



# Town of Reading Economic Development Action Plan for 2016-2022

December 2015 \*DRAFT\*

## Prepared for:

Town of Reading  
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## Acknowledgements

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## Summary

### Overview

The **Town of Reading Economic Development Action Plan** establishes a long term vision for growth and development that balances and respects the primarily residential character of Reading with appropriate development that complements the community. This Action Plan articulates an economic development vision for the town and identifies six implementation strategies and related actions that aim to maximize the redevelopment potential of four priority development areas in Reading.

Phased implementation of this Action Plan over a seven-year period between 2016 and 2022 will help the Town attract development interest, businesses, and residents needed to maintain a vibrancy and mix of uses that will contribute to a viable and diverse commercial and residential tax base.

### Reading's Economic Development Vision

Reading is a vibrant suburban town where businesses can thrive and different generations can meet, connect, and build community. Reading's assets include quality schools, a walkable downtown, bike lanes, transit options including Commuter Rail service and access to major roads, and a lively downtown with retail shops and restaurants.

Reading is committed to strengthening existing businesses, attracting new ones, and expanding the resident base that is needed to support a growing local economy. Reading and community partners will work together to implement this Action Plan of policy changes, infrastructure investments, and programmatic activities that aims to place the Town on firm financial footing for generations and maximize quality of life for current and future generations of people who choose Reading as a place to live, work, study, and play.

### Priority Development Areas

The Town of Reading has identified four regionally-significant Priority Development Areas (PDAs). The process to identify these four priority development areas is described in Appendix F<sup>1</sup>. Redevelopment in these PDAs will help meet projected regional demands for housing, commercial, and industrial uses; strengthen existing places by improving the mix of development types in areas where development already exists; are sited in areas defined as having major growth potential; and are sited near existing transportation resources including public transit, bike, and trail facilities, thus contributing to the creation of more walkable communities.

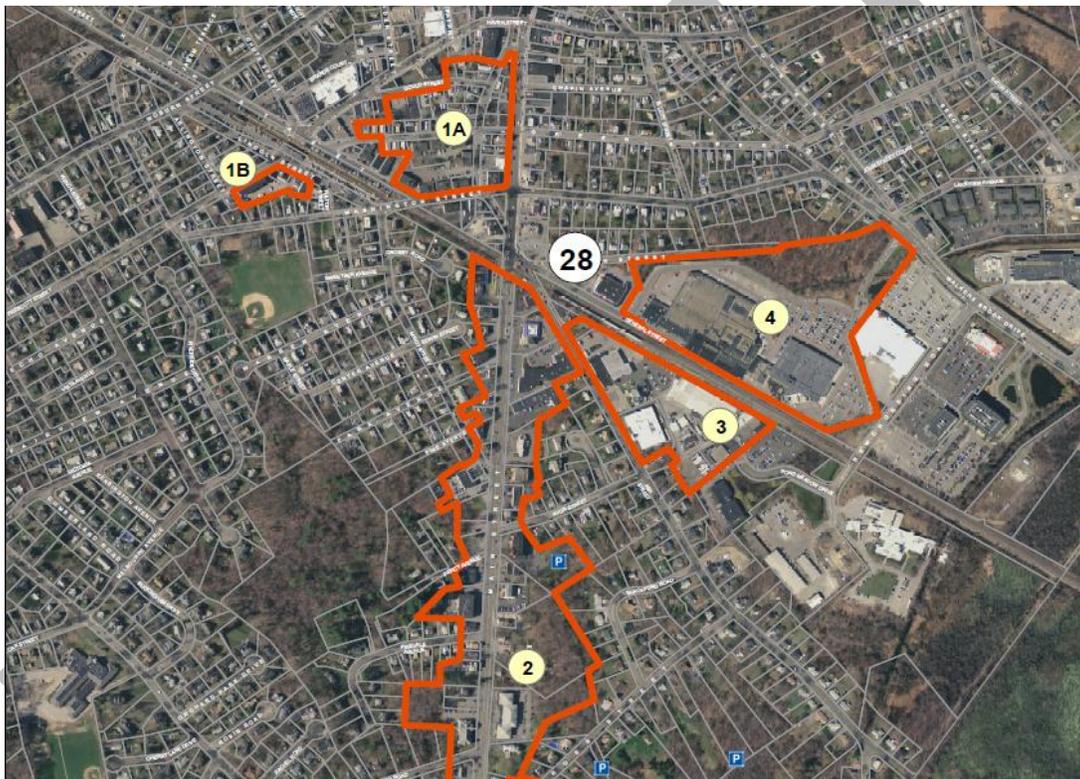
- **PDA #1 - Downtown Reading Proposed Expansion Area.** PDA #1 is a nine-acre area consisting of 46 parcels and is adjacent to the Town's current 40R Smart Growth Overlay District, hereafter

<sup>1</sup> Reading is one of eight municipalities in the North Suburban Planning Council (NSPC) subregion that participated in the North Suburban Planning Council Subregional Priority Mapping Project, a 1.5-year initiative that implemented a robust community engagement process to identify and map locally and regionally significant priorities for development, preservation, and infrastructure investments in the subregion. The project resulted in the identification of regionally significant planning priorities in the NSPC subregion: Priority Development Areas (PDAs), Priority Preservation Areas (PPAs), Significant Transportation Investments (STIs), and Significant Infrastructure Investments (SIIs).

referred to as the Downtown Smart Growth District (DSGD). The Town would like to expand the 40R zoning to include these parcels.

- **PDA #2 – South Main Street.** PDA #2 is a 26-acre area consisting of 82 parcels located south of the downtown on South Main Street. The Town wishes to enable mixed use in this area to allow for more retail and residential development and to facilitate streetscape and road reconfigurations that will enhance the street for pedestrians and bicyclists.
- **PDA #3 – New Crossing Road Redevelopment District and Ash Street Parcels.** PDA #3 consists of the five-acre New Crossing Road Redevelopment District, which consists of four parcels and includes vacant lots, derelict buildings, sites with industrial uses, and parcels on Ash Street.
- **PDA #4, - 1 General Way.** PDA #4 is one large 20-acre parcel with a mix of single-story commercial uses and ample parking. The Town is interested in facilitating a more vibrant mix of uses and structures of different densities in this area.

**Figure 1: Priority Development Areas in Reading**



### How this Plan is Organized

**Historic and Planning Context:** The first section of this Plan provides a brief overview of Reading’s early history and assets and relevant findings from planning efforts and studies the Town has undertaken over the last decade.

**Current Conditions:** The second section of this Plan reviews existing conditions, including population demographics; housing stock, needs, and demand; the local economy in terms of industries and employment; current land use and zoning applicable to the priority development areas; and the market potential for additional retail, office, and residential development in Reading (see Appendix A for Retail and Office Market Analysis and Appendix B for the Residential Market Analysis).

**Priority Development Areas in Reading:** The third section of this Plan reviews existing conditions and development potential of each priority development area (PDA). The section for PDA #3 also includes conceptual urban design work illustrating the redevelopment potential in this PDA.

**Vision and Action Plan Matrix:** The fourth section of this Plan articulates an economic development vision for the town and six implementation strategies and related actions that aim to maximize the redevelopment potential of four priority development areas in Reading.

### Summary of Findings and Recommendations

MAPC conducted a retail market analysis, an office market analysis, and a residential market analysis to develop an understanding of the potential for the four PDAs in Reading to accommodate and attract more commercial and residential development. The following table summarizes the market potential each PDA is best suited to accommodate based on an assessment of market analysis findings, existing conditions, current land uses, and infrastructure assets.

It is important to note that market analyses alone are not a predictor of the success of future developments by type; they only estimate the market *opportunity/potential* for redevelopment to fill regional market gaps in commercial or residential. The ability to capture the market potential identified depends on the implementation of the strategies and actions in the Action Plan.

**Residential market potential:** The housing market - for sale and rental – is strong in Reading. Demand for for-sale single-family and multifamily condominium units is robust, and now exceeds pre-recession levels both in number of sales and median unit prices. Given the expensive housing market, more affordable options are needed, and when they come to market, they go fast. This is also true of rental units, particularly given the lack of new inventory in town. A capture rate of total demand for the study areas was calculated as follows: 75% of multifamily units would be captured in the study areas, and 20% of single-family potential (in alternatives to single family like townhomes). This would result in a total of ~300 new multifamily units, and ~110 single-family (alternatives).



**Retail market potential:** When looking at market potential within the secondary trade area, MAPC uses a lower 5% capture rate. Using this methodology, the market within a ten minute drive time of the study area could likely support up to 6 total establishments with the best opportunities being a grocery/specialty food store, health & personal care stores (pharmacy, beauty supply, cosmetics, sunglass stores, health supplement stores, vitamin or nutrition stores), used merchandise, and a limited service eating establishment. The majority of the retail opportunities supported by the primary trade area would be most appropriate for a downtown setting. The market within the secondary trade area could support additional opportunities including up to 9 restaurants<sup>2</sup>. Attracting additional restaurants particularly to the downtown area is a major opportunity for Reading.



<sup>2</sup> Although the retail gap analysis uses a conservative capture rate, this opportunity may be slightly lower because the retail surplus/leakage data does not yet take into account the recent opening of many restaurants at Market Street at Lynnfield, which is located at the edge of the Primary Trade Area.

**Table 1: Redevelopment Potential**

PDA	Redevelopment Potential by PDA
<b>PDA #1 – Downtown 4OR Potential Expansion:</b>	Multi-family and mixed-use redevelopment potential. Site 1-B would best suited for multi-family; site 1-A would be best suited to multi-family infill or mixed use along major corridors. Retail industries that could potentially be supported by the primary market are health & personal care, specialty grocery, and used merchandise. The market could also support a substantial amount of new restaurants that could help to make Reading a dining destination with the potential to draw in a more regional customer base.
<b>PDA #2 – South Main Street:</b>	Northernmost areas of the corridor hold the greatest potential for multifamily residential and mixed-use development, with a higher percentage of rental units.
<b>PDA #3 – New Crossing Road Redevelopment District and Ash Street Parcels:</b>	Residential & office uses could work well here with a small amount of retail in the more visible area of the site to serve the residents and workers. Limited potential for retail as part of a mixed-use development, as the retail components would lack visibility to attract a larger customer base without significant redevelopment to improve circulation. Office space would likely be a better fit – particularly spaces targeting creative industries attracted to former industrial areas or light industrial uses such as shared commercial kitchen space.
<b>PDA #4 – 1 General Way:</b>	Within the context of the current market the town may be able to support 15,000-30,000 square feet at this site, potentially even through a renovation of the existing space. Because this is a large parcel, this relatively modest amount of office space could be integrated with other uses such as residential and existing retail. Multifamily owner and rental units and single-family alternatives (e.g. town homes) on areas of the parcel closest to downtown may be feasible, and attractive if developed as part of a larger mixed-use complex. Should the Town prefer a mix of retail and new office uses here, it could work with the property owner to identify an anchor office tenant interested in a build to suit property.

**Action Plan Strategies**

Action Plan strategies focus on facilitating redevelopment activity through policy changes, infrastructure investments, branding and marketing, and public-private partnerships. The Plan recommends a phased approach that concentrates on attract growing industry sectors identified in the retail and office market analyses as holding the greatest potential for growth and in the areas identified as most suitable to accommodate different development types.

A summary of Action Plan strategies and actions is provided below.

**Table 2: Overview of Action Plan Strategies and Actions**

Strategies and Actions	
<b>#1</b>	<b>STRATEGY: Adopt local policies and practices that will facilitate compact development and mixed use in the transit-accessible PDAs.</b>
<b>1A</b>	Expand the Downtown Smart Growth District (DSGD) to PDAs #1A and #1B to continue fostering mixed use development in the Commuter Rail station area.
<b>1B</b>	Facilitate more compact, mixed-use development in PDAs #2, #3 and #4.
<b>1C</b>	Develop and implement a comprehensive parking strategy.

<b>Strategies and Actions</b>	
<b>#2</b>	<b>STRATEGY: Enhance walkability and connectivity within and between the priority redevelopment areas.</b>
<b>2A</b>	Make infrastructure investments that will create a safe and welcoming pedestrian environment between the PDAs and between the PDAs and the Commuter Rail station.
<b>2B</b>	Prioritize improving connections around PDA #3 – New Crossing Road Redevelopment District and Ash Street parcels – to enhance the area’s accessibility from PDA #2 and walkability to and from the Commuter Rail station.
<b>#3</b>	<b>STRATEGY: Brand and market priority development areas to attract interest from the developers, commercial establishments, and potential customers.</b>
<b>3A</b>	Convene a working group of stakeholders in and around downtown Reading that can develop a brand identity for priority development areas in Reading.
<b>3B</b>	Establish an online presence to market and promote Downtown Reading.
<b>3C</b>	Consolidate economic development resources in a new section of the Town of Reading website.
<b>3D</b>	Hold networking events for existing and prospective downtown Reading business owners.
<b>3E</b>	Maintain a database of prospective retail and office tenants.
<b>3F</b>	Implement a phased approach to marketing redevelopment in PDAs.
<b>#4</b>	<b>STRATEGY: Support existing local businesses.</b>
<b>4A</b>	Work with the existing local business group to plan activities and events that will help to support the local business community.
<b>4B</b>	Connect local business owners with programs that can help them to strengthen and expand their businesses.
<b>4C</b>	Identify a team of individuals in the Town of Reading who can champion economic development and serve as liaisons to the small business community.
<b>#5</b>	<b>STRATEGY: Promote public/private partnerships and collaboration to maximize redevelopment potential.</b>
<b>5A</b>	Consider public/private partnerships with developers to help address gaps in financing redevelopment projects.
<b>5B</b>	Engage with local and regional entities and groups with access to businesses, developers, and investors to market redevelopment potential in Reading.
<b>5C</b>	Facilitate redevelopment opportunities that require parcel consolidation with multiple owners.
<b>#6</b>	<b>STRATEGY: Build community and activate the public realm in Downtown Reading through cultural economic development and placemaking initiatives.</b>
<b>6A</b>	Implement public space activities, programs, and events that can facilitate creative placemaking.
<b>6B</b>	Promote Reading as a creative community.
<b>6C</b>	Program engaging activities that transform main streets within and between the PDAs.

**Action Plan Development Process**

This Action Plan is informed by six elements of work and developed with feedback provided by residents, business owners, property owners, and others through several public meetings and during a public comment period for the Plan draft. The feedback from the public meetings directly informed the development and refinement of the Action Plan strategies and actions. Please see appendices C, D, and E for summaries of public feedback provided at each public meeting.

Figure 2: Action Planning Project Elements



Table 3: Public Participation Schedule

Activity	Summary
<b>Project Advisory Committee</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A nine-member Advisory Committee met quarterly to provide input at key points during the project between September 2014 and June 2015</li> <li>• Committee members reviewed and provided early feedback on the project scope of work; the retail, office, and residential market analyses; and the conceptual urban design work for one priority development area.</li> </ul>
<b>Press Publicity, Mailings, and Television Coverage</b>	<p>Each public meeting was promoted through the following activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• press releases disseminated through the Town of Reading and MAPC;</li> <li>• direct mailings to abutters of the New Crossing Road and Ash Street parcels priority development area;</li> <li>• bi-weekly email blasts to the Town Manager's mailing list;</li> <li>• posts to Facebook groups via our Advisory Committee;</li> <li>• coverage by Reading Community Television (RCTV); and</li> <li>• articles in the Reading Advocate, the Reading Patch, and the Daily Times Chronicle news outlets.</li> </ul>
<b>Public Meeting #1 – April 1, 2015</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Over 60 people attended;</li> <li>• Presentation of the Economic Development Action Plan and the development potential of four PDAs;</li> <li>• Conducted visual preference survey utilizing keypad polling; feedback directly informed subsequent modeling of redevelopment potential and conceptual urban design work illustrating redevelopment potential in one PDA.</li> </ul>

Activity	Summary
<p><b>Public Meeting #2 – June 3, 2015</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Over 50 people attended;</li> <li>• Introductory presentation, followed by “world-café” style discussion stations where participants engaged with facilitators at stations and could travel freely throughout the evening.</li> <li>• Participants learned about the different elements feeding into the development of the Action Plan:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ the retail, office, and residential market analyses;</li> <li>○ conceptual urban design work of redevelopment potential;</li> <li>○ transportation connectivity; and</li> <li>○ development scenarios modeling estimates of redevelopment potential.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>Public Meeting #3 – October 7, 2015</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approximately 60 people attended;</li> <li>• Open House format, where attendees could circulate around six stations to speak with MAPC or Reading staff about proposed Action Plan goals and strategies, provide feedback on the conceptual urban design work illustrating development potential in one priority development area (PDA), and provide feedback on the draft Economic Development Vision.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Action Plan Draft Public Comment Period, November 17 – December 1, 2015</b></p>	<p>Content forthcoming – after the comment period is complete.</p>

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## Historic and Planning Context

### A Brief History

Reading was incorporated as a town on June 10th, 1644. The area that is currently the Town of Reading was known as both Wood End and Third Parrish during its early years. The oldest remaining structure in Town is the Parker Tavern, built in 1694 and now operated by the Reading Antiquarian Society. A town meeting voted to fund public education in 1693, and Reading's first public library was created in 1868. The small community played active roles in both the Revolutionary and Civil Wars. Prior to the 1800s, the Town evolved from a series of isolated, subsistence farms to a specialized farming community located around a town center.

Reading became a manufacturing town during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This industry was able to prosper as a result of the construction of the Andover-Medford Turnpike, currently Route 28, which improved access to Boston. Among the major businesses in Town were Daniel Pratt's clock factory, Samuel Pierce's organ pipe factory, and Sylvester Harnden's furniture factory. Access to Boston and the southern markets increased with the arrival of the Boston & Main Railroad to Reading in 1845. Around this time, shoe-making had expanded from a cottage industry to larger factories, and neckties were also produced in the Town for just under a century. Several factories were forced to close during and after the Civil War, however, as the market demand from the south declined. After the Civil War, Reading became a predominately residential community, though industrial activity did eventually expand. The forerunner to General Tire & Rubber Company was located off Ash Street. Ace Art, Boston Stove Foundry, and a number of other companies were created in Reading after World War I.

In 1986, Reading adopted the Reading Home Rule Charter, which created a Town Manager position that is responsible for the day-to-day government operations. A few elected boards and commissions are responsible for policy and decision making functions. Reading's governance structure has changed quite a bit since the town was incorporated, reflecting the changing size and needs of the community. When the Town was created in 1644, its government consisted of a Board of Selectmen and a Town Meeting. In 1944, a representative town meeting replaced the open town meeting style that had been in place for 300 years.

Reading's 2005 Master Plan sums up its urban form well: "the traditional New England village structure, with a distinct center, family-oriented residential neighborhoods, few business corridors and a surrounding system of natural elements." The residential, family-centered nature of Reading is valued strongly by the community and facilitating development that retains this value is of critical importance.

### Planning Efforts and Policies Advancing Economic Development

This Action Plan builds on a number of planning and zoning efforts that have been undertaken in Reading over the last decade. Relevant economic and housing-related findings, recommendations, policy changes are summarized below.



- Reading Master Plan (2005):** This Master Plan included a detailed chapter on economic development, which recommended the establishment of an Economic Development Commission. As a result of the Master Plan, the Town created and staffed an Economic Development Committee (EDC) that served between 2006 and June 2015. The Master Plan flagged opportunities for redevelopment and identified three priority development areas: lower Haven Street; Main Street; South Main Street; and General Way. Key recommendations from the Master Plan include: enhancing streets in the downtown core with pedestrian access and streetscape improvements;

placing parking behind buildings and emphasizing green infrastructure in front of building; implementing infrastructure improvements that calm traffic; and adopting zoning that facilitates mixed use.

- **Downtown Reading Market Assessment & Business District Composition Analysis (2007):** This study serves as an important collection of business and customer patterns in Downtown Reading. The study highlights issues facing the downtown area and identifies opportunities for a mix of businesses and identifies tenant recruitment targets. The study suggests that the Town create a “sales package” that can help it market itself to potential businesses.
- **Reading Housing Production Plan (2013):** The Town completed a Housing Production Plan (HPP) in 2013 that identified the need to create additional market-rate and affordable housing in the Town, specifically targeting cost burdened households and the aging population that may be looking to downsize.
- **Main Street Corridor Study (2012):** This study identified strategies that aim to elevate Main Street in Reading, Wakefield, and Melrose, into a greener, more accessible multi-modal transit corridor. The study recommended improvements to pedestrian and bicycle access, signage, and the advancement of environmentally friendly and efficient transportation alternatives.
- **Economic Development Self-Assessment Tool (2014):** The Town of Reading utilized the Economic Development Self-Assessment Tool (EDSAT) to assess the municipality’s strengths and weaknesses when it comes to sustaining and expanding economic development. The EDSAT recommended an update to the Town’s economic development strategy if it intends to allow for more commercial and industrial development.
- **Reading Bicycle Network and Pedestrian Priority Plan (2014):** This Plan identified actions the Town could take to improve safety, health, and the environment. The study concentrated on major roadways in Town and focused on increasing pedestrian and bicycle access to schools trails, retail and employment centers, transit, and parks.
- **Reading is Ready for Your Business (year):** This brochure explains the Town’s proactive approach to economic development and offers a number of reasons why it is ripe for commercial investment, including its low commercial tax rate, presence of a commuter rail station, and a multi-million dollar grant to revitalize its downtown streetscape.
- **Doing Business in Reading (2015):** This guide for those interested in opening a business in the Town. It answers commonly asked questions about the Town’s Planning Division, Building Department, and Health Department, specifically in regard to permits, plans, and licenses. The document also offers design guidelines for those that have moved beyond the application and permitting process and are ready to open their business in Town. In 2015, the Town of Reading, worked with MAPC to revise the Guide, which includes streamlined permitting check lists and flow charts, which aim to clarify the steps involved with opening a business in town.

## Policies and Guidelines

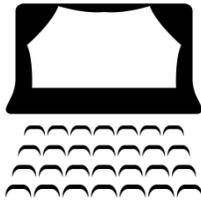
Over the last decade, the Town has adopted a number of zoning changes, policies, and guidelines that facilitate compact, mixed-use development. Notable policies, guidelines, and standards adopted to date that support vibrant mix of land uses and a quality public realm include:

- Downtown Smart Growth District (40R)
- Gateway Smart Growth District (40R)
- South Main Street Design Best Practices
- Zoning Bylaw Changes (recently amended in 2014)
- Complete Streets Policy

## Current Conditions

Reading has a number of environmental, cultural, and demographic assets that make it a prime location for development.

### Cultural Assets



Reading boasts a number of cultural assets that contribute to its vibrancy as a community and attract visitors to the Town. In order to mitigate the demolition of older buildings in Reading's downtown, some of which were representative of the Town's manufacturing history, a Historical Commission was formed in 1978 to identify and help preserve Reading's historical assets. The Historical Commission has inventoried over 270 properties in Town of historical or architectural importance.

There are many opportunities for engaging with the arts in Reading. The Town is home to the Reading Symphony Orchestra, the Reading Civic Band, and two community theater groups, the Quannapowit Players and the Colonial Chorus. Children can get involved in the musical and fine arts through instructional programs at Creative Arts for Kids. The Reading Art Association, founded in 1959, supports the advancement of art in the community and the Reading Antiquarian Society operates the Parker Tavern, a public museum in town.

The Town of Reading recently undertook a planning effort to examine the feasibility of establishing a cultural district in Downtown Reading. According to the **Downtown Reading Cultural District Exploratory Study**, "A cultural district is a specific, well-recognized, labeled, mixed use area of a city or town in which a high concentration of cultural facilities, assets and activities serve as an anchor to attract people." The study goes on to identify these facilities, assets, and activities in Town that make Downtown Reading a viable location for such a district. It also explains how a cultural district could be created in Reading as it relates to zoning and boundary considerations. Case studies of other cultural districts in the region are explored to evaluate successes and commonalities. The study goes through the results of a fall 2014 survey that asked residents about their interest in a cultural district and what it should encompass. Overall, Town residents expressed a strong interest in developing a cultural district and their objectives were for one that has more collaborative events, one that has well promoted events, and one that involves the development of a cultural arts center facility. The study ends with short-term/immediate suggested actions and medium- to long-term suggested actions for developing such a district.

### Environmental Assets



The Town of Reading has a rich stock of environmental assets. Approximately 30% of the Town's land area is made up of wetlands, swamps, and floodplains. Both North Cedar Swamp and South Cedar Swamp, which together span the length of the town's eastern boundary, provide groundwater supply, flood control, and habitat for wildlife. Timberneck Swamp, Bare Meadow, and Fairbanks Marsh serve similar environmental services while also providing for passive recreation options. Walkers

Brook and Bare Meadow Brook are two headwater streams that run through Reading on their way to the Aberjona, Ipswich, Mystic, and Saugus Rivers.

Encompassing over 300 acres of Reading's northern border and adjacent to the Ipswich River is the Town Forest. This area is within the floodplain of the river, allowing it to serve as a buffer from flooding. It also acts as a buffer from encroaching development and it protect the Town's well fields. This dense pine forest grew in the 1930s as abutting areas were reforested. Today, the Town Forest contains a number of wide paths that can be used for hiking, cross-country skiing, camping, environmental education, and more. Other

wooded areas of Reading include Kurchian Woods and Marion Woods. The former consists of almost 33 acres of mature trees, vernal pools, and a bog.

Provisions in the Town’s land use regulations encourage the protection open space. However, budgetary constraints have prevented the additional municipal purchasing of land. While negotiating with private developers for contributions to the town’s recreation facilities and open spaces has helped fill this budgetary gap, this strategy will become more difficult to implement as the amount of buildable land decreases and land costs increase.

### Transportation Assets



Like other communities in the NSPC region, both traffic and through-traffic loads have increased in Reading. That being said, Reading is fortunate from both an automobile and public transportation standpoint. The Town is in close proximity to the I-93/I-95 Interchange, a major node of the region’s interstate system. Running in the north-south direction, I-93 offers a major entry to Boston for commuters, even those coming from as far north as New Hampshire.

Reading residents benefit from both the Haverhill commuter rail line running through downtown and the Lowell line running on the west side of I-93. At present, the Metropolitan Bay Transit Authority (MBTA) operates 19 Boston-bound Haverhill line trains and 23 outbound trains that stop in Reading on weekdays. Six commuter trains operate in each direction to and from Boston that stop in Reading on weekends and holidays. There is an average travel time of 34 minutes between the Depot stop in Reading and North Station in Boston. The MBTA operates two bus routes from the Depot; one to Wakefield and the other to the MBTA’s Orange line at Malden Center. The Merrimack Valley Transit Authority operates two buses a day that run from Reading Depot to Lawrence and from Reading Depot to Andover. About 6.5% of Reading’s population takes public transportation to work.



Reading’s Board of Selectmen adopted a Complete Streets policy in July of 2014. This policy has been recognized as one of the nation’s best for encouraging streets that are safer for pedestrians and bicyclists, reflect the local neighborhood and its culture, and entice visitors to local restaurants and shops. Reading’s Complete Streets policy tied for the sixth best in the country in a 2014 ranking by Smart Growth America. The document describes how the Town plans to implement a Complete Streets policy, including revising

planning documents, zoning and subdivision codes, procedures, and the like to integrate Complete Streets principles on all Town streets, trails, and paths.

### Reading’s Workforce

#### Population



Reading’s population: 24,747 (Census 2010)



36% of households have school-age children (Census 2010)

As of the 2010 U.S. Census, Reading has a population of 24,747 people. This marks a growth of 1,039 people, or 4%, since 2000. Reading’s population growth is somewhat greater than the MAPC region, at 3.1%, and the NSPC subregion, at 2.8%.

When looking at household projections by age of householder, Reading saw its population of 25 to 34 year olds decline 9% between 2000 and 2010 according to the U.S. Census. This was a greater decline

than for the entire MAPC region, at -6%, but quite less of a decline as for the rest of the NSPC subregion, at -16%. The 9% growth in 35 to 65 years olds aligns with both the region's and the subregion's growths at 7% and 8%, respectively. Out of the 9,305 households in Reading, 36% have children under 18. Of these households, 86% are married couples. This proportion is much greater than in the whole MAPC region where 71% of households with children are married couples.



Reading's population is increasing and growing older. Based on MAPC's Stronger Region projections, the town could see a 10% population increase between 2010 and 2030. In particular, the senior population (over 66) is projected to increase by nearly 75%, or over 2,500 residents. Meanwhile, younger adult populations (20-54) are projected to grow minimally, and the number of school aged children is projected to decrease by nearly 10%. Significantly, households will grow by a higher percentage than population.

These projected changes will likely have a significant impact on the type of housing units needed in Reading. Many senior and Millennial households prefer smaller housing units, often in multifamily layouts in or close to amenity rich, walkable environments with alternatives to auto transportation, including transit, bicycle, and pedestrian modes.

While both the MAPC region and the NSPC subregion saw their percentages of White, non-Hispanic residents decline between 2000 and 2010, Reading's percentage grew by 1%. Approximately 92% of Reading is White, 1% is Black or African-American, 4% is Asian, 2% is Hispanic, and 1% is Two or More Races.

### Income



*Average family household income in Reading is significantly higher than the median income of households in Massachusetts (ACS estimates)*

Incomes in Reading are significantly higher than those in all of Middlesex County. At \$102,000, (ACS 2008-2012 estimates) incomes are more than 25% higher. Family households also earn significantly more. ACS 2009-2013 5-year estimates indicate that income has risen even higher to \$105,459 per year; this is more than 1.5 times the median household income of Massachusetts at \$66,866 per year. Thus, households have significant resources for housing, which is reflected in housing prices and rental rates.

### Educational Attainment



*Reading's percentage of residents with some college education is higher than that of most municipalities in the NSPC subregion (ACS estimates)*

Often associated with high income is a high level of educational attainment. After Winchester, Reading has the highest level of educational attainment within the NSPC subregion. While 45% of the population in the NSPC subregion has earned a Bachelor's degree or higher, 55% of Reading residents have some college education (ACS 2009-2013 5-Year estimates.)

**Wages**



Wage growth in Reading over a recent five-year period are on par with the county and state

Between 2008 and 2013, the wage growth in Reading was positive and has been on par with Middlesex County and the state. The Information industry in Reading is, however, an outlier with 79% growth in average weekly wages – because there are such a small number of Information jobs, this change is likely due to one or two companies that came to Reading and offered higher wages. Wages in professional and technical services in Reading continued to decline between 2008 and 2013 as they did between 2001 and 2008. Administrative and Waste Services also saw a significant drop in wages at around a 25% decline. Many individual office-based industries did see wage growth however including Finance and Insurance, Real Estate and Rental and Leasing, and Health Care and Social Assistance.

**Market Potential**

In order to develop an understanding of the potential for the four PDAs in Reading to accommodate and attract more commercial and residential development, MAPC conducted a retail market analysis, an office market analysis, and a residential market analysis. The next two sections review key findings and recommendations from the office, retail, and residential market analyses as they pertain to each PDA.

It is important to note that market analyses alone are not a predictor of the success of future developments by type; they only estimate the market *opportunity/potential* for redevelopment to fill regional market gaps in commercial or residential. These estimates of potential are based on available information about current residents and businesses in Reading, the regional trade area of which Reading is a part of, and available population and household projections. The ability to capture the market potential identified in the next few sections depends on the implementation of the Action Plan.

**Reading’s Retail Market**



In order to assess the current retail environment in Reading, MAPC conducted a retail inventory to understand what is currently in the downtown area (where the vast majority of retail in Reading is currently located). This section summarizes key findings and recommendations from the full retail market analysis (see Appendix A).

**Retail Inventory**

There are approximately 153 establishments in the downtown area, including both retail and professional offices. Reading currently only has one retail vacancy in the downtown area – a former Walgreens on Harnden Street. Reading has a low percentage of retail (shoppers and convenience goods) when compared with a typical downtown mix. Conversely, downtown Reading has a high amount of professional services. This trend is actually fairly common in downtowns of similar communities throughout the region and is often the result of larger big box retail stores and online retail sales drawing sales away from more traditional downtowns. Affected downtown retail establishments went out of business and professional offices came in to fill the newly available space.

### Retail Opportunity Gap Analysis

MAPC staff analyzed ESRI Business Analyst data within the defined trade areas in order to conduct a retail gap analysis. A retail opportunity or gap analysis looks at the overall demand for retail goods and services within a designated trade area based on the spending potential of the households (demand), and the actual sales for those goods and services within the market area (supply). The difference between the demand and supply is called the retail “gap.” If the demand exceeds the supply, there is “leakage,” meaning that residents must travel outside the area to purchase those goods. In such cases, there is an opportunity to capture some of this spending within the market area to support new retail investment. When there is greater supply than demand, there is a “surplus,” meaning consumers from outside the market area are coming in to purchase these goods and services. In such cases, there is limited or no opportunity for additional retail development. Thus, the retail gap analysis provides a snapshot of potential opportunities for retailers to locate within an area.

Findings indicate that the local trade area presents limited opportunity for downtown and mixed-use oriented retail. However, when considering the primary trade area and secondary trade areas, there are opportunities for additional retail establishments, especially restaurants. (ESRI Business Analyst Data)

### Potential Supportable Retail Square Footage

MAPC staff uses a conservative capture rate to analyze the retail gap and understand the potential for additional establishments. This capture rate acknowledges that any single retail district will never be able to re-capture the full amount of retail leakage. Competition from regional shopping areas such as Market Street in Lynnfield and Route 28 in Stoneham, as well as other local districts and online shopping will always draw business away from the study area. When analyzing the market potential within the primary trade area, MAPC uses a 10% capture rate.

When looking at market potential within the secondary trade area, MAPC uses a lower 5% capture rate. Using this methodology, the market within a ten minute drive time of the study area could likely support up to 6 total establishments with the best opportunities being a grocery/specialty food store, health & personal care stores (pharmacy, beauty supply, cosmetics, sunglass stores, health supplement stores, vitamin, or nutrition stores), used merchandise, and a limited service eating establishment. The majority of the retail opportunities supported by the primary trade area would be most appropriate for a downtown setting.

The market within the secondary trade area could support additional opportunities including up to 9 restaurants<sup>3</sup>. Attracting additional restaurants particularly to the downtown area is a major opportunity for Reading. Downtown Reading already has just over 20 restaurants in close proximity that offer a diversity of food types. This restaurant presence could be further enhanced as restaurants in particular often draw a regional customer base and tend to do better when located near one another. They can be marketed collectively as a dining destination and patrons travelling to the area know that they will have several dining options. Multiple restaurants also increase the visibility and convenience of a location.

At this time there is not a significant market opportunity within the secondary trade area to support a full new arts-related retail establishment. However if the town implements a cultural district downtown this could potentially bolster the market if more people are willing to travel to the area to visit unique arts-related retail establishments.

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<sup>3</sup> Although the retail gap analysis uses a conservative capture rate, this opportunity may be slightly lower because the retail surplus/leakage data does not yet take into account the recent opening of many restaurants at Market Street at Lynnfield (e.g. Davio's, FuCaKyu, Legal C Bar, Wagamama, Yard House, Panera Bread, Temazcal, etc.), which is located at the edge of the Primary Trade Area.

### Retail Worker Potential

Because there are a number of professional services that exist within downtown Reading, there is already a local base of workers who are also customers of stores and restaurants. In addition, there are close to 88,000 people employed within a ten minute drive time (ESRI). There is therefore potential to capture business from these nearby employees as well. Office workers can spend a significant amount of money on food and convenience items throughout the week. A successful marketing campaign could help to drive additional business from the surrounding population of workers in addition to the residents that are living within the trade area.

### Reading's Office Market



In order to determine the potential demand for office in Reading, MAPC staff analyzed existing office inventory, economic trends in Reading, and regional trends in the office market. This section summarizes key findings and recommendations from the full office market analysis (see Appendix A).

### Office Market Profile

According to Assessor's data, the Town of Reading has approximately 610,000 square feet of office space. The majority of office space in Reading is located within the study area or in close proximity to it, either in the downtown, on South Main Street, or at Walkers Brook Drive. More specifically within our study area, the Downtown 40R expansion has approximately 3,824 square feet of office<sup>4</sup>. South Main Street has around 127,690 square feet of office. New Crossing Road and One General Way have no office uses at this time. Through the recent EDSAT process, it was determined however that very little of this office space is currently vacant or available for new tenants. Commercial brokers also cited that the lack of available office space was a challenge for the town.

MAPC staff analyzed data on the largest employers (i.e., employing 100+ people) to determine which industries are the most represented amongst this group. The majority of these employers are either large retail establishments (Stop-n-Shop, Market Basket, Home Depot) or educational institutions (Reading Memorial High School, Austin Preparatory School). Only two of the largest employers are traditional office space users (Massachusetts Bay Constables, East Middlesex Industries).

### Space Trends

MAPC staff looked broadly at the Boston regional office market to identify the role of Reading within the larger market. Overall the office market in the Boston region is doing very well with net absorption at multi-year highs through the third quarter of 2014. Vacancies are near the ten-year low and asking rents are also at an all-time high<sup>5</sup>. Reading is part of the Jones Lang LaSalle Boston North submarket.<sup>6</sup> When analyzing the suburban markets in Boston it is clear that the 128/Mass Pike market is particularly strong, although the Boston North market is doing well and improving. Positive indicators in the Boston North market are that the vacancy rate is down 2.1 points year over year and below the historic average (17.2%). Boston North has also seen greater year over year rent growth and a greater percentage of absorption than the overall suburban market.

<sup>4</sup> This PDA is adjacent to the current 40R district in Reading which has a much more significant amount of office space.

<sup>5</sup> Jones Lang LaSalle

<sup>6</sup> Includes the communities of Arlington, Beverly, Chelsea, Danvers, Everett, Lynn, Lynnfield, Malden, Marblehead, Medford, Melrose, Nahant, North Reading, Peabody, Reading, Revere, Salem, Saugus, Somerville, Stoneham, Swampscott, Wakefield, Wilmington, Winchester, and Woburn

Compared with the 128/Mass Pike Market however, the vacancy rate in Boston North is still much higher. The discrepancy between the two markets becomes more significant when looking at the vacancy rate for Class A office space (7.1% in 128/Mass Pike and 14.7% in Boston North). Boston North also has a lower percentage of Class A office space available when compared with the 128 Mass Pike and overall suburban market. Asking rents in 128/Mass Pike are also much higher at about \$28.99 per square foot. This compares with \$20.43 per square foot in Boston North. JLL does indicate that the leverage in the North market is shifting from a market that favors tenants to one that favors landlords which speaks to the growing competitiveness of the market. Once again, if Reading is able to strategically attract office tenants, the town stands to benefit from the growing office market in the Boston North subregion.

### **Employment Projections**

Analyzing job projections at a more regional level demonstrates what industries are growing in and around the Town of Reading and where there may be some potential for Reading to capture some of this growth in their office market. The Massachusetts Department of Labor and Workforce Development projects job growth between 2010 and 2020 (+14.7% or 31,399 jobs for traditional office oriented industries) for the Metro North Workforce Investment Area (WIA). This area includes Arlington, Belmont, Burlington, Cambridge, Chelsea, Everett, Malden, Medford, North Reading, Reading, Revere, Somerville, Stoneham, Wakefield, Watertown, Wilmington, Winchester, Winthrop, and Woburn.

It is projected that slightly more than 16,000 office-oriented jobs will be added within the WIA. Businesses will require office space to house their workers and it is likely that more will be needed than is currently available. However there are a number of major competitors within the MetroNorth WIA including Cambridge, Burlington, and Woburn. These municipalities already have strong commercial bases and a large number of office-based industries. As these markets become saturated however, office-based industries will look to other municipalities. This may present an opportunity, but Reading will need to implement effective business attraction strategies in order to capture a portion of this job growth.

### **Office Development Potential**

At this point in time, Reading has the potential to support some small office space downtown or along South Main Street (PDA 1 & PDA 2). In the downtown it will be important to balance office development with retail, restaurants, and residential. There is also some potential to work with property owners of larger parcels (such as the One General Way parcel within our study area) in order to develop new office space (likely 15,000-30,000 square feet). The regional market supports a large office tenant, but there is a significant amount of competition from nearby municipalities.

As noted above, the Boston North sub-market continues to improve and the sub-market is likely to see more interested office tenants as market pressures in surrounding areas grow. There is significant job growth projected within the MetroNorth WIA and Reading has seen job growth in office-based industries over the past ten years.

The limited amount of office space currently on the market or slated to come onto the market in Reading suggests that if the town is interested in increasing office space and workers in the town, build to suit options may hold the greatest potential. Build to suit refers to a way of leasing commercial property through which the developer builds to the specifications of a tenant and would be ideal for attracting a larger office tenant. This strategy offers many advantages including a guaranteed tenant and a higher chance of project financing. The town can focus on attracting one or two key tenants within an industry that has a competitive advantage in the town. Based on historical job growth in Reading, the health care and social assistance industry may be an important opportunity to pursue.

### *Retail and Office Market Potential: Growth Opportunities*

**PDA #1, Downtown 40R Proposed Expansion:** The proposed downtown 40R expansion holds potential for additional retail on Main Street although the focus should be to first fill vacancies on Main Street just outside this PDA in the existing 40R district. The Walgreens space should be prioritized. Retail industries that could potentially be supported by the primary market are health & personal care, specialty grocery, and used merchandise. The market could also support a substantial amount of new restaurants that could help to make Reading a dining destination with the potential to draw in a more regional customer base. Smaller office spaces downtown are in demand and additional space could be added on the second and third floors of mixed-use buildings. It is important to balance small office use development in the downtown with retail, residential and restaurants in order to ensure a good balance of uses. This is consistent with the recommendation of the priority mapping project to build mixed use infill in this area (see Appendix B, Residential Market Analysis for more information.)

**PDA #2, South Main Street:** The NSPC priority mapping project identified multi-family as the most appropriate use for this PDA. Regarding retail and office there may be some potential at the North end of this corridor, close to the existing downtown. It would be important for the town to work with existing property owners and identify their interest in potentially developing mixed use. These buildings could add residential and small office spaces while maintaining existing retail. (See Residential Market Analysis later in this document for more information.)

**PDA #3, New Crossing Road Redevelopment District:** As the priority mapping planning process indicated, PDA 3 (New Crossing Road Redevelopment District) has some potential for a mixed-use development. This development could incorporate office space within a mixed use development. Mixed use developments with office, retail, and residential are attractive to workers and interest in these types of environments is growing particularly among young professionals. In particular, residential & office uses could work well here with a small amount of retail in the more visible area of the site to serve the residents and workers. Because of the current industrial character of PDA 3 there may be an opportunity to pursue a creative development that in addition to small office spaces also incorporates light industrial uses such as a shared use commercial kitchen space. (See Residential Market Analysis later in this document for more information.)

**PDA #4, One General Way:** PDA #4 is the most appropriate site for office development at this point. Within the context of the current market the town may be able to support 15,000-30,000 square feet at this site, potentially even through a renovation of the existing space. Because this is a large parcel, this relatively modest amount of office space could be integrated with other uses such as residential and existing retail. The other potential opportunity for this site would be for the town to pursue a build to suit project for a more significant amount of office space if they are able to incentivize a large tenant to locate here. The Healthcare industry for example may benefit from this location as there are already medical office tenants nearby including Hallmark Health Medical Associates and Physician Interactive. (See Residential Market Analysis later in this document for more information.)

### **Reading's Residential Market**

The residential market analysis provides an update on housing needs using Census and recent American Community Survey data and examines the opportunity/potential for residential or mixed-use redevelopment to capture housing demand. This section summarizes key findings and recommendations from the full residential market analysis (see Appendix B).

### Household Composition



Nearly 75% of households in Reading are family households and over a third have children 18 and under living at home - higher than percentages in surrounding Middlesex County. Couples with children often prefer larger housing units (i.e. single family homes). However, although the percentage of families with children is higher, so is the percentage of married couples without children. This may indicate younger couples move to Reading in anticipation of having children. Further, although there are a lower percentage of nonfamily households, the percentage of households with people 65 or older is higher. Older populations, along with younger singles and married couples without children, are more likely to prefer smaller housing units, whether as starter units for younger couples, or downsizing units for older couples. (ACS 2008-2012 estimates)

### School Enrollment

Although Reading has seen an increase in its public school enrollment over the last decade, it appears that it may have peaked, with enrollment down in the current year. Should this continue, and should more seniors choose to downsize and sell their homes to families with younger children, the demand for additional new construction single-family units may ease to some extent. (School Enrollment, 2004-2014)

### Housing Stock



The vast majority of residential units in Reading are single family units, representing over 75% of total stock. This is significantly higher than that of Middlesex County, where only 55% of total stock is comprised of single family homes. In fact, Reading has a lower percentage of all multifamily housing types than its surrounding county. Most notably, only 7% of units are in smaller multi-family structures (2-4 units), compared to over 22% in Middlesex. Fewer units are also in larger multifamily arrangements as well, however, units in larger 10+ unit structures are comparable. This may be a result of recent multifamily developments over the last decade. (ACS 2008-2012 estimates)

In general, the age of Reading's housing stock is typical of Middlesex County. Just under a third of existing units were constructed before 1939 – most of which is located near the historic downtown center, where homes in pre-automobile days were built within walkable distance to goods and services and the train station. However, and to be expected, as a suburb of Boston, the majority of homes were constructed over time post WWII, indicating the continued suburbanization of metropolitan areas. Approximately, 10% of total housing stock was built in each decade from the 1950s to 1980s. Although this housing is not old by historical standards, much of it is multi-story, and may not meet accessible needs for seniors as they age. Nor is it likely to include amenities sought after by today's younger renters. Only 9% of units were built since 2000.

### Unit Characteristics

As is common in primarily single-family unit communities, Reading's housing stock has traditionally been, and continues to be owner-occupied. However, although the percentage of owner-occupancy units has hovered above 80% for over a decade, there appears to be a slight increase in renter demand. Thus, even though more ownership units were added over the timeframe, the growth in rentals was higher by percentage (+14%) compared to single family (+4%). Rental growth can be attributed to larger rental complexes that have opened since 2000 (e.g. Reading Commons, formerly Avalon, and most recently, 30 Haven). (ACS)

Condominium ownership, particularly in multi-family structures, is also growing in Reading. According to Massachusetts Department of Revenue Parcel Counts by Property Class data (Table 7), condominium development has increased in town. Between 2000 and 2015, the overall percentage of condos increased to 13.1% of total Reading parcels (+464 units), whereas single-family units decreased 2.1% (in percentage of total units). This number reflects both new condominium development and condominium conversions. Given the decrease in multifamily units (two- to 3-family), condo conversions are likely taking place in old 2- and 3-family rental buildings. At the same time, the percentage of parcels with apartments (buildings with more than 4 units) increased by 7 over the timeframe, which would include larger apartment structures like 30 Haven and Reading Commons. Essentially, the finding is that there is growing interest and support for multifamily ownership and rental units.

There is a limited inventory of rental units within and nearby the priority redevelopment areas, particularly in the downtown. Generally, newer units with amenities in the downtown command higher rents than older product. For example, the new rental building at Haven Street, which has underground parking, elevator access, a gym and community room receives \$1,900 and up for 1BR units, and over \$2,500 for 2BR units. Older rentals, with little or no amenities, like the Celeste Apartments on Washington Street receive far less (\$1,200 for a 1-bedroom). These rents are comparable to larger units in highway-adjacent Reading complexes with greater amenities like pools (i.e. Reading Commons, former Archstone property). Property management at the Haven Street property noted that proximity to the commuter rail, and the retail and restaurants in the building and in downtown, were main drivers. (Source: Zillow; Craigslist)

### Sales Trends

Demand for ownership housing is strong in Reading. The housing market has picked up significantly as it recovered from the recession. In 2013, the first time since the recession, total sales exceeded the 2005 height. Interestingly, while the number of single family homes purchased increased by 42% since 2008, the number of condominium sales increased by over 250%. The market for condominiums – townhome style, and multifamily – has increased significantly. Further demonstrating the strength in the Reading housing market is the increase in sales prices since the recession lows (Figure 4). The median sales price for all units in Reading was \$445,000, nearly 5% above the previous median price peak in 2005. And although condos are more affordable than single family homes (\$250K vs. \$485K, respectively), condo prices have increased at a higher rate (33%) than single family homes (21%) since 2008.

Given the number of condominiums, this may indicate a change in housing preferences, particularly given the recent construction of multi-family, age-restricted condominium development, most notably at Reading Woods near Rte. 128.

### Household Projections

To estimate potential new unit housing demand for the study areas (all of which are within, or within walking distance to downtown), MAPC's Stronger Region 2020 household and household preference analysis was analyzed for all of Reading. As noted earlier, the number of households in Reading will increase over the coming years, with the greatest increase likely to be households headed by persons 55 and older. However, there will also be sizeable increases in younger households (20-34 years old; +20%). Households headed by those 35-54 – those most likely to have school-aged children living at home and to reside in single family houses - are projected to decrease. This change in households will lead to smaller household sizes, and likely, changes in unit preferences, both in size and location. Based on general housing preferences by age, MAPC produces demand projections by type of housing, (single- and multi-family units), and by tenure (rental and ownership). Based on these calculations, MAPC estimates Reading will require an additional 950 units by 2020, 400 multifamily and 540 single-family units.

## Residential Market Potential: Growth Opportunities

The housing market - for sale and rental – is strong in Reading. Demand for for-sale single-family and multifamily condominium units is robust, and now exceeds pre-recession levels both in number of sales and median unit prices. Given the expensive housing market, more affordable options are needed, and when they come to market, they go fast. This is also true of rental units, particularly given the lack of new inventory in town. Further, although recent permit data shows the market has responded by building more multifamily, brokers as well as business owners in downtown note that there is a growing need for more residential in or near downtown, which command premium prices when in new or renovated formats. Households are increasingly looking to be close to the commuter rail, and the many retail, services and restaurants found in downtown.

While the highest demand is likely to be for single-family homes in Reading, the demand for multi-family units is likely to increase, particularly if developed in premium locations (e.g. downtown). Further, with limited vacant land remaining in town for single-family residential construction, opportunities for multi-family at different scales is likely more feasible, with downtown or downtown-adjacent areas holding the greatest potential given the location of larger parcels with potential for redevelopment, and market preferences for walkable, mixed-use areas – seniors and younger households don't want to be on the outskirts.

With a limited supply of rental apartments, particularly in new buildings, there is demand for additional units, particularly in and around downtown. This is supported by recent trends including the success of the Haven Street project, the younger renter demand, and preference of seniors to live in downtown environments.

Given the location of the priority sites for analysis, and the housing preferences of those most likely to reside in or adjacent to a downtown environment, a capture rate of total demand for the study areas was calculated as follows: 75% of multifamily units would be captured in the study areas, and 20% of single-family potential (in alternatives to single family like townhomes). This would result in a total of ~300 new multifamily units, and ~110 single-family (alternatives). Further, given increasing demand for rental and the absence of new product, specifically in downtown and downtown adjacent areas, this analysis assumed a higher percentage of new units would be rental than currently found town-wide.

Residential opportunity will differ by area:

**PDA #1 – Downtown 40R Potential Expansion:** Downtown would be most attractive for multi-family and mixed-use redevelopment - both ownership and rental - to take advantage of proximity to the train station and retail/restaurant amenities most attractive to younger workers (without children) and households looking to downsize. Site 1-B would best hold multi-family, whereas Site 1-A would be best suited to multi-family infill or mixed use along major corridors. However, with few large parcels available in 1-B, parcel assembly would likely be needed to make redevelopment feasible.

**PDA #2 – South Main Street:** Northernmost areas of the corridor hold the greatest potential for multifamily residential and/or mixed-use development, with a higher percentage of rental units. Units would likely be most attractive to smaller households interested in the proximity to the train station and existing retail amenities along Main Street in the downtown core. Redevelopment could also serve as a new gateway opportunity to the larger downtown. Added residential densities would also further support existing and future retail establishments.

**PDA #3 – New Crossing Road Redevelopment District and Ash Street Parcels:** Given that this priority area remains within walking distance to the train station and downtown retail amenities, residential could likely be supported, perhaps through a combination of ownership multi-family and single-family alternatives such as townhouses. However, since it is also somewhat removed from the downtown, there is

limited potential for retail as part of a mixed-use development, as the retail components would lack visibility to attract a larger customer base. Office space would likely be a better fit, particularly spaces targeting creative industries attracted to former industrial areas.

**PDA #4 – 1 General Way:** Multifamily owner and rental units and single-family alternatives (e.g. town homes) on areas of the parcel closest to downtown may be feasible, and attractive if developed as part of a larger mixed-use complex. The area remains within walking distance to the train and downtown, and with a mix of office and redeveloped retail, could attract residential interest from households looking for higher density environments. However, as highlighted in the office analysis, should the Town prefer a mix of retail and new office uses here, it could work with the property owner and other specialists to identify an anchor office tenant interested in a build to suit property.

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## Priority Development Areas (PDAs) in Reading

This section contains four sections that summarize existing conditions in each priority development area (PDA) and the development potential in each area. The development potential that each PDA is identified as being suitable to accommodate and attract is informed by the retail, office, and residential market analysis findings, MAPC alternative development scenarios modeling based on public feedback and evaluation of current parcel capacity, and MAPC's assessment of the land use conditions within and around each PDA.

Each data table outlining parcel characteristics in each PDA draws from available data using 2015 assessor's data and highlights the development types each PDA is suitable to accommodate. Please see Appendix F for maps that provide additional information about current conditions at each parcel – utilizing 2015 assessor's data. The last table in this section provides a snapshot of zoning regulations and parking requirements applicable to each PDA as of October 2015.

### Development Potential in PDAs in Reading

*Market potential:* It is important to note that market analysis findings alone are not a predictor of the success of future developments by type; they only estimate the market *opportunity/potential* for redevelopment to fill regional market gaps in commercial or residential. Successful redevelopment and the ability to expand the industry sectors identified are dependent upon the Town's implementation of the strategies outlined in this Action Plan.

*Development scenarios modeling:* MAPC used the ArcGIS extension tool CommunityViz to generate estimates of potential additional square feet of commercial space and potential additional residential units that could be realized through redevelopment in the four priority development areas in Reading. The modeling generated estimates of commercial, mixed use, and residential development that could be possible on parcels within each PDA should redevelopment occur on all or some of the structures within parcels. For the purposes of the modeling exercise, MAPC identified a list of parcels within each PDA that could be considered suitable for redevelopment based on several criteria. Parcels meeting at least three of the following criteria were selected for modeling:

- construction before 1995 (over 10 years old);
- more than 50 percent impervious;
- building value is less than the value of the land (i.e., improvements to land value ratio is below 1);
- parcel is larger than most in the PDA, e.g., over an acre in size
- parcel is located in a prime location, e.g., at a highly visible location and/or adjacent to the Commuter Rail station

Next, MAPC created model building types with attributes that were exemplary of the uses and density preferences that were voiced by participants during a visual preference polling exercise that took place at the April 2015 public meeting. The model building types were also adjusted to align with the maximum floor area ratio permitted in each PDA under current zoning. Please see Appendix G for a visual description of the CV modeling approach and results.

Modeling results indicate that, with zoning changes that permit the expansion of the 40R to parcels in PDA 1, higher density uses in PDA #2, and exploration of parcel consolidation to facilitate redevelopment in areas like PDA #3, the Town of Reading could facilitate an additional ~240,000 sf of commercial and an additional ~400 residential units – compared to ~70,000 sf of additional commercial and ~50 additional residential units under status quo – current zoning.

**Table 4: Development Scenarios Modeling Estimates**

Note: these estimates are provided for illustrative purposes only and are based on modeling applied to select parcels within each PDA; these estimates are *not* a prediction of redevelopment that will occur.

PDA	Status Quo, Current Zoning	Estimated Redevelopment Potential, Zoning Changes
PDA #1A	~37,000 additional sf of commercial; no additional dwelling units	~18,000 additional sf of commercial; ~100 additional dwelling units (under a mixed-use redevelopment scenario)
PDA #1B	~ no additional sf of commercial; ~2 additional dwelling units	~10,000sf of commercial; ~ 80 additional dwelling units (under a mixed-use redevelopment scenario)
PDA #2	~4,000 additional sf of commercial; 70 additional dwelling units	~12,000 additional sf of commercial; ~200 additional dwelling units (under mixed use and multifamily development scenarios)
PDA #3	~ 30,000 additional sf of commercial; no dwelling units	~80,000 additional sf of commercial; ~18 additional dwelling units (under a commercial-office scenario and mixed use redevelopment scenarios applied only to Ash St parcels)
PDA #4	no additional development	~140,000 additional sf of commercial (commercial/office scenario, involving redevelopment and parcel consolidation)

### Urban Design Preferences

Urban design is an important component of redevelopment. It can address topics such as site layout/internal circulation, site connectivity to adjacent transportation and public realm amenities, and building style and fit with neighboring structures and uses.

A Visual Preference Survey (VPS) was administered at the April 1, 2015 public meeting via keypad polling, which presented images of developments exemplary of different types of design, different densities, and different uses. Attendees were asked to submit a “Yes” or “No” answer as to whether they considered the development in each image to be suitable in each PDA.

The design preferences indicated by the majority of participants at the public meetings are identified in the following table. Use preferences are included directly in the subsequent tables that summarize characteristics and development potential in each PDA.

**Table 5: Urban Design Preferences**

<p><b>Top Choice, PDA #1: Downtown Reading Proposed 40R Expansion Area</b></p>  <p><i>Image example: Castle Courtyard in Natick</i></p> <p><b>Comments:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good landscaping</li> <li>• Very proportional</li> <li>• Appropriate window to wall ratio</li> <li>• Good building offset</li> <li>• Nice arches</li> </ul>	<p><b>Top Choice, PDA #2: South Main Street</b></p>  <p><i>Image example: Falmouth</i></p> <p><b>Comments</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Like all the green space and lamp posts</li> <li>• Good to have parking in back</li> <li>• Well-articulated roof line; like the bays, contours</li> <li>• Like benches, seating, open space is pleasant for pedestrians</li> </ul>
<p><b>Top Choice, PDA #3: New Crossing Road Redevelopment District</b></p>  <p><i>Image example: Arlington</i></p> <p><b>Comments</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mixed-use: inclusion of retail is nice</li> <li>• Mix of uses could be especially good for seniors – residential and easy access to market place</li> <li>• •Could also be suitable in 1B</li> </ul>	<p><b>Top Choice, PDA #4: 1 General Way</b></p>  <p><i>Image example: Watertown</i></p> <p><b>Comments</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Like that there are lots of windows</li> <li>• Like techy vibe</li> <li>• Like reuse of historical building and blending of traditional and modern</li> <li>• [Like but needs] more green space</li> </ul>

## PDA #1: Downtown Reading: 40R Expansion Area

PDA #1 includes 46 parcels in the downtown that are adjacent to the current downtown 40R Smart Growth Overlay District, which is referred to as the Downtown Smart Growth District (DSGD). The Town would like to expand the 40R zoning to the remainder of the downtown to facilitate redevelopment of these parcels. PDA #1 is in close proximity to the commuter rail station. The market potential for this site is mixed-use infill. This could include multi-family housing, ground floor retail, and smaller upper floor offices. Feedback provided during public meetings indicated support for additional mixed use in this area.

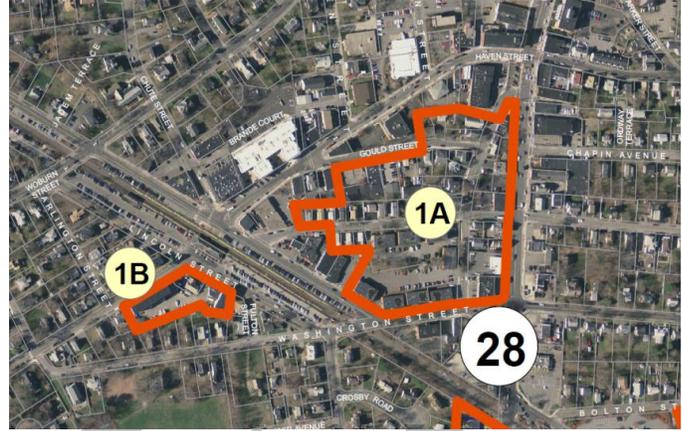


Figure 3: PDA #1 Parcel Characteristics

### PDA #1: Proposed 40R Expansion Area Parcel Characteristics

Total acres:	8.59
Number of parcels:	46
Parcel size range:	.06 acres to 1.21 acres (average .19)
Age of Structures:	10 (21.7%) built before 1900 27 (58.7%) built 1900-1950 7 (15.2%) built after 1950 (missing data for two parcels)
Stories:	24 (52.2%) one-story 17 (37.0%) two-story 2 (4.3%) three-story 1 (2.2%) four-story (missing data for two parcels)
Building value per parcel range:	\$57,700 to \$2,598,100 Average: \$301,936
Improvements to land value ratio range:	.02 to 1.82 Average: .9
Current Uses:	Office, Residential, Commercial
Current ownership:	39 different owners of 46 parcels, 36 owners from Massachusetts

Data Source: 2015 Reading Assessor's Data

## PDA #2: South Main Street

PDA#2: South Main Street is located in the southern portion of Reading. The northern end of the corridor is within walking distance of Main Street and Haven Street and the commuter rail station. The market potential for the northern end of the corridor is for mixed use that can support and blend into the commercial already located in downtown Reading. The addition of some residential in the central and southern portions of the corridor holds some promise to support future retail growth as well. Feedback provided during public meetings indicated support for commercial – including retail – on the first floor, with residential uses above.

**Figure 4: PDA #2 Parcel Characteristics**

PDA #2: South Main Street Parcel Characteristics	
Total acres:	50.9
Number of parcels:	82
Parcel size range:	.1 acres to 3.97 acres (average .62)
Age of Structures:	9 (11.0%) built before 1900 27 (32.9%) built 1900-1950 39 (47.6%) built after 1950 (missing data for seven parcels).
Stories:	33 (52.2%) one-story 34 (37.0%) two-story 8 (4.3%) three-story 1 (2.2%) five-story (missing data for seven parcels, two parcels have two buildings)
Building value per parcel range:	\$19,500 to \$7,141,700 Seven parcels have missing data or no buildings Average: \$635,760
Improvements to land value ratio range:	.02 to 1.82 Average: .9
Current Uses:	Office, Residential, Commercial
Current ownership:	69 different owners of 78 parcels, 63 owners from Massachusetts; 90 owners of condo units

Data Source: 2015 Reading Assessor's Data



## PDA #3: New Crossing Road Redevelopment District

PDA #3 includes New Crossing Road Redevelopment District and several adjacent parcels on Ash Street.<sup>7</sup> Current uses range from vacant lots and derelict buildings to commercial uses on parcels on Ash Street that abut residential parcels. The market potential in this area is for multifamily development that would generate additional spending needed to support retail in close proximity. There may be some opportunities for mixed use and creative flex/office space as well. The area is a half-mile walk from the Commuter Rail.



Feedback provided during public meetings indicated a preference for promoting commercial uses in this PDA. Visual preferences voiced also indicated support for mixed uses that may include office space, gallery space, and a mix of office, commercial, and industrial uses.

Figure 5: PDA #3 Parcel Characteristics

PDA #3: New Crossing Road Redevelopment District Parcel Characteristics	
Total acres:	8.77
<b>Number of parcels:</b>	9
Parcel size range:	0.23 acres to 2.49 acres (average .97)
Age of Structures:	3 built before 1950 4 built after 1950 (Note: missing data for two parcels)
Stories:	4 one-story 3 two-story (Note: missing data for two parcels)
Building value per parcel range:	\$0 to \$6,870,400 Average: \$1,215,100
Improvements to land value ratio range:	0 to 19.73 Average: 2.71
Current Uses:	Office, Industrial, Warehouse, Garage
Current ownership:	7 different owners, all from Massachusetts. 2 parcels owned by the Town of Reading.

Data Source: 2015 Reading Assessor's Data

<sup>7</sup> PDA #3 was originally defined as the New Crossing Road Redevelopment District in the NSPC mapping project but was expanded over the course of this planning process to include Ash Street parcels. Inclusion of these parcels strengthens the opportunity to promote mixed use in this area of town -- in order to facilitate a transition in uses from commercial, to mixed, to residential, from PDA #3 to adjacent PDA #2.

## PDA #3 Urban Design Exercise: Visualizing Redevelopment Potential

### Introduction

Building on previous planning work, MAPC and the Town of Reading developed an urban design framework to illustrate the redevelopment potential of PDA #3.

Located within an easy walk to downtown and the commuter rail, PDA 3 is approximately 9 acres.<sup>8</sup> It is currently composed of industrial and commercial uses housed predominately in large, one-story buildings set among a primarily impervious environment. Redevelopment potential is high, with opportunities to retain some existing businesses, potentially preserve a historic building, replace large warehouses with new office and commercial space, and add mixed-use development along Ash Street.

**Figure 6: Aerial of PDA #3 New Crossing Road Redevelopment District and Ash Street Parcels**



The Town of Reading has a tremendous opportunity to partner with property owners and developers to redevelop this underutilized land proximate to the downtown. This underutilized area can be transformed into a vibrant node that also serves as a transitional space between big box retail uses to the east and smaller-scale commercial and residential buildings to the west.

<sup>8</sup> PDA 3 was originally a four-acre site behind the Reading Municipal Light District Building. Based on community feedback and discussions with MAPC, the Town expanded the boundaries of PDA 3 to include the land fronting Ash Street. This expansion allows for a more holistic site plan that better relates to the surrounding context and creates a stronger connection to the downtown.

The proposed urban design for PDA #3 establishes a vision for a vibrant, walkable neighborhood that can improve the quality of life for residents and employees, while also having a positive economic impact. Existing uses and businesses can be retained, while new ones that take advantage of the site's prime location are added. The conceptual urban design of PDA #3 guides the size and scale of buildings, the organization of the site, their land uses, the types and locations of public space, circulation, and parking. What follows are a description of the urban design and the process of developing its framework.

### *Urban Design Process*

The vision for PDA #3's future originates with the surrounding community. An extensive public engagement process provided insight into the types of land uses, building typologies, and public realm amenities that are desirable and appropriate for the site. The community initially provided feedback through a Visual Preference Survey (VPS) at the April 2015 public forum. The VPS gave participants a chance to vote on building types, heights, and other features that they like or dislike for each of the four PDAs in Reading. For PDA #3, participants generally voted for contemporary architecture typologies that blend modern with traditional elements. They prefer three- to four-story buildings with varied facades and windows (i.e., not long, monolithic walls) and distinction between bottom and upper floors. Roofs that are articulated and pitched are also preferable, although this is more important along Ash Street than within the interior of the PDA. Residents envision a public realm that's highly walkable, with wide sidewalks, visible crosswalks, and ample open space. As part of the April public forum, a majority of participants also commented that they want to retain the commercial and industrial uses in the interior of PDA 3, although mixing uses, including residential, would be acceptable along Ash Street.

In addition to community engagement, MAPC conducted a market analysis to gauge the potential for future development, and scenario modeling to test the implications of various development schemes. After reviewing this information, MAPC staff completed a site visit in April 2015 to better understand the existing conditions of PDA 3. Below is a selection of current conditions in PDA #3 as of spring 2015.

**Figure 7: Images of Current Conditions in PDA #3**



Based on these planning processes, MAPC developed a conceptual urban design framework for PDA 3. The draft proposal was presented to the community at a public forum in June 2015. Meeting participants included representatives of the Reading Municipal Light District (RMLD), which occupies a substantial portion of PDA 3.<sup>9</sup> They and others in attendance provided feedback that assisted with refining the urban design of the site.

### *Urban Design Framework*

Based upon the process summarized above, the following principles guide the urban design of PDA 3. The site will:

- become a vibrant neighborhood that serves residents and employees;
- retain existing businesses while introducing additional land uses;

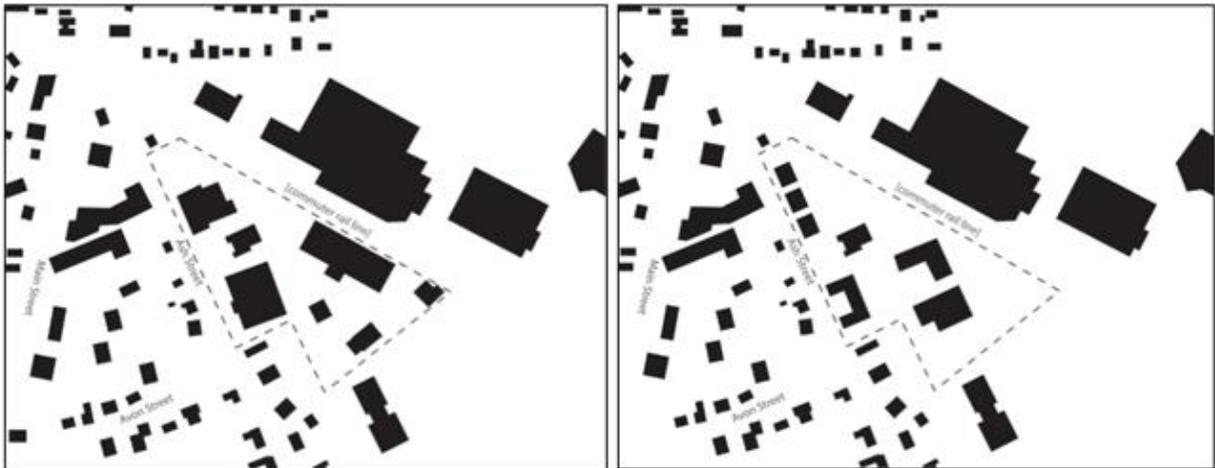
<sup>9</sup> Currently, RMLD is embarking on its own facilities planning assessment. They provided feedback that informed MAPC of the department's future space needs.

- provide safe and accessible circulation through multiple transportation modes;
- connect to the downtown, commuter rail stop, and other areas in the vicinity;
- develop in a context-sensitive manner that provides an appropriate transition between the residential neighborhood to the west and the big-box retail area to the east;
- dramatically increase the amount of open space; and,
- provide adequate parking.

**Conceptual Design**

The following diagrams provide a snapshot of PDA 3’s existing conditions followed by proposed future conditions. The site currently contains large, one-story buildings that are incompatible with much of the surrounding context, particularly to the west where single-family homes and smaller-scale commercial buildings are typical. Buildings are separated by large swaths of asphalt. Future development could be more compact and oriented toward Ash Street, creating a more walkable and less inward-facing environment. The scale of the buildings will be more compatible with the surrounding area, providing a bridge between the single-family homes to the west and larger, big-box buildings to the east.

**Figure 8: PDA #3 existing building footprints; proposed building footprints**



Currently, the site primarily contains municipal uses (e.g., Reading Municipal Light Department, Reading Credit Union) and light manufacturing. Redevelopment could entail consolidating the Reading Municipal Light Department and Credit Union in one building towards the east side of the site, and opening up Ash Street for mixed-use development. The portion of the site behind Ash Street will contain a mixture of flexible office space, light industrial (potentially including existing businesses), and community uses (such as a day care or community center).

**Figure 9: PDA #3 existing land use mix; proposed land use mix**

The vast majority of the site is currently impervious, composed of impenetrable materials such as asphalt, concrete, and various building materials. In addition to creating an inhospitable environment, impervious surfaces can cause environmental issues by inhibiting storm-water retention and amplifying solar heat. Currently, parking lots comprise the vast majority of the site. In the future, parking will be concentrated along the rear and south side of the site in order to

minimize conflicts with pedestrians and improve walkability. Given the proposed mix of land uses and scale of buildings, there is ample space for parking under existing parking requirements.

**Figure 10: PDA #3 existing impervious surface; proposed parking**



Parking lots can be more than asphalt. By integrating green elements and planning for storm-water runoff, parking on PDA 3 can be both aesthetically pleasing and pleasant.

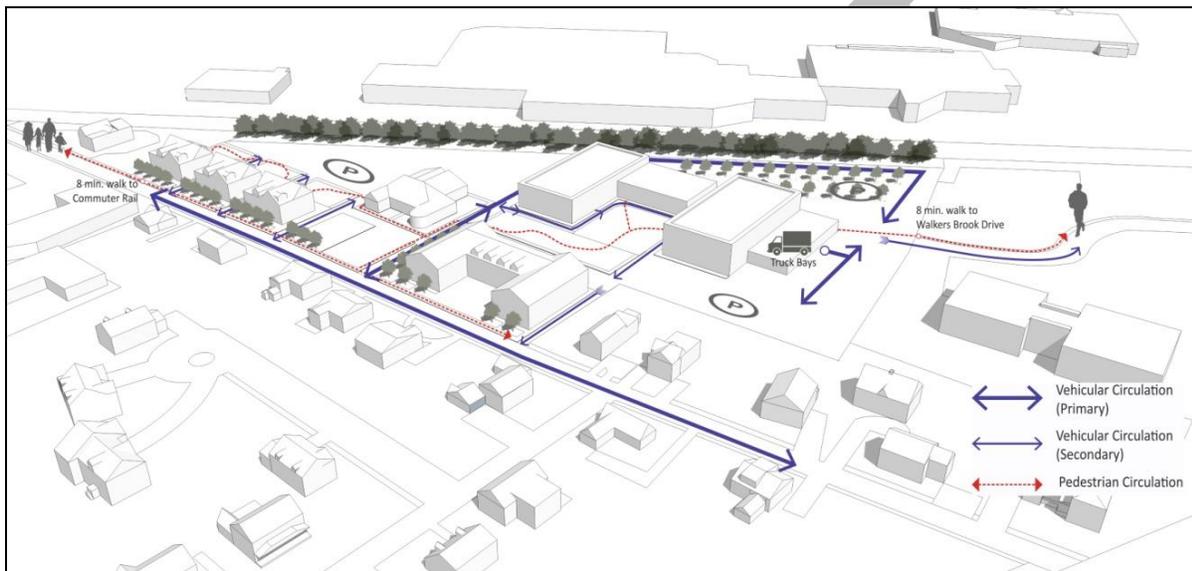
**Figure 11: Potential permeable features to reduce impervious surface and manage water resources**



**Proposed Circulation**

Under the proposed framework, vehicular circulation will be routed to reduce conflict with pedestrians and maximize safety. On the east edge of the site, a connection to New Crossing Road for vehicles, pedestrians, and bicyclists improves connectivity to the retail and commercial areas along Walkers Brook Drive. This access point may also decrease traffic along Ash Street by providing a more direct connection to Route 128. The pedestrian experience will be vastly improved by increased connectivity via an integrated network of sidewalks and pathways throughout the site.

**Figure 12: PDA #3 proposed circulation**



Enjoyable and safe open spaces are composed of a variety of surfaces, interactive elements, adequate lighting, and a mix of passive and active recreation areas. Proposed commercial/industrial buildings for PDA 3 could be oriented around a central open space that will include (1) a plaza with seating and event space and (2) a green space with trees and plantings. Elements such as public art, outdoor furniture, lighting, and even a water feature can help to create an open space that is inviting, comfortable, and interesting. Modest setbacks along Ash Street provide additional greenery. Mixed-use buildings each have open space in the rear. Trees provide a buffer from noise resulting from the adjacent commuter rail line, and increase the comfort of pedestrians navigating Ash Street and parking lots on the site.

Figure 13: PDA #3 proposed open space



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## Refined Design

The proposed design concept for PDA #3 creates a new node near downtown Reading. The design is informed by resident input, suggesting that commercial and industrial buildings be located to the rear of the site, that space be retained for existing businesses and RMLD, and that the site develop in a context-sensitive manner, provide adequate parking, and create a sense of place. Rather than a purely functional, auto-dominated industrial zone, the site becomes walkable and attractive, benefiting those who live and work there and drawing residents from the surrounding community. It connects a variety of surrounding land uses and building typologies through transitioning scales and a mix of residential, commercial, office, light industrial, community and open spaces.

**Figure 14: PDA #3 proposed site plan**

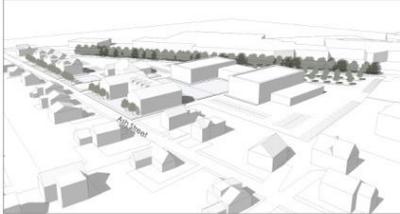


The bird's eye view perspective below illustrates the massing of the site's buildings and their physical relationship to each other and the surrounding neighborhood.

**Figure 15: PDA #3 bird's eye view perspective of proposed site plan; additional massings**



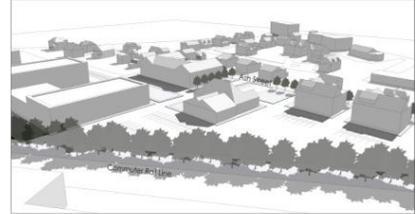
Aerial view along Ash Street towards downtown



Aerial view along Ash Street towards Route 128



Aerial view from New Crossing Road across train tracks



Ground view along Ash Street towards downtown



Aerial view from Main Street



Aerial view from Avon Street



Reflecting the community's preference, the building heights in PDA 3 range from 2 to 4 stories. At 45 feet, the existing Reading Municipal Light and Power Station remains the tallest building on the site. This historic structure helps create a sense of place and should therefore be preserved as a part of the future neighborhood to whatever extent possible.

As illustrated, the site contains seven buildings of various sizes, multiple areas of open space, and more-than-adequate space for vehicular movement and parking. Buildings along Ash Street are characterized by pitched roofs, which complement the existing homes across the street. In the rear of the site, the buildings have a more contemporary architectural aesthetic, reflecting a style more appropriate to their commercial and industrial uses.

The massing of PDA 3 buildings—their general shape and size—is respectful to the surrounding context. Their scale provides a transition between the residential area to the west (consisting largely of single-family homes) and commercial area to the east (consisting of large-footprint, big-box stores and mid-rise towers). The spaces between buildings are also compatible in size with the surrounding neighborhood. Together, this creates a harmonious environment.

The design of the mixed-use buildings proposed for the north section of Ash Street is based on 78 Holten Street in Danvers, MA. This recently constructed building contains space for ground-floor retail/office space with six residential units above. This building served as the model for a rezoning effort (adopted in 2014) for a neighborhood adjacent to Danvers’ downtown.

**Figure 16: 78 Holten Street, Danvers – Photo and Elevation Graphic**



**Figure 17: Rendering of PDA #3 depicting the proposed plaza and commercial buildings**

Note: rendering does not include façade detail in order to maintain a focus on the general layout of the buildings and the inclusion of the public realm.



This urban design concept aligns with the alternative development scenario modeling estimate outlined in the beginning of this section. The proposed development in the conceptual design, including the buildings' uses, square footage, number of stories, required parking spaces (under existing zoning), and potential number of residential units aligns with the estimates generated from the alternative development scenarios modeling.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Although the site would require 285 parking spaces, the design includes 350, providing added flexibility if the Town wishes to build larger buildings than what is proposed.

## PDA #4: 1 General Way

PDA #4: 1 General Way is one large parcel consisting of 20 acres. It consists of a mix of single story commercial uses with ample parking and a Market Basket. The area is about a half-mile walk from the Reading Commuter Rail station.

This area is identified as suitable for office space with residential to blend the site in with surrounding residential uses. Build-to-suit office space could be successful in this location.



Feedback provided during public meetings indicated a preference for a mixed use, walkable environment with an emphasis on commercial uses including office.

**Figure 18: PDA #4 Parcel Characteristics**

<b>PDA #4: One General Way Parcel Characteristics</b>	
Total acres:	20
<b>Number of parcels:</b>	1
Parcel size range:	n/a
Age of Structures:	Built in 1910
Stories:	two - story building
Building value per parcel :	\$8,436,800
Improvements to land value ratio:	0.87
Current Uses:	Shopping Center
Current ownership:	1 owner based in Massachusetts

Data Source: 2015 Reading Assessor's Data

## Zoning Regulations and Parking Requirements Applicable to Priority Development Areas

The Town of Reading’s zoning bylaw regulates the physical development and preservation of land and the kinds of uses permitted on each individual parcel of property within the town. Reading’s 17 zoning districts are divided in four types: Residence, Business, Industrial, and Overlay. Within Residence are the Single Family 15 (S-15), Single Family 20 (S-20), Single Family 40 (S-40), Apartment 40 (A-40), and Apartment 80 (A-80) Districts. Within Business are the Business A (Bus A), Business B (Bus B), and Business C (Bus C) Districts. There are eight Overlay Districts: Flood Plain (F), Municipal Building Reuse (MR), National Flood Insurance Flood Management (NF), Aquifer Protection (AQ), Planned Unit Development (PUD), Planned Residential Development (PRD), Gateway Smart Growth (GSGD), and Downtown Smart Growth (DSGD) Districts. There is one Industrial District (Ind). The following table summarizes the zoning districts applicable to the four PDAs in Reading.

The specific zoning regulations applicable to each PDA are as follows:

- PDA #1 consists of two areas separated by High Street and the commuter rail line. PDA #1A is located within Bus B, which has few requirements regarding yard sizes, floor area ratio (FAR), and the like. The district allows up to 350,000 square feet of floor area retail. Most uses are allowed as-of-right, besides medical facilities and places of assembly, which require special permits. PDA #1B is located within SF-15, a residential district, which allows a FAR of 2.9 units per acre and a commercial FAR of 0.75. In this district, the structure must have a minimum area of 15,000 square feet and must have a maximum height of 35 feet.
- PDA #2 spans three zoning districts: Bus A, S-15, and A-40. The area of PDA #2 within S-15 has the same zoning provisions as PDA #1B. Unlike the Bus B District, Bus A requires a minimum area of 40,000 square feet, an FAR of 1.09 units per acre, and a commercial FAR of 0.75. The structure can be at most 40 feet high and most uses are allowed. In A-40, there is also a minimum area requirement of 40,000 square feet, though it must be for residential purposes. Requirements regarding FAR and maximum height are the same as for Bus A.
- Both PDA #3 and PDA #4 fall in the Industrial District. Like in the Bus B District, the main requirement is that there is no more than 350,000 square feet of floor area retail. There are the same guidelines regarding uses other than industrial uses.

**Table 6. Zoning Applicable to Priority Development Areas (PDAs) in Reading as of November 2015**

PDA	1A	1B	2	2	2	3, 4
Zoning District	Bus B	SF-15	Bus A	SF-15	A-40	Ind
Minimum Area	NA	15000sf	40000sf	15000sf	40000sf	NA
FAR - Units Per Acre		2.9	1.09	2.9	1.09	
FAR - Commercial		0.75	0.75	0.75	0.75	
Floor Area Retail Allowed	<350000		<350000			<350000
Minimum Frontage	NA	100ft	NA	100ft	80ft	NA
Required Front Yard	NA	20ft	15ft	20ft	30ft	NA
Required Side Yard	NA	15ft	30ft	15ft	30ft	NA
Required Rear Yard	NA	20ft	30ft	20ft	30ft	NA

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PDA	1A	1B	2	2	2	3, 4
Maximum Coverage % of Lot	NA	25%	25%	25%	25%	NA
Maximum Building Height	NA	35ft	40ft	35ft	40ft	NA
Other Permitted Principal Use						
Minimum Area	NA	15000ft	NA	15000ft	10000ft	NA
Minimum Frontage	NA	100ft	NA	100ft	80ft	NA
Required Front Yard	NA	20ft	15ft	20ft	20ft	50ft
Required Side Yard	NA	15ft	10ft	15ft	NA	20ft
Required Rear Yard	20ft	20ft	20ft	20ft	NA	20ft
Maximum Coverage % of Lot	85%	25%	60%	25%	NA	60%
Maximum Building Height	45ft	35ft	45ft	35ft	40ft	60ft
Other Uses						
Child care	Y		Y			Y
Adult day care	Y		Y			Y
Medical facility	SPP		SPP			SPP
Civic or private club	Y		Y			N
Community center	Y		Y			N
Restaurant	Y		Y			Y
Retail <35,000	Y		Y			Y
Convenience store	Y		Y			Y
Office	Y		Y			Y
Health club	Y		Y			Y
Place of assembly	SPP		SPP			SPP
Retail services	Y		Y			Y
Consumer service retail est	Y		Y			Y
Professional services	Y		Y			Y
Facility for skilled trades	Y		Y			Y
Financial inst	Y		Y			Y
Computer services	Y		Y			
Funeral est	Y		Y			

**Table 7: Parking Requirements as of November 2015**

Parking Requirements by Use	Parking	Loading
Single family	2 spaces plus 1 for each room for rent or accessory apartment	NA
Two family	1.5/unit plus 1 for each rental	NA
Apartment	1.5/unit	1 for every 20 rental units
Retail, Office, Consumer Service	1/300sf gross floor area	1 for every 5,000sf gross floor area in excess of 2,000sf
Restaurant w/ seating	1 for every 4 seats, plus 1 for every employee on largest shift	1 if 0-2000sf floor area, 2 if 2001-4000, 3 if 4000+
Restaurant w/o seating	1 for every 75sf net floor area, but no less than 10	1 if 0-2000sf floor area, 2 if 2001-4000, 3 if 4000+
Industrial	1 for every 500sf of gross floor area	1 if 0-100,000sf gross floor area, 2 if 100,001-150,000, 3 if 150,001-300,000, if 300,000+ 4 plus one for every 150,000sf over 450,000
Office/Professional Building	1 space for every 300sf gross floor area	1 if 0-100,000sf gross floor area, 2 if 100,001-150,000, 3 if 150,001-300,000, if 300,000+ 4 plus one for every 150,000sf over 450,000
Townhouse and Townhouse dev	2 spaces for each dwelling unit	NA

# Economic Development Vision and Action Plan

## Economic Development Vision

Reading is a vibrant suburban town where businesses can thrive and different generations can meet, connect, and build community. Reading's assets include quality schools, a walkable downtown, bike lanes, transit options including Commuter Rail service and access to major roads, and a lively downtown with retail shops and restaurants.

Reading is committed to strengthening existing businesses, attracting new ones, and expanding the resident base that is needed to support a growing local economy. Reading and community partners will work together to implement this Action Plan of policy changes, infrastructure investments, and programmatic activities that aims to place the Town on firm financial footing for generations and maximize quality of life for current and future generations of people who choose Reading as a place to live, work, study, and play.

### Action Plan Matrix

The following Action Plan identifies six strategies for advancing economic development in the town and a set of actions to realize each strategy.

Each proposed action is identified as a near, mid, or long-term priority for implementation.

- Near-term actions are those that are recommended for start up and implementation within the first year after plan adoption.
- Mid-term actions are recommended for start-up and implementation within 24-36 months of Plan adoption.
- Long-term actions are recommended for start-up and implementation within seven years of Plan adoption.
- Many actions are flagged as requiring an ongoing investment of time over the course of the seven-year period following adoption of the plan.

Table 8: Reading Strategic Economic Action Plan Matrix

	Strategies and Actions	Near-term (2016-2018)	Mid-term (2018-2020)	Long-term (2020-2022)
<b>1</b>	<b>STRATEGY: Adopt local policies and practices that will facilitate compact development and mixed use in the transit-accessible PDAs.</b>			
<b>1A</b>	<b>Expand Downtown Smart Growth District (DSGD) to PDAs #1A and #1B to continue fostering mixed use development in the Commuter Rail station area.</b> This zoning will facilitate mixed-use infill development, which will help meet Reading’s Economic Development goals as well as regional demand and potential shortages of housing. PDA 1A and 1B are well suited to accommodate greater density and expanded mixed use...	x		
<b>1B</b>	<b>Facilitate more compact, mixed-use development in PDAs #2, #3 and #4.</b> Amend zoning to facilitate higher density mixed use and in PDA #2 – South Main Street – with a focus on the northern segment closest to Downtown Reading next to the railroad tracks. South Main Street has underutilized retail parcels that could be redeveloped to mixed use with commercial on the first floor and residential above. Rezoning for mixed use, particularly in the Northern end of South Main Street, will generate more foot traffic downtown. Facilitate development in alignment with South Main Street Design Best Practices. Adjust zoning requirements to facilitate mixed use in PDA #3. Work with property owners, developers and major tenants to pursue parcel consolidation to facilitate redevelopment.		x	
<b>1C</b>	<b>Develop and implement a comprehensive parking strategy.</b> Evaluate parking requirements and make adjustments consistent with parking best practices, e.g., installation of signage to indicate locations of parking lots; and tiered parking minimums and maximums based on uses.		x	
<b>2</b>	<b>STRATEGY: Enhance walkability and connectivity within and between the priority redevelopment areas.</b>			
<b>2A</b>	<b>Make infrastructure investments that will create a safe and welcoming pedestrian environment between the PDAs and between the PDAs and the Commuter Rail station.</b> Enhance connectivity to major streets, especially in PDA 3 so that access is provided to Walkers Brook Drive to enhance the New Crossing Road Redevelopment District. Continue to implement the Complete Streets Policy and recommendations from the Main Street Corridor Study, Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan, and South Main Street Design Best Practices. Consider inclusion of crosswalks, curb extensions, signals and stop signs at key locations, e.g., Washington street near the Commuter Rail tracks; on both sides of the Commuter Rail tracks; at the intersection of High Street and Green Street; at Main Street and Ash Street; at Main Street and Minot Street; and at Main Street and Avon Street.			x
<b>2B</b>	<b>Prioritize improving connections around PDA #3 – New Crossing Road Redevelopment District and Ash Street parcels – to enhance the area’s accessibility from PDA #2 and walkability to and from the Commuter Rail station.</b> Test possible transportation improvements		x	x

## Reading Economic Development Action Plan, 2016-2022

December 1, 2015

	<b>Strategies and Actions</b>	<b>Near-term (2016-2018)</b>	<b>Mid-term (2018-2020)</b>	<b>Long-term (2020-2022)</b>
	using temporary means such as zones, tape, removable paint or striping, barriers, and signage to delineate wider sidewalks, bike lines, or adjusted travel lanes on the street. Prioritize permanent transportation improvements through the Town’s annual maintenance program. Reference urban design concepts regarding circulation and placement of parking that are included in this Action Plan.			
<b>3</b>	<b>STRATEGY: Brand and market priority development areas to attract interest from the developers, commercial establishments, and potential customers.</b>			
<b>3A</b>	<b>Convene a working group of stakeholders in and around downtown Reading that can develop a brand identity for priority development areas in Reading.</b> Establish a new Economic Development Partnership – a public-private partnership that can help promote all redevelopment opportunities, including the transit-oriented development potential of areas like PDA #1, the northern segment of PDA #2, and PDA #3, which are a walkable ½ mile from the Commuter Rail station. This group should include business owners, property owners, developers, town staff, and interested citizens.	x		
<b>3B</b>	<b>Establish an online presence to market and promote Downtown Reading.</b> Use social media and Smartphone technology to offer cross promotions, publish business news, and keep people up to date on downtown events and programs. Work with local and regional business and economic development entities– some of which have active followings on social media, e.g., Reading Parents Network Facebook Group and Shop the Block, which operate Buy Local campaigns. Prioritize attracting local chains and restaurants that diversify current offerings, e.g., coffee/sandwich shops, brunch, and gift shops and which may appeal to families.	x		
<b>3C</b>	<b>Consolidate economic development resources in a new section of the Town of Reading website.</b> Provide content of interest to prospective developers and businesses. Profile the character and development potential of each PDA. Post the new Guide to Doing Business in Reading and streamlined permitting flowchart and checklists. Identify market opportunities in the areas of: specialty foods, health and personal care; used merchandise; and restaurants. Link to existing businesses and business support organizations.	x		
<b>3D</b>	<b>Hold networking events for existing and prospective downtown Reading business owners.</b> These events will help strengthen relationships amongst existing business owners and be a great resource for prospective business owners looking to learn more about operating a business in downtown Reading.	x	x	x
<b>3E</b>	<b>Maintain a database of prospective retail and office tenants.</b> Maintain communication with prospective tenants by sending out notifications when opportunities or space become available. . Listen for and document the interests of prospective tenants, e.g., collaborative, coworking space;	x		

## Reading Economic Development Action Plan, 2016-2022

December 1, 2015

	<b>Strategies and Actions</b>	<b>Near-term (2016-2018)</b>	<b>Mid-term (2018-2020)</b>	<b>Long-term (2020-2022)</b>
	office space; restaurant space; etc.			
<b>3F</b>	<b>Implement a phased approach to marketing redevelopment in PDAs.</b> Concentrate on filling downtown vacancies and promoting retail and mixed use in PDA #1 and in the northern section of the South Main Street corridor. Promote build-to-suit potential at PDA #3: New Crossing Road Redevelopment District and at PDA #4: One General Way – these PDAs are best suited to accommodate new office space. The regional market indicates potential for securing a large office tenant, but regional competition is strong; marketing and promotion of Reading’s transit access and amenities for workers – including housing – will contribute to attracting office tenants.	x	x	x
<b>4</b>	<b>STRATEGY: Support existing local businesses.</b>			
<b>4A</b>	<b>Work with the existing local business group to plan activities and events that will help to support the local business community.</b> Events like the Reading Fall Street Faire & Shop the Block Holiday Shopping Event help to attract potential customers to the square. Adding additional events and coordinating on business promotions would also help to support local businesses.	x	x	x
<b>4B</b>	<b>Connect local business owners with programs that can help them to strengthen and expand their businesses.</b> Continue to take advantage of state programs such as the Massachusetts Downtown Initiative to make the downtown a desirable destination and continue to bring in experts, such as the retail best practices consultant that the town previously worked with, who can provide direct support to local businesses. Partner with community partners to explore opportunities for low-cost services that can help businesses scale up operations. That can help bring the cost of utilities down for local businesses.	x	x	x
<b>4C</b>	<b>Identify a team of individuals in the Town of Reading who can champion economic development and serve as liaisons to the small business community.</b> These individuals could be members of a to-be-formed Economic Development Partnership. Identify a champion within the Partnership who will maintain an open line of communication between the Town and the local business community, conducting visits on a regular basis and bringing concerns back to town hall. They can work to identify business development programs offered by the Commonwealth and help firms take advantage of them. This Partnership will also help steward implementation of all actions outlined under strategies 3 and 4. In lieu of budget constraints, the Town of Reading will reach out to area colleges and universities to access interns for additional assistance.	x		
<b>5</b>	<b>STRATEGY: Promote public/private partnerships and collaboration to maximize redevelopment potential.</b>			
<b>5A</b>	<b>Consider public/private partnerships with developers to help address gaps in financing redevelopment projects.</b> Gaps may exist for predevelopment work such as infrastructure related to the development and for parking. Consider sharing a portion of development and		x	x

## Reading Economic Development Action Plan, 2016-2022

December 1, 2015

	<b>Strategies and Actions</b>	<b>Near-term (2016-2018)</b>	<b>Mid-term (2018-2020)</b>	<b>Long-term (2020-2022)</b>
	infrastructure costs by being a partner on infrastructure improvements. This is a particularly important consideration for PDAs #3 and #4.			
<b>5B</b>	<b>Engage with local and regional entities and groups with access to businesses, developers, and investors to market redevelopment potential in Reading.</b> Partner with groups such as the Reading-North Reading Chamber of Commerce, Shop the Block, the Sustainable Business Network of Massachusetts, and LOCUS, the coalition of real estate developers and investors that advocates for walkable urban development near transit.		x	x
<b>5C</b>	<b>Facilitate redevelopment opportunities that require parcel consolidation with multiple owners.</b> Create a system for monitoring property sales and redevelopment interests of parcel owners in the area. . The Town will convene/facilitate meetings of smaller property owners of adjacent properties to assess interest in combining properties to maximize redevelopment opportunities. Example: The Town can work closely with Reading Municipal Light Department to explore PDA #3 parcel redevelopment options that would meet future facilities needs.		x	x
<b>6</b>	<b>STRATEGY: Build community and activate the public realm in Downtown Reading through cultural economic development and placemaking initiatives.</b>			
<b>6A</b>	<b>Implement public space activities, programs, and events that can facilitate creative placemaking.</b> Continue partnership with Cultural Connections Reading (CCR) and others to hold festivals, fairs, and open studios similar to the plant sale and arts exhibits that are held on the Town Common. These activities bring together local businesses, residents, and arts and culture groups. Build on beautification activities like the Reading Garden Club’s “Adopt a Site” program.	x	x	x
<b>6B</b>	<b>Promote Reading as a creative community.</b> Work with community partners to implement recommendations from the recently completed Cultural Districts study. Conduct an inventory of cultural assets, apply for cultural economic development grants, and apply for Cultural District designation. Market Reading as a creative community in order to attract creative industries and developer interest in constructing live/work space in areas like PDA #3.	x	x	x
<b>6C</b>	<b>Program engaging activities that transform main streets within and between the PDAs.</b> This may include community service/clean-up days, creative demonstrations of public realm improvements, such as plantings or street furniture, removable paint or striping and signage to delineate proposed sidewalks or bike lanes in areas; and temporary or permanent public art in public spaces in the PDAs.	x	x	x

## Next Steps: Partners for Action Plan Implementation

This section provides an overview of the existing organizations, boards, commissions, voluntary groups, and individuals that have a role in stewarding the implementation of this Action Plan. Roles may include: convening; facilitating; marketing; and organizing programs and events that engage property owners, developers, business owners, and residents.

### Planning Division

<http://www.readingma.gov/planning-division>

The mission of the Planning Division is:

- to honor and sustain our natural world;
- to patiently and fairly guide both private and public land-use decisions;
- to listen to and learn from each individual with respect for their goals, dreams and ideas; and
- to continually strive toward excellence in service and education to the Town

### Board of Selectmen

<http://www.readingma.gov/board-of-selectmen>

The Board of Selectmen is composed of five members who are elected for overlapping three-year terms. As specified in the Reading Home Rule Charter they are the Chief Elected Officers of the Town. The Selectmen call Town Elections and prepare the Warrants for Town Meetings and make recommendations on the Warrant Articles. They initiate legislative policy by inserting Articles in the Town Meeting Warrants and then implement the votes subsequently adopted. They adopt Town policies that can be found in the Selectmen's Policies; review fiscal guidelines for the annual operating budget and capital improvements program and make recommendations to Town Meeting on the same. The Board of Selectmen serves as the Road Commissioners for the Town of Reading and oversees traffic issues and approves the Town's Traffic Rules and Regulations. In addition, the Board appoints members to most of the Town's Boards, Committees and Commissions. The Selectmen also serve as the licensing board responsible for issuing and renewing licenses for alcohol establishments, restaurants, car dealers, peddlers and entertainment and amusement devices.

### Community Planning and Development Commission

<http://www.readingma.gov/community-planning-and-development-commission>

The CPDC makes studies and prepare plans concerning the resources, developmental potential and needs of the Town. CPDC annually reports to the Town giving information regarding the physical condition of the Town and any plans or proposals known to it affecting the resources, physical development and needs of the Town. The CPDC has the power to regulate the sub-division of land within the Town by the adoption of rules and regulations governing such development. CPDC has all of the power and duties given to Planning Boards, Boards of Survey and Industrial Development Commissions under the Constitution and General Laws of the Commonwealth, and such additional powers and duties as may be authorized by the Charter, by Bylaw or by other Town Meeting vote.

### Reading-North Reading Chamber of Commerce

<http://www.readingreadingchamber.org/about-the-chamber/>

The mission of the Chamber is to have a working partnership among the business community, the public officials and the residents of Reading and North Reading, so government and business decisions result in an improved economic environment and quality of life. The Chamber keeps its members aware of issues concerning them on both the state and local levels, and issues that impact the business community as a whole.

## **Shop the Block, Reading, Mass.**

<https://www.facebook.com/Shop-The-Block-Reading-Mass-108587762587982/>

Shop the Block is an informal association of small business owners in Downtown Reading who organize local events to promote small businesses. They promote an annual holiday “Shop the Block” event that includes restaurant specials, entertainment, raffles, with proceeds benefitting the Reading-North Reading Chamber of Commerce, which maintains a fund that assist with holiday lighting displays in both municipalities. The group maintains a Facebook page. It is not officially affiliated with any established organization.



## **Cultural Connections of Reading (CCR)**

CCR is a new voluntary group that aims to promote the cultural assets of Reading as way to attract people to the downtown. The group includes town residents and town staff who served on the working group that was formed to advise on the development of the 2014 Cultural District Exploratory Study, which was produced using funding from the Massachusetts Downtown Initiative (MDI). The group includes members of the Reading Historical Commission, Reading Colonial Chorus Players, Reading Civic Concert Band, Creative Arts, Reading Arts Association, RCTV, Reading Public Library and the Reading Garden Club.

## **Public-Private Economic Partnership**

Implementation of this Action Plan is dependent upon public and private partnerships and the dedication of economic development staffing capacity at the town level. The Town of Reading is considering models for expanding staffing capacity in the Planning Division as part of broader discussions related to town finances that are currently underway as of November 2015. Economic development staffing capacity is contingent about the town's ability to raise additional revenue.

The Town has examined the economic development models of 11 neighboring municipalities in order to identify options for organizing and strengthening its current economic development capacity<sup>11</sup>. Below is a summary of current practices in neighboring municipalities which are being investigated as future options for growing economic development

- *Appointed municipal committees, commissions, or councils tasked with economic development responsibilities.* Most of the peer communities have appointed voluntary groups tasked with the mission of assisting the municipality with the development and/or implementation of an economic development strategy that are affiliated with an existing, appointed board or commission, e.g., the Board of Selectmen. These groups serve as a forum for identifying strategies for supporting existing businesses and attracting new ones as well as identifying policy changes that can facilitate

<sup>11</sup> Research performed during summer 2015 by a planning intern for the Town of Reading.

a welcoming and safe downtown environment. This is the model that the Town maintained until June 2015.

- *Business and merchants associations.* Several municipalities have nonprofit business associations or merchants associations. These entities administer activities that include: business networking; awards programs recognizing and celebrating local businesses; administering shop local campaigns; organizing seasonal and holiday-themed festivals; and maintaining databases of economic development opportunities. Resources are typically raised through monthly and annual membership fees. The Reading-North Reading Chamber of Commerce and Shop the Block currently administers programming similar to those offered by associations in peer municipalities.
- *LocalFirst group.* One municipality has established a non-profit, membership-based LocalFirst group that aims to promote the environmental, economic, and cultural benefits of doing business with locally-owned businesses. This particular group has connections with local business networks that emphasize sustainability and environmental responsibility. Municipalities across the country have established Local First chapters. In Massachusetts, the Sustainable Business Network (SBN) has helped launch a half-dozen Local First groups.<sup>12</sup>
- *Main Streets organization.* One municipality has a nonprofit main streets program that has an executive board, several standing committees, and several full-time staff. The organization organizes events throughout the year that supports patronage to local businesses; it also offers storefront improvement programs and administers retail incentive and loan programs. The main streets model is a nationally-recognized public-private partnership model that relies on grants, membership contributions, and sponsorships.<sup>13</sup>
- *Economic Development Partnership.* One municipality has a nonprofit partnership that not only engages local businesses but also financial institutions, nonprofit organizations, and schools. The partnership's work is guided by a strategic plan focused on supporting local businesses, connecting employers to local talent, and marketing the municipality as a great place to do business. The partnership also operates a "Venture Fund" offering low-cost financing designed to assist ventures that would add diversity to the business community; this fund is made possible through a partnership with a local community development financial institution (CDFI), a private organization that has teamed up with local banks to develop and administer this fund.<sup>14</sup>
- *Enhanced staffing.* Several towns have expanded capacity in their planning offices and have division or department titles that include 'Economic Development.' In one municipality, the role of the office includes serving as a liaison between business owners and government entities involved in the provision of business assistance and the administration of tax incentive programs. In another municipality, the department administers grants and technical assistance to local businesses through a storefront enhancement program. Pending the ability to secure additional town resources, the Division could expand to include economic development responsibilities and change its name to include Community and Economic Development.

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<sup>12</sup> Example - Brookline Local First: <http://brooklinelocalfirst.org/> .

<sup>13</sup> Beverly Main Streets: <http://beverlymainstreets.org/>

<sup>14</sup> Lawrence Partnership: <http://lawrencepartnership.org/VentureFund>