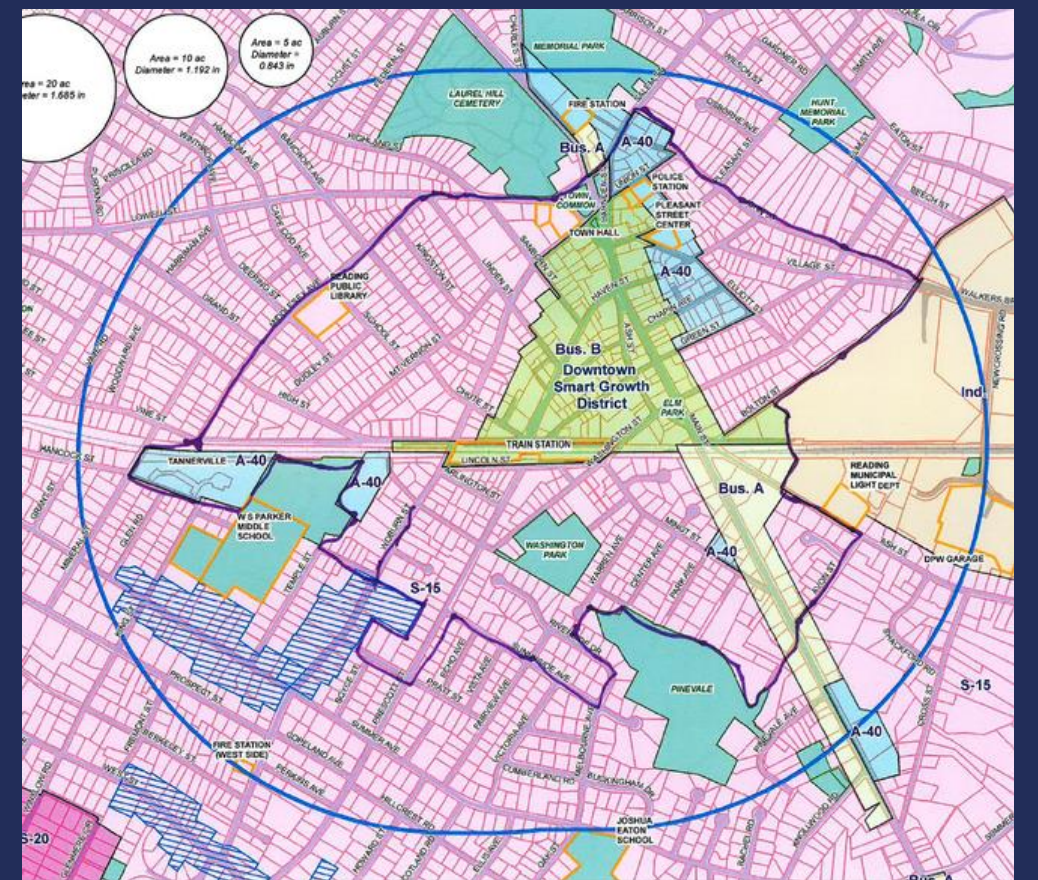
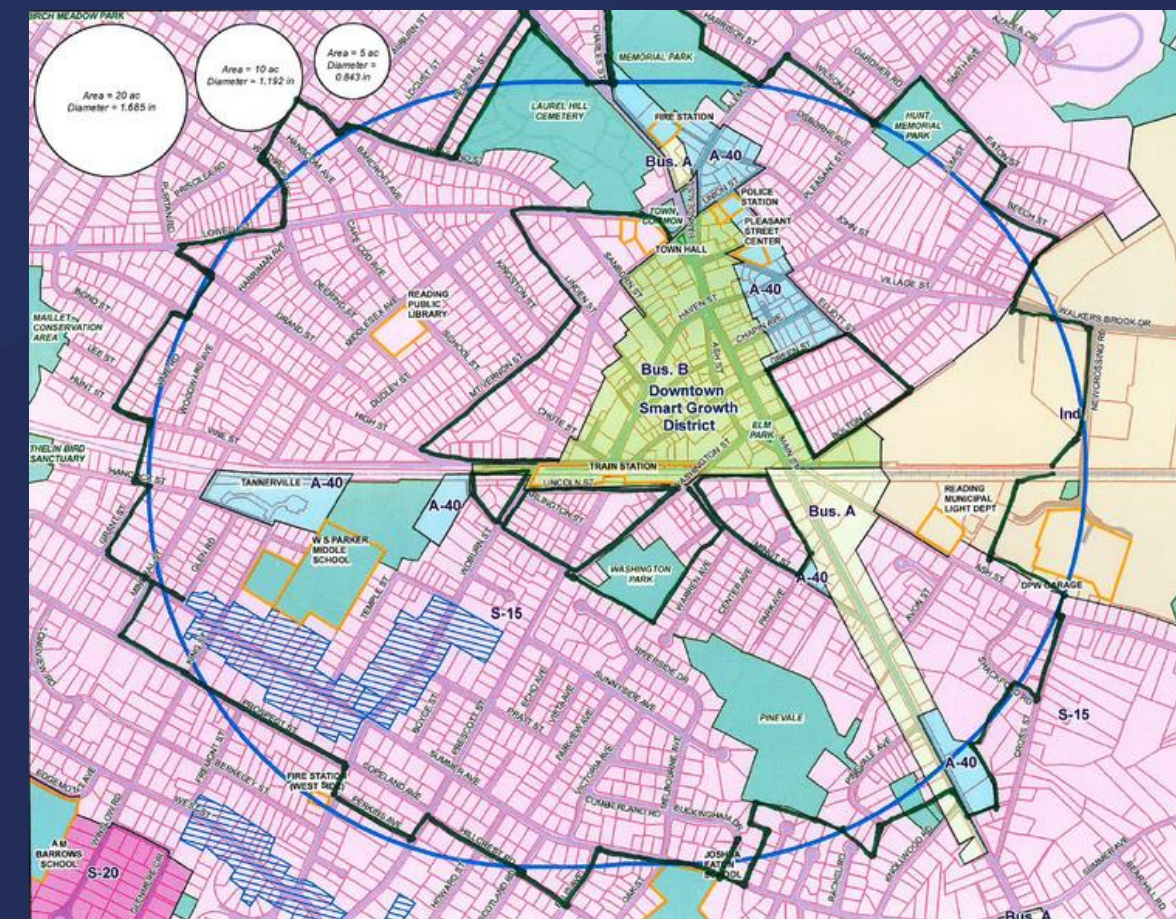
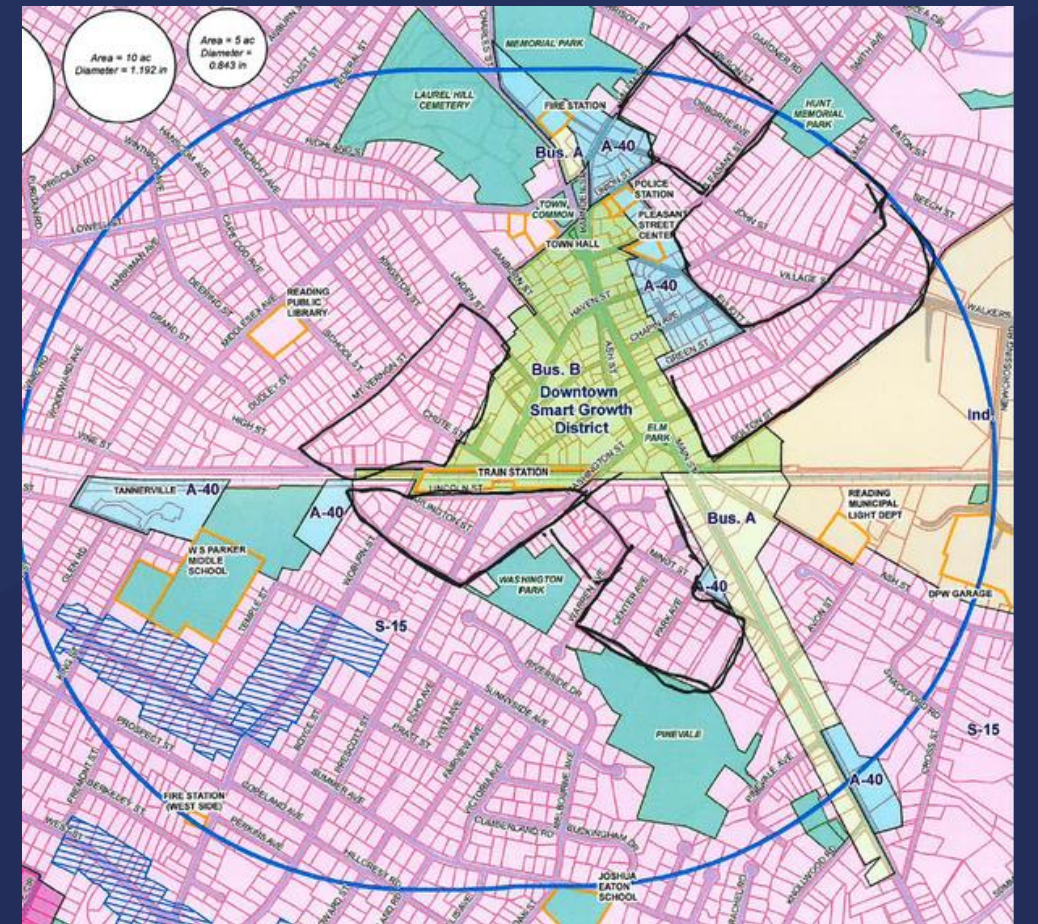
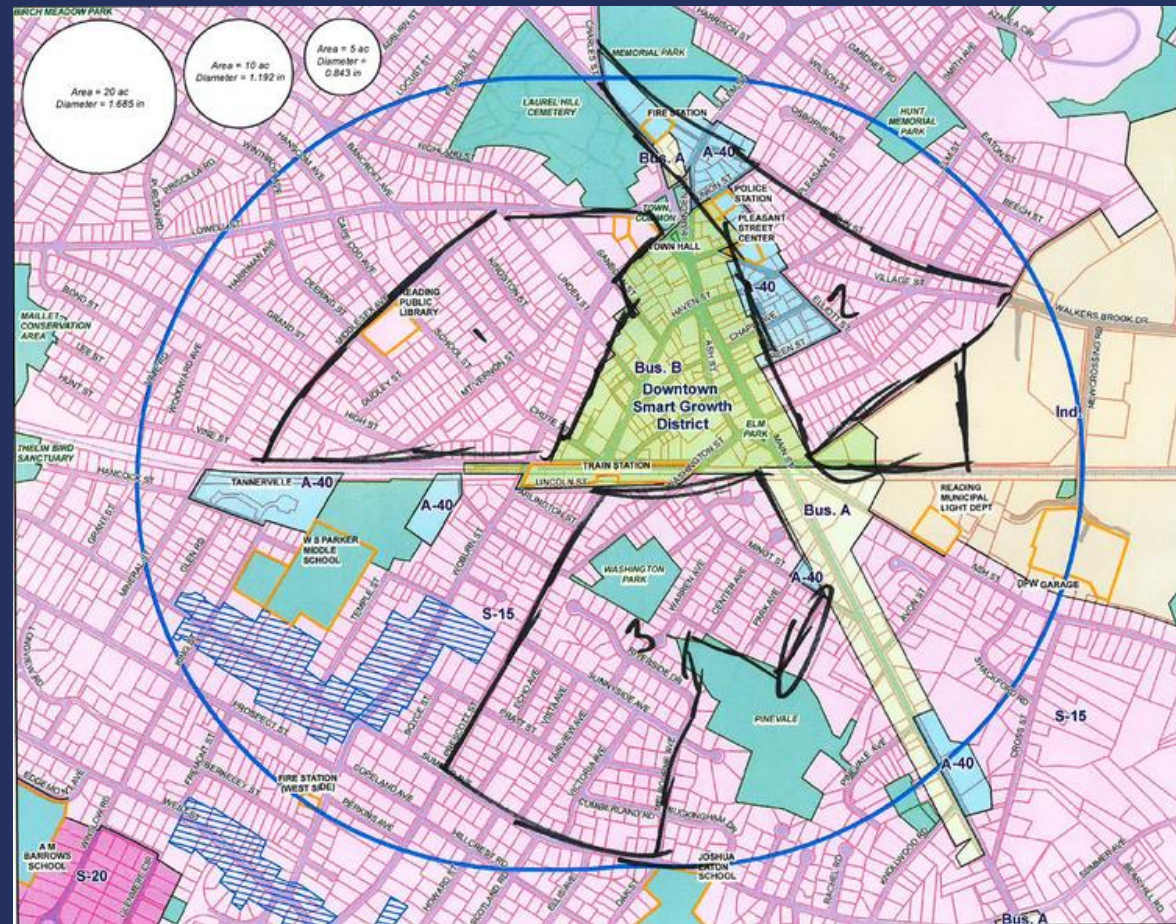
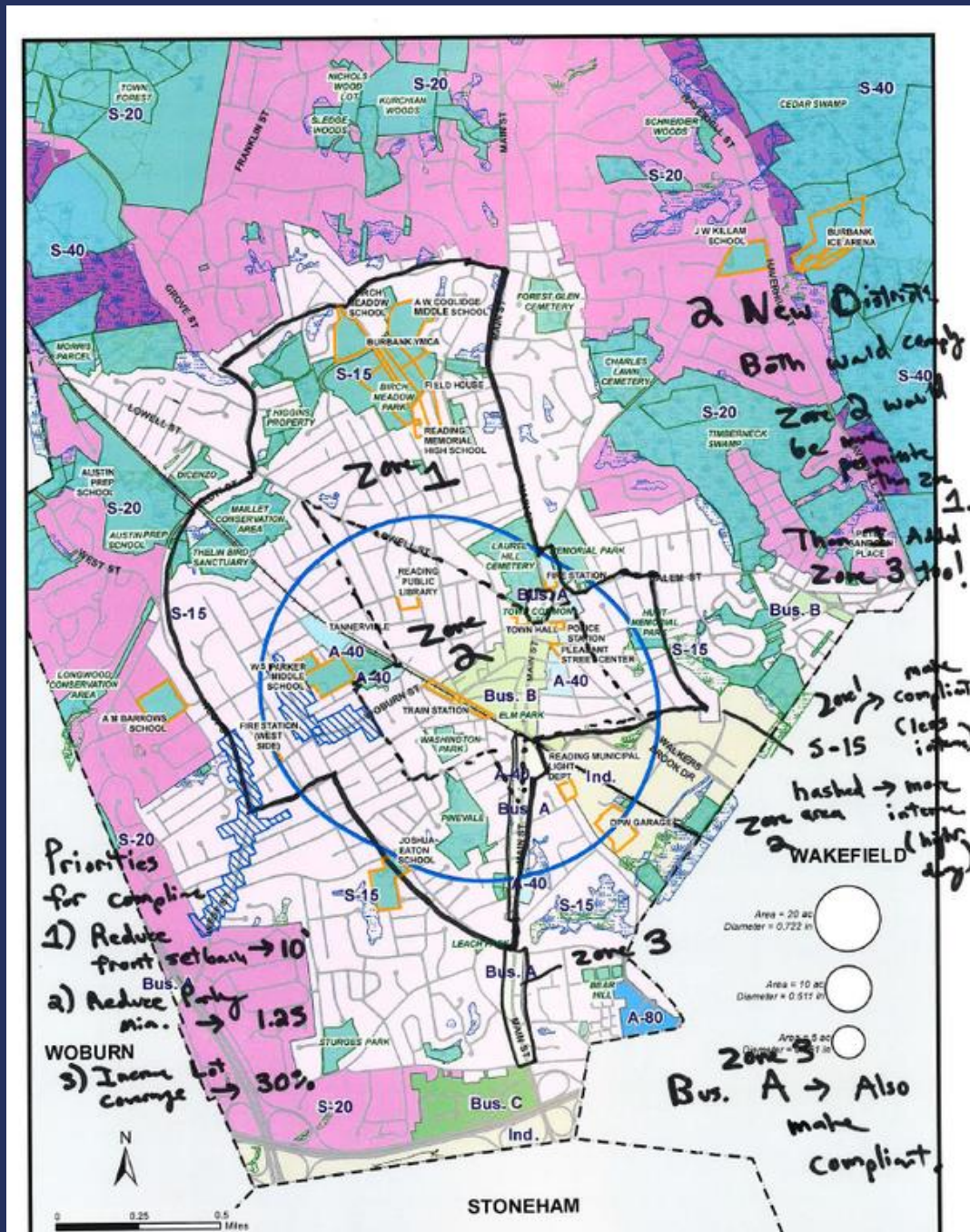
9.1.1.7 Off-street parking areas, or loading and unloading areas shall be provided in the amounts set forth in the following table. Where the computation of required spaces results in a fractional number, a fraction of one-half or more shall be counted as one. In the event of a conflict of interpretation as to the category of the principal use, the Board of Appeals shall determine the proper interpretation.

	Current S-15	New District Proposed
Minimum Lot Size (square feet)	15,000	5,000
Minimum Frontage (ft)	100	60
Required front yard (ft)	20	10
Required side yard (ft)	15	10
Required rear yard (ft)	20	15
Maximum Coverage % of Lot	25%	30%
Maximum Building Height (ft)	35	35
Maximum Density	N/A	22 units/acre
Multi-family Parking minimum req'd spaces/unit	1.5 spaces/unit	1.25 spaces/unit

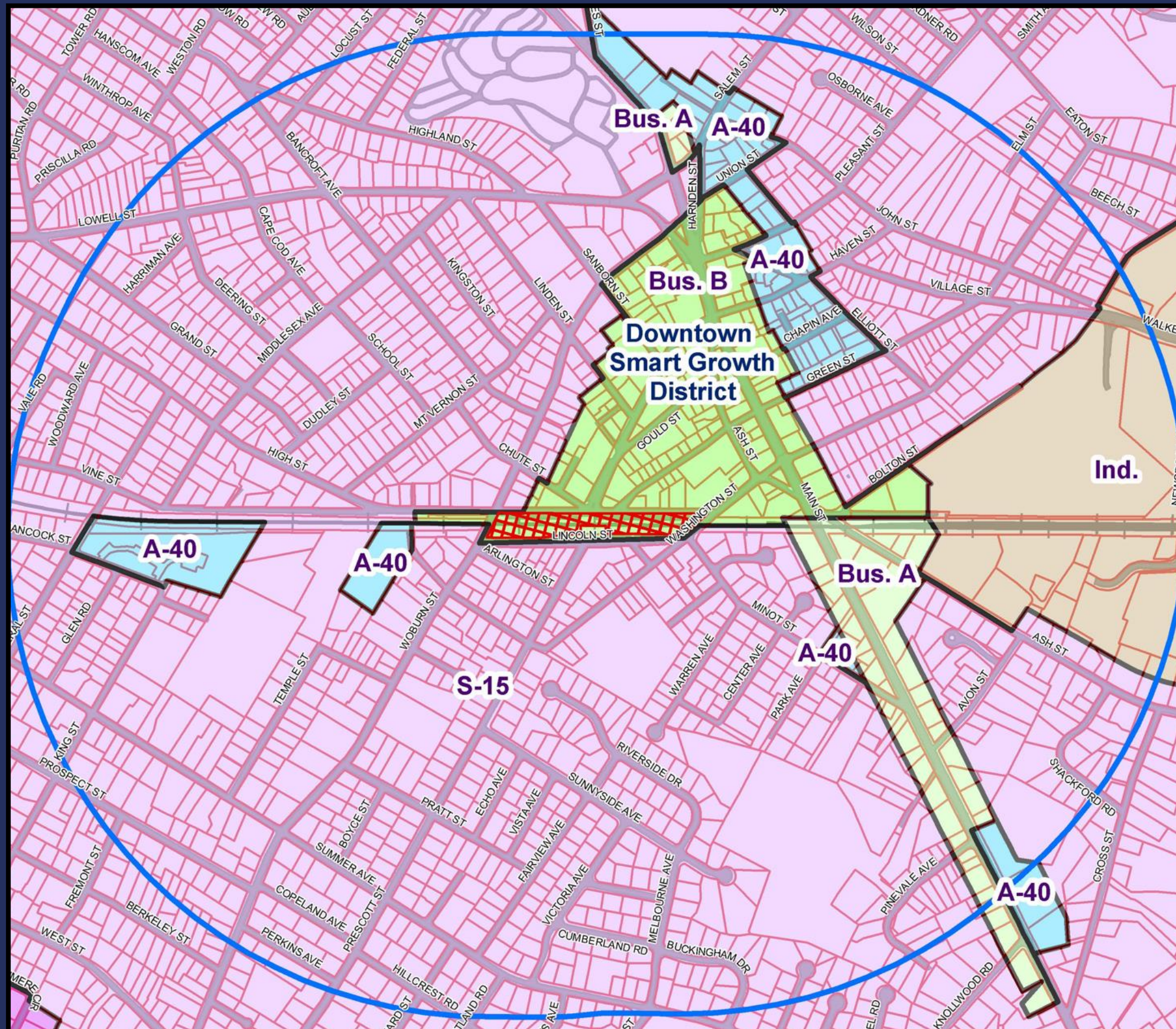
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10,000	5	0.23	3,000
12,000	6	0.28	3,600
15,000	8	0.34	4,500
20,000	10	0.46	6,000
25,000	13	0.57	7,500
30,000	15	0.69	9,000
35,000	18	0.80	10,500
40,000	20	0.92	12,000
45,000	23	1.03	13,500

Questions on Dimensional Controls?

Draw the District Exercise



Why are we only proposing our district over existing residential districts?



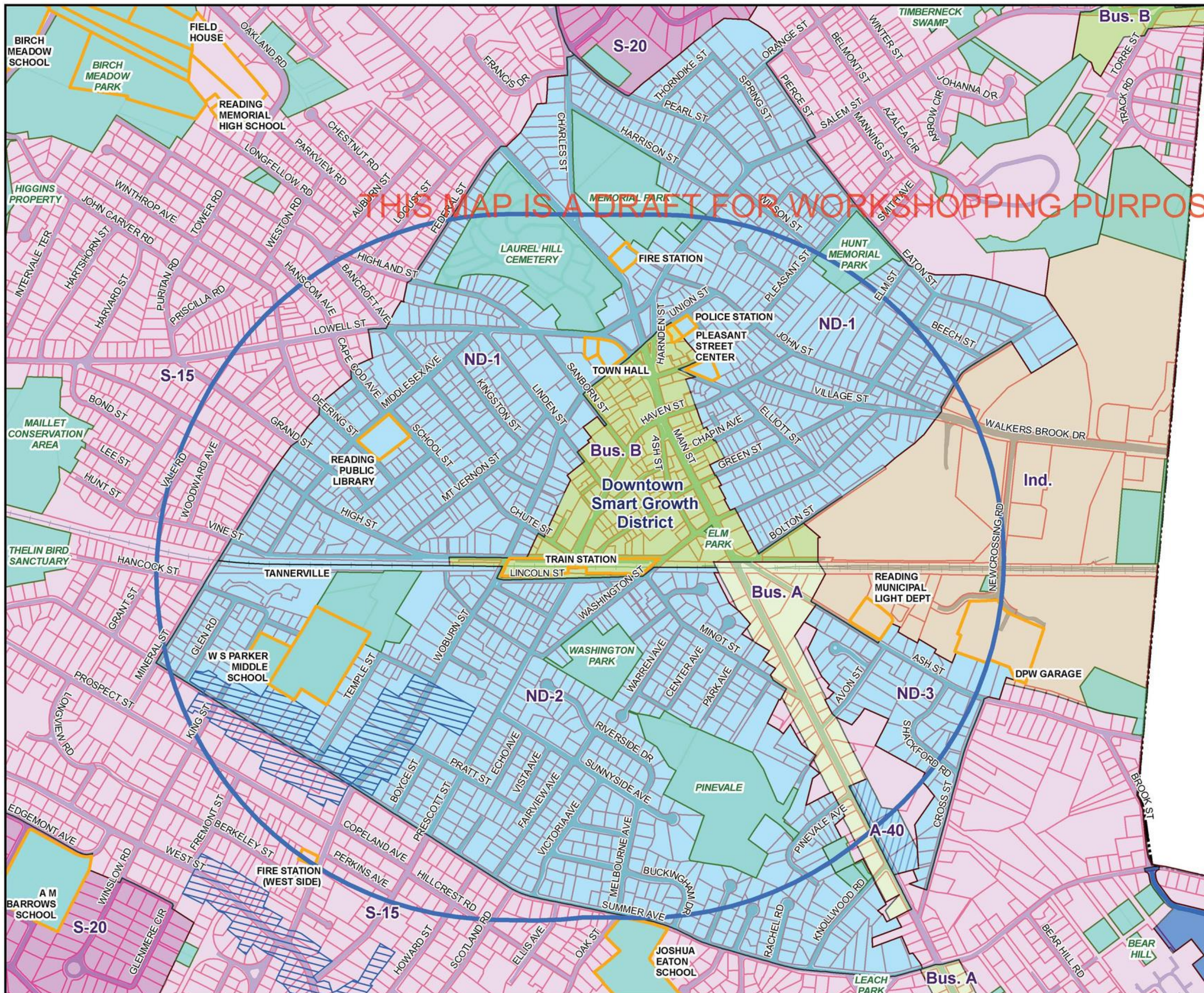
Only 5% of the land in Reading is in a business district. 94% of the land in Reading is in a single-family only district.

If we did want to use a business district, the one 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 to reduce density. 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.

THIS MAP IS A DRAFT FOR WORKSHOPPING PURPOSES

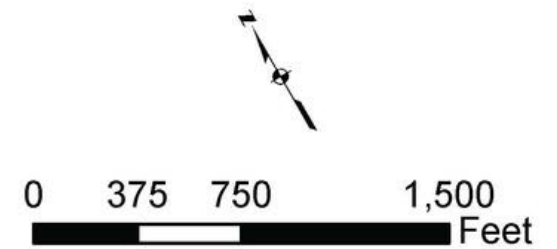


- ### Legend
- Reading MBTA Station 0.5 Mile Buffer
 - Municipal Building Lot
 - Open Space
 - Historic District
 - Reading MBTA Station Parcel
 - Tax Parcel
 - Railroad
- ### Zoning Districts
- New District (ND)
 - A-40
 - A-80
 - Bus. A
 - Bus. B
 - S-15
 - S-20
 - S-40
 - Ind.

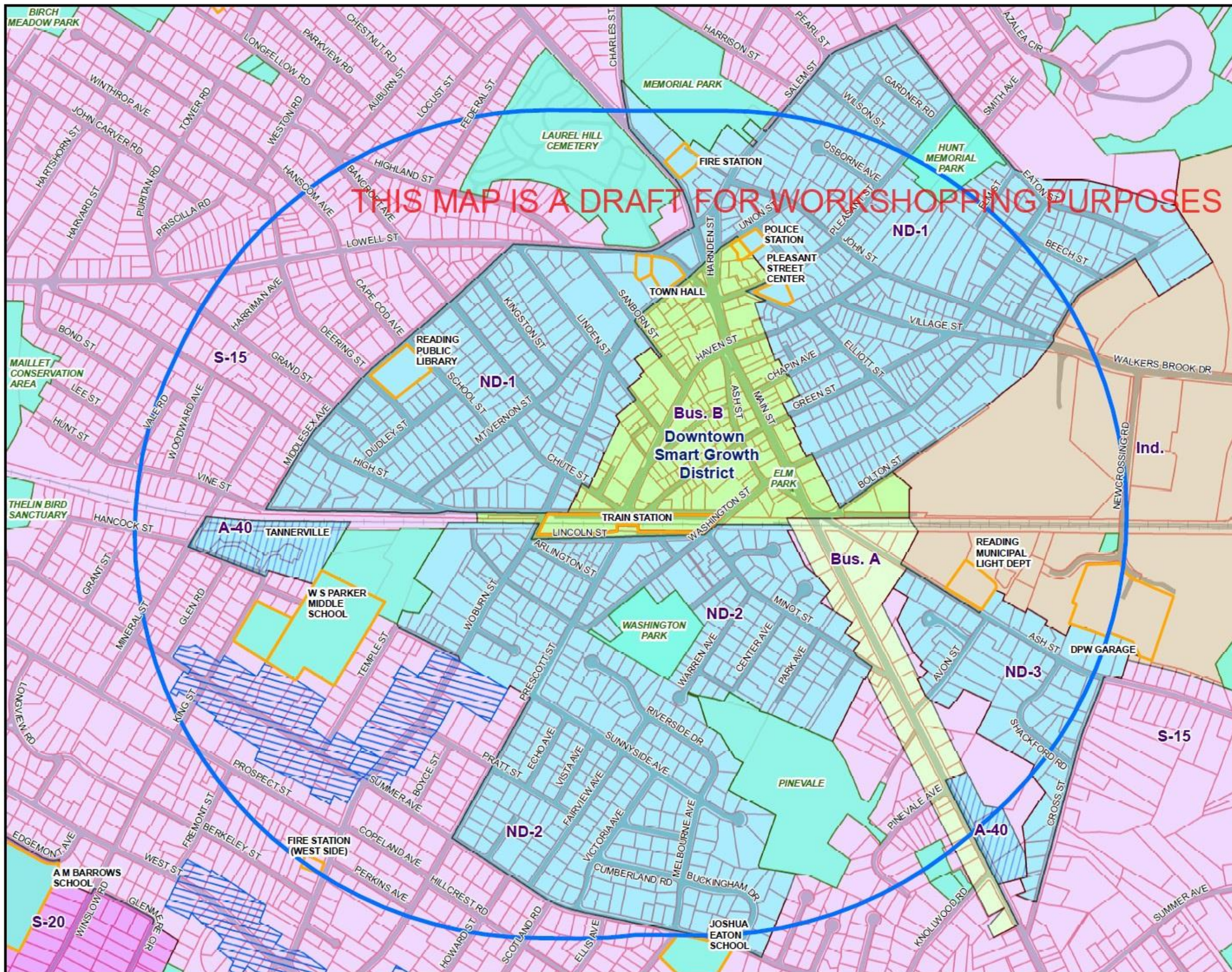
Area = 20 ac
Diameter = 1.404 in

0.5 Mile Buffer Area = 660.57 Acres

Zoning	Total Area (acres)	Buffer Area (acres)	Area Converted to ND (acres)
A-40	30.79	28.00	30.79
S-15	2,114.52	518.2	537.51
ND-1	298.77	208.56	N/A
ND-2	242.47	220.7376	N/A
ND-3	27.71	21.44	N/A



Map Release Date: 11/8/23



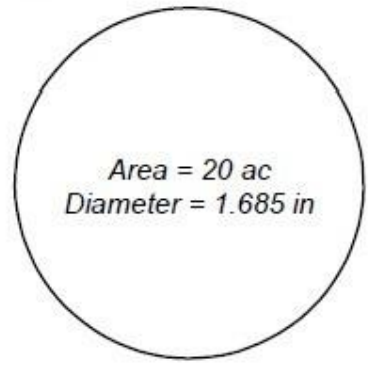
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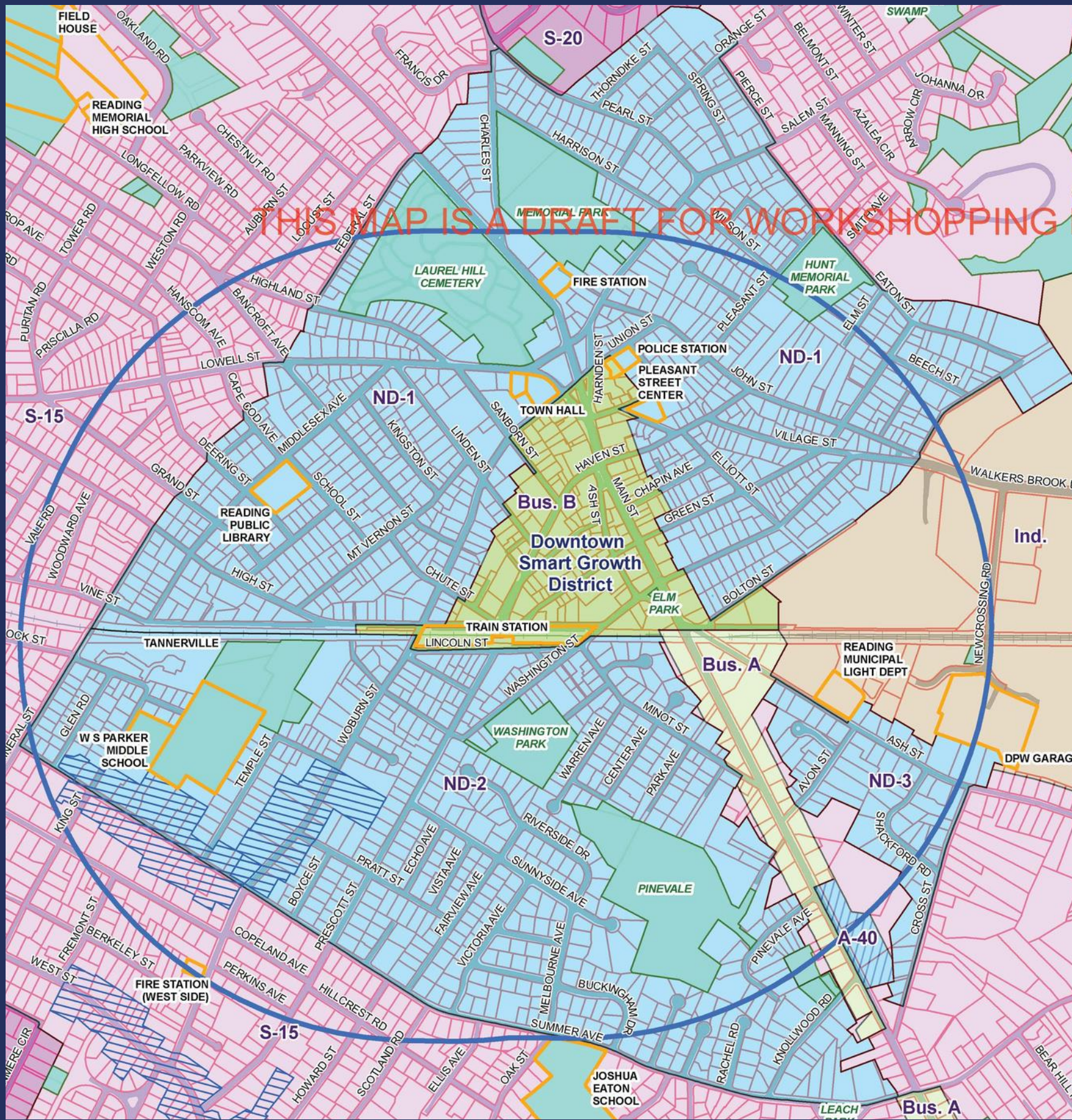
0.5 Mile Buffer Area = 660.57 Acres

Zoning	Total Area (acres)	Buffer Area (acres)	Area Converted to ND (acres)
A-40	30.79	28.00	30.79
S-15	2,134.78	538.46	315.91
ND-1	188.48	154.1	N/A
ND-2	124.25	123.44	N/A
ND-3	27.71	21.44	N/A

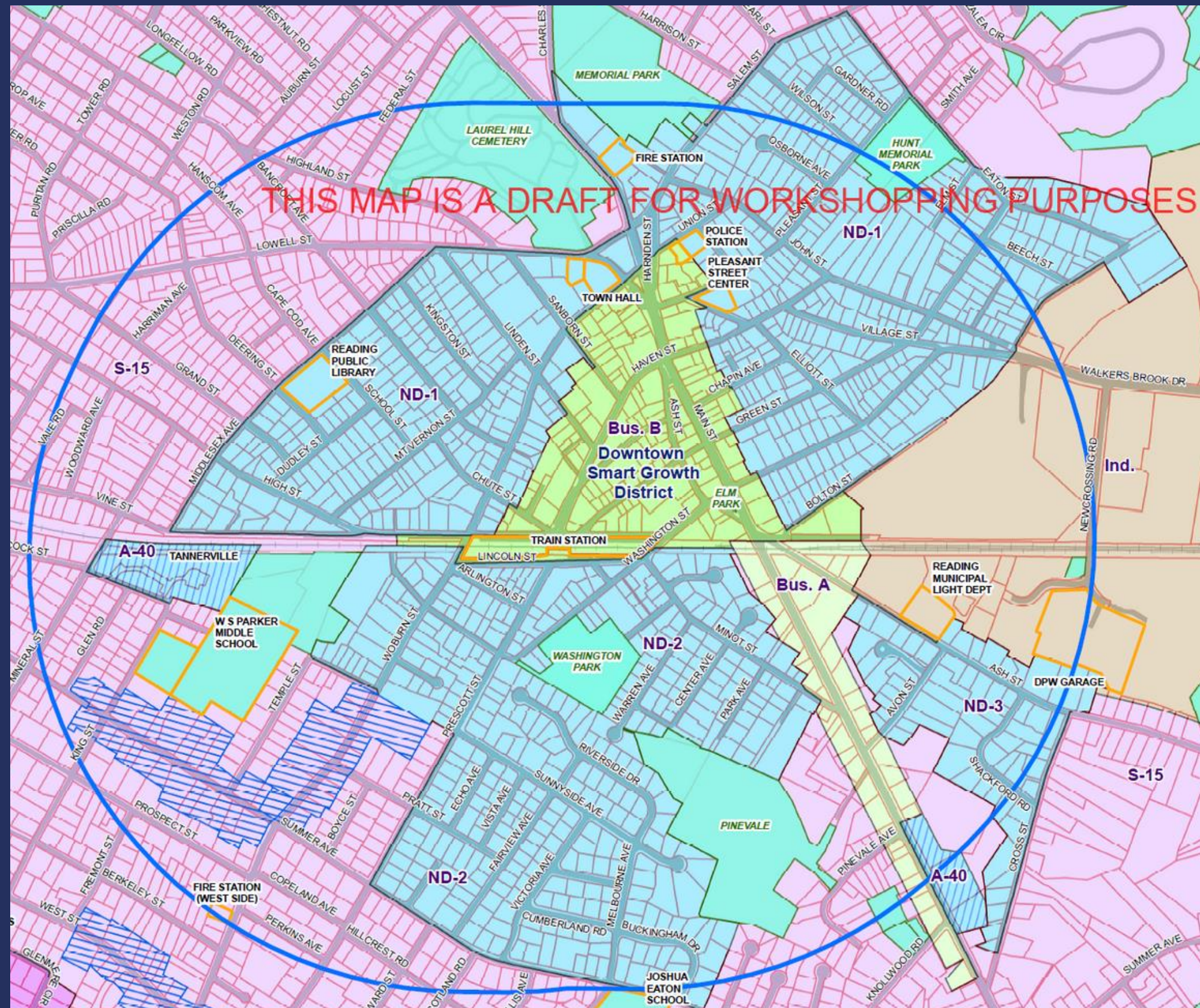


1 inch = 625 feet

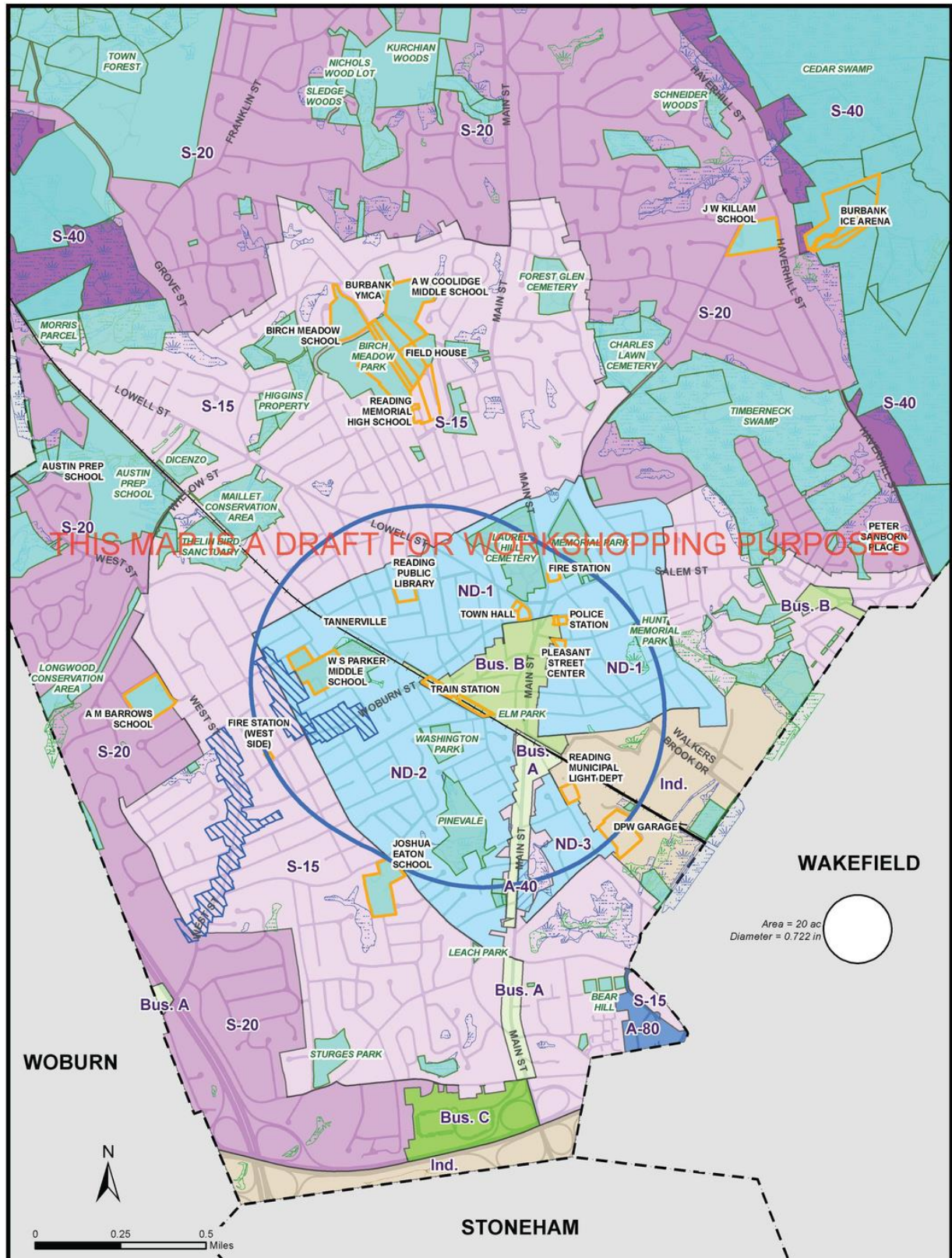
Map Release Date: 11/8/23



Option 1 "Larger"



Option 2 "Smaller"




Legend

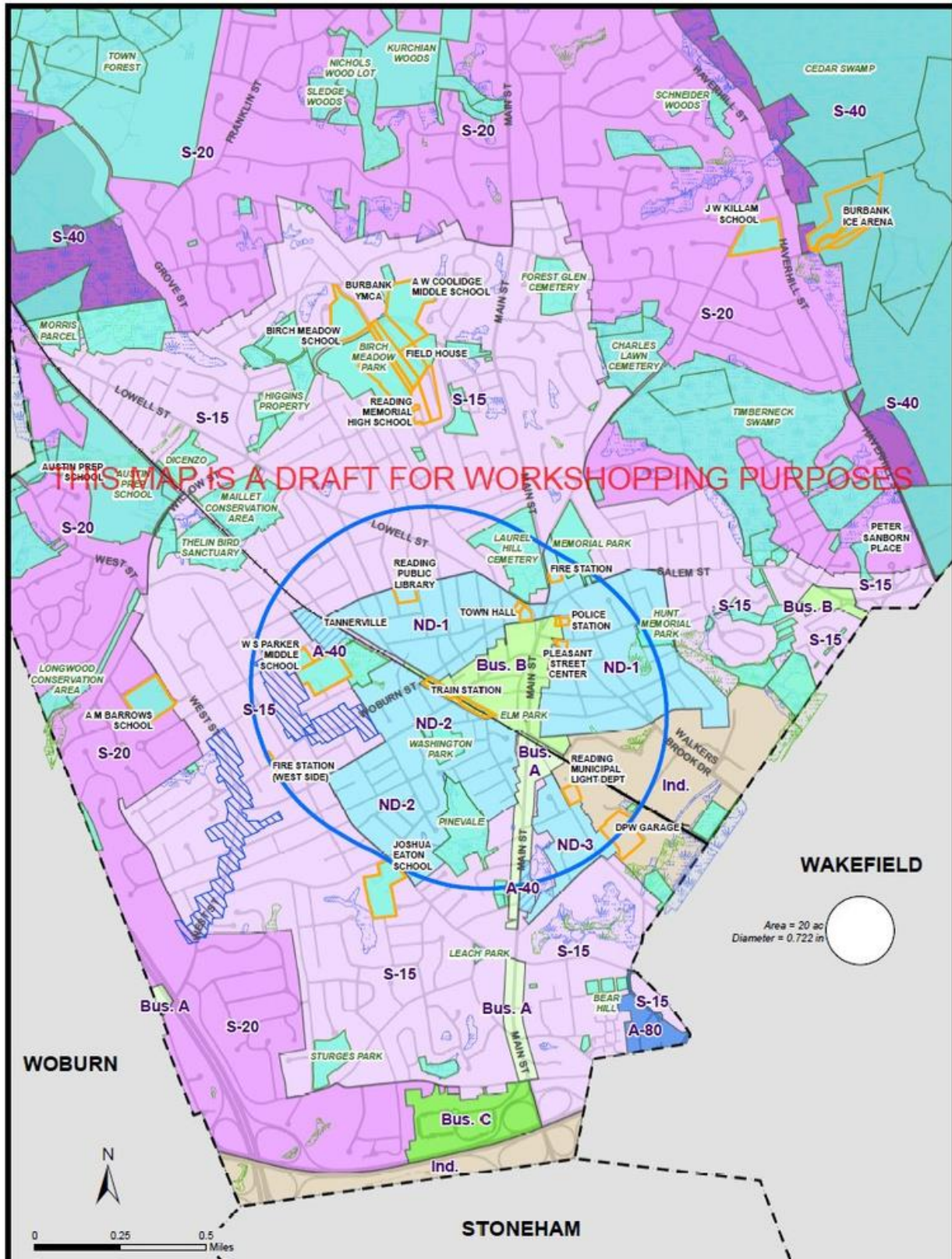
— Town Boundary	— Railroad	▨ Historic District	▨ Municipal Building Lot	▨ Open Space	▨ Wetland	▨ Forested Wetland	▨ Reading MBTA Station 0.5 Mile Buffer
Zoning Districts				New District (ND)			
A-40				A-80			
Bus. A				Bus. B			
Bus. C				S-15			
S-20				S-40			
Ind.							

Map Release Date: 11/8/23

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.




Legend

— Town Boundary	— Railroad	▨ Historic District	▨ Municipal Building Lot	▨ Open Space	▨ Wetland	▨ Forested Wetland	▨ Reading MBTA Station 0.5 Mile Buffer
Zoning Districts				New District (ND)			
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A-40				Bus. A			
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Questions for Discussion

1. What are your first thoughts / What jumps out?
2. What are your biggest concerns? / What do you find as most positive?
3. If you prefer this 2nd option are there combinations between the two that could be reached?
4. What are your feelings on avoiding the Historic Districts?...Does it make any difference if stronger requirements or Design Guidelines are provided to these areas?
5. Which option do you feel is healthiest for the Town's needs? Why?

Open items we are still working on with our partners

Department of Public Works

Infrastructure projections (sewer)
Future pedestrian improvements

Police Department

Parking regulations/enforcement
Overall level of service

Fire Department

Design of lots
Public safety access

School Committee

Future potential enrollment impacts
and evaluation of needs

Historical District & Commission

Discussions of protections in the
district and assessment of historic
properties

CPDC

What size projects should require
site plan review?
...specifics of administration

Present

Compliance with the law

Zoning district submittal

Update to our Zoning Bylaw

Update to our Zoning Map

Release design guide

Future

Cleanup district edges like Bus-A

Make ADUs by-right

Inclusionary Zoning

Commercial Zone Visioning

Pedestrian improvements

Pedestrian/Bike Plan

Adjust min lot size in the rest of S-15?

Our immediate concern is complying by our deadline.

Once that is complete there will be several rounds of follow-up on things we have learned as part of this process.



Questions?

Next Steps :

Feedback is requested until
Thanksgiving

Public Hearings will start in
Dec/Jan

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