

Medford Comprehensive Plan

Visions for the Wellington Circle/Station Area

Rezoning of Mystic Valley Parkway



VP.1.1.4

Rezone appropriate emerging corridors, such as Mystic Avenue and Mystic Valley Parkway, to create zoning responsive to the desired land uses for each corridor.

Mystic Avenue and Wellington/Mystic Valley Parkway are areas with a variety of uses but very different development patterns and characteristics.

public comments during the engagement process for this plan. One outcome could be the revision of the original draft zoning; a second outcome might be to launch a new study, perhaps parallel to the study for the

*"For areas where there will be more development, make sure streets are welcoming (Mystic Avenue). They go hand in hand."
Steering Committee Meeting No. 3*

Mystic Avenue is a long corridor with a variety of building and parcel sizes. One side abuts a residential neighborhood; the other backs onto the Mystic Valley Parkway and I-93. These two roads create a significant barrier between Mystic Avenue and the Mystic River which gave the corridor its name. There is no formal access to the river between Main Street and Shore Drive. There is a pedestrian crosswalk on Mystic Valley Parkway as it crosses the river, but there is not an outlet under I-93 to Mystic Avenue.

Wellington/Mystic Valley Parkway area. The Wellington/Mystic Valley Parkway area has much larger parcels and a mix of industrial uses and large-scale retail. Relatively recent investment at River's Edge, along the Malden River and the location of the Wellington Orange line stop (which also acts as a bus connector) provide a different set of physical, transit, and economic circumstances from Mystic Avenue. The larger parcel sizes and public transit connections to the other Orange line communities provide an opportunity to focus on job creation and retention. Emerging industries such as life science manufacturing and the green energy industry may be candidates for the land development patterns in this area. The City is in the process of focusing further study on this area and should create a neighborhood plan that includes input from representatives from a wide range of industries on their needs for space, employees, and amenities attractive to those employees. The area is already being targeted for development; this is an ideal time to incorporate regulatory changes to encourage desired uses. Other outcomes from that planning process may include public infrastructure improvements to leverage new investment for existing residents and establish better connections to the rest of the city.

*"So much potential for rezoning on Mystic Avenue."
Public Workshop No. 1*

Mystic Avenue was the subject of a rezoning study in 2018. Community support at the time included mixed-use that would add residential, including affordable housing, to a variety of uses – restaurant, retail, hotel, maker spaces, outdoor dining, food production. Some participants did not support housing, however. The proposed zoning options divided the corridor into geographic zones that would govern the type and intensity of land uses. Since 2018, the changing relationship between home and work, the desire to have more outdoor gathering spaces, and the need for daily goods and services within a walk or easy bicycle ride have become more frequent topics as a result of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The City should revisit the 2018 study, taking into account

Figure 2. The rezoning of Mystic Avenue and the Mystic Valley Parkway would allow for land uses that support new investment in emerging industries and catalyze future economic development.

Promoting Transit-Oriented Development

COORDINATE MOBILITY & DEVELOPMENT

AA.2.1 INCREASE THE PRESENCE OF RESIDENTS, JOBS, AND DESTINATIONS IN AREAS WITH HIGH TRANSIT ACCESS TODAY OR IN COORDINATION WITH PLANS FOR EXPANDED MULTI-MODAL ACCESS.

Medford has many valuable jobs, leisure activities, outdoor recreation spaces, and commercial centers that are strong assets for work and play. Spanning a range of industries and areas of interest, these assets are attractive to many Medford residents who may seek to use them. With eight commercial centers and many other amenities in other neighborhoods, these attractions are distributed across Medford. Mobility must be a key consideration in future development patterns to ensure that all residents have equitable access to these amenities. Development patterns that are compatible

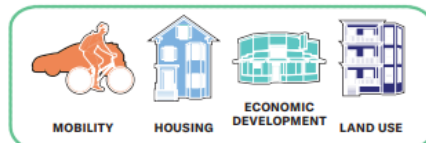
with transit accessibility are key elements of an equitable future for Medford. Many residents rely on transit to provide reliable and affordable access to jobs, schools, shopping, and other resources within and outside of Medford. The City should pursue initiatives to center development around transit, increase access to and within these transit-rich areas via multiple modes, especially biking and walking. This development should be mixed use, including varied housing typologies, affordable housing, and diverse commercial amenities.

Relevant Ongoing City Projects:

- Comply with and Develop Multi-Family Zoning Requirement for MBTA Communities;
- Creation of clear guidelines for Planned Development Districts
- Wellington Circle Study

"Mystic Ave could be an employment center for high paying, professional jobs."
Public Meeting No. 1

"Medford Square should be the vibrant center, but it currently is not."
Public Workshop No.2



TOPIC AREA OVERLAP

AA.2.1.1

Allow and promote increased density and mixed uses within walking distance of MBTA train stations and areas served by major bus routes.

Many areas of Medford are within walking distance of transit options such as MBTA rail stations (including the Orange and Green Lines as well as the Commuter

Rail) and local bus stops. The City should revise zoning codes and other development guidelines to encourage higher density and mixed use development in these areas.

AA.2.1.2

Promote transit-oriented mixed-use development along emerging corridors like Mystic Avenue and Mystic Valley Parkway.

Aside from existing commercial centers, Medford has several emerging corridors that have significant potential as mixed use, transit-oriented districts. Major corridors like Mystic Avenue and Mystic Valley Parkway already offer business and housing options. Further development can increase the housing diversity through medium

density projects that include a mix of uses to attract new businesses to fill existing gaps. The City should work to promote these corridors to developers and seek to attract mixed use projects. Neighborhood plans in these areas should be pursued to identify and implement locally-tailored development strategies.

AA.2.1.3

Evaluate current density in transit-rich areas and consider increases that are compatible with existing conditions.

The City should evaluate existing density around transit hubs and work with local communities to identify opportunities for density increases that meet the needs of current residents. When potential

discrepancies arise around issues such as parking, the City should develop strategies to mitigate residents' concerns while preserving the ability to add density.

AA.2.1.4

Evaluate whether Medford's current zoning is consistent with the new housing requirements for MBTA communities and modify zoning to bring the City into compliance and preserve its right to access state grants.

The Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development recently released final regulations on MGL Chapter 40A, Section 3A. Section 3A requires that communities with access to public transit have at least one zoning district

of reasonable size within 0.5 miles of a commuter rail station, subway station or bus station. This district must allow multifamily housing as of right, without age restrictions, and of a type that is suitable for families with children.

Utilizing Wellington Air Rights

ENCOURAGE BALANCED GROWTH

VP.2.2 DEVELOP UNDERUTILIZED PARCELS TO MEET SPECIFIC NEEDS, INCLUDING DIFFERENT HOUSING TYPES/AFFORDABILITY, COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT, AND CLIMATE MITIGATION

Underutilized parcels fall into several categories. Some parcels may be vacant land, either because they were never developed or the original use has ceased. Others may be nonconforming lots under the current zoning and may not be able to be developed without a zoning change. Others may be in use now, but the use itself no longer conforms to the zoning. The ownership of such lots is important. The City should create a database of City-owned parcels, including those in tax title, and map that list to understand how the geographic location may influence the eventual use.

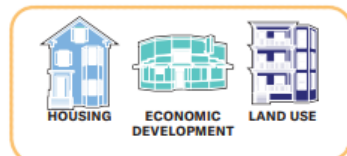
Nonconforming lots that are in use or whose use is no longer viable can be challenging to redevelop as the permitting and approval process may discourage new investment. For these parcel types, re-evaluating the applicable zoning may prompt a change to reduce the nonconformity (by changing the

relevant dimensional or use standard) or to create a process by which investment can occur without triggering the need for a variance.

Undeveloped lots present another set of opportunities; these could include one or more of the following: creating small pocket parks for neighborhoods underserved by local parks; addressing stormwater management by creating nature-based flooding mitigation; allowing smaller-scale housing on small lots to address the City's need for affordable housing; providing space for community gardens, or other gathering spots, or other neighborhood-specific spaces. In the City's commercial and industrial districts, vacant lots offer opportunities for new development with public benefits.

Relevant Ongoing City Projects:

- Wellington Transformation Study
- Implement a home improvement program to improve the quality of housing for low to moderate income households, with a strong emphasis on energy efficient and climate resilient retrofits



TOPIC AREA OVERLAP

VP.2.2.1

Leverage centrally located City-owned sites to promote and develop multi-family residential properties.

As a land-owner, the City has the ability to develop its own land to meet its goals for housing and economic development. The city should consider a study of City-owned properties to determine the best options for redevelopment.

VP.2.2.2

Capitalize on city-owned properties and air rights to Wellington parking lots to support new job growth.

To promote economic growth, including living wage jobs for Medford's residents, the City should evaluate all City-owned properties for suitability for different types of development, including commercial, 21st-century industrial, and life sciences or other emerging industries.

VP.2.2.3

Consider a redevelopment plan to create incentives to address underutilized parcels in key areas.

The Community Development Board, as the City's Redevelopment Authority, has the power to acquire, develop, and dispose of land under the M.G.L. Chapter 121B. The City should develop a redevelopment plan to allow the Community Development Board

to develop properties owned by the City in accordance with the plan. This action can be tied to 4.2.2.4 below, as a redevelopment authority with an active redevelopment plan, can establish design guidelines for the redevelopment area(s).

VP.2.2.4

Consider a Design Review Board and design guidelines or standards for new development types to address community concerns about context, massing, and neighborhood impacts.

The Design Review Board can act as an advisory board to the Community Development Board providing input on the

design of new construction or rehabilitation based on a set of design guidelines developed for one or more areas of the city.

Future Zoning and Neighborhood Strategies

Two Strategies for Zoning Changes

The zoning-related goals, objectives, and actions at the end of this section can be divided into two types of strategies: geographic (i.e., address all recommendations for a specific area at once) or topical (i.e., address all actions related to a particular topic at once). These strategies also have an impact on the timing of implementation, as discussed below.

The Future Land Use Map provides a guide to grouping geographic recommendations. The map identifies Corridors, Centers & Squares, Neighborhood Centers, and Gateway Nodes. These areas deserve specific attention during implementation, and some may require a more in-depth planning process. For example, Medford Square has received in-depth study and the path to implementation is well-defined; West Medford Square, Mystic Avenue, and the Wellington/Mystic Valley Parkway area may require a specific planning process to evaluate the specific changes necessary to achieve the goals of this comprehensive plan. Topic-based strategies generally apply across larger areas of the city and may require additional research but not complete planning studies.

The two strategies listed above also have different implications for timing. Topic-based Strategies are less likely to

require additional in-depth planning. With assistance from the Office of Planning, Development & Sustainability, these recommendations can begin to move through the planning process without much further study. These topics may need additional research into precedents before the language of the zoning ordinance can be drafted, and some community meetings for input on the draft. A legal review of the draft ordinance should take place before the draft ordinance moves into the City's review and adoption process.

The recommendations for the Geographic Strategies will require a more in-depth planning process first. These recommended neighborhood and corridor studies are more detailed than a comprehensive plan. The goal of such studies is to ensure that zoning changes address the needs of a specific area, incorporate specific community goals, and build support from participants in the process. In this case, a planning study under the management of the Office of Planning, Development & Sustainability would be the first step. Such a study could include the draft language for the zoning ordinance. Again, a legal review of the draft language would be required before formal review and adoption.

Centers & Squares

These areas should be the primary clusters of businesses and will include a mix of residential, arts and culture, and recreational uses appropriate to the type of center or square. Medford Square and West Medford Square have been discussed since the beginning of the planning process and are historic centers of activity. The opportunity for the Wellington/Mystic Valley Parkway/Fellsway area to become a different type of center emerged during the planning process. All three areas offer

possibilities for various combinations of uses, densities, and development strategies that the city can explore further through the recommendations of this plan. Zoning strategies should consider the mix of land uses within each area, development standards that enhance the public realm, encouraging activity from morning through evening, and the transition from mixed-use and higher density areas to those that are single-use and lower density.

Example: The southeast corner of Medford, east of I-93 and adjacent to Everett, has a different development pattern from the rest of the city, as shown in the current Land Use map. Ross and Locust Streets form the western edge of the first cluster of big box stores, industrial, and warehouse uses. This cluster ends to the east at Fellsway and to the north at Myrtle Street. A second cluster starts at River's Edge Drive and ends at the Malden River. This cluster includes the apartments at The Residences at River's

Edge. A residential area is sandwiched between the Fellsway and River's Edge Drive.

The development pattern in the first cluster is inefficient with low-scale buildings and large parking areas. With the proximity of this area to the Wellington Station (Orange line and bus hub) and I-93, the City should strongly consider rezoning this area for higher density uses, including life sciences and clean energy, two emerging sectors in Massachusetts.

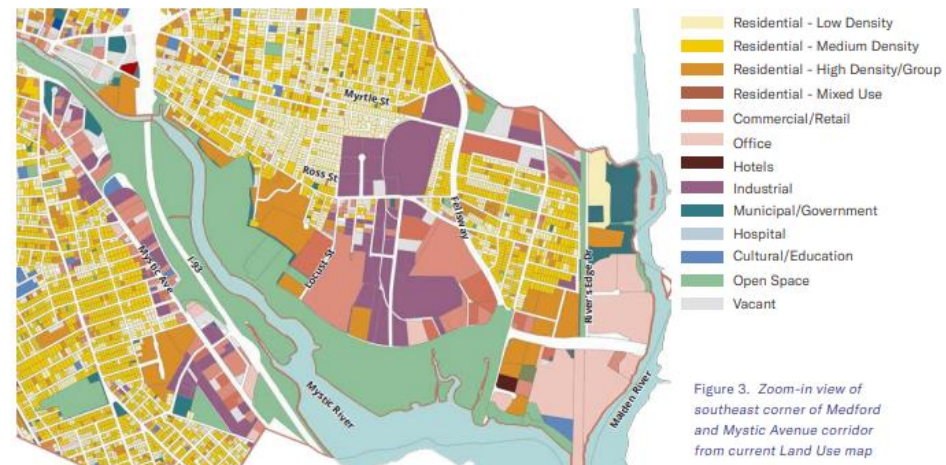


Figure 3. Zoom-in view of southeast corner of Medford and Mystic Avenue corridor from current Land Use map

Increasing Pedestrian Safety/Walkability

AA.3.1.4 Prioritize quick-build fixes for dangerous pedestrian areas.

Intersections and roadways that are dangerous for pedestrians and bicyclists can be addressed through strategic tactical and permanent improvements. Quick-build improvements focus on making scalable changes that do not require significant investment or construction, such as flexposts, temporary paint and pavement markings, and new and/or updated wayfinding signage for those who walk and bike. Wayfinding infrastructure is not only easily implementable and relatively inexpensive, but also provides comfort and critical information for those who walk, bike, or take transit. Intersections and the associated roadways and paths leading to an intersection should include a mixture of landmark, identification, directional, and informational signage for those using alternative modes. Details within these signage categories consist of large visual cues to create a sense of place, the name of

where the sign is located, directional arrows with distances or walking/biking minutes to key destinations, and directories and/or maps. Solutions like these can help shorten crossings, calm traffic, and improve visibility for more vulnerable modes.

Past planning efforts, road safety audits, and complete streets policies have highlighted the need to invest in improved pedestrian bicycle infrastructure particularly in critical areas of high demand such as Boston Avenue, Forest Street, High Street, Salem Street, and the Main Street corridor. State programs including MassDOT's Shared Streets and Spaces Program can give the City the opportunity to address safety and connectivity for those who bike and walk, because these programs prioritize projects that use quick-build materials for speed management, bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, and Main Streets activation

Figure 11. Fellsway (Route 28) and Riverside Avenue Intersection: Mobility Issues



Note: Since Fellsway is a State-owned road, the City will need to advocate for these improvements and coordinate with the State on relevant grant opportunities.

efforts. It is critical that the City coordinate and involve the public and key stakeholders throughout the location selection process and preliminary design phase to create improvements that address key safety, connectivity, and accessibility issues.

The intersection of the Fellsway and Riverside Avenue serves as a vital intersection in the City of Medford. Sitting at the node between dense residential neighborhoods and a major shopping center, it provides a quick route for those traveling to neighboring communities, the Wellington residential areas, commercial uses at Fellsway Plaza, and the transit hub at Wellington Station. Four MBTA routes (the 100, 108, 134, and 710) run along the Fellsway and intersect at Riverside Avenue, as there are up to six bus stops within a quarter-mile radius of the intersection. The adjacent Fellsway Plaza has numerous vital local businesses, and industrial uses also

bring heavy trucks to the area. The 2019 Road Safety Audit reported 30 crashes from 2014-2016, 13% of which involved pedestrians. The existing road geometry promotes high speeds, leaving much to be desired for pedestrian and bicyclist safety.

Although crosswalks exist at Riverside Avenue and the southern portion of the Fellsway, significant enhancements need to be made to shorten crossing distances, improve accessibility, provide lighting during night hours, and dedicate signal phasing for those who walk and bike. Tactical and easily implementable solutions can be applied to decrease lane widths in order to slow drivers, create curb extensions with paint, bollards or planters, remove on-street parking for improved site distances, upgrade crosswalks to national standards, and implement temporary ADA ramps and detectable panels. Figure 11 below highlights key problem areas and issues within the Fellsway & Riverside Avenue intersection.

Figure 12. Fellsway (Route 28) and Riverside Avenue Intersection: Mobility Opportunities



Wellington Circle Area Study

AA.1.2.4

Implement the recommendations from recently completed Road Safety Audits (RSA), traffic studies, and MassDOT's ongoing Wellington Circle area study.

"Wellington Circle is hard to walk or bike through."
Public Workshop No. 1

A Road Safety Audit (RSA) is the formal safety review of an existing or planned road or intersection by an independent, multidisciplinary team. It estimates and reports on road safety issues and identifies opportunities for improvements in safety for all road users. Recently, MassDOT has

completed RSAs for a number of locations in Medford, including at the intersection of Fellsway (Route 28) and Riverside Avenue, and at Roosevelt Circle. Implementing the recommendations from these key studies will improve safety for all users – drivers, pedestrians, transit, bicyclists - in the City of Medford.

Working Group Discussion



Figure 3. Alternative concepts were discussed at a working group meeting as part of MassDOT's ongoing Wellington Circle area study.