

NEEDHAM PLANNING BOARD

Friday, May 12, 2023

9:00 a.m.

Virtual Meeting using Zoom

Meeting ID: **880 4672 5264**

(Instructions for accessing below)

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Direct Link to meeting: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88046725264>

1. Presentation by Stantec, reviewing their findings from a parking study focused on Needham Center and Needham Heights.
2. Correspondence.

(Items for which a specific time has not been assigned may be taken out of order.)

To:	Amy Haelsen Town of Needham	From:	Needham Parking Study Team Stantec
File:	Needham Parking Study – Zoning Review	Date:	April 24, 2023

Reference: Needham Parking Study – Zoning Review DRAFT

As part of the Needham Parking Study, Stantec completed a review of parking standards in the Zoning By-Law of the Town of Needham with a focus on Needham Center and Needham Heights. This summary memorandum defines:

- How Needham's minimum parking requirements compare with observed activity in Needham Center and Needham Heights, as well as against national standards.
- How the Zoning By-Law currently provides for flexibility in parking requirements with new projects based on location, land use types, and other factors.
- How the Town's parking requirements and by-laws compare against the existing parking supply in Needham Center and Needham Heights.
- How parking standards support or detract from the Town's planning and community development vision.
- What policies and mechanisms are available for Needham to adopt which have been used elsewhere.

Recommendations for adjusting Zoning By-Laws to adopt more flexible parking management practices in line with the goals of the study are outlined in the last section.

PARKING STUDY GOALS

The following goals provide the framework for the parking study as well as this zoning review:

- Document **existing parking supply** and daily demand
- Improve parking management system for residents, employees, customers, and visitors
- **Investigate efficiency and user-friendliness** of parking meters and other payment methods and find opportunities to improve
- Identify and recommend parking supply **efficiencies/ opportunities** to unlock parking in areas of higher demand
- Identify opportunities to **better align policies** with the long-term goals and growth of the two areas
- Support the **economies** of the Needham Center and Needham Heights
- Inform decision-making for **future street improvement projects** and zoning updates

Reference: Needham Parking Study – Zoning Review DRAFT

PARKING REQUIREMENTS AND THE NEEDHAM CONTEXT

Communities use parking requirements to ensure that a development's parking supply is appropriate to meet demand. Many communities employ minimum parking requirements, mandating that parking be provided on the basis of a project's size, i.e. square footage or number of housing units.

Many communities base these standards on historical precedent or available national data, which tends to favor larger lot sizes, car-centric land use patterns, and single-use projects, due to historic suburbanization patterns and/or the ease of collecting accurate data at such relatively isolated sites. The American Planning Association's "Parking Standards" became the go-to guide for establishing parking requirements across the United States in the 1950's, and it dictated ratios that complimented the rapid suburbanization of America. Few communities have updated their parking requirements since. The modern equivalent for these standards and the benchmark for most parking analyses is the Institute of Transportation Engineers' (ITE) Parking Generation Manual, currently in its 5th edition. ITE provides the majority of its data in the category of "General Urban/Suburban," which the manual describes as "an area associated with almost homogeneous vehicle-centered access."¹

In recent years, many denser communities have found that their parking standards, unchanged for decades in some cases, encourage excess parking construction, particularly in mixed-use areas like Needham Center and Needham Heights. In a town like Needham, using national-level standards as a basis for setting minimum parking requirements is inadvisable based on:

- The town's centuries-old development pattern promoting closely-spaced mixed-use buildings without parking, which is incongruent with the greenfield, single-use sites constructed in the late-20th century when automobile travel took precedent;
- The intense spatial and vertical mix of land uses within walking distance of one another within Needham Center, Needham Heights, and surrounding neighborhoods; and
- The multimodal travel environment of Needham Center and Needham Heights, with Commuter Rail stations, bus services, a robust sidewalk network, and short block lengths that support trips by walking and biking.

Perhaps as a result of these characteristics, Needham has fielded multiple waivers for parking requirements in recent years. The Town provided decisions for nine special permit applications from the Zoning Board of Appeals for commercial projects seeking relief from parking standards in the Center Business District. The decisions reflect a four-year period between May 2018 and April 2022. Seven of the nine applications involved a request to provide no new off-street parking for a project; all but one project (which involved a farmer's market) were for redevelopment of an existing property.

All nine projects were granted approval by the Board; the list of projects is detailed in Table 3. Several common justifications were provided by the Board of Appeals in granting waivers to these developers, including:

- Off-street parking is not currently available at the property

¹ *ITE Parking Generation, 5th Ed., p.9*

Reference: **Needham Parking Study – Zoning Review DRAFT**

- Only minor modifications to the property were sought which would not affect vehicular or pedestrian movements
- Properties were in close proximity to municipal lots for employee and/or customer parking
- Employers would be ordered to purchase parking stickers to allow for employees to park in municipal lots

Up to 156 parking spaces were waived from construction requirements as a result of these decisions.

Table 1 – List of Projects for Waiver Review

Date	Business Name	Business Type	Address	Parking Required	Parking Requested/Granted
June 2018	Eat Well	Restaurant	946 Great Plain Avenue	30 spaces	0 spaces
October 2018	PEX Health and Fitness	Gym	1451 Highland Avenue	Up to 16 spaces	0 spaces
October 2018	Rx2Care Clinic	Medical Office	1498 Highland Avenue	6 spaces	4 spaces
November 2018	Gyro and Kebab House	Restaurant	1056 Great Plain Avenue	14 spaces	0 spaces
February 2019	Pancho's Taqueria	Restaurant	1450 Highland Avenue	Up to 23 spaces	Up to 4 spaces
October 2019	PM Story Corporation	Restaurant	946 Great Plain Avenue	24 spaces	0 spaces
June 2021	Klein Orthodontist	Medical Office	30-50 Chestnut Street	9 spaces	0 spaces
October 2021	Needham Nutrition	Retail	915 Great Plain Avenue	16 spaces	0 spaces
April 2022	Needham Farmer's Market	Retail	Greene's Field	26 spaces	0 spaces

Reference: Needham Parking Study – Zoning Review DRAFT

BASELINE PARKING REQUIREMENTS

A comparison of Needham's townwide minimum parking requirements to auto-centric national standards shows that Needham generally requires more parking, as shown in Table 1.

Table 2 – Sample Needham Parking Requirements Compared Against ITE Rates

Land Use	Needham Requirement ²	ITE Land Use Code	ITE Projection	Needham Comparison
Residential	1.5 spaces per unit <i>(1 space per unit for affordable units with no more than one bedroom)</i>	221 (Multifamily Housing, Mid-Rise)	1.31 spaces per unit ³	Higher
Office	3.33 spaces per 1000 square feet	710 (General Office Building)	2.39 spaces per 1000 square feet	Higher
Medical Office	5 spaces per 1000 square feet	720 (Medical-Dental Office Building)	3.23 spaces per 1000 square feet	Higher
Retail	3.33 spaces per 1000 square feet	820 (Shopping Center)	1.94 spaces per 1000 square feet	Higher
Restaurant	1 space per 3 seats, plus 10 spaces per takeout service station	932 (High-Turnover, Sit Down Restaurant)	1 space per 3 seats	Comparable

These comparisons found that Town parking requirements trend more conservatively than the national standards, which are already considered too conservative for a town like Needham. However, requirements in zoning and overlay districts in the study area do allow for reductions of these requirements for some projects, as discussed later in this memo.

² Requirements per square foot have been converted to per 1,000 square feet for easy comparison.

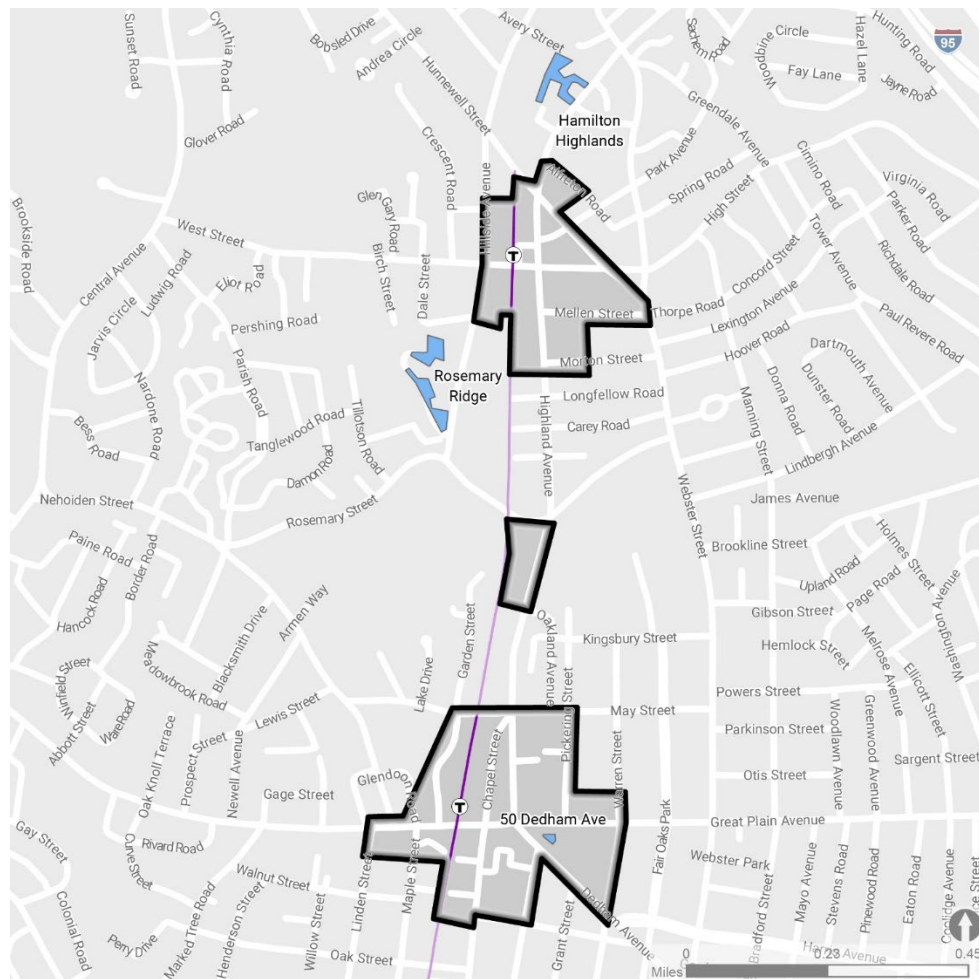
³ Assumes 2 bedrooms per housing unit

Reference: Needham Parking Study – Zoning Review DRAFT

OBSERVED PARKING CONDITIONS

To better understand residential demand in Needham, the team observed parking demand at three multi-unit residential complexes in or adjacent to Needham Center and Needham Heights (Figure 1). These were overnight observations, which typically captures peak demand at a residential location.

Figure 1 – Sites of Observed Residential Parking Demand (in blue)



Overall, the analysis found that parking demand at these multifamily locations is below what Needham's standards would require as a minimum. Specific observations include:

- Of the 185 housing units present at the Hamilton Highlands and Rosemary Ridge projects adjacent to Needham Heights, 172 vehicles were counted; this reflects a parking demand of 0.93 spaces per unit compared against the 1.5 space per unit requirement.

Reference: Needham Parking Study – Zoning Review DRAFT

- Of the 10 housing units present at the 50 Dedham Avenue project in Needham Center, 13 vehicles were counted; this reflects a parking demand of 1.3 spaces per unit compared against the 1.5 space per unit requirement.

Additionally, the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) conducted overnight parking counts at two apartment complexes on 2nd Avenue, within the New England Business Center Zoning District, in June 2022.⁴ Of the 390 housing units present in these projects, 242 vehicles were counted. This equates to 0.63 spaces per unit, lower than the Town's Zoning By-Law requirement. It is noted that these apartment complexes are in more automobile-oriented areas of the community than Needham Center or Needham Heights.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR PARKING REQUIREMENT REDUCTIONS

The Zoning By-Law allows for several provisions where minimum parking requirements may be waived. These provisions often differ by zoning district and require approval by the Zoning Board of Appeals in a way which can be seen as subjective and risky for developers to pursue. Nonetheless, conversations with Town staff indicated that waivers are frequently requested and granted for commercial establishments in Needham Center and Needham Heights.

Additional Waivers from Minimum Parking Requirements

In all zoning districts **except the Center Business District**, the Board of Appeals may provide a special permit exempting projects from meeting minimum parking requirements if fitting one of the following conditions:

- The particular use of the structure does not warrant the minimum number of spaces; or
- The extent of the building coverage on a particular lot is such that in laying out parking spaces in accordance with design requirements that the minimum number of spaces can not be met.

The Board of Appeals considers the following in granting these Special Permits:

- The permit will not be detrimental to the town or to the general character and visual appearance of the surrounding neighborhood and abutting uses
- Changes that would alter the special circumstances contributing to the reduced parking need or demand are precluded
- In some business districts (including Avery Square, but not Center Business), shared parking for uses having peak demands at different types, unusual age or other characteristics of site users, or user-sponsored demand reduction devices are being pursued
- The ability to provide for additional parking is demonstrated
- A structure, use, or lot is not exempted from future compliance with parking standards

⁴ Data courtesy MAPC

Reference: **Needham Parking Study – Zoning Review DRAFT**

Most of these considerations are subject to interpretation, even if carried out in a consistent way by the Board of Appeals. For prospective commercial development projects, this introduces a high degree of risk. Therefore, developers are encouraged to only build projects that are compliant with minimum parking requirements, requiring many design compromises that can increase development cost and subsequent rents while precluding prospective projects that may be very compatible with Needham's historic built context but are not compliant with zoning.

Off-Site Parking Arrangements

The Town allows for off-street parking to be provided up to 300 feet away from the subject building, and this parcel must be under the same ownership. In the Avery Square Business District, this distance is up to 500 feet for general parking, or 800 feet for employee parking.

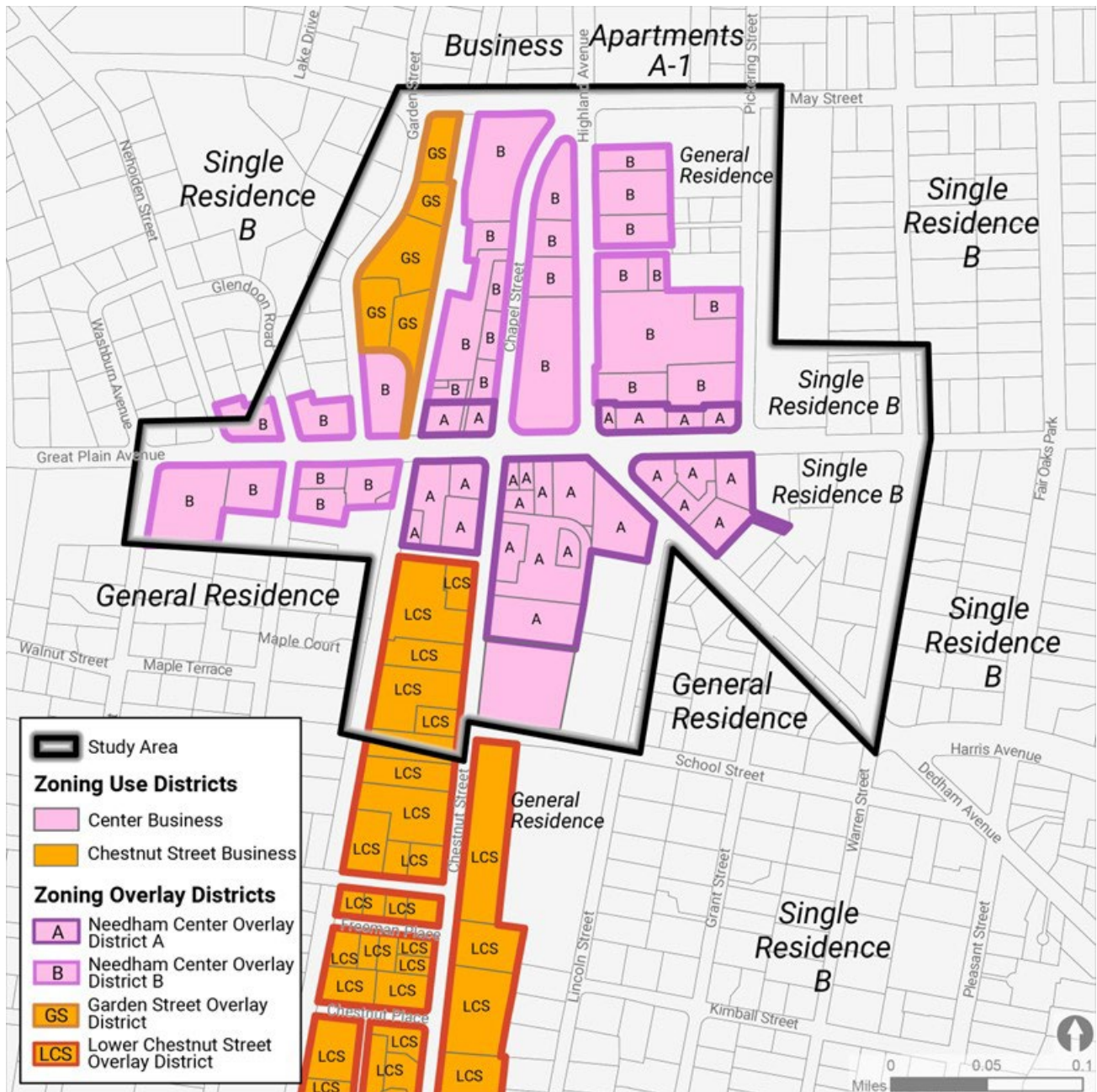
Since few developers own multiple properties and typically are unable to sacrifice one to be the parking for another, the opportunity of using a nearby off-site lot to satisfy the parking requirement of a development project is lost. Flexible off-site parking arrangements typically do not require common ownership and allow much greater distances between the requesting and donating parcels.

Additional Reductions via Overlays

The focus areas for this study comprise multiple overlays (see maps, Figure 2 and Figure 3).

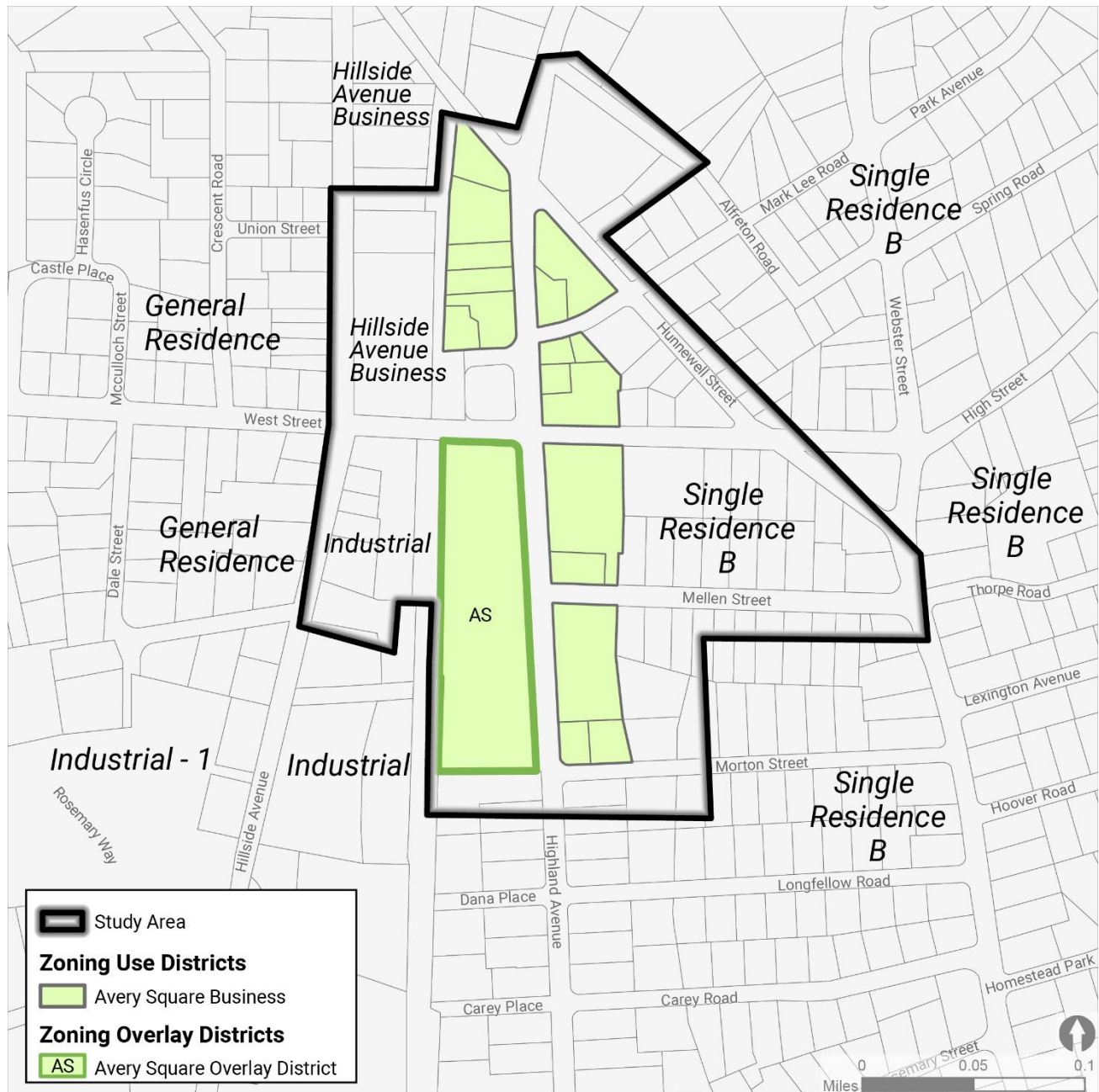
Reference: Needham Parking Study – Zoning Review DRAFT

Figure 2 – Zoning Districts and Overlays in Needham Center



Reference: Needham Parking Study – Zoning Review DRAFT

Figure 3 – Zoning Districts and Overlays in Needham Heights



Reference: **Needham Parking Study – Zoning Review DRAFT**

These areas offer additional opportunities for flexibility in parking provision; some are by-right and most are by the Special Permit process. Table 2 provides a summary of parking exception opportunities by overlay.

Table 3 – Exceptions to Parking Requirements in Selected Zoning Districts and Overlays

District/Overlay	Exceptions to Parking Requirements
Center Business District	• Parking requirements relieved or waived for the following instances: ○ Retail uses under 800 square feet of floor area do not need to provide off-street parking. ○ Buildings with 40% or more of its usable floor area above the ground floor, upper-story uses only need to provide 80% of the parking requirement, with the exception of medical office uses. ○ Changes of use excepted when the change of use requires nine or fewer additional off-street parking spaces for compliance without requiring Special Permit. • Special permit to relieve or waive parking requirements if project: ○ Replaces or substantially improves an existing building or site; ○ Promotes the goal of preserving and enhancing the Center Business District as a pedestrian-oriented local shopping and business district; ○ Incorporates the recommendations of the Design Review Board; and ○ Demonstrates that the maximum number of off-street parking spaces practicable are provided.
Needham Center Overlay District	• Parking requirements relieved or waived for the following instances: ○ Retail uses under 800 square feet of floor area do not need to provide off-street parking. ○ Buildings with 40% or more of its usable floor area above the ground floor, upper-story uses only need to provide 80% of the parking requirement, with the exception of medical office uses. • Special permit to relieve or waive parking requirements if project: ○ Replaces or substantially improves an existing building or site; ○ Promotes the goal of preserving and enhancing the Center Business District as a pedestrian-oriented local shopping and business district;

Reference: **Needham Parking Study – Zoning Review DRAFT**

	○ Incorporates the recommendations of the Design Review Board; and ○ Demonstrates that the maximum number of off-street parking spaces practicable are provided. ○ Changes of use excepted when the change of use requires nine or fewer additional off-street parking spaces for compliance without requiring Special Permit. • Special Permit to allow for payment of a fee in lieu of meeting the minimum number of parking spaces (see below for details) if the Planning Board determines: ○ The applicant has demonstrated it cannot accommodate the required parking spaces on a surface lot or under the building in an economical way. ○ The applicant has demonstrated it cannot accommodate the required parking spaces through a combination of on-site parking and shared parking with an adjoining property. ○ The project has been designed to the extent feasible to reduce the required number of off-street parking spaces.
Chestnut Street Business	• Changes of use excepted when the change of use requires nine or fewer additional off-street parking spaces for compliance without requiring Special Permit. • <i>Additional waivers available per general zoning, see above</i>
Lower Chestnut Street Overlay District	• Parking requirements relieved or waived for the following instances: ○ Buildings with 40% or more of its usable floor area above the ground floor, upper-story uses only need to provide 80% of the parking requirement, with the exception of medical office uses. ○ Changes of use excepted when the change of use requires nine or fewer additional off-street parking spaces for compliance without requiring Special Permit. • Special Permit to allow for payment of a fee in lieu of meeting the minimum number of parking spaces if the Planning Board determines: ○ The applicant has demonstrated it cannot accommodate the required parking spaces on a surface lot or under the building in an economical way.

Reference: **Needham Parking Study – Zoning Review DRAFT**

	○ The applicant has demonstrated it cannot accommodate the required parking spaces through a combination of on-site parking and shared parking with an adjoining property. ○ The project has been designed to the extent feasible to reduce the required number of off-street parking spaces. • <i>Additional waivers available per general zoning, see above</i>
Garden Street Overlay District	• Parking requirements relieved or waived for the following instances: ○ Changes of use excepted when the change of use requires nine or fewer additional off-street parking spaces for compliance without requiring Special Permit. ○ Buildings with 40% or more of its usable floor area above the ground floor, upper-story uses only need to provide 80% of the parking requirement, with the exception of medical office uses. • <i>Additional waivers available per general zoning, see above</i>
Avery Square Business District	• Justification for relieved or waived requirements if shared parking for uses having peak demands at different types, unusual age or other characteristics of site users, or user-sponsored demand reduction devices are being pursued. • Allowance for off-site parking (parking on a separate parcel serving more than one user) for non-residential uses at distances up to 500 feet for general parking, or 800 feet for employee parking, including for limited encroachment into adjacent residential districts. • Changes of use excepted when the change of use requires nine or fewer additional off-street parking spaces for compliance without requiring Special Permit. • <i>Additional waivers available per general zoning, including for shared parking for uses having peak demands of different types; see above</i>

Overall, while these parking waivers are well-intentioned efforts to overcome the burden of building sufficient parking in Needham's space-constrained historic villages, modern standards in similar places typically provide more latitude. For instance, new project waivers often apply to larger projects than just 800 square feet, with some communities exceeding 2,000 square feet. Absolute waivers for changes of use are also common up to 2,000 square feet or higher with no use conditions. Upper story reductions, especially in New England, are

Reference: **Needham Parking Study – Zoning Review DRAFT**

often full waivers, since upper stories are typically residential, and residents can park in the spaces used by employees.

Needham Center Off-Street Parking Fund Details

The Zoning By-Law allows for a Special Permit to allow for payment of a fee in-lieu of meeting the minimum number of parking spaces in the Needham Center, Lower Chestnut Street, and Garden Street Overlay Districts. The Planning Board must determine that:

- The applicant has demonstrated it cannot accommodate the required parking spaces on a surface lot or under the building in an economical way.
- The applicant has demonstrated it cannot accommodate the required parking spaces through a combination of on-site parking and shared parking with an adjoining property.
- The project has been designed to the extent feasible to reduce the required number of off-street parking spaces.

The fee is computed on a per-space basis and paid into a special revenue fund known as the Needham Center Off-Street Parking Fund. The Fund is meant to be used towards providing shared or public parking benefiting uses within the area covered by the Needham Center Development Plan. The amount of the fee is determined by the Planning Board in accordance with the Needham Center Development Plan or the Town of Needham Capital Improvements Plan.

Although considered a best practice for managing a downtown's parking system, conversations with Town staff indicated that the Parking Fund is not actively contributed towards or drawn from. It is likely that the conditions to first demonstrate a minimal parking impact discourage developers from seeking an in-lieu waiver, since a smaller project reduces profits, negating the benefit of making the payment.

NEEDHAM'S PARKING REQUIREMENTS COMPARED TO OBSERVED DEMAND

An analysis of Needham's parking requirements was compared against the existing land uses and the existing parking supply in Needham Center and Needham Heights by employing a shared parking demand model. This section covers the inputs to this model and its findings to demonstrate how Needham's parking requirements compare to how residents, customers, and employees currently access Needham Center and Needham Heights, particularly given the existing parking supply. Roughly, this analysis includes the following steps:

1. Estimate the amount of various land uses in the focus areas
2. Using Needham standards, including any potential reductions as possible, estimate demand applying zoning standards
3. Compare #2 to observed parking utilization (captured in November 2022 through the Parking Study)
4. Develop shared parking model reflecting observed demand
5. Compare observed demand to actual supply and Needham standards

1. Estimate Land Use

A core component of this analysis is an understanding of the land uses present in the community. The Town provided parcel-level land use and assessing data which the team refined and verified through a combination

Reference: Needham Parking Study – Zoning Review DRAFT

of staff feedback, online research, and “windshield” surveys on Google Maps. Estimated square footages by use for Needham Center and Needham Heights land uses are shown in Table 4 and Table 5, respectively.

Table 4 – Land Uses in Needham Center

Land Use	Square Footage	Units
Apartment	88	Dwelling Units
Auto Shop	9,717	Square Feet
Bank	53,362	Square Feet
Church	98,010	Square Feet
Government Office	129,235	Square Feet
Medical Office	28,914	Square Feet
Office	117,019	Square Feet
Restaurant	39,024	Square Feet
Retail	327,437	Square Feet
School	62	Students
Warehouse	26,307	Square Feet
TOTAL	1,026,615 88 62	Square Feet Dwelling Units Students

Table 5 – Land Uses in Needham Heights

Land Use	Square Footage	Units
Apartment	14	Dwelling Units
Auto Shops	9,903	Square Feet
Bank	12,348	Square Feet
Church	35,034	Square Feet
Day Care	4,224	Square Feet
Government Office	23,780	Square Feet
Health/Fitness Club	6,440	Square Feet
Medical Clinic	3,360	Square Feet
Nursing Home	160,742	Square Feet
Office	77,780	Square Feet
Restaurant	6,664	Square Feet
Retail	64,396	Square Feet
Warehouse	19,800	Square Feet
TOTAL	424,485 14	Square Feet Dwelling Units

A typical approach to estimating parking demand—also reflected in Needham’s current off-street parking requirements--assumes that each land use in a downtown needs its own supply of parking and thus simply adds together the amount of parking demand “required” for each use to estimate demand. This level of

Reference: **Needham Parking Study – Zoning Review DRAFT**

analysis assumes that demand for each land use is constant throughout the day and that the parking supply for each parcel is at a quantity needed to accommodate its highest demand.

2. Calculate Parking Requirements per Needham Standards

As Table 1 demonstrates, commonly-observed land uses in Needham are subject to more conservative requirements than national standards. Needham's parking requirements were applied to the land uses in Needham Center and Needham Heights after adjusting for reductions allowed by-right in the study areas. These reductions include:

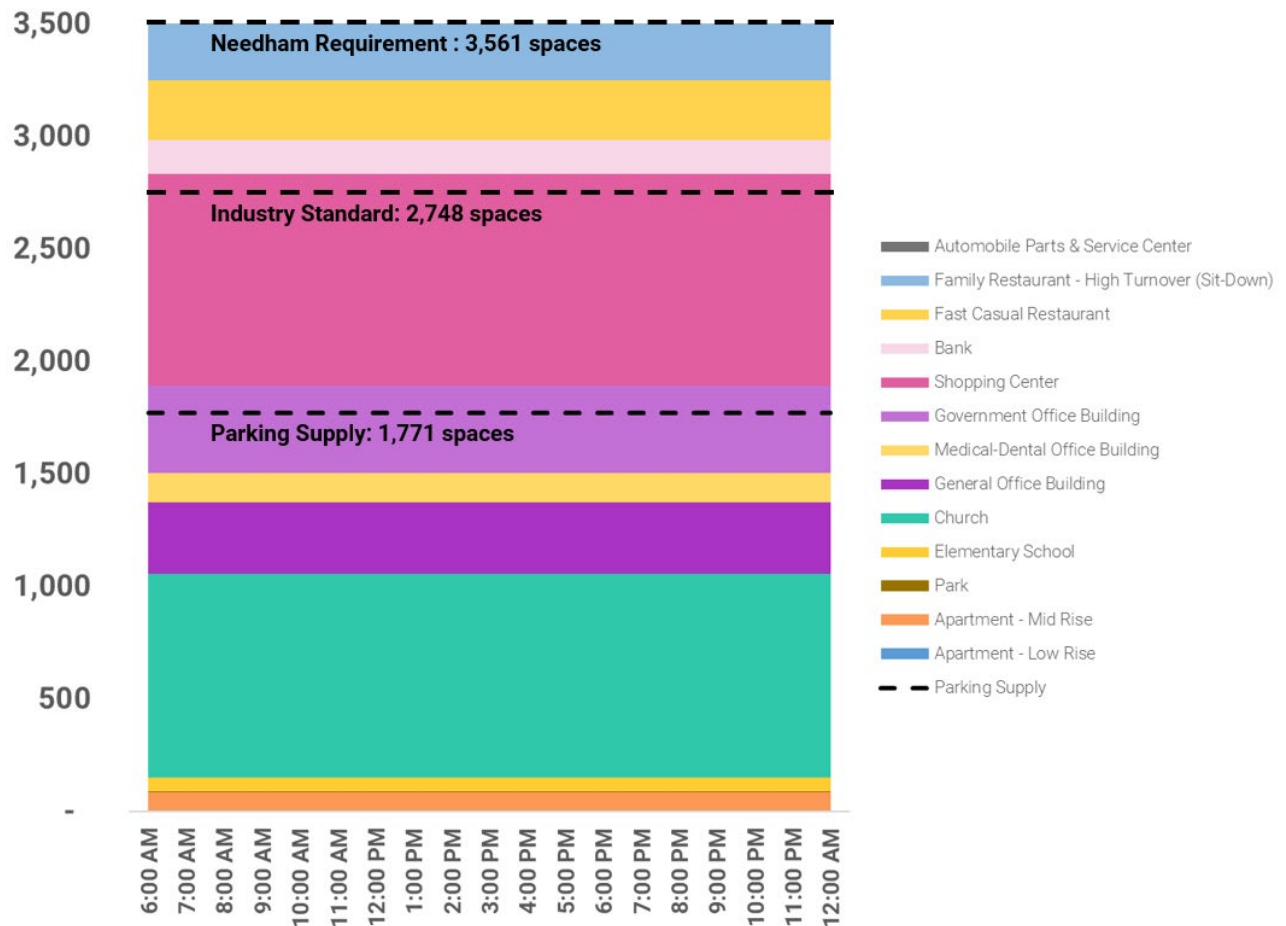
- Exceptions for retail uses under 800 square feet of floor area to require no off-street parking
 - Given assessing data, only one retail use with under 800 square feet of gross floor area was identified
- Allowance for buildings with 40% or more of its usable floor area above the ground floor to meet only 80% of the parking requirement for the upper-story uses, with the exception of medical office uses
 - A windshield survey on Google Maps, followed by cross-checking with assessing data, identified 286,000 of square feet (approximately 28% of the Needham Heights study area) subject to only 80% of the parking requirement.

Reductions were only applied in Needham Center; no buildings and/or land uses in Needham Heights were found to meet these provisions.

Figure 6 shows that in Needham Center, if all existing land uses were built to Needham's parking requirements with provision for by-right reductions, a total of 3,344 parking spaces would need to be constructed—well in excess of the 1,771 spaces in the current supply. In Needham Heights, Figure 7 shows 1,127 spaces would be required compared to the existing supply of 991 spaces.

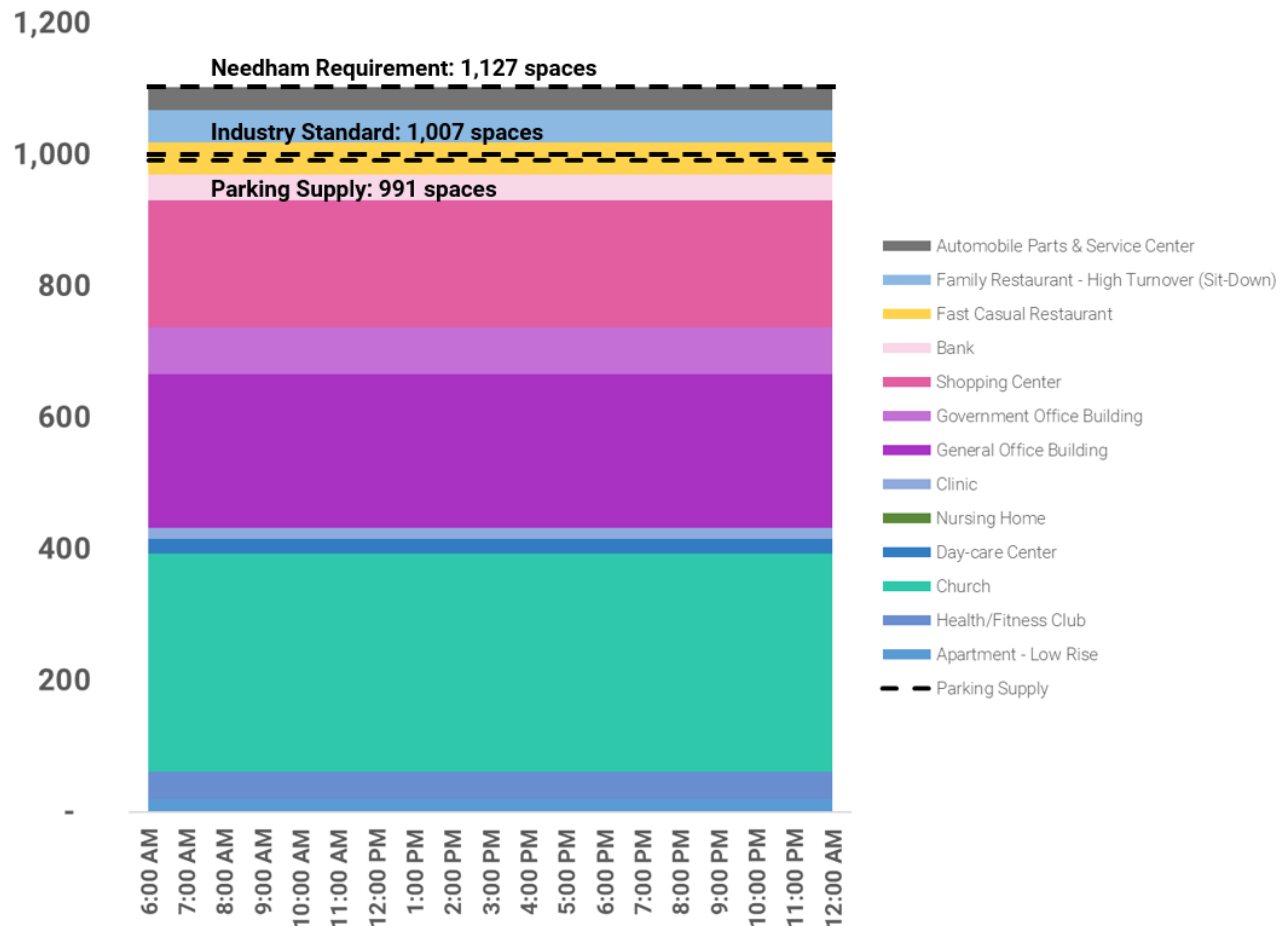
Reference: Needham Parking Study – Zoning Review DRAFT

Figure 4 – Needham Center Parking Supply Compared Against Needham Parking Requirements



Reference: Needham Parking Study – Zoning Review DRAFT

Figure 5 – Needham Heights Parking Supply Compared Against Needham Parking Requirements



This analysis shows that both the national standards and Needham’s requirement for off-street parking construction would yield more parking spaces than are currently supplied in both Needham Center and Needham Heights. In reality, the parking study has shown that peak utilization of parking in the Needham Center and Needham Heights study areas does not approach the capacity of the parking supply, much less the standards or zoning.

4. Develop shared parking model reflecting observed demand

The Urban Land Institute (ULI) publishes the *Shared Parking Manual*, which provides analysts with a methodology to estimate real parking demand over time in mixed-use areas like Needham Center and Needham Heights. This methodology is also recommended by ITE. The team used the Shared Parking Manual methodology, including parking estimates from ITE, to create a model of demand across the entire Needham Center and Needham Heights study areas. The methodology includes these local context reductions:

Reference: Needham Parking Study – Zoning Review DRAFT

- Staggered Peaks: Shared parking is common in mixed-used districts. One key characteristic is balancing the various “staggered peaks” of demand curves for various uses. For example, demand at an office is low in the middle of the night, hits its peak in the middle of the day, and drops off again in the early evening. Conversely, a nearby restaurant may have little to no demand during the day but peak around the dinner hour. Modeling parking demand of these land uses applies a time-of-day percentage to the peak parking demand rates, creating a more realistic estimate of demand in mixed-use environments like Needham Center and Needham Heights.
- Internal Capture: Parking demand is further reduced in downtown environments because retail, commercial, office, and residential uses are closer together and more walkable. Users that opt to walk within the study areas to get from one destination to another (without re-parking their vehicle) are considered “internally captured.” Depending on the use, this can reduce total parking demand from stand-alone uses an average of 15% to well over 50%.
- Mode Split: In addition, Needham Center and Needham Heights may each generate trips from outside these geographies by people that don’t need a car at all, including walkers, bikers and those using transit, so an additional “mode split” reduction can be taken for some uses.
- Vacancy Rates: Finally, certain vacancy assumptions for housing, office, retail, and restaurant uses are also incorporated into the model.

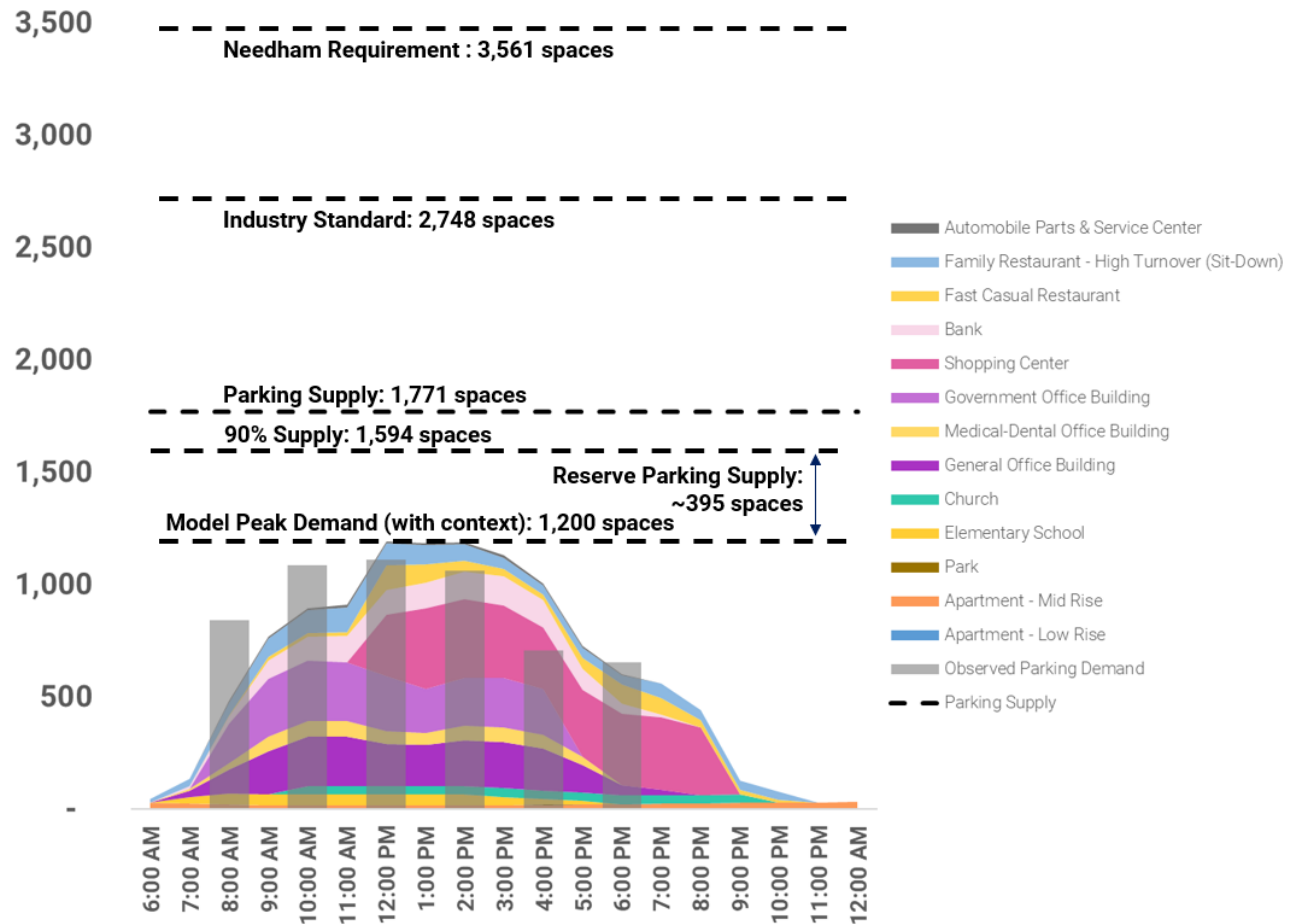
Using the ULI methodology with these local context reductions applied to national standard parking requirements, parking demand was modeled for the Needham Center and Needham Heights study areas. Parking utilization counts captured for the parking study were then used to calibrate the modeled curve downward, resulting in a model that is based on observed demand. The modeled peak demand still falls at or above the study’s observations to provide a conservative estimate of the amount of parking needed for existing land uses in the study area.

The results of this exercise point to the existing parking supply in Needham Center being approximately 395 spaces larger than the need at the weekday midday peak, assuming that 10% of this supply should be held in reserve for fluctuations in demand. This is reflected in Figure 8. In Needham Heights, Figure 9 shows that peak demand yields approximately 370 fewer spaces than the 90% supply.

It is important to note that not all parking is in the exact right location or currently regulated appropriately to support the additional development that this oversupply of parking could generate. However, strategies discussed later in this memorandum involve use of some of this excess parking to support new development and would save significant financial and land costs compared to building new parking.

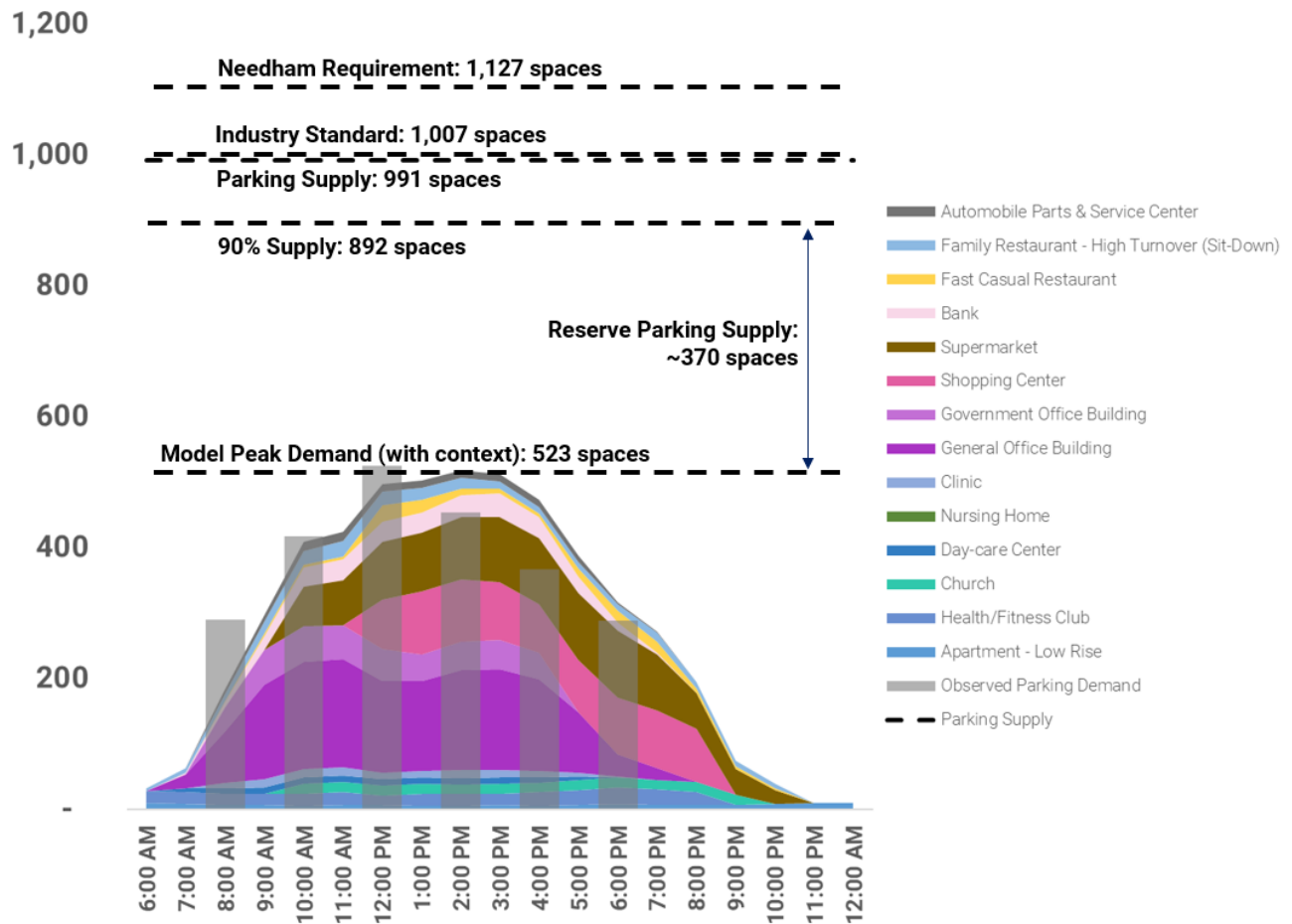
Reference: Needham Parking Study – Zoning Review DRAFT

Figure 6 – Calibrated Parking Demand in Needham Center Compared Against Parking Supply



Reference: Needham Parking Study – Zoning Review DRAFT

Figure 7 – Calibrated Parking Demand in Needham Heights Compared Against Parking Supply



Reference: **Needham Parking Study – Zoning Review DRAFT**

NEEDHAM PARKING SITE REQUIREMENTS COMPARED TO COMMUNITY GOALS

Parking requirements in Needham were reviewed to identify where listed standards support or detract from community goals and the vision encouraged as part of this parking study.

Several requirements relating to parking space dimensions and driveways were found to be in harmony with encouraging a pedestrian-scale in Needham Center and Needham Heights, including:

- Prohibition on new curb cuts in the Center Business District along Chapel Street, Chestnut Street, Great Plain Avenue, and Highland Avenue
- Limitations on the number of curb cuts based on project site frontage (no more than two for every 150 feet or less of frontage)
- Floor-to-area ratio (FAR) bonuses for vehicular access for providing parking and loading area access from an existing shared or common access driveway
- Lot coverage bonuses for enclosed parking provided underground and/or within building itself
- Front setbacks are strongly restricted in the Center Business District (with the exception for providing a pedestrian plaza or similar amenity) and limited to no more than 15 feet in the Avery Square Business District, effectively prohibiting parking in the front setback area
- Driveway openings are restricted to no more than 18 feet of width for one-way travel and 25 feet of width for two-way travel

These requirements are all best practices, though communities often require even fewer curb cuts and narrower driveway openings. Several other topic areas were identified for potential changes to the Zoning By-Law to lessen construction burdens for developers, better promote multimodal travel in the study areas, and conserve land area for uses other than parking.

LOADING AREAS

The Zoning By-Law requires adequate off-street loading space for all new construction or building additions greater than 100 square feet of floor area. No trucks may be on the public way while loading, unloading, or waiting to do so.

This provision constrains the introduction of new retail uses, particularly restaurants, reliant upon deliveries to sustain daily operations. Existing properties with off-street loading facilities or off-street parking which can accommodate vans and trucks are able to be re-developed to introduce new retail or restaurant uses. However, new construction must accommodate off-street loading space for deliveries regardless of the property's need or the feasibility of providing access to loading from the street. While the requirement may have been designed to avoid double-parking by delivery vehicles, the majority of just-in-time delivery vendors will not take the time to circulate to an off-street dock anyway, relying on smart curb management through loading zones to avoid double-parking—a simple solution that would avoid such significant and potentially wasted parcel impacts.

Reference: **Needham Parking Study – Zoning Review DRAFT**

Besides simply adding loading zones, another remedy for this loading restriction is enacting flexible on-street parking regulations in commercial districts which can impose delivery time restrictions to certain segments of the day when deliveries might be in conflict with other curb uses.

BICYCLE RACKS

One bicycle space must be provided for every 20 parking spaces constructed for a new development; this threshold applies only when at least 40 parking spaces are constructed. In the Center Business District, mixed-use buildings with dwelling units must provide bicycle racks facilitating locking that accommodate one bicycle for every two dwelling units.

Requiring provisions that encourage travel by means other than non-single occupancy driving, i.e. transportation demand management (TDM) measures for new development projects, is a standard practice. The Zoning By-Law requires TDM plans associated with new development projects in select business districts but not in Needham Center or Needham Heights.

While there is strong justification for TDM measures elsewhere in Needham where there is a lack of infrastructure to support bicycling, walking, and transit usage, TDM can be very successful in places where that infrastructure already exists, such as in Needham Center and Needham Heights. Tying complimentary measures such as provision of bicycle racks or subsidizing transit passes to building square footage or employee count can support the adoption of TDM practices, particularly if parking waivers can also be provided.

Reference: **Needham Parking Study – Zoning Review DRAFT**

ZONING POLICY AND MECHANISM RECOMMENDATIONS

Needham's Zoning By-Law includes several provisions which relieve burdens from developers to provide off-street parking at a rate which demand may not generate. These provisions spur economic development by reducing development costs as well as conserve land in Needham Center and Needham Heights to be used for more efficient purposes than adding more parking when an oversupply already exists. Additionally, the Zoning Board of Appeals has demonstrated a precedence for granting waivers from minimum parking requirements for commercial developers when requested.

The review of the Zoning By-Law found that the zoning ordinance often applies parking standards in a way which can be challenging for developers to navigate and may require more parking to be built than is warranted. This section defines new or revised policy measures to consider with the aim of:

- Providing consistency with the application of policies across zoning districts and overlay areas which are each primarily associated with commercial and/or mixed-use buildings.
- Reducing time and cost delays for developers seeking exceptions to zoning standards which have a strong precedent of being granted anyway.
- Advancing best practice standards from other local communities which help meet parking study and townwide transportation, community development, and economic development goals.

REDUCE PARKING REQUIREMENTS

Many communities across the country have sought to lower--or outright eliminate--their minimum parking requirements to spur development or ease the burdens faced by developers, municipal staff, and elected officials in advancing projects with reduced parking provision.

As the study has shown, Needham's parking requirements skew more conservative (higher minimums) than national standards and do not reflect observed parking demand in Needham Center and Needham Heights. While minimum parking requirements may have once reflected a sensible approach to ensuring developers were addressing the parking demands generated by projects, today they represent an artificial requirement which commercial projects in Needham often seek to get out of.

Many municipalities across Greater Boston have lowered or waived parking requirements in portions of their communities, including Walpole (no commercial parking requirements within the central business district), Ipswich (no requirements within the central business district or within 500 feet of municipal parking), and Brookline (reduced residential requirements in close proximity to transit).

When enacted in combination with other measures detailed in this section, common concerns raised by community members related to parking can be sufficiently addressed to allow lowered parking requirements to move forward.

CONSIDER PARKING MAXIMUMS

Parking maximums help ensure that developers can opt into supplying parking at a rate commensurate with new development projects but not at an excessive rate. By placing a restriction on the number of spaces a developer can provide with a project, the community limits the negative impacts that an oversupply of parking can impose.

Reference: Needham Parking Study – Zoning Review DRAFT

Where stakeholders might resist the introduction of parking maximums, softer measures such as in-lieu fees or shared parking arrangements can ensure that an overprovision of parking for a development project can help advance one or more community benefits. For instance, where a developer will build parking at a rate that the community feels would result in an underutilization of the supply, the developer can be made to share a portion of the parking or pay a per-space fee to help advance community transportation and/or economic development initiatives.

The City of Boston recently instituted citywide parking maximums tailored towards a project's location and land use mix. Developments must demonstrate that the off-street parking provision is below listed maximums provided by the City. In more suburban settings, Belmont (in specific districts) and Burlington (throughout the community) each provide for parking maximums.

ALLOW REDUCTIONS FOR MIXED-USE PROJECTS

Under Needham's Zoning By-Law, projects with more than one use must meet minimum requirements for all uses, regardless of whether these shared uses place similar demands on the parking network at different points of the day (except by special permit in certain business districts). Many communities acknowledge that a mixed-use project, such as a retail building with above-ground apartments, will almost never see peak demand for each of these components realized at the same time.

A sample table allowing for mixed-use reductions from the Somerville Zoning Ordinance is defined below:

Time of Day	Commercial	Evening Commercial	Residential	Total
6am - 9am	(X) * 25%	(X) * 0%	(Y) * 100%	= sum of this row
9am - 7pm	(X) * 100%	(X) * 50%	(Y) * 65%	= sum of this row
7pm - 11pm	(X) * 25%	(X) * 100%	(Y) * 100%	= sum of this row
11pm - 6am	(X) * 0%	(X) * 25%	(Y) * 100%	= sum of this row

Mixed-use computation applies percentages at different points of the day to estimate parking demand under different use types. For instance, an office project may be required to meet 100% of the minimum parking demand during weekday working hours but have no requirement during overnight hours. A related residential project may require 100% compliance during overnight hours but only 65% during weekday days, as shown in the Somerville example. A mixed-use residential and office project in this instance would have a peak shared demand reflecting the greater sum of:

- 100% of the office use and 65% of the residential use or
- 0% of the office use and 100% of the residential use

The parking requirement would be customized to meet this level of shared demand.

EXPAND OFF-SITE PARKING ALLOWANCES

Needham's Zoning By-Law allows limited use of off-site parking, provided the lot and subject building are no more than 300 feet apart and under the same ownership. The By-Law does not allow for the use of public parking to satisfy this condition, whether for on-street or off-street spaces.

Many communities allow development projects to tap into public parking resources or enter into arrangements with private parties (explored in the following measure) to use off-site parking within a 2,000 foot or greater

Reference: Needham Parking Study – Zoning Review DRAFT

radius to satisfy parking requirements. These provisions typically require projects not to own the spaces but only to demonstrate that estimated parking demand can be satisfied using these resources, such as by showing that the satellite parking location can accommodate some or all of the subject project's demand at different points of the day. Protections are often built into by-laws requiring the off-site location to fall within a similar zoning district, to retain the character of nearby residential neighborhoods, and sometimes a documented arrangement with the off-site landowner is required to be on file.

The review of waivers for recent Needham commercial development projects found several instances where the Town obligated businesses to purchase employee permits to park in municipal lots, an example of using off-site parking to satisfy off-street parking requirements.

CODIFY SHARED PARKING AGREEMENTS

Shared parking agreements enable separate properties to share a parking area controlled by one of the properties. This allows for the private parking supply at a single location to be opened up to a greater number of users, helping to limit the future growth of the parking supply associated with new development projects—especially when the shared supply is in excess.

Needham allows for shared parking in the Avery Square Business District for non-residential users at up to an 800-foot distance for employees. Many nearby communities have similar provisions that apply community-wide. In Avery Square, developers must demonstrate that shared parking is for uses with peak demands at different times, which is a typical requirement. However, Needham also allows sharing when there exists unusual age or other characteristics of site users or if there will be user-sponsored demand reduction devices, such as car-pooling.

Shared parking agreements can take on many forms, including:

- Shared parking between two complementary uses to unlock “restricted” parking facilities
- Shared parking at specific times of the day or week for specific users, such as restaurant employees using bank parking at night through an agreement between limited entities

Agreements between private parties often take on the form of a lease, where one user pays the other for access to parking. The Town can serve as a mediator between involved parties to provide fair protections and exit clauses to agreements, ensure land rights are protected, and to maintain any grandfathered zoning privileges. The Town's involvement can also inventory the status of parking areas and serve as a facilitator for future parties seeking to obtain or lease parking. These actions help relieve developers of the effort involved in facilitating a shared parking arrangement and encourage continued adoption of the practice.

When an agreement takes place between the Town and a private party, such as for general public parking on a private lot during off-hours, instead of lease payments, the Town can provide “in-kind” services such as improvements to and maintenance of surface areas, lighting, and signage, as well as commitments to provide snow clearance during winter weather.

In many communities, shared parking is already informally practiced. However, a formal agreement ensures that the party “providing” parking is compensated if desired, while fair rules of use and termination can be established, avoiding disputes or the fear of being towed.

Reference: **Needham Parking Study – Zoning Review DRAFT**

EXPAND TRANSPORTATION DEMAND MANAGEMENT

Transportation demand management (TDM) speaks broadly to measures constructed as part of development projects or practiced by multi-unit residences, offices, and retail stores to encourage non-single occupancy vehicle travel by employees, residents, and visitors. In Needham, TDM measures are required for projects in some commercial districts but not those in Needham Center or Needham Heights.

Requiring TDM measures for all projects can further encourage multimodal travel throughout Needham. Individuals will be more likely to walk, bike, or take transit with assurances that bike parking will be available at destinations, incentives will be in place for those carpooling or vanpooling, and transit users will be supported with subsidies or other means to encourage travel by train or bus.

An effective TDM strategy should be clear and attainable; developers should not be incentivized to seek exceptions or skirt requirements which cannot be well enacted or tracked. Many municipalities throughout Greater Boston feature a static list of measures to enact or to choose from, much like Needham has for projects which require TDM action.

ALLOW BY-RIGHT REDUCTIONS

Special permits to relieve developers from meeting minimum parking requirements are granted by the Board of Appeals. As stated earlier, the Board may consider factors such as the ability of a project to demonstrate it can be compliant with parking standards if need be, or that a future change of use does not preclude meeting requirements.

These and other provisions are subject to interpretation , introducing a high level of uncertainty for developers seeking waivers from meeting parking requirements. Town staff indicated that nonetheless, most commercial projects end up at the Board of Appeals seeking a waiver from minimum parking requirements.

Clear, objective standards which developers can meet to reduce their on-site parking provision can simplify the development review process and provide peace of mind to the community that providing less parking with development projects will not produce harmful outcomes. These can include requirements to satisfy other measures detailed in this memo, such as more easily obtaining off-site parking, allowing shared parking agreements and enacting transportation demand management strategies. If a developer is reducing their on-site parking need through these or other by-right requirements, waivers to forego meeting minimum parking requirements will not be required, improving the overall development market in Needham while simultaneously making results more predictable for the Town and the public.

ADOPT/ACTIVATE IN-LIEU FEE PROGRAM

More active promotion, use and management of the Needham Center Off-Street Parking Fund can ensure that developers seeking waivers from minimum parking requirements are creating community benefits by some other means.

A by-right fee payment, which can be tied to the per space cost of a surface or structured parking space in a way which can incentivize forgoing excessive parking construction (rather than one tied to Planning Board approval, on a case-by-case basis, as practiced today), can be implemented and used to fund transportation improvements in Needham's commercial districts. These can include:

- Maintenance and improvements (landscaping, lighting) to public parking assets

Reference: Needham Parking Study – Zoning Review DRAFT

- Improvements to the multimodal transportation network to encourage greater walking and bicycling activity
- Beautification for Needham Center and Needham Heights to spur economic activity

Many communities throughout Greater Boston have enacted parking benefit districts, which use revenues from sources like in-lieu fees to fund local improvements, including Natick, Brookline, and Arlington. A best practice is a tiered fee which increases the per-space amount at increasing thresholds, allowing communities to disincentivize large projects from reducing too many spaces, while small projects can economically participate.



21 Highland Circle, Needham, Massachusetts 02494
(781) 444-3011 • Fax (781) 444-1089 • Chair@NeedhamHousing.org

May 10, 2023

Adam Block, Chair
Needham Planning Board
500 Dedham Avenue
Needham, MA 20492

Ref: Status Update -- Linden/Chambers
Redevelopment Project

Dear Chair Block:

I'm writing you with a brief status update on the Linden/Chambers Redevelopment Project. At this point NHA is nearing completion of the following milestones:

- Conceptual Design of the project,
- Understanding of the zoning changes that will be needed,
- Analysis of the options for achieving the needed zoning, and
- Recommendation as to the best option: zoning changes via Town Meeting action.

NHA respectfully requests a meeting with the Planning Board to 1) present the Conceptual Design and receive input/guidance from members; and 2) present our research and analysis of the zoning options, and gain concurrence as to the best way forward.

Please let me know if we can be scheduled for a Planning Board meeting in the near future.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Reginald C. Foster".

Reginald C. Foster, Chair
Needham Housing Authority

cc: Jeanne McKnight
Lee Newman
Alex Clee
Cheryl Gosmon
Robert T. Smart

Tentative Schedule for Zoning – October Special Town Meeting

Tuesday July 11, 2023 – Planning Board to finalize language to include in legal notice

Vote to send language to Select Board

Tuesday July 25, 2023 – Select Board refer back zoning article to Planning Board

Friday August 11, 2023 – Send legal notice to the newspaper

Thursday August 17, 2023 – Post notice with Town Clerk, first run in newspaper

Thursday August 24, 2023 – second run in paper

Tuesday September 5, 2023 – Planning Board Hearing date

Tuesday September 19, 2023 - finalize language

Tuesday September 26, 2023 (or earlier) – final language for warrant to Myles.

Monday October 23, 2023 – Special Town Meeting date - TENTATIVE