

# Mixed-Use Development and Parking in Stoughton Center



## **Planning Evaluations and Recommendations**

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Briefing Report and Progress Summary

Prepared for the Town of Stoughton Planning Board

Prepared by The Cecil Group

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# MIXED-USE DEVELOPMENT AND PARKING IN STOUGHTON CENTER

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### Introduction

The Town of Stoughton has set a goal of fostering beneficial mixed use development within the Town Center. The goals associated with these uses and patterns were established as part of the Town's Comprehensive Plan that serves as a guide to manage growth and direct improvements.

To implement the Comprehensive Plan for the downtown, there are a number of initiatives that must be taken, including providing improved zoning that will encourage the development of appropriate mixes of uses. In addition, there is a need to define an approach for the most appropriate relationship between commuter parking and publicly-owned land, and to consider actions that can continue the Town's direction towards positive reinvestment in the Center.

As part of the implementation process, the Town's Planning Board has secured professional planning assistance through the auspices of the Massachusetts Downtown Initiative, which is managed by the Department of Housing and Community Development. The Cecil Group, a planning and design firm, has provided technical planning assistance through consulting services provided through a small grant that was obtained by the Town, and coordinated through the Town's Planning Board.

The study undertaken by The Cecil Group provided an evaluation and prepared recommendations that focus on several key issues:

1. *Parking* – In order for downtown Stoughton to properly develop as a mixed use district, there must be an adequate supply of parking to support the businesses, housing, civic and other uses that will occur there. The study examined the status of the balance between existing land use and parking, and considered the implications associated with future mixed-use development.
2. *Publicly-owned Land* - The MBTA and the Post Office control and use substantial land areas within the Town Center. The study considered the opportunities associated with re-organization of these uses.
3. *Opportunities for Public Actions* – In order for mixed-use development to occur that brings along the advantages of “Smart Growth”, there is likely to be a need for public actions that will invite and support the private sector reinvestment that may occur.

This document is a summary of the findings and recommendations prepared by The Cecil Group. It consists of a brief report that provides information, evaluations, and recommendations for use by the Town.

## List of Key Recommendations

1. *Adopt and implement a strategy to better use land to provide for a balance mix of uses* – Under current conditions, the pattern of land parcels and uses effectively blocks viable mixed-use reinvestment in the town Center. The location and characteristics of existing buildings and parking areas are not in balance. There are only a few limited locations that could beneficially support mixed use development because of the lack of available land for parking, poor circulation patterns, and the dominance of MBTA and Post Office parking areas within the Center.
2. *Relocate or reorganize MBTA and Post Office uses* – The MBTA parking areas and the Post Office are providing for important local and regional needs. However, they are located on parcels of land that limit the ability to advance “Smart Growth” redevelopment consisting of a mix of residential, retail and commercial development. These uses provide very limited direct support for businesses in the Center, and result in circulation patterns and traffic volumes that are in conflict with Town goals.
3. *The Town should promote consolidation of MBTA parking on one site, or appropriate relocation to another site* – The Town should actively promote alternative parking solutions that relocate (in whole or in part) the commuter parking demand to areas where the impact will be lessened on Smart Growth, transit-oriented redevelopment, while retaining the convenience of a station within easy walking distance of the Center.
4. *The Town should promote relocation of some or all of the Post Office functions to another site* – The Post Office operations include on-site parking of mail trucks, sorting and other operations that a key land parcel in the Town Center. If possible, the customer service function should be retained. If it is not possible to provide for such a reorganization, however, the Town would benefit from relocation of the Post Office function to other nearby areas where automobile access is convenient and where parked trucks and handling operations will not be a constraint on beneficial mixed use redevelopment.
5. *In collaboration with the MBTA and/or the Post Office, the Town should sponsor a redevelopment initiative* – the Town should advance a redevelopment initiative that would result in the re-organization of the parcels discussed above, improve circulation, invite desirable redevelopment, and support associated infrastructure improvements.

Development Density: Land and Land Use

The Town of Stoughton is in the process of establishing a mixed use overlay district that will foster the development of mixed-use projects within a defined boundary that includes Stoughton Center. The proposed overlay district boundary is used as the boundary for this study, as shown below.

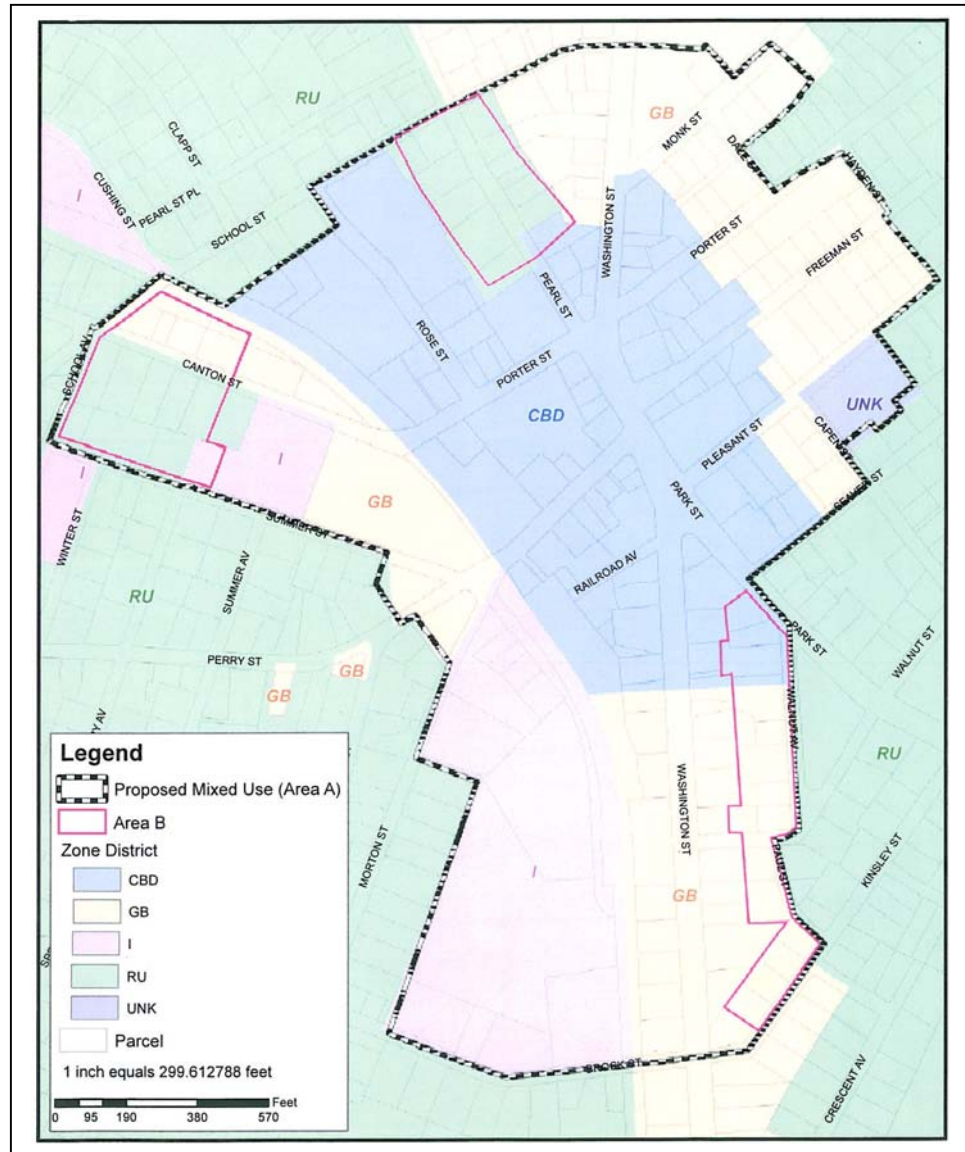


Figure 1: Proposed Stoughton Center Mixed Use Overlay District (Prepared by the Town of Stoughton)

The following criteria lists the qualities of suitable sites for mixed use development. Criteria for an acceptable site includes:

- The site must be in close proximity to Stoughton's central business district and the Stoughton MBTA station, and within the proposed Stoughton Center Mixed Use Overlay District.
- The site, or combination parcels must be large enough to accommodate a development that can include some parking on the site with other uses.
- Primarily publicly owned sites were considered, including those controlled by the Town of Stoughton and the MBTA. Other sites of suitable size were identified, but not included in the options due to private ownership.
- The existing site must be underutilized by its current uses.

Stoughton has several parcels (Fig. 2) that meet the criteria for mixed use development. These parcels, shown below, include both potential public and private development sites. The public sites consist of the MBTA commuter parking lots and the post office with its adjoining parking lots. Private sites include an industrial site adjacent to the rail line, St. Vincent DePaul and a large site north of the town center.

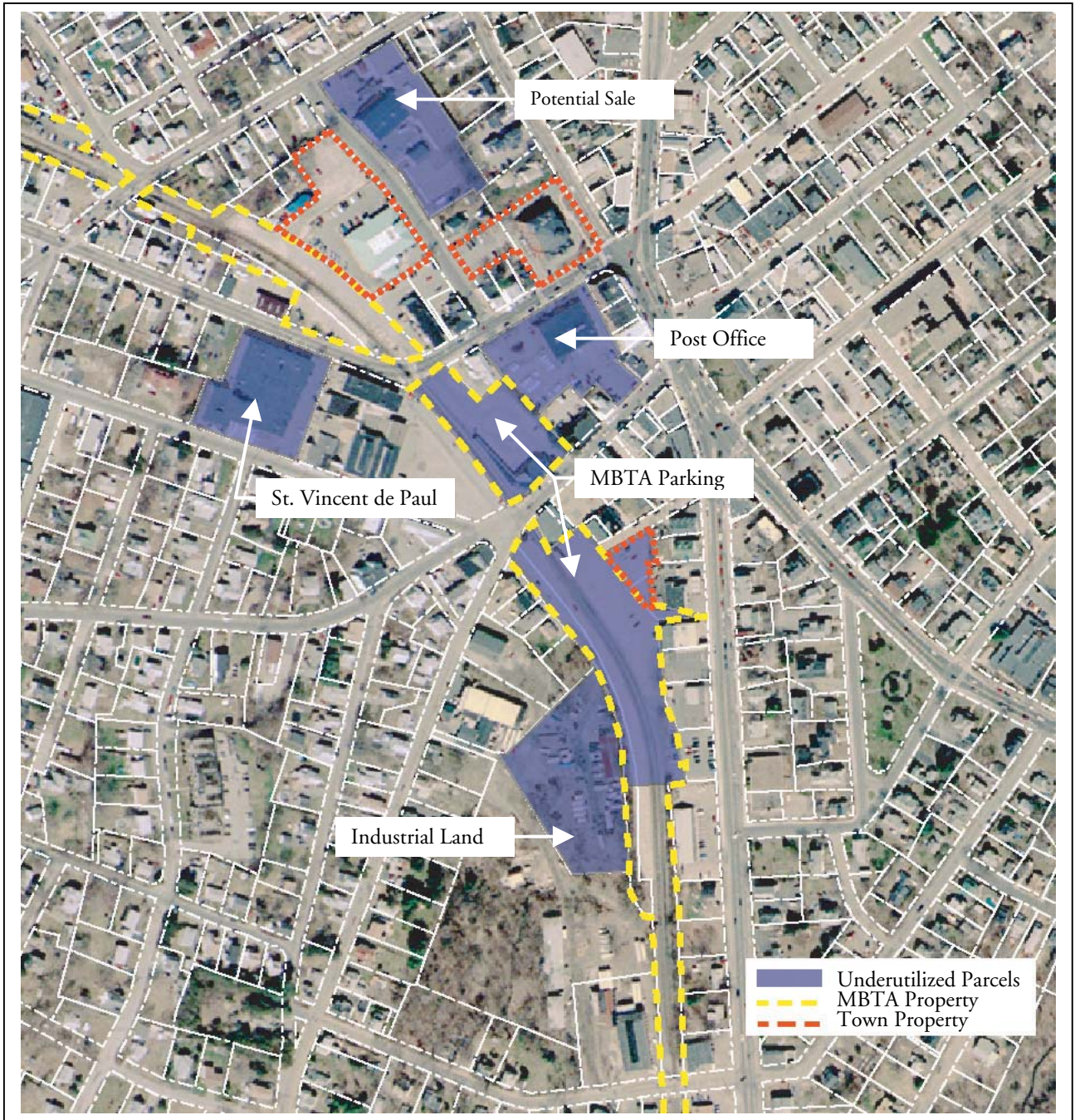


Figure 2: Sites that could accommodate mixed-use development in the downtown core with MBTA and town ownership.

## Parking Evaluation

### Supply

The Cecil Group studied the existing parking supply in downtown Stoughton. The study was accomplished by using a scaled aerial photograph to estimate the total square footage of parking within the study area, shown in Figure 3. The total square footage was divided by a parking ratio of 375 square feet per vehicle, which was found to be typical within the study area through spot checking from the GIS database provided by the Town. The result was an estimated total of 1,800 parking spaces in off-street parking lots. Including street parking spaces there are an estimated 1,900 total parking spaces within the study area.



Figure 3: The existing off-street parking lots included in the study area (purple line)



### Demand

The parking demand was estimated using the same method as the parking estimate to determine the size of building footprints on the ground floors within the study's boundaries. The building footprint total was multiplied by a factor of 1.3 to account for buildings with occupyable second floor space. Using a parking demand ratio of 3 cars per 1,000 square feet, the study area needs approximately 2,400 parking spaces.

Using these two approximate values, an estimated deficit of 500 parking spaces within the study area is generated.

### **Purpose**

Potential mixed use development in Stoughton Center will bring more active uses and will help alleviate the parking shortage through additional parking.

This study includes two illustrative scenarios that are not intended to be development proposals, but provide examples of potential outcomes that could benefit the Town. Both scenarios primarily consider the development of publicly held land. However, both scenarios include the redevelopment of the site currently used by St Vincent de Paul. The existing St Vincent de Paul facilities do not require proximity to Stoughton Center, and could be relocated outside the center to open up a critical opportunity for development. The development depicted on this site in both scenarios includes a new roadway connecting Summer Street and Canton Street, providing another secondary access way to route traffic away from busy intersections in the area. With close proximity to the MBTA station, the St Vincent de Paul site could become an important development opportunity to achieve new housing and commercial uses adjacent to the Stoughton business district.

### **Scenario A: MBTA Parking Consolidation**

The expansion of the existing MBTA parking lot south of Wyman Street can be accomplished with a single structured parking deck above the existing lot. The adjacent Town-owned parcel could be combined with the MBTA land to further increase the potential parking on site, and provide a small development opportunity next to the new parking deck that will visually screen the appearance of the deck from the central business district. Figure 4 shows a parking deck on this site with approximately 160 spaces.

On the Post Office block, a new development could be built that includes the renovation of the historic Stoughton train station. The train station is a building of excellent aesthetic quality that should be used as a centerpiece for the town. The new development could include either housing or office/commercial space over a surface parking lot of approximately 63 spaces.

In addition to those development opportunities, the St. Vincent de Paul could also be developed as previously discussed.



Figure 4: Scenario A, MBTA parking consolidation option.

### Scenario B: MBTA and Post Office Relocation

The existing Post Office block is large enough to accommodate commercial and residential development on all sides of the block with enough room to develop a highly efficient parking garage for the Town and MBTA use. The buildings that surround the garage are tall enough to easily conceal a 3 floor garage, and potentially four floors could be built without any significant visual impact from Stoughton Center. A 3 floor parking structure as depicted in Figure 5 could have 260 parking spaces. As shown in Figure 5, ample room

remains in the interior portion of the block to create residential development along the MBTA rail line that can face towards a courtyard separating the development from the parking garage. The additional parking may also allow for future development on the block in the parcels along the edge currently used for parking or unoccupied. As in scenario A, the historic train station could be renovated as part of the residential development.

In scenario B, the existing MBTA lot south of Wyman Street is redeveloped with a new mixed use project and improved roadway. Approximately 50 spaces of surface parking would be provided for the development along the MBTA tracks.

In addition to those development opportunities, the St. Vincent de Paul could also be developed as previously discussed.



Figure 5: Scenario B, MBTA and Post Office relocation.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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### Town Strategy

In order for the Town of Stoughton to fully realize the “Smart Growth” potential of its Center, it must assemble a clear strategy that will unlock the capacity of the land and the infrastructure to support mixed-use development. Although there are some opportunities for beneficial private sector redevelopment to occur within the Town Center, there are several conditions that cannot be improved without concerted public action.

As described in the analysis portion of this briefing report, the existing pattern of land uses, ownership and circulation effectively limit redevelopment in key areas of the center. As a result, the Town must be proactively engaged in the process of restructuring the opportunities.

This study has led to the following recommendations concerning a town strategy to meet the planning objectives that have been formed for the downtown:

- *Reorganization of publicly-owned parcels* – The Town, through its Planning Board and Board of Selectmen, should formally adopt a policy that advocates reorganization and relocation of certain publicly-owned lands in order to foster desirable, economically beneficial mixed-use redevelopment. The focus for this reorganization should consist of the existing MBTA-owned lands (including land that it may lease for commuter parking), the Post Office, and town-owned streets or parcels that might contribute to the overall goals.
- *Planning and implementing alternative locations* – Alternative locations for the MBTA commuter parking and/or Post Office functions must be explored, planned, and implemented.
- *Redevelopment through competitive proposals* – The redevelopment of land made available by the reorganization of the public parcels should be pursued through an open competitive process that identifies private sector redevelopment entities and leads to the development of mixed of uses and locations that will contribute to the Town and Town Center success.

### Town Actions

Through a series of action steps, which have proven successful in other communities, these strategies can be implemented. Here are the most important steps:

- *Designate a Stewardship Team* – The success of the redevelopment requires a team of individuals committed to the long-term. Appointments should be made among the Selectmen, Planning Board, and other key boards and committees for a team that will be charged with coordinating activities, discussing options and educating the community about the status of the redevelopment. This should be separate from the Implementing Authority discussed below.

- *Adopt a Policy Directive* – The chief elected officials should lead the effort and establish town policy, so that further actions and initial discussions can be advanced with the non-town agencies that will become involved.
- *Approach the Non-Town Agencies* – The Selectmen or their representatives should then approach the MBTA and the Post Office to establish potential joint interests in the outcomes for the downtown.
- *Coordinate with the State Legislature* – Similarly, the state legislative body should be approached to ensure they are familiar with the plan of redevelopment and their potential roles in ushering through supporting legislation.
- *Prepare MOU's* – Before further commitments are made, Memoranda of Understanding could be drafted and discussed with the MBTA and the Post Office. These MOU's will define the processes within which the feasibility for relocation may be acted on.
- *Land and Regulatory Control* – The next steps will be to set the local criteria and official processes for redevelopment, and to attempt to gain control of the subject parcels of land.
- *Implementation Authority* – At this point, it is recommended that a separate implementing authority be created that is made responsible for the completion of the redevelopment plans; such as concluding contracts, agreements, and negotiations.
- *Funding and Programs* – The tools for acting on the above steps include the needed funds and the programs that help build the redevelopment plan. Some of the important options are listed in the next section.

## Tools

There are a series of “tools” or programs that will assist or advance the strategies, either with policy and program support, or, through direct or indirect financial support. A number of these are local decisions to adopt sections of the state law and apply them to the plan. The others are funds and programs managed by state authorities under the regulations established for those laws.

### I. Local Powers

The town is presumably familiar with many of the powers that are available to it through state laws. There are some relatively new state laws that may also apply, and there are ways that previously enacted legislation may be used to support the strategies.

- Rezoning is a local power for allowing change. The rezoning initiative previously being considered could be brought forward and modified in support of the preferred strategy.

- District Increment Financing (DIF) is a program that allows the incremental increase in private tax dollars, which result from reinvestment in a specific area, to be directly invested into infrastructure improvements, such as roads, utilities and public parking. A Development District is designated and, if approved by the state economic assistance coordinating council, becomes the source of tax funds used to fund projects in the Invested Revenue District.
- Urban Center Housing –Tax Increment Financing (UCH-TIF) is a special section of the state law (Chap 40 section 60) for a District Increment Financing program when a project includes affordable housing.
- Local Redevelopment Powers - With the formal adoption of a Redevelopment Area, the town may use powers of eminent domain and reconstruction. This goes beyond the DIF program with additional powers to restore degraded areas.
- Community Preservation Act is a program of ear-marked tax monies that can be used to fund land acquisitions followed by implementation towards any of the goals of historic preservation, housing, and open space. The projects funded under this program do not have to solely advance one of those three options but must support those efforts.
- Chap. 40R and 40S are two state laws that, upon local adoption under zoning, could provide payments to the town for each housing unit built in a redevelopment project. However, these programs require intensive housing development associated with the redevelopment.

## II. State Programs

TOD and Smart Growth are two of the state programs that support projects in town centers with bus and train facilities. The programs support mixed-use development in downtowns and around the stations. These programs include funds and legal authorities to enact redevelopment schemes that also increase public ridership on the MBTA transportation system. Additional programs are more general in application but have a higher rate of success when connected to the downtown plans being considered here.

- Transit Oriented Development Infrastructure and Housing Support Program (TOD) provides financial assistance for four specific types of projects—pedestrian improvements, bicycle facilities, housing projects, and parking facilities—in mixed use developments within 1/4 mile of transit stations.
- Commercial Area Transit Node Housing Program (CATNHP) is a state funded bond program available to municipalities, non-profit and for-profit sponsors to support first-time homebuyer housing through new construction or acquisition and rehabilitation of housing projects, of 25 units or more, within neighborhood commercial areas and in proximity to public transit nodes.
- Priority Development Fund These funds, similar to many other current state programs, are geared towards the production of housing, but can be used to support related facilities that ultimately result in the production of affordable housing.



- Public Works Economic Development Grant (PWED) program was created to invest in infrastructure that stimulates economic development. The level of grants has typically been one-half to over a million dollars.
- Community Development Action Grant (CDAG) program is designed to fund community development projects to revitalize and redevelop decadent, substandard and blighted open areas for public benefit, in the public interest, and for a public purpose consistent with the needs of communities.
- MBTA Capital Program is included in the yearly budget of the Authority. Specific funds can be ear-marked for projects within the MBTA capital program, or separately authorized in line items approved by the state legislature. In either case, funds can be directly applied to a project within the town.