

LITTLETON STATION VILLAGE VISION PLAN



Excluding Appendix



JANUARY 2020



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This project was funded by MassHousing and the Town of Littleton

LITTLETON STATION VILLAGE VISION PLAN

January 2020

Prepared for the Town of Littleton

by
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Littleton Station Village Vision Plan

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
BACKGROUND	3
STUDY AREA	3
TOPOGRAPHY AND INVENTORY OF NATURAL RESOURCES	8
DEVELOPMENT CONSTRAINTS	9
TOWN SNAPSHOT	13
POPULATION	13
HOUSEHOLDS	15
COST OF COMMUNITY SERVICES	18
MARKET OVERVIEW	20
KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	20
MARKET METRICS	21
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT	30
STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, AND OPPORTUNITIES	31
SURVEYS	33
FRAMEWORK FOR DEVELOPMENT	35
DEVELOPMENT NODES	37
ILLUSTRATIVE PLANS	37
ZONING IMPLEMENTATION	41
APPENDIX	43
A.	COST OF COMMUNITY SERVICES ANALYSIS
B.	DRAFT CHAPTER 40R ZONING AND APPLICATION TO DHCD
C.	MIXED-USE CHARACTER EXAMPLES
D.	COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT DOCUMENTATION
E.	CASE STUDIES
F.	COMMUNITY SURVEY SUMMARY
G.	INTERIM REPORT (JULY 2019)

INTRODUCTION

Through Littleton's Master Plan process, our community pledged to work together to ensure that Littleton remains a place that values its history and character and preserves a sense of community. And as our town grows and our landscape changes, we must remember the needs of our children, our older adults, families, employees, and others by making sure Littleton has opportunities for residents of all ages, backgrounds, and incomes to have suitable, good-quality housing.



We need to ensure as we grow that Littleton provides a range of housing for people who want to continue to reside here, work here, or become Littleton residents.

Nestled between Route 495 and Route 2, Littleton is a desirable place to live not only because of its location, but also because it's a welcoming community with an exemplary school system, successful athletic, theater and music programs, low crime rate, and a desirable population. As stated in the Master Plan, we need to ensure as we grow that Littleton provides a range of housing for people who want to continue to reside here, work here or become Littleton residents. Despite this vision, however, Littleton's population of young adults ages 20-34 is declining while its older adult population struggles to remain in Littleton due to the increased cost of living and lack of housing options to downsize. So, how do we attract and retain young residents in our community and meet the needs of our growing population of older adults? It's simple. **We follow the recommendations in the Master Plan.**

Littleton is a thriving town, but in order to remain so in the future, we must provide a variety of housing that meets the needs of different age groups and is affordable to people of different socio-economic backgrounds. Littleton currently has many single-family homes but lacks the variety of housing types that can meet the needs of many people already living in our community as well as those who cannot afford to live here although they work here or have family that reside here. To be clear, the lack of affordable housing in Littleton affects not only our older and younger demographics, but also the people we rely upon every day including our first responders, highway laborers, school teachers, health care aids, service technicians, and wait staff.

Littleton will continue to grow and the challenge we currently face is how to grow strategically by encouraging development in logical areas. To guide us through this transition, we

need to look at areas where development makes sense including Littleton Common and the Foster-Taylor street adjacent to the train station ("Littleton Station"). Littleton Station particularly offers the unique opportunity to not only create affordable housing, but also new jobs while improving the connection to this area of Littleton with safe and pleasant bike and walking paths, and public transportation.

Over the past year the Littleton Station working group has contemplated, researched and imagined the potential development of Littleton Station. Through many meetings, community forums and surveys, we have formulated a vision of what "could be" for this part of Littleton. Bringing this vision to fruition, however, depends on a strong partnership between the Planning Board, developers, elected officials, and most importantly the residents of Littleton. As a community we must ensure that we provide opportunities to people trying to build their life as an adult and adults who are trying to preserve the life they have built, and such opportunities can be created at Littleton Station.

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BACKGROUND



Littleton has been working to implement its Master Plan ever since it was adopted by the Planning Board in 2017. The Master Plan's priorities include a focus on locations with significant opportunities for economic growth:

- Littleton Common/Great Road Corridor,
- Littleton Depot/Littleton Industrial Park, and
- The MBTA Station/ Taylor Street/Foster Street intersection.

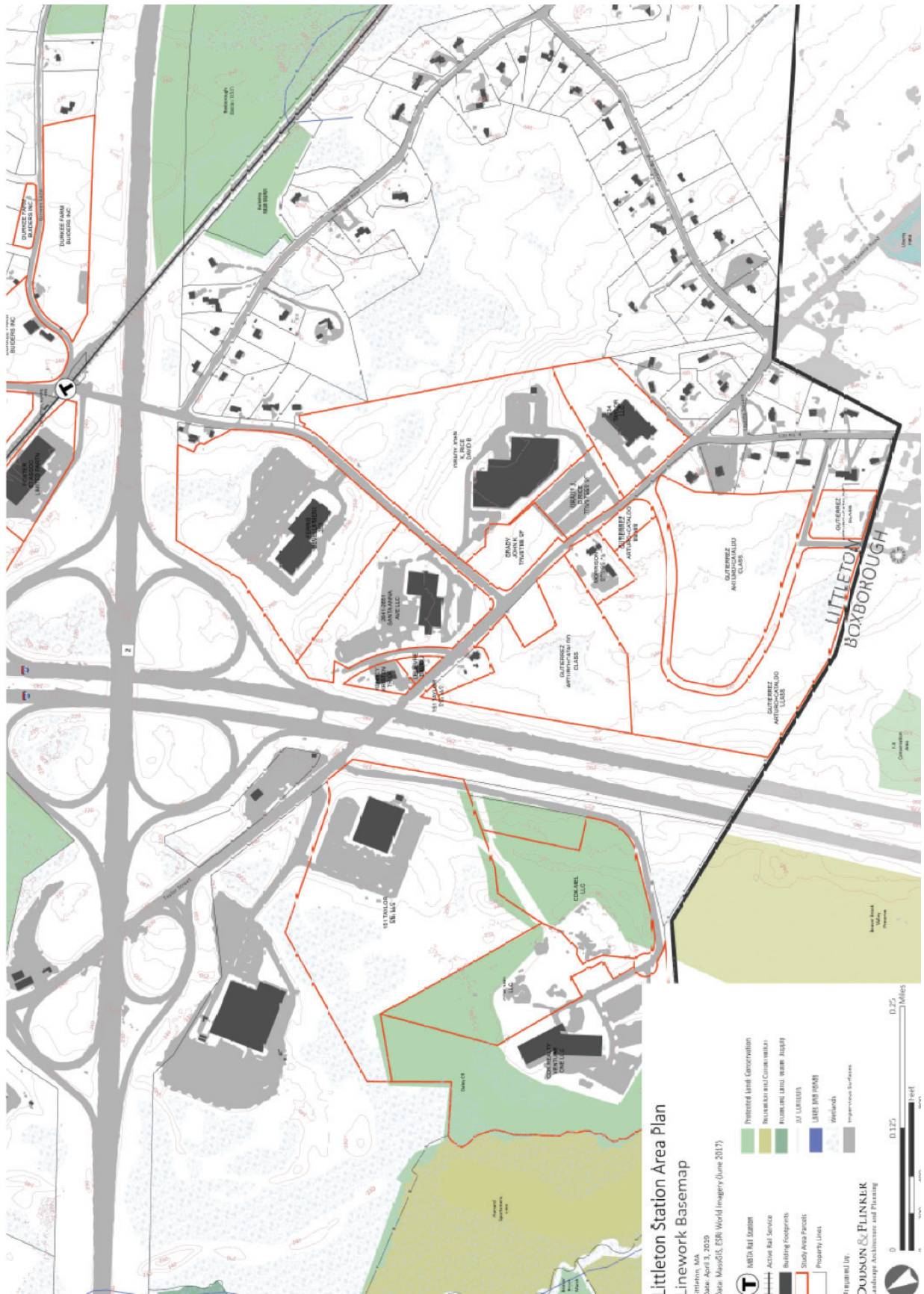
These areas encompass most of the land presently zoned for commercial and industrial use. However, the planning process revealed concerns about whether the current zoning works well both for the town and private property owners. Accordingly, the Master Plan called for further study of these areas with the goal of identifying opportunities to foster economic vitality and housing diversity while protecting Littleton's small-town character and quality of life.

The Master Plan Implementation Committee (MPIC) embraced Littleton Common as their first project. They have continued to lead the Littleton Common planning process through a major rezoning initiative that is expected to reach town meeting in May 2020. While the Littleton Common effort was starting up, the Commonwealth publicized a new grant program in 2018 to increase housing development, especially in the eastern part of the state where a majority of recent job growth has occurred. Littleton applied for and received a grant from MassHousing's Planning for Housing Production program in order to move forward with planning for development in the vicinity of Littleton's MBTA Station – the area referred to as **Littleton Station Village** throughout this report. MassHousing selected Barrett Planning Group to lead the study, and Barrett Planning Group subsequently retained Dodson & Flinker and RKG Associates for support. The consultants working on a Complete Streets design project for Foster Street, Fuss & O'Neill, Inc., also assisted with this study by providing information and co-facilitating a public participation event on April 5-6, 2019.

■ STUDY AREA

The Littleton Station Village study area is located in the south end of Littleton about 2.5 miles from Littleton Common and adjacent to the cloverleaf interchange of Interstate 495 and Massachusetts Route 2 (Map 2-1). It is home to the Littleton/Rt 495 MBTA station on the Fitchburg rail line, which brings commuters 30 miles to and from North Station in Boston. Easily accessible by car from the surrounding region, the Littleton train station has seen steady increases in ridership over the last decade, especially after it was rebuilt (2011-2013) and improvements to the line itself, including double-tracking and new

MAP 2.1. LITTLETON STATION STUDY AREA



signals, were completed in 2016. Morning boardings grew from around 200 in 2012 to nearly 500 in 2018. In concert with the station improvements, the MBTA built 195 parking spaces on the north side of the station. On any given weekday, the MBTA lot is fully occupied by 7 AM, with an additional 15-20 “improved” spaces for commuters who arrived after the lot was full.



“Improved” parking at the Littleton MBTA station. (Photo courtesy of MAPC.)

The location and combination of regional road and rail access provides an extraordinary opportunity for Littleton to promote a more coherent, economically successful future for the area. By focusing on transit-oriented development, the town can encourage a lively mix of homes, businesses, and amenities within an attractive, walkable neighborhood.

Until the regional highways were built in the 1950s and 60s, the study area consisted of a rural landscape of scattered farms, forests and orchards, overlain on rolling topography that drains numerous brooks and wetlands. The area was linked to the north via Foster Street to Littleton Center and the Common, while Taylor Street led northwest to the train depot at West Littleton. For many years, this part of town had its own schoolhouse and remained a quiet country neighborhood. While remnant farms remain, improved road and highway access catalyzed the construction of new homes on frontage lots and the development of new subdivision roads, a process that continues with the recent buildout of the Durkee Farm subdivision across Foster Street from the train station.

To take advantage of direct access to Rte. 2 and I-495, Littleton rezoned more than a square mile of land on either side of the interchange for industrial development. This led to construction of office and research buildings housing a variety of technology firms that have come and gone. They continue to evolve in response to ongoing changes in the regional economy. However, much of the remaining land in the Industrial zone is comprised of undevelopable wetlands along the Beaver Brook, the broad highway rights-of-way, and areas too steep to support construction.

Sliced and diced by highway, road, rail and wetland corridors, the study area is divided into numerous often unrelated pieces. There is a danger that as the remaining vacant parcels are developed, the somewhat random, uncoordinated pattern of existing development will become even more fragmented. However, the location and combination of regional road and rail access provides an extraordinary opportunity for Littleton to pro-

mote a more coherent, economically successful future for the area. By focusing on transit-oriented development, the town can encourage a lively mix of homes, businesses, and amenities within an attractive, walkable neighborhood – designed for people who would rather walk, bike and use transit instead of cars. This can help meet Littleton’s needs for more diverse housing and increase business opportunities, while limiting impacts on current residents and preserving the rural setting.

The goal of this study is to map out the physical opportunities and constraints at work in the study area, build on this understanding through a public engagement process, and together explore opportunities for the future. This report describes a process of site analysis and assessment using maps and other tools, as well as reviewing citizen input received through public workshops, on-line surveys and working group meetings. The final result is a conceptual framework for potential redevelopment of the site as a walkable mixed-use village. While it will be up to residents, business owners and the changing marketplace to determine the outcome of this process years from now, we can today identify guiding principles, policies and regulations that can shape implementation of the Town’s vision for the area and make sure it stays on the right path.

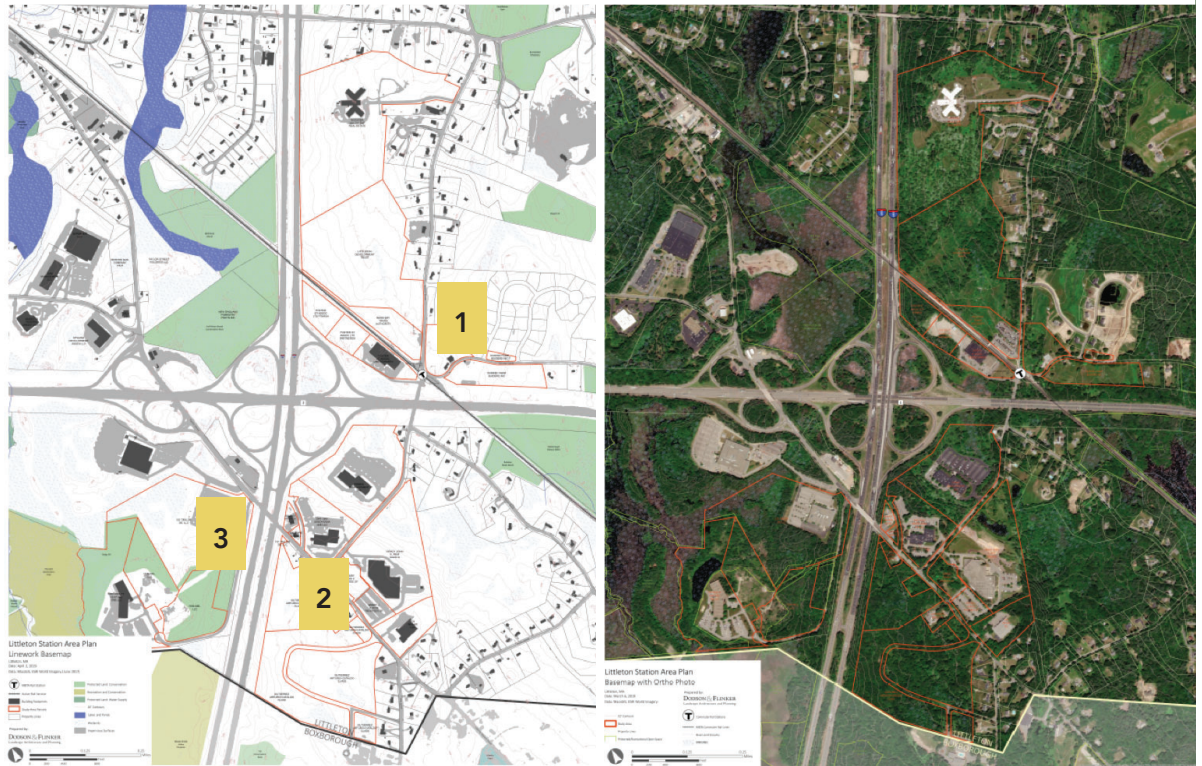
CLUSTERS WITHIN THE STUDY AREA

The boundaries of the study area include much of the Industrial-A Zoning District, centered on the I-495/Rt. 2 Interchange, as well as several adjoining vacant or underutilized parcels in the surrounding residential district. With the highways as major dividers limiting access between them, these parcels fall into three general clusters, with access off of either Foster or Taylor Streets (Map 2-2):

- first, the area immediately adjacent to the train station and extending north parallel to Foster Street to include the Nashoba Valley Life Care Center, comprising about 100 acres;
- second, the area surrounding the intersection of Foster and Taylor street, about 92 acres; and
- third, an area south of Taylor street and west of I-495, totaling about 73 acres.

Existing development around the train station consists mostly of detached single-family homes along Foster St., including the recently completed Durkee Farm subdivision. These are buffered from I-495 by a 34-acre wooded parcel north of the train station, and by the undeveloped portion of the 42.7 acre parcel occupied by the Life Care Center of Nashoba Valley, an assisted living facility at the northern end of the study area. Southwest of the train station, immediately across the tracks, is a light industrial facility run by Stoneyard, a manufacturer of native veneer stone, and two undeveloped lots which can be accessed through its parking lot. These three lots are immediately adjacent to the Rt 2/I-495 cloverleaf.

The area near the Foster and Taylor Street intersection is dominated by four corporate office buildings, each characterized by a single large multi-story building surrounded by parking lots and buffered by woods at the edge of the property. These buildings are owned by (or leased to) a variety of electronics, software and other businesses, including a marijuana-growing facility. The parcels are abutted by residential streets with single-family frontage lots, which continue south across the town boundary into Boxborough.

MAP 2-2. STUDY AREA CLUSTERS

West of I-495 the area is dominated by office, light industrial, and distribution facilities, each comprising a large building and parking lot, for the most part surrounded by streams and wetlands associated by the Beaver Brook. There appears to be little vacant, developable land associated with these parcels, so any change in use will likely involve redeveloping existing buildings and parking lots.

TOPOGRAPHY AND INVENTORY OF NATURAL RESOURCES

The Littleton Station study area generally follows a ridge running north and south from Littleton Center to Boxborough (Map 3-1, next page). To the east lies Long Pond Swamp, which as the name implies drains north into Long Pond, and other streams that drain southeast into Boxborough. To the west the ridge drops into the Beaver Brook Valley. Foster Street follows the ridge as it winds south from the Town Center, climbing from an elevation of around 250 feet to a high point

around 340 feet just south of Harwood Ave. From there it drops almost 90 feet to the railroad tracks, crosses a stream, then climbs again to an elevation of 330 feet at the intersection of Foster and Taylor Streets. Taylor street connects northwest across the Beaver Brook Valley to Littleton Depot. To the south, it follows high ground into Boxborough.



The natural barriers formed by the brooks and swamps were reinforced by the layout of the railroad and highways, which of necessity avoided the high ground and followed the edge of the marshes (or filled them in). As a result, the study area is divided into a northerly half rising towards Harwood Ave, and a southerly half centered on the hilltop at the intersection of Foster and Taylor Streets. These topographic and man-made features make it difficult to create any additional roadway connections that could more effectively connect the various properties together.

This rolling and varied topography has provided the neighborhood with a rich natural landscape of brooks, ponds, wooded swamp, open marsh, and upland forest, as well as historic orchards and other agricultural land. State surveys have mapped out extensive areas of wetland, especially in the Beaver Brook Valley. Large areas of these have also been listed as Priority Habitats of Rare Species by the Commonwealth's Natural Heritage Program, and are included in the BioMap assessment as important links in the regional open space system.

The Beaver Brook Valley is also important as a source of public water supply. The entire valley south of West Littleton is identified as an aquifer, and the Dept. of Environmental

Protection's Zone II Wellhead protection area includes almost the entire area between I-495 and Whitcomb Ave at the base of Oak Hill. The Zone II represents all of the surface areas draining into the aquifer that feeds the Town's Whitcomb Avenue wells, which supply 45% of the town's drinking water. East of Foster Street, smaller brooks and their associated wetlands gather stormwater runoff from the roadway and adjacent properties and drain north and south. These areas are less extensive than those along the Beaver Brook, but are important on a neighborhood level for flood mitigation and the movement of wildlife. (Map 3.1)

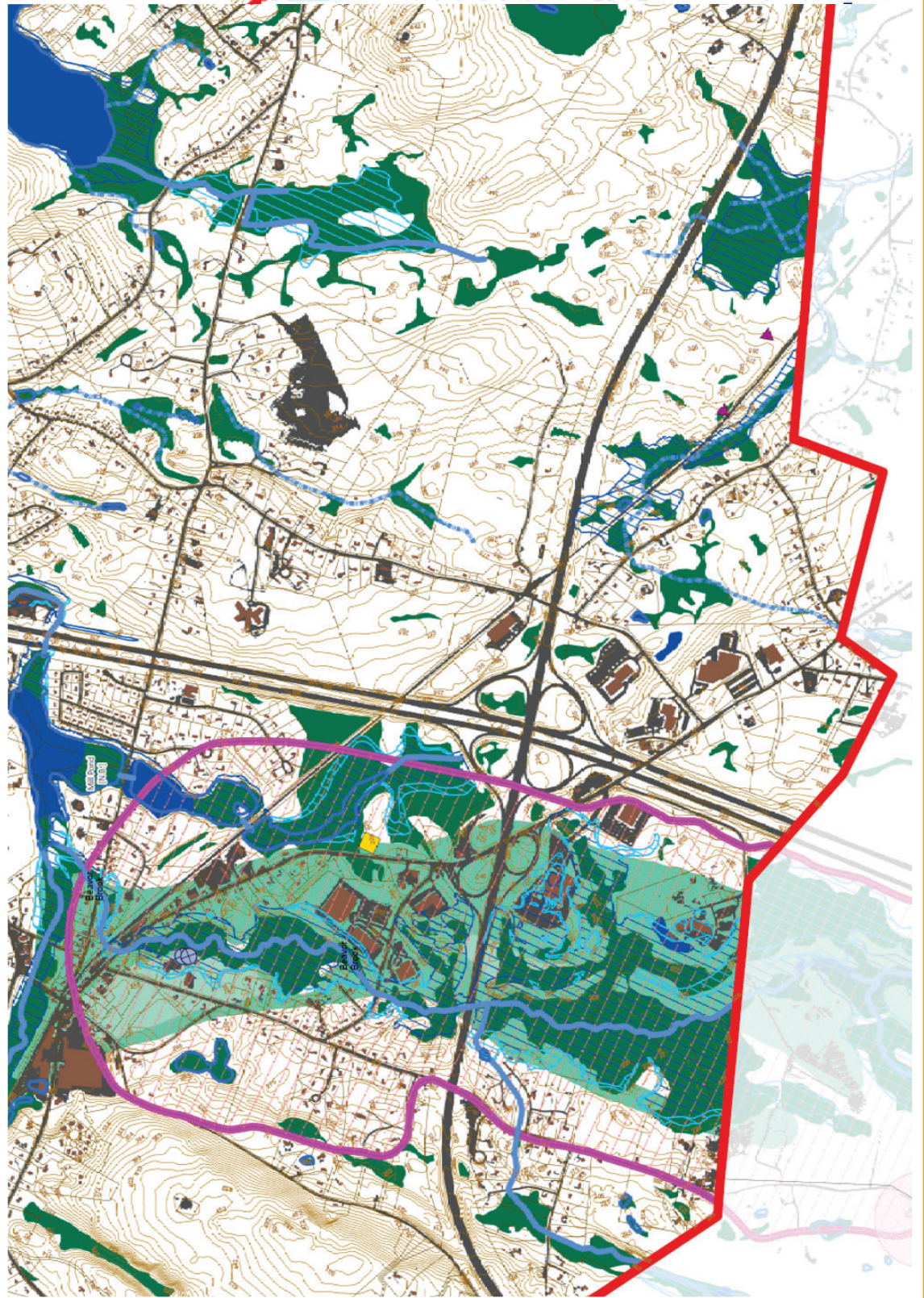
■ DEVELOPMENT CONSTRAINTS

While some 265 acres are included in the various parcels making up the study area, not all of this land is developable. By identifying and mapping out the physical, regulatory and practical constraints on development, we can identify opportunities for future development in the area (Map 3-2).

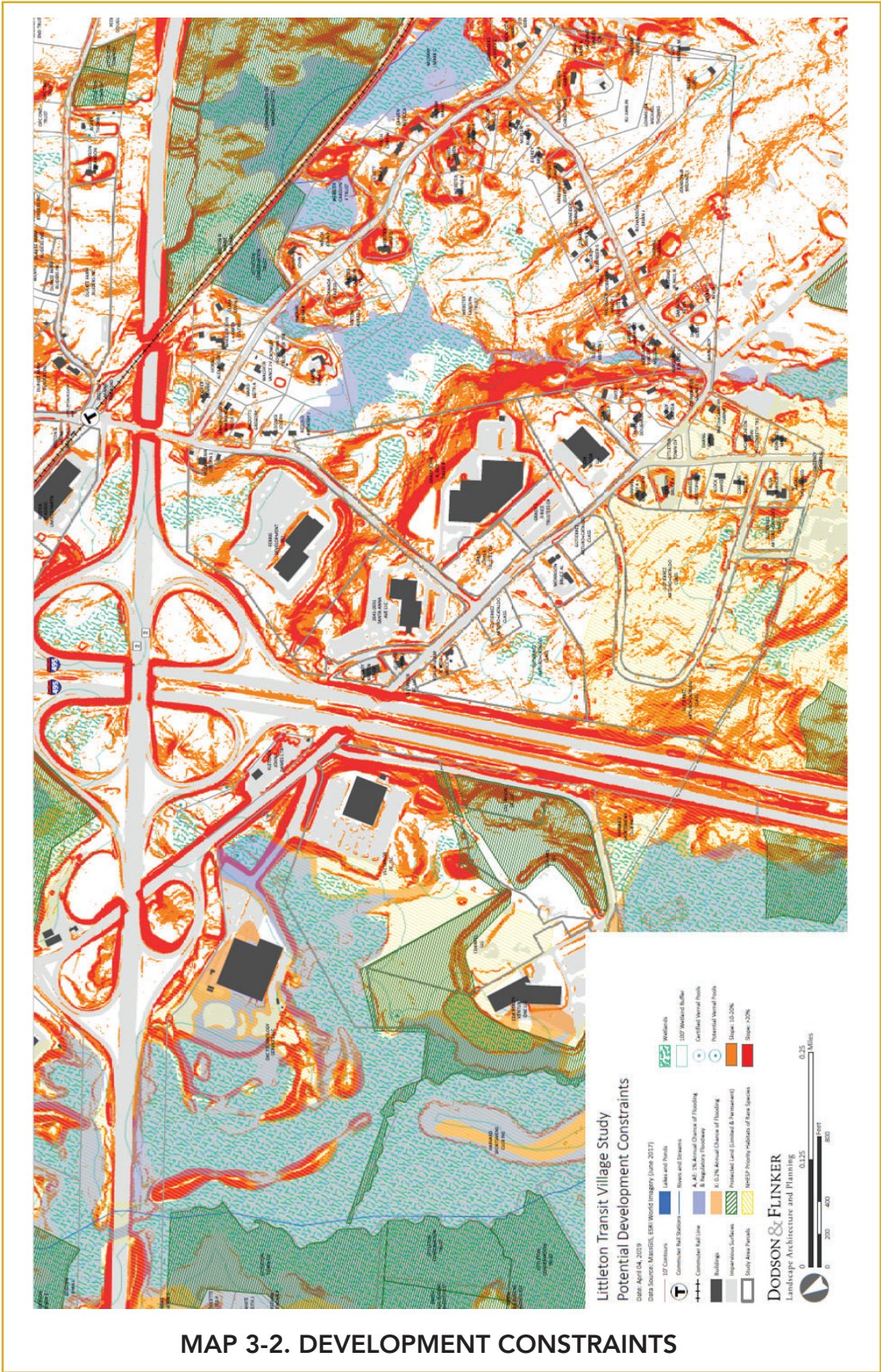
As illustrated by the maps of ecological and water supply resources, the largest factor constraining development are the wetlands and floodplains associated with the Beaver Brook and other streams in the area. Wetlands are protected by the Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act (MGL Chapter 131, Sec. 40), which requires any activity within 100 feet of a wetland (or 200 feet from a river or stream) to be reviewed by the town conservation commission, which issues conditions designed to prevent impact on the wetland resource. Littleton also has its own wetland protection by-law, which essentially forbids any disturbance within the first 50 feet of the buffer zone. In addition to the wetlands which appear on the map, which are based on aerial reconnaissance conducted by the state, there are smaller water courses and wetlands that do not appear on the maps but which are subject to the same laws and regulations. These must be flagged and surveyed as part of each development project, certified by the conservation commission and protected from disturbance.

The current pattern of development is fragmented and incoherent, resulting from the complex topography of the area, overlaid with the railroad, state and federal highways, local roads, streams and wetlands, residential homes and corporate offices. While some large developable sites exist, there is a limited amount of direct road frontage – requiring construction of costly new streets.

The Wetlands Protection Act also extends to floodplains, areas that are subject to seasonal or occasional flooding due to periods of heavy precipitation or snowmelt. The so-called 100-year floodplain, mapped out across the country by the Federal Emergency Management Agency, is a topographic boundary with a 1% chance of flooding in any given year. Littleton's Wetlands and Floodplain Regulations officially designates as wetlands the areas called out as Zone A and AE on the Middlesex County Flood Insurance Rate Map (FIRM). These include large areas along the Beaver Brook west of I-495, as well as smaller areas along the railroad tracks to southeast of the train station. There are no floodplains mapped for smaller streams within the study area.



MAP 3-1. TOPOGRAPHY & NATURAL RESOURCES



MAP 3-2. DEVELOPMENT CONSTRAINTS

While wetlands are both a physical and a regulatory constraint on development, there are several practical constraints that will influence development in the study areas. Steep slopes have been mapped out based on LIDAR topographic data for the site. These show slopes from 10-20 percent (that is, a rise of 1-2 feet in ten feet distance) as well as slopes over 20 percent. While construction is theoretically possible on steep slopes such as these, the extra expense will tend to make development infeasible – especially in a suburban or rural context. In this case, development will likely be limited by steep slopes in areas adjacent to the highway and roadway embankments, as well as on the hillside along Foster Street between the rail station and Taylor Street.

One final constraint is represented not by the qualities of the land itself, but by the location and configuration of the various parcels. The current pattern of development is fragmented and incoherent, resulting from the complex topography of the area, overlaid with the railroad, state and federal highways, local roads, streams and wetlands, residential homes and corporate offices. While some large developable sites exist, there is a limited amount of direct road frontage – requiring construction of costly new streets. And those streets will have to connect to relative narrow country roads like Foster Street. Finally, the scale and location of existing buildings, driveways and parking lots - especially the large office/light industrial structures off of Taylor Street - will itself constrain redevelopment. Should these building no longer be needed or become too expensive to maintain, they will have to be torn down before redevelopment can occur.

As a result of these factors we can conclude that some areas are more likely to support development or redevelopment. North of the train station there is nearly 100 acres of vacant land, of which at least half is only moderately constrained by wetlands and steep slopes. The principal issue is that steeper slopes and wetlands separate the largest and most buildable part of the site from the likely entrance on Foster Street. Likewise, development in the area immediately adjacent to the train station will be somewhat constrained by slope and wetland issues, as well as the existing parking lots and the rail corridor itself.

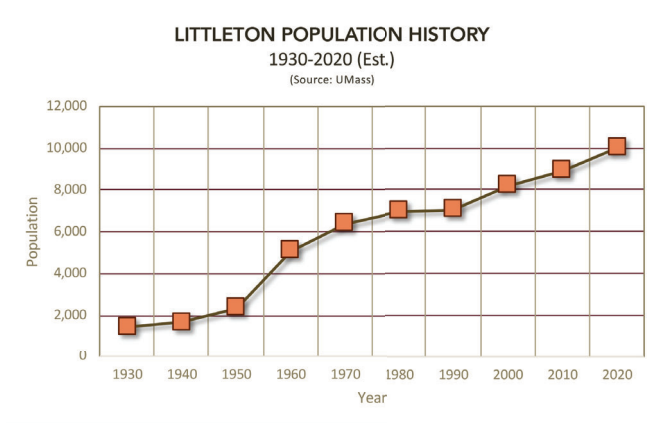
The southern node of potential development at the intersection of Taylor and Foster Streets is less constrained by physical factors, but suffers from a fragmented ownership and development pattern. Existing structures were built in the center of each lot, largely surrounded by a sea of parking, and have little relationship to the road or to each other. A series of smaller lots along the roadside limit access to the larger development sites behind them. Development of the Gutierrez parcel (225 Taylor Street), located south of Taylor Street opposite the end of Foster Street, will require construction of new roadways to serve the site.

On the west side of I-495, extensive wetlands, floodplains, steep slopes and regulated wildlife habitat all limit the extent of additional development. The pattern of existing parcel boundaries, the location of adjacent conservation parcels, and the configuration of existing buildings, driveways and parking lots will likely constrain expansion outside of the existing development footprint. With active uses and/or reuse plans already in place for most existing structures, extensive redevelopment may not be possible or needed. Plans have been approved to demolish an existing two-story building at 151 Taylor Street to facilitate construction of a new distribution warehouse.

TOWN SNAPSHOT

POPULATION

Until recently, Littleton was a pretty well-kept secret on the outer orbit of the Boston metropolitan area. Situated at the crossroads of I-495 and Route 2, Littleton is a low-density residential town that has begun to grow rapidly. Its estimated population of 9,935 today represents a 11.3 percent growth rate since the last decennial census (2010).¹ Based on current estimates from the Census Bureau, Littleton ranks fifth in the state for the largest population increase since 2010. By 2020 when the next decennial census takes place, Littleton will almost surely rank among the state's fastest-growing communities. The University of Massachusetts predicts that by 2035, Littleton will be home to at least 10,460 people, but this probably underestimates the town's actual 15-year growth potential.



Littleton has become a magnet for families priced out of nearby towns like Acton and Westford because Littleton offers what many young homebuyers want: good schools, quiet neighborhoods, open space, and easy access to regional employment centers. Today, about 23 percent of the town's population consists of children under 18. And, like most of the surrounding towns, Littleton has a fairly small population percent of older adults (14.3

Table 4.1. Age of Population

	LITTLETON	Acton	Ayer	Boxborough	Groton	Westford	Harvard
Total	9,935	23,561	8,055	5,794	11,301	24,194	6,570
< 18 Years	23.3%	24.6%	19.1%	21.5%	23.8%	26.9%	22.4%
18 to 34	14.2%	13.9%	22.2%	20.7%	14.4%	14.7%	15.4%
35 to 64	48.1%	46.0%	45.9%	46.5%	47.9%	45.6%	45.8%
65+	14.5%	15.5%	12.7%	11.3%	13.9%	12.9%	16.4%

SE:B01001. Age, and Barrett Planning Group LLC.

¹ American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (ACS 2018), Total Population, retrieved from Social Explorer, A00001.

percent). In most cases, these towns also fall well below the Boston Metro region-wide average for the 18-to-34-year cohort, 19 percent. This is a telling indicator of the limited housing options that exist in the outer suburbs.

RACE AND ETHNICITY

Most of the towns in Eastern Massachusetts are predominantly white, non-Latino communities, and Littleton is no exception. Slightly over 88 percent of its current population is white, and of the minorities residing in Littleton today, the overwhelming majority are of Indian or Chinese descent.²

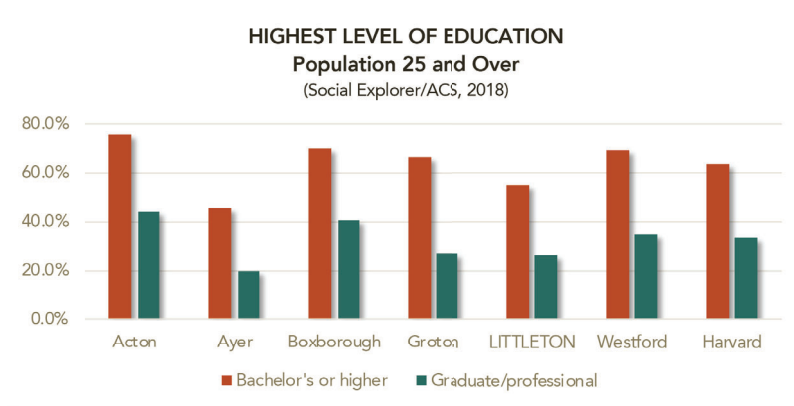
Table 4.2. Population and Race

	LITTLETON	Acton	Ayer	Boxborough	Groton	Westford	Harvard
Total Population:	9,935	23,561	8,055	5,794	11,301	24,194	6,570
Percent White	89.4%	69.6%	90.2%	72.5%	91.6%	78.7%	84.8%
Black or African American	0.4%	1.7%	3.3%	0.8%	0.2%	0.8%	6.4%
American Indian/Alaska Native Alone	0.1%	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.1%	0.0%	0.6%
Asian	6.1%	25.1%	4.5%	21.6%	4.7%	18.8%	3.7%
Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander	0.0%	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Some Other Race	0.0%	0.5%	0.3%	1.7%	0.1%	0.1%	1.8%
Two or More Races	4.0%	2.9%	1.6%	3.4%	3.3%	1.6%	2.6%

SE:A03001. Race, and Barrett Planning Group, Inc.

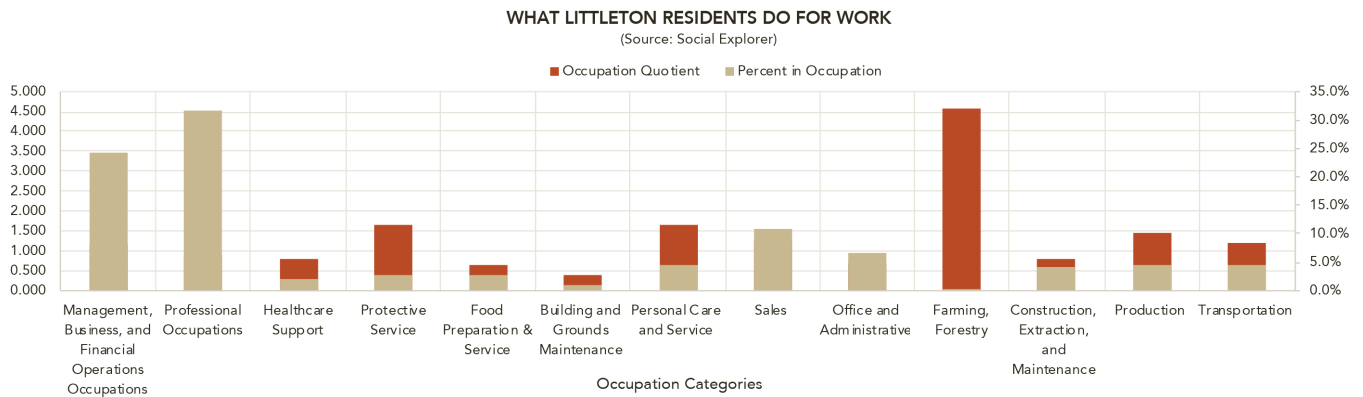
EDUCATION AND LABOR FORCE

As Littleton grows and its home values increase with the development of new market-rate housing, its population is gradually becoming wealthier and more well educated. Just over half the adult population in Littleton today has at least a bachelor's degree and about one-fourth have graduate or professional degrees. These statistics are lower than most of the nearby towns, but over time, Littleton has attracted people with higher levels of education.

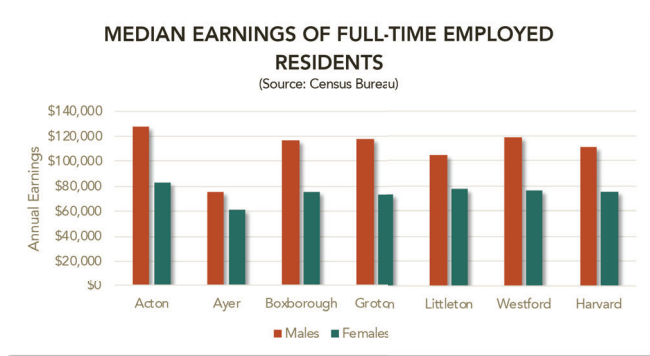


Seventy percent of the population 16 and over in Littleton is in the labor force, which is about average for the surrounding towns. What people actually do for work relates in part to their level of education and access to jobs in the region where they live. By comparing a community's percentage of the labor force in each occupation category to that of a larger reference area, it becomes possible to understand where the local labor force is

² ACS 2018, Place of Birth for the Foreign-Born Population, Social Explorer A07001.



An occupational quotient compares the percentage of the local labor force in each major occupational category with the percentage of the labor force in a larger reference economy (in this case, Middlesex County). It is a useful indicator of labor force skills, competitiveness, and education.



strongest in terms of skills and competitiveness. For Littleton residents, the highest **occupational quotients** are in agriculture, management and finance, protective services such as law enforcement or firefighters, service occupations and sales, and manufacturing and logistics. By contrast, the highest quotients in communities with a very high education profile like Acton and Boxborough are in management, the professions, and health care.³ Though the absolute number of jobs in agriculture is small, farming as a share of all occupations is significant in places like Littleton, Harvard, and Groton. Given the number of working farms and orchards in this part of the state, strength in farm employment is not a surprise.

Littleton's labor force is somewhat more diverse in terms of skills and occupations and somewhat less well paid than its neighbors. The median earnings of Littleton men with full-time employment, \$104,401, is the second lowest of the towns in the Littleton's comparison area, though at \$77,350, Littleton women overall have earnings closer to their regional counterparts.

³ Occupational categories referred to in this section are based on definitions and data collection standards of the U.S. Bureau of Labor Standards (BLS), 2018 Standard Occupational Classification System. www.bls.gov/soc/2018/major_groups.htm.

HOUSEHOLDS

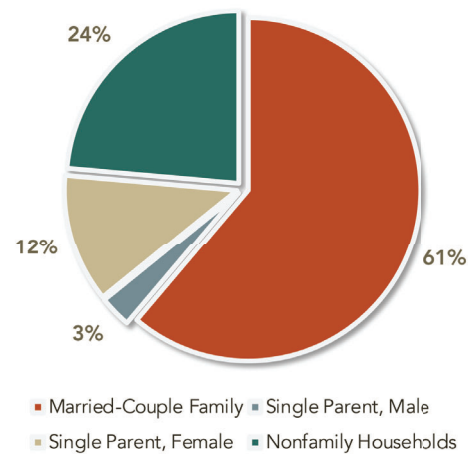
Littleton's 3,559 households are predominantly families (76 percent), as would be expected in a suburban community. Still, the proportion of single-parent families in Littleton far exceeds that of any of the surrounding towns. Of Littleton's 2,719 families, nearly 20 percent are headed by a single parent, with or without dependent children at home.

TENURE

Not surprisingly, the vast majority of Littleton households own their home. However, this is not the case across age groups. Young householders – generally people under 35 – are far more like to rent than

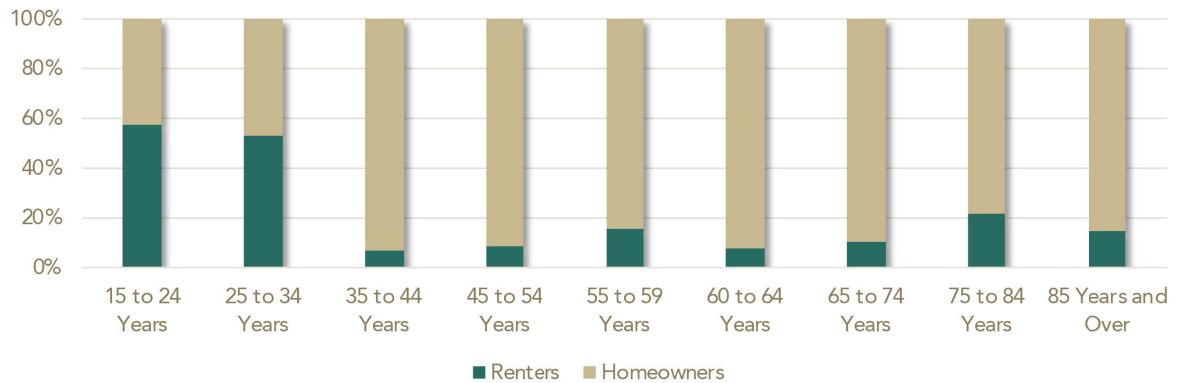
LITTLETON HOUSEHOLDS BY TYPE

(Source: Social Explorer)



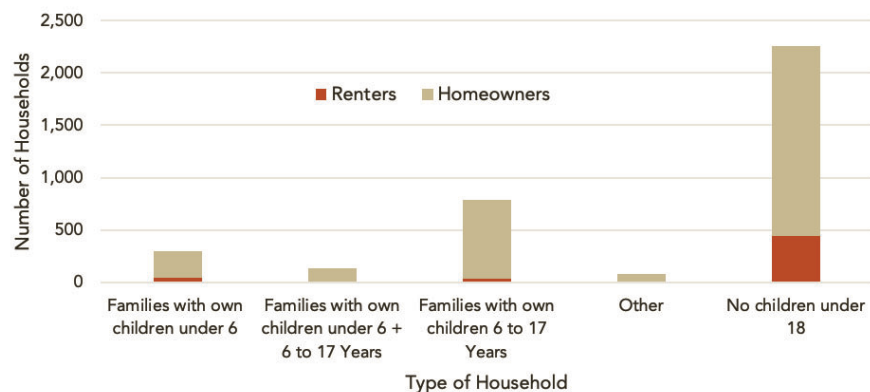
HOUSEHOLDS BY TENURE

(Source: Social Explorer)

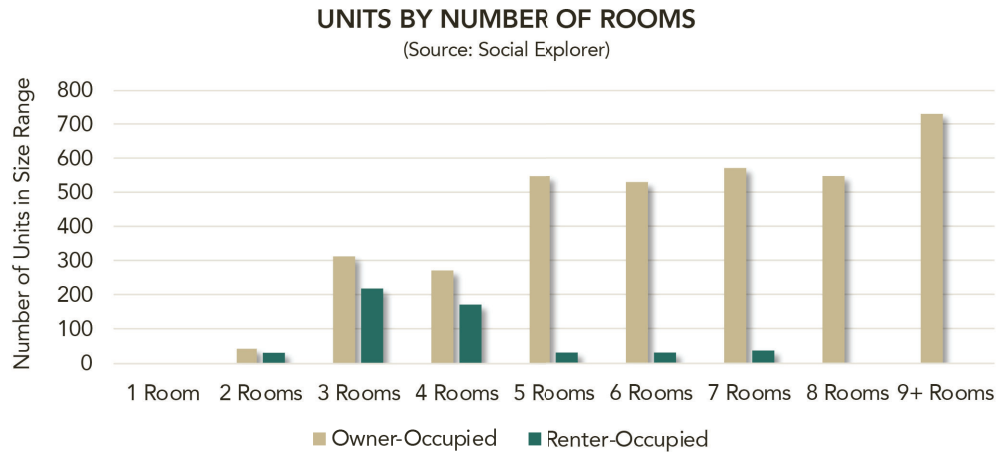


WHERE DO LITTLETON'S CHILDREN LIVE?

(Source: ACS 2018 5-Year Estimates)



own, and the proportion of renters increases among older adults as well. Yet, just 15 percent of Littleton's total housing inventory is occupied by renters, and one-third of those units are single-family homes, not apartments. There are not many options in Littleton today for people who want or need managed rental housing, and this is true at all market levels.



HOUSING SIZE AND HOUSEHOLD SIZE

Littleton's residential land use pattern and housing stock are not well aligned with the characteristics of its households. In Littleton today, over half of all households are single people living alone or two-person households. However, over half of all housing units in Littleton consist of seven or more rooms, and only 33 percent have 2-5 rooms.

HOUSEHOLD INCOME

Littleton is on the upper end of the income range for Middlesex County towns, yet compared with some of the surrounding communities, its household wealth metrics fall roughly in the middle. While there is little question that Littleton is rapidly becoming a wealthy town relative to its place in the region 20 years ago, it still offers a place for middle-income families to buy a home within the orbit of the Boston labor market. What it does not offer is a place for young workers and older adults to rent if they choose, and it has remarkably little to offer on the lower end of the homeownership market for any age group. As the town is already well aware, its zoning policies have much to do with the high cost of housing. What may be less apparent is that the same zoning policies also affect Littleton's fiscal condition.

Table 4.3. Household Incomes in Littleton and Region

Income Metric	Acton	Ayer	Boxborough	Groton	LITTLETON	Westford	Harvard
Median Household Income	\$137,910	\$84,917	\$108,207	\$126,883	\$120,638	\$141,173	\$148,625
Median Family Income	\$164,842	\$114,267	\$152,083	\$150,991	\$141,283	\$158,432	\$165,781
Median Non-family Income	\$51,828	\$54,179	\$54,787	\$44,450	\$48,750	\$49,902	\$58,750
Median Homeowner Income	\$166,897	\$120,540	\$151,172	\$145,051	\$134,375	\$153,280	\$153,125
Median Renter Income	\$55,050	\$60,679	\$73,073	\$42,833	\$36,736	\$80,938	\$52,059

Source: Social Explorer, citing the American Community Survey, and Barrett Planning Group.

■ COST OF COMMUNITY SERVICES

Although the public often assumes that housing is inherently a “fiscal negative,” that is not always the case. Nonresidential development places demands on municipal services, too, depending on the type of land use. For example, retail stores and restaurants usually demand more from public safety personnel than any other municipal department, but industrial uses tend to require higher expenditures for public works. Food service establishments also require periodic inspections by the health department, and uses ranging from nursing homes and day care centers to performing arts centers require semiannual or more frequent inspections by health, fire, and building authorities. In some towns, nonresidential development of all types places demands on services traditionally thought of as “residential,” such as public libraries. When a community invests in waterworks and sewer system upgrades, the benefits are often shared by residential and nonresidential ratepayers.

In Littleton today, real estate taxes from commercial and industrial property taxes supply 27.2 percent of the town’s tax levy, yet the combined value of these properties is about 19.8 percent of the Town’s total assessed valuation. ... demand on town services from nonresidential taxpayers is responsible for only 14.6 percent of Littleton’s annual municipal expenditures

Recognizing that each class of use has both unique needs and needs common to all uses, fiscal impact analysts have developed models to identify, estimate, and assign service costs to various types of development. The most widely used model as a starting point is known as **proportional valuation**. This model embraces a long-standing fiscal impact principle: the cost of nonresidential municipal services can be inferred from the relationship between nonresidential real property values and the total value of real property in a community, adjusted for type of community and size of tax base. After establishing the approximate share of nonresidential expenditures under existing conditions, analysts can use a similar process to estimate the cost of services that will be used by new growth.

In Littleton today, real estate taxes from commercial and industrial property taxes supply 27.2 percent of the town’s tax levy,⁴ yet the combined value of these properties is about

19.8 percent of the Town’s total assessed valuation. The difference is explained by Littleton’s classified or split tax rate, which effectively shifts some of the tax burden away from residential property owners. By contrast, demand on town services from nonresidential taxpayers is responsible for only 14.6 percent of Littleton’s annual municipal expenditures (and only 5 percent of all General Fund expenditures).

New commercial projects present a potential revenue benefit to Littleton, yet as the Market Overview (Chapter 5) shows, there is not currently strong market demand in Littleton for new nonresidential development, especially near Littleton Station, where there are already vacant or underutilized buildings. The Town’s long-term land use-fiscal management strategy has to reach beyond aspirations for new business and industrial investment and embrace diversifying the housing stock. Communities control the make-up of their population by the choices they make to control housing growth. Littleton is no exception.

⁴ For purposes of a cost of community services analysis, tax levy and assessed value figures exclude personal property. The focus here is on land use. The proportional valuation analysis can be found in Appendix A.

LAND USE ECONOMICS: QUICK FACTS



Littleton has **ONE** commercial-industrial property for every **SEVENTEEN** residential properties. (Excludes the town's farms and some utility properties.)



Nonresidential real estate like The Point drives a large share of Littleton's total nonresidential property valuation, **\$396 million** and the **AVERAGE** nonresidential value, **\$3.7 million**. Yet, on average, nonresidential properties cost the Town about **\$12K** in services each year.

Not all **HOUSEHOLDS** place the same demands on town services, and schools are not the only service affected by housing growth.



On a per capita or per household basis, community services cost less when delivered efficiently. Sprawl is expensive! Professional and academic literature shows that on average:

- Public safety costs are **15% less** in compact neighborhoods than spread-out residential areas;
- Road maintenance in a village or compact neighborhood: **34% less**
- Recreation, cultural services: **18% less.**

HOW TO GET BASIC GOODS AND SERVICES INTO OUTLYING NEIGHBORHOODS?



- ZONING
- INVEST IN INFRASTRUCTURE - OR MAKE IT FEASIBLE FOR THE DEVELOPER TO MAKE THE INVESTMENT
- PUBLIC EDUCATION
- CAPITALIZE ON THE COMMUTER RAIL
- STRENGTHEN THE MARKET. PROMOTE A VARIETY OF HOUSING FOR A VARIETY OF HOUSEHOLDS AND BOOST CONSUMER DEMAND.

MARKET OVERVIEW

Barrett Planning Group retained RKG Associates (RKG) to assist with identifying market supply and demand metrics in consideration of development opportunities for the Littleton Station Village study area. The study area parcels total approximately 245 acres with the largest portion situated in the northeast quadrant of the I-495 interchange. Although near the interchange the only direct access to Route 2 and Interstate 495 is at Taylor Street, this local road provides direct access to the northwest and southwest quadrants, and a connection to the northeast and southeast quadrants via Foster Street.

■ KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Town needs to decide how it wants this area to serve the community in the future, what uses will be allowed, and how it will differentiate itself from other activity nodes in Littleton.

The challenge with the area around the Littleton Train Station is two-fold. Limited visibility from major roadways such as I-495 and Route 2 make the area less competitive for office and retail uses compared to other locations in Littleton and surrounding communities. The second challenge is that other competitor sites and areas offer more amenities to potential businesses looking for a location. Places like The Point or Littleton Common provide a more complete place that draws customers in from a wider area. The study area's disjointed development pattern, lack of

sidewalks, and wetlands make it difficult to connect buildings and parcels. The Town first needs to decide how it wants this area to serve the community in the future, what uses will be allowed, and how it will differentiate itself from other activity nodes in Littleton.

Based on our analysis of the commercial, industrial, and residential markets in and around Littleton, we offer the following key findings for consideration.

RETAIL MARKET

Within Littleton's retail marketplace, there are opportunities to capture more retail spending that is leaving the area. Retail opportunities in the Train Station area will be limited by inadequate visibility, access, regional competition, and other locational factors. The Point and future development in Littleton Common will draw retail potential away from the Train Station area. It is recommended that any future retail in this study area focus on serving a local customer base and offer convenient access and visibility where possible.

OFFICE AND INDUSTRIAL MARKETS

Opportunities for office space appear to be limited as well given the area's available inventory of vacant space, unless a property owner or developer has a specific end-user already lined up. Any short-term office development in the study area would likely be

small scale and focused on drawing tenants from immediate surrounding area. The area's existing office inventory will likely be able to serve any incremental demand for space in the near term, and marginal asking rents indicate a low incentive for developers to invest in new space. The Town could help building owners and office developers by enhancing pedestrian and bicycle connections within the study area, improving connections to the Commuter Rail station, or even changing the zoning to allow a mix of uses on a single parcel to spread risks and rewards across use categories or even encourage redevelopment of older office buildings.

While many parcels in the study area lack visibility from 495 and Route 2, the area is connected to both transportation routes which is particularly attractive to distribution and warehousing facilities. This concept has already been proven in Littleton's Industrial Park and an e-commerce distribution center was recently approved at 151 Taylor Street in the study area. The continued growth of online sales activity will drive demand for distribution and warehousing space, especially as more companies integrate online sales platforms and delivery options into their business models. Additional industrial development appears to be the most viable commercial development option for the study area today, but the Town should consider how industrial uses co-exist and interact with residential or mixed-use if those too are desired.

RESIDENTIAL MARKET

Despite projected population growth in Littleton through the year 2035, residents are growing older and the pre-retirement and senior cohorts are projected to grow significantly. These are typically householders seeking to retire, relocate or otherwise downsize their housing needs, perhaps unburdening themselves of a multi-bedroom single-family home for a smaller condominium, apartment, or even assisted living. If residential is a desired use in the study area, the Town should consider where residential development would be best suited in the context of future commercial uses. The Town should also encourage future housing developments to incorporate age-friendly design components so units could be marketed to residents of all ages and abilities. While the market for senior housing appears to be strong and growing, it is best to design and build units that can be marketed to a wider resident base.

MARKET METRICS

RKG reviewed the market indicators for retail, office and industrial, and residential uses to better understand the potential for different types of development on the study area parcels.

RETAIL

RKG considered areas within a 5-minute, 10-minute and 15-minute drive time from the study area parcels for the retail analysis as shown in Figure 5-1. This consisted of a review of estimated retail sales leakage in each drive-time radius, and the potential supportable retail development based on a recapture of the sales leakage. "Sales leakage" represents the uncaptured household spending demand for retail of any given area. All markets experience some degree of sales leakage, in some instances due to a lack of variety and retail venues.

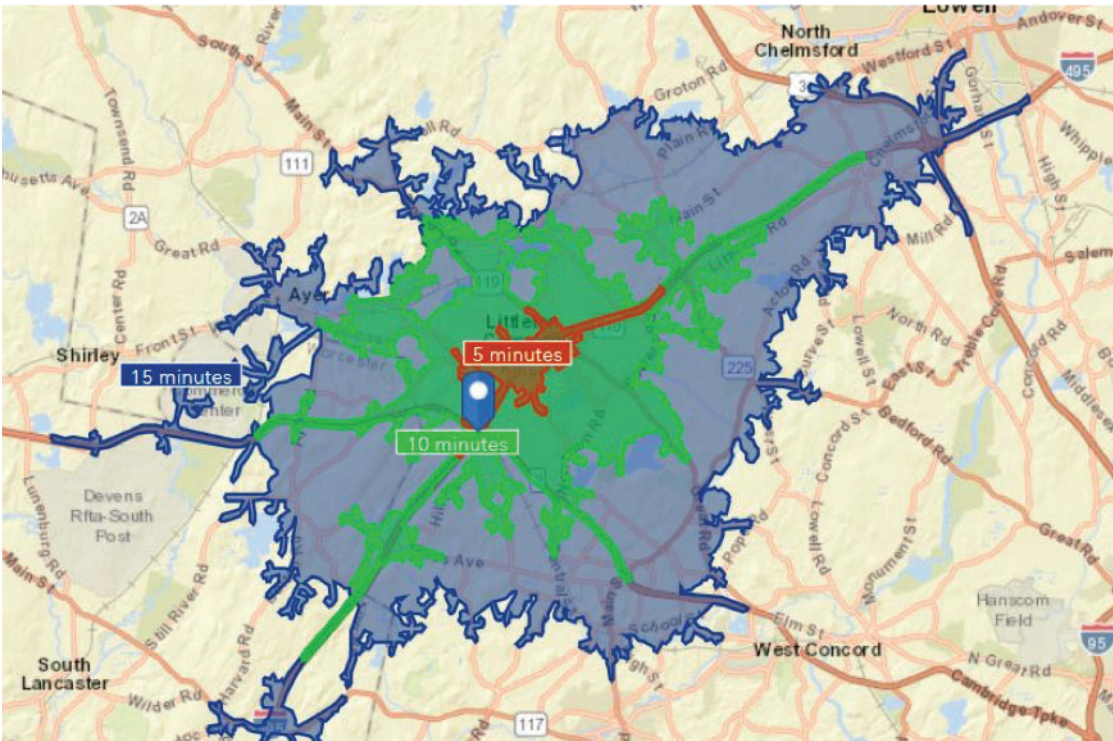


Figure 5-1. Retail sales drive time and leakage analysis.

As a result, the development of additional retail space may serve to recapture some portion of sales leakage. In this analysis, RKG estimated the supportable retail development based upon a 25 percent recapture of sales leakage within the 5-minute drive time and 10-minute drive time market areas. Capturing substantial spending within the 15-minute drive time market was considered more difficult, given its overlap with some of the 5.2 million square feet of existing retail within a 15-mile distance of the study area. This includes The Point, a 540,000 square foot mixed-use retail center in Littleton located at Exit 31 on I-495. As shown in Table 5-1, there are ten additional retail centers and malls within fifteen miles of the study area.

TABLE 5-1. NEARBY RETAIL CENTERS	
Centers within 15 Miles	Sq. Ft.
The Point	540,000
Highland Commons	900,000
Drum Hill S/C	197,000
Orchard Hill Park	368,460
Leominster S/C	460,000
Mall at Whitney Field	656,844
Meadow Brook Center	271,377
Solomon Pond Mall	886,327
Shops at Billerica	298,441
WaterTower Plaza	282,591
Twin City S/C	350,000
Total	5,211,040

Sources: RKG, ESRI.

For our analysis, RKG focused on the 5- and 10-minute drive time radii as we believe any retail, dining, or drinking establishments that may locate in the study area will be locally-serving. This location is not well connected from Route 2 and I-495, and the proximity to The Point suggests limited opportunity for a second large-scale retail, restaurant, and lodging development. The study area is also within a 5-minute drive of Littleton Common where the Town is focusing efforts to

improve the town's center with a mixture of retail, restaurants, professional offices, and possibly some smaller scale housing. While there are opportunities to expand retail offerings in the study area, RKG believes those offerings would be best integrated with other use types and focus on serving the local market rather than a more regional market.

As shown in Table 5-2, the market area (614 households with annual spending demand of \$33,750 per household) within a 5-minute drive of the site is a net importer of retail sales, exhibiting sales leakage in only a few merchandise lines. Sales leakage exists in the apparel and accessory lines, general merchandise (which includes large retail stores like Target and Wal-Mart), specialty retail, and dining/drinking. RKG estimates that a modest 25 percent capture of this leakage could support an additional 3,200 square feet of retail. Within a 10-minute drive, the local market (6,580 households with annual spending demand of \$43,825/household) is a net exporter of nearly \$40 million in retail spending with retail surpluses across most merchandise lines. RKG notes that the number of households, as well as their retail spending demand, for the 10-minute drive time well exceed those for the 5-minute drive time and, further, many of the destination malls (refer to Table 2) may be just beyond the 10-minute drive.

Within the 10-minute drive, opportunities for retail expansion exist for retail categories such as clothing and accessories, general merchandise, sporting goods, office supplies, and restaurants. Given the location and regional competition with other power centers and malls, retail categories such as clothing stores, general merchandise, and sporting goods are unlikely to locate here. Smaller scale stores in these categories may be more appropriate for a redeveloped Littleton Common or future expansions/changes in retailers at The Point. There may be opportunities to capture some of the leakage occurring in the office supply and restaurant categories as those uses have smaller space requirements and could be supported with more localized spending. RKG estimates that a 25 percent recapture of this sales leakage could represent demand for an additional 68,600 square feet of retail, but the likelihood of that demand coming to the study area is low.

Conclusions. The opportunity exists for additional retail development at the site but are limited by adequate visibility, access, regional competition, and other locational factors. Any potential retail development would be more likely to serve a local neighborhood and commuter market as opposed to a broader regional draw due to the existing presence of several large nearby retail centers.

OFFICE AND INDUSTRIAL

RKG reviewed 2017 employment figures by selected industry sectors for the Metro South/West Workforce Development Area (WDA) which includes Littleton. Projected employment for the year 2027 was estimated using metrics provided by the Massachusetts Department of Labor that identifies projections by industry sector specific to the WDA. As shown in Table 5-3, employment across the selected industries is projected to increase by nearly 40,000 employees for a total of 519,700 employees by 2027. Utilizing standard square foot per employee metrics this results in an estimated demand for more than 7.2 million square feet of additional commercial and industrial space, or approximately 725,000 square feet annually. It is important to note that this does not necessarily equate to demand for new built space, as some demand could be met through reduced vacancies or increased utilization of existing space.

TABLE 5.2. RETAIL DEMAND AND SALES

Estimated Retail Demand and Sales, by NAICS Sector - Drive Times - US Route 2 @ I 495 - Littleton, MA	NAICS Code	5-Minute Drive Time				Estimated Existing Store Count
		Demand/HH	Demand	Sales	(Export) /Import	
Total		\$33,748	\$20,721,274	\$90,450,011	\$67,780,734	3
Furniture & Home Furnishings Stores	442	\$1,253	\$769,565	\$3,151,204	\$3,256,966	
Furniture Stores	4421	\$662	\$406,166	\$3,151,204	\$2,745,038	
Home Furnishings Stores	4422	\$592	\$363,399	\$875,327	\$511,928	
Electronics & Appliance Stores	443	\$1,830	\$1,123,471	\$6,932,543	\$5,809,072	
Bldg Materials, Garden Equip. & Supply Stores	444	\$2,876	\$1,765,860	\$30,585,627	\$28,819,766	
Bldg Material & Supplies Dealers	4441	\$2,649	\$1,626,477	\$29,573,182	\$27,946,705	
Lawn & Garden Equip & Supply Stores	4442	\$227	\$139,384	\$1,012,445	\$873,061	
Food & Beverage Stores	445	\$8,355	\$5,129,872	\$23,525,269	\$18,395,398	
Grocery Stores	4451	\$7,113	\$4,367,290	\$21,405,099	\$17,037,809	
Specialty Food Stores	4452	\$312	\$191,745	\$713,903	\$522,158	
Beer, Wine & Liquor Stores	4453	\$930	\$570,836	\$1,406,267	\$835,431	
Health & Personal Care Stores	446,4461	\$2,809	\$1,724,790	\$10,725,627	\$9,000,837	
Clothing & Clothing Accessories Stores	448	\$3,187	\$1,957,051	\$297,194	(\$1,957,050)	
Clothing Stores	4481	\$2,235	\$1,372,070	\$0	(\$1,372,070)	
Shoe Stores	4482	\$377	\$231,246	\$0	(\$231,246)	
Jewelry, Luggage & Leather Goods Stores	4483	\$576	\$353,734	\$0	(\$353,734)	
Sporting Goods, Hobby, Book & Music Stores	451	\$1,652	\$1,014,613	\$1,311,868	\$297,255	
Sporting Goods/Hobby/Musical Instr Stores	4511	\$1,450	\$890,185	\$792,427	(\$97,758)	
Book, Periodical & Music Stores	4512	\$203	\$124,428	\$519,441	\$395,013	
General Merchandise Stores	452	\$5,268	\$3,234,313	\$2,734,059	(\$2,216,747)	
Department Stores Excluding Leased Depts.	4521	\$3,754	\$2,305,206	\$0	(\$2,305,206)	
Other General Merchandise Stores	4529	\$1,513	\$929,107	\$1,017,566	\$88,459	
Miscellaneous Store Retailers	453	\$1,707	\$1,048,010	\$2,157,234	\$1,109,224	
Florists	4531	\$153	\$93,891	\$115,326	\$21,435	
Office Supplies, Stationery & Gift Stores	4532	\$572	\$351,400	\$146,795	(\$204,605)	
Used Merchandise Stores	4533	\$136	\$83,614	\$652,394	\$568,780	
Other Miscellaneous Store Retailers	4539	\$845	\$519,106	\$1,242,718	\$723,612	
Food Services & Drinking Places	722	\$4,811	\$2,953,729	\$9,029,386	\$5,266,013	
Restaurants	7221	\$4,367	\$2,681,035	\$8,219,742	\$5,538,707	
Special Food Services	7223	\$176	\$107,894	\$0	(\$107,894)	
Drinking Places - Alcoholic Beverages	7224	\$268	\$164,800	\$0	(\$164,800)	

TABLE 5.3

Estimated Employment and Building SF Needs by Selected Industry Sector Annual 2017 - 2027		Metro South / West WDA				
		Avg/SF per Emp	2027 Employ	Change from 2017	Est. Gross Demand Bldg. SF	Est. Gross Annual Demand - SF
OFFICE/FLEX						
Information	200	27,563	110	21,962	2,196	
Finance/Insurance	200	20,655	285	57,036	5,704	
Real Estate	200	8,885	931	186,124	18,612	
Professional/Technical	200	87,729	13,193	2,638,574	263,857	
Administration/Waste Services	200	40,599	4,923	984,658	98,466	
Subtotal			185,431	19,442	3,888,354	388,835
INSTITUTIONAL						
Health Care/Social Assistance	200	86,690	12,214	244,281	24,428	
Subtotal			86,690	12,214	244,281	24,428
COMMERCIAL						
Arts and Entertainment	200	15,573	1,767	353,434	35,343	
Retail Trade	250	59,180	989	247,312	24,731	
Accommodations/Food Services	175	43,862	3,287	575,151	57,515	
Other exc. Public Administration	200	18,926	1,071	214,260	21,426	
Subtotal			137,541	7,114	1,390,156	139,016
INDUSTRIAL						
Construction	150	29,608	3,101	465,198	46,520	
Manufacturing	1,000	43,488	(3,273)	na	na	
Wholesale Trade	750	26,173	488	366,011	36,601	
Transportation/Warehousing	1,200	10,751	750	900,090	90,009	
Subtotal			110,020	1,066	1,731,299	173,130
TOTAL			519,682	39,836	7,254,090	725,409

Source : US Census, MA Department of Labor and RKG Associates, Inc. (2018)

TABLE 5-4.

Metro South / West WDA	SF	Vacant	Rate	Ask \$
Office 3Q 2018	5,084,145	1,281,205	25.20%	\$ 16.77
Office 3Q 2010	4,597,560	726,414	15.80%	\$ 14.88
# Δ since 2010	486,585	554,790		\$ 1.89
% Δ since 2010	10.58%	76.37%	9.4 points	12.70%
Industrial 3Q 2018	20,625,076	928,128	4.50%	\$ 7.11
Industrial 3Q 2009	7,493,026	681,865	9.10%	\$ 5.82
# Δ since 2009	13,132,050	246,263		\$ 1.29
% Δ since 2009	175.26%	36.12%	(4.6) points	22.16%

Source : CBRE and RKG Associates, Inc. (2018)

Office indicators for the third quarter of 2018, as reported by CBRE and shown in Table 5-4, report 5.1 million square feet of existing office space in the suburban Boston Route 495/Route 2 West submarket which includes Littleton. This was a 10.6 percent increase since Q3 of 2010. Over the same period, vacancy increased from 15.8 percent to 25.2 percent, equating to nearly 1.3 million square feet in Q3 of 2018. This vacant space would represent adequate supply to meet three years of the forecasted demand in office and institutional space based on employment projections for the WDA. CBRE also notes that the average asking lease rates increased by almost 13 percent over the period from 2010 to 2018, to \$16.77 per square foot. Asking rents in this range are likely marginal in their ability to support speculative development, meaning only the most risk-tolerant investors

are likely to build substantial space or those that have an anchor tenant or build-to-suit client in place.

CBRE also notes that existing industrial space totaled 20.6 million square feet in the Route 495/Route 2 West submarket for Q3 2018. This is a substantial increase from the 7.5 million square feet reported in Q3 2009. Despite a decline in the vacancy rate over this time, the Q3 2018 vacancy of 4.5 percent equates to 928,200 square feet or a five-year supply of the projected industrial demand in the WDA. Asking lease rates increased by 22 percent from \$5.82 per square foot in 2009 to \$7.11 per square foot in 2018, slightly greater than a typical \$6 per square foot which could warrant new construction, particularly if there is a tenant-in-hand.

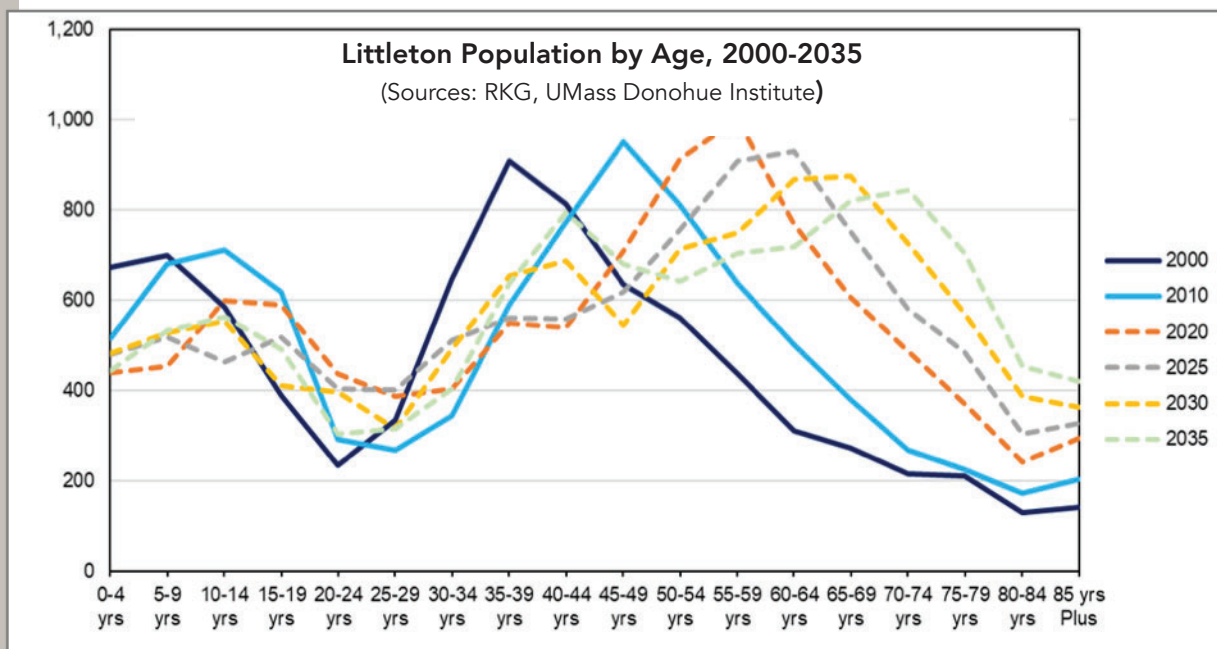
Conclusions. The opportunity for additional office SF appears to be limited given the area's available inventory of vacant space, unless for a specific end-user. Any short-term office development in the study area would likely be small scale and focused on the immediate surrounding community - ideally with a tenant in-hand prior to construction. The area's existing office inventory will likely be able to serve any incremental demand for space in the near term, and marginal asking rents indicate a low incentive for developers to invest in new space. Any large-scale office development would likely come with a tenant-in-hand as a large anchor user or a corporate headquarters location. Recent trends indicate a move of corporate offices toward the Route 128 and Boston markets, making it more difficult to sell a location along I-495 without significant amenities and transportation options. Plans by the Gutierrez Company have been approved since 2003 for the construction of 330,000 square feet of office space for the property along Taylor Street in the southeast quadrant of the study area. Spec office buildings have been approved for that site, but the market has yet to materialize.

Industrial and warehousing development has proven successful in Littleton with the growth experienced in Littleton's Industrial Park along Distribution Way. Recent additions to the park include Potpourri and FIBA Technologies who use access to Route 2 and I-495 for their distribution of product. According to recent Planning Board documents, in November 2018 a new 145,000 square foot e-commerce distribution center was approved for the property at 151 Taylor Street continuing the trend of warehouse and distribution businesses locating in Littleton and taking advantage of the access to major travel routes. Industrial development appears to be the most viable commercial land use at this time but must be carefully considered due to surrounding uses and future land uses that seek to take advantage of a new train station. If there is a desire to see additional residential development or mixed-use development occur around the train station, the Town should consider how those uses co-exist and interact with existing and/or future industrial uses.

RESIDENTIAL

Littleton's housing stock is dominated by single-family homes which comprise approximately 93 percent of all housing units. Over the last eighteen years, only 197 building permits were issued for multi-family units, of which 144 were issued for the development at 15 Great Road. Over the same period, 656 permits were issued for new single-family homes. Demographically, Littleton's population is changing. The Town's overall population is projected to grow by nearly 1,400 residents through the year 2035 and is projected to have a growing age cohort of residents ages 65 and older. This population cohort has different housing needs, including a desire for smaller units, less maintenance, ac-

cessibility features, first floor living, elevator access, etc. The expression of demand for multi-family and senior housing from residents was clear in Littleton's 2015 Elderly Needs Assessment, the 2017 Master Plan, and the approval of a Senior Housing Zoning Bylaw by Town Meeting in Fall 2017. Figure 5-2 highlights how Littleton's population is projected to shift by age cohort through the year 2035.

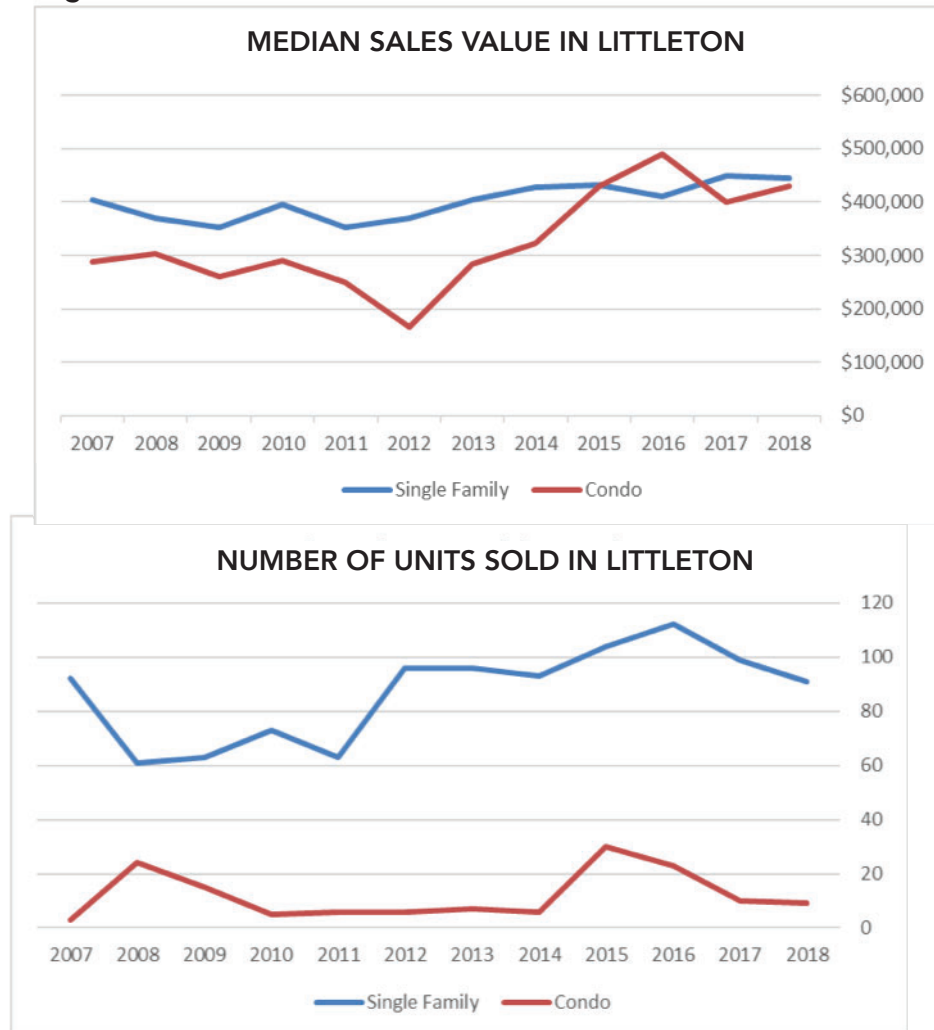


Residential Market. To better understand the ownership and rental housing market in Littleton, RKG compiled indicators from several proprietary sources tracking both markets. Figures 5 and 6 show the change in median sales value and the number of sales for single-family and condominiums in Littleton from 2007 to 2018.

The median selling price of single-family homes has increased 20 percent since 2012 when recovery of prices from the Great Recession began. Prices for condominiums in Littleton have jumped 160 percent in the same period. The median selling price for condominiums increased from a low of \$165,660 to \$430,000 in 2018. In 2017, the median condominium sale price surpassed the median single-family sale price. In 2018, the median sale price of a condominium and a single-family home were very similar. The rapid price escalation of condos in Littleton could be driven by supply and demand factors. Senior residents in Littleton are looking to downsize yet remain in the community. The stock of available condominiums coming up for sale each year from 2007 to 2018 averaged around twelve units. Not all senior households are looking to downsize into an apartment or a senior living community, and this factor could be driving up sales prices if demand is outpacing supply.

The median sale price for single-family homes increased 20 percent between 2012 and 2018, going from \$370,250 to \$445,000. The overall trendline shows a steady rise in median sale price over this seven-year period with small declines in 2016 and 2018. Sales of single-family homes have averaged 99 units per year since 2012. In Table 5-5, a limited sample of owner-occupied residential market activity around the study area indicates that

Figures 5-3 and 5-4: Residential Sales Trends



Sources: RKG, The Warren Group.

TABLE 5.5.

Littleton Market Activity - Single Family	Price	SF	Price per SF	Beds	Baths
Recent Sales	\$ 800,000	2,957	\$ 271	4	3.0
	\$ 481,000	2,600	\$ 185	3	3.0
	\$ 480,000	2,300	\$ 209	3	3.0
	\$ 625,000	3,000	\$ 208	4	3.0
	\$ 260,000	1,428	\$ 182	3	1.0
average	\$ 529,200	2,457	\$ 215	3	2.6
Current Listings	\$ 599,000	2,768	\$ 216	4	3.0
	\$ 825,000	3,305	\$ 250	4	3.5
	\$ 405,000	4,053	\$ 100	6	5.0
	\$ 380,000	1,656	\$ 229	5	1.0
average	\$ 552,250	2,946	\$ 187	5	3.1

Source : Zillow and RKG (2019)

single-family list and sale prices vary considerably based on the location in Littleton, size of the unit, and year built. The sample listing of recent sales range in price from \$260,000 to \$825,000, with an average sale price of \$529,200. Within the study area, there are four single-family listings in the Durkee Farm subdivision. These homes begin at \$750,000 and go up from there.

Table 5-6 provides a sample of apartment listings from the three larger rental developments Littleton. The monthly pricing for Pondside and Village Green is almost identical on a monthly basis and on a per square foot basis. Both rental properties are averaging about \$2.00 per square foot for one-bedroom units and \$2.10 per square foot for two-bedroom units. Vacancy at Pondside is around 9 percent and 7.6 percent at Village Green. Typical vacancy rates for multi-family properties are between 5 and 10 percent, with vacancy rates closer to 5 percent equating to full occupancy. It is interesting that rent rates at both locations are generally equal since Pondside is quite a bit older than the new Village Green and contains fewer amenities. This could speak to demand for rental apartments in Littleton since prices and vacancy are nearly identical in two rental complexes that were built at different times and have differing levels of amenities.

TABLE 5.6.

Littleton Market - Rentals	Pondside	Village Green	Littleton Ridge	avg
Unit Count	90	144	70	101
vacant	8	11	-	6
% vacant	8.9%	7.6%	0.0%	6.3%
Ask Rent Low	\$ 1,880	\$ 1,846	na	\$ 1,863
Ask Rent High	\$ 3,355	\$ 3,143	na	\$ 3,249

Source : Apartments.com, RKG (2019)

Conclusions. Despite projected population growth through the year 2035 (averaging 100 persons annually), the population is getting older and the pre-retirement and senior cohorts exhibiting high growth. These are typically householders seeking to retire, relocate or otherwise downsize their housing needs, perhaps unburdening themselves of a multi-bedroom single-family home for a smaller condominium, apartment, or even assisted living. If the average annual condominium sales are applicable for absorption, any sizable development on parcels in proximity to the Littleton Train Station could suggest a lengthy stabilization unless such units were built incrementally in several phases, diminishing a developer's at-risk capital.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

As part of the larger public participation process, the consulting team and the Littleton Station Working Group facilitated a two-day workshop to gather input and ideas for future development around Littleton Station. On Friday, April 4, 2019, local residents, landowners and other stakeholders gathered for an evening workshop that started with a presentation of maps and other information describing existing conditions at the site. Participants were divided into small groups to discuss strengths, weaknesses and opportunities in the study area, and then reconvened for a large group discussion to share their top issues and opportunities. On Saturday, April 5, 2019 participants worked to explore these opportunities in more detail, circulating among topic stations to explore important elements of the plan:

1. Traffic, Parking & Streetscapes
2. Public Preferences for Design of Architecture and Public Spaces
3. Natural Resources, Open Space and Recreation
4. Economic Development, Marketing & Branding
5. Social Issues & Quality of Life
6. Master Plan Alternatives

Each station had a series of exercises with maps and photographs or discussion questions for participants to work on, guided by a professional facilitator. Following the workshop,



the maps and discussion questions used at the workshop were reformatted into a set of three separate on-line surveys that were distributed over the course of six weeks. All told, more than 500 residents have been part of discussing the future of the study area and shaping alternatives for the future.

■ STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, AND OPPORTUNITIES

In many ways, the study area is a microcosm of the entire town, where residents value rural character, quiet country roads, farms and open space – but also look for efficient transportation, convenient goods and services, and modern amenities. Many participants listed rural character, historic sites and buildings, agricultural landscapes, woods, walking trails and winding rural roads as specific strengths of the study area. They also value the train station – some moved to the neighborhood to be within walking distance – and the shuttle to from the station to IBM was mentioned. **In general, participants see the town's high real estate values as a strength, but also value Littleton's family-friendly small-town atmosphere.**



Weaknesses identified in the study area included the limited parking at the train station (especially a lack of parking just for Littleton residents) and the limitations on access to the station. Foster Street is seen as narrow, dark and bumpy, lacks sidewalks or bike lanes, and has some dangerous intersections. Access to the station from the highway requires a roundabout journey through the 495/Rt 2 interchange to the Rt. 2/ Taylor Street off ramp up Taylor Street and down Foster Street. This is seen as a weakness of the station site, in part because of the impact of existing and potential traffic on narrow country roads like Foster Street. The real estate market was also seen as a weakness, with **half-full office and light industrial buildings** indicative of a difficult office/retail market. Meanwhile there are too many big houses with not enough smaller units available for residents who'd like to downsize. Within the study area, poor soils, wetlands and ledge

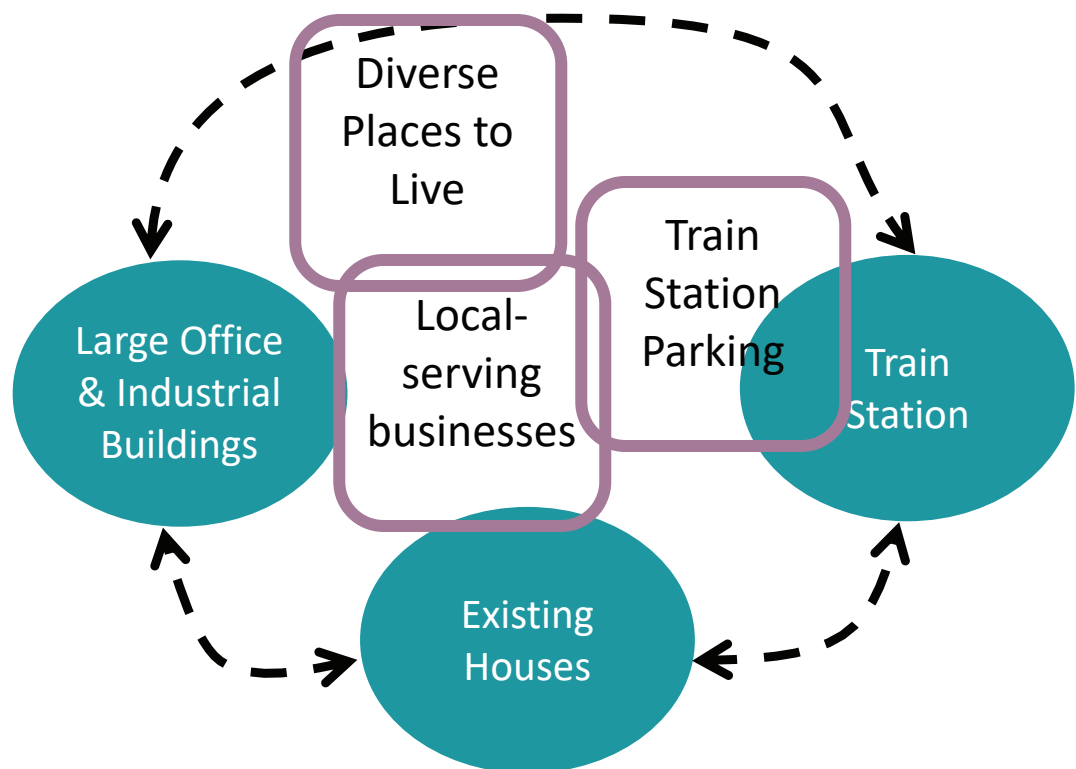


are recognized as constraints for development, especially in that the lack of public wastewater treatment requires reliance on private septic systems.

Participants in the workshop identified numerous opportunities around the train station and surrounding properties to improve safety and convenience for residents while providing benefits to the town at large. This was reinforced by survey results. Potential benefits supported by most respondents included:

- Additional parking by the train station, including dedicated parking for local residents
- Appropriate improvements to Foster Street, combining traffic calming and pedestrian improvements with street lighting near the station.
- Support for healthy lifestyles with walking and biking
- Reuse of vacant or underutilized buildings
- Reducing car traffic by enhancing access to rail travel
- Creating jobs for local residents
- Providing shops, services, and/or restaurants that serve the neighborhood
- Providing smaller housing units for young people and seniors
- Growing of the tax base
- Providing more diverse housing types, including some subsidized affordable housing

Opportunities surrounding the intersection of Foster and Taylor Streets were also identified. Participants liked the idea of creating a mixed-use village center with shops and local services, and apartments and townhouses for smaller households, combined with playgrounds, ballfields, and trails for walking and biking. Fewer respondents supported the idea of building additional detached single-family homes, or of expanding larger office/



light industrial uses (the current primary land use in this area).

Noting a range of opinions at the April workshop, the survey included a question about how best to distribute potential development around the study area. While almost 12 percent of respondents said there should be no additional development, 20 percent favored the area near the train station, and 21 percent the area at Foster/Taylor Streets. Almost 45 percent supported a balance of development between the train station and the Taylor/Foster intersection, with a focus on improving pedestrian and bicycle access to the train station from throughout the area.

■ SURVEYS

Following the April community events, the Town decided to make a similar set of activities available to residents through a series of online surveys. Information about the face-to-face and online engagements with the public can be found in Appendix D, E, and F, but below are some of the salient findings from the participation process.

VISUAL PREFERENCE SURVEY

Both the workshop and on-line survey included questions based on a series of photographs of varied building types and styles, streetscapes and landscaping. The visual preference survey results indicated a preference for two-story buildings with traditional New England architecture, porches, and varied massing and rooflines. Respondents showed support for mixed use buildings located along lively streetscapes, and residential buildings located in garden-like settings. There was low support for large buildings, modernist architecture, and buildings with unvaried architectural massing. Boxy buildings with frequent but shallow façade articulation were also rejected. Throughout, there was little support for buildings fronted by barren roadways and parking lots.

Among choices for typical Village Center buildings (for example, structures with shops on the ground floor and apartments or offices above), residents preferred buildings with a residential scale and massing over more commercial-style buildings. Of these, residents seemed to prefer images with a more rural character, with a combination of farmhouse-style buildings and barn-like structures within a rural landscape setting.

REFLECTING ON THE PUBLIC INPUT

Both the workshop and survey results indicated a preference for modestly scaled traditional New England architecture in a compact village setting, while rejecting contemporary architecture and sprawling suburban development patterns. Residents saw the potential benefits of steering future development towards dense, walkable, mixed-use centers, focused around important amenities like a train station or a major crossroads. These patterns of development, while offering important community and economic benefits, can also help protect valuable open space resources by clustering development instead of sprawling out into the countryside.

Participants indicated low support for continued development of single-family detached homes, large office campuses, or large boxy-looking multifamily developments. In many ways, the scale of architecture supported by the public's input is fine-grained and well-suited to the kind of careful infill that would be required in order to convert the two principal focus points of this fragmented study area into cohesive villages.

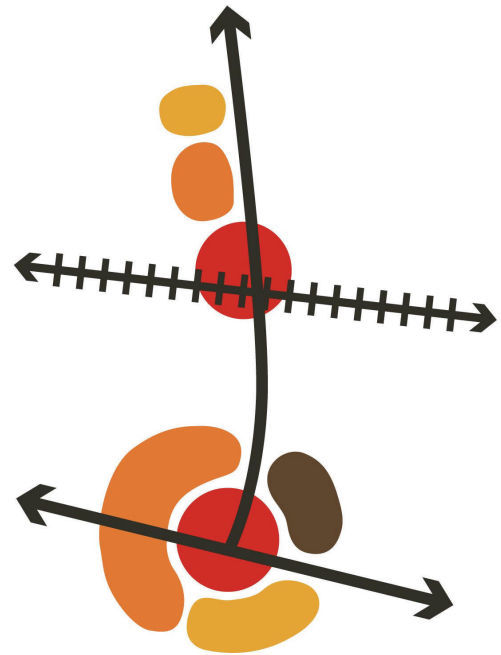
FRAMEWORK FOR DEVELOPMENT

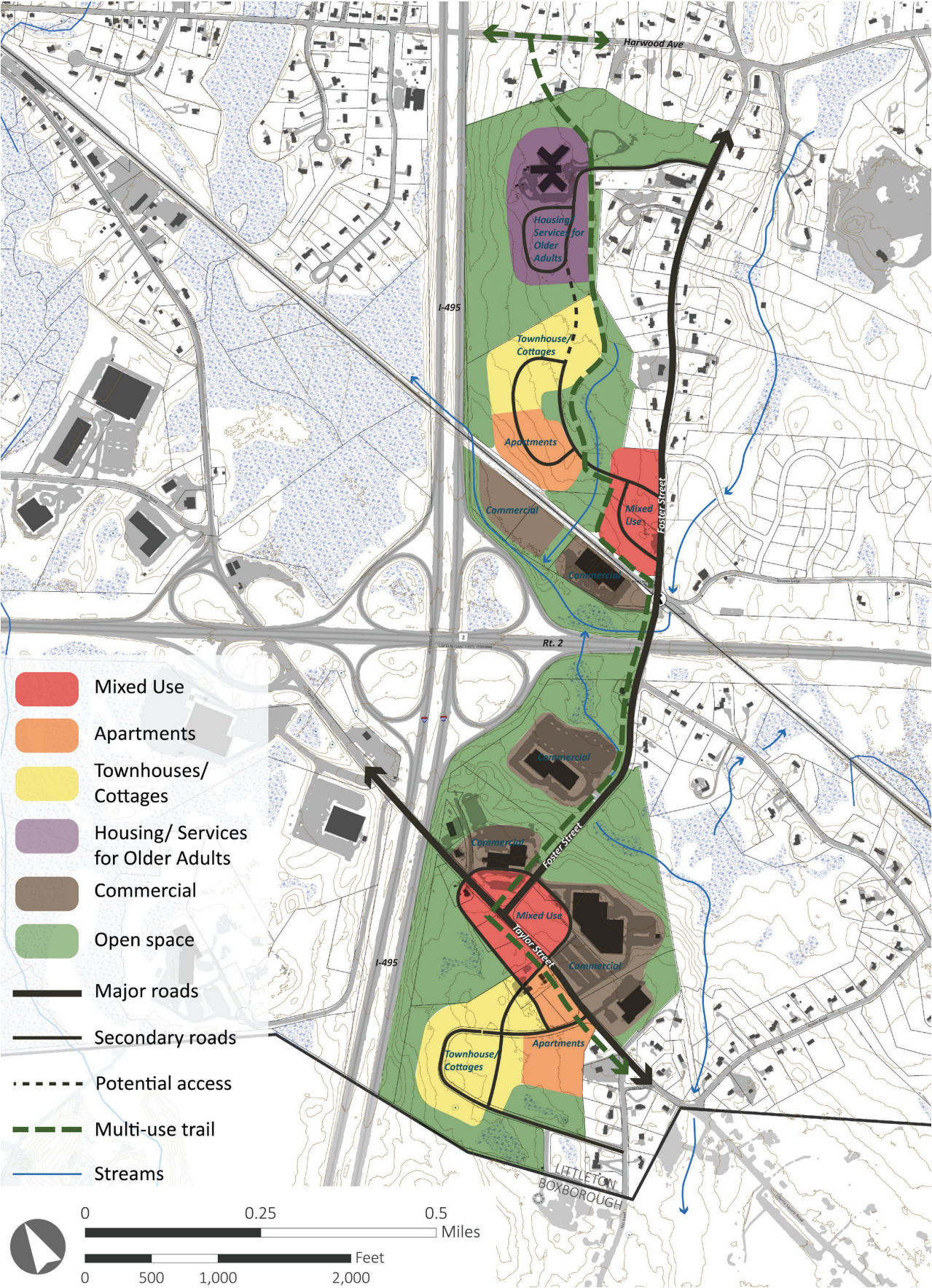
Starting at the public workshop, the consulting team developed a series of sketch plans for the site to explore opportunities for new homes and businesses while minimizing impacts on the rural character and quality of life enjoyed by neighborhood residents. The sketch plans show that in theory, enough land available to support hundreds of new dwelling units and over a hundred thousand square feet of commercial space. However, this level of development would only be possible with provisions for:

- Shared wastewater systems, whose feasibility depends on soil capacity and other conditions.
- Adequate public water supply. The Littleton Electric Light and Water Department (LELWD) is taking into account potential development in the Littleton Station area as it plans to meet future water demand in the town.
- Acceptable traffic capacity for Foster and Taylor Streets and related intersections.
- Suitable site conditions without additional wetlands, ledge, etc. to further constrain development.
- Interest and willingness of landowners to participate in a common masterplan.

For each of these, there is a carrying capacity that will likely reduce the extent of development that can actually be achieved in the study area. All of these factors will be evaluated and assessed as part of whatever development plans come forward (and in fact are actively in play as landowners explore their options under current zoning).

While it is difficult to predict the ultimate extent of future development, the planning process has identified a conceptual framework for future growth. This framework can serve to guide development decisions over time, so that as each landowner or developer makes decisions about their own property or site, each project helps to build an attractive, walkable, well-organized village center. In its simplest form, this framework focuses development around the two primary nodes in the study area: the train station and the Foster/Taylor intersection, as illustrated on the next page.





■ DEVELOPMENT NODES

Each node would have a mix of commercial and residential uses organized around attractive, walkable streets and other public spaces. Additional development would extend out from the mixed-use core, taking the form of apartments, townhouses or compact single-family neighborhoods as determined by the real estate market and carrying capacity of the land and available services. Each neighborhood, even if built by a separate developer, should be tied into the overall framework with a coherent network of streets, greenways and pedestrian paths connecting to the mixed-use core.

More detailed conceptual plans show how this framework could be extended as a general masterplan for redevelopment of the study area, including potential interior road connections and distribution of various development types. Again, what is shown is only one possible future state, but it begins to illustrate how likely development types could best be distributed on the site and how they could be linked together with roads, paths and open space networks.

As described earlier, the topography, site drainage and existing road and rail corridors divide the study area into two nodes at the train station and the Foster and Taylor Intersection. Conceptually, each area would be redeveloped with a mix of commercial and residential land uses (of varying densities) surrounding a compact, walkable mixed-use village center. Wetlands and stream corridors would remain protected, combined with buffers along the highway to create a continuous network of open space that will serve as a shared amenity. A multi-use trail threads through both villages, starting at Harwood Avenue and running south through open space to Littleton Station, then along Foster and Taylor Streets to the southern village center and beyond.

Within each neighborhood a network of streets connects across property lines, taking advantage of existing roads and driveways, and discharging traffic at the most suitable points on existing roads. Rather than cul-de-sacs, roads are configured as an interconnected grid, distributing traffic to multiple points and enhancing access for service and emergency vehicles. The size and design of each roadway is carefully designed for its intended purpose, ranging from larger circulation streets without parking to “Main Street style” shopping streets with parallel on-street parking, to quiet residential lanes and service alleys.

■ CONCEPT PLANS

The following concept plans show one way that this development framework could play out over coming decades. The intent of the concept plans is not to recommend a particular level of density – that will need to be determined by the town when revising the zoning, as well as reflecting an assessment of wastewater, traffic capacity, wetlands impacts and other carrying capacity factors. Rather, the purpose is to explore various building forms and development types and test out their fit with the site and the neighborhood. Each of these is based on residential and mixed-use project types that have been built recently in similar towns along the I-495 corridor – suggesting that they are meeting a demand in the real estate market and are economically feasible for the development community.

STUDY AREA NORTH

In the concept plan for the north half of the site, the train station is the focal point for a new Littleton Station Village. Immediately adjacent to the existing parking lots, mixed-use buildings provide space for shops, restaurants and other businesses on the first floor, with apartments or offices above. Two- or three-story mixed-use buildings with pitched roofs, varied rooflines, and engaging storefront windows create a lively streetscape along the edge of Foster St., and on the interior open up onto new parking lots. Continuous sidewalks and landscaping invite pedestrians to walk throughout the complex or visit on their way to and from the station. Varied building massing creates a variety of welcoming outdoor spaces and a feeling of appropriate scale, so that each attached section of the mixed use buildings feels like an individual small building, while functioning efficiently as a large whole.



The structure closest to the train platform and parking lots could be designed as a landmark building, helping visitors find their way around the village, and it could include indoor waiting rooms and public facilities catering to commuters. If financially feasible, the adjacent parking lot could be redeveloped as a multi-story parking structure, providing parking both for commuters and residents of new multi-family structures. The Stoneyard's light industrial facility across the tracks from the train station could be included in the zone, and would itself be a good location for a parking garage, mixed-use, apartments, etc., with a bridge across the tracks to the station.

Extending north from the mixed-use center, a small network of secondary roads threads through the vacant parcel north of the station, and could either loop back or continue through the Nashoba Valley Life Care property to Foster Street. Along these secondary roads there are opportunities for a variety of housing type which take advantage of each particular site and its context. For example, larger apartment structures would be a good fit for the site between the train station and I-495, where they would have easy walking access to the station and not be visible from existing homes or streets. At the north end townhouses could provide for housing for seniors and be a good fit with the existing life

The range of housing types will help address a need in the town for more small-unit housing, which can be ideal for seniors looking to downsize, or for young people seeking starter homes.



care facility. In between, small single-family houses or cottages provide another popular development style and help to buffer the village from the existing single-family houses on Foster St.

This range of housing types will help address a need in the town for more small-unit housing, which can be ideal for seniors looking to downsize, or for young people seeking starter homes. It would be possible to design all of the structures, including the larger multi-family buildings, with traditional New England style and detailing, with varied massing and rooflines that would help the village fit into its context. Parking would be located behind buildings, within garages, or carefully screened to reduce its visual impact. The variety of residential building facades and front porches forms a rich street edge that creates the sense that this neighborhood and the adjacent mixed-use center are all part of the same village.

The village is also united by a continuous open space network that includes a wooded buffer along the highway as well as a greenway along the east side that helps protect an existing wetland corridor. This also provides a visual buffer to the existing homes along Foster Street. A multi-use trail could follow the greenway from Harwood Ave, past the assisted living facility, and along the stream corridor between the existing single family homes and new cottages. From here, bicyclists and pedestrians enter the mixed-use village center, and then the trail continues along Foster St south towards the Foster and Taylor Village.

STUDY AREA SOUTH

The concept plan for the south half of the study area focuses development in a new Village at Foster and Taylor Streets. (See next page.) Here there is an opportunity to create a traditional Main Street in both form and function, with two- or three-story buildings fronted by broad sidewalks and on-street parallel parking. Ground level spaces would be reserved for active uses like shops, restaurants and service businesses. Upper stories could have offices or apartments. The architectural design could follow the New England village model, with varied massing and rooflines, porches and other amenities. In addition to shop fronts on the street, most buildings could also open up onto parking lots in the rear, which are connected across lot lines and where possible connected to the existing corporate parking lots to take advantage of unused pavement.



Some of the existing corporate and light industrial structures in the area could remain, with smaller buildings replacing their sterile front yard spaces. Others could be torn down and redeveloped over time to meet the changing demands of the marketplace. These large, level building pads and parking lots could lend themselves to redevelopment fairly easily; or the existing buildings could be retrofitted to fit the needs of the mixed-use village; or a combination of both could occur over time.

A loose grid of streets provides access to the interior of each block, crossing lot lines to rationalize circulation, and limiting access to a few carefully chosen points on Foster and Taylor Streets. This eases traffic flow and helps visitors navigate through the village, while tying each neighborhood to the village center. South of Taylor Street the plan can incorporate the approved road layout for the "Littleton Technology Park." As with the north village, the interior blocks can host a variety of housing types selected to fit the capacity of each site and the nature of its context. In this plan, larger apartment buildings are kept in close contact with the village core. Interior streets to the south could have a combination of attached townhouses and detached single-family homes on narrow lots. A neighborhood park creates a focal point for community events at the junction between the townhouses, cottages and apartment buildings next to the mixed-use center. This could include space for a community center building, pool and other amenities typically associated with multifamily housing projects.

As in the station village to the north, open space is consolidated into continuous buffers and greenways that serve as a counterpoint to the developed neighborhoods. This includes forested buffers on the slope adjacent to I-495, as well as upland forest surrounding the wetlands and stream corridor in the south end of the study area. This will help to protect water quality in the brooks as they flow off of the site, as well as establishing additional greenway corridors for wildlife and to extend woodland trails off of the property into neighboring parts of Littleton and Buxborough. In addition to natural trails through the woods, village residents will be able to use the paved multi-use trail to traverse the village and safely walk or bike down Foster Street to the train station.

■ ZONING IMPLEMENTATION

The good news is that Littleton has several regulatory reform options to promote development in the Littleton Station area. However, each possibility involves features that the property owners, developers, the Planning Board, or Littleton residents may see as down sides if not potential deal-breakers. If the Town wants to allow or encourage development in this location, the available zoning tools include the following:

- A “smart growth” overlay district adopted under G.L. c. 40R
- Under the Zoning Act, G.L. c. 40A, without the special features of Chapter 40R
 - As-of-right zoning with site plan review
 - Master plan special permit
 - Transfer of development rights (special permit)

Table 7.1 provides a technical comparison of these tools. Below is a brief description of some policy issues the Town may want to consider.

CHAPTER 40R

Several Massachusetts towns have adopted “smart growth” districts under Chapter 40R since the law went into effect in 2004. Though it encourages mixed-use development, the real aim of Chapter 40R was to unlock the potential for new housing growth, especially in Eastern Massachusetts and ideally (but not only) at train stations and in commercial centers. It can be a powerful tool for this purpose, as demonstrated in numerous Chapter 40R overlay districts around the state. From the developer’s perspective, Chapter 40R presents several advantages:

- A community that adopts a Chapter 40R district usually intends to encourage growth, so there is a strong prospect for predictable permitting;
- Chapter 40R includes provisions intended to discourage appeals (financial risk to abutters filing an appeal); and
- There is no cap on developer profits, unlike Chapter 40B.

When the local board that will be permitting projects in a Chapter 40R district has experience with as-of-right site plan review, the transition to Chapter 40R is fairly seamless. In fact, it can be gratifying because Chapter 40R takes the mystery out of design review. However, when the board is used to exercising discretion through the special permit process and wants the ability to deny a proposed use, Chapter 40R can be very challenging.

There is nothing a town can do under Chapter 40R that is not readily available under Chapter 40A, the Zoning Act. The key difference is that Chapter 40R brings the promise of incentive revenue and Chapter 40A does not. If Littleton were to choose Chapter 40R as the permitting mechanism for development in Littleton Station Village, the town would be eligible for two types of incentive payments:

- A **Zoning Incentive Payment**, which ranges from \$10,000 to \$600,000 depending on the number of new housing units the district is zoned to create (20 units vs. more than 501 units). The Town becomes eligible to request the Zoning Incentive Payment after Town Meeting adopts the Chapter 40R bylaw **and** the Attorney General has approved it.

- A **Bonus Payment** of \$3,000 per unit for each unit that could not have been built without the Chapter 40R district. The Town becomes eligible to request Bonus Payments as building permits are issued for the new units.

Often, having a Chapter 40R district enhances a town's competitiveness for certain state grants. However, DHCD has become stringent about requiring certification from towns that the area placed in a Chapter 40R district is "construction ready" and will not require infrastructure funds from programs like MassWorks in order to proceed.

Below are some examples of towns that have successfully used Chapter 40R to provide for housing growth:

- Easton
- Lakeville
- Ludlow
- Lunenburg
- Lynnfield
- Norwood
- Reading
- Plymouth
- Sudbury

MASTER PLAN SPECIAL PERMIT

A master plan special permit under Chapter 40A can be a very useful tool for permitting the overall buildout of a large site at a "master plan" concept level well before a developer is ready to proceed with a specific project. The special permit locks in the developer's zoning rights and provides a level of assurance to lenders that development will be able to move forward. Once the special permit has been granted, the developer can apply for site plan review on a phase-by-phase basis, and while the site plan process per se is as-of-right, the plan review process will always be subject to certification of consistency with the original special permit.

Communities that have used the master plan special permit to provide for growth while exercising control through the special permit process include:

- Hopkinton
- Plymouth
- Grafton

TRANSFER OF DEVELOPMENT RIGHTS

Transfer of development rights (TDR) is a voluntary growth management option that allows or encourages higher-density development in a designated "receiving" area in exchange for protecting land in a "sending" area, or an area where the community would like to see preservation, not development. Both the sending and receiving areas have development rights based on what zoning allows. However, the owner of land in a receiving district has the potential to exceed what zoning ordinarily allows by acquiring development rights from an owner in the sending area. TDR generally works best when the community has a partnership with a land trust, but it is not a prerequisite for success.

Littleton has been awarded an EEA Planning Assistance Grant, in part, to study TDR as a potential tool for focusing development in activity areas like Littleton Station Village, where development is encouraged, while protecting open space in areas considered priorities for conservation or agriculture. The purpose of the study is to determine whether TDR will work in a community of Littleton's size. Work on TDR will begin soon and may provide another tool to incentivize development around the train station.