



# Stoneham Town Center Strategic Action Plan December 2014



Prepared for:  
Town of Stoneham  
35 Central Street  
Stoneham, MA 02180

Prepared by:  
Metropolitan Area Planning Council  
60 Temple Place, 6<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Boston, Massachusetts 02111  
Tel (617) 451-2770  
[www.mapc.org](http://www.mapc.org)



# Acknowledgements

The Stoneham Town Center Strategic Action Plan reflects the completion of a six month collaborative planning process to identify a vision and accompanying goals and strategies to revitalize and energize Stoneham's historic Town Center. Thank you to all who participated throughout the process. This project was undertaken with funds from the State's District Local Technical Assistance program. The Metropolitan Area Planning Council wishes to express our thanks to the Governor and the members of the Legislature for their continued support and funding of this program.

This draft report was produced by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council, professional technical assistance was provided by Matthew Smith, Senior Regional Planner; Steve Winter, Economic Development Manager; Christine Madore, Associate Planner; and Jessica Robertson, Transportation Coordinator.

## **Metropolitan Area Planning Council**

### **Officers**

President Lynn Duncan, City of Salem

Vice President Keith Bergman, Town of Littleton

Secretary Shirronda Almeida, Massachusetts Association of Community Development Corporations

Treasurer Taber Keally, Town of Milton

Thank you for the assistance and leadership of the following individuals:

### **Town of Stoneham**

David Ragucci, Town Administrator

Stoneham Town Center Advisory Committee



# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements .....	ii	Recent and Planned Investment .....	12
I. Planning Context .....	1	<i>Future Investments</i> .....	12
Historical Perspective .....	2	VI. Market Study Findings.....	13
Stoneham Center Today.....	2	Retail Market Potential .....	13
II. Current Conditions .....	2	Residential Market Potential .....	14
Population and Households.....	2	VII. Stakeholder Input .....	15
<i>Population: Existing and Projected</i> .....	2	A. Advisory Committee .....	15
<i>Household Characteristics</i> .....	3	B. Interviews.....	15
<i>Race and Ethnicity</i> .....	3	Strengths .....	15
<i>Income and Poverty</i> .....	4	Weaknesses .....	15
Industry and Employment.....	5	Opportunities.....	15
Stoneham Town Center Jobs .....	5	C. Transportation Workshop .....	15
III. Land Use & Zoning.....	6	(For a complete overview including results from the meeting, see	
Residential Uses .....	6	Appendix B.)D. Public Open House.....	16
Retail and Office Uses .....	7	VIII. Recommendations.....	20
Zoning .....	8	IX: Implementation Matrix .....	29
Central Business District (CBD) .....	8		
Business District.....	8	<i>Appendix A: Stoneham Market Analysis (separate document)</i>	
Residence B.....	8	<i>Appendix B: Public Open House Summary (separate document)</i>	
Parking Requirements .....	8		
Sign Requirements.....	8		
IV. Historic and Cultural Assets.....	9		
Historic Assets.....	9		
Cultural Assets .....	9		
V. Transportation .....	10		
Automobile Access.....	10		
Bus Service.....	10		
Pedestrian Environment .....	11		
Parking.....	11		
Bike facilities.....	11		





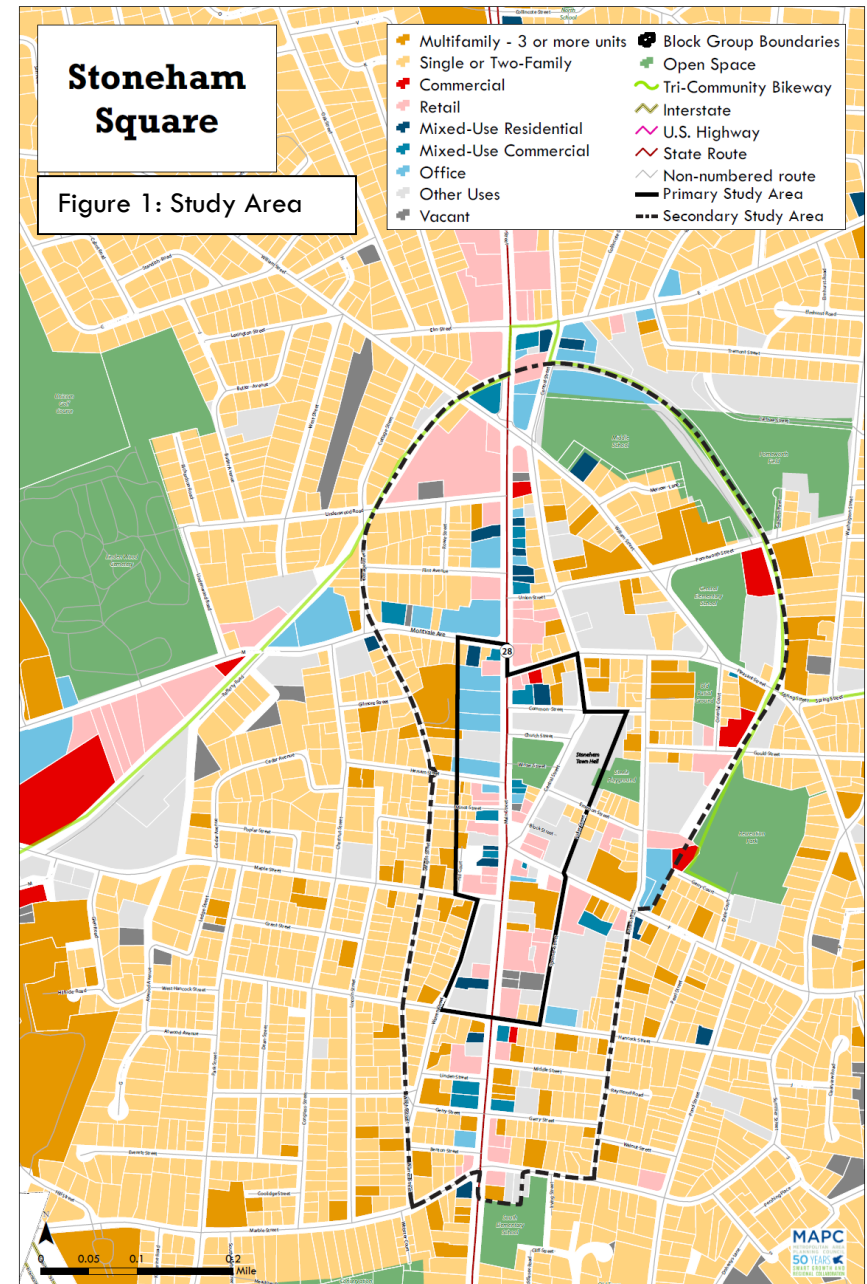
# I. Planning Context

The purpose of the **Stoneham Town Center Strategic Action Plan** study is to identify a set of goals, strategies and actions to reinvigorate Stoneham Center and its surroundings and regain its place as the focal point of community life. The project included several phases. The first Phase involved an analysis of existing conditions including a review of demographic and socioeconomic conditions, existing land use and zoning and other criteria detailed in this report. A broad market study was then undertaken to identify the potential for supportable residential and retail development within the Town Center area. This analysis, combined with significant input received from the public at an Open House event on October 1, 2014 informed a series of recommendations highlighted in Section VIII of this document.

## Location and Study Area

The Town of Stoneham, a mature inner-core suburb, is uniquely located north of Boston at the junction of Interstates 93 and 95, which provides residents with strong access to Boston and regional job centers, and companies a strategic location with strong auto-oriented transportation links.

Stoneham's Town Center area is the focus of this analysis. As shown in Figure 1, Stoneham Center is located along State Route 28 (Main Street). The study area includes Stoneham Square, the Town Common, primary entry corridors, and surrounding blocks. The primary study area (solid black line) includes all parcels along Main Street between Montvale Avenue to the north, Hancock Street to the South, Spencer and Fuller Streets to the east, and Warren Street/Hill Court to the West. A larger secondary study area (dotted black line) includes all parcels bounded by the proposed Tri-Community Bikeway right-of-way to the north, Wright Street to the west, Pine Street to the east, and Marble Street to the South. Essentially, these areas serve as the gateway corridors into the town center.



## Historical Perspective

Stoneham residents take pride in their industrial history as the former “Shoe Town” during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. At its peak, local footwear manufacturers produced up to 380,000 pairs of shoes, one of the largest outputs in the county.

At the turn of the century, Stoneham saw a population boom as shoe manufacturing gave way to the pharmaceutical and automobile industries, both major employers in the town during the 1900s. However, with the construction of I-93 in the 1960s, Stoneham’s transformation into a residential suburb for many that work in Boston was complete. Since then, Town Center has seen its place as the center of community life fade, as the largest employers and retail located along highways and other auto corridors and residential development went to more auto-oriented suburban developments.

## Stoneham Center Today

Stoneham Center remains the active civic center of the town, with Town Offices, the Post Office and the Library all located within a ¼-mile of each other; however, post-WWII suburbanization has drawn much of the area’s vibrancy away, with large auto-oriented shopping centers located just outside of the study area drawing businesses and consumers away from the center. Fortunately, recent investments have kick-started Stoneham Center’s transformation, including development of a new, picturesque Town Common, the adaptive reuse of older buildings into mixed use housing and retail, and construction of a new middle school nearby, as well as brand new mixed-use construction. Despite these investments, and although Stoneham Center retains numerous businesses, including restaurants, professional services, and notably, a professional theatre, foot traffic tends to be light except during special events and before and after theatre performances. So, although the area aspires to have the pulse of a downtown, it is not yet the destination it could be. Instead, and as indicated during interviews for this project, Stoneham Center for many is a place they pass through in their cars. Thus, the Town

must increase efforts to undergo the greater transformation desired by many to fully recapture its place as the center of the community.

## II. Current Conditions

### Population and Households

#### Population: Existing and Projected

Stoneham Center<sup>1</sup> has just over 3,400 residents, accounting for approximately 16% of Stoneham’s 21,437 total residents as of the 2010 Census. Over the past twenty years, Stoneham’s population has grown slowly and has not experienced the robust growth seen in neighboring towns that have access to public transit or are close to major highways. MAPC’s *MetroFuture*<sup>2</sup> projections show that Stoneham’s overall population will remain stable over the next 15 years (Figure 2); however, the age

Figure 2: Projected Population Growth

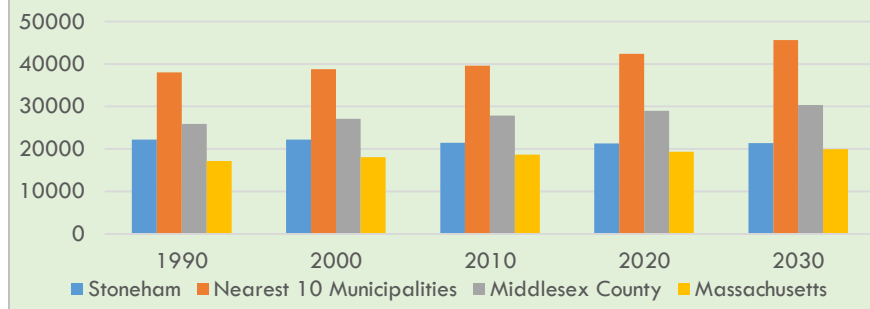
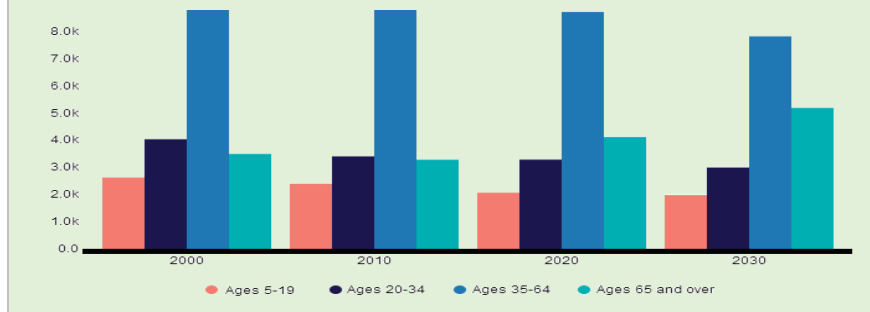


Figure 3: Projected Population Growth by Age, Stoneham



<sup>1</sup> Four Census block groups in the Stoneham Square area

<sup>2</sup> *MetroFuture* is MAPC’s 30-year long-range regional plan.

composition will change significantly. Seniors aged 65 or above will see the greatest increase - 60% by 2030, whereas younger residents will decrease (Figure 3). This change in age distribution will impact Stoneham's housing demand, amenities desired, and service costs. Attracting a younger workforce to live and work in the community will be critical to maintaining a balanced tax base in the town.

### Household Characteristics

Stoneham Center is home to approximately 1,300 households, roughly 15% of Stoneham's total of close to 9,000. Although there has been a slight decrease in the number of households over the last decade, the number of households is projected to increase over the next 20 years according to MAPC's projections. (Table 1).

Like surrounding residential suburban communities, Stoneham has a high proportion of family households (65%); however, only 27% are families with children.. Additionally, and similar to regional and national trends, Stoneham's households are getting older and smaller: median age has increased and household size has decreased over the past 20 years. Stoneham and Stoneham Center are projected to see a significant increase in number of households headed by persons 65 and older over the next 20 years (Table 1).

The aging of the population will have a large impact on the housing stock in Stoneham Center. Many older households, including "empty nesters", are more likely to downsize to both reduce cost of living and eliminate the need to upkeep larger homes. They often prefer smaller units in walkable, amenity-rich environments typically found in mixed-use and/or multi-family buildings and environments like Stoneham Center. However, given the aging of the population, it is important for Stoneham Center to attract younger households, both singles and couples without children, as well as households with children. More residents with spending power are needed to support an active retail environment. Fortunately, housing preferences of younger people and seniors are very much aligned in today's market – both are more "urban-inclined" – with many preferring to live in multi-family structures. Therefore, creating an accessible, amenity rich, active environment will be attractive to both.

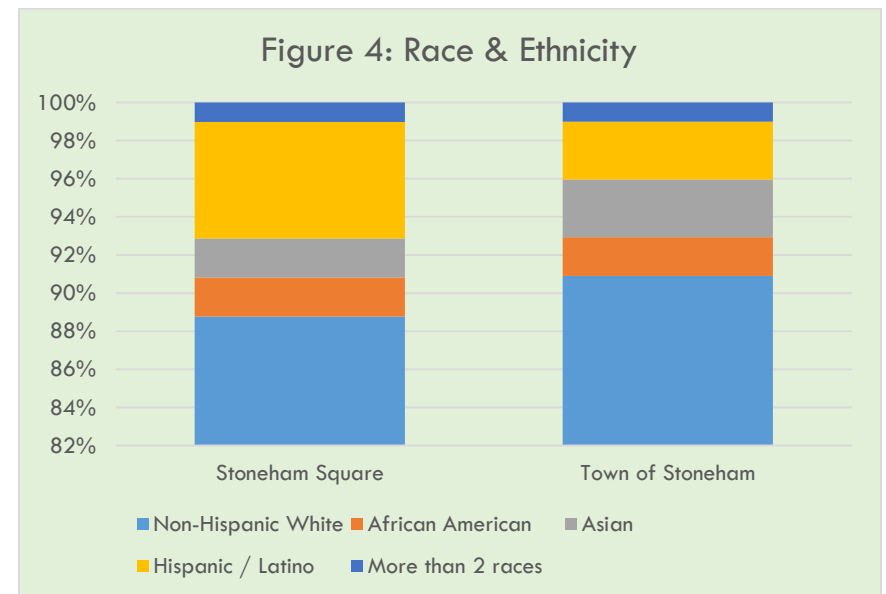
**Table 1: Household Change by Age: 2010 - 2030**

	2010	2020	2030	Change	%
<b>Households</b>	<b>8,994</b>	<b>9,239</b>	<b>9,507</b>	<b>513</b>	<b>5.7%</b>
Under 20	47	34	24	(23)	-49%
20 to 34	1,053	1,106	1,045	(8)	-1%
35 to 54	3,521	2,994	2,940	(581)	-17%
55 to 65	1,840	2,080	1,738	(102)	-6%
65+	2,533	3,025	3,760	1,227	48%

Source: US Census and MAPC (Stronger Region Projections)

### Race and Ethnicity

The Town of Stoneham is a predominantly white community (90% in 2010). The Stoneham Center area has a slightly more diverse population, with more African-American than the Town and twice (6%) as many Latino/Hispanic population (Figure 4).



## Income and Poverty

The median household income (MHI) in Stoneham Center (\$62,466) is approximately 15% lower than Stoneham overall (\$72,938). While income levels are comparable to surrounding towns like Medford and Woburn, they are significantly lower than its more affluent neighbors such as Winchester and Reading and increasingly, Melrose. And although MHI in Stoneham has increased over the past decade, incomes increased by a lower percentage compared to all but one of its surrounding communities between 2000 and 2012.

**Table 2: Household Income, Stoneham and Surrounding Communities**

	2000	2012	Percent Change
<b>STONEHAM</b>	<b>57,240</b>	<b>\$72,938</b>	<b>27%</b>
Malden	45,255	\$54,229	20%
Medford	52,510	\$72,773	39%
Melrose	62,985	\$86,264	37%
Reading	76,453	\$102,614	34%
Wakefield	64,811	\$85,810	32%
Winchester	93,585	\$128,199	37%
Woburn	55,094	\$72,434	31%

Source: US Census 2000 and ACS 2012

Stoneham's lower income is due in part to the large number of seniors, many of whom are likely living on a fixed income. When looking at household incomes by age of the householder, those over 65 years of age earn under \$37,000 annually. Median incomes for households between 25 and 64 years of age exceed \$85,000.

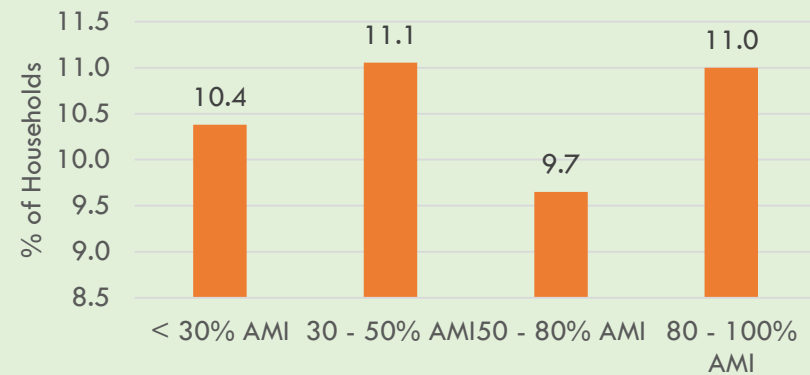
**Table 3: Household Income by Age**

Age	Median Income
15 to 24 years	\$54,583
25 to 44 years	\$85,293
<b>45 to 64 years</b>	<b>\$88,530</b>
65 years and over	\$36,827

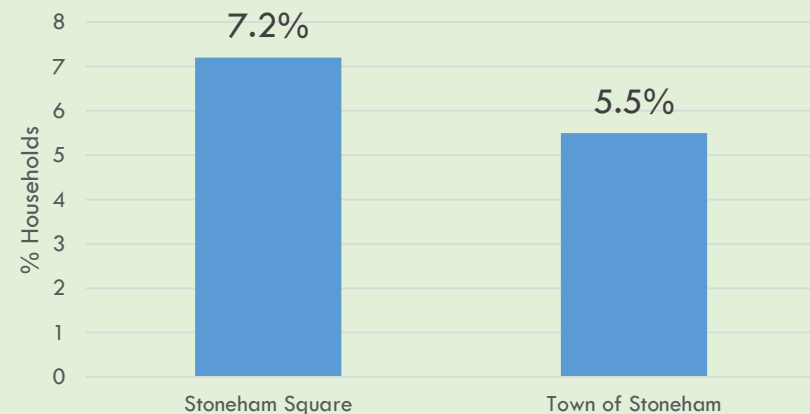
Source: ACS 2012

Over a third of Stoneham's households are either low, very low, or extremely low income (Figure 5); more than half of this population is burdened by housing costs (spending 30% or more of their income on housing). Additionally, Stoneham Center has a higher number of households living in poverty than all of Stoneham - 7.2% vs. 5.5%, respectively. (Figure 6).

**Figure 5: Low Income Households**



**Figure 6: Households Living in Poverty**





## Industry and Employment

Businesses not only bring tax revenue to a community, they bring jobs for local residents, and they bring consumers (employees who reside out of the area, but commute in) to support local retail and services.

### Stoneham Town Center Jobs

Stoneham Town Center is the historic center of business within the community. Although the area no longer is the primary location for business growth and employment within town, nearly 740 businesses within a half-mile of the Town Common still employ approximately 4,000 workers. When looking at workers within a 5-minute drive, the number increases to over 16,000. This represents a large pool of potential consumers.

Professional and Scientific Services, Retail Trade, and Health Care & Social Assistance establishments are the largest employers within the half-mile. Among the many retail jobs, clothing and accessories stores, and food and beverage stores have the highest number of employees; however, most are located outside of the Study Area at and around Redstone Plaza and along Montvale Avenue. The large number of professional and health care workers is attributed to the presence of office buildings and health care providers (e.g. Massachusetts Eye & Ear Infirmary), along Montvale Avenue from Main Street to I-93.

**Table 4: Employment within ½-mile of Town Common**

Industry	Businesses		Employees	
	#	%	#	%
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing etc.	1	0.1%	3	0.1%
Mining	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Utilities	0	0.0%	1	0.0%
Construction	68	9.2%	289	7.2%
Manufacturing	25	3.4%	221	5.5%
Wholesale Trade	22	3.0%	89	2.2%
Retail Trade	66	8.9%	465	11.6%
Transportation & Warehousing	13	1.8%	118	3.0%
Information	10	1.4%	187	4.7%
Finance & Insurance	38	5.1%	228	5.7%
Real Estate, Rental & Leasing	23	3.1%	72	1.8%
Professional, Scientific & Tech Svcs	101	13.7%	545	13.6%
Management of Companies & Enterprises	2	0.3%	3	0.1%
Administrative & Support & Waste Management & Remediation Services	76	10.3%	344	8.6%
Educational Services	16	2.2%	202	5.1%
Health Care & Social Assistance	62	8.4%	471	11.8%
Arts, Entertainment & Recreation	21	2.8%	94	2.4%
Accommodation & Food Services	31	4.2%	135	3.4%
Other Services (except Public Administration)	78	10.6%	335	8.4%
Public Administration	11	1.5%	194	4.9%
Unclassified Establishments	75	10.1%	0	0.0%
TOTAL	739	100.0%	3,997	100.0%

### III. Land Use & Zoning

Land use in the Primary Study Area (Figure 7, solid black line) is supportive of a walkable Town Center Environment and includes retail establishments, professional and town offices, institutional uses, open space and mixed use multifamily residential.

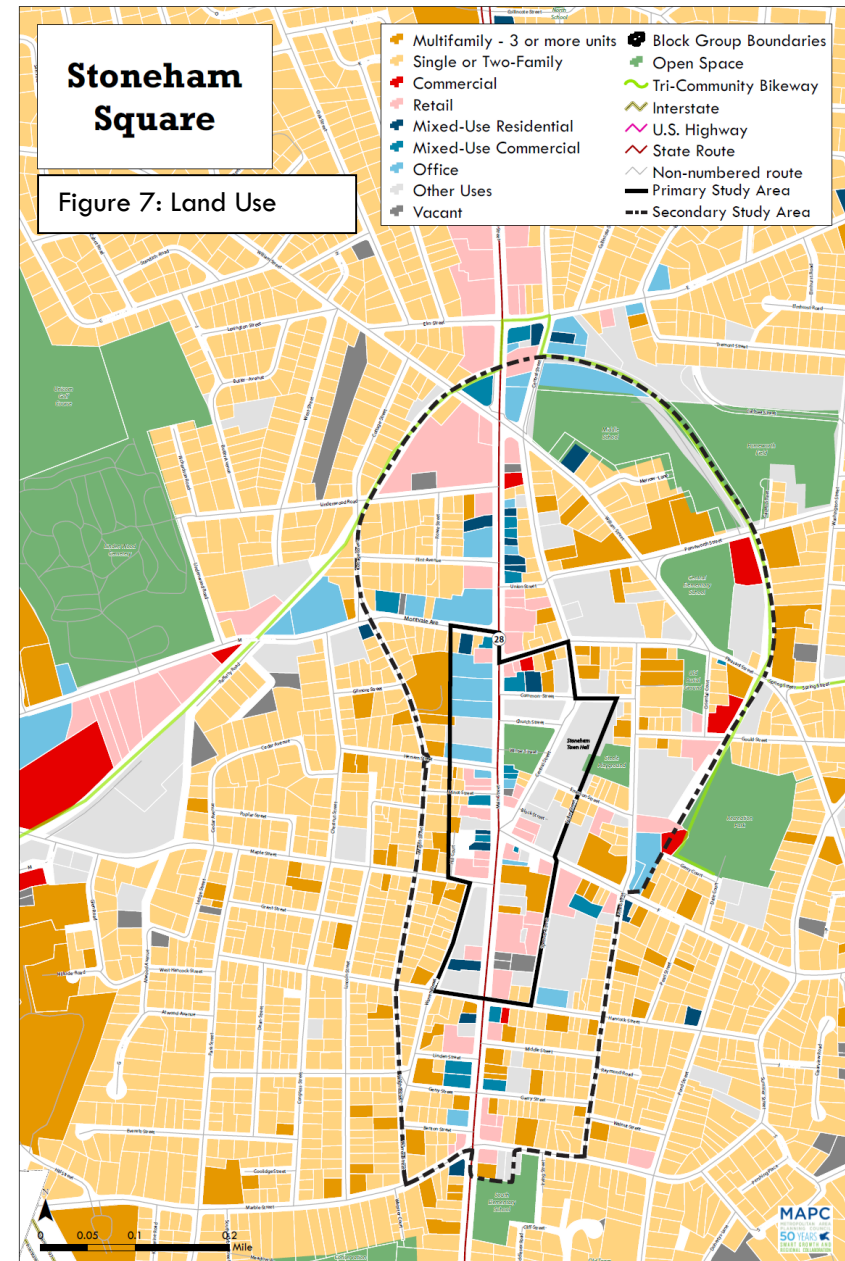
The Secondary Study Area (dotted line) includes auto oriented retail and office uses including Stop and Shop and Mass Eye and Ear, the newly renovated and expanded Stoneham Middle School, and single-, two- and multifamily (including townhouses) residential. Numerous underutilized parcels holding retail and light industrial uses are found south of Stoneham Square on parcels facing Main Street.

#### Residential Uses

Residential density is essential to a successful town center. Local residents form a crucial consumer base for local retail areas as they support establishments beyond the 9 to 5 workday, particularly on weekends. However, although residential uses are found on nearly 70% of parcels within the larger study area, most are lower density single or two-family residences along the periphery, as well as some smaller multifamily developments.

Within the Primary Study Area, there are a limited number of residential uses. Notably, there is the former Love's building condominiums just south of Stoneham Square, and the new rental complex at 411 Main Street. Beyond these two developments, the only residential options include walk up rental units located on upper floors of older buildings. These units lack the amenities many downtown inclined populations prefer, and are not accessible to those unable to maneuver stairs easily.

Greater residential uses and densities would better support an active retail environment, while also provide housing for seniors and young professionals most likely to reside in Town Center.



## Retail and Office Uses

A key component to a successful town center is a varied and balanced retail environment. A balanced environment is one that offers a mix of shopping and convenience retailers, restaurants, personal services (e.g. salons, spas) and professional services like accountants, attorneys, and doctor's offices.

As mentioned previously, retail uses are found primarily along Main Street. To better understand the uses, MAPC staff surveyed the existing retail environment by walking the entire study area and documenting each store by type. In total, approximately 130 retail and professional office establishments were identified. This included a range of retail, service, and professional offices. Institutional uses (e.g. Town Hall, Library, etc.) were not counted.

The main finding is that the retail composition of the area is unbalanced (see Table 5), with an unusually high concentration of personal and professional services/offices, and a low supply of retail establishments like shoppers and convenience goods.

**Table 5: Existing Retail Inventory by Type**

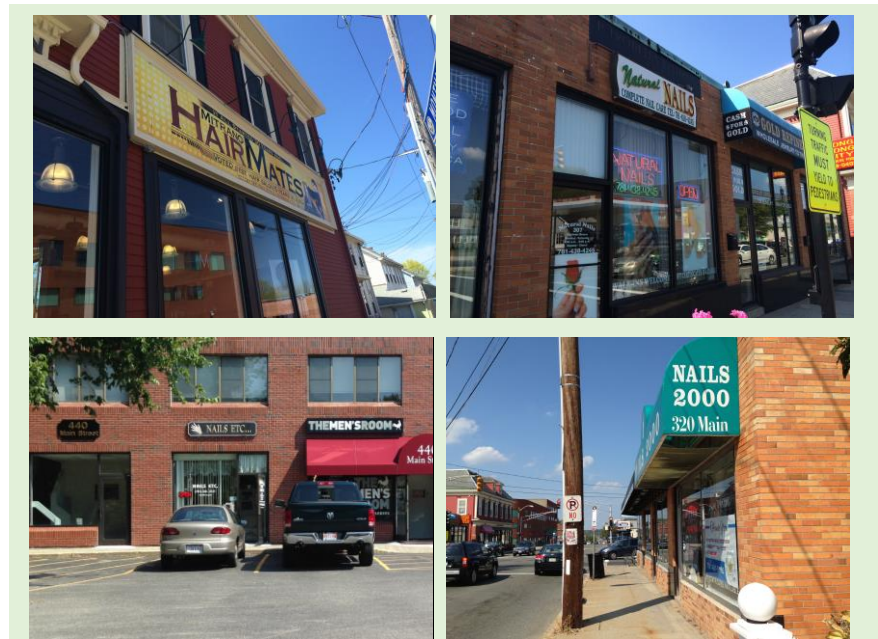
Type	# of Stores	% Town Center	Typical Neighborhood/Community Center Mix
Shoppers Goods	13	11%	30-40%
Convenience Goods	9	7%	20-30%
Food Service	19	16%	10-20%
Personal Services	46	42%	10-20%
Professional Services	25	20%	10%
Vacant	5	4%	5%

Source: MAPC

In particular, there is a very high concentration of Personal Services businesses – 46 stores, or 42% of the total inventory including numerous hair, nail, and other service establishments like dry cleaning. This is significantly higher than the 10-20% found in a typical neighborhood center. Professional Services/Offices (lawyers, accountants, etc.) made up 20% of the total, which is far higher than the typical 5% found in balanced centers. On the flip side, the number of shopping goods stores – places like

clothing stores, gift shops, shoe stores, books, etc. – is very low at 11% (30-40% would be typical), as are the number of convenience goods stores (food, health/pharmacies, health, beauty, etc.) 30-40% would be typical. Food service is currently within the typical range found in town centers; however, the inventory is heavy on limited service and take out options that offer similar choices – pizza, sandwiches, etc. And although vacancy is slightly lower, this may reflect the ability of businesses to continue operating due to lower rents for older spaces, and the overall non-competitive environment.

In summary, the area lacks the variety of retail options typically associated with destination shopping and dining environments.



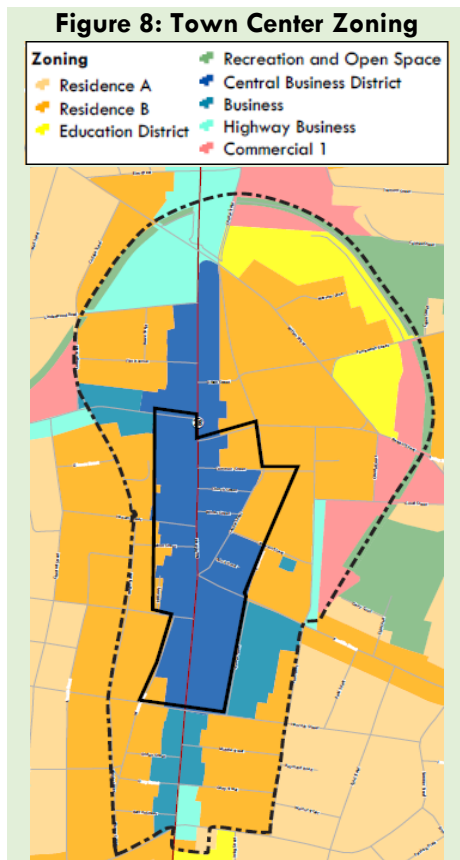
Stoneham Center retail is dominated by personal services including many hair and nail salons. More shopping and convenience retail would create a more balanced retail environment where consumers can accomplish many tasks in one central location.

## Zoning

Generally speaking, current zoning allows for a mixed-use, amenity rich environment in and around Town Center.

### Central Business District (CBD)

All parcels along Main Street within the Primary Study Area are included in the Central Business District, as are many north in the Secondary Study Area. The purpose of the district is to preserve and improve the character of Stoneham Square and its vicinity. The district allows for many by right uses typical in a Town Center including mixed use buildings with dwellings above the first floor, retail, restaurants and service establishments. Drive thrus are not allowed, and auto uses are only allowed by special permit.



### Business District

Parcels along entry corridors (Montvale, Franklin and Main) are zoned primarily as Business. The purpose of the district is “to provide an area for retail sales and services and other uses associated with a Central Business District” and allows for retail, service and office uses, as well as minor automotive repair businesses. One of the most beneficial uses within proximity of a CBD is higher density residential; however, only 5-units are allowed and only in mixed-use situations. Given that these areas are easily walkable from Stoneham Square and the Common, they could be strong locations for multifamily-only or larger mixed-use residential to better

support local retail and to enliven the environment.

### Residence B

Most of the Secondary Study Area is zoned “to provide residential areas of medium intensity with a variety of housing types.” This includes single- and two-family homes. However, multifamily is only allowed by Special Permit. Higher density residential surrounding downtown environments, as they provide a strong customer base for local merchants. Thus, allowing multifamily by right would be beneficial to the success of Town Center.

### Parking Requirements

Parking requirements, even for a location with few public transportation alternatives, are somewhat high for a town center. For example, new medical and dental offices require 5 spaces per 1,000 sf, whereas other office uses and retail require approximately 3 spaces per 1,000 sf, which is more typical. However, given the character of Stoneham Town Center retail, the presence of several public parking lots, and several underutilized private lots (e.g. Salem 5 Bank and others), opportunities to make requirements flexible should be explored including shared parking strategies. Multifamily residential parking requirements are also high. The bylaw requires 2.1 spaces for every multifamily unit constructed. This is likely more than is needed, particularly for smaller housing units (e.g. studios and one-bedroom units).

High parking requirements may make development infeasible, particularly on smaller parcels. Tying parking requirements to number of bedrooms per unit should be explored. For example, studios would require 1 space, 1-bedroom units would require 1.5 spaces, and 2- and 3-bedroom units would require 2 spaces.

### Sign Requirements

Sign requirements could be improved. Although the bylaw regulates many elements, it is also quite restrictive for a Town Center. Perpendicular “blade” signs (signs that protrude from the structure), which are common in walkable areas, and which provide points of interest to attract customers from shop to shop, are not allowed, nor are temporary A-frame signs. A review of the signage requirements should be undertaken to learn from other places what works and doesn’t work in a Town Center.



## IV. Historic and Cultural Assets

Stoneham Center has a number of historic and cultural offerings. These amenities are very important to the Town Center economy as they attract (and could potentially attract more) visitors to the area, as well as residents interested in residing in a community with an established sense of place. More simply put, they enhance the overall environment.

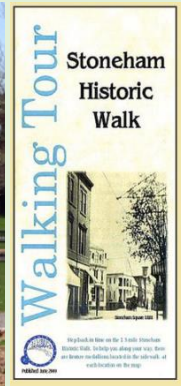
### Historic Assets

Stoneham Center study is home to many of the town's greatest surviving historic resources. Stoneham's historical registry currently lists a dozen structures, including Town Hall, the Fire Station and the Library, all of which remain in use today. Stoneham Square is also home to several commercial structures built in the late 1800s during the height of the shoe industry. These structures, built during prosperous times, create a true Town Center environment, and help to create a strong sense of place. There are also numerous historical homes formerly owned by prominent businessmen and industrialists located in the surrounding residential districts. Homes include the Fuller House on Franklin Street, the Silas Dean House on Pine Street, and the Old Town House, Stoneham's first Town Hall (1826) on Central Street. John Hill's Shoe Factory (1858) on Main Street has been repurposed, first as Love's Furniture and now as "The Residences at Stoneham Square."

### Cultural Assets

Cultural amenities within the Center include The Stoneham Theater, a gallery, as well as numerous events held in Stoneham Common, including summer concerts, Town Day and more. The greatest asset is the Stoneham Theatre, a professional theatre that hosts a variety of programs year round. In addition to 6 main stage shows annually, the theatre also has a concert series, a youth theatre program, the gallery curated by The Griffin Museum of Photography in Winchester, and holds special events throughout the year.

Although not in the study area, other cultural amenities nearby include the Stone Zoo, and numerous recreational facilities and walking trails in the Middlesex Fells Reservation.



Many of Stoneham Center's historic buildings remain in use including the Town Hall (1939), Fire House (1916) and Library (1904) and serve as the center of civic life. They also provide the area with a strong sense of place.

## V. Transportation

A strong, efficient and reliable transportation network, including auto, bicycle, pedestrian and public transit amenities, is essential to the success of a Town Center and its economic opportunities. Transportation not only provides access to jobs, it also provides access to customers needed to support area businesses.

### Automobile Access

Stoneham Square is primarily accessible by automobile along State Route 28, Main Street, which serves as a regional north/south route and is notably used as a cut-through when Interstates 93 and 95 are heavily congested. Montvale Avenue connects Main Street and the center to Interstate 93. Congestion in Town Center is a concern, particularly during peak hours. The most significant backups occur at the intersection of Montvale and Route 28, and the Stoneham Square intersection, where Main, Franklin and Central Streets converge. Congestion is in large part due to commuters cutting through from other communities such as Melrose Wakefield, Malden and Reading.

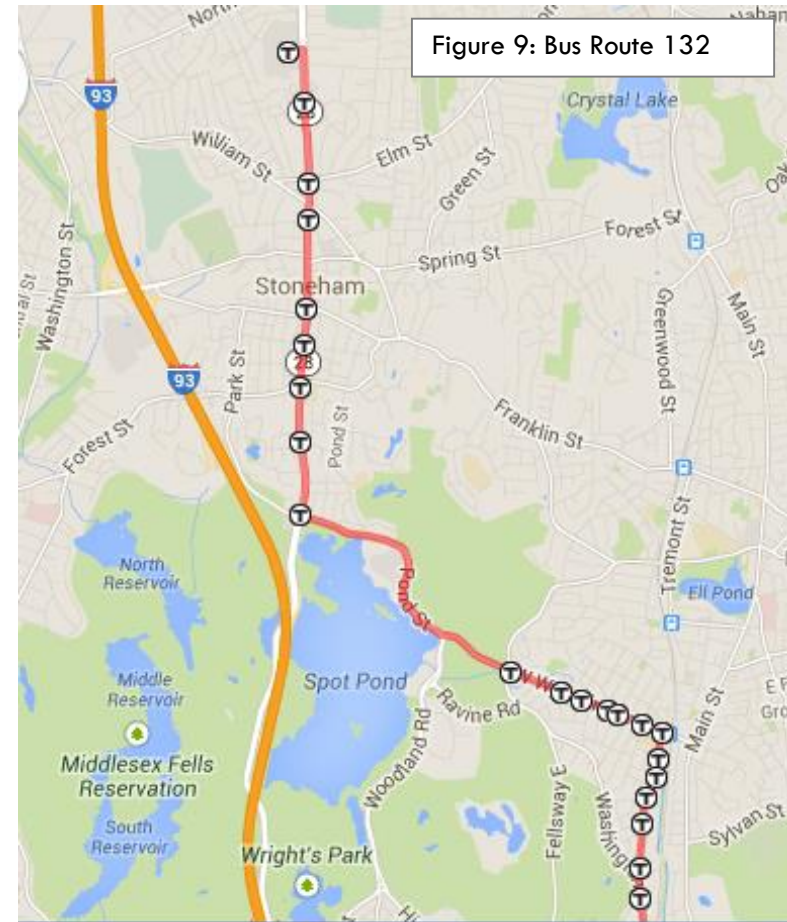
### Bus Service

Stoneham Square is currently serviced by MBTA bus route 132, which runs between Redstone Shopping Center and the Malden Center, which connects to the Orange Line via Oak Grove Station. The bus makes several stops along Main Street / Route 28. Current inbound service begins at 6AM and ends at 7PM, which is a significant challenge for commuters and visitors, particularly those traveling outside of the 9 to 5 workday. Saturday inbound service is 8am to 7:30pm and there is no Sunday service.

A majority of local merchants have expressed the need to relocate existing bus stops that are obstructing storefronts and adding stops near job centers, as well as create an express bus service between Stoneham and Downtown Boston (Haymarket). More specifically, some businesses even stated that the unpredictable service and lack of a later transit option limits the potential to attract employees, in particular city dwellers who do not own a car. Further, bus service does not connect Town Center's residents or consumers to other amenities in Town, most notably there is no public transportation link to the Stone Zoo or other nearby recreational amenities.

Without a direct link, the opportunity to capture more business from these major regional attractions is lessened.

Although MBTA commuter rail stations are located approximately one mile from Town Square in Melrose with no bus service connecting these stations to Stoneham, public transit is not an option for many.



**Bus Route 132 provides limited, local service to the Malden Center Orange line station, but does not stop at the Stone Zoo and other recreational amenities in the Fells.**

## **Pedestrian Environment**

The pedestrian environment varies widely within the study area. Within Stoneham Square, sidewalks are in good to excellent condition, with round curbs and brick paving along edges. Tree plantings and lamp posts are placed consistently along the sidewalk and feature barrels with potted plants maintained by the Stoneham High School Class of '82's beautification committee. Sidewalk width ranges between 8 and 16 feet, which can accommodate pedestrians, street furniture and outdoor dining (which is currently not allowed.). Cross walks in the Square are clearly striped and paved with brick, with accessible ramps at all intersections.

Interviews with local merchants revealed a unanimous consensus that additional improvements can be made to make Stoneham Square a more inviting place for pedestrians. Suggestions include adding hanging plants to lamp posts and changing the timing of crosswalk signals to coordinate with traffic signals, and more.

Outside of the Stoneham Square, pedestrian conditions are not as favorable. Large parking lots with curb cuts break up large segments of sidewalks, significant cracking and impediments were noticed, and street crossings at some intersections are confusing and dangerous (e.g. Montvale and Main Street, in front of the Post Office).

## **Parking**

Stoneham Square has ample on and off-street parking. Many businesses along Main Street have parking lots in the front, side, or behind buildings. An additional 4 public parking lots can be found adjacent to Town Common, Town Hall, and the Fire Station, however, these lots are not well-marked by directional signage.

A large proportion of merchants interviewed stated that "the lack of parking" in Stoneham Square is perceived, not the reality, due in large part to the lack of clear signage, or unrealistic expectations to "always park in front of a particular shop." Merchants also noted that aggressive ticketing and 2-hour parking periods for designated on-street parking may be too short to encourage visitors to extend their stay downtown. The addition of short-term, 15 to 30 minute period parking spaces near take-out restaurants or businesses that command shorter visits may improve parking turnover rates downtown.

## **Bike facilities**

No bicycle facilities current exist in the study areas. There are no bike lanes, sharrows (shared lane bicycle street markings), or dedicated bike paths. However, the proposed Tri-Community Greenway is scheduled to begin construction in spring 2015.



## Recent and Planned Investment

Over the last decade, Stoneham Center has begun the process of transitioning back to the focal center of the community. This is most evident by the numerous investments that have occurred within the study area.

Public investments in the Town Center study area have brought a sense of place to the study area, particularly through the redevelopment of Stoneham's Town Common. Additional investment includes the new Stoneham Middle School located at the northernmost boundary of the study area.

Several private investments within the study area have also brought attention to the area. Most visibly, residential construction including "The Residences at Stoneham Square," a 47-unit condominium development at the former Love's Furniture building (2007); and the under construction 411 Main Street, a mixed use project with retail and 25 one- and two-bedroom rental units; are bringing more residents to the center. Additionally, new townhouse development on Pomeworth Street (2007) and duplexes on Emerson and Warren Streets (2008) have brought more people within walking distance.

Private commercial development is also bringing more retail and offices to the area. This includes the recent redevelopment of the Heritage Building (across from Town Common) into a mixed-use retail and office complex. The building is now home to the Chamber of Commerce, a yoga studio, with additional ground floor retailers are expected in the coming months. Other investment within the study area include renovation of a 2-story medical office in 2011, a new restaurant and improvements to existing establishments.

### Future Investments

No additional mixed-use or commercial development is currently planned within the study area; however, plans are in the works to begin construction of the Tri-County Greenway. The bikeway, which will originate from Stoneham's Recreation Park will extend through Woburn and Winchester using existing railroad right of way is expected to obtain approximately \$5.5 million in state and federal funds and begin construction beginning in 2015.



Recent investment is helping to reestablish Town Center as the focal point for community interaction.

### Recent Public Investments

- **Town Common:** The Stoneham Town common was constructed in 2007, and is home to Town Day, the holiday tree lighting, summer concerts and more.
- **Stoneham Middle School:** Town Meeting on February 7, 2012 approved \$40.5M for a new middle school. Construction began in the summer of 2012 and opened in Fall 2014. The Massachusetts School Building Authority will reimburse 57.5% of \$22M of the project cost.

### Recent Private Investments:

- **The Heritage Building** (2013 -2014): This retail/office rehabilitation project by Middlesex Investment Partners included interior and façade improvements and the addition of an outdoor patio area.
- **The Petrillo Building** (2008-2014): This mixed-use project includes 25 one to two-bed apartment units and ground level retail.
- **Former Love's Building** (2007): This mixed-use residential condominium includes 47 units and ground level commercial space.



## VI. Market Study Findings

To develop a realistic, achievable, and implementable plan for Stoneham Town Center, it is crucial to understand the how much development and types of commercial investment the marketplace can potentially support.

As part of this project, a general market analysis was conducted to identify the potential demand for residential, retail, and to a lesser extent, office development within Stoneham Center Study Area. It is important to note that findings from market studies offer a glimpse of what could potentially be supported within an area based on current data, trends and assumptions made as part of the analysis. Market studies do not predict what will be developed. Thus, the purpose is to help communities to better understand the level of investment that may be possible, and to develop strategies to attract development and new business activity, market available retail and office space, identify opportunity sites that hold potential for redevelopment, and inform regulatory changes that may be needed to achieve desired results.

This section will highlight the major findings from the market study, including demand estimates for residential units, as well as square footage estimates and types of supportable retail. (The full market analysis is included as Appendix A.)

### Retail Market Potential

To estimate the potential for new retail space in Stoneham Town Center, MAPC performed two analyses: a retail gap analysis of trade area residents, and a retail demand analysis of local workers.

MAPC conducted the retail gap analysis first to identify the potential for additional retail within the trade area. For this project, the trade area – the area where a retail hub can expect to attract the majority of its consumers – included all households and their spending within a 5-minute or 10-minute drive of Town Center.

In summary, and as highlighted in the following table, the potential exists for significantly more retail in Stoneham Town Center - up to 50,000 sf of additional retail within 10-15 establishments. The greatest opportunity is for clothing stores, shoe stores, restaurants, and gift/hobby/home furnishings stores. These are the types of retailers identified as lacking in

the analysis of the existing retail environment, thus there is little competition in place should new establishments choose to locate in Stoneham.

**Table 6: Summary of Potential Supportable Retail by Square Feet and Number of Establishments**

Trade Area	Supportable Square Footage	Total Establishments	Types
Primary Trade Area (5-minute drive)	45,600	10-12	5 small clothing/shoe stores (or 2-3 larger ones), full service restaurant, 2 limited service restaurants (cafes), home goods and gift shop, 1 hobby shop (music/books/electronics)
Secondary Trade Area (5-mile Radius)	15,750	4-5	2-3 full-service restaurants, 1 limited service restaurant (café), 1 furniture/home furnishings, 1 hobby (music/books)
<b>ESTIMATED POTENTIAL</b>	50,000 (total supportable sf – existing vacant sf, then rounded)	15 establishments (10 new storefronts)	Clothing/shoes, restaurants (limited and full svc), gift/hobby, home furnishings.

However, despite the potential, it is important to note again that this is not a prediction of what will open in the Town Center, rather it is what may be possible. There are many factors that go into whether or not a business decides to locate in an area, including the availability and quality of the space, the size of the space, its location and visibility (which is crucial for retail), foot and auto traffic, parking availability and other considerations. Given that many existing spaces are older, it may be difficult to attract retailers to some locations. Newer spaces in strong locations with high

visibility (e.g. Stoneham Square, near Town Common and public parking) will be more likely to attract new tenants if lease terms and costs are favorable.

### Worker Retail Potential

Next, MAPC analyzed the potential of local workers to support area retail. Studies show that workers spend approximately \$100 per week on food and convenience goods near their office or place of work. Therefore, based on assumptions outlined in the more detailed market study (Appendix A), the 16,000 workers within a 5-minute drive of Town Center could support up to 5 establishments if a portion of their spending can be captured. In particular, take-out and sit down restaurants, as well as delis and convenience retail.

## Residential Market Potential

For Stoneham's Town Center to become reenergized – to grow and prosper – it is important to look for ways to offer more housing within the study area, particularly the types of units the market demands.

The purpose of the residential analysis was to identify if the potential exists for additional development within the Town Center, and if so, how many units could be supported, what type of units are in demand, and the households most likely to reside in them.

Demographic shifts highlighted earlier in this report, and changing housing preferences will likely drive demand in Stoneham Center. Specifically, with an aging of the population – locally and regionally – and with younger people staying single longer, and families having fewer children, household sizes are getting smaller. Thus, the demand for and preference for smaller housing units including multifamily and town homes with amenities in a walkable environment has increased. Stoneham Town Center provides the type of environment attractive to these demographics and residential unit types.

To estimate future demand, MAPC used its Stronger Region Forecasts to estimate the number of housing units needed over the next 5-7 years.

**Table 7: Projected Household Change, 2012 - 2030**

	2012 Total	2020 SR	Total Unit Demand	2030 SR	Total Unit Demand
<b>Households</b>	<b>9,050</b>	<b>9,239</b>	<b>189</b>	<b>9,507</b>	<b>457</b>
<b>Town Center Capture (33%)</b>	<b>n/a</b>	<b>n/a</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>n/a</b>	<b>152</b>
<b>Remainder of Stoneham (66%)</b>	<b>n/a</b>	<b>n/a</b>	<b>126</b>	<b>n/a</b>	<b>304</b>

Based on MAPC's household projections, at least 189 new households are expected in Stoneham by 2020, and over 450 by 2030. Given the aging of Stoneham's households, the increase of older renters coupled with a decrease in younger renters, new unit demand is for multifamily development in locations accessible to retail and services as well as transit. Thus, given changing preferences, approximately one-third of total demand could be supported in the Town Center area. The remainder would be built in other areas in town, particularly areas closest to highway infrastructure (e.g. the proposed Fallon Road project<sup>3</sup>), and commuter options (e.g. near Melrose or Wakefield town lines, such as the proposed 300-unit Weiss Farm 40B project). Additionally, given the growing percentage of renters over the last decade, approximately half of all unit demand will be for rental apartments – predominantly one- and two-bedroom units.

Amenities including elevator access, fitness rooms and other common space will make new units more competitive with other amenity rich areas that offer transit. Further should the Town Center offer a greater range of activities and amenities – particularly an improved retail landscape and especially public transit options (express bus, or commuter rail feeder service) the same multifamily units that are typically attractive to older residents could attract younger households, particularly those who work along Interstates 95 and 93, and who wish to be closer to work. Further, based on current sales prices for newer condominiums, new construction could likely be supported in Stoneham Center, particularly given the lack of condominiums available for sale within the region.

<sup>3</sup> For purposes of this analysis, the Fallon Road 300-unit residential project to the west of I-93, and disconnected from much of Stoneham, was considered an outlier, and units were not included in future demand projections.

Finally, more than 40% of Stoneham households are cost burdened, meaning they spend over 30% of their income on housing costs. Therefore, deed-restricted affordable units should be required in any new development.

## VII. Stakeholder Input

Throughout the Stoneham Town Center Vision & Action Plan process, input was sought from various stakeholders. This included input from the project Advisory Group, local merchants and business owners, developers, and the public.

### A. Advisory Committee

A 15 member project Advisory Committee was formed at the outset of the project. The committee was organized by the Town Administrator, and included a broad range of interests from local businesses, representatives from Town departments, boards and committees, the Stoneham Theatre, Stone Zoo, residents and more. The Advisory Committee worked closely with MAPC throughout the process, provided feedback, engaged citizens, volunteered at public events, and provided feedback on the draft document.



The Stoneham Town Center Advisory Committee worked with Town Staff and MAPC throughout the process to review findings, reach out to community members, and to facilitate the Public Open House.

### B. Interviews

Over a dozen interviews were conducted with stakeholders as part of the planning process.

### Strengths

Among the strengths identified, many felt the area had “good bones” – it feels like a Town Center. It’s location near the interchange of Routes 93 and 95 was also seen as an advantage. Nearby amenities like the Stone Zoo as well as events like Town Day also bring or could potentially bring more people to the square. The Stoneham Theater was mentioned by all as a major asset and draw. The diversity of restaurants – including Italian, Indian, Asian and other options – were also a major plus.

### Weaknesses

Several weaknesses were also identified. Many were concerned about traffic and the limited public transportation options. Many felt the area lacked a diversity of retail options and that there was little to do after 5pm beyond eating or the theater. Others felt the area looked dated and could be spruced up through façade improvement, improved signage and other improvements to the public realm. Others felt the town could be more business friendly by updating ordinances to allow for things like outdoor dining (currently not allowed), and improved signage.

### Opportunities

Those interviewed also identified numerous opportunities for Town Center. This included the opportunity to attract more residents, to capture more pass through traffic to support area businesses, and better, coordinated marketing efforts to bring attention to the Center and its businesses.

### C. Transportation Workshop

A workshop was held on July 30 2014 to discuss transportation challenges and potential solutions, including those specific to the Town Center. The meeting, which was jointly held as part of a parallel planning process through MAPC’s Transportation Department, attracted approximately 30 participants, including many members of the Town Center Plan Advisory Group. Additional stakeholders in attendance included downtown business owners, Hallmark Health, social service organizations, and representatives of the Stoneham Housing Authority, Greenway Committee and Open Space and Recreation Committee. After a brief overview presentation participants rotated through breakout groups focused on transit, bicycling, or walking. Traffic congestion and lack of transit alternatives – the area is underserved by transit compared to surrounding towns - were identified as key issues facing Town Center. This not only limits commuter options for

residents and their access to jobs, it limits the consumer base for local merchants, and hurts local businesses looking to attract qualified workers from areas outside of Stoneham. For example, with few transit options, the Stoneham Theater has difficulty attracting actors from Boston. Additionally, pedestrian safety and the need to reduce fatalities also surfaced as a major concern during discussions.



Image: Transportation Workshop

At the meeting, participants identified the following needs:

- Improvements to existing MBTA bus routes, including greater frequency, longer operating hours (after 7pm) and Sunday service.
- Desire for new transit service that could include:
  - A new express bus route to Boston
  - Extending Bus Route 131, which currently stops at the Melrose town line on Franklin Street, into Stoneham Town Square.
  - An east-west shuttle bus along the Montvale Ave/Main Street/Franklin Avenue corridor connecting to commuter rail and express bus services in Melrose and Woburn.
- Improved pedestrian crossings in Stoneham Center including improved light timings in Stoneham Square, safety improvements near the Post Office and at Montvale Avenue/Main Street.
- Expanded bicycle facilities including the Tri-Town bike path, and connections (bike lanes, sharrows, etc.) to recreational amenities

(For a complete overview including results from the meeting, see Appendix B.)

## D. Public Open House

The Town of Stoneham, Stoneham Town Center Advisory Committee and the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) held an Open House public meeting on October 1, 2014 to engage the larger Stoneham community and receive input for this vision and action plan. More than 80 people attended and provided many thoughts, opinions and guidance about the future of Stoneham's Town Center.

A complete summary of the meeting is provided as Appendix B for review. However, key takeaways from the evening were that Stoneham has a very engaged citizenry committed to improving the Town Center area. Specifically, there was widespread support for numerous improvements and amenities within the Town Center including a greater variety of shops, restaurants and activities; the desire for more attractive signage and streetscapes; the need for a comprehensive marketing strategy or "brand" to create buzz and draw more people to the area to live and to shop (both locals and from surrounding towns); more public transportation options to make the area more accessible and convenient; and more activities for both adults and children. The desire for a realistic, achievable set of strategies to improve and energize the area was also expressed.

The meeting featured several "stations" where the public was able to offer input into the process. A few key findings from the input stations are below.

### Stoneham Strengths, Challenges and Opportunities

Attendees at this engagements station were asked to state what they liked most about Stoneham's Town Center (Strengths); what they liked least (Weaknesses); and what they felt would improve the area most (Opportunities). Highlights include:

#### Strengths

- Stoneham Theatre (most common answer)
- Location near Interstates 93 and 95, and proximity to Boston
- Good restaurants.
- People
- Town Common and events



### Weaknesses

- Area lacks amenities beyond theater. Not enough to do downtown – for adults or children. No nightlife.
- Building facades/streetscapes look dated and tired.
- Traffic
- Not enough public transportation
- Not many shopping options – need more.

### Opportunities

- A greater variety of shopping options.
- More public transportation options – local, express and connector buses.
- Additional restaurants – for families and for young professionals.
- Signage and streetscape improvements to make the area more visually appealing.
- Improvements to the Common – physical and programmatic. (e.g. fountains, ice skating, more events)



At the first two engagement stations of the October Public Open House, meeting participants were presented with information about the project, then stated what they felt were the area's greatest strengths, weaknesses and opportunities.

### Station: Priorities

After listening to a presentation highlighting existing conditions and market opportunities within the Town Center, attendees were asked to review a dozen draft priorities for the plan to address to improve the Town Center area. Each participant picked their top four.

Based on the results, participants felt that improvements to streetscapes and the public realm, more restaurants and cafes, a greater variety of retail options, and more public transportation options should be prioritized to improve the Town Center.

Other important strategies included the need for a comprehensive marketing strategy to attract more customers to Town Center businesses, as well as more events programming, and recreational options. Low on the list was the need for additional housing, pedestrian improvements, and bike amenities and connections from other areas of town.



Top priorities identified by Open House attendees included:

- 1) Streetscape and public realm improvements.
- 2) More public transportation options.
- 3) More restaurants and cafes.
- 4) A greater variety of retail options.

## Station: Visual Preference

At the Visual Preference engagement station, participants create visual preference collages representing potential development, amenities and activities they would like to see in Stoneham Town Center.

Participants perused hundreds of images depicting different building styles and typologies, from multi-story mixed-use buildings to single family homes to commercial strip mall development, as well as recreational and programming activities including restaurants, active streetscapes, art and music festivals and more.

Many participants indicated the need for a more cohesive built environment within the Town Center area. Although not stated as a priority in the previous exercise, many selected images depicting multi-story, mixed-use structures (3-4 stories) with residential above. More specifically, they wanted to see a “nice downtown look” where the “scale is human” and the “mixed use with retail at street level” have “quaint New England style exteriors” including “traditional brick.” Many images were selected more than once. In terms of amenities, the greatest priorities included the desire for more and “unique dining destinations: with outdoor seating, more “hip nightlife” options, and additional programming, including movies and ice skating in the Common.



The final engagement station allowed participants to identify building types, as well as activities and amenities they most wanted to see in Town Center.

## Visual Preference Image Selections and Direct Quotes



"Scale is human"  
"Mixed streetscape – not just a place to drive through.  
Mixed building appearance."



"Clean, colonial."  
"Nice looking area to shops and live above."



"Friendly, lively."  
"Outdoor seating. Walkable square with something  
worth walking to."



"Place for people to congregate and meet."  
"Attractive city scape."



"Modern, clean, feels younger. Mix of retail."  
"Attractive storefronts. Trees enhance the beauty."



"Colonial structures befitting the town."  
"Looks doable and realistic reach for Stoneham."



"Draw diverse shopping experience."  
"Unique shops."



"Draw – nightlife."  
"Good nightlife activity. Robust exciting upscale food  
and drink. Good socializing environment."



"This looks super fun. I want a beer and a brush!"  
"Personal growth, education, fun adult activities –  
always have to go to another town."



"Farmers market."  
"Farmer's market, CSA pick up brings community  
together."



"Health. Outdoor rink on the Common."  
"Recreation on the Square – family oriented."



"Attractive outdoor dining."  
"Café and casual restaurant outdoor seating."



## VIII. Recommendations

The following recommendations are presented in two parts. Part A is a narrative highlighting the goals, strategies, and actions to further enhance and re-energize the larger Stoneham Town Center areas. Part B (TO BE COMPLETED AFTER PUBLIC REVIEW) is an implementation matrix that provides suggestions for who is responsible for each strategy. This could include a Town department or committee, a non-profit organization, a private entity, or others. The matrix also identifies when each should be accomplished – short, medium, long-term – and the potential resources need to achieve the strategy (e.g. General fund, grants, staff time, etc.)

### **Goal 1: Build organizational capacity in Stoneham's Town Center to advocate for continued revitalization and stronger growth.**

#### **STRATEGIES**

##### **1.A. Hold Town Center specific networking events to improve interaction between local businesses, residents and potential investors.**

Networking events are crucial to the success of local business districts. They provide local business owners an avenue to build partnerships, discuss concerns about and opportunities for their business, build a larger clientele, and identify larger issues to be addressed to better the business environment/climate.

##### **Actions:**

- **FIRST STEP: Create a database of all existing business owners.**
- **Hold Town Center specific networking events.**

##### **1.B. Building on momentum from this project, form an official Stoneham Town Center Neighborhood Association to implement this plan, advocate for and make improvements to the town Center, and serve as a booster organization for the Town Center.**

Membership for any neighborhood association should include diverse perspectives including business owners, local residents and workers. The

neighborhood association would be charged with advocating for neighborhood improvements (both in Town Center and surrounding residential areas), developing neighborhood goals and strategies to achieve desired results, organizing neighborhood activities and events specifically for area residents, and more. A neighborhood association often includes a mixture of volunteers including homeowners, renters, business owners, institutional representatives and other local organizations.

##### **Actions:**

- **FIRST STEP: Identify and recruit additional key stakeholders beyond the current plan Advisory Committee to ensure broad range of interests and perspectives.**

The Advisory Committee should meet after completion of this plan, discuss a path forward, identify priorities it wishes to tackle, and recruit additional membership to broadly reflect the larger Town Center community.

##### **1.C. Create a Downtown subgroup of the Chamber, and eventually a Downtown Merchants Association, tasked specifically with promoting Town Center businesses, events and programming.**

Many Town Center merchants are members of the Stoneham Chamber of Commerce, therefore the Chamber is familiar with merchant needs and resources available to promote these businesses. To focus specifically on the needs of downtown business interests, a Town Center subgroup of the Chamber should act as the initial organization to coordinate and promote events and activities specific to the area. Once activity and participation grows, a more formal Merchants Association should be formed to take on a larger role. Merchants Associations in other communities have successfully promoted and increased business activity. Many create downtown websites highlighting member businesses and promotions, hold regular events like First Fridays and/or Holiday Strolls, etc. Funding for these organizations is primarily derived from membership fees, which include advertising, and other benefits, but also from fundraising events and activities. Merchant Associations are typically comprised only of local business owners and their employees.



#### **Actions:**

- **FIRST STEP: Convene Town Center merchants to identify interest in forming a subgroup of the Chamber.**
- **Establish the Chamber subgroup and create a workplan.**
- **Upon establishment of a Merchants Association, create a work plan (tasks, priorities), including funding structure, for the organization.**

**Goal 2: A more inviting, attractive and easily navigable public realm to increase awareness of Stoneham Town Center and its existing (and future) amenities.**

### **STRATEGIES**

#### **2.A. Create a regulatory environment that encourages a more attractive public realm desired by the larger community.**

Participants at the public open house, and many interviewed, stressed the need to improve the overall appearance of Stoneham Town Center. Many felt it was a primary reason that Stoneham Town Center lacks “a pulse.” Landscaping, signage, building façade upgrades and other improvements to improve the overall look of Town Center and its would help to attract more businesses, customers and residents.

#### **Actions:**

- **FIRST STEP: Develop and adopt revised signage standards into the zoning bylaw specific to and appropriate for a town center.**  
Standards should allow for perpendicular “blade” signage (protruding from buildings) to provide greater visibility, specific design elements to create cohesion in the center, and temporary signage (through special permit) such as A-frames to better attract customers.
- **Develop a wayfinding plan to guide motorists (but also bicyclists and pedestrians) to Town Center services and amenities.**  
Stoneham Town Center is not clearly identified to motorists, nor are its many amenities or parking. A wayfinding signage plan, including Gateway signage from the north, south, east and west, that clearly indicates downtown and its attractions (e.g. Town

Common, Stoneham Theatre) and amenities, in particular public parking would help to make the area more navigable to help capture pass through traffic, and point visitors to key attractions like restaurants, the Stoneham Theatre, etc. Branding should be incorporated into any wayfinding plan.

- **Identify funding (town, grant or other) to implement wayfinding plan.**
- **Consider adopting a set of design guidelines to accompany Central Business District Zoning to encourage the building design desired by participants at the public meeting.**  
Many at the public meeting wanted to preserve a “New England” character, with materials such as brick or clapboard siding, an active retail ground floor with large windows, plantings, etc. A set of recommended guidelines would encourage strong design by informing developers during the earliest stages of each project.
- **Continue to fund the recently created façade improvement program to assist local businesses with the appearance of the establishment to attract more customers and enhance the larger environment.**

**Goal 3: An energized Town Center with greater retail, entertainment and service options.**

A key priority of area stakeholders was the desire to attract a more diversified mix of retail and entertainment amenities to the Town Center area.

### **STRATEGIES**

#### **3.A. Target key retail opportunities to locate in Stoneham Center.**

The retail market analysis identified several retail sectors that could potentially be supported within Stoneham Town Center including clothing, shoe, home goods and gift stores.

#### **Actions:**

- **FIRST STEP: Identify and create a list/spreadsheet of establishments in other downtowns that may be interested in opening a second or third location, and recruit them to Stoneham Town Center.**  
The Town Planner working with the Chamber of Commerce and other stakeholders should identify establishments in other communities and then use the market analysis, and other materials,

to recruit establishments to available spaces in Town Center. Priorities should include clothing stores, shoe stores (which also builds on Stoneham's history), specialty gifts and restaurants.

- **Develop a database of available retail spaces.** (See Goal 3 for more.)
- **Work with current owners of Town Center establishments interested in opening another shop or restaurant to identify potential spacesm connect them to resources (training, funding), etc.**
- **Look to attract additional downtown anchor establishments that will draw larger numbers of people to Town Center during the day and evening to increase foot traffic in and support smaller establishments nearby.**

Although the Stoneham Theatre is a strong evening anchor, the area lacks a “draw” during the day beyond civic uses. Anchor establishments such as high traffic retail or restaurant uses (e.g. large cafes, pharmacies), public or private facilities (e.g. private fitness facilities or YMCAs), or other institutional would help to draw more customers to Town Center.

### **3.B. Create a more exciting environment by developing and/or attracting additional programming and cultural activities to Stoneham Square.**

Throughout the planning process, many stated that beyond the Stoneham Theatre (“a huge amenity”), and a few restaurants, there was little to do in the Town Center – for all ages.

#### **Actions:**

- **FIRST STEP: Explore potential for the Stoneham Theatre to hold more events to attract more visitors to town and support both the theater and local businesses.**

Although the Stoneham Theatre was far and away considered the greatest asset in Town Center, many expressed a desire for additional programming, including concerts, and potentially movies on nights when the theater is dark. Theater management and local stakeholders should meet to explore potential opportunities that are consistent with the mission of the theater.

- **Encourage more restaurants and bars to locate in Town Center, particularly those that would attract a young professional post-work crowd.**

A more active environment with nightlife options would potentially attract nearby workers. In fact, several people interviewed suggested Town Center was the perfect location for a “good American bar and grill.” They could also help to attract younger residents to the area.

- **Study the feasibility of an ice rink in Town Common to attract families in colder, winter months, when foot traffic decreases.**

More amenities and programming will bring more people to Town Center to support existing, and potentially attract additional retail and service establishments. For example, increased visitation could help to attract a coffee shop or café that is desired by many, but has been difficult to attract.

### **Goal 4: A more robust, convenient and efficient multi-modal transportation system to better connect Stoneham Square residents and businesses.**

Increasingly, businesses and residents, look to locate and/or live in areas with a menu of transportation options available to them including public transit, bicycle and pedestrian networks, and the automobile. In order for Town Center to fully maximize its potential, additional transportation options are needed to better serve residents and workers.

(Many of these recommendations were developed as part of the parallel Livable Cities planning process referred to earlier in the document.)

### **4.A. Improve local mobility and access to transit for Town Center residents, employees and customers.**

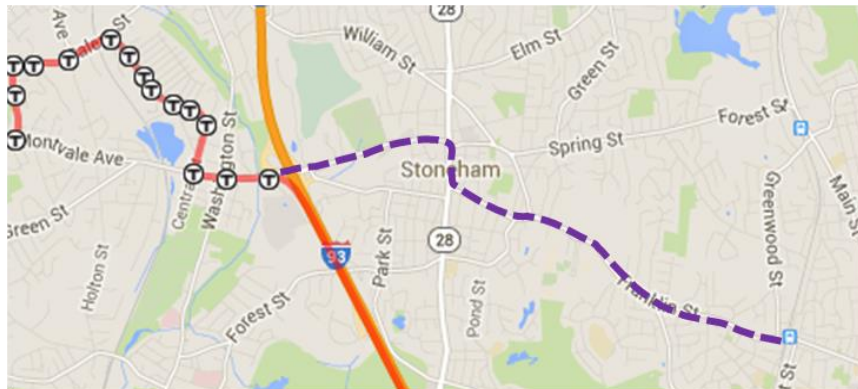
#### **Actions:**

- **FIRST STEP: Work with the MBTA to extend service on the 132 beyond 7pm, and to add a stop for the Stone Zoo and other recreational amenities in the Fells.**

Extended weekday and weekend service would make bus transit a more viable option for residents who work beyond the traditional 9 to 5 workday, while adding a stop at the Stone Zoo would better link Town Center to potentially capture more visitors (through cross-marketing with the zoo.)

- **Develop and adopt a Complete Streets policy that requires street design and construction to accommodate all users including cars, transit, bicyclists and pedestrians.**
- **Work with the MBTA to extend the 325 express bus from Malden into Stoneham Center.**  
Many expressed the desire for an Express Bus connecting Stoneham Town Center to Boston. Currently, the 325 express bus connects Malden to Boston's Haymarket, but could potentially be extended.
- **Study the feasibility to develop a local shuttle serving the east-west corridor (Montvale, Main Street, Franklin) through Stoneham Center connecting it to Express Bus service in Woburn and Commuter Rail service via the Melrose Highland station.**

**Figure: Potential east-west shuttle corridor.**



- **Identify funding to conduct a parking study to improve convenience and accessibility of parking through parking management strategies.**  
Most believe that lack of parking is more a perception than a reality in and around Town Center. Identifying strategies to best manage parking through a series of strategies could benefit all users.

#### **4.B. Ensure a safe pedestrian environment throughout Stoneham Town Center to encourage foot traffic and to better support local businesses.**

##### **Actions:**

- **Repair existing crosswalks and add additional crosswalks where needed most to ensure pedestrian safety.**
- **Ensure sidewalks are in good condition, both within the Primary Study Area (e.g. in and around Stoneham Square and Town Common), but also along entrance corridors in the Secondary Study Area that connect to residential neighborhoods. (Conditions vary along these corridors.)**
- **Improve snow removal in key areas.**  
Businesses in town center environments rely on clear sidewalks and pathways to and from parking and residential structures to allow customers to reach their establishments. Stronger enforcement of existing snow removal requirements may be needed. MAPC's Snow Removal Policy Toolkit presents a menu of best practices and examples from local ordinances.  
(<http://www.mapc.org/resources/snow-removal-policy>)

#### **4.C. Promote and increase access to bicycle amenities and facilities.**

##### **Actions:**

- **Ensure the Tri-Community Bikeway is fully funded and built.**  
The Tri-Community Bikeway will link Stoneham Town Center to a regional bike network through Woburn and Winchester. This will provide existing Stoneham residents and workers, and potentially attract new ones, with an alternative to the car, and access to the region as bicycling continues to grow throughout the region as a viable commuting alternative.
- **Create a bike plan for the Town of Stoneham.**  
A comprehensive bike plan for the entire Town with connections to Town Center would be beneficial by attracting visitors from outside the area, and providing improved connections for Town Center

## BEST PRACTICES: Dedham Business Guide



The Town of Dedham's APA-award winning "Dedham Business Guide" is an excellent tool to assist the small business community with navigating the Town of Dedham process for opening a business. The guide includes the following information in an easy-to-read format:

- **Getting Started:** Info on business certificates, taxes, zoning, signage, regulations, and technical assistance.
- **Town Contacts:** Contact and information for Town Departments and Business Resources.
- **Overall Process:** From Plan through Permitting.

There are also specific guides about:

- **Opening a restaurant:** Information about permits needed, parking requirements, obtaining common victualler License and Alcoholic Beverages License, signage, etc.
- **Opening a Small Store:** Information of getting a Business Certificate, Permits and Licenses, etc.
- **Site Plan Review**
- **Design Review**
- **Special Permit or Variance process.**

residents to recreational, retail and job destinations outside of the area.

- **Identify priority locations for the placement of bike racks in Town Center to encourage cyclists to stop at local businesses.**

**Goal 5: Improve marketing of Stoneham Town Center locally and within the North of Boston region to attract more customers to area businesses, more employment to Stoneham and more residents.**

## STRATEGIES

**5.A Develop a comprehensive, brand driven marketing strategy specifically for Town Center to attract more businesses.**

### Actions:

- **FIRST STEP: Form a working group/committee comprised of Town Center stakeholders including the Chamber, business and property owners, and other interested parties to strategize and conduct a marketing strategy using a consultant.**
- **Identify funding (Town funds, grant funds, other) and hire a consultant to develop a brand and strategy.**
- **Look for opportunities to cross market Town Center with other attractions, such as the Stone Zoo.**

**5.B. To better attract desired investment to Stoneham Town Center, ensure the Town becomes and is perceived to be a business-friendly community.**

### Actions:

- **FIRST STEP: Create a Town Center page on the Town website highlighting Stoneham Center's many amenities.**  
This could include a page dedicated to the Town Center, with information about and links to local business organizations (e.g. Chamber), as well as other valuable documents.
- **Create a "How to Do Business in Stoneham" guide modeled after the Massachusetts APA-award winning guide from Dedham.**

Although many suggested that the Town has become more business-friendly, developing a guide that provides a step by step



process for opening a business could help to attract potential investors, and signal to the business community that Stoneham is not only open for business, but welcoming and ready to attract more businesses.

- **Place the Market Analysis (Appendix A) on the town website to highlight investment opportunities and to potentially attract market segments with the greatest opportunity in Stoneham Center.**

The market analysis identifies several retail and residential sectors with potential for growth in Stoneham. Placing the study online could attract those looking to invest in, or further reinforce those already planning to invest, in the community.

- **Revise ordinances to allow for common amenities/activities found in successful Town Centers like outdoor dining in summer months and A-frame signs to better draw consumers into stores and restaurants.**

Visibility is crucial to retail and other smaller businesses. Ensuring these businesses are visible, through quality, well-designed signage is a must.

- **Develop a database of vacant/available retail/office spaces, and opportunity sites for development and place on Town website (preferably on newly created Town Center page.)**
- **Ensure all of downtown is connected to wireless internet service.**

Today's workers do business in many environments – offices, homes and increasingly between at parks, cafes, and other public spaces.

### **5.C. Promote Stoneham's historic and cultural assets to draw more visitors (and residents) to the area.**

Historic structures and locations are key economic drivers, in that they attract visitors interested in learning about history, businesses interested in locating in historic, walkable shopping districts, and residents looking to reside in a community with established character.

#### **Actions:**

- **FIRST STEP: Seek funding to update the Stoneham Historic Walking Tour pamphlet to provide more information about historic amenities.**
- **Look for opportunities to cross promote Stoneham's historical amenities with cultural and retail offerings.**

For example, coordinate a "Sites and Bites Tour" where groups tour the many historic assets and then learn more about them while dining at a downtown restaurant. Another strategy would be the development of an annual holiday house tours or creating "pop up" displays in storefronts calling attention to their significance, or creating a mobile app walking tour, and others.

### **Goal 6: A greater diversity of housing options to meet market demand – particularly smaller senior and younger households interested in living in a walkable, amenity-rich Town Center environment.**

#### **STRATEGIES**

##### **6.A. Focus new mixed-use residential development in the Primary Study Area and mixed-use or multifamily-only development in the Secondary Study Area.**

More residents living in Town Center would better support an active, amenity rich environment that includes more retail and restaurants, and expanded transit options.

#### **Actions:**

- **FIRST STEP: Identify priority sites for mixed-use and multifamily development.**  
The new Town Planner should continue to work with the Town Center Plan Advisory Committee (or as recommended, the newly established Town Center Neighborhood Association). Mixed use should be prioritized within the Primary Study Area.
- **Work with property owners of identified priority sites to encourage desired redevelopment.**

## **6.B. Ensure the development process is predictable and transparent to encourage multifamily and mixed-use development.**

### **Actions:**

- ***FIRST STEP: Review permitting procedures and identify mechanisms to streamline the development process.***

Business owners and developers look to invest in communities that offer transparency and expedited permitting, as they offer a roadmap – or a path and timeframe – to opening a business or developing a property. Currently, the process is considered to be somewhat complicated.

- ***Revise zoning to allow mixed-use and multifamily (of over 5-units) by right in the Primary Study Area and along key access corridors.***

The new Town Planner should conduct a full review of the Central Business District zoning, and consider the potential for an overlay district over the Primary Study Area to allow for greater densities, greater sign requirements, etc.

## **6.C. Mitigate displacement of current residents and businesses through policies to provide affordable housing and business training and assistance.**

### **Actions:**

- ***Make information about affordable housing opportunities and business training resources accessible to residents and businesses.***
- ***Explore adopting inclusionary zoning which would require a percentage of new units to be deed-restricted affordable units in larger developments.***

Over 30% of Stoneham households would potentially qualify for affordable housing, and 40% of Stoneham households are housing cost burdened. Given the need for affordable housing, the requirement of affordable units should be encouraged.

## IX: Implementation Matrix

The matrix identifies each goal, strategy and action (How?) potential responsible parties for each (Who?), timing (When?) and potential funding resources.

Short-term = Year 1-2

Mid-term = Year 3-4

Long-term – Year 5 and beyond

GOAL	STRATEGY	ACTION (HOW)	WHO	WHEN	POTENTIAL RESOURCES
Goal 1: Build organizational capacity in Stoneham's Town Center to advocate for continued revitalization and stronger growth.	1.A. Hold Town Center specific networking events to improve interaction between local businesses, residents and potential investors.	FIRST STEP: Create a database of all existing business owners.	Chamber Town Center Subgroup	Short Term	Town staff time
		Hold Town Center specific networking events.	Chamber Town Center Subgroup	Short Term and Ongoing	Chamber & Merchant volunteer time
	1.B. Building on momentum from this project, form an official Stoneham Town Center Neighborhood Association to implement this plan, advocate for and make improvements to the town Center, and serve as a booster organization for the Town Center.	FIRST STEP: Identify and recruit additional key stakeholders beyond the current plan Advisory Committee to ensure broad range of interests and perspectives.	Town Center Plan Advisory Committee Town Administrator	Short Term	Volunteer time Town staff time
	1.C. Create a Downtown subgroup of the Chamber, and eventually a Downtown Merchants Association, tasked specifically with promoting Town Center businesses, events and programming.	FIRST STEP: Convene Town Center merchants to identify interest in forming a subgroup of the Chamber.	Chamber of Commerce	Short Term	Staff and volunteer time
		Establish the Chamber subgroup and create a work plan.	Chamber Town Center Subgroup	Short Term	Volunteer time Chamber staff time
		Upon establishment of a Merchants Association, create a work plan (tasks, priorities), including funding structure, for the organization.	Town Center Merchants	Mid-Long Term	Merchants volunteer time

GOAL	STRATEGY	ACTION (HOW)	WHO	WHEN	POTENTIAL FUNDING RESOURCES
Goal 2: A more inviting, attractive and easily navigable public realm to increase awareness of Stoneham Town Center and its existing (and future) amenities.	2.A. Create a regulatory environment that encourages a more attractive public realm desired by the larger community.	FIRST STEP: Develop and adopt revised signage standards into the zoning bylaw specific to and appropriate for a town center.	Town Planner Planning Board	Short- to mid-term	Staff time Massachusetts Downtown Initiative Grants (EOHED)
		Develop a wayfinding plan to guide motorists (but also bicyclists and pedestrians) to Town Center services and amenities.	Town Planner Consultant	Mid-term	Town Technical assistance funding (DLTA or Planning for Metro Future through MAPC) Massachusetts Downtown Initiative Grants (EOHED)
		Identify funding (town, grant or other) to implement wayfinding plan		Mid-term	Town funds
		Consider adopting a set of design guidelines to accompany Central Business District Zoning to encourage the building design desired by participants at the public meeting	Town Planner Consultant	Mid-term	Town staff time Technical assistance funding - DLTA & Planning For MetroFuture (MAPC), PATH or PDF funding (DHCD)
		Continue to fund the recently created façade improvement program to assist local businesses with the appearance of the establishment to attract more customers and enhance the larger environment.	Town Administrator Board of Selectmen	Ongoing	Town funds, grant funds
Goal 3: An energized Town Center with greater retail, entertainment and service options.	3.A. Target key retail opportunities to locate in Stoneham Center.	FIRST STEP: Identify and create a list/spreadsheet of establishments in other downtowns that may be interested in opening a second or third location, and recruit them to Stoneham Town Center.	Chamber Town Center Subgroup Town Planner	Short-term	Chamber subgroup volunteer time Town staff time



GOAL	STRATEGY	ACTION (HOW)	WHO	WHEN	POTENTIAL FUNDING RESOURCES
		Develop a database of available retail spaces. (See Goal 3 for more.)	Chamber Town Center Subgroup Town Planner	Short-term	Chamber subgroup volunteer time Town staff time
		Work with current owners of Town Center establishments interested in opening another shop or restaurant to identify potential spaces connect them to resources (training, funding), etc.	Chamber Town Center Subgroup Town Planner Town Administrator	Short-term and Ongoing	Chamber staff time Town staff time
		Look to attract additional downtown anchor establishments that will draw larger numbers of people to Town Center during the day and evening to increase foot traffic in and support smaller establishments nearby.	Chamber Town Center Subgroup Town Planner	Short-term	Chamber staff time Town staff time
	3.B. Create a more exciting environment by developing and/or attracting additional programming and cultural activities to Stoneham Square.	FIRST STEP: Explore potential for the Stoneham Theatre to hold more events to attract more visitors to town and support both the theater and local businesses.	Chamber Town Center Subgroup Town Center Advisory Committee Stoneham Theatre Cultural Council	Short-term and Ongoing	Sponsorships Grant funding Chamber staff time Town staff time Volunteer time
		Encourage more restaurants and bars to locate in Town Center, particularly those that would attract a young professional post-work crowd.	Chamber Town Center Subgroup Town Planner	Ongoing	Town staff time Chamber subgroup volunteer time
		Study the feasibility of an ice rink in Town Common to attract families in colder, winter months, when foot traffic decreases.	Town Administrator Open Space and Recreation Committee	Short- to mid-term	Town or grant funds
		Goal 4: A more robust, convenient and efficient multi-modal transportation system to better connect Stoneham Square residents and businesses.	4.A. Improve local mobility and access to transit for Town Center residents, employees and customers.	FIRST STEP: Work with the MBTA to extend service on the 132 beyond 7pm, and to add a stop for the Stone Zoo and other recreational amenities in the Fells.	Town Administrator Town Planner

GOAL	STRATEGY	ACTION (HOW)	WHO	WHEN	POTENTIAL FUNDING RESOURCES
		Develop and adopt a Complete Streets policy that requires street design and construction to accommodate all users including cars, transit, bicyclists and pedestrians.	Town Planner	Short-term	Town staff time MassDOT Active Streets Certification Program
		Work with MBTA to extend the 325 express bus from Malden into Stoneham Center.	Town Administrator	Mid-term	Town staff time MBTA (implementation)
		Study the feasibility to develop a local shuttle serving the east-west corridor (Montvale, Main Street, Franklin) through Stoneham Center connecting it to Express Bus service in Woburn and Commuter Rail service via the Melrose Highland station.	Town Administrator Town Planner	Mid-term	Town, grant or State technical assistance funds
		Identify funding to conduct a parking study to improve convenience and accessibility of parking through parking management strategies.	Town Planner Planning Board	Mid-term	Town, grant or State technical assistance funds
	4.B. Ensure a safe pedestrian environment throughout Stoneham Town Center to encourage foot traffic and to better support local businesses.	Repair existing crosswalks and add additional crosswalks where needed most to ensure pedestrian safety.	DPW Capital Improvement Advisory Committee	Ongoing	Chapter 90 Street and Roadway funding
		Ensure sidewalks are in good condition, both within the Primary Study Area (e.g. in and around Stoneham Square and Town Common), but also along entrance corridors in the Secondary Study Area that connect to residential neighborhoods. (Conditions vary along these corridors.)	DPW Capital Improvement Advisory Committee	Ongoing	Town staff time Town transportation funds MassDOT Active Streets Certification Program

GOAL	STRATEGY	ACTION (HOW)	WHO	WHEN	POTENTIAL FUNDING RESOURCES
	4.C. Promote and increase access to bicycle amenities and facilities.	Improve snow removal in key areas.	Merchants	Ongoing	Volunteer time Town funding
		Ensure the Tri-Community Bikeway is fully funded and built.	Town Administrator Capital Improvement Advisory Committee Open Space and Recreation Committee	Short- to mid-term	Town staff time Volunteer time
		Create a bike plan for the Town of Stoneham.	Town Planner Open Space and Recreation Committee	Mid-term	Town, grant or State technical assistance funds
		Identify priority locations for the placement of bike racks in Town Center to encourage cyclists to stop at local businesses.	Town Planner Open Space and Recreation Committee	Short- to mid-term	Town staff time Grant funds
Goal 5: Improve marketing of Stoneham Town Center locally and within the North of Boston region to attract more customers to area businesses, more employment to Stoneham and more residents.	5.A Develop a comprehensive, brand driven marketing strategy specifically for Town Center to attract more businesses.	FIRST STEP: Form a working group/committee comprised of Town Center stakeholders including the Chamber, business and property owners, and other interested parties to strategize and conduct a marketing strategy using a consultant.	Chamber of Commerce Stoneham Town Center Advisory Committee	Short-term	Chamber staff time Volunteer time
		Identify funding (Town funds, grant funds, other) and hire a consultant to develop a brand and strategy.	Town Planner Chamber Town Center Subgroup	Short- to mid-term	Local Options Meals Tax funds Chamber funds Town and Chamber staff time
		Look for opportunities to cross market Town Center with other attractions, such as the Stone Zoo.	Chamber Town Center Subgroup Stone Zoo	Mid-term	Local Options Meals Tax funds Chamber Town Center funds Chamber Subgroup Volunteer time
	5.B. To better attract desired investment to Stoneham Town Center, ensure the Town becomes and is perceived to be a business-friendly community.	FIRST STEP: Create a Town Center page on the Town website highlighting Stoneham Center's many amenities.	Town Administrator Town Planner	Short-term	Town staff time

GOAL	STRATEGY	ACTION (HOW)	WHO	WHEN	POTENTIAL FUNDING RESOURCES
		Create a “How to Do Business in Stoneham” guide modeled after the Massachusetts APA-award winning guide from Dedham.	Town Administrator Town Planner	Short- to mid-term	Town staff time Town funds to hire consultant
		Place the Market Analysis (Appendix A) on the town website to highlight investment opportunities and to potentially attract market segments with the greatest opportunity in Stoneham Center.	Town Center Advisory Committee Town Administrator	Short-term	Town staff time Stoneham Town Center Advisory Group volunteer time
		Revise ordinances to allow for common amenities/activities found in successful Town Centers like outdoor dining in summer months and A-frame signs to better draw consumers into stores and restaurants.	Town Planner Planning Board Board of Selectmen	Short-term	Town staff time
		Develop a database of vacant/available retail/office spaces, and opportunity sites for development and place on Town website (preferably on newly created Town Center page.)	Town Planner Chamber Town Center Subgroup	Short- to Mid-term	Town staff and Chamber Subgroup volunteer time
		Ensure all of downtown is connected to wireless internet service.	Town Administrator Town Planner	Long-term	Town funds Grant funds
	5.C. Promote Stoneham's historic and cultural assets to draw more visitors (and residents) to the area.	FIRST STEP: Seek funding to update the Stoneham Historic Walking Tour pamphlet to provide more information about historic amenities.	Stoneham Historical Society		Membership fees Future event revenues (e.g. home tours)
		Look for opportunities to cross promote Stoneham's historical amenities with cultural and retail offerings.	Stoneham Historical Society Chamber Town Center Subgroup	Mid-term	Membership fees Event revenues



GOAL	STRATEGY	ACTION (HOW)	WHO	WHEN	POTENTIAL FUNDING RESOURCES
Goal 6: A greater diversity of housing options to meet market demand – particularly smaller senior and younger households interested in living in a walkable, amenity-rich Town Center environment.	6.A. Focus new mixed-use residential development in the Primary Study Area and mixed-use or multifamily-only development in the Secondary Study Area.	FIRST STEP: Identify priority sites for mixed-use and multifamily development	Town Planner Town Administrator	Short-term	Town staff time Technical assistance funding - DLTA & Planning For MetroFuture (MAPC)
		Work with property owners of identified priority sites to encourage desired redevelopment.	Town Planner Town Administrator	Short-term and Ongoing	Town staff time
	6.B. Ensure the development process is predictable and transparent to encourage multifamily and mixed-use development	FIRST STEP: Review permitting procedures and identify mechanisms to streamline the development process.	Town Planner Town Administrator Building Department	Short-term	Town staff time Technical assistance funding - DLTA & Planning For MetroFuture (MAPC)
		Revise zoning to allow mixed-use and multifamily (of over 5-units) by right in the Primary Study Area and along key access corridors.	Town Planner Planning Board Board of Selectmen	Mid-term	Town staff time Technical assistance funding - DLTA & Planning For MetroFuture (MAPC)
	6.C. Mitigate displacement of current residents and businesses through policies to provide affordable housing and business training and assistance.	Make information about affordable housing opportunities and business training resources accessible to residents and businesses	Town Planner	Short-term	Staff time Town funds
		Explore adopting inclusionary zoning which would require a percentage of new units to be deed-restricted affordable units in larger developments	Town Planner Planning Board Town Administrator	Mid-term	Staff time or State technical assistance funds