MARLBOROUGH FORWARD

Building the Next Chapter for Marlborough

An Economic Development and Growth Strategy for the Marlborough Economic Development Corporation

MEDC MARLBOROUGH ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

MARCH 2026
DRAFT

PREFACE

Dear Marlborough Community,

On behalf of the Marlborough Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) Board of Directors, I am pleased to present the 2026 Marlborough Forward Plan developed in partnership with RKG Associates. This plan represents an important step in aligning Marlborough's economic development strategy with the city's long-term growth objectives, fiscal stability goals, and commitment to maintaining a high quality of life for our residents, businesses and visitors alike.

RKG's work provides a thoughtful, data-driven foundation for decision-making in several key areas:

1.Updated Economic Analysis and Target Industry Identification
The plan includes a refreshed and comprehensive economic assessment of Marlborough's current market position. It identifies emerging and high-potential industries and sectors that the city may consider pursuing to strengthen its competitiveness, diversify its economy, and capture new opportunities for job creation and investment.

2. Fiscal Impact Model for Land Use and Development Scenarios
A new fiscal impact model has been developed to help city leaders understand the revenue implications and municipal service costs associated with various land use and development patterns. This tool will be invaluable as Marlborough evaluates potential projects and considers how future development can best support the city's financial health.

3. Analysis of Capital and Service Impacts of Growth
RKG worked closely with city departments to assess how different growth trajectories may affect municipal services, infrastructure capacity, and capital investment needs. This collaboration identified potential mitigation strategies and capital expenditures that will be critical to sustaining growth responsibly and effectively.

4. Development of Future Growth Scenarios
In partnership with the MEDC, RKG constructed several future growth scenarios to evaluate their alignment with the city's economic development goals. These scenarios illustrate how different development paths may influence city revenues, expenditures, and progress toward long-range priorities—helping guide conversations about where and how Marlborough should grow.

This forward plan provides both vision and practical tools to help Marlborough chart a sustainable, strategic path for the future. It reflects the valuable input of city departments, community partners, and the MEDC team, and it offers a strong framework to support informed policy decisions in the years ahead.

We are grateful for the continued leadership and collaboration of the City of Marlborough and look forward to working together to advance the initiatives outlined in this report.

DAN STANHOPE
MEDC Chair

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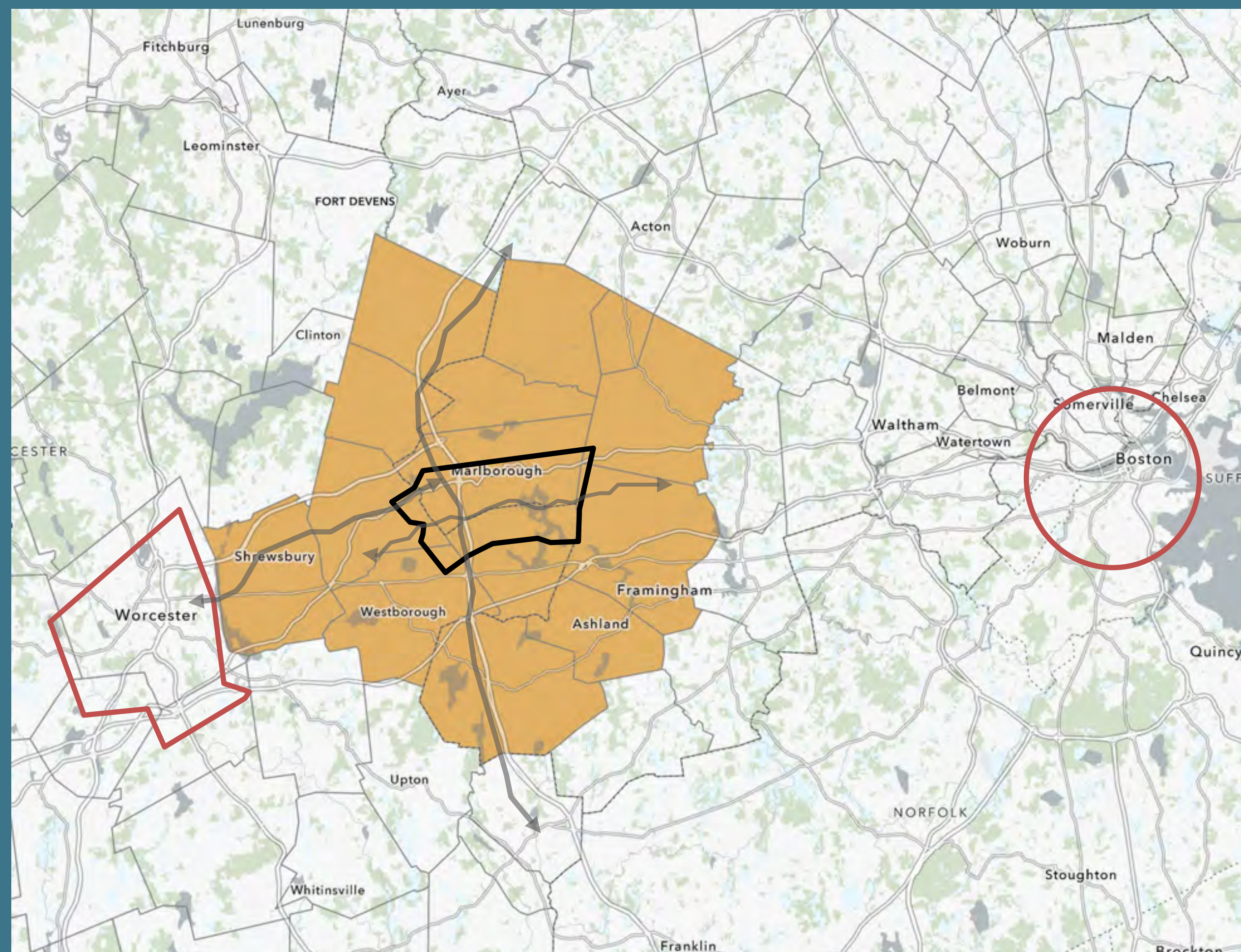
Acknowledgments

This plan was initiated, funded, and managed by the Marlborough Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) through its Executive Committee and team of dedicated staff. MEDC contracted with RKG Associates to author the plan. We would like to thank Mayor Dumais, the Marlborough City Council, the MEDC Executive Committee, and Marlborough city staff for your participation, guidance, and leadership in the creation of the Marlborough Forward Plan.

MARLBOROUGH'S ECONOMIC POSITION

Marlborough is at the heart of the MetroWest region within 10 miles of Worcester and 30 miles of Boston. The city is connected to several major transportation routes like I-495, I-290, and Route 20 providing excellent vehicular and freight connectivity to and from all of Marlborough's economic hubs. These transportation connections also facilitate 33,000 employees to enter the city each day for work along with 3,200 Marlborough residents who rely on these roads to access jobs across the city. Most employees entering the city for work each day are coming from surrounding communities such as Worcester, Hudson, Framingham, and Shrewsbury along with 1,200 workers commuting in from Boston. The highly accessible location of Marlborough's most prominent commercial and industrial areas are just one of many attributes that attract businesses both large and small.

From an economic standpoint, Marlborough has a very diverse mix of businesses both in size as well as by industry. The city is home to many large nationally-recognized employers like Raytheon, Moderna, and BJ's, while also maintaining a wealth of small businesses populating the downtown and commercial corridors. Marlborough also has the amenities businesses are looking for such as quality restaurants, hotels, retail, and recreation. Lastly, the city has supported the redevelopment of several properties for multifamily and mixed use projects increasing the housing stock by several thousand units in recent years. It is these factors that make Marlborough an attract place to live, work and invest.



Marlborough is transitioning from a traditional suburban office center into an innovation, housing, and mixed-use economy. This Plan seeks to prepare MEDC and City leaders for this continual shift and provide strategies for managing change over time.

KEY ECONOMIC TRENDS

Through our research, we identified several key economic trends that have, and will continue, to shape Marlborough's future as a regional hub.

1 Marlborough Functions as a Regional Employment, Retail, and Recreation Hub.

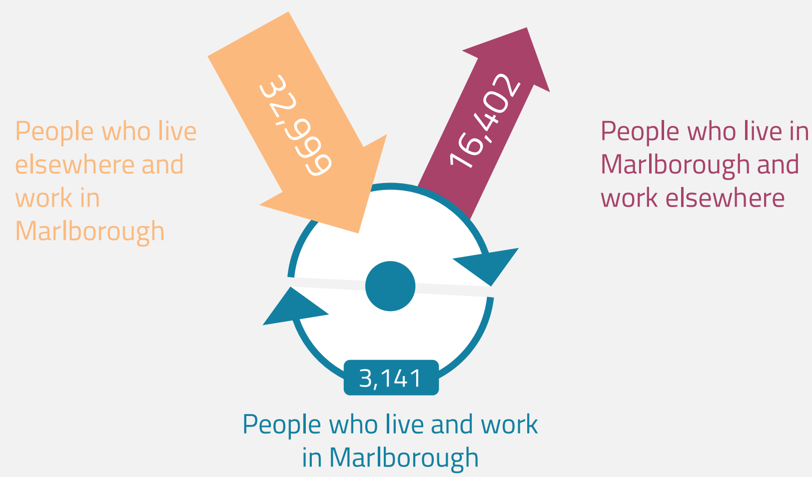
Despite the impacts of job loss and business closures resulting from the 2020-2021 pandemic, Marlborough's local economy rebounded gaining nearly 1,400 jobs between 2019 and 2024. Those jobs spanned across sectors like Healthcare, Management, and Admin Services. Despite job losses, Manufacturing, Retail, and Professional/Technical Services still comprise over 1/3 of Marlborough's total jobs. These sectors *were* impacted by changes in consumer spending and return to office policies stemming from the pandemic, but also state and national trends related to efficiencies in manufacturing and continued offshoring of jobs.

Marlborough is also a hub for retail, food and beverage, and recreation businesses which are all amenities attractive to both businesses and those who call Marlborough home. Over 5,000 jobs in Marlborough are attributable to the service sector across stores, restaurants, gyms, and fitness facilities. The city's continued growth in both population and employment brings more spending power increasing the viability of service-based businesses. One prominent challenge is the imbalance between wages in these industries and housing that is affordable to workers. This issue is present in many communities across Eastern Massachusetts, and one Marlborough should continue to monitor.

Key Industry Sector Job Change '19-'24

▲ Admin. +1,594 Jobs	▲ Management +841 Jobs	▲ Healthcare +619 Jobs
▼ Prof/Tech -775 Jobs	▼ Retail -575 Jobs	▼ Manufacturing -341 Jobs

Source: MA DER, ES-202.

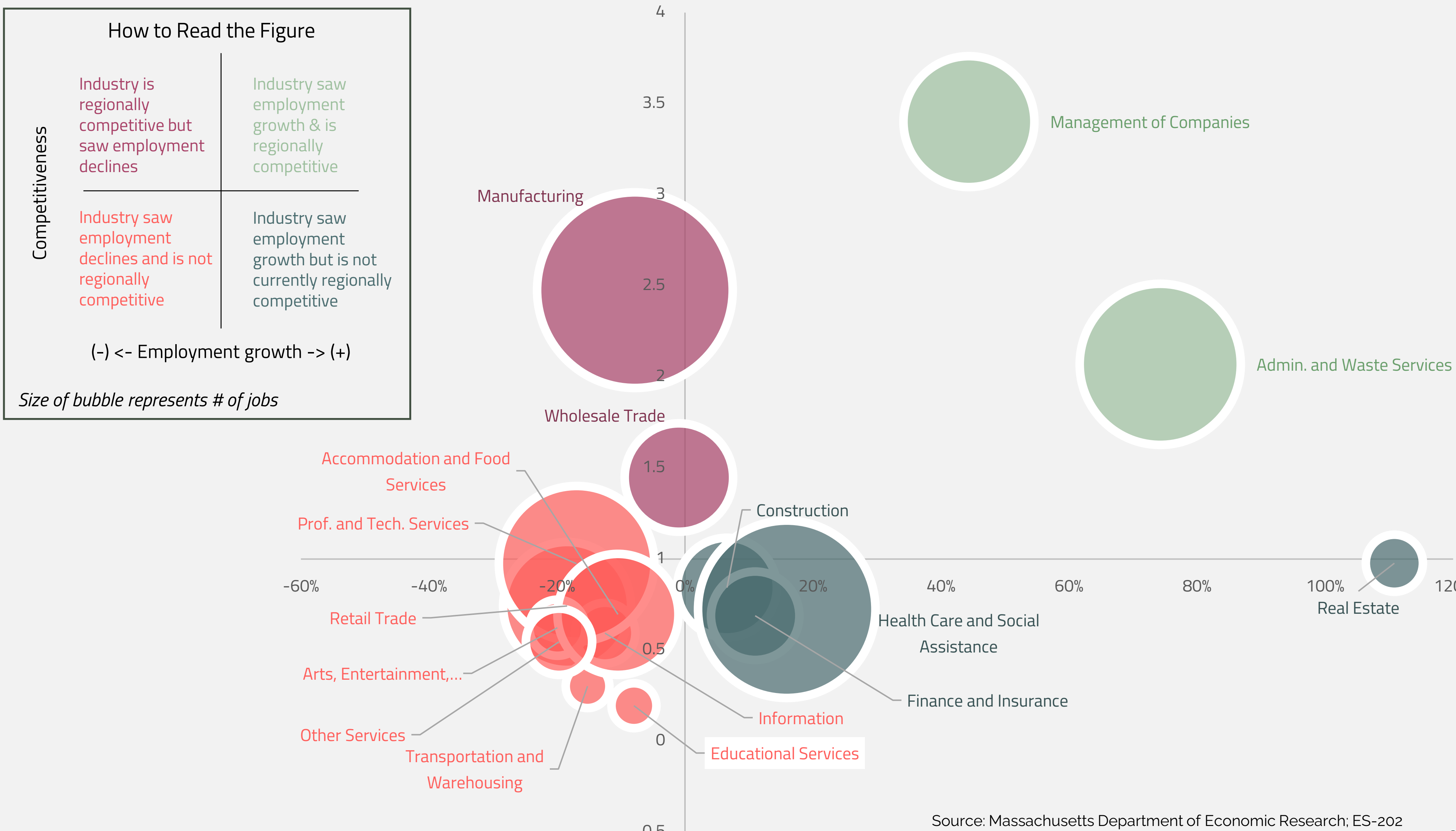


Marlborough is a regional employment hub attracting nearly 33,000 in bound commuters each day. A boost to daytime population and spending at local businesses.

KEY ECONOMIC TRENDS

1 Marlborough Functions as a Regional Employment, Retail, and Recreation Hub.

Marlborough continues its competitive edge across several prominent industry sectors compared to the rest of Massachusetts in sectors like Management, Admin Services, and Manufacturing while sectors (in red) lost some competitive edge due to job losses. Emerging sectors (in blue) are ones with job growth and could become more specialized over time.



Source: Massachusetts Department of Economic Research; ES-202 Total, All Private Industries 2024 Q3 Monthly Average Employment

KEY ECONOMIC TRENDS

2 Industrial, Manufacturing, IT/Tech, and Scientific R&D Remain a Core Strength.

Marlborough has been, and continues to be, a hub in the MetroWest region for industry sectors that are pursuing cutting edge technologies, advancements in manufacturing, and pushing the boundaries of health care and scientific research. Industry sectors here in Marlborough, such as Advanced Manufacturing and Life Sciences, also align with the state's recently adopted Economic Development Plan.

Core industries in Marlborough such as Professional and Technical Services, IT, Advanced Manufacturing, and Health Care support over 9,000 jobs across 450 individual businesses creating a dynamic and diverse ecosystem that creates a built-in resilience to short-term economic shocks. However, large footprint office buildings that were once full five days a week are experiencing challenges as companies that remain in Marlborough look to shrink their space needs. While the number of businesses and employees remain high, their utilization of physical space has changed resulting in increased office vacancy and potential long-term impacts to Marlborough's fiscal health.

Core Industries and Subsectors in Marlborough

Professional, Scientific, Technical Services
- Scientific Research
- Engineering
- IT Industry

240 Businesses
3,800 Employees

IT/Tech Services
- Software Publishing
- Computer Systems
- Technical Assistance

38 Businesses
670 Employees

Advanced Manufacturing
- Semiconductor Manufacturing
- Navigation, Guidance, Aeronautical Systems
- Telephone Apparatus

27 Businesses
2,900 Employees

Health Care
- Diagnostic and Medical Laboratories

140 Businesses
1,700 Employees

KEY ECONOMIC TRENDS

2 Industrial, Manufacturing, IT/Tech, and Scientific R&D Remain a Core Strength.

New England's industrial market is anchored by high-value sectors like pharma, electronics, and precision manufacturing, with Marlborough showing job concentrations and export sales well above national averages. Industry sectors with location quotients highlighted in green represent clusters of goods producing businesses where Marlborough has a unique concentration compared to the Commonwealth.

Although some national demand has softened with shifts in the economy and site-selection timelines have lengthened, these are industry sectors that continue to innovate and are needed to feed supply chains to many other business sectors in Massachusetts and across the Us.

To continue Marlborough's trends of attraction and retention of these businesses, near-term growth will depend on retaining existing tenants and attracting complementary specialized uses that fall within the supply chain. In later sections, target industries are discussed where MEDC can focus recruitment and retentions efforts.

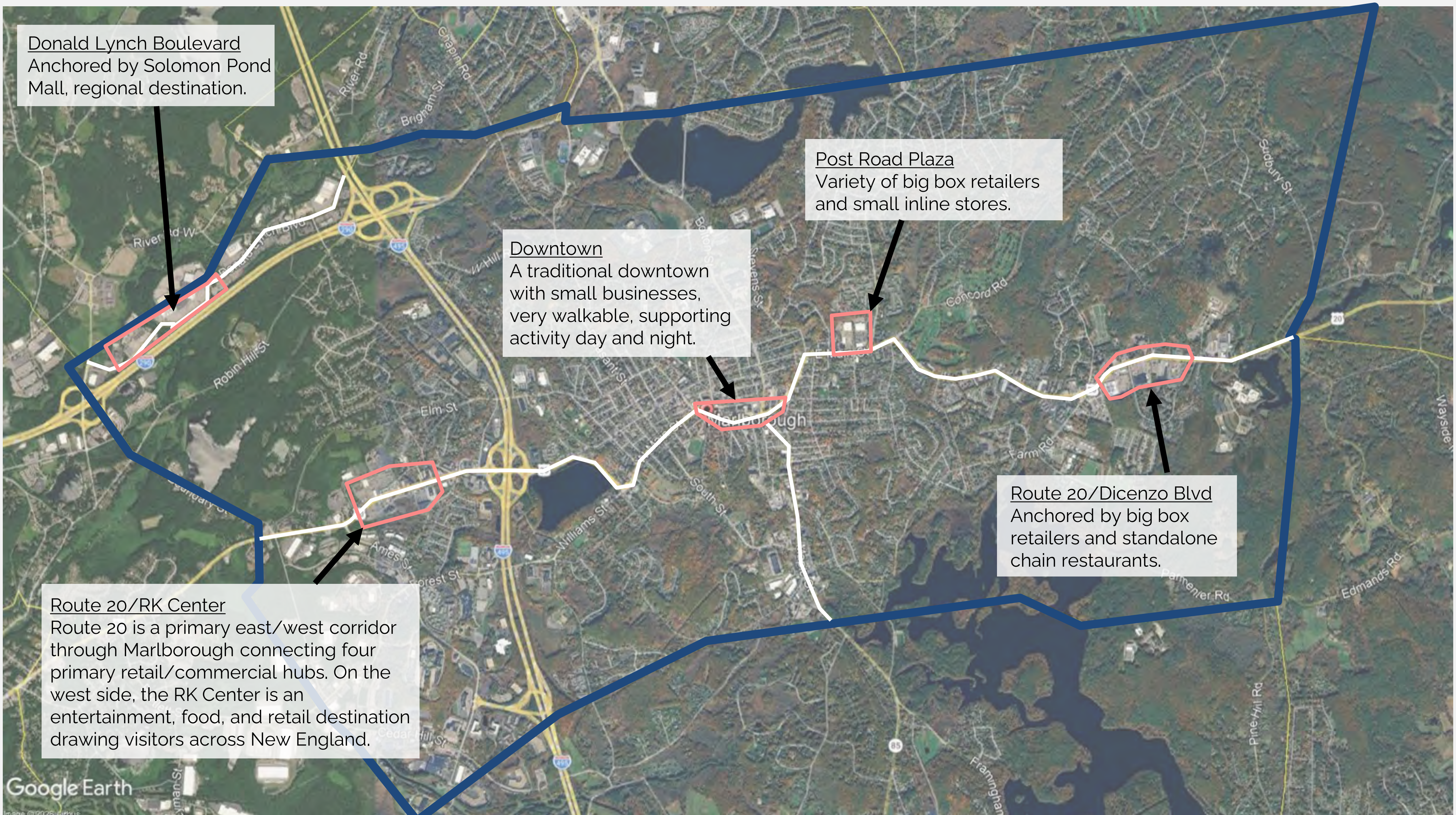
NAICS	Description	2024 Jobs	2024 LQ
3254	Pharmaceutical and Medicine Manufacturing	499	7.41
4234	Professional and Commercial Equipment and Supplies Merchant Wholesalers	689	4.80
3345	Navigational, Measuring, Electromedical, and Control Instruments Manufacturing	912	11.48
2362	Nonresidential Building Construction	853	4.88
3344	Semiconductor and Other Electronic Component Manufacturing	808	10.64
3359	Other Electrical Equipment and Component Manufacturing	402	12.36
3342	Communications Equipment Manufacturing	285	17.97
3391	Medical Equipment and Supplies Manufacturing	358	5.70
3261	Plastics Product Manufacturing	279	2.46
4236	Household Appliances and Electrical and Electronic Goods Merchant Wholesalers	129	1.77
3259	Other Chemical Product and Preparation Manufacturing	53	3.44
3118	Bakeries and Tortilla Manufacturing	400	5.94
4246	Chemical and Allied Products Merchant Wholesalers	95	3.23
3333	Commercial and Service Industry Machinery Manufacturing	143	8.45
3328	Coating, Engraving, Heat Treating, and Allied Activities	216	8.64
4238	Machinery, Equipment, and Supplies Merchant Wholesalers	103	0.69
3121	Beverage Manufacturing	127	2.04
2383	Building Finishing Contractors	36	0.22
3231	Printing and Related Support Activities	105	1.53
3339	Other General Purpose Machinery Manufacturing	72	1.32
3335	Metalworking Machinery Manufacturing	112	3.71
3334	Ventilation, Heating, Air-Conditioning, and Commercial Refrigeration Equipment Manufacturing	51	1.83
2382	Building Equipment Contractors	54	0.11
4854	School and Employee Bus Transportation	217	5.75
4251	Wholesale Electronic Markets and Agents and Brokers	67	0.70
4237	Hardware, and Plumbing and Heating Equipment and Supplies Merchant Wholesalers	37	0.62
3353	Electrical Equipment Manufacturing	32	1.06
4231	Motor Vehicle and Motor Vehicle Parts and Supplies Merchant Wholesalers	32	0.44
3329	Other Fabricated Metal Product Manufacturing	33	0.61
4233	Lumber and Other Construction Materials Merchant Wholesalers	27	0.53
3271	Clay Product and Refractory Manufacturing	51	7.76
3327	Machine Shops; Turned Product; and Screw, Nut, and Bolt Manufacturing	44	0.68
3279	Other Nonmetallic Mineral Product Manufacturing	39	2.53
4921	Couriers and Express Delivery Services	34	0.20
3149	Other Textile Product Mills	29	2.60

Source: Lightcast, 2025

KEY ECONOMIC TRENDS

③ Retail and Restaurants are Important for Residents, Businesses, and Visitors.

Marlborough attracts a high number of visitors throughout the year to its various retail and dining districts because of the diversity of offerings and the accessibility of the districts. Each retail area shown in the map below has its own unique attributes that draw patrons for different reasons. This allows Marlborough to capture more spending in the region and attract a wider variety of businesses by size, product, and price point.



Source: Google Earth, 2026.

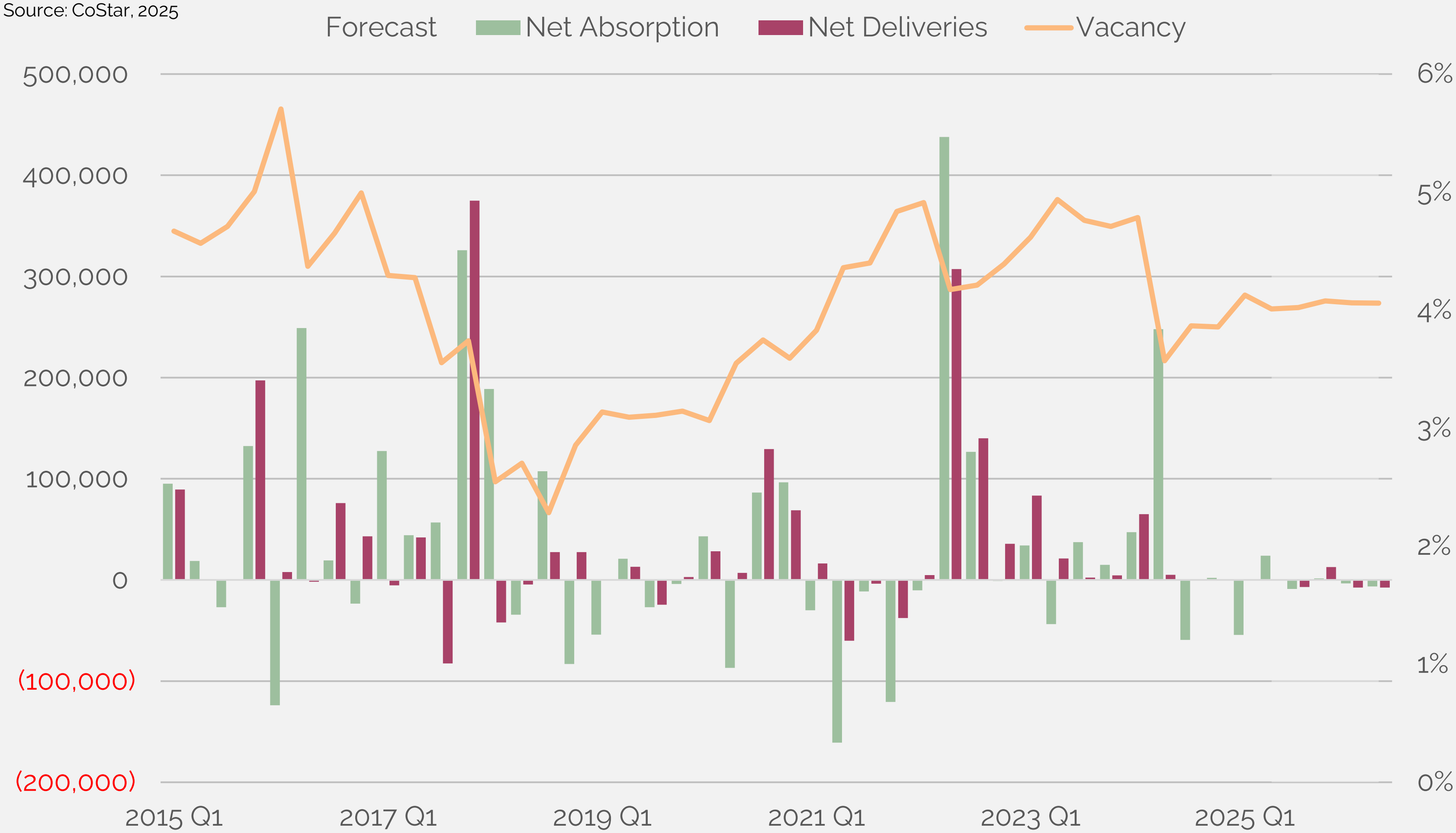
KEY ECONOMIC TRENDS

3 Retail and Restaurants are Important for Residents, Businesses, and Visitors.

Physical retail space in the Marlborough submarket (Marlborough and adjacent communities) has remained relatively stable over the last 12-15 months with very little new construction and new leasing activity keeping vacancy rates at around 4%. These rates have recovered from the increase in vacancy experienced during and immediately after the pandemic. Marlborough's local retail market is no different. Spaces that are well located, maintained, and offer tenants flexibility in fit out experience low vacancy in areas like Downtown, prominent retail centers, and along high visibility corridors. However, the city should continue to monitor areas with larger footprint anchor stores like Solomon Pond Mall and retail plazas along Route 20.

Submarket Retail Market Activity

Source: CoStar, 2025



KEY ECONOMIC TRENDS

3 Retail and Restaurants are Important for Residents, Businesses, and Visitors.

While Marlborough is a destination for many visitors coming from a distance, many customers are visiting Marlborough from nearby communities connected by major highways and state routes. Data collected by PlacerAI shows nearly 20% of all annual visits to Marlborough originated from Worcester and Hudson with another 30%+ coming from communities with connections to Route 20, Route 9, and I-495. The transportation connectivity Marlborough enjoys helps bring customers to the city.

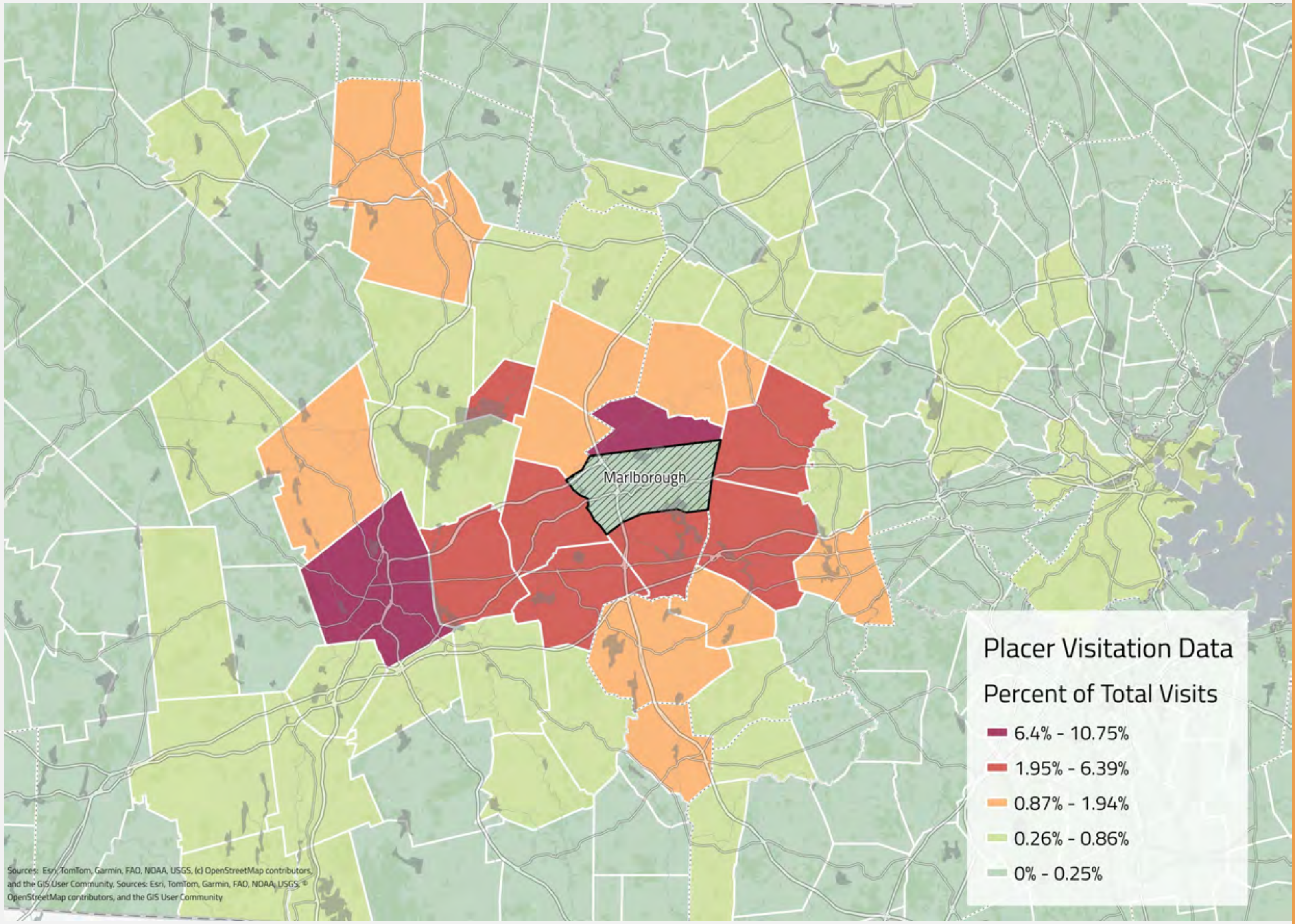
$100,000+

Nearly 60% of visitors to Marlborough are in households earning over $100,000 a year bringing more expendable income to businesses in the city.

$150/Week

Employees in Marlborough as well as visitors to Marlborough are spending in categories that could directly benefit local businesses:

$94/Week on Food
$30/Week on Entertainment
$17/Week on Apparel
$9/Week on Personal Care



Source: PlacerAI, 2025

KEY ECONOMIC TRENDS

3 Retail and Restaurants are Important for Residents, Businesses, and Visitors.

Locations in Marlborough tracked by PlacerAI between June 2024 and May 2025 generated nearly 24 million individual visits from those who do not live in Marlborough. Residents living in Marlborough generated an additional 14.6 million visits. On an average daily basis, tracked locations in Marlborough see nearly 105,000 trips generating millions of dollars in spending each day. Marlborough's regional reputation as a destination for food, shopping, entertainment, and sports/recreation creates these inflows and spending patterns. Focusing on these commercial districts must continue to be a focus so they remain viable as economic and consumer preferences change.

24M Annual Visits

Annual visitation to Marlborough's various businesses and destinations totaled nearly 24 million from June 2024 to May 2025. This does not count visitation from residents who live in Marlborough, only employees and visitors from outside the city.

2.6M Annual Visits

Annual visitation to Marlborough's downtown area totaled to over 2.6 million from June 2024 to May 2025.

Chicken Fanatics

Raising Cane's and Chick-fil-A are drawing 1.6 million trips to Marlborough. Unique restaurants in prime locations can help drive vehicular and foot traffic.

Name	Sub Category	# of Visits
RK Center	Neighborhood Centers	4,415,057
Marlborough Village District	Community Shopping Centers	2,683,337
Marlborough Commons	Community Shopping Centers	2,306,688
Post Road Plaza	Community Shopping Centers	2,058,498
Raising Cane's Chicken Fingers	Fried Chicken Joint	1,007,641
Target	Big Box Store	948,303
Target	Big Box Store	943,992
Shops At The Pond	Strip/Convenience	937,375
Hannaford	Supermarket	907,680
Market 32	Grocery Store	891,316
Apex Entertainment	General Entertainment	818,720
The Home Depot	Hardware Store	717,752
McDonald's	Fast Food Restaurant	667,587
Chick-fil-A	Fast Food Restaurant	643,505
Shell	Gas Station / Garage	629,758
Shell Full Site	Convenience Store	610,685
McDonald's	Fast Food Restaurant	583,353
CVS/pharmacy	Drugstore / Pharmacy	582,876
Village Plaza	Strip/Convenience	579,715
Fore Kicks II Indoor & Outdoor Sports Complex	Sports Club	525,676

Source: PlacerAI, 2025

KEY ECONOMIC TRENDS

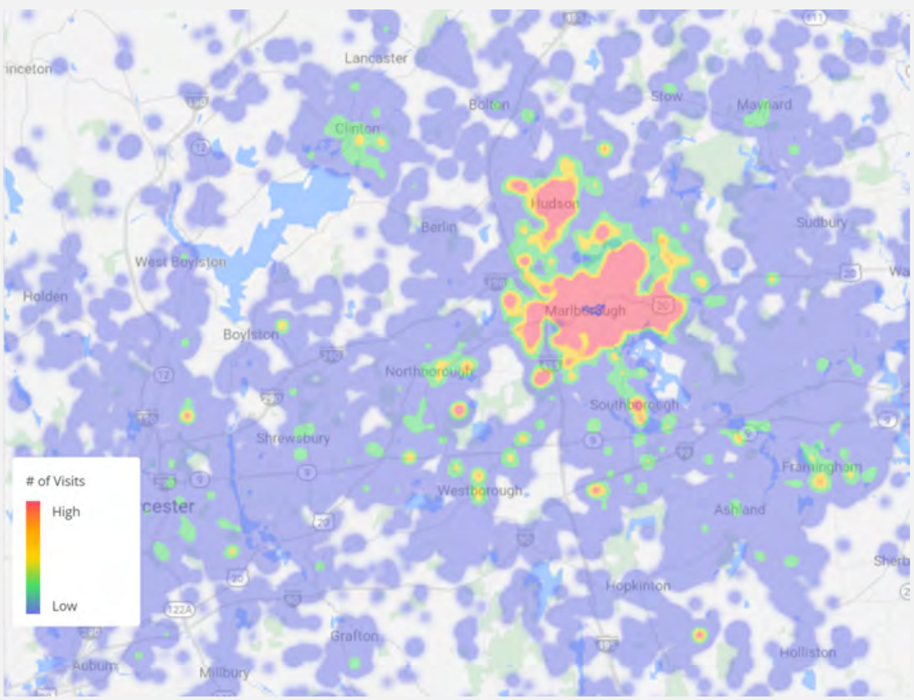
4 Downtown is a Critical, Yet Changing, Asset for Marlborough

Marlborough's Village District generates over 2.6 million visitor trips per year, the second highest visitation destination outside of the RK Center. Its diverse mix of uses, pedestrian connectivity, and its role as a civic hub attract a wide range of visitors. The most successful downtowns are those that provide multiple reasons to visit be it grabbing a bite to eat, meeting friends over a coffee or a beer, conducting business at City Hall, or getting your hair done; trip chaining means more time and money spent downtown.

Downtown has not only been a home for business, civic, and religious uses, but has also been a place residents call home. Housing in the Village District and in the neighborhoods surrounding it provide a variety of housing types for both owners and renters. The development community has also realized this with new mixed-use projects taking shape in downtown bringing additional customers within walking distance of the very businesses we want to support. This is a transition many downtowns are going through, an approach to development that was prevalent in our downtowns for decades before zoning took hold and made it more difficult to replicate what people love about these places: a mix of uses, prioritizing pedestrians, and social interaction.

Most visitors to downtown are coming from within Marlborough or nearby communities such as Hudson, Northborough, and Southborough.

Identifying what nearby communities have and do not have in their own downtowns could help Marlborough attract even more visitation and spending downtown.



Source: Placer AI.

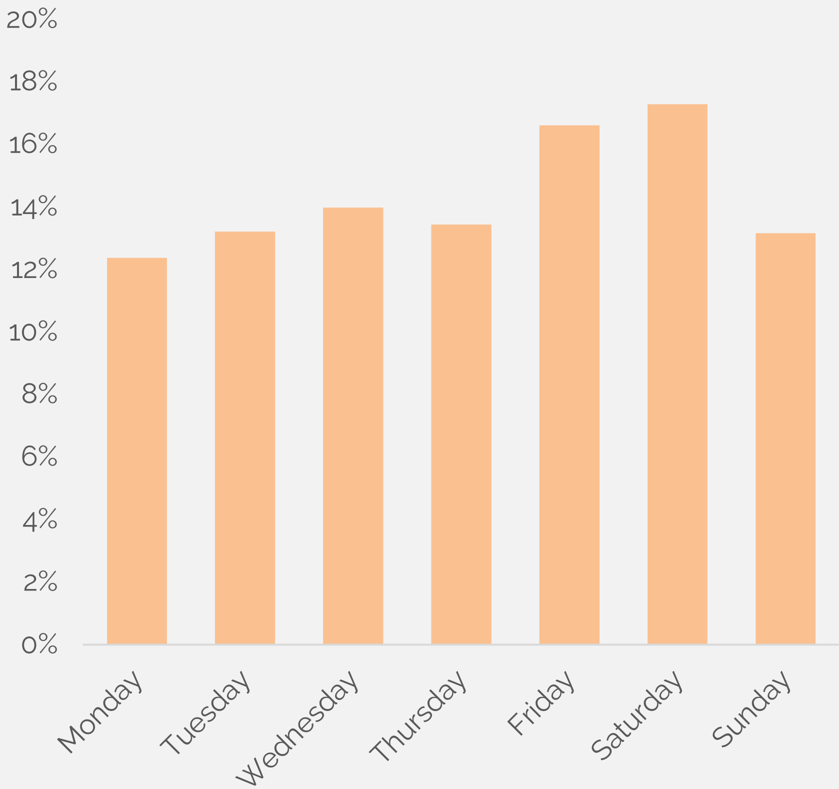
Source: Google Maps.

KEY ECONOMIC TRENDS

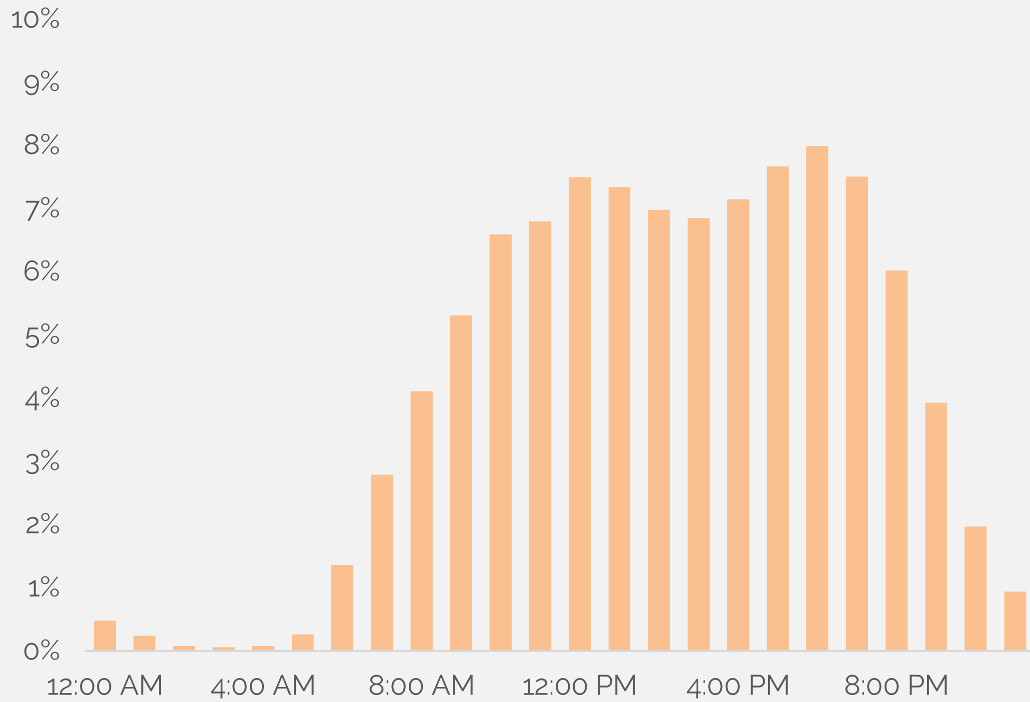
4 Downtown is a Critical, Yet Changing, Asset for Marlborough

Data from PlacerAI illustrates the percentage of visits to downtown by day of the week and time of the day. Typical of most downtowns that include restaurant, entertainment, and drinking places visitation is highest on Friday and Saturday and peaks can be seen around lunch and dinner hours. It is notable that visitation Monday through Thursday is not that much lower which speaks to the mix of uses downtown attracting visitors who may be frequenting the many service-based businesses downtown has to offer. Maintaining this diverse mix of businesses as well as bringing more people downtown to live, work, and visit will ensure downtown continues to thrive.

Marlborough Village District
Percentage Of Average Daily Visits



Marlborough Village District
Percentage Average Hourly Visits



Source: Placer AI.

KEY ECONOMIC TRENDS

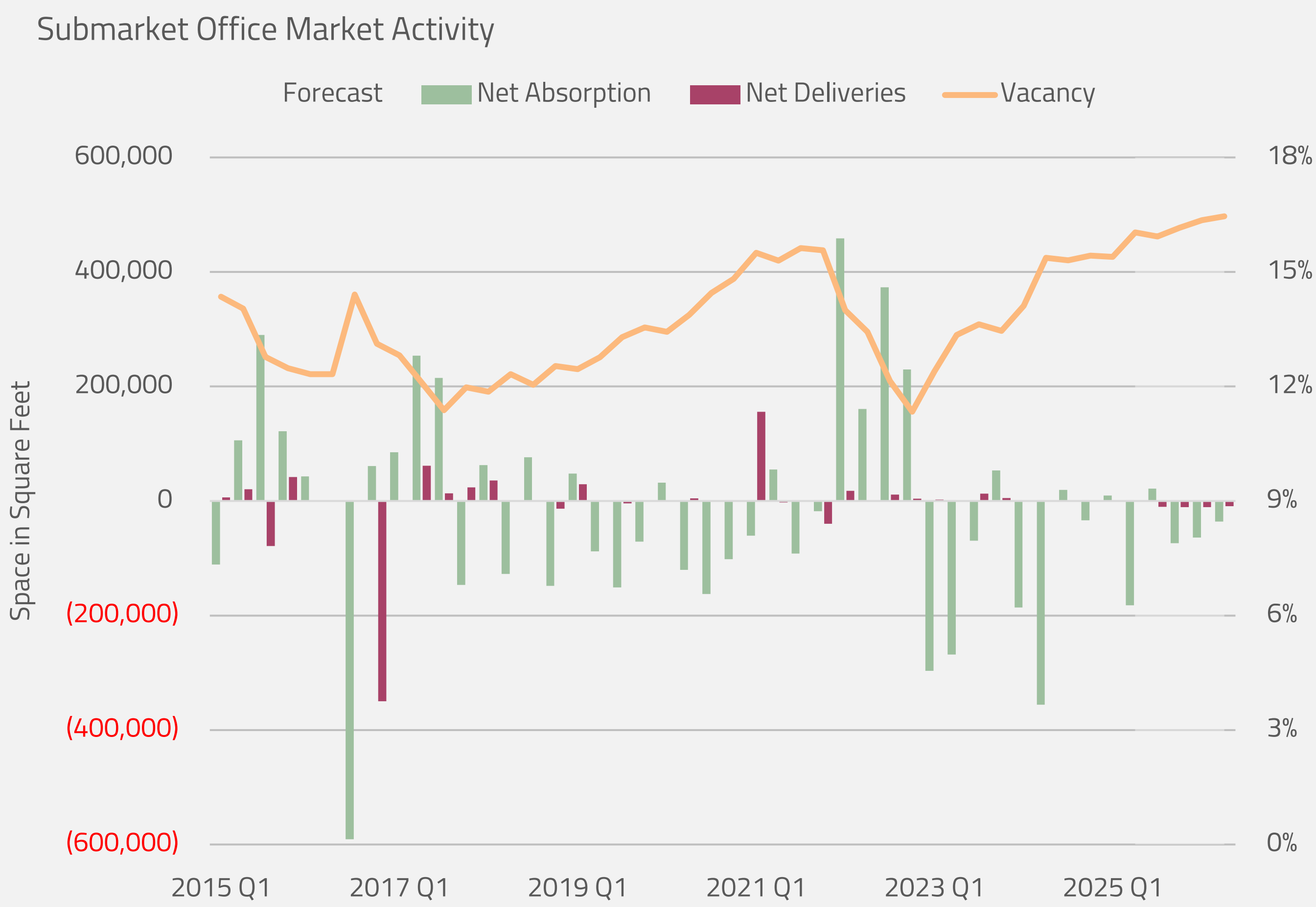
5 Older Office and Flex Space is Underperforming

Marlborough, although 30 miles from Boston, is impacted by what happens in the real estate market across all of Eastern Massachusetts. The city's large employment base and square footage of office and industrial space are affected when new product is built closer to Boston which places companies closer to their employment base and closer to Boston as an economic center. Although Marlborough can price compete with cities and towns closer in, that is not always enough to shield it from changs in the broader market. One of the continual challenges Marlborough faces is the swing in employment that can occur during times of economic downturn or shock as witnessed during the Great Recession, the impacts of the pandemic on office occupancy, and now the pull back of government funding. Evidence of these changes can be seen in the number of proposals for the redevelopment of commercial space to residential use. City leaders now face questions about how much commercial land do we allow to change use and where do we preserve commercial for when the market cycles back again.

The office submarket Marlborough sits within has a current vacancy rate of 17% with very few new office buildings constructed over the past 10 years. Most of the activity in the submarket has been businesses vacating space followed by a lease up a few quarters later.

Other than a brief period in 2021/22, office vacancy has been steadily climbing in the submarket since 2017. Older buildings lacking modern amenities and flexible space sizes are not performing well in Marlborough and companies and investors are not likely to construct new office space without a build-to-suit tenant in hand.

This leaves Marlborough, and other communities across the submarket, with a choice to rethink areas of heavy office concentrations or wait out the market cycle and hope dynamics change.

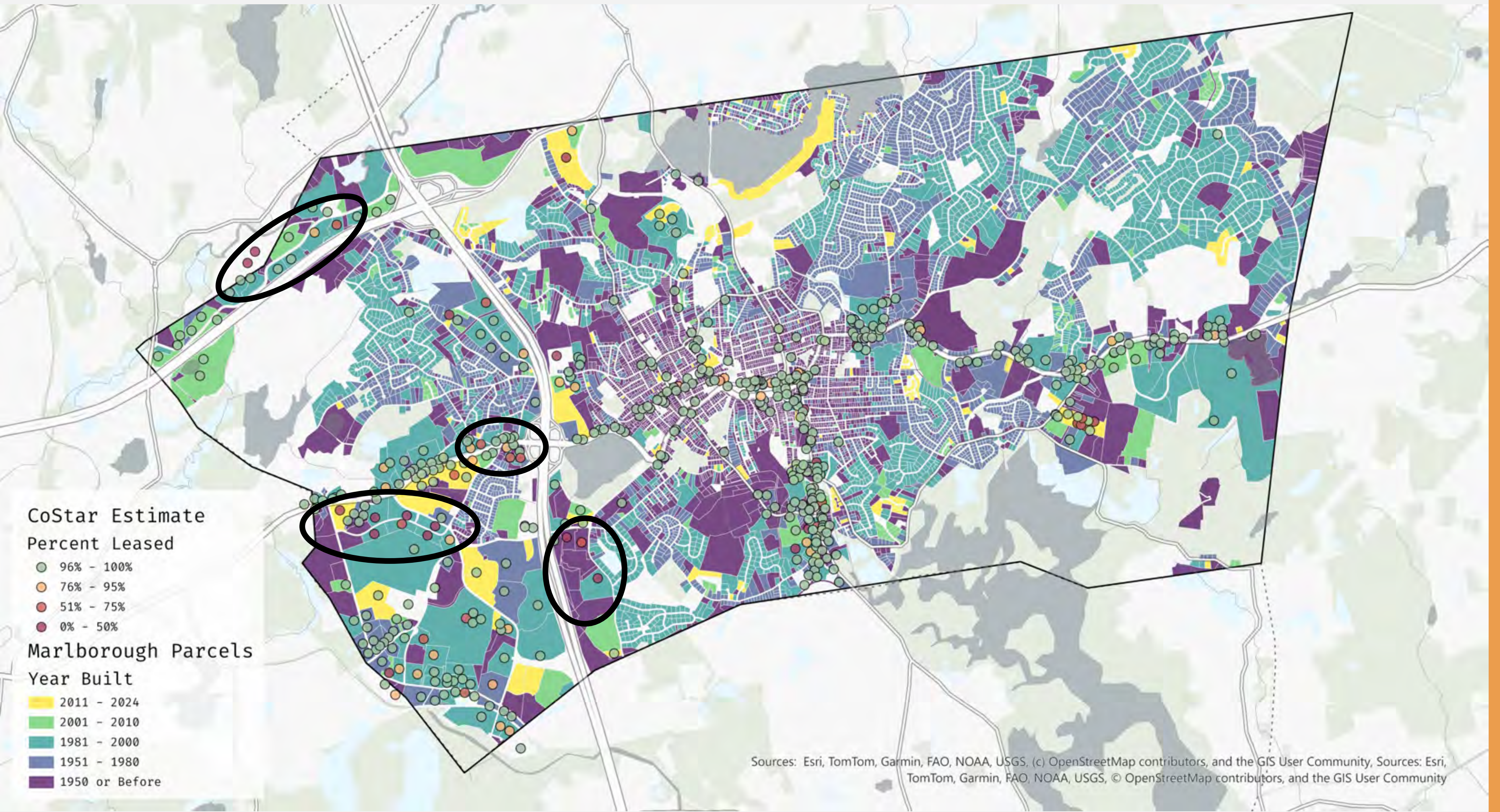


Source: CoStar, 2025

KEY ECONOMIC TRENDS

5 Older Office and Flex Space is Underperforming

This map illustrates buildings tracked in CoStar by their year built (color of the parcel) and their current occupancy rate (color of the dot). Areas circled in black highlight clusters of buildings that were largely built before 1950 or in the 80s and 90s that have become obsolete in today's office leasing environment. They are experiencing high levels of vacancy due to their large footprints, lack of amenities, and outmoded design. These area may be locations where the city could consider encouraging repositioning of assets to help spur reinvestment and an increase in the tax base.



Source: CoStar 2025, RKG Associates.

5 Older Office and Flex Space is Underperforming

As noted earlier, the city has already experienced multifamily projects taking shape in what are largely a commercial areas. Two more recent examples of this are the developments in the Green District in the Southwest Quadrant and the new ALTA French Hill complex just north and west of downtown. These development projects have added hundreds of new multifamily residential units reflecting the shift in market dynamics and the financing environment property owners and developers find themselves in today.

Recent Developments

In recent years Marlborough has permitted several new multifamily developments in various locations across the city including in the downtown, areas adjacent to downtown, and parts of the Southwest Quadrant. These new developments are generating new growth for the city, increasing population and household spending, but several projects were built on land historically zoned for commercial/industrial use.

Green District

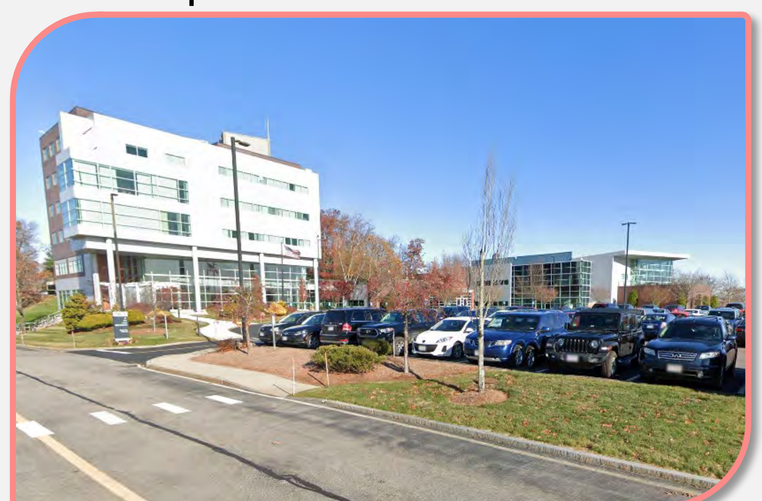
ALTA French Hill

Future Projects:

The city is currently facing several more residential redevelopment and infill projects on what is largely commercial or industrial land. Two examples include 26/62 Forest Street and Campus Drive. Buildings are Forest Street are facing high vacancy and difficulty leasing to commercial tenants while the Campus has very large areas for surface and structured parking that could be repositioned to include other uses.

26/62 Forest Street

Campus Drive



Source: Google Maps.

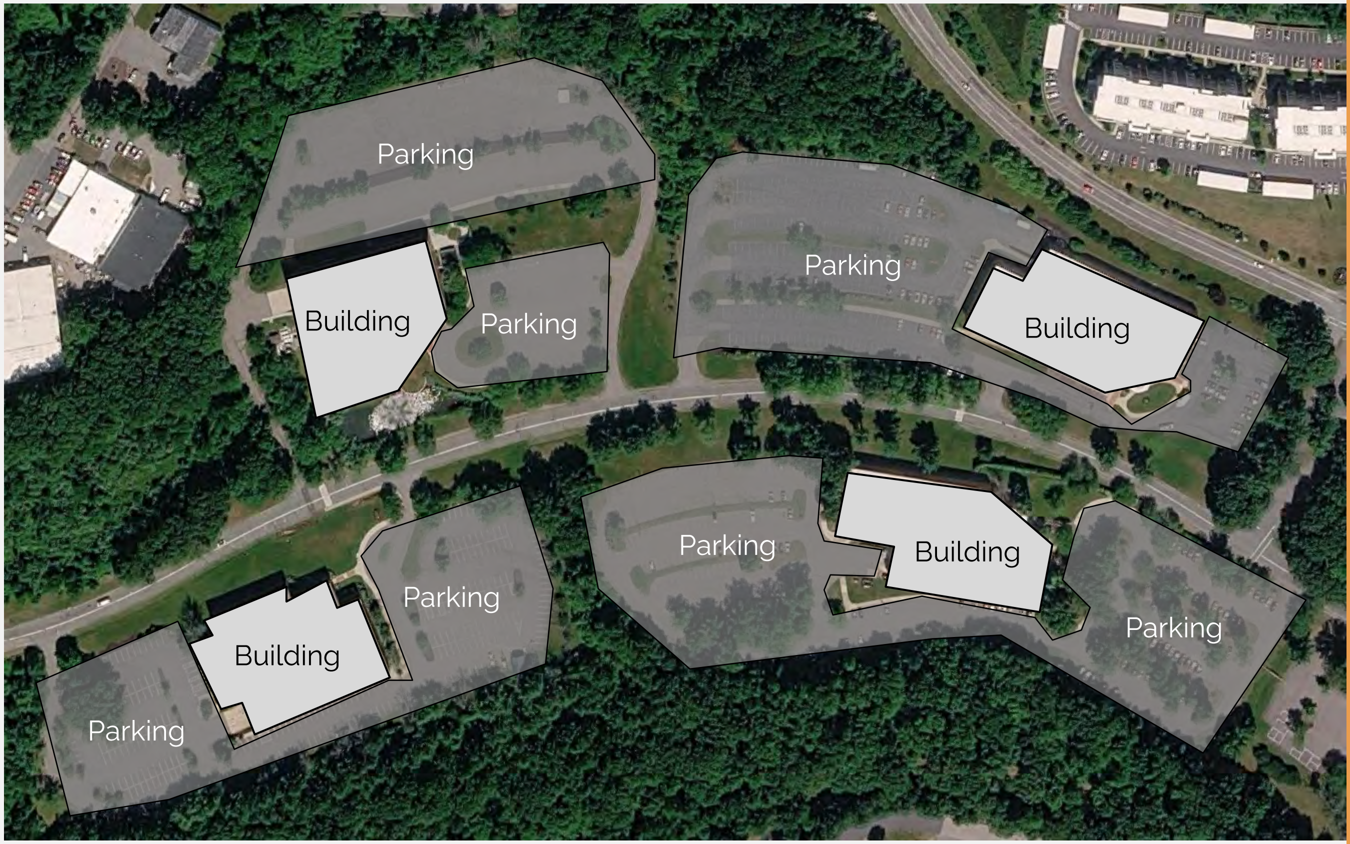
KEY ECONOMIC TRENDS

⑥ Southwest Quadrant is an Economic Driver but Facing Transition

The Southwest Quadrant area in Marlborough, largely defined as the area between Route 20 to the north, I-495 to the east, and the city's southern and western borders with Northborough and Southborough, is the city's economic engine generating thousands of jobs across hundreds of businesses. Many of these businesses have a national and international presence spanning many industry sectors from health care and pharmaceuticals to cutting edge research and advanced manufacturing. This area is one of the largest employment hubs in MetroWest providing jobs at a regional level beyond Marlborough and its immediate neighbors.

While the area does maintain a large commercial and industrial presence, it is not immune to economic changes and market cycles (as noted earlier in this document). The impacts of the pandemic and recent economic shifts in national spending priorities has resulted in an underutilization of existing office assets. Parking lots are not full, and some businesses do not need the same amount of space per employee as they did 30-40 years ago when many of these buildings were built. These economic factors have led to some property owners and developers to explore alternative uses in the Southwest Quadrant, including redeveloping commercial/industrial properties for residential uses. These rezoning requests are bringing up important questions at MEDC and at the City Council which this plan seeks to address through its analysis and exploration of strategies.

Underutilized Space:
Traditional office park development in this part of Marlborough historically relied on large surface parking lots surrounding a 2-3 story office building largely isolated from other uses. These buildings and campuses have higher vacancy and ample parking resulting from hybrid work schedules and shrinking space requirements.



Source: Google Maps.

KEY ECONOMIC TRENDS

⑥ Southwest Quadrant is an Economic Driver but Facing Transition

A decision to rezone parcels or larger areas of the Southwest Quadrant to allow residential and mixed-use development is not easy and requires the consideration of several factors including, but not limited to:

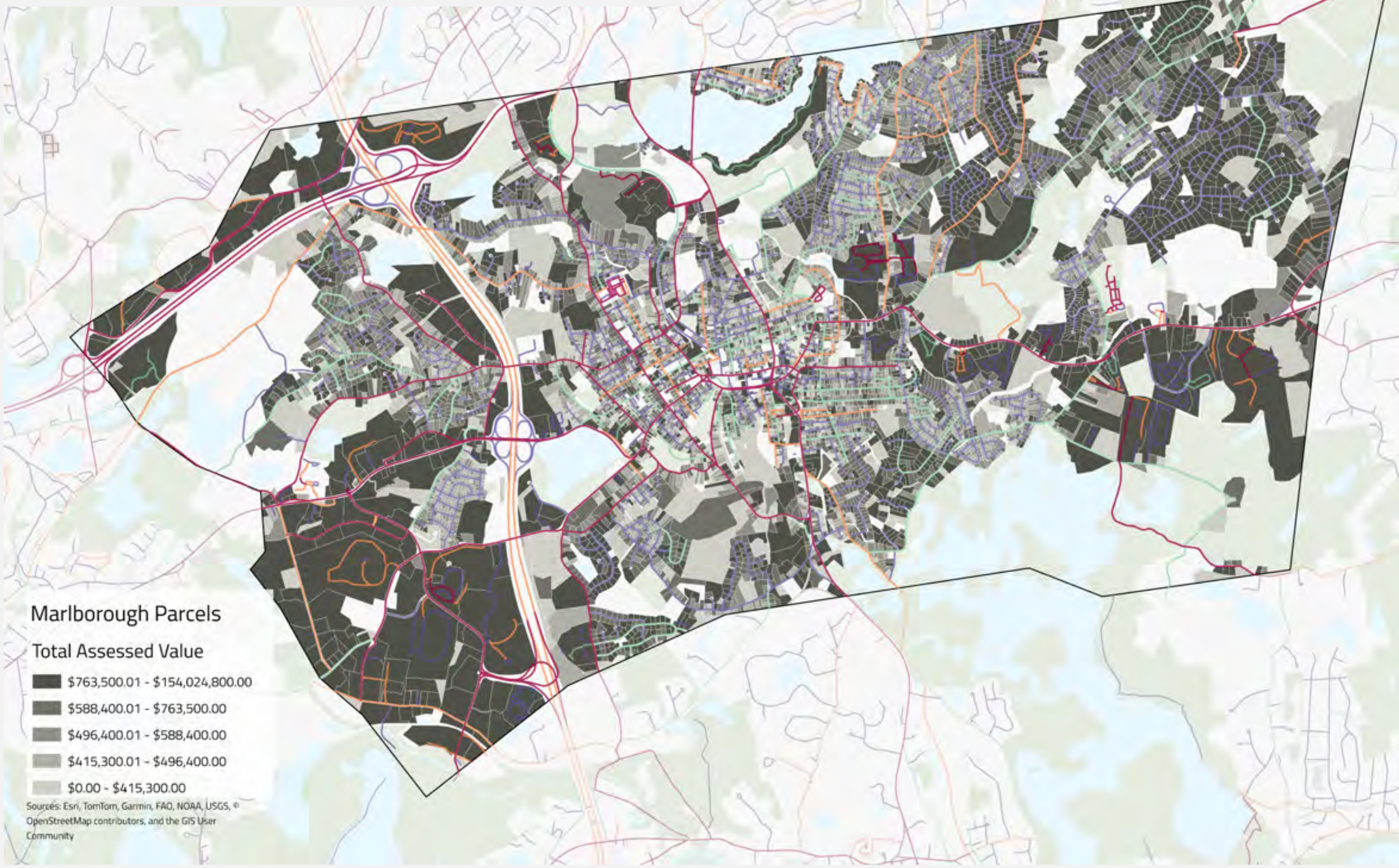
- Impact on city revenues, including property taxes.
- Impact of city services and infrastructure.
- Longer-term effects on the direction of a major employment hub for the region.
- Allowing residential uses alongside commercial/industrial uses and the potential for conflicts.
- Lack of amenities, transportation options, and recreation assets in this area.

It is true that this area contributes significantly to the city's overall tax base illustrated by this map showing the assessed value of every parcel of land in Marlborough. Darker colored parcels represent the most "valuable" properties in the city from a total assessed value perspective.

Parcels in the Southwest Quadrant all fall into the highest category translating to substantial revenue, especially when taxed at the higher commercial tax rate.

However, it is important to also consider the utilization of the land and buildings in relation to what a parcels assessed value is to truly understand its contribution.

Total Assessed Value per Parcel in Marlborough



Source: RKG Associates, MassGIS, City of Marlborough.

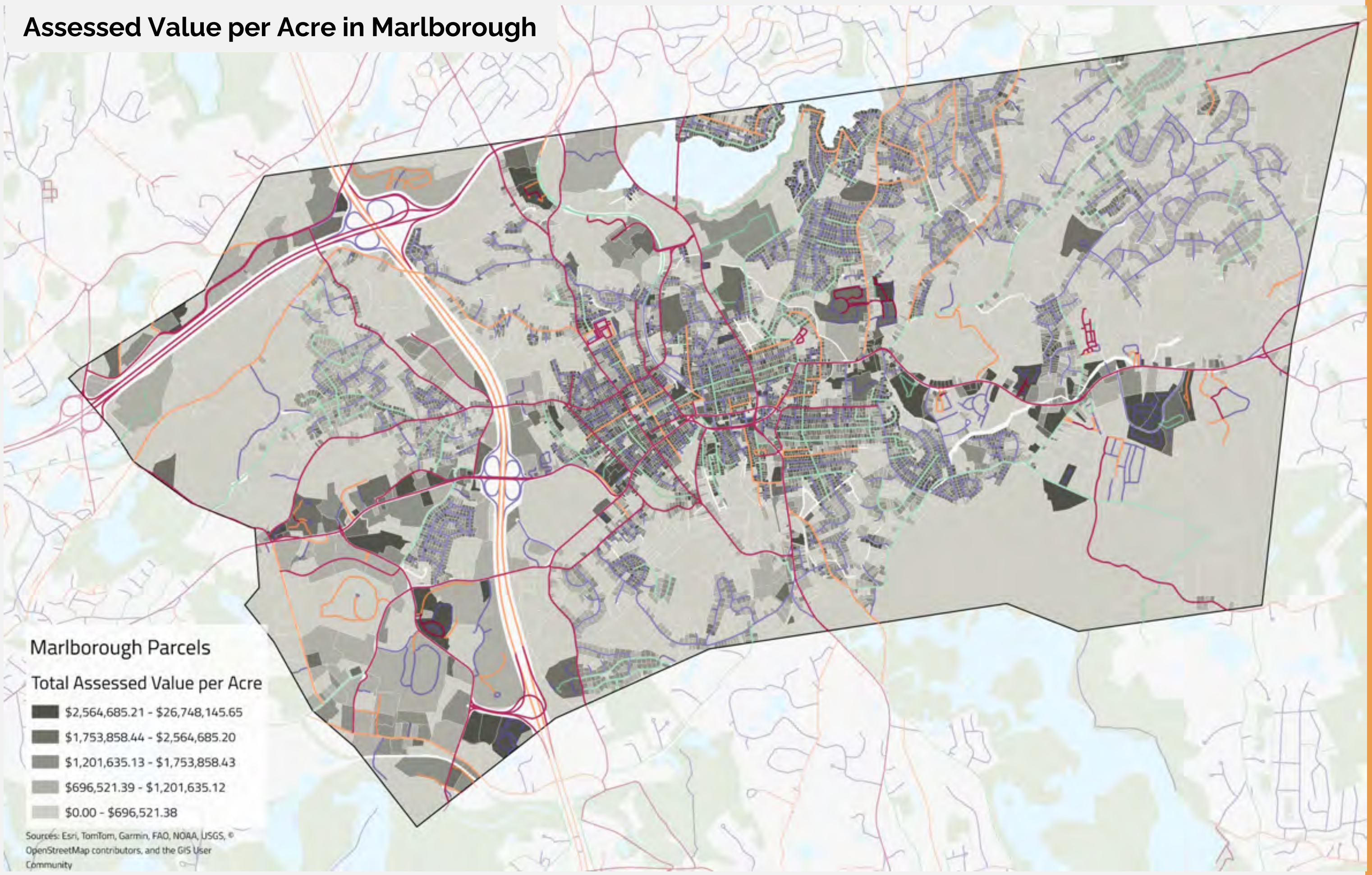
KEY ECONOMIC TRENDS

⑥ Southwest Quadrant is an Economic Driver but Facing Transition

To more accurately reflect the utilization of a parcel in relation to its assessed value, the map below illustrates assessed value on a per acre basis. This methodology shows the parts of the city with smaller lots and a tighter development pattern are actually its most productive from a tax perspective. For example, instead of the entire Southwest Quadrant showing up in darker colors parcels that have been developed more intensely drive greater tax revenues per acre. The same can be said for the Village District and neighborhoods surrounding downtown. Smaller lots with buildings that take up much of the parcel drive more value per acre. With density comes financial returns for both the developer and the city.

This is not suggesting the city should rezone all commercial/industrial land for more intensive uses, however proactive measures could be taken to selectively rezone for new uses or a more intense pattern of development that maximizes utilization of the land.

This proactive approach to planning for the future could help the city generate new growth to support budget increases and capital projects, as well as diversify uses in districts that are subject to periodic economic and market swings.



Source: RKG Associates, MassGIS, City of Marlborough.

KEY ECONOMIC TRENDS

7 Housing Availability and Affordability Continue to Drive Investment

Across much of Eastern Massachusetts, the housing crunch continues to deepen both the availability and affordability challenges we face as a state. While this is not a challenge specific to just Marlborough, it is important to recognize the role housing plays in creating the kind of city we want and the attraction housing can have to prospective employers. If businesses know their employees will struggle to find housing at a price that is affordable compared to their pay structure, they may look elsewhere. Fortunately, Marlborough has been doing its part to expand housing choice, but regional availability is still an issue. This has resulted in more applications for housing development across the city.

3,300 New Residents

Population projections completed by RKG, as well as those from other sources, estimate Marlborough's population could grow by 2,000 residents through 2038 is demographic trends continue.

2.5 Average Household Size

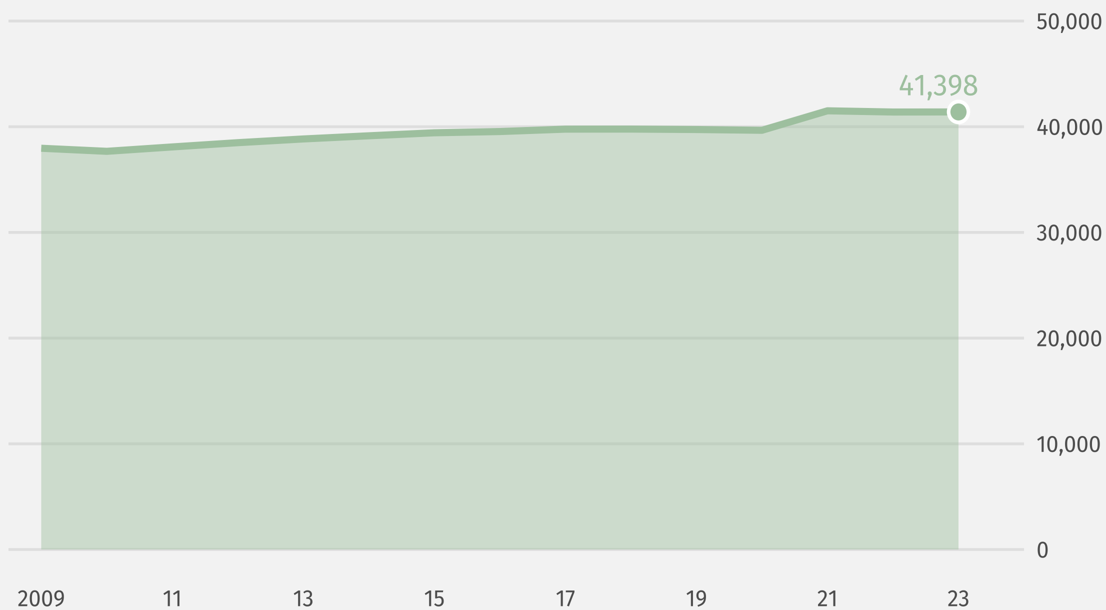
Household size is down in Marlborough and across most of Massachusetts. Smaller households mean we need more housing units even for modest gains in population.

44% of Households Rent

Only 56% of Marlborough households own their own home. Rental housing plays a critical role for the city's residents both young and old. It also supports the city's workforce who cannot afford to buy.

Change in Total Population

Source: ACS 5-Year Estimates.



KEY ECONOMIC TRENDS

7 Housing Availability and Affordability Continue to Drive Investment

The availability and affordability narrative may be best illustrated by the graphic below showing the amount of new multifamily housing delivered in the broader submarket and how quickly those new units are absorbed or leased up. The orange line shows the fluctuations in the multifamily vacancy rate as new developments come online and are quickly leased up by tenants. The pattern in the data shows as new units are delivered to the market, the vacancy rate spikes. However, vacancy quickly declines back to around 4% within a few quarters. This graphic shows that even with hundreds of new units delivered each year in the submarket, they are having little effect on bringing the vacancy rate to a healthier level (6-8%). Low vacancy and high demand reinforces the condition of ever-increasing rent and homeownership prices.

0.2% Vacancy

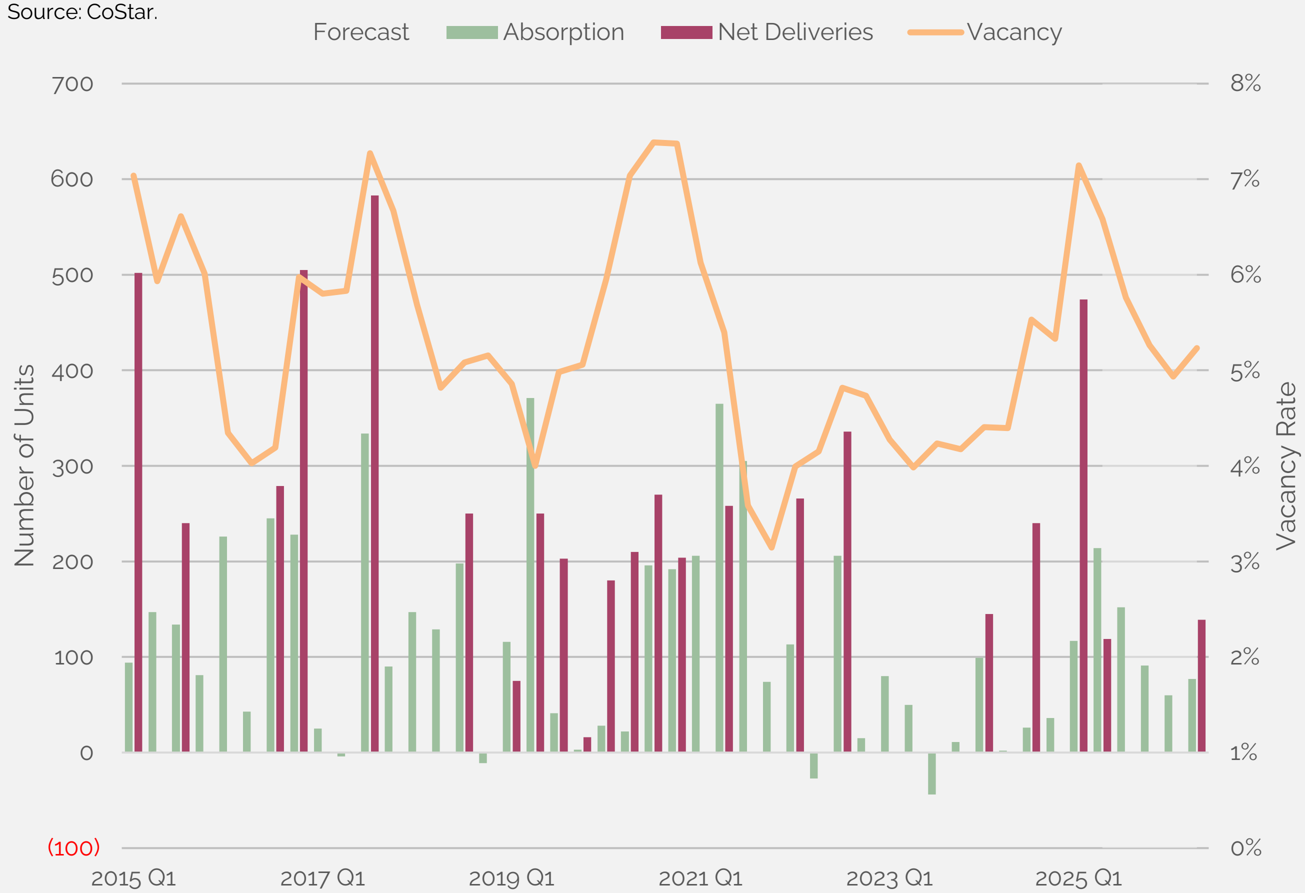
The current vacancy rate for owner-occupied housing in Marlborough. This means there is almost nothing on the market to purchase.

60% of Homes Sold Over Asking

What little housing is on the market is typically sold in 20 days or less and on average sells for 60% over the asking price in Marlborough.

Submarket Multifamily Development Activity

Source: CoStar.

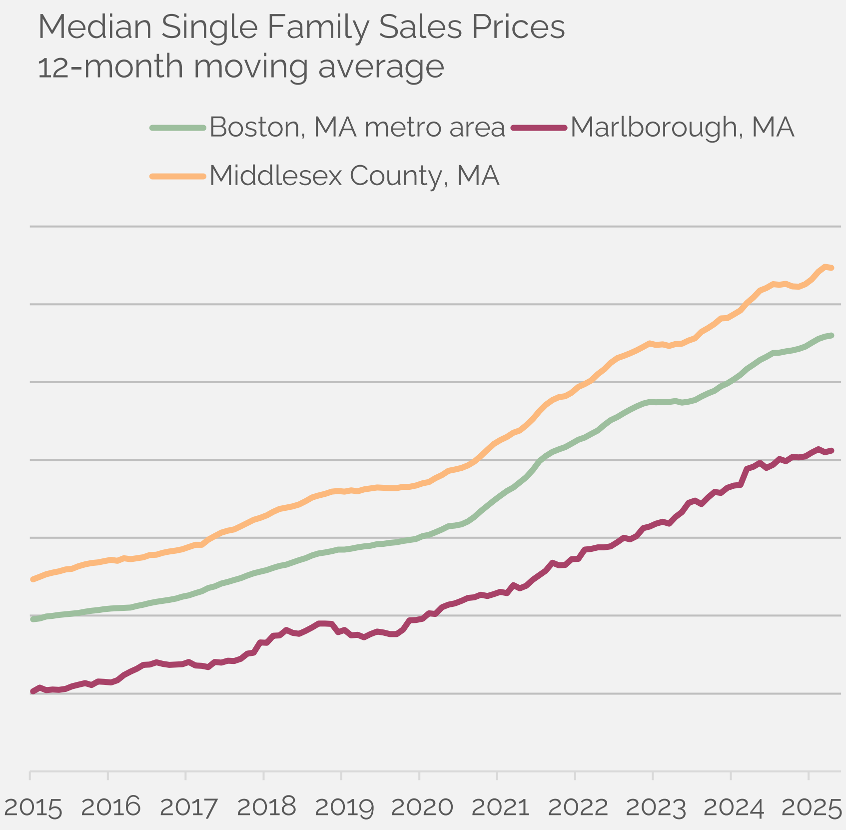


KEY ECONOMIC TRENDS

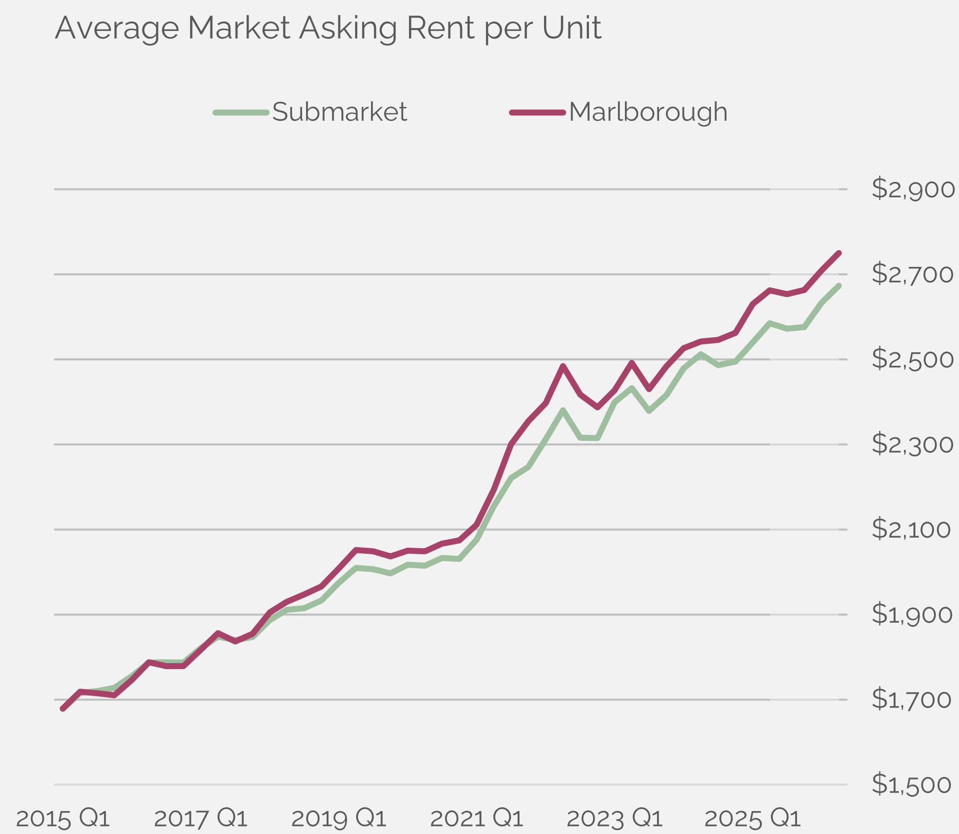
⑦ Housing Availability and Affordability Continue to Drive Investment

Housing prices, exacerbated by the pandemic, have been trending rapidly upward for both for-sale and rental housing. Although Marlborough's average single family sales prices are lower than both the broader Boston metro and Middlesex County, they have still increased by $300,000 over a 10-year period. Housing prices in Marlborough increased 100% at a time when real household income growth across Massachusetts was around 40%.

The same story holds true for rent growth in Marlborough and the broader submarket. Average market rate asking rents in Marlborough increased by $1,000 a month, or a 59% increase over 10 years. Average rents in the city are now higher than the submarket, likely due to the amount of new market rate multifamily housing built over the last few years. To combat rising housing prices, the city will need to focus strategies on what it can do to encourage and incentivize a wider range of housing types and price points.



Source: Redfin Market Data.



Source: CoStar.

OPPORTUNITIES & CHALLENGES

The analysis of Marlborough's economic conditions, housing market, development patterns, and fiscal dynamics reveals a city that is well positioned for continued growth but facing some structural transitions. Marlborough's location, employment base, and accessibility provide a strong foundation for future economic expansion. At the same time, shifts in office demand, housing affordability pressures, and infrastructure considerations require strategic planning to ensure growth is economically-resilient and fiscally beneficial. The following opportunities and challenges summarize the most important findings from the analysis and help frame the strategic themes and strategies that follow.

OPPORTUNITY 1: Positioning Marlborough as a Regional Innovation and Employment Hub

Marlborough sits strategically between Boston and Worcester and already functions as a major employment and retail center within the MetroWest region. This location advantage, combined with the city's existing corporate campuses and industrial base, creates an opportunity to capture growth from innovation industries expanding outward from the Boston market. Target sectors such as scientific research and development, engineering services, and technology-related industries align with Massachusetts' broader innovation economy and represent opportunities for future job growth.

OPPORTUNITY 2: Redevelopment of Underutilized Office and Employment Properties

Changes in workplace patterns following the pandemic have left portions of Marlborough's commercial districts underutilized. Many buildings constructed in the 1980s and 1990s are experiencing higher vacancy and slower absorption due to outdated layouts and evolving workplace needs. While this presents challenges, it also creates opportunities to reposition older properties for new uses such as life sciences, advanced manufacturing, mixed-use development, or housing where appropriate. Strategic redevelopment of these properties could strengthen the tax base while revitalizing key employment districts.

OPPORTUNITY 3: Continued Housing Demand and Population Growth

Marlborough's population has grown steadily over the past decade and is projected to continue growing through the coming decades. This growth has been supported in part by new housing development and the city's proximity to major employment centers. As the regional economy continues to expand, demand for housing in accessible locations like Marlborough is likely to remain strong, presenting opportunities for strategic residential development that supports workforce attraction and economic growth.

OPPORTUNITY 4: Strengthening Downtown as a Walkable Mixed-Use Center

Downtown Marlborough has advantages as a commercial district that support walkable development, small business activity, and placemaking. An analysis of roadway connections and travel patterns shows that downtown sits at the center of the city's street network, providing strong accessibility and visibility for businesses. The area's pedestrian-friendly environment and proximity to civic and commercial uses create opportunities to expand mixed-use development, strengthen small business activity, and enhance downtown as the city's cultural and economic center.

OPPORTUNITY 5: Leveraging Strategic Transportation Connectivity and Infrastructure

Marlborough benefits from strong regional connectivity through major highways and arterial roadways that link the city to the broader MetroWest and Greater Boston markets. This connectivity supports industrial development, corporate campuses, and commercial corridors throughout the city. These transportation assets position Marlborough to attract businesses seeking regional access while supporting future development along key commercial corridors. It is also attractive to residents looking to move to Marlborough and commute outside the city.

Marlborough also benefits from a full-service water and sewer system that expands across the city and has the capacity to accommodate additional development. Many communities along I-495 and west of Marlborough are more limited in their ability to accommodate development if they rely on septic systems, wells, or a limited public water and sewer system. Marlborough also provides residents and businesses with robust public safety services, recreation and fitness offerings, library services, senior services, and an expansive school system.

CHALLENGE 1: Structural Changes in the Office Market

The shift toward hybrid and remote work has weakened demand for traditional suburban office space. Marlborough's older office buildings, particularly those constructed in earlier decades, have experienced slowER rent growth and higher vacancy rates. Without proactive strategies to reposition or redevelop these properties, portions of the city's office inventory may continue to struggle.

CHALLENGE 2: Managing the Transition of Key Employment Districts

Areas such as the Southwest Quadrant remain major employment centers and generate a significant share of the city's non-residential tax revenue. However, some of these areas are experiencing higher vacancy rates and evolving development pressures. The city will need to carefully manage how these districts evolve to maintain a strong employment base while allowing appropriate redevelopment where market conditions support it.

CHALLENGE 3: Balancing Growth with Infrastructure and Service Capacity

Future development must be carefully aligned with the city's infrastructure and municipal service capacity. This plan includes fiscal impact modeling and scenario analysis to ensure that new development generates sufficient revenue to support city services and infrastructure investments. Strategic planning will be required to ensure growth strengthens the city's fiscal health while maintaining high-quality services for residents.

CHALLENGE 4: Housing Affordability Pressures

Despite relatively strong incomes, housing affordability is an increasing challenge in Marlborough. The housing market remains tight, with extremely low homeowner vacancy rates and limited rental availability. More than half of renters and nearly one-quarter of homeowners are considered cost-burdened, indicating that housing costs are consuming a growing share of household income. Without additional housing supply and a wider range of housing options, affordability pressures may intensify.

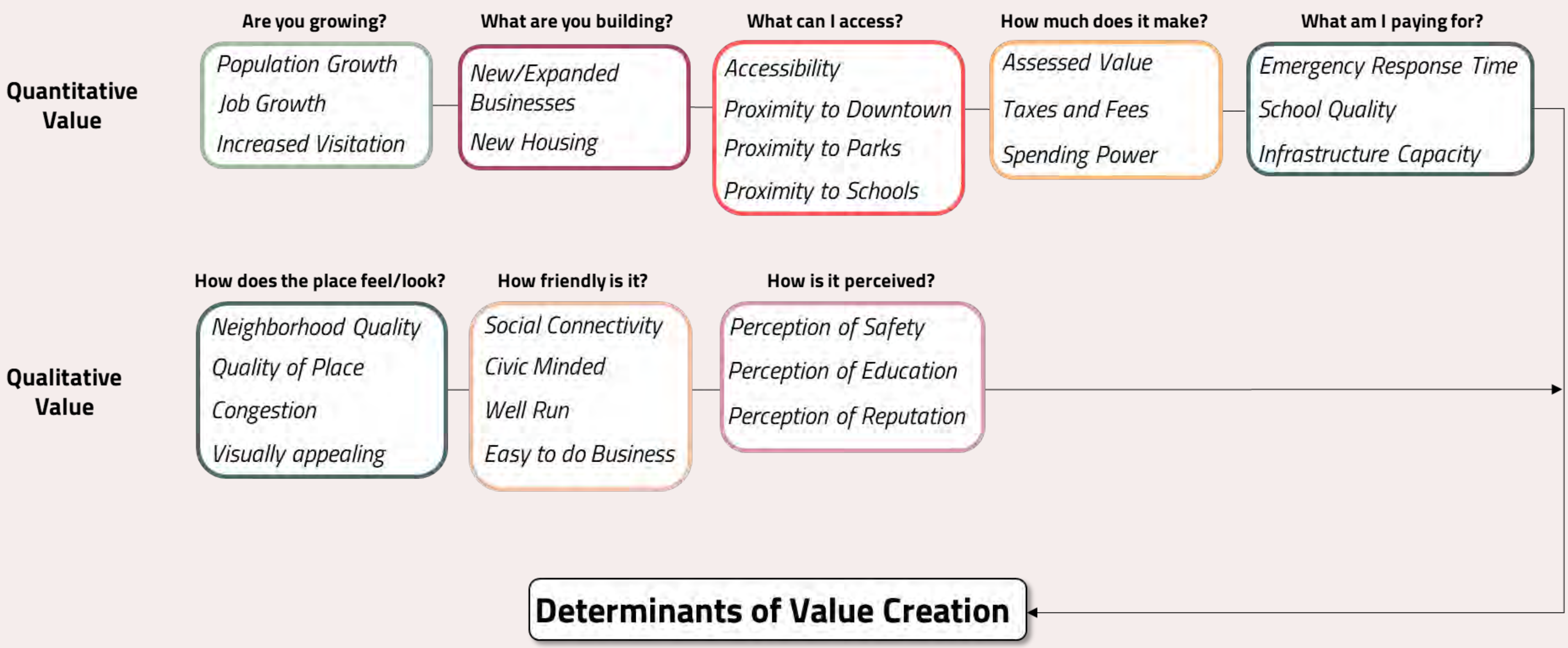
CHALLENGE 5: Aging Housing Stock and Limited Housing Diversity

Much of Marlborough's housing stock consists of single-family homes built before 1990, with fewer options available for smaller households or workforce housing. At the same time, household sizes are shrinking and demand for smaller housing units is increasing. This mismatch between housing supply and household needs could limit the city's ability to attract and retain younger workers and families.

THE VALUE PROPOSITION

For a plan to succeed, its goals and strategies must reinforce and expand upon the value of the place. In this case, value is intended to mean the quantitative and qualitative aspects that make a place desirable to live, work, visit, and invest in. There are many contributing factors that create and sustain that value, but during times of economic transition and uncertainty it is important to articulate the individual factors that give a place (in this case Marlborough) value.

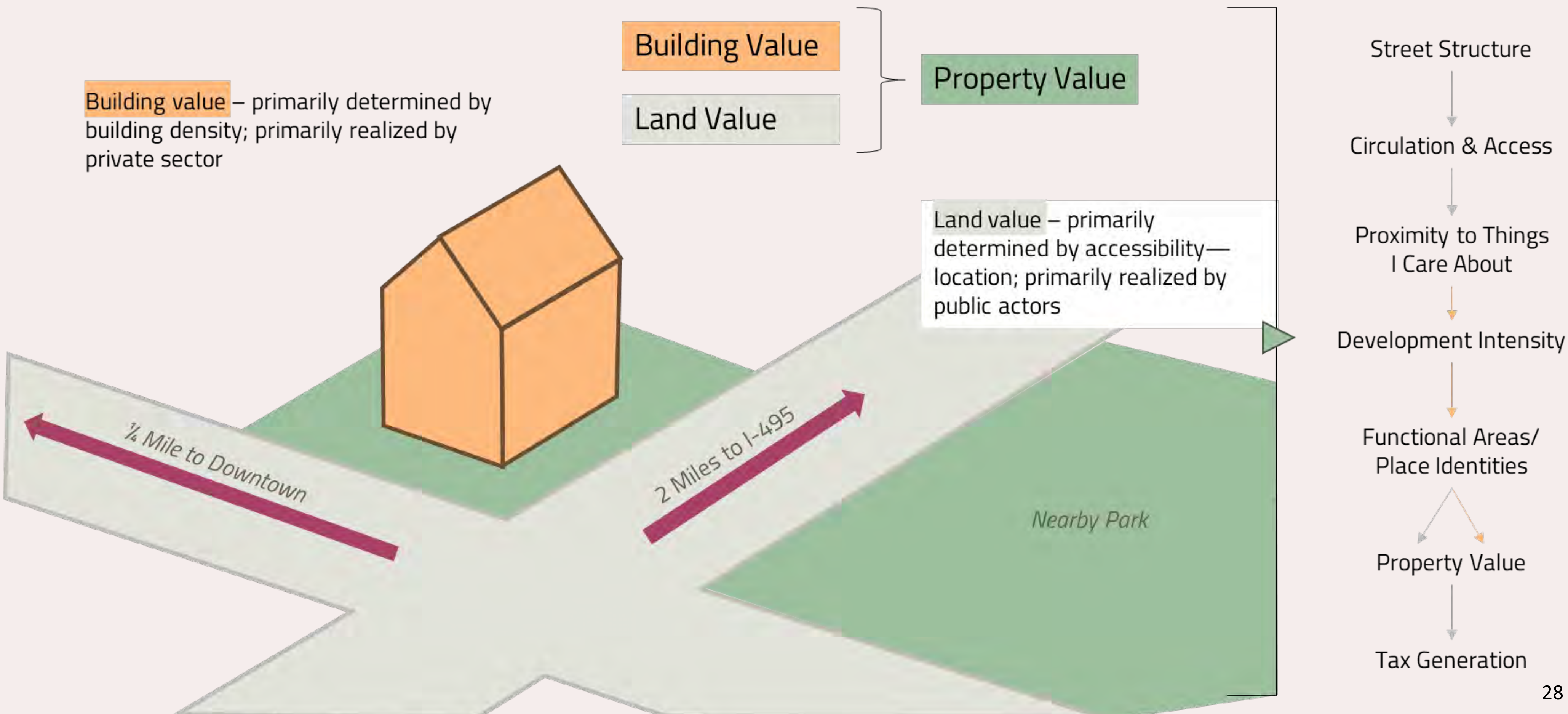
In Marlborough, the city has established goals of continued economic and population growth to ensure their long-term fiscal health is sustainable and resilient. To do that, the city needs to continually monitor numerous measures that go beyond the typical data points of population, job growth, and business starts. Value is holistic in a place and as much about what you can measure as it is about perception and experience. The flow chart below illustrates some of the ways Marlborough can quantify the value of place, many of which are linked to the themes and strategies of the plan and value measures the city can use as it's making decisions: ***Will this decision sustain or drive value?***



THE VALUE PROPOSITION

The concept of value can certainly be related back to dollars and cents for a municipality. There are few levers a city can pull to ensure public services, property taxes, and growth are working together to reinforce value. In order to increase city spending for public services or undertake a capital project, revenue must be available. That revenue can come from grants or loans, but more often it comes from municipal spending of cash or long-term bonds. The same can be true for increases to the city's operating budget. Raising additional funds through increases in the tax rate or an override vote may be unpopular, but municipalities are left with few options.

In Massachusetts, this is where new growth and development can be helpful. New development and the assessed value associated with that new growth can provide a boost to the municipality's property tax collections above the Proposition 2.5% limitations. Continually growing, allowing for redevelopment, and strategically planning for the future creates monetary value.

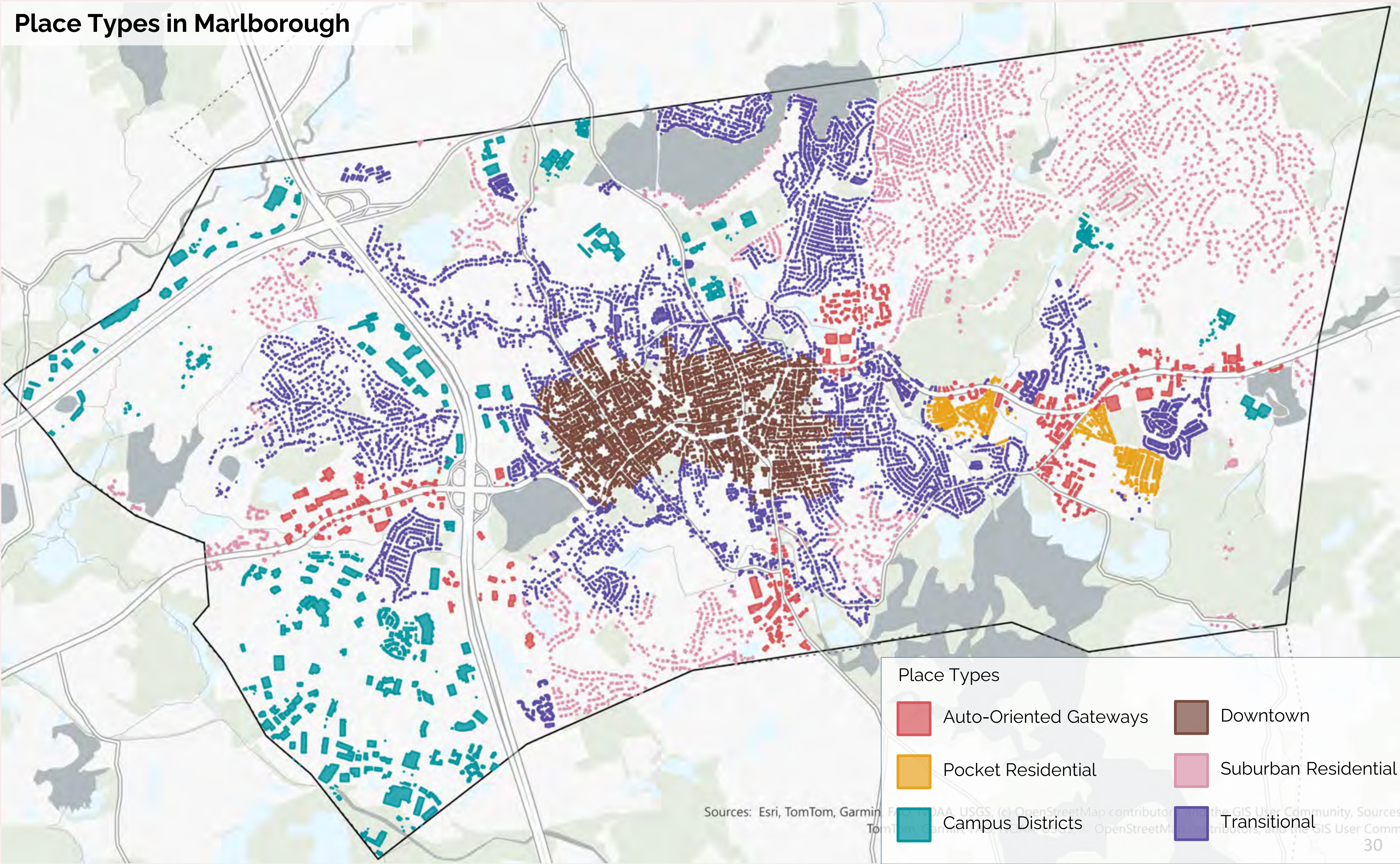


THE VALUE PROPOSITION

Value can also be created and sustained by investing in a place, its people, and the municipal staff and processes that people interact with. Having a downtown with a variety of activities, events, and places to go creates value by drawing people in to spend time and money. Creating streamlined processes for evaluating and approving new development can send signals to investors that your community is a place to create value. Offering quality services and responsive results to taxpayers keeps them in the community for longer and also helps attract new residents and businesses to the city. While these measures are more qualitative, reputation is critical when trying to attract and retain value.

THE VALUE PROPOSITION

Marlborough, like many cities, has many neighborhoods and districts that are different from one another, but each one contributes to the value of the city overall. Although each neighborhood or area of the city may have its own name, set of businesses, school district, or park space; there are similarities in the way the land is used, how roads are laid out, and how people interact with the area. RKG developed a model that measures how buildings, land, and roads function and groups them by similar place types. This helps us think more about the value of places that are like one another rather than defining a place by neighborhood or zoning boundaries.



THE VALUE PROPOSITION

Three distinctly different commercial place types are shown in the images and descriptions below each with their own unique development pattern, building styles, mix of uses, and functionality. Their value is defined by their contribution to property taxes, the businesses and jobs they support, the goods and services they produce, and the entertainment they provide. Although they each have their own purpose within Marlborough, they are all important contributors to the city's bottom line and ensuring they can continue thriving is vital to the city's fiscal and economic health. There are also different approaches needed to maximize the value derived from each of the place types.

Commercial and Economic Activity Driven Place Types

Downtown

Downtown
Highest citywide integration, fine-grained walkability, and mixed-use "movement economy" where pedestrian accessibility supports retail clustering, local employment, and the greatest tax revenue per acre.

Auto-Oriented Gateways

Auto-Oriented Gateways
High vehicular circulation and regional visibility, enabling highway-oriented retail and service uses. Strong sales activity but heavy land allocation to parking produces lower taxable building area per acre and weaker place-based economic spillovers.

Campus Districts

Campus Districts
Internalized spatial systems with limited public permeability, functioning as major employment centers and institutional attractors. Economic impact is strong from wages and visitors, but tax yield per acre depends on ownership structure, exemptions, and built intensity.

Value Creation Is Place-Specific, Not One-Size-Fits-All

- Strengthen walkability, intersections, and third places to increase pedestrian movement, dwell time, and retail spending.
- Support small-scale infill and upper-floor housing to raise tax productivity and support local business activity.
- Improve neighborhood connections to grow access, housing demand, and shared value around the center.

- Introduce infill on excess parking to increase taxable building area and reduce land inefficiency.
- Be flexible with future uses as redevelopment occurs over time.
- Improve infrastructure and aesthetics of each gateway/corridor.

- Increase edge permeability and last-mile connections to link workers and visitors with surrounding businesses.
- Support mixed-use or residential infill on underutilized edges to diversify the tax base and activate the district.
- Encourage shared structured parking and future-ready design to reduce costs and encourage redevelopment.

THE VALUE PROPOSITION

Residential place types also drive value for the city by providing safe, comfortable, and socially-connected places for residents to live. Value does come from home sale prices and rents, but it also comes from quiet streets, greenery and trees, interactions with neighbors, and being able to find housing one can comfortably afford that meets their personal or family's needs.

Residentially Driven Place Types

Suburban Residential

Suburban Residential

Lowest local integration, winding street networks and large lots separating daily needs. This typology creates both high infrastructure costs per unit and high tax productivity per acre.

Transitional Neighborhoods

Transitional Neighborhoods

High local integration and residential walkability, linking commercial destinations to surrounding housing. Strong connectivity create a balanced tax base with efficient infrastructure utilization.

Pocket Residential

Pocket Residential

Single-access movement structures with uniform housing types, often delivering affordable living at high occupancy rates. Tax productivity is highly dependent on shared infrastructure and density rather than land value appreciation.

Value Creation Is Place-Specific, Not One-Size-Fits-All

- Improve local connectivity through safe walking and biking links to nearby schools, parks, and centers.
- Encourage modest infill, accessory housing, or shared community amenities to increase land efficiency and tax productivity.
- Enhance public realm, trees, and trail access to reinforce long-term neighborhood value and strengthen access to surrounding destinations.

- Support small infill and mixed-use on key corners to add neighborhood services within walking distance.
- Enhance pedestrian crossings, traffic calming, and greenways to improve access between homes and commercial destinations.
- Preserve residential scale while enabling incremental redevelopment that grows value and supports efficient infrastructure.

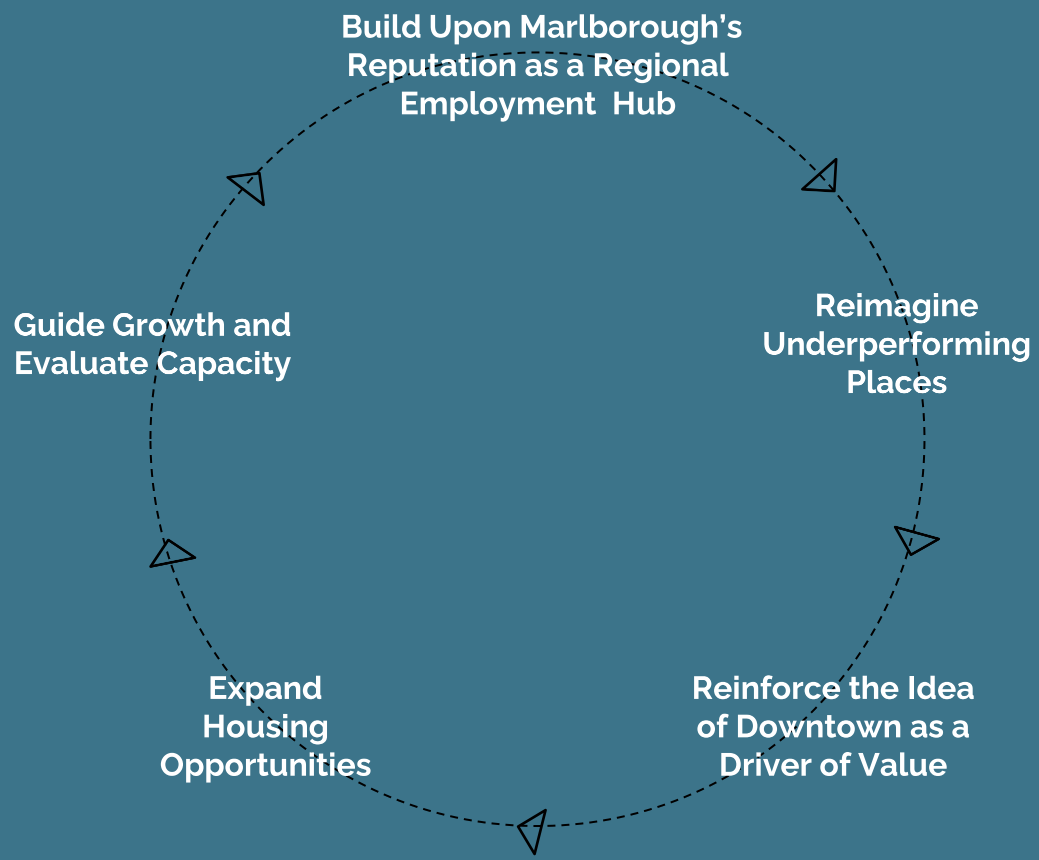
- Demand for smaller, more affordable housing options.
- Cluster shared amenities, green space, or community facilities to reinforce livability and reduce infrastructure costs per unit.
- Add neighborhood-serving uses or service pads on commercial edges to enhance convenience and increase taxable activity.

THEMES OF THE PLAN

Rather than organizing the plan around individual projects or geographic districts alone, Marlborough Forward is structured around five strategic themes that reflect the most important opportunities and challenges identified through the analysis. These themes capture the key forces shaping Marlborough's future, from repositioning aging office districts and expanding housing options to strengthening downtown and attracting new businesses. Each theme represents an area where coordinated action by the City, private sector partners, and the broader community can guide growth over the next 10 years.

Together, these themes provide a strategic framework for aligning economic development, land use planning, housing, and infrastructure investment. The strategies and actions that follow are designed to help Marlborough leverage its competitive advantages, respond to changing market conditions, and ensure that future development supports a strong commercial tax base, vibrant neighborhoods, and a resilient local economy.

The following five strategic themes provide the organizing framework for Marlborough Forward and guide the strategies and actions that will shape the city's growth over the next decade.



THEME 1: Build Upon Marlborough's Reputation as a Regional Employment Hub

Why:

Marlborough has long served as a major employment center within the MetroWest region, benefiting from its strategic location between Boston and Worcester and access to regional transportation corridors. The city's existing concentration of employers in sectors such as research and development, engineering services, and technology positions Marlborough to capture continued growth from the broader Massachusetts innovation economy. At the same time, competition for these industries across the region is intensifying. Reinforcing Marlborough's role as a regional employment and innovation hub is therefore essential to sustaining long-term economic growth and strengthening the city's commercial tax base. This theme focuses on attracting and retaining high-value industries and positioning Marlborough as a competitive location for companies seeking space to expand beyond the core Boston market.

Evidence from the Analysis:

- Marlborough is a key employment and retail center bridging the Boston and Worcester markets.
- Regional industry strengths include scientific research, engineering services, and IT sectors.
- Firms choose locations that provide access to specialized talent, partners, and research ecosystems.

Strategies and Actions Moving Forward:

1. Target growth industries aligned with Marlborough's competitive advantage (see next pages for target industries).
    1. Action – Focus retention and recruitment efforts on newly identified target industry sectors.
    2. Action – Build out specific information and marketing packets geared toward target industries. This may include information on existing companies and clusters, supply chains, workforce alignment, available spaces/sites, and infrastructure.
    3. Action – Form industry-specific business roundtables comprised of businesses within Marlborough that fall within target industry sectors. Meet 1-2 times per year to discuss business needs, recruitment strategies, and workforce needs.

2. Position Marlborough as a scale-up location for companies.
    1. Action – Update MEDC's property database quarterly so prospective tenants can quickly view available spaces.
    2. Action – Add information on MEDC's website in multiple languages showcasing mall business funding programs, local permitting, and how to guides.
    3. Action – Streamline permitting for start up and small companies that could scale in Marlborough.

3. Strengthen connections between employers, workforce, and regional research institutions.
    1. Action – Identify potential regional research institutions to partner companies within Marlborough.
    2. Action – Establish consistent coordination with MassHire MetroSouth/West and align workforce needs in Marlborough with programs and resources from MassHire.
    3. Action – Consider hosting a local or regional job fair if companies are struggling to connect with talent in the region.

THEME 1: Build Upon Marlborough's Reputation as a Regional Employment Hub

Target Industries for Marlborough to Focus On

Professional, Scientific, Technical Services:

- Scientific Research and Development Companies
- Engineering Services
- IT Industry

240 businesses, 3,800 employees

Examples of Companies in Marlborough
- Doble Engineering
- Cloud Bridge Solutions
- Sumitomo Pharma

Ambulatory Health Care Services:

- Diagnostic & Medical Laboratories

140 businesses, 1,700 employees

Examples of Companies in Marlborough
- New England Cryogenic
- Athena Diagnostics

Publishing Industries

- Software Publishing

38 businesses, 670 employees

Examples of Companies in Marlborough
- Sceris
- Mentor Graphics
- One Shield

THEME 1: Build Upon Marlborough’s Reputation as a Regional Employment Hub

Target Industries for Marlborough to Focus On

Computer and Electronic Product Manufacturing

- Semiconductor and Related Device Manufacturing
- Search, Detection, Navigation, Guidance, Aeronautical, and Nautical Systems
- Telephone Apparatus Manufacturing

27 businesses, 2,900 employees

Examples of Companies in Marlborough
- Raytheon
- Hologic
- Allegro Microsystems

Recreation Industries

- Fitness and Recreational Sports Centers

27 businesses, 680 employees

Examples of Companies in Marlborough
- New England Sports Center
- All Seasons Tennis Club

THEME 2: Reimagine Underperforming Places

Why:
Marlborough's office parks and employment districts have historically been major drivers of the city's economy and tax base. However, changing workplace trends and the shift toward hybrid work have significantly altered demand for traditional suburban office space, leaving portions of the city's older office inventory underutilized. Rather than viewing this solely as a challenge, Marlborough has an opportunity to strategically reposition these areas for new economic uses. This may include adapting older office buildings to accommodate emerging industries, supporting mixed-use redevelopment where appropriate, and ensuring that key employment districts remain attractive locations for business investment. By proactively guiding how these areas evolve, Marlborough can maintain strong employment centers while adapting to changing market conditions.

Evidence from the Analysis:

- Older office buildings have experienced weak absorption and slow rent growth.
- Many buildings from the 1980s–1990s are struggling due to outdated layouts and hybrid work trends.
- Vacancy is concentrated in areas such as the Southwest Quadrant, historically an employment hub.

Strategies and Actions Moving Forward:

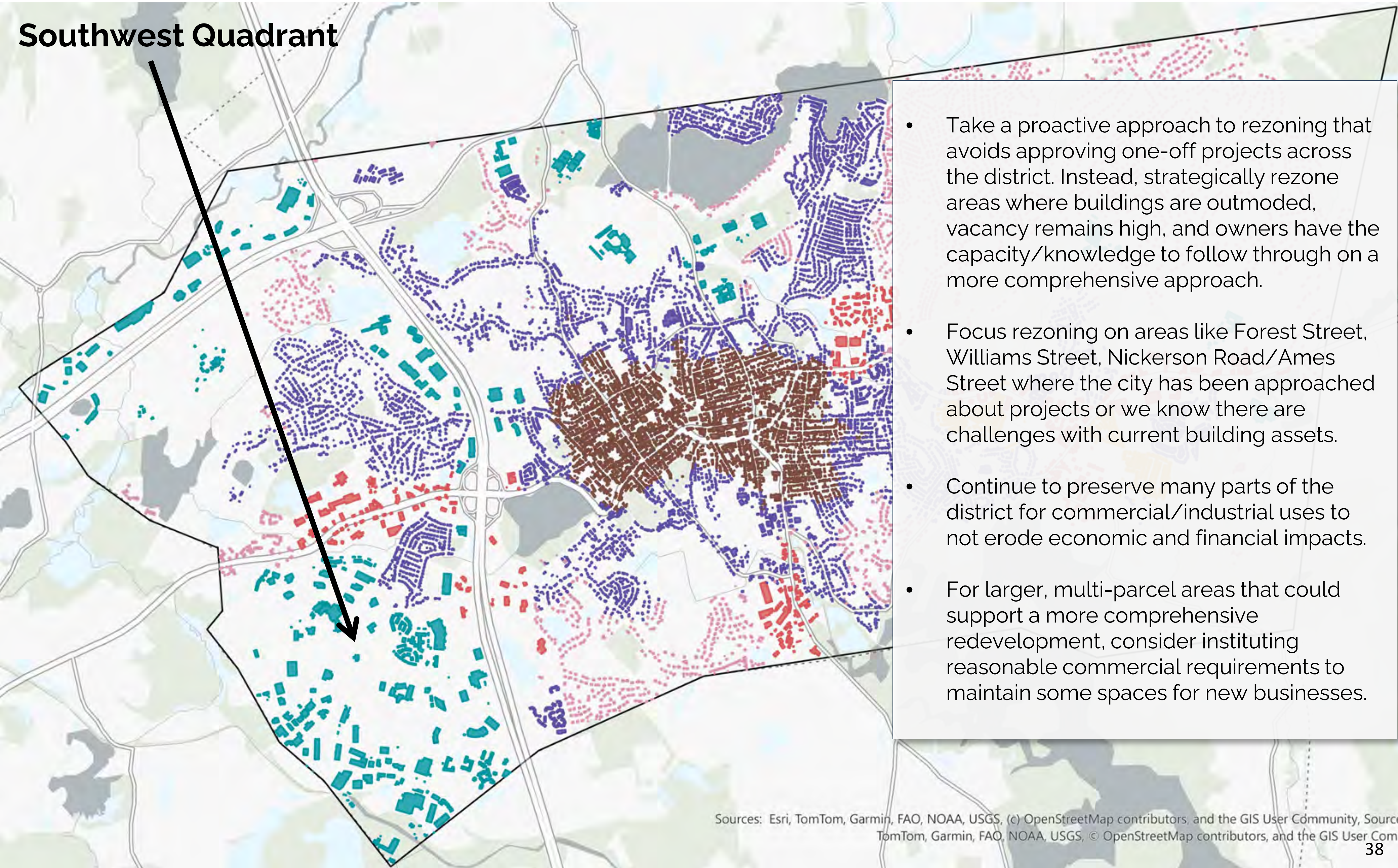
1. Identify pathways for redeveloping obsolete buildings.
    1. Action – Consider rezoning strategic locations in the Southwest Quadrant to allow property owners to redevelop (see following pages).
    2. Action – Identify zoning and permitting barriers to redevelopment such as building coverage, open space requirements, setbacks, heights, and parking requirements. Reduce or eliminate barriers as appropriate.

2. Maintain attractive commercial/industrial districts while allowing for targeted flexibility.
    1. Action – When rezoning an area of significant acreage for other uses, consider maintaining some commercial requirement is appropriate.
    2. Action – Consider adjacent uses to districts up for rezoning to avoid conflicting land uses (housing next to heavy industrial).

3. Encourage mixed-use development where conditions support it.
    1. Action – When mandating mixed-use buildings, consider the location of the parcel and buildings and whether it has good access, visibility, and has enough housing, jobs, and/or visitors to support the commercial use.

THEME 2: Reimagine Underperforming Places

The Southwest Quadrant has been an area of transition for some time and is likely to continue to see development interest given the high vacancy rates in parts of this area and outmoded buildings not well-suited for today's tenants. Proactive property owners have begun approaching the city gauging interest in possible office to residential conversions, but some parcels would be one-off developments surrounded by existing industrial/commercial uses creating disconnected buildings or worse, incompatible uses. To address these concerns, this plan recommends the city consider strategic and proactive rezoning where vacancy persists, infrastructure is available, and the city can continue to maintain a healthy commercial/industrial base.



- Take a proactive approach to rezoning that avoids approving one-off projects across the district. Instead, strategically rezone areas where buildings are outmoded, vacancy remains high, and owners have the capacity/knowledge to follow through on a more comprehensive approach.
- Focus rezoning on areas like Forest Street, Williams Street, Nickerson Road/Ames Street where the city has been approached about projects or we know there are challenges with current building assets.
- Continue to preserve many parts of the district for commercial/industrial uses to not erode economic and financial impacts.
- For larger, multi-parcel areas that could support a more comprehensive redevelopment, consider instituting reasonable commercial requirements to maintain some spaces for new businesses.

THEME 2: Reimagine Underperforming Places

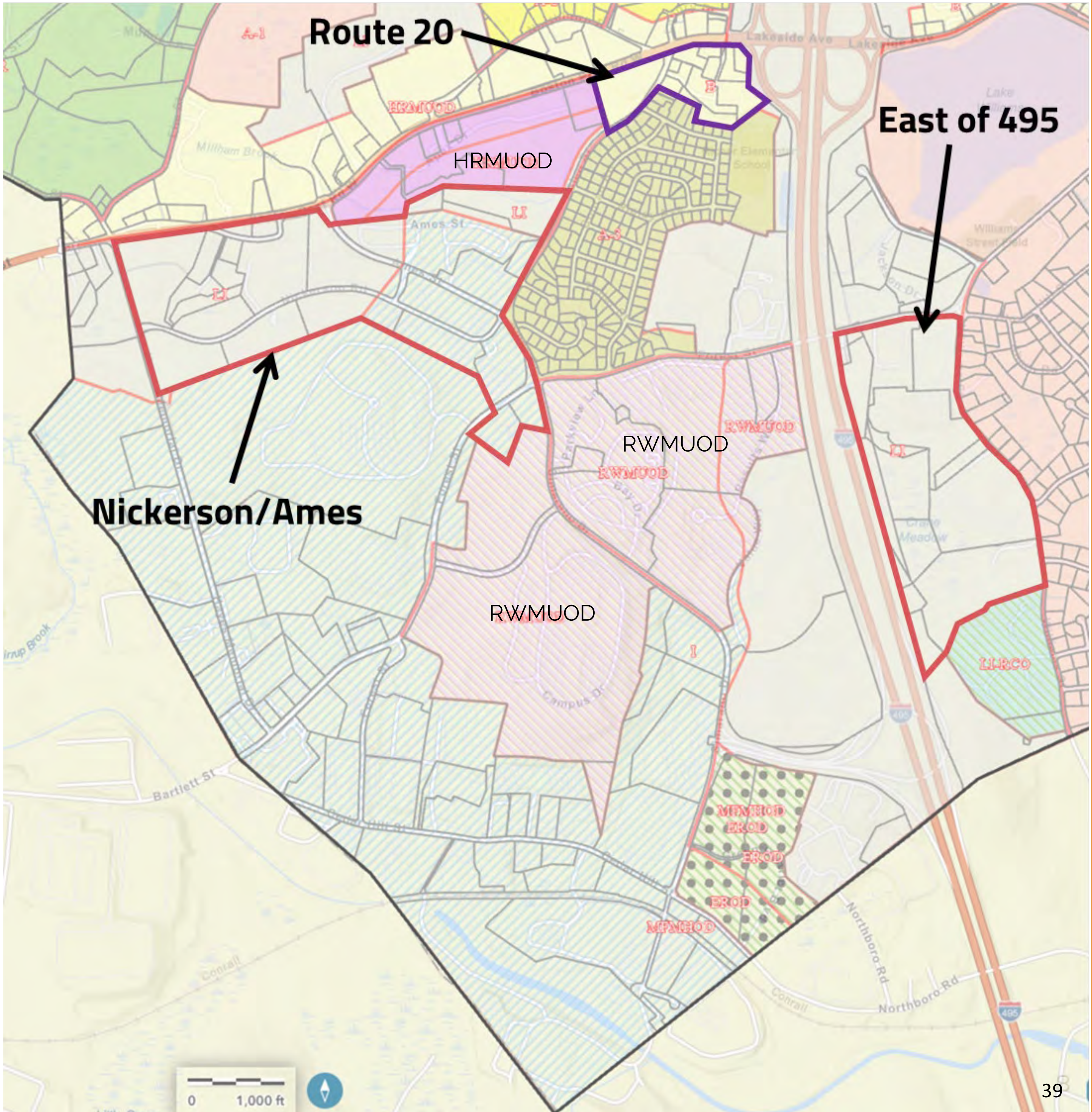
Three areas the city could consider for strategic rezoning include the area east of 495 along Forest and Williams Streets, the area east of the RK Center along Route 20, and the area along Nickerson Road and Ames Street.

Each of these locations struggles with vacant office buildings that are challenging to retrofit for today's tenants. In the case of Forest Street, there is an active proposal in front of the City Council now to redevelopment some of the area for multifamily housing.

Limiting rezoning to these three areas would allow the city to approve projects and gain new tax growth while leaving a large portion of the SW Quadrant as industrially and commercially zoned.

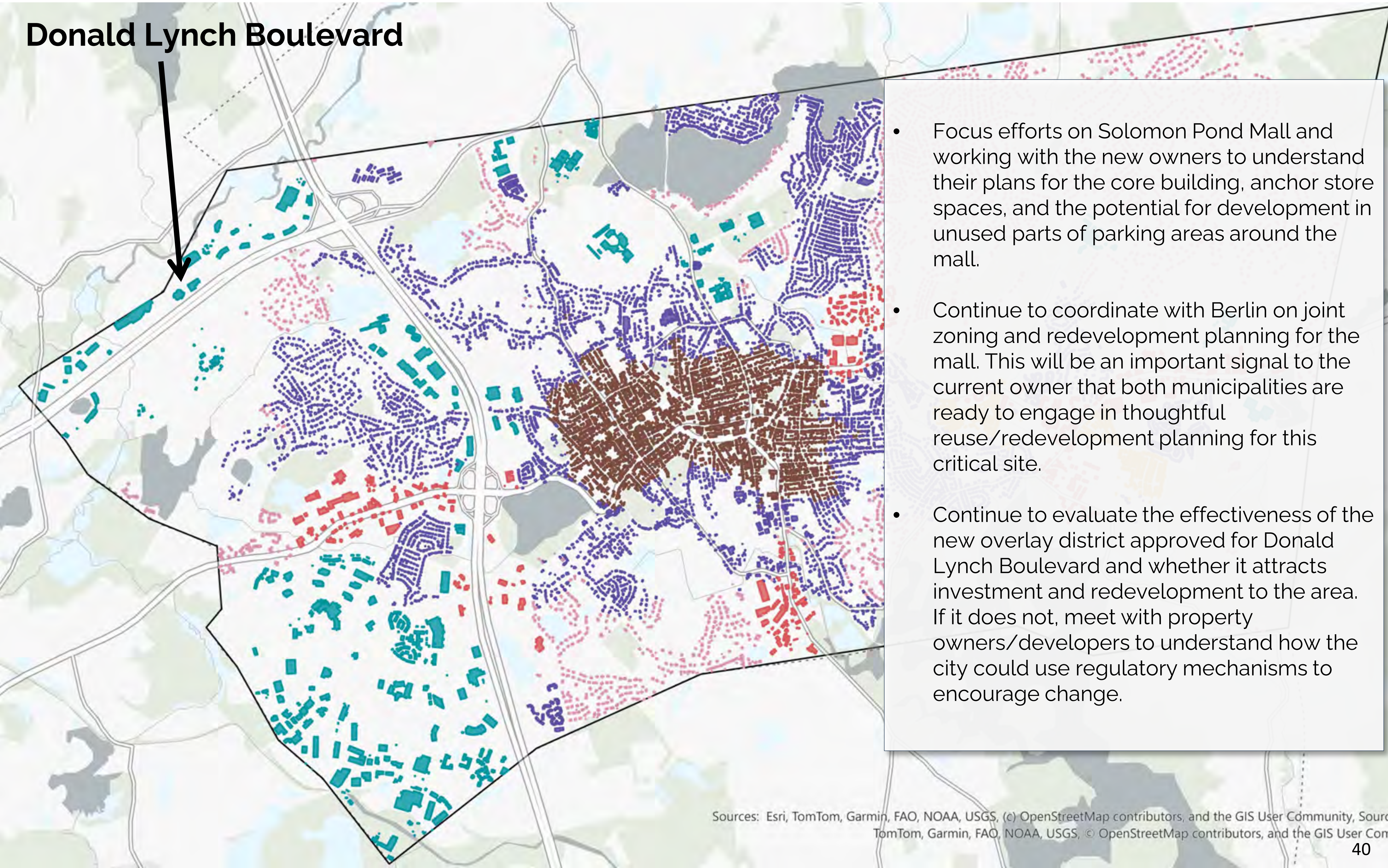
The city does not have to do all three rezonings at once. These could be phased in if more discussion and study is needed, particularly for the larger commercial area along Nickerson Road. Land in that area is largely held by 1-2 property owners which could create an opportunity to work closely with a developer to shape a development proposal that is financially feasible for the private sector but accomplishes city goals of balancing residential growth and maintaining some commercial/industrial space.

These areas are being put forward as considerations for the City Council as it weighs future development approvals or zoning changes in this area.



THEME 2: Reimagine Underperforming Places

The Solomon Pond Mall is one of the largest taxpayers by dollar amount in Marlborough and Berlin, but a continued pattern of vacancy will lower the taxable value of that asset over time. The mall is under new ownership with plans to change the use of interior spaces within the mall to focus on industrial activities. Questions remain about the transition of anchor stores which are still active and own their portions of the parking lot. Coordinating with the new owner will be important to understand their plans and the potential to redevelop anchor stores and underutilized parking to generate more value for the city.



- Focus efforts on Solomon Pond Mall and working with the new owners to understand their plans for the core building, anchor store spaces, and the potential for development in unused parts of parking areas around the mall.
- Continue to coordinate with Berlin on joint zoning and redevelopment planning for the mall. This will be an important signal to the current owner that both municipalities are ready to engage in thoughtful reuse/redevelopment planning for this critical site.
- Continue to evaluate the effectiveness of the new overlay district approved for Donald Lynch Boulevard and whether it attracts investment and redevelopment to the area. If it does not, meet with property owners/developers to understand how the city could use regulatory mechanisms to encourage change.

THEME 3: Reinforce the Idea of Downtown as a Driver of Value

Why:

Downtown Marlborough represents one of the city's most important assets for sustaining a vibrant, mixed-use place that supports small businesses, cultural activity, and community identity. Its central location within the city's street network and pedestrian-friendly environment provide a strong foundation for continued investment and revitalization. As economic development increasingly favors walkable, mixed-use districts that combine housing, retail, and entertainment, Downtown Marlborough is well positioned to serve as the city's primary destination for residents, visitors, and businesses. Strengthening downtown will not only support small business growth and placemaking but also reinforce Marlborough's identity as a dynamic and attractive place to live and work.

Evidence from the Analysis:

- Downtown is accessible from many connecting roadways, making it one of the most accessible areas in the city.
- Lower through-traffic creates a better environment for pedestrians and small businesses.
- Downtown is a heavily visited place in Marlborough, attracting over 2.6M visits per year.

Strategies and Actions Moving Forward:

1. Expand mixed-use development in the downtown core.
    1. Action – When requiring ground floor commercial space in a mixed-use building, prioritize those requirements along high visibility downtown streets such as Main Street, Weed Street, Florence Street, and Court Street. This will help concentrate business activity in the most impactful locations while not dispersing businesses to areas where they may not succeed.
    2. Action – Consider allowing multifamily as a stand alone use outside these core streets and not requiring first floor commercial. This will promote adaptive reuse and smaller scale redevelopment and put more residents (potential customers) in closer proximity to downtown businesses.

2. Consider strategic zoning changes that would reduce barriers to development downtown.
    1. Action – Revise allowable heights to 5 stories or 60 feet in downtown. The current 4 story/60-foot restriction can be confusing.
    2. Revise parking requirements for multifamily housing to reflect industry standards of 1 space per studio and 1-bed unit, 1.5 spaces for a 2-bed unit, and 2 spaces for a 3-bed unit.
    3. Consider a shared parking ordinance for downtown.

3. Strengthen downtown's identity as a destination.
    1. Action – Continue to invest in streetscape improvements, public parks and plazas, and maintenance of parking garages.
    2. Action – Consider supporting a branding strategy specific to downtown.
    3. Action – Consider creating links between the Visit Marlborough webpage and the page for the Marlborough Downtown Village Association for cross-marketing opportunities.

THEME 4: Expand Housing Opportunities

Why:
Housing availability and affordability are increasingly important factors shaping the region's economic competitiveness. Marlborough has experienced steady population growth in recent years, driven in part by its accessibility to regional employment centers and the development of new housing. While the city has expanded its housing stock, that expansion has largely been the result of higher density multifamily rental housing. We know household sizes are shrinking and demand for smaller, more diverse housing types is growing. Expanding housing options will help Marlborough attract and retain workers, support local businesses, and ensure that future economic growth is reinforced by a stable and accessible housing market. This theme focuses on encouraging a broader range of housing types in appropriate locations while aligning residential growth with infrastructure capacity and community goals.

Evidence from the Analysis:
- Owner vacancy is extremely low (0.2%) and rental vacancy is 4.7%, indicating tight supply.
- 55% of renters and 23% of homeowners are cost burdened.
- Household composition is shifting toward smaller households and renters.
- It is becoming increasingly difficult for lower- and middle-income workers to afford housing.

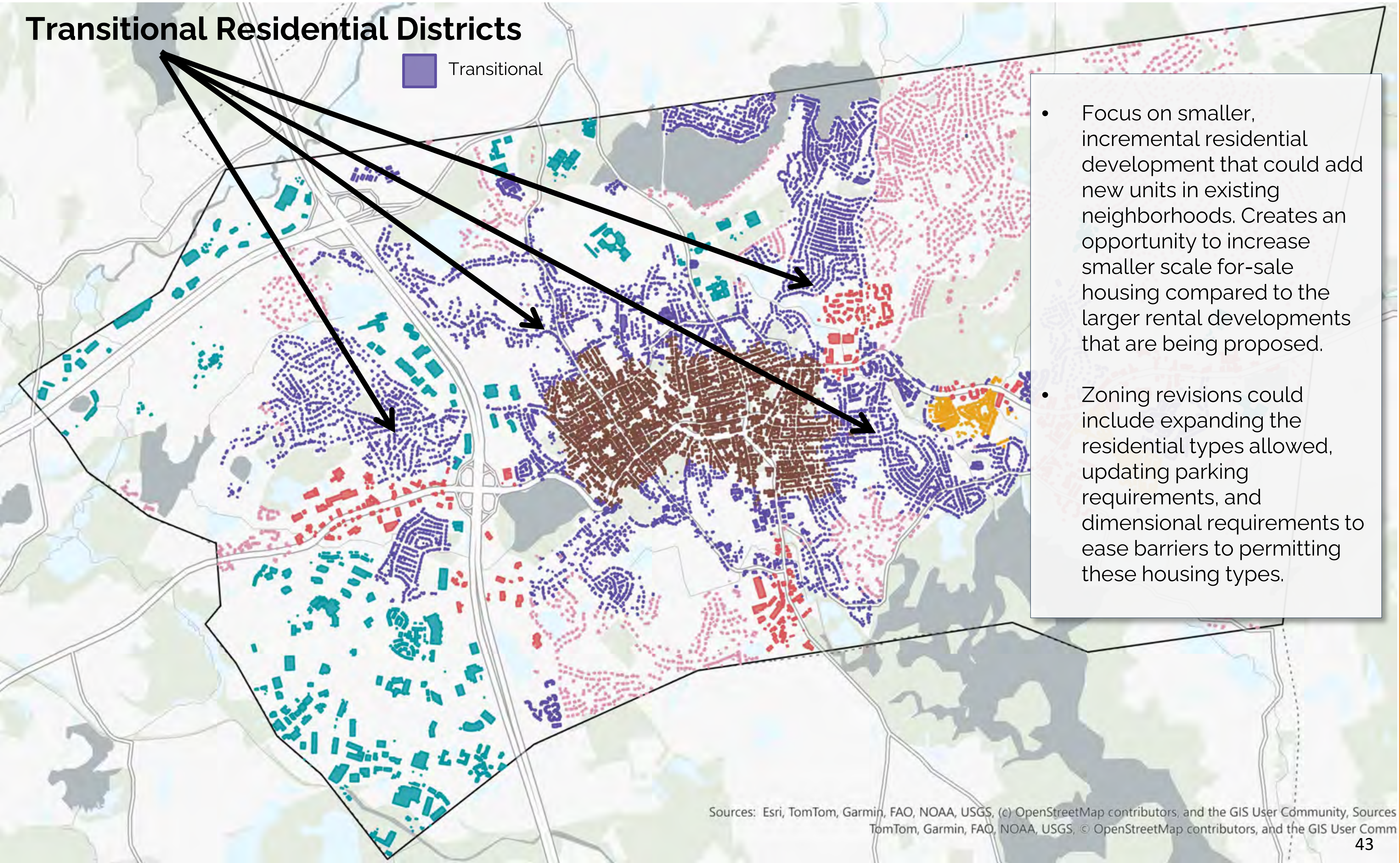
Strategies and Actions Moving Forward:

1. Increase housing supply in strategic locations.
    1. Action – Consider the strategic rezoning strategies from this report and their impact on increasing housing supply in locations where infrastructure and capacity can adequately support it.

    2. Action – Review the city's Zoning Ordinance to identify zoning districts where barriers to housing could be eased or removed. This could include the following suggestions:
        1. Allowing some housing options as-of-right in more districts. This could include a review of where single-family attached housing could be allowed as-of-right instead of by special permit, expanding where two-family homes are allowed, and where multifamily up to a certain size could be allowed as-of-right.
        2. Consider establishing a size threshold (square feet or units) that would trigger a special permit for certain housing types.
        3. Consider moving some Special Permits for residential/mixed use to the Planning Board to ease the burden on the City Council.
        4. Consider allowing missing middle style housing in transition districts like RB, RC, NB in the table of uses by expanding the types of residential structures allowed by right or through site plan review by the Planning Board.
            1. Revisit regulations of lot area per dwelling unit in relation to median lot sizes in each zoning district to ensure the types of housing you are allowing can actually be built.
            2. Ease use restrictions on single family attached housing types, like townhomes, in districts such as RB, RC, NB, B, MV, Wayside, and DLB.

THEME 4: Expand Housing Opportunities

Areas of Marlborough expanding out from commercial and mixed-use places could provide opportunities to introduce new housing types for both owner and renter households. The "missing middle" housing types of the past such as triple deckers, 4-6 unit buildings, townhomes, and small apartment buildings could fit in at the edges of these districts serving as a transition in form and density from the more intensely developed commercial and mixed-use places. Implementation of this approach would require revisions to the city's zoning ordinance to expand housing options in these areas and relax parcel and dimensional requirements.



- Focus on smaller, incremental residential development that could add new units in existing neighborhoods. Creates an opportunity to increase smaller scale for-sale housing compared to the larger rental developments that are being proposed.
- Zoning revisions could include expanding the residential types allowed, updating parking requirements, and dimensional requirements to ease barriers to permitting these housing types.

THEME 4: Expand Housing Opportunities

Strategies and Actions Moving Forward (Cont'd):

3. Expand affordable housing options in the city.
    1. Action – Increase the number of deed-restricted affordable housing units in Marlborough to continue staying above the 10% 40B threshold. The city is currently at 10.83%. If affordability restrictions expire and units come off the Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI) list, the city will be at risk of new 40B developments.
    2. Action - Maintain an internal list of 40B eligible units and monitor the expiration dates of any units that are not deed restricted in perpetuity. Start conversations with building owners early to determine their willingness to extend the deed restrictions and what incentives they may need in return.
    3. Action - Consider funding and completing a Housing Production Plan and achieve EOHLC certification which can provide the city and the zoning board of appeals with protections and a pathway toward compliance should the city fall below its 10% obligation.
    4. Action - Look for ways to partner with Marlborough's Community Development Authority to modernize and expand deeply affordable for those most in need.
    5. Action - Provide a first-time homebuyer revolving loan program coupled with first time homebuyer education programs.
    6. Action -Ensure the Community Development Authority's website is updated with information on all programs and funding available and removing previous program information. Consider translating all housing-related information on the city's website to multiple languages to help with education and uptake in programming.
    7. Action - Identify city-owned surplus land or buildings that could be repurposed to support the production of affordable or mixed-income housing through an RFQ/RFP process.
    8. Action - Develop educational materials and trainings in multiple languages for landlords, property owners, and smaller-scale developers on navigating the city's processes, ensuring compliance with rules and regulations, and fair housing and tenant laws.

THEME 5: Guide Growth and Evaluate Capacity

Why:

As Marlborough continues to grow, it will be critical to ensure that new development strengthens the city's long-term fiscal health while maintaining the quality of public services and infrastructure that residents and businesses rely on. Growth that generates strong tax revenue and aligns with available infrastructure capacity can help the city continue to invest in schools, public safety, transportation, and utilities. At the same time, unmanaged growth could place strain on municipal resources. This theme focuses on guiding development in ways that maximize economic and fiscal benefits while ensuring that infrastructure systems, municipal services, and long-term planning priorities remain aligned.

Evidence from the Analysis:

- Prioritize development that strengthens the city's tax base.
- Align development with infrastructure capacity.
- Evaluate major redevelopment projects using a multi-pronged approach.

Strategies and Actions Moving Forward:

1. Review Massachusetts state law and best practices in property assessments to determine if multifamily buildings can be taxed at a commercial tax rate instead of at a residential rate.
2. Coordinate infrastructure investments with growth areas.
    1. Action – Identify a location for a new "west" fire station west of I-495. Ensure the new station has adequate staffing and response apparatus to handle the anticipated call volumes.
    2. Action – Consider hiring additional staff for the city's Recreation Department. This will be especially important if additional residential units are added over time.
    3. Action - Continue to address Inflow and Infiltration (I&I) points to add capacity without having to add infrastructure to the system. New development would add to the fees paid into this revolving fund.
    4. Action - Follow through on any recommendations from the ongoing hydraulic modeling study of the sewer system if any deficiencies are identified.
    5. Action - Consider funding a water system master plan to identify any deficiencies in the water delivery system across Marlborough and prepare capital plans for addressing any identified issues.
    6. Regularly meet with department heads and assess current infrastructure and operational capacity in relation to new growth.

3. Ensure the city's existing development evaluation matrix is updated and used for development decision making.
    1. Action – Revisit the 2018 Multifamily Development Review Criteria and Design Guidelines to add new relevant criteria, update environmental considerations, and more specifically reference this plan and its strategies.

THEME 5: Guide Growth and Evaluate Capacity

As part of this study process, a fiscal impact model was constructed to help the city understand the financial and service cost implications of different development decisions. The model is able to calculate future revenue from a hypothetical development scenario and compare that revenue to city and school service costs. By subtracting estimated revenue from estimated costs, the city can better understand if the development provides enough revenue to offset costs. This is particularly true when it comes to residential development which comes with greater service demands and costs than most commercial and industrial development.

During this process, we presented findings that showed shifting underperforming commercial/industrial assets to a higher density residential use can generate far more in assessed value and property taxes than the current commercial use. Two hypothetical examples were analyzed, a 56-acre area along Nickerson Road and the 22-acre Solomon Pond Mall site. The scenarios projected the fiscal outcomes if both areas went from their current mix of commercial uses to all multifamily residential at a density similar to the new buildings in the Green District.

The model results showed that assessed value could increase ten-fold along Nickerson Road and bring in $3.5M of net new revenue per year for the city while only generating about 78 new students. The mall site could generate upwards of $2.4M in new revenue with only 31 new students. Working closely with the school district, we found that new multifamily residential development in Marlborough only generates about **7 students for every 100 units built and leased**.

Potential Unit Counts	Acres	Current Assessed Value	Current Tax Value	New Potential MF Units	Future Assessed Value	Future Potential Taxes	Tax Delta	Potential Students
Nickerson/Ame	56.08	$47,591,400	$807,150	1,122	$437,632,638	$4,315,058	$3,507,908	78
Mall Site	22.21	$28,594,900	$484,970	444	$173,180,830	$2,937,147	$2,452,177	31

The Lodge
240 units/11.8 acres = 20 DU/AC

Green District
235 Units/10.2 acres = 23 DU/AC

IMPLEMENTATION MATRIX

The following implementation matrix is intended to help MEDC and city leaders prioritize actions and understand which entities could take the lead on advancing them.

Strategic Theme	Key Action	Lead Entity	Supporting Partners	Timeframe
Employment Hub	Target growth industries aligned with Marlborough's competitive advantage.	MEDC		Short-Term
	Position Marlborough as a scale up for companies.	MEDC		Short-Term
	Strengthen connections between employers, workforce, and regional research institutions.	MEDC	MassHire MetroWest, Educational Institutions, Area Businesses	Medium-Term
Reposition Office Districts	Identify pathways for redeveloping obsolete buildings.	City Council	Mayor's Office, MEDC, Planning Board	Short-Term
	Maintain attractive commercial/industrial districts while allowing for targeted flexibility.	City Council	Mayor's Office, MEDC, Planning Board	Long-Term
	Encourage mixed-use development where conditions support it..	City Council	Mayor's Office, MEDC, Planning Board	Mid-Term
Reinforce Downtown	Expand mixed-use development in the downtown core.	City Council	Mayor's Office, MEDC, Planning Board	Long-Term
	Consider strategic zoning changes that would reduce barriers to development downtown.	City Council	Mayor's Office, MEDC	Short-Term
	Strengthen downtown's identity as a destination.	MEDC	Downtown Marlborough Association	Mid-Term
Expand Housing Opportunities	Increase housing supply in strategic locations.	City Council	Mayor's Office, MEDC, Housing Authority, Developers	Mid-Term
	Review the Zoning Ordinance to identify districts where barriers to housing could be eased.	City Council	Mayor's Office, MEDC	Short-Term
	Expand affordable housing options in the city.	City Council	Mayor's Office, Housing Authority, Developers	Mid-Term
Guide Growth and Evaluate Capacity	Determine if multifamily can be taxed at a commercial rate.	City Council, Mayor's Office	City Solicitor, City Comptroller	Short-Term
	Coordinate infrastructure investments in growth areas.	City Council, Mayor's Office	Department Heads, MEDC, State Funding Agencies	Long-Term
	Ensure development matrix is updated and used.	MEDC	City Council, Department Heads	Short-Term

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Marlborough Forward is intended to guide the city's economic development and growth decisions over the next 10 to 15 years. While the strategies and actions outlined in this plan provide a roadmap for strengthening Marlborough's economy, the city's long-term success will depend on the ability to regularly evaluate progress and adjust strategies as economic conditions evolve. Monitoring key indicators will help MEDC and city leaders understand whether Marlborough is successfully advancing its goals of strengthening the commercial tax base, attracting and retaining businesses, expanding housing opportunities, and ensuring that future growth remains aligned with infrastructure and municipal service capacity.

To support this effort, Marlborough should establish a set of performance indicators that track economic development activity, real estate market conditions, housing growth, and fiscal outcomes over time. These indicators do not represent rigid targets but rather a framework for measuring progress and informing decision-making. Regularly reviewing these metrics annually will help the city understand whether key goals are being achieved and where additional policy adjustments or investments may be needed.

Sample Evaluation Measures

Economic Development and Business Growth
- Total employment within Marlborough.
- Number of new businesses established each year.
- Expansion or relocation of companies within target industry sectors.
- Commercial vacancy rates across office, industrial, and retail sectors.
- Square footage of commercial or industrial development completed.

Fiscal Health and Tax Base
- Commercial vs. residential share of the tax base.
- Total assessed value of commercial and industrial.
- Property tax rates.
- Change in the city's fiscal year budget.

Housing and Population Growth
- Number of housing units permitted and constructed annually.
- Housing vacancy rates for both rental and ownership units.
- Average rents and home sale prices.
- Population and household growth trends.
- Number of deed restricted affordable units.

Infrastructure and Service Capacity
- Water and sewer system capacity utilization.
- School enrollment trends.
- Public safety service demand.
- Capital investment needs for infrastructure and services.

MARLBOROUGH

FORWARD

MEDC MARLBOROUGH ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

MARCH 2026

DRAFT

RKG ASSOCIATES INC