



Town of
BELMONT
MASSACHUSETTS

Town of Belmont: Exploration of Potential Development in the Brighton Street Corridor

**Final Presentation for HKS Urban Politics Field Lab, Prof. Justin de Benedictis-Kessner
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Our Team



ALISA
BHAKTA

Master in Public Policy '27
at the Harvard Kennedy
School of Government



SEBASTIAN
FERNANDEZ

Master in Public Policy '26
at the Harvard Kennedy
School of Government



MARIN
FURUYAMA

Master in Public Policy '26
at the Harvard Kennedy
School of Government



CLAUDIA
SACHS

Master in Design Studies '26
at the Harvard Graduate
School of Design



PRANAV
SUBRAMANIAN

Master in Design Studies '27
at the Harvard Graduate
School of Design

Agenda

- Background _____ 04
- Methodology _____ 07
- Key Findings _____ 13
- Conclusions _____ 47
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Background

Problem

The Town of Belmont's 2022 Financial Organization Structure Review identified **over-dependence on residential property taxes** as a key structural deficit driver.

The report **recommended increasing commercial development** to support financial health and reduce the tax burden on residents.

The Town sees **the Brighton Street Corridor as a potential candidate** and hopes to continue **incorporating local values, needs, and priorities** in a potential Brighton plan.



Our Task:

Engage residents and stakeholders to build a vision for the Brighton Street Corridor.

Key Research Questions

SUB-QUESTIONS:

OVERARCHING QUESTION:

How can Belmont incorporate local values, needs, and priorities in planning for potential commercial redevelopment?

01

AMENITIES: What types of **non-residential amenities and services** are residents interested in seeing along the Brighton St. Corridor?

02

RESIDENT VISION: What **vision do residents have for the future of the Brighton St. Corridor?**

03

PRIVATE SECTOR INPUT: What would make this project **attractive (or not) for developers?** For **property owners?**

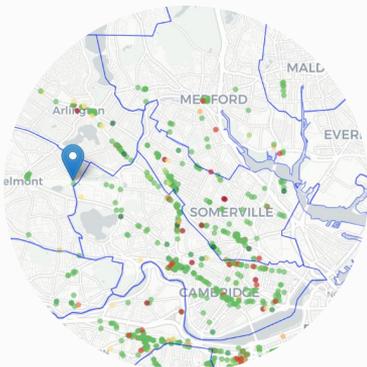
04

COMMUNICATION: How should Belmont **communicate the project and its impacts** to Town Meeting Members and residents?



Methodology

Methodology



Data Analysis

Analyzed existing survey data and amenity map to understand resident sentiment and current regional landscape



Resident Engagement

Engaged 105 Belmont residents (4 focus groups & one survey) to understand vision, preferences, and concerns for the Brighton Street Corridor



Developer & Property Owner Interviews

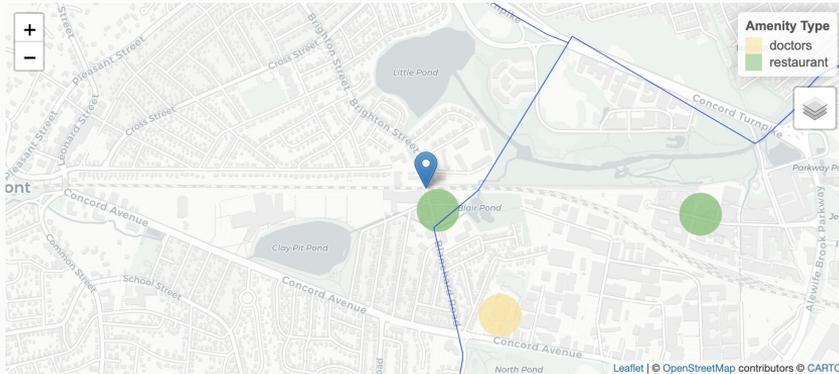
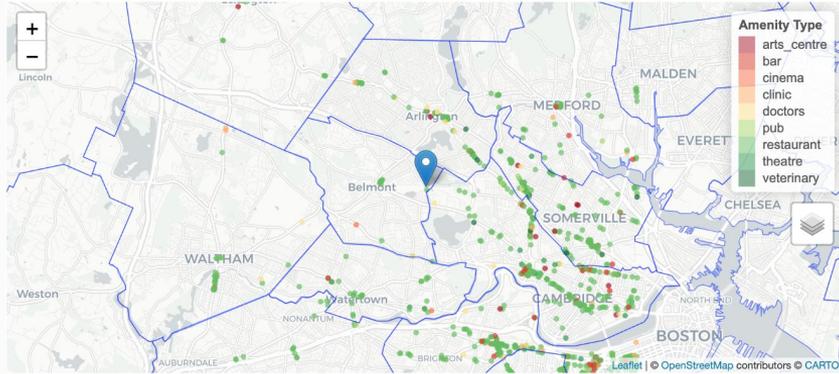
Interviewed 14 private stakeholders to determine interest and feasibility considerations for commercial redevelopment



Peer City Interviews

Interviewed 3 stakeholders from peer cities to understand development priorities, processes, and considerations

Methodology - Data Analysis



What we did

- Analyzed **existing survey data** for resident sentiment & preferences
- Developed a **spatial map** of area amenities for current regional landscape

Methodology - Resident Engagement

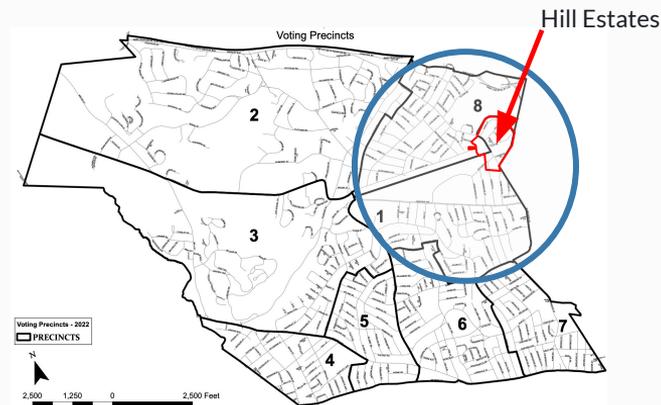


Who we talked to

- 4 Focus Groups
- 20 Residents
- 3 Resident Interviews
- 1 Survey
- 82 Hill Estate Residents

What we talked about

- Residents' vision
- Preferred amenities
- Key concerns



Methodology - Private Sector Engagement



Who we talked to

11 Developers

4 Property Owners



What we talked about

- Feasibility constraints
- Site evaluation factors
- Incentives
- Engagement strategies

Methodology - Peer City Interviews



Who we talked to

3 Representatives

Why Cambridge & Watertown?

- Neighboring towns to the east and south



What we talked about

- Nearby development
- Lessons learned from similar development
- Collaboration and Communication with Neighboring Municipalities





Key Findings

01

Amenities

02

Resident Vision

03

Private Sector Input

04

Communication

01

Residents' Preferred Amenities

Resident focus groups selected preferred amenities

Resident Focus Group (N=23)

Residents say:

Number of Mentions (N=23)



"A balance [of local and chain businesses] is important - there is stability that chains offer"

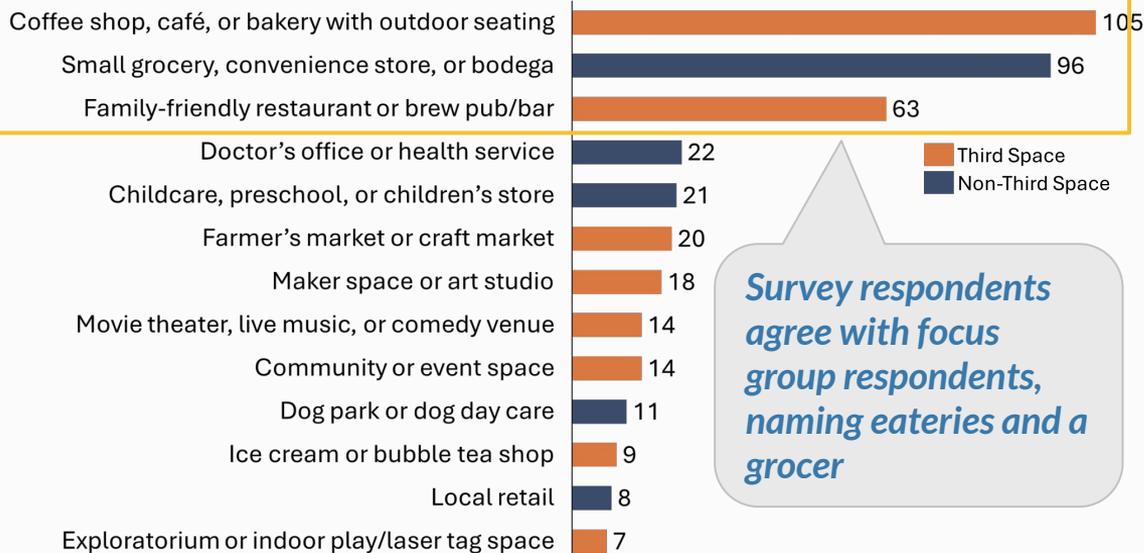


Focus group participants' top 5 amenities focus on places to eat, gather, and shop

Hill Estates residents selected preferred amenities

Hill Estates Survey (N=68)

Weighted Average Scoring (N=68)

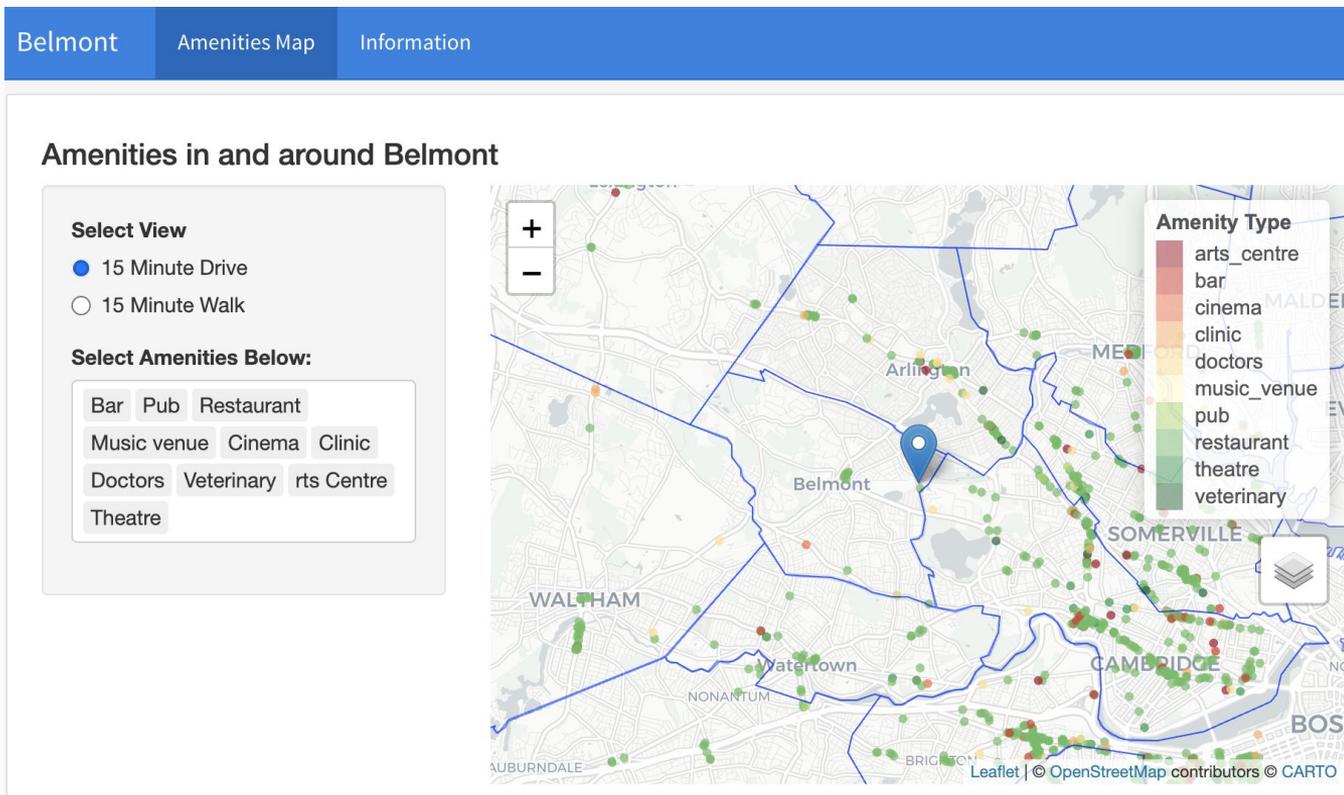


Survey respondents agree with focus group respondents, naming eateries and a grocer



Source: Hill Estate Resident Survey | Question: Please rank the top 3 amenities and/or experiences you would most like to see along Brighton Street in the future (10-15 years from now)?

Current state mapping shows gap in amenities

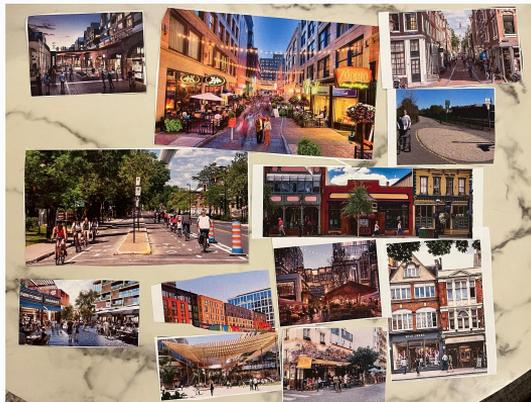


Source: OpenStreetMaps | Note: [Link to interactive dashboard](#)

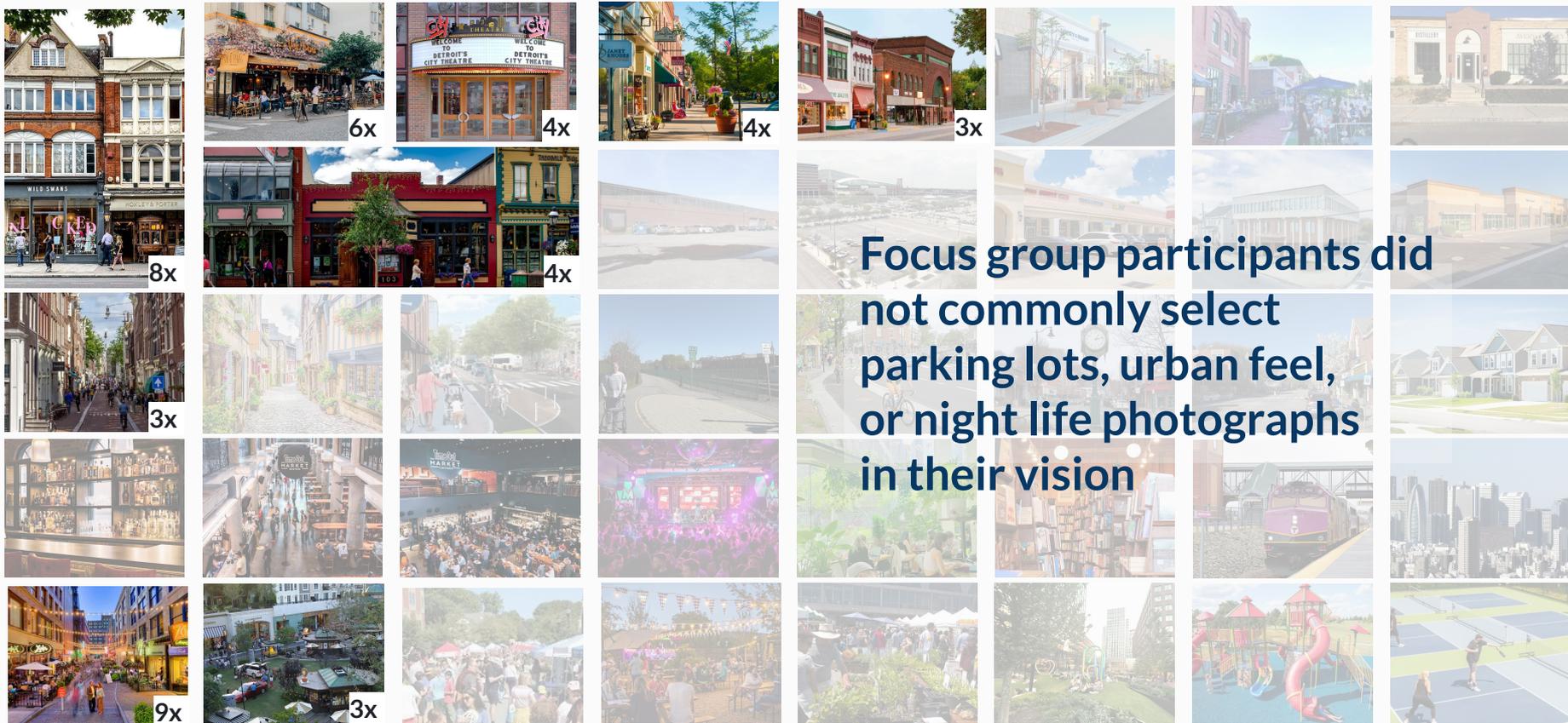
02

Residents' Vision and Considerations

Focus groups selected photos reflecting their vision



Focus groups selected photos reflecting their vision



They favored liveliness, familiarity, and curb appeal



Residents say:

"I'm a fan of **brickwork**—I think it's a lovely part of this area."

"I was thinking about the pictures I [selected] when I wrote [these] words: **welcoming, lively, and appealing.**"

I like areas that are **welcoming**, where you can **walk the sidewalks**, and egress out of the shop is easy to do."

Focus groups are open to up to four stories

DESIGN

BUILDING HEIGHT

PARKING

MOBILITY & SAFETY

CONCERNS

TRAFFIC

AFFORDABILITY & EQUITY

FINANCIAL IMPACTS

ENVIRONMENT

- Residents predominantly support a four-story height limit
- Residents favor setbacks, especially of upper levels, to prevent tall buildings from feeling “oppressive”

Residents say:

“Realistically, you wouldn’t go higher than four stories—that is the level people will tolerate.”



Source: Resident Focus Groups | Note: Design and concern considerations are ordered from most to least mentioned (as listed on the left)

Focus groups want sufficient parking

DESIGN

BUILDING
HEIGHT

PARKING

MOBILITY &
SAFETY

CONCERNS

TRAFFIC

AFFORDABILITY
& EQUITY

FINANCIAL
IMPACTS

ENVIRONMENT

- Residents express interest in seeing sufficient parking with any development that occurs
- Putting parking in the back is a popular way of supporting curb appeal

Residents say:

“We have to think about parking over there because there isn’t any street parking.”

“If we don’t include parking, it will be a challenge to find a retail that would survive solely on the bike path.”



Focus groups want walkability and bikeability

DESIGN

BUILDING
HEIGHT

PARKING

MOBILITY &
SAFETY

CONCERNS

TRAFFIC

AFFORDABILITY
& EQUITY

FINANCIAL
IMPACTS

ENVIRONMENT

- Residents support diversity in modes of transportation
- 8 focus groups participants mentioned walkability, and Hill Estate respondents desire bikeability
- Ensure safety at intersections

Residents say:

“Accommodate biking, walking, and driving.”



Community Path Website

Focus groups are most concerned with traffic

DESIGN

BUILDING
HEIGHT

PARKING

MOBILITY &
SAFETY

CONCERNS

TRAFFIC

AFFORDABILITY
& EQUITY

FINANCIAL
IMPACTS

ENVIRONMENT

- Traffic and congestion were a top concerns for Hill Estates respondents (85%) and focus groups
- Residents suggest multimodal transit for alleviation

Residents say:

“(The road) can’t handle the traffic and is bumpy with potholes.”



Focus groups want to preserve affordability

DESIGN

BUILDING
HEIGHT

PARKING

MOBILITY &
SAFETY

CONCERNS

TRAFFIC

AFFORDABILITY
& EQUITY

FINANCIAL
IMPACTS

ENVIRONMENT

- 78% of Hill Estates respondents said they were somewhat or very concerned about the loss of affordable or family housing
- 6 comments in focus groups mentioned affordability of housing (particularly Hill Estates) and amenities

Residents say:

“This area includes voices that are underrepresented in our community.”



Focus groups seek clarity around economic impacts

DESIGN

BUILDING
HEIGHT

PARKING

MOBILITY &
SAFETY

CONCERNS

TRAFFIC

AFFORDABILITY
& EQUITY

FINANCIAL
IMPACTS

ENVIRONMENT

- Many recognized the importance of generating tax revenue
- Some thought revenue should drive decision-making
- Some hold reservations that increased population or traffic could burden public services further

Residents say:

“When we talk about revenue, we are really talking about preserving schools, keeping seniors in town, and letting people stay in homes.”



Focus groups are concerned with flooding and waste

DESIGN

BUILDING
HEIGHT

PARKING

MOBILITY &
SAFETY

CONCERNS

TRAFFIC

AFFORDABILITY
& EQUITY

FINANCIAL
IMPACTS

ENVIRONMENT

- Residents expressed concerns about flooding in the area
- Concerns were also raised regarding environmental contamination from Pure Coat

Residents say:

“The Pure Coat site raises issues of environmental contamination.”

“French Construction elevated their site above the floodplain.”



Summary Findings

RESIDENT CONSIDERATIONS

BUILT FORM

- Familiar, warm architecture (e.g., brick)
- Open to up to 4 stories
- Active sidewalks and upper-level set-backs
- Greenery/natural features

MOBILITY & ACCESS

- Multi-modality (biking, walking, driving)
- Traffic mitigation
- Parking availability, parking in the back
- Pedestrian and bike safety

AMENITIES

- Local-serving amenities
- Third spaces
- Restaurants, grocers, family-friendly entertainment, health services

OTHER

- Environmental concerns (flood, contamination)
- Affordability
- Engage Hill Estates
- High city revenue opportunity



AFFORDABILITY & EQUITY

Housing is the top concern for affordability and equity. Residents recognize a strong need for more affordable housing, with some accepting that solutions could involve inconveniencing a few for the benefit of many. However, they **don't want Brighton Street to shoulder full responsibility for providing affordable housing.** They hope to see the Hill Estates protected and more integrated with the rest of the town, recognizing that Hill Estates' interests have not always been well represented in local decision-making.

Residents Tend to Support:

- Affordable housing
- Protecting and integrating Hill Estates

Residents Tend to Oppose:

- Luxury housing and upscale amenities

"This area includes voices that are underrepresented in our community."



COMMUNITY

Resident communities near the Brighton Street Corridor largely revolve around family life and senior living. Residents enjoy spending much of their social time outdoors, but indoors public and communal spaces gain a heightened importance during the winter. There is **clear demand for more of these social spaces.**

Residents Tend to Support:

- Spaces to be with neighbors and socialize
- Family and senior-friendly
- Outdoors living

Residents Tend to Oppose:

- Adult experiences
- Individual experiences

"I like seeing liveliness. People walking their dogs, taking their kids to get ice cream."



FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Many residents recognize the importance of generating tax revenue for the Town, with some saying revenue is so important that it should be the primary factor guiding local decision-making. That said, they are **uncertain about what impacts they can actually expect from redevelopment**, with some holding reservations that increased traffic or population could actually burden public services further. Residents are interested in hearing outside professional assessments.

Residents Tend to Support:

- Revenue-generating opportunities
- Professional financial assessments
- Transparency on expected impacts

Residents Tend to Oppose:

- Unclear and unsubstantial financial/revenue implications

"When we talk about revenue, we are really talking about preserving schools, keeping seniors in town, and letting people stay in their homes."



SUSTAINABILITY

Flooding is a top concern around redevelopment in the area, with many suggesting the need for resilient construction features like elevated foundations and rain gardens. There are also concerns around environmental contamination from Pure Coat with residents wanting a thorough cleanup before development. Additionally, given the importance of outside activities for Belmont residents' lifestyle, they hope to see continued protection of natural and green spaces.

Residents Tend to Support:

- Resilient development
- Environmental protection

Residents Tend to Oppose:

- Contamination and pollution
- Reduced green space

"This is a low point in Belmont so there are concerns about drainage and flooding."



MOBILITY

Residents support multimodal mobility and believe the area should accommodate walking, biking, and driving. This should aim to alleviate reliance on automobile traffic, as **overcongestion is one of residents' top concerns around future development.**

Pedestrian and cyclist safety, especially at intersections, is the top priority for multimodal mobility. The community path is an exciting new amenity, and an additional MBTA stop is a possibility.

Residents Tend to Support:

- Safety features
- Multimodal transit
- Walkability

Residents Tend to Oppose:

- Overcongestion
- Traffic

"Accommodate biking, walking, and driving."



PARKING

Despite desiring walkability and bikability, many residents believe some parking is essential, saying that businesses will struggle to survive without the car traffic enabled by parking (especially during the winter). A few residents were concerned that parking could be a problem if new housing units were built. However, **these concerns contrast with residents' strong interest in active sidewalks and small-scale look and feel.** Putting parking in the back is a popular way of marrying the two.

Residents Tend to Support:

- Being able to park at amenities
- Parking space for housing
- Parking in the back

Residents Tend to Oppose:

- Large parking lots

"If we don't include parking, it will be a challenge to find retail that would survive solely on the bike path."



LOOK & FEEL

Nearly all residents desire a cohesive destination that fits Belmont's small-town character, **favoring active sidewalks with accessible storefronts, and familiar materials like brick, wood, and other warm materials.** However, some are open to more modern design, citing appreciation for the new public library. Residents value "organic" and "green" elements, including greenery, natural materials, and features that create opportunities for people to gather outside.

Residents Tend to Support:

- Active sidewalks
- Familiar materials and designs
- Organic feel and outdoors spaces

Residents Tend to Oppose:

- Urban and modern materials and design
- Hostile and car-oriented design

"Character and aesthetics are key, because they distinguish change that feels interesting versus aggressive."



BUILDING HEIGHT

While some residents are open to greater height, there is broad agreement that **Belmont residents would probably not tolerate any development over four stories tall.** Residents concerned about revenue generation and affordability see increased height as a necessary piece of the puzzle. They see setbacks, and especially setbacks of upper levels, as an opportunity to prevent taller buildings from feeling "oppressive."

Residents Tend to Support:

- Modest height increases (up to 4 stories)
- Evidence and reasoning for increased height
- Upper-level setbacks

Residents Tend to Oppose:

- Large height increases (over 4 stories)

"We need to think strategically about where to put more height, and as someone who lives near here, I would love to see more 3-4 story buildings."



AMENITIES

Residents show strong preference for the following six categories of amenities: **dining options, family-friendly recreation, health services, live entertainment and theaters, convenience and grocers, and boutique retail.** They are mixed on local business vs. chains, with some feeling much stronger than others, but there is wide agreement that amenities should generally be small and scaled to the needs of the community.

Residents Tend to Support:

- A mix of local businesses, regional chains, and national chains
- Family-friendly and affordable
- Small-scale establishments

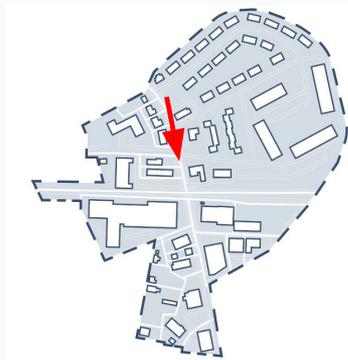
Residents Tend to Oppose:

- National big-box stores

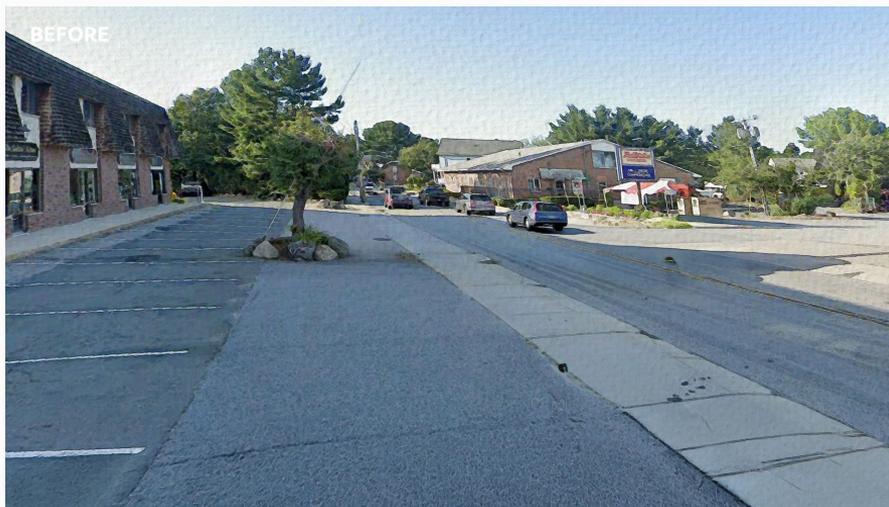
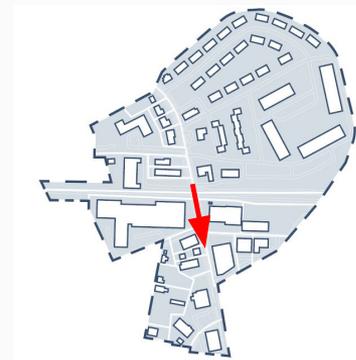
"To me, what is more important is how the business interacts with the rest of the community."



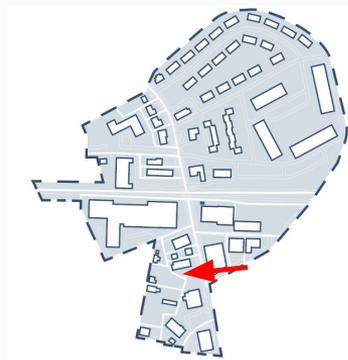
Rendering based on resident input



Rendering based on resident input



Rendering based on resident input



03

Developers & Property Owners' Considerations for Feasibility

How the Surroundings Shape the Site

SITE

MOBILITY &
ACCESS

MARKET

FEASIBILITY

POLICY

- Fragmented ownership and lack of site control limit redevelopment.
- Key parcels (including MBTA land) are small or encumbered.
- The site is overshadowed by more active districts which can reduce developer attention.
- The area is undervalued relative to nearby districts but holds long-term appreciation potential.

“It’s hard to do something like this without [a singular site owner], and you cannot assume that others will allow redevelopment on property they own.”



Transit Oriented Developments Improve Feasibility

SITE

MOBILITY &
ACCESS

MARKET

FEASIBILITY

POLICY

- Traffic congestion at key intersections is a major feasibility inhibitor.
- Limited access reduces attractiveness to particular uses.
- Parking is costly and physically difficult due to poor soils.
- Need for stronger multimodal connections to improve viability.
- Proximity to commuter rails is a major asset.

“Make direct pedestrian- and bicycle-safe connections to the bike path. That would be a modest but helpful thing.”



Market: Aligning Uses with Demand

SITE

MOBILITY &
ACCESS

MARKET

FEASIBILITY

POLICY

- Housing is the strongest/ most feasible primary use.
- Ground-floor retail may work, but retail demand is limited without more density.
- Hospitality development depends on access and institutional investment (there is demand).
- Understanding what height/density will be accepted by residents.
- Concerns about competition from Cambridge, Arlington, Watertown, Fresh Pond

“Increasing residential density increases the probability that you'll be able to support more commercial, period.”



Private Entities Desire a Clear Path Forward

AFTER

SITE

MOBILITY &
ACCESS

MARKET

FEASIBILITY

POLICY



“Certainty matters above all... it takes years and sometimes millions of dollars to get a project permitted and entitled.”

1. Targeted zoning adjustments can unlock high-value, context-sensitive redevelopment.

2. A town-led plan can create certainty and accelerate high-quality proposals.

3. A right-sized, Belmont-scaled mixed-use center is achievable.

4. A lead anchor project provides a strong starting point opportunity.

Desired Policy Solutions to Support Redevelopment:

“Without incentives and higher FAR, developers can’t justify redevelopment.”

SITE

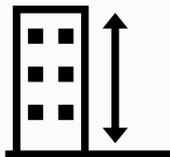
MOBILITY &
ACCESS

MARKET

FEASIBILITY

POLICY

Zoning & FAR* Flexibility



Allowing for 5-over-1 construction and 60-70 ft building widths.

Financial Incentives



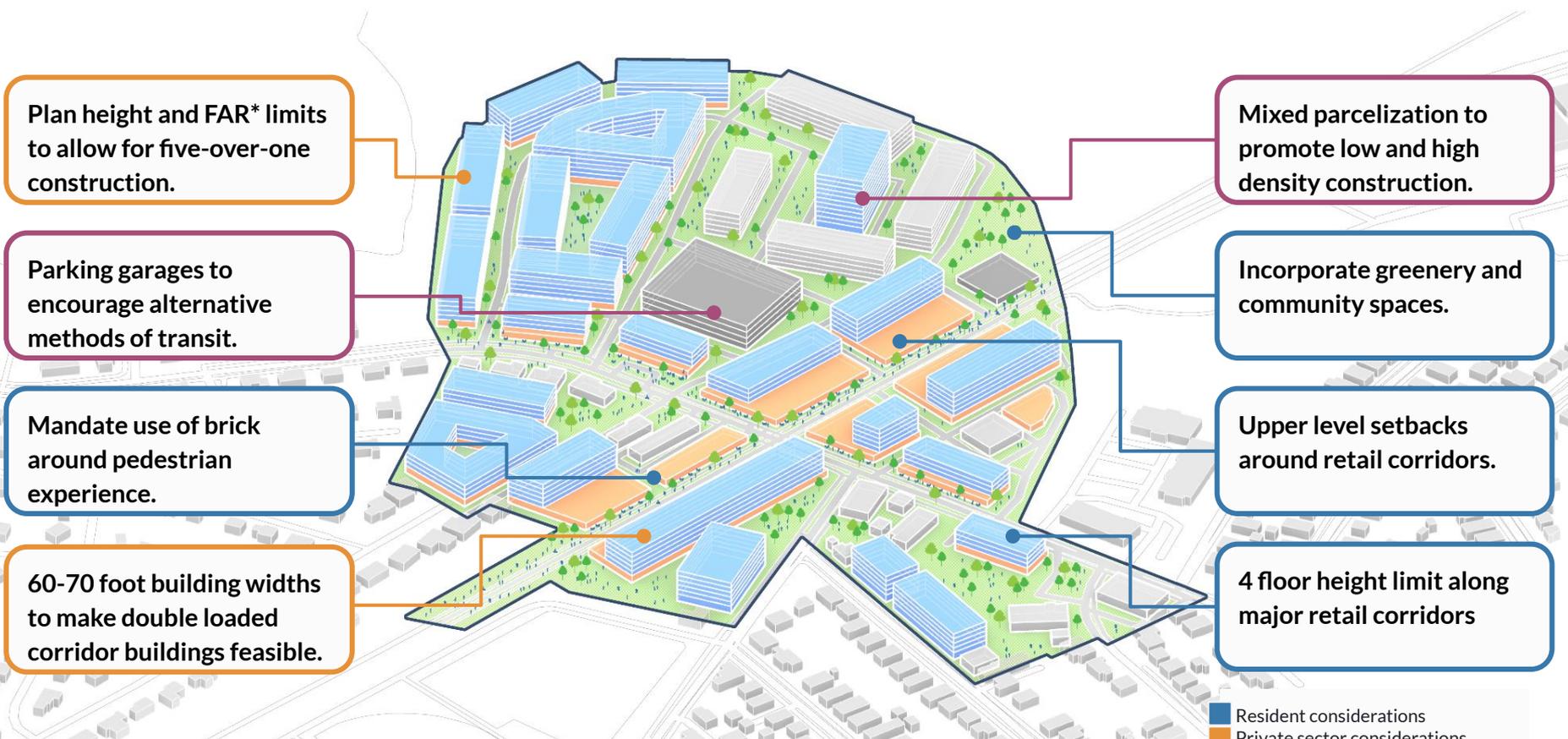
TIFs and Public Improvement Fees to guarantee infrastructure improvements.

Permitting Support



Address need for streamlined permitting and predictable review timelines.

Design Considerations from Stakeholders



Plan height and FAR* limits to allow for five-over-one construction.

Parking garages to encourage alternative methods of transit.

Mandate use of brick around pedestrian experience.

60-70 foot building widths to make double loaded corridor buildings feasible.

Mixed parcelization to promote low and high density construction.

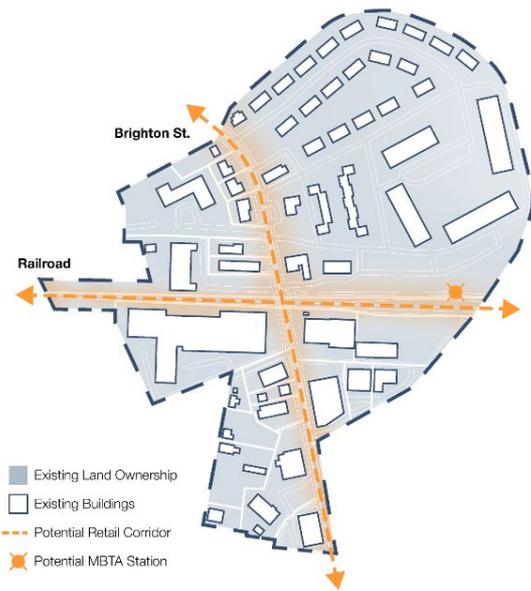
Incorporate greenery and community spaces.

Upper level setbacks around retail corridors.

4 floor height limit along major retail corridors

*FAR: Floor Area Ratio

Potential Phasing Strategy



00. Identify main commercial corridors and transit oriented development opportunities.



01. Upzoning and infrastructural improvements in areas with singular ownership to promote first mover advantage.



02. Encourage gradual development of surrounding parcels through further upzoning and inclusion of green spaces.

Summary Findings

RESIDENT CONSIDERATIONS

BUILT FORM

- Familiar, warm architecture (e.g., brick)
- Open to up to 4 stories
- Active sidewalks and upper-level set-backs
- Greenery/natural features

MOBILITY & ACCESS

- Multi-modality (biking, walking, driving)
- Traffic mitigation
- Parking availability, parking in the back
- Pedestrian and bike safety

AMENITIES

- Local-serving amenities
- Third spaces
- Restaurants, grocers, family-friendly entertainment, health services

OTHER

- Environmental concerns (flood, contamination)
- Affordability
- Engage Hill Estates
- High city revenue opportunity

PRIVATE SECTOR CONSIDERATIONS

BUILT FORM

- High FAR, reduced setbacks and parking reqs
- Reparcelizing for 5-over-1 construction
- Increase density to support commercial
- Ensuring zoning flexibility

MOBILITY & ACCESS

- Improve traffic flow
- Transit oriented development
- Sufficient parking to attract tenants
- Setbacks enabling street-accessible storefronts

FEASIBILITY

- Policy support to fund improved infrastructure
- Coordinated site control & phasing
- Speedy entitlement and permitting
- Housing as anchor, town support for affordable

OTHER

- Speedy entitlement and permitting
- A healthy feedback loop of communication
- Highlight appreciation potential
- Flood prevention

04

Considerations for Communication

Stakeholders want multi-channel communication

Digital and easily accessible information

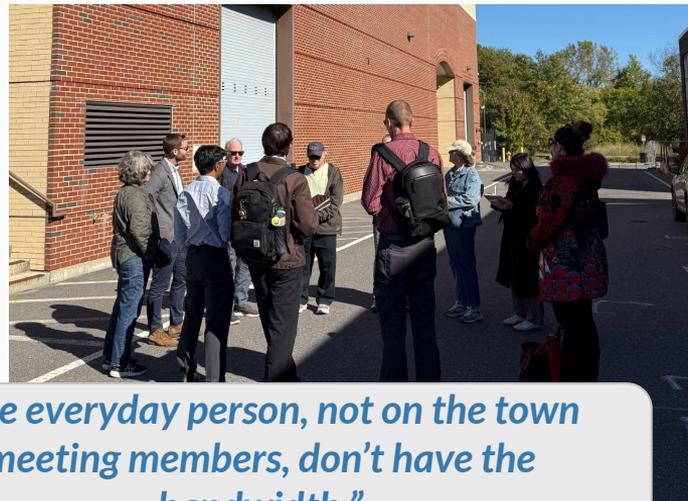
- QR codes, text notifications, hybrid meetings, social media, surveys

In-person engagement

- Multi-stakeholder working groups, mailers, charettes, walking tours

Public events

- Farmers markets, soccer games, town day

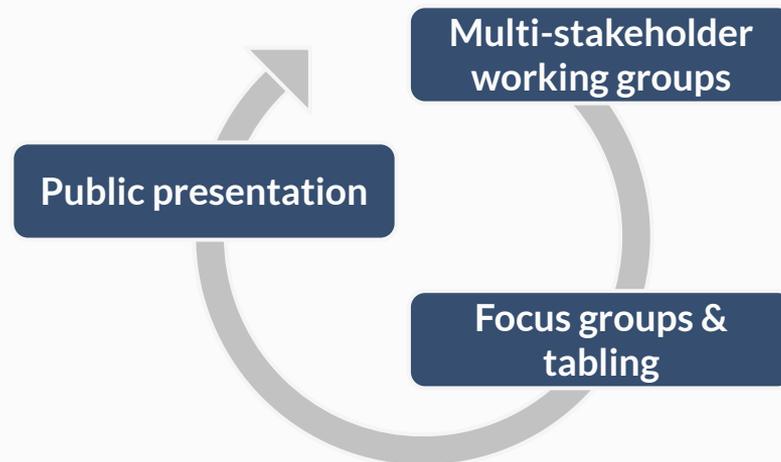


“The everyday person, not on the town meeting members, don’t have the bandwidth.”

“Going to where people are. [We] want to make sure we’re getting the word out to people.”

Stakeholders prefer meaningful and iterative engagement

- Stakeholders want **consistent** and **iterative** engagement and communication throughout the process
- They don't want reactive or one-off communication
- **Stakeholders want to be asked directly** about their needs (ex. developers)



“There needs to be more engagement, back-and-forth.”

“Have community meetings fairly early... and meet with the neighbors.”



Conclusions

Summary Findings

AGREEMENTS

- Consistent communication and engagement
- Transit-oriented development
- Walkability and bikeability to amenities
- Safety at major intersections
- Smaller setbacks at commercial corridors for street-accessible storefronts
- Flood prevention
- Greenery and social spaces

DISAGREEMENTS

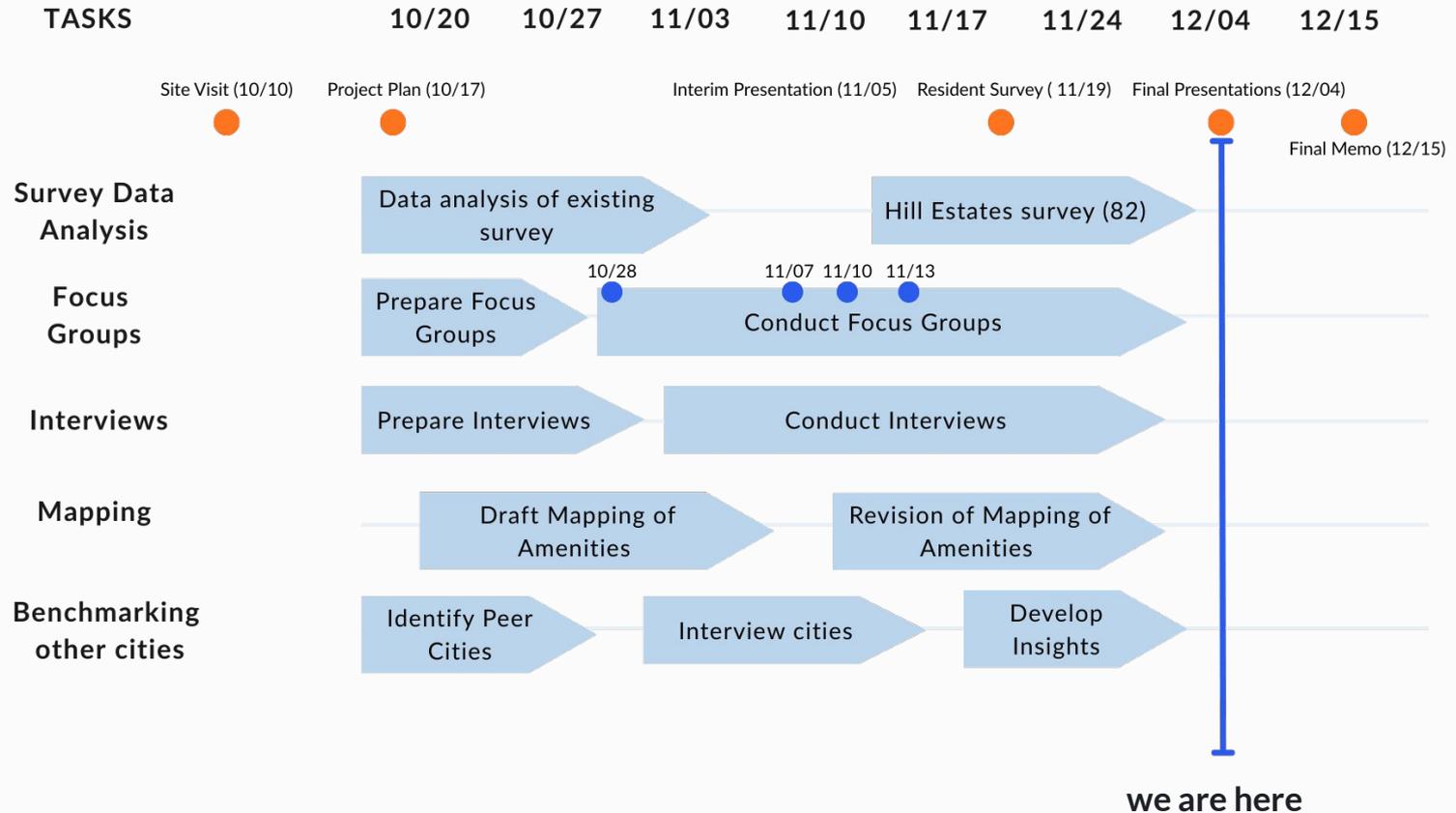
- Number of buildable floors allowed
- Residential setbacks
- Parking minimums
- Affordable housing percentage

THANK YOU!
QUESTIONS?



Appendix

Timeline



Current Parcel Ownership



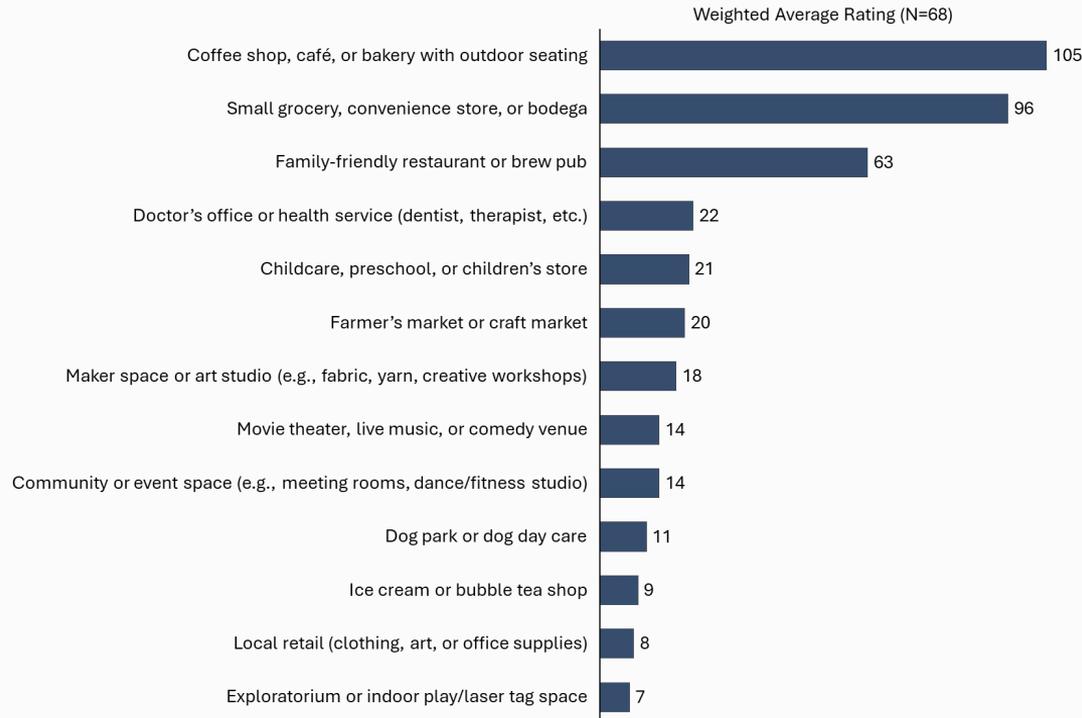
Hill Estate Resident Survey (1 of 6)

As a reminder, The Town of Belmont is exploring possible updates to the Brighton Street Corridor (the area near Hill Estates and the Community Path) that could include new shops, restaurants, small businesses, housing, or community spaces. No decisions have been made. Overall, how do you feel about new multifamily and retail development in or near your neighborhood?



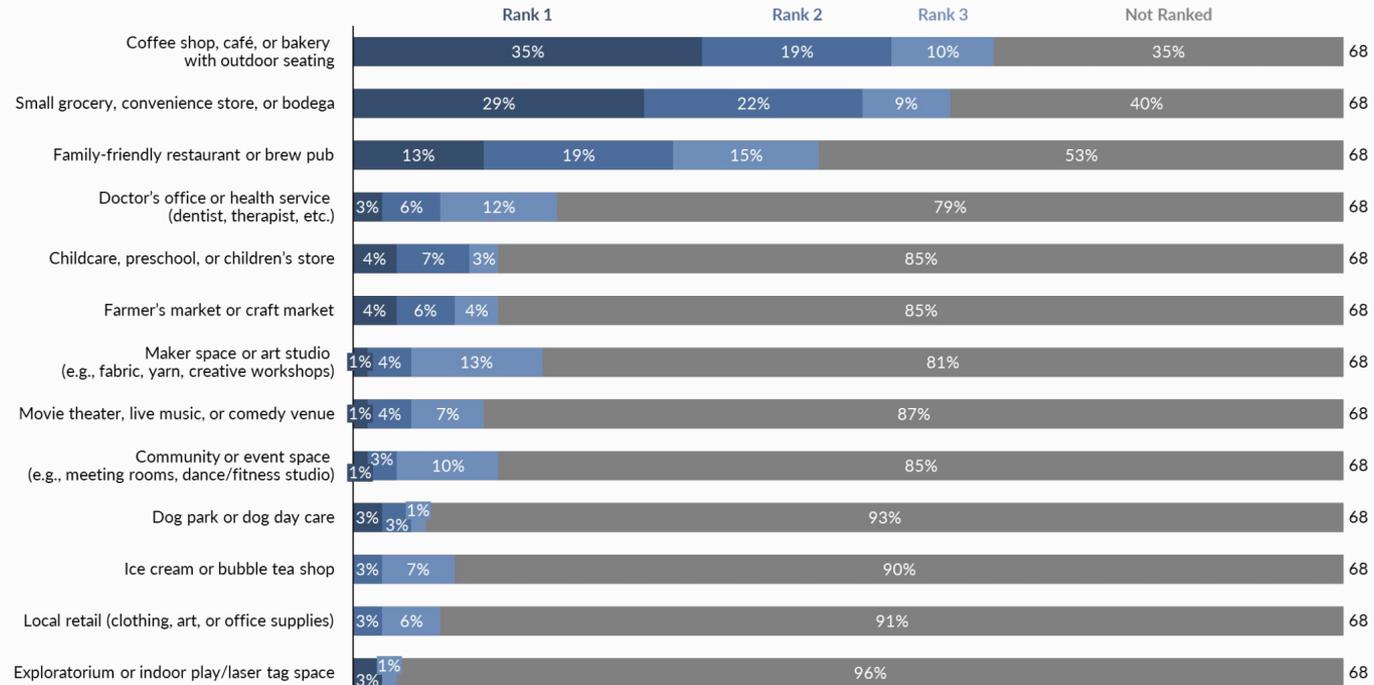
Hill Estate Resident Survey (2 of 6)

Please rank the top 3 amenities and/or experiences you would most like to see along Brighton Street in the future (10-15 years from now)? Please click and drag the options on the left to a box on the right.



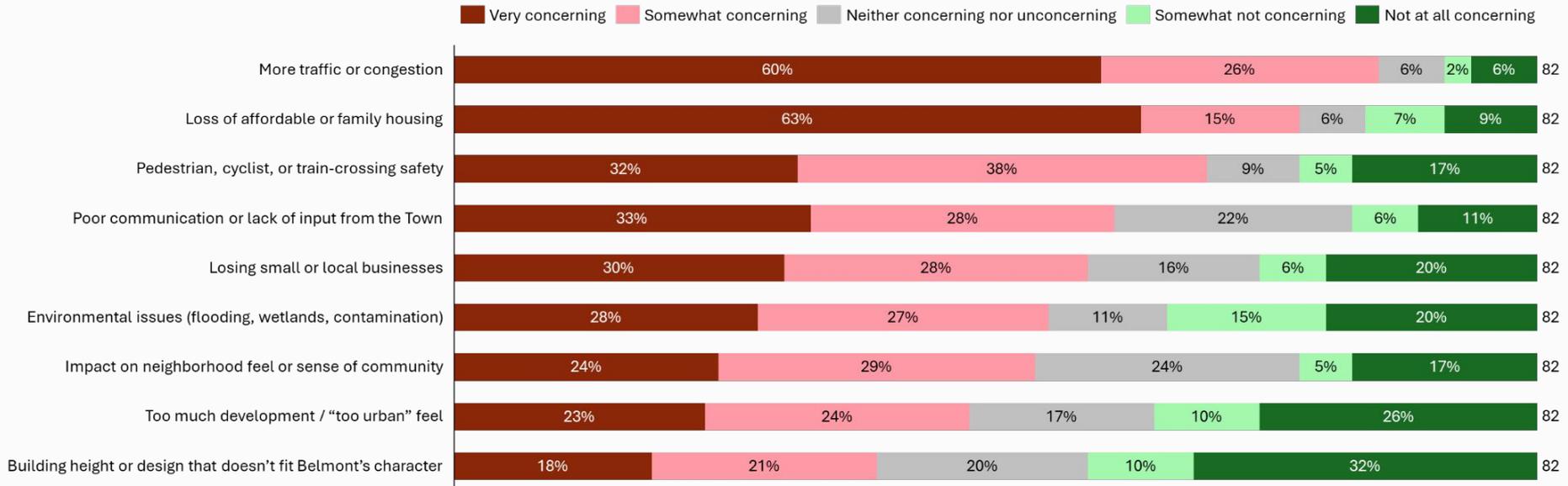
Hill Estate Resident Survey (3 of 6)

Please rank the top 3 amenities and/or experiences you would most like to see along Brighton Street in the future (10-15 years from now)? Please click and drag the options on the left to a box on the right.



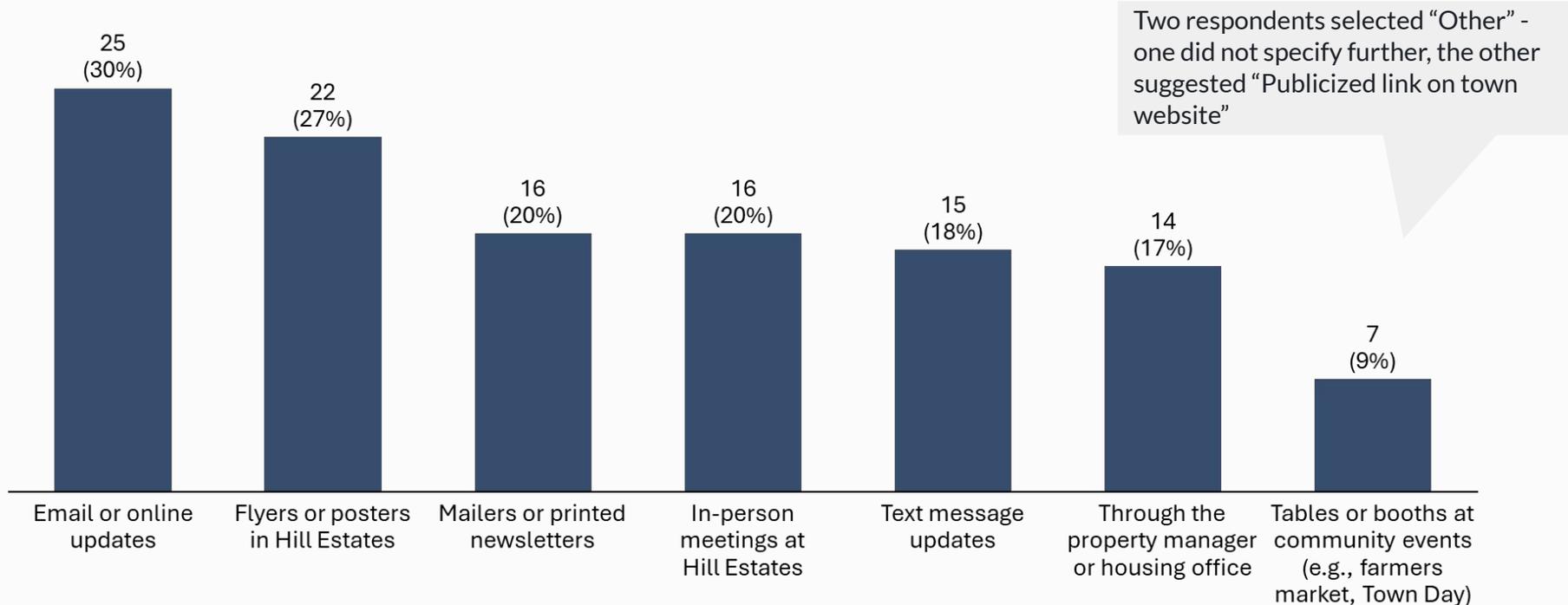
Hill Estate Resident Survey (4 of 6)

Some people might have concerns about potential development in the Brighton corridor. Please rate the following concerns from 1 (not at all concerning) to 5 (very concerning).



Hill Estate Resident Survey (5 of 6)

What is the best way for the Town to share updates or get your feedback about this project? Please select all that apply.



Hill Estate Resident Survey (6 of 6)

(Optional) Please share any other thoughts or input you have here:

