

Harvard Street Holistic Plan for MBTA-Communities Compliance



Harvard Street Plan

What is the problem?

15 solutions to conserve + enhance this cherished neighborhood

What we're doing + why

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Community feedback so far

Department of Planning and Community Development [Update](#) | June 12, 2023

[How to participate](#)

What is the problem?

Brookline has great, sustainable neighborhoods, especially where different building types are all within walking distance. Different building typologies expand housing choices to meet the needs of people at all stages of life. And Brookline has a robust inclusionary zoning bylaw that requires projects with 11+ units to provide 15% affordable units on site. Inclusionary zoning is a fundamental way to integrate racial and social diversity throughout a community.

The Problem Brookline's zoning is disconnected from neighborhood character we all cherish. Even in districts where multiple units (multifamily and mixed uses) are currently allowed on one lot, incompatible zoning metrics like floor-area ratio mean those prized nineteenth century mixed use buildings cannot be built today.

There is also lack of parity: **Brookline zoning allows a 25,000 sf single-family home to be permitted as of right**, but denies the construction of a 25,000 sf apartment building on a typical-sized lot where such use is allowed. Even then, a special permit is required for any project with 4+ units.

Why does this matter?

The inability to construct multiple units on one lot means no opportunity to apply Brookline's inclusionary zoning bylaw—compounding racial and social inequities and segregation.

In addition to regulatory barriers, zoning does not codify the physical qualities the community cherishes about their neighborhoods.

And this is a problem not just on Harvard Street but in all of Brookline's multifamily and mixed use zoning districts.

The Solution Using Harvard Street's exemplary Main Street development pattern as a foundational first step, we can involve the community in shaping the regulations to enhance this district and facilitate the creation of different housing types to meet different household needs—fortifying the retail and services in this prime economic center.

Harvard Street Community Engagement + Project Phases with Opticos Design, form-based-zoning experts

PHASE 1 Community Input for Desired Design Outcomes	PHASE 2 Test Fits of Community Input	PHASE 3 Site Visualizations	PHASE 4 Review Zoning Bylaw Drafts with Boards + Community
May 12, 30, 31 and June 9	June 28-29	Mid-July	Starting Mid-July
<p>How Form-Based Zoning better ensures desired outcomes</p> <p>Pre-Workshop survey results</p> <p>What does the community want to see, experience in the built environment</p>	<p>How well did we incorporate community input for zoning</p> <p>Are there are any constraints or issues we need to resolve</p>	<p>Architectural renderings put proposed design standards together</p> <p>How would the zoning get applied on opportunity sites</p>	<p>Review and comment on a first draft of complete zoning for Harvard Street Main Street along with site plan + design review bylaw</p> <p>Test zoning for gaps + compliance with MBTA-CA</p>

To participate, visit <https://www.brooklinema.gov/3589/Presentations-Workshops>

What we are doing + why

From 2020 – 2022, the Department of Planning + Community Development (**DPCD**) **conducted a technical study** to identify and remedy barriers to multiunit and mixed zoning. Staff began with Harvard Street, an architecturally coherent district with capacity for growth but no design standards to conserve its character.

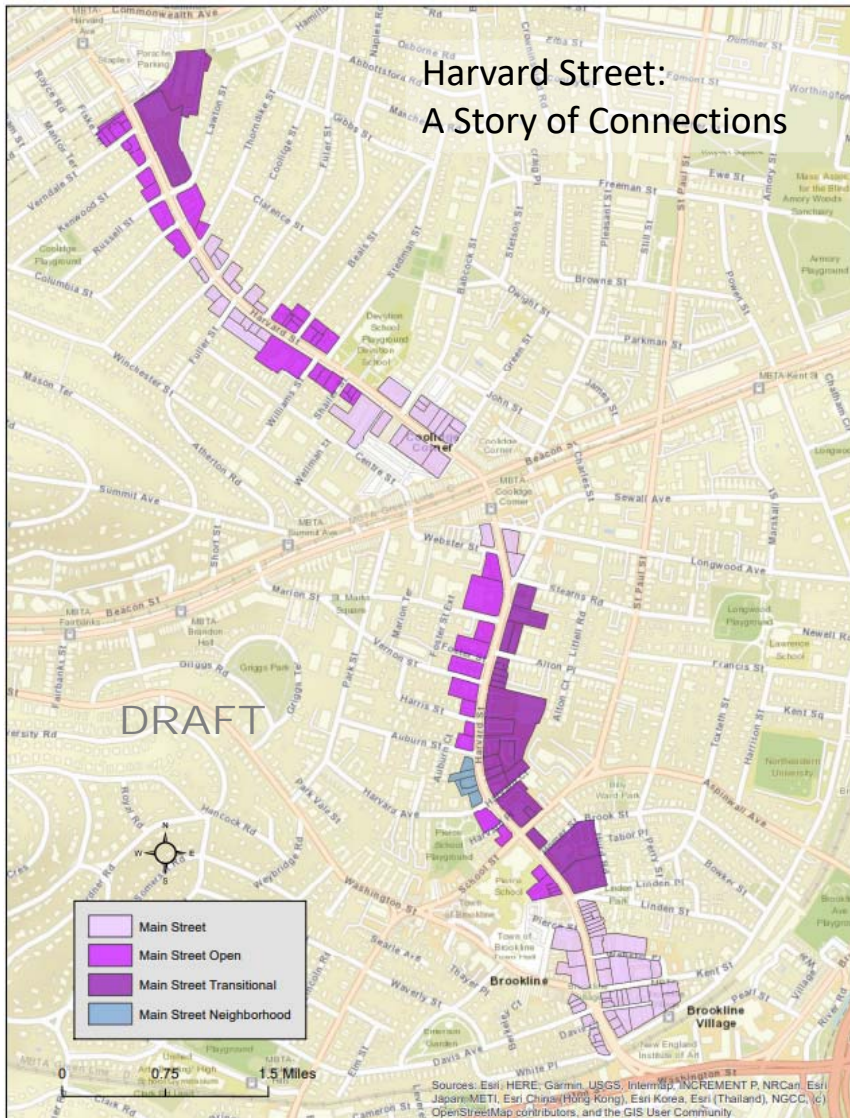
In 2022 **the State passed MBTA Communities Act**, which requires 175 municipalities to have at least one zoning district that allows multifamily zoning without discretionary permits.

In late 2022/early 2023, staff **recommended building on this Harvard Street Study**--which catalogs the physical character of exemplary Harvard Street properties serving as a foundation for form-based zoning---**as a responsible + meaningful way to comply with the MBTA-CA.**

In early 2023, with the support four land-use boards, **the Select Board provided emergency funding** to hire a form-based **zoning expert** to facilitate **robust community workshops** to shape design standards as a **safeguard for as-of-right permitting**

With the Town's investment in community engagement + expert consulting services, the plan for Harvard Street zoning aims **to codify what people value about their neighborhood** and **ensure sustained growth to come:**

15 planning solutions to conserve + enhance
Harvard Street's cherished character . . .



1. Enhance “Main Street” Place Type

Walkable environment with interconnected tree-lined mixed-use streetscapes. Emphasizes storefront ground-floor as a focal point of neighborhood retail, services, housing

The regulating plan is a coherent plan to benefit all of Harvard Street:

- o Treats each core business area with equal weight
- o Balances real growth with protection of heritage sites
- o Enhances the unique qualities of each subarea
- o Creates connections between subareas
- o Expands rich pedestrian experience at street level
- o Maintains 3.5/4-story scale in base zoning
- o Is shaped by community stakeholders

More Planning Solutions for Town's Consideration

2. A path to meeting both the **Select Board's resolution** to Staff + all criteria mandated for **MBTA Compliance**
3. A process centered on local government's obligation to create land use regulations that abide by constitutional **due process**:
 - a. A 2-year **technical block-by-block study** of both regulatory barriers and gaps in protecting existing character
 - b. Wide **community engagement** that brought new people to the table facilitated by a pre-eminent zoning expert
 - c. A zoning bylaw to provide **objective, enforceable standards—legal basis for findings in Board decisions**
4. A **form-based zoning framework** reverse engineered to match what community wants to see in the built environment
5. A mechanism to facilitate **real housing + commercial growth** at a **modest pace** while reinforcing existing **character**
6. An opportunity to consistently apply your **15% inclusionary zoning** bylaw: any projects with 11 units or more will have **affordable units on site**
7. Virtually any residential/mixed-use project will be **mixed income**—a proven means for **integrating social + racial diversity** throughout neighborhoods. (Any affordable units on Harvard Street have not been created under IZ.)

More Planning Solutions for Town's Consideration

8. A collaboration of the EDAB and the HAB on an incentive that would achieve **reciprocal benefits** by:
 - a. expanding **affordable housing at different income levels**, including ownership opportunities for **workforce housing**
 - b. providing meaningful **financial benefits for ground floor retail**, a support to landlords trying to lease to **local retailers**
9. An **expansion of allowed desirable commercial uses** to increase the marketability and competitiveness of this prime commercial area
10. A **financial feasibility** analysis proving that **ground floor retail in mixed use projects is the highest best use on Harvard**, which will only fortify the Town's ongoing correspondence with DHCD to allow GFC mandates vs incentives
11. Max building height of 4 stories would **conserve existing housing stock; massing standards to respect abutter views**
12. **Architectural standards** to better integrate new buildings into the traditional context
13. Standards for the Brookline Village National Register District, the Town's first mixed-use neighborhood, to **deter demolition and preserve** character-defining features
14. Standards for universal design to better ensure **ADA compliance**
15. An **expansion of design review** to include holistic site components for BOTH as of right + special permit projects

How we got here...

2020 - 2022 Regulatory Division provides technical foundation before MBTA-CA became law

- [Harvard Street Study](#) identifies barriers to multi-unit, mixed-use development
- Study surveys existing character of exemplary buildings block-by-block

2021 – Economic Development Bill for MBTA Communities/Multifamily Zoning

- January - Planning Director presents Town status, opportunities, risks + timeline to Housing Advisory Board

2022 – State passes [MBTA Communities Act](#)

- April - Planning Director presents extensive options to Select Board
- Early to late Fall - Regulatory Division consults with various board chairs, selected TMMs in all precincts, leaders of pro-design, pro-housing community groups: *Shall we build on the Study's foundation to propose Harvard Street as MBTA-CA District using form-based zoning? Very positive response*

2023

- Dec 2022 - Jan 2023 – Planning Board, Preservation Commission, Housing Advisory, Economic Dev. Advisory vote unanimously to support a form-based zoning approach to propose Harvard St as an MBTA-CA district
- Jan 2023 – Select Board votes to provide emergency funding to hire form-based zoning consultant
- Feb 2023 – [Select Board issues policy direction](#) to staff for MBTA-CA project

Community Engagement and Investment

- Staff surveyed existing conditions (\$150,000 savings to the Town) over two years: over 120 specs measured on sampled buildings
- \$277,000 in emergency funding for Form-Based Zoning expert + community facilitator
- \$10,000 on specialized architectural standards for Brookline Village Commercial National Register district
- \$15,000 grant for compliance testing
- 40 presentations + community group/public meetings
- 5400 postcards mailed to Harvard Street property owners, tenants, abutters
- 15 hours of site walks with precincts
- 60+ hours dedicated office hours
- 260+ people attend Community Kick-Off
- About 200 responses to pre-workshop surveys
- Up to 9 community workshops prior to vetting draft
- 6 weeks scheduled for public to review draft
- Monthly updates to Select Board with Public Comment

What we've done...

PHASE 1 Community's desired design outcomes

Site Walks with Staff

Pre-Workshop Surveys

Community Workshops with Opticos Design

- May 12 + June 9, 2023 – Babcock to Verndale
- May 30, 2023 – School to Babcock
- May 31, 2023 – Station to School

What to expect...

June 28-29, 2023	PHASE 2 Test-fit workshops of community input Compliance model testing
July 19	PHASE 3 Site visualizations workshops
Mid-July – August	PHASE 4 Public review of draft bylaw with boards, incl. Select Board
August 31, 2023	Submit Warrant Article to Fall Town Meeting
December 31, 2023	State deadline to comply with MBTA-CA

What we are learning from the community...

Reinforce human-scale quality of existing building heights

Use quality building materials typical of Harvard Street

Preserve historic buildings

Maintain **variety of uses at the street level**

Ensure **accessibility**, especially for people who use mobility devices, at the beginning of a project for a more **inclusive community**

Consider abutters' views, especially in 2.5-story neighborhoods

Protect and maintain public shade trees in urban heat islands

Community Feedback on Phase 1 Workshops

“There are **so many aspects to write into the plan to make an "as of right" zoning code.** I'm grateful to you and to the consultants from Opticos Design for all the careful work you are putting into this plan.”

“Thank you for a **great discussion.**”

“Thank you for holding the community zoom meetings on the Harvard Street form-based zoning. I am looking forward to zoning that **will insure the types of buildings we want to see on Harvard Street** with some of the beautiful varied design types you presented.”

“The **many participants added ideas that I had not thought of.**”

“**I wish we had form-based zoning years ago.**”

“**I'm feeling more optimistic about Harvard Street.**”

How to participate

Learn MBTA Communities Act – Town Hub

- <https://www.brooklinema.gov/2044/Multifamily-MBTA>

Join Upcoming Community Workshops + Public Meetings

- <https://www.brooklinema.gov/3589/Presentations-Workshops>

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