



**HARVARD** Kennedy School  
JOHN F. KENNEDY SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT

## Town of Belmont

# Brighton Street Corridor Commercial Development

### **Final Memo**

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### **Urban Politics Field Lab**

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# I. Executive Summary

**Overview:** The Town of Belmont is seeking opportunities to increase commercial development to mitigate its current overreliance on residential property taxes. To support this effort, our team of Harvard Kennedy School and Graduate School of Design students engaged with residents and other key stakeholders to begin shaping a vision for the Brighton Street Corridor (“the Corridor”), an area in Belmont that the Town has identified as a potential candidate for redevelopment.

**Research Focus:** We examined how Belmont could incorporate local values, needs, and priorities in planning for potential commercial redevelopment in the Corridor. Specifically, we explored: (1) resident preferences for amenities, (2) resident vision for the Corridor, (3) feasibility from developer and property owner perspectives, and (4) stakeholder communication and engagement preferences and best practices.

**Methodology:** To address these research questions, we sought to incorporate a broad range of perspectives and information, employing a mixed-methods research design combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. Our methodology consisted of four components: (1) analysis of survey and spatial data, (2) resident engagement via focus groups, interviews, and a survey, (3) interviews with developers and property owners, and (4) interviews with stakeholders from peer cities.

## Key Findings:

- Residents most commonly desire dining, family-friendly experiences, grocers, and health services. This is consistent across residents from precincts 1 & 8, those outside of precincts 1 & 8, and Hill Estates residents.
- Residents envision a lively center with curb appeal, ideally built with familiar materials and styles. They are open to modest height increases if executed correctly.
- Residents are most concerned with traffic, road safety, affordability/equity, and environmental impacts.
- Private entities (e.g., developers and property owners) describe an implementable vision plan outlining strategies for transit, zoning, and other critical factors as an important condition influencing the viability of first-mover redevelopment.
- Stakeholders want to be engaged transparently and iteratively about Belmont’s development plans through a combination of in-person and digital channels, ensuring they feel heard throughout the process.

Through our engagements with residents, developers, property owners, and representatives from neighboring municipalities, we have identified key areas of similarity and convergence that can guide next steps. The findings highlight ongoing tensions between competing priorities, including resident concerns, feasibility considerations, and long-term corridor goals.

Areas of Agreement	Areas of Disagreement
<p><i>Shared desires and priorities:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Consistent communication and engagement about future Town plans, and to provide direct input</li> <li>→ Transit-oriented development</li> <li>→ Walkability and bikeability to amenities</li> <li>→ Smaller setbacks at commercial corridors for street-accessible storefronts</li> <li>→ Greenery and social spaces</li> </ul> <p><i>Shared concerns:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Safety for pedestrians and bikers at major intersections</li> <li>→ Flood prevention</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Number of buildable floors allowed: Residents prefer a max. of 4 floors to preserve Town character while private entities seek a min. of 5 floors for feasibility</li> <li>→ Residential setbacks: Residents prefer setbacks from the property line on housing to allow for an active and light-filled streetscape</li> <li>→ Parking minimums: Residents advocate for adequate parking while private entities note that parking minimums may impact feasibility</li> <li>→ Inclusionary zoning percentage: Residents want to see more inclusionary zoning, while private entities state that 10% is reasonable, while 15-20% may be too steep</li> </ul>

The following transmittal memo details the research methodology and summarizes key findings across the four research questions.

## II. Background & Research Questions

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 for commercial development and hopes to continue incorporating local values, needs, and priorities in a potential Brighton Street plan. To advance this effort, the Town of Belmont partnered with our team to engage residents and stakeholders in shaping a vision for the Corridor.

We focused the research and analysis around the following overarching question:

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

To address this guiding question, we examined four sub-questions:

- 1) Amenities: What types of non-residential amenities and services are residents interested in seeing along Brighton St. Corridor?
- 2) Resident Vision: What vision do residents have for the future of the Brighton St. Corridor?
- 3) Private Sector: What would make this project attractive (or not) for developers? For property owners?
- 4) Communication: How should Belmont communicate the project and its impacts to Town Meeting Members and residents?

### III. Methodology

To explore these research questions and incorporate a wide variety of perspectives, we pursued four methods: data analysis, resident engagement, interviews with developers and property owners (“private sector”), and interviews with peer city stakeholders.

Method	Description
Data analysis	Analysis of previously administered survey responses and a spatial amenity map to gauge initial resident sentiment and the current regional landscape of amenities
Resident engagement	Engagement with 104 Belmont residents through focus groups, interviews, and a survey to understand vision, preferences, and concerns for the Brighton Street Corridor
Private Sector Interviews	Interviews with 14 private stakeholders, which included developers and property owners, to determine interest and feasibility considerations for commercial redevelopment
Peer City Stakeholder Interviews	Interviews with 3 stakeholders from peer cities, Cambridge and Watertown, to understand development priorities, processes, and considerations

#### (1) Data Analysis

We **analyzed responses from an existing survey** that the Town of Belmont had administered on the Brighton Street Corridor before our involvement. This survey, which had received 137 resident responses, provided initial insight into resident sentiment regarding the Corridor and potential development, as well as preferences for particular amenities (*See Appendix A for key results*).

We also **developed and analyzed a spatial map of amenities** that exist within a 15-minute drive and walk radius from the Brighton Street Corridor using OpenStreetMaps data. The amenities included in our analysis were those that residents expressed they wanted through our engagement with them. This map was developed into a public, interactive dashboard that the Town can use in the future (*See Appendix B for link to dashboard and more details*).

## (2) Resident Engagement

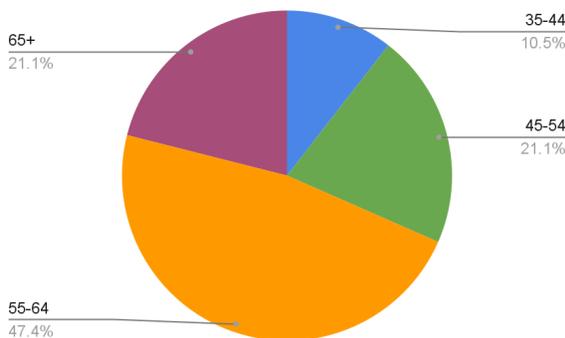
We employed a multi-pronged approach utilizing focus groups, interviews, and a survey to gather a wide variety of resident perspectives. Across these 3 methods of resident engagement, we sought to understand their **vision** for the Brighton Street Corridor, including the desired look and feel, most wanted and useful **amenities** in the area, and any **concerns** they have around developing in the area (*See Appendix C for focus groups and interview protocol*).

### **FOCUS GROUPS**

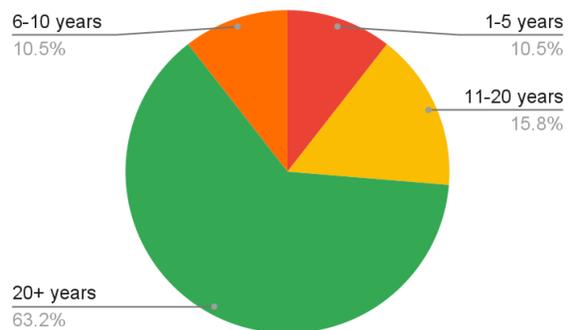
We facilitated **four focus groups** in person, where we spoke with **19 residents**. Three of these focus groups consisted of Town Meeting Members from precincts 1 & 8, which are the precincts that directly touch the Corridor. From these Town Meeting Members, we aimed to hear the perspectives of the residents they represent. The final focus group consisted of several residents who lived outside of precincts 1 & 8 to ensure other Belmont perspectives were captured.

<b>FOCUS GROUP (N)</b>	<b>DATE</b>
Precinct 1 & 8 (N=3)	October 28th
Precinct 1 & 8 (N=7)	November 7th
Precinct 1 & 8 (N=5)	November 10th
Other Residents (N=4)	November 13th

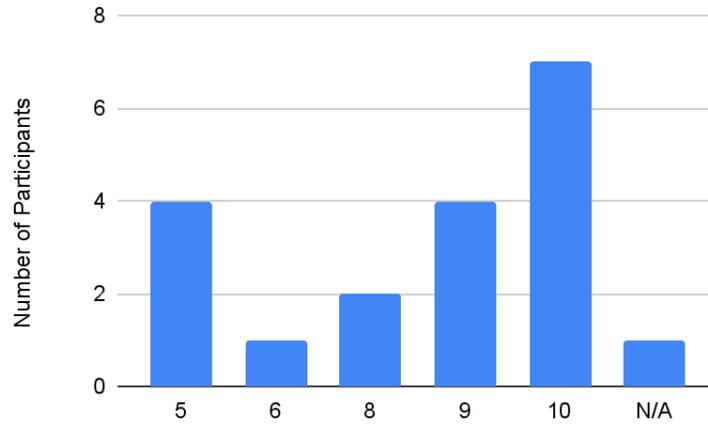
*Design:* Participants were recruited through email invitations, which captured information on focus group interest/availability, as well as key demographic characteristics to ensure diversity in participant backgrounds and opinions (*See Figures 1, 2, and 3*). Focus groups were structured around a standard set of questions (*See Appendix C*) and a mix of activities, including a facilitated “sticky-note” brainstorm on desired amenities (*See Figure 4*), a visual collage exercise to elicit preferences for desired styles and architecture (*See Figure 5*), and a guided Q&A discussion.



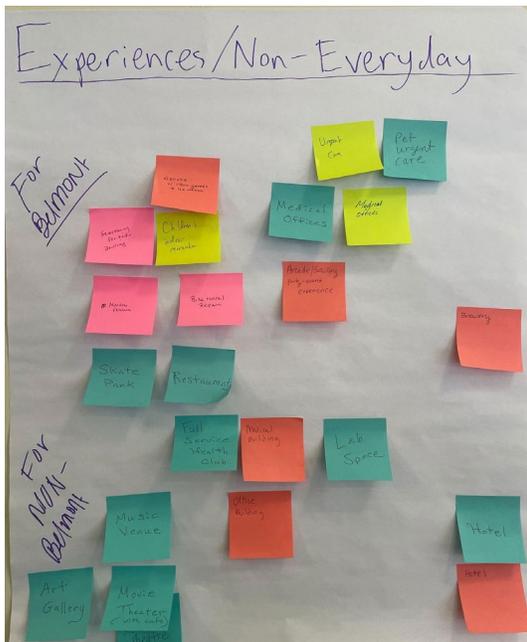
**Figure 1. Focus Group Participants' Ages**



**Figure 2. Focus Group Participants' Years of Residence in Belmont**



**Figure 3. Focus Group Participants' Level of Support for Brighton Street Corridor Overlay Zoning Proposal to Increase Commercial Development** (Survey Question: *On a scale from 'very against' to 'very supportive,' where do you currently stand on the idea of adopting a Brighton Street Corridor Overlay zoning proposal aimed at increasing commercial development?*)



**Figure 4. Focus Group 'Most Desired Amenities' Activity**

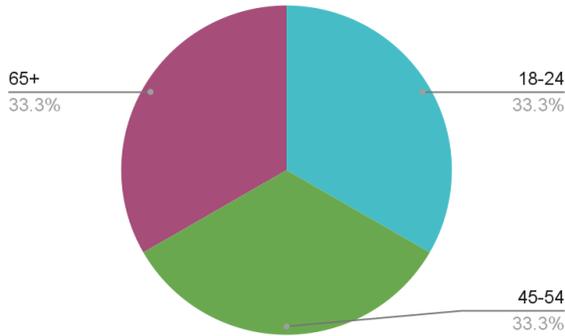


**Figure 5. Focus Group 'Vision Collage' Activity**

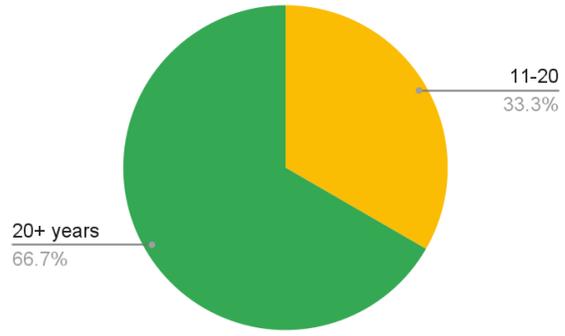
**INTERVIEWS**

We conducted virtual **one-on-one interviews** with **3 residents** to hear from voices and perspectives not captured in the focus groups.

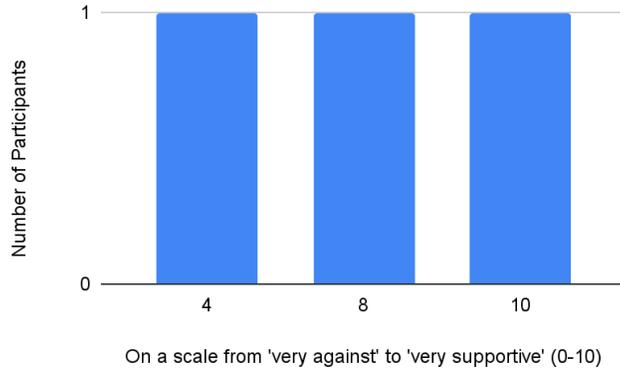
*Design:* Participants were recruited through email invitations, which captured information on focus group interest/availability, as well as key demographic characteristics to ensure diversity in participant backgrounds and opinions. Interviews were structured around a standard set of questions (*See Appendix C*).



**Figure 6. Interviewees' Ages**



**Figure 7. Interviewees' Years of Residence in Belmont**



**Figure 8. Interviewees' Level of Support for Brighton Street Corridor Overlay Zoning Proposal to Increase Commercial Development** (*Survey Question: On a scale from 'very against' to 'very supportive,' where do you currently stand on the idea of adopting a Brighton Street Corridor Overlay zoning proposal aimed at increasing commercial development?*)

**SURVEY**

We administered an **online Qualtrics survey** specifically targeting **Hill Estates residents**, who live directly within the Brighton Street Corridor. As the Hill Estates apartments are the only naturally occurring affordable housing in the area, and because these residents are likely to be the most impacted by the redevelopment, it was important to ensure direct engagement with this group. This survey was distributed via email from the Hill Estates Property Manager and received **82 respondents** (*See Appendix D for full set of questions and analysis of responses*).

### (3) Developer & Property Owner Interviews

We interviewed **11 developers** who operate in the greater Boston area, as well as **4 property owners** who own property in the Brighton Street Corridor. In these interviews, the focus was on understanding feasibility constraints around large-scale development, factors of importance during the site evaluation process, incentives to make redevelopment viable, and effective strategies for stakeholder engagement (*See Appendix E for interview protocol*).

### (4) Peer City Interviews

We interviewed **3 representatives** from the neighboring cities of **Cambridge** (to the east) and **Watertown** (to the south). They represented perspectives from zoning, development, planning, and design. These interviews provided insight into nearby development, lessons learned from development projects in their municipality, including evaluation of externalities and communication of their plan to constituencies, and preferences around communication and collaboration with Belmont (*See Appendix F for interview protocol*).

## V. Detailed Findings

The following findings structured as mapped to the four research sub-questions:

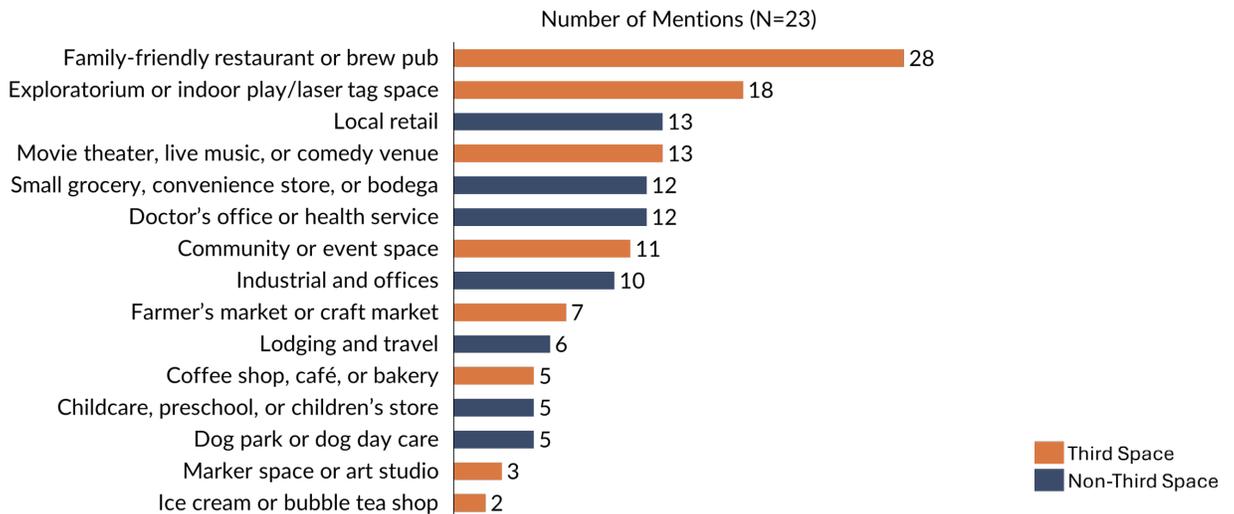
- 1) **Amenities:** What types of non-residential amenities and services are residents interested in seeing along Brighton St. Corridor?
- 2) **Resident Vision:** What vision do residents have for the future of the Brighton St. Corridor?
- 3) **Private Sector:** What would make this project attractive (or not) for developers? For property owners?
- 4) **Communication:** How should Belmont communicate the project and its impacts to Town Meeting Members and residents?

### (1) Residents' Preferred Amenities

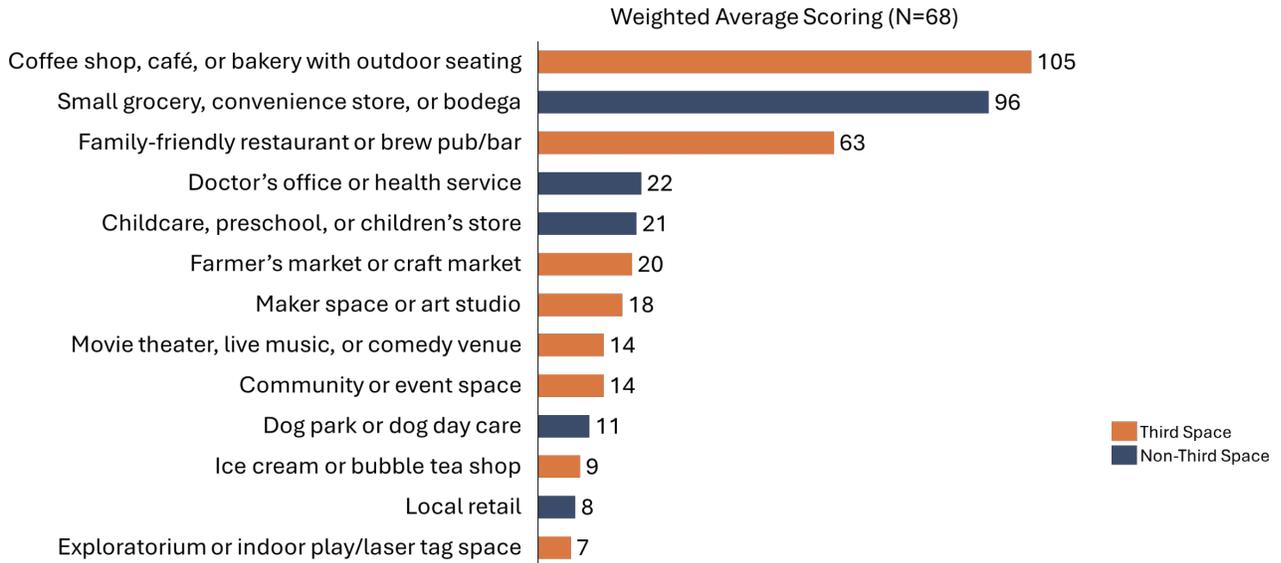
#### **Key Insights**

- Resident focus groups and Hill Estates survey respondents mainly agree on the preferred amenities in the area, choosing places to eat, gather, and shop (*See Figures 9 and 10*).
- Residents express a preference for local businesses, but understand the importance of a balance between local and chain businesses, given the stability that chains offer.
- Residents express a desire for third spaces, or community gathering places outside of their home or work, where they can socialize and meet other residents.
- There is a gap in the amenities residents would like to have in Belmont, requiring them to travel outside of the Town to access them.

#### **Key Data**



**Figure 9. Preferred Amenities Mentioned in Resident Focus Groups**



**Figure 10. Preferred Amenities Ranked in Hill Estates Survey** (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)?)

## (2) Residents' Vision and Concerns

### Key Insights

- Residents prefer familiar, warm architecture (e.g., brick), active sidewalks and upper-level setbacks, and greenery and natural features.
- The majority express openness to a building height of up to 4 stories.
- Residents want sufficient parking and a variety of transportation modes in the area.
- Residents are most concerned with traffic and congestion in the area, as well as the safety of pedestrians and bikers.
- Other concerns residents express include the loss of housing affordability, the lack of clarity around the impact on tax revenue, and flooding and contamination in the area.

### Key Data

Residents express their preferences across look and feel, building height, parking, and mobility and safety, with look and feel being the most mentioned aspect. The following details their preferences in order from most to least mentioned:

Design Element	Details
Look & Feel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Sense of Place:</b> Nearly all residents desire a cohesive destination that fits Belmont’s small-town character.</li> <li>● <b>Street-level Activation:</b> Residents state preference for active sidewalks with street-accessible storefronts.</li> <li>● <b>Familiar Architecture and Materials:</b> Residents express mixed preferences between modern and traditional design but show strong support for brick and other warm, approachable materials.</li> <li>● <b>Integration of Nature:</b> Residents value “organic” or “green” elements in the community, including greenery, natural materials, and features that create opportunities for people to gather.  <i>“I’m a fan of brickwork—I think it’s a lovely part of this area.”</i>  <i>“The idea of spaces with greenery and twinkly lights where people could spill out is appealing.”</i>  <i>“I like areas that are welcoming, where you can walk the sidewalks, and egress out of the shop is easy to do.”</i></li> </ul>
Building Height	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Residents predominantly supported a building height limit of <b>four stories</b>. A few emphasized added height for rooftop HVAC accommodation.</li> <li>● Residents favor <b>setbacks</b>, especially of upper levels, to prevent tall buildings from feeling “oppressive.”</li> <li>● Several residents acknowledge economically viable height limits will be <b>determined by developers</b>.  <i>“Realistically, you wouldn’t go higher than four stories—that is the level people will tolerate.”</i></li> </ul>
Parking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Residents express interest in seeing <b>sufficient parking</b> with any development that occurs.</li> <li>● Putting parking in the back is a popular way of supporting curb appeal.  <i>“We have to think about parking over there because there isn’t any street parking.”</i>  <i>“If we don’t include parking, it will be a challenge to find a retail that would survive solely on the bike path.”</i></li> </ul>
Mobility & Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Residents support <b>diversity in modes of transportation</b>.</li> <li>● 8 focus group participants mentioned <b>walkability to amenities</b> - and Hill Estate respondents desire <b>bikeability</b>.</li> <li>● Ensuring <b>safety</b> at the intersection and around busy traffic was a core priority (70% of Hill Estates respondents rate this concern as very or somewhat concerning).  <i>“Accommodate biking, walking, and driving.”</i></li> </ul>

Residents also express concerns about redevelopment in the area, particularly regarding traffic, affordability and equity of housing and amenities, financial impacts of development on the Town, and environmental concerns. The following details their concerns from most to least mentioned:

Concern	Details
Traffic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>More traffic and congestion</b> is the top concern for focus groups and Hill Estates respondents (86% rate this concern as very or somewhat concerning) .</li> <li>● Some suggest <b>multimodal transit or transit-oriented development</b> as a tool for alleviation.</li> <li>● Some suggest it was <b>not resolvable</b>, but created <b>opportunity</b>.</li> </ul> <p><i>“(The road) can’t handle the traffic and is bumpy with potholes.”</i></p>
Affordability & Equity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>78%</b> of Hill Estates respondents say they are somewhat or very concerned about the <b>loss of affordable or family housing</b>.</li> <li>● 6 comments in focus groups mention <b>affordability of housing</b> (particularly Hill Estates) and <b>amenities</b>.</li> </ul> <p><i>“This area (Hill Estates) includes voices that are underrepresented in our community.”</i></p>
Financial impacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Many recognize the importance of <b>generating tax revenue</b>.</li> <li>● Some express an interest in <b>revenue</b> driving decision-making.</li> <li>● Some hold reservations that increased population or traffic could burden public services further.</li> </ul> <p><i>“When we talk about revenue, we are really talking about preserving schools, keeping seniors in Town, and letting people stay in homes.”</i></p>
Environmental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Residents expressed concerns about <b>flooding</b> in the area and a desire for adjustments to mitigate the risks.</li> <li>● Concerns were raised regarding <b>environmental contamination</b> from Pure Coat.</li> <li>● 55% of Hill Estates survey respondents rate this concern as very or somewhat concerning.</li> </ul> <p><i>“The Pure Coat site raises issues of environmental contamination.”</i>  <i>“French Construction elevated their site above the floodplain.”</i></p>

Using the above resident input, Able.City generated the following renderings to visualize what select areas of the corridor might look like (See Figures 11-13).



**Figure 11. Before & After Rendering of Brighton Street and Vale Road, going south**



**Figure 12. Before & After Rendering of Brighton Street before Hamilton Road, going south**



**Figure 13. Before & After Rendering of Brighton Street and Hamilton Road, going west**

### (3) Developers' and Property Owners' Considerations for Redevelopment Feasibility

#### **Key Insights**

#### **SITE: How the Surroundings Shape the Site**

- Developers share that fragmented ownership across different parcels limits redevelopment feasibility. They note that site control or a clear distribution strategy are important pre-conditions to committing to a project - and that this fragmentation might increase coordination costs.
- Developers share the small sizes of the parcels and encumbrances on key properties, including the MBTA property, limit flexibility in site planning and phasing.
- Developers perceive the site as competing with other active and more established districts nearby, which could potentially divert market demand and investor attraction toward alternatives that are lower in risk.
- While the area is currently undervalued compared to adjacent neighborhoods, developers see long-term appreciation potential here, especially given the site's proximity to Alewife and the more established districts.

#### **INFRASTRUCTURE: Transit-oriented Development Improves Feasibility**

- Developers identify limited road capacity, traffic congestion, and difficult site access as major deterrents, affecting construction logistics and reducing the kinds of uses that could succeed.
- Developers note parking development is expensive due to poor soils, which makes below-grade solutions less viable.
- Developers express concern that parking requirements may constrain density, unless there are alternative mobility strategies.
- Developers see mobility as a powerful asset: the bike path, walkability potential, and proximity to the commuter rail could improve feasibility.

#### **MARKET: Aligning Uses with Demand**

- Developers agree that housing is the anchor use that makes the most sense in Belmont - and that everything else, including retail, hospitality, and office space depends on increasing residential density. They note that ground-floor retail can work, if enough residents support sufficient density.
- Developers report the market for lab and office space is currently "weak," and these uses need larger assembled parcels than the Belmont site currently offers. They also note hospitality could work in a targeted way, with sufficiently strong access and institutional capital. Ultimately, they share that feasibility depends on height and density.

### **FEASIBILITY: Establishing a Clear Path Forward**

- Developers consistently state that low-density projects do not “pencil out” given the high cost of land and construction in the Greater Boston area. To make financials work, they note a minimum height of 5 stories as an important condition influencing feasibility.
- While financial incentives are welcome, process certainty is the most critical feasibility factor for developers. They view lengthy, uncertain permitting timelines as a major financial risk that drives capital away.
- Developers highlight that feasibility of housing is heavily impacted by parking requirements. Developers note that underground parking is not feasible due to poor soil conditions and high water tables, while structured parking is prohibitively expensive. Consequently, they view parking minimums as a barrier to feasible development.
- Developers agree that the "highest and best use" for the site is currently residential. The market for life sciences and office space is described as "cratering" or "weak," meaning feasibility relies almost entirely on housing or niche commercial uses like extended-stay hotels.

### **POLICY INCENTIVES: Desired Solutions to Support Redevelopment**

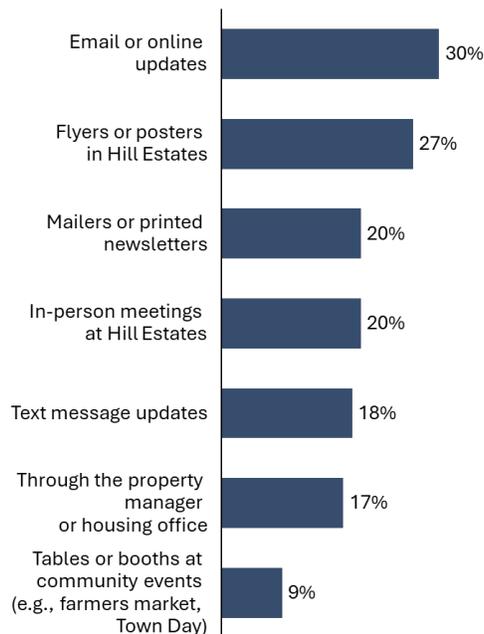
- Private entities strongly prefer "by-right" zoning that is clear and predictable, often referencing Cambridge as a model to emulate. They advocate for a regulatory framework that minimizes discretionary reviews which can be hijacked by political opposition.
- To bridge the gap between high costs and achievable rents, developers suggest policy tools such as TIFs (Tax Increment Financing), utility discounts, and density bonuses in exchange for community benefits.
- A key policy request is the reduction of parking minimums. Developers argue that market demand supports lower ratios, which would directly improve project affordability and design.
- Private actors argue that a developer-led rezoning process is too adversarial and risky, and that having the Town establish a master plan and set the guardrails and vision might give investors the confidence to participate.

## (4) Considerations for Communication

### Key Insights

- Resident and private sector stakeholders, along with peer cities, emphasize the importance of multi-channel communication (both digital and in-person) to ensure information is as accessible as possible (*See Figure 14*).
  - ◆ Digital strategies noted include QR codes, text notifications, hybrid meetings, social media, and online surveys.
  - ◆ In-person engagement methods noted include multi-stakeholder working groups, mailers, charettes, and walking tours.
- Residents state they prefer to receive information at popular public events in Belmont, such as farmers' markets, soccer games, and Town day.
- Stakeholders express a preference for consistent, iterative engagement, rather than reactive or one-off engagement.
  - ◆ Cambridge notes they did this for their Alewife Quadrangle Zoning project via an iterative and multi-step process consisting of multi-stakeholder working groups, focus groups, and tabling, and a public presentation before a proposal or plan is officially developed.
- Developers express a desire to have opportunities to provide direct input on their needs.

### Key Data



**Figure 14. Preferred Method of Outreach in Hill Estates survey** (*Survey Question: What is the best way for the Town to share updates or get your feedback about this project? Please select all that apply.*)

# VI. Toolkit

Full images included in supplemental toolkit document.

## Resident Vision Guide

 <h3>FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS</h3>	 <p>Many residents recognize the importance of generating tax revenue, but are concerned about the impact of increased taxes on the local economy. They are also concerned about the impact of increased taxes on the local economy. They are also concerned about the impact of increased taxes on the local economy.</p> <p><b>Residents Tend to Support:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professional financial assessments</li> <li>• Transparency in expected impacts</li> </ul> <p><b>Residents Tend to Oppose:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unclear and unsubstantial financial/revenue implications</li> </ul>
<h3>COMMUNITY</h3>	 <p>Residents near the Brighton Street Corridor largely support the idea of increasing density and public spaces. They are also concerned about the impact of increased density on the local economy. They are also concerned about the impact of increased density on the local economy.</p> <p><b>Residents Tend to Support:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family and senior-friendly outdoor living</li> <li>• Accessible and inclusive spaces</li> </ul> <p><b>Residents Tend to Oppose:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individual experiences</li> </ul>
<h3>AFFORDABILITY &amp; EQUITY</h3>	 <p>Housing is the top concern for affordability and equity. Residents are also concerned about the impact of increased density on the local economy. They are also concerned about the impact of increased density on the local economy.</p> <p><b>Residents Tend to Support:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Affordable housing</li> <li>• Protecting and integrating Hill Estates</li> </ul> <p><b>Residents Tend to Oppose:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Luxury housing and upscale amenities</li> </ul>
<h3>SUSTAINABILITY</h3>	 <p>Flooding is a top concern around redevelopment in this area, with many residents expressing concern about the impact of increased density on the local economy. They are also concerned about the impact of increased density on the local economy.</p> <p><b>Residents Tend to Support:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Environmental protection</li> <li>• Contamination and pollution</li> </ul> <p><b>Residents Tend to Oppose:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduced green space</li> </ul>
<h3>PARKING</h3>	 <p>Despite desiring walkability and livability, many residents believe some parking is essential, being 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 living and small-scale look and feel, putting parking in the middle of trying to get the job done.</p> <p><b>Residents Tend to Support:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being able to park at amenities</li> <li>• Parking spaces for housing</li> <li>• Parking in the back</li> </ul> <p><b>Residents Tend to Oppose:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Large parking lots</li> </ul>
<h3>MOBILITY</h3>	 <p>Residents support multimodal mobility and believe the area should accommodate walking, biking, and driving. This should aim to alleviate reliance on automobile traffic, as <b>overcongestion is one of residents' top concerns around future development.</b> 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.</p> <p><b>Residents Tend to Support:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multimodal transit</li> <li>• Walkability</li> </ul> <p><b>Residents Tend to Oppose:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overcongestion</li> <li>• Traffic</li> </ul>
<h3>LOOK &amp; FEEL</h3>	 <p>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 value "connect" and "green" elements, including greenery, natural materials, and features that create opportunities for people to gather outside.</p> <p><b>Residents Tend to Support:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Active sidewalks</li> <li>• Familiar materials and designs</li> <li>• Open and green spaces</li> </ul> <p><b>Residents Tend to Oppose:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Urban and modern materials and design</li> <li>• Hostile and car-oriented design</li> </ul>
<h3>BUILDING HEIGHT</h3>	 <p>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 are concerned about revenue generation and affordability as increased height especially setbacks of higher levels, as a opportunity to prevent taller buildings from feeling "oppressive."</p> <p><b>Residents Tend to Support:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Modest height increases (up to 4 stories)</li> <li>• Evidence and reasoning for height increases</li> <li>• Upper-level setbacks</li> </ul> <p><b>Residents Tend to Oppose:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Large height increases (over 4 stories)</li> </ul>
<h3>AMENITIES</h3>	 <p>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. chain stores, but there is a strong preference for local businesses. A wide agreement that local amenities should generally be smart and scaled to the needs of the community.</p> <p><b>Residents Tend to Support:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A mix of local businesses, regional chains, and national chains</li> <li>• Family-friendly and affordable</li> <li>• Small-scale establishments</li> </ul> <p><b>Residents Tend to Oppose:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National big-box stores</li> </ul>

# Private Entity Vision Guide/Design Considerations

SITE	INFRASTRUCTURE	MARKET
<p>Private entities view the site as a prime location for <b>higher-density housing or mixed-use redevelopment</b> given its proximity to Cambridge and transit, but they identify significant constraints such as existing active uses (maintenance shops), conservation land, and the challenges of assembling fragmented parcels.</p> <p><b>Private Entities Tend to Support:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>High-density residential use:</b> Developers consistently identify housing as the "highest and best use" for the site given market dynamics.</li> <li>• <b>Resolving large parcels:</b> To make certain developments like life sciences use projects viable, developers note, "You'd have to really assemble quite a large parcel."</li> </ul> <p><b>Private Entities Tend to Oppose:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Low-density industrial use:</b> There is a consensus that "Industrial is out the door... no one in Belmont is going to want big trucks coming in and out."</li> <li>• <b>Lack of site control:</b> Developers are wary of proposing plans without ownership, noting, "It's hard to do something like this without site control, and you cannot assume that others will allow redevelopment on property they own."</li> </ul>	<p><b>Traffic congestion</b> on Brighton Street is a universal concern that could hinder development, while non-automotive connections (bike paths, pedestrian access to Alewife) are seen as critical assets that should be enhanced to offset vehicle traffic limitations.</p> <p><b>Private Entities Tend to Support:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Bike and pedestrian connectivity:</b> Developers strongly favor improvements that "make direct... pedestrian and bicycle safe connections to the bike path" to improve accessibility without adding cars.</li> <li>• <b>Proximity to transit:</b> The potential for a commuter rail stop or better connection to Alewife is viewed as a "significant driver of the feasibility of the project."</li> </ul> <p><b>Private Entities Tend to Oppose:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Expensive parking:</b> Owners and developers flag that "Other is a no-right-only and it leads to a lot of congestion" which complicates access.</li> <li>• <b>Expensive parking solutions:</b> Due to poor soil conditions, developers oppose requirements that force them to build underground, noting, "You can't really do below grade parking."</li> </ul>	<p>The market for office and lab space is viewed as weak or "cratering," whereas demand for housing is robust; <b>retail is seen as viable only if supported</b> by sufficient residential density or specific niches like extended-stay hospitality.</p> <p><b>Private Entities Tend to Support:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Residential density to support retail:</b> Developers emphasize that "Increasing residential density... increases the probability that you'll be able to support more commercial period."</li> <li>• <b>Extended-stay hotels:</b> This asset class is seen as a potential fit for the affluent demographic, with one expert noting, "Extended-stay hotels work well in affluent communities. Renovation, relocation, and family visits all create demand"</li> </ul> <p><b>Private Entities Tend to Oppose:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Lab and office development:</b> There is skepticism about these uses, with one stakeholder stating, "It's well known that lab space is cratering."</li> <li>• <b>Unsupported retail mandates:</b> Developers warn against forcing retail where it cannot survive, asking, "What kind of commercial is actually going to be supportable in Belmont?"</li> </ul>
FEASIBILITY	POLICY CONSIDERATIONS	COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
<p>Financial viability for redevelopment hinges on <b>achieving critical mass (density and height)</b> to offset <b>high land and construction costs</b>, with a strong preference for "by-right" zoning to reduce risk and timeline uncertainty</p> <p><b>Private Entities Tend to Support:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Greater height and density:</b> To make ground-up construction affordable, developers assert, "You need to assume at least a 5- or 6-story height... In order to make it feasible."</li> <li>• <b>Fast-tracking permitting:</b> Speed is equated with financial viability as "fast tracking development is a huge help... every month of permitting delays is money not being put to work."</li> </ul> <p><b>Private Entities Tend to Oppose:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>High inclusionary zoning requirements:</b> Requirements above 15-20% are viewed as deal-breakers, with one developer noting, "Inclusionary going to 20%... right now is not really feasible".</li> <li>• <b>High parking ratios:</b> Mandating two spaces per unit is described as "not realistic" compared to nearby Cambridge standards.</li> </ul>	<p>Private sector actors want Belmont to adopt <b>clear, flexible zoning</b> similar to Cambridge's ("zone it like it's Cambridge, zone it like allows for higher FAR and minimal setbacks, alongside financial incentives like tax relief or infrastructure support).</p> <p><b>Private Entities Tend to Support:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Cambridge-style zoning flexibility:</b> Owners explicitly state, "If you want people to participate like it's Cambridge, zone it like it's Cambridge."</li> <li>• <b>Financial and density incentives:</b> Developers argue that "Incentives unlock the ability to leverage capital," specifically citing utility discounts, tax incentives, and increased height allowances.</li> </ul> <p><b>Private Entities Tend to Oppose:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Restrictive height caps:</b> Limiting buildings to three stories is seen as fatal to redevelopment, with one stakeholder noting, "If you're not going to let me build three stories, I'm not sure redevelopment will make sense."</li> <li>• <b>Uncertain regulatory processes:</b> The risk of indefinite delays is a major deterrent as "Certainty matters above all... it takes years and sometimes millions of dollars to get a project permitted."</li> </ul>	<p>Developers view community engagement as a challenging but essential part of the process that works best when the town establishes a <b>clear, supportive framework</b> and vision upfront, rather than leaving developers to fight battles alone.</p> <p><b>Private Entities Tend to Support:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Interactive design processes:</b> Engaging neighbors early through "design charrettes... to hear what people think can be done" is cited as a helpful strategy.</li> <li>• <b>Town-led vision:</b> The most successful projects occur "where the public sector has clearly articulated a need, and there's grassroots understanding of that need."</li> </ul> <p><b>Private Entities Tend to Oppose:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Proposing without a framework:</b> Developers want to avoid situations where "there is no such framework, and the developer is just showing up... land getting yelled at."</li> <li>• <b>Ineffective outreach methods:</b> Tactics like door-knocking are described as "ineffective... Residents dislike it."</li> </ul>

# Parcel Ownership Map



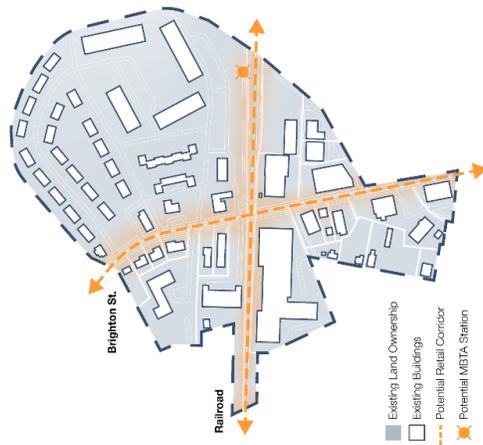
# Design Guidelines Visualization



Resident considerations  
Private sector considerations  
Resident/private sector alignment

A legend located in the bottom right corner of the page. It consists of three colored squares stacked vertically: a blue square, an orange square, and a purple square. To the right of these squares are the corresponding text labels: "Resident considerations" for the blue square, "Private sector considerations" for the orange square, and "Resident/private sector alignment" for the purple square.

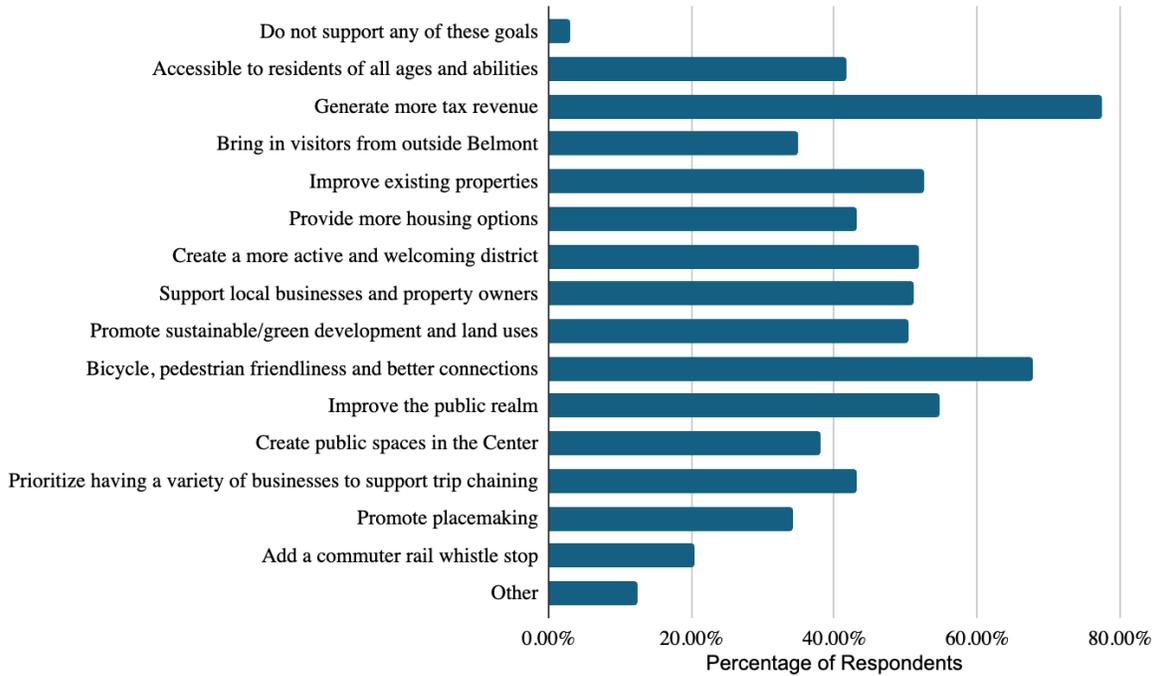
# Phasing Strategy



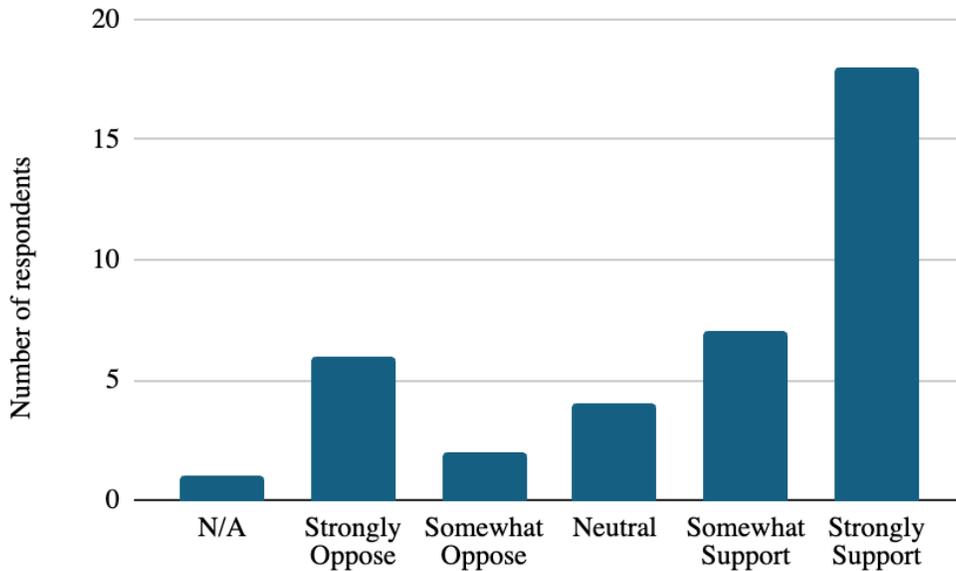
# Appendix

## Appendix A: Town of Belmont Survey Analysis

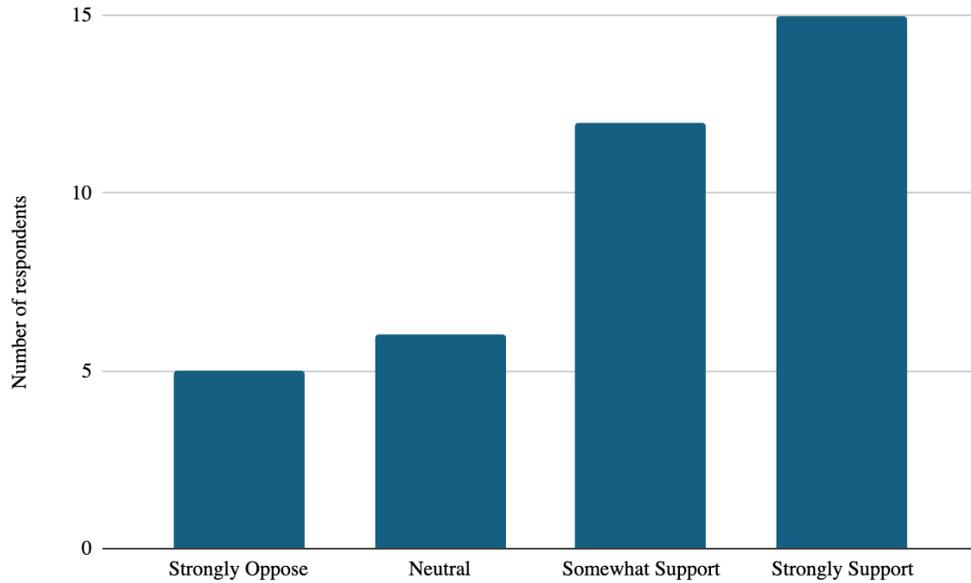
Q. What goals should the Town embrace related to the Brighton project area? Check all that apply.



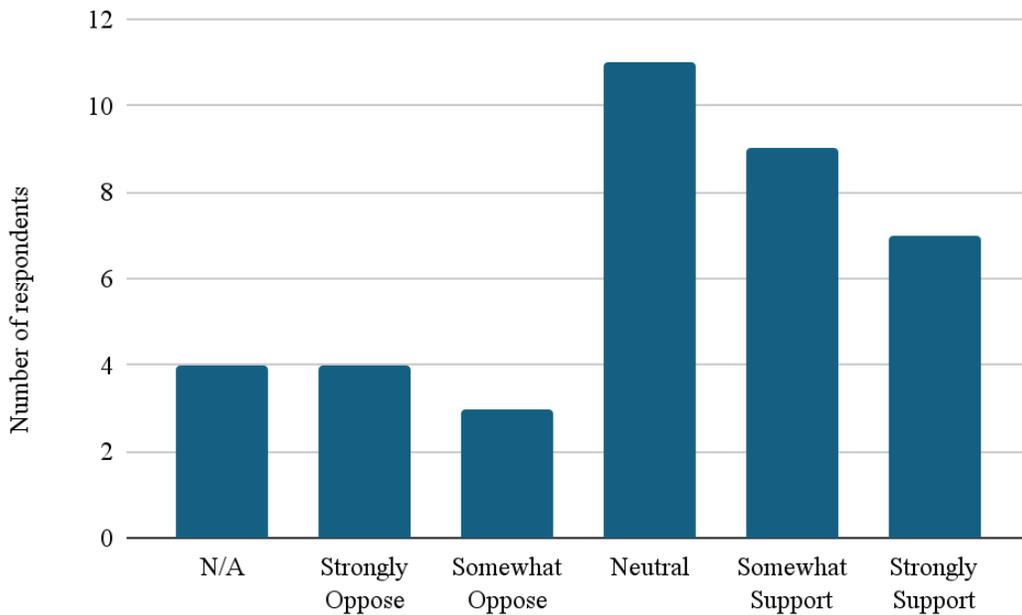
Q. How would you characterize your level of support for the following possible changes for the project area? [More retail offerings.]



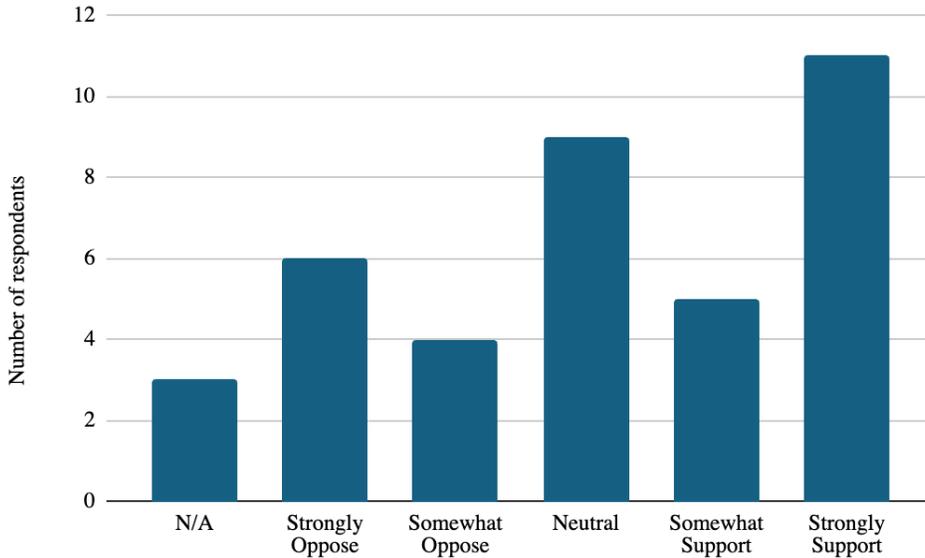
Q. How would you characterize your level of support for the following possible changes for the project area? [More restaurants and entertainment.]



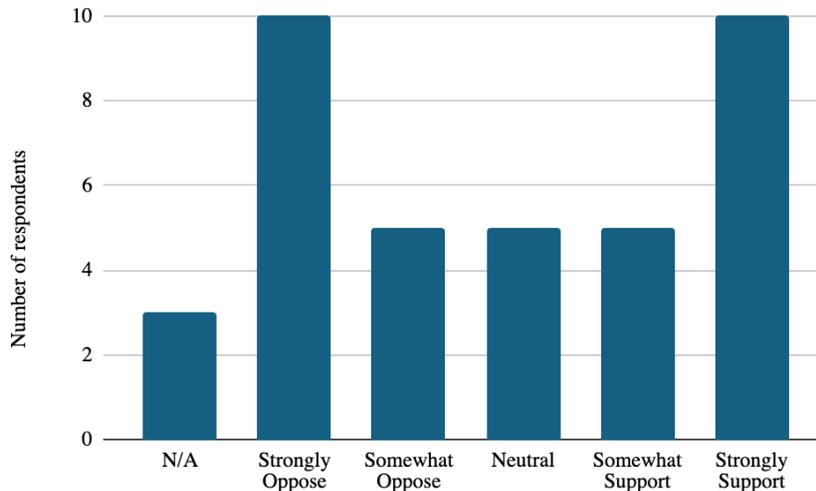
Q. How would you characterize your level of support for the following possible changes for the project area? [More mixed-use buildings.]



*Q. How would you characterize your level of support for the following possible changes for the project area? [Moderate upzoning to allow some additional density (changing the allowed zoning to allow more building area).]*



*Q. How would you characterize your level of support for the following possible changes for the project area? [More significant upzone to allow greater density and mix of uses.]*



**Appendix B: Amenity Map**

[Link to dashboard here](#)

*Note: Built on R using OpenStreetMaps data (as of November 24, 2025)*

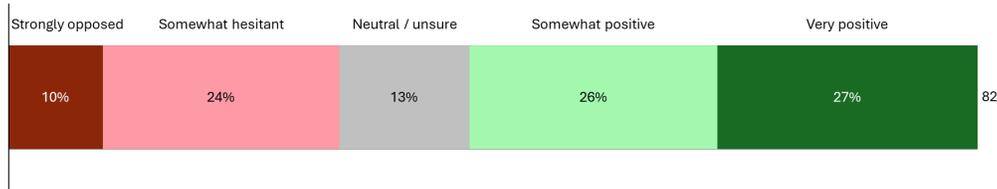
## Appendix C: Resident focus group and interview protocol

1. Tell us about a recent fun experience you enjoyed in public in Belmont. It can be at a park, restaurant, or any other location open to the public.
2. **ACTIVITY (COLLAGE):** Participants assemble a collage of their long-term vision for the Brighton Street Corridor—think 10, 15 years in the future. Facilitators ask questions about why people are choosing to include the images they select, and communicate that participants can sketch or write notes on the collage as needed.
  - a. When you imagine the Brighton Street Corridor 10 or 20 years from now, what do you hope it feels like as a place to live, work or visit?
    - i. Please give your top 3 desired adjectives that come to mind when picturing an ideal Brighton Street area: e.g. modern, cozy, rustic.
  - b. What construction materials are you most interested in seeing (e.g. brick facade)?
  - c. How many stories would you like buildings to be?
3. **ACTIVITY (STICKY NOTES):** What types of new day-to-day amenities and stores would you like to see at Brighton Street in the long-term? (Especially think if there are any that you currently leave Belmont to use).
  - a. Do you have any strong preference between chain amenities, local businesses, or some mix of the two in Belmont?
  - b. How about for your older neighbors? Younger neighbors? Families? What are you hearing from different community members, especially renters or others who are not as civically engaged?
4. Beyond the amenities and stores you need day-to-day, what experiences, cultural offerings, or other types of establishments would make the Brighton Street Corridor a unique destination?
  - a. Examples: art gallery, escape room, axe throwing, small movie theater, music venue, “paint and sip”-concept creative workshop, pool hall, arcade, smash room, internet cafe, pickleball brewery
5. When you think about nearby towns (ex. Arlington, Cambridge, Lexington), what amenities do they have that you wish the Brighton Street Corridor (or Belmont) did?
6. What values should guide new development in Belmont?
7. What are your top concerns related to a possible Brighton Street redevelopment?
  - a. What would you most like to see from the Town to mitigate those concerns?
  - b. Top traffic concerns specifically, and how they could be mitigated?
  - c. What other concerns come to mind when you consider the perspectives and things you’ve heard from other Belmont residents? Especially renters and other people who are not as civically engaged.

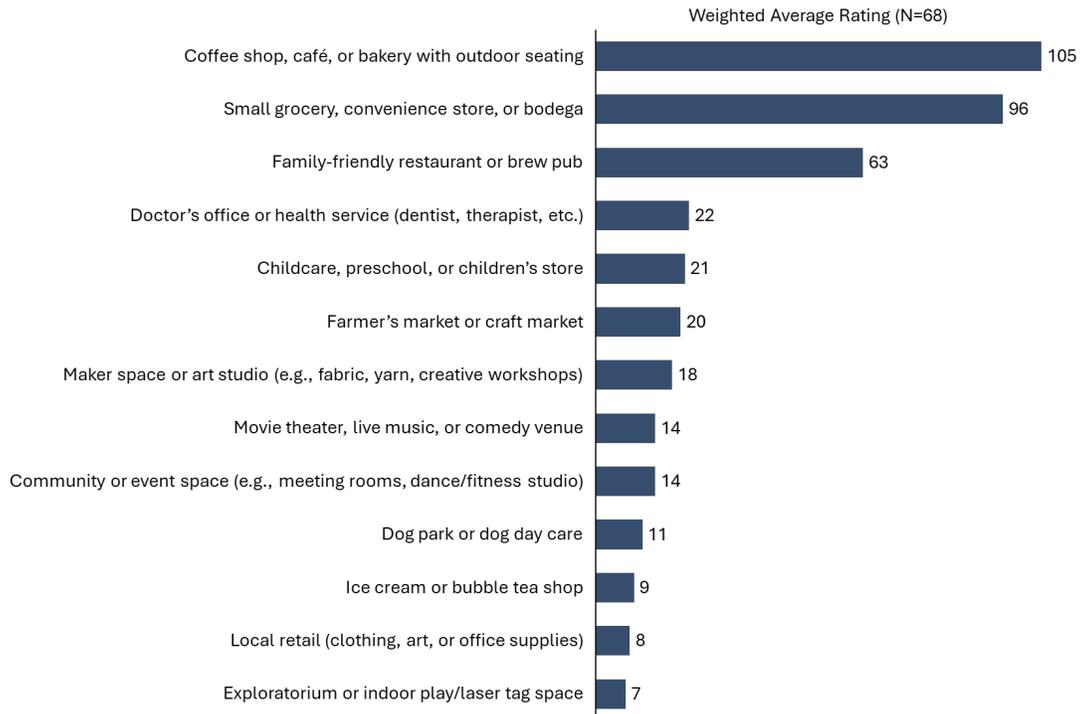
8. What would transparent and inclusive communication about this project from the Town look like to you?

**Appendix D: Hill Estates survey questions & results**

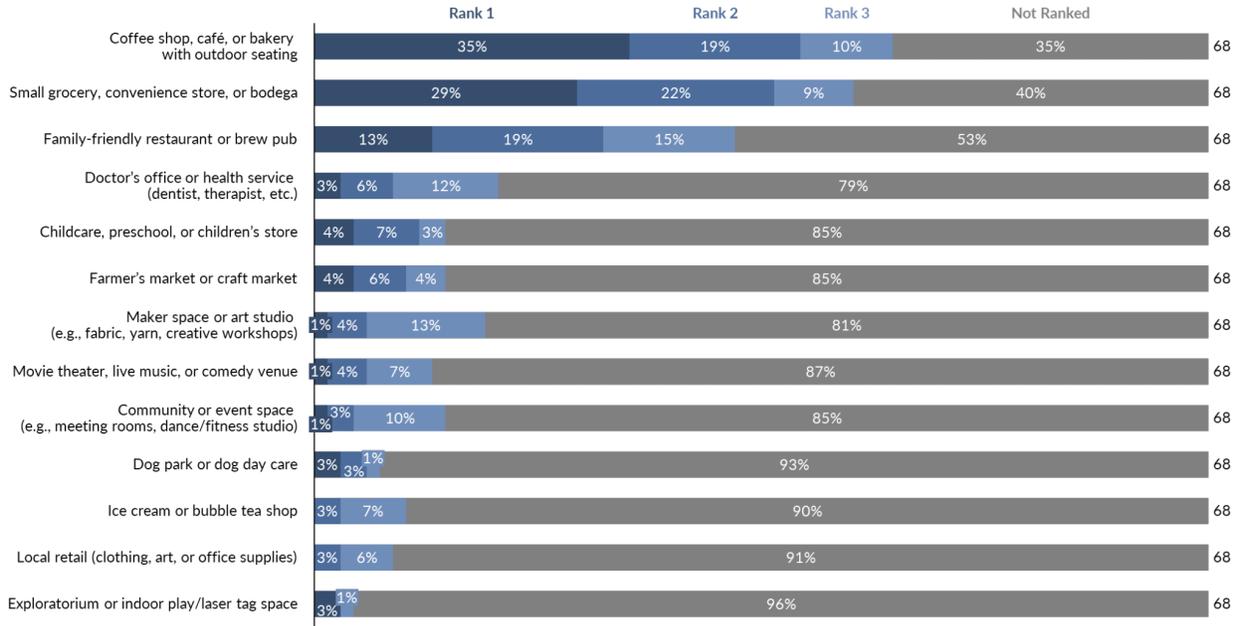
*Q: As a reminder, The Town of Belmont is exploring possible updates to the Brighton Street Corridor (the area near Hill Estates and the Community Path) that could include new shops, restaurants, small businesses, housing, or community spaces. No decisions have been made. Overall, how do you feel about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



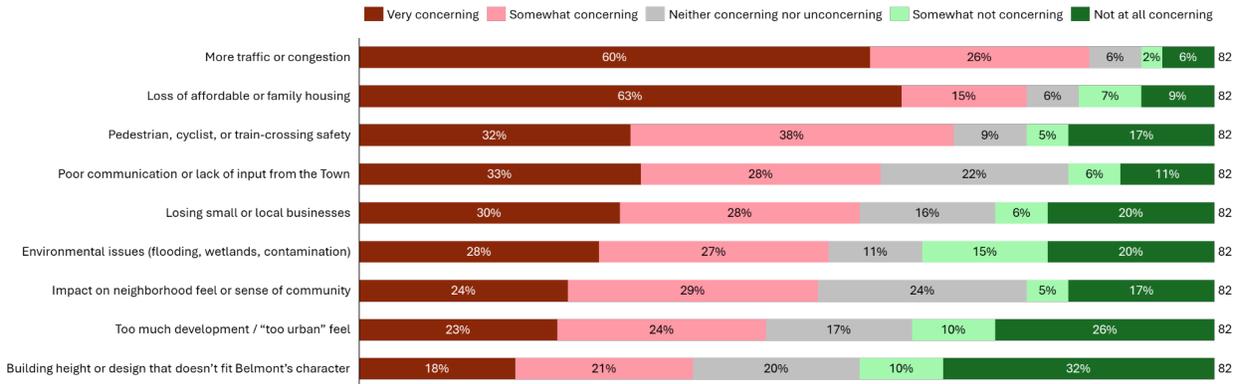
*Q: Please rank the top 3 amenities and/or experiences you would most like to see along Brighton Street in the future (10-15 years from now)? Please click and drag the options on the left to a box on the right.*



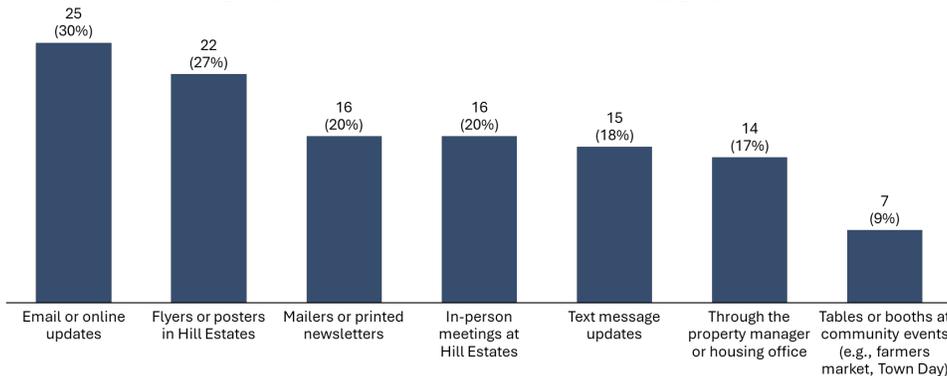
**- DRAFT: FOR DISCUSSION PURPOSES ONLY -**



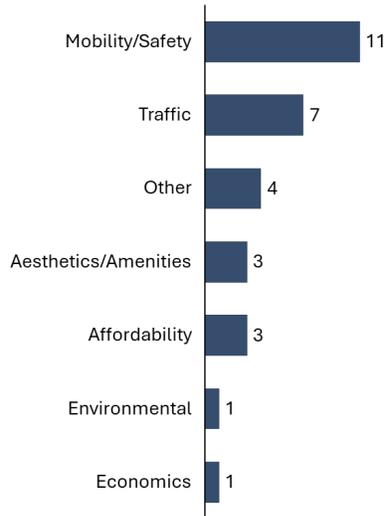
*Q: Some people might have concerns about potential development in the Brighton corridor. Please rate the following concerns from 1 (not at all concerning) to 5 (very concerning).*



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



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



## **Appendix E: Questions used in Private Sector Interviews**

### **Developers:**

1. Contextual Question: What has been your involvement in development near Belmont, or Boston as a whole?
2. Developer Perception
  - a. In today's climate, and looking ten years down the road, what kinds of development opportunities do you see as most viable to encourage commercial growth on Brighton Street?
  - b. What aspects of the towns that you've worked in's current development process or policies make projects easier or harder to pursue?
3. Developer Priorities
  - a. When evaluating whether to invest in a site like Brighton Street, what are the biggest factors that influence your decision?
  - b. How do you typically engage with residents or local businesses during a project, and what works well (or doesn't) in those interactions?
  - c. If Belmont wanted to make Brighton Street a more attractive place to invest, what concrete actions or changes would make the biggest difference?

### **Property Owners:**

1. Contextual Question: How do you currently use or manage your property on Brighton Street, and what are your long-term goals for it?
2. Resident Perception
  - a. What challenges or barriers would you anticipate facing if you wanted to redevelop or improve your property?

- b. What do you think would make Brighton Street a more attractive or successful commercial area for you and for the community?
- c. How do you feel about the idea of larger-scale redevelopment along Brighton Street?
- 3. Resident Priorities
  - a. What could the Town do to make it easier or more appealing for you to invest in your property or partner in redevelopment?
  - b. Are there specific Town processes or regulations that feel confusing or restrictive?
  - c. How could the Town better communicate opportunities or support to property owners?

### **Appendix F: Questions used in Peer City Interviews**

1. Can you briefly describe [the project or area in the community that might be comparable to Belmont's Brighton Street area]? Namely: What were the goals of your project? What were some of the key challenges and opportunities your town faced in getting the project started?
  - a. Cambridge: [Massachusetts Avenue and Cambridge Street](#)
  - b. Watertown: [Watertown-Cambridge Greenway](#) and [Commercial Corridor Guidance](#)
2. What strategies helped make your city a "destination" for both residents and visitors?
  - a. Prompts: public spaces, events, anchor tenants, walkability improvements, arts/cultural programming, branding efforts
3. From your experience, what factors make a project like this attractive to developers? What makes such projects attractive (or not) to property owners or small businesses?
4. How did you balance local character and economic development goals? How did you ensure new amenities complemented existing businesses and community identity?
5. How did your community communicate about the project (its goals, benefits, and potential impacts) to residents?
  - a. What messages or channels were most effective (e.g., social media, mailers, pop-up events, public meetings)?
  - b. How did you address skepticism or opposition?
6. How did you maintain engagement and transparency throughout the process? Any best practices for fostering trust or enthusiasm?
7. Is there anything I didn't ask about that you want to share? What else should Belmont be considering in this early stage about its Brighton Street Corridor?