

Zoning Workshop Debrief, Takeaways & Ideas

Part 1: VISIONING – 20 years from now...

Characteristics / Amenities:

- vibrant; active day and evening
- pedestrian & bike-friendly
- “best places to live never have enough parking” – accommodate alternate modes
- streetscape improvements (i.e., wider sidewalks)
- ease of access for parking & traffic
- inviting architecture
- people-friendly
- more density to support businesses
- open feeling versus canyon-like feeling
- reduced scale of buildings

Business-Related:

- local grocery store
- more than retail
- mix of restaurants
- live/work spaces
- strong chamber and business sector leaders
- outdoor seating
- rent controls/limits to keep unique tenants
- shop local campaigns
- activate vacant retail spaces
- more parking for commercial uses

Entertainment/Arts/Culture:

- entertainment venues & fun – theater, bowling, etc.
- interactive art installations, public venues, cultural center
- murals, interactive sculptures
- cultural district that draws people from the region
- Arts organizations, galleries
- rethink: movies in park vs movie theater

Natural & Historic:

- preservation of natural & historic features
- more trees, gardens, greenery, parklets, pathways
- breaks/spaces along storefronts
- active open spaces
- pedestrian path to Walkers Brook Drive / Route 28
- lower density & more green space
- space to breathe and circulate

Part 2: Focus Groups

Lot Coverage Focus Group

Question 1: What lessons have we learned from recent developments?

AND Question 2: What is the ultimate goal of reducing lot coverage?

Comments (loosely grouped by topic):

-why did board let 100% lot coverage happen?

→ education about factors considered when 40R adopted locally

-feeling that developers take advantage of staff and CPDC (i.e. via the waiver process)

→ education about how waiver process works

-currently, buildings define lot coverage; parking and other impervious is excluded

-reducing lot coverage is most credible way of gaining open space

-guidelines for reduced lot coverage to make the open space usable for pedestrians

-desire to reduce lot coverage to encourage pass throughs, open space, plantings, seating

-guidelines needed for open space so it's usable and attractive

-suggestion for 25' setbacks w/out increased height

-facades need more visual breaks

-we are oversubscribing parking

→ education about lot coverage, interplay between dimensional requirements, competing priorities

→ define & address Lot Coverage in Zoning and Design Guidelines

→ define & address Open Space in Zoning and Design Guidelines (in coordination with Lot Coverage)

Question 3: Are there other ways to achieve this goal?

Comments:

-zoning doesn't determine design of buildings, only parameters; some sites would warrant additional story in exchange for bigger setbacks and more open space

→ education about waiver process, need for flexibility in zoning

-Lexington has deep sidewalks with benches; Lexington owns these sidewalks

→ include wider sidewalks that use portion of private land in open space calculation?

→ have step-backs occur at grade to carve out openings, not at raised level; address in Design Guidelines

-“Need to decide setbacks & guidelines and not use existing buildings for future regulations.”

→ clarification needed from CPDC about what this comment is getting at

Open Space & Pathways Focus Group

Question 1: What constrains creation of Open Space?

Comments:

- developers want **revenue** generators
 - parking**; cars are dominant
 - privatization** of lots/spaces; proper management, **maintenance** (i.e., municipal costs, sidewalk plowing), sizing and use of green areas
 - abutting uses** not favorable or inviting to green space; lack of existing connections
 - lack of strong **design guideline** language; idea to require permeable pavement (i.e. lattice concrete)
 - equitability** and **access**
- establish stronger language and parameters for Open Space in Zoning and/or Design Guidelines including materials, responsibility for maintenance, ways to formalize and encourage public access (if appropriate), location in coordination w/abutting uses, location on site (i.e. elevated vs at grade), etc.

Question 2: How do we envision open spaces being used?

Comments:

- connections to larger and existing areas (i.e., Birch Meadow, Lake Q), and destinations via greenbelt, sidewalks, paths, trails, loops
 - public art, sculpture, fountains, water features, trash/recycling
 - tree lines along major corridors, string of pocket parks
 - community gardens, farmer's market, festivals, concerts, active performance and community uses; centered around commercial uses
 - welcoming design, serenity or socialization, quiet area/road to take pets or family
- Use this feedback to help define Open Space

Question 3: Creative ways to achieve this vision at the lot level or collectively beyond the lot?

Comments:

- stronger language in zoning and design guidelines; more design tools
 - signage and wayfinding to important areas; sidewalk enhancement
 - stronger plan coordination
 - reduce need for parking with transit and greenery in depot area; expand bike access & parking
 - reimagine it incorporated into other uses (i.e. elevated green space over parking); integrate commercial and open space areas
 - reconfigure parking areas (i.e., CVS lot, Ash Street)
 - increase utilization: better information and maps, walkability index
- establish stronger language and parameters for Open Space in Zoning and/or Design Guidelines including materials, responsibility for maintenance, ways to formalize and encourage public access (if appropriate), location in coordination w/abutting uses, location on site (i.e. elevated vs at grade), etc.

Parking Focus Group

Question 1: Eliminate or modify the commercial exemption; what are the implications?

Comments:

- if we change it, how will that impact existing buildings and sites? It won't...?
- will removing exemption restrict what types of uses/developments happen on a site?
- small parcels hard to develop; parking requirement will make it harder
- parking requirements reinforce social inequity; need to be aware of unconscious bias
- we need to think beyond the individual lot and development; think of whole town and bigger picture
- look at large lots on periphery of downtown (i.e., houses of worship)
 - General sentiment that we don't want to get rid of exemption and force burden of parking back onto every parcel; need to find creative long-term solutions to parking management
- desirable uses need parking; parking critical to success of commercial businesses
- hard for developers to determine parking demand without a retailer
- impression that Brande Court Lot used dramatically less now than when it was Atlantic Supermarket
 - use matters! predicting parking demand and municipal lot burden is hard given unknowns (i.e. business tenant, success, hours of operation)
- stores have no control over where patrons park; patrons want to park in front or will leave
 - education about parking regulations, utilization, behavior
 - fix parking regulations first
- parking data/utilization during pandemic not instructive for major parking changes
 - wait for pandemic to end to assess demand & utilization

Focus Groups – Takeaways & Ideas

1. Education needed about:
 - a. 40R adoption in Town, 40R vs 40B in terms of local control
 - b. Zoning vs Design Guidelines; Variances vs Waivers - it seems there is a real need to understand waiver process, flexibility & negotiation
 - c. Market factors, balancing design guidelines w/economics
 - d. Lot Coverage – interplay with other dimensional controls; what counts; existing lot coverages downtown
 - e. Parking – regulatory landscape, utilization, behavior
 - f. Parking 300' Exemption – what it is, how it applies
 - g. How do we have it all? Parking, open space, and investment in Town

2. Ideas for Zoning Bylaw (ZBL) & Design Guidelines (DG)
 - a. Define Open Space in ZBL 10.5 and DG, add it to list of allowed uses in 10.5, establish parameters for it:
 - i. materials, responsibility for maintenance, ways to formalize and encourage public access (if appropriate), location in coordination w/abutting uses, location on site (i.e. elevated vs at grade), etc.
 - b. Define Lot Coverage in ZBL 10.5; address it in DG
 - c. Look at façade breaks and step-backs (at-grade) in DG
 - d. Dimensional Requirements:
 - i. Require a minimum lot size for 40R redevelopment?
 - ii. Establish a maximum lot coverage and/or minimum open space %?
 - iii. Require 10' setbacks from minimum of two property lines (let developers decide which ones in order to allow siting of building and open space as is sensible given abutting buildings/uses)?
 - ➔ Remember: CPDC has ability to waive strict compliance with dimensional requirements if a development warrants it and waiver provisions are met
 - e. Parking – fix regulatory landscape first; gather new utilization data once pandemic ends, and then reassess if zoning changes are needed