



Stoughton Train Depot Reuse Study - Summary

Prepared for
Town of Stoughton
Economic Development
Department

2023



Sponsored by
**Massachusetts
Downtown Initiative**

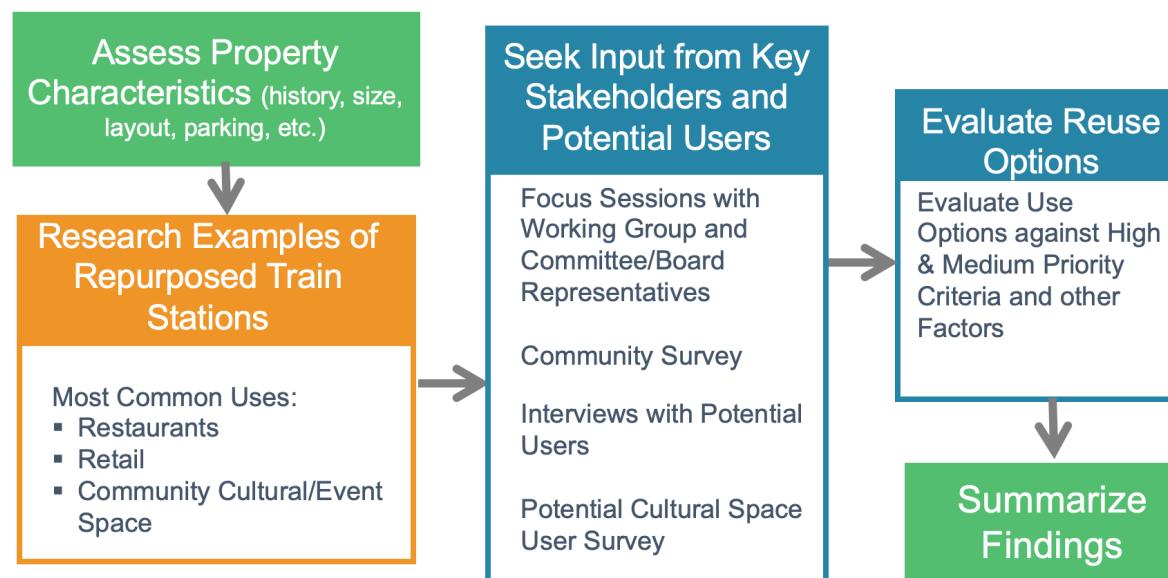
Prepared by
**FinePoint
Associates LLC**

Project Overview and Findings

Project Purpose: FinePoint Associates was hired to assist the Town of Stoughton in exploring reuse for the Town-owned Train Depot by conducting research pertaining to the site and potential uses, and obtaining input from the community (with the assumption the property would remain in town ownership). Funding for this project was provided by the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development through the Massachusetts Downtown Initiative.

Process: FinePoint worked collaboratively with Stoughton's Economic Development Director throughout the process and received input from a working group of representatives from other Town Departments (Planning, Engineering, Facilities) as well as committee and Board members.

Seeking the Best Reuse Option - The Process



Project Overview and Findings

Summary of Findings: The historic Stoughton Depot has a footprint of approximately 3,100 square feet apportioned into a main lobby area and waiting room, along with 2 small offices and 2 restrooms. The structure also has an attic and a 62-foot tall clock tower. The Depot is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and renovations must adhere to historic preservation guidelines.

We looked at many cases of small repurposed train stations in Massachusetts and beyond; 14 examples are highlighted in our report. The most common uses are: restaurants, retail, and community cultural use facilities (for events, performances, exhibits, etc.).

Stoughton residents support the idea of repurposing the Depot for a multi-use community facility. 73% of survey respondents indicated they are in favor of this use. The types of cultural activities that most residents would like to see take place at the Depot include:

- Festivals, Beer Gardens (68%)
- Art Displays featuring Local Artists (64%)
- Music Concerts (62%, and
- Community/Theater Performances (54%).

A majority of residents (58%) feel it's important for any repurposed use to include providing shelter for commuters during peak hours; 56% feel it's important to provide space for arts and culture performances/exhibits; and 52% feel it's important to provide space for

community events or meetings. Providing space for private events (weddings, parties, etc.) is seen as less important.

We reached out to several organizations that regularly use cultural space to obtain their input regarding the demand for space and suitability of the Depot. These organizations use space for theater productions, music concerts, other types of performances and classes. The respondents were largely enthusiastic about the idea of additional available space.

Representatives of the Little Theater of Stoughton (LTOS) are particularly supportive of the idea and expressed their interest and eagerness to use the Depot for performances. They envision the space being creatively utilized with the addition of retractable seating, the attic used for activities, and the possibility of a temporary tent as needed to accommodate dressing rooms and storage. LTOS indicated they would be interested in using cultural space for approximately 20 performance days and 60 rehearsal days per year. Three other organizations also expressed interest in potentially using the space for a total of 12 additional performance days and 34 rehearsal days. One of the organizations mentioned they would only be interested if the space was offered free of charge; the others could pay a modest rent.

It should be noted, there are challenges associated with using the Depot for performances and several

Project Overview and Findings

cultural space users showed concern about the size (audience capacity) and the layout (configuration restricting sight lines and limiting full use of the space). In addition, performances require specialized infrastructure such as seating, stage lighting, electrical design to support theater lighting, and sound abatement improvements.

A summary evaluation of potential reuse options is illustrated in the following chart. The use options were formulated based on the research of other repurposed train stations and discussions with community representatives. The "High" and "Medium" priorities used as evaluation criteria were the result of resident input. We also added two other evaluation factors -- market/user demand and appropriateness/suitability of the structure.

The "Community Cultural Arts Facility" use scores highly against most criteria and received the strongest support from survey respondents. This use would contribute to Stoughton Center's development as a dining & entertainment destination, bring foot traffic into downtown, and add to the variety of available arts and culture activities. Further, there has been some preliminary interest from potential cultural space users. However, this use would likely not generate much, if any, revenue for the town beyond operating expenses and the use of the space presents some challenges that might limit its use for performances and increase renovation costs.

The initial cost estimate for restoration, mechanical and electrical upgrades and site improvements is \$2.8 million. The Town is currently investigating funding availability and feasibility issues such as capacity by use and additional associated rehabilitation needs.

If further analysis calls for an alternative to be considered, the "Restaurant" use also scores highly against many criteria and received strong resident support (68%). This use would enhance the Center as a dining & entertainment destination, bring customers downtown, and generate some revenue for the town. Plus, in the past, there has been interest from potential business operators that wanted to use the space as a brewery taproom or coffee shop/caf . However, restaurant use would not increase the variety of arts and culture activities in the Center and may provide less public access to the historic building.

A "Mixed Use" option could also be considered that brings together the best aspects of both uses. It is conceivable that a repurposed Depot might include a taproom/coffee shop/caf  and a shared or separate multi-function community space that could be used for cultural events and activities.

Evaluation of Uses

■ = High □ = Medium □ = Low

		Potential Uses for Repurposed Train Depot					
		Community Cultural Arts Facility	Restaurant	Educational/ Museum Use	Retail	Business Incubator	Office Space
High Priority	Enhance Stoughton Center as Dining & Entertainment Destination	■	■	■	□	□	□
	Generate Significant Amount of Users	■	■	□	■	□	□
	Active Nights/Weekends	■	■	□	□	□	□
Medium Priority	Increase Social Gathering Space	■	■	□	□	□	□
	Generate Revenue for Town	□*	■	□	■	□	■
	Allow Public Access to Historic Depot Building	■	□	■	□	□	□
	Increase Arts & Culture Activities in Stoughton Center	■	□	■	□	□	□
Other	Market/User Demand	□	□	□	□	□	□
	Appropriateness/Usability of Space	□	■	■	■	■	■

Potential uses were based on research of repurposed train stations & stakeholder discussions. Priorities were established through Community Survey.

□* = Depending on rental fees that could be charged.