



ULI TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PANEL REPORT

# EAST MILTON SQUARE

MILTON, MA

JANUARY 10, 2019

## ABOUT ULI BOSTON/NEW ENGLAND

ULI Boston/New England is a District Council of the Urban Land Institute (ULI), a non-profit education and research organization supported by its members. Founded in 1936, the Institute today has more than 42,000 members worldwide. ULI members represent the full spectrum of land use planning and real estate development disciplines working in the private, public, and non-profit sectors.

The ULI Boston/New England District Council is committed to advancing ULI's Mission to "provide leadership in the responsible use of land and in creating and sustaining thriving communities" through its evolving platform as the leading real estate organization for convening and sharing best practices in our region. Our community outreach programs enables local ULI leaders to identify challenges to better development, feature best practices from across the country and devise new solutions to improve land use patterns.

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## ABOUT THE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PANEL (TAP) PROGRAM

The ULI Boston/New England Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) Program provides expert, multidisciplinary, and non-partisan advice on land use and real estate issues to public agencies and nonprofit organizations. Drawing from its extensive membership base, ULI Boston/New England conducts panels offering objective and pragmatic advice to local decision makers on a variety of land use and real estate issues, ranging from site-specific projects to public policy questions. The TAP Program is intentionally flexible to provide a customized approach to specific land use and real estate issues.

Learn more at: <https://boston.ulি.org>

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# Executive Summary

The East Milton Square Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) convened on January 10, 2019, at the Milton Public Library, under the direction of the Urban Land Institute's Boston/New England Chapter. Over the course of the day, the TAP, consisting of eight real estate professionals, met with local business owners, residents, representatives from the Town of Milton and other key stakeholders. The purpose of the TAP was to devise a strategy to advance a district planning effort to address zoning changes that will enable the Town to re-energize East Milton Square. The TAP presented their findings and recommendations to the public later that evening at Milton High School.

## The TAP Process:

Provides an overview of the Urban Land Institute's Boston/New England District Council and its Technical Assistance Panels (TAPs), while also supplying a list of the panel members and stakeholders who took part. The chapter also outlines the study area for the TAP, and describes the process undertaken by the panelists and stakeholders to arrive at the recommendations presented at day's end during a public presentation at Milton High School.

## Background and History:

Gives a thumbnail sketch of the issues that the TAP was assembled to address and the questions that the Town posed to the panel regarding the redevelopment of East Milton Square. Provides a brief history of Milton's evolution from a mill town to a bedroom community of Boston; key population and demographic information; and an overview of the study area.

## Assets and Opportunities:

Identifies the strengths of the Town and the East Milton neighborhood as it pertains to its redevelopment prospects. These include an engaged community, close proximity to Boston & public transportation; open space within and in close proximity to the district; the potential for a walkable business district; and a wealth of information provided by a number of previously conducted and ongoing studies of the issues facing East Milton Square.

## Challenges:

Examines the obstacles that the Town must overcome in order to successfully redevelop East Milton Square into a thriving business district, including: Pedestrian safety; traffic circulation and driver behavior; a functionally obsolete zoning code and a difficult approvals process; community resistance to development; a lack of affordable housing; and outdated building stock.

## Recommendations:

Proposes a number of actions that the Town of Milton can implement to achieve its goal of creating a vibrant business district. Key recommendations include: developing a mechanism to build community consensus around a vision for the redevelopment; allowing for mixed-use, affordable housing and increased height and density in East Milton Square; improving the pedestrian experience; expansion and clarification of the boundaries of the commercial district; creating an overlay district or adopting 40R; and developing a predictable approval process to facilitate private investment in the district.

### **Funding Sources:**

Offers a diversity of financial tools that can assist the Town of Milton in achieving its goals of repositioning East Milton Sq.

### **Conclusions:**

Outlines high level recommendations that will assist the Town of Milton with addressing concerns for repositioning East Milton Square to be more acceptable for its resident.

# The TAP Process

The Boston/New England District Council of ULI serves the six New England states and has over 1,400 members. As a pre-eminent, multidisciplinary real estate forum, ULI Boston/ New England facilitates the open exchange of ideas, information, and experience among local and regional leaders and policy makers dedicated to creating better places through the Technical Assistance Panel Program (TAP).

## Technical Assistance Panels (TAPs)

The ULI Boston/New England Real Estate Advisory Committee convenes TAPs at the request of public officials and local stakeholders of communities and nonprofit organizations facing complex land use challenges, who benefit from planning and development professionals providing pro bono recommendations.

At a TAP, a group of diverse professionals with expertise in the issues posed are specially assembled to spend one to two days visiting and analyzing existing conditions, identifying specific planning and development issues, and formulating realistic and actionable recommendations to move initiatives forward in a way consistent with the applicant's goals and objectives.



Panelists working through their recommendations

## Panel Members

ULI Boston/New England convened a volunteer panel of experts whose members represent the range of disciplines necessary to analyze the challenges and opportunities facing the Town of Milton in their efforts to revitalize East Milton Square. Practice areas included architects, developers, designers, planners, attorneys, and financial analysts.

The following is a list of panelists:

### Co-Chairs

Jim Heffernan, Attorney, Rich May, P.C.  
Michael A. Wang, AIA, LEED AP BD+C,  
Principal, Form + Place

### Panel

Manisha Bewtra, Senior Program Manager,  
Massachusetts Housing Partnership  
Richard Houghton, Landscape Architect,  
Halvorson Design Partnership, Inc.

Marianna McCormick, VP of Business  
Development, MassDevelopment

Paul Nelson, Manager of Transportation  
Planning, Howard Stein Hudson

Navaneeth Raj, MSRED, MIT

Mathieu Zahler, Principal, MPZ Development LLC

### ULI Staff

Manikka Bowman, Director, Policy &  
Outreach, Boston/New England District  
Council

Sara Marsh, Manager, Boston/New England  
District Council

### TAP Writer

Mike Hoban, Principal, Hoban  
Communications

(Panelists have donated their time)



TAP Panelists on walking tour of study area

## Stakeholders

The TAP benefited from the participation of the diverse group of stakeholders – local business owners, representatives from the Town of Milton, and neighborhood residents.

The following is a list of stakeholders:

Melinda Collins, Member, Milton Select Board  
Ned Corcoran, President, Corcoran & Associates, P.C.  
James Coyle, Member, East Milton Neighborhood Association  
Andy D'amato, Member, East Milton Neighborhood Association  
Pat Desmond, Publisher, Milton Times  
Jed Dolan, Funeral Director, Dolan Funeral Services  
Bob Falconi, Owner/Developer, Falconi Companies  
Melissa Fassel-Dunn, Owner, Milton Scene

Susan Harvey, Member, East Milton Neighborhood Association

Meryl Manin, Owner, Grono & Christie Jewelers

Marion V. McEttrick, Private Practice Attorney

Michael Mignosa, Owner, Fruit Center Marketplace

Kate Reagan, Owner, East Milton Dental

Steve Rines, Member, East Milton Neighborhood Association

Jeanne Schmidt, Owner/Developer, Falconi Companies

Jerry Touger, Member, East Milton Neighborhood Association

Paul Traverse, President, Traverse Companies

Mike Traverse, Broker, Traverse Companies

Vance Welch, Co-Owner, Abby Park & Novara

Richard Wells, Member, Milton Select Board

## The TAP Process

The East Milton TAP was held on January 10, 2019. Panelists from the ULI Boston/New England District Council were greeted at the Milton Town Hall by town planner William Clark, assistant town planner Lauren Masiar, and select board members Richard Wells and Melinda Collins. Following the meet and greet session, panelists were given a guided tour of East Milton Square narrated by Clark, with additional color provided by Masiar, Wells and Collins. Michael Dennehy, town administrator, joined the group during the course of the trip.

The tour began at a thriving local restaurant, Novara, located in the building that was once home to the Milton Cinema, which closed in 1987. The group proceeded down Adams Street, observing a number of small businesses before crossing Granite Street to Manning Community Park (also known as the "deck"). The 45,000 square foot area of grass, trees and paths was constructed over I-93 in 1997 as a way of connecting the east and west sides of the square. The park is underutilized but cannot be converted to other uses due its designation as a park by state and federal agencies.

From the park, panelists observed the U.S. Post Office, a single-story granite building on Adams Street built in 1936 which was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1986; the Milton Art Center on Edge Hill Road, which offers classes and workshops and hosts events; a commercial district on the west side of the park that includes some older vintage office space; and a residential section that is also home to a number of businesses. The group left the park and passed the fire station at the intersection of Adams Street and Granite Avenue. Built in 1956, the structure is reaching obsolescence and is scheduled to

be replaced in 3-5 years, but does not appear to be a candidate for adaptive re-use.

The tour stopped next at the Fruit Center Marketplace, the largest retail draw in the commercial district, which straddles the line between the commercial and residential districts. As the group left the market, they observed the proposed 80,000 square foot mixed-use site bordered by Adams, Bassett and Franklin Streets. Owned by the Falconi Companies, the project would combine office space and an indeterminate number of apartments but is currently on hold. The group then proceeded down Mechanic Street, which is currently a residential area with larger plots than the other residential part of the neighborhood and runs behind the commercial zone on Granite Ave. The group concluded its tour down Granite Street to observe the tight commercial spaces and traffic on the way back to the fire station.

It is important to note that while the tour did not experience firsthand the peak traffic that travelers encounter each weekday morning, the area was still heavily congested upon arrival at 8:40, and as the morning wore on, the traffic had slowed down considerably.

The group returned to the Milton Public Library, where the ULI panel interviewed stakeholders, listed in the previous sub-section, in two separate panel discussions for the remainder of the morning. The panelists then engaged in an intensive closed-door charrette to develop recommendations based on the input from the stakeholders as well as background information provided by the briefing book compiled by the Town. The analysis and recommendations were then shared in an open public forum, which was also aired on Milton Public Access TV at Milton High School that evening.

# Background and History

The Town of Milton sought the help of the ULI TAP to develop a workable strategy for the future development of East Milton Square through the creation of a mixed-use overlay district. East Milton Square is a densely developed residential neighborhood that is also home to the Town's largest commercial district. The business district is bisected by the depressed Interstate 93, and its streets are used as a cut-through for traffic traveling to Quincy and Boston. This creates enormous traffic congestion at peak commute times as well as unsafe conditions for pedestrian and bicycle traffic throughout the day.

Much of the development for East Milton Square occurred before zoning was adopted over 80 years ago. As a result, many of the parcels in the district are pre-existing, nonconforming structures. The current zoning is not conducive to allowing the type of development that could potentially energize the district while preserving the neighborhood character, and includes height and density restrictions. Multifamily residential use, with the exception of age-restricted senior housing, is not allowed in the commercial or residential district in the study area under current zoning. The boundaries between the residential and commercial districts are also inconsistent, and there are multiple commercial enterprises operating under variances within the residential district. A local developer has proposed a mixed-use, high-density project that would include 50-plus apartments, but has met with strong resistance from the East Milton Neighborhood Association. Additionally, Milton has not met its 40B threshold, with only five percent of the housing stock deemed affordable. The ULI TAP was asked to address the following:

## Questions

### **Question One: Best Practices in District-Based Planning and Stakeholder Engagement**

What are the best practices in district-based planning that the Town should consider? How should the Planning Board design a planning process that prioritizes effective public and stakeholder engagement? Are there existing case studies that can help the Town to assess the most effective and efficient path forward for planning an overlay district?

### **Question Two: Managing Use Boundaries**

Given that East Milton hosts both an existing residential neighborhood and the Town's largest business district, how should the Town consider the residential/commercial boundary? Should the boundary remain a strict line between commercial/residential as it exists today, or are there creative strategies that yield a different approach or support a mix of uses that do not threaten the existing neighborhood?

### **Question Three: Priority Issues for Further Study**

Considering the intricacies of the study area, and its proximity to I-93 and surrounding urban areas, what issues require a deeper dive investigation? Do the existing traffic and parking studies meet the needs of the study area, or do they require additional study? Is market demand easily understandable or should the Town pursue a demand analysis? Understanding the community's vision for a vibrant live-work-play experience in East Milton, and comparing that vision with market influences, what are the right mix of uses

that present the greatest potential for the business district? What are the primary market opportunities and challenges for downtown redevelopment?

## A Brief History of the Town of Milton

Originally a part of Dorchester, Milton was incorporated as an independent town in 1662. It is bordered by three Boston neighborhoods – Dorchester, Mattapan (to the north), and Hyde Park (west) – as well as Quincy to the east and Canton to the west. Milton was originally an agricultural town, but by harnessing of the waterpower of the Neponset River, Milton evolved into a mill town that produced flour, gunpowder, paper and chocolate. The Granite Railway, which transported granite from Quincy to the Neponset River in Milton Village, was the first chartered railroad in the United States. The Old Colony Railroad, which provided railway access to Boston with passenger stations at Central Avenue and Milton Village, was instrumental in transforming Milton into

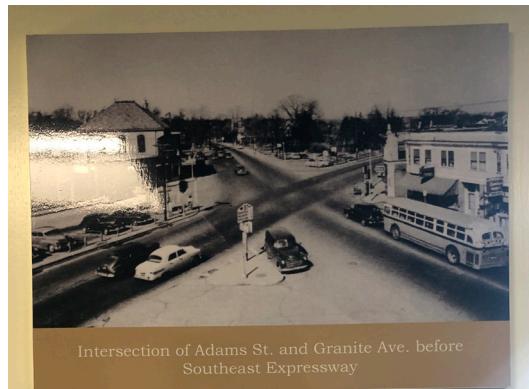
a wealthy suburb of Boston. Today Milton is largely residential, deriving just 3.8 percent of its tax revenue from commercial uses.

## Population/Demographics

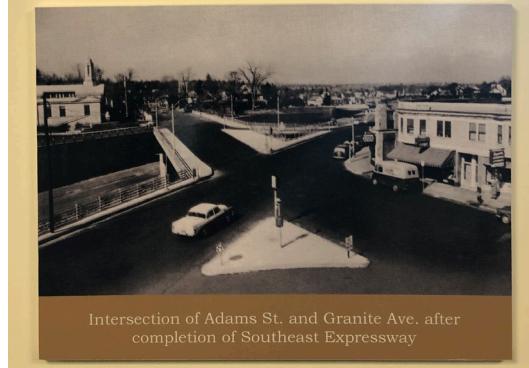
The Town of Milton has seen a slow but steady population increase, from 26,093 in 2000 to 27,575 in 2017. The estimated median household income is \$126,000, and the median home value in Milton is \$679,200 as of December 31, 2018, well above the state average. Demographically, Milton is 74 percent non-Hispanic white, 14 percent black/African American, and four percent Asian.

## The Study Area

East Milton Square is home to the largest of the Town's commercial/retail districts. The study area, consisting of the business district and the Residence C district, encompasses a total of 28.7 acres (approximately 1.25 million square feet). The square is bisected by I-93 (the Southeast Expressway), but is joined by



Intersection of Adams St. and Granite Ave. before Southeast Expressway



Historic images of Milton Square



the Manning Community Park, a landscaped deck that sees little use by residents.

Comprised of 92 parcels, the area includes 82 mostly single-story buildings along with a handful of two-story structures. Much of the building stock is older, with 1940 being the average year of construction.

The existing commercial uses are mostly medical office and services, and the retail – most of which is concentrated on the east side of the park – is located in two principle areas, Adams Street/Granite Avenue and the Fruit Center Marketplace. Adams Street primarily offers restaurants, coffee and pizza shops, service-oriented businesses, as well as a jewelry store and a spa. Granite Avenue,

which runs parallel to I-93, is populated by offices, a liquor store, a hair salon and a fitness center. The Fruit Center Marketplace is the retail anchor of East Milton Square, with a cluster of destination and specialty retailers and restaurants, and a CVS in addition to the grocery store. The Falconi Companies, the largest single property owner in the district, has attempted to gain approval for an 80,000 square foot mixed-use project near the Fruit Center, but has met with stern opposition from the East Milton Neighborhood Association on multiple proposals.

# Assets and Opportunities

## Engaged Community

As evidenced by the membership level of the East Milton Neighborhood Association (estimated to be in the hundreds) and the participation level at the TAP stakeholder meetings (20 representatives), the residents and business owners of Milton are fully engaged in the decision-making process for the redevelopment of East Milton Square. According to stakeholders, Town Meetings concerning the redevelopment of the Square often draw over 200 residents.

## Existing Studies

The decision-making process for the redevelopment of East Milton Square is aided by the number of studies and surveys that have already been conducted in recent years. These include the 2015 Master Plan; the 2018 East Milton Community Preference Survey; and the East Milton Square Parking and Access Study (2011). The East Milton Square Parking and Access Design Project and the MassDOT Design Project are also both currently underway. In addition to these recent studies, there was a previous ULI TAP conducted in 2005 for Milton Village, which addresses similar challenges facing East Milton Square.

## Proximity to Boston & Public Transportation Access

East Milton Square is located just seven miles from South Station in Boston via I-93, although commute times have lengthened considerably in recent years. There is also ready access to Route I-95 approximately one mile to the South off I-93. The area is serviced by three MBTA bus routes. The 215, connects to both the North Quincy stop and the Quincy Center stop on the Braintree branch of the Redline. The 217 connects both the Ashmont branch and the Braintree branch of the Redline with stops at Ashmont, North Quincy, and Quincy Center. And the 245 connects to the Mattapan Trolley to Quincy Center.

## Retail/Restaurant Destinations

Anchored by the Fruit Center, East Milton Square has a variety of moderately-priced, locally-owned and operated restaurants and cafes, retail, and services that provide a foundation for the live-work-play environment the Town is seeking.

## Walkability Potential

With so many residences located within close proximity to the business district and its retail, restaurants, and open green spaces, the Square is eminently walkable, although pedestrian safety and parking management issues are concerns.



Fruit Center Marketplace

## Nearby Open Space

In addition to the Manning Community Park, Andrews Park and Crane Field, panelists identified a number of potential parcels that could be used to create a network of connected green space in the district.

## Adequate Parking for Existing Uses

There is a widespread belief that there is inadequate parking in the business district. However, according to parking studies, the existing parking serves the needs of the businesses in the area, although wayfinding and pedestrian access is an issue that needs to be addressed.

# Challenges

## Pedestrian Safety and Traffic Circulation

The most pressing concern expressed by stakeholders during the meetings may have been the issue of pedestrian safety in the district. Traveling from the west side of I-93 to the east side (where the retail and businesses are heavily concentrated), or west to east to the U.S. Post Office, is precarious. Driver behavior is a major factor in these safety concerns and there is a perception that there is inadequate enforcement of traffic laws in the area. The volume of traffic created by the number of drivers using the streets in the square during morning and afternoon peak hours to avoid congestion on I-93 regularly creates gridlock that is directly impacting the businesses and retail in the district, as on-street parking becomes difficult to access. Outside of the morning and afternoon peaks, when traffic flows more freely, residents expressed concerned about the speed and volume of the cut-through traffic on Adams Street and Granite Avenue to Boston and Quincy. Moreover, the need for improved sidewalks, crosswalks, and realignment of traffic lights was both discussed and observed.

## Functionally Obsolete Zoning Code and Fragmented Community Engagement Process

The zoning code was established after much of the Square was built, resulting in many of the parcels in the district being designated as pre-existing, nonconforming structures. There are also a number of businesses (most notably the Fruit Center) located within the residential district. Because of this, the permitting and approval process lacks an efficiency and certainty to the detriment of both the residents and developers.

The zoning and approval process is also complicated by a challenging community engagement process. Many residents perceive that new development proposals are not effectively communicated to the public until far too late in the approval process. Additionally, while resident groups such as the East Milton Neighborhood Association are vocal, other constituencies may be underrepresented.

East Milton Square 2011, Prior to closure of Adams Street over I-93



## No Cohesive Identity in the District

There is no real center to the business district, and the much smaller west side is cut off from the east side due to the aforementioned traffic issues. Despite the presence of the Manning Community Park, there is no “real” town green / focal point. Although the perception is that the Manning Community Park is the center of East Milton Square, the true center of gravity is to the east side, where restaurants appear to be thriving and the Fruit Center draws in the most users.

## Lack of Affordable Housing

The town is far below the state-mandated affordable housing threshold, leaving it subject to 40B developments that may not be consistent with the character of the neighborhood.

## Outdated Building Stock

A local real estate broker indicated that while there is solid demand for commercial retail and office space in the district, much of the existing stock is of subpar quality. Many of the properties were either not initially well-constructed or have outlived their use. Moreover, some properties are owned by family trusts and absentee landlords who are either not willing to invest in the properties or unable to feasibly redevelop their properties.



Interstate 93

# Recommendations

As outlined in the 2015 Master Plan for the Town of Milton, developing a detailed vision for the commercial districts, in this case, East Milton Square, is the first step towards creating a more vibrant business district and increasing the commercial tax base. The revitalization can best be achieved through vertically integrated mixed-use development, an expansion of the business district, increased density and the incorporation of mixed-income housing, all of which are well-suited for East Milton Square. In addition, integrating a thoughtful approach to placemaking that incorporates the ideas of the town stakeholders and neighborhood residents will ensure an enjoyable experience within the public realm. The panelists recommend adopting a four-step process to achieve those ends:

## 1. Build Community Consensus

There is clearly a recognition on the part of the townspeople that East Milton Square is in need of improvements that could create a more vibrant business district with diverse amenities while preserving its small town character. The challenge is developing a consensus that can make that vision a reality. The panel recommends:

- **Adding Staff** – Much of the responsibility for guiding consensus building would fall on the Planning and Community Development department, which needs additional resources to accomplish the myriad of tasks associated with their mission. The Select Board should consider adding full or part time staff to the planning department, or in lieu of that action, hire consultants with technical experience in urban design, architecture,

landscape architecture, zoning & design guidelines, traffic improvements, etc. to assist the staff in focusing on specific “District Visioning” efforts like the ones panelists are recommending and are reinforced by the Master Plan. The Select Board could also create a “Citizen’s Advisory Council” comprised of residents with a range of expertise in various disciplines such as economic development, business ownership, non-profits, the arts, etc., to oversee specific initiatives.

- **Develop a Proactive Community Outreach Program to Engage Stakeholders** – Using social media, email campaigns, and traditional news outlets such as the Milton Times and Milton Scene, engage the public to participate in facilitated public brainstorming sessions to discuss what they would like to see developed in the Square, as well as give them an opportunity to voice their concerns.
- **Plan a Design Charrette** – Once the goals for development have been established, hold a series of charrettes to translate those goals into form – both architectural and place-making.
- **Draft A Vision** – Distill public feedback and create a document that clearly articulates priorities and processes.

## 2. Refine a Vision for East Milton Square

Using the 2015 Master Plan as a guide, which recommends increasing commercial development to increase tax revenue and creating affordable housing as its top

priorities, create a workable vision that incorporates the details of that plan. The panel recommends that the draft include these components::

- **Mixed-Use Development** – Vertically integrated mixed-use projects with residential or office over ground floor commercial/retail should be encouraged, for both new construction and renovations/additions to existing buildings.
- **Allow for Multifamily Construction** – A diversity of mixed-income residential offerings, including affordable housing, through the adoption of inclusionary zoning would allow downsizing seniors to remain in Milton, and create opportunities for a more diverse demographic. A proactive approach could help reduce the threat of undesirable 40B projects.
- **Increase Height and Density**. In order to achieve the goals of the town to create a more vibrant business district, zoning should be changed to allow for greater height and density. In order to maintain

the small-town feel of the neighborhood, design guidelines can be devised that would allow for height and density to be concentrated in the center of the district and taper off as development moves towards the residential neighborhoods. Increased density comes with benefits such as additional tax revenue which will allow the Town to pay for non-revenue generating improvements- streetscapes, open space, infrastructure, etc., and add more commercial space. Density bonuses can be offered in exchange for the accommodation of public amenities.

- **Expand the Commercial District.** The Master plan calls for increasing the commercial base, and while allowing for additional height and density for new developments is one way to accomplish that goal, expanding the footprint of the commercial district is a second avenue. Currently, the business district is not logically defined. For instance, the Fruit Center Marketplace, arguably the primary driver of activity in the neighborhood, is not in the district. A number of businesses that



East Milton Square Plan Rendering. Credit: Halvorson Design & Howard Stein Hudson, 2018

are already operating on the periphery of the commercial district border or beyond could be incorporated into the district through re-zoning. This doesn't mean that existing uses have to change but, rather, a more flexible zoning will allow for future uses that may be more conducive to creating the desired mixed-use environment without requiring an extensive approvals process that includes variances.

- **Create More Public Space.** In addition to the Manning Community Park, Andrews Park and Crane Field, consider introducing additional small pocket parks throughout the district. If the Adams St. corridor were to be developed as a more significant thoroughfare, for instance, those smaller open spaces could be developed to provide a different type of experience than the larger parks and become focal points for expanded commercial development, including restaurants with outdoor dining.
- **Focus on Placemaking.** While the Manning Community Park should be included in any placemaking plans, it need not necessarily be the focal point of those efforts. The center of gravity of the business district appears to lie on the east side of the I-93 corridor, where much of the retail and many of the restaurants are located. A district-wide plan should incorporate open space, seating areas, benches and public art to connect the shopping and dining experiences as well as the residential and commercial structures. (See appendix for ULI brochure, "Implementing Creative Placemaking in Real Estate".)
- **Expand Commercial/Retail Offerings**
  - There appears to be demand for additional high quality commercial/retail space within the district, as well as a greater diversification of retail offerings such as specialty shops, entertainment, and wellness/fitness centers. Conducting a market demand analysis would be helpful for determining what the market will support.
- **Improve Parking in the District.** Develop a parking management plan that will allow for more efficient use of the current parking throughout the district. Ensure that new developments contribute adequate parking for their uses, while encouraging the accommodation of alternative modes of transportation. Consider implementing short term (versus all-day) parking by installing parking meters throughout the business district and explore shared parking strategies. Add wayfinding measures throughout the district that will direct people to available parking, as well as retail, restaurants and parks. Mid-block parking, whether it be on-street, at-grade or structured, is essential to create a vibrant, walkable, mixed-use district.
- **Preserve Cultural and Historic Character of the Community** – In looking at old photographs of East Milton Square prior to the introduction of the southeast expressway, one can appreciate the evolution of the neighborhood. Preserving community character, whether considering the adaptive reuse of buildings that have a storied history – such as the firehouse – should be contemplated as new development is proposed. The recording of the area's cultural history – palimpsest – can be integrated into a more dense and vibrant commercial district.
- **Improve the Pedestrian Experience.** One of the greatest concerns expressed during the stakeholder sessions was pedestrian safety, due to the use of East Milton Square as a cut-through, and the volume and speed of the vehicles in the district. Any plan to create a walkable and bicycle friendly environment must include ways to mitigate these issues. The Halvorson Design & Howard Stein Hudson drawing of the planned improvements in the vicinity of Manning Park over I-93 illustrates a number of mechanisms to achieve that end, but many of those solutions could be applied throughout the district.



Preliminary sketch identifying the Adams Street corridor, east of I-93, as the potential center of gravity for redevelopment in the East Milton Square area. Credit: Halvorson Design & Howard Stein Hudson

Below are suggestions for improving the pedestrian experience in East Milton Square.

- Increase the width of the sidewalks wherever possible to provide more space for pedestrians.
- Shift curb lines to reduce crossing distances on the major streets to make them more pedestrian-friendly.
- Add dedicated bicycle lanes where possible to provide a safer environment for cyclists and also to make bicycles a more viable option for travel in the neighborhood. Lanes could be either simple dedicated painted sections of the roadway or behind the curb itself, which provides greater protection.
- Where possible, create a landscaped buffer between vehicles and pedestrians, as increasing streetscape vegetation and creating buffer zones increases pedestrian safety. This may also serve as a traffic calming measure, as adding plant material creates more of a neighborhood feel, as opposed to that of a highway off-ramp.
- Increase the density of vegetation along streetscapes that are adjacent to the highway along the south end of Manning Community Park. This not only adds to the walkable neighborhood experience but serves to reduce highway noise.
- Consider reconfiguring traffic signals in the district to increase visibility for motorists, like the signal repositioning planned at the Adams St. approach to East Milton Square from the west.
- Create comprehensive district-wide streetscape guidelines to create cohesive aesthetic and functional streetscape characteristic to enhance the vibrancy of East Milton Square. Various elements would include enhanced lighting, benches, continuity and hierarchy of paving materials, plantings, and other amenities such as bike racks and decorative waste receptacles. The guidelines for the streetscape character could be modified for a range of physical “zones” such as vehicular, curb, planter, walking, retail, as well as multi-modal zones within the district. For instance, café tables and pocket parks could be established adjacent to retail zones.
- Provide vehicular and pedestrian wayfinding signage as a way to make the district more comfortable, pleasant and approachable.
- Stress the importance of publicly owned paving and planting areas to be designed with robust soil conditions and in close coordination with Town in order to be maintainable over time.
- Create flexible and programmable public spaces at select locations to enable the town to suit the evolving needs of the neighborhood.

- While design guidelines are being drawn up, the Town may also want to use the time to plan transportation improvements. Working in conjunction with property owners, that may include adding or subtracting automobile lanes on the major thoroughfares such as Adams St., and/or improving pedestrian or bicycle access. Also related to private and public investment, the town should consider what it is willing/able to invest in public realm improvements. Enhancing the district is a shared opportunity for both developers/property owners and the town/public right of way.

### 3. Provide the Regulatory and Design Tools Needed to Realize that Vision.

As outlined in the Master Plan, those tools include encouraging 40R development (see below) and/or the creation of a mixed-use overlay district. It may also include addressing nonconforming uses and dimensions through grandfather clauses; permitting small scale commercial uses in the neighborhoods through similar clauses and allowing for additional uses in appropriate locations; passing inclusionary housing that allows for a wider range of housing types to accommodate a changing demographic; developing a parking management plan; and establishing design guidelines that will preserve the neighborhood character.

- **Adopt 40R.** 40R is a tool at the state level that can be adopted fairly readily by communities. It includes design guidelines so that the interests of a community can be represented and establishes a regulatory framework that allows for it to be done efficiently. It gives the community some comfort in knowing what will happen going forward, but also gives the developer surety that he's not wasting time and resources on a project that has little chance of being built – as long they comply with design guidelines. There are three towns (Reading, Rockland, and Danvers) that are similar in size to Milton that have successfully completed projects recently using 40R.

A case study for 30 Haven, a mixed-use project in Reading which earned the ULI Jack Kemp Excellence in Affordable and Workforce Housing Award, is included with this report.

#### • **Create Mixed-Use Overlay District.**

Overlay districts are useful tools for incentivizing a specific type of development in a carefully defined area, while allowing the existing underlying zoning to remain intact. Mixed-use overlay districts often incorporate well-defined development standards that allow more flexibility for as-of-right projects that meet revitalization goals and adhere to more stringent guidelines. These fully-integrated performance standards can result in the incorporation of a range of public benefits and amenities for the neighborhood, both in terms of the character of building design and the quality of the surrounding streetscapes. Together with new design criteria, a refined approvals process is typically outlined, providing the desired balance of certainty for the community and flexibility for the developer. Mixed-use overlay districts are an excellent tool for a wide range of contexts of varying degrees of density, including recent projects undertaken in Belmont (Cushing Square) and Wayland (Town Center).

### 4. Develop a Predictable Approvals Process to Facilitate Private Investment

Make development decisions predictable, fair, and cost-effective for those seeking to develop projects. A clearer process for developers provides a higher degree of certainty that when they go before a planning board or zoning commission that they're going to be able to move a project forward. In addition, establish a mechanism that allows for the voices of the community to be heard throughout the process that still allow for responsible development to move forward in a timely fashion.

- Clearly outline procedures and timelines for approvals.

- Spell out development criteria through integrated design guidelines/performance standards.
- Consider administrative approval process for projects of a certain scale with adherence to design guidelines.
- Adequately define the Special Permit process, don't make it too onerous, and avoid involving multiple boards
- Clarify additional design review requirements for major projects above a certain square footage, i.e., 50,000 square feet



Diagram of an expanded East Milton Square Commercial District depicting an integrated public realm, a revitalized streetscape network and areas of more intense mixed-use development

#### An explanation of the graphics:

- Red dashed line shows current Commercial District
- Solid red line is a potential expanded Commercial District boundary, including the Fruit Center Marketplace, parcels along Adams Street reaching out towards the Quincy border, etc.
- The yellow arrows depict a hierarchical network of streets that could be embellished with paving, urban furniture, lighting and signage to create a consistent public realm in the Commercial District
- Green areas show existing and proposed new public open space, including pocket parks
- Orange areas are parcels in an expanded Commercial District that would incorporate less intensive mixed-use development as they are in transition zones to the surrounding residential neighborhoods
- Brown areas are parcels in the core of the new Commercial District, and/or along the highway, where more intense mixed-use development with greater height would be logical
- The blue "P"s are mid-block locations for parking lots and/or structured parking; These would be spread out throughout the Commercial District ideally and not have a visual impact on primary pedestrian environments [streetscapes]

# Funding Sources

## **MassDevelopment**

Offers a diversity of financing and real estate solutions to support companies and nonprofits, increase housing, eliminate blight, and drive economic growth across Massachusetts.

## **Massachusetts Housing Partnership**

MHP's Community Assistance team supports the development of affordable housing statewide by providing trainings, webbased tools, publications, and workshops to municipalities, housing authorities, non-profits, and developers.

## **Massachusetts Downtown Initiative (MDI)**

DHCD's Massachusetts Downtown Initiative (MDI) offers a range of services and assistance to communities seeking help on how to revitalize their downtowns.

The primary mission of the MDI is to make downtown revitalization an integral part of community development in cities and towns across the Commonwealth.

## **Massachusetts Cultural Council**

The Commonwealth supports the arts with capital grants for the acquisition, design, renovation, and construction of cultural facilities. They also offer grants for development studies.

The facilities fund is administered jointly by MassDevelopment and the Massachusetts Cultural Council.

## **Public Infrastructure Financing**

- Tax-Exempt Bonds for Public Infrastructure  
The District Improvement Financing (DIF) program allows the town to leverage new private investment through bonds supported by enhanced property taxes that allows infrastructure to "pay its own way."
- MassDevelopment issues tax-exempt bonds for improvements to roadways, sidewalks, parks, parking garages, bridges, tunnels, wharves, and a range of public facilities. Infrastructure programs that use this tax-exempt financing include (DIF) and Special Assessments.

## **Predevelopment Loans**

- MassDevelopment provides low interest rate loans up to \$100,000 with deferred repayment terms to finance pre development real estate projects.
- MassWorks Grants prepare communities for success with a particular emphasis on projects that support the production of multi-family housing in appropriately located walkable mixed-use districts, result in direct and immediate job creation, and/or that support economic development in weak or distressed areas.

# Conclusions

As noted in the 2015 Milton Master Plan, “there is a tendency on the part of some residents to view change negatively, with skepticism, and to oppose it. However, it is important to recognize that change is inevitable.”

In order for the Town of Milton to promote the kind of mixed-use development that will preserve the character of the surrounding neighborhood while fulfilling the vision of a vibrant live-work-play experience in East Milton Square – as is clearly spelled out in the Master Plan – some change will be required. That change begins with having a shared vision that local stakeholders have endorsed and are willing to work towards, rather than against.

As stated in the Master plan, the first priority is the need for commercial development to increase tax revenue. This can best be achieved by making streetscape improvements, encouraging additional retail and restaurants, and locating housing above shops to create viable business centers. That means encouraging mixed-use development and expanding the diversity of housing types in East Milton Square to stimulate the integration of more commercial and civic amenities.

Density is one of the solutions to achieving those ends, as is the expansion of the

commercial district. Design specifications can be devised and followed to ensure that the historic character and small-town feel are preserved, but allowing for density and additional height are crucial to increasing revenue that will be used to fund the streetscape and open space elements that are vital to placemaking in East Milton Square.

The creation of an overlay district or the adoption of 40R can make these changes possible. Doing so also provides some protection against potential 40B development, which would invite national developers with the deep resources to be able to withstand lengthy approvals processes to construct projects that are inconsistent with the small town feel of the neighborhood. Encouraging local developers who share in the Town’s vision and have a first-hand understanding of the community are more likely to yield proposals that are reflective of the character of East Milton Square.

As stakeholders work towards creating a more specific vision for in East Milton Square, it may be helpful to remember that the Fruit Center met with stern opposition when it was first proposed and is now a vital force within the business district.

# Appendix

## **ULI Case Study, “Implementing Creative Placemaking in Real Estate”**

<https://americas.uli.org/research/centers-initiatives/building-healthy-places-initiative/creative-placemaking/>

## **ULI Case Study, “Housing in the Evolving American Suburb”**

<https://uli.org/wp-content/uploads/ULI-Documents/Housing-in-the-Evolving-American-Suburb.pdf>

## **ULI Case Study, “Reaching for the Future”**

<http://uli.org/wp-content/uploads/ULI-Documents/Creative-Finance-for-Smaller-Communities.pdf>

## **MassDevelopment**

Real Estate Services: <https://www.massdevelopment.com/what-we-offer/real-estate-services/>

Financing: <https://www.massdevelopment.com/what-we-offer/financing/>

## **Massachusetts Cultural Council Facilities Fund**

<https://massculturalcouncil.org/organizations/cultural-facilities-fund/>

## **Massachusetts Downtown Initiative (MDI)**

<https://www.mass.gov/service-details/massachusetts-downtown-initiative-mdi>

## **Massachusetts Housing Partnership**

<https://www.mhp.net/community/technical-support>





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