

# 2011 Williamsburg Village Centers Study

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## Findings and Recommendations



Williamsburg Village Centers Visioning Committee & Pioneer Valley Planning Commission

# History of Project

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- Born out of the 2010 Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) Update
- The Plan established goals to:
  - Encourage vibrant mixed-use village centers
  - Focus growth near village centers in order to promote open space preservation
  - Ensure that development is respectful of the Mill River as a scenic and recreational resource
  - Make open space connections and connect the village centers with a multi-use corridor



# 2011 Williamsburg Village Centers Study

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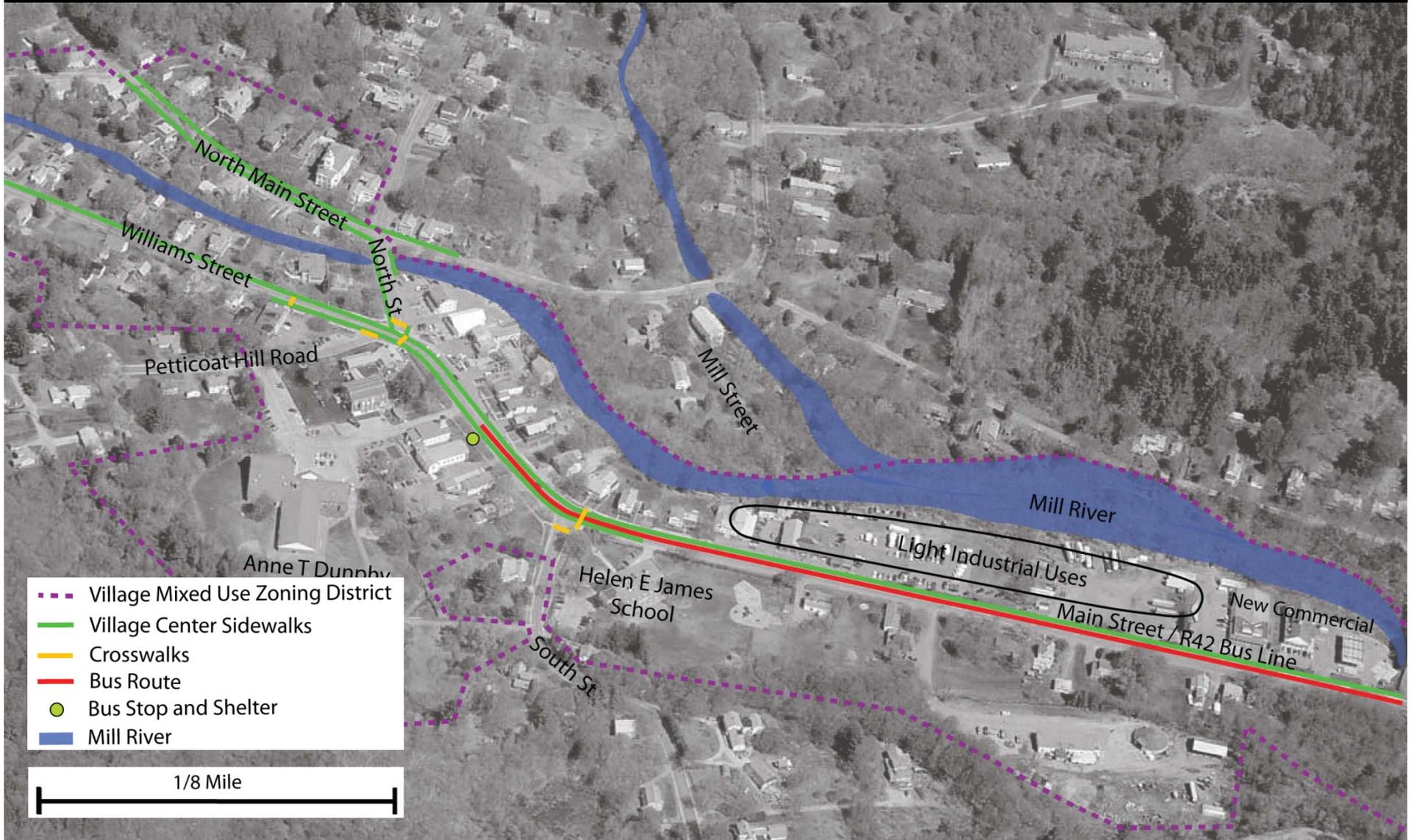
## ➤ Purpose of Project

- Find out what kinds of village center development the community wants to see
- Assess whether our zoning allows the types of development the community wants
- Propose zoning amendments to meet community goals
- Recommend other appropriate strategies to meet community goals

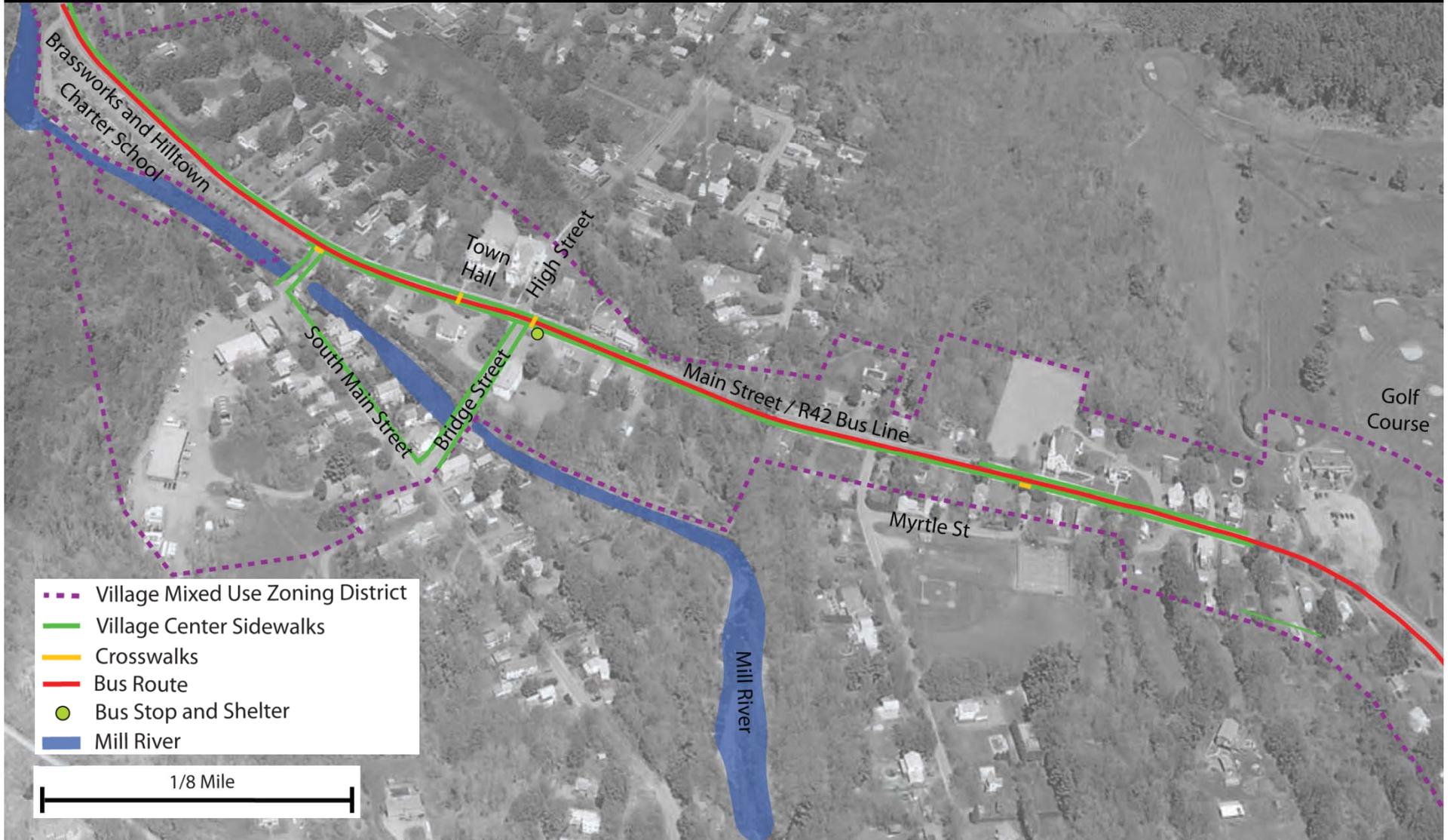
## ➤ A Note About “Development”

- Development is improvement of the landscape in various ways:
  - Mix of different land uses in a community
  - How private properties are developed
  - Creation of public amenities like parks, trails and street trees, etc.

# Williamsburg Village Center (Site Analysis)



# Haydenville Village Center (Site Analysis)



# Site Analysis: What We Learned...

- Many small parking lots and curb cuts make it challenging and less pleasant for pedestrians to walk around the village center when there is a lot of traffic
- Most properties along the river do not face or make use of the river
- There is no safe way for pedestrians or cyclists to travel from downtown Williamsburg to Haydenville



# Zoning Analysis: What We Did

- Took measurements to identify the characteristics of properties in our village centers
  - We looked at actual lot sizes, frontage measurements, and building setbacks and heights.
- Compared these ACTUAL characteristics of our village centers to the ZONING REGULATIONS
- Compared the ZONING REGULATIONS to BEST PRACTICES for using zoning to promote vibrant downtown districts

**VILLAGE CENTERS ZONING ANALYSIS TABLE – WILLIAMSBURG, MA**

Prepared by the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission

	Existing Requirements in Village Mixed Use District	Existing Conditions in Village Centers <sup>1</sup>	New Urbanism Best Practices Guide <sup>2</sup> (2009) and Downtown Zoning Repair Workshop at the National Conference of the American Planning Association (2011)
<b>Min. Lot Size</b>	65,000 sq. ft (~1.5 acres). Additional units require an additional area 10% greater than required for the previous number of dwelling units (e.g. a property with a 2 <sup>nd</sup> unit requires a total of 71,500 sf, a property with a third unit requires a total of 78,650 sq. ft, etc.). Minimum Lot Size does not apply to Accessory Apartments.	Downtown Haydenville: <sup>3</sup> 5,916 sq. ft (.14 acres) to 98,548 sq. ft (2.26 acres). Only two properties (just over 3 percent) conform to the zoning requirement  Downtown Williamsburg: <sup>4</sup> 3,132 sq. ft (.07 acres) to 38,192 (.88 acres) (range excludes the 3 acre school property). No properties except for the school meet the minimum lot size requirement (including the school, less than 2% conform to current zoning)  Connector Areas: <sup>5</sup> 9,487 sq. ft (.22 acres) to 335,908 sq. ft (7.7 acres) (excludes golf club). Less than 31% of properties conform to current zoning  Across the entire Rt. 9 Corridor, only 26% of properties conform to lot size requirements, based on data provided by Town Assessor	No minimum lot sizes in commercial districts. Lots in smart growth residential zones typically range from 3,000 to 5,000 sq. ft  APA Workshop: In general, use the low end of prevailing lot sizes in the district as the minimum; allow homes on lots as small as 3,000 sq. ft, but fit the standards to neighborhood needs
<b>Min. Frontage</b>	200 ft	Downtown Haydenville: 34 ft to 284 ft. Less than 7% conform to zoning  Downtown Williamsburg: 35 ft to 210 ft (excludes school, which has 411 ft of frontage). Less than 4% conform to zoning  Connector Areas: 53 ft to 1063 ft. Just over 47 percent conform to zoning	No requirement in commercial districts. Residential: 30 - 70 ft for a 1-family home lot <sup>6</sup>  APA Workshop: Use the low end of prevailing frontages as the minimum
<b>Max. Building Height</b>	40 ft	Haydenville Sampling: 24 ft – 35 ft  Williamsburg Sampling: 19 ft to 36 ft	Residential: 2.5 stories or 30 ft maximum  APA Workshop: Not taller than iconic town buildings
<b>Front Setback</b>	40 ft	Downtown Haydenville: 5 ft – 131 ft. Just over 43% conform to zoning  Downtown Williamsburg : 12 ft to 122 ft. Just under 34% conform  Connector Areas: 9 ft to 273 ft. Nearly 65% conform	5-25 ft. Identify a “build-to” line, not a front setback requirement, and no different setbacks for commercial versus residential buildings  APA Workshop: For commercial uses, use front lot line as build-to line. For residential uses, measure minimum and maximum prevailing

# Zoning Analysis: What We Learned

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- Our zoning requirements prevent new developments that are similar to what we already have in our village centers
  - The zoning does not match the actual characteristics of our village center properties
  - Many of the differences between newer commercial developments and our traditional developments result from our zoning regulations
- For example, almost none of the properties in our village centers meet the minimum lot size requirement of 65,000 square feet (approximately 1.5 acres)
  - E.g. the Big Mamou property, a typical village lot, is just 8,712 square feet.



# Zoning Analysis: What We Learned

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Our zoning requirements do not match the actual characteristics of our village center properties (ctd.)

- For example, very few of our village center properties meet the 200 foot frontage requirement.
  - E.g. the Williamsburg Market property has approximately 60 ft of frontage.



# Zoning Analysis: What We Learned

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Our zoning requirements do not match the actual characteristics of our village center properties (ctd.)

- For example, the majority of properties in our village centers do not meet the front setback requirement of 40 feet.
  - E.g. the Brewmaster's Tavern setbacks of approximately 30 feet do not meet the town's 40 foot requirement.



# Zoning Analysis: What We Learned

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Why does it matter that our zoning requirements do not match the actual characteristics of our village center properties?

- In many cases, our zoning regulations prevent or hinder commercial and mixed-use development in our village centers.
- Our regulations are not based on good village design – We are requiring new developments to be out of character with our traditional village centers



# Zoning Analysis: Key Lessons Learned

- Our zoning regulations prevent new developments that are similar to what we already have in our village centers
- Most of the key zoning requirements that govern lot and building characteristics in the Village Mixed Use District do not match the actual conditions in our village centers
- Even though the zoning allows both commercial and mixed-use properties by right in the Village Mixed Use District, our dimensional requirements actually prevent conversion of properties in the village centers to these uses.



The Big Mamou property, a typical village lot, is less than 9,000 square feet, while the minimum lot size requirement is 65,000 square feet.



The Williamsburg Market property has approximately 60 feet of frontage. This does not meet the 200 foot frontage requirement.



The Brewmaster's Tavern property is set back approximately 30 feet from the street, falling short of the 40 foot setback requirement.

# Village Centers Visioning Forum

**After studying the zoning, we held a Visioning Forum to find out:**

- What the community likes and dislikes about our village centers
- What kinds of development the community wants to see encouraged
- What are the major opportunities for improving our village centers

## WILLIAMSBURG-HAYDENVILLE VILLAGE CENTER VISIONING FORUM

Sponsored by the Village Centers Visioning Committee

### AGENDA

**7:00 p.m.** – Introduction

**7:20 p.m.** – Opportunities & Constraints Roundtable: Small Group Discussions

**7:55 p.m.** – Report Back to the Larger Group: Summary of Group Discussions

**8:30 p.m.** – Setting Goals for Our Village Centers

**8:55 p.m.** – Wrap Up & Next Steps

Take the Village Centers Survey at [www.surveymonkey.com/s/villagecenters](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/villagecenters)

### INTRODUCTION

#### Introduction

- Welcome: History and Purpose of the Village Centers Visioning Project (Village Centers Visioning Committee)
- Site Analysis and What We've Learned So Far (Pioneer Valley Planning Commission)
- Purpose of Forum (Pioneer Valley Planning Commission)

#### What is Visioning?

We will be talking about what we want our village centers to be in 20 years. Visioning forums are dynamic public meetings in which community members discuss basic values and goals, as well as major issues. We will set goals based on shared community values, and these goals will guide town decision-making.

#### What is Development?

We will be talking about the types of development we would like to see in and near our village centers – as well as in the areas along Route 9 that are outside our village centers. We encourage you to think about development comprehensively: Development is improvement of the landscape in various ways, and can refer to the mix of different land uses in a community, how private properties are developed, the creation of public amenities like parks, trails and street trees, etc.

### OPPORTUNITIES & CONSTRAINTS ROUNDTABLE: SMALL GROUP DISCUSSIONS

- **What do you like about our village centers and what are the opportunities? Are there special places?**
- **What would you improve about our village centers? Are there places with conflicts?**
- **What types of development should we encourage in our village centers?**
  - We have housing, retail, office space and civic and community uses in our village centers. Should our village centers have more or less of any of these?
  - Should the town promote mixed-use development (e.g. residential above retail, office or other commercial uses) in the village centers?
  - What qualities or features should development (including new development and redevelopment) have?
- **What types of development should we encourage along Route 9 outside of the village centers?**

# Village Centers Visioning Forum

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## These Are the Questions We Asked Residents:

- **What do you like about our village centers and what are the opportunities? Are there special places?**
- **What would you improve about our village centers? Are there places with conflicts?**
- **What types of development should we encourage in our village centers?**
  - We have housing, retail, office space and civic and community uses in our village centers. Should our village centers have more or less of any of these?
  - Should the town promote mixed-use development (e.g. residential above retail, office or other commercial uses) in the village centers?
  - What qualities or features should development (including new development and redevelopment) have?
- **What types of development should we encourage along Route 9 outside of the village centers?**

# Goals for the Village Centers

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**These goals were first drafted at the community forum and were refined by the Village Centers Visioning Committee:**

- 1. Improve and preserve the character of our village centers**
- 2. Maintain and improve walkability within our village centers, and create better pedestrian access to and between the village centers**
- 3. Encourage community interaction in the village centers**
- 4. Create more publicly accessible green space for community gatherings in both village centers**
- 5. Take advantage of the Mill River to unite the village centers, and feature the mill River as a town centerpiece that promotes vibrancy, a healthy ecosystem, recreation and economic development**
- 6. Encourage a diverse mix of uses (commercial, civic, shared uses, housing options, flexible transition of uses, home businesses)**

# Village Centers Survey

- We created a web survey that was open for over a month, and 83 residents gave us their input!

## Williamsburg-Haydenville Village Centers Survey

### 1. Welcome!

Welcome to the Williamsburg-Haydenville Village Centers Survey!

This survey is being conducted by the Village Centers Visioning Committee, with the help of the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, to get community input on the types of development we would like to see in and near our village centers in the future. In addition to the Village Centers, we are also looking at the areas along Route 9 that are outside of our village centers.

Please note that we are not endorsing any of the images shown in this survey. We are showing a range of images to find out what types of development residents like and don't like. Also, we encourage you to think of "development" comprehensively: Development is improvement of the landscape in various ways, and can refer to the mix of different land uses in a community, how private properties are developed, the creation of public amenities like parks, trails and street trees, etc.

Your answers are entirely anonymous. Your input will be used to assess our village center zoning regulations and other strategies to strengthen our village centers.

This survey takes about 20 minutes to complete. The survey will be open through Wednesday, July 6th.

Thank you for your time and input!



# Village Centers Survey

- We used different images to ask residents what kinds of developments they would like to see in the village centers.

4.

Imagine these commercial buildings in or near the Williamsburg or Haydenville village centers. Please rate each image based on whether you would like to see this type of development in or near our village centers.

5.



**Rate how well you would like this type of development in or near our village centers.**

	Strongly Dislike	Dislike	Neutral	Like	Like Quite a Bit
Rating	<input type="radio"/>				

# Village Centers Survey: Examples of Images Rated by Residents



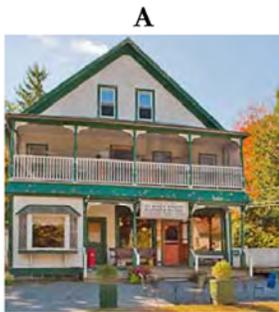
# Village Centers Survey: Examples of Images Rated by Residents



# Village Centers Survey

We analyzed the results...

- Rank these images from 1 to 3, based on which you would like most to least in or near our village centers.



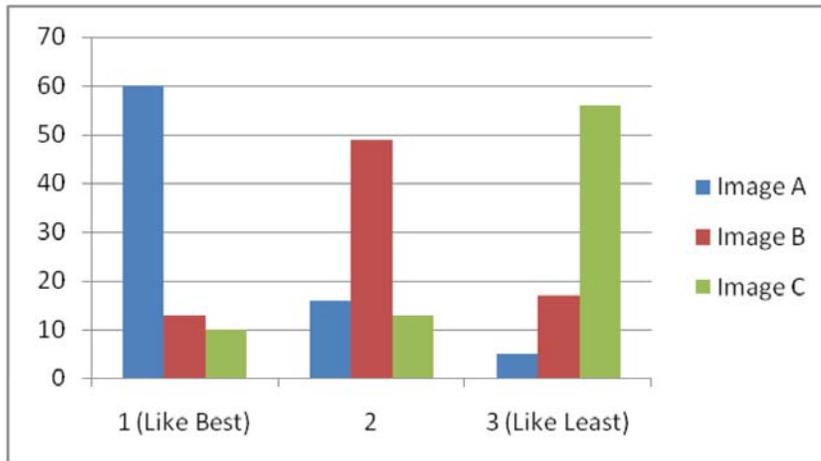
74% (60 Respondents)  
Liked Image A Best.



62% (49 Respondents) Liked  
Image B Second Best.



71% (56 Respondents) Liked  
Image C Least.

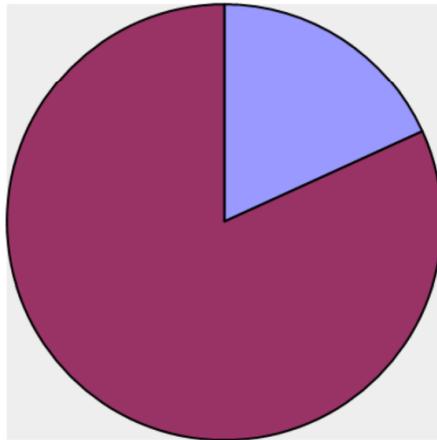


Response Count: 83



# Village Centers Survey (Questions About the River)

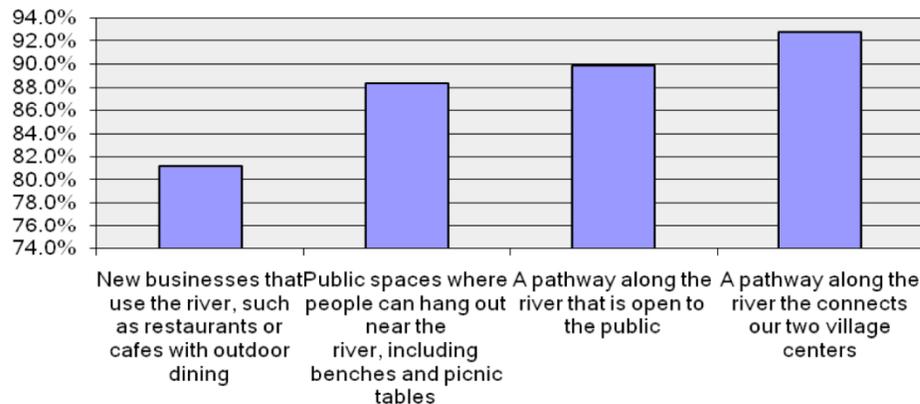
How would you like to see future development in our village centers relate to the Mill River?



- Development along the river is fine the way it is. It should stay the same or have a similar relationship to the river as it has today.
- Future development should face and be more oriented towards the Mill River, rather than facing its back to the river.

81.8% of respondents (54) indicated that future development should face and be more oriented towards the Mill River, rather than facing its back to the river. Response Count = 66

In the future, which of these would you like to see along the Mill River in our village centers (Check All the Apply)



# Key Lessons Learned from the Public Input

- Residents want the village centers to become more vibrant while retaining their small-town, rural feel.
- Pedestrian safety and vehicle parking are important.
- Open space and greater use of the river are important.
- Residents like the traditional development pattern in the village centers and support new development that is similar.



# Putting it All Together: What We Heard From Residents

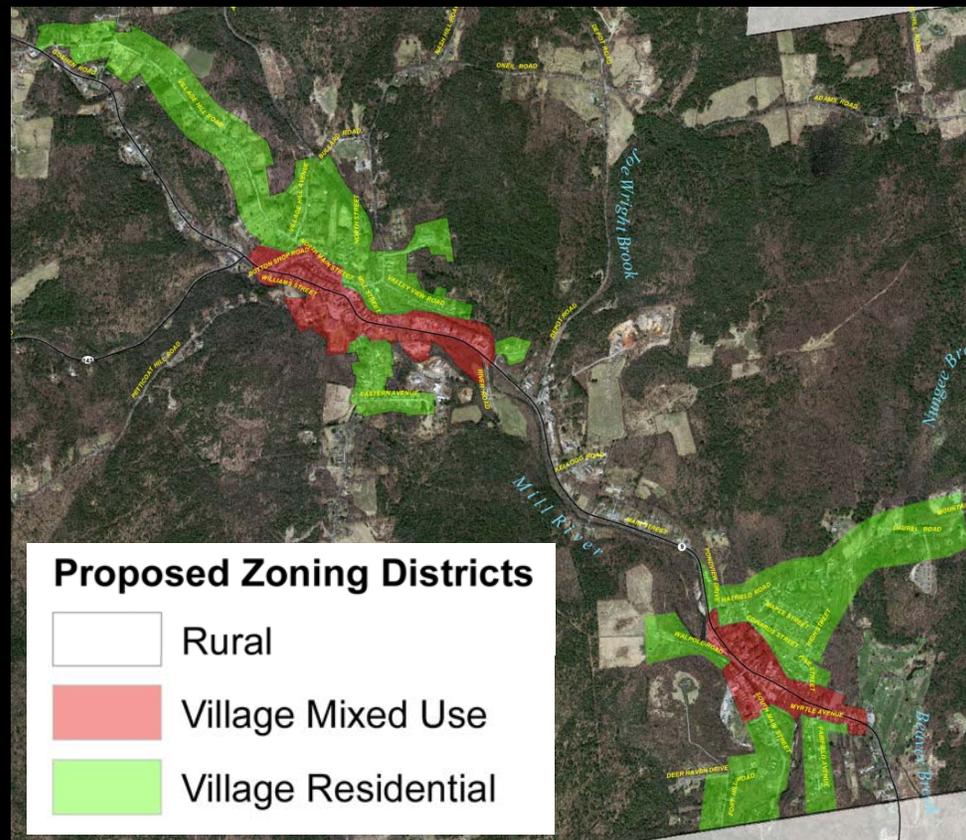
- Residents want the village centers to become more vibrant while retaining their small-town, rural feel.
  - Residents want the village centers to have more destinations, to be more vibrant and walkable, and to foster a sense of community.
- Pedestrian safety and vehicle parking are important.
  - Residents support traffic calming, shared parking and public lots.
- Open space and greater use of the river are important.
  - Residents want central green spaces for community gathering and support a non-motorized connection between the village centers
- Residents like the traditional development pattern in the village centers and support new development that is similar.
  - Residents support mixed-use buildings, local businesses, and maintenance and reuse of existing buildings



# Key Short-Term Zoning Recommendations

- Amend the boundaries of the Village Mixed Use Zoning District to include only the existing and desirable future expansion areas for the village centers.

**Why?** Currently, the entire Route 9 corridor is in the Village Mixed Use District. This change would establish a much smaller area where we can make changes to the zoning regulations to promote desirable village center-type development. Conversely, this prevents Village Mixed Use District regulatory changes from promoting village center development outside the village centers.



# Key Short-Term Zoning Recommendations

- Revise the Use Table for the Village Mixed Use Zoning District to allow uses that promote the identity and goals of the village centers, and to prohibit uses that undercut this identity.

**Why?** In some cases, the zoning regulations allow uses that are not compatible with the village centers. In other cases, the zoning regulations make it more difficult to create new uses that ARE compatible with the village centers. The Use Table can be amended to support town goals for the village centers.

Section	Use	VR	VM	RU	Notes
3.1	<b>Residential Uses</b>				
	Single-family dwelling	P	P	P	
	Two-family dwelling	P	P	P	
	Multi-family dwelling (up to 4 dwelling units)	SP	<b>P SP</b>	SP	
	Accessory apartment	SP	<b>P SP</b>	SP	See Section 9.0
	Upper-floor <b>apartments-dwelling units</b> in Mixed Use buildings	P	P	SP	See Section 9. Limited to a maximum of 3 residential dwelling units per structure
	<b>More than 4 upper-floor dwelling units in Mixed Use buildings</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>SP</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>[To accommodate flexible reuse of larger buildings, such as mill buildings]</b>
3.2	<b>Business Uses</b>				
	Adult Uses	N	SP/SPR	N	See section 4.2
	Agriculture, horticulture, floriculture	N	P	SP	
	Automobile sales, rental, leasing	N	SP	SP	
	Automobile service and repair	SP	<b>SP P</b>	SP	Including auto body repairs
	Bank	N	P	SP	
	Bed & Breakfast inn (4 units or less)	SP	<b>P SP</b>	P	
	Business with a drive-through	N	SP/SPR	N	See Definitions, Section 19
	Commercial, non-residential uses exceeding 5,000 sq. ft. (building footprint)	N	SP/SPR	SP/SPR	

# Key Short-Term Zoning Recommendations

- Amend the dimensional standards and supporting regulations for the Village Mixed Use District to reflect the community's desire to support and promote a traditional village center development pattern, including smaller lot size, frontage, setback and coverage standards.

**Why?** Based on public input from the community forum and survey, residents want to promote development that is compatible and consistent with the existing village centers, but we found that the current zoning regulations actually prevent compatible development. Zoning changes that would promote development that the community wants to see include amendments that establish smaller lot size, frontage, setback and coverage requirements within the village centers.

Today, the dimensional standards are the same in all zoning districts. These changes would create a new Table of Dimensional Standards that establishes different regulations for the different zoning districts so that the town can promote different types of development in different parts of town.

## 9.0 Table of Dimensional Standards

VM. Village Mixed Use District

VR. Village Residential District

RU. Rural District

Zone	Minimum Lot Area* and Frontage		Min. Front Setback / Setback Range	Minimum Side / Rear Setback		Maximum Height	Maximum Lot Coverage	
	square feet	feet		feet	feet		feet	%
<b>VM Proposed</b>	<u>7,000<sup>A</sup></u>	<u>55<sup>B</sup></u>	<u>10-25<sup>C</sup></u>	<u>5<sup>D</sup></u>	15	40	50	10,000
VM Existing	65,000**	200	40	15	15	40	50	10,000
VR	65,000**	200	40	15	15	40	50	10,000
RU	65,000**	200	40	15	15	40	25	10,000

# Supporting Changes

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(Ctd.) Amend the dimensional standards and supporting regulations for the Village Mixed Use District to reflect the community's desire to support and promote a traditional village center development pattern, including smaller lot size, frontage, setback and coverage standards.

➤ The community also wants to promote flexible reuse of existing buildings.

## Strategy: Create a Village Centers Special Permit

Why? Even after we fix the dimensional standards to match Williamsburg's existing conditions better, a small number of existing structures will continue to be non-conforming. A Village Centers Special Permit would allow the redevelopment of these remaining properties that continue to be non-conforming even after new dimensional requirements take effect. Although the zoning revision would not seek to promote the creation of new developments that possess these dimensional characteristics, the purpose of this Special Permit would be to allow sufficient flexibility for these pre-existing non-conforming properties to be reused and redeveloped over time.

# Key Short-Term Zoning Recommendations

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- Create site plan review provisions that ensure that all proposed developments within the Village Mixed Use District are reviewed for their compatibility with the village centers and the town goals established by this study.

Why? To promote new developments that support town goals for the village centers.

## Strategy: Establish Village Centers Minor Site Plan Review and Review Criteria

### 1. Village Centers Minor Site Plan Review

Why? In the current zoning regulations, Site Plan Review (Section 6) applies only to large projects with a building footprint exceeding 5,000 square feet. Village Centers Minor Site Plan Review can be added to establish, for smaller projects within the village centers, site plan review requirements that are less burdensome to the applicant than the requirements under Section 6 – Site Plan Review.

### 2. Village Centers Site Plan Review Criteria

Why? The criteria are used by the Planning Board to help review projects for their compatibility with town goals for the village centers.

# Key Short-Term Zoning Recommendations

## ➤ Allow only one curb cut, and...

**Why?** Residents want to promote development that improves walkability in the village centers. Many small parking lots and curb cuts make it challenging and unpleasant for pedestrians to walk around the village center when there is a lot of traffic. Many cars going in and out of individual parking lots for each property also make it more dangerous for pedestrians. Limiting new developments to one curb cut per property would, over time, reduce the number of times pedestrians must cross paths with cars that are entering or exiting parking lots.



# Key Short-Term Zoning Recommendations

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- Promote new parking that is located behind or to the side of buildings when feasible, and that does not obstruct access to or enjoyment of the Mill River.

Why? Residents want to promote development that improves walkability in the village centers, and residents want to promote appreciation of the river and feature the Mill River as a town centerpiece.

Parking to the side of or behind buildings promotes a better pedestrian experience, as it orients development towards pedestrians instead of cars. When parking lots are between the sidewalk and the building, it is easier for drivers to access the building but harder for pedestrians to do so (the building is farther away from the sidewalk, and it becomes necessary to leave the sidewalk and traverse a parking lot and pay attention to moving vehicles in order to get to the building).

It is also a goal of this study to promote appreciation of the Mill River. The proposed zoning amendments (in the Village Centers Site Plan Review Criteria) provide guidance to help balance the goals of not putting parking in front of buildings and also not putting parking to the rear of a property in a way that obstructs access to or enjoyment of the river.

## Decision Map Showing How Proposed Revisions Apply to Specific Projects

### How do the Village Centers Zoning Revisions Apply to my Project?

1. Check the zoning map to determine the district in which the property is located. The zoning map has been revised to reduce the extent of the Village Mixed Use District.



2. Check the Use Table to see what uses are allowable by right or by Special Permit, and which uses are not allowed in the district. The allowable uses in the Village Mixed Use District have been revised.



3. Check the Table of Dimensional Requirements to see what dimensional standards apply in the district. The Village Mixed Use District standards have been revised to promote development consistent with the existing village centers.



4. All site plans for projects within the Village Mixed Use District will be reviewed using the Village Centers Site Plan Review Criteria, including:



Projects that are subject to Section 6 – Site Plan Review (an existing bylaw) because they have a building with a footprint greater than 5,000 square feet. The Village Centers Site Plan Review Criteria apply in addition to the criteria within Section 6 – Site Plan Review.



All other projects requiring a building, driveway or special permit in the Village Mixed Use District, which are subject to Section XX - Village Centers Minor Site Plan Review, including:



Projects on non-conforming properties (those that do not meet the dimensional standards), which may apply for a Village Centers Special Permit for a redevelopment that involves a change of use, or may expand a preexisting use through existing zoning provisions



Projects on conforming properties (that meet the dimensional standards)

# Key Short-Term Non-Zoning Recommendations

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- Capitalize on the current school planning effort to identify opportunities for public, shared-parking lots that serve the village centers.

## Next Steps

- Discuss possibilities for setting aside portions of parking lots for public use at all times and/or during non-school hours

- Establish a committee to address walkability and traffic calming in the village centers.

## Next Steps

- Establish a standing committee to address walkability and traffic calming issues in town
- Once the PVPC Traffic Calming Study is complete, work to implement its recommendations
- Request a PVPC Parking Study for downtown Williamsburg
- Create a plan for improving pedestrian connections from the neighborhoods to the village centers, and identify priority areas for new sidewalks

- Explore potential funding and strategies for historic preservation and maintenance of the town's historic buildings and cultural areas.

## Possible Strategy

- Adopt the Community Preservation Act to create a robust local funding source for historic preservation, affordable housing and open space initiatives

# Key Medium and Long-Term Recommendations

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- Review home occupations provisions with the goal of promoting home businesses and cottage industries.
  
- Establish a Stormwater Bylaw to protect water quality in the Mill River and its tributaries throughout the Town of Williamsburg.
  - This is a high priority for proponents of open space and clean water in town
  
- After completion of a parking study and/or provision of additional public parking options (e.g. at the school parking lots or through additional on-street parking ), revisit the town's off-street parking standards to consider potential reductions in the village centers.
  - Currently, off-street parking regulations require every property to have its own parking lot. Reducing or eliminating off-street parking requirements would allow the village centers to have a greater orientation towards pedestrians, and less orientation towards cars. Space currently used for parking could be used to create publicly accessible open space and infill developments. But, to do this, the town first needs to understand and meet its public parking needs in the village centers.

# 2011 Williamsburg Village Centers Study

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Want a digital copy of  
the full report?

Visit the town  
website or contact  
the Pioneer Valley  
Planning Commission:  
[dmckahn@pvpc.org](mailto:dmckahn@pvpc.org)

