

**Ahead or Behind the Curve?:  
Compact Mixed-Use Development  
in  
Suburban Boston**

(Text)

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**Lincoln Institute of Land Policy  
Working Paper**

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**Lincoln Institute Product Code: WP03JO1a** *(text)*  
*Lincoln Institute product code for accompanying figures and photos is WP03JO1b*

**Ahead or Behind the Curve?:  
Compact Mixed-Use Development in Suburban Boston**

**Abstract**

Although Greater Boston communities developed before World War II have a tradition compact mixed-use development, many recently developed suburbs have been reluctant to encourage such development. In the last few years, “smart growth” advocates have been encouraging compact mixed-use development in suburban communities in order to combat sprawl. There are six types of sites that provide opportunities for compact mixed-use development:

1. Infill and redevelopment in developed town centers;
2. Public transit stations outside of downtowns;
3. Office/industrial parks;
4. Redevelopment of existing shopping centers and strips;
5. Military/institutional facility reuse;
6. Undeveloped “greenfield” sites.

This paper is part of ongoing research to identify and analyze compact mixed-use developments in Greater Boston. Anyone wanting to suggest inclusion of projects not discussed in this paper or to add material about projects that are mentioned is encouraged to contact the author.

## About the Author

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## Acknowledgements

Armando Carbonell, Cochairman, Department of Planning and Development, at the Lincoln Institute for Land Policy and Oliver Gillham provided insightful comments for this paper. Besides consulting a range of printed sources and websites of municipalities, regional planning organizations, and developers (see Notes), I interviewed the following people, who were generous with their time and insights:

Gary Ayrassian, Attleboro Planning Director; Tom Bott, Kingston Town Planner; Sarah Buck, Gloucester Community Development Block Grant Grants Administrator; Bill Clark, Planner, Metropolitan Area Planning Council; William Constable, A.W. Perry Senior Vice President; Stephen Costello, Norwood Town Planner; Dennis Dizoglio, Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority Director of Planning; Lynn Duncan Wilmington Town Planner; Greg Guimond, Southeastern Regional Planning & Economic Development District (SRPEDD) Comprehensive Planning Director; Paul Halkiotis, Weymouth Economic Development Planner; Laura Harbottle, Scituate Town Planner; Aaron Henry, Milton Planning Director; Philip B. Herr, Principal, Philip B. Herr Associates; Peter Hollands, Telecom City Project Director; Ann Houston, Massachusetts Housing Partnership Senior Program & Policy Advisor; Bruce Hughes, Old Colony Planning Council Planner; Stephen Kerlin, Ashland Town Planner; Norman Khumalo, Walpole Town Planner; Angus Jennings, Marshfield Town Planner; Ray Ladue, Brockton Area Transport Administrator; Peter Lowitt, Devens Enterprise Commission Land Use Administrator/Director; Valerie Massard, Plymouth Town Planner; Lee

Newman, Needham Planning Director; Roger Nicholas, Canton Town Planner; Marcia Rasmussen, Concord Director of Planning and Land Management; Sarkis Sarkisian, Natick Community Development Director; Shaun Suhoski, Ayer Director of Community and Economic Development; Susan Yanofsky, Westwood Economic Development Officer.

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### **Figures and Photos—WP03JO1b**

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## **Ahead or Behind the Curve?: Compact Mixed-Use Development in Suburban Boston**

### **Introduction**

#### **Greater Boston's Pattern of Compact Mixed-Use Development**

The tradition of dense mixed-use development is strong in the urban core of Boston and Cambridge. Since 1960s, these cities have pursued successful strategies of urban renewal and infill in a stubborn effort to stem suburban flight and center city disinvestment. Since Governor Francis Sargent decided to curtail additional highway construction in Boston and shift to greater reliance on public transit in the early 1970s, the city has been upgrading its rapid transit service. The extensive Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) transit system, which most metropolitan areas can only envy, provides the infrastructure for encouraging compact developments around transportation nodes. Over the past decade, Boston and Cambridge have witnessed an acceleration of urban infill projects, making it a national model for flourishing urban life. These projects were being studied and celebrated by the Boston Society of Architects' National Conference on "Density: Myth and Reality" (September 12-14, 2003).

According to Smart Growth America's "Sprawl Index," the Boston-Lawrence-Salem-Lowell-Brockton SMSA ranks as the 77th least sprawling metropolitan area out of the 83 largest nationwide (1 is most sprawling and 83 is most compact). Greater Boston ranks 74th in having a strong mix of homes, jobs & services; 70th in residential density; and 55th in the strength of town centers.<sup>1</sup>

Despite these positive rankings, suburban and exurban communities in Greater Boston have lagged the region's urban core and other areas of the country in pursuing compact mixed-use development. Maturing metropolitan regions, such as Los Angeles and the Bay Area, have run up against the practical reality of sprawl—developable land is limited—and have undertaken denser new development than is common in New England. Los Angeles, for example, has a population of 5,400 persons per square mile, while Boston's density is 2,700 per square mile. On the West Coast, cost-conscious developers, land use regulators, and housing buyers have accepted a high density product than we typically see on small, scattered development sites in Northeastern suburbs with large-lot zoning. Sunbelt metropolitan areas are leading the nation in turning failed shopping centers and underutilized suburban parcels into thriving mixed-use developments. Such metropolitan areas as Washington, DC, Atlanta, Denver, Dallas, Houston, Vancouver, San Francisco, Portland, Los Angeles, and San Diego have actively been encouraging transit-oriented development (TOD) near transit stations.<sup>2</sup>

Meanwhile, there is a consumer segment seeking out urban lifestyles, and developers are trying to meet the demand. The Congress for New Urbanism has increased its emphasis on infilling at already developed places.

Suburban Boston has been slower to promote compact mixed-use development. The region's population has been growing slowly, and many have believed Massachusetts could accommodate low-density development. Many traditionally rural communities that are becoming suburban, particularly along the I-495 corridor, have resolutely sought to maintain low densities and avoid compact mixed-use development, even when faced with the consequences of sprawl.

Nevertheless, sprawl has become a critical issue in Massachusetts. Several initiatives have focused on preserving open space, including the Massachusetts Rivers Protection Act (1996), Cape Cod Land Bank (1998) and Community Preservation Act (2000). The Cape Cod Commission (established 1990) focused on requiring Developments of Regional Impact (commercial projects of more than 10,000 square feet and residential projects of more than 30 units or 30 acres) to pay to remediate project impacts on open space, traffic, water, and community character. Encouraging density has not been a major emphasis of the Commission's work until recently. Many communities have focused on improving the appearance of new development through site plan review and design and signage guidelines.

Massachusetts communities have, nevertheless, discovered that development restrictions, open space purchases, and the creation of public transportation are not enough to stem sprawl. It has become apparent that development needs to mix uses in more compact patterns. By building in such a way, a region conserves open space and protects other environmental resources. Compact development can increase the market for public transportation. By allowing people to walk to work, shops, entertainment, and community facilities, mixed-use projects reduce automobile trips. Any opportunity for people to walk or take public transportation lessens the vehicle volume that contributes to traffic congestion. Since mixed-use development often means mixed-income development, such development helps promote social equity and counteract the age and income segregation that occurs in many suburban areas. The mixing of people in town centers also allows for the creation of valuable social capital.

Sensible new development is best located in already developed areas that have the infrastructure to support it. This implies that new housing should be built in formerly single-use zones where it has not traditionally been sited: shopping strips and office parks.

Greater Boston communities are beginning to grapple with this issue and are examining an array of sites that provide opportunities for compact mixed-use development. The types of sites include:

- Infill and redevelopment at developed sites in town centers
- Public transit stations outside of downtowns;
- Office/industrial parks;
- Redevelopment of existing shopping centers and strips;
- Military /institutional facility reuse;
- Undeveloped "greenfield" sites.

This paper will examine the different types of sites that can accommodate new mixed-use development by discussing projects that either have been completed in recent years or projects that suburban communities are considering.

### **Infill Compact Mixed-Use Development in Town Centers**

Right around the year 2000, suburban Boston communities started promoting compact mixed-use developments, making this revival a truly 21st-century phenomenon. As architects and planners were raising the issue of sprawl through such efforts as the Boston Society of Architects' Civic Initiative for a Livable New England, some communities were starting to nudge development back into their downtowns. Several towns rezoned their centers to encourage multi-story residential and commercial projects, striving to encourage a mix of uses. Such communities have included Attleboro, Canton, Framingham, Gloucester, Hyannis, Norwood, and Wakefield. On Cape Cod, the Cape Cod Commission's 2002 Regional Policy Plan provides new regulatory incentives for development to locate in town centers.

Some communities in Eastern Massachusetts want mixed-use development near public transit stops in order to attract commuters to become residents. Such town center redevelopment is not just an alternative to sprawl, it revitalizes traditional business centers, many of which had been declining for years. Living and shopping in town centers is growing in popularity, especially for young adults and empty-nesters. Apartments and townhouses in town centers are an emerging housing market niche.<sup>3</sup> Planner Linda E. Hollis argues: "Enlightened real estate analysts believe that somewhere between 25 and 40 percent of residents of metropolitan areas would like to live in urban housing."<sup>4</sup>

Downtowns offer the independent stores and eating places that you cannot find at chain-store-only shopping malls. Suburban restaurants and coffee houses are booming, as suburbanites figure out that you do not have to travel to downtown Boston to find a good meal or an evening out. The growing popularity of town centers illustrates the trend of people gravitating to "third places," community-oriented places beyond home and work, that sociologist Ray Oldenburg discussed in his book *The Great Good Place: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Community Centers, Beauty Parlors, General Stores, Bars, and Hangouts and How They Get You Through the Day* (1990). Suburban downtowns are being redeveloped not because of some "smart growth" fiat, but because the public enjoys these places.

Municipalities also are interested in downtown redevelopment because it provides new uses for "brownfields," old buildings and industrial sites which have been abandoned or underutilized because of hazardous waste contamination. This follows a generation-long trend of adaptively re-using old mills and schools and employing historic preservation for community revitalization.

Affordable housing advocates are focusing their efforts on downtown redevelopment. The Citizens Housing and Planning Association (CHAPA) has funded Smart Growth

Demonstration projects in five communities, providing technical assistance and forging partnerships with such organizations as the Massachusetts Housing Partnership and local housing authorities. In fact, Ann Houston, of the Massachusetts Housing Partnership, leads the CHAPA Smart Growth effort. The communities with demonstration projects include Manchester-by-the Sea, Wakefield, Bedford, Needham, and Stockbridge (see project descriptions in this report). Each project takes a different problem related to increasing housing density in a community without compromising its quality of life.

The leading candidates for using mixed-use development to revitalize their town centers are older more established suburbs. Some are small cities, like Attleboro (population 42,068), Framingham (66,910), Quincy (88,025), Salem (40,407), Waltham (59,226), Weymouth (53,988), and some are large towns, like Canton (20,775), Natick (32,170), and Norwood (28,587). Their downtowns have suffered from competition from chains at the shopping malls, and their older industrial bases have disappeared. They are welcoming new residents and an urban ambience to revive their town's economy, fill vacant buildings, and bolster the tax base.

Smaller, more rural suburbs, especially those in Southeastern Massachusetts and beyond I-495, have been less eager to embrace compact mixed-use development because their town centers are less capable of accommodating sizable new development. Even though they have become bedroom communities, their residents—both old-timers and recent arrivals—value the “rural” identity and often oppose new development that appears “dense” or “urban.” Such towns include Holbrook (10,785), Kingston (11,780), and Lakeville (9,821).

Despite opposition to specific compact mixed-use development proposals, many suburbs are embracing it. The most intriguing thing is that there is no concerted regional movement yet—there are many individual communities deciding to promote mixed-use development because it generates positive growth for them. Their stories are encouraging to proponents of “smart growth” and compact mixed-use development.

**Figure 1: MBTA Commuter Rail Map indicates many opportunities for mixed-use development.**

Abington

The recent revival of the Old Colony Line to Kingston and Plymouth has stimulated new development. At Abington, Beacon Residential Properties has developed Woodlands at Abington Station, a residential complex near the commuter rail station. It has created 192 units, including 39 affordable rental units, on the site of a former paintball challenge course. A shortcoming of the project is that it lacks a convenient sidewalk connecting the residences to the train station, which is a mere 1/8 mile away.

Abington is seeking to build on the Woodlands at Abington Station project by recently rezoning 50 acres around the railroad station for residential and retail use.<sup>5</sup>

**Figure 2: Abington—Rail bisects photo, with train station in lower half. At top is Woodlands at Abington Station, a residential complex with 192 units.**

### Attleboro

Attleboro is focusing downtown revitalization efforts around its commuter rail station, a 19<sup>th</sup>-century classic that serves one of the largest riderships in the MBTA commuter rail system. Planning Director Gary Ayrassian reports that the city plans to redevelop a vacant factory and underutilized commercial sites near the railroad station for mixed-use development. A new zoning ordinance allows ground floor retail with housing above. The first development under this ordinance has 8 condos above 2,500 square feet of retail. The Attleboro Redevelopment Authority plans to clear a 4 ½-acre block for 70-80 residential units, 10,000-12,000 square feet of retail, and a day care center. The Greater Attleboro Taunton Regional Transit Authority (GATRA) has secured federal transportation funds (TEA-21) for a new bus terminal to be located on the ground floor of a 750-space parking garage with a top-floor indoor skating rink and restaurant.

Gary Ayrassian says that Attleboro plans to do more to encourage new stores and restaurants in the downtown to attract new residents. Already the city has the Attleboro Museum, an art gallery in the former London's Department Store, and the Hometown Bar & Grille, a spin-off of Morin's Diner, which has fed Attleboro since 1911.

**Figure 3: Attleboro—Rail line runs diagonally from lower left. Train station has red roof. City plans to redevelop 4 ½ acres to right of station for housing, bus station, and parking garage.**

### Ayer

Out to the west of I-495, the town of Ayer, site of the former Fort Devens, has a mixed-use project near its commuter rail station (Fitchburg Line). A local developer is renovating the Spaulding Block, a commercial building whose upper floors have long been vacant. The project would create 8-10 affordable housing units above ground floor retail. The project is seeking funding for the affordable units from the Massachusetts Development Financing Agency (MDFA) and MassDevelopment. Besides providing affordable housing, the project would contribute to town center revitalization. Ayer has used zoning to encourage revitalization through its Downtown Business Zone, which allows mixed uses, increased density, and relaxed parking requirements.

### Brockton

Brockton is yet another older city using a new bus facility to spur downtown redevelopment. Brockton Area Transit's (BAT) new bus station, the BAT Centre, opened in 1999 next to the Brockton commuter rail station. BAT is developing a large parking garage to serve commuters. The city has encouraged new housing to be built on underutilized parcels near this transit center. The first project will have 90 market units in the vacant Etonic Treton Building. Two other neighboring housing projects, with as yet unknown numbers of units, are in the early development stages.

**Figure 4: Brockton—Rail line runs diagonally from lower left. Station platform is grey and yellow. Former Etonic Treton building is being rehabilitated for 90 market-rate units. Two other conversions of factories to housing are being planned.**

### Canton

One of the best examples of the transformation of suburban downtowns is in Canton, southwest of Boston near the interchange of Route 128 and I-95. According to Town Planner Roger Nicholas, the town wanted to revitalize its fading town center, which had lost much business to strip shopping centers. In 2000, Canton town meeting adopted a new zoning overlay district to encourage a mix of dense housing and new retail in the town center. One of the major draws is proximity to the commuter rail station, which is located a mere 25-minute ride from downtown Boston. The Town reduced its parking requirement to one parking space per housing unit, assuming that a couple could own a single car because one spouse would be likely to commute by rail. Canton also has undertaken extensive streetscape improvements, including burial of utility wires along much of the Washington Street.

By thus baiting the hook, Canton has attracted several new developments. Local developer John Marini has led the way with the Village at Forge Pond—39 units with retail on Washington Street and housing on the upper floors and in rear structures. Opened in 2001, the Village at Forge Pond offers the trendy Center Field's Bar & Grill and a walking trail around Forge Pond. The project even includes affordable units. Just up Washington Street, Marini is developing another 45 condos at Grover Estates. Across the street is a model downtown block, called Washington Place, with 29 housing units over ground floor retail that includes the critically-acclaimed Olio Restaurant.

Not all new Canton development has ground floor retail. The Library Project, which is under construction, will have 47 units on Washington Street, and a project on Wall Street has 14 units with two of them designated affordable. Behind Grover Estates and the Library Project is Canton Commons, a pioneer project built in 1996 with 66 condos that are oriented toward commuters wanting to use the nearby commuter rail service. These projects do not have ground floor retail, but they strengthen the town center by providing residents who can patronize the shops and eating places in other properties.

Planner Roger Nicholas sees these six projects as anchors at the northern end of Washington Street that will spur redevelopment of underutilized commercial properties stretching down Washington Street toward Cobb's Corner. Nicholas anticipates a continuous band of ground floor retail with two floors of housing units above as well as additional housing units in the rear of the buildings.

**Figure 5: Canton Center—In the center of the photo is the train station and parking lot. Canton Commons (66 units) is at the bottom. The Village at Forge Park (39 units) is upper right. Washington Place (29 units) is upper center. Grover Estates (45 units) is under construction at left.**

**Figure 6: Canton Center—Washington Place has 29 housing units and retail on ground floor, including the acclaimed Olio Restaurant.**

### Concord

Concord Crossing, developed in the mid-1990s, is one of those projects that look like they have always been part of the townscape. Concord Crossing incorporates 4 buildings located around the Concord Depot commuter rail station off of Sudbury Road and Thoreau Street. Two of the buildings have retail uses on the ground floor and 20 housing units above. In the building with the Chang An Restaurant on the ground floor there are offices upstairs. The total amount of retail, office, and warehouse space is 24,482 square feet. The developer Period Realty Trust, which already owned the Concord Depot and Bedford Farms Ice Cream building, worked out a creative deal with the MBTA to use commuter parking spaces as part of the development and replace the parking at another site.

Concord Director of Planning and Land Management Marcia Rasmussen points out how the town has long encouraged mixed-use development by allowing mixed uses through the zoning code. The town encouraged the developer to include housing in the Concord Crossing project. The town also provided a waiver on parking requirements because the parking spaces tend not to be used by residents during the day and thus can be used by shoppers.

Concord also encourages mixed-use development by allowing housing in industrial zones. At a development, next to the former Damon Mill on Route 62, in an industrial zone, a recent project includes 8 housing units, office space, and enclosed parking.

### Framingham

Framingham is well known in the region for shopping centers on the Route 9 strip. They also have traditional downtowns with latter 19<sup>th</sup>-century buildings dating from an era when industry dominated the economy. Situated on the Worcester-Boston commuter rail line, both communities are seeking to encourage more mixed-use development in their downtowns. The Framingham story is instructive. In the 1970s, the town prohibited multi-family dwellings throughout the community after a spate of mid-rises on Route 9 upset local citizens. Until 2002, when this ordinance was changed, no apartments could be built downtown to take advantage of the commuter rail station. The new zoning sought to encourage denser mixed-use development. Framingham has approved 200 apartments in 2 of 5 former Dennison industrial buildings; the 3 remaining building are being used for offices. Other potential downtown projects include the former Kendall Hotel (22 units) and the Arcade Project (250-275 units).

**Figure 7: Framingham—Railroad line bisects photo, with rail station in lower half and downtown on left. Framingham has approved 200 apartments in 2 of 5 former Dennison industrial buildings, along tracks at upper left.**

Manchester-by-the-Sea

The Manchester Affordable Housing Corporation and the Manchester Housing Authority have undertaken a two-stage project to increase density in the town center adjacent to the commuter rail station. The Housing Authority has renovated and preserved 21 affordable rental units at 12 Summer Street. At 10 Summer Street, the Affordable Housing Corporation is building a mixed-use development with 17 housing units (5 set aside for first-time homebuyers) and spaces for 3 stores.

Milton

Milton, which borders the southern Dorchester end of Boston, is primarily a residential suburb. Approximately 95% of its tax base is residential, so the town is interested in encouraging commercial or mixed-use development. Since Milton zoning does not permit mixed-use development by right, the town has used either Planned Unit Development (PUD) or special permits to allow residences and commercial to be put in the same building.

The Residences at Milton Landing, located on Wharf Street on the banks of the Neponset River, have been developed as a PUD, whereby the town tailored the allowable land uses to the site. The project, owned by the Kaneb family, who are local developers, is redeveloping a site that accommodated an old freezer plant that burned down. Milton Landing has 73 luxury condos opening in 2004. On the ground floor, there is approximately 5,000 square feet of retail space. Milton Landing is well served by the MBTA Red Line Milton Village station.

Milton has a similar project being proposed for 131 Eliot Street, which is the site of the former Hendrie's Ice Cream factory. The town owns the sub-surface parking area beneath the factory, which is owned by a developer who proposes to tear it down and built condos approximately 50 condos. The town, which controls the parking area, wants the developer to include ground-floor retail to cater to local consumers and to expand the non-residential tax base. The community and the developer have not come to an agreement on the mix of retail and housing, so the project is still in flux. If constructed, the project would benefit from its location at the Central Avenue MBTA Red Line stop.

Natick

Natick is seeking to redevelop its downtown as a counterweight to the Route 9 commercial strip. The town is considering rezoning Industrial I land near the town center that prohibits housing for mixed-use development, reports Community Development Director Sarkis Sarkisian. The Housing Overlay Option Plan (HOOP), which will be brought before town meeting in 2004, will seek to increase affordable housing and create a livelier town center. If the new zoning is approved several multi-use projects could be built near the commuter railroad station. New housing in Natick Center might prove

popular because the Town has already created a harmonious ensemble of public buildings with the new Town Hall, Public Safety Complex, and the Morse Institute library addition. A new \$2.5 million arts center in a former fire station has created an appealing venue for cultural activities.

### Norwood

Norwood is another community seeking to redevelop its town center, which stretches along its own Washington Street. Town Planner Stephen Costello has described how the Downtown Norwood Central Business District Vision Plan and Action Strategy (1998) called for a Downtown Apartment Overlay District that would allow housing to be built above retail uses. The new zoning, passed in 2000, also reduced parking requirements for downtown housing. The Norwood revitalization strategy focuses on encouraging new restaurants by offering six new restaurant-only liquor licenses, facade grants, and streetscape improvements.

New restaurants are coming and so are new apartments. Norwood Crossing is located at the Norwood Depot commuter rail station. Opening this year, Norwood Crossing has 105 “luxury” units being managed by Abbott Development. Right across the tracks developer John Marini is seeking to build another 51 condos.

**Figure 8: Norwood—Commuter rail line runs top to bottom, with station near top. Toward center is Norwood Crossing, with 105 housing units.**

**Figure 9: Norwood Crossing, viewed from rail station.**

### Quincy

Quincy is seeking to bring more development to an already attractive and vital

downtown. Right next to the Quincy Center MBTA station, providing both commuter rail and Red Line service, Munroe Place has opened with 111 apartments and 10,000 square feet of ground floor retail. The attractive 8-story building is being managed by Abbott Development, a Boston developer with a specialty in mixed-use projects.

**Figure 10: Quincy—At Quincy Center Red Line and commuter rail station, Munroe Place is being opened. It has 111 housing units and 10,000 square feet of retail space.**

### Salem

The old seafaring city of Salem has been redeveloping its historic core for a generation. The Salem Maritime National Historic Site, under the National Park Service, brings alive the history of the port city. The newly-expanded Peabody Essex Museum, designed by

Moshie Safdie, is making Salem a place of pilgrimage for devotees of cutting-edge architecture, maritime history, and the arts of the Far East.

There is a new housing project opposite the commuter rail station on the former Parker Brothers factory site. Jefferson at Salem Station has 266 new housing units, supplying new patrons for downtown businesses and activities. The mid-rise infill project has been designed to extend the urban fabric of downtown Salem, although it lacks commercial space. The developer, JPI, a nationwide developer of multi-family housing based in Texas, also is developing large residential projects in Ashland and Westwood.

**Figure 11: Salem—Jefferson at Salem Station has 266 new housing units.**

### Scituate

On the South Shore's Scituate Harbor, the new Scituate Harbor Redevelopment has 10,000 square feet of retail, including a cinema, and 28 housing units. The project was built on the site of two dilapidated sheds on Front Street. The town is reviewing a new project which would add 37 housing units and 2,000 square feet of retail. According to Town Planner Laura Harbottle, the town is trying to enlarge the amount of retail space in the project to create a more vital area around the harbor.

### Walpole

The year 2003 has seen two mixed-use projects go up in Walpole's town center. At 959 Main Street, there are 8 rental apartments located over retail stores. Behind this block, a new building has gone up with 6 condos over office/retail space. These projects are located very close to the Walpole train station, where former factories have been renovated to accommodate office space.

**Figure 12: Walpole—An example of small-scale mixed-use infill. This Main Street building has 8 rental units over retail.**

### Waltham

Waltham's Moody Street is a poster child for revitalization in an older industrial city. It is crammed with restaurants, pubs, furniture stores, ethnic groceries, and other independently-owned shops. The key project that changed Moody Street's faded image and attracted new residents was Cronin's Landing. Developer Boulder Capital, of Weston, MA, redeveloped the site of the shuttered Grover Cronin Department Store in 1998 into a 5-story apartment building with 281 housing units and 25,500 square feet of stores and restaurants. Boulder Capital is building another 348 units farther west on Charles River at Longview Place next to the former Waltham Hospital. These sites are well-served by the Waltham commuter rail station.

**Figure 13: Waltham—Cronin’s Landing is in middle, below Charles River and commuter rail station and to the left of Moody Street Bridge. Cronin’s Landing has 281 housing units and 25,500 square feet of retail space.**

### Wilmington

According to town planner Lynn Duncan, Wilmington, rezoned its relatively small town center located at a commuter rail station in 1994 to encourage mixed-use development. No projects were built until a sewerage treatment system was completed in 2002. Since then, a developer has built a three-story building with 8 apartments on two floors over a ground floor with retail uses. A second such building is being erected, while a third is in the planning stages. Wilmington’s town center is developing more of a presence than it has know before.

## **Communities in Early Stages of Encouraging Mixed-Use Development**

### Cape Cod

Cape Cod is a laboratory for dealing with growth issues. In 1990, a local referendum established the Cape Cod Commission, a regional planning agency with the authority to regulate development projects with regional impacts. Over the years, the Commission has tried to control sprawl by requiring large projects to pay for mitigation of their impacts on traffic, open space, water resources, and community character. The agency has modified many development proposals and turned down some projects like big box stores. In tandem with the Commission’s regulation, Cape Cod towns have aggressively purchased open space in order to prevent development from taking place in areas valued for their natural qualities. In 1999, voters adopted the Cape Cod Land Bank, which used a 3% surcharge on real estate taxes to raise funds for open space purchases. This initiative spurred the passage of the Massachusetts Community Preservation Act, which empowers communities across the state to undertake similar efforts.

Despite these measures, Cape Cod still struggles to contain. sprawl. In the Cape Cod Commission’s recently-adopted third *Regional Policy Plan* (2002), the Commission is providing incentives for development to take place in concentrated “growth/activity centers.”<sup>6</sup> There is a growing sentiment that new, more compact development patterns need to be adopted because open space conservation, transportation improvements, and growth management efforts cannot effectively counteract sprawl by themselves.

Hyannis, the largest downtown area on Cape Cod, is a leader in changing its zoning to encourage housing to be built on two floors over ground floor retail. A market study done for Hyannis confirmed the economic rationale for this strategy by finding a need for more housing and office space, but not more retail. Other Cape towns are considering zoning changes for their centers, but nothing significant has yet occurred.

**Figure 14: Gloucester—Rail line curves through Gloucester from left to right, with station next to two large warehouses in center. Boston Society of Architects' Density Conference sought designs for site below railroad tracks.**

**Figure 15: “Gloucester Green” proposal, by Fox & Fowle, Architects, New York, NY, has apartment buildings curving along railroad tracks.**

### Gloucester

The Boston Society of Architects' September, 2003 Conference on “Density: Myth & Reality” featured a competition for designing dense projects at 3 sites in Greater Boston. The City of Gloucester nominated a site near its commuter rail station to get some fresh ideas about creating transit-oriented development near its train station. The two winning designs proposed by competing architects were referred to as “Gloucester Green” and “Leaves of Grass.” The “Gloucester Green” proposal (Fox & Fowle, Architects, New York, NY) organized 351 new housing units in a sweeping crescent along the railroad alignment and combined them with 170,000 square feet of retail, office, and civic space. The “Leaves of Grass” design created a major open space at the train station and sited 661 housing units and 176,000 square feet of retail and commercial space on the edges of the site. The developed edges were scaled to make a scaled-down transition to the existing neighborhoods around the site and shape streetscapes that would connect to Gloucester's downtown. Given Gloucester's existing compact 19<sup>th</sup>-century townscape, the “Gloucester Green” submission may be more sensible because it has half as many housing units.

Whether or not the city pursues the design competition scenarios, with their urban densities, remains to be seen. In any case, Gloucester is experiencing redevelopment near the station. Station Place, being built on the site of an old gas station, will have 7 housing units above ground-floor retail. A \$3 million federal grant is paying for expansion of a 20-car commuter parking lot to one with 100 spaces. Although this move will encourage rail ridership, it will use land that could be devoted to mixed-use development.

According to Grants Administrator Sarah Buck, the town is encouraging mixed-use redevelopment of a nearby 7-acre former industrial site and the site of the Lepage Glue Factory near the West Gloucester train station. The Lepage factory will have 39 rental units, with 8 set aside for low-income families with less than a \$24,000 income for four people. These projects have been stimulated in part by \$1.6 million in streetscape improvements and the creation of a mixed-use Village Overlay District.

### Marlboro

Marlboro Town Planner Al Lima describes a public attitude in the suburban I-495 corridor that opposes new density because of fears that it will destroy long-beloved communities. Lima says the only way to make density acceptable is by developing a “New Suburbanism,” which creates infill projects in town centers and at brownfield sites. Marlboro commissioned a consultant study of the downtown core and 6 additional commercial sites for new mixed-use development opportunities. The study recommended

3 sites as being appropriate for infill housing with the others being able to accommodate retail and office uses.<sup>7</sup>

### Marshfield

Marshfield is using mixed-use development to create a thriving downtown where there has been a sprawling strip with vacant properties. Marshfield's main business district has never had much density because the town center was historically small. Town leaders want to create a more vital town center in order to create an alternative to the commercial strip and boost local businesses. A mixed-use overlay district is to be brought before town meeting in fall, 2003. The overlay district would call for mixed uses, full lot coverage by buildings, and street frontages at the sidewalk. The town is supporting redevelopment with a new sewer line and streetscape improvements. The parcel with the greatest potential for redevelopment is a shopping center parking lot whose owner is content with the status quo.<sup>8</sup>

### Wakefield

Wakefield recently adopted a master plan that encourages mixed uses and greater density in the town center and near the commuter rail stations. The town has obtained a grant under the Citizens Housing and Planning Association's (CHAPA) Smart Growth Demonstration projects, which is funding a consultant to help revise the zoning to encourage mixed uses.

### Weymouth

Weymouth is another older large suburb that has adopted a master plan (2000) to encourage mixed-use development. The plan seeks to focus development in its four commercial villages by allowing buildings to abut the sidewalk and adjoining buildings (0-lot lines), locating parking in the rear, and building housing above retail space. The town is in the process of rethinking zoning to encourage denser development at projected Greenbush commuter stations at Weymouth Landing and Jackson Square.

## **Public Transit Stations Outside of Downtowns**

Some of the most promising sites for compact mixed-use development are at commuter rail and T stops in Greater Boston. The opportunities in town centers served by transit are evident. There are also opportunities for new transit-oriented development (TOD) at rail stations outside of town centers, many of which are currently surrounded by parking lots and open space. These locations tend to allow a blank slate for development. They hold great potential, but can yield sprawl if municipalities do not zone the area for compact mixed-use projects. Commonwealth Development Chief Doug Foy is making TODs near MBTA stations one of his top "smart growth" priorities.

The MBTA, with its agent Transit Realty Associates, has been identifying sites that it owns near transit stations for new development. Not only can this encourage denser development and increased transit ridership, the land sales can make money for the

MBTA. The MBTA estimates that revenues from its real estate deals may reach \$15 million in fiscal year 2004.<sup>9</sup> MBTA Director of Planning Dennis Dizoglio is developing a “Livable Transit Centers” program, which will work with partner communities to develop TODs, some of them on surplus property owned by the MBTA. One such project is an 80-unit housing complex built on air rights over the train tracks at Porter Square on the Cambridge-Somerville border (the first MBTA air rights development project). Another MBTA project is being planned near the North Quincy station, where 240 housing units and a 500-car parking facility will be built.

The biggest project would be at North Point on MBTA property around the Lechmere Station in Cambridge, Somerville, and Charlestown. Developed in phases by Guilford Transportation Industries Inc. and Spaulding & Slye Colliers, North Point could create up to 5 million square feet of residential (2,500 units), office and retail space, making it the area’s single largest development in the modern era. The Lechmere Station will be relocated to serve the new project. Construction is projected to start in 2004.<sup>10</sup>

The power of public transportation to promote concentrated mixed-use development is evident from the projected impacts for the Urban Ring. The Urban Ring is a proposed rapid transit loop circling from Logan Airport through Chelsea, Everett, Somerville, Cambridge, Brookline, Boston’s Longwood Medical Center to Columbia Point and UMass Boston. It would connect the spokes on the T, namely the Blue, Orange, Red, and Green Lines, so that passengers would not have to travel downtown to change to another line and then travel out to another peripheral location. Although the Urban Ring has been in the planning process for a number of years, the state has not yet decided about whether to fund the \$2-\$3 billion project.

According to a report “Coming Around,” by Charles C. Euchner and Anthony Flint and published by the Rappaport Institute for Greater Boston, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University (2003), the Urban Ring would stimulate a great deal of new development at station nodes along the route. Over 25 years, the transit project could lead to an additional 15.2 million square feet of commercial and institutional space (an increase of 14% to 122.9 million square feet), almost 37,000 new jobs (18% growth to 241,000), and population growth of 16,215 (7% growth to 238,000). These numbers demonstrate potential for improved transit service to promote new development near station nodes.<sup>11</sup>

### Ashland

One of the foremost examples of new transit-oriented development (TOD) near a commuter rail station is at Ashland, which has a relatively new stop on the Worcester-Boston line. When Ashland was getting a commuter rail stop, there was debate about whether the station should go in the center of town near existing stores and homes, but with little room for commuter parking, or outside of the center where hundreds of parking spaces could be created. Although the town center location would be more in keeping with smart growth principles, the choice was made for the commuter parking lot location about a mile west of the town center.

This has created an opportunity for TOD. According to town planner Stephen Kerlin, the town recently rezoned the area around the commuter rail station as a Rail Transit District, basing it on California and Oregon models. There is substantial abutting vacant land for JPI, developers of multi-family projects in Salem and nearby Westboro, to develop Jefferson at Ashland, a development with 500 “luxury” apartments in 3-story buildings. Ninety units would be set aside for seniors. The development, which is still in the permitting stages, will have one- and two-bedroom units, but no three-bedroom units because the town fears the impact of additional schoolchildren on the municipal budget. The project will be strictly residential, without retail or office uses.

A project of comparable size is projected for an 80-100-acre site about a mile to the east of Ashland’s town center. The Faford Corporation’s project will have 528 condos, with a first phase of 60 units. Although it will not be convenient for walking to the train station, it will have 75,000 square feet of retail space. The design will separate the residential and retail uses and not provide a housing-over-retail configuration.

**Figure 16: Ashland—Rail line crosses diagonally from upper left, with station and commuter lot in center. Proposed 500-unit JPI project would be in lower left.**

### Medford

North of Boston on the MBTA’s Orange Line, there is a lot of dense development near the Wellington Circle Station. Telecom City (discussed under Office Parks) is the largest planned project, but there are others as well. The Mystic Center project is to be built on a vacant 15-acre parcel, where a 1950s shopping center once stood. National Development plans up to 8 buildings on property, including 500-600 apartments and condos, a hotel, and office and retail space. The developer will incorporate the 160,000 square-foot Deutsche Bank office building and 2,000-car parking garage that it has purchased. Beginning construction by 2004, the \$130 million project includes \$5.4 million to redesign the traffic pattern at congested Wellington Circle. Starting at the same time nearby will be Residences at Wellington Place, 137 housing units developed by Abbott Development.

### Green Line Stops and Other MBTA Stations

The MBTA has identified additional stations as sites for transit-oriented development with its agent William “Buzz” Constable, of Transit Realty. Some of these sites are located along the proposed Greenbush Line, which only received final go-ahead from Governor Romney in September, 2003, after months of delay because of public opposition. The Greenbush Line will traverse the South Shore towns of Braintree, Weymouth, Hingham, Cohasset, and Scituate. These are built-out suburbs that have some infill potential near commuter rail stations. Scituate, with its Scituate Harbor Redevelopment project, demonstrates the kind of smaller scale infill developments that could appear in these communities.

Elsewhere in the region, the Riverside Station, at the Green Line terminus in Newton, has potential for another one million square feet of mixed-use development if a parking garage is built on the site. Since Riverside is located near the Worcester commuter rail line, the new development could also tie into that rail line. The MBTA is also targeting redevelopment at a 37-acre brownfield site at Readville on the Boston-Dedham line with rail stop. In Revere, the city is planning a transit-oriented development for parking lots at the Wonderland Blue Line Station overlooking Revere Beach. Around the recently-opened Newburyport commuter rail station there is surplus MBTA property is available for a transit-oriented development.

### Opposition to Transit-Oriented Development

Even though there is a widespread demand for new housing and denser development across Greater Boston, sometimes communities oppose such developments. Opposition often has to do with the scale of projects and perceived changes to the town's image. For some opponents, it's straight-out NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard). In Malden and Melrose, neighbors have been resisting 575 units plus retail space proposed for a site near Oak Grove Station at end of Orange Line. They have regarded the scale of the project as too large for the site. Smaller towns that have traditionally been more rural in character and have lacked substantial centers tend to be most opposed to TODs. Development is constrained in many rural suburbs by a lack of public sewer service and a limited water supply. Some communities that have opposed dense development at transit stations include Holbrook (population 10,785) and Kingston (11,780).<sup>12</sup> Such opposition does not mean that transit-oriented development is impossible to locate in Greater Boston. However, there may be opposition, usually from concerns about the design and environmental impacts. Developers of transit-oriented development have to be opportunistic and go where the community is ready to accept it.

### Holbrook

One of the more controversial transit-oriented developments has been proposed in Holbrook for a site near the Holbrook-Randolph Old Colony Line station. Developer Joseph R. Mullins Company proposed to build Old English Square, with 343 condos, on a 79-acre site. Needing a two-thirds vote for rezoning, the project received only 58% of the votes at town meeting (98 of 163 votes). Opponents criticized the large scale of the project and expressed a concern that the project might turn into low-income housing.

### Kingston

At the Kingston commuter rail station, Town Planner Tom Bott has been trying to encourage compact mixed-use development. Abutting the 1,000-space parking lot there are sand quarries and other vacant land available for development. These parcels, located near Route 3, the Kingston Mall, and a sewage treatment plant, are in the middle of one of the region's fastest growing communities. Bott twice has tried to persuade town meeting to change the zoning around the train station from industrial to a multi-use "transit village" and twice has been rejected. The first time, in 2001, the proposal lost by a majority, but the second time, in 2002, it won with 55% of the vote, but this was less

than the two-thirds required for rezoning. Some opponents, especially owners of upscale homes near the train station, believed that the rezoning proposal could permit an overwhelming density near the train station and ruin Kingston's rural character. Another reason for opposition was concern about rising education costs due to new families moving to the "transit village."<sup>13</sup>

Ironically, Kingston may get what it does not want anyway because a developer, Beacon Properties, is pursuing a Chapter 40B 780-unit affordable housing project at the site. According to state law, 40B affordable housing projects can circumvent town zoning, though projects that are completely out of scale with the town have to reduce the number of units to an appropriate level before proceeding with the project. This situation has put the Town in a negotiating position with the developer in which it is trying to realize some elements of the "transit village."

**Figure 17: Kingston—Commuter rail station and parking lot in center, with sand quarry, above it, the site of proposed transit village. Kingston Mall is above sand quarry.**

### **Redevelopment of Office/Industrial Parks**

There is potential for mixed-use development at office parks, both as redevelopment of older parks and as a paradigm for new office parks. There are dozens of business parks scattered across Greater Boston, especially along the Route 128 and I-495 beltways, that could be candidates for mixed-use development. The idea of adding housing and complementary retail at business parks is being discussed. At a symposium sponsored by the Builders Association of Greater Boston, David Begelfer, CEO of the Massachusetts Chapter of the National Association of Industrial and Office Properties (NAIOP), said that developers would like to incorporate housing and retail in office parks.<sup>14</sup> There is a surplus of office space during this economic downturn, but housing and retail space is very much in demand. Probably the better opportunities for integrating housing are in office parks, which often have attractive settings with ample green space, not in industrial and warehouse parks, which are not usually conducive to for residential living.

One obstacle to mixed uses in business parks is municipal zoning laws which do not permit residential or retail uses in business parks. This reflects the mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century theory of zoning that different land uses should be separated. Planners Peter Calthorpe and William Fulton, in *The Regional City*, say of office parks:

Under current zoning, these primary work destinations are isolated and clustered into districts near highway interchanges. Through some bizarre identification with factories, offices are seen as a poor fit with village, town, and urban centers. To the contrary, they should be integrated into our mixed-use centers. Such integration adds strength to the retail component of the center, reinforces the transit system supporting the center, and increases the value of any of its civic uses.<sup>15</sup>

Besides being influenced by antiquated zoning, many suburbs are also leaning away from allowing residences in office parks because they are wary that new housing units could attract families and increase municipal education expenditures.

Perhaps the biggest difficulty with changing the patterns of office park development may be inertia. Suburban office development in recent decades has sprawled everywhere and has avoided the mixing of uses. Robert Lang, Director of the Metropolitan Institute at Virginia Tech, argues that there is more office space scattered in “edgeless cities” than in traditional downtowns or the even emerging “edge cities that have been identified by Joel Garreau.<sup>16</sup> Changing the pattern of “office sprawl” will require a serious change in Massachusetts policies.

### I-495 Corridor

Interesting opportunities to integrate housing into office parks are being missed along Greater Boston’s highway corridors. EMC is planning to build over one million square feet of office space in along I-495 in Westboro and Southboro, but no housing or retail is included that could introduce mixed uses and reduce some of the projected 8,000 extra car trips per day. Cisco Systems has recently opened 3 of 10 permitted office buildings in Boxboro. These structures have 426,000 square feet of space with 500 employees (the final project will total 1.9 million square feet). Though some in the community have advocated inclusion of housing, the Cisco Systems project follows the conventional “campus” model that excludes non-corporation uses. The attractively-landscaped campus provides walking trails and conservation lands and conveys a bucolic impression, but ample opportunities for mixed-use residential development go unrealized.

**Figure 18: Boxboro—Cisco Systems has recently opened 3 buildings on its campus. Opportunities for mixed-use development are being overlooked in traditional office parks.**

### Lakeville

The Lakeville-Middleboro commuter rail station, located near the intersection of I-495 and Route 105, offers an interesting opportunity for mixed-use development. A developer is seeking to build a retail center of 13,500 square feet at the commuter rail stop. It could accommodate up to 6 retailers, including a coffee shop serving commuters. Adjacent to Lakeville’s 850-space parking lot, 71-acre Corporate Park has approximately 51 acres or approximately 11 building sites still available for development. The Southeastern Regional Planning and Economic Development District (SRPEDD) has suggested that the Corporate Park be allowed to add residential and retail uses so that the business park could become a mixed-use transit village. But the selectmen have opposed the proposal out of concern that new housing would add students to the school system and increase the town’s budget. Lakeville, a town of 9,821, has preferred to see housing built on large lots in the conventional suburban pattern. Another opportunity for Transit-Oriented Development arose when the Commonwealth sought to sell off the closed Lakeville State Hospital, which is less than ½ mile from the commuter rail station. The Commonwealth

sold the property to developers who want to build strip retail on the Route 105 frontage and elderly housing on the rear of the 70-acre parcel. The town supported zoning for these uses instead of permitting mixed-uses near the railroad station.

**Figure 19: Lakeville—I-495 bisects photo from left to right, with rail line curving below it. Commuter lot is in center, and Lakeville Corporate Park is in bottom half. The vacant Lakeville State Hospital property is on the left of Route 105, which runs top to bottom on the left. Mixed-uses are not permitted in this area.**

### Marshfield

Marshfield has rezoned a 100-acre industrial-zoned parcel for mixed-use development, with a particular emphasis on housing. According to Town Planner Angus Jennings, the mixed-use overlay district, off Route 139 near Route 3, creates three sections for development. Each section, with a minimum of 30 acres, will have a 1 ½-acre public green around which buildings will be arranged. The first section has a proposal for a supermarket with a café in front, an assisted living facility with 100+ beds, and additional retail and senior housing. Although such a development pattern may not create a true downtown, it will create a development node that is denser and more pedestrian-friendly than the usual commercial strip.

### Needham

Needham is a community where a proposal to place residential mixed-use development in an office park was shot down by business interests. In 2001, the Needham Planning Board, with consultant Goody, Clancy & Associates, prepared a plan for redeveloping the 215-acre New England Business Center, located off Route 128. The plan included developing a mixed-use area as well as a redesign of the office park that would create more urban densities, heights, and streetscapes. Most of the plan passed town meeting, but the mixed-use portion was removed. Business interests in the office park opposed housing, fearing that the new residents might ultimately oppose business expansion in their “neighborhood.” The Planning Board hopes to revisit this issue as part of its efforts to find sites for affordable housing in the community.

### Telecom City, Medford-Malden-Everett

Until recently, developers of Telecom City, which straddles Medford, Malden, and Everett, wanted to follow the single-function office park model. Telecom City was originally designed as a suburban-style corporate park for an urban area. Only in July, 2003, did the project decide to add housing to the mix. Developer Preotle Lane & Associates, of New York, plans to include 200 housing units with 440,000 square feet of office space in the first phase of Telecom City. Phase II (in Everett), projected to include 700,000 square feet of commercial space, could also include housing. According to project manager Peter Hollands, the project has added housing because of urgings from Governor Romney’s “smart growth”-oriented administration. Telecom City also has

adjusted to market realities, recognizing that housing is scarce and office space is abundant.

**Figure 20: Telecom City—Rail line bisects site from top to bottom. Wellington MBTA station and parking facility is bottom center. Telecom City development will be built to right of rail line on both sides of river.**

### Westwood

One of the more intriguing redevelopment concepts related to an industrial park is at a 76-acre industrial/warehouse district in Westwood situated between Route 1, Route 28, and the commuter rail line. The Westwood industrial park was one of three sites in the Boston Society of Architects' Density Design Competition. Westwood's Economic Development Officer Susan Yanofsky nominated this site for the competition to get some fresh ideas about deriving more economic and community value from an aging industrial park.

The two winning designs are intended as “talking pieces” to inspire dialogue in Westwood. The more nuanced design is called “Westwood Square: From Suburban Space to Town Place” (designed by Wendy Kohn, Will Fleissig, & Tim Van Meter, Denver, CO). It levels the industrial park and builds a neo-urbanist town center around a central “civic spine” lined with civic buildings and leading from Route 1 to the relocated Islington commuter rail station. The plan accommodates a broad range of uses adapted to the context of the site, ranging from big box retail along Route 1 to smaller retail with housing on the upper floors along the spine. There is an array of housing types including 5-story apartment buildings, row houses, and single-family detached homes similar in scale to the surrounding neighborhood. The plan calls for over 1,300 housing units and 856,000 square feet of retail and commercial space. A few “quirky buildings” are scattered through to create a sense of character. Market feasibility was not part of the submission, so the conceptual design is not on an implementation track. Nevertheless, it is provocative about what can be done with aging industrial parks.

**Figure 21: Westwood—Left diagonal greenbelt is rail line and right diagonal highway is Route 1. In between is Westwood industrial zone, for which Boston Society of Architects' Density Conference sought mixed-use redevelopment plans.**

**Figure 22: Westwood—One of Design Competition winners, by Wendy Kohn, Will Fleissig, & Tim Van Meter, Denver, CO. Aerial view shows commercial uses on right, next to Route 1, and residential uses on left near commuter rail station.**

## Woburn

According to William “Buzz” Constable, of Transit Realty, there are intriguing possibilities for mixed-use development at commuter rail stations near office parks in Woburn--the Anderson Regional Transportation Center and the former Mishawum station, which was closed when the nearby Anderson station recently opened. Both rail stops are surrounded by vacant land and office buildings that could be melded into mixed-use development through the introduction of housing and retail.

**Figure 23: Woburn—Rail line runs top to bottom on right, with Anderson Regional Transportation Center and commuter lot in middle. Opportunities for new mixed-use development and redevelopment are on left side.**

**Figure 24: Woburn—Former Mishawum commuter rail station and parking lot near top center between highways. This is a possible mixed-use development site.**

### **Redevelopment of Existing Shopping Centers and Strips**

An untapped opportunity for mixed-use redevelopment is in suburban “greyfields.” According to planners Peter Calthorpe and William Fulton, in *The Regional City: Planning for the End of Sprawl* (2001), “greyfields” are “the low-density commercial zones known for their relentless surface parking lots and single-story buildings.”<sup>17</sup> “Greyfield” sites include dead malls, scattered underused parcels that line commercial strips, and surplus military bases and public institutions.

Architect Jonathan Barnett believes that decaying underutilized commercial areas are prime sites for redevelopment. Barnett argues that obsolete and derelict highway-oriented developments are rapidly becoming a major problem for developers as well as for communities.<sup>18</sup> Compact mixed-use developments are the most profitable reuse in many cases. Barnett points to Mizner Park, in Boca Raton, FL, as an example (one of the few successful ones) of an outmoded shopping center being turned into a mixed-use New Urbanist development in the heart of the community. The 1991 project includes 500,000 square feet of office and retail space, 272 apartments, an art museum, and a performing arts amphitheater.

Greater Boston has not seen many “greyfield” commercial strip redevelopments, especially compared to fast growing areas of the South and the West. The pressure for new development has not been so great in New England as to force extensive redevelopment of underutilized commercial parcels.

Currently there are only portents for transforming the vast commercial strips of Greater Boston into an archipelago of denser, mixed-use islands. The commercial strip, with its big box stores, fast food franchises, and scattered shopping centers, is one of the dominant forces in shaping our sprawling development patterns. Most corporate retailers

and most shoppers avoid downtowns and neighborhood centers and focus on the commercial strip. That is the reality and it will not change soon. The *Boston Globe* (“Store Chains Press Ahead with Growth,” August 10, 2003) recently reported a pent-up retailing boom that is expected to sweep Greater Boston. Each of the new commercial projects described by the *Globe* article are located on commercial strips—on Donald Lynch Boulevard in Marlboro, Route 9 in Chestnut Hill and Natick, and in Plainville off I-495.<sup>19</sup>

### Hingham

Proposed new retail development in Greater Boston is following the conventional pattern of bigger boxes sprawling along the highway strip with scant efforts to create more of a pedestrian-friendly mixed-use environment, as is happening in other parts of the country. It is ironic that the latest trend in retail marketing, the “lifestyle center,” is new to this area. The “lifestyle center” is a 150,000-500,000-square-foot development which resembles an open-air “main street” and is conducive to leisure-time visits to a mix of restaurants, entertainment, and upscale shopping. It incorporates big boxes into a more user-friendly environment.

S.R. Weiner and Associates, Inc., of Chestnut Hill, is opening a “lifestyle center” in Hingham in 2004. The Derby Street Shoppes, located off Exit 15 of Route 3, will replace a 1950s shopping center with a Building 19 store with 66 stores and restaurants laid out in a “main street” format. S.R. Weiner, which owns 58 varied shopping centers across New England, has a comparable project in the works for Millbury, MA, off Route 146, at The Shoppes at the Blackstone Valley. The stores at these “lifestyle centers” include Barnes & Noble, Eastern Mountain Sports, Whole Foods, Starbuck’s, Williams Sonoma, and comparable upscale chain retailers.<sup>20</sup>

“Lifestyle centers” like the ones in Hingham and Millbury are single-use developments. They do not incorporate offices and housing in the same way Mashpee Commons does. Nevertheless, they demonstrate a growing dissatisfaction with the commercial strip and its aesthetic jumble, yawning acres of asphalt, and relentless in-and-out driving through traffic jams. Though the sense of community offered by “lifestyle centers” is relatively superficial, they are more welcoming to pedestrians than the forbidding commercial strip. They use land more efficiently and require fewer in-and-out auto trips by shoppers. “Lifestyle centers” may not be the best solution for encouraging retailers to pursue compact mixed-use development patterns, but if they allow for connections to neighboring housing and workplaces, they are a start.

### Mashpee Commons

The most notable example of a redeveloped shopping center in Massachusetts is Mashpee Commons, in Mashpee, on Cape Cod. It is celebrated because Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk designed the 1988 master plan for turning a failing strip shopping center into a new town center. Mashpee Commons, developed in the “New Urbanism” style by developers from Providence Arnold Chace and Douglas Storrs, has over 90 stores, 5 restaurants, a cinema, post office, small offices, and 13 housing units.

Up to 480 additional housing units are currently planned. The idea is to develop them compactly in order to create a “neighborhood” adjacent to the commercial district. Mashpee Commons was an early example of the multi-use “lifestyle centers,” resembling traditional town centers, which are now being built by national developers as a “main street” alternative to cookie-cutter shopping malls.

**Figure 25: Mashpee Commons—Above retail space, Mashpee Commons has offices and some housing units.**

### Natick

There is a novel concept project in the talking stages—it is at the Natick Mall, which is adding 500,000 square feet retail to 1.5 million already in operation. As part of the expansion, the Natick Mall is considering building residences right in the mall, targeting a market of people who want to live right in the middle of the scores of restaurants and stores provided by an upscale mall. Such a project might not be anyone’s idea of a traditional town center, but it could inject more of a community feel into shopping malls while encouraging denser development patterns

### Newton

The suburbs of Boston have nothing that compares with Mashpee Commons. The closest thing is the practice of shoe-horning apartment buildings into commercial strips. Examples include the recent Avalon at Newton Highlands, which has 294 “luxury” rental units. The project has no retail of its own, but there is a McDonald’s and a Mobil station right in front and an array of restaurants and retail stores along Newton’s Needham Street commercial strip. This is not true mixed-use “New Urbanism,” but it is more compact development.

**Figure 26: Newton—Avalon at Newton Highlands is located off Needham Street behind a commercial strip.**

## **Institutional/Military Facility Reuse**

### South Weymouth Naval Air Station

The opportunities for redeveloping former military bases are limited. The prime candidate is the South Weymouth Naval Air Station, located in parts of Abington, Rockland, and Weymouth. The air station has been the subject of plans evolving toward the “New Urbanism” model. After the air base closed in 1996, a study committee proposed building office space and elderly housing. Then, in 1999 the Mills Corporation proposed building a two-million-square foot “hypermall” with a cluster of big box stores. Criticism of the extraordinary traffic impacts—60,000 vehicle trips per day—convinced the community to withdraw support for the project. After the demise of the Mills Corporation project, the community produced a proposal for 300 units of elderly housing

(to avoid attracting schoolchildren), 300,000 square feet of office space, ball fields, and a golf course. Although granting a permit for this project, the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection advised that it did not meet “smart growth” standards and suggested further reworking.

The South Shore Tri-Town Development Corporation, which is spearheading the redevelopment of the 1,450-acre base, is now working with the Lennar Corporation, of Irvine, CA, on a new mixed-use plan, which includes office space, shopping, and housing that would even include units for families.<sup>21</sup> The “New Urbanism”-style project might have its own commuter rail station to encourage the use of public transit. The Lennar Corporation is noted for redeveloping closed military bases in San Francisco and at the Mare Island Shipyard and Hunters Point Shipyard, both on San Francisco Bay. The trademark of these projects is mixed uses. Mare Island is ultimately supposed to have seven million square feet of commercial, office, and industrial, space as well as 1,400 housing units and abundant recreational opportunities. It is expected that the new Lennar plan will be brought to Weymouth town meeting for approval in spring, 2004.

**Figure 27: Weymouth—South Weymouth Naval Air Station is on right side. Route 18 bisects photo from top to bottom. Rail line crosses Route 18 and runs next to military base. Significant mixed-use development is anticipated here.**

#### Commonwealth of Massachusetts Surplus Properties

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts is the biggest property owner in the state, and it has many parcels of surplus property that could be used for mixed-use and transit-oriented development. The Massachusetts Division of Capital Asset Management, in fact, regularly sells parcels for development. Some of the biggest opportunities for mixed-use developments are at vacant state hospitals, some of which have been closed for two decades or more. For various reasons, redeveloping these properties has proven difficult. There has been a lot of red tape. In some cases, the historic structures have proven costly to rehabilitate, especially since time and fires have done extensive damage. Even if the buildings cannot be reused, the land itself might be developed for new uses.

Some state hospitals that are potential development candidates are Danvers, Foxboro, Worcester, Metropolitan, Taunton, Medfield, and Rutland. Currently, the Commonwealth is entertaining two development bids for Boston State Hospital in Mattapan. This 175-acre site is the largest undeveloped area in the city of Boston. Both proposals would build approximately 300 housing units, many of them affordable, as well as some combination of a supermarket, eating places, community facilities, and a job training center.

Although state hospital sites may be suited to mixed-use development and the Romney administration is promoting “smart growth” principles, opportunities are being lost. The Commonwealth has sold the vacant Lakeville State Hospital, which is only ¼ mile from the Lakeville Commuter rail station, to developers who propose to build strip retail and

an elderly housing project on the site and neglect the opportunity for Transit-Oriented Development.

### **“Greenfield” Development**

Although planners are not encouraging developers to create compact mixed-use communities at “greenfield” sites, large-scale projects being built on open land in the metropolitan periphery can follow this pattern. Because of the relatively built-up nature of Eastern Massachusetts, there are few large “greenfield” projects being proposed. It is interesting to note that developers have steered clear of mixed uses when they develop large “greenfield” sites. The natural environment is attractive to residents seeking rural tranquility, so anything seeming to be urban is avoided. The pros and the cons of each “greenfield” site are too complex to discuss in detail here, but brief descriptions provide a sense of the issues to be confronted.

An example of an existing project that could be considered a “greenfield” site is Quincy’s Marina Bay project. Started in the mid-1980s, Marina Bay has over 600 units, offering flats, townhomes, and detached single-family homes in a mix of styles from modern to Nantucket to French Third Empire. Marina Bay has 9 restaurants, shops, an office complex, and recreational facilities. Two additional residential properties have been put up nearby. Facing Boston Harbor, Marina Bay has commuter boat service to downtown Boston and a 685-slip marina. As large parcels of developable land get scarcer, it becomes more difficult to create project like Marina Bay.

A leading current “greenfield” project under consideration is the proposed Villages at Danforth Farm, in the northwest corner of Framingham. The project would have 700 housing units and approximately 4,000 square feet of convenience retail space. The developer National Development has proposed building on 40 of the site’s 150 acres. This housing-oriented Planned Unit Development (PUD) was approved in 1988 to create a use on the site that harmonized with the surrounded residential area. Before this the land was zone to accommodate up to 1.5 million square feet of office or industrial space. The developers, National Development, thought that with 7 housing units per developed acre, the Danforth Farm project would preserve valuable open space while providing needed housing units. Because of the large scale of the project at what had been a farm, there has been widespread opposition. The Framingham Selectmen and Town Meeting are suing the Planning Board for approving the project, and the neighboring Town of Wayland opposes it as well.

An even larger project is the one proposed by the A.D. Makepeace Company in Southeastern Massachusetts. A.D. Makepeace is the state’s largest cranberry grower and its largest private landowner, with 12,000 acres in Plymouth, Carver, and Wareham and smaller holdings in neighboring towns. With a declining cranberry industry and a booming housing market, A.D. Makepeace decided to develop some of its land about 4 years ago. The company sought to pursue “smart growth” development that would cluster buildings and preserve valuable open space—note that 6,000 contiguous acres of its holdings make up the largest unprotected pine barren forest in the country. The

developers originally were trying to work on a development vision with the local communities, but the process broke down. Some citizens sought to stop any significant development on these holdings, no matter how well the project followed “smart growth” prescriptions.

The developer is now working with towns individually and is not attempting a grand master plan. Although plans have not been formally presented, it appears that A.D. Makepeace is moving away from “New Urbanism” approaches and may be pursuing the traditional residential subdivisions, single-use business parks, and strip retail that are permitted by local zoning.

Another large Southeastern Massachusetts development is The Pinehills, in Plymouth. It is instructive about the way “greenfield” projects can develop. The Pinehills is more of a planned residential community than a true mixed-use project. Developed in 9 clustered “villages” on 3,000 acres, The Pinehills has conserved 2,000 acres of the land as open space and has three golf courses (a fourth could be added someday). Of the 2,800 projected housing units, 320 have been built or are under construction. One-third of the units will be set aside for residents over age 55. Development being undertaken by the Del Webb company, which built Sun City, AZ, specializes in age-restricted communities. The commercial heart is the 178-acre Village Green, which now has only a dentist office and a bank, but may eventually have a supermarket. Because of the project’s exclusive nature, the Village Green would essentially serve only residents of the project. The Pinehills is no model of mixed-use development—in fact, mixed ages will not be allowed in certain areas—but it is instructive about development tendencies when large “greenfield” sites are developed. The idea of the gated community, seclusion, and a separation of uses often motivates “greenfield” development, not social pluralism and economic activity.

## Future Directions

The density movement is showing signs of life in suburbs across Greater Boston after lagging West Coast and Sunbelt metropolitan areas. “Smart growth” advocates are discovering that proactive efforts to encourage compact mixed-use development should be a priority.

Long-established suburban towns are beginning to embrace compact mixed-use development as a means to revitalize town centers that have lost businesses to commercial strips. New housing, shops, restaurants, and cultural venues feed off each other, generating a reinforcing growth dynamic. New suburban downtown development improves the local economy, expands the tax base, and enhances the community’s image and quality of life. Canton, Norwood, Quincy, and Waltham are among the communities that recognize this.

Denser development can also increase the supply of affordable housing. With some of the most expensive housing in America and a genuine shortage of affordable housing for working people, many in the Boston area are looking at denser development as a way of reducing land development costs.

The marketplace is recognizing that a growing number of consumers prefer to live in city and town centers for the urbane lifestyle, the enhanced sense of community, and the public transit option. Developers, large and small, are pursuing compact mixed-use projects. Local developers include John S. Marini, Beacon Residential Properties, and Abbott Development. National developers who have been building compact mixed-use project elsewhere in the country have discovered the Boston area. They include JPI, of Irving, TX, Avalon Bay Communities, Inc, of Alexandria, VA, and Lennar Corporation, of Irvine, CA. With the emerging interest of large development companies in mixed-use projects, it makes sense for communities to think about how to harness large-scale capital investment to achieve these objectives.

The Urban Land Institute (ULI), a national developer’s trade association, claims that “One of the hottest trends in real estate is the development of town centers and urban villages with mixed uses in pedestrian-friendly settings.” A ULI brochure goes on to advise that “These development concepts—frequently complex and difficult to undertake—are still relatively undersupplied in the market.” A ULI study by Jim Heid, of Urban Green LLC, estimates that over the next couple decades 19% of new housing development will take place in cities, 26% will take place as suburban infill, and 55% will take occur in “greenfields.”<sup>22</sup>

It is obvious that many obstacles must be overcome if compact mixed-use developments are to become a significant trend in suburban Boston. In most communities within the I-495 beltway, undeveloped land is scarce. Massachusetts zoning laws, which the American Planning Association ranks among the most outmoded in the country, have yet to be modernized to encourage “smart growth” and compact mixed-use development. A coalition of planners, community groups, and elected officials has formed the Zoning

Reform Working Group (ZRWG), which is promoting legislation to remake the state zoning law for the first time in over 30 years (see “Zoning Reform in Massachusetts” website [www.masszoningreform.org](http://www.masszoningreform.org)). Zoning reform advocates are seeking to encourage compact development by curtailing such incentives to sprawl as the “grandfathering” provision, which allows a landowner to freeze zoning on his parcel for eight years by submitting a preliminary subdivision plan, and the Approval Not Required (ANR) provision that allows unlimited divisions of individual parcels along existing roads to proceed without meeting the zoning requirements applicable to new subdivisions. The zoning reform bill also would promote consistency between municipal master plans and actual zoning.

Builders and real estate interests are nervous that zoning reform may make new development more difficult. Framers of zoning reform legislation are seeking to ensure that a new system of land-use regulation encourages compact mixed-use development and affordable housing construction while giving municipalities more effective control over the development process. Another way for the state to make family housing more acceptable in mixed-use settings would be to revamp school financing formulas so that municipalities do not find it fiscally disadvantageous to accept new family housing.

Mixing residential and commercial uses in the same building also can be constrained by financing complexities. Housing does not always co-exist well with retail in the same project. They each have different market and financing requirements, especially when housing construction is being funded through the Massachusetts Housing Finance Authority (MHFA) and other government housing lending programs. Depending upon the location and design of retail space, it may not derive enough business from local residents and commuters and not attract outside shoppers. Retail space may not generate sufficient revenues to carrying its share of the debt. Multi-family housing may work best when developed next to retail in a downtown, producing a horizontal mixing of uses.

Perhaps most importantly, planners must develop a broad public constituency for compact mixed-use development. Civic leaders need to put forward a scenario for these new development patterns that is desirable and economically and politically viable. A starting point might be projecting where to locate Greater Boston’s future growth. If the region were to grow by 10% over 20 years, 300,000 people and 120,000 housing units (2.5 persons per unit) would have to be added. This rate of growth seems reasonable since the 101 cities and towns in the Metropolitan Area Planning Council’s jurisdictional area grew by 4.9%, or 143,460, to 3,066,394 between 1990 and 2000. Since the region has shrinking opportunities for “greenfield” subdivision development, most new housing would have to be infill or redevelopment. This implies the need to look strategically at promoting development in city and town centers and redevelopment at “greyfield” commercial strip sites. This has implication for economic development as well as affordable housing and the quality of life.

The Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) took a step toward shaping this scenario for future growth when it designated 15 Concentrated Development Centers in its *MetroPlan 2000* (formally designated as of 1997), with concurrence of local municipalities. Concentrated Development Centers are places uniquely suited for dense

development because of their infrastructure, zoning, and a local desire for increased development. The Concentrated Development Centers include the Boston-Cambridge core, Alewife, Chelsea, Malden, Lynn, Peabody, Salem, Gloucester, Quincy, Waltham, Natick, Framingham, Franklin, West Acton, and South Acton.<sup>23</sup>

MAPC, which proposed regulatory streamlining in order to promote development in Concentrated Development Centers, is starting a new regional planning initiative, MetroFuture: Regional Vision and Growth Strategy, which could further advance the vision of concentrating development where it is most appropriate. Perhaps this planning process will recognize that town centers in dozens of other communities also have potential for growth.

Some state “smart growth” initiatives, including reformed land use regulation, being developed by Commonwealth Development Chief Doug Foy, are likely to promote compact mixed-use development. Foy has made clear that his agency, which coordinates environmental, transportation, and housing and community development issues, intends to fund infrastructure improvements only where the community is capable of accommodating it.

Foy’s agency has not yet specifically indicated what areas should be growth centers, but it might follow the recommendations of The Commonwealth Housing Task Force outlined in the report “Building Our Heritage: A Housing Strategy for Smart Growth and Economic Development.” This recent report, authored by Barry Bluestone, Edward C. Carman, and Eleanor White, has called for municipalities creating “overlay zoning districts,” which would accommodate new units of affordable housing near transit nodes, in town centers, and in underutilized commercial areas. The report recommends that the state offer a “density bonus” of \$2,000 to \$3,000 per affordable housing unit paid to communities that accept them in overlay districts. On top of this, the state should pay 100% of school costs for schoolchildren living in these units because some municipalities are resistant to paying educational costs for additional students. A third incentive would direct state infrastructure spending to communities with overlay districts. The housing task force report estimates that this initiative could result in enough land being zoned to accommodate the construction of 33,000 affordable housing units over 10 years. This would not only make overall housing more affordable, it would stem sprawl and revive city and town centers.<sup>24</sup>

Despite policies that states and localities enact, compact mixed-use development will not do away with sprawl. Rutgers University urban policy professor Robert W. Burchell has written that a 25% reduction in the sprawl growth of population in rural and undeveloped counties is achievable through current land use management methods. This sprawl growth would be channeled to urban and suburban counties that are already developed and have the infrastructure to accommodate it.<sup>25</sup> The Urban Land Institute projections prepared by Jim Heid are comparable in scope. The sprawl pattern of land development is long established in this country—the best we may do is to encourage pockets of concentrated development, urbanistic design, and public transportation service.

Development is place-specific and requires an “opportunistic” approach that locates compact mixed-use projects where there are appropriate redevelopment sites. Under the “opportunistic” approach, some developments will be mixed-use and follow the principles of “New Urbanism,” but many will be single-use housing, retail, office, or institutional projects in a setting which includes the complementary uses. Development will come to some communities more readily than others. Some places that oppose specific developments today might be persuaded to accept developments with lesser impacts on another occasion.

The march of compact mixed-use development will be incremental and locally-oriented. It has the potential to be a major trend in Greater Boston over the next decade, or at least until all the best sites have been cherry-picked for development.

### **Ten Ways to Promote Compact Mixed-Use Development**

1. Be “opportunistic” and work in locations where mixed-use development fits.
2. Use compact mixed-use projects to revitalize downtowns.
3. Build near transit stations.
4. Use mixed-use development to create more affordable housing.
5. Increase density by building 3-5 story buildings on sites with one-story commercial buildings.
6. Rezone town centers, commercial strips, and office parks for mixed-use development.
7. Reform state zoning law (Chapter 40A) to encourage mixed-uses in downtowns and other “growth centers.”
8. Develop model mixed-use projects at office parks & on the commercial strip.
9. Designate “growth centers,” which have the infrastructure to support new development, and provide incentives for developing there.
10. State and municipalities concentrate infrastructure investments in mixed-use “growth centers.”

## Afterword

### Exploring the Transit-Oriented Landscape

Greater Boston is one of the few metropolitan areas in America that is tailor-made for Transit-Oriented Development (TOD). Boston has a commuter rail network that was started in the 1830s, was never abandoned, and serves as an important part of the region's transportation infrastructure today. The Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) has made significant commuter rail investments, ridership has risen, and new developments are sprouting near railroad stations.

There are 119 commuter stations in the MBTA network (this is in addition to stops on the "T" system, which has 131 subway and trolley stops in Boston, Cambridge, Somerville, Malden, Brookline, Newton, Quincy, and Braintree). The main terminal points—Plymouth/Kingston, Middleboro, Providence, Franklin, Worcester, Fitchburg, Lowell, Lawrence, Haverhill, Newburyport, and Rockport, describe an arc around Boston that forms the perimeter of the Boston metropolitan area. This arc roughly parallels I-495, which serves as the region's outer belt highway. The rail lines are spokes leading to the "hub."

Riding the 11 MBTA commuter rail lines, you will discover the concealed skeleton of metropolitan Boston. Although most Eastern Massachusetts communities originated as 17<sup>th</sup>-century Puritan villages and developed along the ocean or rivers, the modern character of most communities was established during the railroad age. The rail lines were the original corridors of metropolitan development a century before the highways. Noted historian Sam Bass Warner described Boston's "streetcar suburbs," which developed along streetcar lines that commuters rode to their jobs in downtown Boston. The extensive network of railroads developed by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century spurred comparable suburban development beyond the city of Boston. That development still forms the core of many suburbs, though their centrality has been dissipated by post-World War II auto-related strip and subdivision development.

Railroads helped make "bedroom" communities for Boston early on. West Newton became the first commuter rail stop, when the Boston-Worcester Railroad reached there in 1834. Subsequent towns to become suburbs included Brookline, Wellesley, Belmont, Weston, Lincoln, Winchester, and exclusive North Shore enclaves Manchester-by-the-Sea and Beverly Farms. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Norwood, Walpole, Stoughton, Beverly, Waltham, Framingham, and Natick were factory towns, connected to Boston and commercial outlets by the railroad. They became more commuter suburbs with the coming of the automobile and the decline of industry. Urban manufacturing centers such as Quincy, Brockton, Attleboro, Worcester, Lowell, Lawrence, Haverhill, Lynn, and Chelsea flourished because of the railroad. Though they have lost much of their local primacy because of urban and industrial decline, these small cities still form promising nodes in the metropolitan fabric.

Towns that were once rural are now suburban and are the frontier of sprawl. The MBTA has opened new commuter stations on old railroad lines in some of these communities. This has happened along the Old Colony lines in Southeastern Massachusetts at Lakeville, Kingston, Halifax, and Hanson. It has also happened along the I-495 beltway at Franklin, Ashland, Southboro, South Acton, and Littleton.

Riding the commuter rails around Greater Boston provides a completely different sense of the region than you can achieve by driving a car. The 119 railroad stops include a cross-section of attractive long-established town centers and more remote commuter-oriented sites with large parking lots. A large majority of these train stations are at places that can accommodate new mixed-use development.

Following each train line, which was originally built by such railroads as the Boston & Albany, Boston & Maine, and the Old Colony, you get a sense of how the metropolis grew and how the communities relate to each other. The passenger is struck by the dense urban landscape that stretches out in every direction from downtown Boston as far as Route 128. As soon as the train passes under Route 128, the landscape changes to become a checkerboard of sprawl and open spaces. The train routes pass through a lot of post-industrial landscapes with old warehouses and empty factories. These places can be downright ugly, but they also present good opportunities for new development, whether it is railroad-oriented or not.

The open space comprises woods, wetlands, and, occasionally, farms. Developers might at first see these places as candidates for new mixed-use development—and some may be—but most of these open spaces are nature's lungs in the metropolis and need to be conserved, and many of them are under permanent protection. The most evident of these places are the cranberry bogs of Southeastern Massachusetts along the Kingston/Plymouth and Middleboro/Lakeville lines—the Great Cedar Swamp near the Hanson train station is an example of protected natural resources constraining development—and the marvelous marshlands trains cross traveling north near the coast to Newburyport.

It is easy for someone to explore Greater Boston's suburbs through its train network (though the automobile remains the most obvious mode of transport). Commuter trains travel along 11 routes in and out of Boston seven days a week (schedules are reduced on the weekends). The magnificently-restored South Station, with its spacious waiting room and varied food court, services the Fairmount, Needham, Kingston/Plymouth, Middleboro/Lakeville, Attleboro/Stoughton/Providence, Franklin, and Framingham/Worcester lines. The new North Station has a puny lobby and insufficient seating for waiting passengers and is jammed with surging crowds before events at the Fleet Center upstairs. North Station is the terminus for the South Acton/Fitchburg, Lowell, Haverhill/Reading, and Newburyport/Rockport routes.

The farthest journey (Worcester or Fitchburg) will not cost more than \$11.50 round-trip (although the MBTA is planning fare hikes of around 25% for 2004). Most of the lines take about one hour to traverse, with Needham (40 minutes), Worcester (1 ¼ hours) and Fitchburg (1 ½ hours) being the exceptions.

The MBTA reports that approximately 65,000 people commute on these train lines round-trip every workday. If you drive to work, you may be hardly aware of the commuter rail's existence, the stops it serves, and its convenience. The relatively small number of weekend travelers are headed into the big city for entertainment and shopping. Although there are few excursionists traveling from Boston to suburban stations, they have plenty of interesting destinations to choose from.

Many suburban centers shaped in the century prior to World War II either have been fashionable destinations for years or are on the upswing. Suburban downtowns are making a comeback because they tend to offer a wide array of independently-owned shops and restaurants, coffee houses, art cinemas, ethnic groceries, antiques shops, art galleries, and other one-of-a-kind places. The architecture is full of character, walking opportunities are attractive, and there are civic institutions such as town halls, schools, libraries, and churches. These downtowns are still the primary place that people think of when they imagine Melrose, Needham, Winchester, or Wakefield. They provide a "sense of place" amidst the homogenization of much late 20<sup>th</sup>-century suburban development.

The town center shopping district is just the sort of formula that the retail industry is adopting by building "lifestyle centers," which offer a pleasant pedestrian experience mix of upscale stores, except that they are mainly national chains. The town centers served by the MBTA commuter rail network are decidedly funky with destination gourmet restaurants standing next to second-hand furniture and clothing stores.

Such commercial districts range from West Newton and Newtonville to Natick and Waltham's Moody Street. Ethnic eateries and shops abound in Framingham (Brazilian) and Lynn (Latin American of all nationalities). Comfortable middle-class suburban downtowns can be discovered in Needham, Belmont, and Winchester. The upscale shopping scene can be found in Wellesley, Concord, and Manchester-by-the-Sea. Historic maritime cities that have reinvented themselves include Salem and Newburyport. The fishing towns of Gloucester and Rockport have become tourist meccas.

Most communities that have commuter rail service have potential for compact mixed-use development. Some built-out upscale town centers like Wellesley, West Newton, or Belmont can accommodate smaller developments, while other downtowns that have suffered commercial and industrial decline, such as Attleboro, Lynn, and Brockton, have much greater potential to remake themselves.

As the suburban centers of Greater Boston attract more infill mixed-use development, the buzz they produce should grow. Many downtowns are worth visiting now, but their attraction should increase in the coming years, creating a constellation of historic suburban centers scattered across the region. This trend can put the "great" into "Greater Boston."

## Endnotes

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- <sup>2</sup> Boston Society of Architects, *How We Live: A Civic Initiative for a Livable New England*, Boston, MA: Boston Society of Architects, 2000, p. 9.
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- <sup>6</sup> Cape Cod Commission, *Cape Cod Regional Policy Plan*, Barnstable, MA: Cape Cod Commission, 2002, pp. 21-27.
- <sup>7</sup> Al Lima, presentation at Conference on “New Urbanism: A Case Study and Theory in Suburban Boston,” Builders Association of Greater Boston, May 7, 2003.
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