



Needham Center Development Plan

Executive Summary

March 30, 2009

Introduction

Needham Center is at the geographic and symbolic center of town. This village center is at the focal point of a collection of residential neighborhoods with the attributes of easy access to Boston, pleasant green spaces and an excellent school system that have all made this a highly desirable community in which to live and work.

Needham Center's potential to become a vibrant center of the town's business, civic, cultural and social life is great. The intent of this Development Plan is to provide a cohesive vision and comprehensive plan from which the coordinated decision-making required by all involved stakeholders will follow.

Project Goals

The overarching goal of this plan is to unlock Needham Center's potential. This will create significant benefits for town residents, business and property owners and employees. At the same time, this plan protects adjacent residential neighborhoods from the impact of development and addresses current and future pressure on traffic and parking. To achieve this the Development Plan is designed to:

- Provide an overall master plan to guide public and private development of the built environment.
- Create a vibrant downtown with a diverse mix of goods, services and housing informed by

smart growth and transit-oriented development principles.

- Reduce regulatory barriers to good development.
- Provide incentives for the private sector to create public benefits.
- Create an attractive village environment character.
- Improve traffic flow and parking.
- Create a safer and enriched pedestrian experience.
- Improve environmental quality.
- Encourage new investment.
- Generate additional tax revenues for the Town.

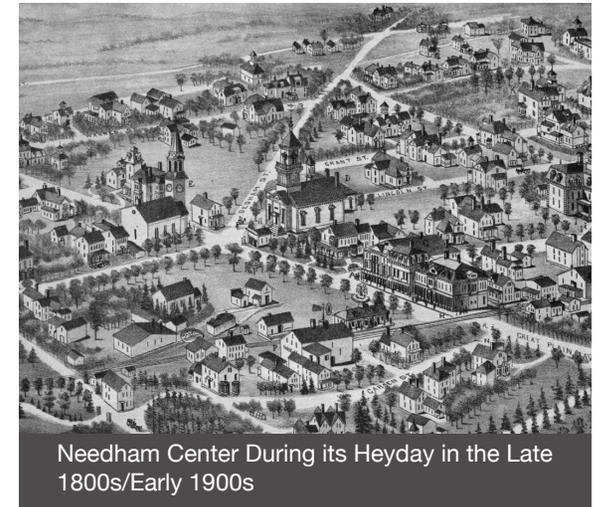
Needham Center Today

Needham Center is a much loved and used downtown but there are missed opportunities in the areas of the built environment, land use, traffic and parking that this plan addresses.

Two features stand out as attributes of Needham Center today. One is its "center focus", referring to a sense of place dominated by the civic presence of Town Hall and Common among the surrounding commercial properties. The second is the location of two commuter rail stations providing easy access to Boston.

Built Environment

During Needham Center's heyday, in the late



Needham Center During its Heyday in the Late 1800s/Early 1900s

1800s/early 1900s, many beautifully designed buildings of two and three stories, and even some of four stories, stood within a block of Town Hall and Common as evidenced in historical photographs. Yet today the built environment of Needham Center is dominated by one story buildings with nondescript or unattractive facades. Although there are pockets of attractive and pleasant streetscape, the built environment is further diminished by:

- Unattractive streetscape
- Sidewalks unfriendly to pedestrians
- Inconsistent building setbacks
- A lack of trees and greening
- Inadequate crosswalks
- Excessive numbers of curb cuts
- An abundance of parking lots fronting the street

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY |

Land Use

Needham Center is a serviceable downtown that is enjoyed. The most predominant use is retail followed by office. In addition there are the significant institutions of Town Hall and the Hospital. Downtown enjoys the benefit of open space at locations including Town Common, Greene's Field and Memorial Field. Needham Center suffers however from a lack of:

- Diversity in retail
- Community space for social and cultural events
- Evening and weekend activities
- Residential options

Market Analysis

A study of the market shows there is a demand for additional retail, office and residential space. In addition there is the opportunity for transit-oriented development (TOD) promoting mixed-use residential projects. The market analysis showed that the potential demand over the next five years is:

- Retail - 245,000 SF
- Office - 50,000 SF
- Residential - 168,000 SF

Underpinning this documented demand for additional development is the necessity of providing adequate traffic and parking capacity.

Zoning

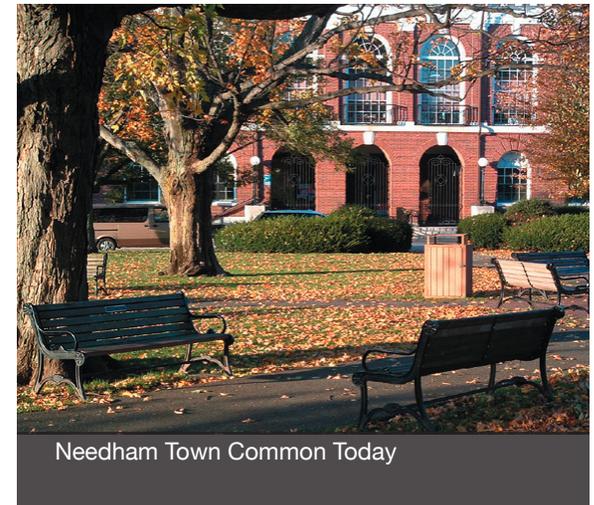
Current zoning contributes to redevelopment barriers that exist in Needham Center. Some properties have little room to grow, but most are already at or over their maximum development potential based upon current zoning. The uncertainty in the project approvals process itself is an additional obstacle to redevelopment. Changes to current zoning can address these barriers as well as create opportunities to encourage projects that complement a comprehensive vision for a revitalized downtown.

Subdistricts

Three zoning districts, each with its own character, compromise Needham Center today.

Needham Center Business District

This district is the hub of downtown with a central focus of Town Hall and Common. These two historic landmarks, along with Needham Center Station, give the defining character to this district. The Center District also has the most urban feel with the most consistent building setbacks at the edge of street front lot lines. This district can be enhanced as the visual and social focus of town by increasing density of development and taking advantage of Center Station for transit-oriented development projects.



Needham Town Common Today

Chestnut Street Business District

This zoning district includes two distinct areas, each with its own character: Lower Chestnut Street and Garden Street.

Lower Chestnut Street

The commercial area organized along Chestnut Street is dominated by Beth Israel Deaconess Hospital and Needham Junction Station. The Hospital is undergoing a significant expansion that will stimulate demand for additional office space nearby. Junction Station provides another opportunity for transit-oriented development projects.

Garden Street

Although it belongs to the same zoning district, this small area next to Center Station is completely separate from and of a completely different character than Chestnut Street. Its character is most influenced by the adjacent residential neighborhood.

Highland Avenue Business District

The predominant nature of this district is a collection of strip malls that are built up to the Highland Avenue frontage. Memorial Field and the adjacent high school, Needham Public Library and Rosemary Lake converge at the northern entry to this district. At its southern end, the historic Emery Grover building faces a collection of buildings consistently set back from Highland Avenue with landscaping. This zoning district serves as the entry into downtown.

Development Plan

The Development Plan is first and foremost a cohesive vision for the redevelopment of Needham Center, which lays the groundwork for a comprehensive plan addressing the built environment, land use, zoning, traffic and parking.

Village Concept

The vision for this plan reflects upon historic Needham Center and the traditional New England Village for inspiration and reinterprets it for contemporary life.

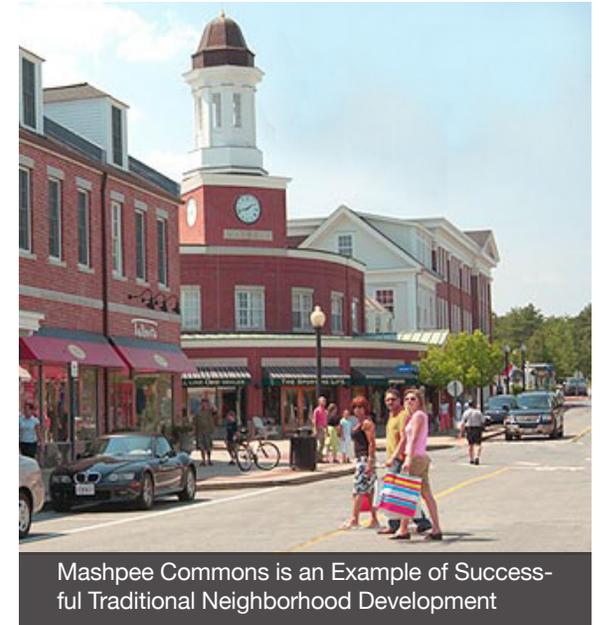
For more than two centuries the traditional New England villages thrived. At their best they were densely populated with two and three-story buildings housing a diverse mix of commercial, residential and civic uses. Economic, social and civic activities were centered in these town centers while outlying areas remained rural.

For the past hundred years, increasing reliance on automobiles and zoning laws that fostered it, have promoted a suburban development pattern that dispersed commercial development and took away from the focus and livability of the town center.

In response, there is a movement advocating the Village Concept, also known as Traditional Neighborhood Development (TND) or New Urbanism. The elements of the Village Concept are:

- Diverse, mixed-use districts combining residential, commercial and civic uses in a compact area;
- A balance of public and private spaces that enhance identity and value;
- Use of traditional New England towns as a model for the future;
- Greater use of public transportation.

Needham Center's two commuter rail stations afford it the opportunity for transit-oriented development (TOD) which complements the above stated goals of the village concept while further promoting transportation choices and reducing automobile usage.



Mashpee Commons is an Example of Successful Traditional Neighborhood Development

Density, Height & Street Edge

Intrinsic to the principles of a thriving town center is the desire to provide a diverse mix of uses in a walkable area with a vibrant streetscape. This requires an increased level of development to give the village center a built form that is walkable and well defined, as well as economically viable. Increased development means higher buildings that contribute to the streetscape and afford increased economic opportunity. It is also important to encourage building to the street edge to create a framework for village spaces.

Development Potential

The Development Plan encourages development of the following uses:

- **Retail** - A diverse range of retail style stores with “main street” being more appropriate than “big box”-style stores.
- **Office** - There is a demand for a variety of office uses with a particular niche for medically related office space driven by the hospital.
- **Residential** - It is important to expand downtown housing choices to achieve a more vibrant town center.
- **Mixed-Use** - Diversity and character with a mix of uses are critical to a successful town center.
- **Parking Consolidation & Improvements** - There is the opportunity to consolidate and/or provide better management of existing parking.
- **Streetscape Improvements** - Public and private improvements to the streetscape will enhance the walkability of Needham Center.

Development Potential by District

Highlights of the development potential of the three zoning districts are broken out below:

Needham Center Business District

The proposed increased density is designed to enhance the town common as an urban space but not overpower the town hall. An east-west pedestrian link is delineated from Greene’s Field to Center Station, which provides opportunities for mixed-use, transit-oriented development.

There is the opportunity for a public/private partnership for parking improvements in the Walgreens parking lot that is modeled on the successful consolidation of the Chestnut Street parking lot.

Chestnut Street Business District

The opportunities for the two distinct areas of this zoning district are discussed separately:

Lower Chestnut Street

This area is significantly impacted by the hospital, which is located primarily in the adjacent Medical Overlay District. The expansion of the hospital is expected to stimulate additional development along Chestnut Street. The Development Plan encourages projects that contribute to a well defined street edge along Chestnut Street.

Garden Street

The density proposed for this area is less than on Lower Chestnut Street because it is adjacent to a residential district to the west. In addition, multi-family and mixed-use multifamily projects are encouraged in this location to complement the adjacent residential neighborhood.

Highland Avenue Business District

The focus of this district is the development of Highland Avenue as a boulevard leading into downtown. The Development Plan proposes to enhance Highland Avenue in concert with the current improvements underway at Memorial Field.



Proposed Street Frontage Development

Build-out and Traffic Analysis

A build-out analysis was performed to determine the likely amount of development to occur under the proposed zoning. Over the next twenty years redevelopment is likely to result in total build-out from the existing 1,230,000 SF to 1,448,000 SF.

In addition to zoning requirements, market absorption and traffic capacity will also affect the maximum build-out. The Development Plan proposes to improve traffic flow with the upgrade of five traffic signals and the addition of one new signal. A traffic analysis of the projected build-out shows that with the proposed signal improvements, wait times at five locations will be shorter than under existing conditions, and at the sixth location will be equal to existing conditions.

Beyond improvements to traffic flow in the downtown area itself, the town has designated a network of surrounding roads as throughways with the potential of diverting some through traffic from the center to these secondary street routes. The Development Plan also proposes that the town initiate traffic demand management (TDM) initiatives that would result in more efficient use of transportation resources.

By utilizing the upgraded traffic signal system the town will also have the ability to monitor conditions at critical traffic congestion locations. This monitoring should be part of an annual review that includes evaluation of the secondary street routes and the TDM program.

Parking

The Development Plan includes a multi-pronged, comprehensive and balanced approach to accommodating parking for both existing uses and new development. Successful vibrant town centers require convenient parking provided in a way that complements the desired form of a mixed-use, walkable town center. The components of this comprehensive strategy include:

- Consolidation of off-street parking to provide more parking in less area.
- Modest reductions in parking requirements where appropriate.
- Additional flexibility in parking requirements to allow payment in lieu of parking requirements

and encourage creative, shared parking solutions that is appropriate for mixed-use.

- Establishment of a parking fund to be used for parking and transportation-related improvements.
- Development of a parking management program to make better use of existing parking.
- Establishment of a transportation demand management program to reduce car trips into the center thereby reducing the demand for parking.
- Development of a parking structure.

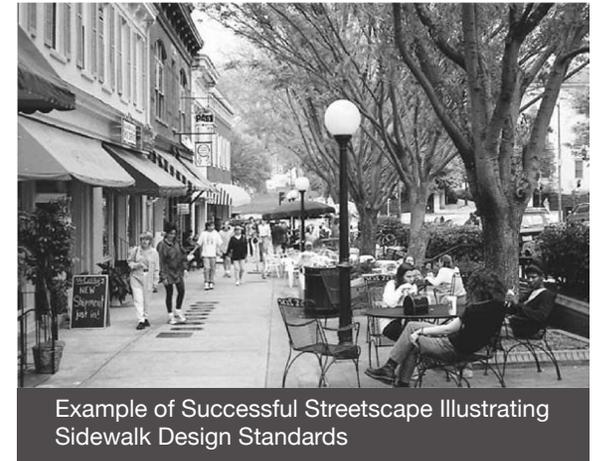
Design Guidelines

The Design Guidelines have been developed to encourage good design that will contribute to a safe, attractive and vibrant town center. The guidelines are intended to provide direction to businesses, property owners, developers and town departments involved in development and improvement projects within the Study Area.

The Guidelines also serve as a reference for the Planning Board and other town departments involved in the project review process.

The guidelines provide a clear and consistent standard so that project applicants will understand the town's design goals and thus facilitate a smoother, more efficient review process.

These guidelines build upon the 1995 [Design Guidelines for the Business Districts](#) and are the



Example of Successful Streetscape Illustrating Sidewalk Design Standards

result of a working partnership between the town, the business community and residents. The guidelines have been developed through an open and inclusive process of public discussion, workshops and review that has benefitted from the participation of a broad range of individuals and groups within the town.

Zoning Plan

The goals for the proposed zoning are designed to:

- Reduce barriers to development in the existing zoning.
- Encourage investment in new development and redevelopment of downtown properties.
- Protect the public interest in Needham Center as a vital, attractive business district.
- Provide for a fair, predictable development review and permitting system.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Encourage a mix of uses including retail, services and housing.

The proposed zoning focuses primarily on the creation of four new overlay districts:

- Center District A
- Center District B
- Garden Street District
- Lower Chestnut Street District

The benefits of this overlay zoning are as follows:

- Preservation of existing property rights.
- Creation of more choices.
- Provision of new development privileges under a different set of rules.
- Greater flexibility for both applicants and town boards reviewing proposed projects.
- Overlay districts ability to deviate from existing zoning district boundaries.

Highlights of the proposed overlay district zoning are discussed below, by district:

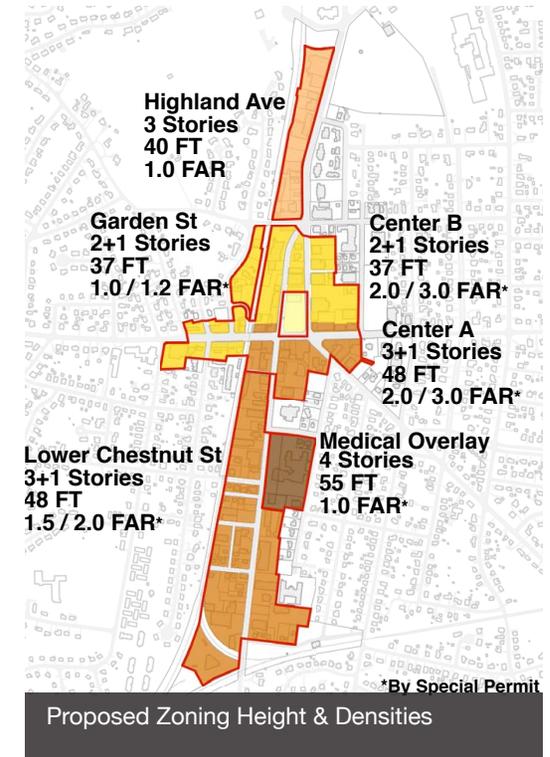
Needham Center

- Adds use regulations for five housing units by right, more units by special permit.
- Divides the Center Business District into two sub-districts in order to accommodate a maximum 4-story height along a portion of Great Plain Avenue (Center District A) and a maximum 3-story height in the rest of the Center Business District (B).

- Provides for significant increase in maximum FAR from 1.0 (existing) to 2.0 or 3.0 by special permit.
- Preserves existing side and rear setback rules for lots adjacent to residential districts.
- Requires affordable housing units in mixed-use buildings with six or more housing units.

Chestnut Street

- Applies only to the Chestnut Street portion of the underlying Chestnut Street Business District.
- Allows taller buildings, but only on lots with frontage on Chestnut Street.
- Increases minimum lot size from 10,000 SF (existing) to 15,000 SF to encourage parcel assembly.
- Increases minimum frontage from 80 FT to 100 FT to reduce the number of curb cuts.
- Stipulates minimum and maximum front setbacks.
- Preserves existing side and rear setback rules for lots adjacent to residential districts except for:
 - Lots adjacent to residential districts may have a setback of 10 FT for underground parking structures.
 - Lots adjacent to MBTA Right of Way have a 25 FT setback composed of 10 FT landscape buffer (or landscaped surface parking by special permit) and 15 FT for accessory uses excluding structures (10 FT setback for underground parking also allowed).



- Increases maximum FAR from 0.70 (existing) to 1.5 or 2.0 by special permit.

Garden Street

- Applies only to the Garden Street portion of the underlying Chestnut Street Business District. Not as use-intensive as the Chestnut Street Overlay District.
- Retail use only by special permit.
- Multi-family dwellings by special permit.
- Minimum lot size in the overlay district is in-

creased from 10,000 SF (existing) to 15,000 SF to encourage parcel assembly.

- Increases maximum FAR from 0.70 (existing) to 1.0 (multi-family/1.2 (all other allowed uses) by special permit.

Highland Avenue Business District

- No overlay district created here.
- Highland Avenue Business District replaces the existing Business District.
- Proposed regulations are primarily a “clean-up” of existing dimensional rules in order to achieve consistency with Needham’s other business districts.
- FAR of 1.0 added.

Implementation

The strategy to make a revitalized Needham Center a reality will require a multi-pronged approach that is persistent in effort, focused on goals and flexible in responding to changing community needs.

It is imperative that town officials keep the vision of a successful and vibrant village environment in the main stream of community awareness. The momentum of the study and the action that follows should be as seamless as possible. A follow-up “Action Committee” or some other mechanism to maintain momentum in this implementation process is essential. Otherwise it is all planning and no action. This will be a journey with celebrations for

success and adjustments to setbacks. Commitment and persistence must invigorate the process. Like all things in life, you are growing or you are dying. This implementation requires the same nurturing in order to grow.

The implementation schedule below is divided into early action, a mid-term phase and a long-term phase. This implementation schedule is a compilation of recommendations from the study and available information on potential private sector projects.

This implementation schedule includes general planning activities that serve to coordinate the various projects. Project opportunities are organized by public projects, public/private partnerships and private development. The implementation schedule is front loaded in the early action phase with planning and projects to kick start redevelopment efforts. Work initiated in the early action phase will be continued in the successive phases as discussed below.

Early Action 2008 - 2009

The early action phase includes both activities already underway and those targeted for catalyzing town center redevelopment.

Planning

- Zoning Vote - Spring Town Meeting 2009
- Economic Development Specialist hired in 2007



Example of Recently Completed Streetscape Improvements on Chapel Street

- Needham Center Action Committee formed
- The Community Preservation Act has already been adopted and will be used as one source of funds for qualifying Needham Center projects

Public Projects

- Town Hall and Town Common
- Senior Center
- Memorial Field
- Road & Sidewalk Improvements
 - Traffic Signal Upgrades - Phase 1
 - Chestnut Street Reconstruction
 - Road and Sidewalk Improvements - Phase 1

Public / Private Partnerships

- Streetscape Improvements
- Parking Consolidation Projects

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY |

Private Projects

- Hospital Expansion, Phase 1
- Theater Block Mixed-Use Project - Phase 1
- Roche Brothers Site Improvements
- Walgreens Site Improvements

Mid Term 2010 - 2014

The mid term phase will build on planning initiatives and projects started during the early action phase.

Planning

- Needham Center Action Committee five Year Review, Evaluation and Course Corrections

Public Projects

- Road and Sidewalk Improvements
 - Traffic Signal Upgrades - Phase 2
 - Road and Sidewalk Improvements - Phase 2
- Needham Junction Station Parking
- Emery Grover

Public / Private Partnerships

- Streetscape Improvements
- Parking Consolidation Projects

Private Projects

- Hospital Expansion, Phase 2
- Theater Block Mixed-Use Project - Phase 2

Long Term 2015 - 2028

The Long-Term phase anticipates completion of projects initiated in the previous two phases plus the advent of new opportunities for public and private projects. The success of previous phases towards a

new, vibrant village environment will stimulate further development in the latter action phase.

Planning

- Needham Center Action Committee 10 & 15 Year Review, Evaluation and Course Corrections

Public Projects

- Needham Center Redevelopment
- Road and Sidewalk Improvements - Phase 3

Public / Private Partnerships

- Parking Structure

Private Projects

- Hospital Private Parking Lot Redevelopment
- Lower Chestnut Street - MBTA Properties Redevelopment



Proposed Mixed-Use Development Along Chestnut Street

Summary of Existing Zoning and Proposed Amendments for May 2009 Town Meeting

Dimensional Standard	EXISTING		PROPOSED		
	Center Business	Chestnut Street	Needham Center Overlay	Lower Chestnut Street Overlay	Garden Street Overlay
Minimum Lot Area	10,000 sq. ft.	10,000 sq. ft.	10,000 sq. ft.	15,000 sq. ft.	15,000 sq. ft.
Minimum Frontage	80 feet	80 feet	80 feet	100 feet	80 feet
Maximum Building Height: By Right	35 feet 2.5 stories	35 feet 2.5 stories	<u>Sub-District A</u> 35 feet 2.5 stories <u>Sub-District B</u> 2.5 stories 35 feet	35 feet 2.5 stories	35 feet 2.5 stories
Maximum Building Height: By Special Permit	N/A	N/A	<u>Sub-District A</u> 37 feet, 3 stories <u>or</u> 48 feet 3+1 stories <u>Sub-District B</u> 37 feet 2+1 stories	For lots with frontage on Chestnut St: 37 feet 3 stories <u>or</u> 48 feet 3+1 stories	37 feet 2+1 stories
<u>Minimum</u> Building Height	N/A	N/A	<u>Sub-District A</u> 2 stories, 27 feet	N/A	N/A
Floor Area Ratio: By Right	1.0 or as existing on 1/1/90, whichever is greater	0.7	Same as Center Business	0.7	0.7 by right
Floor Area Ratio: By Special Permit			2.0 <u>or</u> 3.0	For lots with frontage on Chestnut Street: 1.5 <u>or</u> 2.0	1.0 for multi-family 1.2 for other uses

ZONING SUMMARY

Summary of Existing Zoning and Proposed Amendments for May 2009 Town Meeting

Dimensional Standard	EXISTING		PROPOSED		
	Center Business	Chestnut Street	Needham Center Overlay	Lower Chestnut Street Overlay	Garden Street Overlay
Front Setback	Minimum 3 feet, or Average of adjacent setbacks, whichever is smaller	Minimum 20 feet	Minimum 0 feet	Minimum 5 feet or Average of setbacks within 100 feet, whichever is smaller	Minimum 10 feet or Average of setbacks within 100 feet, whichever is smaller
Side and Rear Setback Adjacent to Residential Zones	Minimum 50 feet, including 25-ft. landscaped buffer closest to residential boundary	Minimum 50 feet, including 25-ft. landscaped buffer closest to residential boundary	Same as Center Business; except minimum setback 10 feet for underground parking structure	Same as Chestnut Street except: <u>Lots adjacent to residential districts</u> *Minimum setback 10 feet for underground parking structure <u>Lots adjacent to MBTA ROW</u> *Minimum setback 10 ft. for underground parking structure *Minimum 25-ft. setback composed of: (a) 10-ft. landscaped buffer or, by special permit, surface parking if landscaped and (b) 15 ft. for accessory uses, excluding buildings or structures.	Minimum 10 feet side and rear
Building Coverage	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Summary of Existing Zoning and Proposed Amendments for May 2009 Town Meeting

Dimensional Standard	EXISTING		PROPOSED		
	Center Business	Chestnut Street	Needham Center Overlay	Lower Chestnut Street Overlay	Garden Street Overlay
Enclosed Parking	Included within FAR calculation with exception of underground parking exclusion by Special Permit; certain design standards also apply	Included within FAR calculations	Underground parking exempt from FAR	Underground parking exempt from FAR	Underground parking exempt from FAR
Basic Off-Street Parking Requirements	Per ZBL Section 5.1.2	Per ZBL Section 5.1.2	Per ZBL Section 5.1.2 except: * No parking required for retail <800 sq. ft. * Reduced parking for buildings with more than 40% of floor area located in upper stories * Bike racks required for residential uses * Payment in lieu of parking spaces to Needham Center Off-Street Parking Fund	Same as Needham Center Overlay	Same as Lower Chestnut Overlay