

# NARRATIVE & IMPACT STATEMENT

Special Permit Application

*Pursuant to Section 5.6 of the Reading Zoning Bylaw*

## MONTAGE AT 281 MAIN STREET

Reading, Massachusetts 01867

Submitted by:

**281 Reading, LLC**

January 2026



# 1. INTRODUCTION AND PROJECT OVERVIEW

## 1.1 Project Summary

The Applicant, 281 Reading, LLC, respectfully submits this Narrative & Impact Statement in support of a Special Permit application for the proposed mixed-use development known as "Montage." This application is submitted pursuant to Section 5.6 of the Reading Zoning Bylaw, which governs mixed-use development within the Business A zoning district.

Montage represents a thoughtfully designed gateway development that advances community planning objectives while contributing to the growth of the South Main corridor. The project consists of a four-story mixed-use building containing 24 residential units (including 3 affordable) above 2,400 SF of ground-floor commercial space. Situated on a 33,554 SF lot in the Business A zoning district, the development is strategically positioned within PBA 2B, just 0.6 miles from the Commuter Rail.

This application includes a waiver request pursuant to Section 5.6.7.2 to allow commercial space representing approximately 9.85% of net area in lieu of the required 25%. This waiver directly supports the retention and expansion of Bay State Physical Therapy, a longtime Reading business that has served the community for over a decade. The waiver enables them to relocate to modernized, accessible space while remaining in Reading, furthering the bylaw's underlying goal of preserving and growing local businesses.

Property Address	281 Main Street, Reading, MA 01867
Zoning District	Business A
Priority Development Area	PDA 2B
Lot Size	33,554 square feet (0.77 acres)
Proposed Building Height	4 stories
Residential Units	24 units (21 market-rate, 3 affordable)
Commercial Space	2,400 SF (9.85% of net area)
Gross Building Area	32,862 SF
Floor Area Ratio (FAR)	< 1.0
Parking Spaces	40 spaces (38 required)

## 2. EXISTING CONDITIONS AND SITE CONSTRAINTS

### 2.1 Current Site Conditions

281 Main Street presents a compelling case for redevelopment. The approximately 34,000 square foot lot in the Business A zone is underutilized, constrained by environmental, structural, and regulatory limitations that render the current improvements obsolete in the contemporary market.

### 2.2 Environmental Constraints

- **Activity Use Limitation (AUL):** The site operates under an AUL, which restricts allowable uses.
- **Brook Constraint:** A small brook bisecting the lot has historically constrained site planning options. The proposed project is designed to work within this natural constraint.

### 2.3 Structural & Infrastructure Deficiencies

The existing building suffers from several issues which render it ineffective in cultivating commerce and attracting engaging uses in the South Main corridor:

- The upper level lacks a second means of egress & ADA accessibility
- The building lacks ADA accessibility, making it unsuitable for most commercial uses
- High elevation of structure disconnects it from streetscape and necessitates ramping, adding further accessibility challenges
- No public electric vehicle charging infrastructure
- Minimal landscaping with only two trees on-site
- Fencing that disconnects the property from neighboring commercial properties
- Limited streetscape engagement.

## 3. SITE CONTEXT AND LOCATION

### 3.1 Strategic Gateway Location

The site enjoys an exceptional location within Reading's commercial and transit infrastructure. The site's position along Route 28 places it at a strategic gateway into Reading, with high visibility and significant traffic exposure. This visibility makes the site particularly suitable for commercial activation and streetscape enhancement. The surrounding context is predominantly commercial and residential, with immediate neighbors including Perfecto's Cafe and Pet Companions.

### 3.2 Transit Accessibility

The site's proximity to transit infrastructure strongly supports transit-oriented development goals:

- **Commuter Rail:** The Station is located just 0.6 mi (approx 11 min walking distance) from the site, providing direct rail access to Boston's North Station and communities along the Haverhill Line.
- **Highway Access:** Route 128/Interstate 95 is accessible within a one-minute drive, providing regional connectivity for residents and commercial tenants.
- **Walkability:** The site provides pedestrian access to downtown retail core, Commuter Rail

## 4. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

### 4.1 Development Program

Montage seeks to replace inferior, underutilized commercial space with robust, engaging MU programming, Class A commercial space while creating affordable units. The property's location within the Bus A zoning district and PBA 2B makes it ideally suited for the proposed mixed-use development. Its high visibility along Route 28, combined with proximity to transit and commercial amenities, positions the site as a natural location for transit-oriented, walkable development.

Number of Stories	4
Number of Residential Units	24 (1 BR & 2 BR)
Commercial Rentable Area	2,400 SF (9.85% of net area)
Building Area (Gross / Net)	32,862 SF / 24,376 SF

## 5. ALIGNMENT WITH COMMUNITY PLANNING GOALS

The project has been designed to advance Reading's planning objectives across policy areas.

### 5.1 Housing Production Plan

The development directly supports Reading's Housing Production Plan through:

- **Housing Stock:** 24 new housing units diversifies the community's housing stock
- **Affordable Housing:** Three (3) affordable units will contribute to the Town's Safe Harbor status
- **Transit-Oriented:** Within 0.6 mi of Commuter Rail supports transit-oriented development goals
- **Accessible Design:** Accessible design will serve seniors, residents with disabilities

### 5.2 Economic Development Goals

The project advances Reading's Economic Development Plan by:

- **PBA 2B Activation:** Activating PBA 2B with compact, mixed-use consistent with Town's vision
- **Class A Commercial Space:** Introducing 2,400 SF of modern, accessible Class A commercial space to address the documented shortage of quality commercial space in Reading
- **Business Retention:** Supporting the retention and expansion of Bay State Physical Therapy, a longtime Reading business that has served the community for over a decade
- **Residential Base:** Expands residential base essential for supporting commerce

### 5.3 Infrastructure Plan

The project contributes to Reading's infrastructure goals through:

- Public EV charging stations supporting the Town's sustainability and climate action goals
- Upgraded sidewalks along Main Street improving pedestrian infrastructure
- Net addition of (9) trees (11 added, 2 removed) enhancing streetscape and environmental quality
- Street-level engagement through storefronts, walkways, and outdoor seating areas

## 6. WAIVER REQUEST

### 6.1 Bylaw Requirement

Section 5.6.7.2 of the Zoning Bylaw requires that the gross floor area dedicated to commercial space within a MU project shall be not less than twenty-five percent (25%) of gross floor area of the project, after spaces for access, circulation, egress, mechanicals, and utilities are netted from the calculation.

### 6.2 Waiver Requested

The Applicant respectfully requests a waiver pursuant to Section 5.6.7.2 to allow 2,400 SF of commercial space, representing approximately 9.85% of the net area, rather than the required 25%. This waiver request is consistent with the CPDC's authority under Section 5.6 to grant waivers.

### 6.3 Justification for Waiver

This waiver request serves the primary intent of the Bylaw, to help preserve and grow Reading businesses, while enabling superior project outcomes. As stated in 5.6.7.2.b:

*CPDC may waive or allow flexibility for certain dimensional or the requirements for a Mixed-Use project that provides space for existing commercial tenants, so as to maintain current viable businesses on the premises post-redevelopment.*

The Applicant has collaborated with the existing first-floor tenant, Bay State Physical Therapy, a longtime Reading business, to secure a more accessible, modern, and expanded facility at Montage, thus not only maintaining but expanding this business post-redevelopment.

### 6.4 Waiver Benefits

1. **Business Retention and Growth:** Bay State Physical Therapy has served the Reading community for over ten years and has outgrown its current space. Their care model requires modernization, and this waiver allows them to relocate to an expanded, accessible, modern facility while remaining in Reading.
2. **Right-Sized Commercial Space:** The 2,400 SF provided is appropriately sized for a variety of uses. Better functionality and dimensioning help attract businesses with longevity rather than struggling to fill oversized spaces that may remain vacant or attract marginal tenants.
3. **Enhanced Streetscape Engagement:** The proposed design enables semi-covered outdoor seating and architectural features that activate the streetscape, creating the vibrant pedestrian environment that the mixed-use provision seeks to foster.
4. **Improved Configurations:** The waiver allows for superior unit configurations, an improved unit mix responsive to demand, and bicycle storage that amplifies transit-oriented development goals.
5. **Superior Massing:** The design achieves superior massing, including the substantial 4<sup>th</sup> floor step-back and varied front setbacks that reduce perceived bulk and create interest from the street.

## 6.5 Lessons from Strada on Main

The Applicant's experience developing Strada has informed Montage's design. That process revealed tensions between the Bylaw's requirements and its underlying goals. We share these observations as experiential evidence that the requested waiver will produce superior outcomes.

### The Mathematical Squeeze

Four requirements interact to create an unforgiving constraint:

- (1) Commercial space must be at least 25% of net area
- (2) Residential is permitted only on upper floors
- (3) Height is limited to four stories
- (4) Design Best Practices recommend a fourth-floor step-back

Density concentrates on floors 2 & 3, while floor 1 must maximize viable commercial space while programming necessary building systems. The result is a restrictive balancing act limiting the building.

### Lesson 1: Unit Mix & Design Impacts

Rather than spread units evenly across 3 floors, Strada was forced to cram more units into lower levels producing ineffective, impractical configurations:

- Living areas just 10-11 feet wide extending 25+ feet deep
- L-shaped units requiring built-in furniture because standard pieces won't fit
- Units wedged with galley-style living areas and limited storage
- Nearly 70% of units are 1 BR, not a market response, but a geometric inevitability

**Community Impact:** A building two-thirds one-bedroom represents a missed opportunity under the Housing Production Plan as it fails to serve a wider audience and add to the community's housing mix. Awkward units lacking adequate storage and circulation lease reluctantly and turn over frequently.

**Montage Improvement:** The waiver enables properly proportioned units and a balanced mix serving broader household types and supporting longer tenancies.

### Lesson 2: Commercial Space Configuration

Maximizing ground-floor commercial means configuring space around building systems such as stairs, elevators, mechanicals, mail and package operations, while preserving continuous commercial frontage. Front or side residential entries would bifurcate commercial space, making it exceptionally difficult for businesses to configure. This produced irregular geometries that limit uses the property can attract.

**Community Impact:** Reading's Economic Development Plan identifies a shortage of quality commercial space. Poorly configured space doesn't address this shortage; it creates inventory that may stay vacant or attract marginal tenants, undermining community goals.

**Montage Improvement:** The 2,400 SF commercial space was designed around tenant needs: improved geometry, appropriate proportions, flexibility for one or two tenants, engaging entries along Main St, accessible parking, outdoor seating, and clear distinction between residential and commercial entry points while programming building systems on the first floor.

### Lesson 3: Resident Amenities

The Bylaw's net area calculation excludes circulation and mechanicals but not common area amenities, forcing designs to eliminate features that support quality of life. Strada has no tenant amenity spaces, lacking even basic features like interior bicycle parking and tenant storage.

**Community Impact:** Amenities attract residents, improve quality of life, encourage alternative transportation, and command higher rents that support further investment. Strada cannot compete with contemporary properties offering bicycle storage, co-working spaces, gyms, and clubhouses.

**Montage Improvement:** The waiver enables a rooftop terrace, providing outdoor space in an area lacking nearby parks, and bicycle storage to promote alternative transportation. While modest, these amenities balance bylaw requirements with practical reality and support broader community goals.

### Summary of Lessons

Strada Challenge	Community Impact	Montage Solution
Forced design parameters created configuration issues	Transient residents; doesn't serve families; misses Housing Plan goals	Balanced mix & livable units, with retention in mind
Commercial carved around systems, forced to maximize gross area; wrong proportions, poor configuration	Doesn't address quality space shortage, higher potential for vacant storefronts	Right-sized 2,400 SF design compelling for many uses
Zero amenities	Can't compete; more traffic; more turnover	Rooftop terrace, bike storage

We are proud of Strada as the first project approved under the 2019 bylaw amendment and believe it will serve Reading exceptionally, but Montage reflects lessons learned. This waiver request is about achieving better outcomes by designing to the Bylaw's intention.

## 7. SITE DESIGN

### 7.1 Site Plan Overview

The project plan maintains the spirit of the existing site orientation while making improvements to streetscape activation and pedestrian engagement. The result is a site plan that provides a surplus of two parking spaces while delivering meaningful improvements to the corridor.

Land Area	33,554 SF
Building Footprint	4,724 SF
Curb Cuts	1 (existing location)
Parking Spaces	40 provided (38 required)
Compact Spaces	30%
Loading Spaces	1
Net Tree Addition	+9 (11 added, 2 removed)
Lot Coverage	14%



### 7.2 Connectivity Improvements

The proposed site design eliminates the existing fence at Perfecto's Cafe, promoting pedestrian connectivity between the properties and creating a more cohesive commercial district feel. This connectivity supports the shared parking efficiencies inherent in mixed-use development and encourages cross-patronage between businesses.

### 7.3 Stormwater Management

The project incorporates comprehensive stormwater management measures designed to meet or exceed applicable regulatory requirements. The stormwater management system will include appropriate best management practices to control runoff quality and quantity, with detailed engineering provided in the accompanying civil engineering plans.

## 8. BUILDING DESIGN

### 8.1 Architectural Character

The proposed building consists of a four-story structure with podium construction. It features 24 residential units on floors two through four, and 2,400 SF of commercial space at the street level. The building's design draws on architectural elements from Downtown Reading while incorporating modern, energy-efficient materials and construction techniques.

The building massing seeks to create visual interest through changes along the vertical plane, with a generous fourth-floor step-back that substantially reduces the sense of verticality and the building's perceived bulk from street level. Varied front setbacks further articulate the facade and building mass.

### 8.2 Exterior Materials

The exterior material palette has been carefully selected to complement the character and history of Reading while providing durability and contemporary aesthetic appeal:

- Prefabricated aluminum balconies in black finish
- Equitone Inspira wood-effect panels for warmth and texture
- Equitone Linea panels in dark gray and light gray
- Aluminum storefront system in black for commercial frontage
- Centria-style rib corrugated metal panels in rich black

### 8.3 Floor-by-Floor Programming

- **Ground Floor:** 2,400 SF of commercial space divisible up to two units, with dedicated retail entry on Main. Outdoor seating activates the streetscape. Building support includes interior trash room (eliminating dumpsters), package/mail receiving, fire protection, switchgear, and bicycle storage.
- **Floors 2/3:** Each floor contains nine (9) residential units with a mix of 1 BR & 2 BR layouts. Select units feature private balconies. Efficient circulation via elevator and stair access.
- **Floor 4:** Six (6) units with generous step-back. Shared rooftop terrace provides much needed outdoor space in an area lacking public space, as well as adding architectural character.

## 9. ZONING COMPLIANCE AND DESIGN GUIDELINES

### 9.1 South Main Street Design Guidelines Compliance

The project has been designed to address best practices established for the South Main corridor:

Guideline	Project Response
Site Design	Meets goals for parking, sidewalk design, landscaping, lighting, drainage, utilities
Location on Site	Engages streetscape, located close to Main St, 4th floor stepped back substantially, scaled in proportion to nearby buildings
Entries	Commercial entry along Main St emphasized for engagement; residential entrances directed to rear aligned with parking
Facade	Engages/enlivens streetscape through facade articulations & material changes
Materials	Materials fit with character/history of town & align with corridor context

### 9.2 Comparison to Previously Approved Projects

This project represents the third application under the 2019 bylaw amendment targeting mixed-use development in this corridor. The subject project falls within the range of approved projects:

Metric	Subject	250-262 Main	346-348 Main
Residential Units	24	30	12
Commercial %	10%	25%	6.7%
Lot Size (SF)	33,554	40,511	10,343
Units Per Acre	31.16	32.36	50.54
Net Parking (vs. req.)	+2	+7	-2
FAR	< 1.0	< 1.0	> 1.5
Lot Coverage	33%	24%	58%

## 10. TRAFFIC IMPACT ANALYSIS

### 10.1 Traffic Study Summary

The Applicant engaged a Traffic Impact Assessment (TIA) to evaluate how the proposed development will affect vehicle traffic generation and operations in the study area.

### 10.2 Trip Generation Summary

Time Period	Residential	Retail	Total
Weekday Daily	144	196	340
AM Peak Hour	9	14	23
PM Peak Hour	12	24	36

### 10.3 Key Findings

- No apparent safety deficiencies were noted with respect to the motor vehicle crash history
- Traffic-volume increases are anticipated to range from 1.3% to 1.8%, during peak periods.
- Lines of sight at the project site driveway exceed the recommended minimum sight distances.
- Maximum increase in overall intersection delay of less than five seconds.
- Under 2032 Build conditions, movements exiting the project site driveway operate at Level of Service D with residual vehicle queuing of up to one vehicle.

### 10.4 Alternative Transportation

- **Bicycle Storage:** Interior + outdoor bicycle storage for residents and visitors
- **Transit Proximity:** 11-minute walk to MBTA Commuter Rail providing direct access to Boston
- **Walkability:** Improved sidewalks connecting to Downtown Reading and commercial amenities
- **EV Infrastructure:** Public electric vehicle charging stations to support electric vehicle adoption

## 11. PARKING MANAGEMENT AND OPERATIONS

### 11.1 Parking Supply

The project provides forty (40) on-site parking spaces, exceeding the thirty-eight (38) required by the bylaw. The parking configuration maintains a layout and traffic flow like the existing property while accommodating the increased development intensity.

Total Parking Spaces	40 (2 above requirement)
Compact Spaces	30%
Loading Spaces	1 dedicated, oversized
Curb Cuts	1 (existing location)
EV Charging	Public EV charging stations

### 11.2 Allocation Strategy

The forty on-site parking spaces will be allocated as follows:

1. **Residential Assigned Spaces (24):** Each residential unit will receive one assigned parking space, located primarily at the rear of the site, numbered and assigned at lease signing.
2. **Commercial Spaces (8):** Designated spaces near the commercial entrance will serve commercial tenants. These spaces will be clearly signed for commercial use during business hours.
3. **Shared/Overflow Spaces (8):** Remaining spaces will function as shared parking, available to visitors during evenings and weekends and to commercial overflow during peak business hours.

### 11.3 Complementary Demand Patterns

The uses exhibit demand patterns that support shared utilization, a benefit of MU development:

- **Commercial Peak (Weekdays 8 AM - 6 PM):** During these hours, most residents are at work, leaving residential spaces underutilized and available for commercial overflow if needed.
- **Residential Peak (6 PM - 10 PM + weekends):** When residents return home, the commercial space is closed or operating at lower capacity, freeing spaces for overflow.

### 11.4 Management and Enforcement

- **Signage:** Signage will identify residential spaces, commercial spaces, and shared/visitor spaces. Wayfinding signage at the entrance will direct commercial visitors to appropriate parking areas.
- **Residential Permits:** Residents will receive parking permits or access devices for their assigned spaces. Lease agreements will clearly state parking rules and restrictions.
- **Management:** The property management company will monitor parking utilization and address conflicts. A designated contact will be available to resolve parking issues.
- **Commercial Coordination:** Commercial tenants will be provided guidelines on parking and will communicate parking locations to guests and customers.

## 12. OPERATIONAL IMPACTS

Montage has been designed to minimize impacts on neighboring properties and the community through careful attention to building operations, service functions, and management protocols.

### 12.1 Loading and Deliveries

- **Loading:** One on-site loading space accommodates residential move-ins, furniture deliveries, and commercial shipments without impacting Main Street traffic flow.
- **Delivery Hours:** Commercial deliveries will be scheduled during regular business hours (8 AM - 6 PM weekdays) to minimize disturbances to residents and neighbors.
- **Move-In Coordination:** Residential move-ins will be coordinated and staged through property management to prevent conflicts and ensure loading area availability.

### 12.2 Trash and Recycling

- **Interior Trash Room:** Waste and recycling will be contained in an interior trash room, eliminating outdoor dumpsters and associated visual, odor, and noise impacts.
- **Collection Schedule:** Waste pickups will occur during daytime hours, consistent with regulations.
- **Recycling Program:** The building will manage a comprehensive recycling program with marked containers and resident education materials.

### 12.3 Building Security and Access

- **Secure Entry:** Residential areas secured with access control, separate from commercial entries
- **Surveillance:** Security cameras will monitor common areas, parking, and building entrances
- **Property Management:** Property management will provide responsive oversight

### 12.4 Commercial Tenant Operations

- **Operating Hours:** Commercial tenants will operate as allowed by community regulations.
- **Lease Requirements:** Lease agreements will require compliance with operating hour restrictions, use limitations, and parking management.

### 12.5 Lighting

- **Parking Area Lighting:** LED fixtures will provide adequate safety illumination while using guards to prevent light spillage onto neighboring properties.
- **Building Lighting:** Exterior building lighting will be modest and directed downward, enhancing the streetscape without creating glare.
- **Photometric Compliance:** A photometric plan demonstrates compliance with lighting standards.

### 12.6 Mechanical Equipment and Noise

- **HVAC:** Rooftop equipment will be selected for quiet operation & comply with noise ordinances
- **Building Construction:** Building will be constructed with sound-attenuating materials/techniques

## 13. CONCLUSION

Montage at 281 Main Street represents a carefully designed, community-focused development that advances Reading's planning goals while respecting the character of the South Main Street corridor. The project delivers multiple community benefits:

- Adds 24 housing units, including 3 Affordable units supporting Safe Harbor status
- Provides 2,400 SF of Class A commercial space addressing the documented shortage of quality commercial space in Reading
- Retains and expands Bay State Physical Therapy, a longtime Reading business
- Activates Priority Development Area 2B with transit-oriented development
- Incorporates lessons learned from Strada to deliver superior design outcomes
- Enhances infrastructure with sidewalk upgrades, EV charging stations, and streetscape plantings
- Exceeds parking requirements and promotes alternative transportation
- Complies with South Main Street Design Guidelines
- Generates minimal traffic impact as confirmed by independent traffic study
- Substantially increases the property's assessed value and property tax contributions

The requested waiver under Section 5.6.7.2 serves the purpose of the Bylaw by enabling quality housing, occupied commercial space with a committed tenant, and appropriate amenities. The project falls within the range of previously approved developments in this corridor and represents responsible, community-oriented development. As such, the Applicant respectfully requests approval of this Special Permit application, including the waiver under Section 5.6.7.2, and looks forward to working collaboratively with the Planning Board and community to bring this project to fruition.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Saverio Fulciniti". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'S'.

**281 Reading, LLC, Applicant**