

# Littleton Station Village Vision Plan

June 4, 2020

## FINAL REPORT



DODSON & FLINKER  
Landscape Architecture and Planning

RKG

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## OVERVIEW

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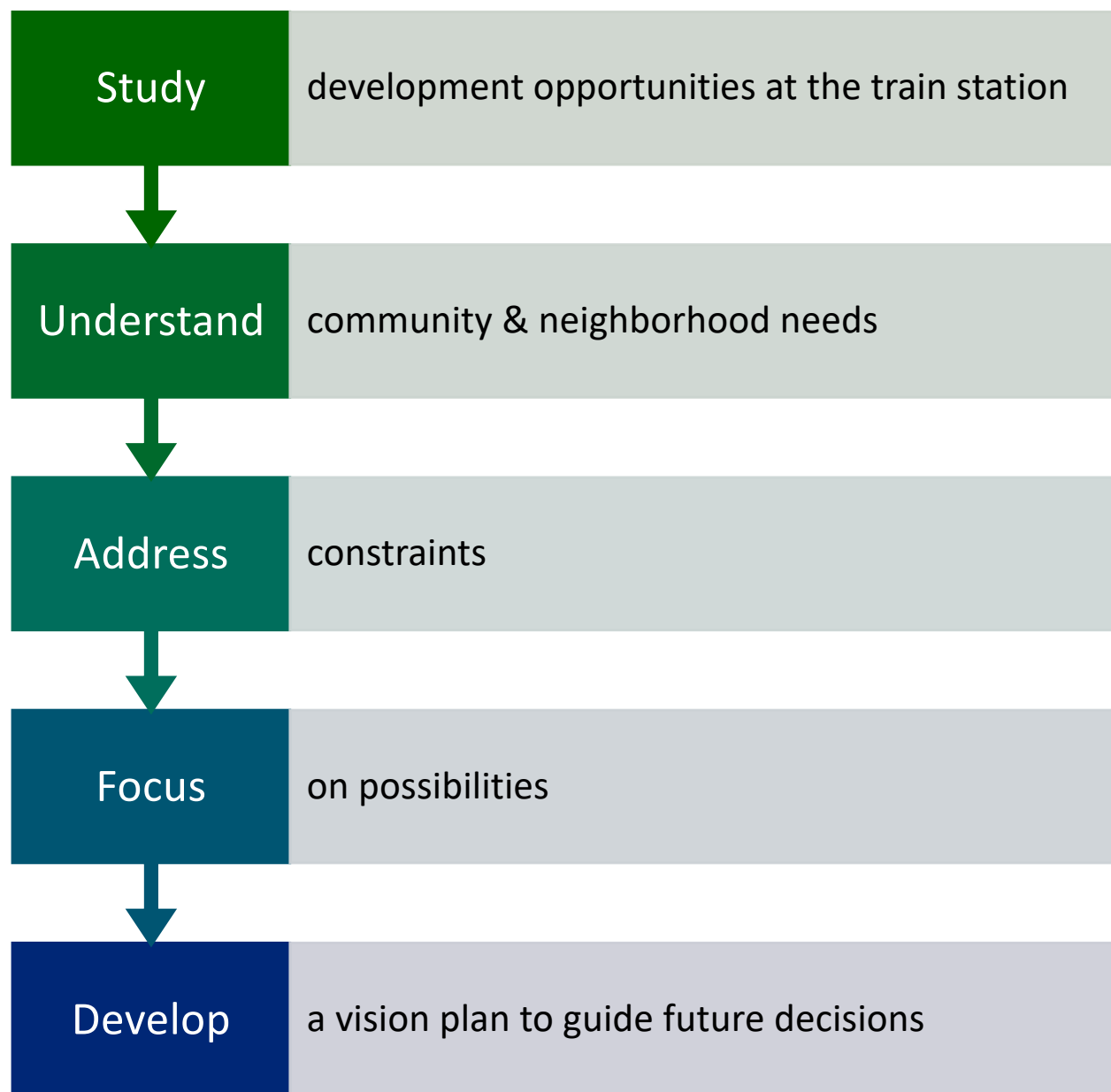


# Why this study?

- Littleton Master Plan “opportunity areas” (2017)
  - Littleton Common
  - Littleton Depot/Industrial Park
  - Littleton MBTA Station
- Littleton’s designation as Housing Choice Community (2018) opened the door to MassHousing grant for Littleton Station Village Vision Plan.



## Project goals



# Project team

- Barrett Planning Group LLC
- Dodson & Flinker, Inc.
- RKG Associates, Inc.

With assistance from:

- Fuss & O'Neill, Inc.
- Town of Littleton Planning  
Department, Water  
Department, Town  
Administrator

Littleton Station Working Group



**Process**

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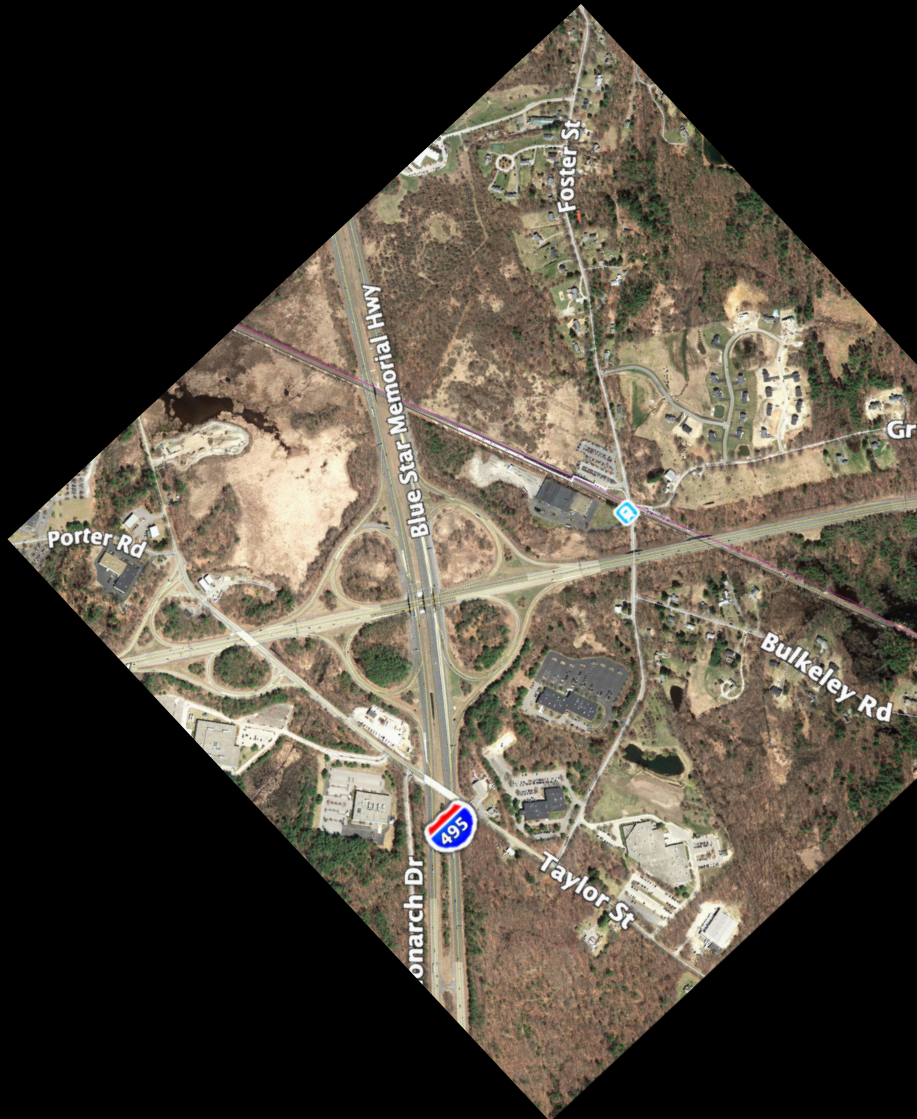


# Key components

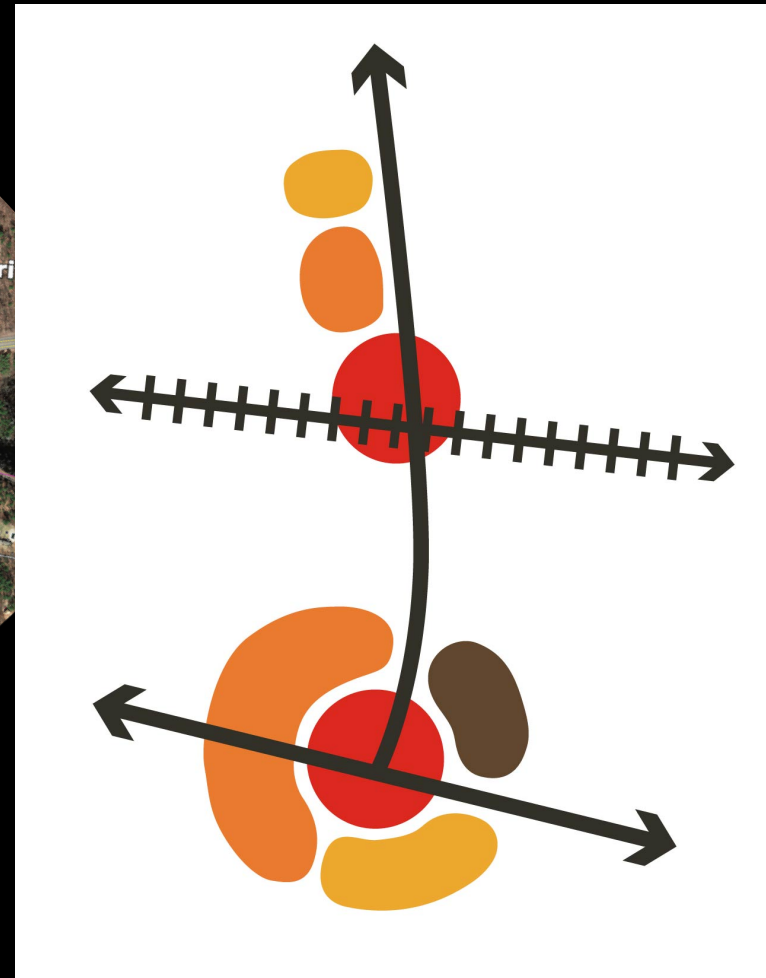
- Site Analysis
  - Physical
  - Regulatory
- Data Analysis
  - Demographics
  - Office, Industrial, Retail, Multifamily Markets
  - Regional Trends
  - Fiscal
- Community Consultation
  - Visioning Sessions
  - Survey
  - Working Group, Planning Board



# Study area



Approximately 263 acres





# Observations

- From a market perspective
  - Study area has limited access & visibility, disjointed development pattern
  - Better competing opportunities elsewhere
  - Retail suitability: limited, local, neighborhood, commuter
  - Office suitability: existing space absorption, area lacks amenities
  - Warehouse/distribution logistics: best nonresidential option
  - Residential: senior, young singles/couples best residential options

# Observations

- Residential market
  - Strength lies in rental development
  - Condos likely slow absorption
- Opportunities & challenges
  - Wastewater
  - Amenities & services
  - Regulatory constraints
  - Neighborhood considerations
  - Is the market strong enough to deliver more than apartments?
  - *What makes a village?*



# Report says land at T stations could handle 253,000 housing units — and ease traffic gridlock

By **Tim Logan** Globe Staff, Updated December 18, 2019, 12:01 a.m.

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# Observations

- Littleton's residential land use pattern and housing stock are not well aligned with its household characteristics.
- Over half of all households are single people living alone or two-person households. Yet, over half of all housing units have 7+ rooms, and only 33 percent have 2-5 rooms.
- Littleton doesn't offer a range of options for young workers and older adults to rent, and it offers very little on the lower end of the homeownership market for any age group.



## What does the community want?

- Site visits and interviews
- Suburban transit development case studies
- Interviews: local, industry, market
- Visioning process
- Survey



### Friday, April 5:

- 6:30-8:30: Listening Session

### Saturday, April 6

- 9-Noon: Visioning!



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RKG





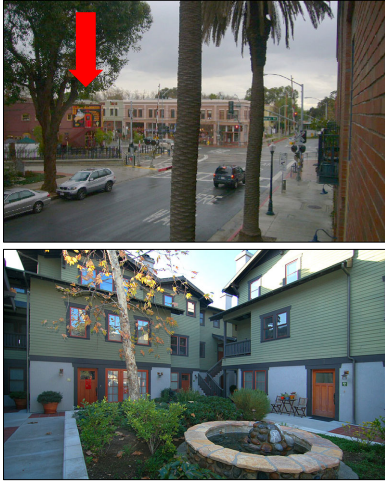


# Community visioning



## Mission Meridian Village

Located across the street from a light rail station servicing the Gold Line to Los Angeles from South Pasadena, the Mission Meridian Village development is an award-winning mixed-use village development in Southern California. The site consists of 67 condos and 5,000 square feet of retail over a 1.65-acre site. There are two levels of subterranean parking, providing 280 spaces in total for residents and nonresidents. The housing types located on-site range from single-family homes, to bungalows, duplexes, mixed-use lofts, and courtyard housing<sup>1</sup>. Mission Meridian Village is distinctive in placement, as it is between the historic neighborhood center and a traditional single-family-home neighborhood, forming a connection that was previously unrealized while preserving the local historic character. The development has won the following awards for its intelligent design, proactive approach to transit-oriented development, and commitment to new-urbanism: the Charter Award from the Congress for the New Urbanism (2006), the "Tranny Award" from the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans, 2006), five Golden Nugget Awards from the Pacific Coast Builders Conference (2006), and it was selected as an Outstanding Transit Project in America by Urban Land Institute (2006).<sup>2</sup>



Conclusions from this study were as follows:

- Develop a clear time frame and strategy for implementation
- Capitalize on the existence of opportunities such as large parking lots or vacant land. They are less useful for an area with limited scope.
- Conduct a clear visioning process with extensive community feedback, particularly before building. This will avoid delays at time of approval which can increase the cost of development.
- Work closely with single-family homeowners in the area, remaining sensitive to their needs and expectations
- Allow for "by-right" zoning when and where possible
- Consider incorporating a "transit-district" or "transit-village" overlay zone to affirm certain TOD criteria is met
- Establishment of a "floating" TOD overlay zone allows for fluid planning of the station area and the surrounding corridors, while avoiding higher land speculation costs



## University Station

Situated along both Route 128 and I-95, and adjacent to the Route 128 Commuter Rail station, University Station has blossomed into one of the most multi-faceted and frequently-visited mixed-use developments in the Greater Boston Area. The 120 acres in Westwood, MA are zoned for uses including hotel, office, retail and residential use, with 750,000 square feet dedicated to retail and restaurants and 350,000 square feet dedicated to office space. Current tenants range from Wegmans, to Del Frisco's Grille, to Target and Nordstrom Rack<sup>1</sup>. Brigham and Women's Health Care Center is also located there. The announcement of the University Avenue Mixed-Use District acquisition was made in 2012 by Charles River Realty Investors in partnership with New England Development, Eastern Real Estate, and Clarion Partners<sup>2</sup>. The site officially opened in March of 2015 and is one of Massachusetts's largest mixed-use development projects today.

University Station was a comprehensive effort on the part of the developers, the municipality and the community to re-envision and rejuvenate an area that was previously an old industrial site. In coordination with town officials, a new master plan for the area was created from the existing that was better suited to the financing feasibility and permitting processes involved in bringing the site to fruition. A new zoning overlay district was established upon an agreement from the community and town staff, and development was divided into several phases<sup>3</sup>. Housing options now include assisted living residences and luxury apartments, with two 4-story condominium buildings currently under construction.

Conclusions from this study were as follows:

- Align re-permitting in coordination with re-envisioning to create cohesion and improve overall efficiency
- Establish strong communication channels with all invested parties to ensure a smooth transition and avoid unnecessary pitfalls. For example, the MBTA, the Finance Committee and the Board of Selectmen
- Understand what is feasible to your specific project and the needs of those living nearby who will actively eat, work and play at the site
- Partner with interested vendors early in the process
- Strongly analyze station area data during initial assessment to scale the style and growth of proposals, particularly when a plan is being carried out in phases



<sup>1</sup> University Station, New England Development, 2019, P 01

<sup>2</sup> "New Team, New Vision for Westwood, MA Mixed-Use Development," Charles River Realty Investors, April 13, 2012, P 01-03

<sup>3</sup> "Case Study- University Station," New England Development, 2019, P 01

# Happenings in other towns



## Concord Commons

Concord Commons is a transit-oriented, mixed-use development in West Concord that was developed in conjunction with Concord Crossing in the downtown. This 1.93-acre site is ideally located not only adjacent to the train tracks, but to a nearby industrial park and active/passive recreation resources. Community members were very receptive to this project as the previous site was the former Atlantic Pre-Hung-Door factory, and was a major eyesore in the town. The site was made possible in the early 2000s because of a provision for a special permit process which allowed for a combination of uses in an industrial zone.<sup>1</sup> The Commons consists of 20 apartment units, 5% of which are affordable, as well as restaurant, retail and office uses. Under the plan, 146 parking spaces were provided, totalling a 15% parking reduction. There are 15 spaces dedicated strictly to commuter parking.



Walkable connections to the West Concord Center Village, the Concord commuter rail station and the Concord-Acton Industrial Park have vastly expanded options for residents, affiliated local businesses, and created job opportunities, particularly along Thoreau and Sudbury Roads. A push on behalf of the town for more greening has made these connections more pleasant and popular. The town also advocated for a reduction in lot size from 2.15 to 1.93 acres, hugely contributing to these pathway improvements.<sup>2</sup>

Concord Commons demonstrates an almost effortless transition from an underutilized lot to a quaint yet activated space. The development fulfilled the goals of revitalizing the West Concord Center Village, strongly engaged with the community throughout the development process, and provided more affordable housing options with funding provided solely by private developers.

Conclusions from this study were as follows:

- Town's must advocate for uses they know will best service their constituents, despite the fact that it might not be the developer's first option
- Transparency and proper community outreach can virtually eliminate pushback throughout the TOD (re)development process
- Reduction of impervious surfaces can have multiple economic benefits including on stormwater management systems and on parking requirements
- Continue to engage those property owners interested in furthering smart growth initiatives throughout the town
- Integrate tactics that employ form over use, not only to create human-scale spaces, but spaces that are uniform with existing development outside the station area plan
- Advocate for greening/landscaping and streamlined architectural design in new connections to encourage usage and promote smart growth. Also request commercial businesses to follow these guidelines.

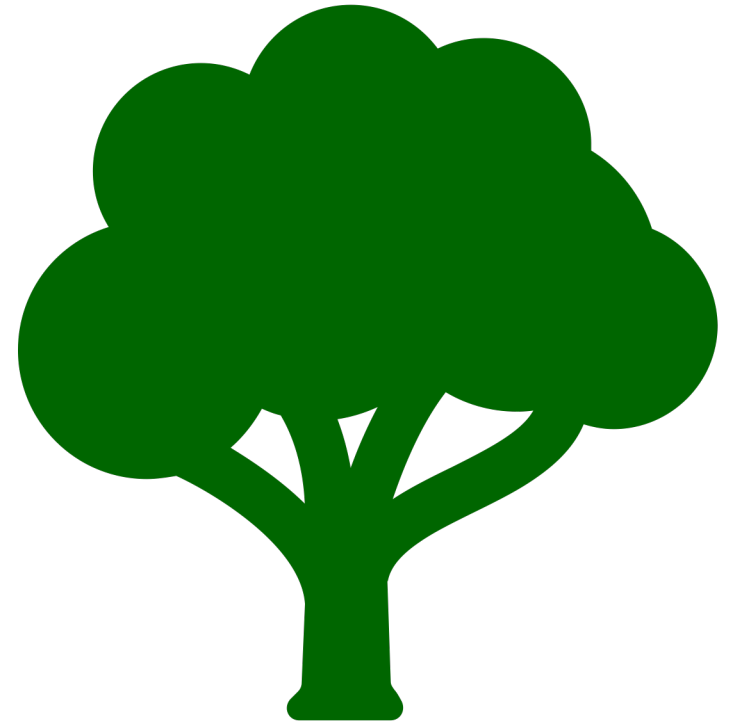


<sup>1</sup> Concord Commons and Concord Crossing, Metropolitan Area Planning Council, 2019

<sup>2</sup> "Concord Commons, Concord MA", Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Success Stories, Massachusetts Government Smart Growth Toolkit

# What are the study area's assets?

- Rural character
- Historic sites, buildings and agricultural landscape
- Winding rural roads lined with trees and stone walls
- Beautiful woods with walking trails
- Train station
- IBM shuttle
- High real estate values
- Family-friendly town



# What are its weaknesses or limitations?

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Not enough parking at the train station!

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Foster Street narrow, dark and bumpy

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No sidewalks

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Half-full office/industrial buildings

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Indirect highway access

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Dangerous intersections

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Difficult office/retail market

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Too many big houses with no place to downsize to

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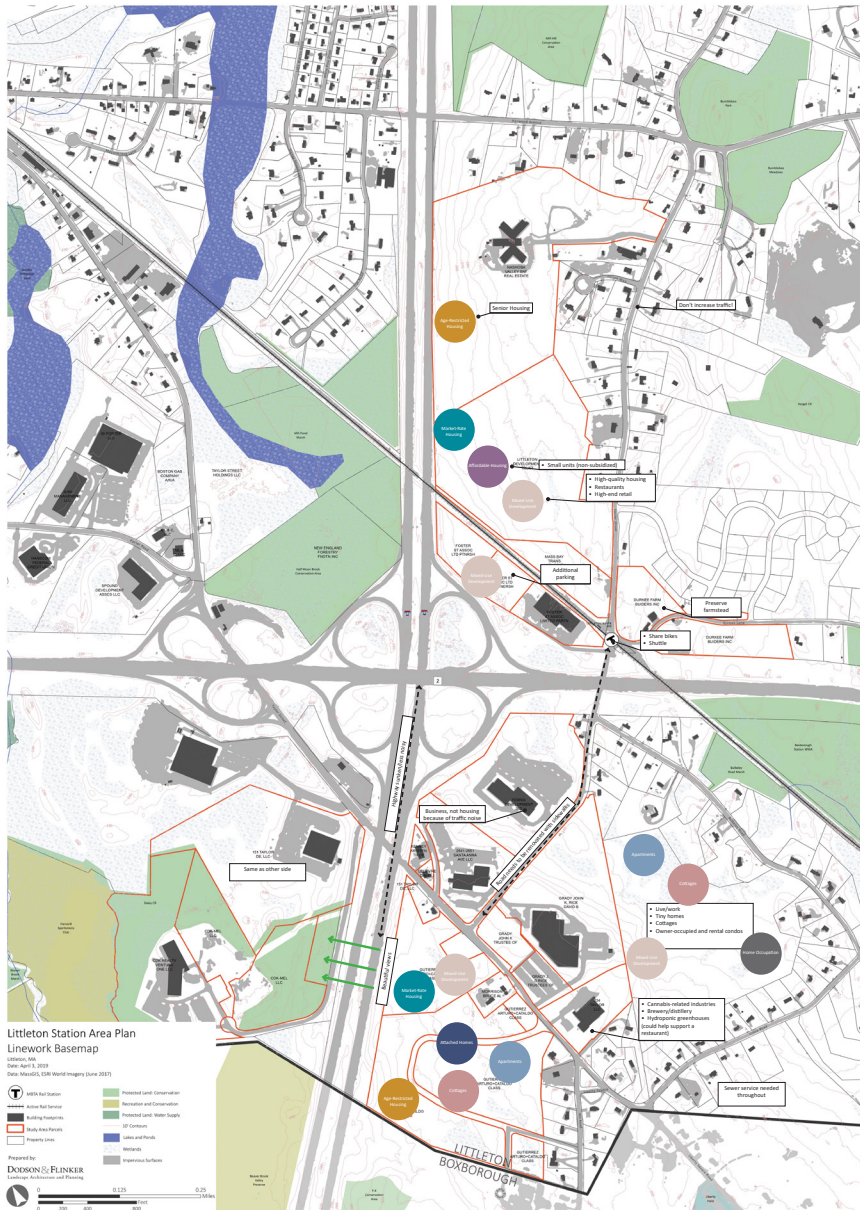
Lack of sewer

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Soils, ledge and wetlands constrain development



# What we heard



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# **What are the potential social/community benefits of development around the train station?**



Smaller units at the train station could benefit older adults, young adults, small families



People need places to socialize: coffee shop, brew pub, restaurant

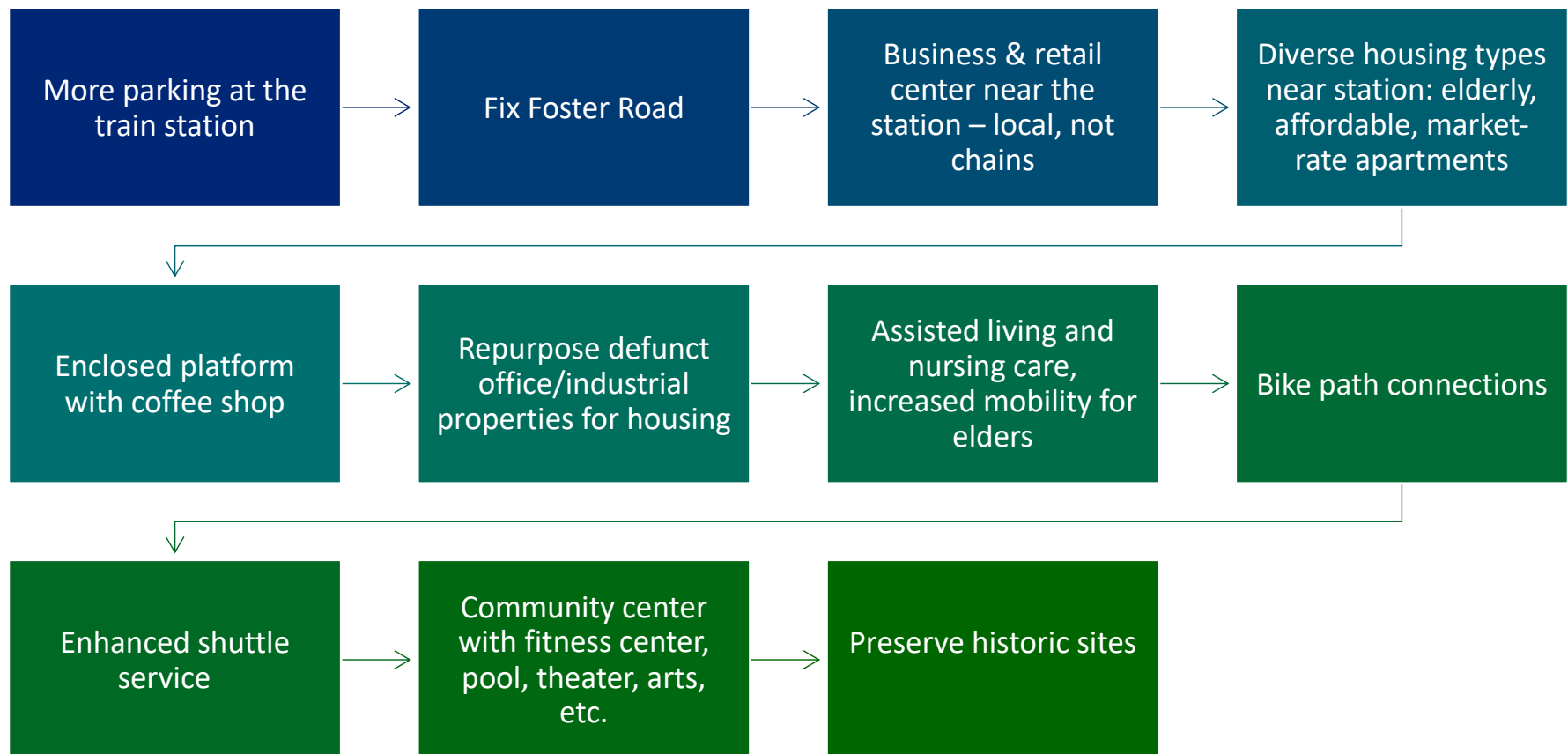


People want things to do: arts/culture, easy access to groceries, places to walk



People want to get around without a car when possible

# What could – or should – development do to improve the town's quality of life?



## What about people who live near the train station now?

Residents appreciate “peace and quiet”

Value homes with yards, gardens

Many concerns about traffic, Foster Street, train station parking



# What people would like to see near the train station

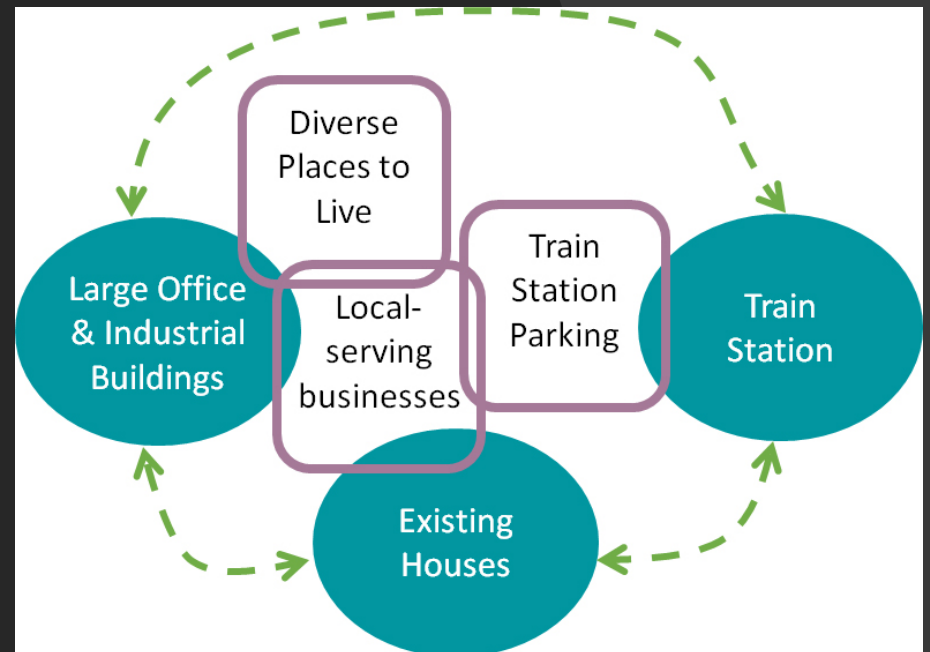
- Café
- Yoga studio
- Community athletic center
- Tech/start-up incubator
- Artisan space
- Health care
- Holistic medicine

*And many others ...*

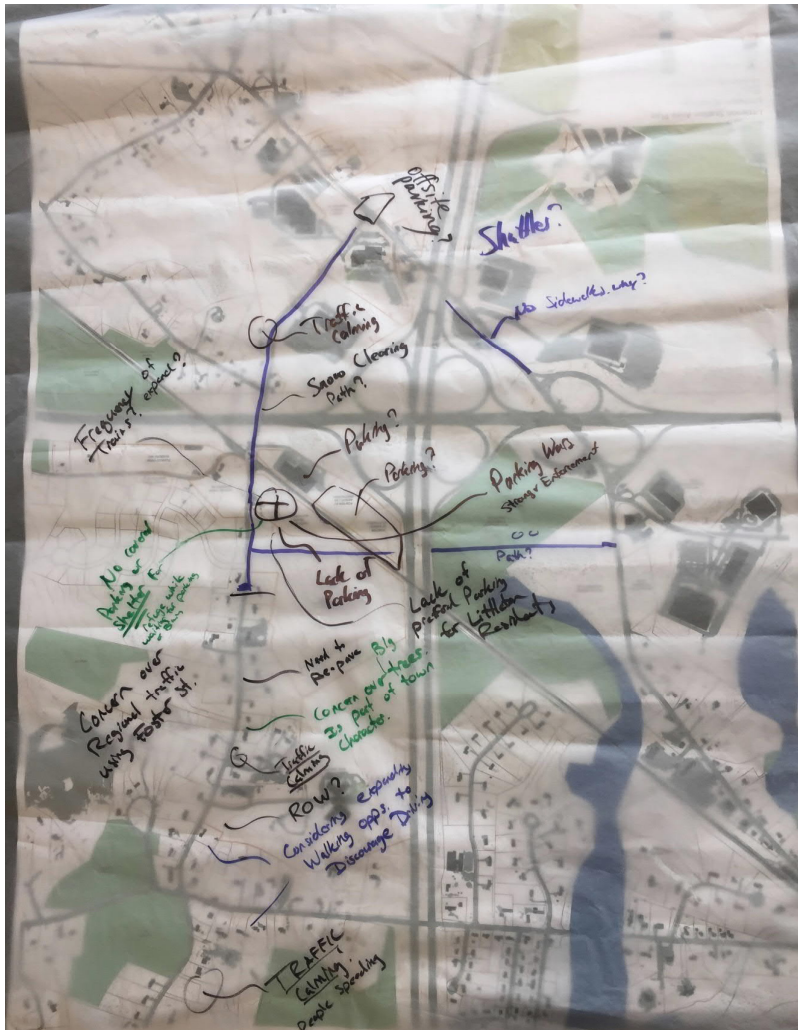


# Opportunities

*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.*



# Transportation & mobility: what are the concerns?



- Biggest issues we heard:
  - Lack of train station parking
  - Lack of shelter/awning
  - Need for traffic calming on Foster Street
  - Street lighting between train station and parking areas across Foster Street



# Community Surveys

- Three over six weeks
- Mirror topics at Saturday 4/6 vision session
  - Social/housing, economic development
  - Transportation/mobility, open space
- Visual preferences, master plan ideas

# What we heard: the community surveys

TOP 3 "YES" IDEAS	<b>LITTLETON STATION VILLAGE</b> <i>General Opportunities</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bike path connections (69%)</li> <li>Preservation of historic sites (56%)</li> <li>Parking garage (54%)</li> </ul> <i>Business Opportunities</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coffee shop (57%)</li> <li>Bakery, ice cream shop, deli, etc. (42%)</li> <li>Brewery/pub (42%)</li> </ul>	TOP 3 "NO" IDEAS	<i>General Opportunities</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Diverse types of housing (39%)</li> <li>Repurposing existing buildings for housing (24%)*</li> <li>Assisted living and nursing care (19%)*</li> </ul> <p>*23% rated these ideas favorably, indicating a split in public opinion.</p> <i>Business Opportunities</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Light industry (48%)</li> <li>Boutique hotel (44%)</li> <li>Pharmacy (40%)</li> </ul>
	<b>VACANT LAND NORTH OF STATION</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Biking and walking trails (57%)</li> <li>Parking for Littleton residents (48%)</li> <li>Shops and restaurants (42%)</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conventional single-family homes (48%)</li> <li>Affordable housing (37%)</li> <li>Cottage-style homes (36%)</li> </ul>
	<b>FOSTER &amp; TAYLOR STREET</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Biking and walking trails (63%)</li> <li>Village center with mixed-use buildings (39%)</li> <li>Playgrounds (31%)</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Technology-related office or light industrial use (52%)</li> <li>Conventional single-family homes (51%)</li> <li>Cottage-style homes (36%)</li> </ul>



- Family-friendliness of area
- Train station
- Winding rural roads lined with trees and stone walls



- Lack of parking
- Lack of sidewalks
- Narrowness/darkness of Foster Street

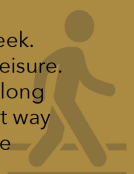
- Loss of rural town character
- Increased traffic
- Potential for more school children



**Increased parking availability**  
was identified as the top potential  
benefit of redevelopment.



- 61% of respondents go for a walk around Littleton at least once a week.
- 93% of those who walk do so for leisure.
- 50% feel that creating sidewalks along Foster Street is the most important way to improve pedestrian safety in the vicinity of the station.



# What we heard: the community surveys

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Little

## LITTLETON STATION VILLAGE Survey Snapshot

Through a series of three surveys administered from May-June 2019, participants shared their thoughts about developing Littleton Station and surrounding areas.

RESIDENTIAL OR MIXED  
USE BUILDINGS, 2-3 STORIES



The visual preference portion of the survey included 32 images of a variety of building types, including:

- Residential or mixed use buildings (2-3 stories)
- Larger residential or mixed use buildings
- Cluster housing
- Villages or centers

Participants were asked to check off any images that contained building styles they felt may be suitable for Littleton. These images were selected by **at least 50% of the respondents**. (Note: none of the images of larger residential or mixed-use buildings were selected by at least 50% of survey participants.)



CLUSTER  
HOUSING



VILLAGE OR  
CENTER





An abstract graphic on a gray background. A thick black arrow starts from the bottom left, curves upwards and to the right, then turns into a spiral that extends towards the top right. Several organic, blob-like shapes in shades of red, brown, and gold are scattered around the arrow. The text 'Framework for development' is centered in white, with the subtitle '(It takes a town to make a village)' below it.

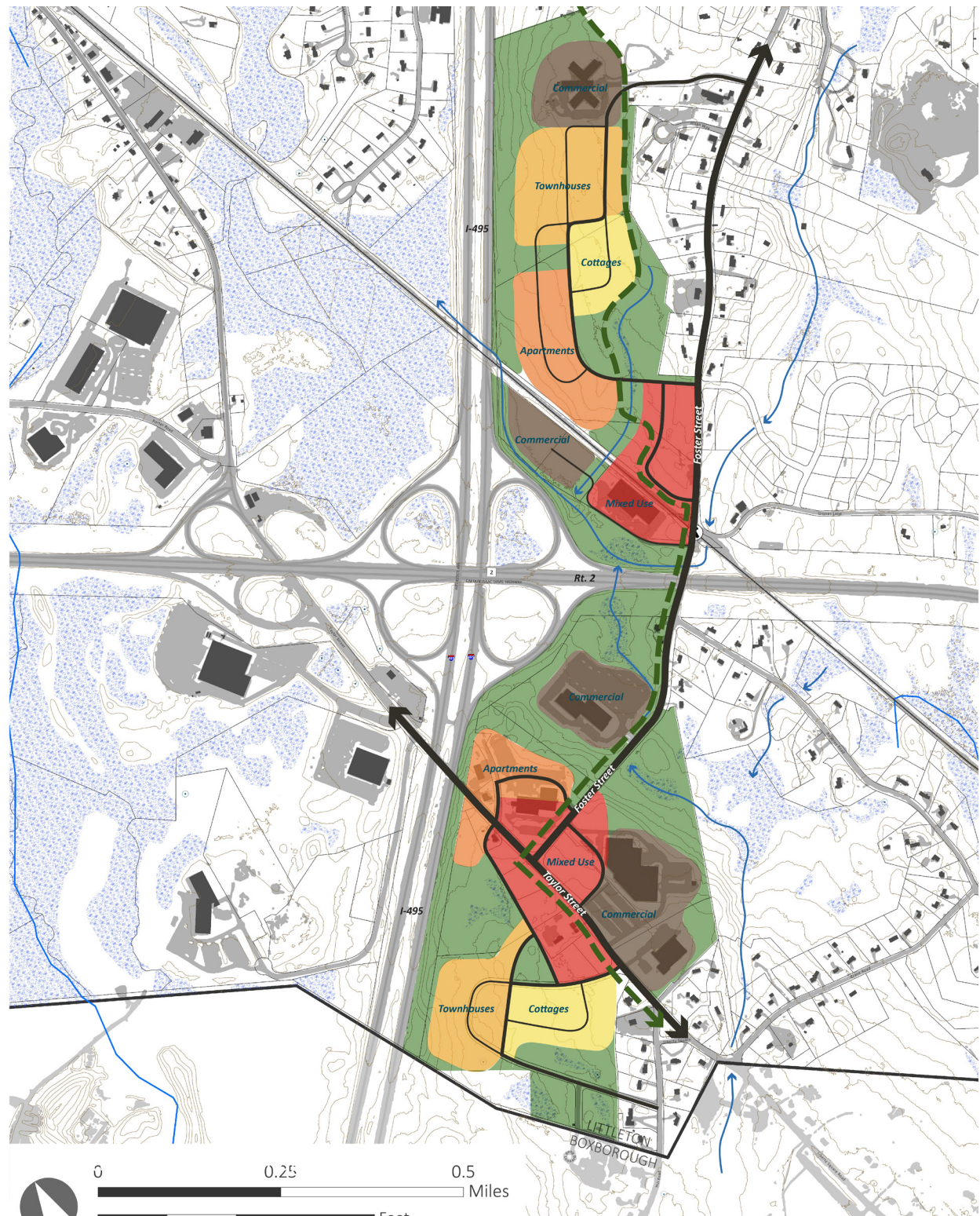
# Framework for development

(It takes a town to make a village)

# Concept Plan

Urban design is the art and science of shaping a community's **public realm**. That realm is collectively comprised of **public spaces**, the **activities** that occur within them, and the **buildings that frame them**.

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## Study area north





## Study area south





# What next?

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# Important questions

## Regulatory reform

- As-of-right zoning is great, but do you have enough information to make it work for this area?
- Can you arrive at a master plan special permit option that developers can live with?
- How will you review design?
- How much density is the town willing to accept?

## Funding & improvements

- If 40R, how will you invest the incentive payments in connectivity improvements for the village?
- How will wastewater be addressed?
- What about District Improvement Financing (DIF)?



# Easier said than done .... but it can be done

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- What does Littleton want?
- Luring residential development is easier than luring high quality development, amenities, community benefits
- On its own, housing does not make a village
- Getting smart development:
  - Compact, sustainably designed and built
  - Maximum transportation options/minimal parking
  - Range of housing prices
  - Parking subordinate to building form
  - Universal design, visitability



# Littleton is in the driver's seat

... don't lose sight of the importance of **good urban design**: context, form, connectivity, sustainable design, accessible public spaces, mixed housing types

# Tools

- Chapter 40R *with design standards*
- Chapter 40A as-of-right *with design standards*
- Master plan special permit *with design standards*
- Transfer of development rights *if feasible*

Potential Chapter 40R challenges:

- **Adequate infrastructure & utilities**

For any option:

- Development agreement, mitigation



# Thoughts to keep in mind ...

- Multifamily market remains strong
- Developers looking for suburban sites
- ***Make a village***: housing, things to do, places to congregate, places to work
- Be flexible about uses in village commercial space
- Make existing nonresidential space more competitive: make a work environment that attracts tenants and their young workforce
- **What you approve for development in Littleton Station Village will be there for a long time ...**

# Thank you

