



TOWN OF  
**READING**  
MASSACHUSETTS

# MBTA COMMUNITIES & READING

CPDC Public Hearing #3: 2/5/24

## Goal for tonight:

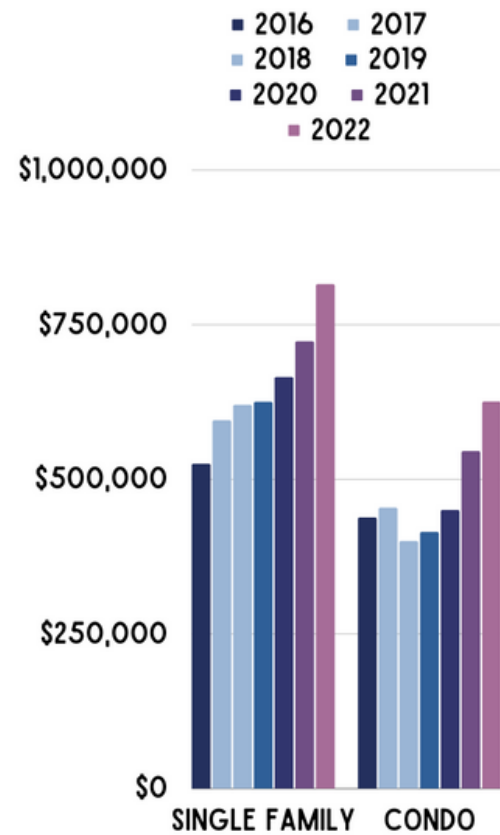
Recap what we have heard so far and establish the path forward.

## Agenda:

Staff Presentation (30 minutes):

- Review the MBTA Communities compliance process to date
- Discuss the actionable public feedback we've received within the public hearings
  - In relation to our existing proposal
  - In relation to requests for additional areas to be considered
- Alternate Concepts for Exploration
- Limitations of the law
- Answers to our most frequently asked recent questions
- Next steps

Public Comment



### HOME PRICES

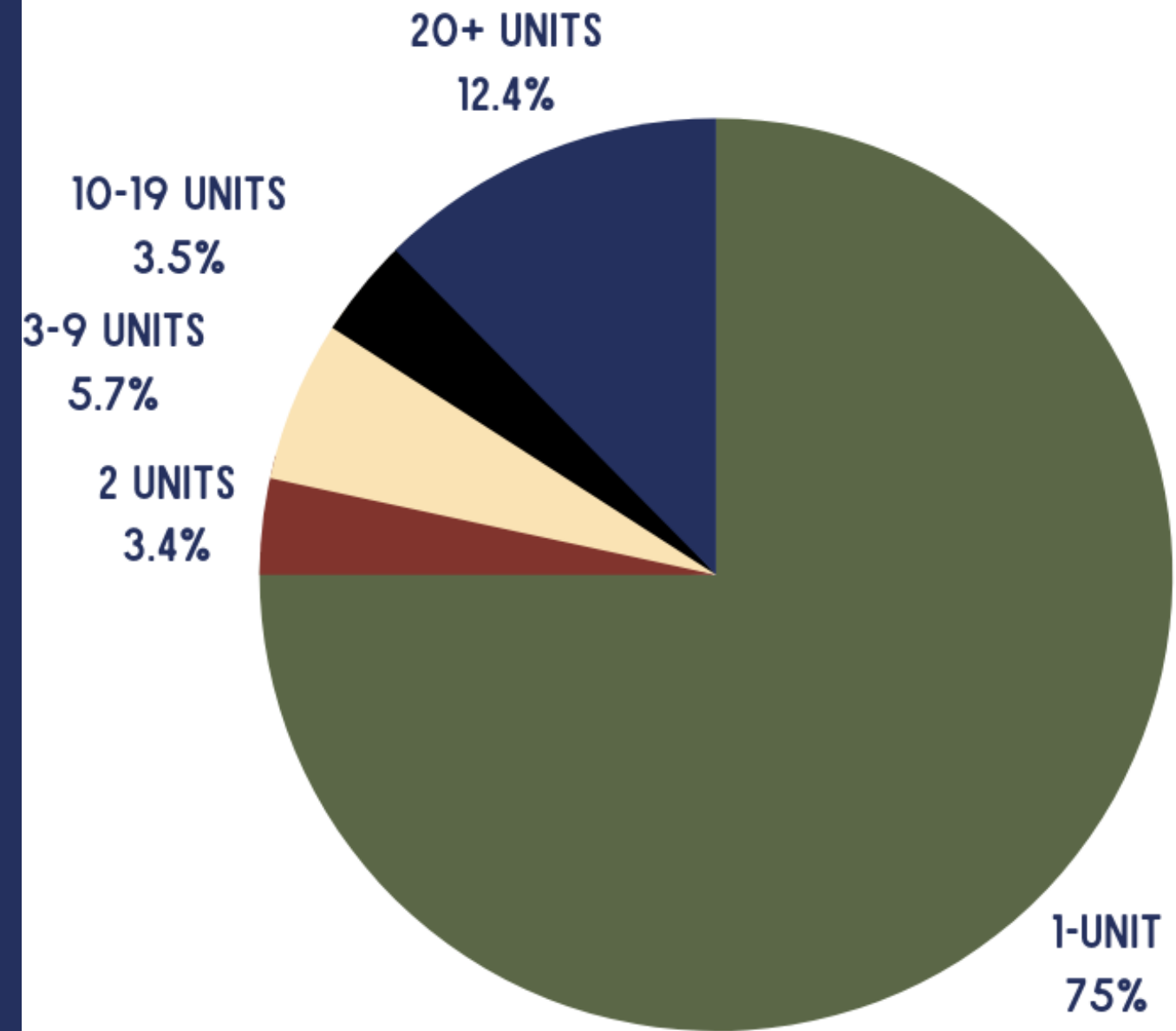
The median single-family home price in 2016 was \$525,000. In 2020 the median single-family sales price was \$665,000, in 2022 the median sales price had skyrocketed to \$815,000. This is an increase of 22.56% since 2020.

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.



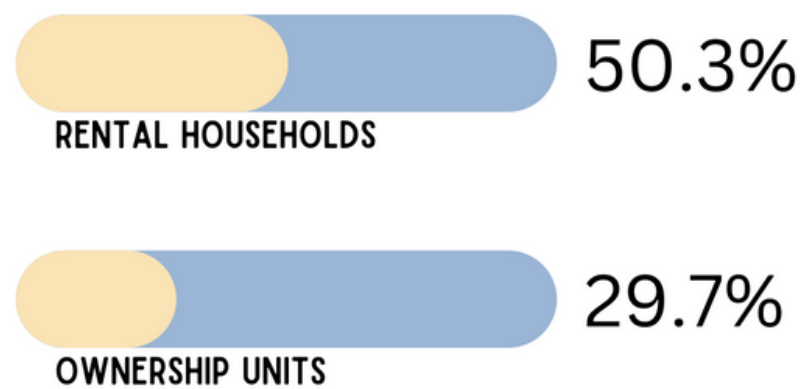
**A HOUSEHOLD WOULD NEED TO EARN APPROXIMATELY \$235,000+ TO AFFORD THE MEDIAN HOME PRICE OF \$815,000**

## 2020 HOUSING STOCK BY STRUCTURE TYPE



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

### COST-BURDENED - PAYING MORE THAN 30% OF THEIR INCOME ON HOUSING

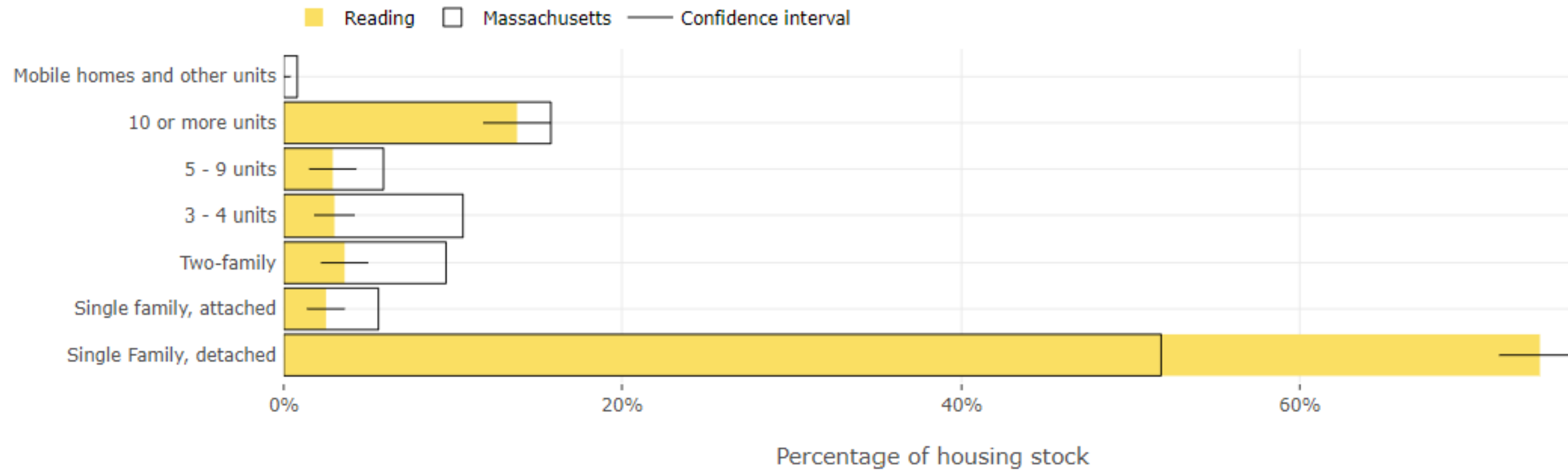


**THE MAKEUP OF READING'S MULTI-FAMILY HOUSING IS CURRENTLY SKEWED TOWARDS LARGER DEVELOPMENTS, WITH 20+ UNIT BUILDINGS MAKING UP 57% OF THE EXISTING MULTI-FAMILY HOUSING IN READING**

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



### Housing units by building type Reading v. State

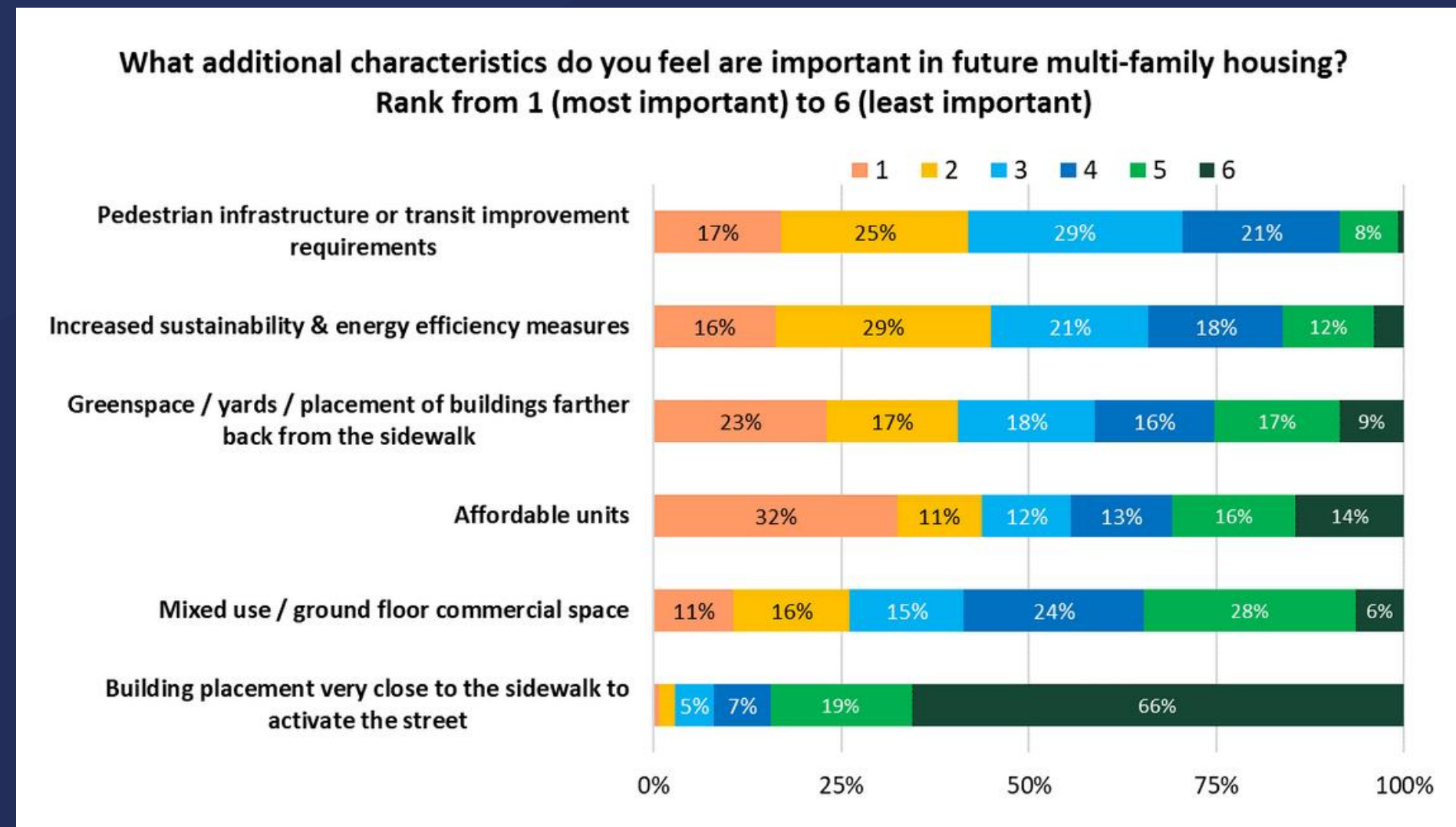
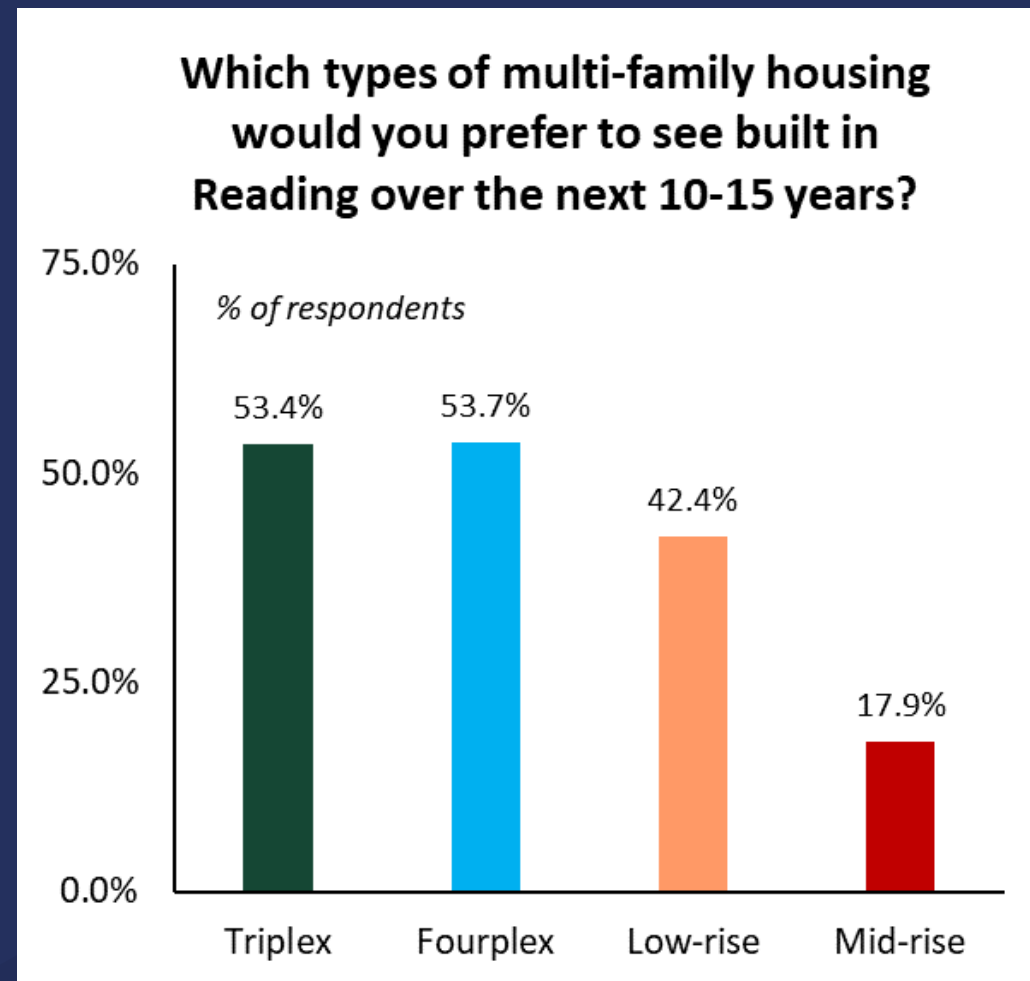


Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2016-2020 5-year estimates  
Table S2504: Physical Housing Characteristics for Occupied Housing Units

# Recap of our process to date

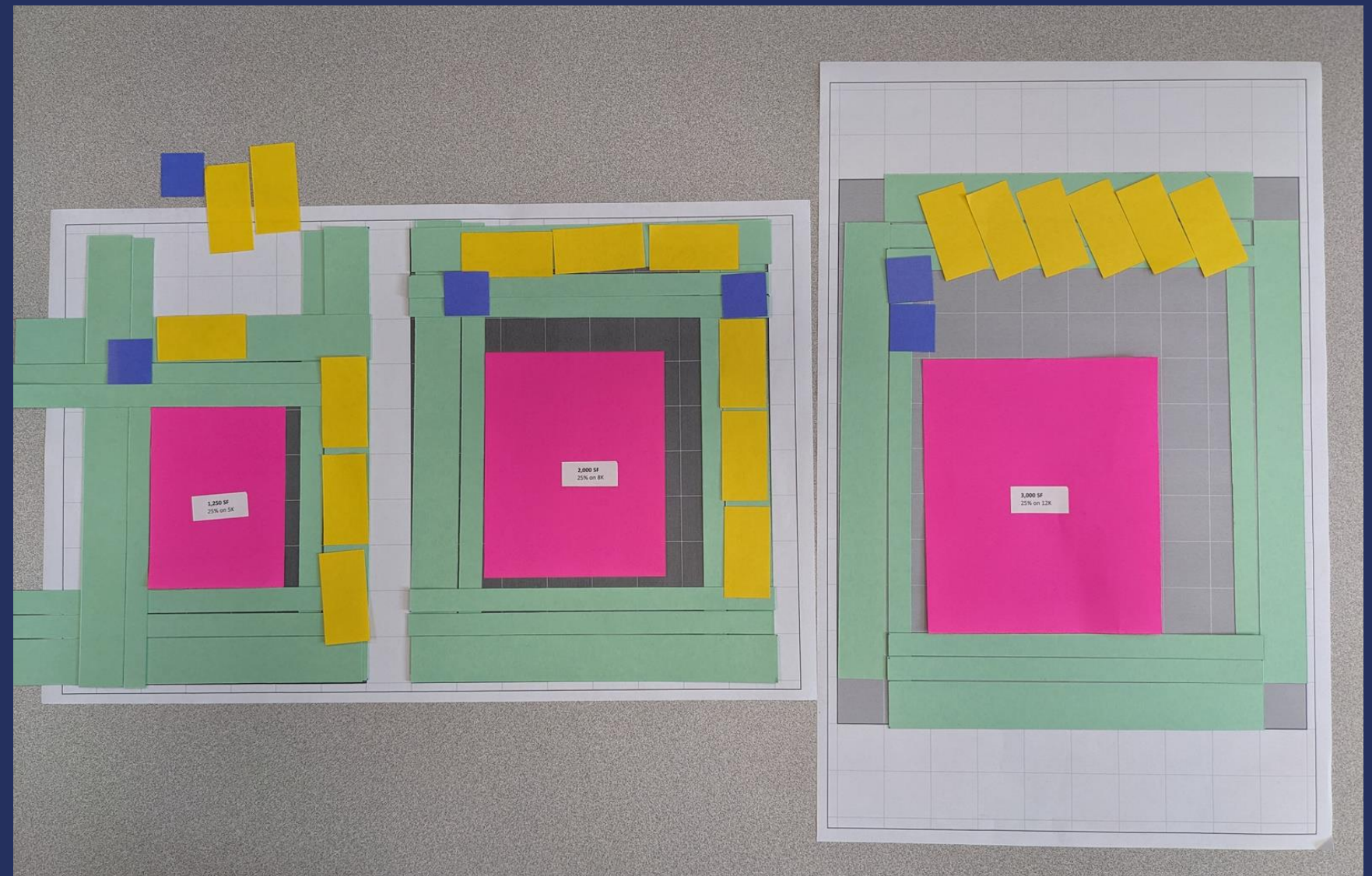
Staff began our public process in June 2023 with a survey and general outreach at public events and board and committee meetings.

The goal of our survey which was open from June through August was to gain new information from residents as to (1) general views on types of multi-family housing, (2) what qualities in locations were important, (3) top concerns, and (4) discover what they see as the best fit for Reading in the long-term. 99.5% of survey respondents live in Reading.

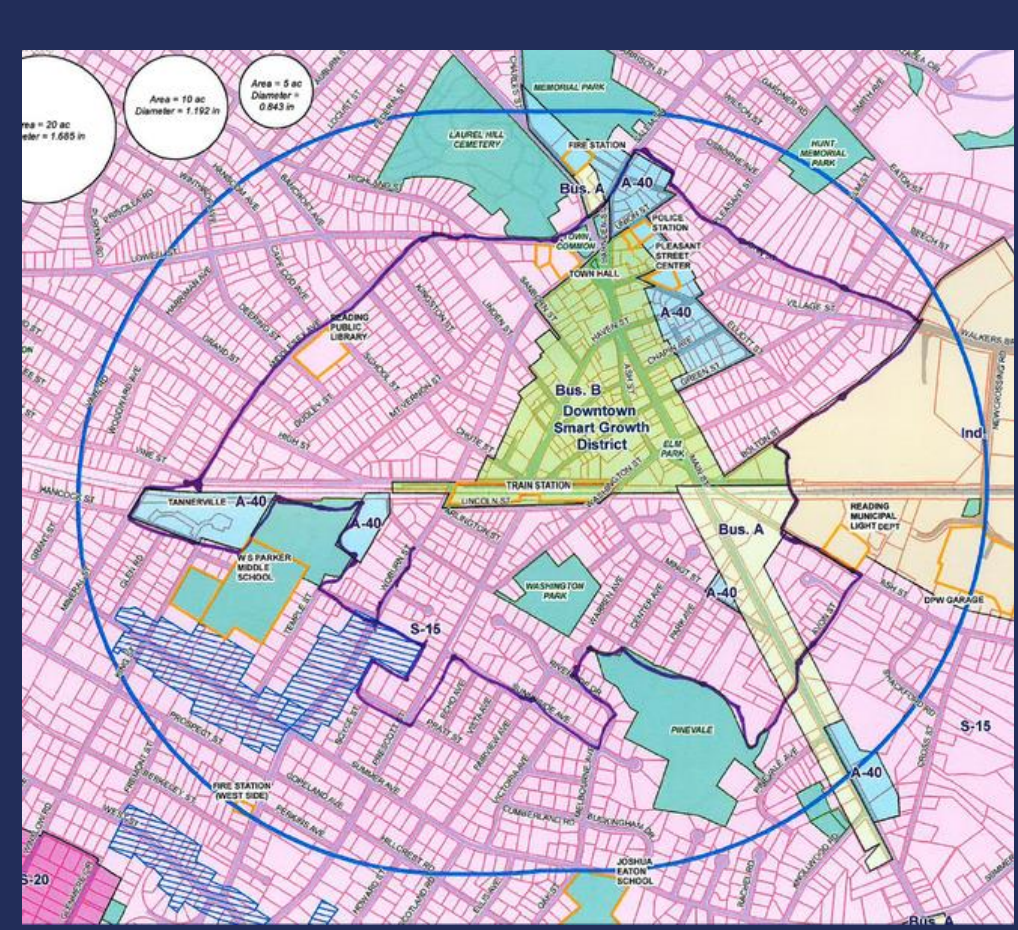
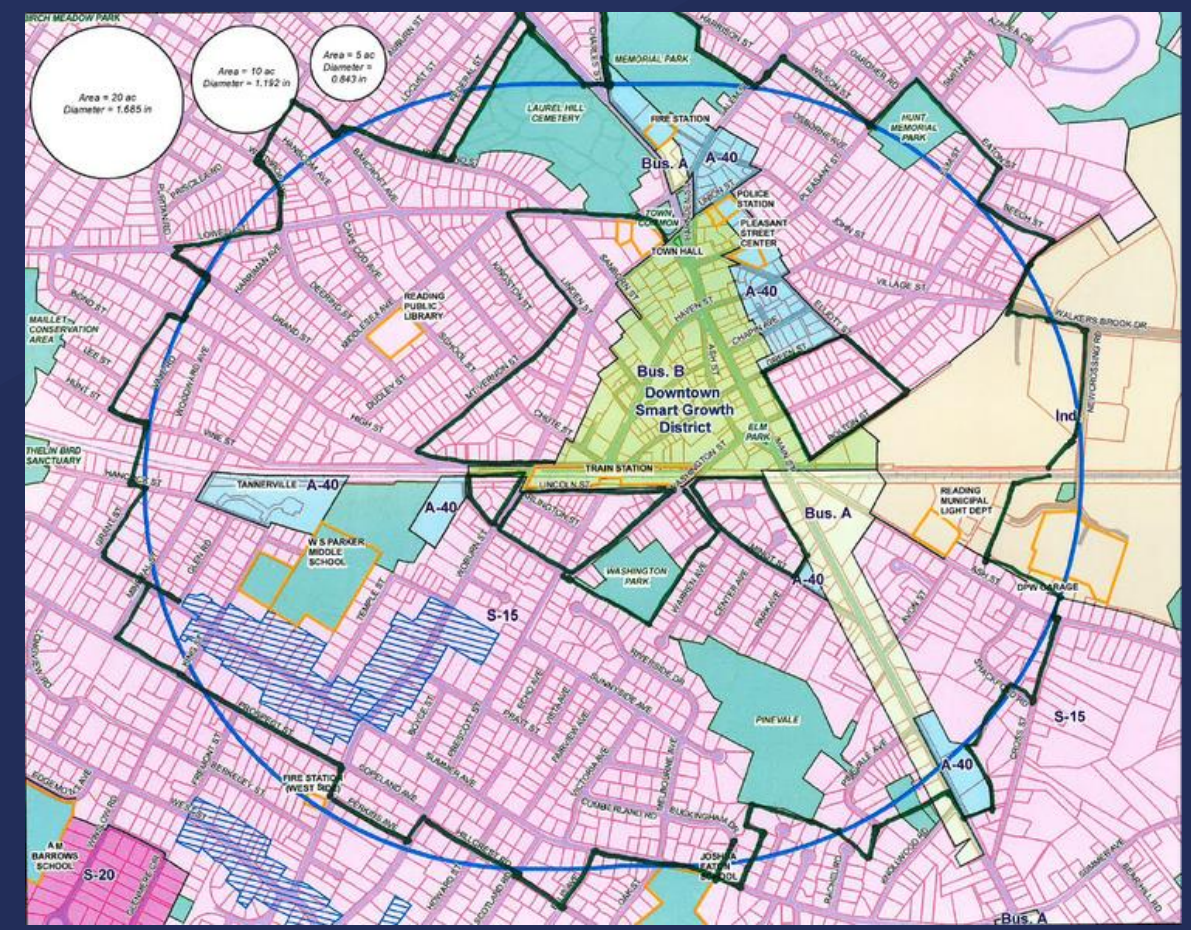
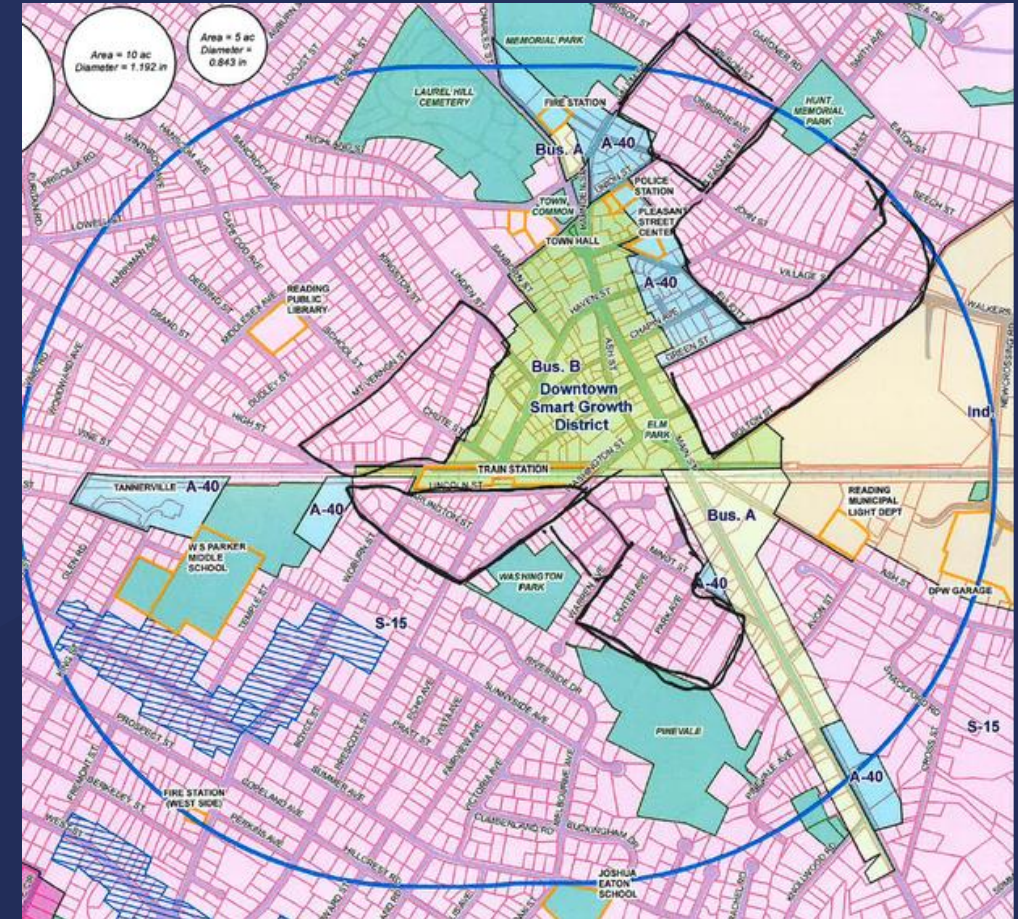
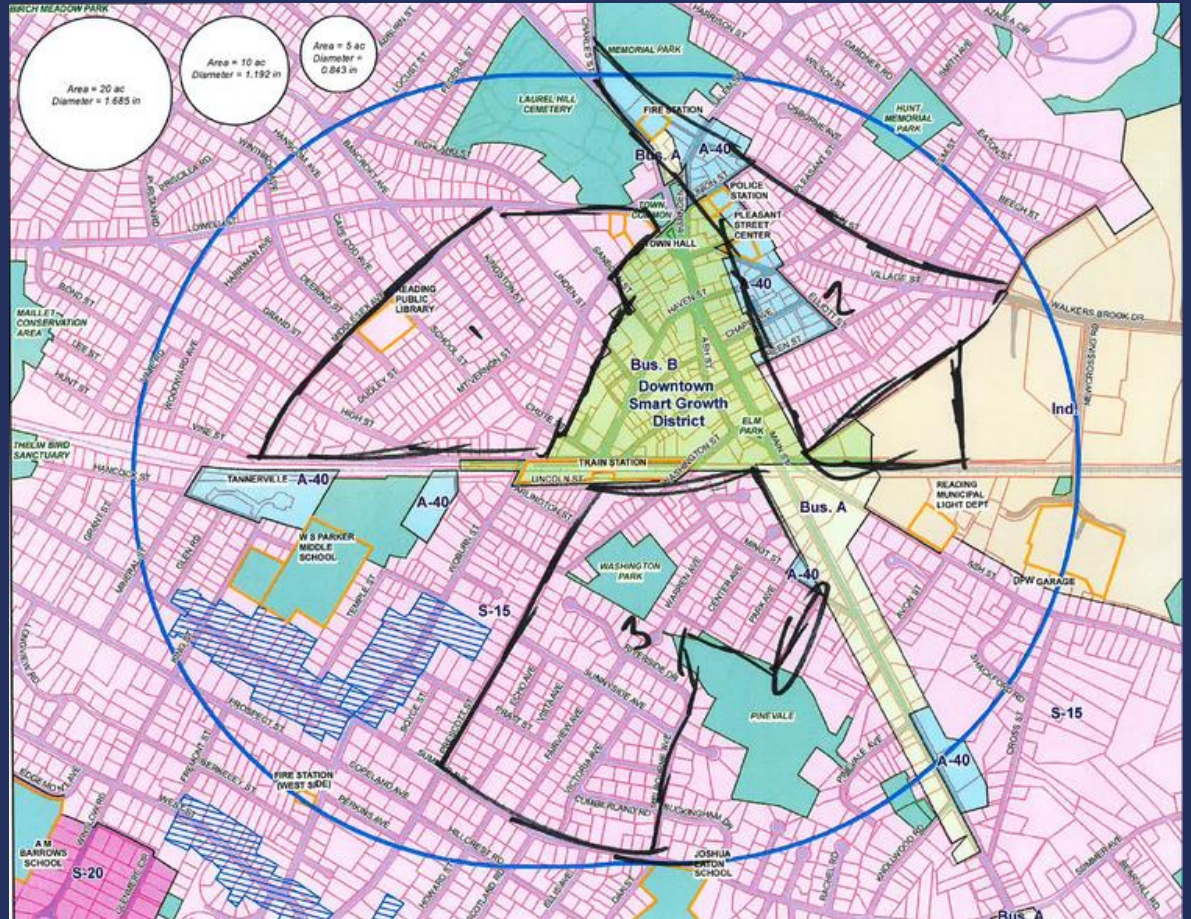
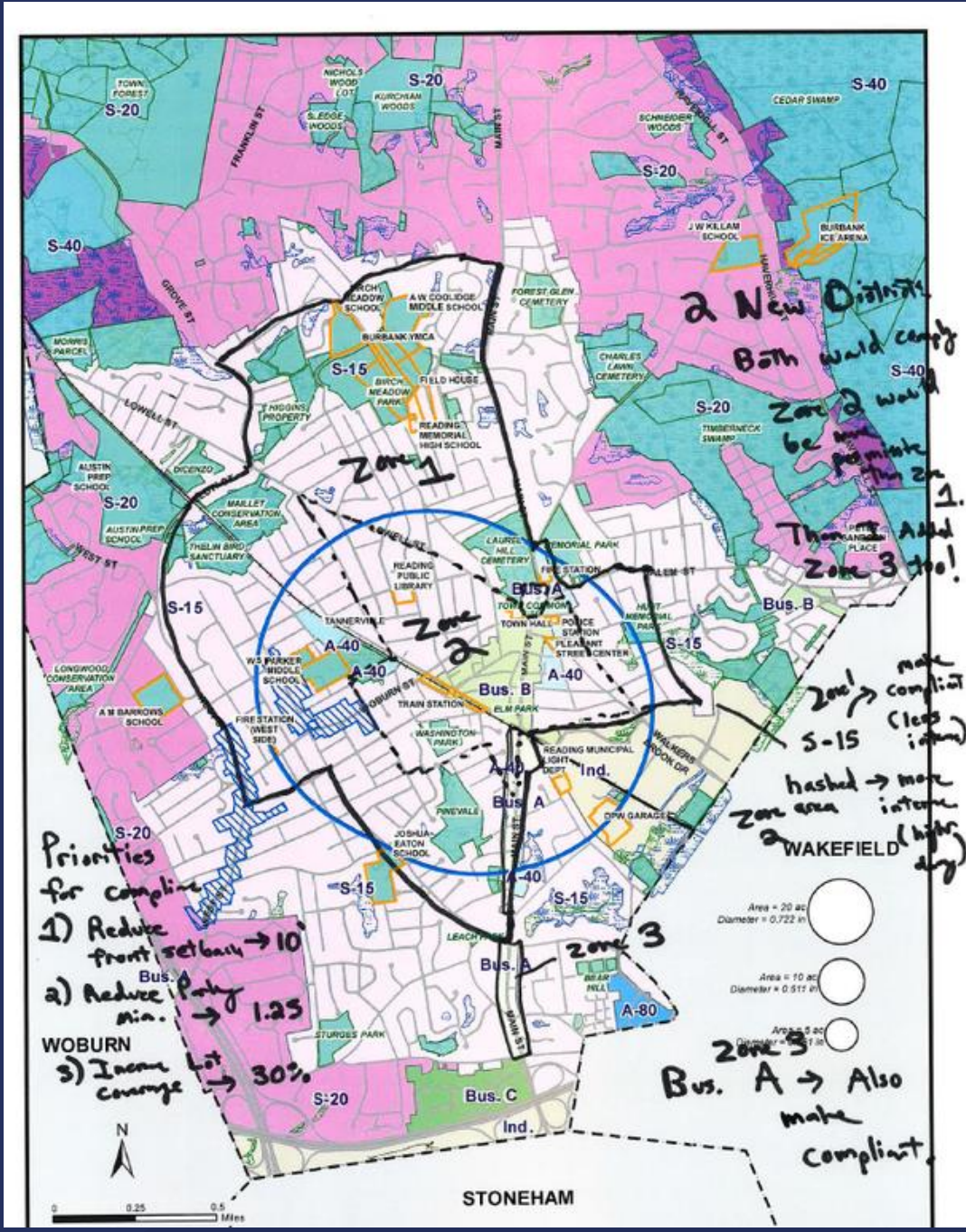


# Knowledge Series - September to November

We took the survey results forward to be turned into a proposal through our Knowledge Series of events. We educated the public on the history of zoning in Reading as it informs our decisions today, we did an entire workshop around dimensional controls and the tradeoffs inherent in a 5000 sq ft minimum lot size, and had residents produce maps.



Only 7 of the 41 maps included areas significantly outside of the 1/2 mile



# Formal CPDC Public Hearings

## December to present

The outcome of that series of public events and research was the starting point for the proposal brought forth into the formal CPDC public hearings that began in December.

That proposal was finalized in early December, and those residents whose property was within the proposed new zoning district were notified by mail directly after the map was finalized ahead of the 12/18 hearing.

In the last two public hearings we've received two types of actionable feedback.

- (1) Feedback on specific aspects of the proposal for improvement
- (2) Requests for additional areas of Town to be considered as alternative options for comparison

# Revisions to the Existing Proposal from the Public Hearing Process

Changes we have already made to our proposal in direct response to public input:

- (1)** Implemented a *new* 25% Landscaped Area requirement for residential development
- (2)** Revising required minimum parking to leave at the existing parking ratio of 1.5 spaces/unit
- (3)** The production of map options with smaller overall area and unit capacity
- (4)** Increasing setbacks as possible on large lots that are 15,000sf and greater
- (5)** The removal of increased allowances for additional Affordable units

REMINDER! Not everything can fit on a 5,000 sq ft lot as compared to a 15,000 sq ft lot.

# What else we have heard about our existing proposal from the Public Hearing Process

The two other items we have heard the most public comment about have been concerns about:

## **(1)** Historic properties

**Staff comments:** Nothing about the law or any proposed zoning changes will cancel out or stop the existing protections for historic properties. Nothing stops any additional protections from going into place. Protections for historic properties aren't in the Zoning Bylaw, they are in the General Bylaw.

In the short-term we would recommend working with RHC to take an increase in the demolition delay from 6 months to 12 months to Town Meeting alongside any proposal in order to immediately have increased protection for historic properties.

## **(2)** Restricting the combination of small lots into larger lots.

**Staff comments:** We are still considering if there is a legal way to respond to this concern within zoning.

# Pattern Book Potential

A Site Plan Review Tool for CPDC, Staff, Applicants, and Public can use to assist pre-permitting process

Relate back to Zoning, specifically in this case to Mixed Residential Zone

Gain better understanding on preferred forms, massing and site design elements (including desired architectural details)

Develop with Historic Context and Infill Development Graphics that may be integrated into Bylaw

Diagrams, Photographs, Illustrations to convey guidelines and recommendations

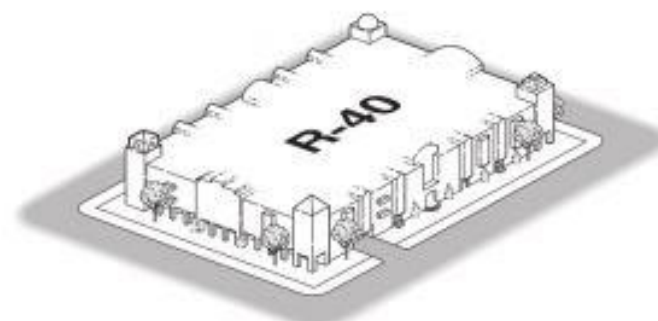
## Conventional Zoning

Density use, FAR (floor area ratio), setbacks, parking requirements, maximum building heights specified



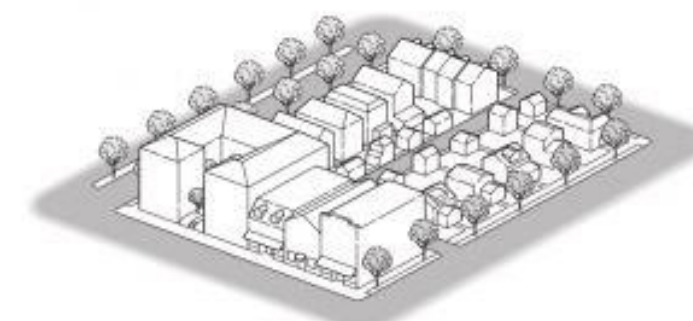
## Zoning Design Guidelines

Conventional zoning requirements, plus frequency of openings and surface articulation specified



## Form-Based Codes

Street and building types (or mix of types), build-to lines, number of floors, and percentage of built site frontage specified.



# Location, Location, Location

Overall, staff's takeaway has been that most of the actionable feedback we've received in relation to the existing proposal has not actually been about the core content of the proposal, which is the design of smaller-scale, house-like, multi-family buildings (MR concept) but about the location and larger lot potential.

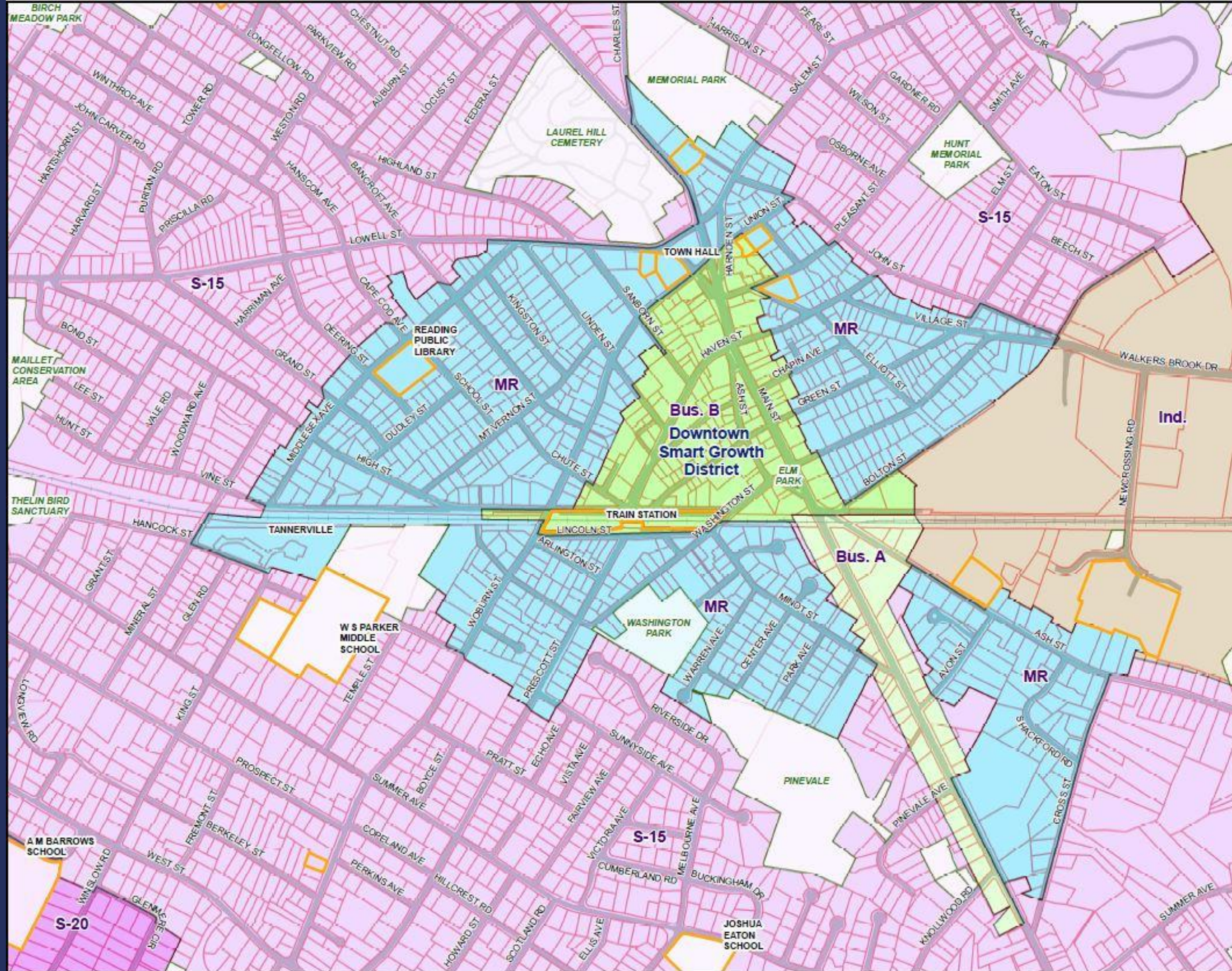
We've heard 3 key alternates:

**(A)** Take pieces of our MR concept and spread them elsewhere throughout Town

**(B)** Combine MR concept with a high-density area to potentially lower density allowances in MR

**(C)** Use commercial areas only

# January 22 2024 Map



## Legend

- Municipal Building Lot
  - Open Space
  - Reading MBTA Station Parcel
  - Tax Parcel
  - Railroad
- ### Zoning Districts
- Mixed Residential (MR)
  - Bus. A
  - Bus. B
  - Bus. C
  - S-15
  - S-20
  - Ind.

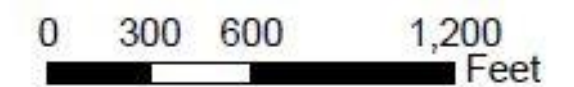


## #1 MR Town Center

0.5 Mile Buffer Area = 660.57 Acres

Zoning	Total Area (acres)	Buffer Area (acres)	Area Converted to MR (acres)
A-40	30.79	28.00	30.79
S-15	2,134.78	538.46	204.5
MR	238.78	228.42	N/A

Projected Developable Land in MR (acres)				
Total MR Area	Municipal & Church Parcels Removed	ROWs Removed	Wetlands Removed	Total Developable MR Area
238.78	-14.99	-44.70	-6.36	172.73



1 inch = 625 feet

## Alternate “A” - MR All Around Town

**Key idea:** Take the % of proposal that does not need to be our 1/2 mile area and instead place it in other areas of Town that could meet some or all of our goals of walkability to schools / retail / parks / amenities.

**Possible locations:** Salem St as a corridor out towards REI; north near Wood End school & Homegoods; near the High School; by Calareso’s Market; ???

**Initial thoughts from staff:** Our MR district controls were designed for S-15 lots, so moving outside the S-15 zone would require additional testing and thought to ascertain that the controls make sense on larger S-20 lots.

## “B” - MR + Big Buildings

**Key idea:** Combine our existing MR concept with a higher density district allowances (big buildings) that could potentially allow lower density allowances in MR. This idea directly responds to concerns we've heard that the allowed max unit counts as currently proposed in MR are too high.

**Possible locations:** Combine MR Core with a piece of Bus-A or Industrial

**Initial thoughts from staff:** Concerns about higher unit counts in MR is a key piece of feedback we've heard and there are a few possible combinations we would want to test. This combo is more complicated to test than some other ones.

## “C” - All Commercial

**Key idea:** Rather than zoning to incorporate smaller-scale multi-family into existing residential neighborhoods, we would zone for larger, denser buildings in our commercial zones.

**Possible locations:** Business-A on south Main and pieces of the Industrial zoning

**Initial thoughts from staff:** This proposal would still directly impact single-family homeowners as every commercial district directly abuts single-family homeowners. This proposal could essentially convert some of our already limited commercial land (5% of all land) to residential.

**Questions:** There are a range of heights and densities that we could use for compliance in our commercial zoning, what is our priority in design? Incentivizing mixed-use with bonuses? Minimizing area therefore maximizing building size or vice versa?

## Limitations of the Law: Mixed-Use

**Mixed-use can only be REQUIRED in an “eligible location where existing village-style or downtown development is essential to preserve pedestrian access to amenities.”**

**Staff comments:** This means that the Mixed-use CANNOT exclusively be required in Business-A or Industrial, it can only be incentivized with multi-family alone allowed in partnership.

To incentivize Mixed-use would require additional density or loosening of the dimensional controls like allowing additional height for one example.

# Limitations of the Law: Affordable Housing

MBTA Communities is not an affordable housing law.

Affordable units can only be required when “the zoning requires not more than 10% of the units in a project to be affordable units, and the cap on the income of families or individuals who are eligible to occupy the affordable units is not less than 80 percent of area median income....in no case will EOHLC approve alternative affordability requirements that require more than 20% of the units to be affordable units” (except in an existing 40R district).

To put a requirement of more than 10% of units to be Affordable requires the completion of a third-party economic feasibility analysis to demonstrate that a “reasonable variety of multi-family housing types can be feasibly developed at the proposed affordability levels”.

**Staff comments:** We believe outside of MBTA compliance zoning we could rezone *some* of the areas residents have suggested for large scale multi-family and require 20-25% of units to be Affordable and/or be more deeply affordable at 50% or 30% AMI. Should areas such as South Main Street be further considered for compliance a 10-15% allowance may be appropriate.

# Limitations of the Law: “Neighborhood Scale”

We’ve heard the question many times recently “Why can’t we use existing multi-family complexes to help us achieve compliance?”

The state advises, “for purposes of compliance with Section 3A, a multi-family zoning district should be a neighborhood-scale district, not a single development site on which the municipality is willing to permit a particular multi-family project.”

Our existing multi-family complexes (one example at right) are individual projects on a singular tax parcel. In order to “use” them we would need to include large portions of the single-family zones that surround them.

Staff have looked to capture existing multi-family development in the proposed iteration (Reading Village, RHA, S. Main St, etc.).



## Zoning capacity vs. Propensity to develop

The prescribed zoning or unit capacity, while important for consideration, is not indicative of redevelopment rate and potential, need, or balance. We should focus on outcomes, health and longevity.

Zoning capacity is not a build-out projection. Today, under current conditions, all zones in Reading currently have zoning capacity because that number is an analysis of what could be built by-right under zoning, not a prediction of what will be built.

In considering any proposal, the likelihood of development or propensity for sites to be developed is a better prediction of the rate and types of construction that may result from any zoning changes.

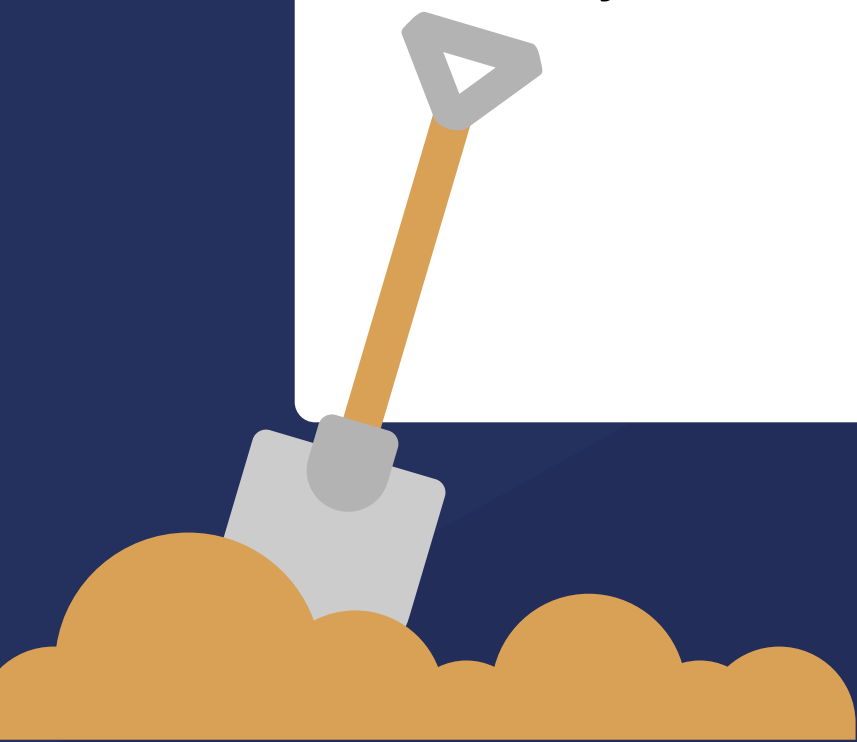
# What is an overlay?

In zoning we have what are called base zoning districts. In Reading these are our Single Family 15, 20, Business A, Industrial, etc.

An overlay is additional zoning that sits on top of the base district. It typically has different qualities than the base zoning and usually covers multiple base districts, for example a Floodplain overlay.

An overlay is simply a different way of inserting zoning requirements and rules into a bylaw. It has the same force of law as a base district, it is simply a way of administering zoning. It's a tool.

In order to decide what is the best tool to use to put it into our bylaw and administrate it on a day-to-day basis you have to know the content of it.



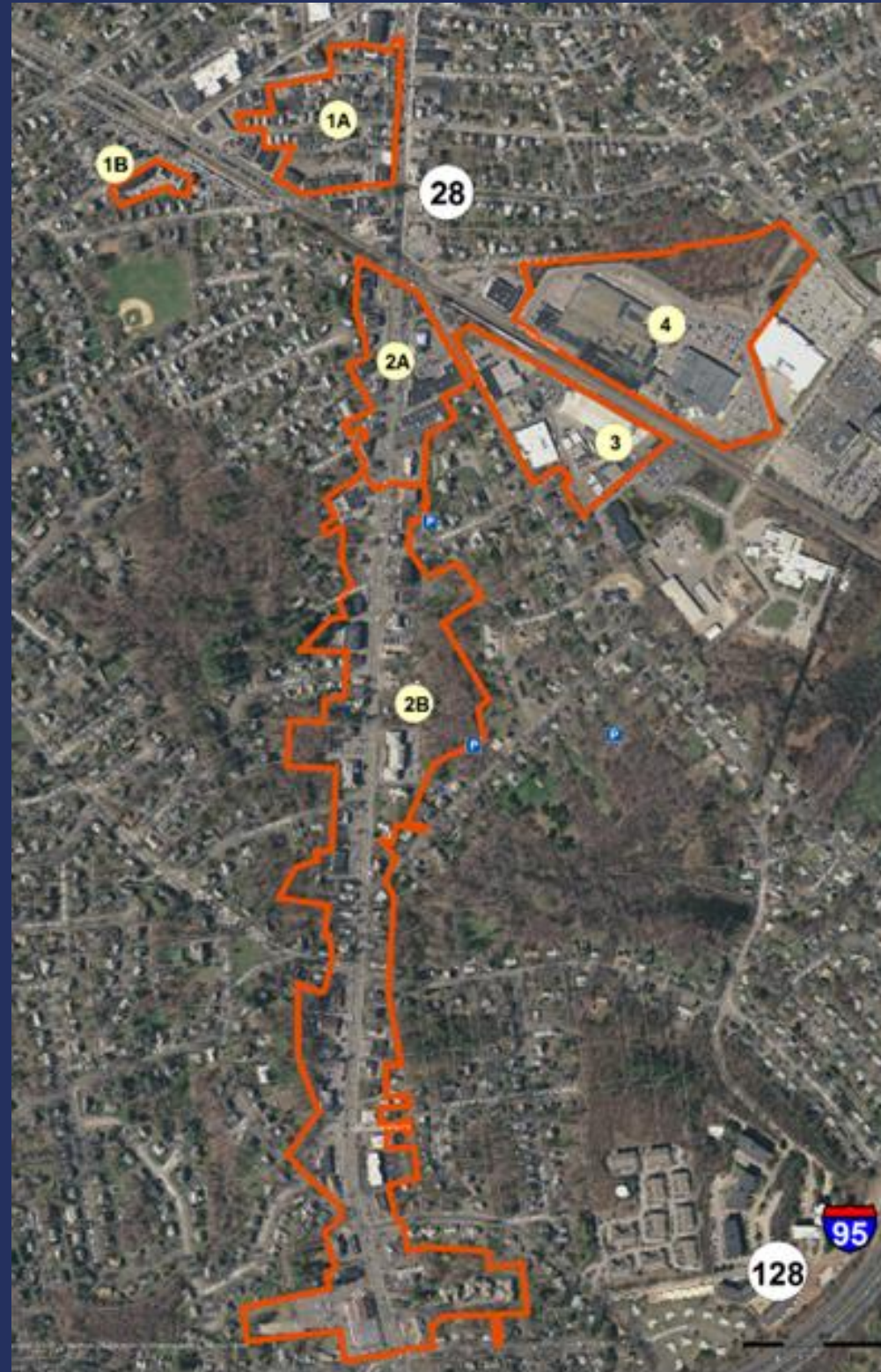
## Comparisons with other Towns & Cities

Comparisons to other communities proposals are difficult for a number of reasons.

There are 129 communities that are required to pass zoning this calendar year. Each Town and City was given their own set of requirements they have to meet in terms of acreage, zoning capacity, and location. Each Town and City in addition to having (1) different requirements has (2) their own history of development, different (3) existing economic conditions, (4) housing stock, (5) existing zoning, (6) goals.

Housing is a regional priority but at the local levels every need and allowance is different. Should similar scales and uses be sought we may pull strong/creative language from others as needed.

# Priority Development Areas & the Economic Development Action Plan



Reading's Economic Development Action Plan, completed in 2015-16, laid out a series of priority development areas (seen at left) with varying goals.

Since the plan was completed, the zoning in PDA 1A (downtown) has been changed twice (2016-17 and 2021). PDA 1B has been developed. PDA 2A & 2B had mixed-use development bylaws put in place (2018-19). A visioning exercise for area 3 was conducted (2019) but stalled due to the pandemic and other.

We've received a lot of comments and questions as to why redevelopment hasn't yet taken place on Areas 3 & 4 - work such as this simply takes time.

## Current Concept & Alternatives A, B, C

**MR Town Center  
(Current concept)**

**MR All Around Town  
“A”**

**MR + Big buildings  
“B”**

**Commercial  
“C”**

For any concept to be fully vetted for compliance takes many weeks of staff work to take it from a conceptual idea through iterative testing to a presentable form complete with dimensional controls and potential zoning language.

If we want to fully explore any of these alternatives, we will not be going to April Town Meeting. Do want to move forward with testing any of these? Which ones?

## Potential next steps

**Post-meeting notes:** At the meeting it was decided to pause the process of taking zoning amendments to Town Meeting, in order to explore all 3 of the alternative concepts listed on the prior slide.

Staff will clarify and detail the alternatives to be fully explored and the basic parameters of them in a memo, to be approved by CPDC, so there is documentation of this public hearing process, clear directive of the scope of our work, next steps, and an updated timeline.

We will close the formal Public Hearing for taking zoning amendments to Town Meeting, and reconvene in a series of public meetings in late Spring/early Summer as we move forward into Phase 5 of the compliance process and compare these alternatives once they are fully vetted by staff into compliant forms.



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