

STOUGHTON CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT STUDY



**A PRODUCT OF THE
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PROGRAM**



**PREPARED BY:
OLD COLONY PLANNING COUNCIL
70 SCHOOL STREET
BROCKTON, MA 02301**

Stoughton Central Business District Study

Introduction

Stoughton has a compact, varied downtown. It has a strong image and great accessibility but considerable unmet potential. The following looks at possibilities for diversifying and intensifying its varied uses. These benefit from the site's centrality, its concentration of attractive buildings, its diverse complementary public and private uses, and its accessibility by commuter rail and regional bus service. The rail service may be further improved if the proposed New Bedford /Fall River service restoration increases the frequency of service while lessening congestion and parking demand in the center.

The concerns are with increasing the concentrated commercial, public, and residential uses area in the center, (defined as a block or so around the nexus of Rtes. 27, 139, and 138) and with encouraging varied housing opportunities within a 10-minute walk. Accordingly, a two-tiered approach to Transit Oriented Development (TOD) zoning is recommended. To examine these concerns and possibilities the following considers some underlying issues.

Summary

The Stoughton CBD study explores opportunities to diversify and intensify uses in the Stoughton CBD, in the spirit of Transit Oriented Development. This leads to a draft TOD bylaw prepared by MAPC. Staff:

- Met with the Planning Board, MAPC staff, and town staff to get information and discuss findings.
- Defined a two-tiered study area, surveyed local land uses and examined the use of major buildings in the blocks surrounding the Square; then interviewed property owners and real estate professionals about their experiences and their expected prospects for the Square.
- Reviewed experience with CBD mixed-use zoning and TOD zoning in other communities.
- Met with the Planning Board, MAPC staff, and town staff to get information and discuss findings; sought possible niche markets for firms based in the Square.
- Recommended and mapped a two-tiered approach to rezoning; TOD-I encouraging integrated mixed uses right around the square, and TOD II extending for a 10 minute walk and encouraging varied, slightly more dense new housing.

Questions

- Is town seeking more mixed-use buildings or more mixed uses? Some mixed uses in a neighborhood may be neutral or complementary, while others can be conflicting.
- Is the town concerned only with intensifying uses in the Square or also with pursuing larger, more diffuse TOD opportunities in the surrounding areas? (Discussed below under Alternate Strategies).

- Will the TOD approach work well with RR service which is much less frequent than rapid transit service? How much will the proposed New Bedford /Fall River extension help with more frequent service?
- What is the best strategy for relating downtown to the Shaws' shopping center and Route 138 commercial strip to the north? Is it better to seek more active bridging uses than the present gas station and bank to tie the areas together, or to leave them distinct and to capitalize on the Square's compactness, variety, accessibility, improved appearance and traffic flow, and stronger image?
- How can the Square be strengthened as a special destination?



Residential to commercial transition along Pearl Street

Observations/Concerns

- Access/centrality - Like many small downtowns, the Square is the most central place in town, being the crossroads of the major streets and numbered routes, but it can be a more difficult area in which to drive and park than sites on the outlying commercial strips.
- Present traffic is difficult for drivers and very challenging for the desired pedestrians. How can crossings be improved? Will traffic gaps created by the lights be enough to ease mid-block crossing?
- There is little totally vacant upper floor space.
- Most upstairs space in major buildings is at least partially occupied by offices or studios. The upstairs in many smaller, older buildings on side streets contains apartments.
- There are many traditional mixed retail and residential buildings built that way or converted from houses, e.g., on Porter and Wyman Street. Elsewhere there are houses with ground floor-businesses which may be home occupations, (e.g., a card

reader on Washington Street), and some houses apparently have been totally converted to office space while retaining a residential appearance.

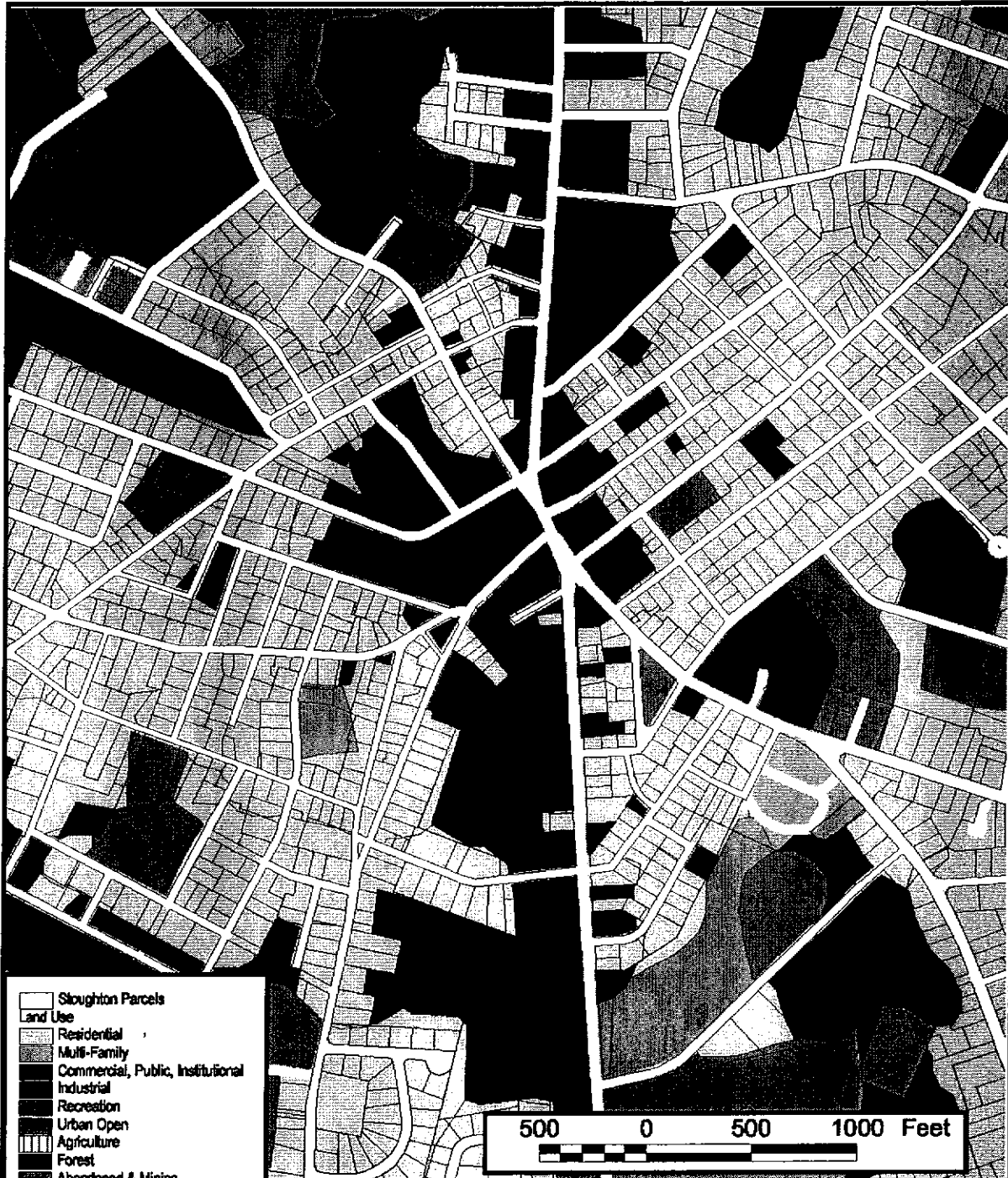
- One concern is that partially-occupied upper floors may not provide enough revenue to support extensive recent improvements. Have any owners sought Mass. Historic Commission facade restoration grants?
- The town has a tradition of living with dramatically juxtaposed uses, e.g. a house and grape arbor next to a small detergent factory. The pattern seems to be accepted, but the impacts need to be considered.



Vacant modern second floor space and partially vacant ground floor space in the heart of the Square

- The land use transitions between business and residential uses vary. They are very clean-cut on Pearl Street north of the Square, but much more uneven on highway-oriented commercial section of Washington Street to the south.
- Much varied housing and some scattered potential development sites are found near downtown (particularly to west) within 1000 to 1500 feet (a 4 to 6 minute walk).
- Houses are generally larger east of the Square and that area has a clearer non-residential / residential transition, while there are smaller houses and more potentially conflicting uses mixed with housing west of the Square.
- Density - The estimated 19 apartments on Porter Street, Wyman Street and Railroad Ave occupy about .88 acres for a net density of 26 dwelling units acre, in addition to the ground-floor commercial uses. This is well above the 6.2 units/acre allowed for one-bedroom apartments in the Residential-M District and is slightly above the 19.8 units/acre allowed for a 50-unit hotel or motel in the Highway Business District.

Stoughton CBD Study



Old Colony Planning Council, 70 School Street, Brockton, MA 02301
GIS Data Sources: MassGIS, Town of Stoughton, OCPC

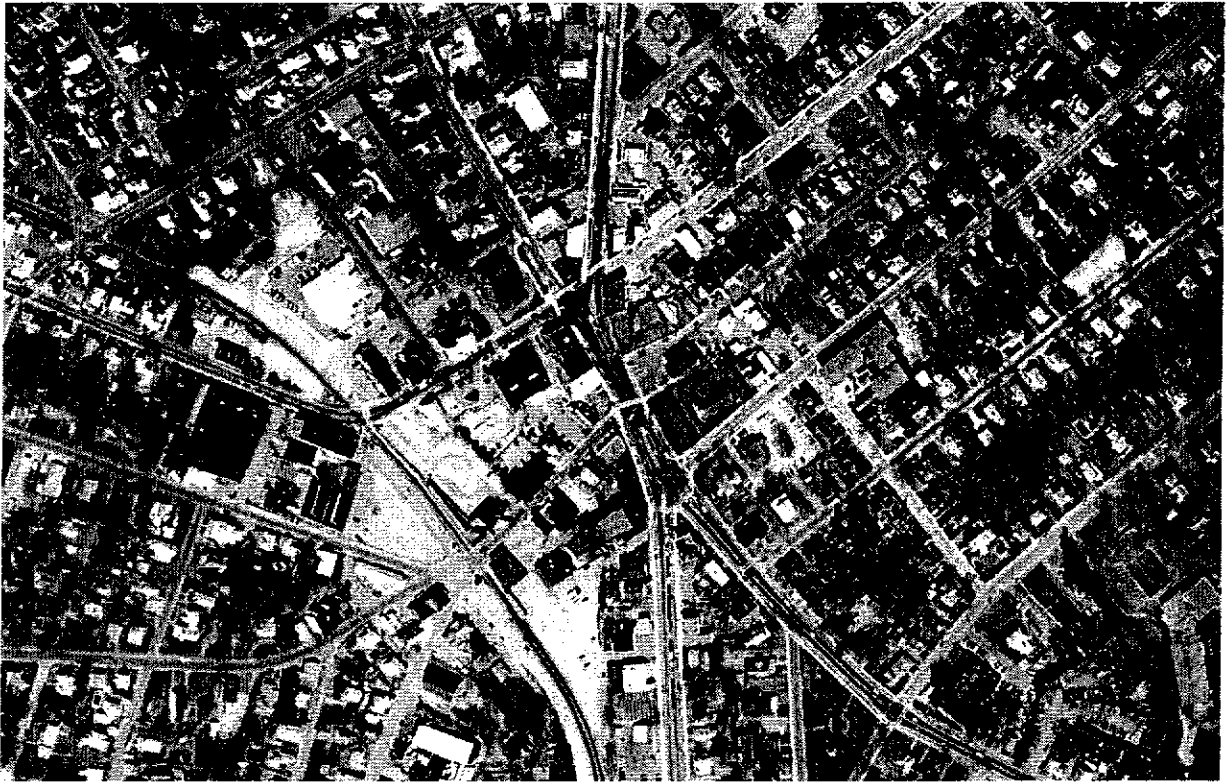
The largest amount of vacant or under-used upper floor space is in the second floor of the wooden portion of the former shoe plant now known as the Stoughton Business Center / Trackside Center. It is almost entirely used for self-storage bins while the ground floor is fully occupied with retail and service businesses. The owner has an office suite on the second floor and is converting storage space to offices as the market absorbs them. Other parts of the complex have upstairs artists' work spaces, two churches, light industry, and other offices. The owner proposes some upstairs housing for other under-used space in the complex.



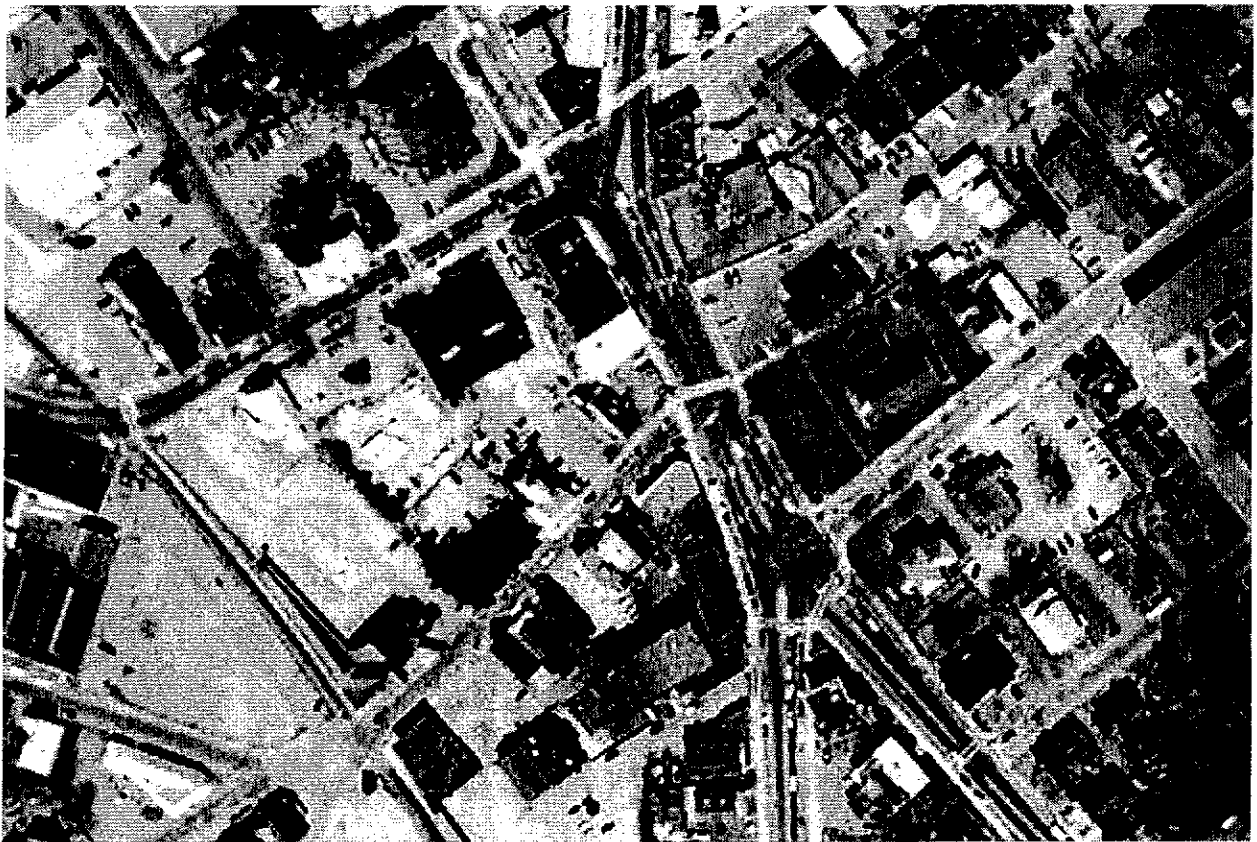
The old and the new; post war Army/ Navy Store, local oil co. and three-year old art gallery/ framing shop in the Lehane Building



Main portion of Trackside Center/Stoughton Business Center – ground floor totally occupied with new retail uses; upstairs combining office space and temporary self-storage rooms



Stoughton Square and surrounding neighborhoods; Trackage Complex to center left; Capen St. Elderly housing to center right



Stoughton Square showing extensive scattered parking areas

Demand for Space in Center

The experience of the local property owners and real estate professionals interviewed for this study, and staff observations in the Square and along major roads to the north and south suggest that demand is weak for general retail and office space. The firms that have fully rented their recently renovated or converted space reportedly have done so by offering good space in attractive buildings at very moderate rents. This has left some nearby recently vacated more expensive space empty as no new tenants have taken advantage of it.

The Square's present uses include:

- Specialty retailers; an Army/Navy store, bakeries, ethnic groceries (Polish and Portuguese /Brazilian), pharmacies, and Brazilian-oriented services and clothing/shoe stores.



Day care center at Trackside Center between main building and brick building with artist studios and two churches



Day Care Center

- Personal services: banks, barber shops, nail shops, money transferring, picture framing, insurance offices, tax firms, law offices, weight loss facilities, English language lessons, home decorating.
- Commercial services: electrical contracting, flooring, tool service, upholstering.
- Art and design related; picture framing, art gallery, graphic arts, design studios, artists' studios (non-residential), recording studio, movie theater /performing arts center.
- General and specialty restaurants, bars and clubs with jazz and contemporary popular music Ethnic social clubs, including a large Portuguese club under construction between Railroad Ave. and Wyman Street.
- Public Services; Town Hall, Post Office, Library, Historical Society, churches, commuter rail station.
- Despite these many varied, complementary uses, the Square has some ground-floor retail vacancies where key attractions such as Wyman's Jewelers have closed and not been replaced. Such losses, compared with the extensive retail activity along Washington Street, show that the Square, though central, is no longer the prime retail location.



Two of Stoughton Square's assets, commuter rail service and the historic train station.

This suggests building on possible niche markets benefiting from centrality, visibility, moderate-cost space, and the agglomeration effects of each other's presence.

Possible Niche Markets

Niche market uses that have been noticed or suggested by local observers include:

- Financial and legal establishment

These uses are the backbone of most downtowns, but they have been scattering as exemplified by the former bank converted to office space at the junction of Washington and Park Street and the new, solid brick banks and credit unions recently built on outlying sites along Route 27 between Brockton and the Square.

- Immigrant and Ethnic Services

The Square and surrounding areas contain money transfer agents, restaurants (like the new Boca no Aqua), Brazilian grocery stores, small churches, attorneys and other professionals catering to new communities, along with related specialty shops and several Brazilian and Portuguese-oriented clubs.

One question is whether the related activities will continue to grow around the Square, perhaps taking up more vacant space, or whether such activities will disperse as the respective communities become more affluent and suburban.

- Creative Arts

The Square now has the Cinema Pub/ Stoughton Performing Arts Center, the Henson / Jackson Art Gallery, the Mocking Bird Recording Studio, and occasional jazz events at the nearby Grille 781 in the Square itself, while just across the tracks from the Square there are scheduled open microphones for new performers at Whiplash Lounge (former Blues Station) and a long-established group of artist studios in the Trackside Center (former Cochrane Shoe plant). In addition, there is an art gallery and school on Route 27 closer to Brockton.

Beyond this, it is hoped that forthcoming street, sidewalk and streetscape improvements in the Square and related traffic controls will attract people to the Square; and that these amenities and potential increases in commuter rail service will make living in and around the Square more attractive. The Square already has examples of upstairs business and residential uses. The owner of the former boot factory is considering adding some generous upper-floor apartments in one of his buildings. The challenge is to keep or intensify the key downtown non-residential uses while creating room for all potential residents. This suggests both adding upstairs housing in mixed-use buildings in or at the edge of the Square, and encouraging a range of slightly higher-density housing scattered through the surrounding walkable neighborhoods.

Results of TOD and Mixed Use CBD Zoning Elsewhere

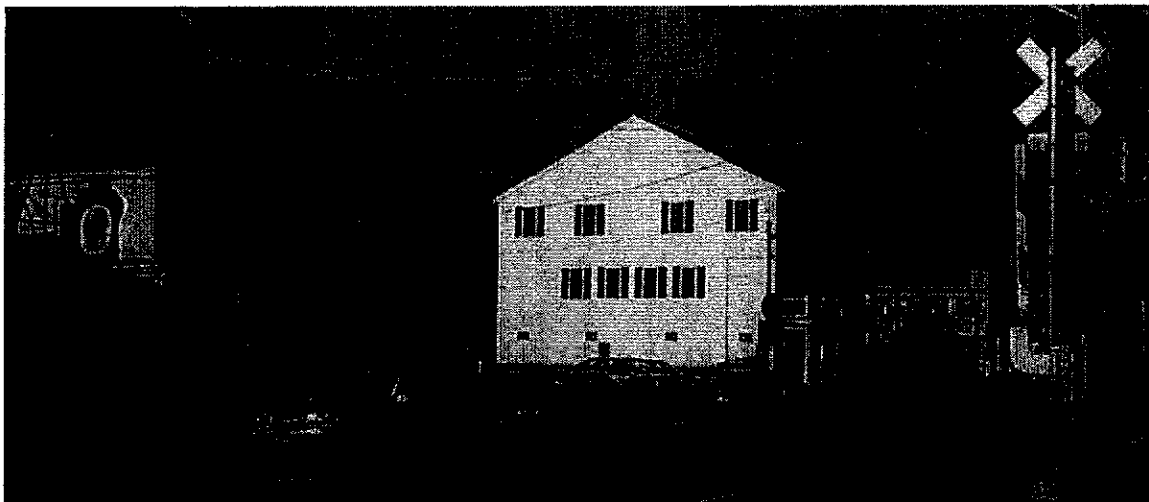
The towns of Abington, Canton, Hanover, Hingham, Holbrook, Scituate, Pembroke, Whitman, and Wrentham, among others, have recently adopted provisions for mixed-use downtown development. So far Abington, Canton and Scituate have had the most success in approving and building such projects.

Abington

Abington has adopted a CBD overlay district allowing mixed uses, primarily residential, over commercial space, greatly reducing dimensional requirements, increasing allowed densities, and accepting shared parking and off-site parking. This district has led to:

- Conversion of an abandoned 19th - Century theater to apartments over commercial space.
- A new mixed-use (commercial below, condos above) building at the edge of downtown.
- A new all-residential building in the mapped District, but beyond the functional downtown.
- A present proposal for a new mixed-use building on the main street next to the adapted theater.

The first is on Railroad Ave. and the others are all on North Ave., the heart of traditional North Abington Center



New mixed-use building (condos above / commercial space opening on to porch below) at edge of North Abington Center

Abington has also enacted a TOD district just south of the Abington Commuter Rail Station. This seeks to complement the commuter rail line and nearby neighborhoods with a mix of small, well-buffered uses serving commuters and adjacent neighborhoods; to encourage greater use of the rail service and pedestrian / bicycle travel; and to decrease local

automobile trips. Accordingly it allows mixed commercial / residential developments by Special Permit.

The standards, like those of the CBD District, call for building close to the street, with parking away from the front lot yard area. Housing requires a special permit, must include 3 or more units, and is limited to mixed-use projects or free-standing buildings. It is limited to 25% of mixed-use developments unless it is on the upper floors of a commercial building. This comes to 4500 sq. ft. out of the 18,000 sq. ft. permitted on the minimum 10,000 sq. ft. lot at 60% coverage and 3 floors. Allowing for the minimum required parking, nine 1000-sq. ft. units would require 26,500 sq. ft. or about 14.7 units/acre.

While the proportion of housing is unlimited on the upper floors of commercial buildings it presumably must be within the 35-foot building height and 60% lot coverage standards (though 0' side yards may be allowed by Special Permit) and the building is must be sewerred, have one parking space per unit, and have only 2 bedrooms/unit. The 10,000 sq. ft. minimum lot requirement could allow two 6,000 sq. ft. floors. With 15% of the floor in public space this would allow ten 1,000 - sq. ft. units; equivalent to an improbable 43 du/acre.

Stand-alone dwellings units are presumably limited by the same height and coverage standards and parking requirements, and require an additional 2500 sq. ft. per unit beyond the basic minimum 10,000 sq. ft. lot. With this standard, eighteen 1,000 - sq. ft. units would need 55,000 sq. ft., for a density of about 14.2 units / acre, or nearly twice that normally allowed by the by-law.

To date, the only nearby development is the 192-unit Ch.40b Abington Commons rental development west of the tracks and near the station access road, and a large church east of the tracks. These are immediately outside of the TOD area and are set back from the road partly due to commercial uses along the frontage but are still within easy walking distance. The need is to complement these with varied types of housing, retail space, and professional services, and closely integrated open spaces. There is major retail development on Route 123 north of the station, but it is oriented more to auto traffic.

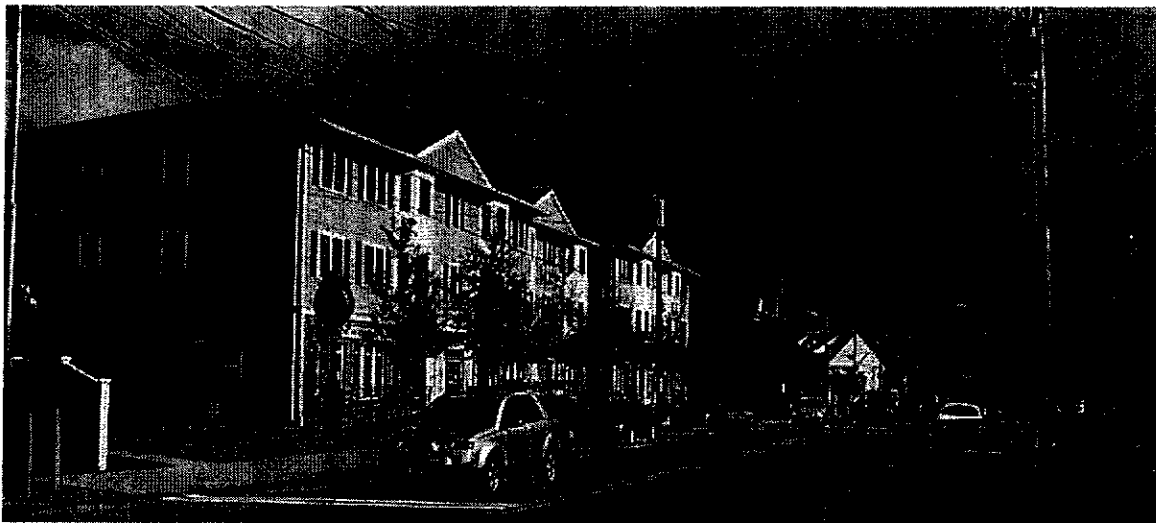


New Abington Commons apartments set back from Summer St.

Canton

Canton's bylaw allows mixed uses with significant design review in its Economic Opportunity District running along Washington Street in the town's railroad-served somewhat linear center.

Some of Canton's new mixed-use buildings are near the train station and at the edge of the traditional center, while others are closer to the more developed heart of the downtown. The building across from the station fronts on Washington Street, and has ground-floor commercial space along that frontage. Some others nearer the center are at an angle to the street with commercial space opening to a parking area and accommodating firms which need less exposure.



Mixed-use ground floor retail space / upper floor residential space diagonally across from Canton Commuter Rail station (White fence is at edge of tracks)

Hanover

Hanover has just adopted a complex Village Planned Unit Development bylaw allowing extensive mixed-use projects, such as the proposed Hanover Village, on sites of at least 25 acres along Route 53.

Hingham

Hingham has a year-old CBD overlay district encouraging housing over existing or new commercial space but nothing has happened yet, probably due to the disruption from ongoing construction of a commuter rail tunnel line through Hingham Square.

Hull

Hull has intensified its traditional one-story Kenberma commercial center with construction of a 12 - du mixed commercial / residential building. The first level is slightly depressed residential and retail parking, the street level is fully leased retail space largely along a ramped-up sidewalk, and the third and fourth floors are market rate apartments covering a portion of the retail space. It was approved as an as-of-right use

under the town's Business District zoning. It more than meets a 30% minimum retail space requirement and the total dwelling units were reportedly limited by parking requirements. It is on the route of the local bus which connects with the Hull Commuter Boat at one end of the town and with MBTA service to Quincy and the Red Line in adjacent Hingham.

Pembroke

Pembroke recently enacted a mixed-used downtown overlay district allowing a mixture of uses with required minimum areas of both commercial and residential space. It has



As-of-right market-rate mixed-use building in Hull's Kenberma retail area



Below grade parking under much of the Kenberma Complex

very extensive lot and set-back requirements precluding much downtown infill development. The one resulting proposal so far is for low-rise commercial /office buildings on a large parcel just south of downtown with several small apartment buildings to the rear.

Scituate

Scituate has a mixed-use residential over commercial project on the former Bell Buoy music club site along Front Street in the downtown Harbor area. It was approved under existing business zoning allowing such mixed uses by special permit with site plan review by the Planning Board. The town is thinking of adding new mixed-use zoning districts elsewhere.



Discrete infill. A new small mixed-use building (apartments above / commercial/ institutional space below) on a small vacant lot in Whitman Center.

Whitman

The town of Whitman recently enacted a Mixed-Use Overlay District allowing commercial / residential buildings on small existing lots. This has already led to a two-story (commercial below/residential above) building on a small infill lot across from Town Hall. Though the ground floor was intended for commercial use, it is now expected to house a small alternative high school.

Wrentham

Wrentham has adopted a Town Center Overlay district encouraging moderate-scale compact mixed-use development and shared parking. However it requires a minimum of five acres, making it suitable for new development or redevelopment of vacant or redevelopable land next to a downtown, rather than for infill development in the heart of

downtown. This fits the situation in Wrentham where a major former industrial site nestles against the downtown.

Prospective Approaches in Stoughton

Going back to the question of whether Stoughton is concerned only with intensifying uses in a tightly defined Square or also with pursuing larger, more diffuse transit-oriented residential development opportunities in close-in surrounding areas, it might be possible to have two districts, one wrapping around the other.

The first, the Intensified CBD (TOD-1) would be based on the present CBD District, possibly slightly expanded to include some under-used land and buildings now mapped Industrial, General Business, or Residential-8. The intent would be to capitalize on the area's accessibility and character by intensifying commercial and public uses in the Square itself, and by adding diverse housing in the immediate area. This could involve:

- Rationalizing the use of parking spaces.
- Modifying the zoning to explicitly allow new multi-family housing generally over ground-floor retail space, (i.e., not being limited to one use per parcel or structure)
- Allowing selective conversion of existing under-used industrial buildings to partial housing use, or re-mapping those areas from I to CBD.
- Encouraging multi-purpose in-fill development of underused land while protecting major community resources.
- Capitalizing on the improved appearance of the Square with the present Public Works Economic Development (PWED) project and on the eased vehicular and foot movement through the Square.

The second, the residentially focused Transit Oriented Development District, (TOD-2) would complement the CBD by building on the surrounding neighborhoods' potential for scattered housing development benefiting from pedestrian access to the rail service and to the heightened amenities in the Square. It would not be a traditional mixed use TOD, but the combination of the two districts would have the same total impact.

Though consistent with the higher densities commonly expected at the edge of a downtown, or near transit, this approach might allow more change than the present neighborhoods desire, and could require significant safeguards. This approach could involve:

- Allowing scattered multi-family housing by special permit at perhaps twice the present 5 to 6.2 units /acre for one-bedroom and two bedroom units.
- Protecting the neighborhood by requiring special permits and design review.
- Possibly even requiring projects above a certain size to acquire development rights over adjacent parcels to ensure a predictable future relationship to the adjacent uses.

For the near future, Stoughton could use the basic CBD intensification approach alone or in combination with a surrounding residential TOD program. Both offer benefits and challenges, and the community needs to decide its overall goals and objectives for the Square and its surrounding neighborhoods.

The Brock Street Area - Stoughton may also want to create a new zoning district and program to allow a large integrated development in the extensive industrial /distribution area between the tracks, Morton Street, and Brock Street. This might be done as an Urban Renewal project or through the new Chapter 40R Smart Growth zoning provisions. However, the site is too large and too remote from the heart of the downtown to be part of the tightly focused intensified CBD approach discussed above. This suggests developing separate provisions for such largely non-residential outlying areas.

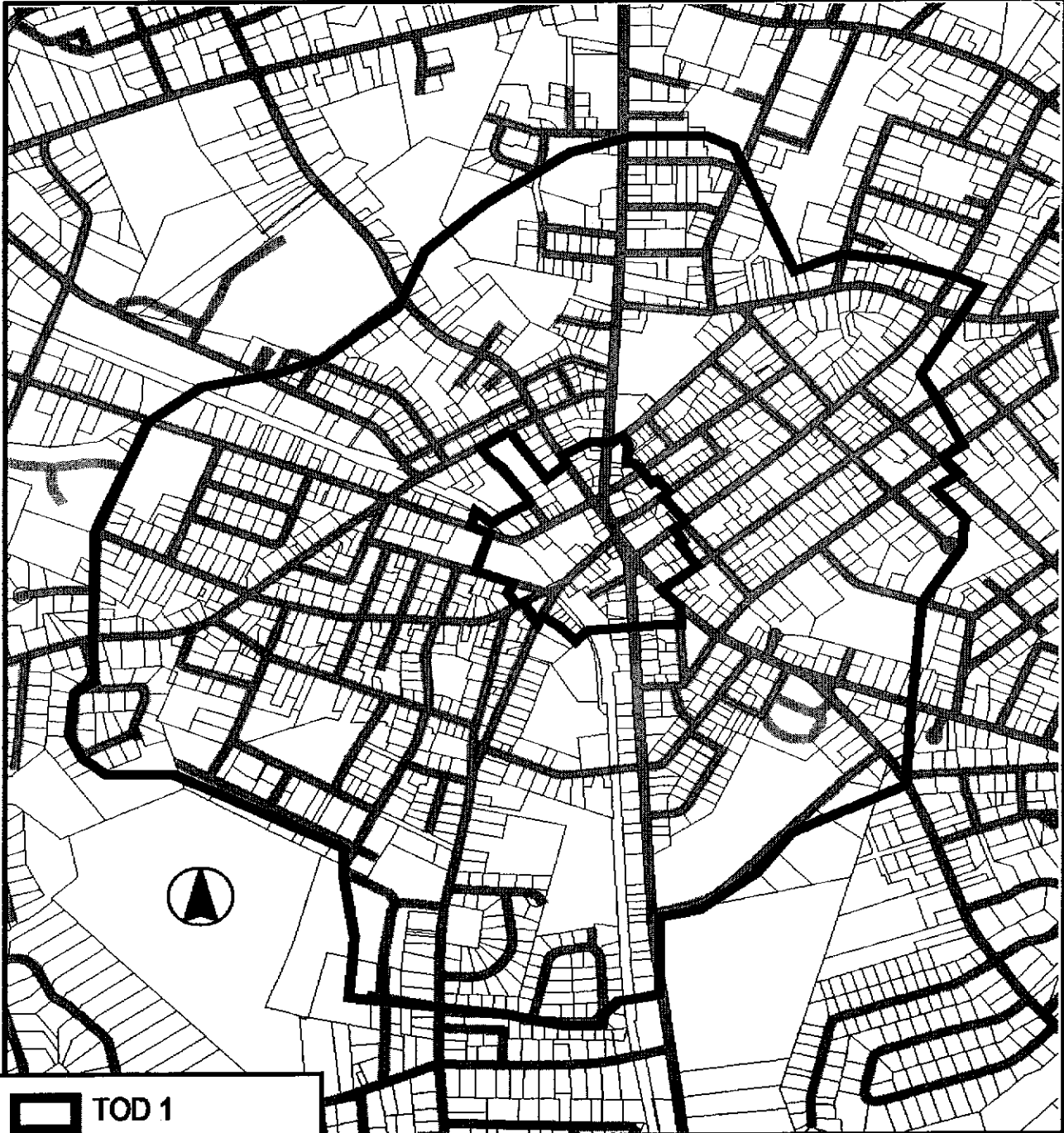
Recommended Policies




- Examine the tradeoffs between the two approaches described above and any variations.
- If resources and public support are limited, focus on the Square itself for the near future. Successes there will increase the quality of life in the surrounding neighborhoods and possibly increase support for a more extensive TOD effort in the future.
- Focus downtown on non-residential uses to keep it an activity/employment center with housing a second, complementary, choice.
- Rather than conversion of existing space alone, seek:
 - More intense infill development or redevelopment, possibly on unused or underused space, e.g., any excess Post Office parking lot frontage on Wyman Street.
 - To build over present one-story space.
 - To use scattered vacant parcels in the TOD-2 neighborhoods - but at risk of losing valuable informal local open space.
- Work to optimize parking lot use by:
 - Inventorying spaces and their use.
 - Reserving close-in space for commercial uses and keeping more remote spaces for long-term employee and commuter use.
 - Developing provisions and agreements for joint use of infrequently used single purpose spaces, e.g., church lots.
- Develop new districts for outlying areas (such as Brock Street) beyond the purposes and scale of the Intensified CBD District (TOD-1) and distinct from the purpose and scale of the residentially oriented TOD-2.

The initial recommended mapping of the proposed TOD-1 and TOD-2 districts is shown on the following map.

Stoughton CBD Study

Proposed TODs



-  TOD 1
-  TOD 2
-  Stoughton Parcels

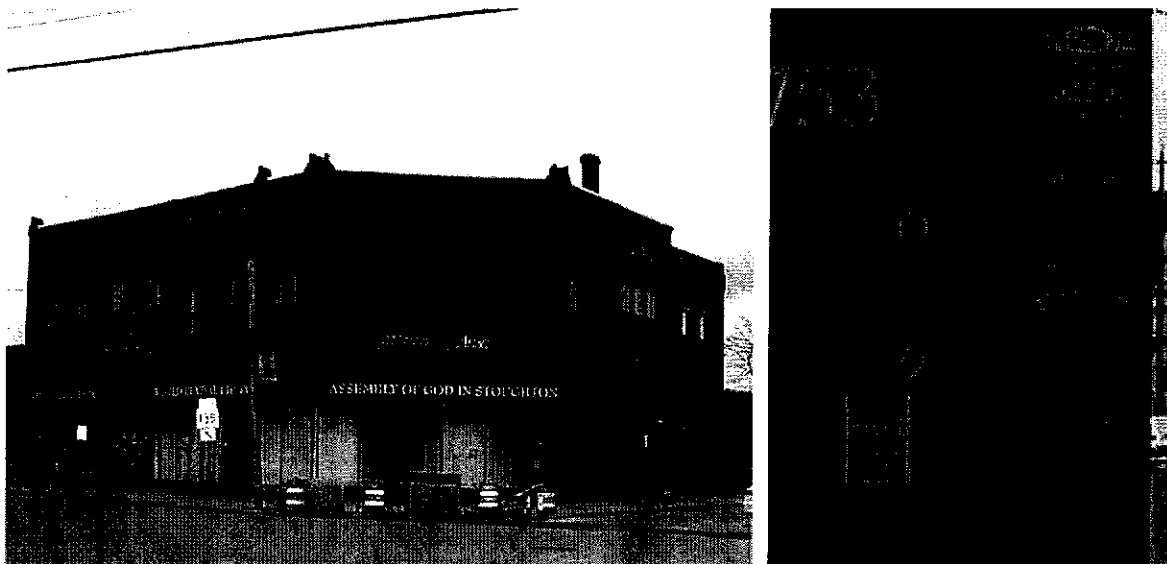


Old Colony Planning Council, 70 School Street, Brockton, MA 02301
GIS Data Sources: MassGIS, Town of Stoughton, OCPC

Appendix

Notes Regarding Major Buildings around the Square

- The Bank Block - 2-1/2 floors, remodeled, first floor occupied with a church and businesses, upper floors have three of six suites occupied with an English language school, a weight loss program, and a realty group.



The Bank Building and its directory of tenants

- Next door – The Lehane Bldg., a classic one-floor “tax-payer” occupied with an art gallery/frame shop, an Army/Navy Store, and an oil company office. Is there a potential for adding upper residential floors?
- 767 Washington Street, modern one-floor Medical Pharmacy building. Is there a potential for adding upper residential floors?
- Adjacent, one-floor highway-style Honey Dew Doughnuts shop set back from the street. The setback and parking out front undermine the character of the Square, but may provide valuable informal short-term parking.
- Corner of Washington and Wyman Streets, modern one-floor building housing CO Graphics.
- 795 Washington Street - One-floor building occupied by window and upholstery firms. Is there a potential for adding upper residential floors?
- 797-893 Washington Street - Modern two-floor building, first floor has a bar, nails shop, hair salon, and tax office. Second floor is empty despite big windows and very prominent location.
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- Pub Cinema Building - A valuable destination use. Adjacent building on corner of Railroad Ave. on same parcel houses music-oriented Grille 831. Owner reports potential for upper-level residential space.
- The former Stoughton Trust Building - Handsome, but cut off from pedestrians by traffic. Three levels, remodeled, first floor partly rented to lawyers, second and third floors rented to retail and office uses. Shares parking with former Post Office to rear.
- Historical Society Building - Handsome landmark set back from street and isolated from pedestrians. Is it all occupied by Historical Society; any rental office space?
- Unitarian-Universalist (UU) Church - Contemporary, attractive with a front lawn, and parking to the rear, but probably less of a presence than the original building. Is there a potential for shared parking during the week?
- International Order of Odd Fellows / Pacheco Hardware building - Another landmark, but the facade appears altered. The ground floor has the Pacheco hardware store. Upstairs is (partially) occupied by a design studio and an English language school. The building is awkwardly set back behind parking (roughly matching setback of UU Church behind its green), but store benefits from the spaces.
- Malcom and Parsons Insurance building, corner of Washington and Freeman Streets - A one-floor bldg. with a restaurant, two other stores and large insurance agency occupying all but one vacant store front. Is there a potential for adding upper residential floors?



Malcolm and Parsons Building across an intimidating expanse of pavement

- Katie and Sal Building, Corner of Washington and Porter Street - A handsomely renovated 2 ½ floor wooden Victorian. Half-occupied ground floor, partially occupied upstairs with offices and studios.



The renovated, and partially occupied Sal and Katie Building

- The Kelly Professional Building - 3 Pearl Street at junction of Porter and Washington Street. A well-known remodeled building in very visible location at head of the Square. Good exteriors, first floor rented to beauty shop and Real Estate firms. All suites are occupied.



The strategically located Kelly Professional Building

- 7-11 Pearl Street - A traditional brick mixed-use building with two floors. Two of three ground-floor stores are occupied, as are both apartments.



7-11 Pearl St. Compact commercial space and upstairs apartments across from Town Hall.

- 17 Pearl Street - A new three-floor mixed-use building with frontage and surface parking on both Pearl and Washington Streets. The ground floor is 2/3rds rented, including a seasonal H and R Block office, and there are eight occupied apartments upstairs.



17 Pearl St. new investment in mixed-use development, replacing a burned-out building

