

The intersection of North Avenue and Albion Street near the commuter rail station provides an excellent location for transit oriented development. Its proximity to transportation, retail, services, and Wakefield's recreational and civic center makes it ideal for a relatively dense mix of residential and commercial construction. Aggregating sites, changing zoning, and resolving parking are among the challenges that must be faced to facilitate this new development.

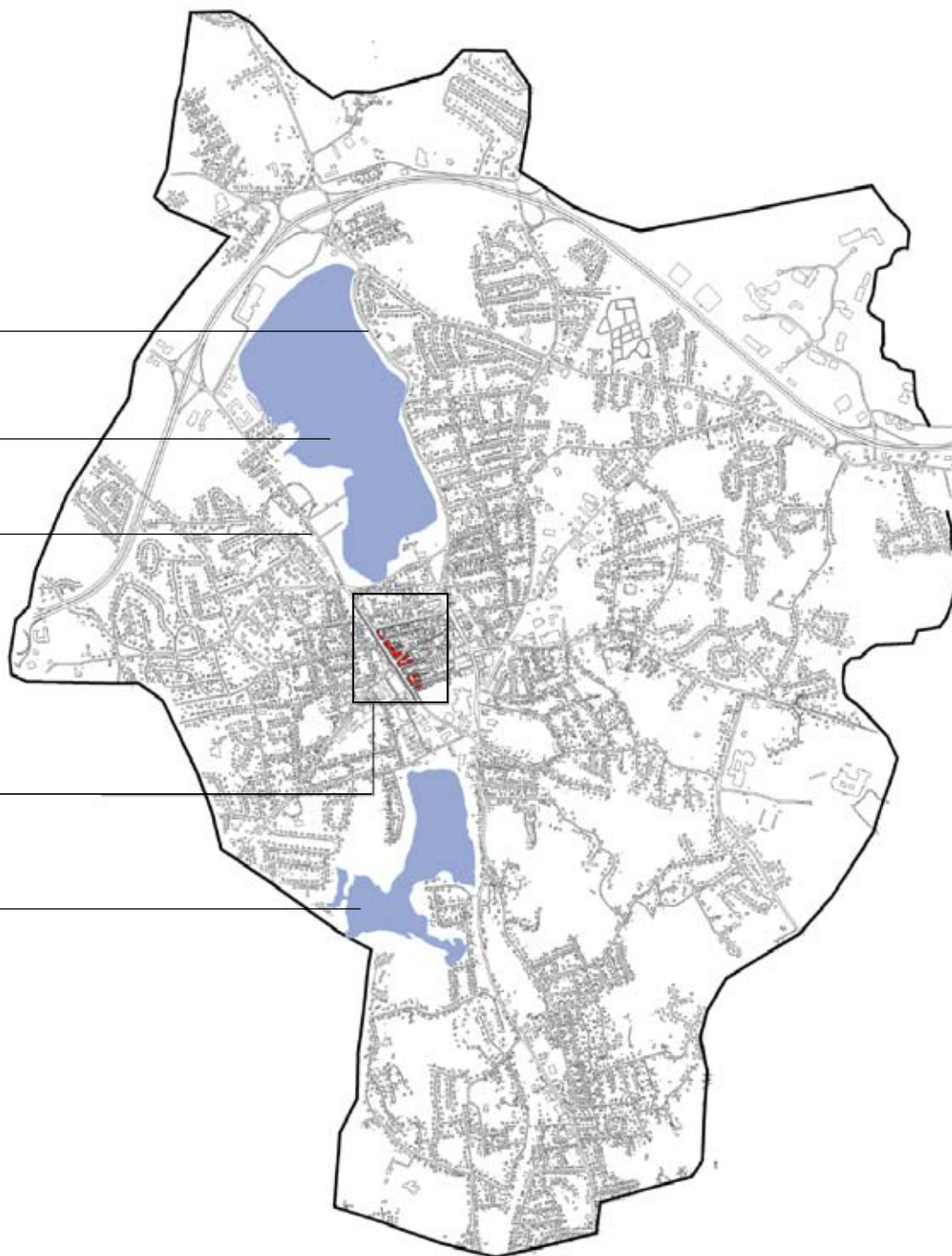
MAIN ST.

LAKE QUANNAPOWITT

NORTH AVE.

**NORTH AVENUE  
DEVELOPMENT AREA**

CRYSTAL LAKE



## 1. EXISTING CONDITIONS- ECONOMIC AND PHYSICAL

The intersection of Albion Street and North Avenue is an important crossroads in Wakefield, and a potential economic development area. It is at the edge of the central business district and at one of the two Wakefield stops on the MBTA's Haverhill commuter rail line. The rail line runs along the west side of North Avenue, creating a "one-sided" street with buildings only on the east.

The area north of Albion Street is marked by retail, a coffee shop, and small office buildings interspersed with parking lots. South of Albion Street the streetscape includes several auto repair and industrial establishments along with residential buildings and parking. Further down is the Middle School, the Department of Public Works, and the Junction. The retail uses near the commuter rail station include a small concentration of specialty shops. The area lacks the continuous street wall associated with a downtown area.

According to shop owners, they do not benefit from the station's presence because it creates a shortage of parking. On-street parking on both side of North Avenue between Albion and Chestnut Streets near the commuter rail station is posted as "one hour" but is often unenforced. The west side of North Avenue south of Albion St. and north of Chestnut St. has over 120 all-day parking spaces for commuters that are prepaid at \$2.00 per day.

The current mix of uses now limits the potential for additional residential and commercial development. This Master Plan proposes alternative uses for key parcels along North Avenue and identifies catalysts for change that could lead to more attractive uses for the town and more profit for parcel owners.



*Despite its proximity to downtown, much of North Avenue is characterized by auto oriented strip development and low density buildings, some with industrial uses.*

*Pleasant cross streets connect North Avenue to Main Street although commercial uses do not have the kind of downtown character that would be appropriate.*





## EXISTING CONDITIONS

- a** Attractive historic housing on side streets provides a context for commercial development on North Avenue and should be protected
- b** Albion St. is a critical but weak link between North Avenue and Downtown whose retail character needs to be reinforced.
- c** The one sided commercial district with tracks and parking opposite buildings requires special attention to streetscape along the tracks.
- d** One story commercial buildings and minimal streetscape do not create the vibrant town center quality appropriate at this location.
- e** The commuter rail station offers a focus for economic development on North Avenue.
- f** One story industrial uses do not take advantage of their location near downtown and the commuter rail station nor contribute to a pedestrian-friendly environment.
- g** The density of existing multifamily residential on Richardson Ave. provides a model for future development near North Avenue.
- h** The Harvard Mills renovation provides an example of new office space near downtown utilizing an historic building.





## PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

Locate parking behind and under new buildings, not along North Avenue.

a

Encourage upper story residential development along North Avenue near the commuter rail station.

b

Improve Albion streetscape and support commercial development to reinforce connection to Downtown.

c

Encourage retail development with housing above to reinforce existing Albion Street retail and the connection to Main Street.

d

Encourage transit oriented development around commuter rail station to reduce the need for cars.

e

Support streetscape improvements on both sides of North Avenue to create neighborhood character.

f

Support streetscape improvements along the middle school to improve pedestrian connections to the Junction.

g

Protect the character of residential neighborhoods and their historic buildings.

h



## DEVELOPMENT CONCEPT PROPOSAL

North Avenue near Albion Street is an appropriate location for what is known as “Transit Oriented Development”. It is a recent term for a traditional pattern of building where housing and retail are concentrated near public transportation to create a compact “village” connected by train to the region. It builds on infrastructure already in place, creates housing without paving over open space, reinforces the central business district, and lessens dependence on automobiles, easing traffic and parking problems. Transit oriented development is supported by the Romney administration, which is formulating incentives for this kind of construction.

The proposal illustrated concentrates mixed use development across the street from the train station near the Albion Street connection to Main Street. It is based on a similar proposal in the Housing Component of the Master Plan. Three to four stories of housing sit on top of a floor of retail/commercial space, with parking behind and below. North and south of the Albion Street/North Avenue intersection, mixed use construction could continue, or residential only multifamily housing can line the street. Retail could benefit from a location opposite the commuter rail station.

The proposed retail and commercial uses continue and reinforce those on Albion Street, expanding “downtown” beyond Main Street to create a more vibrant central business district. Appropriate stores and services could anchor this end of Albion, connecting commuters, pedestrians, and drivers to downtown and the Junction in a loop of commercial enterprises.

Housing in this location is appropriate for young professionals commuting to Boston or “empty-nesters” who can walk to the pharmacy, coffee shop, stores, or the library on Main Street.

Although proximity to the train station does not alleviate the need for parking, it reduces it. Commercial and housing uses can share parking, one requiring spaces primarily during the day, and the other at night, reducing parking need further. Cars should be located behind or below buildings, allowing storefronts and building entries to face North Avenue.

Mixed use developments that stack housing, commercial, and parking on tight urban sites such as North Avenue are not inexpensive to build. Excavation for parking and the differing structural requirements of different uses add to the complexity of construction. Developments must be large enough to cover the cost of elevators and other infrastructure improvements, often requiring that multiple parcels be assembled.

Mixed use development will reinforce the integrity of North Avenue, channel development into an area where it reinforces the character of Wakefield, and provide much-needed housing without destroying green space in the Town. It is not a departure from, but a continuation of Wakefield’s traditional way of building in downtown areas. It is appropriate not only on North Ave. but on Main Street downtown, along Albion St. between North Ave. and Main St., and in Greenwood along Main St. as well.

## DESIGN CONCEPT IMPLEMENTATION

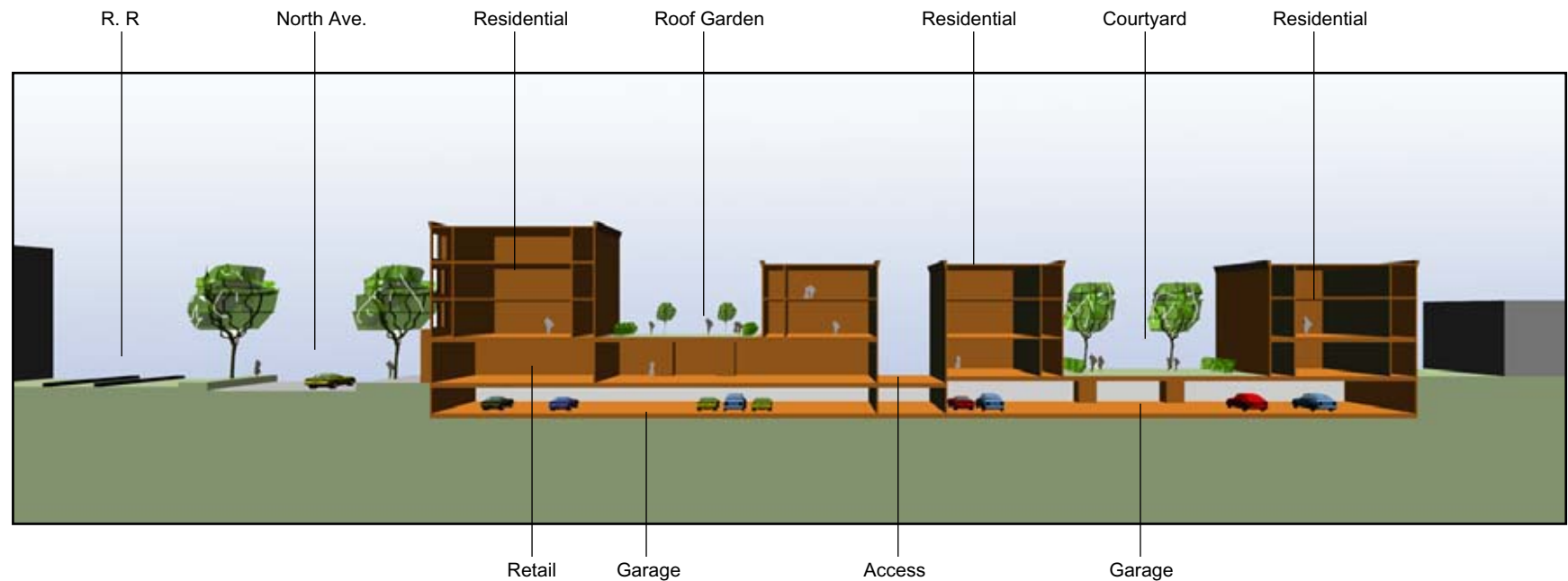
As the feasibility and fiscal benefit analyses on the following pages indicate, market forces are creating a context in which the type of transit oriented development proposed is becoming increasingly realistic. The town can create a more hospitable environment for the type of development that will reinforce the downtown character of North Avenue and Albion St. by taking the measures outlined below. These will allow Wakefield to work with developers to craft proposals that combine financial viability with positive contributions to the business context. Implementation measures include:

**Zoning Changes.** Wakefield should enact changes in its zoning ordinance that will allow and control mixed use development. Changes should include allowing residential development over

first floor commercial space and reduced parking requirements near public transportation.

The creation of a Zoning Overlay District will allow the town to consider transit oriented development in the North Avenue area and acknowledge the area's special conditions. This kind of special district designation can help create a context for negotiations with developers that can lead to improvements in the character of the town and fiscal benefits for Wakefield, while allowing developers to see reasonable profits from their efforts

**State Incentives for Transit Oriented Development.** The town should take advantage of anticipated state incentives for transit oriented development if they are implemented and Wakefield's proposals qualify for the benefits that are offered.





*A new mixed-use building on Mass. Avenue in Harvard Square employs massing, detailing, and materials to fit the pedestrian scale. Note the building setbacks and railings above the first, third and fourth floors. A height of four stories is more appropriate for North Avenue in Wakefield.*



*Waltham's Cronin's Landing mixed use development reinforces the commercial character of Moody Street with retail along the street and housing above. Parking is accommodated on a landscaped two level parking structure partially below grade. The five story complex is articulated in a way that doesn't overwhelm the street. Four stories is more appropriate in Wakefield.*

**Parcel Aggregation.** Mixed use development is generally more economically viable on larger parcels than on smaller ones. The town should support the aggregation of small parcels to allow larger scale development along North Avenue and Albion Street. Wakefield can take the initiative by opening discussions with property owners, developers and realtors on the implementation of a master plan vision and can support appropriate private initiatives as they are proposed.

**Streetscape Improvements.** The town should support improved streetscaping, including planting trees, improving sidewalks and lighting, and upgrading signage and facades. Work can be implemented through programs such as those outlined in the previous chapter and in Sections XII and XIII, and by requiring developers to meet specific requirements in exchange for project approval. Design guidelines will help clarify expectations.

Trees, crosswalks, distinctive lighting, planters, and buildings with canopies or awnings will all add to the vitality of North Avenue. Generous glazing opening into retail spaces or restaurants will connect buildings to the downtown central business district and help to activate Albion Street as a connector. See Streetscape Elements, Section XII, for examples of the kind of design that should be encouraged.

Streetscape improvements sponsored by the town and current property owners will upgrade the area for current uses and create a context that encourages appropriate new redevelopment. Requiring improvements as part of development proposals helps ensure that there are public benefits associated with private development.



## PARKING AND NEIGHBORHOOD PRESERVATION

**Parking Policy and Enforcement.** The town should pursue incremental parking problem resolutions similar to those recommended for downtown, as part of a comprehensive parking strategy. The first step is enforcement of existing regulations. In particular, the one hour parking spaces near retail storefronts need to turn over for the businesses to thrive. A regular enforcement program in these areas would address one of the most pressing concerns brought forward by participants in the economic development planning process.

Some areas may benefit from extending the parking time limit to 2 hours to allow more extended stays in the area. Other areas can be limited to 15 or 30 minutes to free up spaces for convenience shopping.

The town can benefit by charging more for all-day parking spaces for commuters along the west side of North Ave. Two dollars for the day is below current market rates and discourages commuters from looking for alternatives to parking on North Ave. Fewer spaces used by commuters means more spaces for those patronizing area businesses.

As improvements and redevelopment along North Avenue increase the number of people shopping, living and working in the area, additional measures must be taken to make more parking available for them. Options include reducing the amount of space set aside for commuter parking, finding alternative locations for commuter parking, and increasing the number of spaces available. Additional spaces may be available on North Avenue near the

Middle School and in parking lots at or below grade.

**Parking Garage Construction.** The construction of a parking garage in the downtown area as proposed in the previous chapter can also be beneficial to North Avenue businesses. Significant new mixed-use and multi-family developments illustrated in this chapter may require parking garages to accommodate residential and commercial uses. Given the tight sites and cost of garage construction it is unlikely these developments will be able to provide all the spaces that are needed to meet zoning requirements. Developers may request relief from these requirements given the proximity of mass transportation, so it is unlikely that development sites along North Avenue can contribute to solving on-going parking problems elsewhere.

Although a parking garage can have benefits, the town should carefully control location, size, and design to insure that it fits into its context. Historic district designation can give the town some leverage over where a garage can be built and what it looks like.

**Historic Preservation.** Wakefield should protect residential neighborhoods and historic buildings from demolition and out-of-scale construction. Historic district designation can be a tool that empowers the town to control where new construction can take place and the form it takes.

Historic buildings, such as the old train station, can be celebrated with signage noting the importance of the rail road in Wakefield's development.





Multiuse development and improved streetscape opposite train station



# REDEVELOPMENT FEASIBILITY & FISCAL BENEFIT

The analysis and table below illustrates the fiscal implications of the redevelopment scenario illustrated for North Avenue.

North Avenue Economic Development Plan Land Values and Fiscal Benefits														
	Impact of Redevelopment on Property Value							Fiscal Impact of Redevelopment						
	Res'l Units	GSF	Land Value / Unit or SF	Structured Parking Deduction	Projected Land Value	Current Assessed Value	Increase in Property Value	Tax Calculation				School Cost	Fiscal Benefit	
								Acres	Hard + Soft cost / SF -- condo value	Total Value	Projected Taxes		Fiscal Benefit (Taxes less School Cost)	Additional Net Fiscal Benefit (Fiscal Benefit less Current Taxes)
<b>Avon and Chestnut Street</b>														
Residential -Condominium	16	22,500	\$75,000	\$422,857	\$782,500			0.3	\$350,000	\$5,625,000	\$64,125	\$15,953	\$48,173	\$36,750
Retail		7,500	\$25		\$187,500			0.1	\$100	\$962,500	\$23,235		\$23,235	\$19,427
<b>Total</b>		<b>30,000</b>			<b>\$970,000</b>	\$630,901	<b>\$339,099</b>	<b>0.4</b>		<b>\$6,587,500</b>	<b>\$87,360</b>	\$15,953	\$71,407	<b>\$56,177</b>
<b>Chestnut and Albion Street</b>														
Residential -Condominium	55	77,400	\$75,000	\$951,429	\$3,195,000			1.6	\$350,000	\$19,350,000	\$220,590	\$54,877	\$165,713	\$104,799
Retail		32,000	\$25		\$800,000			0.4	\$100	\$4,100,500	\$98,986	\$0	\$98,986	\$83,758
<b>Total</b>		<b>109,400</b>			<b>\$3,995,000</b>	\$3,154,200	<b>\$840,800</b>	<b>2.0</b>		<b>\$23,450,500</b>	<b>\$319,576</b>	\$54,877	\$264,699	<b>\$188,557</b>
<b>Albion Street and Richardson Avenue</b>														
Residential -Condominium	42	58,500	\$75,000	\$771,429	\$2,362,500			1.1	\$350,000	\$14,625,000	\$166,725	\$41,477	\$125,249	\$99,038
Retail		15,750	\$25		\$393,750			0.3	\$100	\$2,038,750	\$49,215	\$0	\$49,215	\$42,663
<b>Total</b>		<b>74,250</b>			<b>\$2,756,250</b>	\$1,357,200	<b>\$1,399,050</b>	<b>1.4</b>		<b>\$16,663,750</b>	<b>\$215,940</b>	\$41,477	\$174,464	<b>\$141,701</b>
<b>Richardson Ave and West Water Street</b>														
Residential -Condominium	13	17,600	\$75,000	\$229,714	\$713,143			0.3	\$350,000	\$4,400,000	\$50,160	\$12,478	\$37,682	\$26,304
Retail		0	\$25		\$0				\$100				\$0	
<b>Total</b>		<b>17,600</b>			<b>\$713,143</b>	\$471,301	<b>\$241,842</b>	<b>0.3</b>		<b>\$4,400,000</b>	<b>\$50,160</b>	\$12,478	\$37,682	<b>\$26,304</b>
<b>West Water and Armory Street</b>														
Residential -Condominium	40	56,400	\$75,000	\$654,857	\$2,366,571			1.2	\$350,000	\$14,100,000	\$160,740	\$39,988	\$120,752	\$82,927
Retail		14,850	\$25		\$371,250				\$100	\$1,856,250	\$44,810	\$0	\$44,810	\$44,810
<b>Total</b>		<b>71,250</b>			<b>\$2,737,821</b>	\$1,566,901	<b>\$1,170,920</b>	<b>1.2</b>		<b>\$15,956,250</b>	<b>\$205,550</b>	\$39,988	\$165,562	<b>\$127,737</b>
<b>Armory Street</b>														
Residential -Condominium	13	18,000	\$75,000	\$68,571	\$895,714			0.5	\$350,000	\$4,500,000	\$51,300	\$12,762	\$38,538	\$24,549
Retail		0	\$25		\$0				\$100					
<b>Total</b>		<b>18,000</b>			<b>\$895,714</b>	\$579,501	<b>\$316,213</b>	<b>0.5</b>		<b>\$4,500,000</b>	<b>\$51,300</b>	\$12,762	\$38,538	<b>\$24,549</b>
<b>North Avenue TOTAL</b>					\$12,067,929	\$7,760,004	<b>\$4,307,925</b>			<b>\$71,558,000</b>	<b>\$929,886</b>	\$177,534	\$752,353	<b>\$565,026</b>
1 - 2004 Fiscal year residential tax rate = \$11.40 per thousand; commercial tax rate = \$24.14 per thousand 2 - School costs calculated assuming 0.20 children per unit and a cost per child of \$4,963 3- Assumes 1400 gsf for condominiums 4 - Assumes \$250,000/acre for site improvements 5 - Assumes 2 parking spaces per condo 6 - Structured parking cost calculated at \$20,000/space 7 - For additional assumptions see Section VI. Development Scenarios Overview														

All numbers presented on the chart on the previous page are approximate and require further verification. Values and calculations should be considered valid only for demonstrating development potential for the concepts presented, although they can serve as models for development or redevelopment throughout Wakefield. While every site is unique and presents its own set of opportunities and challenges, the trade-offs, when considering residential, retail or commercial uses apply to many sites in town.

Each of the six blocks shown in the redevelopment concept for the North Avenue study area was analyzed based on its financial feasibility. Residential use is the most likely construction option with ground floor retail in some locations clustered on either side of Albion Street. Buildings are to be three to four stories high, not including parking that may be located below.

It would be difficult to substitute office for residential on these sites. The limited parking that is available, and the small floor plates that could be created on the relatively small parcels do not make this a strong office building location.

The development scenarios analyzed balance the community's preference for smaller scaled buildings with the realities of development costs and market demands. Each scenario assumes wood frame construction with some parking located partially below grade and behind buildings. Wood frame structures are limited to four stories and average approximately \$100 per square foot for hard costs and an additional \$30 per square foot for soft costs. Any building over four floors requires steel frame construction which pushes the per square foot hard construction cost to \$140. To recover the costs associated with steel frame construction,

the buildings would have to be higher than 6 stories to create a sufficient number of units. This is a building height unlikely to be acceptable to the town.

The small lot sizes mean that a significant percentage of the parking spaces would have to be constructed below grade, raising costs as the number of units rise. The design scenario assumes some parking relief from existing zoning requirements due to proximity to the commuter rail station. Any further reduction in the amount of parking provided on-site would negatively impact the projects' perceived value and marketing.

These models illustrate that at least 3 to 4 stories of development are needed to make redevelopment attractive to the owners. When taken in aggregate, this model does generate fiscal benefit and added value over existing uses. When analyzed site by site, all of the scenarios have a net positive fiscal impact, but not all of the redevelopment concepts improve on the existing value of the properties.

The current use on the site between Richardson Avenue and West Water Street is generating significant value, therefore it is unlikely that the owner of this particular site would redevelop the property in the near future. As residential and/or retail rental values increase, this site may become more feasible for redevelopment. The site between Chestnut and Albion Streets receives a considerable improvement to the value of the land through redevelopment. This is due in part to the larger size of the parcels, the number of units that can be built, and the addition of a significant amount of ground floor retail to the development.