



MEMORANDUM

TO: Laurie Connors, Planning Director

FROM: Lauren Lind, AICP, Senior Planner
Judi Barrett, Principal-in-Charge

RE: Initial Analysis: Potential District Compliance, MBTA Communities Law

DATE: May 22, 2023

In 2021, the Massachusetts legislature enacted Section 3A of the Zoning Act, requiring that municipalities in the MBTA service area adopt zoning to allow multifamily residential development by right (i.e., without the need for a discretionary permit). The MBTA service area consists of 175 cities and towns, excluding Boston. Classified as an adjacent community, Northborough is subject to the new law. The Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) issued final “Compliance Guidelines for Multi-family Zoning Districts under Section 3A of the Zoning Act” (Section 3A Guidelines) in October 2022. Under these guidelines, most communities (including Northborough) have until December 31, 2024, to certify to DHCD that they have adopted a conforming zoning district.

Shortly after DHCD issued the Section 3A Guidelines, the Massachusetts Housing Partnership (MHP) announced that it had established a “3A-TA” grant program to help communities work toward compliance. The Town of Northborough applied for a 3A-TA grant, and Barrett Planning Group was retained to provide support to Town staff to assess potential locations for an MBTA Communities compliant district. We met with you to identify and discuss possible district locations and local priorities. We were provided with parcels to include in our initial analysis and a comprehensive permit associated with one of those locations. Thereafter, we used DHCD’s Compliance Model to assess two district scenarios for their ability to comply with MBTA Communities guidelines. Our analysis is based on the revised Section 3A Guidelines dated October 21, 2022.

Technical Review: Scenario Modeling

Northborough's MBTA Communities district requirements include all the following parameters:

- Minimum Area: 50 acres
- Minimum district multi-family unit capacity ("Unit Yield"): 750 units
- Minimum Gross Unit Density: 15 units/acre

Town staff suggested that three parcels near the intersection of Route 9 and Southwest Cutoff should be the priority location for a 3A district as these parcels are the locations of an existing Avalon multi-family development and a proposed multi-family development, thus presenting an opportunity to align zoning with current and proposed use of these sites. Multifamily residential is currently not an allowed use in the Industrial zoning district applicable to these parcels.

Below is a description of our approach and conclusions. Table 1 and 2 provides a summary of the relevant findings from our first round of modeling efforts. Attachment A includes a map of these potential district locations.

POTENTIAL DISTRICT LOCATIONS:

The applicable parameters we have used for modeling these scenarios are described in the *Modeled Scenario* section below and further detailed in Table 1 and 2. The following three parcels were included in this analysis:

PARCEL 1: 1000-15999 AVALON DRIVE

This parcel includes an existing Avalon multi-family residential development that was permitted through a Chapter 40B Comprehensive Permit in 2006.

Address: 1000 to 15999 Avalon Drive

Parcel Size: 33.23 acres*

Existing zoning: Industrial

Number of units: 382 existing

Status: Chapter 40B development with 25% affordable units (96 units deed-restricted)

Parcel IDs: Map 108/3

*There are discrepancies in the acreage of these parcels listed in different data sources. For the purpose of this model, we have utilized the data available through MassGIS (Bureau of Geographic Information).



PARCELS 2 & 3: 333 & 353 SOUTHWEST CUTOFF

These two parcels, currently developed as medical office buildings and recreational fields, represent the potential location of a new multi-family residential development proposed by Trammel Crow Company.

Address: 333 and 353 Southwest Cutoff

Parcel Size: 27.71 acres (6.41 ac + 21.3 ac)*

Existing zoning: Industrial

Number of units: 315 proposed by Trammel Crow Company

Status: developed for nonresidential purposes

Parcel IDs: Map 109/11 and Map 109/12

*There are discrepancies in the acreage of these parcels listed in differing data sources. For the purpose of this model, we have utilized the data available through MassGIS (Bureau of Geographic Information).

MODELED SCENARIO 1

This scenario draws from dimensional standards of Northborough's existing Downtown Neighborhood (DN) zoning district. A maximum height of 35 feet in the DN district has been represented in the model as 3 stories. The maximum lot coverage of 30% and minimum open space requirement of 20% from the DN district zoning has been applied in this scenario, though it should be noted that maximum lot coverage need not apply to multi-family uses under Section 7.06.030D of the DN district zoning.

Per Zoning Bylaw Section 7.06.030J(2)(a), multi-family and townhouse developments in the DN district require a minimum lot area of 10,000 square feet (sf) of lot area for the first two units and an additional 4,500 sf for each additional unit thereafter. To calculate the minimum lot area required for one unit in the model, we have used 5,000 sf per unit as the metric.

Northborough's parking ratios are defined by bedroom count, which is not a factor that the model is designed to consider. Under Zoning Bylaw Section 7.09.030 B2(a)(2), multi-family use requires the following parking space ratios: 1 space/studio; 1.5 spaces/1-bedroom; 2 spaces/2-bedroom or more. To provide an estimate that could feasibly represent an average per unit parking ratio in a multi-family development, we have used 1.75 spaces per unit in the model.

Scenario Parameter Totals:

- Area: 61 acres
- District Multi-family unit capacity ("Unit Yield"): 1,838 units
- Average Gross Density: 35 units/acre



Table 1: MODELED SCENARIO SUMMARY			
	1: 1000-15999 AVALON DRIVE	2: 353 SOUTHWEST CUTOFF	3: 333 SOUTHWEST CUTOFF
Model Results			
Area (acres)	33.23	21.3	6.41
Unit Yield	1,055	549	234
Gross Density (units/acre)	31.75	25.77	36.5
Selected Dimensional Regulations			
Min. lot size (sq. ft.)	5,000	5,000	5,000
Max. building height (stories)	3	3	3
Max. lot coverage	30%	30%	30%
Parking spaces per unit	1.75	1.75	1.75
Min. open space	20%	20%	20%

MODELED SCENARIO 2

Since the first modeled scenario results well exceeded Northborough's minimum requirements, the second scenario was tested to obtain a total multi-family capacity and district density that was closer to Northborough's minimum requirements. For this version of the district model, we changed the minimum open space area requirement to 50% and reduced the height to 2.5 stories.

Scenario Parameter Totals:

- Area: 61 acres
- District Multi-family unit capacity ("Unit Yield"): 835 units
- Average Gross Density: 15.9 units/acre

Table 2: MODELED SCENARIO SUMMARY			
	1: 1000-15999 AVALON DRIVE	2: 353 SOUTHWEST CUTOFF	3: 333 SOUTHWEST CUTOFF
Model Results			
Area (acres)	33.23	21.3	6.41
Unit Yield	499	214	122
Gross Density (units/acre)	15.02	10.05	19.03
Selected Dimensional Regulations			
Min. lot size (sq. ft.)	5,500	5,500	5,500
Max. building height (stories)	2.5	2.5	2.5
Max. lot coverage	30%	30%	30%
Parking spaces per unit	1.75	1.75	1.75
Min. open space	50%	50%	50%



Recommendations and Next Steps

Some key questions for the Town to consider include:

- **Density:** What kind of density does Northborough wish to aim for? Is there a preference to meet minimum criteria or exceed? Would you like to see higher density in any portions of the district or along certain streets?
- **Mixed-Use:** MBTA Community districts cannot require mixed-use development, although it may be allowed as an option. Is mixed-use important to include in this district?
- **Development Agreements:** We are concerned that the development agreement in place for Avalon may result in this parcel being viewed as “excluded land”, which for the purpose of the compliance regulations means land areas on which it is not possible or practical to construct multi-family housing. These scenarios may be reviewed by DHCD on a case-by-case basis.
- **Affordable Housing:** Inclusionary zoning requirement of up to 10% of multi-family units in a development can be included in district zoning without submission of an Economic Impact Analysis (EIS). Inclusionary zoning requirements exceeding 10% will require an EIS.

Town staff have suggested additional parcels for continued analysis, including: White Cliffs Mansion on Main Street; parcels located Downtown on Hudson Street & Main Street; additional parcels along Southwest Cutoff currently used as a gravel pit; and parcels along King Street that are permitted for future development of an assisted living facility. We will provide a subsequent memo with the model analysis results of those additional sites.

Once we determine (in consultation with you) the most appropriate boundaries and basic dimensional regulations to move forward with, there will be additional details to work out that these first two preliminary analysis memos will not address. These include inclusionary zoning requirements for affordable housing, as well as how to incorporate site plan review and design review into district regulations.

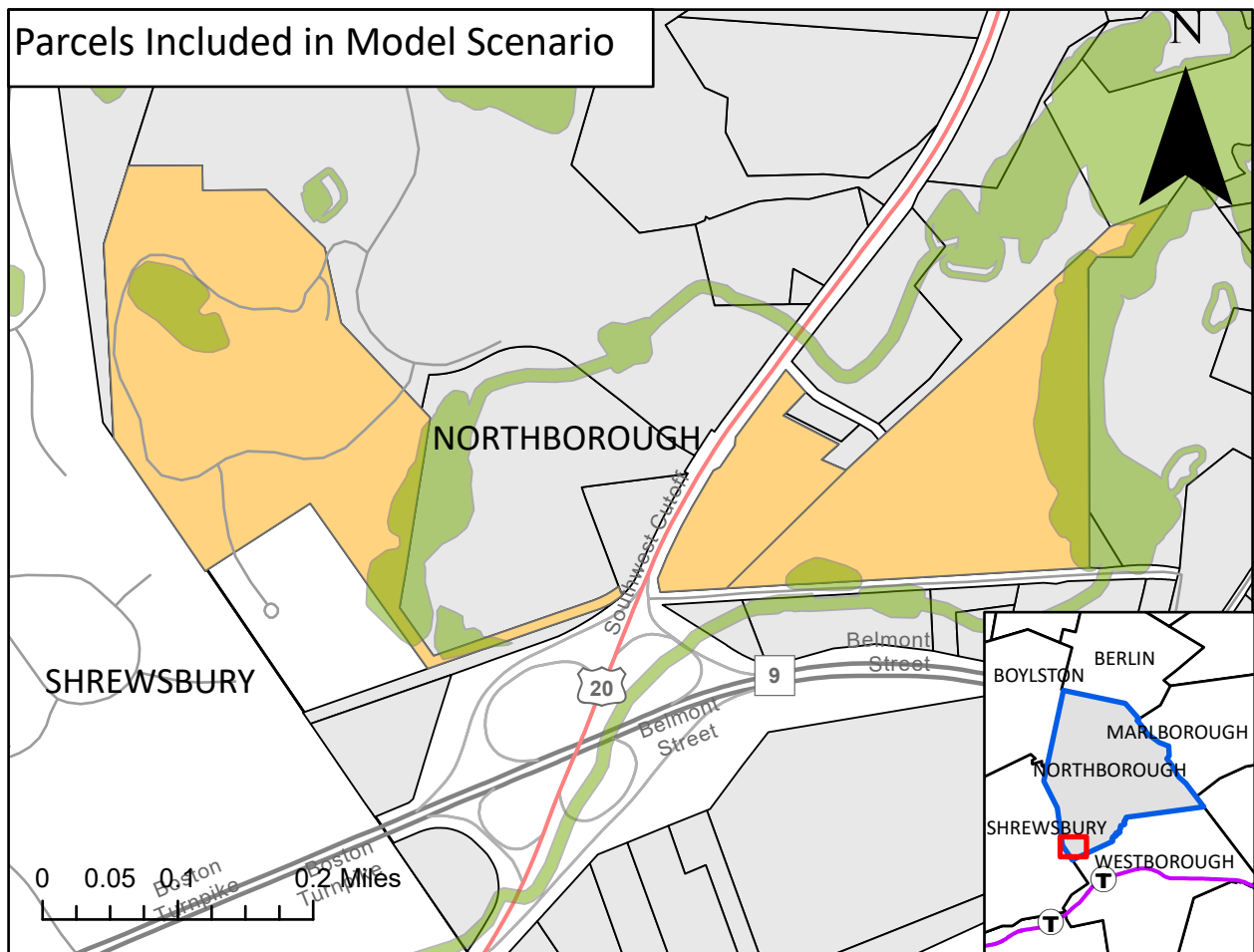
We look forward to continued discussions with the community on this topic.



Attachment A

Map of Draft MBTA Communities Potential District Locations





Legend

- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Commuter Rail Station | Limited Access Highway | Modeled Parcels |
| Regular Service Commuter Rail | Multi-lane Hwy, not limited access | Parcels Outside District |
| Used Seasonally or for Special Events | Other Numbered Highway | |
| Density Denominator Deductions | Major Road, Collector | |
| | Ramp | |