

## Belmont Center Overlay Zoning – Community FAQ

### January 29, 2026

#### 1. What is being proposed?

The Town is proposing two zoning overlay districts for Belmont Center:

- **Belmont Center Overlay District (BCOD)** – focused on mixed-use buildings with required ground-floor commercial space.
- **Center Gateway Overlay District (CGOD)** – a small area on Concord Avenue intended to allow commercial and hotel use.

These overlays **do not replace existing zoning**. They add an optional set of rules that property owners may choose to use.

#### 2. What would these proposals accomplish?

- **Bring more foot traffic and shoppers to Belmont Center** by promoting reinvestment, encouraging creation of a built-in customer base and strengthening Leonard Street as a walkable, active main street.
- **Improve the Town's finances** by expanding the commercial tax base and reducing over-reliance on residential property taxes.
- **Create housing options that Belmont lacks**—smaller apartments for seniors, empty-nesters, young professionals, and people who want to stay in Belmont without a single-family home.
- **Preserve Belmont's character** by using a form-based zoning code that regulates building form and appearance, including height, massing, siting, and design—not just use.
- **Advance sustainability goals** by focusing growth in a walkable, transit-served location.
- **Provide long-term flexibility**: zoning creates options, not mandates, and any development would occur organically over decades.

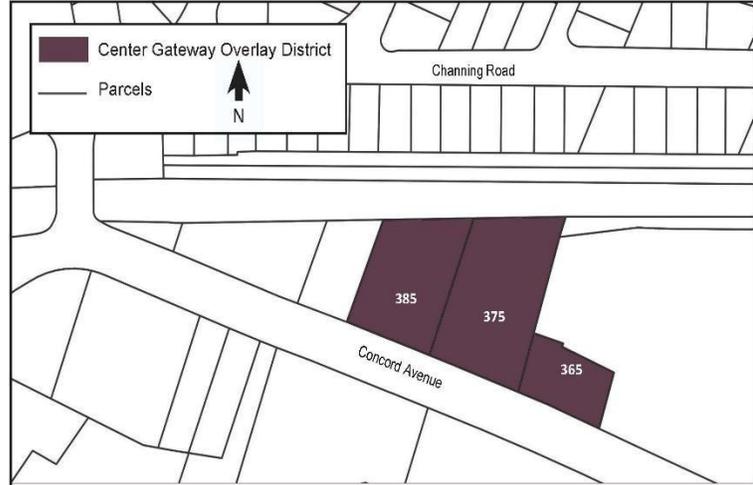
#### 3. Is this a specific development project?

No. This is **zoning only**. There is no developer, no approved project, and no requirement that any property be redeveloped. It sets out what Belmont wants, so that investment in our Town works on our terms.

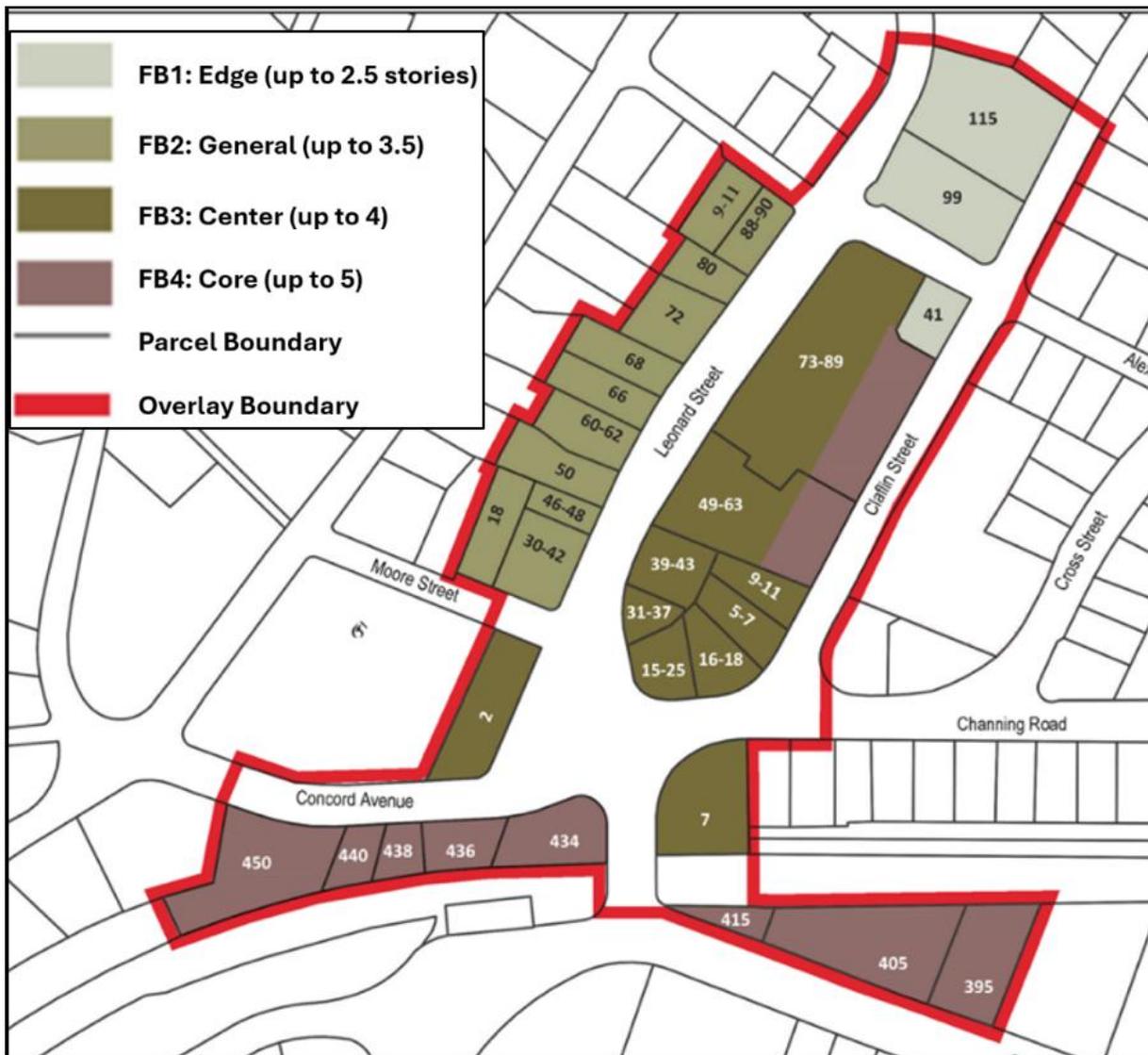
#### 4. Where does this apply?

The Center Gateway zoning overlay proposal covers three parcels on Concord Avenue (map at right).

The Belmont Center zoning overlay proposal covers Belmont Center, including Leonard, Claflin, Cross, and Alexander Streets, plus nearby sections of Concord Avenue and Channing Road (map below).



The town-owned Claflin Parking Lot is **NOT** included in either of the overlay districts.



## 5. How tall could buildings be?

- Maximum heights range from **2.5 to 5 stories**, depending on location.
- Along Leonard Street, the maximum height is **3.5 to 4 stories**, depending on the side of the street.
- The tallest buildings (5 stories / 55.5 feet) are limited to specific areas on Concord Ave and Claflin Street.

## What is Allowed in Each Zone?

FB1: Edge	FB2: General	FB3: Center	FB4: Core	Center Gateway Overlay District
Buildings up to 2.5 stories	3.5 story buildings	4 story buildings	5 story buildings	5 story buildings
Architectural appearance consistent with single- and two-family homes, but commercial and office uses allowed	Mix of semi-detached, detached, and attached mixed-use buildings. Flat roofs allow for green or roof-top uses	Attached mixed-use buildings with continuous street wall Flat roofs to allow for green or roof-top uses	Urban street wall with minimal setbacks  Flat roofs allow for green or roof-top uses	Attached or detached commercial buildings with prominent entries and façades  Hotels allowed

## 6. Why is Belmont considering this now?

- Belmont Center has been studied extensively, beginning with a [community vision plan](#) completed in 2008.
- The Center is the town’s historic commercial and civic heart, but it faces vacancies, limited reinvestment, and outdated zoning.
- Belmont has budget challenges caused in part by heavy reliance on residential taxes, and this is a promising opportunity to spur new economic growth.
- Competing communities have modernized their zoning and captured economic activity that currently bypasses Belmont.

In a nutshell, this proposal implements long-standing planning goals using modern zoning tools.

## 7. What are form-based zoning codes?

Form-based zoning codes focus on **how buildings look and relate to the street**, rather than simply how they are used. They regulate:

- Building height and number of stories
- Massing, siting, and setbacks
- Ground-floor activity and transparency
- Pedestrian orientation and streetscape

This approach creates a simpler process and **more predictable, context-sensitive outcomes**.

## 8. Is anything required to be built?

No. Zoning creates **possibility**, not obligation.

## 9. How fast would development occur?

If development occurs, it would likely happen **organically over time**, influenced by:

- Interest rates and construction costs
- Goals of parcel owners
- Market demand

## 10. How much development is possible at full buildout?

Based on professional modeling (assuming every parcel redevelops to its maximum, which is unlikely):

- **Commercial space:** up to ~393,000 net new square feet
- **Residential space:** ~180 to ~520 units, assuming mostly studios and one-bedrooms
- **Hotel space:** one potential hotel, limited to **150 rooms**.

Actual outcomes would almost certainly be lower.

## 11. Would this help the Town budget?

Yes, [modeling across multiple scenarios](#) shows a **net positive fiscal impact** in every case.

Estimated annual net benefit to the town budget ranges from approximately:

- **\$300,000 (very conservative scenario)** to
- **\$2 million (optimistic scenario)**

This reflects both new commercial taxes, as well as hotel taxes in the more optimistic scenario that assumes a hotel is built.

## 12. What about school costs?

Data shows that town-center apartments overwhelmingly attract:

- Singles and couples
- Empty-nesters
- Small households

Even those scenarios that included affordable units and two-bedroom units showed a net positive impact for the town.

## 13. How will this affect parking and traffic?

Based on professional [parking](#) and [traffic](#) studies:

- Current parking resources (e.g. Clafin lot and street parking) are sufficient. Overnight parking will not be allowed.
- The area is walkable, bike-accessible, and served by transit.
- Morning commute will not be impacted; afternoon commute will see a 15-second increase.

## 14. What tools are included in the zoning to manage traffic and parking?

- Updated parking strategies and shared parking provisions
- Potential intersection signalization
- Emphasis on walking, biking, and transit use

## 15. How would local businesses be affected?

The intent is for **net positive impact**, including:

- More customers living nearby
- Increased foot traffic
- Stronger destination appeal

## 16. What about construction disruption?

The Planning Board is drafting an amendment for Annual Town Meeting this year that includes **strong construction management requirements**, such as:

- Limits on construction parking
- Business-open signage
- Phased construction planning

- Coordination with Town departments and business groups

The Town is also exploring broader business-support initiatives such as façade programs, signage flexibility, and marketing assistance.

### 17. Is there sufficient infrastructure capacity?

- **Water and sewer** systems have sufficient capacity, with site-specific review required for each project.
- **Electric service** is adequate. If upgrades are required, they will be funded by developers.
- All projects must comply with modern building codes, stormwater regulations, and energy requirements.

### 18. Will historic resources be protected?

- Historic buildings remain protected under existing demolition delay rules and deed restrictions.
- The zoning **does not encourage demolition** of historic resources.
- If redevelopment occurs due to extraordinary circumstances, the code requires context-sensitive design.

### 19. Has this been publicly reviewed?

Yes. The proposed overlays are based on the Vision for Belmont Center completed in 2008. The Planning Board's review process has extended over more than a year and has incorporated extensive public feedback. More than 30 public meetings, hearings and listening sessions have been held.

All materials, recordings, and updates are publicly available.

### 20. What about environmental considerations?

The proposal is expected to have **net positive environmental outcomes**:

- Concentrating growth in a walkable, transit-served center reduces car dependence and regional sprawl.
- All new buildings must comply with Belmont's **Specialized Stretch Energy Code**, requiring high energy efficiency and lower reliance on fossil fuels.
- Projects must meet modern **stormwater, open space, and utility standards** that did not apply to much of the existing building stock.

Any redevelopment would be subject to geotechnical review, modern building codes, and site-specific permitting requirements.

### 21. How were the buildout and fiscal estimates developed?

To understand potential impacts, the Town commissioned professional consultants to model **every parcel** in the overlay area using GIS and architectural massing software. The model:

- Applied all zoning rules, height limits, setbacks, open space, and parking requirements
- Accounted for parcel size, configuration, and access constraints
- Generated conservative and optimistic development scenarios

These buildout results were then translated into fiscal impact estimates using assessor data, school enrollment multipliers, and public finance models. Multiple scenarios were tested, all of which showed a **positive net fiscal impact** compared to existing zoning. This modeling and fiscal analysis can be found on the project site [here](#).

## 22. The Bottom Line

This zoning proposal:

- Does **not mandate development**
- Sets **clear, predictable rules** if development occurs
- Focuses growth where Belmont **can best support it**
- **Protects Belmont's character** by using Form Based Code
- **Improves fiscal stability** by diversifying sources of tax revenue

It is a long-term investment in Belmont Center's vitality, sustainability, and economic resilience.