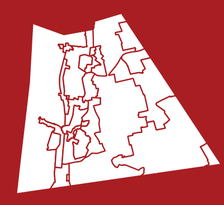
Introduction

Melrose Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Regulation Revisions

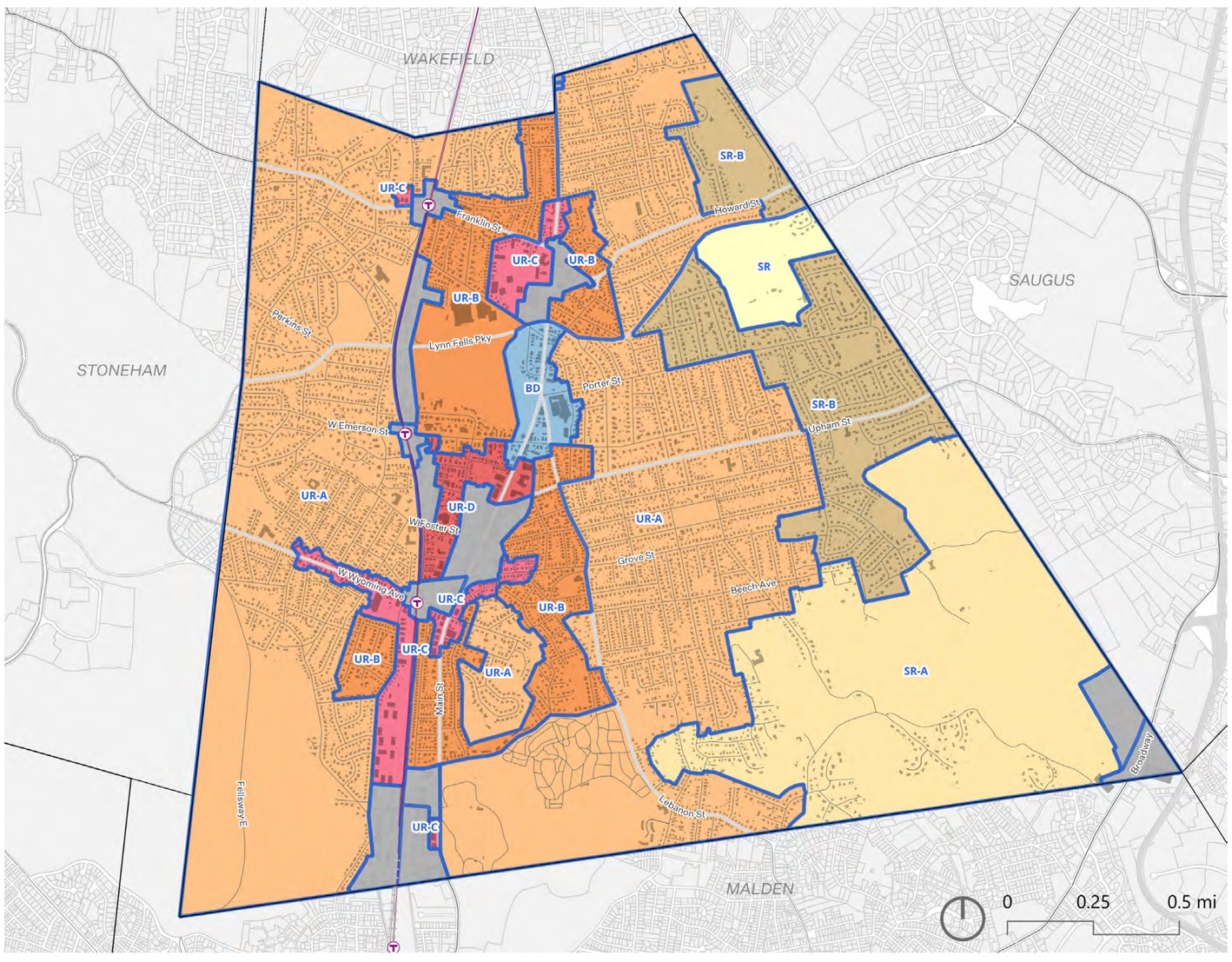


Improving Our Zoning

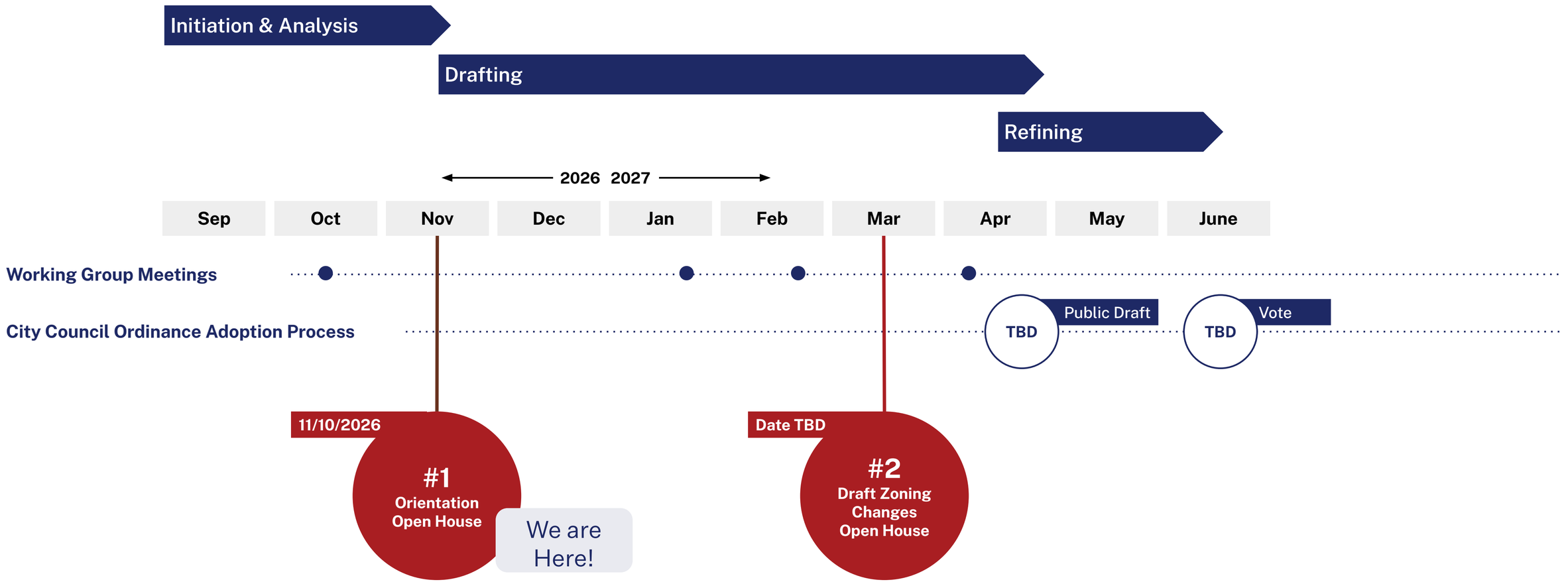
Project Goals

This project aims to reflect the nature and form of Melrose's beautiful neighborhoods in the City's Zoning Ordinance.

- **Reflect and protect desirable existing patterns**
- **Focus on missing middle housing**, by amending the zoning to allow and encourage small multifamily housing
- **Decrease the need for special permits and variances** by lowering the number of nonconforming properties
- **Revise the Business - D (BD) District** to align with current conditions and needs
- **Adjust Subdivision Regulations** as undeveloped land decreases

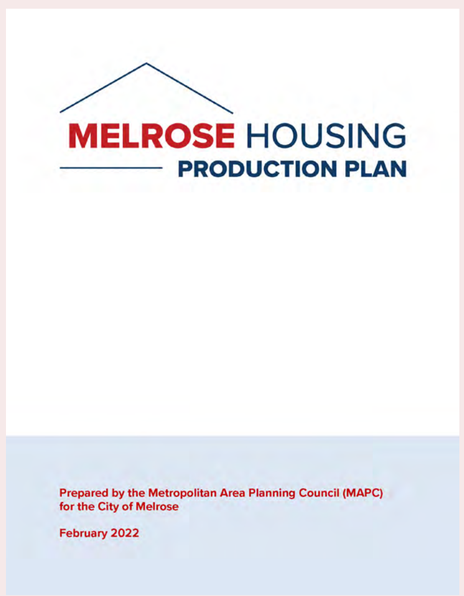


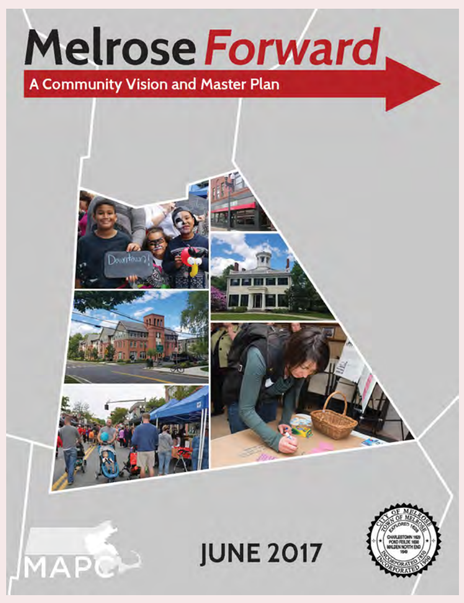
Project Timeline



To learn more, scan the QR code:







Missing Middle Housing

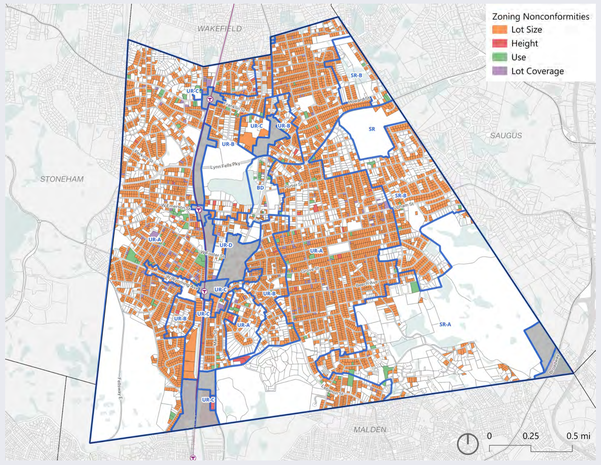
By building off the recent zoning recodification undertaken in 2024, this current effort will continue modernizing the zoning ordinance

- Melrose has already focused other efforts on increasing density; the current process does not include the City's densest districts
- The HPP and Master Plan highlight a lack of small starter homes and buildings with two to eight units
- Increasing the diversity of housing types will help meet Melrose residents at every stage of life, with incremental increases to the local housing supply

Nonconformity Analysis

Melrose Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Regulation Revisions

All Nonconformities



What do these Nonconformities Mean?

Parcels of land that don't fall within the dimensional or use requirements laid out in the zoning ordinance are nonconforming

- **Nonconformity does not affect existing buildings and lots**, but can make future additions and other construction projects more difficult
- **High numbers of nonconformities are common in the region**, but nonconformities can indicate that the current zoning code is not aligned with existing patterns
- **Existing neighborhood patterns can not be replicated today** due to nonconformities

Nonconformity Count

Type	Number of Parcels Citywide	Percent of Parcels Citywide
Lot Area	6,299	75%
Building Coverage	218	3%
Height	55	< 1%
Use	199	2%
All Types	6,427	76%

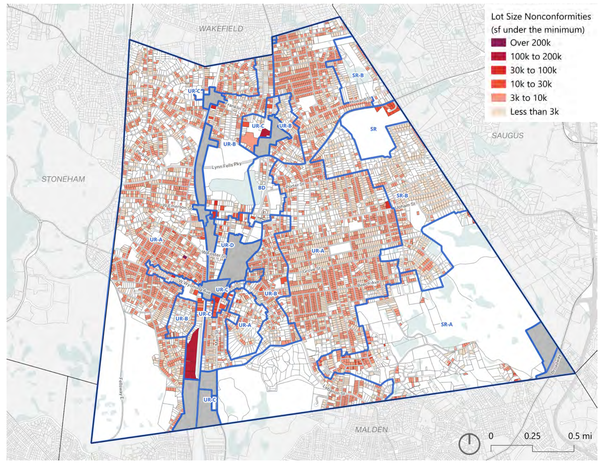
Other Nonconformities

You will see analysis on lot width, depth, and setbacks in our district zoom-in boards where we look at data on a smaller scale.

Besides lot area and use nonconformities the citywide scale analysis also included:

- **Building coverage nonconformities:** parcels where a building's footprint takes up a larger percent of the parcel than allowed by the zoning
- **Height nonconformities:** buildings that have more stories than allowed by the zoning

Lot Area Nonconformities

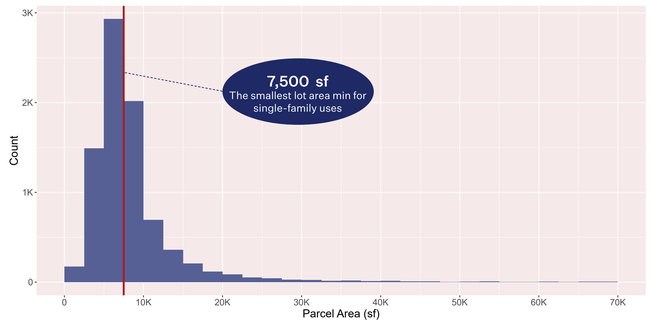


Lot Size Nonconformities Per District

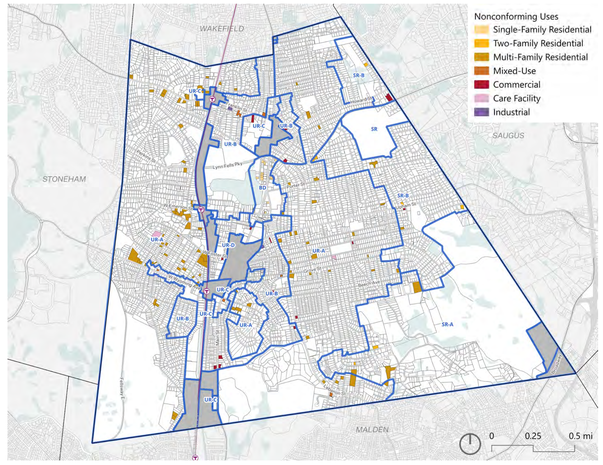
District		Number of Parcels per District	Percent of Parcels per District
Suburban Residence	**SR**	14	93%
Suburban Residence - A	**SR-A**	277	62%
Suburban Residence - B	**SR-B**	544	64%
Urban Residence - A	**UR-A**	4,269	84%
Urban Residence - B	**UR-B**	1,001	78%
Urban Residence - C	**UR-C**	154	76%
Urban Residence - D	**UR-D**	94	73%
Business - D	**BD**	39	42%

Why So Many Lot Area Nonconformities?

- **Small parcels:** the median parcel area of 7,000 sf is lower than the smallest minimum for single-family uses, which is 7,500 sf
- **Minimums linked to number of units:** the lot area minimums increase with every additional unit on a site, leading to some sites with lot area minimums as high as 7.7 acres



Use Nonconformities





Use nonconformities do not include parcels with permitted uses that do not conform to dimensional requirements, like lot area. These properties could not be built today.

- **Multi-family uses** are defined as any parcel with 3 or more units, and over 75% of the nonconforming multi-family uses are parcels with 3 or 4 units
- **Single-family uses** are not permitted uses in the BD district
- **Two-family uses** are not permitted uses in suburban residence districts
- **Mixed uses** (residential and commercial) are not permitted uses in suburban residence districts or the UR-A district
- **Commercial uses** are not permitted in the residential districts, besides funeral and medical offices in UR-C and UR-D





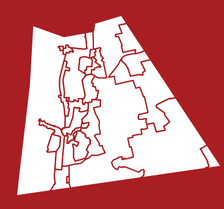
Small multi-family homes ▲

What do you think?

Place Sticky Notes Here

Urban Residence A (UR-A)

Melrose Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Regulation Revisions

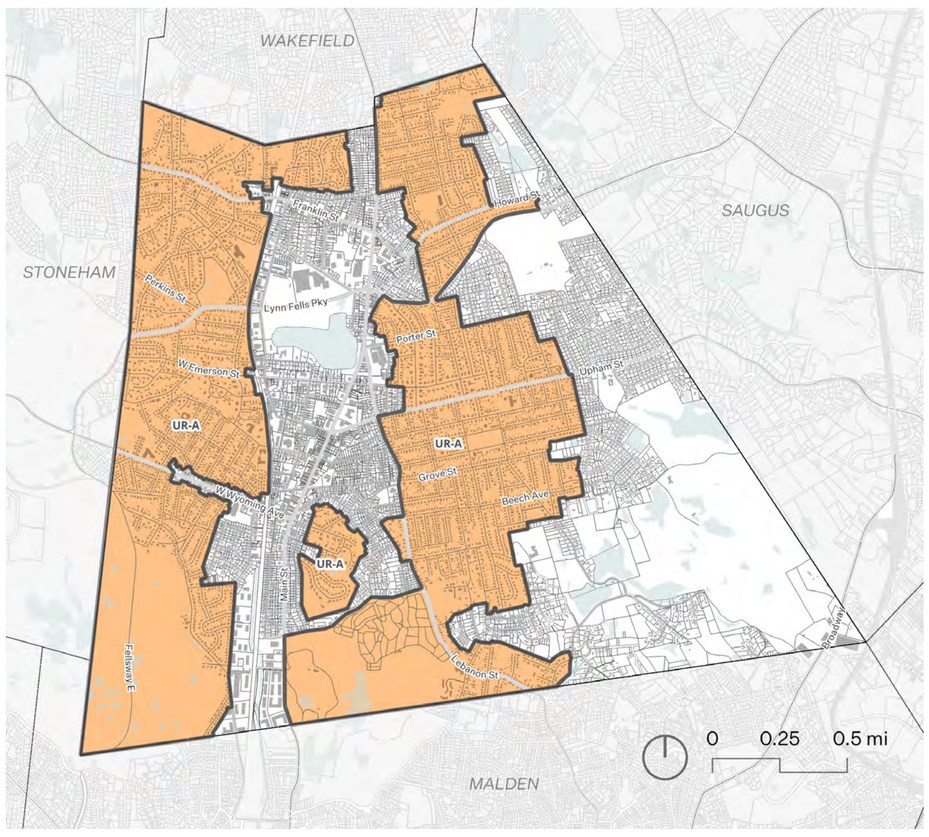


Defining Characteristics

What patterns define the district?

Purpose: *Lowest urban density residential district*

- Consists mostly of 2 to 2½ story single-family homes
- Small lot size and narrow lot width creates higher density urban fabric within single-family context
- Small building footprints resulting in lower building coverage
- Many homes have covered or enclosed porches that encroach on the front yard setback, covered are permitted, enclosed are not
- Many homes encroach on the side yard setback on one side due to a driveway on the other side yard

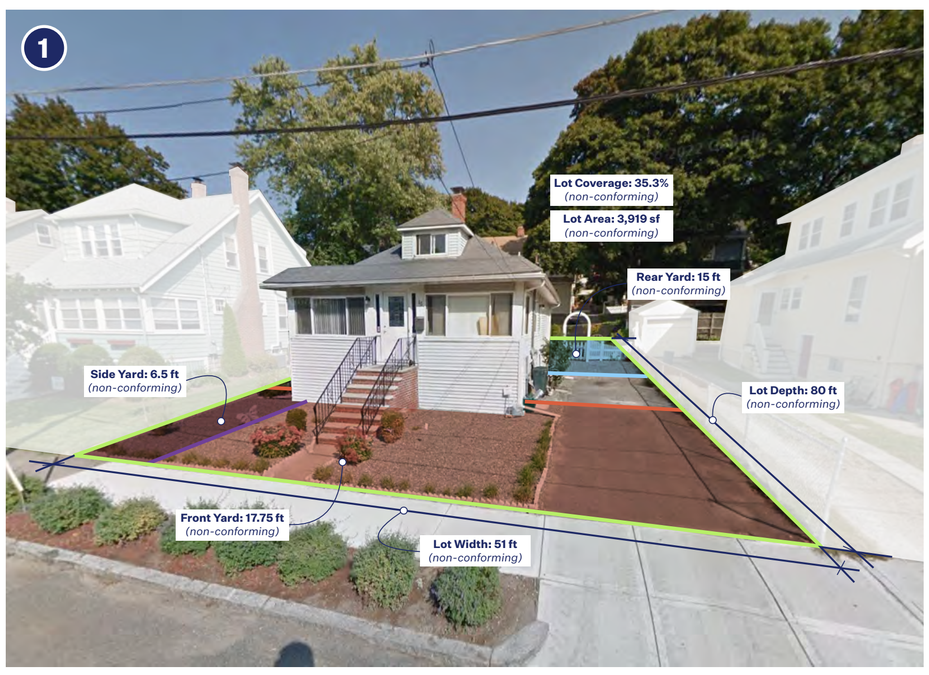


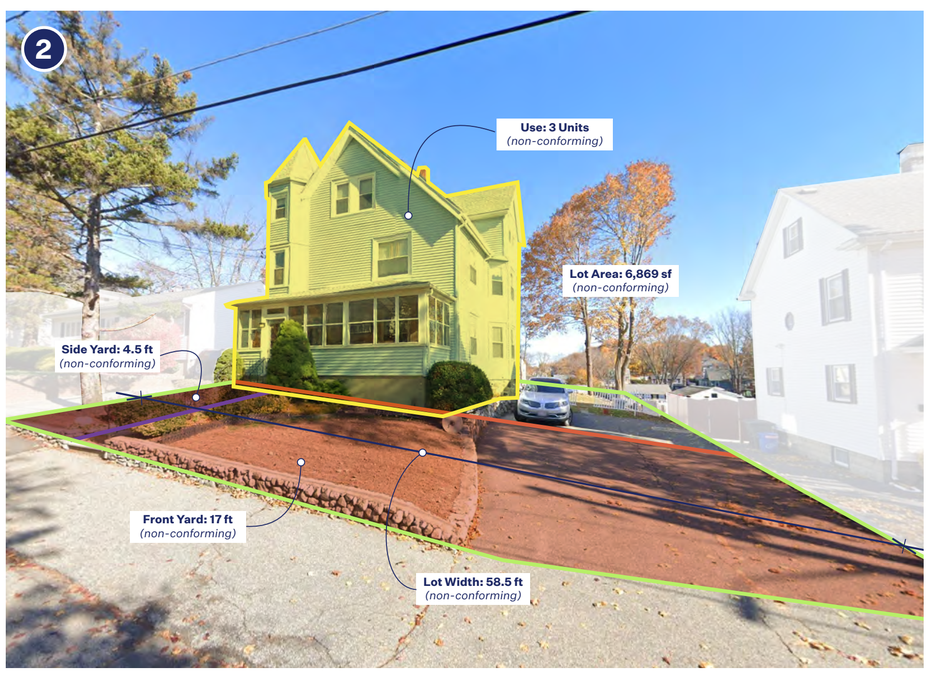
Zoning Dimensions

Current Zoning Regulations

Front Yard Min Nonconformities
Rear Yard Min Nonconformities
Use Nonconformities
Building Coverage Nonconformities







Parcel Dimensions

*most less than 20’ are enclosed porches

	Zoning Requirement	Observed Pattern
Lot Area Min	7,500 - 13,500 sf	3,500 - 8,000 sf
Parcel Width Min	75 - 100 ft	50 - 65 ft
Parcel Depth Min	90 ft	> 90 ft
Setback - Front Min	20 ft	15 - 25 ft*
Setback - Side Min	10 ft	5 - 15 ft
Setback - Rear Min	20 ft	> 20 ft
Building Height Max	2½ stories	2 - 2½ stories
Building Coverage Max	35%	< 35%

Areas of Further Study

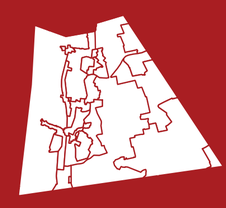
- Permit small multi-family uses
- Set a maximum lot area instead of a minimum especially for single-family uses
- Lower the parcel width minimum for single-family
- Allow enclosed porches built as additions to encroach on front setbacks
- Lower side yard setback minimums

What do you think would make Urban Residence A better?

Place Sticky Notes Here

Urban Residence B (UR-B)

Melrose Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Regulation Revisions

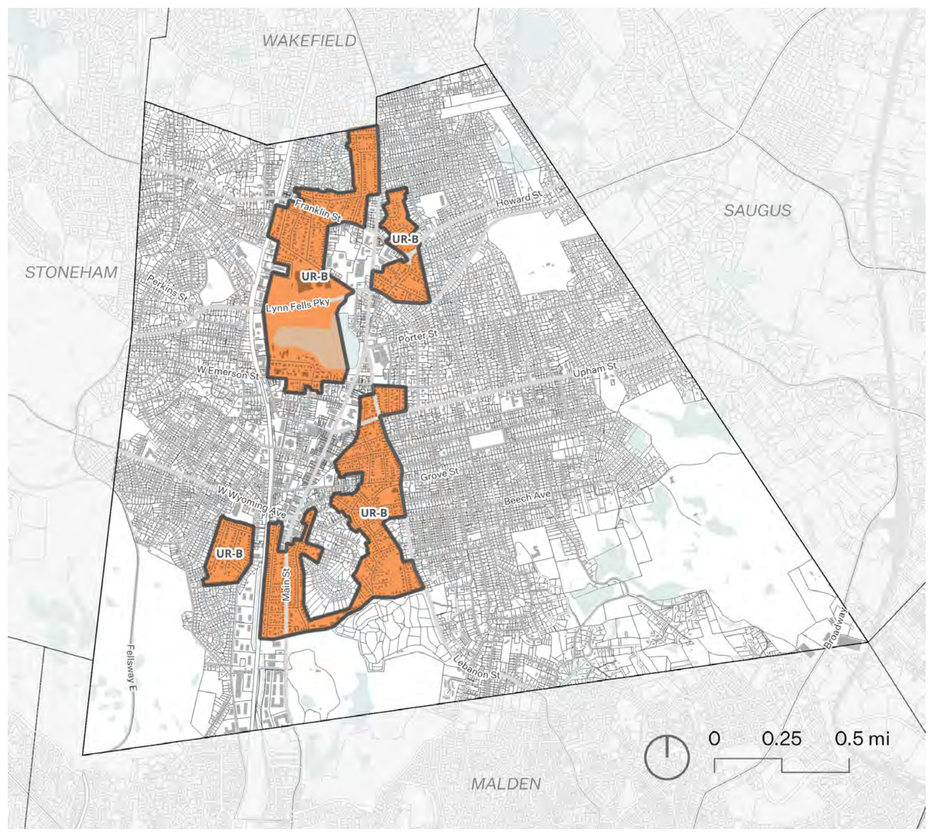


Defining Characteristics

What patterns define the district?

Purpose: *Low urban density residential district including multi-family housing*

- Consists mostly of 2½ story single- and small multi-family homes
- Small lot size and narrow lot width creates higher density urban fabric within single-family and small multi-family context
- Small building footprints result in lower building coverage
- Many homes encroach on front yard setbacks, either by an enclosed front porch or by the front facade of the principal building
- Many homes encroach on the side yard setback on one side due to a driveway on the other side yard

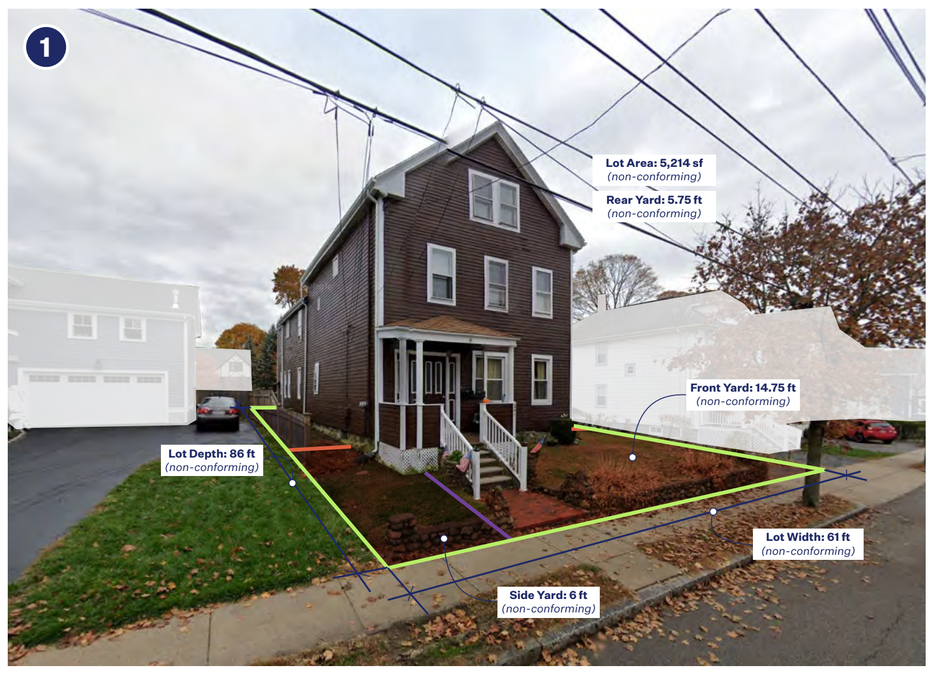


Zoning Dimensions

Current Zoning Regulations

Front Yard Min Nonconformities
Rear Yard Min Nonconformities
Use Nonconformities
Building Coverage Nonconformities







Parcel Dimensions

*7,500 sf + 3,000 for each dwelling unit after the first
**most less than 20' are enclosed porches

	Zoning Requirement	Observed Pattern
Lot Area Min	7,500* - 10,000 sf	4,500 - 8,000 sf
Parcel Width Min	75 - 100 ft	40 - 60 ft
Parcel Depth Min	90 ft	> 90 ft
Setback - Front Min	20 ft	10 - 25 ft**
Setback - Side Min	10 ft	5 - 15 ft
Setback - Rear Min	15 ft	> 15 ft
Building Height Max	2½ stories	2½ stories
Building Coverage Max	50%	< 50%

Areas of Further Study

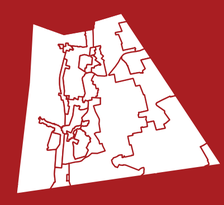
- Permit small multi-family uses by right instead of by special permit
- Set a maximum lot area instead of a minimum, especially for single-family uses
- Lower the parcel width minimum for all uses
- Lower the front setback minimum and allow enclosed porches built as additions to encroach the front setback
- Lower the side yard setback minimum

What do you think would make Urban Residence B better?

Place Sticky Notes Here

Urban Residence C (UR-C)

Melrose Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Regulation Revisions

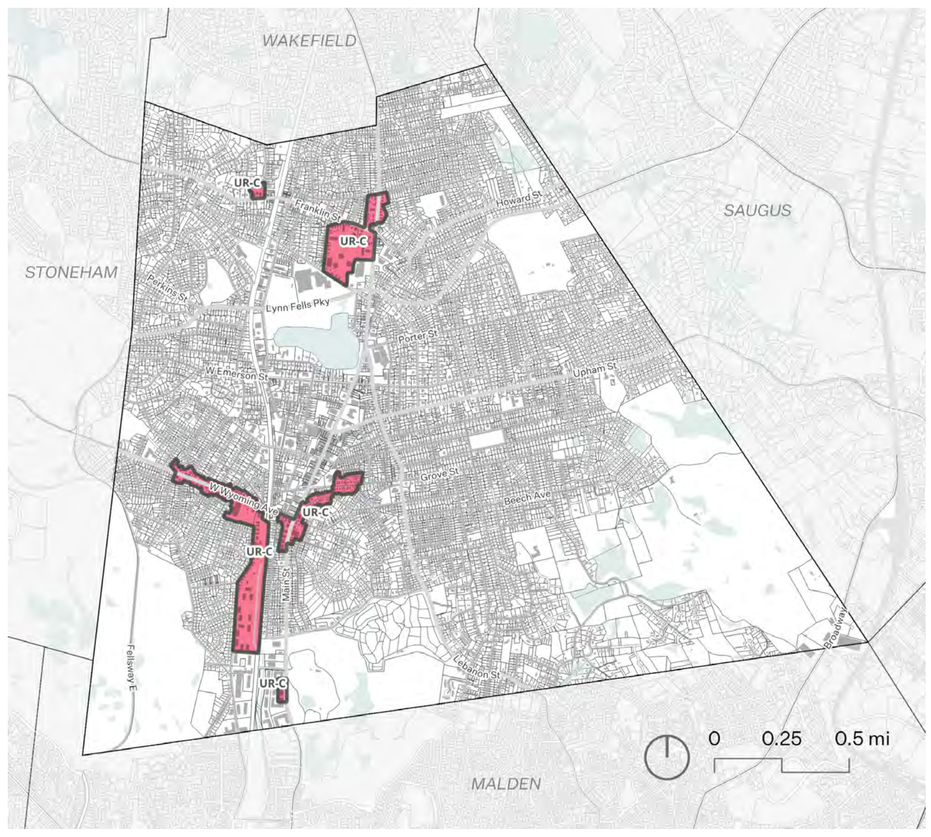


Defining Characteristics

What patterns define the district?

Purpose: *Urban density residential district including multifamily housing and businesses serving the neighborhood*

- Consists mostly of multi-family homes from 2½ to 4 stories
- Lot sizes are consistently too small, as per the required minimum based on land use and number of dwelling units
- Building footprints and lot sizes are small, resulting in low building coverage
- Shallow lot depths compared to other zoning districts
- Many homes encroach on the front yard setback, either by an enclosed front porch or by the front facade of the principal building
- Many homes encroach on the side yard setback on one side due to a driveway on the other side yard



Zoning Dimensions

Current Zoning Regulations

Front Yard Min Nonconformities
Rear Yard Min Nonconformities
Use Nonconformities
Building Coverage Nonconformities



>90% of parcels in image are non-conforming by Lot Area Min, Parcel Width Min, and Side Yard Min





Parcel Dimensions

*6,000 sf + 1,250 sf for each dwelling unit after the first; 20,000 sf for Nursing Homes
**6,000 sf for single-family when min is 7,500 sf
***Multi-family is up to 50% smaller than required with number of dwelling units

	Zoning Requirement	Observed Pattern
Lot Area Min	7,250 - 20,000+ sf*	6,000** - 12,500 sf***
Parcel Width Min	75 - 100 ft	50 - 120 ft
Parcel Depth Min	90 ft	< 90 ft
Setback - Front Min	20 ft	10 - 20 ft
Setback - Side Min	10 ft	5 - 10 ft
Setback - Rear Min	15 ft	> 15 ft
Building Height Max	4 stories	< 4 stories
Building Coverage Max	50%	< 50%

Areas of Further Study

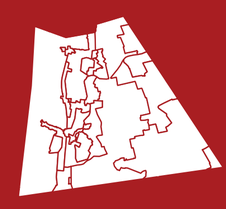
- Permit multi-family uses in mixed-use buildings by right instead of by special permit
- Set a static lot area minimum for multi-family uses, instead of depending on the number of dwelling units
- Lower the parcel width and depth minimum
- Lower the front setback minimum and allow enclosed porches built as additions to encroach on the front setback
- Lower the side yard setback minimum

What do you think would make Urban Residence C better?

Place Sticky Notes Here

Suburban Residence B (SR-B)

Melrose Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Regulation Revisions

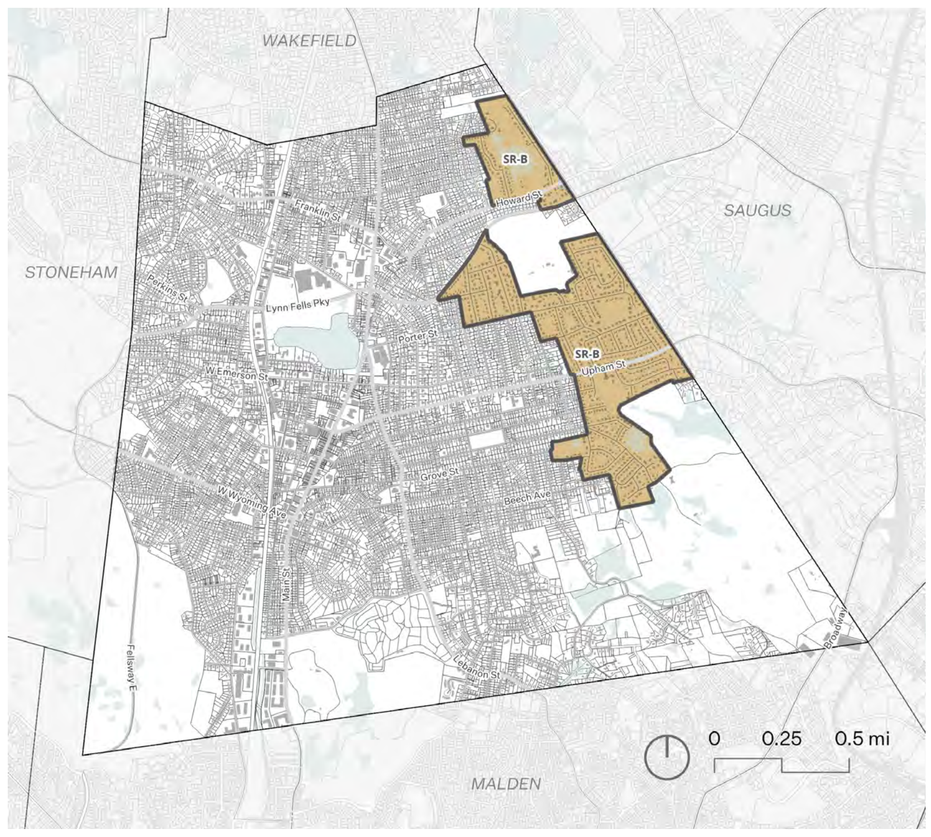


Defining Characteristics

What patterns define the district?

Purpose: *Suburban density residential and agricultural use district*

- Consists mostly of 2 to 2½ story single-family homes
- Small lot sizes and narrow lot widths
- Small building footprints resulting in lower lot coverage
- Homes are consistently setback along the front yard lot line, resulting in rear yard setback nonconformities, even on deeper lots
- Many homes encroach the side yard setback on one side due to a driveway on the other side yard



Zoning Dimensions

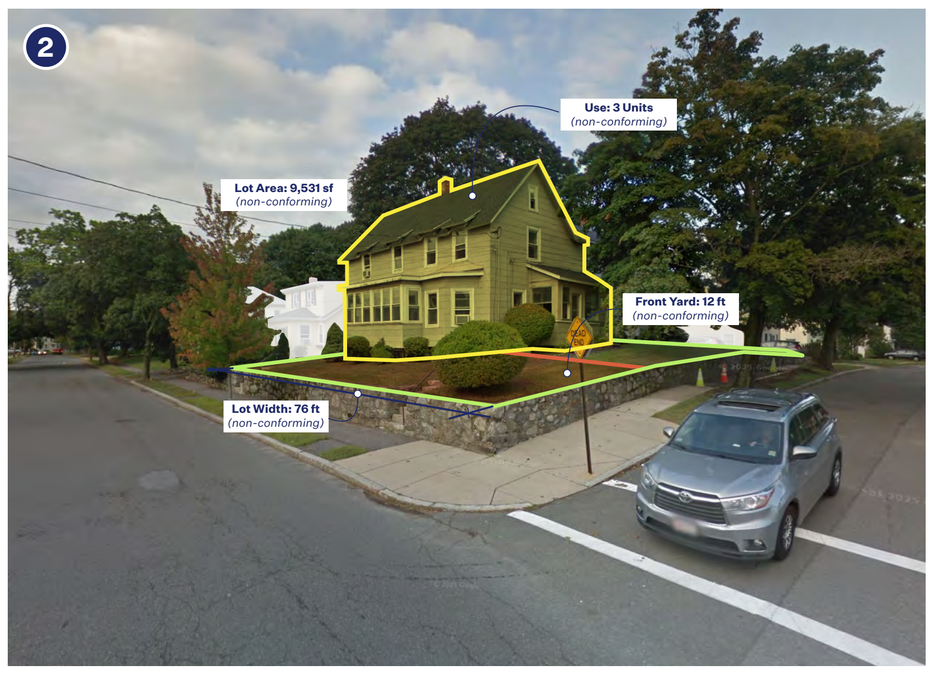
Current Zoning Regulations

Front Yard Min Nonconformities
Rear Yard Min Nonconformities
Use Nonconformities
Building Coverage Nonconformities



All parcels in image are non-conforming by Lot Area Min, and most by Parcel Width and Side Yard Min





Parcel Dimensions

	Zoning Requirement	Observed Pattern
Lot Area Min	10,000 sf	6,000 - 12,000 sf
Parcel Width Min	80 ft	60 - 80 ft
Parcel Depth Min	90 ft	> 90 ft
Setback - Front Min	20 ft	> 20 ft
Setback - Side Min	12 ft	10 ft
Setback - Rear Min	30 ft	20 - 50 ft
Building Height Max	2½ stories	2 - 2½ stories
Building Coverage Max	35%	< 35%

Areas of Further Study

- Set a maximum lot area instead of a minimum lot area
- Lower the parcel width minimum
- Lower the side yard setback minimum
- Lower the rear yard setback minimum

What do you think would make Suburban Residence B better?

Place Sticky Notes Here

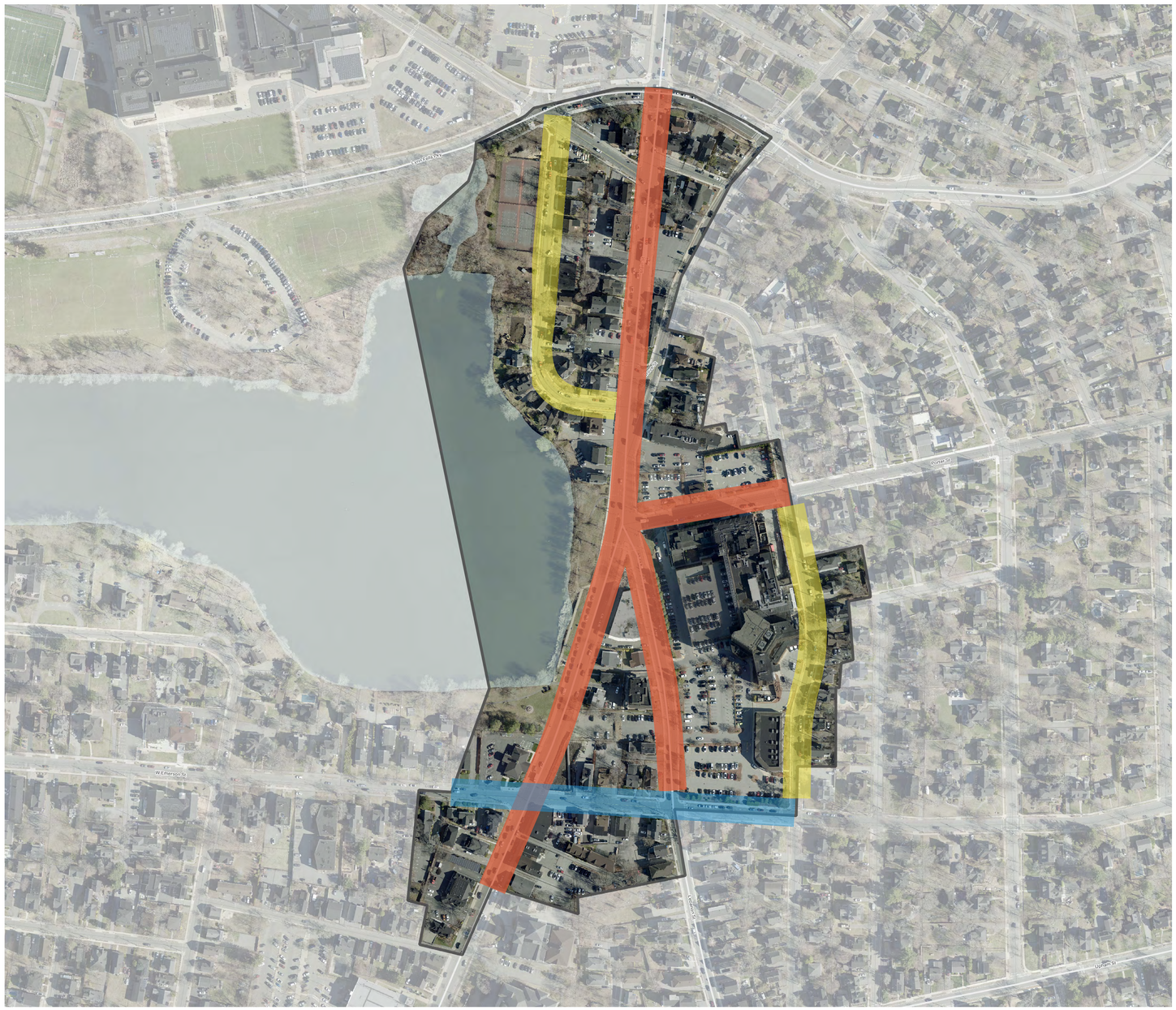
Business D (BD)

Melrose Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Regulation Revisions

Defining Characteristics

What patterns define the district?

Purpose: *Business and multi-family housing district including hospital, medical, offices, and other uses*



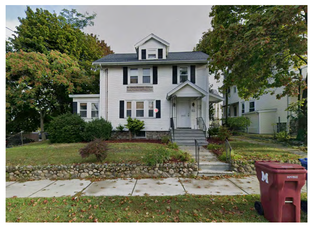
Frontage 1





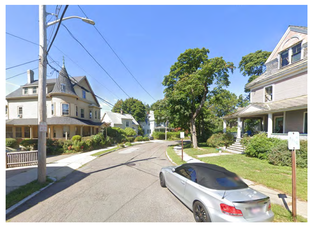
- Purpose-built commercial and office spaces, and mid sized multi-family
- Adaptation of historic residential uses repurposed for commercial uses within the original residential building shell
- Original historic residential is built very close to the front lot line creating a front yard that is non-conforming; purpose-built commercial and office spaces are setback with adjacent parking lots between the front lot line and the building

Frontage 2


- Preservation of historic residential uses, mostly single-family
- Adaptation of historic residential for mixed-use within the original building shell or the original building plus an addition to the front or side facade for business purposes
- Original, unadapted buildings are set back from the front lot line while renovated buildings closely abut the front lot line creating a front yard that is non-conforming; parking is located at the rear and accessed through the side yard driveway

Frontage 3


- Preservation of historic residential uses, with single-family and small multi-family
- Adaptation of historic residential uses adjacent to hospital for non-residential uses within the original residential building shell
- Buildings are placed very closely to the front lot line creating narrow front yards that are nonconforming to the existing zoning; parking is located within the sideyard, attached garages, or on the street

What do you think would make Business D better?

Place Sticky Notes Here