

Dracut Town Center

Visioning Session II



Prepared By:
Northern Middlesex Council
of Governments

December 1, 2011

Project Objectives under District Local Technical Assistance

- **Encourage an appropriate mix of business, residential, cultural and civic uses;**
- **Encourage design that: promotes the historic nature and value of the Center, creates a sense of place, and fosters a distinct identity;**
- **Encourage the reuse of existing underutilized and vacant properties;**
- **Promote compact development that is pedestrian-oriented, through roadway design, shared parking and pedestrian amenities; and**
- **Minimize the impacts on town services and maximize the efficient use of public infrastructure**

The Planning Process

- **Two Public Visioning Sessions**
- **Input from residents, Community Groups, Businesses and Town Boards/Committees**
- **Public Meeting**
- **Town Meeting Presentation**

Overview of the first Visioning Session

- **Reviewed**

- Overview of the Project
- Project Objectives under the DLTA program
- The Planning Process
- Town Center Neighborhood and Commercial Districts

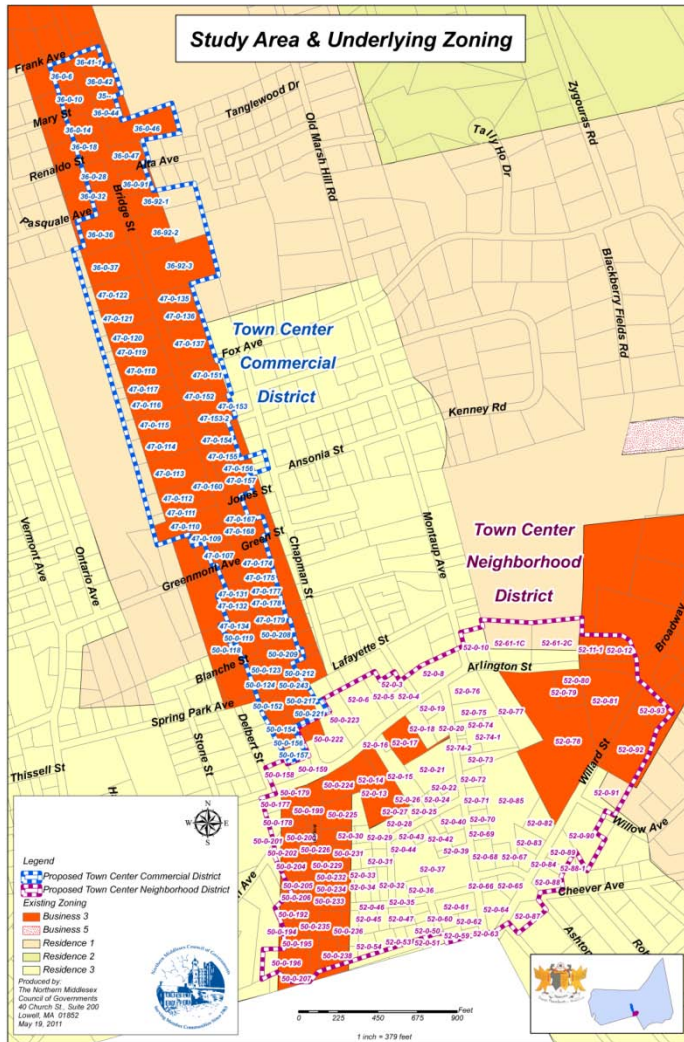
- **Participated in SWOT Session**

- Identified Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats related to the two Study Areas
- Prioritized statements through red (1st), green (2nd), blue (3rd), and yellow (4th) dots.

Two Initial Study Areas

- **Town Center Neighborhood District – in the area surrounding the traditional center of town**
- **Town Center Commercial District- along Route 38 north of Arlington Street to Frank Avenue**

Initial Study Areas



SWOT Analysis Process

- SWOT stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats
- SWOT analysis is a tool utilized by private industry and public agencies at the outset of a planning process
- Designed to capture your personal thoughts about the Town Center area
- Responses were recorded on a flip chart

Prioritization

- At the conclusion of the SWOT Analysis, color coding dots on were placed each flip chart, to prioritize the ideas that participants felt were most important.
- NMCOCG staff tallied the results and summarized the findings.

SWOT Session Results (top five results)

- **Strengths**

- Yellow meeting house
- Town Hall – nice building/historic
- Residential mix
- Nice renovated library
- High visibility area
- Restaurants in plaza on Broadway
- Rifle range – gem (outside study area)

SWOT Session Results (top five results)

- **Weaknesses**

- Wendy's location/late hours
- Aiken Avenue intersection conflicts/blocks traffic
- Too much traffic
- Lack of ornamentals/landscaping
- Inadequate drainage

SWOT Session Results (top five results)

- **Opportunities**
 - Encourage unique small businesses
 - Green space on Bridge Street
 - Design as quaint town center
 - More native plants
 - Develop design guidelines and add trees

SWOT Session Results (top five results)

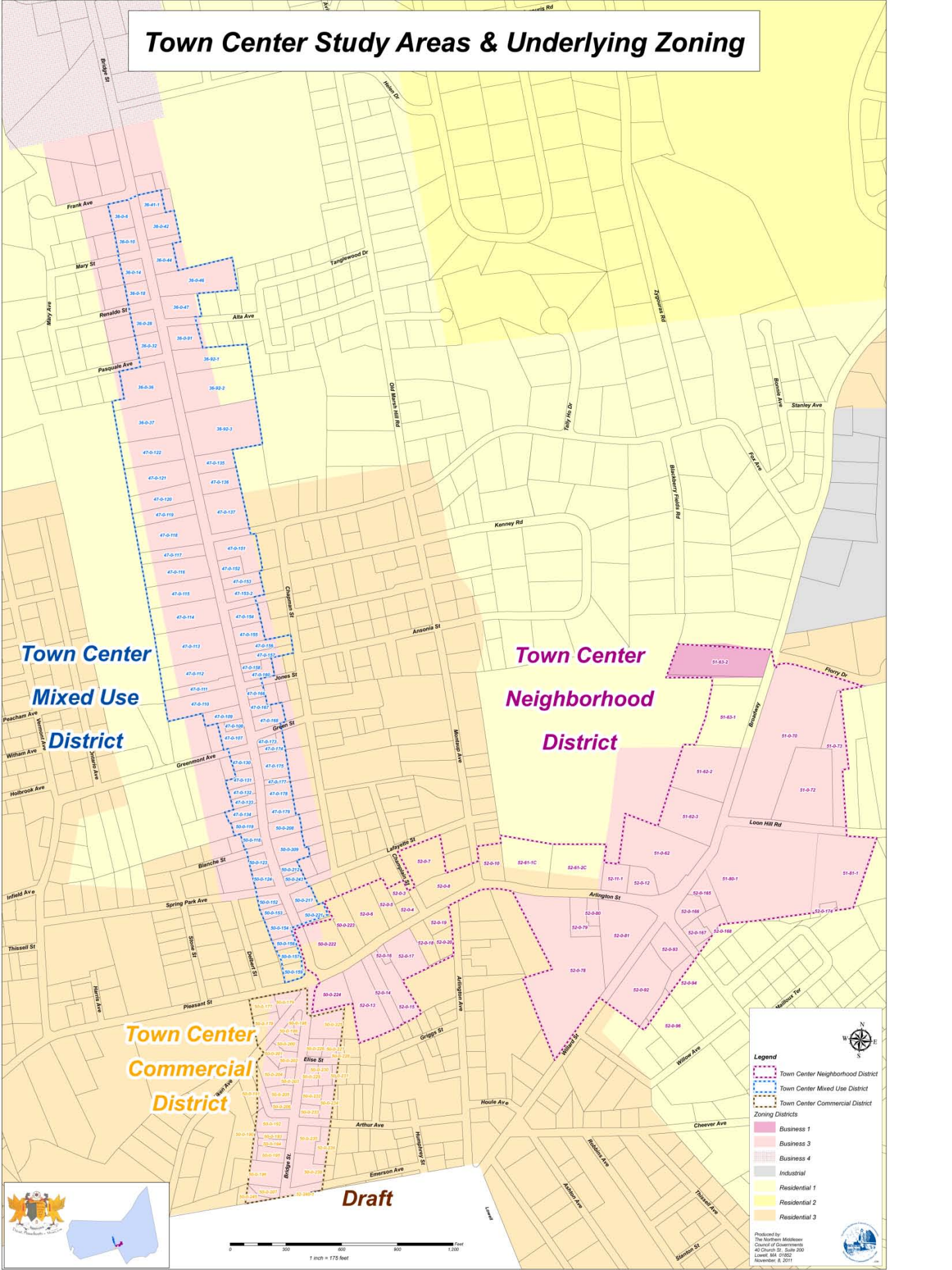
- **Threats**

- Lack of community participation due to more complex development issues
- Flooding from new development
- Many uses at Veterans Memorial Park create traffic problems
- CVS/Market Basket/Wendy's are too close which creates traffic/pedestrian conflicts
- Maintenance costs for new green spaces and locations

Revised Study Areas

- **Town Center Neighborhood District**
 - Along Arlington Street and Broadway (from Bridge St. to Florry Dr.)
- **Town Center Mixed Use District**
 - Bridge Street north of Arlington to Frank Avenue
- **Town Center Commercial District**
 - Bridge Street from the Lowell line to Arlington

Town Center Study Areas & Underlying Zoning



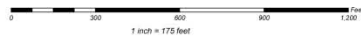
**Town Center
Mixed Use
District**

**Town Center
Neighborhood
District**

**Town Center
Commercial
District**

Draft

- Legend**
- Town Center Neighborhood District
 - Town Center Mixed Use District
 - Town Center Commercial District
- Zoning Districts**
- Business 1
 - Business 3
 - Business 4
 - Industrial
 - Residential 1
 - Residential 2
 - Residential 3



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Town Center Commercial District

- 23 lots comprising a total of 5.2 acres are zoned B3
- All B3 lots within the district are less than an acre in size
- Most B3 lots are occupied with residential uses, while 5 lots are used for commercial purposes
- 10 lots comprising 5.43 acres are split-zoned B3/R3
- Most split-zoned lots are less than an acre in size and all are occupied by residential uses

Recommendations for Town Center Commercial Area

- Given the small lots and relatively high-density of this area, it is recommended that the district serve as a transitional zone between the more urban commercial portions of Route 38 and the traditional town center
- An overlay district allowing mixed uses allowing residential and small-scale commercial (e.g. less than 5,000 sf)
- Resolve split-zoned lots

Town Center Neighborhood District

- Traditional Town Center
- Lot sizes range from $\frac{1}{4}$ acre to just over 4 acres
- Civic heart of the town
- Broadway Street is an important business area and transportation arterial
- Automobile dominated
- Sense of place and unique identity are important

Physical Characteristics

- 14 parcels comprising 25.55 acres are zoned B3; most have commercial uses
- 6 parcels comprising 9.9 are split-zoned B3/R1; uses include residential, commercial and municipal
- One 5.3 acre parcel is split-zoned B3/R3 and is commercially used
- 19 parcels comprising 13.92 acres are zoned R3 and contain both single-family and multi-family residential uses
- One parcel comprising 1.42 acres is split-zoned R1/R3

Recommendations

- Create a village center type overlay district that respects the traditional character of the town center
- Build off the fact that this is the civic center of the community
- Make the area more pedestrian friendly
- Incorporate standards that ensure that future development projects are appropriate and of high quality (design guidelines)
- Incorporate recommendations for the historic preservation plan now under development
- Resolve split zoning issues

Focus of the overlay bylaw and design guidelines

- Create a unified appearance, a sense of place, and community identity;
- Reuse vacant and underutilized properties;
- Encourage a diverse mix of uses including residential, commercial, institutional, cultural and entertainment activities for workers, visitors, and residents;
- Encourage live/work units such as apartments over first floor commercial uses;
- Provide diverse housing opportunities;
- Provide centrally located parking that encourages people to leave their cars and walk through the Town Center;
- To provide a consistent architectural scale and character within the Town Center; and
- Encourage signage that is clear and of an appropriate scale

Main Design Features

- Building facade
- Roof types
- Screening of roof top utilities
- Safe sidewalks and pedestrian crosswalks
- Lighting (on-site and street lighting)
- Active living spaces (seasonal outdoor dining, etc.)
- Landscaping and street trees
- Signage
- New public spaces

Pedestrian Amenities

- Pedestrian lights, benches, signage, etc. should be consistent and help to create an identifiable character for the Town Center.
- Development should consider the needs of pedestrians-- walkways should link to public sidewalks and walkways. Pedestrian amenities such as seating, street trees, landscaping, seasonal flowers, banners, and lighting are encouraged to create interest.
- Sidewalks should be constructed throughout the Center area.
- Crosswalks should be provided where appropriate.
- Street light maximum height should be 14 feet.

Town Center Landscaping Goals

- To achieve a high-quality landscape that features a variety of plant materials.
- To utilize landscape materials to strengthen and unify the center's identity.
- To select plant materials which are relatively hardy, native and require little maintenance.
- To add color, texture and interest to the Town Center.

Building Materials

- The materials of building elements in the Town Center, such as roofs (where exposed to view), exterior walls, trim, and other miscellaneous elements, should be durable yet also possess a traditional character. Wood clapboards, brick, stone, wood trim, and shingled roofs are consistent with the existing town center architecture.
- Corrugated metal siding, metal roofing, stucco, vinyl siding and plywood siding should not be used for exterior surfaces.
- Windows should have clear glazing. Mirrored or reflective glass should not be used.

Town Center Mixed Use District

- 48 parcels comprising 19.4 acres are zoned B3 but almost all are used for residential purposes
- 15 parcels comprising 16.39 acres are split-zoned B3/R1 – most have residential uses
- 6 parcels comprising 2.56 acres are split-zoned B3/R3
- 4 parcels comprising 1.07 acres are zoned R3, while one parcel comprising .29 acres is zoned R3

Recommendations

- Address split-zoned lots;
- Consider allowing mixed use (residential/commercial) development along the corridor;
- Enhance the quality and compatibility of development along the corridor (design guidelines);
- Encourage redevelopment of vacant, underutilized property;
- Encourage innovative development projects that utilize appropriate design, and incorporate suitable landscaping and amenities;
- Minimize the number of building signs and directional signs to avoid repetition and clutter; and
- Orient buildings to the front of the street, and whenever possible, place parking to the side or rear of the building, designing parking areas as smaller, connected lots rather than large lots

NEXT STEPS

- A draft overlay zoning bylaw and corresponding design guidelines for the Town Center Neighborhood will be submitted to the Planning Board next month
- The Planning Board will review the material and NMCOCG will address any comments
- Following completion of the final draft bylaw, the Planning Board will conduct a public hearing
- Approval of any zoning changes requires a 2/3rds vote of Town Meeting