

# COMMUTER RAIL CORRIDOR PLAN

## NEIGHBORHOOD PLANNING FOR THE TREMONT/ESSEX STREET CORRIDOR



October 2013



## Acknowledgments

MAPC would like to thank our project partners from the City of Melrose for their assistance and input throughout the entirety of this project:

Mayor Robert J. Dolan

Denise M. Gaffey - Director and City Planner

Adam L. Duchesneau, AICP - Assistant Planning Director

### Principal Author (MAPC)

Eric Halvorsen, AICP, Transportation Planner

### Contributing Staff (MAPC)

Sam Cleaves, Jennifer Raitt, Meghna Dutta, Christopher Kuschel, Jeanette Lin, Angela Insinger, Eric Bourassa

### Market Analysis Consultant

RKG Associates, Inc.

To request additional copies of this document contact:

Eric Halvorsen, AICP

Metropolitan Area Planning Council

60 Temple Place

Boston, MA 02111

(617t) 451-2770

[ehalvorsen@mapc.org](mailto:ehalvorsen@mapc.org)

Or visit our website:

[www.mapc.org](http://www.mapc.org)

## Funding

The work that provided the basis for this publication was supported by funding under an award with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The substance and findings of the work are dedicated to the public. The author and publisher are solely responsible for the accuracy of the statements and interpretations contained in this publication. Such interpretations do not necessarily reflect the views of the Government.

We also thank the Metro Boston Consortium for Sustainable Communities for making this work possible.



# Table of Contents

## **Executive Summary - 7**

## **Introduction - 9**

Planning Process - 10

Station Area Context - 10

Transportation Network - 13

Demographics - 14

Transit Oriented Development - 16

## **Vision - 18**

## **Components of the Vision - 23**

Market Analysis - 24

Zoning Assessment - 26

Affordable Housing Recommendations - 34

Transportation and Public Realm Improvements - 37

## **Short- and Long-Term Action Steps - 49**

Short-Term Action Steps - 50

Long-Term Action Steps - 51

## **Conclusion - 51**

## **Appendix**

A. Market Analysis Report



## Executive Summary

The City of Melrose has access to three Commuter Rail stations and one rapid rail station, as well as several local bus routes. Growth and development around the transit stations and in the downtown area have been taking place for decades. New development pressures within the City are creating the need to look at how and where additional growth can be accommodated while still maintaining the character of the community. The Tremont/Essex Street Corridor provides excellent access to the downtown, nearby schools, recreational opportunities, and transit creating a corridor that is both desirable and an appropriate location for additional housing and mixed-use development. Building upon the existing transit assets in Melrose, the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) in partnership with the City embarked on a corridor planning process to identify the opportunities and impediments in this area and develop an action-oriented plan for the Tremont/Essex Street Corridor.

The overall vision from the residents, businesses, and property owners along the Corridor was to maintain ease of access and walkability while improving infrastructure and adding new development in key locations. Residents would like to see more restaurant choices and convenience services located closer to the train stations, and connections from the Corridor to surrounding neighborhoods and the downtown through improvements to bicycle and pedestrian facilities.

Building upon the core concepts of what makes successful transit oriented development, MAPC and the City outlined a series of recommendations to capitalize on the opportunities and overcome impediments in order to stimulate investment in the Corridor. Key recommendations include:

### Land Use and Zoning:

- Create a transit oriented overlay district for the Tremont/Essex Street Corridor, as well as changing the base zoning in the existing BC district around the Cedar Park and Highland Commuter Rail stations.
- Increase the allowable Floor Area Ratio (FAR) for development.
- Reduce building setbacks to encourage active street frontage.
- Increase allowable building heights.
- Reduce parking requirements for residential development.

### Transportation:

- Reallocate roadway right-of-way along some streets in the Corridor to accommodate bicyclists and pedestrians.
- Improve pedestrian crosswalks at intersections and mid-block locations along the Corridor.
- Consolidate access points along the Corridor to make sidewalks safer for pedestrians.

### Public Realm Improvements:

- Focus on short-term, quick, implementable solutions to improve public spaces along the Corridor.
- Identify locations for wall murals and art.
- Extend the existing streetscape treatments on West Emerson Street along the Corridor and around the Highlands Commuter Rail station.

Each of these recommendations, and many more, are described in greater detail in the main body of the report. Short- and long-term actions are also listed in the report with the goal of creating a pathway to implementation where incremental steps will result in long-term positive change for the Corridor and the surrounding neighborhoods.





# I NTRODUCTION



## Introduction

In the Greater Boston region, the half-mile transit station areas within the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) system comprise approximately 5% of the total land area, yet they are currently home to 25% of the region's housing units and 37% of the region's employment<sup>1</sup>. This highlights the importance of planning within station areas to ensure housing, jobs, shopping, and recreational opportunities are located within walking distance to transit. Focusing efforts on these natural hubs of activity places critical daily needs within close proximity to an affordable transportation option, and reduces reliance on personal automobiles.

MAPC, in conjunction with the City of Melrose, undertook a corridor planning effort along the Tremont and Essex Street Corridor which parallels the MBTA's Haverhill Commuter Rail Line. This planning effort focused on key opportunities and impediments to creating transit oriented development around the Cedar Park and Highlands Commuter Rail stations, as well as assessing the corridor that connects these two stations. This study addresses ways in which the corridor could support a broader mix of uses, accommodate new housing opportunities, bolster the existing business nodes around the Commuter Rail stations, and connect surrounding neighborhoods to transit through improved walking and biking infrastructure.

The City of Melrose has been the focus of new development due to its proximity to Boston, bustling downtown, access to nearby recreational areas, and transit accessibility. This study capitalizes on these assets within the City and provides a blueprint for driving new public and private investment into a corridor seen by many as the next area in Melrose that could accommodate new development around transit.

## Planning Process

Over the course of approximately five months, local residents, business owners, and property owners worked with the City and MAPC to outline a vision for the Tremont/Essex Street Corridor (the Corridor), understand the opportunities, and develop solutions to overcoming the impediments. In addition to engaging the local community, the process involved coordination with MBTA staff as well as meetings with development firms working on transit oriented development projects in the Greater Boston region.

The planning process included two public meetings and regular meetings with City of Melrose staff. The following is an outline of the planning process:

- Collect and analyze existing conditions data
- Public Meeting #1 - Identifying the Vision
- Articulate community's vision for the area
- Develop land use, zoning, transportation, and public realm concepts
- Public Meeting #2 - Share Concepts with Community
- Refine concepts based on public and City feedback
- Prepare final plan document

This study follows on the heels of two planning processes recently undertaken in the City of Melrose, both of which were incorporated to varying degrees in the recommendations for this study. The first is the Main Street Corridor Study completed by MAPC in 2012 which looked at ways to improve upon the existing transportation network by reducing automobile traffic while promoting walking, biking, and transit options. The second is the planning work done by City of Melrose planning staff on the Smart Growth District along Washington Street just north of the Oak Grove Orange Line station. Both bodies of work tie to the Tremont/Essex Street Corridor either through transportation connections or as an example of a successful zoning strategy. The Tremont/Essex Street Corridor study builds upon these previous efforts and maintains continuity among the goals of all three efforts.

## Station Area Context

For the purposes of this study, MAPC focused on two defined areas within the City of Melrose. The first was the traditional half-mile transit shed around both Commuter Rail stations (see Figure 1.1), and the second was a smaller focus area defined by the City and referred to throughout the process as the Tremont/Essex Street Corridor (see Figure 1.2).

The half-mile transit shed around the two Commuter Rail stations was used to gather demographic and economic information to help inform study recommendations, and look at how to better connect surrounding neighborhoods to the transit station and Downtown Melrose. The majority of existing

<sup>1</sup> MAPC, Growing Station Areas Report, June 2012.



Figure 1.1 - Tremont/Essex Street Corridor and the Half-Mile Radius

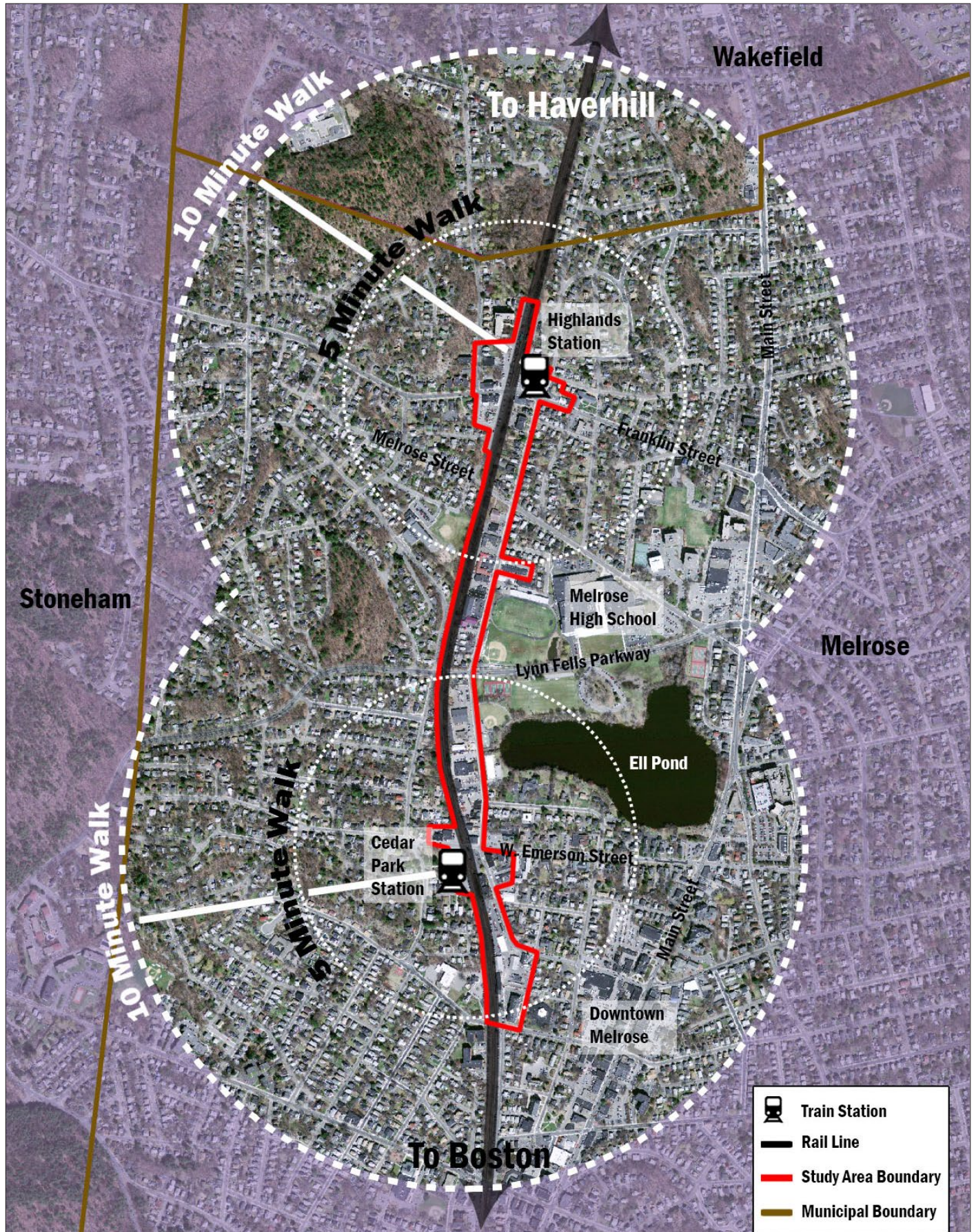
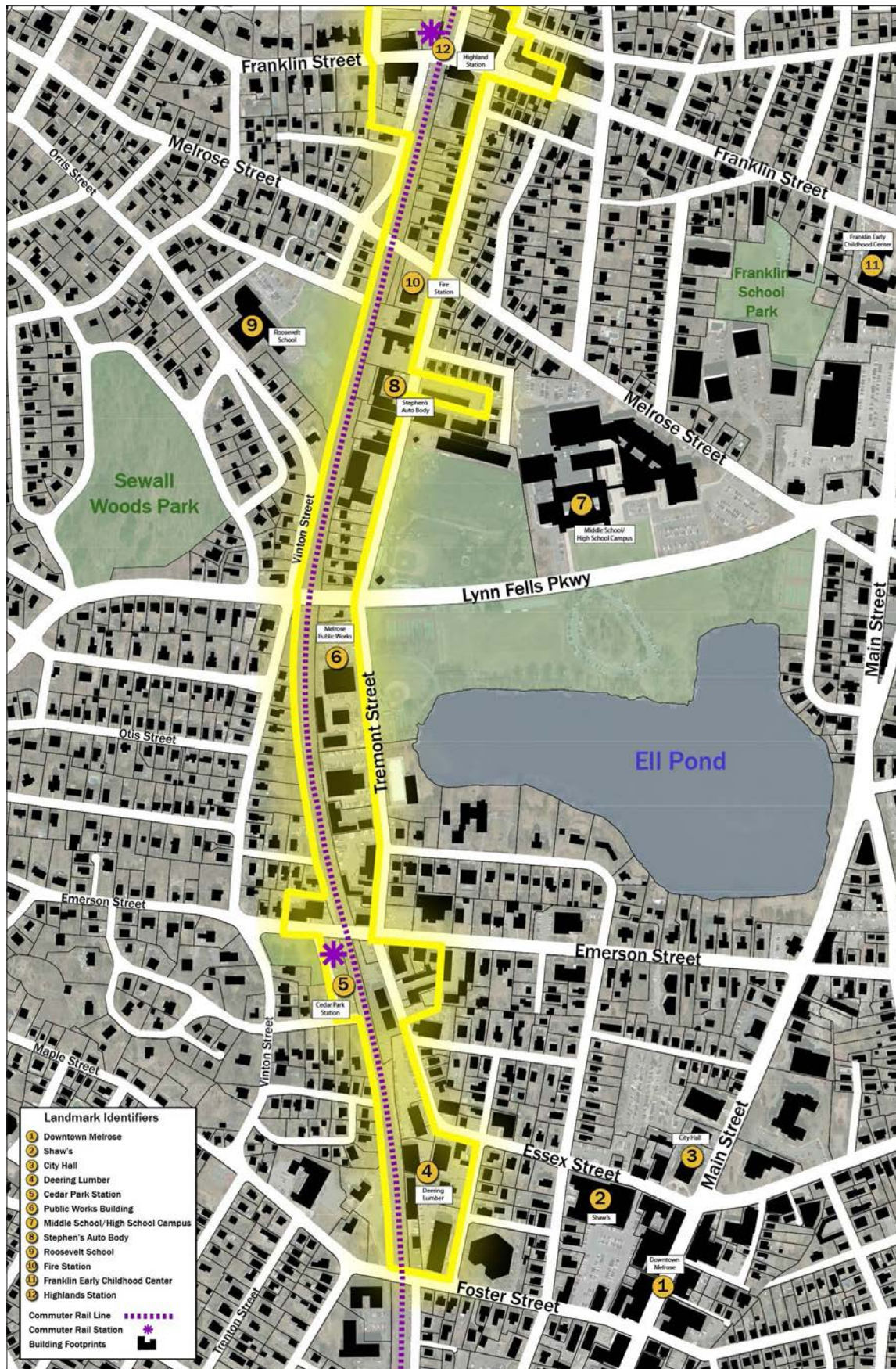




Figure 1.2 - Corridor Focus Area Map



development within the half-mile transit shed is residential with pockets of commercial and office development adjacent to the Commuter Rail stations, in Downtown Melrose, and along a majority of the Corridor. The Corridor's close proximity to Downtown Melrose, Ell Pond, Melrose High School, Melrose-Wakefield Hospital, and the Middlesex Fells Reservation make this area a desirable location for new investment around transit. The two Commuter Rail stations within the corridor provide riders with a 20-25 minute direct link to Downtown Boston via North Station.

The study area corridor is a mix of residential and commercial land uses, with a heavy focus on auto-oriented businesses between Lynn Fells Parkway and Melrose Street. Car repair facilities, car washes, and garages are the predominate businesses in this area between the train tracks and Tremont Street. North and south of this commercial district is a mix of multi-family residential buildings and commercial uses oriented to transit users and the surrounding neighborhoods. The commercial nodes around the Cedar Park and Highlands stations contain a mix of convenience stores, small sit down and take-out restaurants, bakeries and coffee shops, and small boutique retail. The residential development along the corridor is a mixture of rental units and for-sale condominiums in buildings ranging from two stories to four and a half stories in height. The Corridor also contains a section of single-family homes between Melrose Street and Franklin Street.

The MBTA is also a landowner in the Corridor with the two Commuter Rail stations and the rail line right-of-way. The City of Melrose owns and operates the two parking facilities associated with each of the stations. The surface parking lot at the Cedar Park station contains approximately 100 parking spaces and costs \$2.00 per day to park. The surface parking lot at the Highlands station contains 90 parking spaces and also costs \$2.00 per day to park.

## Transportation Network

The Tremont/Essex Street Corridor benefits greatly by being located along the Haverhill Line which provides direct service between Downtown Boston and Haverhill, and stops in between. From either Commuter Rail station along the Corridor, a rider can reach Downtown Boston in about 20-25 minutes. On the weekdays between 5:55 AM and 10:50 AM, trains leave these two stations about every 30-60 minutes inbound to Boston.

During afternoon and evening hours, the schedule becomes more sporadic with headways anywhere from one to two and a half hours. The outbound schedule from Boston has trains running at headways of 20 to 60 minutes depending on the time of day. Saturday and Sunday inbound and outbound trains arrive every three hours.

Daily weekday ridership numbers from 2009 indicate that an average of 230 riders board the Commuter Rail at the Cedar Park station and 380 at the Highlands Station every weekday. On average for both stations, approximately 69% of riders arrive at the station by walking, followed by 29% who drive to the station and park in the lot, and another 2% are dropped off at the station by another driver<sup>2</sup>.

The Corridor is also connected to several surrounding municipalities by four MBTA bus routes that run along portions of Franklin Street, Main Street, and Lebanon Street. Routes 106, 131, 136, and 137 provide service to parts of Melrose, as well as Malden, Medford, Reading, and Wakefield. Several of these routes also connect to stations along the Orange Line at Wellington, Malden Center, and Oak Grove.

The sidewalk network within and around the Corridor is complete with sidewalks on both sides of almost all major and minor roadways. Most of the major intersections in the area have striped crosswalks, visible to varying degrees. The only signalized intersection in the Corridor is at the intersection of Tremont Street and Lynn Fells Parkway. This intersection does have high visibility crosswalks and pedestrian signals. Bicycle infrastructure is lacking in the Corridor with no striped or signed routes connecting to the station or surrounding areas. There are a few existing bicycle parking locations. The bicycle parking located at the Cedar Park station was recently upgraded, and plans are to eventually extend similar treatments to the Highlands station area.

<sup>2</sup> MBTA Blue Book, 2010



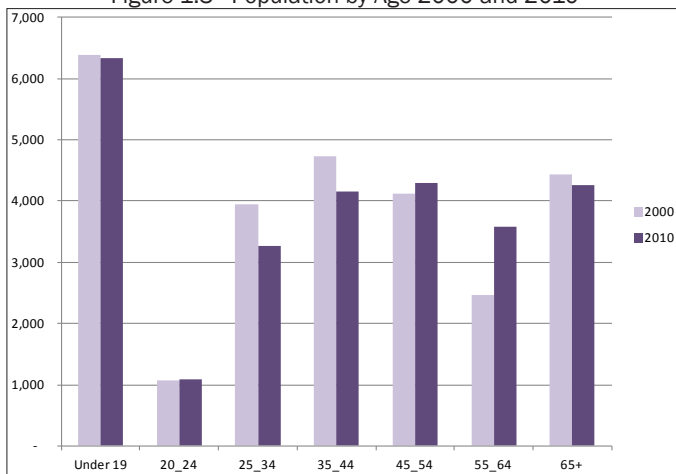
## Demographics

The demographic makeup of an area is a critical component to the success of development around transit stations. The Dukakis Center at Northeastern University recently published research that links five specific demographic characteristics to transit ridership<sup>3</sup>. These characteristics include:

- People of Color
- Recent Immigrants
- Renters
- Lower-Income Households
- Zero-Vehicle Households

Overall, the population in the half-mile station areas around Cedar Park and Highlands remained stable from 2000-2010. When we look at the population changes by age category across the entire City, the biggest gains in population can be found in the 45-54 and 55-64 age groups with a very small increase in the 20-24 age group. When we look at the five year age range cohorts, it appears that many residents in Melrose are choosing to age in place. In 2000, there was high population numbers in the 30-34 and 35-40 cohorts and in 2010 this carried over into the 40-44 and 45-50 cohorts. A similar pattern can be seen in the 55-64 age ranges in 2010. Interestingly, the 70 and over cohorts show declines in 2010 since the year 2000. This could potentially indicate that elderly residents are moving out of Melrose and living in other communities or moving in with family members. Figure 1.3 shows the change in population by age group from 2000-2010.

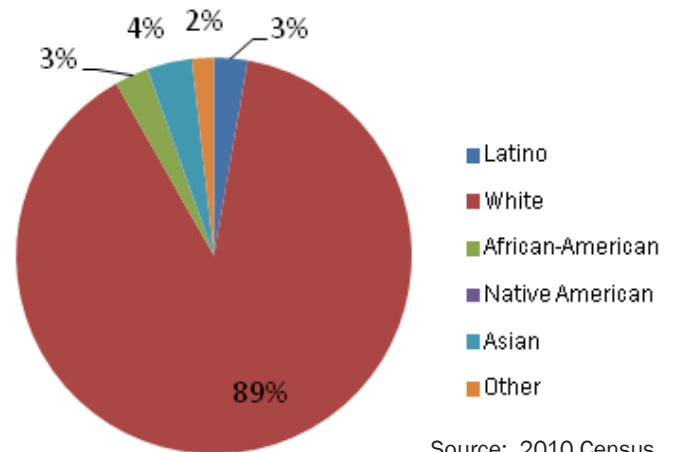
Figure 1.3 - Population by Age 2000 and 2010



Source: 2000 and 2010 US Census

The racial and ethnic makeup of the Corridor remained relatively unchanged between 2000 and 2010 with the large majority of residents identifying themselves as white. The Corridor mirrors what can be seen across the entire City of Melrose, with 90% of the residential population identifying themselves as white. Figure 1.4 shows the breakdown of the Corridor's population by race and ethnicity.

Figure 1.4 - 2010 Population by Race/Ethnicity



Source: 2010 Census

Household characteristics within a station area are another excellent predictor of transit use. Station areas with a higher percentage of rental housing units tend to have higher transit ridership than owner-occupied housing units. This could be a function of household income or a function of the age and career position of the residents in the household. Renters may be young professionals who are starting out in their career and looking for ways to save money by taking transit instead of owning a car. Renters in the Corridor may also be seniors living in the senior housing developments south of Essex Street. Seniors are more likely to take transit because many no longer own a vehicle or are able to drive but still need to get to appointments and to shopping centers. Figure 1.5 compares the number of rental and owner-occupied housing units in the Corridor.

<sup>3</sup> Dukakis Center for Urban and Regional Policy. ETOD Score. Dec. 2012

Figure 1.5 - 2010 Housing Tenure in Half-Mile Transit Shed



Source: 2010 Census

The cost of taking transit for job commutes, shopping trips, or general trips is more affordable than paying for and maintaining a personal vehicle, especially for households that are below the area median income level. Money saved on transportation costs can be put toward housing costs, education, goods and services, or toward savings. This correlation is why low-income households tend to be higher frequency users of the transit system than high-income households. Median household incomes in the Cedar Park and Highlands half-mile station areas are relatively high, \$77,200 and \$89,900 respectively. The median household income for Melrose is \$82,500 per year<sup>4</sup>. When we look at low-income households in the Cedar Park half-mile station area, about 25% of households make less than \$25,000 per year. About 20% of households in the Highlands station area fall into this category as well. Access to a vehicle is another significant predictor of the likelihood that a person or members of a household use transit. Station areas that have a higher number of households without access to a personal vehicle are far more likely to have higher transit ridership than those with high percentages of vehicle access. Approximately 16% of the households in the Cedar Park station area do not have access to a personal vehicle, and 12% of households in the Highlands station area do not have access to a personal vehicle<sup>4</sup>. Households without access to a vehicle may be a reflection of household income, or it could reflect a growing trend of people making the choice to not own a vehicle. Living and/or working in close proximity to transit is a significant benefit to households without a vehicle.

One way to increase transit ridership across the entire Corridor and reduce the number of vehicle trips is to orient new development toward the populations that are most likely to use transit. The groups described above are more likely to take transit, drive less, and shop locally. Currently, only about 16% of the commuters in the Corridor use transit as their primary mode of transportation to work. This is likely a reflection of the demographic characteristics in the area, as well as the overall quality of public transit options within walking distance. Increasing the diversity of people, household income, household type, size, and tenure will help increase the number of residents taking transit.

<sup>4</sup> 2006-2010 American Community Survey

## Transit Oriented Development

Transit oriented development (TOD) is a strategy to integrate a mixture of housing, office, retail and other daily needs in a walkable neighborhood within close proximity to quality public transportation. TOD is usually accomplished through higher intensity, mixed-use, mixed-income development close to the station area with decreasing intensity as one gets further from the station. Successful examples of TOD include a mixture of housing types at varying price points, ensuring that those who need to live near transit and those that choose to live near transit can be accommodated.

The ability of residents and employees to walk and bike to and from the station area is also extremely important. A safe and well connected walking and biking network helps connect residents to local businesses, jobs, recreation areas, and the transit station itself. More trips taken by cyclists and pedestrians can help reduce auto traffic on local and regional roadways, improving congestion and air quality.

The characteristics of the Corridor in conjunction with access to rail and bus transit options make this area an ideal location for pursuing a transit oriented development strategy. Expanding the diversity of the area and housing choices will build on the existing foundation for supporting transit as well as existing and future development in the Corridor.

By coordinating investments in transportation and existing and future development, the City of Melrose can greatly improve the quality and ease of life in Corridor. TOD has a number of benefits for a community depending on the type and quality of the transit service available.



## What is Transit Oriented Development?

A type of development that includes a mixture of housing, office, retail, and other amenities integrated into a walkable neighborhood and located within a half-mile of quality public transportation.

- *Reconnecting America*





## Benefits of Transit Oriented Development

TOD can provide transportation choices - TOD provides transportation for young people, the elderly, people who do not drive, and those who choose to or cannot afford to own a car.

TOD can increase transit ridership - TOD improves the efficiency and cost effectiveness of transit investments. New development around transit stations can increase transit ridership by 20 to 40 percent, which would increase revenue for the MBTA.

TOD can reduce reliance on automobiles - By creating neighborhoods where housing, jobs, and shopping are within walking distance to transit, reliance on driving can be reduced. TOD can reduce annual household rates of driving by 20 to 40 percent.

TOD can reduce air pollution and energy consumption - With more pedestrian, bike, and transit travel taking place, reductions in driving can ease congestion and improve local air quality. TODs can reduce rates of greenhouse gas emissions by 2.5 to 3.7 tons per year for each household.

TOD can increase households' disposable income - Housing and transportation costs are the number one and two highest expenses households have to account for. Some estimates show that reducing household driving costs can help save \$3,000-\$4,000 annually. This can greatly increase a household's disposable income and ease overall household cost burden.

TOD can bolster the local economy - Constructing housing in walking distance to existing or future business districts means local businesses can be supported by the surrounding neighborhoods.

TOD can increase the municipal tax base - New development around the transit station can add to the municipal tax base without large infrastructure costs. This can mean new investments in schools, municipal services, or parks and recreation.

TOD can contribute to more affordable housing - By reducing household expenditures on transportation costs, more disposable income is available to be spent on housing costs. New development around transit stations should also include deed restricted affordable housing units for households making below the area median income.

Source: <http://tod.drcog.org/what-are-benefits-tod>



Boston, MA



Medford, MA

# VISION



The Tremont/Essex Street Corridor Planning effort was not only an identification of the opportunities and impediments to bringing new investment to the area, it was also an opportunity for the community to describe and discuss how they would like to see the area transform over time. MAPC and the City held two public meetings during this planning process. The first meeting provided space for community members to discuss their vision for the Corridor, as well as locations where they would like to see additional housing, new businesses, and transportation improvements. MAPC captured comments through an idea wall and small group discussions during the meeting.



## What We Heard From You

**“I like that it is “active” - the good type of active. The parkland abutting the corridor is utilized by every age group. There are dog walkers, runners, and plain walkers like us. There are the beginnings of people friendly business districts - outdoor cafes that can be a walker’s destination.”**

**- Ellen and Rich Connolly, Melrose Residents**

## What Do You Like Best About The Corridor?





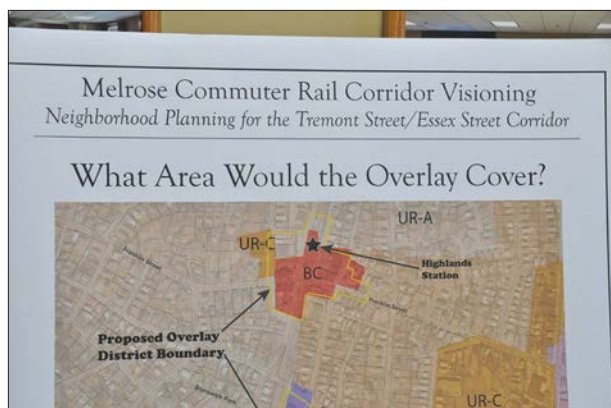
The input received from the community during the first meeting centered on several themes for what the vision for the Corridor should be going forward, which included:

- Maintaining the ability to walk to city services, downtown, open spaces, and the transit stations
- Constructing new development on the Deering Lumber site, along Tremont/Essex Streets, and on the DPW Yard that is not out of scale with the surrounding neighborhoods
- Bringing in additional sit-down restaurants and cafes, artist space, and convenience services near the transit stations
- Improving bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure along the Corridor and connecting to surrounding neighborhoods
- Improving the streetscape in the vicinity of the Highlands station, similar to what was done around the Cedar Park station

These elements of the vision for the Corridor were presented in a map at the second public meeting, along with other recommendations that will be explained later in this report. Members of the community were asked to provide feedback to MAPC and the City on the vision and recommendations presented.



MAPC's recommendations on display for public comment at the second public meeting.



**“The Tremont/Essex Street Corridor is a great location: close to downtown Melrose, the Middlesex Fells and public transportation. At the second meeting there were some excellent and inexpensive recommendations to make the commercial area along Tremont Street more attractive and more welcoming to pedestrians. In addition, the Pedestrian and Bicycling Advisory Committee, of which I’m a member, supports improvements that enable students to bicycle to school, families to bike to neighborhood parks and residents of all ages to walk to the Fells.”**

**- Ellen Katz, Melrose Resident and Member of the Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee of Melrose**

The vision focused on incorporating new mixed-use development along the Corridor to bring in additional housing units as well as some new retail space in key locations. Parcels along the Corridor are highlighted in three different colors: yellow, light orange, and dark orange which signify an estimated time horizon for potential redevelopment activity. Parcels in yellow are the most likely to redevelop within the next five years, light orange represents a 5-10 year time horizon, and the darker orange represents 10 years or more. This information was based on conversations with the City of Melrose's Planning Department as well as feedback provided by the public throughout the planning process. All of the parcels identified as having redevelopment potential are currently supporting existing uses, which necessitates a unique approach to encouraging property owners to either redevelop on their own or sell the property to a developer. As proposals for new buildings are brought forward, the City should ensure development "meets the street" with parking in the rear, and has an active facade that engages pedestrians as they walk along the sidewalk. New development should also help to draw commuters out of the MBTA station and into the Corridor and downtown to shop, eat, and relax before or after work.

Throughout this process, many community members noted they would like to see improved bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure along the Corridor and the east/west streets connecting the Corridor to Main Street. Suggestions ranged from wider sidewalks, to on-street bike lanes, to safer crossings at key intersections. With approximately 69% of transit riders walking to the two stations each morning, safer pedestrian crossings, upgraded sidewalks, and new bike infrastructure are a priority in the neighborhood and could encourage even more people to walk and bike to the stations and along the Corridor.

In order to make Tremont and Essex Street feel more connected to downtown and the surrounding neighborhoods, the streetscape elements currently found along West Emerson Street and around the Cedar Park station should be extended. In the short term, completing similar streetscape enhancements around the Highlands station will signal to existing property owners and potential developers that this is an area the City would like to attract investment in. Improvements to the sidewalks, benches, street trees, light posts, trash receptacles, banners, and other elements could help tie Cedar Park and the Highlands stations together. Over the longer term, the City should consider extending a similar treatment down Tremont and Essex Street to tie the whole corridor together. This portion of the Corridor is long, so it may make sense to reduce the amount of streetscape amenities in order to make the project more financially feasible. The final vision map can be seen in Figure 2.1 including a brief explanation of the different vision elements. Recommendations and potential implementation steps for the vision are explained in further detail throughout the remainder of the report.



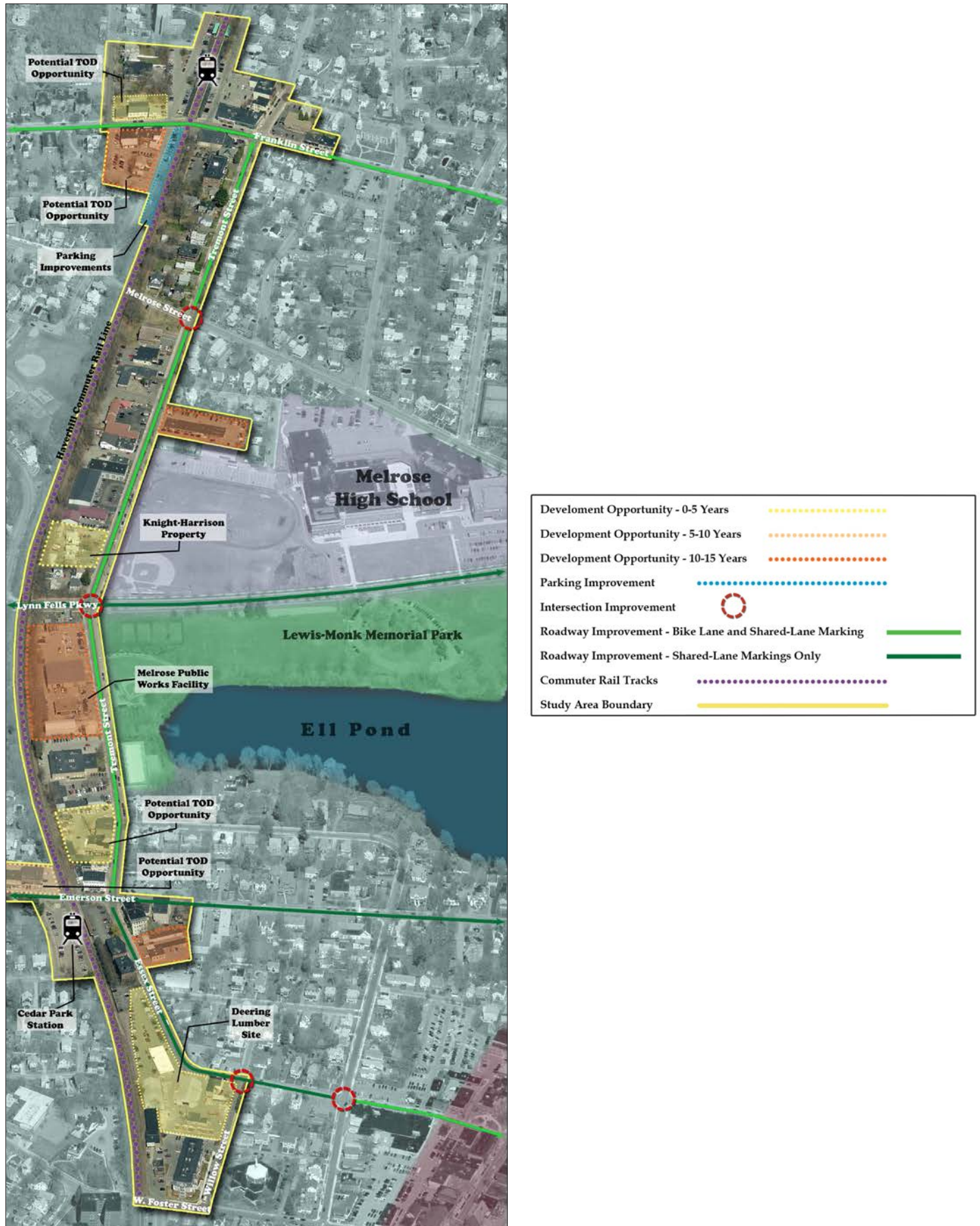
Mayor Dolan kicking off a public meeting for the Corridor Plan.

**“While the corridor provides a number of light industrial, service, and auto oriented uses that are important to the community, a reorganization, and possibly even a reworking of the land uses in this area can likely create a more vibrant neighborhood environment. This can hopefully be achieved by providing property owners in the corridor with a wider range of development opportunities that would allow them to capitalize on the location of this area within the city. It is the goal of this process to produce a neighborhood environment that provides a wide range of uses and amenities that are well interconnected through their physical layout and their transportation network.”**

**- Mayor Robert J. Dolan, City of Melrose**

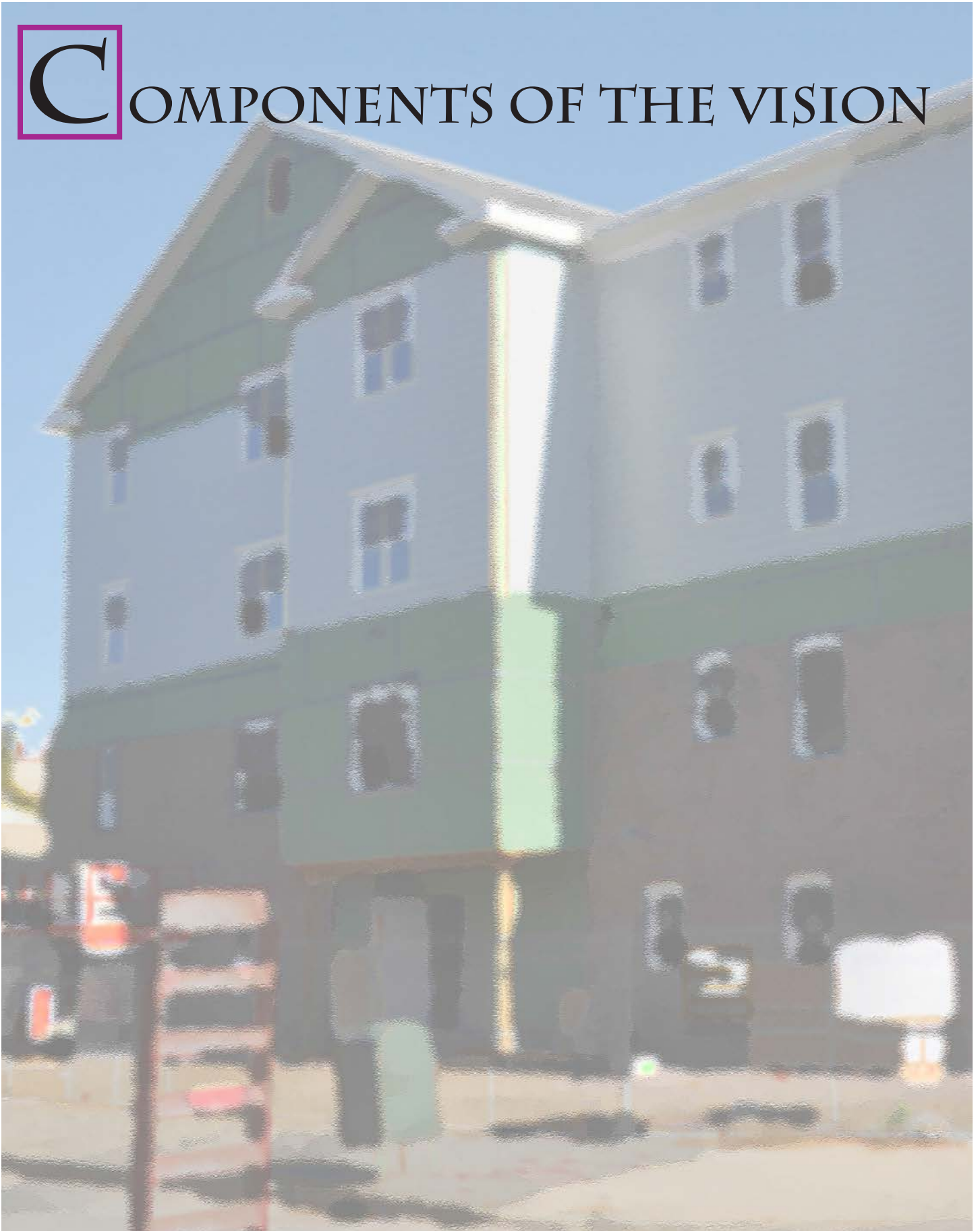


Figure 2.1 - Vision for the Corridor





# COMPONENTS OF THE VISION





The community's identified vision was an important step toward understanding the trajectory of the Corridor and helps shape the recommendations needed to actually get from vision to implementation. As part of this process, MAPC was tasked with identifying the key impediments or barriers to implementing the vision and developing recommendations that would help the City, businesses, developers, agencies, and the community as a whole overcome those barriers. MAPC's recommendations generally focus on three specific components:

- Market Analysis
- Land Use and Zoning
- Transportation and Public Realm Improvements

These components cannot and should not be considered on their own in a vacuum. Each component may be unique, but they all play a vital part in creating and understanding successful transit oriented development. By identifying the impediments and recommending strategies to remove some of the barriers to seeing more development around transit in the Corridor, the community's vision for a well-connected and active corridor becomes more realistic and achievable.

## Market Analysis

The first step in putting together a realistic and achievable plan for development around transit and along the Corridor is to understand the market for new development. An analysis of market demand for residential, retail, and office development can help a community identify specific parcels that may accommodate future development, understand the level of development that may be possible in an area, and help inform changes to zoning. MAPC hired RKG Associates to complete a market analysis for the half-mile station areas around Cedar Park and Highlands which included demand estimates for rental and owner-occupied residential units, retail space, and office space. This section will highlight the major findings from the market study, and talk about potential opportunities and impediments to development from a market perspective. The full market analysis can be found in the Appendix to this report.

### Residential Market Analysis

RKG completed a residential market analysis for the entire City to look at current housing supply and demand, as well as looking out over a five year time

horizon at future demand. Given the amount of recent housing development in Melrose, as well as the growing popularity of the community, it is important to analyze housing demand across the entire city. Over the last decade, the City has added nearly 460 units in total (almost 50 per year). Much of the increase has come in the form of rental housing units. Housing developments like Windsor at Oak Grove, Alta Stone Place, and Cedar Crossing have added hundreds of new multi-family residential units in the City. Additional development around Alta Stone Place and in other locations throughout the City will continue to boost numbers of new residential units.

Since much of the new development in Melrose over the last decade has come from multi-family rental units with some owner-occupied condominiums, the focus for new housing in the Corridor will likely incorporate multi-family rental units with some owner-occupied units as well. This is also the direction a large sector of the housing market in Greater Boston is taking in the wake of the housing bubble burst and recession, with a heavy focus on the rental housing market.

According to RKG, there is demand for additional multi-family housing in Melrose over the next five years. Estimates show there is an absolute demand of around 120 units per year over the next five years. Of those 120 units, new development would comprise about 5% of that figure or 30 units per year. Recent housing developments in Melrose that include both rental units and owner-occupied units have been selling and leasing quickly, in some cases before construction is even complete. Local and regional housing trends show signs of a significant boost in demand for housing near transit, and it is possible that housing demand in Melrose will exceed the current market predictions over the five year period and beyond.

New owner-occupied housing construction in Melrose would likely be marketed to those ages 35 and under and ages 45 to 64 with a household income over \$100,000 per year. Since a large majority of the City's owner-occupied housing is single-family homes, baby boomer households with higher incomes make up the purchasing cohort most likely looking for this type of housing unit. As baby boomers age in place, they may be looking to downsize and could make up a purchasing cohort looking for multi-bedroom condominiums with access to transit, the downtown, and recreational facilities. The reported success of sales at the Cedar



Crossing project indicates that condominium buyers may capture a larger share of the housing market in the future. Households making \$100,000 or more per year could afford sale prices of \$425,000 and up.

On the multi-family rental side, units affordable to households making \$75,000 per year and above make up about one third of the total demand in Melrose. These households could afford rents starting at \$1,875 per month and above. Of these households, about 32% would be younger households (less than 35 years of age), and likely the target for new development around the transit stations in the Corridor. The recent successful leasing of the 99 Essex Street development where reportedly all 13 market rate units were leased up within a month speaks to the potential rising demand of rental properties.

According to the market analysis, there is also a significant demand for rental units affordable to households making under \$60,000 per year. This equates to rents in the \$1,500 per month range and under. Potential demand for these units is close to 186 units per year over a five year period. Land and construction costs create a challenge for developers to construct units at these price points and still make the development financially feasible. Units at these price points may be assisted through federal, state or local subsidies or including affordable units as part of the overall pro forma of a market rate development project.

### Retail Market Analysis

Understanding the retail market as part of a station area plan is very important. First floor retail as part of a mixed-use development scenario is one of the key pieces to creating an active and engaging street frontage. Being conscious of retail market demand is also important from a zoning perspective as well. In station areas where market demand for retail may not be as strong, municipalities may not want to require first floor retail for all buildings and may want to be more strategic about where retail is placed. Over-zoning for retail can lead to vacancies and actually hurt a business district.

In order to determine the annual retail spending power of households within the half-mile radius of the Commuter Rail stations, RKG completed a retail demand analysis. The relatively high household incomes in the area produce high per household retail spending capacity.

Existing households<sup>5</sup> account for more than \$58 million in spending demand for selected retail goods and services. Based on average sales volumes (on a per square foot basis) this spending demand equates to an estimated supportable 156,200 square feet of retail. A majority of this retail demand is currently absorbed by existing retailers in Downtown Melrose, and some is “leaking” out to other communities where specific goods and services can be found that are not located in Melrose. These could be places such as regional retailers, shopping plazas, malls, or big box retailers.

Considering the proximity of the Corridor to Downtown Melrose, coupled with the growth in higher income homeowners and younger renters, it is RKG’s opinion that additional retail and storefronts in the downtown could be supported. MAPC believes that new retail could also be encouraged around the two Commuter Rail stations to attract transit users, as well as existing and future residents living in the Corridor and in surrounding neighborhoods. As more residential development takes place in and around the Corridor, these households will bring additional retail spending power that can support existing and future retail establishments in the area. While new retail development will not make up the bulk of new development in the Corridor, there is likely enough spending power to support some new restaurants or new merchandise retailers.

### Office Market Analysis

Finally, RKG completed an office market analysis for the half-mile area around the Commuter Rail stations which showed very little demand for additional office space in this location. If office development does occur in the Corridor it will likely be constructed with a specific end-user already lined up and it is likely to be small spaces for professional or medical offices instead of a large corporate office development.

<sup>5</sup> 2006-2010 American Community Survey

### Opportunities and Impediments - Market Analysis

The market analysis completed for the Corridor identified the potential for additional housing and a limited amount of retail development over the next five years. RKG highlighted several opportunities in the Corridor as part of the market analysis:

- There is a market for additional residential development in Melrose, with a mix of owner-occupied and rental units.
- The proximity of the Corridor to the Commuter Rail stations and to Downtown Melrose is an amenity that could draw in new development.
- It is likely that additional retail development could currently be supported in the downtown.
- New housing development in the Corridor will bring added spending power to existing businesses and the potential to add new retail space.

RKG also noted a number of potential impediments that could make additional development challenging in the Corridor from a development perspective:

- Parcel assembly will likely be needed as a component of redevelopment due to the linear layout of the Corridor along Tremont/Essex Street. The linear nature of the Corridor would limit size and density of new development absent parcel assembly.
- While there is demand for rental units at lower rent levels, a developer may not be able to make the financing work without some form of subsidy.

The remaining components of the vision address specific recommendations for how the City of Melrose and other partners could increase the marketability of the Corridor as a location for new transit oriented development.

### Zoning Assessment

One of most important components of the vision, which the City of Melrose has jurisdiction over, is the zoning in the Corridor. The existing zoning was identified as an impediment to new development by MAPC in our analysis of zoning and development feasibility. This section describes the existing zoning characteristics in the Corridor, identifies the impediments, and offers recommendations to improve the zoning and make it more flexible to allow for the type of development identified by the community in the vision.

The Corridor is comprised of a mix of business and residential zoning districts. The business districts (Extensive Business, BB/BB-1, and Local Business, BC) occupy most of the study area. The two residential districts, Urban Residence A (UR-A) and Urban Residence B (UR-B) have a small presence within the study area. Residential districts make up the majority of the land surrounding the study area with the exception of the downtown area at the end of Essex Street. Higher intensity business districts are sited along Main Street and Downtown Melrose where the City's primary business district is located. Figure 3.1 shows the existing zoning districts within the study area and adjacent areas.

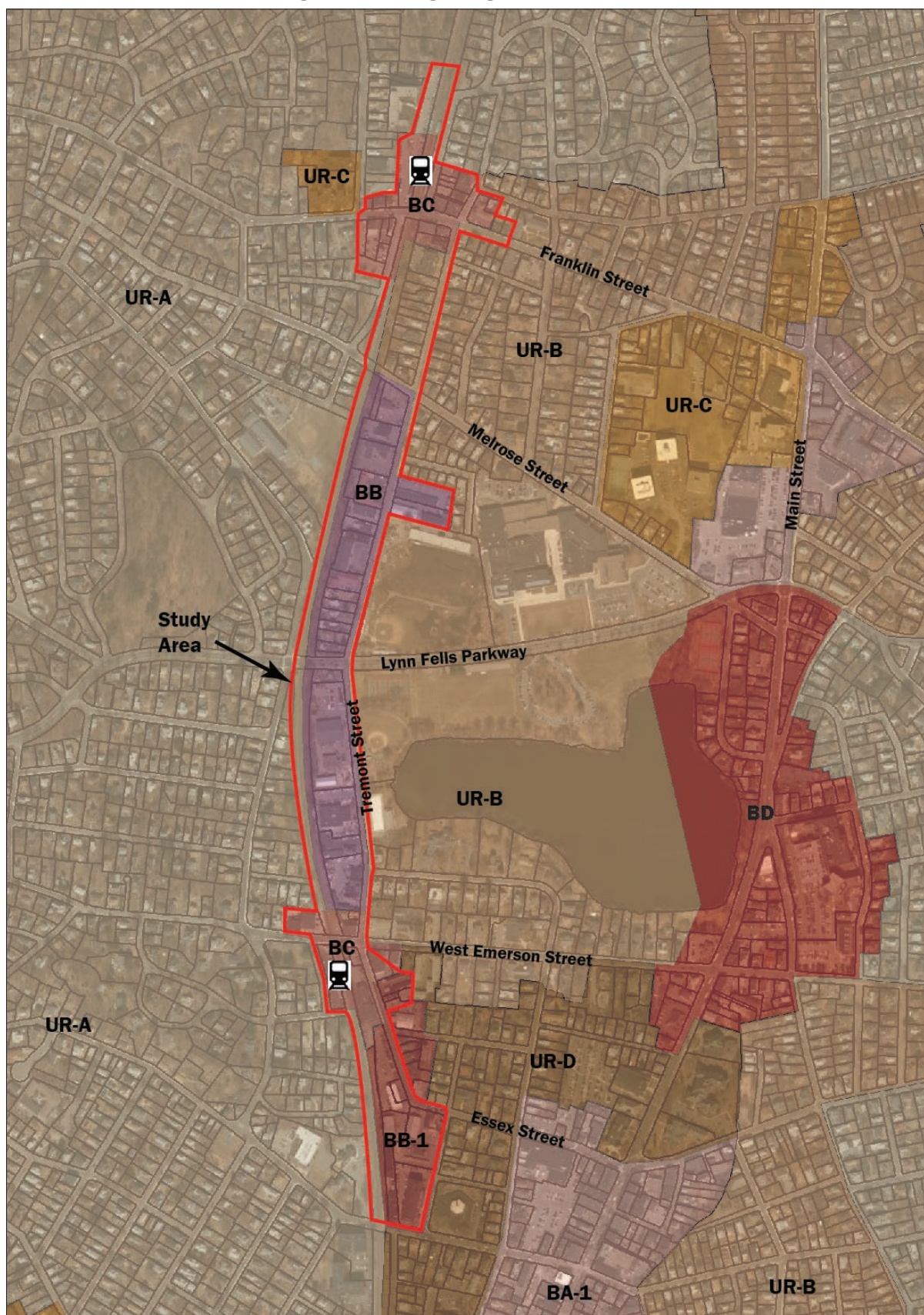
The current zoning districts in the Corridor are fairly exclusive to their dominant use classes. That is, the business districts allow primarily commercial development (retail and service establishments), while the residential districts are fairly exclusive to residential development. The result is that there are few opportunities to mix uses and, as most of the study area is devoted to business uses, to support additional residential uses in the Corridor. The only exceptions are the regulations within the Local Business districts located around both Commuter Rail stations.

#### Business Districts

The BB/BB-1 districts provide for most retail and services establishments, with some restraints. Convenience retail is permitted by right as is general merchandise retail up to 10,000 square feet, over which a Special Permit is required. Other commercial uses such as restaurants, automotive sales places, and indoor/outdoor amusements are also permitted. Hotels and motels are allowed by Special Permit, as are professional offices. Medical office is not allowed in either district.



Figure 3.1 - Existing Zoning in the Corridor



While most industrial uses are not permitted in BB/BB-1, the district does allow construction industry activities, small-scale industrial activities such as bakeries and dry-cleaners (Special Permit only), and R&D facilities (also by Special Permit). Additionally, BB/BB-1 allows a range of community facilities and accessory uses.

The BC district is fairly similar to BB/BB-1 with a few notable exceptions. Multi-family residential is allowed by Special Permit. Also, residential-over-business uses are permitted as-of-right (with the requirement that all dwelling units must be on the upper stories). Business uses are slightly more restrictive, with no convenience retail over 10,000 square feet and general merchandise retail over 10,000 square feet allowed by Special Permit. Auto sales, hotels and motels, amusement establishments are not allowed in the district. There are a few other commercial activities that are allowed by Special Permit, including medical office. Smaller-scale industrial uses such as bakeries and dry-cleaning are allowed by Special Permit.

The BC district does provide some additional residential development opportunity through the Planned Unit Development provision, described below in the Special Permit Provisions section. Additionally, the Planned Business Development provision is allowed by Special Permit in both the BB/BB-1 and BC districts also described below.

### Residential Districts

While the residential districts comprise a much smaller proportion of the study area, they are important to understand as context for potential zoning changes. The UR-A and UR-B districts are some of Melrose's lower-density residential districts. The UR-A district only provides for single-family residential uses as of right, with all other uses (two-family, townhouses) requiring a Special Permit. Multi-family is not permitted at all. The district provides for a range of community facilities and customary accessory uses. Most other uses (commercial, mixed-use, etc.) are not allowed.

The UR-B district is similar to the UR-A, but allows a few additional residential uses. Single- and two-family developments are both allowed by right, as are lodging houses and other group living arrangements such as dormitories. Multi-family residential uses, apartment houses, and in-law apartments are allowed by Special Permit. Community facilities and accessory uses follow similar regulations to that of the UR-A district.

### Special Permit Provisions

Melrose's zoning contains a few Special Permit options intended to provide additional development opportunities and flexibility in otherwise standard, primarily single-use districts. Two of these, the Planned Unit Development (235-69 and -70) and Planned Business Development (235-71) have not been used within the institutional memory of existing City Staff, and should be considered obsolete for the purposes of development in this Corridor because of the large lot size requirements.

However, the Multi-Family Residential Use in Non-Residentially Zoned Areas (235-65) provision has been used to permit a number of projects—including the noteworthy Oak Grove Village development as well as projects in the study area. Applicable in the BA-1 and BB-1 zones, the Planning Board may grant a Special Permit for multi-family uses after finding that the area would not be adversely affected by the proposed use. Dimensional and density requirements are determined by the required and accompanying Design Review Permit (235-66), which references other zoning districts for standards: for parcels 20,000 – 30,000 square feet, UR-C district regulations apply. For lots over 30,000 square feet UR-C district regulations apply, however, the minimum lot area per dwelling unit and height limit may be determined by Planning Board.

City Staff indicated that overall this discretionary process has worked well and has produced good development. One issue, however, is that different parcels in the same base district (for example, BB-1) could have different sets of dimensional and density requirements depending on their minimum lot sizes, which raises conflicts with the uniformity clause in the state zoning statute.

### Smart Growth District (Section: 235-71.1)

This provision operates as an overlay district to specific parcels in the I-A district. It has a half-acre minimum lot size, an alternative set of dimensional requirements, a maximum density of 35 units per acre, and a maximum FAR of 2.0. Allowed uses include multi-family residential (townhouses and apartment buildings), retail establishments, personal and consumer services, professional offices, restaurants, artist studios and live/works space. The height maximum is sixty feet with some restrictions based on the relationship of the building to the lot line. Notably, off-street parking requirements are lower for the Smart Growth District (see Off-Street Parking Regulations table, below).



Careful thought was clearly given to site design and amenities, as the provision has requirements and guidance for bicycle parking, parking lot design, historic preservation, site design, landscaping, and other aspects.

### Dimensional Standards

The Tremont/Essex Street Corridor is comprised of several different zoning districts creating some inconsistencies between the dimensional standards of development projects. The different zoning districts create distinct differences along the Corridor for building heights, setbacks, location of parking, lot coverage, and amount of open space. Around the two transit stations where the BC zoning districts are located, buildings tend to be set closer to the street, some contain a mix of uses in a multi-story building, and have parking located in the side or rear yards. In the BB and BB-1 districts, which make up a large portion of the Corridor, buildings tend to be one-story and single-use, are set back further from the street, and have parking located in the front abutting the sidewalks. The residential development in the UR-B district is primarily single-family homes with varying front yard setbacks, and heights from one-story to two and a half stories.

Since the primary focus of this study is on the business districts (BC, BB/BB-1) within the Corridor, it is important to note how the dimensional standards differ between these districts. The BC zone has dimensional standards that are used to encourage a more traditional style of development, most commonly associated with how neighborhood business centers were designed decades ago. The minimum lot sizes and setbacks are much smaller compared to the BB/BB-1 districts. This allows for a more compact development pattern with buildings that are designed to meet the street and engage pedestrians. The heights, however, are still minimal with restrictions to 30 feet, or two stories.

As mentioned above, development under the BB/BB-1 zoning districts tend to be single-story, single-use structures that are set back further from the street with parking located in the front along the sidewalk. The dimensional standards in the Zoning Ordinance currently support this type of development by requiring larger lot sizes, lot frontage, and setbacks. The uses allowed in this zoning district are also limited to single-uses, prohibiting residential above commercial as an as-of-right option for developers. Table 3.1 illustrates the different dimensional requirements in each of the zoning districts within the Corridor.

Table 3.1: City of Melrose, Dimensional Standards for Study Area Zoning Districts

	Use	Min lot size	Max lot coverage*	Setbacks			Height	Stories	FAR	Open Space
				Front	Side	Rear				
BB/BB-1	Any	10,000	60%	10	12	15	30	2	0.75	20%
BC	Any	5,000**	None	5	None	None	30	2	0.75	10%
UR-A	Townhouse	7,500/DU	35%	20	10	20	35	2.5	None	35%
	2-family dwelling	13,500	35%	20	10	20	35	2.5	None	35%
	Single-family dwelling	7,500	35%	20	10	20	35	2.5	None	35%
	Any other permitted use	10,000	35%	20	10	20	35	2.5	None	35%
UR-B	Single-family dwelling	7,500	50%	20	10	15	35	2.5	None	30%
	2-family dwellings, MF dwellings & townhouses	7,500 + 3,000/ea. add'l DU	50%***	20	10	15	35	2.5	None	30%
	Any other permitted use	10,000	50%	20	10	15	35	2.5	None	20%

\*This is the percent required rear yard area, which is defined as rear yard setback by required lot width

\*\* For mixed uses, minimum lot area increases by 1,000 square feet/DU

\*\*\* Where off-street parking spaces required by Article VIII are located underground and under the building served by the parking, the maximum building coverage may be increased equivalent to the area of parking spaces located underground.

### Parking Requirements

Parking is a critical component to transit oriented development and can be an asset or a hindrance to the success of development around transit. The goal of transit oriented development is to provide options for travel that do not rely solely on personal vehicles. Limiting parking around transit stations is one way to ease traffic congestion and promote more walking, biking and transit use as part of new development.

The parking requirements in Melrose are measured on a per residential unit basis or on a square footage basis for retail and office development. Interviews with City Staff raised the question of whether some parking requirements are too high. There may be the opportunity to reduce the residential parking requirement to a standard more consistent with other

TOD provisions. The City has already implemented lower parking requirements for residential and retail development as part of the Smart Growth District overlay.

The office and retail requirements are on par with typical parking standards. The residential parking standards, however, are high if the goal is promoting transit oriented development. Requiring two parking spaces per unit for multi-family development regardless of proximity to transit and daily needs will not encourage people to take trips using other modes of transportation. The current parking regulations for residential, retail and office development are shown in Table 3.2 as are the parking regulations for the Smart Growth District.

Table 3.2: Parking Requirements by Category

Use	Parking Requirement (base zoning)
Single-family residential	2 spaces/DU
Two-family residential	4 spaces/structure
Multi-family residential	2 spaces/DU (elderly housing: where 1 space/3 DUs)
Lodging house/dorm:	1 space/sleeping unit
Automotive retail or similar service with "extensive display areas":	1 space/1,000sf
Hotel/motel:	1 space/sleeping room and 1 space/400sf common areas/restaurant space
Other retail, service, finance insurance establishment	1 space/300sf
Medical office:	1 space/ 200sf
Wholesale, warehouse, storage establishment	1 space/1,000sf
Mixed use	Sum of other uses, calculated individually
Smart Growth Overlay	
Studio or 1-bedroom DU	1 space/DU
Two-bedroom DU	1.5 spaces/DU
Three-bedroom DU	2 spaces/DU
Multi-family residential	1 visitor space/10 residential dwelling units
Ground-floor office and retail	1 space/350 sf
Above-ground-floor office and retail	1 space/500 sf
Section 253-32 of the Melrose Zoning Ordinance.	
Note: Parking is waived in the downtown area (235-40 B.)	

### Opportunities and Impediments - Zoning

There are several parts of the existing Zoning Ordinance regulating development in the Corridor and elsewhere in the City that offer opportunities for encouraging development around transit, as well as parts that are potential impediments to this type of development. This section will mostly focus on the business districts since these districts regulate a majority of the land within the Corridor. However, these opportunities, impediments, and recommendations could be applied to other transit oriented growth areas the City may want to promote in the future.

**Opportunity:** Setbacks – In the BC district, the setbacks have been designed to encourage buildings to meet the street and provide an engaging first floor frontage. The limited front setbacks also encourage parking to be located behind the building or to be accommodated on-street in some locations.

**Opportunity:** Lot Size - The minimum lot size of 5,000 square feet in the BC district would allow development to take place around the Commuter Rail stations where many lots are between 5,000 and 15,000 square feet in size. Having a minimum lot size starting at 5,000 square feet would not prohibit development on smaller lots and would also not place a burden on developers to assemble multiple parcels for one development.

**Opportunity:** Lot Coverage – Along with minimum lot size, maximum lot coverage can impact the financial feasibility of a development proposal. In the BC district there is no maximum lot coverage percentage meaning a building could cover 100% of the lot area. This of course does not occur because a developer has

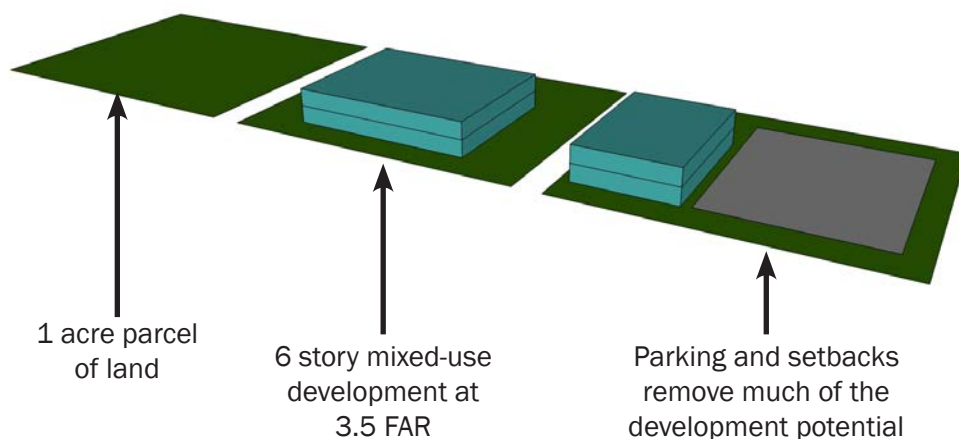
to account for the setbacks, parking requirements, and open space requirements on a site. Having no maximum lot coverage provides added flexibility for a developer and also lets the other dimensional and regulatory requirements determine how much of the parcel will be taken up by the building.

**Opportunity:** Open Space – Both the BC and BB/BB-1 districts have fairly low open space requirements at 10% and 20%, respectively. While the incorporation of open space on development sites is important, open space requirements that are too high can limit the ability of developers to construct buildings large enough to cover costs. The Corridor already benefits from a number of large open spaces and recreation areas including Ell Pond and Lewis Monk Memorial Park.

Even though the setbacks, lot size and lot coverage could encourage larger scale development in the BC district, in practice there are several impediments that limit a developer's ability to construct buildings consistent with the vision for the Corridor. MAPC completed a build-out for several parcels in the Corridor to gain a better understanding of how the current zoning regulations impact development. The recommendations for each impediment were also tested to see if they allow for greater flexibility and development consistent with the vision for the Corridor.

The areas that restrict development overall in the Corridor are parking requirements, Floor Area Ratio (FAR), and building height. The setbacks within the BB/BB-1 district are also restrictive, but specifically apply to that district. Figure 8 illustrates how a parcel of land developed at the maximum FAR (0.75 in this case) is constrained by setbacks and parking requirements.

Figure 3.3 - Impact of Setback and Parking Regulations on Development



**Impediment:** Implementing New Zoning Regulations- There are three basic options for changing zoning requirements: one option is to adjust the current zoning district regulations in the Zoning Ordinance to reflect these changes; the second is implementation through an area-wide overlay district; the third is to create a brand new zoning district with the allowed uses and regulations that will carry forward the vision established by the City and community. While the first option obviates the need for an additional district, it runs the risk of changing requirements elsewhere in the City where such changes may not be appropriate or welcome. An overlay district changes requirements for a specified area – for example, a specifically defined area along the Corridor. Adding an overlay district does create more regulatory clutter for a relatively small number of changes. The third option, creating a new zoning district, allows the City to define uses and a set of regulations that will encourage the type of development the community wants in that specific location. Each of these tools has applicability in certain situations.

**Recommendation:** Since it may not be appropriate to make wholesale changes to the BC and BB/BB-1 districts city-wide, MAPC is recommending implementing changes through an overlay district specific to the BB/BB-1 districts in the Corridor and creating a new zoning district to replace the existing BC districts around the Cedar Park and Highlands stations. The overlay district can be modeled after the Smart Growth District (SGD) was established in the lower Washington Street area. The new zoning districts will set forth as-of-right uses and regulations that are consistent with the principles and goals of this study and promote mixed-use, walkable development around transit. The City can work with residents, business owners, and property owners to define the boundaries of the overlay district as well as engage in further discussion about the appropriate uses and regulations for the overlay district and the new zoning district around the Commuter Rail stations. Several impediments to transit oriented development from the current zoning are outlined below and should be addressed through the new zoning districts.

**Impediment:** Floor Area Ratio (FAR) - The FAR in the BC and BB/BB-1 district is 0.75, meaning the maximum built area on a parcel in these districts can be no more than 0.75 times the size of the parcel. For example, a 10,000 square foot parcel of land could only have

a maximum of 7,500 square feet of built space. As developers begin looking at redevelopment options along the Corridor, a slightly higher FAR (in combination with lower parking requirements and an increased height limitation) would be beneficial and encourage the type of development the community wants to see.

**Recommendation:** Increase the FAR to at least 1.0 in the overlay district that will cover the BB/BB-1 portions of the Corridor and increase the FAR to 1.5 in the new zoning district that will replace the BC zones around the two Commuter Rail stations. As an example, if a 10,000 square foot parcel were developed at an FAR of 1.5, it would allow for a maximum of 15,000 square feet of built space. If 50% of the parcel were developed (5,000 square feet), that 15,000 square feet of built space could be accommodated in a three story building.

**Impediment:** Building Height - The maximum allowable building height in the BC and BB/BB-1 districts is two stories (30 feet). This height limit is extremely restrictive for developers, especially those looking to construct mixed-use buildings with residential on the upper stories. There are currently several buildings along the corridor with heights above two stories/30 feet, especially those in close proximity to the Commuter Rail stations and to Downtown Melrose.

**Recommendation:** Increase the maximum building height in the overlay district and in the new zoning district around the Commuter Rail stations to 4.5 stories (50 feet). This height is consistent with some existing buildings in the Corridor, and is slightly less than what is currently permitted in the Smart Growth District regulations. If there is concern about creating a wall of building along relatively narrow streets, the City could consider a step back of floors three and four. MAPC would not recommend incorporating the height limitation provision from the Smart Growth District that deals with restricting the height of a building if it is adjacent to a residential district. This clause may work well in the Smart Growth District where parcels are much larger in size, but in this Corridor where parcels are not nearly as deep, it will restrict development feasibility. If height and massing are a concern along the Corridor, the City should address this through design review or design criteria instead of specific height restriction clauses.



**Impediment:** Setbacks in the BB/BB-1 Districts – The setbacks in these two zoning districts are currently higher than what would typically be seen in a walkable, mixed-use, transit oriented corridor. Front yard setbacks are currently at a minimum of 10 feet, side yards at 12 feet, and the rear yard setbacks are 15 feet.

**Recommendation:** Reduce the front yard setbacks in the overlay district to a 5 foot minimum and institute a 10 foot maximum. Eliminate the rear and side yard setbacks in the overlay district except in instances where the overlay district abuts a residential district as setbacks would assist in reducing the visual impacts of a multi-story building on single-family homes.

**Impediment:** Parking Ratios - The parking ratios for office and retail development in the BC and BB/BB-1 districts are consistent with industry standards for suburban development, but are slightly higher than what may be appropriate for an area with easy access to transit. The current ratio for office and retail development in the Melrose Zoning Ordinance is 1 parking space for every 300 square feet of development (3.33 spaces per 1,000 square feet). The residential parking ratio of 2 spaces per dwelling unit regardless of unit size is also higher than what may be typical of development around transit. Allowing developers to construct more parking than what may actually be warranted encourages residents to own cars and drive more. This adds to local traffic impacts, reduces roadway safety, and negatively impacts local and regional air quality.

**Recommendation:** Implement parking minimums and maximums in the overlay district and in the new base zoning district for residential units based on the number of bedrooms per unit. MAPC recommends the City consider a tiered set of parking minimums and maximums as described below:

- Studio and One Bedroom Units – Minimum of 0.5 spaces per unit to a maximum of 1 space per unit.
- Two Bedroom Units - Minimum of 1 space per unit to a maximum of 1.5 spaces per unit.
- Three + Bedroom Units – Minimum of 1.5 spaces per unit to a maximum of 2 spaces per unit.

MAPC would also recommend that the City consider increasing their minimum parking requirements for retail and office development from 1 space per 300 square feet to 1 space per 350 square feet in both the

overlay and new base zoning district. The City should also consider creating a shared parking ordinance between residential, office, and retail uses that are part of the same development. Currently, mixed use parking requires that the developer provide parking equal to the sum of the parking requirements from each separate use on the site. This method can lead to excess parking on a site because residential uses typically have peak parking periods at opposite times of the office and some retail uses. Finally, the City is in a unique position by owning and maintaining the Commuter Rail parking lots at the Cedar Park and Highlands stations. Allowing businesses to use the Commuter Rail parking lots after the evening peak commuting times when the lots are not being used as heavily for commuter parking could greatly benefit restaurants or bars in the area that have peak activity in the evenings when the Commuter Rail parking lots are not being used.

#### Smart Growth District – A Model for the Corridor

The Smart Growth District (SGD) that was enacted by the City for the lower Washington Street area near the Oak Grove Orange Line station is an excellent example of how an overlay district can provide added flexibility and encourage mixed use development in close proximity to transit. During discussions with City Planning Staff, there was an expressed interest in using the Smart Growth District as a model for the Tremont/Essex Street Corridor. Generally, this is a good approach but there are some specific differences between the lower Washington Street area and this Corridor that necessitate some changes in the regulations of the existing SGD. The SGD was designed to facilitate mixed-use higher density development on a series of large parcels. Parcels along the Tremont/Essex Street Corridor have a very different layout, namely these parcels lack depth and are linear in nature.

The linear make up of the Corridor creates the need for zoning regulations that are more flexible and allow developers to be more creative with the limited development envelopes they have to work with. For example, setbacks and open space requirements under the proposed overlay district should be designed to closely resemble those of the current BC district rather than that of the SGD. The minimum lot size and frontage requirements of the current SGD are higher than what should be recommended in this Corridor. Minimum lot size is currently set at 0.5 acres with 100 feet of frontage. There are very few parcels in the Corridor that would meet this minimum lot size

threshold. The height maximum in the SGD is more than what may be appropriate in this Corridor as well, and the City may also want to consider revising or eliminating some of the step back requirements of buildings in cases where parcels abut existing residential districts. The limited size and linear layout of parcels in the Corridor may restrict the creativity of the building design as it pertains to step backs and accommodating for setbacks from abutting residential districts.

Since the Corridor is comprised of smaller, more challenging development parcels, it will be important for the City to build in some design standards to ensure new development in the Corridor is consistent with the goals and principles laid out in this study. The SGD does discuss standards for landscaping, building design, signage, parking, site lighting, and various amenities like bike parking and pedestrian ways. Throughout this planning process, residents brought up issues around site design including the issue of multiple access points to developments along the Corridor. Multiple access points from roadways can create an unsafe pedestrian environment. Limiting the number of access point is one example of an issue that could be remedied over time through zoning regulations that address site design and layout.

## Affordable Housing Recommendations

In addition to the zoning changes recommended along the Corridor, it is critical that new housing development include a mix of incomes and housing types that are affordable at all levels of household income. New development around the Cedar Park and Highlands stations and along the Tremont/Essex Street Corridor would provide additional housing within the neighborhood and the City. A significant residential or mixed-use development can spur other revitalization and investment that creates amenities that benefit residents of all income levels. The RKG Market Analysis reports that the study area experienced moderate household growth, particularly owner households. There was a 1% loss in renter households as some properties in the Corridor were converted from rental to condominium units. The City of Melrose can guide development in the Corridor by continuing to provide and expand existing City programs and policies to ensure mixed-income and mixed-use developments are created to accomplish neighborhood diversity and housing choice goals.

The following explains how this can be accomplished, specifically by incorporating affordable housing as a component of future growth in the Corridor and by continuing to maintain rental opportunities in the Corridor.

### Key Recommendations:

- Provide Financial or Zoning Incentives for Mixed-Income, Mixed-Use Development
- Preserve Existing Affordable Rental Housing
- Create and Preserve Affordable Homeownership Opportunities
- Coordinate Long-Term Planning

### *Provide Financial or Zoning Incentives for Mixed-Income, Mixed-Use Development*

The Market Analysis prepared by RKG Associates, Inc. states the need for housing in the Corridor, and suggests the demand for new housing in Melrose is for 600 households over the next five years, of which 3.5% would be new growth. The analysis suggests that new housing could serve two specific markets: potential owner households with a gross annual household income at or above \$100,000 and potential renter households with a gross annual household income at or below \$75,000. The analysis suggests a number of reasons why certain types of housing development may

or may not be feasible on site and explains that reliance upon the turnover of existing units would fill a majority of the market's rental housing needs.

The following recommendations will assume that development moves forward in the Corridor and includes a component related to affordability both on site and to address affordability in the surrounding neighborhood.

The City has been implementing the 2004 Master Plan, Goals, Objectives, and Strategies for Housing to advance programs and policies to preserve and create affordable housing opportunities. The Affordable Housing Incentive Program, Section 235-73.1 of the Zoning Ordinance, requires developers of residential or mixed-use properties with five or more residential units and at least 2,500 square feet of commercial space to set-aside at least 10% of the residential units for households earning at 50% up to 80% of the area median income (AMI). The ordinance allows, in special circumstances, for a developer to make a payment in-lieu-of housing on site to the Melrose Affordable Housing Trust. MAPC recommends that the City ensure that any new development with a housing component incorporate affordability. It is critical that development within close proximity to transit assets, like Commuter Rail stations, have affordable housing options as part of the unit mix. MAPC recommends that the City either 1. designate that sites located within the BB/BB-1 overlay district and within the new base zoning district include a minimum of 15% of the units as affordable or 2. help developers leverage discretionary funds for affordable housing in mixed-use properties (such as the Housing Development Support Program). The City could also negotiate a density bonus for additional affordable units via the Special Permit process set forth in Section 235-73.1.

While limited, local HOME or Affordable Housing Trust funds might be leveraged to offset development costs, including site preparation, gap financing, or the creation of rental housing or downpayment assistance for first-time homebuyers.

#### Preserve Existing Affordable Rental Housing

Preserving housing units and developments with an expiring affordability restriction ("expiring use") should be a priority for the City, especially given the combined potential loss of 500+ senior housing units in the Congregational Retirement Homes I, II, and III and the

Cefalo Memorial Home Complex currently listed on the City's Subsidized Housing Inventory. The City can take steps to preserve existing affordable rental homes and create new homeownership and rental opportunities that will remain available to low- and moderate-income households over the long term.

The neighborhoods surrounding the Tremont/Essex Street Corridor are heavily residential, majority single-family. Preservation of any existing affordable or market rental housing in this area is critical, as well as potentially acquiring or rehabilitating and preserving new affordable housing, while also working to address the aforementioned expiring use properties. HOME and Affordable Housing Trust funds can be used for these activities. Preservation of units ensures that housing is affordable to low- and moderate-income households by protecting the units with a deed restriction. The Melrose Affordable Housing Corporation may also be positioned to purchase rental housing property to ensure that rental units are made affordable to households earning at or below 80% of the AMI.

#### Create and Preserve Affordable Homeownership Opportunities

"Shared equity" programs, such as the City's First Time Homebuyer program, funded through federal HOME funds, bring the cost of homeownership within reach of low- and moderate-income households by using a formula to balance long-term affordability goals and individual asset accumulation. These programs provide an initial subsidy to lower the cost of a home and then split any price gains realized upon home resale between the seller and the City or a housing program sponsor, such as a local non-profit affordable housing developer, including the Melrose Affordable Housing Corporation. The sponsor's appreciation share may either remain with the home to ensure affordability for the next qualified buyer (this is essentially a transfer of the deed restriction at the time of sale), or the appreciated value is returned to the program sponsor who might collect these funds into a larger pool to benefit other future lower-income buyers.

Homeownership programs that incorporate shared equity mechanisms are particularly useful for creating and preserving affordable homes in areas where new transit stations or other neighborhood improvements are expected to contribute to long-term home price

increases. Shared equity homeownership includes deed-restricted housing. Melrose can take steps to ensure that existing low-income homeowners can afford to remain in their homes as property values increase.

As market demand increases in the station area neighborhoods, existing residents may experience an increase in their assessed home values, leading to increases in required property taxes. Those living on a limited or fixed income may be unable to find room in their budgets to cover these added costs. “Circuit breaker” programs provide tax relief by freezing the assessed home value at an earlier level or freezing or reducing the overall tax bill to prevent dramatic increases. While these programs commonly target households with disabled or elderly homeowners, some communities have broadened eligibility to include all low-income households<sup>6</sup>.

### Coordinated Long-Term Planning

The effective coordination of the City’s Master Plan with the North Suburban Consortium’s Consolidated Plan and MetroFuture, the Regional Plan, is important for the long-term success of the aforementioned programs and policies. For example, the Consortium has an objective to produce affordably restricted housing units that are available to low-income families. The City can act upon this objective by putting forward strategies to provide 0% interest, net cash flow loans to fund non-profit developments for extremely low- and low-income households; provide low interest loans to private developers of mixed-income rental development that include a percentage of affordably restricted units for low- and moderate-income households; provide buy down subsidies of condominium units in order to create mixed-income homeownership developments with affordable homeownership units in perpetuity; and create and provide housing rehabilitation loan or grant programs that place affordable restrictions on rental units in owner-occupied multi-family properties.

Among other things, such plan coordination should involve consideration by City housing and planning officials of:

- The impacts of planned transportation investments on housing affordability;
- How the plan advances local and regional housing affordability goals for specific protected classes;

- How the plan will help to reduce the combined costs of housing and transportation for low- and moderate-income households, in light of the accessibility and affordability of transportation options near planned housing investments;
- How the plan ensures that low- and moderate-income households have access to permanently affordable rental housing and homeownership within close proximity to public transit stops, job centers and other essential destinations; and
- How plans for both housing and economic development investments align with regional and neighborhood transportation investments.

Overall, planning programs and policies appear to be available to advance development in the Corridor. Minor modifications of the existing Affordable Housing Incentive Program within the Zoning Ordinance are suggested as follows: consideration of adding a third tier of eligible households (those earning between 30-50% of the AMI); increasing the allocation of affordable units from 10% to 15% to ensure that there is always more than one affordable unit in a development; eliminating the option to make payments in-lieu of housing or increasing the contribution to better reflect actual costs to develop new affordable housing (current Total Development Cost figures should be applied); eliminating the local preference language or reducing the local preference percentage; Chapter 40B regulations have been amended so that municipalities avoid a discouraging effect of marketing of local residency preferences. Such marketing or advertising must state that the use of residency preferences will not have the purpose or effect of delaying or otherwise denying admission to the program in violation of applicable civil rights laws (DHCD critically analyzes predominantly white communities that seek through local preference to favor local residents in the allocation of their 40B housing inventory, disallowing marketing plans that potentially limit opportunities for diversity and that transgress fair housing laws.); and finally adding a section about needing an Affirmative Fair Marketing Plan filed with the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development under E. Administration and Enforcement. Lastly, continued coordinated planning and implementation of housing and economic development activities will help position Melrose within the Greater Boston region and improve market competitiveness.

<sup>6</sup> Information about Massachusetts Circuit Breaker Tax Credit Program can be found at: <http://www.massresources.org/circuit-breaker-tax-credit.html>



## Transportation and Public Realm Improvements

The City of Melrose is the direct beneficiary of three Commuter Rail stations, several MBTA bus routes, and the south side of the City is in close proximity to the Oak Grove Orange Line station. The rail links provide direct access to Downtown Boston, with the Commuter Rail also linking to points north of Melrose along the Haverhill Line. While transit plays a significant role in increasing development potential and attracting people to, the Corridor, transportation connectivity and public amenities play an important role in creating the place around the stations. If walking and biking is or feels unsafe or challenging, people may be less likely to come to an area to utilize the transit stations and adjacent businesses in the Corridor. This in turn may increase the number of people who choose to drive to/ from the area which may increase congestion and the need for parking. This section offers some suggestions for how additional transportation and public improvements can further increase the attractiveness and functionality of the Corridor.

### Walking and Biking Infrastructure - Opportunities and Impediments

The Tremont/Essex Street Corridor has a well connected sidewalk network with sidewalks on both sides of almost all the streets within the Corridor, as well as on a majority of the streets connecting to the surrounding residential neighborhoods. During the public engagement process for this project, many residents expressed interest in seeing improvements to sidewalks, pedestrian crossings, and bike infrastructure in the Corridor. The following will address the opportunities, impediments, and recommendations for improving these facilities.

**Opportunity:** Pedestrian Connectivity - Improving pedestrian connections and safety in the Corridor will create more walking trips to the transit stations and to local businesses. More foot traffic in the Corridor and around the transit stations will help enliven the area and encourage people to stay, shop, and explore. The Corridor already has a well connected sidewalk network, but small changes could make it even better.

**Opportunity:** Right-of-Way – Most, if not all, of the roadways in the Corridor are lower-volume local roadways that primarily carry vehicular traffic accessing the surrounding neighborhoods. This results in

roadways that have slower travel speeds and a narrower right-of-way. While the narrow right-of-way in many locations is a challenge for accommodating improved bike and pedestrian improvements, it does provide the City with the opportunity to be creative and implement a combination of strategies to make it safer and easier for cyclists and pedestrians.



Narrow street widths can be beneficial in slowing down traffic speeds, but can also be challenging to reallocate space for all roadway users.

**Opportunity:** Public Health Benefits - With changes to the existing transportation network, additional walking, biking and transit trips will be encouraged. This not only has the benefit of decreasing congestion and improving local air quality, but will help more people choose active modes of transportation combating obesity and related cardiovascular disease.

**Opportunity:** Reduced Parking Demand - If more trips in the Corridor are taken by pedestrians, cyclists, and transit users, the demand for parking may decrease over time. This has benefits for existing and new development by freeing up existing parking supply and creating less of a need for parking associated with new development. The proximity of the Corridor to Downtown Melrose could also encourage more walking and biking trips to downtown which may help ease the demand for parking.

**Opportunity:** Connecting to Schools - Improving bicycle and pedestrian connectivity in the Corridor from surrounding neighborhoods could help facilitate walking and biking for high school students, reducing the reliance on parents dropping students off and picking them up. This could also help reduce demand for parking along Lynn Fells Parkway that is used during

peak drop off and pick up times by parents. With reduced demand, there may be a possibility of removing parking on one side of Lynn Fells Parkway and striping dedicated bike lanes on the road from Main Street west to Tremont Street.

In order to better connect the walking, cycling, and transit network in and around the Corridor, there are several impediments that need to be addressed. MAPC has identified these impediments as well as potential solutions that would create the types of improvements noted throughout this process by members of the community.

**Impediment:** Pedestrian Crossings - There are several locations where pedestrian crossings could be improved to help pedestrians walking along the Corridor, as well as helping connect pedestrians from surrounding neighborhoods to the Corridor. Many of the crossings along the Corridor are not high visibility crosswalks, and the striping in many locations is fading away.

**Recommendation:** Improve crosswalks at key intersections along the Corridor by striping higher visibility crosswalks such as the “ladder” design. Key intersections include Essex Street/Myrtle Street, Tremont Street/West Emerson Street, Tremont Street/Lynn Fells Parkway, Tremont Street/Melrose Street, and Tremont Street/Franklin Street.



Existing crosswalks at Tremont Street/Melrose Street intersection.



Tremont Street/Melrose Street intersection with ladder style crosswalks.

**Recommendation:** Improve crossings at several streets and mid-block locations along Franklin Street. Franklin Street is a busy area with local businesses, residences, churches, and the MBTA Commuter Rail station creating a lot of activity in the peak hours. As the City plans for streetscape improvements along Franklin Street, attention should be paid to each intersection and the type of crosswalk treatment that may be appropriate at each location. The higher visibility ladder style crosswalk has been striped in several locations along Franklin Street, but often times not along every leg of an intersection. For visual consistency, it is recommended that each leg of the intersection be striped with the same design.

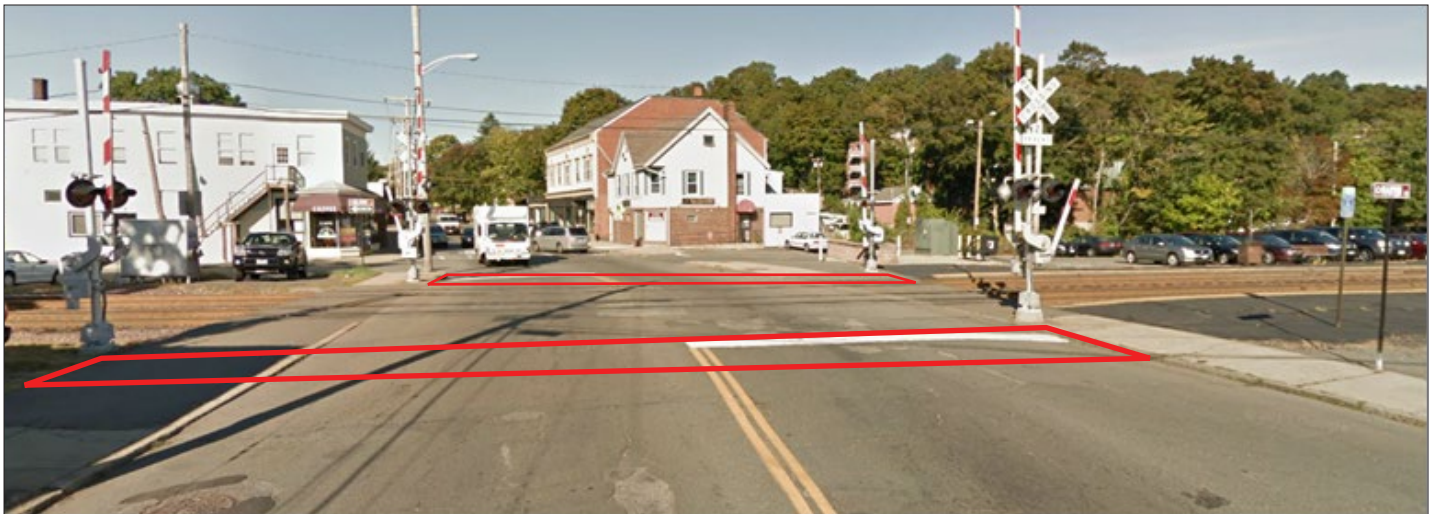
The crossing located along Franklin Street connecting the Melrose Highland Congregational Church to the parking lot across the street should be relocated to align with the front doors of the church. This alignment would move the crosswalk further west on Franklin Street and avoid lining the crosswalk up with the parking lot's entrance/exit driveway. Moving the crosswalk would also necessitate creating new curb cuts for pedestrian access on both sides of Franklin Street and adding ADA detectable warning strips. The City could then move the existing pedestrian crossing signs closer to the actual location of the crosswalk. Keeping the in-street “Yield to Pedestrians” flexible post sign is also recommended.



Finally, the crossings at the MBTA Highlands station along Franklin Street could be improved by providing higher visibility crossings on either side of the crossing gates. Currently, pedestrians must walk a block in either direction to cross Franklin Street safely. These crossings do not line up with where the pedestrian access points are to the station. MAPC recommends moving the stop bar on the east side of the tracks back and placing a crosswalk where the stop bar is currently. On the west side of the tracks, a crosswalk could be located where the stop bar is now and the stop bar could be moved back to the west side of the Franklin Street/Belmont Street intersection behind the existing crosswalk. Pushing the stop bar back to this location would also prevent cars from blocking the intersection of Franklin Street/Belmont Street and allow pedestrians to cross.



Existing crosswalk along Franklin Street at the Melrose Highland Congregational Church. (Image: GoogleMaps)



Potential crossing locations at the Highland MBTA station along Franklin Street. (Image: GoogleMaps)

**Impediment:** Sidewalk Conditions – For the most part, sidewalks along the Corridor are in good condition with few instances of upheaving or significant cracking. While there is limited right-of-way along the Corridor to improve sidewalk width for pedestrians, there are two issues which could be addressed to increase safety and accessibility. The first is ensuring adequate sidewalk width for handicapped pedestrians, especially those in wheelchairs. There are locations along the corridor where utility poles and guide wires have created constraints on the sidewalk width. The second issue is not having sidewalk ramps at intersections that include detectable warning strips for ADA accessibility. The detectable strips are critical for visually impaired pedestrians to find the location and direction of crosswalks.



Utility pole located in the sidewalk.

**Recommendation:**

Work with utility companies to relocate existing guide wires to be parallel with utility poles or outside the boundaries of the sidewalk where possible.

**Recommendation:**

Install detectable warning strips at each sidewalk ramp where intersection improvements are planned.

**Impediment:** Access Points – Along Tremont/Essex Street many of the businesses have created multiple, wide access points in and out of their parking lots which provide numerous conflict points between vehicles and pedestrians along the sidewalk. As vehicles pull out of parking lots along the street, they often pull into the sidewalk blocking the pedestrian right of way. This can also result in situations where a driver is looking for oncoming traffic and may not see a pedestrian walking, leading to a potential crash between the driver and pedestrian. Long spans of access points along a roadway create perceived and actual safety deficiencies for pedestrians which in turn can reduce the number of people who choose to walk along the Corridor.

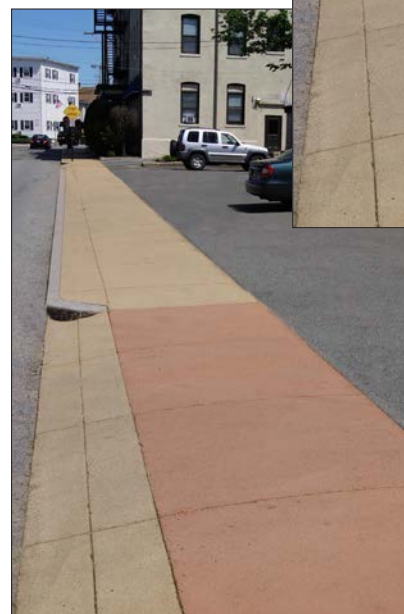
**Recommendation:** Create an access management plan and work with identified property owners to either close or substantially shrink the size of access points. Where access points must remain, the City could use a colored or stamped concrete to delineate to pedestrians and drivers where areas of shared sidewalk space are located along the Corridor. The City could either use the colored concrete where access points are located, or color the sidewalk along the entire length of the Corridor. Example images of both options are shown below.



Existing section of sidewalk along Essex Street.



Access management and curb cut closures.



Curb closures and red colored concrete to warn drivers of pedestrian space.

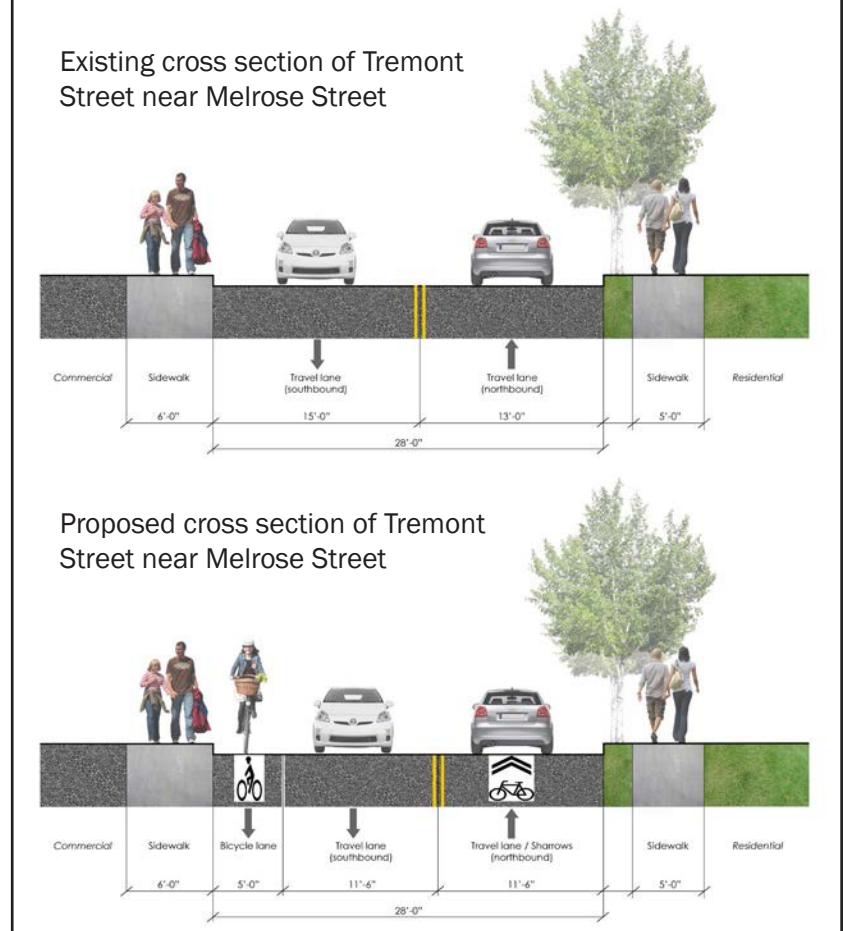


**Impediment:** On-Street Bicycle Accommodations – The Tremont/Essex Street Corridor and the roads connecting to the Corridor, do not currently have any specific accommodations for cyclists. Throughout this planning process, members of the community specifically asked for plans to address how cycling could be encouraged and made safer along the Corridor. The narrow roadway width of almost all the roads in and around the Corridor makes accommodating cyclists in dedicated on-street lanes challenging. Some roadways only have travel lanes and sidewalks and very little width to reallocate for cyclists, while other roadways have on-street parking that may be used to support the local businesses, recreation facilities, or the high school.

**Recommendation:** Essex Street (Main Street to West Emerson Street) – Essex Street has a varied curb to curb width ranging from 26 feet at its narrowest to 33 feet at its widest. Due to the varying widths and the fact that Essex Street does not have a striped centerline, it may be safer for cyclists in the short-term if the City does not stripe for bike accommodations and leaves the width of the roadway to be shared by bikes and vehicles. The City may consider adding “bikes may use full lane” signs or “share the road” signage, but without a striped centerline these signs may not make sense. As this section of the Corridor builds out over time, the City should consider upgrading the streetscape to make the area more pedestrian friendly and frame the street with street trees and lighting to better define the Corridor for all users. In the longer term, the City should consider removing the on-street parking between Myrtle Street and West Emerson Street, which would provide room for a bike lane in the southbound direction and match up with the proposed improvements on Tremont Street north of West Emerson Street.

**Recommendation:** Tremont Street (West Emerson Street to Franklin Street) – The section of Tremont Street between West Emerson Street and Franklin Street is wide enough to accommodate a five-foot striped bike lane in only one direction because of the existing on-street parking that is present along certain sections of Tremont Street. It is MAPC’s recommendation that the City consider striping the five-foot bike lane in the southbound direction, as more cyclists may be traveling from the Highlands area south on Tremont Street to access the Cedar Park station, the Middle School/ High School Campus, Ell Pond recreational area, and Downtown Melrose. The City should also install Share the Road signs on the northbound side of Tremont Street and the appropriate Bike Lane signs on the southbound side. An example cross section of Tremont Street near Melrose Street is shown in Figure 3.4.

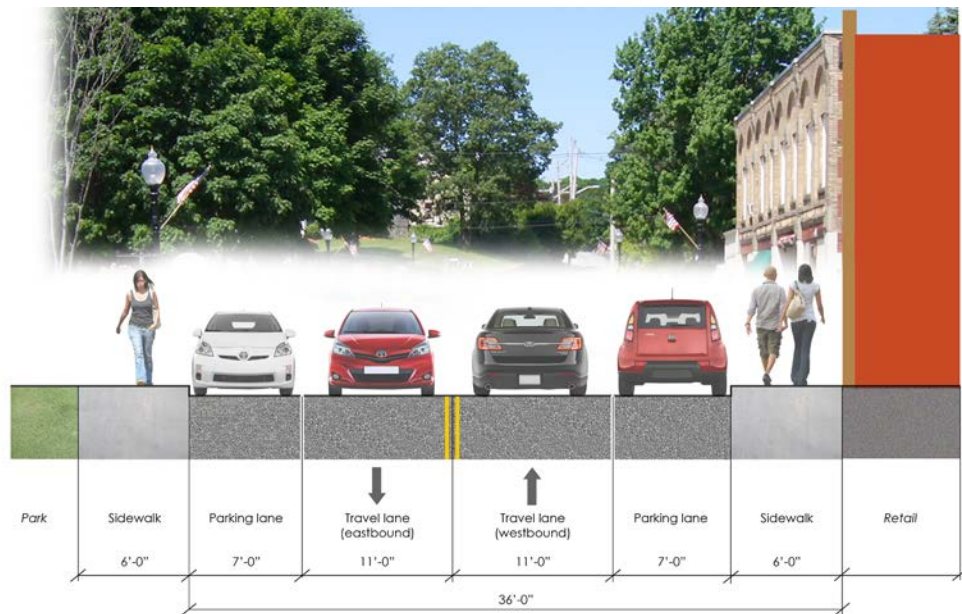
Figure 3.4: Existing and proposed cross section for Tremont Street



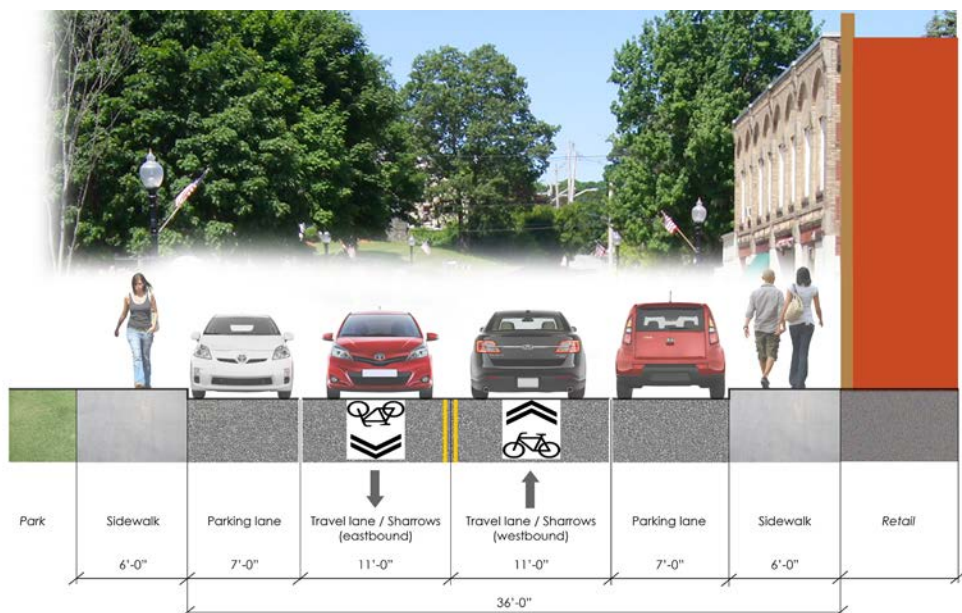
**Recommendation:** West Emerson Street – There are several east/west roadways that connect surrounding neighborhoods to the Corridor and also further east to Main Street and Downtown Melrose. West Emerson Street is one of the east/west roadways that connect surrounding neighborhoods to the Corridor as well as to the Cedar Park Commuter Rail station. This roadway was recently upgraded with new sidewalks, crosswalks, street lighting, and streetscape amenities. A final step to completing the transformation of West Emerson Street would be to add bicycle accommodations. West Emerson Street (between Vinton Street and the Trinity Parish Church) is a two-way road with on-street parking on both sides, limiting the amount of right-of-way that could be dedicated to cyclists. MAPC is recommending the addition of Sharrows on the east and westbound segments of West Emerson Street and keeping the on-street parking. If the City did remove a lane of parking in the future, there would be enough room to fit 4 foot bike lanes in each direction. Figure 3.5 shows the existing and proposed cross section on West Emerson Street.

Figure 3.5: Existing and proposed cross section for West Emerson Street

Existing cross section for West Emerson Street



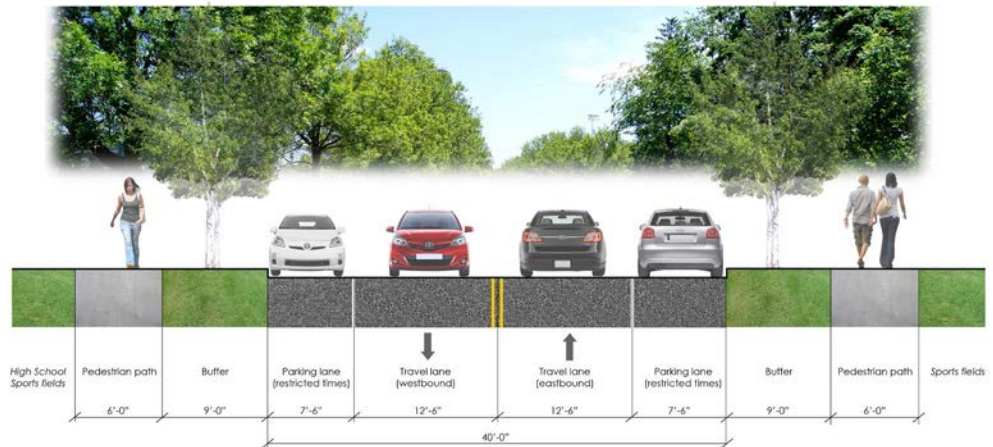
Proposed cross section for West Emerson Street



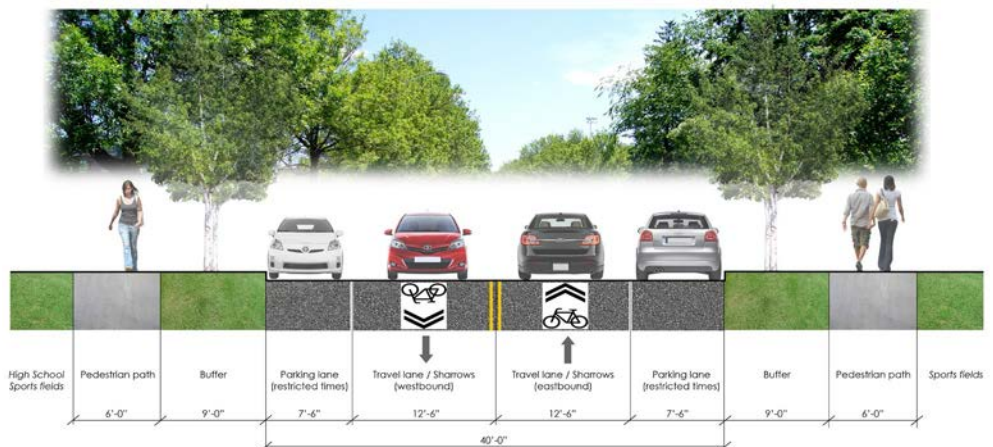
**Recommendation:** Lynn Fells Parkway – Lynn Fells Parkway not only connects the Corridor to Main Street, it also connects to the Fells Reservation to the west thereby making this roadway a bit busier than many of the other east/west connectors. Lynn Fells Parkway also provides connections to the Ell Pond recreational area and Melrose Middle School/High School Campus, which are two significant assets and trip generators in the Corridor. The existing cross section along Lynn Fells Parkway has two travel lanes and parking on both sides of the roadway between Tremont Street and Main Street. The parking along Lynn Fells Parkway is used primarily by parents who are dropping off students at the middle school/high school campus in the morning and picking them up in the afternoon after school. The parking also provides spaces for users of the Ell Pond recreational area, especially when there are sporting events being held on the recreational fields. Since this parking is being used during specific times and days of the week, MAPC is recommended that the City start by installing Sharrows along the roadway. If one lane of parking were removed, the roadway would be wide enough to accommodate dedicated 5 foot bike lanes in each direction. However, at this time the City does not have enough information regarding parking utilization to determine if parking should be removed, and if so, what side of the road should it be removed from.

Figure 3.6: Existing and proposed cross section for Lynn Fells Parkway

Existing cross section for  
Lynn Fells Parkway



Proposed cross section  
for Lynn Fells Parkway

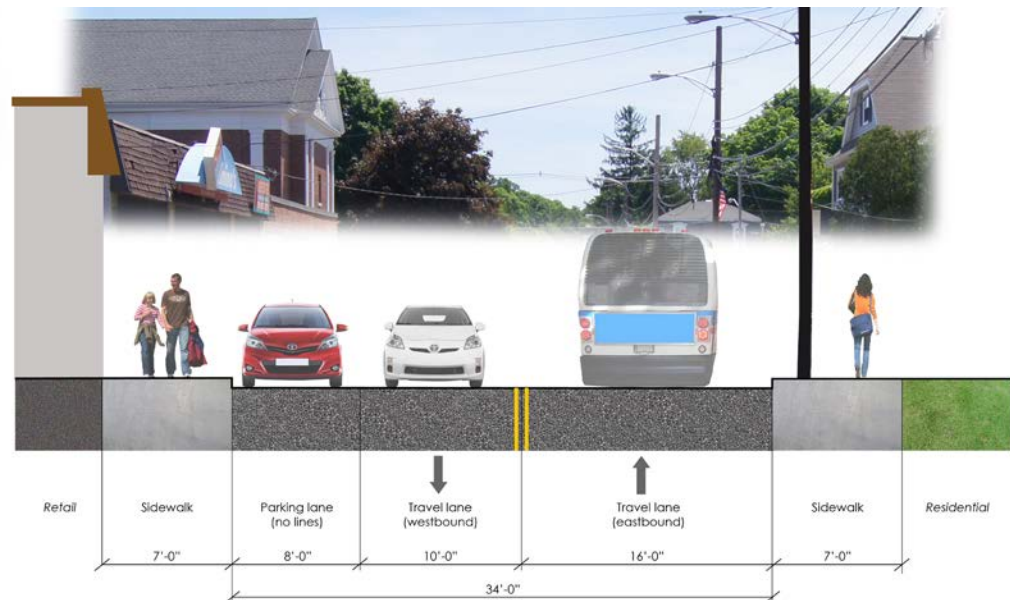




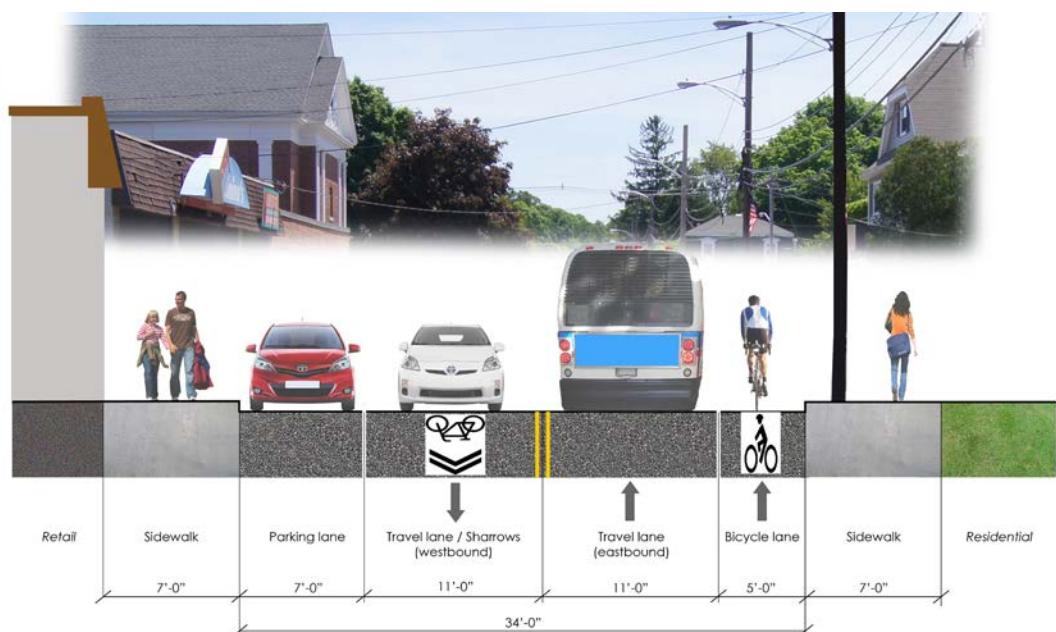
**Recommendation:** Franklin Street – Franklin Street is another busy east/west roadway connecting the Corridor to Main Street as well as heading west into Stoneham. The Highlands Commuter Rail station and the Highlands commercial node are also located along Franklin Street. The City has been pursuing financing options to improve several aspects of Franklin Street, including the roadway, streetscape, and area around the Commuter Rail station. These improvements would be similar to the recent upgrades along West Emerson Street in the vicinity of the Cedar Park Commuter Rail station. As the City continues to seek financing for this project, MAPC recommends that bike accommodations be incorporated into the plans for Franklin Street. Similar to the recommendation for Tremont Street, MAPC suggests the City stripe a 5 foot bike lane on the eastbound side of Franklin Street and stripe Sharrows on the westbound side. As the City continues to seek financing for this project, MAPC recommends that bike accommodations be incorporated into the plans for Franklin Street. Similar to the recommendation for Tremont Street, MAPC suggests the City stripe a 5 foot bike lane on the eastbound side of Franklin Street and stripe Sharrows on the westbound side.

Figure 3.7: Existing and proposed cross section for Franklin Street

Existing cross section for Franklin Street



Proposed cross section for Franklin Street



**Recommendation:** Public Parking Spaces – The City of Melrose is in a unique position compared to many other communities with an MBTA rail station in that the City owns and maintains the surface parking lots at the Cedar Park and Highlands stations. That means the City can choose to make that parking available to customers of local businesses, employees, or residents during off-peak commuting hours, particularly in the evening when eating and drinking establishments are at peak occupancy. Sharing existing parking resources like these across multiple uses can free up on-street parking spaces, and reduce the impact of parking requirements on new development around the train stations. The City may want to complete a parking utilization study during peak activity periods to determine how many spaces in the commuter parking lots are being used in the evenings as a way to determine appropriate shared parking strategies for existing and future development.

Another location that could be used as shared parking is the existing gravel parking area on the east side of Belmont Street parallel to the Commuter Rail tracks. This area is currently used as paid parking for commuters from 5 AM to 12 PM, and appears to be open to the public during all other hours. If this area were resurfaced and striped for parking, it could be used as shared parking for commuters during peak hours and for businesses and residents in the evenings.



Gravel parking area along Belmont Street currently used by commuters and others

### Public Realm Improvements

In addition to the transportation improvements recommended in the previous section, there are also several large and small scale changes that the City, residents, property owners, and businesses could make along the Corridor that would increase the appeal of the area. Public realm improvements and programming such as additional public spaces, neighborhood events, streetscape improvements, and facade improvements are ways to bring more people, business, and excitement to the area. This section contains a series of short- and long-term recommendations for improving the vitality of the Corridor and the smaller business districts around the Commuter Rail stations to both link it to downtown and to give the Corridor its own brand.

**Impediment:** Streetscape Improvements – The existing streetscape along Tremont/Essex Street and Franklin Street does not include updated amenities that match the character of the West Emerson Street area and could be improved to make the Corridor more attractive.

**Recommendation:** Implement streetscape improvements throughout the Corridor with a focus first on Franklin Street, followed by segmented improvements along Tremont/Essex Street. The City has been eager to pursue funding for streetscape improvements in the Highlands business district along Franklin Street, which would include improvements around the Highlands Commuter Rail station. These improvements would be similar in character to what has been done along West Emerson Street around the Cedar Park Commuter Rail station. These improvements should include sidewalk upgrades, ADA accessible ramps, street furniture, new street lighting, trash receptacles, bike parking, and landscaping. If funding allows, the City may also want to consider placing overhead utilities underground to make for a more uniform and attractive looking area. This also has safety benefits by removing utility poles from sidewalks and keeping them away from vehicular travel lanes. A before and after rendering of potential streetscape improvements along Franklin Street are shown in the images below.



A before and after rendering of potential streetscape improvements along Franklin Street.



**Impediment:** Unique Public Spaces – The Corridor does not have a unique identity other than providing auto-oriented services to the residents of Melrose and surrounding communities. Small changes in strategic locations along the Corridor could help add interest and variety and make the walk, bike, or drive along the streets unique and memorable.

**Recommendation:** Short Term Public Improvements - There are several locations where short-term low-cost improvements could turn a small plaza area, a cut out in a wall, or a green space into a place of public activity. One example is the concrete block wall along Tremont Street that blocks off the Melrose Public Works building from the sidewalk. A small amount of paint and some flower boxes could help add some vibrancy to the Corridor in the short term. Another example is the blank brick wall along the west side of Tremont Street near West Emerson Street. This is an excellent location for a wall mural in the short-term as potential longer term redevelopment plans unfold.

Before and after images of potential improvements to the outside of the Melrose Public Works facility.



Before and after images of a potential mural location along Tremont Street.



**Impediment:** Focus on Long-Term Strategies –

Oftentimes, communities are focused on the long-term outcomes of planning processes and the long-term strategies for revitalizing a place. With current funding constraints at the federal, state, and local levels, the long-term approach is no longer the most viable or reliable solution to encouraging the type of change a community wants. While a long-term vision is needed to steer the direction of an area, the action steps associated with the vision should try to accomplish shorter-term objectives before any potential turnover in municipal leadership occurs.

**Recommendation:** Use a long-term vision in combination with short-term action steps. The momentum that has been built during this planning process with community members needs to be harnessed and directed toward achievable short-term outcomes and wins for the Corridor. Some examples of these steps could be events and programs in the Corridor to draw people to the area and create new activity. It could involve neighborhood clean-ups, it could involve short-term low-cost transportation improvements to bring awareness to the need for longer-term solutions, or it could involve short-term low-cost improvements to public spaces like the example of the concrete wall outside the Public Works facility or the wall mural along Tremont Street.

Residents, business owners, and local groups (artists, hobby groups, non-profits, etc.) could work with the City to develop events along the Corridor that will bring people to the area and create a buzz. Events could be organized around the history of the area, clean up events, or events around arts and culture. Ell Pond, the green space around the Cedar Park station, or the middle school/high school campus could serve as locations for hosting events in the Corridor.

The transportation and public realm improvements noted in this section are just some of the short- and long-term items that could bring more investment and attention to the Corridor. These improvements will have benefits for both residents and businesses by helping connect surrounding neighborhoods to the Corridor and the MBTA stations, and also create more vibrancy and activity in a location where single use structures and automobile travel have dominated the landscape for so long.

# ACTION STEPS

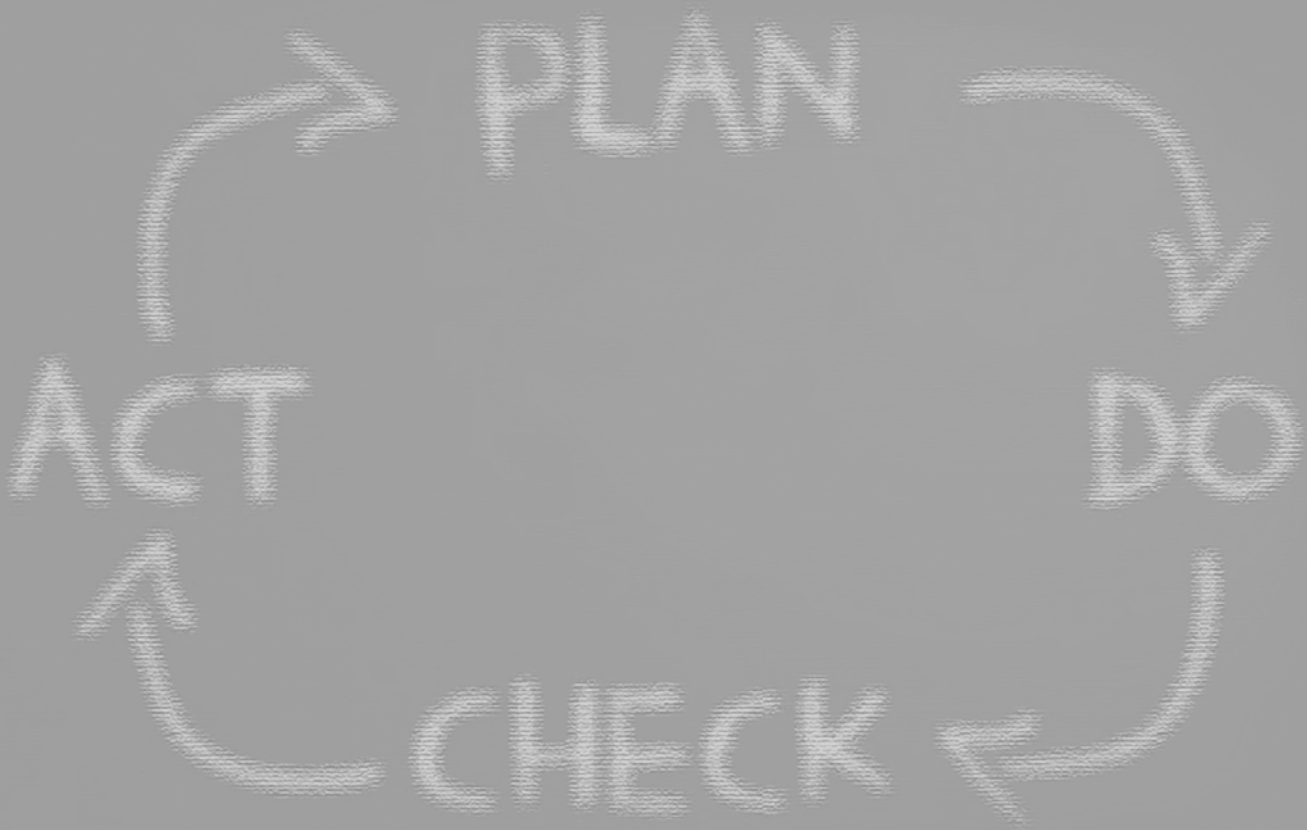


Image Source: [www.123rf.com](http://www.123rf.com)



## Short- and Long-Term Action Steps

The impediments and recommendations discussed in the prior sections of this report are not all meant to be completed simultaneously, nor do they all require the same amount of time, effort, or investment. Many of them are designed to build upon this visioning process to continue momentum and not lose sight of the larger goal of seeing this Corridor revitalized with new investment, a new mix of uses, improved transportation facilities, and enhanced public spaces and amenities. This section describes some of the short-term and long-term action steps and the entities that could take ownership over seeing pieces of the vision for the Corridor become a reality.

### Short-Term Action Steps

1. The City should consider forming a working group for the Corridor that is made of up a City Staff person, Aldermen for the area, business owners, property owners, and residents. The working group could assist the City in keeping momentum moving and spearheading educational efforts within the community as changes begin. The working group could also help organize short-term public realm improvements and establish programs and events along the Corridor to help showcase to the public that this is an area ripe for investment.
2. One of the first immediate action steps the City should take is implementing the recommended zoning changes through both a base zoning district around the Commuter Rail stations and an overlay district along the remainder of Tremont/Essex Street to provide more flexibility for the creation of new transit oriented development. The City should work with property owners to determine which parcels will and will not be considered part of the new base zone and the new overlay district.
3. Addressing the transportation improvements in the short-term can be accomplished through temporary changes to the street to test whether or not reallocating the roadway for other users is effective. Cones, tape, removable paint or striping, barriers, and signage can be used to delineate wider sidewalks, bike lanes, or adjusted travel lanes on the street. If these temporary improvements do not work well, they can be easily removed and the street can go back to functioning as it did before. If the improvements work well, the City can pursue means to make the improvements permanent.
4. The City should also consider additional data collection along roadways where decisions about removing parking have not been made yet, such as along Lynn Fells Parkway to make room for bike lanes. The City should collect data on parking utilization during the weekday and weekend to determine if the parking is indeed being used, how much is being used, and at what times of the day. This data collection can be done very quickly and cheaply, and would inform decision making on how to reallocate the right-of-way along certain streets in the Corridor.
5. Other short-term, but permanent, transportation improvements such as crosswalk re-striping or signage improvements should be made by the City through their annual maintenance programs.
6. Public realm improvements can also be accomplished through simple, quick, and cost-effective means. Efforts to improve a plaza or green space for public use can be done through temporary measures as well. Temporary benches, planter boxes, tables, chairs, public art installations, plantings, etc. can be constructed from recycled materials like pallets or scrap wood. Temporary plantings could be donated by a local landscaping business. Public art could be constructed or painted by local artists or temporarily borrowed from an artist from outside the area. If a working group is established for the Corridor, the group could solicit ideas from the community for how to best improve public spaces and what elements would best benefit businesses and residents alike.
7. In concert with the public realm improvements, events and programs could be planned for the Corridor to engage the community and bring people together. These events could be arranged around constructing the short-term public improvements or a day to explore the temporary transportation network changes. Events like a bike rodeo, or sidewalk sales for businesses around the Commuter Rail stations could bring people to the area and have them engage with the transportation changes first hand.

8. Funding for these short-term improvements may not be available in full through the City. In this case, funding for the lower-cost short-term improvements may come from public/private partnerships between businesses and the City, private donations by businesses, private donations by residents, organized through non-profits, or even collected through an online source like Kickstarter.

roadway construction projects. This may require moving curbs, utilities, adjusting traffic signals, extending medians, and new roadway striping. The City could consider several different funding sources for this work including City transportation improvement funds, state funding through a program like MassWorks, or federal funding through the Boston MPO.

## Long-Term Action Steps

1. The financing of new transit oriented development projects within the Corridor may be challenging. In partnership with GLC Development Resources LLC, a gap analysis for TOD projects was completed with a specific focus on the gaps in financing for these projects. The resulting analysis found that gaps in funding resources existed for predevelopment work, the funding of retail in mixed-use, funding for infrastructure related to the development, and funding for parking. If development along the Corridor is to move forward over the long term, the City may want to look at forming a strategic partnership or funding mechanisms for assisting developers in these specific areas. A public/private partnership can help leverage resources and share a portion of the development and infrastructure costs across multiple entities. This may be especially important if the City decides in the long-term to relocate the Public Works facility and put that property out to bid for development.
2. Due to the nature of development patterns in the Corridor over the last several decades, many of the mid- to long-term redevelopment opportunities may require parcel consolidation of properties with multiple owners. This type of development is challenging and costly for a developer to accomplish. The City may consider creating a system for monitoring property sales or redevelopment interest of parcel owners in the Corridor. If several adjacent properties have interest in redevelopment or sale, it may indicate a chance for multiple owners to pool property to create a more feasible redevelopment opportunity versus selling off individual small parcels of land.
3. If temporary changes to the roadway configuration throughout the Corridor prove to be successful, the City should pursue permanent changes through

4. Extending streetscape elements such as decorative lamp posts, street trees, benches, bike racks, and trash receptacles will help create a cohesive look and feel throughout the Corridor. This could be completed through a partnership between the City and businesses, or possibly through a combination of local, state, and federal funding sources.

## Conclusion

The Tremont/Essex Street Corridor planning process identified several excellent opportunity sites for transit oriented development, but it also identified the key impediments that may be standing in the way of realizing the community's vision. This report outlines action steps that can be taken by the City, residents, business owners, and property owners to diversify the uses along the Corridor and bring new investment to a Corridor that has not changed in many years. As demand for housing in walkable, transit-rich communities continues to grow, this Corridor is primed to take advantage of the growing market share. While there is no guarantee that implementing these measures will automatically lead to new investment in the Corridor, not following through will guarantee that things remain the same. The combination of market forces, updated zoning, increased transportation access, and an improved public realm will signal to the development community that this Corridor is a primary focus for investment for the City of Melrose.