

Frequently Asked Questions

40R Downtown Smart Growth District (DSGD)

- **Why develop a 40R zoning overlay district and not revise the Mixed Use zone or develop a new mixed use zone through the 40A zoning enabling legislation? What are the benefits to the Town to using the 40R statute?**

The 40R zoning overlay provides the town the following benefits:

- Allows design guidelines to be incorporated into the zoning by-law (and therefore more control over what is built)
- Will provide a payment to the Town from the Commonwealth
- Will provide for payment to the Town from the Commonwealth for the support of any additional school enrollment resulting from development using the overlay district

The existing Mixed-Use overlay district includes parameters that are prohibitive for property owners to use (i.e. average 800 s.f. residential unit, 25% landscaping coverage) and covers all of the Business B district (which includes the Green & Gould St. neighborhood).

40A enabling legislation permits mixed use zoning. However design guidelines could not be included. This would result in less control over the “look and feel” of the district than is possible by using the 40R statute.

- **Density: Why encourage growth in the downtown area?**

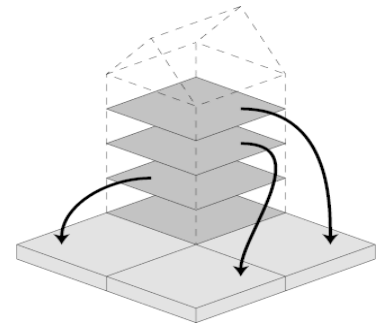
The latest projections from the Metropolitan Area Planning Council are for Reading to grow by 800-1,000 additional households in the next 20+ years. Adopting the DSGD will encourage some of that growth into the downtown thereby providing the following benefits:

- Encourage a more vibrant downtown area (more people living in downtown will create more customers and attract more businesses)
 - Fiscal responsibility through the encouragement of growth where infrastructure is already in place (i.e fewer roads to maintain and plow, fewer street lights, less stormwater management requirements)
 - More environmentally sustainable by providing housing where residents have the potential to walk to the train
 - Less impact on areas of the community where growth is not appropriate.
- **What is Floor Area Ratio (FAR) and how did the 40R parameters get defined. What are some existing FAR examples in the downtown?**

Floor Area Ratio is defined as the amount of floor (square footage) divided by the area (parcel size)

Consultants to the town and CPDC explained that any project that included non-luxury residential development which would require structured parking (as would be needed in Reading due to the small lot sizes in downtown) would need to be at least 3 stories. It is understood that any limitations to the FAR would result in a loss of the first floor commercial space not the third floor of residential. Losing additional first floor commercial space would be detrimental to some of the purpose of the district.

The illustration shows a Floor Area Ratio (FAR) of 1.0. This simply means that, if the area of the parcel is 10,000 square feet, then 10,000 square feet of gross floor area has been built on the parcel. The illustration to the right shows a 4-story building covering 1/4 of the site, giving a FAR of 1.0. Four floors of 2,500 square feet each are built on a site of 10,000 square feet.



FAR = 1.0

As an example, below are some ways (calculations) to get to a FAR of 1.5:

- Build a 2-story building on 75% of the site ($2 \times 0.75 = 1.5$)
- Build a 3-story building on 50% of the site ($3 \times 0.5 = 1.5$)
- Build a 4-story building on 37.5% of the site ($4 \times 0.375 = 1.5$)

Existing FAR Examples (the following are estimates & not exact figures):

- MF Charles = 1.1
- Washington Arms = .8
- 2 Haven St = 2.1

Proposed FAR Projects:

- Atlantic Site (Oaktree Development's proposal) = 2.75
- MF Charles = 1.1
- 18-20 Woburn St = 2.4

- Building height: Why 45 ft max? How do the guidelines address this?

A 45 foot maximum building height was established to be consistent with the underlying zoning (Business B). This is the same height as the existing M. F. Charles building (46') on the corner of Haven and Main Streets. Presently any property owner can build a 45' high commercial building in the Business B district.

The guidelines were carefully developed to enhance the architectural detail and minimize the mass of any building built using the overlay district. This includes but is not limited to:

- Building step-backs

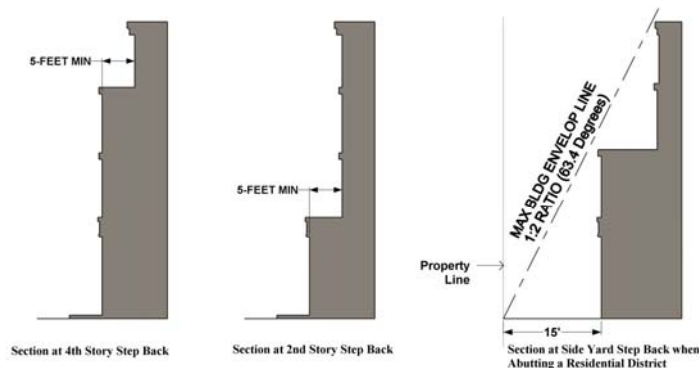


Figure 7.2.2 - Facade Step Back

- Building appearance and composition
- Different treatments for commercial vs. residential uses within building

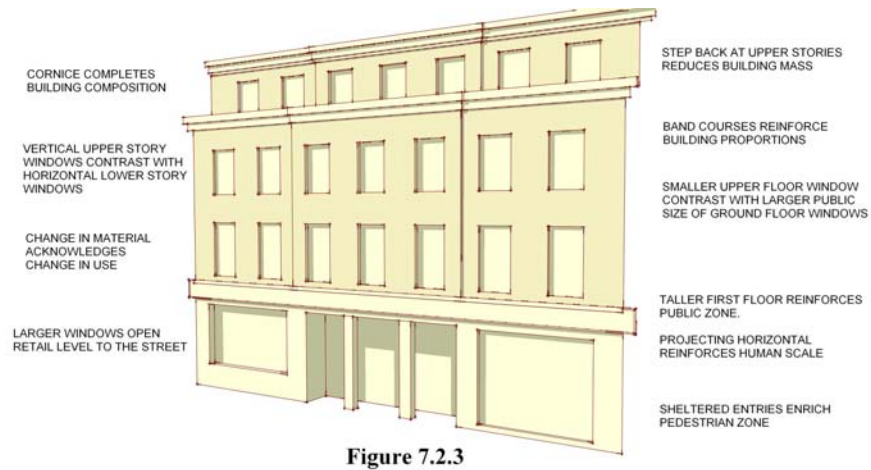


Figure 7.2.3



Figure 7.4.1

- Setbacks and Lot Coverage: Why 0-ft front yard setback or 100% lot coverage?

Many of the buildings in the downtown currently have 0 ft. front and side setbacks. The lack of setbacks creates a walkable commercial district, where nearby storefronts provide interest to shoppers. Side and rear setbacks of 15 feet have been included for properties that abut a residential zone. This is the typical side yard setback for residential districts. These setbacks, along with the required building step-backs are believed to provide similar or greater buffers than now exist between the commercial district and the residential districts.

- Parking: Why the proposed number of spaces per unit or square foot? How does one make the leap from this to “taxpayer funded parking garages”

Currently, parking requirements in the district are waived for retail stores, offices and consumer service establishments if within 300 feet of a public off-street parking facility, a parameter which all properties within the DSGD meet. Therefore, for most uses parking requirements within the district are waived.

The DSGD will generally require:

Office and Institutional	2 spaces per 1,000 ft
Residential Units	1.25 space per unit

These on-site parking requirements are generally greater than what would be required under the Business B zoning due to the waiver identified above, but less than what is required without the waiver or in other districts.

The requirements for the DSGD were established with the following approaches:

- Establish requirements at a level that will encourage shared use of parking,
- Provide some level of requirement so that parking will not be the obligation of the town,
- Include a requirement for land uses that include long-term parking needs.

Parking requirements were included in the DSGD for the uses that would typically inhabit upper floors of buildings (residential and office). Since these parking requirements can not be waived, the additional development within the downtown will most likely not result in substantial additional parking demand within the downtown area.

Parking issues associated with commercial businesses downtown will not be solved through enacting the DSGD but they should not be increased either since the DSGD will not increase the square footage of commercial property downtown. Parking is an issue that will need to be managed by the town with or without adopting the DSGD, an activity the town is undertaking with the recent completion of a parking study, and work on implementation of some of the key short term recommendations.

The following initiatives are underway as part of the implementation of the recommendations of the parking study:

- Expand Employee Parking – The “Blue Zone” has been expanded on Gould Street (through the recent reconstruction project there) and on a temporary basis in the Brande Court parking lot behind the former Atlantic.
- Improve Parking Directional Signs – A consultant has been hired through a State funded “Peer-to-Peer” grant to develop recommendations on way-finding.
- Sharing of Private Parking Spaces – A pilot program will be developed in the area bounded by Main, Haven, Sanborn, and Woburn Streets
- Valet Parking – in response to a previous initiative from a local business owner, the Town is exploring how this might work.
- Expanded Parking Supply – Reverse angled parking is being explored for High Street.
- Bike Racks – Four new bike racks have been installed downtown. More are being planned.
- Bus Shelters – With the MBTA developing concepts for attractive bus shelters in some key locations.

Finally, the recently completed parking study in downtown has observed through detailed analysis that at a maximum, only 60% of the off street parking supply in downtown Reading was being utilized. That was when the Atlantic supermarket was still in full operation.

- Affordable housing: Why 20%?

As identified above, Reading is projected to continue to grow slightly. Reading does not currently meet the State mandated affordable housing goal of 10%, and therefore the entire community is vulnerable to developer initiated 40B applications. By including a 20% affordable housing requirement in this zone, Reading will continue to make progress towards the 10% goal required by the Commonwealth. Once the 10% goal is achieved, the 40B developments that have been constructed or planned in town will not be possible. By including a percentage that is higher than the goal, any new development will assist the town in meeting this goal and being able to plan development where it makes sense for the town not a developer.

- Will there be more traffic in the downtown or adjacent residential streets as a result of the DSGD?

Most traffic is generated by commercial uses. As stated above, the total amount (sq. ft.) of commercial use, as a result of the enactment of the DSGD, will not increase significantly from what is now permitted. It is unknown what the exact impact any development in the downtown will have on traffic in the area, but an increase in traffic would be most associated with a change in use of the existing commercial properties not with the addition of residential uses.

An example of this can be seen by using the traffic generated at the former Atlantic Grocery site and hypothetical development scenarios for the property:

Use	Quantity	Peak # of Trips (5PM-6PM)	On-site Parking Required
Former Atlantic Market	21,000 sq. ft.	210 trips	0 spaces
Hypothetical DSGD Redevelopment Plan			
<i>1st floor Market</i>	10,000 sq. ft.	100 trips	0 spaces
<i>1st floor Restaurant</i>	10,000 sq. ft.	70 trips	0 spaces
<i>2-4th floor Residential</i>	50 units	<u>25 trips</u>	<u>62 spaces</u>
		195 trips*	62 spaces
Hypothetical Business B Redevelopment Plan			
<i>1st floor Market</i>	10,000 sq. ft.	100 trips	0 spaces
<i>1st floor Restaurant</i>	10,000 sq. ft.	70 trips	0 spaces
<i>2nd floor Office</i>	17,000 sq. ft.	<u>25 trips</u>	<u>0 spaces</u>
		195 trips*	0 spaces

The same number of trips is generated from the 2nd – 4th floor residential as the second floor office because the office use accounts for more peak hour traffic.

- How many housing units are possible under this DSGD?

The projection of 256 residential units was determined by applying the State 40R multi-family density (20 units per acre) to all of the parcels in the district.

It is highly unlikely that this projection will be reached because it includes properties such as the Post Office, the Masonic Lodge building, the historic buildings and other properties that are unlikely to be redeveloped into residential use. When the unlikely parcels are removed, the estimated number of units drops to 172. When we removed historic properties and the Masonic Lodge from the list of suitable properties for development the estimated number of residential units was reduced to 156.

Presently, only two property owners have expressed interest in the DSGD which would result in a maximum of 64 residential units. Any additional housing units would most likely be phased in over a significant period of time.

- What is the application and review process for projects under this DSGD zoning?

Applicants proposing projects under this zoning would be the same as with the current zoning. The application would submit a site plan review application to the Community Planning and Development Commission (CPDC). The CPDC would notify abutters and hold a public hearing process just as with any other non-residential project today.

- What is the State (DHCD) review process after Town Meeting; what happens if there are changes to the by-law voted on by Town Meeting?

Reading's DSGD has received its Letter of Eligibility. DHCD has the final approval and their approval will be dependent on the level of changes made. Any changes made subsequently must still comply with the requirements of the statute, including the affordability requirements and minimum densities. If there are minor changes, DHCD will follow an amendment process as stipulated in the statute which could take up to 60 days.

There may be other constraints outside of 40R such as 40A which govern the degree to which any proposed zoning bylaw can change at Town Meeting relative to what was approved by the CPDC following a public hearing.