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Barney S. Heath  
Director

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## MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** February 24, 2023

**TO:** Councilor Deborah Crossley, Chair, Zoning & Planning Committee  
Members of the Zoning & Planning Committee

**FROM:** Barney Heath, Director, Department of Planning and Development  
Jennifer Caira, Deputy Director Department of Planning and Development

**RE:** **#38-22 Discussion and review relative to the draft Zoning Ordinance regarding village centers**  
ZONING & PLANNING COMMITTEE requesting review, discussion and possible ordinance amendments relative to Chapter 30 zoning ordinances pertaining to Mixed Use, business districts and village districts relative to the draft Zoning Ordinance. (formerly #88-20)

**MEETING:** February 27, 2023

**CC:** City Council  
Planning Board  
Jonathan Yeo, Chief Operating Officer

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### Village Center Zoning

The Planning Department spent the end of 2022 presenting the version 1.0 drafts of the Village Center Overlay District (VCOD) [zoning text](#) and [maps](#) and discussing with the Zoning and Planning Committee (ZAP) as well as the community through a series of input sessions and an online input form. Planning and Utile have been working on a series of revised proposals based on this feedback in advance of releasing version 2.0 of the zoning text and maps. Attached to this memo is a framework for a series of proposals to the VCOD zoning. Each proposal includes a brief description, comparison to the version 1.0 draft and explanation of why it is being proposed. The attached framework includes six proposals, briefly described below. The remaining three proposals are still being finalized and will be presented to the Committee at a future meeting in March.

#### VCOD Version 2.0 Framework

1. Focus on design standards. Design standards have been incorporated extensively throughout the proposed VCOD zoning text. Design standards are critical to ensuring by-right development contributes to the vitality of village centers. Version 1.0 also included a set of discretionary design guidelines intended to assist decision makers during site plan review or special permit review. Planning proposes focusing on the standards at this time and guidelines can be revisited at a future date.

2. Identify mixed-use priority streets. Active ground floor commercial uses are an integral part of the success of village centers. The existing zoning for many of these areas requires commercial uses on the ground floor, unless waived by special permit. Continuing to require ground floor commercial use is complicated by the MBTA Communities multi-family zoning requirements which limit the ability to require mixed-use. To address this staff have identified the streets, or portions of streets, where retaining ground floor commercial use is essential and the zoning will incorporate incentives or requirements for mixed-use along these streets.
3. Prioritize historic preservation. The VCOD zoning seeks to balance the opportunity for new housing with the preservation of important historic resources. This proposal would remove properties within a local historic district from the VCOD boundaries and would create a set of zoning exemptions to incentivize the adaptive reuse of older buildings.
4. Reduce residential parking requirements in village centers. Recent local data shows parking in multi-family buildings across Newton is underutilized. Reducing parking requirements and incorporating parking maximums near transit is consistent with national trends and supports City goals to reduce congestion, emissions, and housing costs.
5. Eliminate special permits for additional building height or footprint. The VCOD zoning is intended to create a fair, predictable process for new development. Removing the ability to increase height and/or footprint through a special permit will result in more predictability for both developers and neighbors.
6. Apply a consistent policy to zoning of City-owned parcels. Typically, property owned by the city is zoned Public Use. This is not consistently applied in the existing zoning with some properties zoned business or similar and others zoned Public Use. The first draft of the VCOD maps typically followed the existing pattern. Version 2.0 is an opportunity to clean this up and ensure all municipal buildings are zoned Public Use. It is also an opportunity to consider how surface parking lots owned by the city might transform over time. Planning proposes utilizing the VCOD zoning for public surface parking lots while ensuring all municipal buildings are zoned Public Use.
7. Revise VC1. Feedback about version 1.0 of the VCOD draft zoning text and maps largely centered around the VC1 district. Planning and Utile are working on revamping this district to better prioritize preservation of existing older homes and conversion to multiple units while still allowing for a small amount of new construction. *Details on this proposal will be presented at a future meeting in March.*
8. Incentivize additional affordable housing. Planning is working with representatives of the Newton Housing Partnership as well as consultants Utile and Landwise to determine the feasibility of allowing for additional height in exchange for additional affordable housing, above and beyond the inclusionary zoning requirements. *Details on this proposal will be presented at a future meeting in March.*
9. Maximize MBTA Communities compliance. The focus on new zoning for village centers was started in advance of and has continued in parallel with the state requirements for zoning for multi-family housing near transit stations. As we have received further guidance from the state Planning and Utile have begun to analyze the VCOD zoning against the MBTA Communities requirements to determine how far it could take Newton towards compliance. Once this information is available the Committee can consider how best to maximize compliance as part of the VCOD zoning. *Details will be presented at a future meeting in March.*

Next Steps

Planning and Utile will present the proposals within the framework for feedback from the Committee. This feedback will guide the revisions made in Version 2.0 of the zoning text and maps.

Attachment A: VCOD Draft Version 2.0 Framework (Part 1)

## 1. Zoning Proposal: Focus on design standards

### Comparison to Version 1.0:

	Design Standards
Version 1.0	Version 1.0 of the proposed zoning text incorporated many design standards into the zoning ordinance and included a proposed set of discretionary design guidelines meant to guide site plan and special permit review.
Proposed	Focus on incorporating all non-discretionary design elements into the zoning and revisit design guidelines in the future as a tool for Planning Board and City Council.

### What?

- Design standards are built into almost every section of the VCOD zoning in order to ensure new by-right development positively contribute to Newton’s village centers. Design standards are non-discretionary and must be complied with just like any other zoning requirement, such as maximum height or minimum setbacks.
- Design guidelines are a useful tool to provide additional guidance to developers and decision makers however they are not necessary at this time given the strength of the design standards.
- The proposed design standards regulate the placement of the building on the site, the size and shape of the building, the public space created, and many architectural features of the building. See attached list of design standards by category. A version of the proposed zoning text with design standards highlighted can also be found [here](#).

### Why?

- The focus at this time should be on crafting zoning that ensures quality outcomes for by-right projects. Design guidelines can be revisited at a future date as part of a tool to be used by the Planning Board and City Council during review.

### Additional Resources

Below is a table listing the design standards by category followed by rendered perspectives of three streets across the village centers with the incorporated design standards identified.

## Zoning Framework 2.0

# Design Standards

### Shaping the Building

**Building Footprint** (area in square feet)

**Building Height** (number of stories\*)

**Half-Story**

- Height, max. (in feet)
- Stepback (7', min.)

**Pitched Roof Slope** (max. pitch 14:12)

**Ground Story Height**, min./max. (in feet)

**Ground Story Active Uses**

- Front Elevation width (100%)
- Fenestration (% of Front Elevation area)
- Glazing Standards (% VLT, % VLR)

**Facade Articulation** (max. continuous facade length)

**Architectural Features**, controlled by dim. standards

- Awnings
- Canopies
- Bays
- Balconies

**Building Entrances** (number, location, and articulation)

**Roof Features** (list of allowed features)

**Mechanical Equipment**

- Roof Screening and Setbacks (10', min.)
- Location of wall-mounted equipment

\*max height capped in feet

# Building Placement

**Building Setbacks** (distance in feet)

**Building Separation** (distance in feet)

**Building Placement**

- Facade Build-Out Ratio, min. (% of lot width)
- Sidewalk width (12', min.)

## Site Standards

**Usable Open Space**, lots greater than 30k sf (% of lot)

**Parking Placement**

- Parking Setbacks (distance in feet)
- Access (allowed location)

**Curb Cuts and Driveways**

- Access (allowed location)
- Width, max. (in feet)
- Number per street frontage
- Distance from intersection (in feet)

**Surface Parking Lot Design**

- Landscaped strip, controlled by dimensional standards
- Screening requirements

**Loading**

- Access (allowed location)
- Screening requirements

**Service Areas**

- Location
- Screening requirements

# Lincoln St, Newton Highlands



**1. Building Placement:**

When development occurs on any lot abutting a sidewalk that is <12' in total width, inclusive of the Furnishing Zone, buildings must be set back an additional distance such that a paved area meeting City sidewalk standards of at least 12' width is provided, inclusive of the Furnishing Zone.

**2. Building Entrances:**

Principal entrances must either be recessed from the plane of the facade, or have a projecting Awning or Canopy, to signal building entry and provide adequate protection from the elements.

**3. Architectural Features: Bay**

A bay is a window assemble extending from the main body of a building to permit increased light, provide multi-direction views, and articulate a building wall.

**4. Fenestration:**

For ground story fenestration, glazing must have a min. 60% Visible Light Transmittance (VLT) and no more than 15% Visible Light Reflectance (VLR) as indicated by the manufacturer.

**5. Number of Stories:**

A pitched roof may be composed of roof planes with different slopes. The slope of any pitch must not be greater than 14:12 (49 degrees). The roof rafters must intersect the wall plate or top of wall frame of the exterior walls at a height no more than 2' above the finished floor of the half-story.

**6. Half-Story Step-Back:**

A required distance that certain upper stories of a building must be recessed from the plane of the facade of the stories below.

**7. Parking Lot Access:**

Access to parking lots and structures parallel to the Front Elevation is prohibited when access along another lot line is available.

# Washington St, Newton Corner



1. **Building Placement:**  
When development occurs on any lot abutting a sidewalk that is <12' in total width, inclusive of the Furnishing Zone, buildings must be set back an additional distance such that a paved area meeting City sidewalk standards of at least 12' width is provided, inclusive of the Furnishing Zone.
2. **Building Entrances:**  
Principal entrances must either be recessed from the plane of the facade, or have a projecting Awning or Canopy, to signal building entry and provide adequate protection from the elements.
3. **Architectural Features: Canopy**  
A wall-mounted structure that provides shade and weather protection over a storefront or building entrance.
4. **Fenestration:**  
For ground story fenestration, glazing must have a min. 60% Visible Light Transmittance (VLT) and no more than 15% Visible Light Reflectance (VLR) as indicated by the manufacturer.
5. **Number of Stories:**  
A pitched roof may be composed of roof planes with different slopes. The slope of any pitch must not be greater than 14:12 (49 degrees). The roof rafters must intersect the wall plate or top of wall frame of the exterior walls at a height no more than 2' above the finished floor of the half-story.
6. **Half-Story Step-Back:**  
A required distance that certain upper stories of a building must be recessed from the plane of the facade of the stories below.
7. **Parking Lot Access:**  
Access to parking lots and structures parallel to the Front Elevation is prohibited when access along another lot line is available.

# Walnut St, Newtonville



**1. Building Placement:**

When development occurs on any lot abutting a sidewalk that is <12' in total width, inclusive of the Furnishing Zone, buildings must be set back an additional distance such that a paved area meeting City sidewalk standards of at least 12' width is provided, inclusive of the Furnishing Zone.

**2. Building Entrances:**

Principal entrances must either be recessed from the plane of the facade, or have a projecting Awning or Canopy, to signal building entry and provide adequate protection from the elements.

**3. Architectural Features: Canopy**

A wall-mounted structure that provides shade and weather protection over a storefront or building entrance.

**4. Fenestration:**

For ground story fenestration, glazing must have a min. 60% Visible Light Transmittance (VLT) and no more than 15% Visible Light Reflectance (VLR) as indicated by the manufacturer.

**5. Number of Stories:**

A pitched roof may be composed of roof planes with different slopes. The slope of any pitch must not be greater than 14:12 (49 degrees). The roof rafters must intersect the wall plate or top of wall frame of the exterior walls at a height no more than 2' above the finished floor of the half-story.

**6. Half-Story Step-Back:**

A required distance that certain upper stories of a building must be recessed from the plane of the facade of the stories below.

**7. Parking Lot Access:**

Access to parking lots and structures parallel to the Front Elevation is prohibited when access along another lot line is available.

## 2. Village Center Zoning Proposal: Identify Mixed-Use Priority Streets

### Comparison to Version 1.0:

	Mixed-Use
Version 1.0	Mixed-use and residential allowed by-right in VC3 and VC2 zones. Mixed-use incentivized in VC3 by allowing 4.5 stories for mixed-use and 2.5 stories for all residential. Some limited commercial uses allowed by special permit in VC1.
Proposed	Prioritize certain streets (see maps below) in the VC3 and VC2 districts for mixed-use development by a combination of incentives and requirements. Require at least 75% of the ground floor frontage be dedicated to active commercial uses. Allow ground floor residential in these areas by special permit. Limit VC1 to residential uses only.

### What?

- Focus mixed-use incentives/requirements street by street where ground floor commercial uses are critical to the long-term vitality of the village center. Allow mixed-use or fully residential development in other areas of VC3 and VC2.
- Utilize incentives for mixed-use in village centers near the commuter rail or green line stations to comply with MBTA communities and require mixed-use, unless waived by special permit, elsewhere.
- Allow ground floor residential uses along Mixed-Use Priority Streets by special permit

### Why?

- Current business zones require a special permit to locate residential uses on the ground floor in lieu of commercial uses. It is important to preserve active ground-floor commercial uses on key streets in the core of village centers.
- MBTA Communities does not allow zoning that requires mixed-use, however mixed-use can still be permitted or even incentivized.
- Version 1.0 focused on the VC3 district and incentivized mixed-use by allowing 4.5 stories in lieu of 2.5. This approach included some areas where ground floor commercial is less critical and ignored some key commercial streets in the VC2 districts, such as Watertown Street in Nonantum.
- The attached maps take a finer grained approach by designating mixed-use priority streets

### Additional Resources

The maps below represent an initial draft of the Mixed-Use Priority Streets (identified by a black line). The maps do not represent any other changes anticipated in version 2.0 at this time.

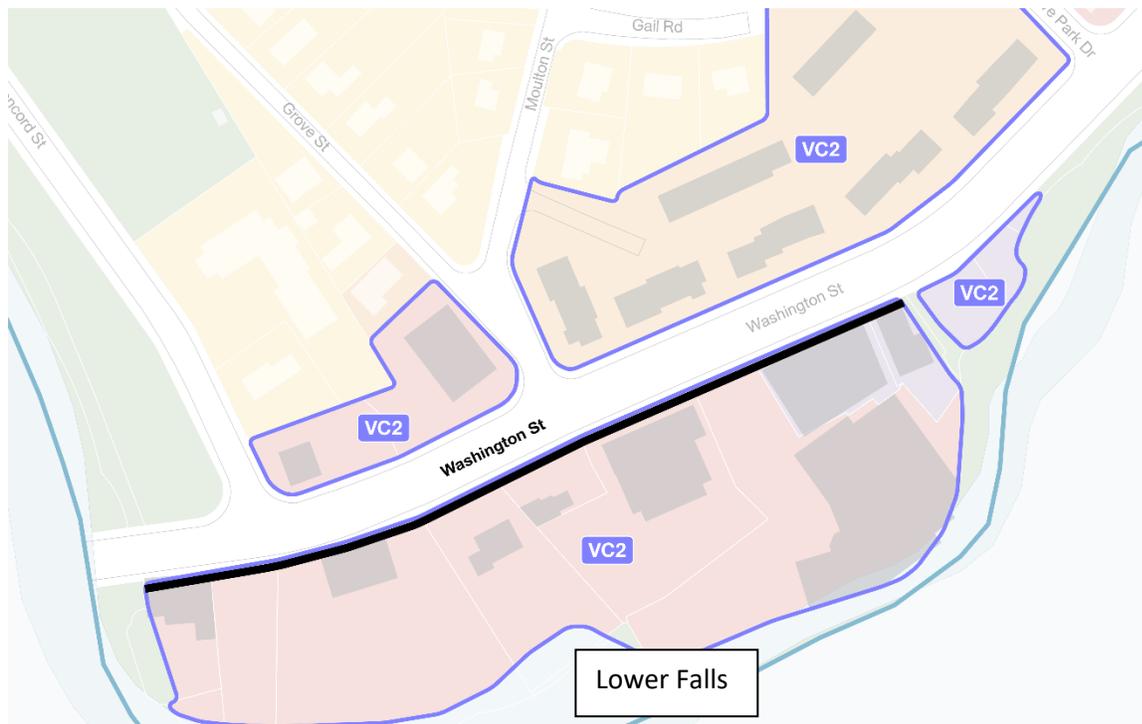
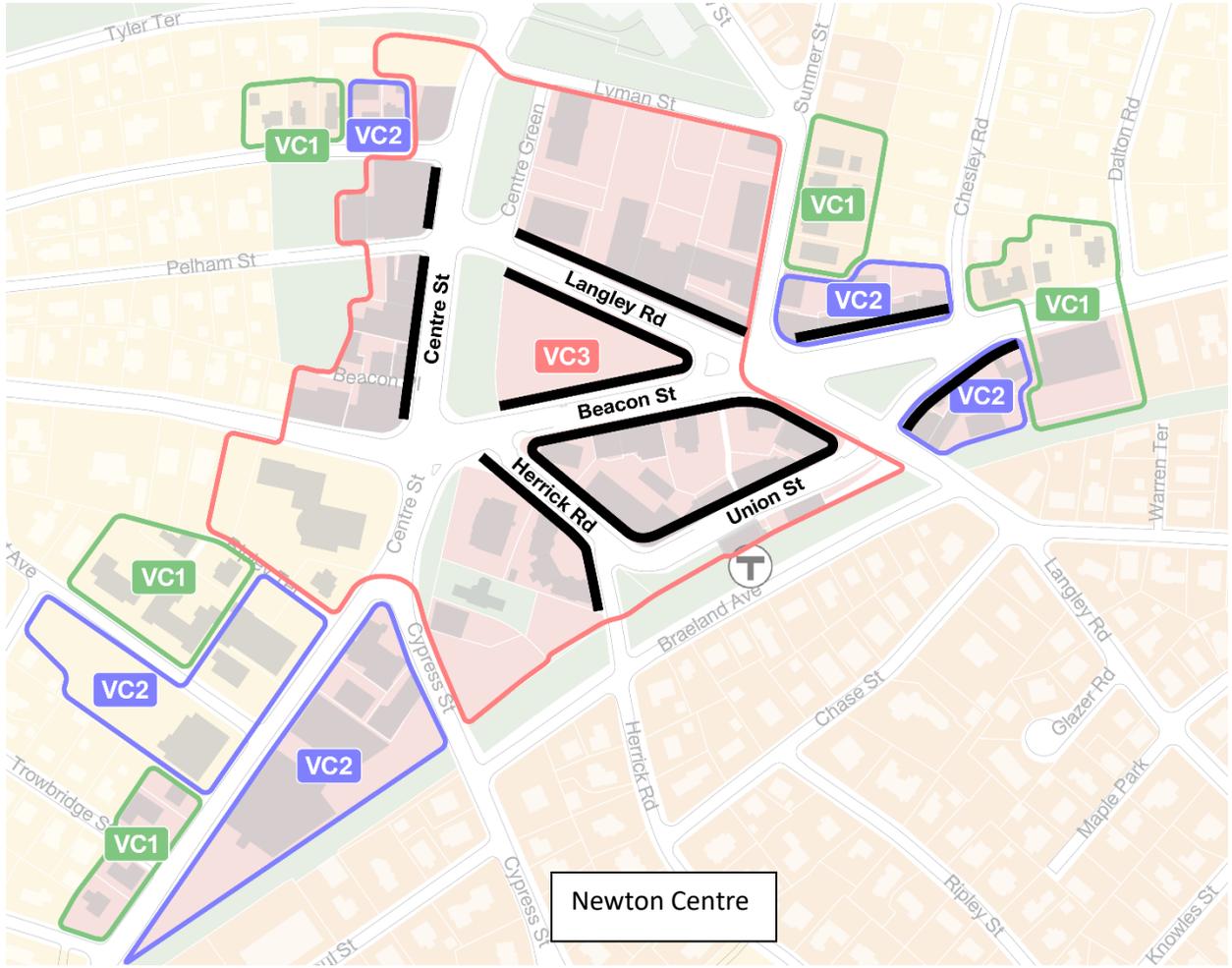
**Existing Zoning**

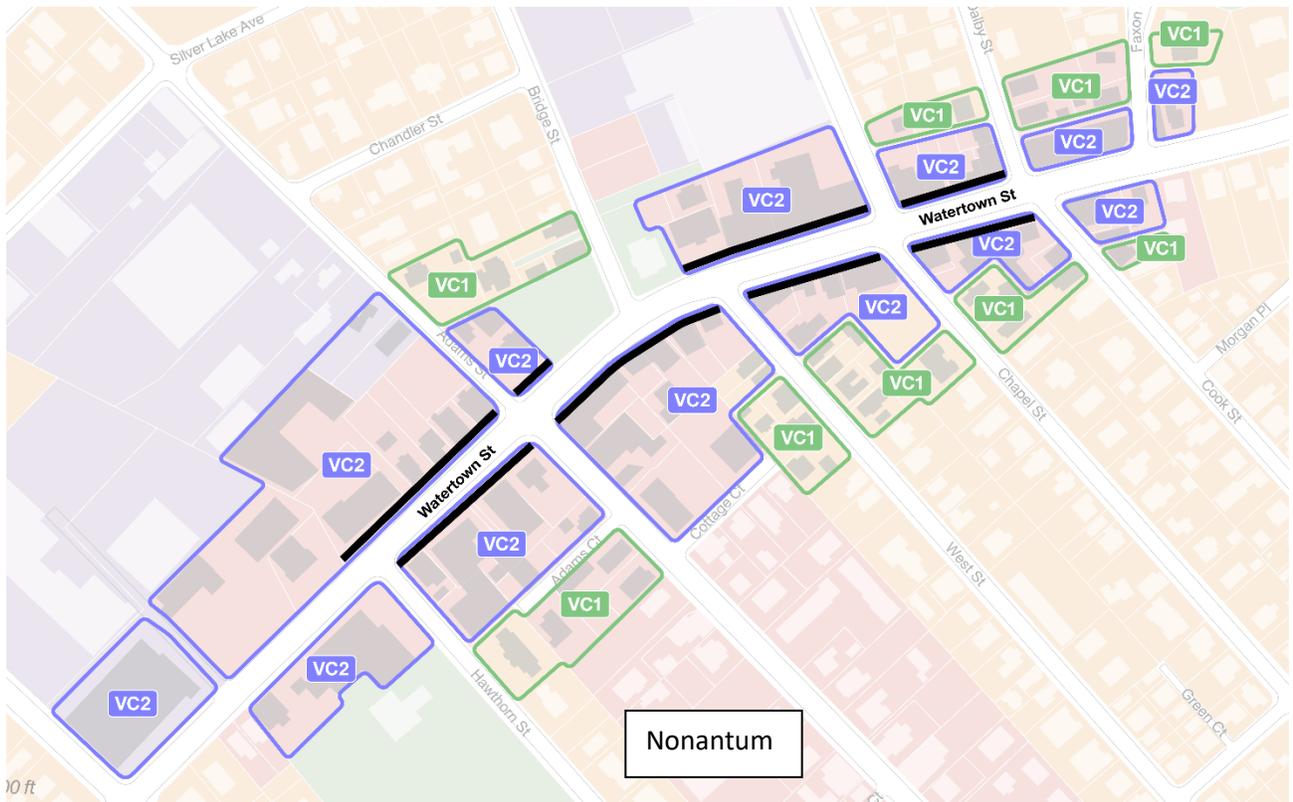
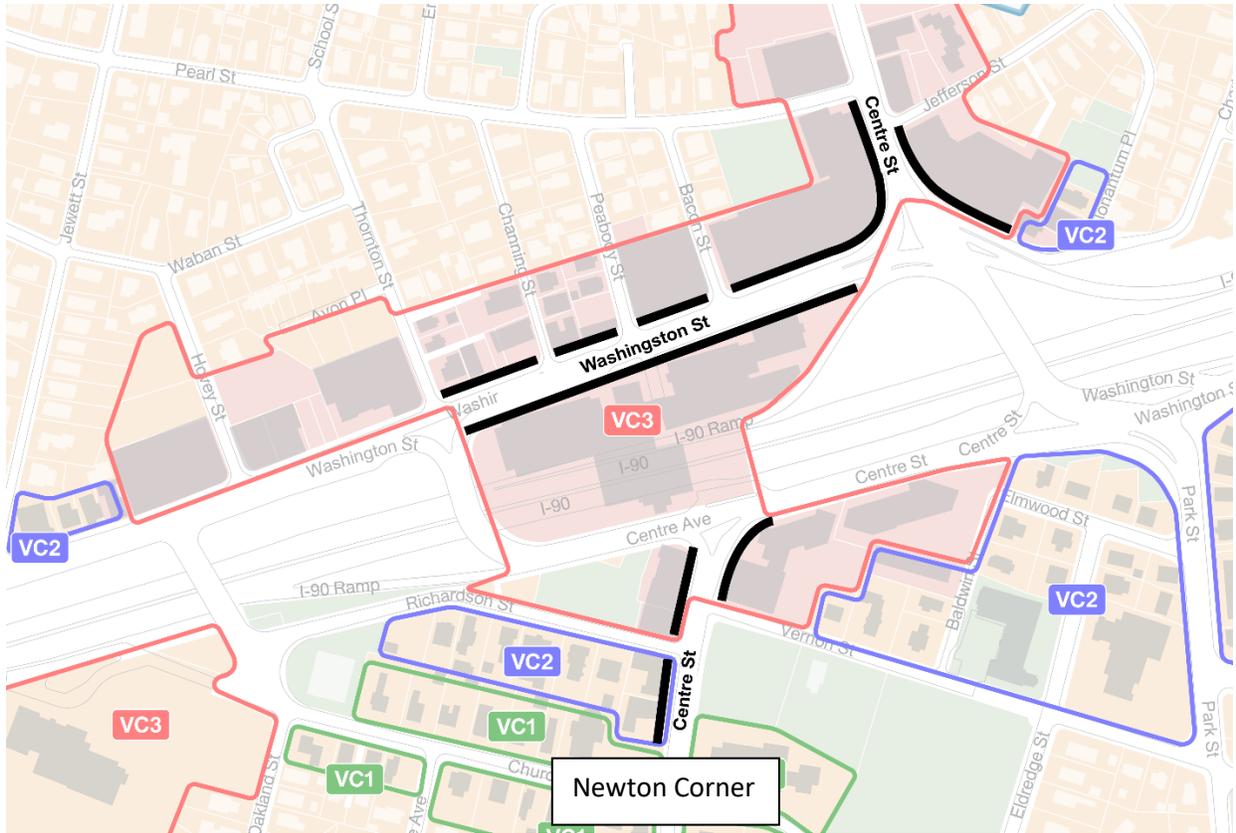
- Business (BU)
- Manufacturing (LM, M)
- Multi-Residence (MR)
- Single Residence (SR)
- Mixed Use (MU)
- Public Use & Open Space (PU, OS/R)

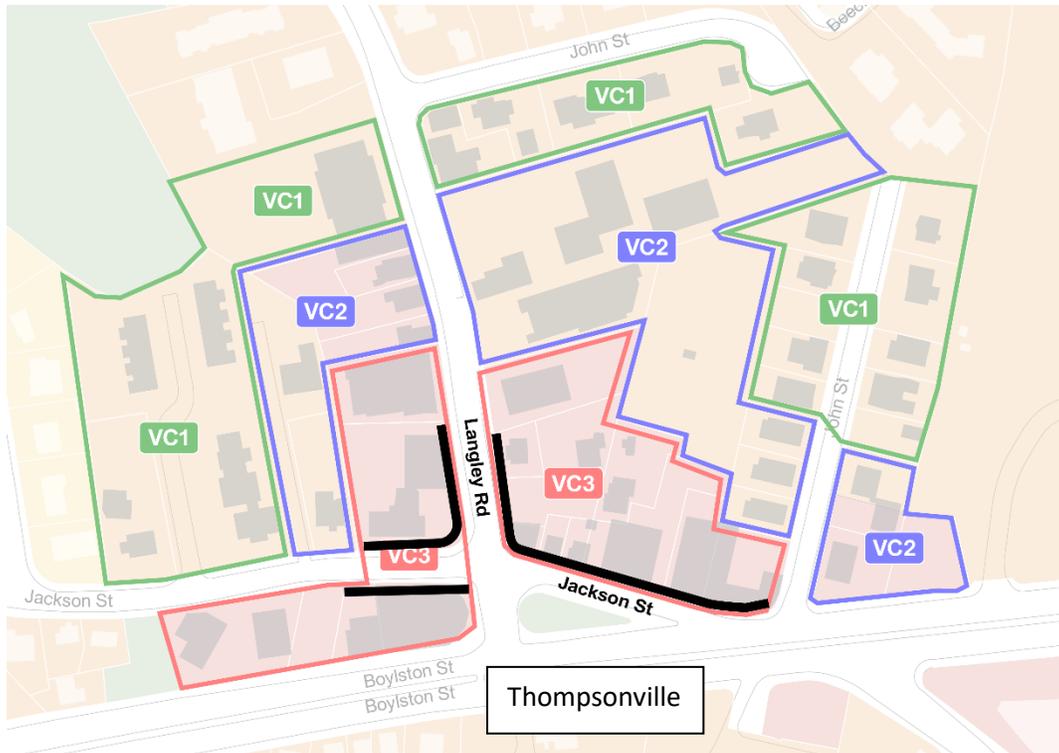
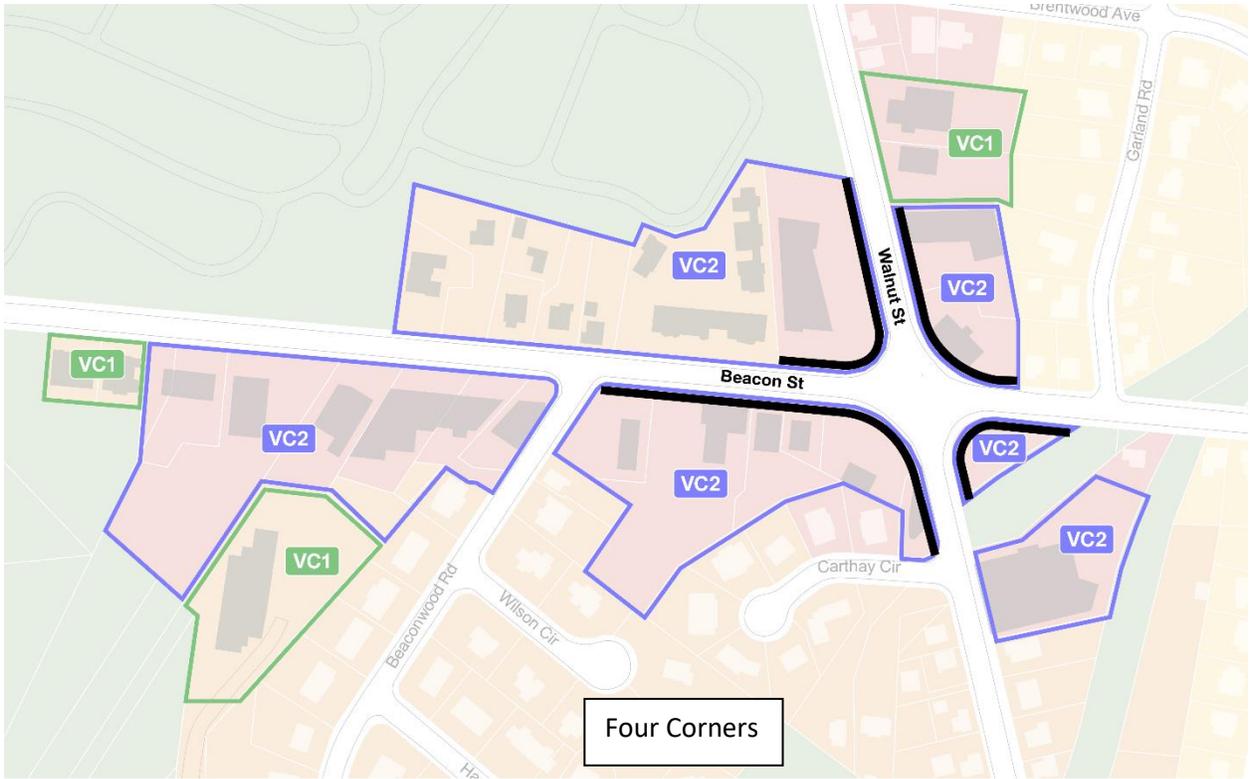
**Proposed Zoning**

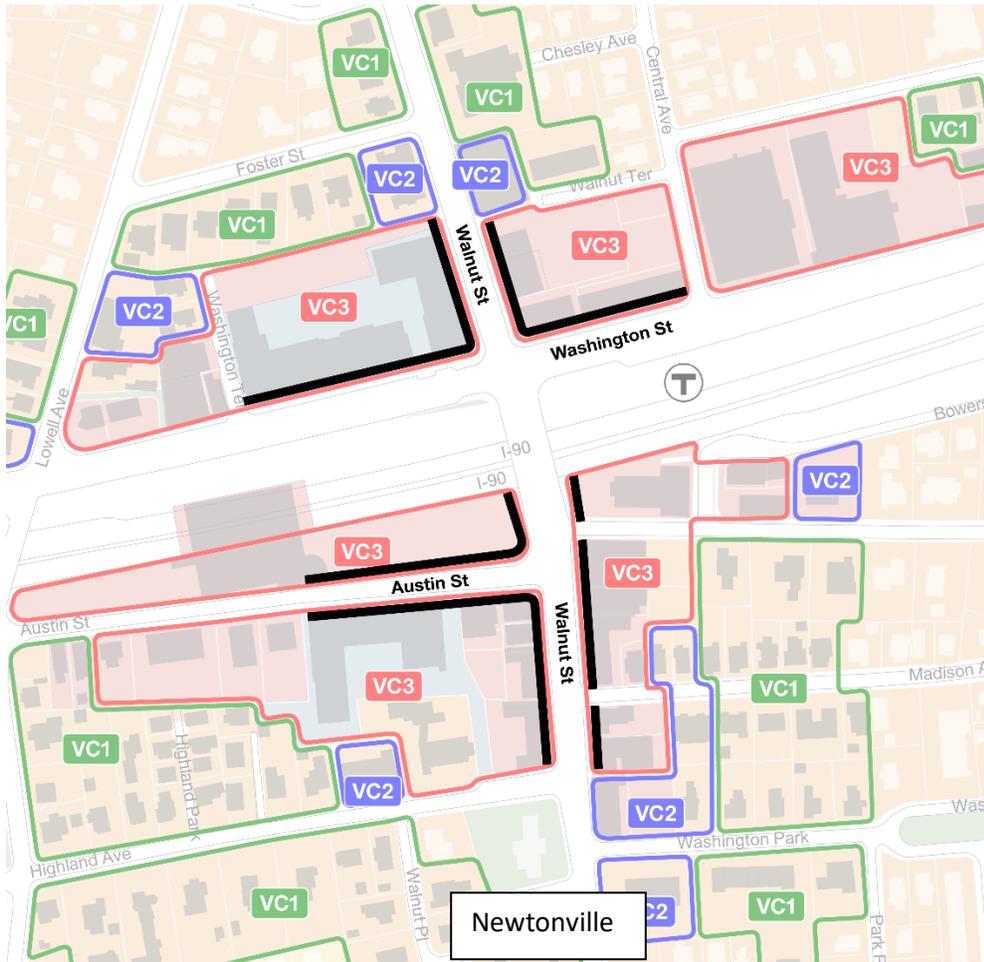
- Village Center 3 (VC3)
- Village Center 2 (VC2)
- Village Center 1 (VC1)
- Mixed-Use Required



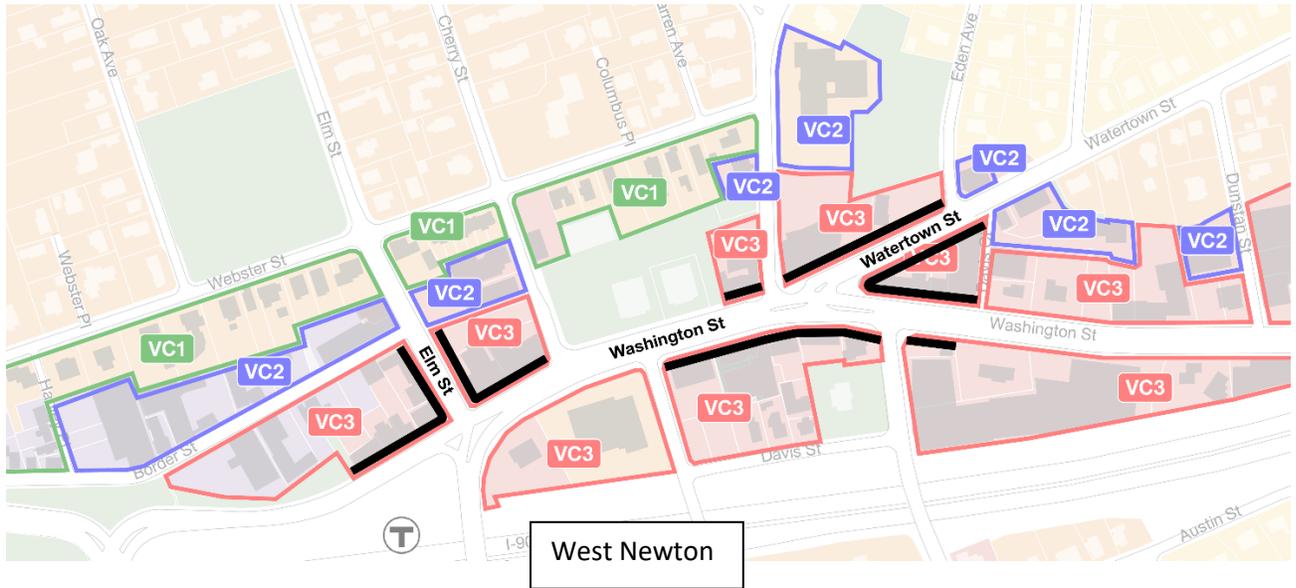
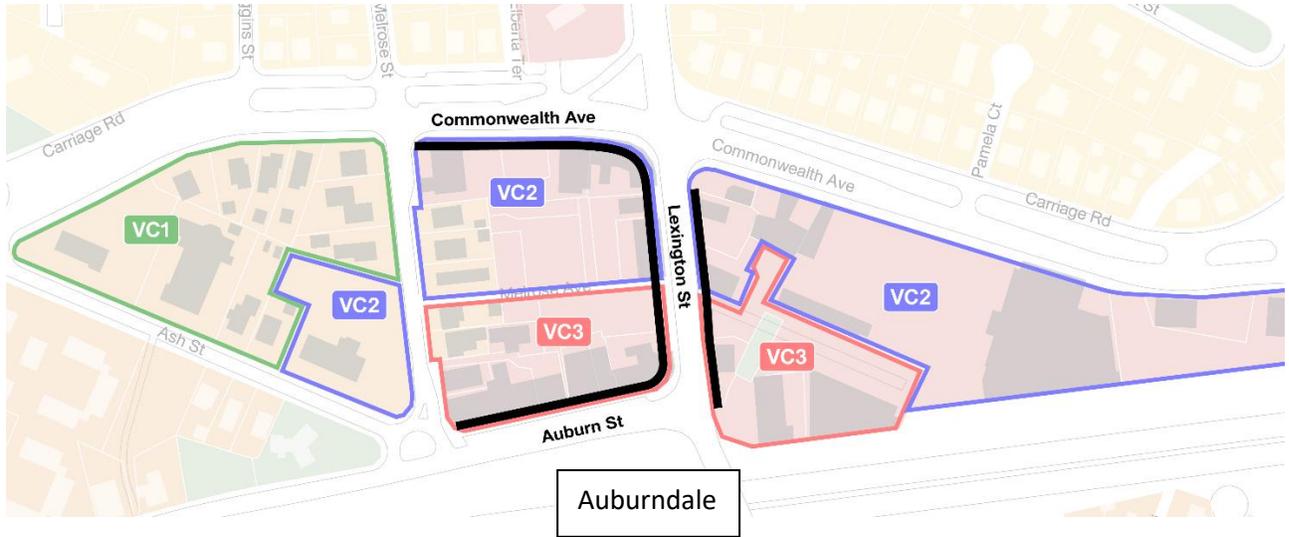








Village Center Overlay District V2.0 Framework – Part 1



### 3. Village Center Zoning Proposal: Prioritize historic preservation

#### Comparison to Version 1.0:

	Local Historic Districts	Adaptive Reuse
Version 1.0	Some minimal overlap with Newtonville and Upper Falls local historic districts	Section reserved
Proposed	Remove properties within local historic districts from VCOD boundaries	Incentivize reuse of pre-1940 buildings in the VC2 and VC3 districts by exempting certain zoning requirements such as parking and open space if building is retained

#### What?

- Revise maps to remove properties in local historic districts from proposed VCOD boundaries
- Include incentives for reuse of existing pre-1940s buildings in VC2 and VC3 districts by exempting certain zoning requirements if the building is preserved. Incentives include:
  - Building footprint bonus for additions (new construction portions must still comply with height and setback requirements)
  - Exempt from parking requirements
  - Exempt from open space requirements
  - Site plan review for parcels over 30,000 sf in lieu of a special permit
- Identify landmarks on VCOD maps

#### Why?

- Existing zoning requirements can create a hurdle to the adaptive reuse of existing buildings as they were often built prior to zoning requirements. Existing buildings are often non-conforming related to zoning requirements such as height, floor area, setbacks, uses, and parking. Allowing for some modest expansion and changes in use without triggering zoning requirements allows for easier preservation of existing buildings and disincentivizes demolition.
- Allows for more options for the preservation and reuse of churches that may have dwindling congregations. Under existing zoning religious uses are exempt from most zoning requirements, however conversion of the space to new uses triggers zoning requirements such as parking.

**4. Village Center Zoning Proposal:** Reduce residential parking requirements in village centers

**Comparison to Version 1.0:**

	Residential	Residential w/in 0.25 miles of transit station	Adaptive Reuse
Version 1.0	1 per unit	1 per unit	1 per unit
Proposed	0.5 per unit	0 per unit min 1 per unit max	None

**What?**

- Reduce residential parking requirements for all residential uses in VCOD and remove parking requirement for residential units within a quarter mile of transit and for adaptive reuse of existing buildings.
- Set a parking maximum of 1 space per unit for residential uses within a quarter mile of transit stations.

**Why?**

- Utile/Landwise analysis found that parking minimums had significant negative impact on site design and overall financial feasibility
- Parking mandates drive up the cost of housing and encourage vehicular use, contributing to traffic and carbon emissions
- Recent data from multifamily and mixed-use buildings across Newton and the region supports reducing or eliminating parking minimums and setting maximums
- Only approximately 50% of existing multifamily parking spaces in Newton are actually being used
- The average number of vehicles per unit across 10 multifamily developments in Newton is 0.8 per unit
- At 28 Austin Street, 95 underground parking stalls are provided for 68 units, at an estimate cost of \$75,000 to construct each space, and an overnight count only found 44 vehicles utilizing the parking
- MAPC’s analysis found that parking supply per unit was the dominant factor associated with parking demand. Each additional parking space per unit is associated with an increase of 0.24 parked cars per household.
- MAPC recommends moving from parking minimums to maximums, reducing parking ratios, unbundling parking from housing costs, and exploring strategies for shared parking

- Aligns with MBTA Communities multifamily zoning guidelines

### **Other Considerations**

- Should the parking exemption be extended beyond a quarter-mile radius from transit?
- Should the zoning include parking maximums beyond a quarter-mile radius from transit?

### **Additional Resources**

See attached MAPC presentation on parking analysis across Metro West at the end of this document.

**5. Village Center Zoning Proposal:** Eliminate special permits for additional building height or footprint

**Comparison to Version 1.0:**

	VC1		VC2		VC3	
	By-Right	Special Permit	By-Right	Special Permit	By-Right	Special Permit
Version 1.0	2.5 stories 5,000 sf footprint	3.5 stories 7,500 sf footprint	3.5 stories 10,000 sf footprint	4.5 stories 12,500 sf footprint	4.5 stories 15,000 sf footprint	5.5 stories 17,500 sf footprint
Proposed	2.5 stories 4,000 sf* footprint	N/A	3.5 stories 10,000 sf footprint	N/A	4.5 stories 15,000 sf footprint	N/A

\*Planning and Utile are working on a further revision to VC1

**What?**

- When the framework for Version 1.0 of the VCOD was presented in June of 2022 and when the first drafts of the proposed maps were released each proposed district listed a by-right height and footprint and a height and footprint allowed by special permit.
- The version 1.0 draft text did not include the ability to increase height by special permit.
- Planning proposes removing the option to increase height and/or footprint by special permit.

**Why?**

- The by-right zoning parameters were informed by economic analysis to ensure that they allowed for feasible development.
- Feedback during engagement around the version 1.0 maps and draft text included concerns that most developers would seek and be granted the extra height and footprint.

**6. Village Center Zoning Proposal:** Apply consistent policy to zoning of City-owned parcels

**Comparison to Version 1.0:**

	Zoning for Publicly Owned Parcels with Municipal Buildings	Zoning for Publicly Owned Surface Parking Lots
Version 1.0	Mix of VCOD districts and Public Use	Mix of VCOD districts and Public Use
Proposed	Public Use	VCOD districts

**What?**

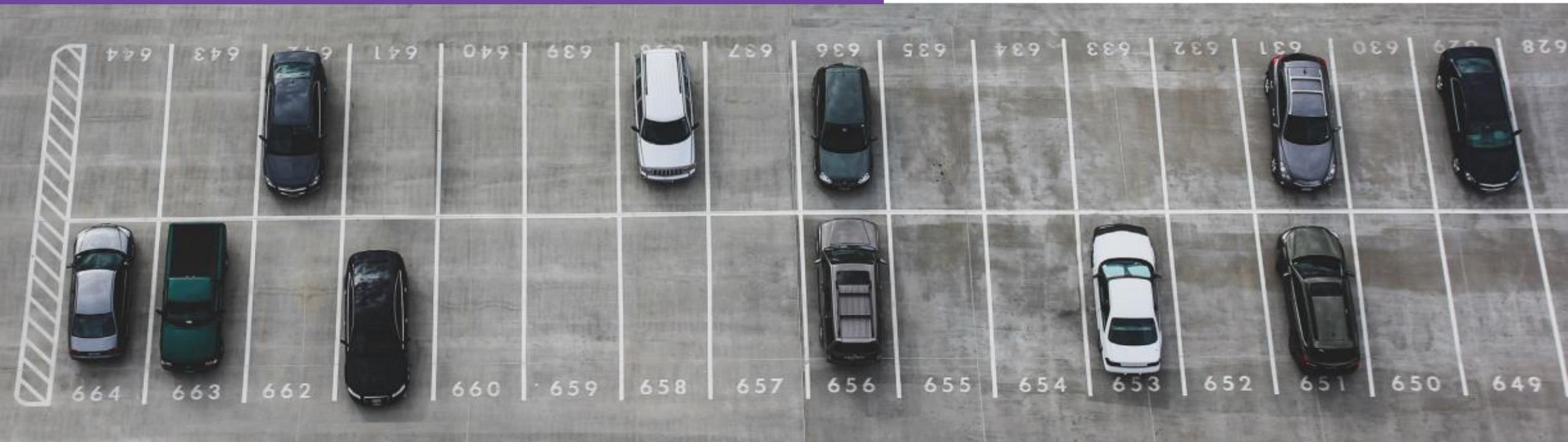
- Rezone City-owned surface parking lots as part of VCOD. Ensure all City-owned parcels containing municipal buildings are zoned Public Use.

**Why?**

- Existing zoning for City-owned properties should be cleaned up as part of this process.
- There was feedback during the engagement process that it would make sense to rezone the City-owned surface parking lots to signal what might be feasible if the City chooses in the future to partner with a developer to build on these lots, similar to 28 Austin Street.
- City-owned land will still need to go through the disposition process and the Real Property Reuse committee of City Council

# WestMetro Phase 4 Data Review

## Perfect Fit Parking Initiative



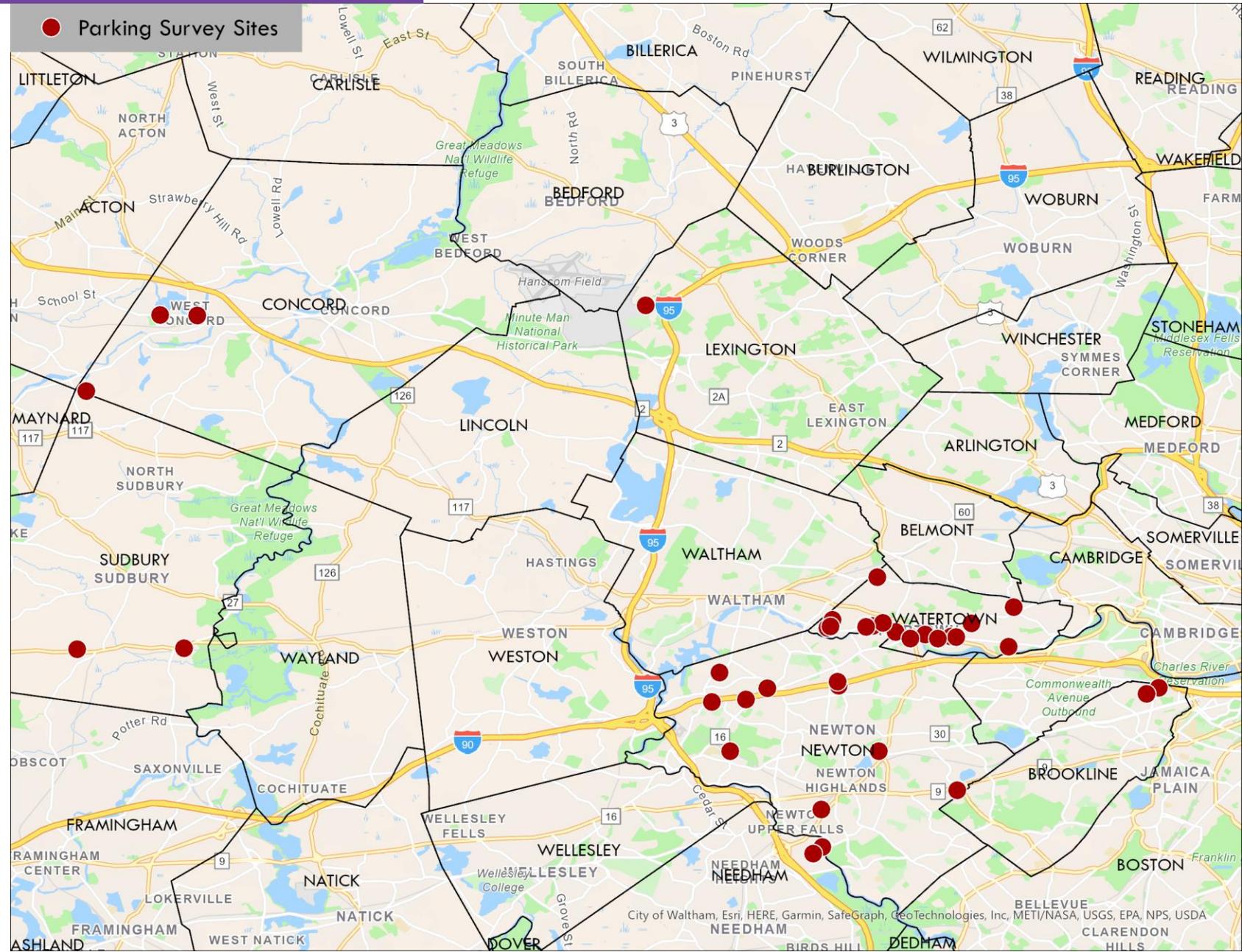
**Metropolitan Area  
Planning Council**

February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2023  
Conor Gately  
Senior Land Use and Transportation Analyst  
Metropolitan Area Planning Council



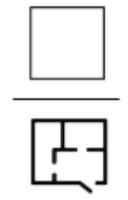
# Perfect Fit Parking Initiative

- Over 40 sites covered by both types of surveys, with 36 having sufficient data to conduct full analysis
- Analysis of parking supply and utilization for each site
- Modeling to determine variables that are strongly associated with parking demand



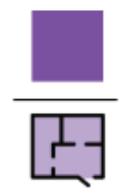
# Perfect Fit Parking Initiative

**Parking Supply per Unit**



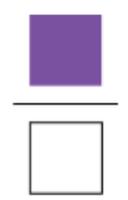
the total number of parking spaces divided by the total number of housing units

**Parking Demand per Unit**



the number of occupied parking spaces divided by the number of occupied housing units

**Parking Utilization**



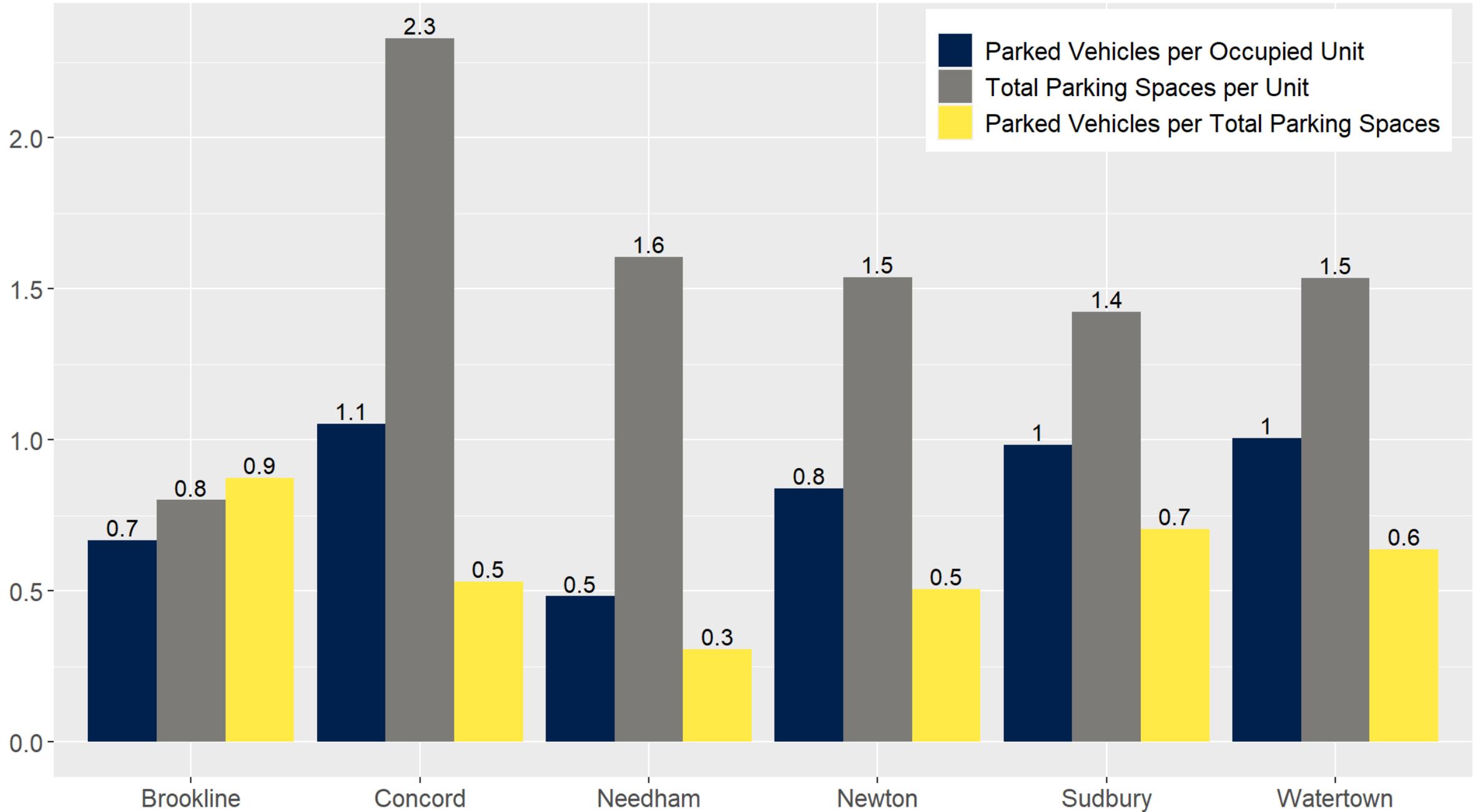
the number of occupied parking spaces divided by the total number of parking spaces

total housing units    unoccupied housing units    occupied housing units    total parking spaces    unoccupied parking spaces    occupied parking spaces

Municipality	Number of Sites	Parking Utilization % Occupied Spaces / Total Spaces	Parking Demand - Occupied Spaces per Occupied Units	Parking Supply - Total Spaces per Total Units
Brookline	2	87%	0.67	0.80
Concord	3	53%	1.05	2.33
Needham	2	31%	0.48	1.60
Newton	10	50%	0.84	1.54
Sudbury	2	71%	0.98	1.42
Watertown	17	64%	1.01	1.53
<b>All Sites</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>0.91</b>	<b>1.56</b>

- Parking supply averages 1.5 spaces per unit – as high as 2.3 in Concord
- Parking demand ranges from 0.48 to 1.05 vehicles per unit
- Parking utilization ranges from 30% to 87% - **on average less than 2/3 spaces are occupied**

# Parking Analysis Results by Town



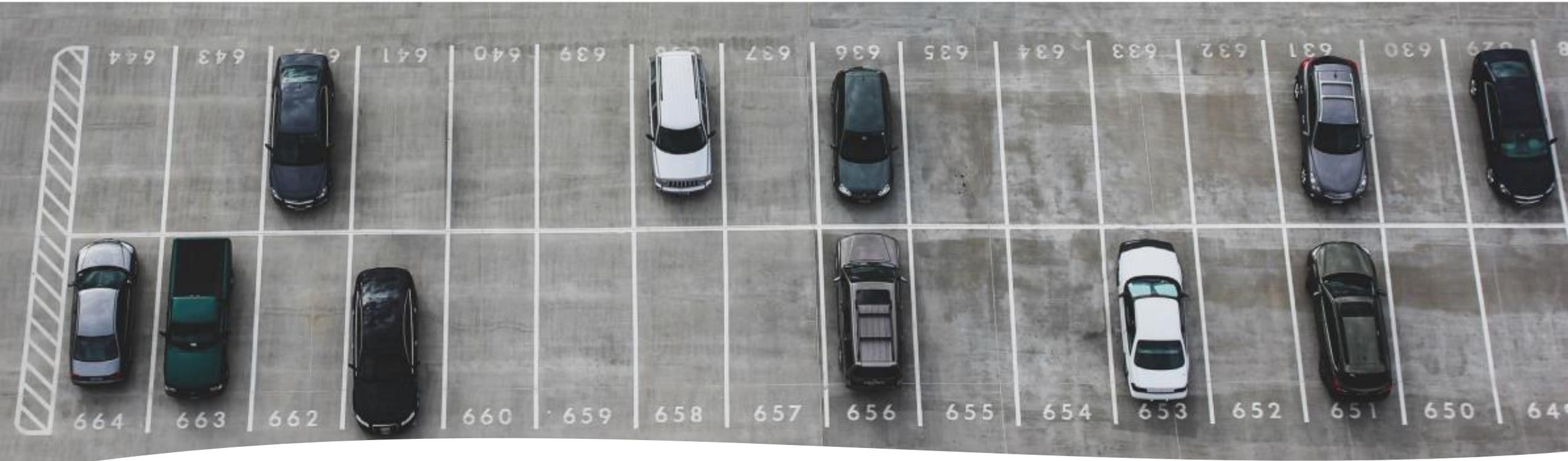
# What factors influence parking demand?

We investigated a total of 25 building and neighborhood variables for their potential influence on the parking demand per unit. These variables are described in Table 1.

- 1. Parking Supply
- 2. Jobs Accessible by Transit
- 3. Percent Affordable Units

Building Features	Parking Features	Built Environment	Socioeconomic Context
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Percentage of units that are affordable</li> <li>• Year of construction</li> <li>• Average bedroom count</li> <li>• Average rent or purchase price</li> <li>• Number of units in building</li> <li>• Housing tenure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presence of bicycle parking</li> <li>• Parking cost</li> <li>• Ratio of parking cost to monthly rent cost per bedroom</li> <li>• Ratio of parking cost to monthly rent cost per unit</li> <li>• Percent of provided parking spaces that are garaged</li> <li>• Ratio of garage to surface parking spaces</li> <li>• Parking supply</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of jobs accessible by 30-minute transit trip</li> <li>• Neighborhood population density</li> <li>• Neighborhood employment density</li> <li>• Neighborhood population and employment density (cumulative)</li> <li>• Presence of MBTA commuter rail station within half-mile</li> <li>• Presence of MBTA rapid transit station within half-mile</li> <li>• WalkScore®</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Median annual income (Census tract)</li> <li>• Average household size for rental households (Census tract)</li> <li>• Average household size for ownership households</li> <li>• Share of households in U.S. Census tract that are renter-occupied</li> <li>• Share of households in U.S. Census tract with zero vehicle</li> </ul>

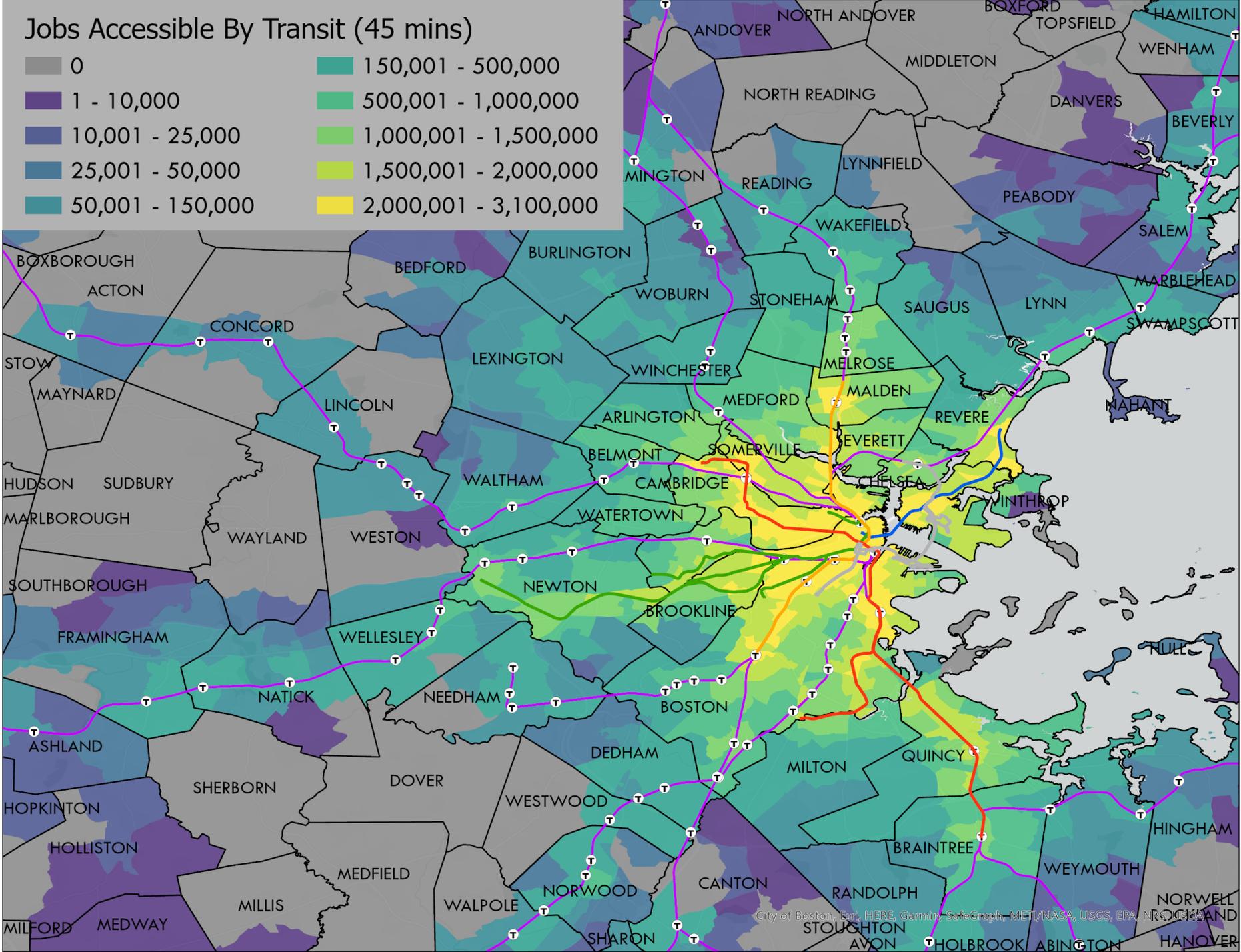
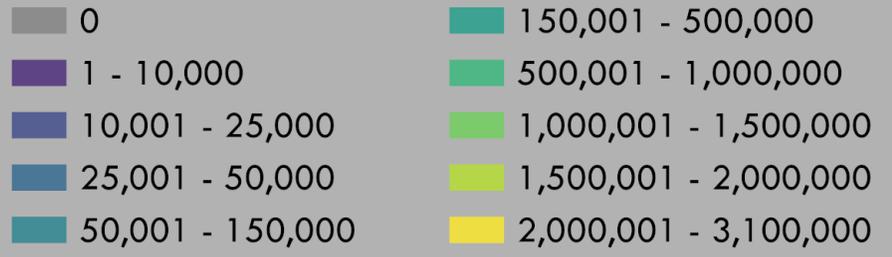
Table 1: Evaluated Building and Neighborhood Characteristics



## Three most influential factors

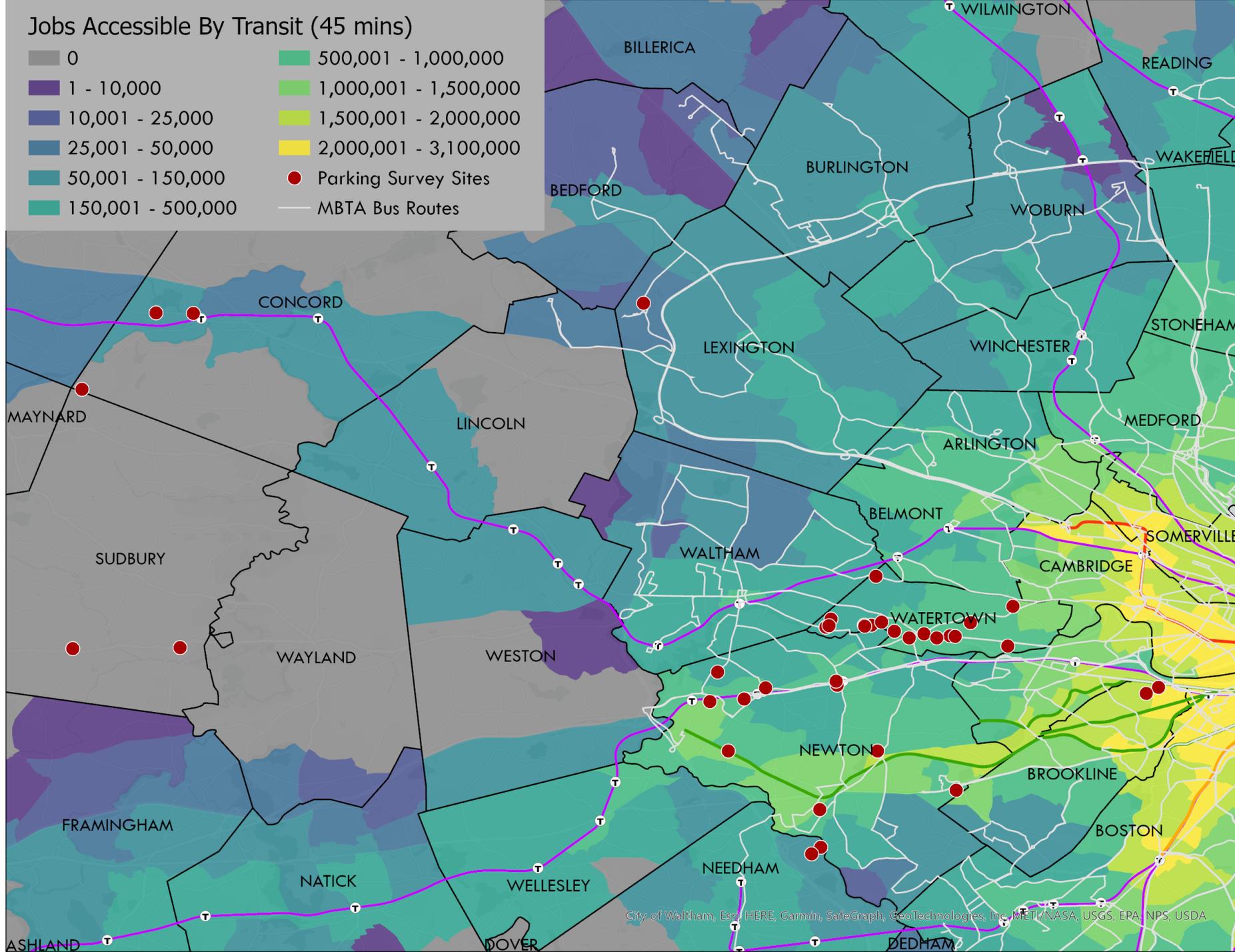
- Parking supply per unit was the dominant factor associated with parking demand
  - Each additional parking space per unit is associated with an increase of 0.24 parked cars per household
- Job accessibility by transit had a modest negative association with parking demand
- The percent of affordable units also had a negative association with parking demand

# Jobs Accessible By Transit (45 mins)



City of Boston, Esri, HERE, Garmin, SafeGraph, METI/NASA, USGS, EPA, NRC, OpenStreetMap contributors, Swatch, NOAA, GEBCO, Mapbox, Aerius, and others.

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# Policy Recommendations

- Shift from parking minimums to maximums
- Reduce parking ratios
- Unbundle parking from housing costs
- Explore strategies for shared parking

# Policy Recommendations

- Require less parking at transit-oriented sites in particular
- Enable lower parking requirements in exchange for more affordable units (especially at transit-oriented sites)