



# Proposed Zoning Changes: Lower Village Business District

February 28, 2023

8pm

# History of Lower Village Planning Efforts

2011	Lower Village Committee Final Report	<p>Recommendations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pedestrian and traffic safety improvements</li> <li>• Village center zoning</li> <li>• Pursuit of water infrastructure</li> </ul>
2012	Lower Village Planning Public Forum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resident feedback on desired uses and priority improvements</li> </ul>
2013 - 2018	Strengths/Weaknesses/ Opportunities/ Threats analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A parcel-by-parcel assessment detailing issues and opportunities at individual sites</li> </ul>
2014	Lower Village Traffic Improvement Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resident feedback on traffic and pedestrian improvements</li> </ul>
2015	Lower Village Visual Preference Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resident feedback on architectural and design preferences</li> </ul>
2018	Business District Assessment & Market Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resident, Business, and Commercial Property Owner survey</li> <li>• Analysis of existing real estate profile &amp; business conditions</li> <li>• Recommendations on zoning &amp; other strategies for improvement</li> </ul>
2019	Lower Village Revitalization Subcommittee Final Report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Summarized key obstacles and recommendations for improving Business District</li> </ul>
2019-2020	Lower Village Roadway Reconstruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Installation of Complete Streets improvements and upgraded drainage infrastructure</li> </ul>
2021-present	Consultant review of draft zoning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In-depth review of draft bylaw, leading to significant revisions</li> <li>• Review of bylaw to generate visuals of zoning changes</li> </ul>



# Lower Village Snapshot:

- 80 Commercial Units
- Neighborhood includes private residences
- Over 194,000 sq.ft. of commercial space
- 11% Vacancy Rate (as of 2018; pre-pandemic)
- 56 Establishments
  - 67% independently owned;
  - 26% chains
  - 7% non-profit or public entities
- Underdeveloped Parcels





# A Vision for Traditional Village Design

Exemplified in 5 distinct ways:

- Walkability
- Strong Mix of Uses
- Housing Opportunities
- Accessible by car, bike, and by foot
- Distinct Sense of Place



## Vision Statement

*Lower Village will be an **attractive gateway** to Stow, developed in the tradition of a **New England village**, where residents and visitors can **safely and conveniently live, work, shop, dine and recreate**. As the primary gateway into town, Lower Village will project the history and character of Stow through the **architectural compatibility** of its buildings and streetscape, providing residents and visitors with a defined **sense of place**. Lower Village will be a place to **meet and connect**, with civic spaces for gathering, and wayfinding to attractions, including farms, orchards, conservation areas and the Assabet River Rail Trail. **Businesses will thrive** in Stow's revitalized hub, attracting people of all ages to services, shopping and entertainment opportunities **accessible** by all modes of transportation.*

Proposed Zoning changes are intended to  
make realization of this vision possible

# Why Adopt New Lower Village Zoning?

---

Auto-dominated District

---

Persistent vacancies

---

Unsatisfactory mix of businesses

---

Lacks a sense of place



## Problem: Automobile Oriented District

- Relatively high and inflexible parking minimums
- Setback requirements prevent creation of streetscape environments
- Lack of design control has resulted in buildings oriented around large parking lots





# Problem: Persistent Vacancies

- Lack of public water and sewer infrastructure
- Lack of opportunities for redevelopment or reconfiguration
- Business and Commercial Property owners list aesthetics and physical appearance among top locational disadvantages
- Damage appeal and draw of a business district





## Problem: Current Business Mix

- Mixed-Use residential development not allowed
- Few restaurants
- Limited opportunities for gathering





An aerial photograph of a commercial area. The scene is dominated by large parking lots filled with cars and several large commercial buildings. A road with yellow markings runs through the center. There are some trees and grassy areas interspersed among the buildings and parking lots. The overall appearance is that of a functional but somewhat generic commercial district.

## Problem: Lack of a Sense of Place

- Lack of connection to nearby recreational opportunities
- Lower Common offers only space for public gathering
- Architectural and site design provides low aesthetic appeal



# Lower Village Business District Zoning Goals



**Balance vehicle, bike,  
and pedestrian  
infrastructure** to create  
a cohesive look and feel



**Incorporate design  
principles** to  
encourage context  
sensitive architecture  
and site planning



**Create an attractive  
gateway to Stow,**  
leveraging tourism with  
public gathering spaces



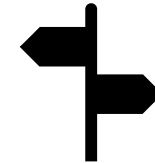
# Lower Village Business District Zoning Goals



**Encourage small-scale mixed-use development** that provides diversified housing options to complement and enhance the district



**Manage stormwater** in a manner that adds to aesthetics and functionality of the district



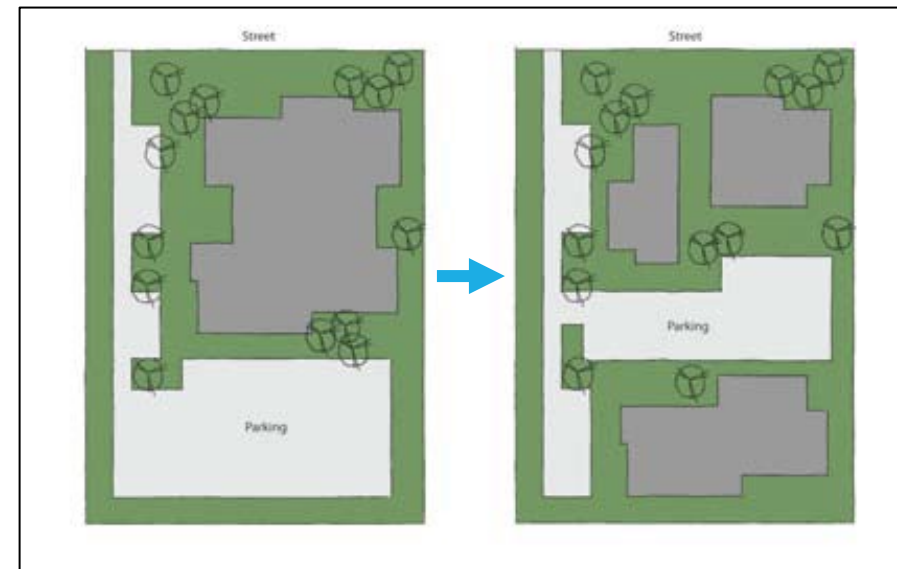
**Manage site access** from Great Road and encourage interior lot connections and streetscapes





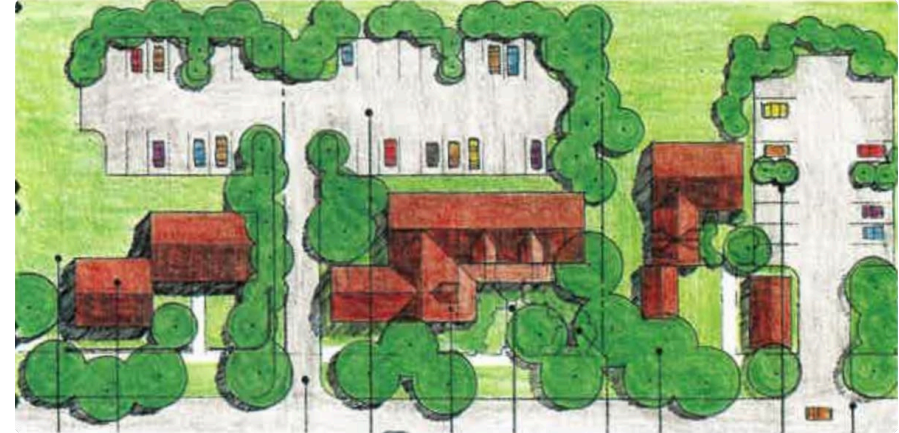
# Goal 1: Balance Vehicle, Bike, and Pedestrian Infrastructure

- Pedestrian-oriented façade design, cohesion with surrounding structures
- Site Planning incorporates Complete Streets design principles
  - Enabling safe access for users of all abilities for all modes of transportation
- Functional open spaces designed to create safe and visually appealing connections





- **Parking Lots** shall not occupy front yards of buildings, and should be designed to serve multiple buildings and uses



- **Sidewalks** must allow easy movement between buildings, and shall be wide enough to encourage pedestrian-oriented streetscapes







# Goal 2: Encourage Context Sensitive Architecture and Site Planning

- Flexibility in dimensional requirements are balanced with stringent architecture and site design standards
- Buildings must be cognizant of New England architectural traditions and oriented toward a pedestrian streetscape (pitched roofs, wood siding, double hung windows, etc).
- Corporate images (i.e. logos) shall not be the dominant exterior feature of any building

THIS  
↓

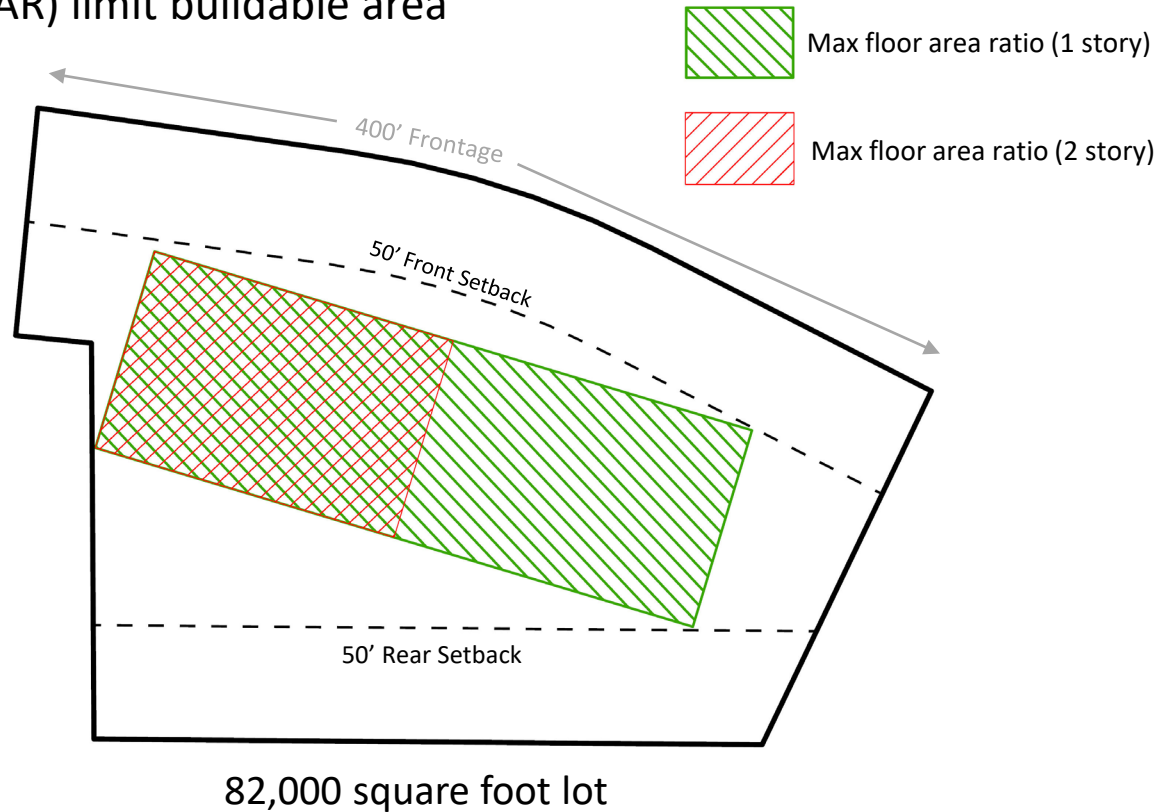


NOT THAT  
↓

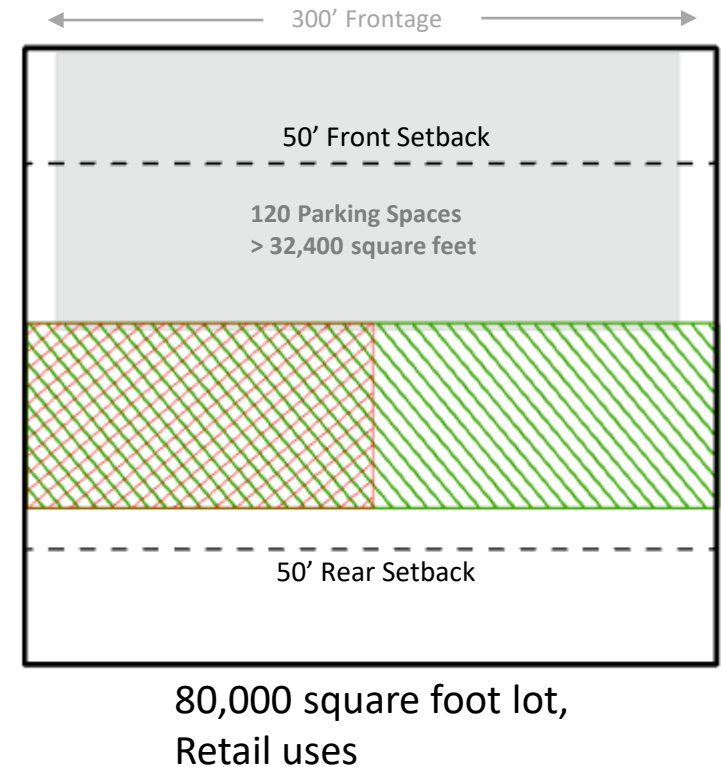


# Current dimensional and parking requirements make it difficult to develop anything different than what exists today

Setbacks and maximum floor-area ratio (FAR) limit buildable area



Add inflexible parking minimums, and creative site design becomes very difficult





# Design standards retain Planning Board control while allowing for village development

- **Façade** standards ensure that building articulation is used to reduce apparent length, monotony, and massing of larger buildings
- **Building siting and orientation** shall adhere to principles of pedestrian-oriented streetscapes, while providing access to functional open spaces



# Proposed Dimensional Standards

<b>Dimensional Requirement</b>	<b><i>Current Zoning</i></b>	<b><i>Proposed Zoning</i></b>
Lot Size	40,000 sf	No minimum
Minimum Lot Width	n/a	No minimum
Minimum Frontage	150 ft	No minimum
Front Yard Setback	50 ft minimum	30 ft <u>maximum</u> along Great Road
Corner Lot Setback	No structure higher than 3 ft within a triangle formed by connecting 25 ft segments along both ways	n/a, but engineer must make a demonstration of adequate site lines
Side Yard Setback	None, but parcels adjacent to Residential District required 50 ft vegetated buffer	None, but parcels adjacent to Residential District require 30 ft vegetated buffer, 50 ft buffer to adjacent dwellings, and Planning Board may increase requirement
Rear Yard Setback	None, but parcels adjacent to Residential District required 50 ft vegetated buffer	Same
Maximum Height	35 ft (all districts)	Same, but rooftop gardens, patios, or other non-enclosed features designed for leisure shall not constitute a separate floor
Maximum Floor-Area Ratio	0.30	None



# A Goal 3: Create an attractive gateway to Stow, provide open spaces and public gathering spaces

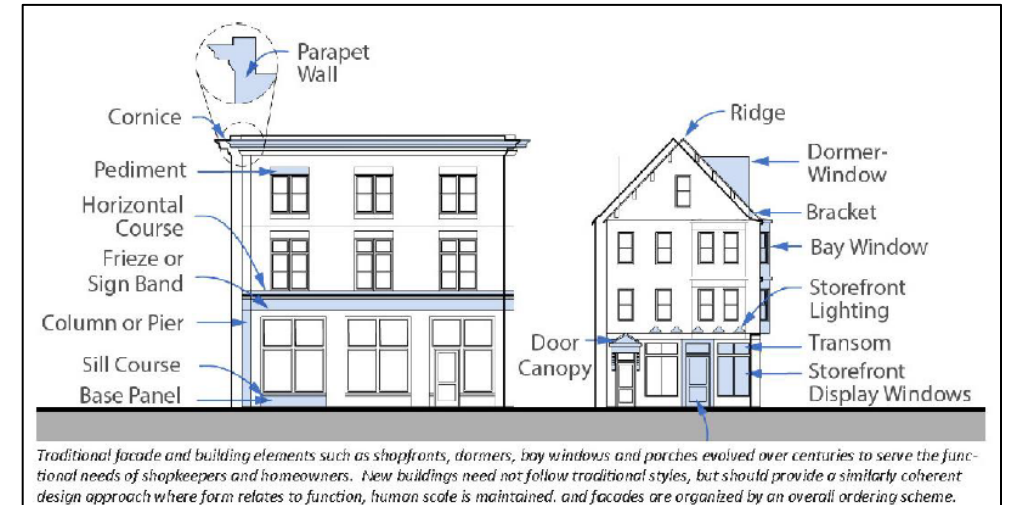
- All developments require 5% of the area be set aside as open space
- Open spaces include courtyards, landscaped seating areas, & other streetscape amenities that encourage interaction and activity
- Pop-up markets and mobile food vendors are allowed by Special Permit





# Goal 4: Encourage small-scale mixed-use development

- Buildings that mix commercial and residential uses allowable by Special Permit
- Primary frontage cannot be taken up with loading bays or garage doors
- Dwellings units are limited to 2 bedrooms and an overall 6 units/acre density







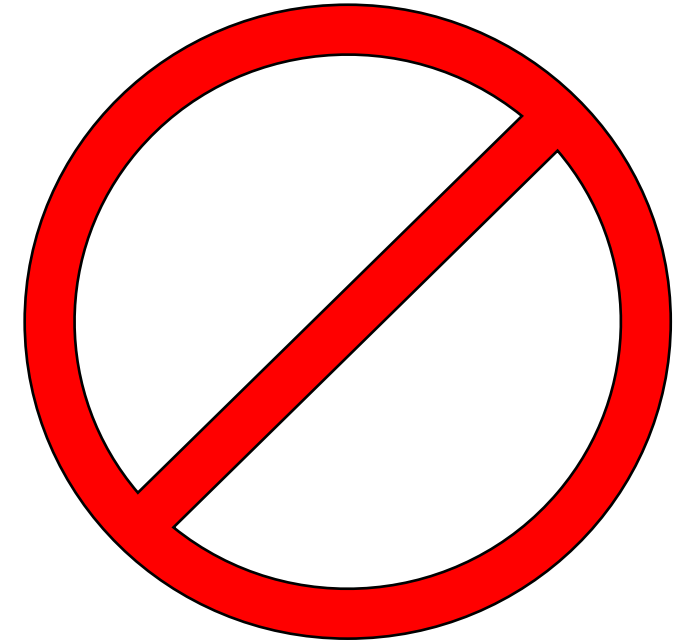
## New Allowed Uses

- Mobile food vendors, pop-up markets
- Artisan production
- Microbreweries, craft breweries, brew pubs
- Focus on “retail centers” rather than individual retail uses
- Mixed use development – one or more businesses in the same building as residential dwelling units

# Prohibited Uses

*Existing nonconforming uses will be allowed to continue, as required under MA zoning law*

- Tourist home, lodging house, hotel, motel
- Motor vehicle service stations and other services that primarily exist for the purpose of providing services to motor vehicles
- Storage of vehicles, equipment, and/or materials not incidental to an allowed use



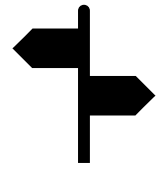




# Goal 5: Utilize low impact development methods & green infrastructure to manage stormwater

- Parking lot landscaping standards encourage low impact methods to manage stormwater runoff
- Building siting and orientation standards include consideration of:
  - storm water management practices,
  - alternative surfacing materials,
  - building and site design elements,
  - landscaping features.





# Goal 6: Encourage interior lot connections and interior streetscapes

- Applicants are encouraged to create internal access drives in order to create additional streetscape environments perpendicular or parallel to Great Road
- Inclusion of Complete Streets design
  - Enabling safe access for users of all abilities for all modes of transportation
- Building placement along internal access drives create visual cohesion, pedestrian accessibility, and functional open spaces
- Internal access drives shall include on-street parking to the extent practicable





# Questions



