

Downtown Study Existing Conditions Report Town of Framingham



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**Urban Design
& Land Use
Vol. 3 of 3**

FRAMINGHAM DOWNTOWN STUDY
TECHNICAL MEMORANDUM ON EXISTING CONDITIONS
URBAN DESIGN AND LAND USE ASSESSMENT

Prepared by: The Cecil Group, Inc.
Prepared for: BETA Group, Inc., and
Town of Framingham

March, 2008

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PROJECT OVERVIEW

Downtown Framingham is a hub of multi-modal transportation, with vehicles, trucking, MBTA commuter rail, regional buses, pedestrians/bicycles, and CSX freight operations converging at the Route 135/Route 126 intersection. The vitality of Downtown Framingham is, in part, dependent upon the ability of the transportation network to service residents, businesses and visitors.

The market potential for retail, office, and residential development will also be a determinant in the future success of the Downtown, because the estimated range of supportable square footage of retail and office development, and number of residential units over the next five to ten years will directly impact the future transportation network.

Finally, urban design and land use conditions will influence planning and design decisions associated with this planning process.

Each of these factors is interdependent upon the others and is integral to achieving the goal of this project, which is to develop a strategy to address the long term revitalization of Downtown Framingham.

This Assessment of Urban Design and Land Use conditions is Volume 3 of 3 for the first phase of this project. Volume 1 provides an assessment of existing Transportation conditions, and Volume 2 describes existing Market and Economic conditions.

Phase II of this project will build upon the above information to develop a recommended strategy for the revitalization of Downtown Framingham.

STUDY AREA

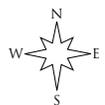
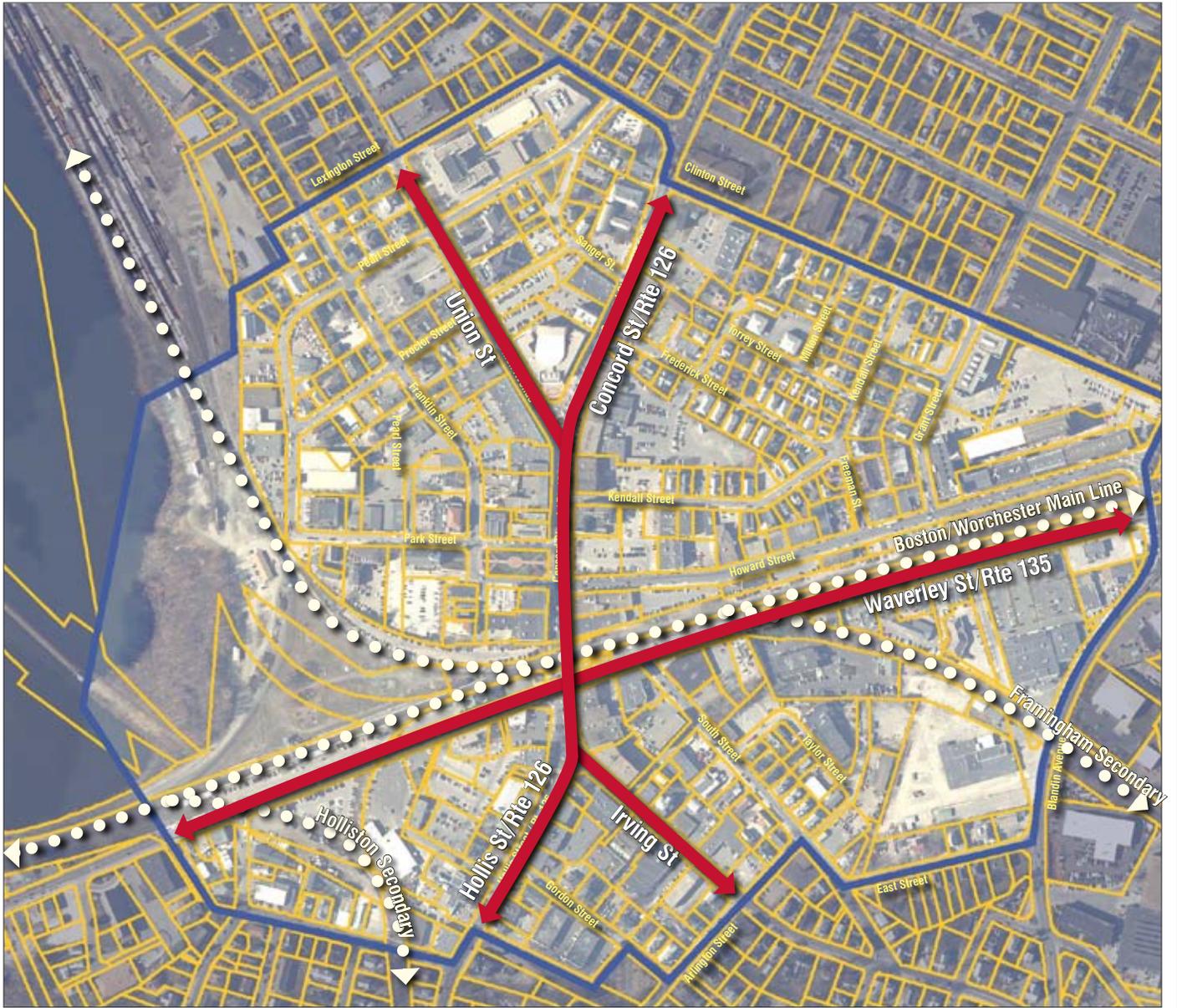
The study area has been defined to include the traditional Central Business District (CBD) as well as surrounding areas that are physically or functionally related to the CBD in terms of land use, transportation and economics. The limits of the study area have been reviewed and confirmed with the project Steering Committee and Town officials at a project Orientation Session, conducted on May 1st. The resulting study area boundaries are shown on *Figure 1*, and include the following:

- Lexington Street, Lincoln Street and Clinton Street to the north.
- Blandin Avenue and Bishop Street to the east.
- Casey Court, Claflin Street, Hollis Street, Gordon Street, Arlington Street, South Street and East Street to the south.
- Farm Pond to the west.

Downtown Framingham is clustered around the intersection of two regional arterials: Route 126, which connects to the Town of Concord and Route 2 to the north, and to the City of Woonsocket in Rhode Island to the south; and Route 135, which connects to the Town of Needham and Interstate 95 to the east, and to the Town of Northborough and Route 20 to the west. As it runs through Downtown Framingham, Route 135 follows the alignment of the main rail line that connects Boston to Worcester and Albany, in the State of New York. The railroad line also intersects Route 126 at grade, just a short distance north of the Route 135 intersection.

It is this major convergence of transportation lines that originally gave rise to the concentration of businesses and industries in Downtown Framingham, based on the availability of access and connectivity. Today, this convergence brings about excessive traffic congestion and hazards to pedestrians, especially at times when the rail crossing is closed to allow large freight trains to pass through.

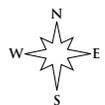
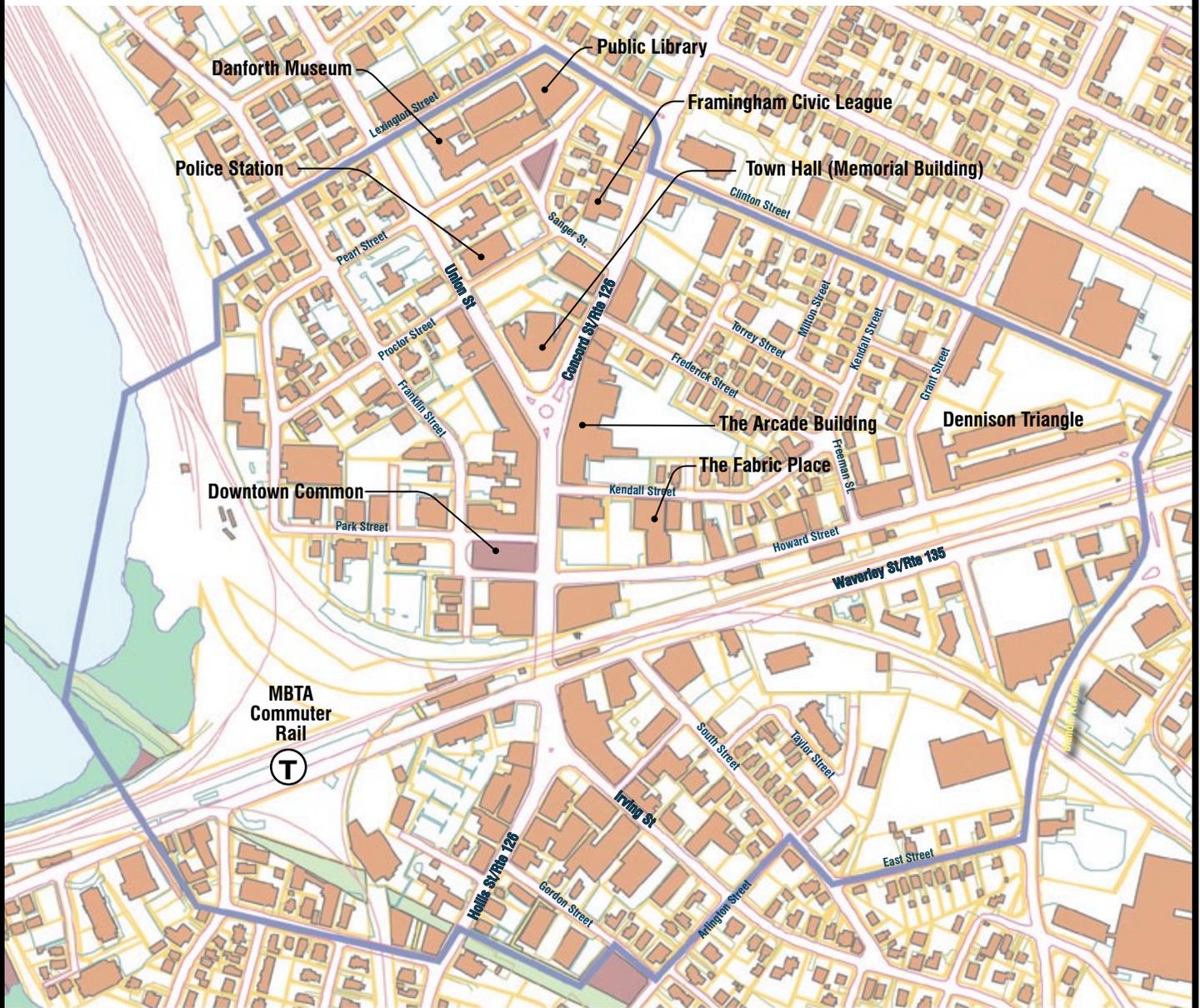
Figure 2, Base Map, shows the existing buildings, improvements and infrastructure contained within the study area, based on available GIS mapping information provided by the Town. In general, Downtown Framingham is densely built with few undeveloped areas and limited open space. The largest concentration of buildings is located along Concord Street and its intersection with Union Avenue, north of Route 135, and along Hollis Street and its intersection with Irving Street, south of Route 135.



Not To Scale

Downtown Study Framingham, MA

**Figure 1
 STUDY AREA**



Not To

Downtown Study Framingham, MA

**Figure 2
 BASE MAP**

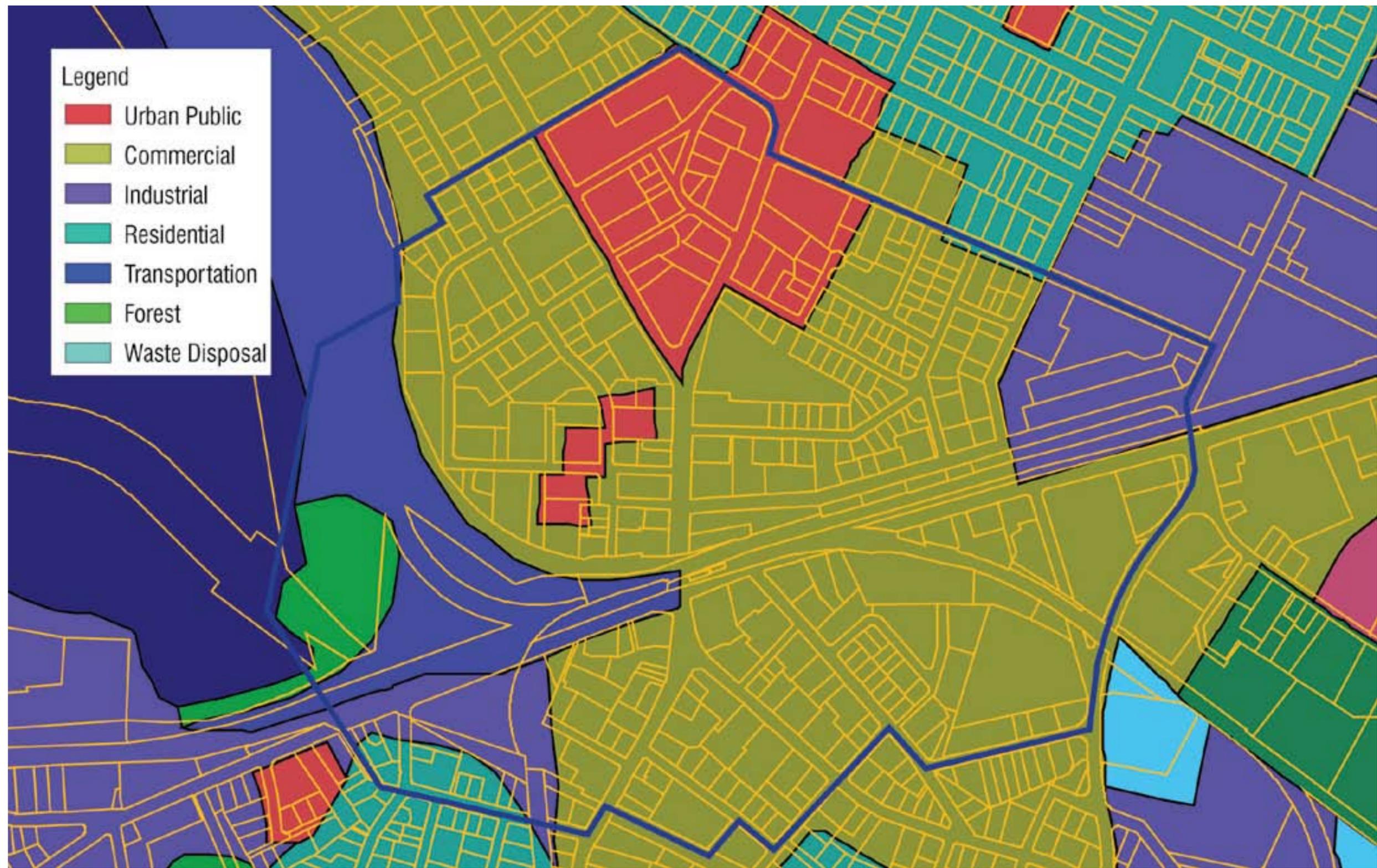
EXISTING LAND USE

Mapping information on existing land use within the study area is available at MassGIS, the Commonwealth's Office of Geographic and Environmental information, and is shown in *Figure 3*. According to this information, approximately two thirds of the study area are occupied by commercial uses, which include general business activities such as retail, offices and commercial services. An important cluster of urban public uses, which include local government and uses of a civic character such as cultural and educational institutions, is clearly identified in the northern section of the Downtown (corresponding to the Town Hall, Police Station, Danforth Museum and Public Library). Another significant portion of land is occupied by transportation uses, representing the main rail line right-of-way and the rail yards located to the west of the downtown. Two smaller areas identified as industrial are located on the eastern and western sections of the study area, adjacent to the rail line and Route 135.

Figure 4 illustrates land use based on field observations carried out during several site visits to the study area. These observations served to break down the general land use categories into more specific types of uses, and reflect a higher level of consistency with the existing conditions at the time when the field observations were made. The map shows how in reality, the existing commercial areas are more concentrated along the main transportation corridors than it was conveyed by the general GIS land use information. At the same time, the presence of well-established residential clusters along Franklin Street, Clinton Street and Arlington Street implies that there is an integral connection between the downtown and the surrounding neighborhoods, and shows how the boundaries between commercial and residential areas within the downtown actually follow property lines rather than roadways.

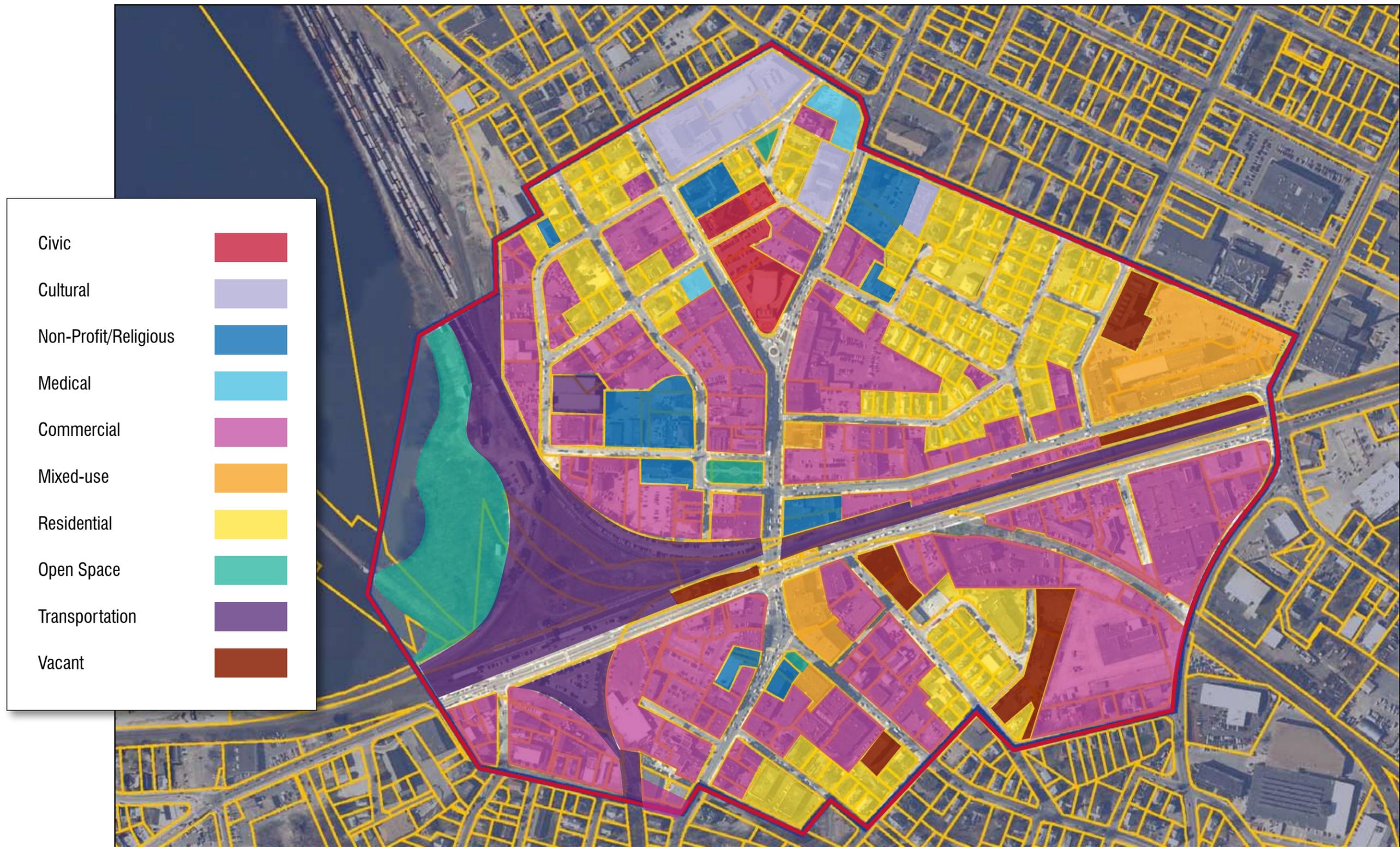
Similarly, a closer look to the existing land use patterns indicates other interesting facts:

- There is a significant amount of religious and non-profit institutions located throughout the downtown commercial areas.
- The high concentration of public and cultural uses clustered around the intersection of Concord Street and Union Avenue, also known as the "Cultural Triangle" represents a strong civic landmark and amenity.
- Zones represented as industrial in the MassGIS database have evolved or are in the process of evolving towards different land use patterns. For example, the eastern section of the study area occupied by the former Avery-Dennison industries is undergoing redevelopment as a mixed-use complex, the Dennison Triangle.



- Legend
- Urban Public
 - Commercial
 - Industrial
 - Residential
 - Transportation
 - Forest
 - Waste Disposal

Source: Massachusetts GIS



Source: Site Visit Observation

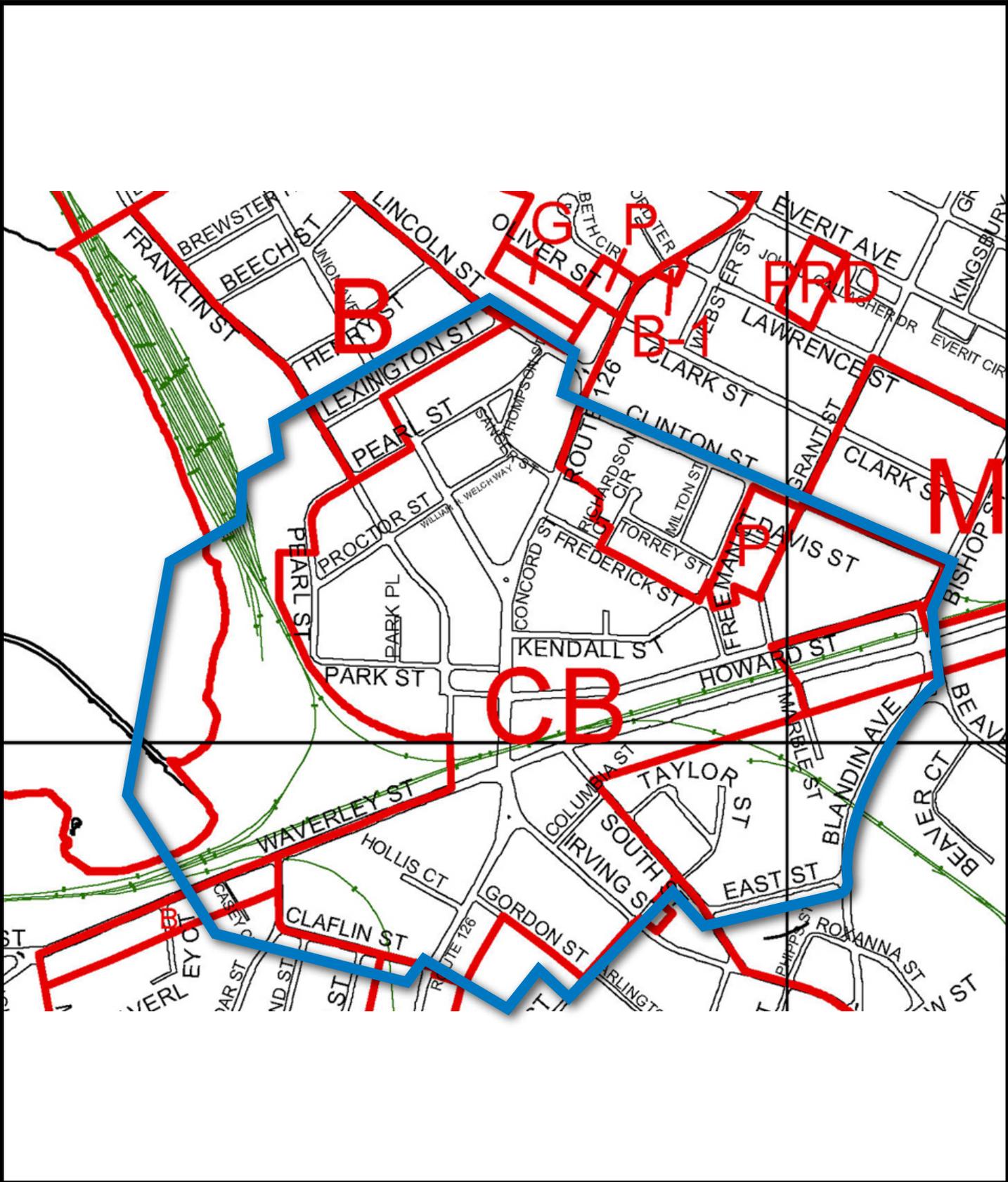
ZONING AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

Several zoning districts are designated within the study area. Zoning district boundaries are represented in *Figure 5*:

- Central Business District (CB)
- Business District (B)
- Neighborhood Business District (B-1)
- Office and Professional District (P)
- Manufacturing District (M)

Table 1 below lists uses permitted as-of-right and uses allowed only by Special Permit.

Table 1		
Uses Allowed by Zoning		
District	Permitted Uses (As-of-right)	(Only allowed by) Special Permit
Central Business (CB)	Specialty retail (less than 8,000 sf, downtown character). Civic, cultural, government uses. Single-family and two-family residential uses are only allowed if existing prior to adoption of the bylaw.	Hotel. Outdoor terraces and cafes. Mixed use (ground floor must be dedicated to pedestrian-oriented business use). Light manufacturing. All uses requiring more than 8,000 sf of building area.
Business (B)	Commerce, retail and offices (less than 8,000 sf). Single-family residential.	Hotel. Restaurants. Transportation terminals. Light manufacturing. Two-family residential. All uses requiring more than 8,000 sf of building area.
Neighborhood Business (B-1)	Commerce, retail and offices (less than 3,000 sf per establishment). Single-family residential. Professional and medical services. Artisans.	Institutions. Library, school, museums. Shops, trade. Restaurants. Two-family residential. Veterinarian. All uses requiring more than 3,000 sf per establishment or 6,000 sf of total building area.
Office and Professional (P)	Professional offices, banks (less than 8,000 sf).	Professional offices, banks (more than 8,000 sf).
Manufacturing (M)	Non-residential uses allowed in Business Districts. Wholesale, bottling. Manufacturing (free of nuisance). Labs, research. Municipal services.	Office and commercial uses requiring more than 50 spaces.



URBAN DESIGN CHARACTER AND IMAGE

Downtown Framingham is characterized by a tightly knit network of streets and blocks, and a dense building fabric. Historic commercial buildings line up Route 126, forming the main commercial spine that extends south of the Route 135 intersection. These buildings range in height from two to four stories, in average. Following traditional urban design patterns, there are zero-setbacks along the street frontage and the ground level is dedicated to commercial use. The Kendall building, the Fitts building, and the Arcade represent outstanding examples of historic commercial architecture characterized by high quality of design and materials, employing the use of brick, granite, limestone and steel.

Parcelization Patterns

The historic development of the downtown led to a parcelization pattern characterized by small blocks and a large number of small parcels (shown on *Figure 6*). This pattern is consistent with the dense character of the traditional building fabric, and the construction techniques available at the time of initial downtown growth.

There are approximately 342 land parcels within the study area, based on the available assessor's data. Of these, about 324 parcels (95% of the total number of parcels) comprise less than one acre each. Approximately 284 parcels (82% of the total number) comprise less than a half acre. Assessor's records also indicate that the great majority of the parcels are independently owned, only a handful of owners control more than one parcel (refer to the discussion on *Land Ownership*, page 42, for more details).

Looking at the spatial distribution of parcels by size, and comparing the distribution of parcels shown in *Figure 6* to the land use observations represented in *Figure 4*, a relationship can be established among the existing parcelization patterns and the observed land use. In general, larger parcels tend to be adjacent to existing or former rail lines and are used (or were used in the past) for commercial, production and wholesale/distribution purposes. The smallest parcels tend to be located on small blocks along narrow streets, and are mostly used as residential. Intermediate size parcels (approximately a half acre) tend to be clustered along the main commercial corridors: Concord, Hollis, Irving, Franklin and Howard Streets, and Union Avenue. These lots tend to be twice as deep as they are wide, reflecting a higher demand and land value based on the commercial advantage of having direct street frontage. This parcel distribution is consistent in general with the character of a historic downtown.

The following assumptions can be made based on these observations:

- Downtown Framingham has grown and developed through small interventions.
- The majority of existing land properties comprise less than a half acre.
- Land is independently owned and controlled by multiple entities.
- Meeting zoning parking requirements is a challenge for most properties in need of renovation, due to limited parcel size.

Building Fabric

Figure 7 illustrates the character and density of the existing building fabric by highlighting building footprints on an aerial photograph of the study area. It also shows existing historic districts.

It is interesting to observe that the largest and most dense concentration of buildings is located on both sides of Concord Street, between Memorial Square and Waverley Street. Building massing along this stretch of road forms two almost continuous “street walls” that extend further north along Concord Street to its intersection with Sanger Street, and along Union Avenue, up to Proctor Street. The intersection of Concord Street and Union Avenue at Memorial Square creates a strong focal point on the Town Hall building, emphasized by the perspective view created by the continuity of the “street walls” on both sides of the street.

The concentration of building massing along the street frontage is also visible south of Waverley Street, along Hollis and Irving Streets, extending the downtown character and perception towards Gordon and Arlington Streets. Further beyond these areas, the concentration of buildings and the continuity of the “street wall” break down into smaller separate units. However, the consistency of image and urban design character created by the continuity of the building fabric along these areas is very strong and contributes to create a special visual identity for the downtown.

The presence of a continuous “street wall” is also visible along two other clusters of buildings of significant architectural and urban design character: the Danforth Museum and Public Library on Lexington Street, and the Dennison buildings along Howard Street.

Historic Character

The areas identified above are characterized by a dense concentration of historic commercial buildings. These buildings are listed as Historic Districts in the National Register of Historic Places. This is the Nation’s official list of cultural resources worthy of preservation, and a national program to coordinate and support public and private efforts to identify, evaluate, and protect historic and archaeological resources. *Figure 7* indicates the location and boundaries of the existing historic districts.

The Concord Square Historic District comprises 140 acres of land and includes 19 buildings located on Park, Concord and Kendall Streets, and Union Avenue. This district includes buildings of architectural, commercial and industrial significance, representative of the Classical Revival architectural style, and significant periods between 1850 and 1949.

The Irving Street Historic District occupies approximately 75 acres of land and includes 21 buildings located along Irving Square and Waverley, South, Columbia, Irving, Gordon and Hollis Streets. These buildings also have architectural and commercial significance, representative of the Colonial Revival and Classical Revival architectural styles, and significant time periods between 1875 and 1949.

Photographs of these buildings are included in the *Photo Inventory* that follows this section.

Street Network

Figure 8 illustrates the street network that serves Downtown Framingham and its components. As previously mentioned in the introductory section, Route 126 (Concord/Hollis Street), Route 135 (Waverley Street) and the Boston main line are three important transportation corridors that converge in Downtown Framingham, and have historically supported the growth of businesses and industries in the study area.

Both Routes 126 and 135 are regional corridors that extend beyond Framingham’s boundaries and carry substantial volumes of traffic (refer to the *Assessment on Transportation Systems* for

detailed information on traffic and transportation). The other streets located in the downtown generally end, or begin, at either one of the two main corridors. Thus, Routes 126 and 135 become the main collector roads that serve Downtown Framingham and connect the district to the rest of the Town and the neighboring communities.

The Boston main line introduces a deep divide between the north and south sectors of the study area, practically subdividing the downtown into two separate street networks with only two crossing points: the Concord/Waverley intersection and Blandin Avenue to the east. This street configuration likely contributes to exacerbate traffic congestion problems in the downtown.

Important secondary roads that serve the northern sector of the study area, and connect Route 126 and the downtown to adjacent neighborhoods, are Union Avenue, Franklin Street and Howard Street. South of the rail line, Irving Street, Arlington Street and Cedar Street play a similar role. Additional short and narrow streets serve the areas located between these secondary roads. These short local streets may just run for one or two blocks at a time, and may turn direction in between intersections creating unexpected angles and vistas.

As a result of these irregularities in street layout, there are blocks of many sizes and shapes throughout the downtown. This variety originates multiple parcel and building configurations, which in turn contribute to create a special identity and a sense of place for particular areas or subdistricts.

Pedestrian Connections

The concentration of civic and commercial uses results in a high concentration of pedestrian traffic along Concord and Hollis Streets (Route 126). Pedestrian activity is also centered on the main points of access to transit services: the MWRTA bus stop in the Downtown Common and the MBTA Station.

Although the main rail line often interrupts pedestrian and vehicular traffic between the north and the south of the study area, especially during train peak times, a consistent flow of pedestrians crossing the rail intersection has been observed during site visits. A significant amount of pedestrians is also visible crossing Waverley Street (Route 135) when trains arrive or depart from the MBTA commuter rail stop.

Other frequently traveled sidewalks connect the central commercial spine and transportation stops to places of work and residential enclaves. Howard, Kendall, Frederick and Irving Streets represent examples of these walking connections (shown in *Figure 9*).

Site observations also indicate that people walk through existing parking lots in order to connect between the Pearl Street garage and downtown destinations, such as the MBTA station or the Danforth Museum. These through-block pedestrian pathways have also been identified by the Framingham Downtown Renaissance, a coalition of local community groups, as part of areas recommended for improvement in their *Downtown Visualization Project* report (2007).

Streetscape Character

Streetscape character varies within the study area. Sidewalks and crosswalks are in overall good condition, especially along the main commercial spine represented by Route 126. There are brick sidewalks along the Downtown Common and ornamental brick accents along the sidewalks surrounding Town Hall. Concord Street south of Memorial Square and Hollis Street north of Gordon have been improved with street trees that greatly enhance their character.

Memorial Square and the Downtown Common are very attractively landscaped with trees, brick pavers, art pieces, benches, flowering beds, period streetlights, bus shelters and wayfinding elements. An opportunity for future streetscape improvements appears to be available at the intersection of Hollis and Irving Streets, where the existing amounts of road pavement seem to be excessive in comparison to the amounts of area actually required by vehicle travel lanes.

Through the rest of the study area, sidewalks appear largely unimproved and are relatively narrow at some locations, such as Howard Street and Waverley Street. Lighting fixtures are of the cobra type and cobra attachments to utility poles.

In general, it could be said that the streetscape character within the study area is defined by the type and character of the buildings that “frame” the street more than by the presence of street trees or other streetscape design elements. This is more apparent along the main commercial spine, where the strong architectural qualities and façade continuity of the historic buildings give the street a clearly defined character (mapped on *Figure 10*). In contrast, the narrow and winding short streets, such as Kendall, Freeman and Frederick, also exhibit a strong streetscape character conveyed by the presence of narrow two-story and three-story residential buildings surrounded by mature trees.

It is in the open areas where buildings don’t “frame” the street, such as Howard, Waverley and Franklin Streets, that streetscape improvements are most needed in order to nurture a pedestrian-friendly environment.

Distinctive Areas or Subdistricts

Based on the land use, urban design and streetscape qualities previously described, several areas or “subdistricts” can be identified in the study area, each with a distinctive identity and a particular urban design character. Suggested are the following subdistricts (represented in *Figure 11*):

- **The Cultural Triangle**: A significant cluster of cultural and civic uses and institutions are located within the area defined by Lexington, Lincoln and Concord Streets, and by Union Avenue. The Danforth Museum, the Framingham Civic League and Auditorium, the Performing Arts Center of MetroWest, the Public Library, and Nevins Hall, located in the Town Hall (Memorial Building), all form part of this “triangle.” The organizations in the Cultural Triangle could benefit from shared planning and coordination of market opportunities, as well as continued support and communication with Framingham Downtown Renaissance (FDR) and START—two organizations that have been instrumental in defining the cultural character of this area.
- **Historic Commercial Districts**: Characterized by an active mix of uses and a strong urban design character, the Concord Square and Irving Square Historic Districts represent a great potential for future enhancement and redevelopment. Paramount is the provision of incentives and requirements to protect the existing historic and urban design character. The Irving Square area may see increased cultural activity with the expected future move of The Amazing Things Arts Center to the Hollis Street fire station.
- **Special Character Areas**: The Downtown Common and the Dennison Triangle are two other areas or subdistricts characterized by the presence of distinctive buildings and streetscape, which have been recently improved or are undergoing improvement. Much has been

accomplished towards the redevelopment of these areas. However, there still are buildings or areas within each of these subdistricts in need of further revitalization.

- **Residential Clusters:** Residential areas located within the periphery of the downtown have a potential to greatly contribute to its vitality and diversity, while obtaining benefit from the proximity and access to jobs, services and transportation. Some of these areas, such as the Kendall Street neighborhood are characterized by a street layout and building configuration that support residential use and community interaction. However, they are affected by economic and social issues that need to be addressed within a context larger than the downtown.
- **Underutilized Land Areas:** There are extensive areas of underutilized and inaccessible land areas adjacent to the downtown, consisting of parcels owned by the railroad companies. These large holdings acquire a special significance when considering the scarcity of land available for open space and recreation. Framingham residents and organizations have suggested tentative uses for these areas through the years, including the possibility of developing parks and recreational areas to provide desired downtown public access to Farm Pond.

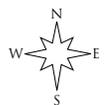
Edges and Boundaries

The presence of distinctive areas or subdistricts with a diverse urban design character represents an asset for the downtown. Diversity in uses and activities contribute to the perception of a lively and vibrant downtown, especially if this diversity results in the perception of a different character or identity from one area to another.

Special planning and design consideration, however, should be given to the edges and boundaries between different areas or subdistricts. These are zones where land use patterns may be substantially different and even conflictive with each other. For example, the presence of light manufacturing uses next to a residential area may create impacts in terms of noise, traffic and visual incompatibility; the presence of a vacant property may detract from the overall image and perception of security in a pedestrian district; long blank walls facing a street can create a similar effect of desolation and blight.

Zoning provisions and design guidelines for these areas should be aimed at mitigating any negative impacts that may arise from the presence of contrasting uses and building types. These could be achieved through regulations controlling building massing, location and height, such as the design guidelines for the Central Business District that have been recently adopted by the Planning Board, or through the creation of appropriately landscaped buffer zones.

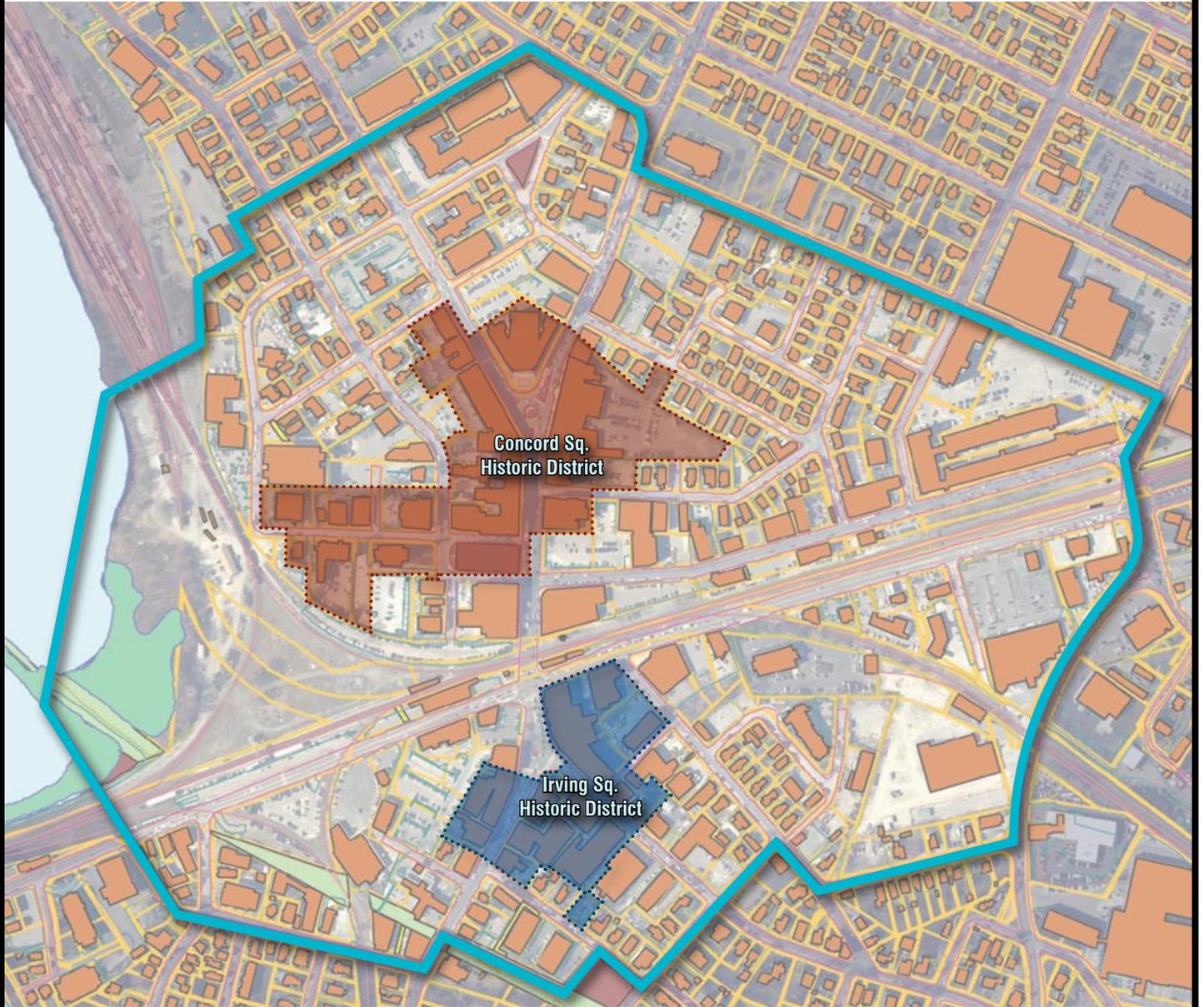
In Downtown Framingham, edge conditions between contrasting land uses and building types can be found along Grant Street, Gordon Street, Claflin Street, and along the property lines that separate large commercial buildings from residential areas. Additional edge and boundary constraints are posed by the rail lines as they cross the downtown, separating the CBD from Farm Pond. These edges need special attention in terms of urban design, landscaping and buffering, and the consideration of potential opportunities for the creation of access between the downtown and nearby open space resources. These areas, edges and boundaries are mapped on *Figure 12*.

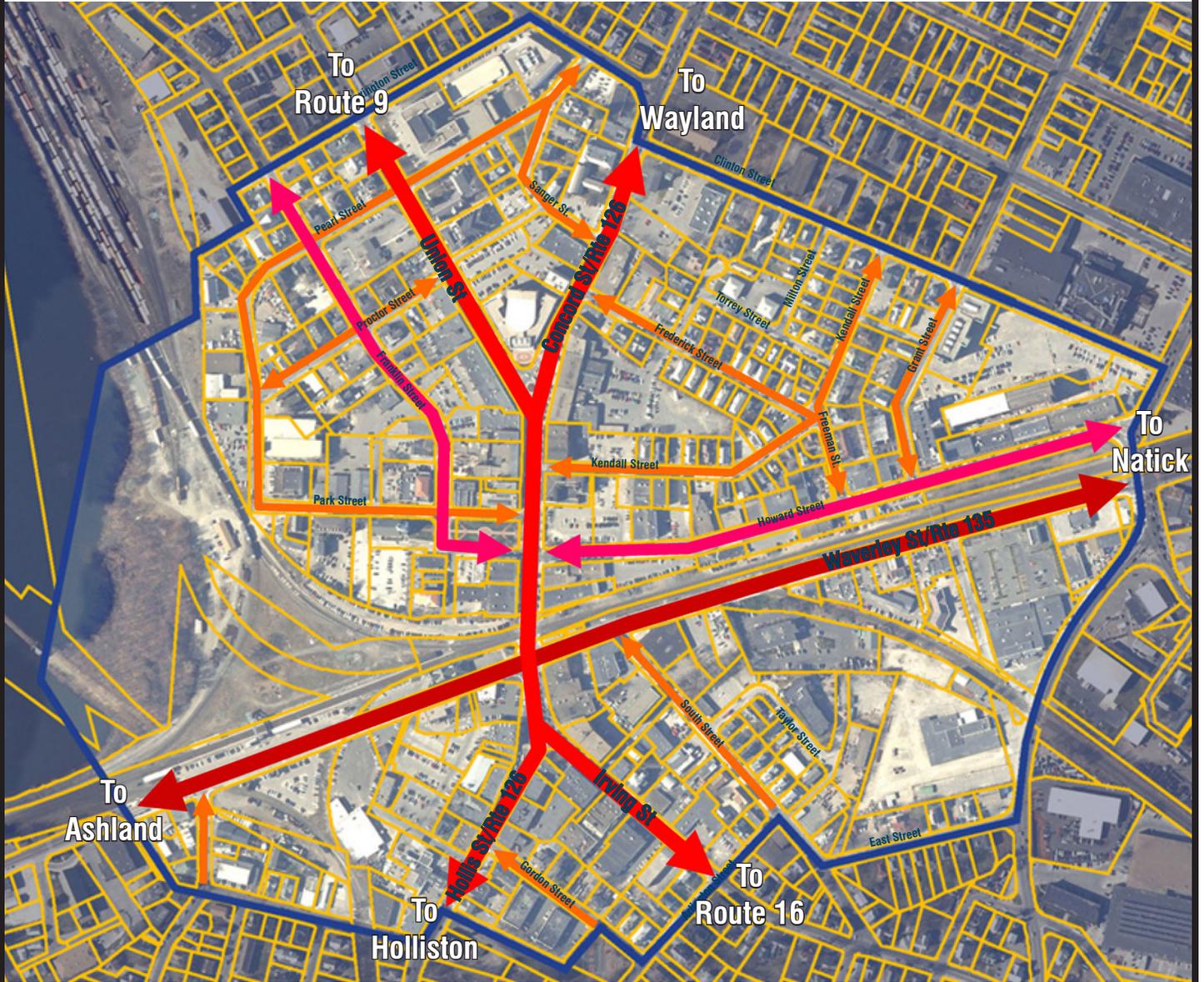


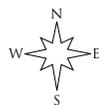
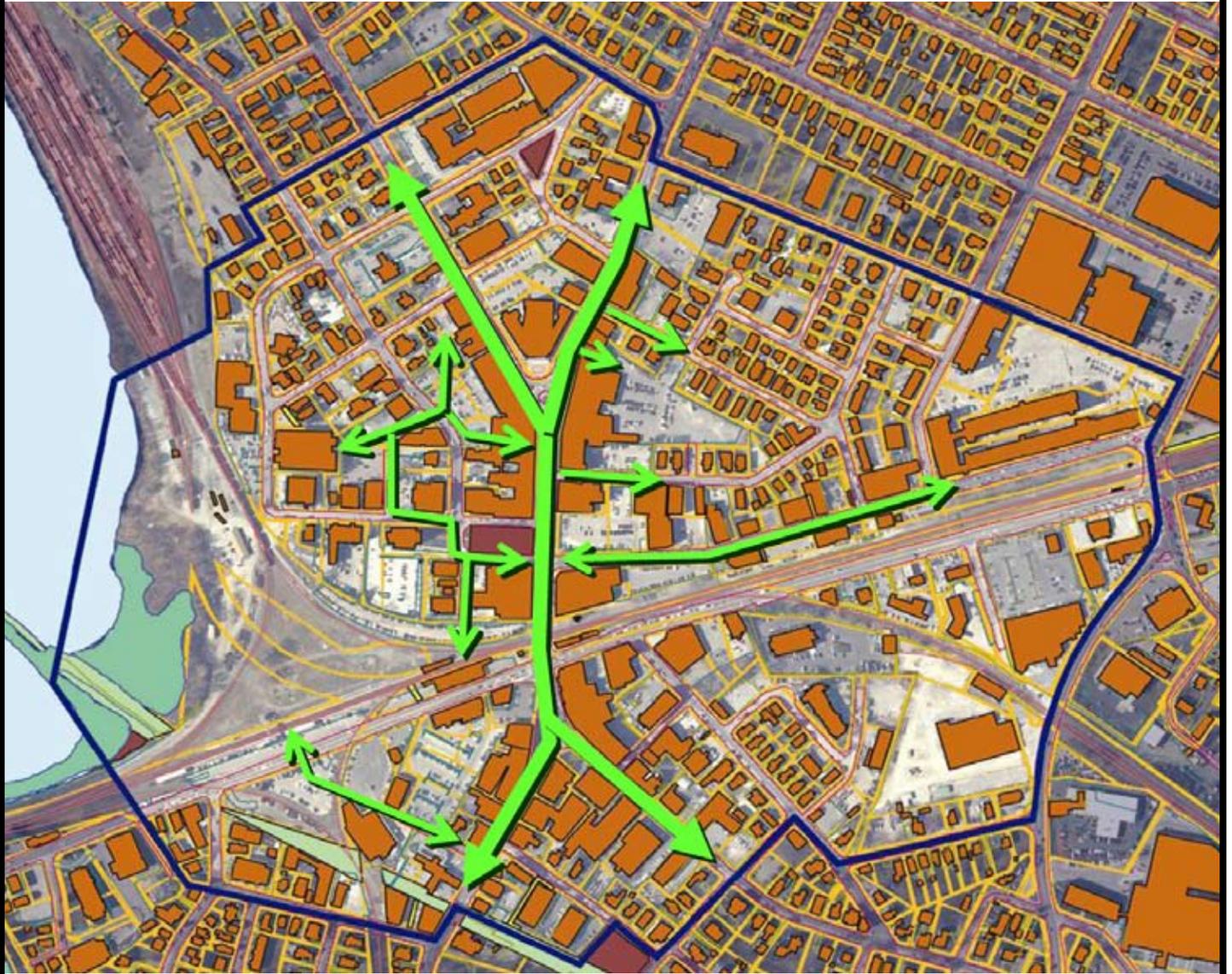
Not To Scale

Downtown Study Framingham, MA

Figure 6
STUDY AREA PARCELS



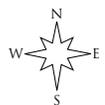
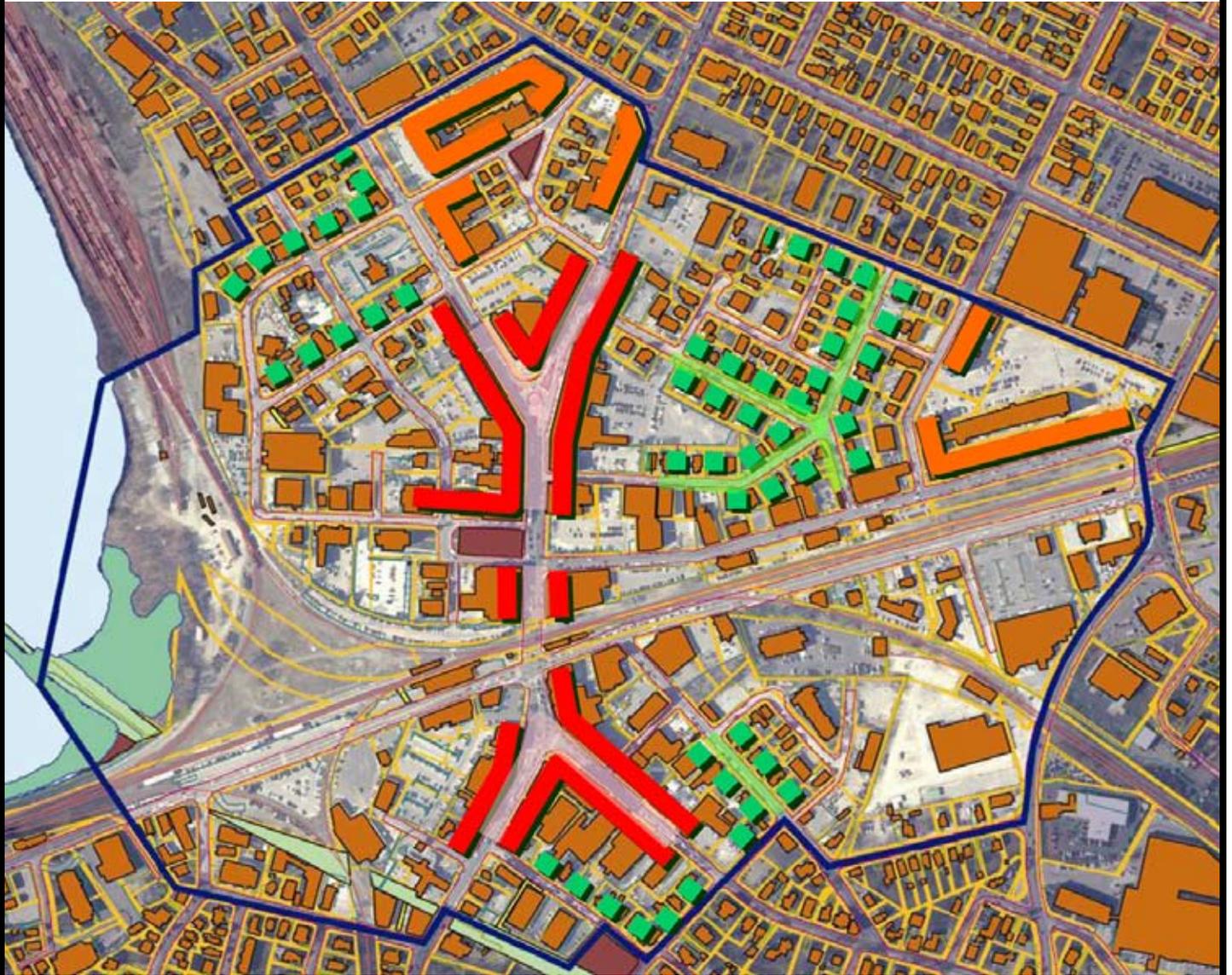




Not To Scale

Downtown Study Framingham, MA

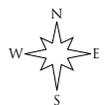
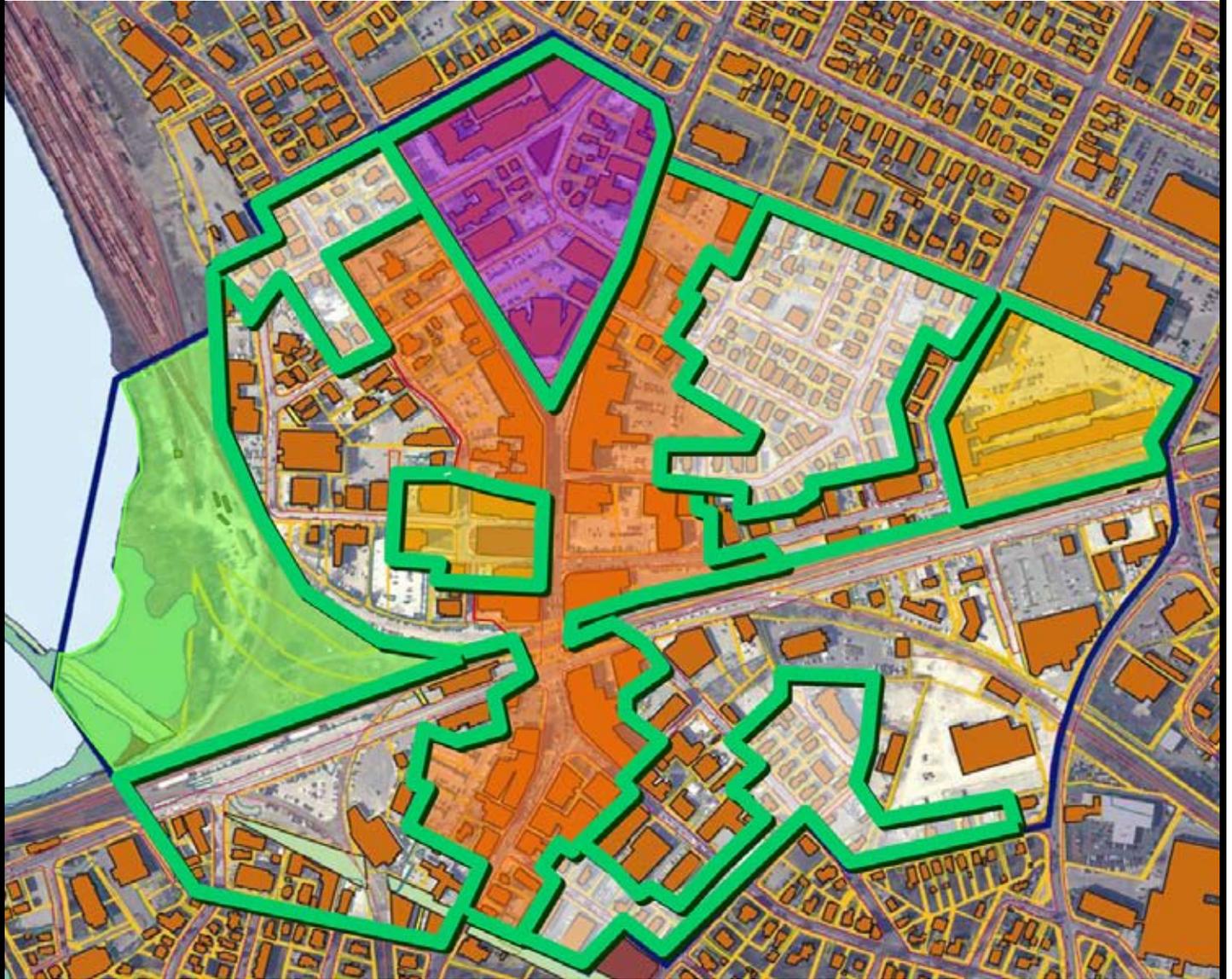
Figure 9
PEDESTRIAN CONNECTIONS



Not To Scale

Downtown Study Framingham, MA

Figure 10
FRAMED STREETS



Not To Scale

Downtown Study Framingham, MA

Figure 11
SUBDISTRICTS



Not To Scale

Downtown Study Framingham, MA

Figure 12
EDGE CONDITIONS

PARKS AND OPEN SPACE

Figure 13 shows the location of parks and open space in the study area.

In general, Downtown Framingham is highly dense and built up. Only a few parks and landscaped areas are available within the study area. These include the following:

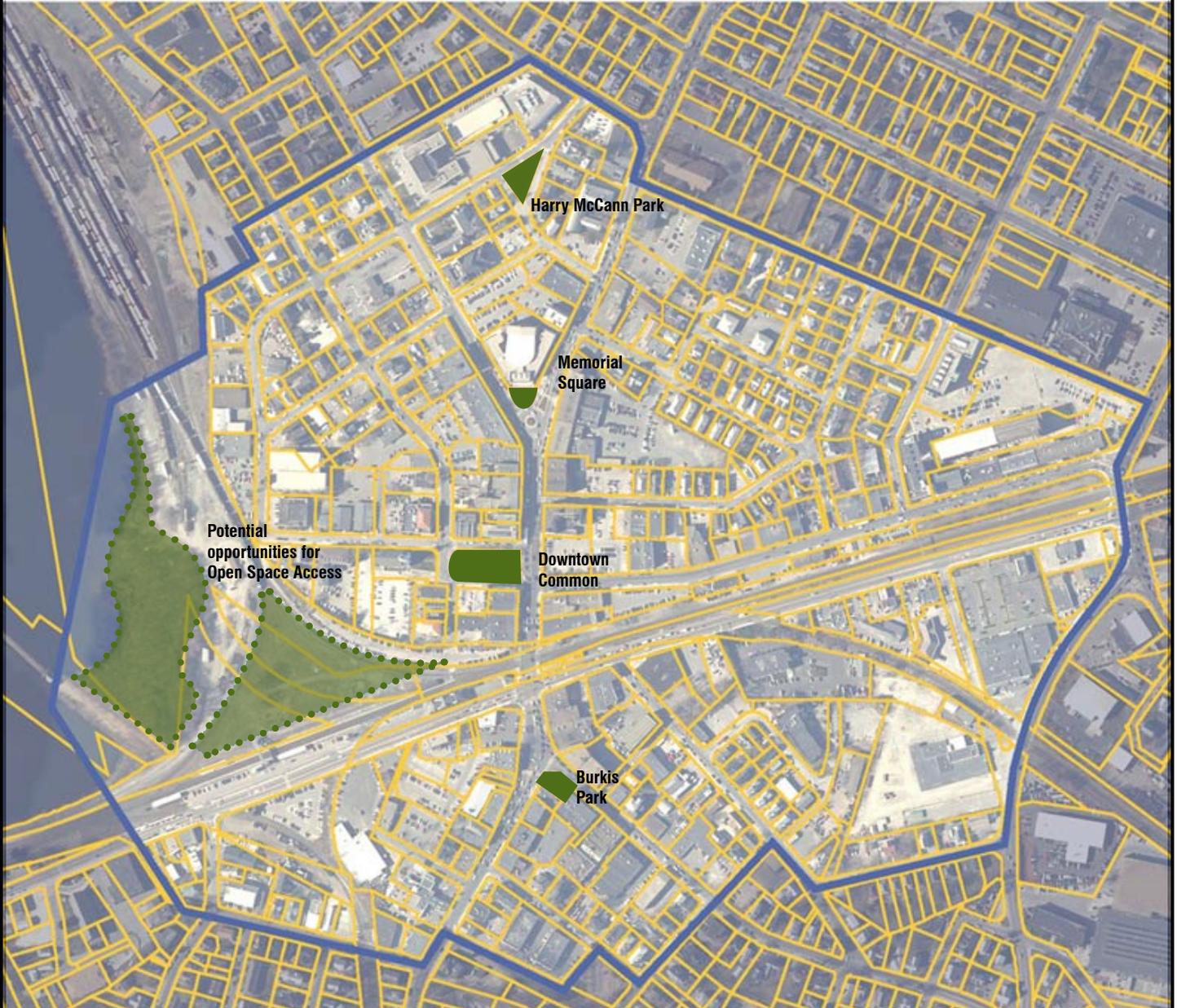
- The Downtown Common (also referred to as the South Common)
- Memorial Square, a landscaped public space in front of Town Hall (also referred to as Memorial Hall)
- J. Harry McCann Park, a triangular square located within the Cultural Triangle
- Burkis Square, a neighborhood park at the corner of Irving and Hollis Streets (Irving Square)

The Downtown Common, Memorial Square and Burkis Square are well designed and landscaped, having been subject to relatively recent improvements. McCann Park, although fairly maintained, could be enhanced through improvements to its plantings and materials.

The effect that these existing parks have on the perception of Downtown Framingham as a pedestrian environment will be enhanced through proposed streetscape improvements that are currently in the planning stages and will contribute to the future greening of the downtown.

Additional open space is available in the form of undeveloped land controlled by the railroad companies that own and operate the Boston main line (CSX and the MBTA). These properties include vegetated shoreline along Farm Pond as well as extensive grassy areas located between the multiple rail lines that intersect around the MBTA station. Combined, these parcels amount to approximately 6 acres of land that could potentially be used for recreational purposes. However, these areas are physically isolated from the downtown by the active rail lines and practically inaccessible.

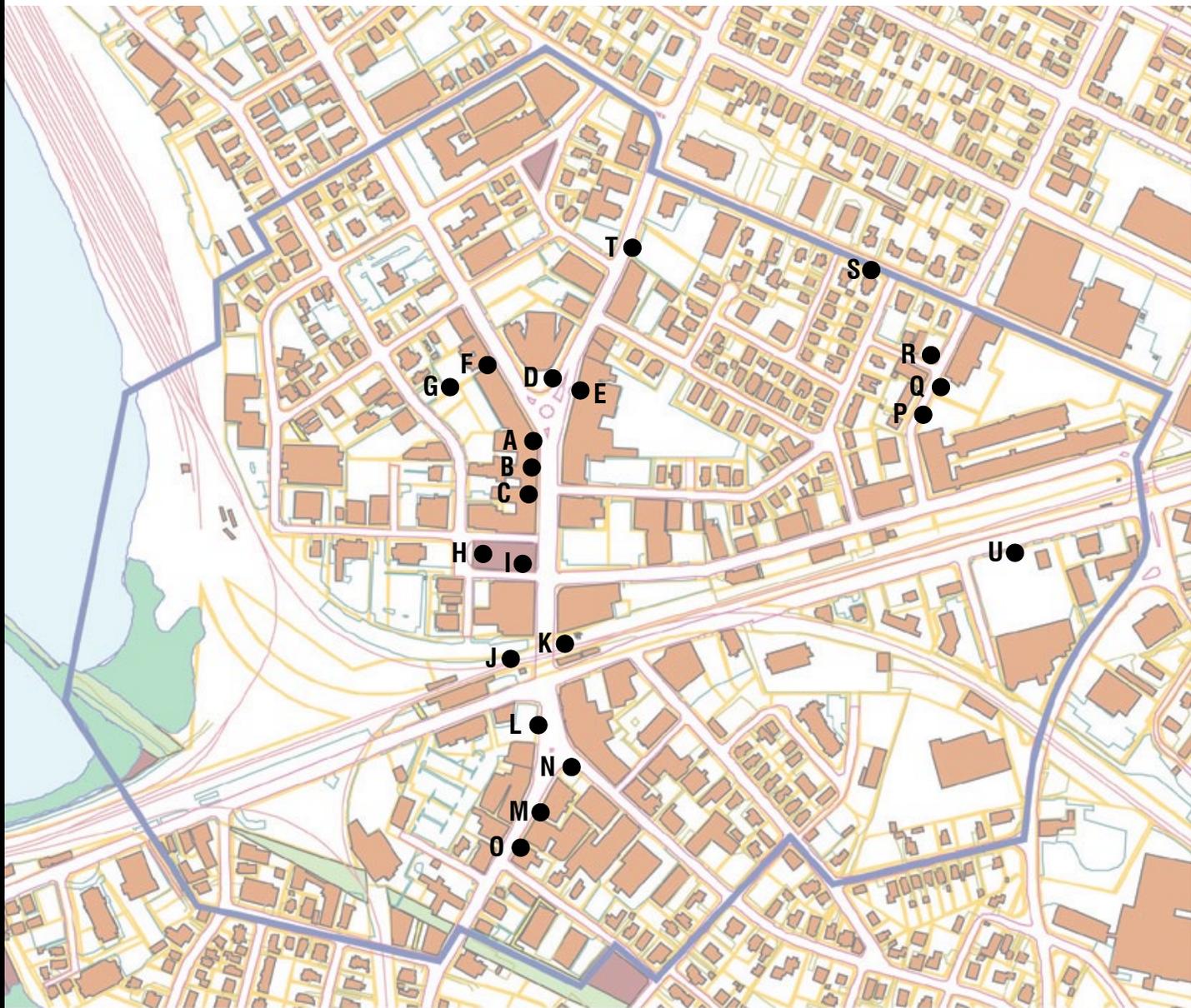
Several concepts and ideas for the recreational use of this land have been proposed through the years. A community charrette organized a few years ago identified the potential for the creation of a waterfront park providing boating access to the pond, which exists now only from the north. Historically, there was an amphitheater and an amusement park near the water. A modern park could include waterfront bikeways and walking trails around the pond, or perhaps community playfields with access from the downtown. The Framingham Downtown Renaissance has reframed these concepts and ideas through its *Downtown Visualization Project*, which recommends the reactivation of the Town's Farm Pond Task Force to sponsor the creation of a vision for the revitalization of these natural resource areas.



PHOTOGRAPHIC INVENTORY

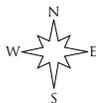
A photographic inventory of urban design and land use conditions of Downtown Framingham has been compiled over several field visits to the study area. Aspects of the downtown recorded photographically include the existing roads and public ways, landmark buildings, civic institutions, parks and open space, sidewalks, streetscape, and signage.

A selection of representative images is included in the following pages to represent the overall architectural, urban design and streetscape character of the study area (*Figures 14-1 to 14-12*). Additional photographs are available in electronic format for use as reference materials during the next steps of the study.



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Not To Scale

Downtown Study Framingham, MA

Figure 14-1
 PHOTO INVENTORY



A. Intersection of Concord Street and Union Avenue, looking north.



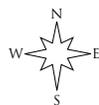
B. Concord Street/Route 126, looking south from Memorial Square.



C. The Kendall Building, renovated for mixed-use.

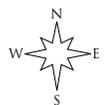


D. The Arcade Building, proposed for mixed-use redevelopment.





E. View of the pedestrian arcade at the Arcade Building.



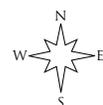
Not To Scale



F. Service alley providing access to parking behind buildings.



G. Parking behind buildings that front on Union Avenue.





H. Downtown Common looking east.



I. LIFT bus stop on Downtown Common.



J. Historic Train Station designed by H.H. Richardson.



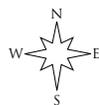
K. Vacant buildings located across Concord Street from the train station.



L. Intersection of Hollis Street and Irving Street, looking south.



M. Hollis Street looking north towards Irving Street intersection.

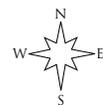




N. *Burkis Park at the intersection of Hollis and Irving.*



O. *Traditional architecture along Hollis Street/Route 126.*

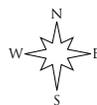




P. *The Dennison Triangle mixed-use redevelopment project.*



Q. *View of the Dennison Triangle from Grant Street.*

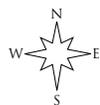




R. Vacant building in the Dennison complex facing Grant Street.



S. View of residential areas along Clinton Street.





T. Streetscape character along Concord Street north of Memorial Square.



U. Streetscape character along Waverley Street/Route 135.

PARKING

An evaluation of parking conditions was made in October 1999 by Rizzo Associates, Inc. (*Downtown Framingham Parking Evaluation*). The study area subject to Rizzo's evaluation was larger than the study area of this Framingham Downtown Study, and it included blocks located north of Clinton Street and east of Bishop Street. However, Rizzo's parking findings for the Central Business District (CBD) were surprisingly similar to parking findings from this assessment of existing conditions, based on available GIS data, recent aerial photographs and site visits conducted last Fall as part of this study. These findings appear to be consistent with the fact that there have not been significant development projects built during the past several years in the downtown, except for the Dennison Triangle which is located outside of the CBD area.

Figure 15 summarizes the results of comparisons between Rizzo's evaluation and current parking observations for the commercial areas of the downtown. Rizzo's evaluation surveyed on-street and off-street parking spaces within seven sub-areas (A, B, C, D, E, F-1 and F-2). Only five of those sub-areas are included within the boundaries of our study area (A, C, D, E and F-2), which are shown in *Figure 15*.

Both Rizzo's evaluation and current parking counts based on the available GIS data and recent aeriels, made as part of this assessment, indicate the presence of approximately 2,800 off-street parking spaces within the study area. Rizzo's evaluation provides a breakdown of off-street parking spaces into private and public parking. In addition, Rizzo calculated that there are approximately 640 on-street parking spaces within sub-areas A, C, D and F-2 (see summary on *Figure 15*).

As a result of this analysis, it can be assumed that there are nowadays a total of approximately 3,400 parking spaces within the boundaries of Downtown Framingham as defined by this study. An assessment of parking supply and utilization trends is provided on page 47 of this technical memorandum.

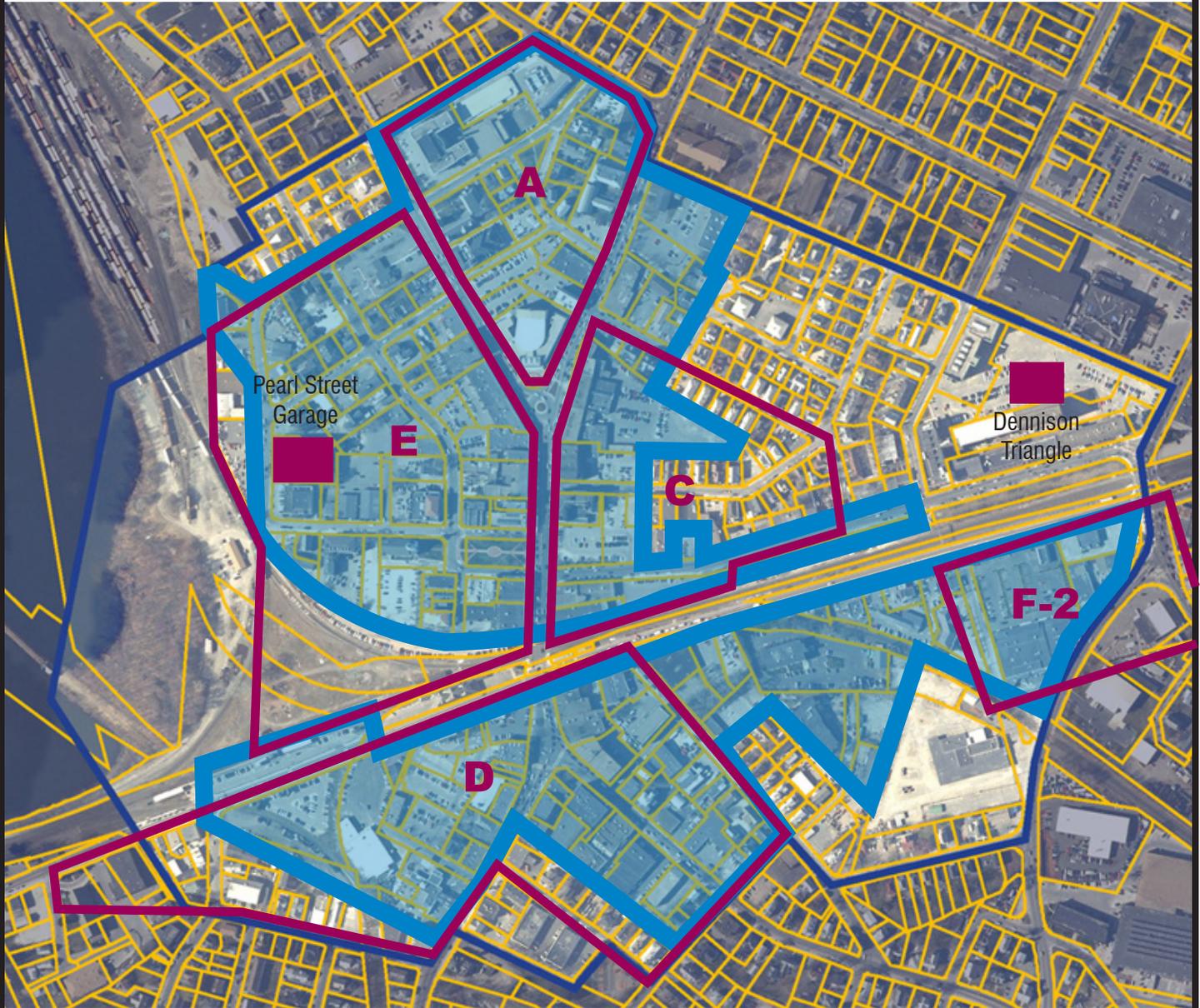
Existing Parking in Commercial Areas (Based on Rizzo's 1999 Parking Evaluation)

Study Sub-Area	Off-Street Public Parking Spaces ⁽¹⁾	Off-Street Private Parking Spaces ⁽²⁾	On-Street Parking Spaces	Total Parking Spaces
A	249	137	125	511
C	274	185	141	600
D	163	295	205	663
E	653	458	171	1282
F-2		372		372
Totals	1339	1447	642	3428
Sub-Total Off-Street Parking Spaces:		2786 spaces		

Notes:

(1) Includes 290 public spaces at the Pearl Street garage

(2) Does not include 322 parking spaces at the Dennison Triangle



 Commercial Areas: Approximately 2,768 Off-street Parking Spaces
(Based on GIS data and aerial photographs, not including Dennison Triangle)

PUBLIC AND PRIVATE INITIATIVES

Several important public and private initiatives are currently underway to plan for the future, improve the existing infrastructure, and redevelop significant properties. The following are some of these initiatives:

Plans and Studies

The Town is conducting a series of plans and studies aimed at improving the existing public infrastructure in the downtown, in addition to this Framingham Downtown Study. The Town is also sponsoring studies and initiatives to support cultural revitalization within the downtown, and facilitate the redevelopment of underutilized properties.

Transit Oriented Development

The Town, through its Planning Department, is applying for TOD funding to improve pedestrian connections between the MBTA station, the MWRTA hub/bus stop, and the Pearl Street garage, all located in the downtown. Support for transit-oriented, mixed-use development is one of the Town's policies for revitalization.

Central Business District Engineering and Streetscape Improvement Plan

The Town is in the process of selecting consultants to advance engineering and streetscape improvements along Concord Street, Waverley Street and Hollis Street. These will include compliance with ADA accessibility requirements.

Pearl Street Municipal Parking Garage Rehabilitation

An analysis of garage rehabilitation needs is underway to identify lighting, security, and other improvements that should be undertaken in the short- to mid-term.

Hollis/Irving Street Intersection Improvements

The Department of Public Works is advancing plans for traffic improvements at this intersection, which may also include streetscape and lighting enhancements.

Public Transit System Enhancements

The local Framingham transit system, formerly known as the LIFT, has recently been replaced by the MetroWest Regional Transit Authority (MWRTA). Unlike the LIFT system, which was limited to the immediate Framingham area, this new regional authority provides bus services between nine member towns in the MetroWest area: Natick, Framingham, Holliston, Hopkinton, Ashland, Wayland, Weston, Sudbury and Sherborn. The MWRTA allows enhanced commuter access within the region, decreases automobile dependence, and provides improved transportation services to those people in need.

Currently, the central hub of the MWRTA is located in Downtown Framingham, but the long-term plan is to eventually relocate this area to the vicinity of Shoppers World/Route 9 on the Framingham Natick border. However, it is anticipated that the current hub location on Concord Street will remain as a bus stop and major point of access in the downtown.

Period Streetlight Installation

Existing cobra lighting along Route 126 will be replaced with period style lighting similar to the samples already installed.

Franklin Street Reconstruction

The reconstruction of Franklin Street is anticipated to start in the Fall, including sidewalk brick accents and new streetlights.

Sign and Façade Improvement Program

The Town has an ongoing Sign and Façade Improvement Program that provides financial assistance to business and property owners to finance part of the cost of improvements to the exterior of commercial buildings.

A recently approved Sign Bylaw (*Article VII*) establishes detailed requirements for the design and placement of signs that will contribute to achieve higher consistency and quality of signage throughout the downtown.

Nevins Hall Market Study

A study will identify market opportunities for cultural activities in the downtown, and the results will be used to inform the design of rehabilitation plans for Nevins Hall.

Cultural Triangle Improvements

Several projects are underway to upgrade and renovate the Town's prime civic and cultural institutions to attract cultural activities and performances to the downtown. START and Framingham Downtown Renaissance (FDR) have been instrumental to the formation of the Cultural Triangle as a dynamic arts district that acts as a source of motivation for people to visit the downtown. The START Framingham Partnership was established in 2002 in collaboration with the Massachusetts Cultural Council, the Framingham Cultural Council, the Framingham's Planning and Economic Development Department, and other cultural and art institutions, to promote artists and cultural activities in the community.

Nevins Hall Restoration

The Town is carrying out renovations of its main Town Hall auditorium to upgrade compliance with fire code requirements and renovate finishes and equipment, in order to attract civic events and cultural performances.

Danforth Museum Improvements

The Danforth Museum is undergoing repairs and renovation work at its main building and associated facilities. Some of these improvements include the design of a plan to improve the adjacent Harry McCann Park.

Redevelopment Projects

At least three large-scale redevelopment projects are underway in the study area, taking advantage of zoning provisions that allow for mixed-use development in the Central Business District, which may include residential units on upper floors as long as the ground floor includes pedestrian-oriented commercial uses. Proposed developments are the following:

The Kendall Building

Redevelopment of the historic Kendall Hotel building at 79-85 Concord Street will result in the creation of approximately 24 residential units and commercial space on the ground level (estimated total area of 38,000 sf). The project includes the historic restoration of the building façades.

The Arcade Project

Approximately 190 residential units (including 20% affordable) and 50,000 sf of commercial space are proposed on the site of the Arcade building at 111 Concord Street (estimated total area of 400,000 sf). This development will represent the first Urban Center Housing TIF project in the downtown, which is part of an Urban Center Housing Tax Finance District (UCH-TIF) created to incent the development of residential uses, affordable housing and commercial space in the downtown. However, the project has recently stalled due to financial constraints.

The Dennison Triangle (*Dennison Crossing*)

The redevelopment of the first phase of the Dennison Triangle is complete and in the marketing phase. The buildings are partially occupied, and include approximately 160 condominiums and a 4-level 322-space car garage. A second phase of development will include vacant buildings along Grant Street, which are slated for commercial redevelopment in the short- to mid-term future.

More detailed information about these redevelopment projects is included in the *Market and Economic Assessment*, provided under separate cover.

REDEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL

Assessing the redevelopment potential of parcels and properties within the study area is a complex undertaking that involves consideration of the physical conditions of the property, use and land ownership, land values, demographics, and real estate market trends, to name just a few of the factors that may affect the likelihood that a property may change use and character.

Although demographic and real estate market findings from the assessment of economic opportunities and conditions are taken into account, this analysis is more focused on the physical conditions that relate primarily to urban design and land use in Downtown Framingham. Two important elements have been investigated on a parcel-by-parcel basis:

- Land ownership
- Susceptibility to change

Land Ownership

The analysis of land ownership patterns in the study area indicates that there are approximately twenty (20) organizations and individuals that own more than one (1) acre of land in Downtown Framingham. It may be surprising that there are such few owners that control more than one acre. However, this could be explained by the relatively small size of the majority of the parcels in the study area and the likelihood that the majority of the property owners own only one property.

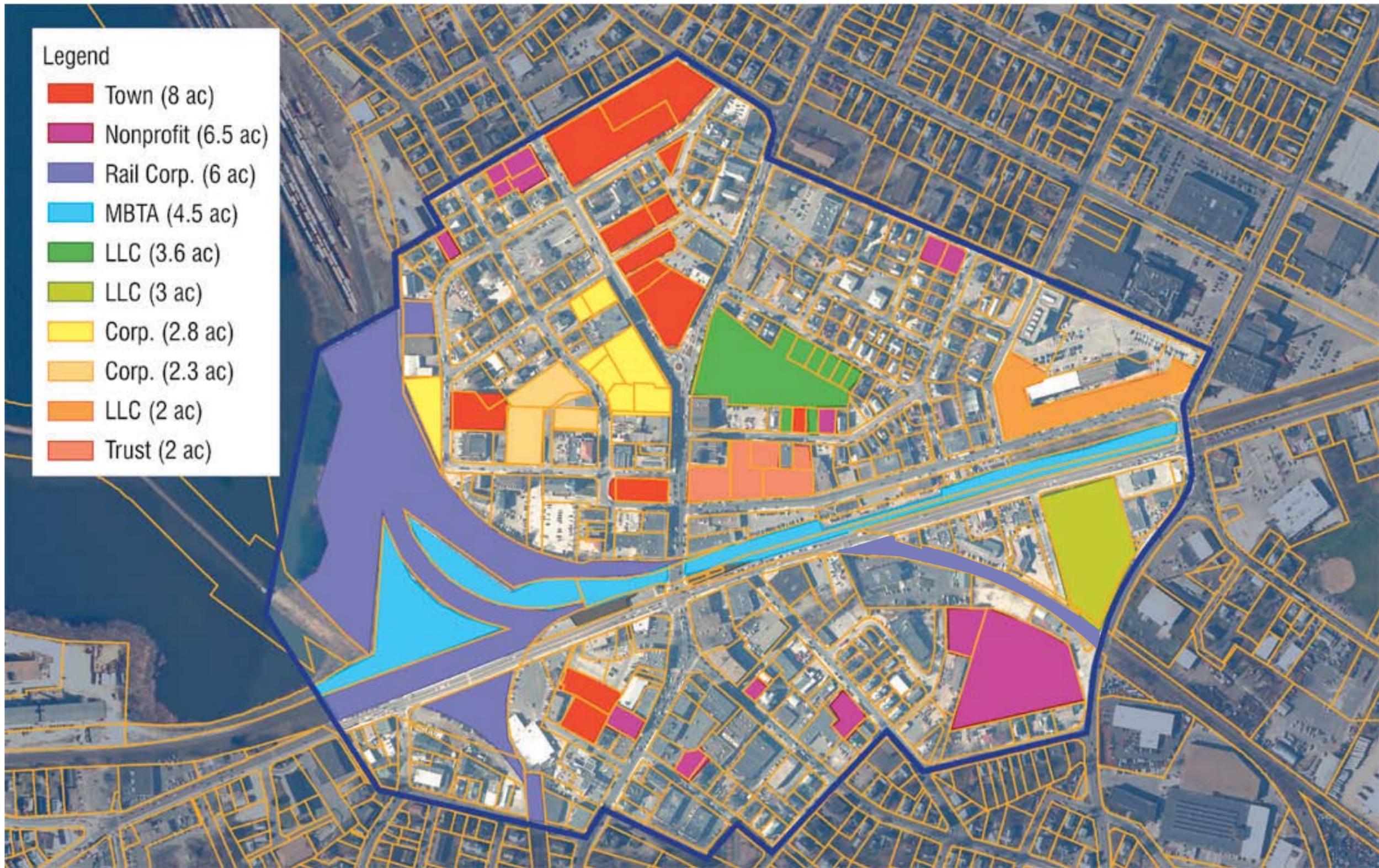
Furthermore, of the twenty or so landowners that own properties larger than one acre, only ten control more than two (2) acres of land (according to data available on the Framingham Assessor's database). Those properties are represented on *Figure 16*. The following is a breakdown of the total area of land owned by entity:

Owner	# of Acres
Town of Framingham	8
South Middlesex Housing Corporation	6.5
Consolidated Rail Corporation (CSX)	6
MBTA	4
Framingham Acquisitions LLC	3.6
Pilavin Realty LLC	3
The Hemenway Inc.	2.8
Franklin Development Corporation	2.3
Framingham 300 Howard LLC	2
Isaacson, Ronald TRS	2

The following observations should be noted:

- The largest concentration of land in the study area is controlled by railroad companies (considering CSX and the MBTA combined).

- Legend**
- Town (8 ac)
 - Nonprofit (6.5 ac)
 - Rail Corp. (6 ac)
 - MBTA (4.5 ac)
 - LLC (3.6 ac)
 - LLC (3 ac)
 - Corp. (2.8 ac)
 - Corp. (2.3 ac)
 - LLC (2 ac)
 - Trust (2 ac)



- The Town of Framingham is the single largest landowner in the study area, which is not surprising considering the high concentration of public and civic land uses in the downtown.
- The second largest landowner (in terms of total amount of land under control) is the South Middlesex Housing Corporation, a non-profit organization. This land is not concentrated in one single parcel, but distributed among several parcels in the downtown. Most of these are small, with the exception of 15 Blandin Avenue, which comprises approximately 3.5 acres and is mostly underutilized.
- Some of the largest tracts of land on the list have been redeveloped or are undergoing redevelopment (Framingham Acquisitions LLC, Pilavin Realty LLC, The Hemenway Inc. and Framingham 300 Howard LLC).

Susceptibility to Change

This analysis considers a combination of qualitative and quantitative factors to identify parcels of land that are susceptible to change. The results are mapped on a parcel-by-parcel basis, and expressed in colors or patterns that will help visualizing parcels that may change in the future, in contrast to parcels that will most likely change and parcels that will not change at all.

As a result, “soft” and “hard” parcels become represented in a diagram that helps to convey the presence and location of areas that may be redeveloped more easily than others, and the location of potential development sites.

Some of the criteria applied to the assessment of “soft” and “hard” areas include the following:

- Parcels and buildings considered “soft” or highly susceptible to change are those currently subject to redevelopment or new construction, and those for which there are formal redevelopment plans or proposals underway.
- Parcels and buildings considered “hard” or not susceptible to change are those with a significant civic or historic value and owners committed to preservation (such as institutions), newer or renovated buildings with high replacement cost that would make change unfeasible (such as recent commercial and mixed use developments), and buildings in average condition that meet owner’s needs and expectations (such as individual homes).
- Intermediate levels of susceptibility are assessed through the consideration of other physical and economic qualities, such as property location, proximity to new or proposed developments, access to transit and transportation, age of existing improvements, market trends, and other conditions that may affect the physical or economic feasibility of redevelopment. For example, parcels or buildings that are underutilized but have good access and visibility in a revitalized district may be susceptible to change in the mid-term; underutilized parcels that are also in a disadvantaged location or require financial incentives to unlock their potential may be susceptible to change in the long-term.

Figure 17 represents the results of the susceptibility-to-change analysis for Downtown Framingham, which can be summarized as follows:

- Areas that are not expected to change include the Town’s civic and cultural institutions (the Cultural Triangle) and the historic commercial buildings along Route 126 (with the exception of the Arcade Building).

- Legend
- Will not change
 - May not change
 - May change (long-term)
 - May change (mid-term)
 - Will change (short-term)



- Areas that are expected to change in the short term are represented by the proposed and ongoing redevelopment projects: the proposed Arcade mixed-use redevelopment, the large building still vacant in the Dennison Triangle (*Dennison Crossing*), and the health care offices under construction at the corner of South and Waverley Streets.
- Areas perceived as being susceptible to change in the mid- to long-term include parcels located next to proposed and current developments that are considered to be relatively “soft” due to the age and conditions of their buildings, or to the presence of large tracts of visibly underutilized parking.
- Areas perceived as being susceptible to change in the long term have been identified as being those areas that are not planned or proposed to change at this point, but that could become significant assets in the long-term as potential areas for redevelopment or recreational open space, should changes in ownership or attitude from the part of their owners take place.

ASSESSMENT OF TRENDS

This section summarizes the key findings and conclusions reached through the analyses of urban design and land use conditions previously discussed. Aspects covered include an assessment of potential development sites and areas that may be subject to future redevelopment; an assessment of parking availability and potential future needs for additional parking, based on available data and mapping information; and general conclusions outlined as a list of perceived opportunities and constraints.

Potential Development Sites

Potential development sites and areas that may be subject to future redevelopment have been identified based on the results of the susceptibility-to-change analysis described in the previous section. These sites and their development potential will be tested and evaluated as part of the exploration of alternative development scenarios that will take place during the next phase of the study. This evaluation will incorporate transportation and economic criteria, derived from the analyses of existing conditions and market trends, together with urban design considerations in order to arrive to a reasonable understanding of development potential.

Potential development sites and redevelopment areas could possibly emerge under certain conditions at some of the following locations:

- Vacant and underutilized parcels along Blandin Avenue.
- Vacant buildings along Irving Street.
- Underutilized lots and parking areas along Franklin Street.
- Wholesale and automotive uses along Pearl and Claflin Streets.
- Substandard housing along Kendall and Frederick Streets.
- Vacant and underutilized land isolated by intersecting rail lines.

It should be noted that these are concept-planning assumptions, and that in reality none of these locations may actually change. Similarly, the redevelopment of any parcel in these areas would likely require the simultaneous concurrence of elements and conditions that may not be available. Thus, these assumptions should be considered only as general planning concepts, not facts.

Parking Supply and Utilization

A preliminary overview of available parking resources within the study area indicates that there is sufficient public parking available in the downtown to meet the needs of the existing historic buildings and civic institutions. This conclusion was reached even taking into account the eventuality that the existing buildings might become fully occupied (low levels of vacancy in the oldest historic structures are likely to be found today; full occupancy would assume that vacancies would likely disappear if the downtown would become highly successful). The results lead to the conclusion that there is enough parking supply within the downtown to provide for the future needs of the existing buildings, as long as new development that creates large amounts of new building space brings along enough parking to satisfy its own needs.

These conclusions will be tested during the next phase of this study, through the generation of alternative development programs and buildout scenarios that will take into account multiple sets of land use, transportation and economic assumptions. Base information for this analysis was obtained from the *Downtown Framingham Parking Evaluation* prepared by Rizzo Associates, Inc. in 1999. Rizzo's evaluation indicates that there is underutilization of the existing parking facilities and, therefore, parking problems in the downtown may not be due to lack of supply, but rather to inefficiencies of parking occupancy and distribution.

Strengths and Opportunities

Downtown Framingham exhibits multiple assets and strengths in terms of urban design and land use. The historic character of its dense commercial district is one of them. Buildings along Concord, Irving and Hollis Street, and along segments of Union Avenue, form a continuous "street wall" of distinctive architecture animated with pedestrian oriented uses at the ground level. These buildings convey a special identity and sense of place to the Route 126 commercial corridor as it runs through the downtown. This strong urban design character is apparent throughout the entire length of the corridor, even in spite of the break down and interruption of the continuity of the building fabric introduced by the downtown railroad crossing.

These strengths are reinforced by the presence of the Town's government offices and other prime local institutions, such as the Danforth Museum, the Framingham Public Library, and the Framingham Civic League. These represent important cultural assets and civic anchors for the northern section of the downtown. South of Waverley Street and the downtown railroad crossing, restaurants and businesses that cater to the needs of the local immigrant population have sustained the vitality of the commercial district (more information on demographics and economic conditions can be found in the Market and Economic Assessment provided under separate cover). The Town has invested significant resources to create public parking in these areas, in order to provide for the needs of historic buildings that do not have site capacity for parking. The combination of these factors should contribute to retaining and enhancing the traditional urban design and land use character of these areas in the long term.

The following elements and conditions represent additional strengths:

- **Visibility and connectivity:** The downtown is connected to the rest of the Town and the region by Route 126, Route 135, the MWRTA transit system and the MBTA commuter rail service. The convergence of multiple modes and routes of transportation contribute to the visibility and accessibility of the study area. However, traffic conditions and frequent congestion along the main vehicular channels need to be improved in order to provide effective and reliable connectivity to other parts of the Town.

- Access to public transportation: The MWRTA bus hub and the MBTA rail station are within easy pedestrian reach (1/4-mile walking distance) from the great majority of services and amenities available in the downtown.
- Accessibility from the surrounding neighborhoods: The main services and amenities offered by the downtown are within easy pedestrian reach (1/4-mile walking distance) of the surrounding neighborhoods and residential areas. The residents of these areas represent a natural constituency and customer base for downtown businesses.
- Availability of public parking: Public parking areas have been created to complement the existing on street and onsite parking in the vicinity of main civic and commercial destinations, and transportation hubs.
- Policies and programs to support redevelopment: The Town has established a series of mechanisms to promote redevelopment by supporting the creation of downtown residential uses and affordable housing through zoning and Tax Increment Finance districts. Similarly, sign and façade improvement programs and investments in streetscape and infrastructure contribute to enhance the aesthetic image and the quality of living and working in the downtown.

In addition to the strengths represented by the downtown commercial spine and cultural amenities, there are other areas and locations within the study area that do not exhibit a similar consistency of urban design and land use character. These include parking lots that may be underutilized, and vacant or underdeveloped sites along the periphery of the downtown. These areas may be seen as opportunities for redevelopment and future improvements (illustrated in *Figure 18*).

The following elements are perceived as opportunities for improvement:

- Transit Oriented Development: The Town, through its Planning Department, is pursuing state grants to finance studies and initiatives supportive of new development within walking distance of the existing transportation facilities. These will result in pedestrian enhancements and other improvements aimed at promoting the redevelopment of potential development sites located within 1/4-mile of Downtown Crossing, which roughly encompasses most of the study area.
- Improvements to Connectivity: The Town is undertaking important planning and design studies to improve traffic and transportation along Routes 126 and 135, with a special focus on their intersection and the traffic impacts created by the adjacent downtown railroad crossing. The results of these studies should contribute to improve traffic conditions along these corridors and provide guidance to the Town regarding the next steps and related initiatives to pursue in the future.
- Open Space and Recreation: Undergoing discussions within the community and Town government concerning potential utilization of rail properties for recreational purposes will hopefully lead to the creation of a shared community vision for the future of these areas. This may include opportunities for the development of public recreational facilities and access to community open space.
- Access to Farm Pond: Public access to Farm Pond, including boating access is available from Mt. Wayle Avenue, approximately 1.5 miles north of Downtown Framingham. Currently, the pond is separated from the downtown by an active rail line and adjacent rail yards. The potential to create additional access to the pond's shoreline from the downtown has been identified by prior studies and community initiatives. If supported by further investigation,

the creation of a pedestrian link to the existing natural resources and open space would greatly contribute to enhance the level of amenities and the quality of living in the downtown.

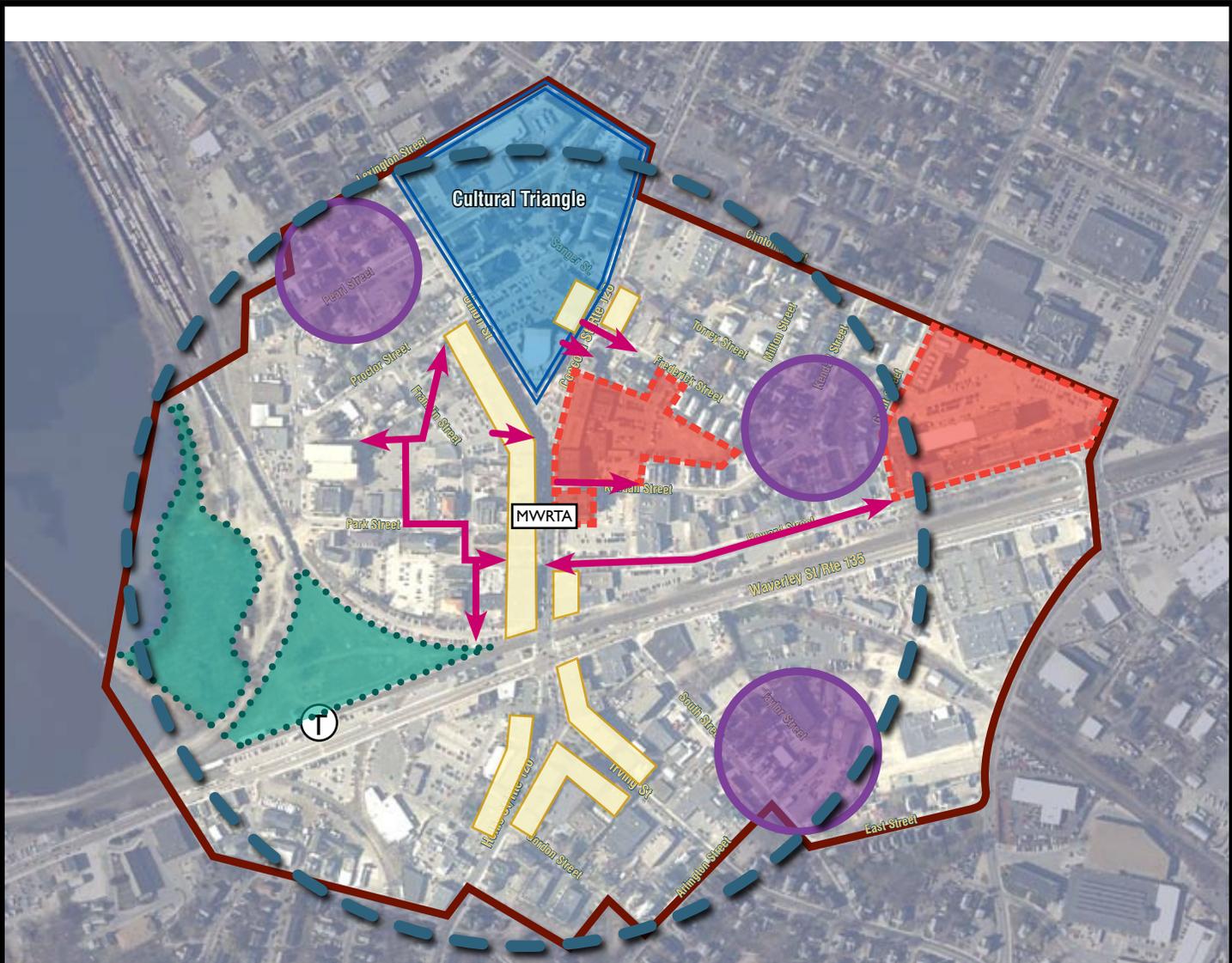
- **Bicycle Access:** Opportunities for bicycle access and bike paths should be explored as part of the analysis of future transportation and urban design alternative scenarios. In particular, opportunities for bike paths connecting to neighboring open space resources and recreational amenities may be available along less traveled roads and underutilized parcels.
- **Neighborhood Revitalization:** Some of the existing residential areas along the periphery of the study area show signs of deterioration and blight. These neighborhood clusters represent important components of the land use and urban design structure of the downtown, and efforts to improve their physical and economic conditions will likely bring positive benefits in terms of the overall balance, stability and livability of the study area.
- **Framingham State College and MetroWest Medical Center:** The presence of these important institutions a few miles to the north represents a potential opportunity for the development of college-related and medical services in Downtown Framingham. College students use the MWRTA bus routes and downtown MBTA commuter rail station to access neighboring localities and travel to Boston.

Weaknesses and Constraints

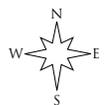
Parallel to the strengths and opportunities there are weaknesses and constraints that restrict the potential of the downtown to thrive physically and economically. Some of these constraints are illustrated in *Figure 19*, and include the following:

- **The Downtown Rail Crossing:** The Boston main line represents a significant disruption of the urban fabric and pedestrian connectivity in Downtown Framingham. While the urban design character and continuity of the main commercial spine may be recognizable on both sides of the tracks, any possible efforts to bridge the divide caused by the rail crossing would greatly contribute to improving the overall image and perception of the downtown. These may include the revitalization of existing vacant buildings along the tracks, as well as streetscape improvements to improve pedestrian conditions along the way.
- **Vacant and Underutilized Properties:** The visible presence of vacant or underutilized buildings and storefronts is a deterrent to visitors and business customers. Vacant storefronts, in particular, convey a negative image and a perception of disinvestment that detracts from marketing and economic initiatives to promote the downtown. This is an issue that will require a concerted effort from the part of businesses, property owners and public authorities to find a common strategy for resolution.
- **Lack of Access to Open Space:** A negative side effect of the dense land use patterns that characterize Downtown Framingham is represented by a lack of greenery and open space within the commercial areas. In particular, the existing lack of access to vegetated areas and open space along nearby Farm Pond represents an obstacle to the enjoyment of a valuable public natural resource that could otherwise be incorporated as part of the downtown recreational assets.
- **Contrasting Edge Conditions:** There are areas within the downtown where land use and urban design patterns may be very different from one parcel to the next, or from one side of the street to the other. These differences may be substantial and even conflictive in some cases, resulting in negative impacts of noise, shadows, visual interference, etc. Planning and development initiatives, and Town regulations need to pay special attention to the prevention and resolution of any potential conflicts that may arise from these situations.

- Low Income Levels: Demographic analyses conducted as part of the economic assessment that accompanies this technical memorandum indicate that household incomes in Downtown Framingham are well below median household income levels for other parts of the Town and the region. This is reflected in the level of maintenance that can be afforded on buildings and site improvements. A local community housing development corporation and other nonprofit organizations are working to improve housing conditions in these areas. Further efforts may be needed from the part of the Town and other constituencies in order to improve the existing socioeconomic conditions, and the overall perception of security in the downtown (Please refer to the *Economic and Market Assessment* of existing conditions for further information on income and demographics).



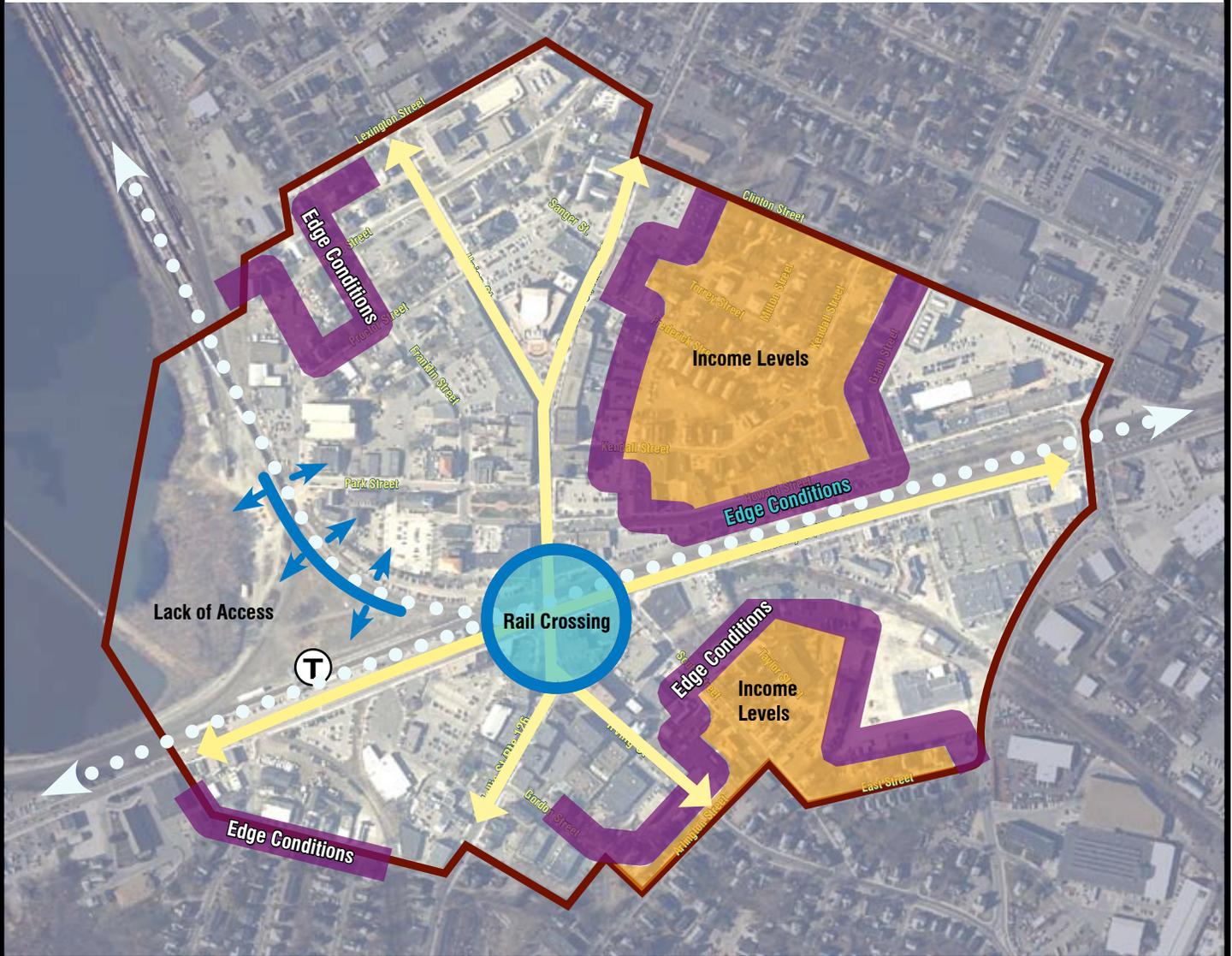
Open Space/Recreation	
Mixed Use Development	
Neighborhood Revitalization	
Transit Oriented Development	
"Main Street" Character	
Cultural Triangle	
Pedestrian and Vehicular Connection Improvements	



Not To Scale

Downtown Study Framingham, MA

Figure 18
ASSETS AND OPPORTUNITIES



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