An aerial photograph of a city street intersection. The street runs diagonally from the top-left to the bottom-right. On the left side of the street, there are several multi-story brick buildings with flat roofs. On the right side, there are more buildings, including one with a prominent arched entrance, and several large parking lots filled with cars. The text "Belmont Center Zoning" is overlaid in large white letters across the center of the image.

Belmont Center Zoning

Public Meeting / Informational Session
February 12, 2025 @ 7:30 pm
Beech Street Center

Meeting Agenda

- Convene (7:30 pm)
- Welcome and Introductions (10 min.)
- Background (25 min.)
- Project Goals and Objectives (15 min.)
- Next Steps and Project Schedule (10 min.)
- Public Comment (60 min.)
- Adjourn

Welcome and Introductions

- **Project Team**

- Planning Board (Planning, Public Process)
- Select Board (Funding Authorization, Authorization to Proceed)
- Office of Planning and Building (Project Management, Management of Consultant)

- **Stakeholders**

- Belmont Residents
- Center Businesses
- Center Property Owners
- Town and Business Employees
- Municipal Technical Staff Support

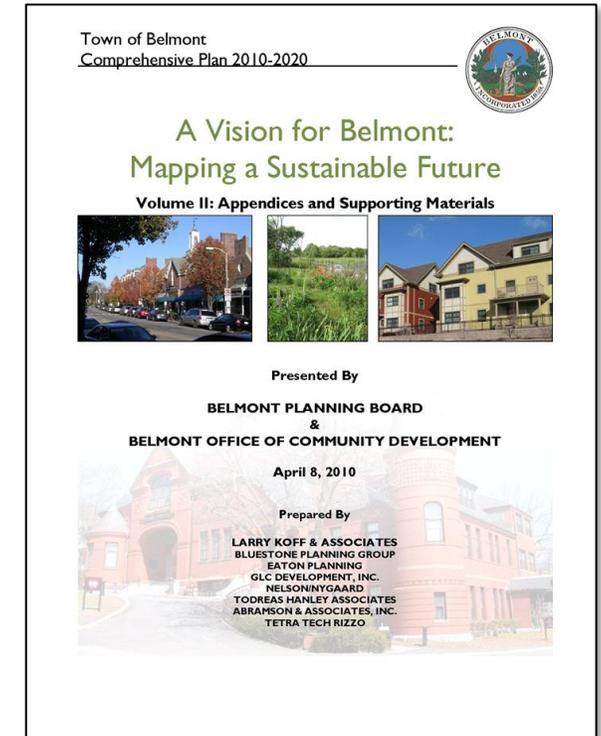
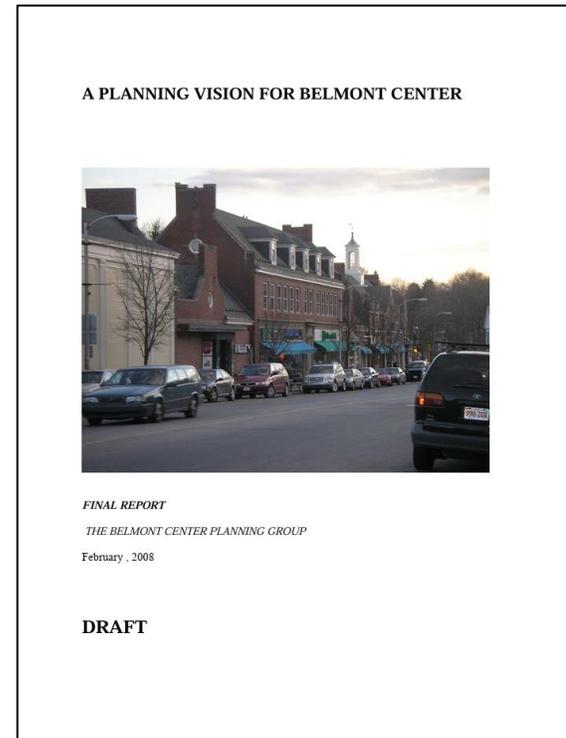
- **Consultant – Able.City**

- Jason King
- Pamela King
- Nuki Giorgadze

Not Attending

Background

- **REPORT: A Planning Vision for Belmont Center (2008)**
 - Seven (7) Primary Recommendations
 - Three (3) Specific Actions
 - Collaborated with over 16 committees and departments
 - Robust outreach process
- **PLAN: Draft Belmont Comprehensive Plan (2010)**
 - 14 Member Committee
 - 60 Member Working Group
 - 500 Survey Responses
 - Two Public Forums



A Planning Vision for Belmont Center (2008)

- **Nine (9) Recommendations**

1. Employ three Approaches
2. Preserve and enhance the Center's historic character and charm
3. Ensure that the Town is well positioned to maximize the positive impact of future development opportunities as they arise.
4. Encourage a complementary mix of business types and land uses to support both vibrant daytime and evening activity through the use of special permitting, informal pre-application discussions with developers and zoning overlay requirements.
5. Provide sufficient parking to support Center businesses and land uses
6. Preserve and enhance the Center's pedestrian scale by making it easier, more pleasant and safer for pedestrians to walk to and through the Center.
7. Preserve and enhance the Center's pedestrian scale by making it easier, more pleasant and safer for pedestrians to walk to and through the Center.
8. Promote civic engagement in the Center through activities, programs and uses that bring community members together

- **Each of these recommendations has been provided to the Consultant with a directive to integrate, as applicable, in project planning.**

Three Approaches

1. Create a Physical Improvement Plan for Public Spaces
Some improvements have been made to the public spaces in the Center. Others will be considered as part of the zoning plan.
2. Adopt a zoning mechanism that provides incentives for high quality design in future development
As recommended here, we are considering the use of a zoning overlay district and Form-Based Code ([see Slide 11](#)).
3. Identify Development Opportunities at Key Sites
As recommended here, we are considering sites like the Electric Light Building, the Municipal Lot, the Drive-Thru Bank, and other sites of interest.

2010 Comprehensive Plan

- Examples of Center-Related Strategies and Actions in the 2010 Comprehensive Plan
 - Historic Preservation Actions (p. 10)
 - Encourage Growth in Commercial Zones (p. 11)
 - Use of Municipal Light Building (p. 61)
 - Vision for Belmont Center (p. 69)
 - Preserve Historic Architecture, Expand Available Commercial Space, Increase Density of Housing (p. 70)
 - Business Improvement District; Tax Increment Financing (p. 103)

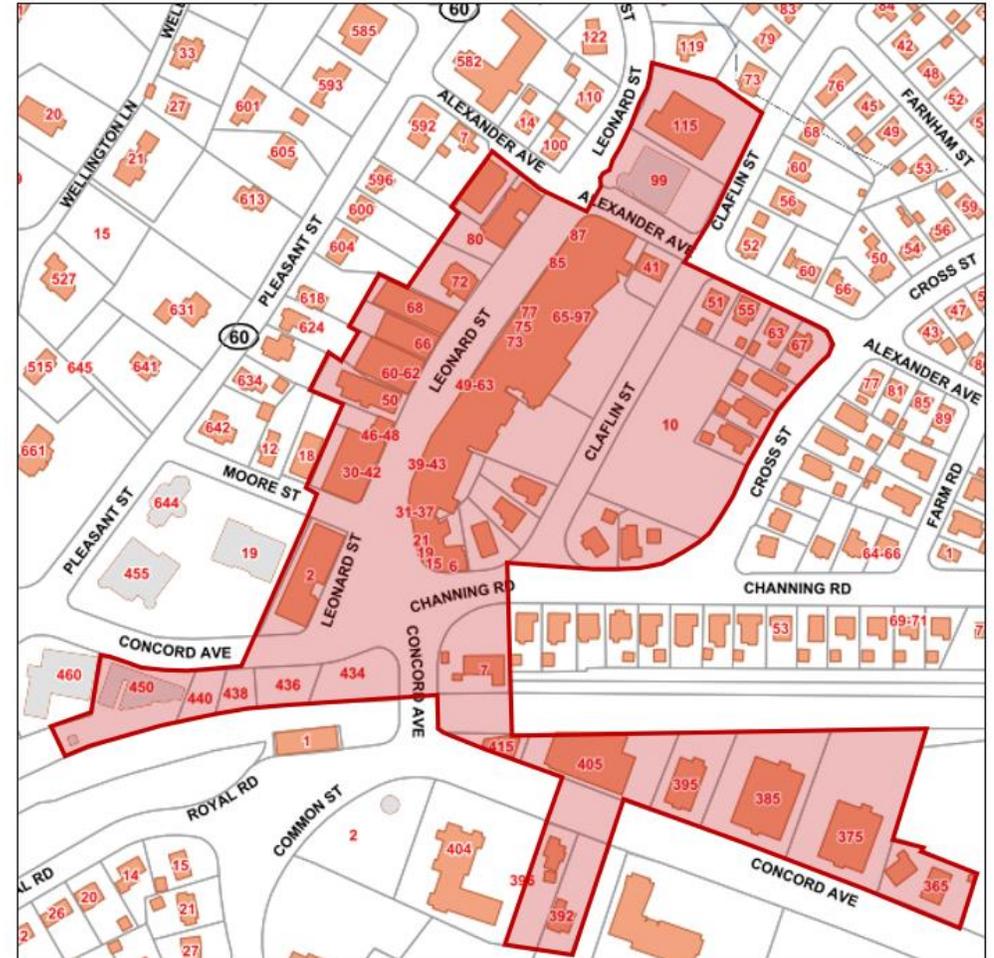


Why the Center? Why Now?

- The Center has always been seen as an unfulfilled commercial opportunity area—one of only a few that exist in Belmont.
- The Center was considered for MBTA 3A. It was scaled back to a few peripheral parcels.
- The rationale for removing much of the Center from 3A was that Belmont should develop something for the Center that is unconstrained by the guidelines of that state program.
- ARPA funding was available for key planning projects and to the Planning Board, as they were discussing their Work Plan, the zoning for the Center rose to the top of the list.

Why the Center? Why Now?

- The Office of Planning and Building was tasked to develop a project scope and market it to qualified design firms to specifically develop a Form-Based Code, as was recommended by the 2008 Plan.
- Four quotes were received after sending to top echelon firms in the Country.
- One firm, **Able.City**, was determined to have the capacity to work within the ARPA funding timeline, and within the available budget.
- The initial project area included just Leonard Street and the Claflin Lot. It was expanded based on feedback from various sources.



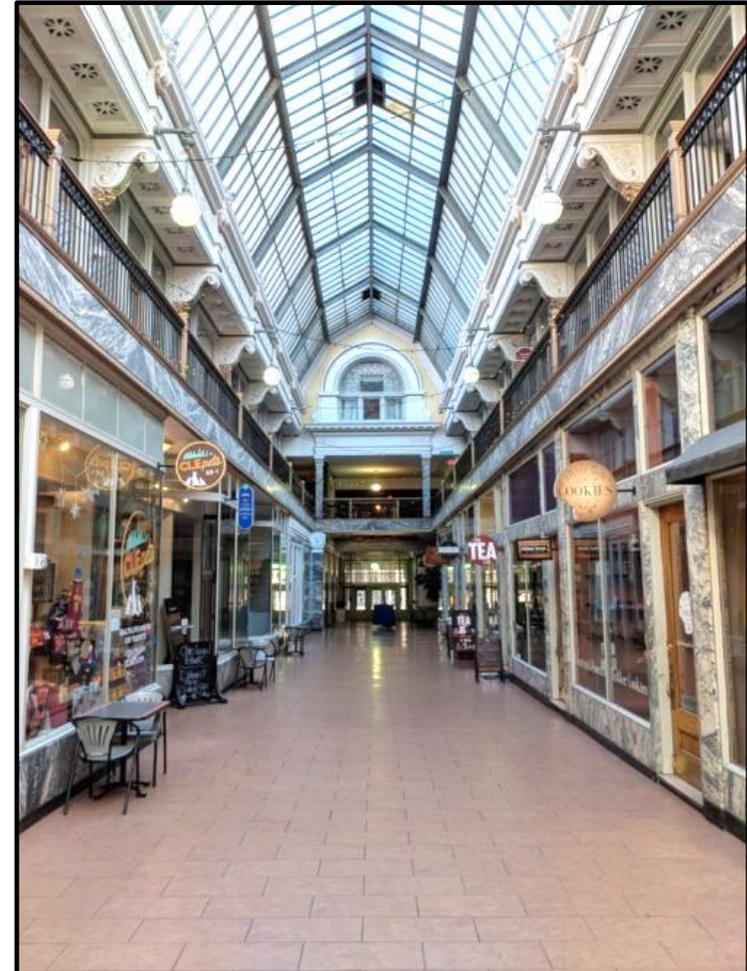
Project Goals and Objectives (General)

- Provide opportunity for additional commercial development
- Provide opportunity for additional complementary residential development
- Maximize tax receipts for municipal revenue
- Work with Engineering on Traffic Solutions
- Consider a parking master plan for the center; no net loss
- Consider key municipal sites for development opportunities
- Create a regional destination to bring dollars in from surrounding areas



Project Goals and Objectives (Specific)

- Provide opportunity for thoughtful development of the Claflin Lot and Leonard Street Backlands
- Find a solution for establishing a Paseo or Arcade cut-through from Leonard Street to the Claflin Lot
- Use placemaking to create a vibrant Belmont Center district to serve residents and draw visitors
- Use the Center as a test case for the use of a Form-Based Code.



What is Placemaking?

- Placemaking is an urban planning and urban design strategy that seeks to improve the public realm, the public spaces that people use, and to improve the lives of the people who use them.
- As MIT's "Places in the Making" report states: *"Put into practice, placemaking seeks to build or improve public space, spark public discourse, create beauty and delight, engender civic pride, connect neighborhoods, support community health and safety, grow social justice, catalyze economic development, promote environmental sustainability, and of course nurture an authentic sense of place."*

What is a Form-Based Code?

- A land development regulation that fosters predictable built results and a high-quality public realm by using physical form (rather than separation of uses) as the organizing principle for the code. A form-based code is a regulation or by-law, not a mere guideline, adopted into a local law. A form-based code offers a powerful alternative to conventional zoning regulation.

E. Building Form

Height	
Primary Building	
Stories	4 stories max.
To Top Highest Eave or lower ridge of Mansard roof ¹	48 ft max. G
Floor-to-Floor (Ground Floor)	15 ft min. I

Roof Form

Flat or Mansard Allowed	See Section 11-4.07
-------------------------	---------------------

Roof Mounted Elements

Height	10 ft max.
--------	------------

Adjacency Requirements

Stepback at Rear Parcel Line

Abutting T or F District		I
Parcels < 100' deep or	none required	
Parcels >= 100' deep	Within 20 ft of property line; 3 stories & 35 ft in height max.	
Abutting L, G, or M District	none required	
Abutting an Alley	none required	

¹ See Section 11-10.02 for means of measurement of height.

F. Frontages

Private Frontage Type	Front	Side St.	Standards
Shopfront	A	A	11-3.04
Common Entry	A	A	11-3.05
Stoop	A	A	11-3.06
Dooryard	X	A	11-3.07
Forecourt	X	X	11-3.08
Porch Projecting	X	X	11-3.09

Key A = Allowed X = Not Allowed

G. Facade Standards

Facade Transparency	Front	Side St.
Ground Floor Facade	65% min.	40% min.
Upper Floor Facade	15% min.; 50% max.	15% min.; 50% max.

Ground floor blank wall length 8 ft max. 32 ft max.
See Section 11-4.12 for Blank Wall Treatment Standards

H. Active Ground Floor Standards

Requirements by use ¹	Front	Side St.
Residential Uses		
Private residence	not req'd	not req'd
Common Space	required	15' min from corner
Non-Residential Uses ²	required	15' min from corner

¹ See Section 11-4.03 for Active Ground Floor design standards
² For commercial uses on the ground floor, the dimensions of the commercial space shall be a minimum of 30' deep from the front facade for a minimum of 60% of the front facade.

Issues of Concern

- Residents and other stakeholders have brought up several areas of concern that they want to make sure that project managers and consultants address. These include:
 - Historic Preservation
 - Urban Design including height and its impacts
 - Parking
 - Traffic
 - Environmental
 - Fiscal Impact
 - Public Process

Historic Preservation

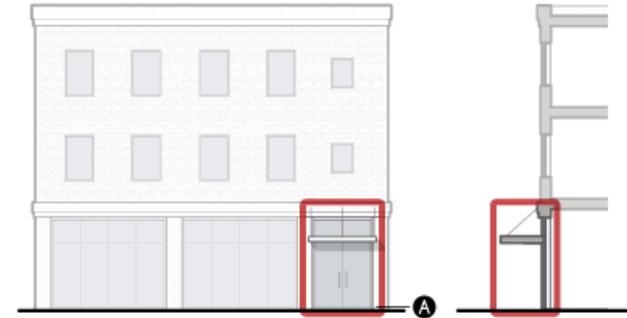
- There are several buildings of high preservation value in Belmont Center
- The 2008 Vision for Belmont Center specifically states as a recommendation:
“Preserve and enhance the Center’s historic character and charm.”
 - Members of the Historic District Commission have participated in the initial workshop and are discussing potential recommendations.
 - Form-Based zoning is an exceptional tool to facilitate preservation of specific notable buildings
 - It can also develop form and design requirements that complement the existing historic character of the district

Urban Design

- As the 2008 Report recommends, we are proceeding to establish “*step-downs*” in building height from the project area core to the edges adjacent to residential neighborhoods [Recommendation 6.30 (b)(iv)].
- Building heights must be viable to facilitate redevelopment thresholds and financial feasibility.
- Several key parcels in the Center have already been zoned with the MBTA 3A overlay, some of which are calibrated at a height of 3.5 stories or up to 55' in height. In some areas of the project, this would be closely matched. In others, it may be lower or higher.
- In terms of complementing existing Center urban design, the Form-Based Code is the ideal tool to establish acceptable form.
- The project will also include design requirements and guidelines to establish a more fine grained design theme for the Center.

Covered Entry

A space that provides sheltered access to an at-grade street-facing entrance with an overhead projecting structure.



Parking

- Parking has been a concern in Belmont for decades—not only in the Center.
- The Claflin Lot is rarely at capacity but is hard to access on foot.
- Street parking is highly prized and competitive and outdoor dining has added an additional challenge.
- The project will proceed with an objective of no net loss of parking.
- Additionally, the zoning will provide opportunities for new parking areas on sites, within buildings, and possibly include new structured parking.
- A **Parking Benefit District** is a contemporary tool to raise parking revenue and reinvest the funds for area improvements. This may also emerge from the project.

Traffic

- **Question:** *Will proposed zoning create additional traffic problems in and around the Center?*
 - Much of the traffic congestion in Belmont Center is regional cut-through traffic in the morning and evening rush hours. At its present levels, these commuters still find the route worth their time.
 - By rezoning the center and creating more destinations, additional visitors, including some cars, will come to the center. We expect that this may be one way to discourage the cut-throughs.
 - The project will also consider other mitigation options such as one-way pairs, signalization, and traffic calming measures.
 - In the end, some congestion is healthy because it discourages some cut-through traffic, slows traffic flow, and may reduce accidents.

Please visit our project page for a listing of the different traffic studies conducted in Belmont, some focusing exclusively on the Center.

Environmental

- Rezoning the Center is not expected to have negative environmental impacts. Specifically:
 - **Stormwater** - Most of the project area parcels are partially or fully covered with impervious surface so stormwater is unlikely to be increased.
 - **Sustainability** - Mixed-use development is much more sustainable and green than suburban sprawl and the zoning can embed specific requirements and further incentives for green development.
 - **Climate Friendly** - Walkable and bikeable urban design reduces auto trips and facilitates transit use. This lowers carbon emissions and can reduce traffic congestion.
 - **Less Expensive** - It is a more efficient form of land use, reducing utility infrastructure extents and costs
 - **Energy Efficient** - Newer buildings and site redevelopment can use more contemporary methods for lowering environmental impact. Modern energy codes will make buildings significantly more energy efficient.

Fiscal Impact

- The amount of additional commercial and residential space that could be added to the district will be informed by anticipated fiscal impact and urban design principles contributing to desired form.
- Maybe somewhere between 6,000 and 30,000 s.f. of commercial space and between 50 and 100 residential units¹ in the center itself, mostly studios, 1BRs, and a few 2BRs. Additional commercial and residential is projected for the Clafin area and Concord Avenue.²
- Fiscal impact is expected to be significantly positive with few municipal services measurably affected.

¹ Typically residential above storefronts are smaller units, not typically desirable for families.

² The Consultant will be able to project the amount of square footage the plan facilitates.

Public Process

- The public process for this project will be robust but somewhat different than a typical municipal zoning project.
- Includes 4-5 public informational or listening sessions
- Hold a public “Open House” format meeting where citizens and other stakeholders can circulate, see product deliverables, and ask questions of the Consultant, staff, and Board members.
- Already held a design workshop/charette and focus groups to get the design process initiated.
- There will be multiple online means for participating or gathering information emanating from the [Project Website](#) and inclusion in the project email distribution list.

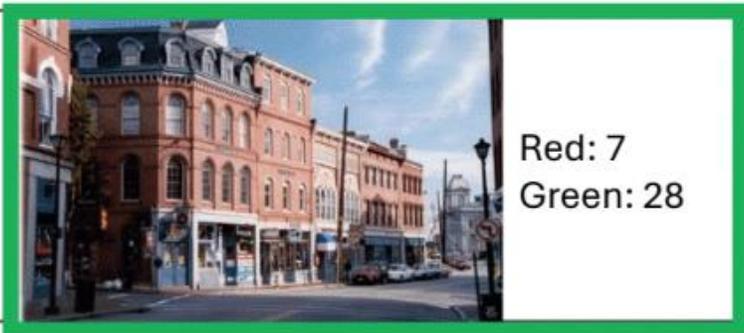
Workshop Feedback

- From the January 22 Workshop, contributors participated in an informal Visual Preference Survey (VPS) which elicited very helpful feedback regarding the types of architectural and urban design they preferred.
- There were 13 breakout groups that each filled in a map of the project area with things they wanted to see and things to be mindful of.
- Each table also came up with a list of five (5) “BIG IDEAS” that should contribute thinking to the project.

COMMERCIAL ADDRESSES WHAT IS APPROPRIATE FOR THE LEONARD STREET AREA?

- Place **GREEN** dots below the images you believe are appropriate for this part of the City.
- Place **RED** dots below the image that is most inappropriate for this part of the City.
- Add a post-it with comments if you like.

-  More of this
-  Not so much



COMMERCIAL ADDRESSES WHAT IS APPROPRIATE FOR THE LEONARD STREET AREA?

- Place **GREEN** dots below the images you believe are appropriate for this part of the City.
- Place **RED** dots below the image that is most inappropriate for this part of the City.
- Add a post-it with comments if you like.

-  More of this
-  Not so much



Red: 1
Green: 22



Red: 9
Green: 18



Red: 6
Green: 17



Red: 1
Green: 23



Red: 3
Green: 12



Red: 9
Green: 16



Red: 5
Green: 13



Red: 13
Green: 9



Red: 1
Green: 23

STREETS & STREETSCAPES

WHAT IS APPROPRIATE FOR THE LEONARD STREET AREA?

- Place **GREEN** dots below the images you believe are appropriate for this part of the City.
- Place **RED** dots below the image that is most inappropriate for this part of the City.
- Add a post-it with comments if you like.

 More of this

 Not so much



Red: 1
Green: 16



Red: 20
Green: 0



Red: 7
Green: 13



Red: 6
Green: 29



Red: 4
Green: 7



Red: 7
Green: 21



Red: 3
Green: 23



Red: 30
Green: 0



Red: 25
Green: 0

RESIDENTIAL ADDRESSES WHAT IS APPROPRIATE FOR THE LEONARD STREET AREA?

- Place **GREEN** dots below the images you believe are appropriate for this part of the City.
- Place **RED** dots below the image that is most inappropriate for this part of the City.
- Add a post-it with comments if you like.

-  More of this
-  Not so much



Red: 4
Green: 17



Red: 8
Green: 12



Red: 4
Green: 16



Red: 15
Green: 0



Red: 7
Green: 3



Red: 7
Green: 19



Red: 31
Green: 4



Red: 9
Green: 23



Red: 15
Green: 1

RESIDENTIAL ADDRESSES WHAT IS APPROPRIATE FOR THE LEONARD STREET AREA?

- Place **GREEN** dots below the images you believe are appropriate for this part of the City.
- Place **RED** dots below the image that is most inappropriate for this part of the City.
- Add a post-it with comments if you like.

 More of this
 Not so much



Red: 7
Green: 12



Red: 10
Green: 19



Red: 9
Green: 21



Red: 10
Green: 2



Red: 16
Green: 0



Red: 10
Green: 8



Red: 23
Green: 17



Red: 8
Green: 24



Red: 23
Green: 1

Next Steps and Project Schedule

- **Planning Board Standing Agenda Item** (2/25, 3/11, 3/25, 4/1, 4/15, 4/29, 5/6)
- **Public Listening Session** – February 27, 2025
- **Public Listening Session** – March 26, 2025
- **Open House Event** – April 10, 2025
- **Planning Board Public Hearing** – April 15 to May 6
- **First Town Meeting Opportunity** – May 2025

The Consultant (**Able.City**) will be providing the Town with a first draft product in Late February and will provide an updated final draft for public review and comment in late March.



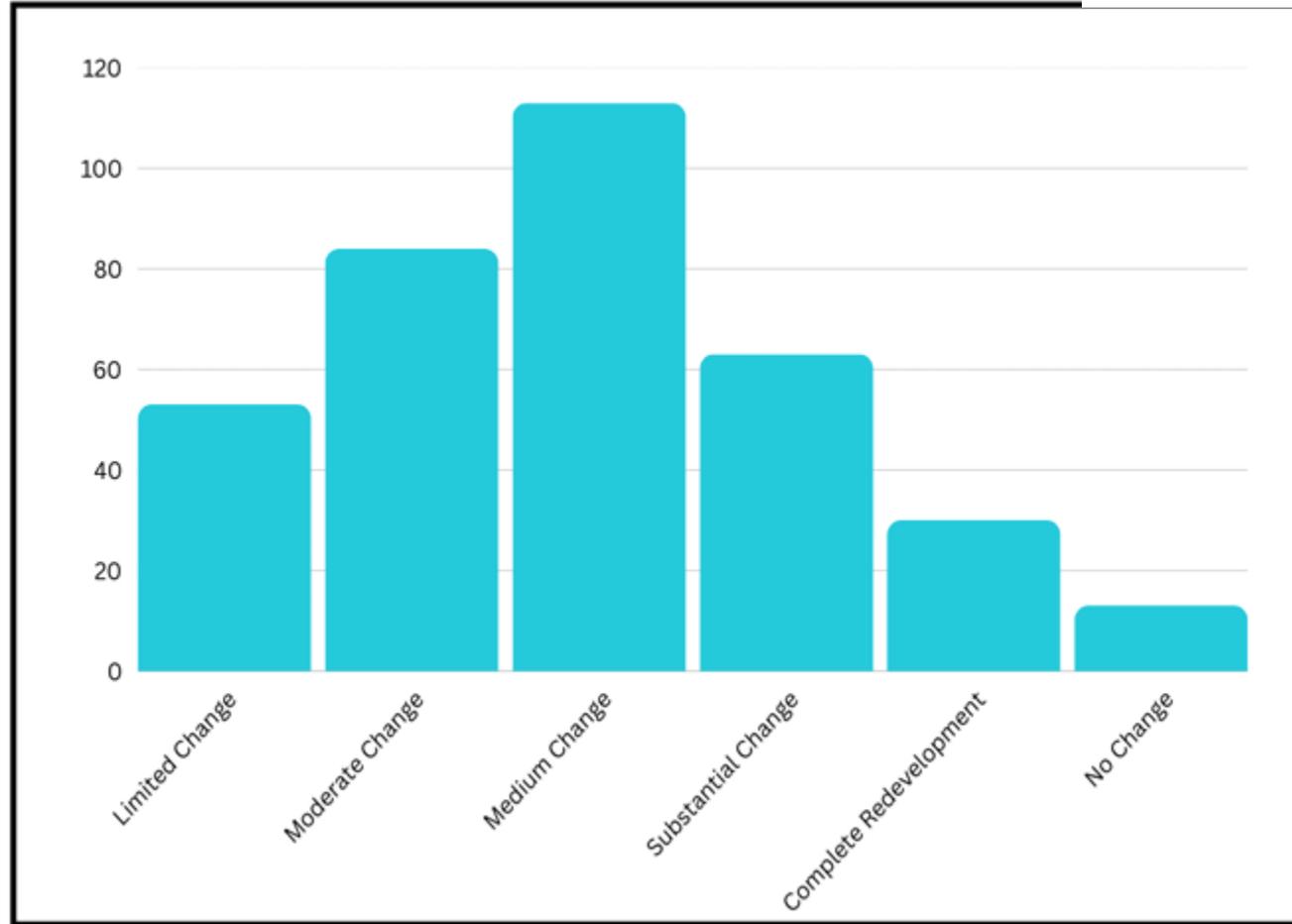
Public Comment

Questions & Comments

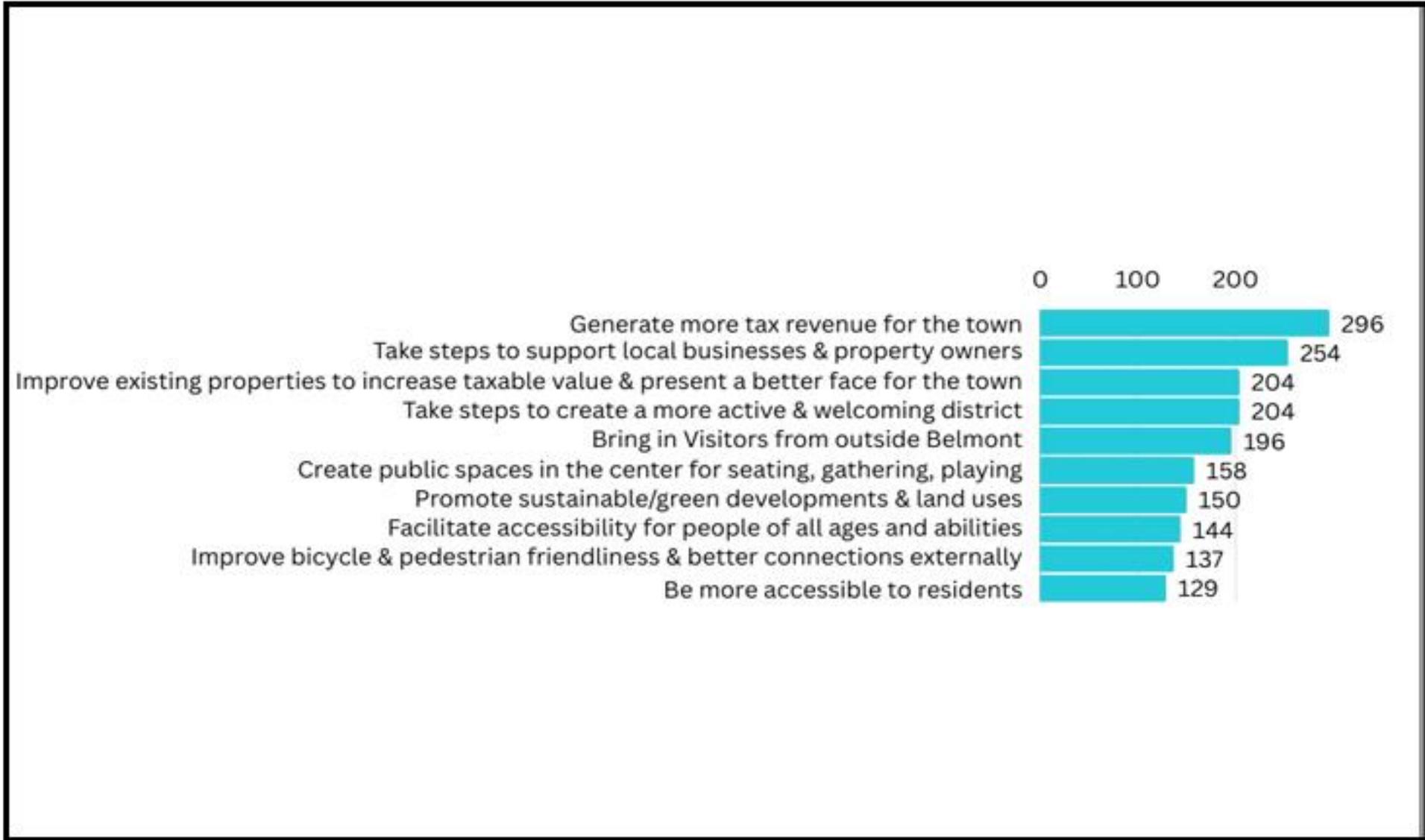
Synthesis of 5 BIG IDEAS

1. Make the Leonard Street Area a vibrant, multi-generational place
2. Safe, comfortable, and interesting streets for walking and biking
3. Increase the town's tax base with more commercial destinations
4. Protect and restore historic structures and places
5. New development should be compatible and respectful of context

What degree of change would you like see related to Leonard Street?



Response to Question 3 from Public Survey



What goals should the town embrace related to Belmont Center?

Response to Question 5 from Public Survey

Business-Related Feedback

- More diverse restaurants
- A grocery store or small market.
- More small businesses and independent stores
- No more banks, or similar oversaturated services.
- Spaces for family-friendly activities or kid-oriented businesses.
- A live music venue, space for local artists and other entertainment options.

Zoning and Land Use

- Improved zoning policies to prioritize a mix of businesses.
 - Policies to avoid over saturation of single business types (e.g., banks).

Community and Aesthetic

- More green spaces and public gathering areas. Improved streetscaping and pedestrian-friendly design (e.g., benches, lighting, planters).
- Consistent aesthetic in building facades (e.g., charming, historic feel).
 - Better utilization of vacant storefronts.
 - Enhanced outdoor seating for businesses.

Traffic, Parking, and Accessibility

- Solutions to ease traffic congestion.
- Better parking options (e.g., free parking, improved layout).
- Increased pedestrian and bike access.

Miscellaneous Concerns

- Balance residential and commercial interests.
- Avoid gentrification or changes that alienate existing residents.
- Ensure developments are family-friendly and inclusive.

Community Feel and Engagement

- Maintain the town's charm and avoid overdevelopment.
- Host more community events or farmers' markets.
 - Create spaces for socializing or gathering.
- Foster small-town vibes while improving vibrancy.
- Develop recreational spaces for families.

Other Public Survey Categories and Response Summaries

Affordable Housing & Increased Density

- Add more affordable housing, especially near public transportation
- Increase density in the center with residential options over shops and multiple stories

Public Transportation and Accessibility

- Maintain or improve public transportation access, emphasizing its importance for a vibrant town center
 - Suggest shuttle or bus services

Climate Resilience and Sustainability

- Prepare the center for climate change.
 - Improve walkability and encourage more eco-friendly transportation solutions.

Event Spaces and Community Integration

- Utilize empty or underutilized spaces for community-focused purposes, such as local events or teen/family recreation.
- Consider how new facilities like the rink and library complement businesses in the center.

Family and Teen-Friendly Spaces

- Desire for businesses catering to families and teenagers, such as game stores, craft spaces, indoor play areas, and family-friendly restaurants/cafes with play spaces.
- Emphasis on creating spaces that foster community interaction.

Other Public Survey Categories and Response Summaries

What you like best about Belmont generally?

