

TOWN OF BELMONT

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# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STUDY



Prepared for:

**The Town of Belmont, Massachusetts**

With coordination from:

**Belmont Office of Community Development**

With funds from:

**The Massachusetts Executive Office of Environmental Affairs**

*Assembled by:*

**The Cecil Group, Inc.**

**Abend Associates**

**September 2003**

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Many thanks to the residents of Belmont and the Corridor businesses.

*Prepared for:*

TOWN OF BELMONT, MASSACHUSETTS

*With coordination from:*

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The corridor represents a vital area to the residents and businesses of Belmont that should:

- Be an aesthetically pleasing and safe community to live and visit for people of all ages,
- Have village squares with a diversity of businesses that support and encourage its use by local residents,
- Ensure the corridor provides a safe flow of pedestrians and vehicles.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

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### I.A. THE COMMUNITY'S VISION

The Belmont Economic Development Study expresses a community vision for The Trapelo Road/Belmont Street Corridor ("The Corridor") that is founded upon its quality of life and opportunities to enhance the businesses, streetscape, and circulation, and to advance the Town of Belmont's long-range economic development goals. A statement of its vision serves as the introduction to this entire document and should be read carefully; its messages are echoed in every recommendation contained in the following pages. This vision appreciates many of the existing qualities of the Corridor, but recognizes that improvements over both the short and long term should occur. The vision also recognizes that these changes will require concerted action to become a reality.

There is a real concern about the safety of pedestrians, the vitality of businesses, parking availability, and the general economic atmosphere along the Corridor. However, the Town of Belmont is in a position to manage the changes so that the quality of life for the businesses, their patrons, and the residential abutters is maintained and enhanced.

This Study has been largely developed through public workshops and commentary from many interested citizens and businesses, and members of the Town's Office of Community Development. In this sense, the Study has many *authors* who have labored over the issues and choices that confront those that want to improve the area. This Plan reflects the citizens' consensus on changes for the future.

The following statement was developed by the Belmont Planning Board through a series of meetings and workshops in the community. It sets the stage for this Study and provides the overall purpose for improving the Corridor.

#### **Belmont Economic Development Mission Statement**

*The Town of Belmont has committed to improving the economic vitality of its commercial squares and business districts. The Trapelo Road/Belmont Street Corridor has been specifically targeted for improvements as it consists of diverse uses from dense commercial development at Waverley Square to single-family residential areas near Cushing Square. The Planning Board seeks to balance commercial revitalization efforts with residential and pedestrian needs, the use of business areas as main transportation routes, and other land-use concerns. The Board commits to promoting public participation and involvement in this planning process.*

Through a series of public meetings and workshops, the Planning Board has developed the following Goals to respond to this mission statement.

1. Promote pedestrian and bicycle improvements while maintaining traffic operations.
2. Improve parking in the commercial areas.
3. Improve the character of the commercial streets.
4. Review and update applicable regulations.
5. Promote economic development.

#### **I.B. PLANNING CONTEXT**

This Study of the Trapelo Road/Belmont Street Corridor investigated transportation impacts and identified measures to enhance the economic vitality of the Corridor. The study should provide a coherent direction for the Corridor's future and allow public expenditures to be most beneficial to the community.

The Massachusetts Executive Office of Environmental Affairs (EOEA) provided the Town of Belmont a grant as part of the Executive Order 418. EO 418 effectively provides many communities with funds to establish Community Development Plans, which include five elements: visioning, housing, open space, economic development, and transportation. The Town also contributed funds and in-kind planning services to support this study. The Town was able to focus on the Corridor study since it received waivers for previously completed elements (visioning, housing, and open space). This Study was prepared on behalf of the Town of Belmont Office of Community Development by The Cecil Group, a Boston based planning and design firm.

This Study identifies the existing conditions, goals, objectives, strategies for improvement, and specific recommendations to support economic development and improve transportation along the Corridor. It also recognizes plans and programs such as the McLean project and its impacts to the Corridor.

#### **I.C. SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS**

This Study identifies a series of actions as part of an implementation plan to promote economic development in the Town's commercial areas and specifically along the Corridor. It establishes goals and objectives that support the Town's Mission Statement. As part of a larger plan to improve the economic health and quality of life in the Town of Belmont, the results of this Study would support future decisions for specific projects along the Corridor. The Office of Community Development would administer these projects. Principal recommendations include:

### Economic Development

- Improve the physical appearance of business districts with design guidelines and streetscape controls.
- Establish gateways at main entrances to the Town of Belmont.
- Identify each commercial district as a distinct place.
- Support reuse of the fire station at Waverley Square.
- Establish economic development programs.
- Increase development with air rights uses over the commuter rail line.

### Land Use/Zoning

- Establish four distinct districts: Belmont Center, Town Squares, Transition, and Residential.
- Encourage mixed-use developments and increase density in town squares.
- Change LB III zones similar to Central and Palfrey Squares to LB I.
- Allow specific commercial uses “by right” within designated areas.
- Reduce front building setback requirements.
- Restrict residences and office uses to upper floors in commercial districts.
- Move zoning district lines to property lines.
- Allow restaurants with seating and liquor licenses in specified commercial zones.
- Prohibit vehicular drive-up window uses in LB I zones and Town Squares.

### Circulation

- Implement a 7-step strategy of coordinated transportation improvements for the Corridor:
  - Step I – Develop a standard street cross-section of the Corridor.
  - Step II – Develop lane requirements for key intersections.
  - Step III – Evaluate each roadway segment.
  - Step IV – Coordinate traffic and pedestrian/streetscape improvements.
  - Step V – Design streets and intersections according to specific situations.
  - Step VI – Design traffic control measures.
  - Step VII – Develop a parking strategy.



- Support the proposed town and regional bicycle networks.
- Construct a parking deck on the municipal lot at Cushing Square and a parking garage over the MBTA tracks at Waverley Square.
- Ensure pedestrian connections and sidewalks are continuous.
- Widen sidewalks where necessary to increase pedestrian safety.
- Establish visual cues and signature signs to identify special places such as town squares.
- Explore opportunities for an intra-municipal trolley service.
- Make parking space requirements for retail and service uses in LB I zones less restrictive.

#### Design Guidelines

- Restrict outdoor displays except during permitted special events.
- Prohibit flat roofs on one and two-story buildings.
- Make signage standards conform to design guidelines.
- Allow projecting signs.
- Require continuous variation in façade treatments.
- Require large windows in the facades.
- Allow awnings.

## II. PLANNING METHODOLOGY AND PROCESS

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### II.A. PLANNING PROCESS

The Economic Development Study was developed over a year-long period during which time there were numerous public meetings and workshops with the Planning Board. This work involved research, data collection, and analysis. This section identifies the methods and processes that were used to develop the Study.

#### Phase I. Plan Initiation and Overall Conditions

During the first phase, there were several meetings with the Planning Board to establish an approach and schedule for the planning process. The consultant and the Town of Belmont Office of Community Development (OCD) staff then collected baseline information about the Town in general and about the corridor. This information included town demographics, tax assessor data, state geographic information system (GIS) data, local housing and economic data, and US Census data. From this information and Town sources, the consultant produced several maps, which included land use and housing suitability maps.

#### Phase II. Establishing Goals and Objectives

A community workshop was held on January 25, 2003 to provide an overview of the study and a basic demographic assessment of the Town. A second workshop was held on February 28, 2003 to define the goals and objectives as they related to assessment and improvements along the Trapelo Road/Belmont Street Corridor. The results of these workshops are discussed in Section IV. Goals and Objectives.

The consultant met with the Board and the OCD and attended several Planning Board meetings to help determine and refine the Goals and Objectives. These groups also helped define the future of the Corridor based on the public's commentary received in the workshops and on the consultants' analysis.

#### Phase III. Mapping the Future of the Corridor

The consultant team reviewed available assessor records, traffic patterns, zoning requirements, and other relevant information in order to evaluate circulation and economic issues and opportunities along the corridor. Recommendations and design concepts were presented to the Planning Board at a public meeting and to other groups for their review. These concepts provided direction on potential recommendations that needed to be refined.

#### Phase IV. Preparation of the Draft Economic Development Plan

From the results of the community meetings, goals and objectives, meetings with the planning staff, and research of key issues, the consultant prepared a draft set of recommendations. The planning staff reviewed them and submitted the recommendations to the Planning Board for review.

#### **Phase V. Preparation of the Final Plan**

After consideration of the residents' comments from previous meetings and the Planning Board's comments, the consultant submitted a final plan to the Town. It included refinements to the recommendations and several maps and conceptual illustrations that support the vision and goals for the Trapelo Road/Belmont Street Corridor.

### III. SUMMARY OF EXISTING CONDITIONS

#### III.A. OVERVIEW

The Town of Belmont is generally a residential suburb located seven miles from the City of Boston, Massachusetts. Five towns border Belmont (see Table 1). It has excellent access to local and regional transportation facilities including a trackless trolley, commuter rail, bus service, and State Route 2. The land area of approximately 4.7 square miles supports almost 25,000 people and has a density of 5,305 people per square mile as shown in the following table.

*Table 1. Land and Population of Neighboring Communities*

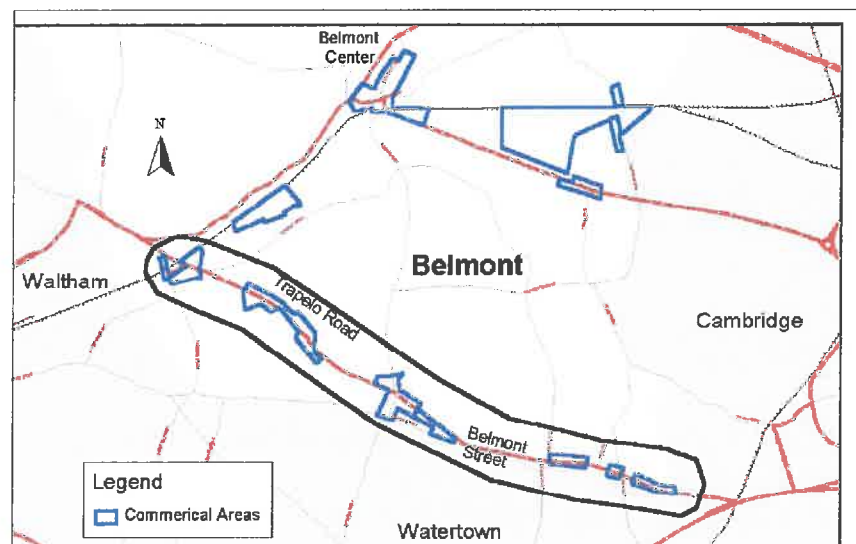
Community	Land Area (sq. mi.)	Population	Density
Arlington	5.18	44,630	8,618
Belmont	4.66	24,720	5,305
Cambridge	6.43	95,802	14,899
Lexington	16.40	28,974	1,767
Waltham	12.70	57,878	4,557
Watertown	4.11	33,284	8,098

Source: MA Dept. of Housing and Community Development, 2003

Belmont's history and growth dates back to colonial times when mainly agriculture supported its development. Transportation connections to Boston, including trolley and rail lines, spurred subdivision development in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. From that time, Belmont developed mostly as a residential area and currently has about seven percent of its land zoned as commercial.

The Economic Development Study focused on the Trapelo Road/Belmont Street Corridor (see Figure 1). This important corridor runs 2.2 miles east from the Waltham town line on Trapelo Road to the Cambridge city line on Belmont Street. It includes all the properties that front these roads as well as those that are part of the commercially-zoned districts.

*Figure 1. Map of the Trapelo Road/Belmont Street Corridor*



### III.B. TOWN-WIDE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

#### Existing Conditions

The economic conditions within Belmont are increasingly impacted by regional and national economic changes such as loss of customers from retailers on main streets and increased parking demands. However, there are some unique local conditions relative to regional and national information that can be understood from some of the data.

#### Town Demographics

The population in Belmont decreased about two percent between 1990 and 2000, and is projected to increase about three percent between 2000 and 2005 (see Table 2). Although the goods producing employers pay more than service-producing employers, the Town has many more service than goods-producing employers (see Tables 3 and 4).

*Table 2. Population for the Town of Belmont, 1980 - 2005*

Year	Population
1990	24,720
2000	24,194
2005*	24,920

\* Estimate, Massachusetts Department of Employment and Training, 2003  
Source: US Census, 1990, 2000

*Table 3. Economic Snapshot for the Town of Belmont*

Population	2000	24,194
	2005 (estimated)	24,908
Income	2000 Per Capita	NA
	1999 Median Family	\$95,057
	1999 Median Household	\$80,295
Wages for Quarter Ending December 2001	Average Weekly Wage	\$723.03
	Goods Producing Wage	\$1,051.64
	Service Producing Wage	\$685.18
Number of Employers for Quarter Ending December 2001	Goods Producing	75
	Service Producing	554
	Total	629

Source: Massachusetts Department of Environmental Training, March 2003

Employment in the industry sectors of Belmont has remained relatively flat over the past ten years. The service sector, however, has risen and fallen over 15 percent during the past ten years (see Figure 2).

The service sector provides almost half of the jobs in Belmont. Aside from the service sector, only employment in the government sector has shown any real increase in employment, almost 22 percent since 1996.

Table 4. Goods Producing Industries in the Quarter Ending December 2001

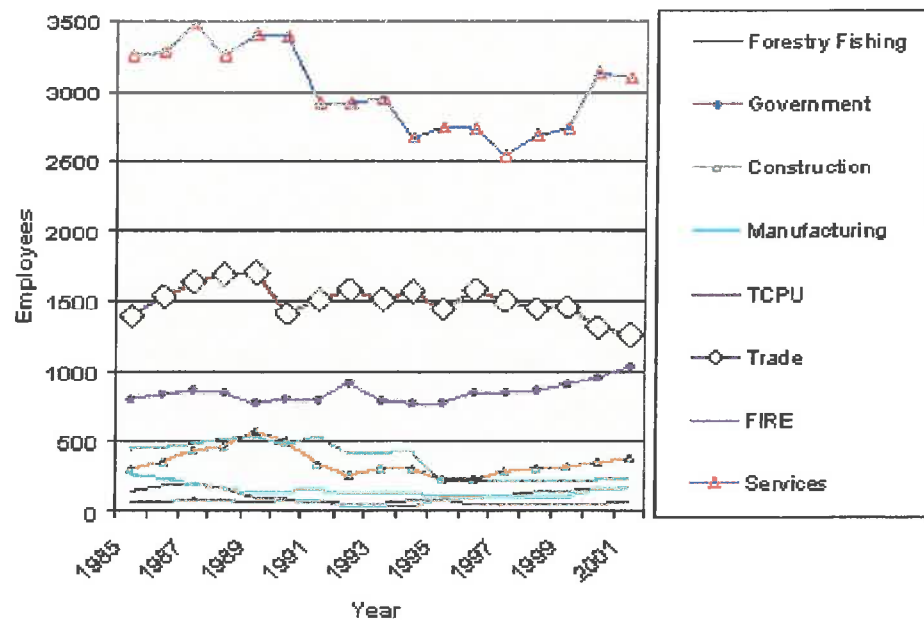
Industry	Number of Employers	Employment	Average Weekly Wage
Agricultural Services	14	185	\$542.00
General Building Contractors	8	50	\$1,884.00
Heavy construction, Ex. Building	***	***	***
Special Trade Contractors	39	289	\$1,142.00
Print and publishing	7	59	\$1,591.00
Fabricated metal products	***	***	***
Industry machinery and equipment	***	***	***
Electronic and other electric equipment	***	***	***
Instruments and related products	***	***	***
Total for goods producing industries	75	687	\$1,051.74
Total for all industries	629	5,374	\$732.00

\*\*\* - suppressed data

Between 1991 and 2001, employment dipped and rose the same amount, approximately 13 percent. Although the number of business establishments have increased by about nine percent during this same period, the number of establishments has decreased by five percent in the past six years (see Figure 3).

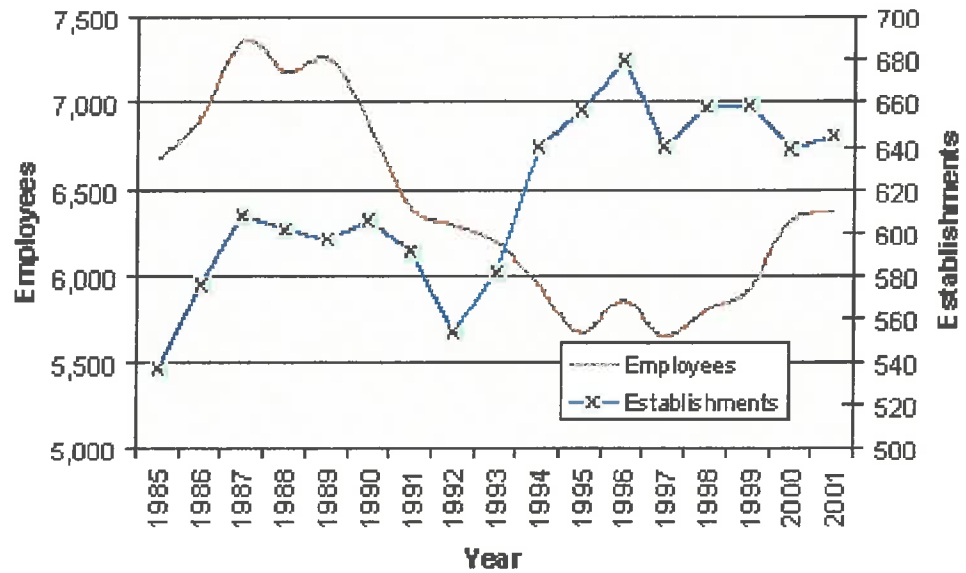
Although unemployment decreased over the past ten years, it rose 1.3 percent between 2000 and 2001 (see Figure 4).

Figure 2. Changes in Employment by Industry in Belmont, 1985 - 2001



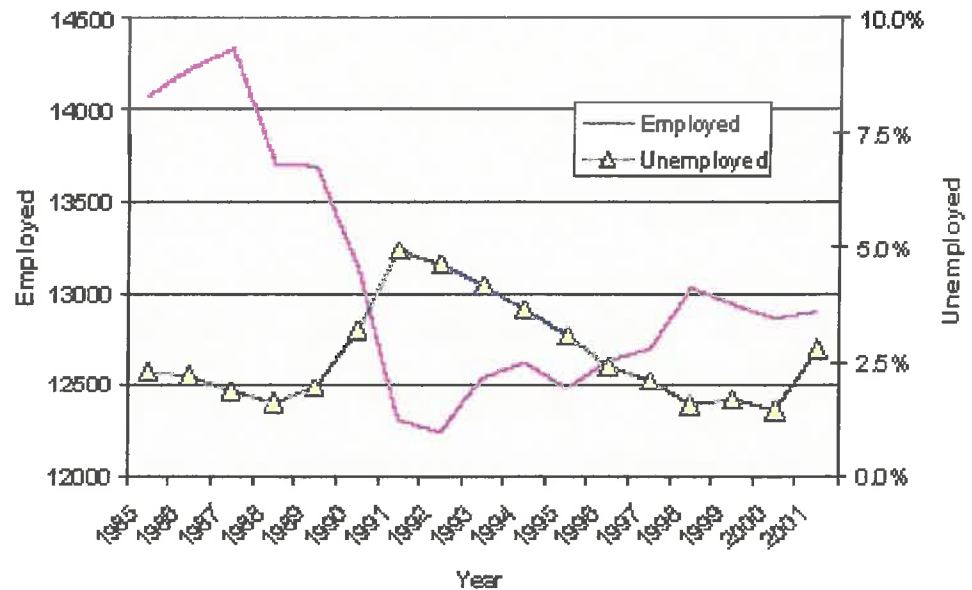
Source: MADET, 2002

Figure 3. Employees and Establishments in Belmont, 1985 - 2001



Source: MADET, 2003

Figure 4. Unemployment in Belmont, 1985 - 2001



Source: MADET, 2003

### III.C. CORRIDOR AND DISTRICTS

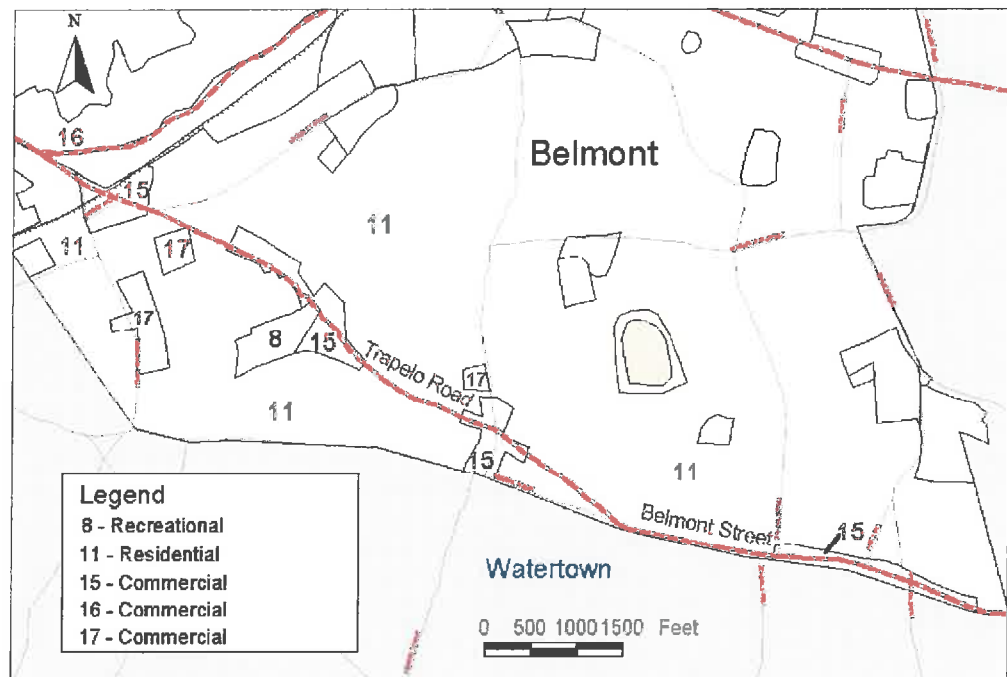
#### Land Use and Zoning

Zoning is one tool that the Town uses to plan, develop, and manage land and its uses. Zoning districts represent what the Town's future uses should be for particular areas and do not always reflect existing land uses. Identification of land uses provides an indication of existing uses and land patterns. Use of these planning tools contribute to the understanding of how the existing land use patterns and relationships can be developed and managed to improve their contribution to the economy of Belmont.

#### Land Use

Land-use zones are classified according to the types of uses that are currently in an area. The Trapelo Road/Belmont Street Corridor has three different types of land uses according to state land-use records: commercial, recreational, and residential (see Figure 5 and Table 5). Approximately ½ of the land along the two main roads of the Corridor is identified as commercial property. The remaining areas are identified as residential and recreational.

*Figure 5. Land Use Along the Corridor*



Source: MassGIS database, 2003



*Table 5. Description of Land Uses Along the Corridor*

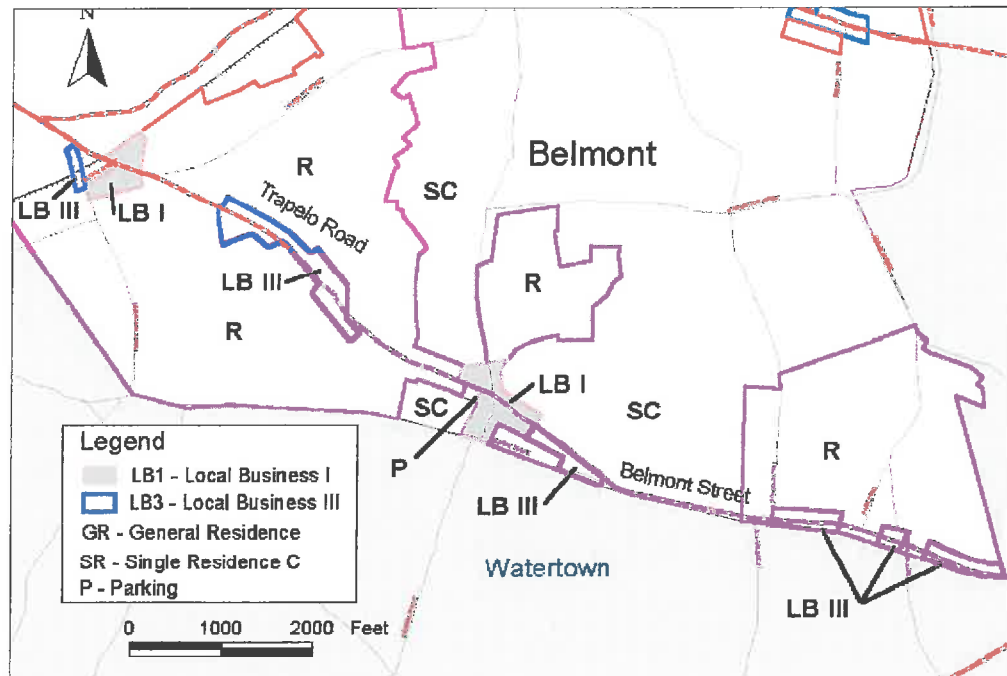
Code	Abbreviation	Description
8	RS	Spectator Recreation
11	R1	Residential: Smaller than ¼ acre lots
15	UC	Commercial: General urban, shopping center

Source: MassGIS, Town of Belmont, Massachusetts, 2002

### Zoning

The Town of Belmont designates specific districts and allowable land uses and activities within the target area according to a Schedule of Use and Intensity Regulations within its Zoning By-law. There are three business districts in the Zoning By-law: Local Business I, II, and III. Most of the Squares and the immediate areas surrounding them are zoned for Local Business districts (LB I and LB III) with residential districts (R and SC) located between them (see Figure 6 and Table 6). Districts that have main intersections are generally designated as LB I and LB III and include Waverley and Cushing Squares. The other commercial zoning category along the corridor is LB III, which generally has more residential uses mixed among the commercial uses and includes Central and Palfrey Squares.

*Figure 6. Commercial Zoning Districts Along the Corridor*



Source: MassGIS database, 2003

*Table 6. Description of Zoning Districts Along the Corridor*

Code	Description
LB I	Local Business I
LB III	Local Business III
P	Parking
R	General Residence
SC	Single Residence C

Source: Town of Belmont, Zoning Ordinance, 2003

#### *LB I District – Local Business I*

The LB I districts along the corridor are predominantly composed of a range of designated commercial and mixed-use properties with a smaller component of multi and single-family residential properties. Commercial uses include specialty retail, franchised businesses, restaurants, health and fitness, and services, such as banks.

These districts have a strong commercial base and typically do not have associated residential uses. For example, there are no residences on the street level of the LB I district in Waverley Square. However, moderate density residences are generally located adjacent to these districts and businesses.

#### *LB III District – Local Business III*

The LB III districts are generally composed of separate residential and commercial properties as well as mixed-use properties. Many mixed-use properties were two and three-story homes that were converted for retail and office uses on one or more of the levels. Other properties are strictly commercial with one story, and some have up to seven businesses. Typical uses include coffee shop, ethnic market, real estate, pizza, video, hair salon, repair, laundry, and similar non-chain businesses.

#### *P District – Parking Lot*

The P district designates areas for parking lots. There are two parking districts in the study area. One has a lot for 52 vehicles in Cushing Square. The other lot is located in Waverley Square and has 40 parking spaces. The town owns and manages these municipal lots and provides parking at long-term (monthly) and short-term (2 hours maximum) rates.

#### *GR District - General Residence*

The GR district allows single and two-family dwellings on small lots (7,000 square feet minimum). There are no allowances for multi-family dwellings.

#### *SC District – Single Residence C*

There is only one SC district in the study area. It is adjacent to the Cushing Square LB I and P districts. The SC district only allows detached single-family dwellings on lots with a minimum of 9,000 sq. ft. There are no allowances for two or multi-family dwellings.

### Assessment of Commercial Districts

The commercial districts along the Trapelo Road/Belmont Street corridor contain a diversity of businesses, residences, and mixed-use properties. This section assesses the properties within each district. These assessments were based on assessor data and site visits.

### Corridor Overview

There are 126 parcels within eight commercial districts along the Trapelo Road / Belmont Street Corridor (see Tables 7 and 8). Although many of the parcels contain multiple businesses, this study assessed the uses at the parcel level only. For example, a large parcel with six retail businesses is identified as one commercial parcel.

*Table 7. Classification of Properties in the Corridor Districts by Land Use*

District (location*)	Residences	Mixed Use, Primarily Residential	Mixed Use, Primarily Commercial	Commercial	Industrial	Total
East Belmont	7	2	0	14	0	23
Cushing Square	9	52	3	23	0	37
Palfrey and Central Sq.	12	2	0	28	1	43
Waverley Square	8	1	1	13	0	23
<b>Total Properties</b>	36	7	4	78	1	126
<b>Percent of Total</b>	29%	6%	3%	62%	1%	100%

\* See Figure 6 for district locations.

*Table 8. Land Area of the Commercial Districts by Use on the Corridor*

	Residential	Commercial	Mixed use	Total	Acres	Percent of Total
East Belmont	23,070	83,215	8,583	114,868	2.64	12%
Cushing Square	47,079	184,677	8,237	239,993	5.51	26%
Palfrey and Central Sq.	51,888	324,149	9,212	385,249	8.84	41%
Waverley Square	42,380	138,727	16,838	197,945	4.54	21%
<b>Total</b>	164,417	730,768	42,870	938,055	21.53	100%
<b>Percent of Total</b>	17%	78%	5%	100%		

Commercial properties, those that are solely for the use of an allowable business in the district, represent more than half of the properties (62 percent) along the Corridor. A relatively smaller percent of parcels are identified as mixed use (nine percent). A significant portion of the properties within the commercial districts, almost 30 percent, is residential, and most of them contain two-family units.

### *East Belmont*

There are three LB III commercial districts along Belmont Street. Half of the properties are commercial and appear to be in good to excellent condition; the other half are residential.

### *Cushing Square*

Cushing Square, which has two commercial zoning districts (LB I and LB III) and one parking district, has over 35 parcels. Mixed-use parcels represent more than 30 percent of the parcels in the district, which is a higher percentage than in other districts along the Corridor. Portions of this district have been revitalized, as many of the buildings and storefronts are in excellent condition. However, it is clear that there was no design coordination between the various private properties.

### *Palfrey and Central Squares*

Palfrey and Central Squares are located within the LB III zoning district. The east portion of this area has several vacant properties and is beginning to undergo redevelopment. Plans were recently approved for a new commercial building at the former VW dealership. A new municipal fire station headquarters is also being planned for the north side of Palfrey Square. The west portion of this district has mainly small retail shops and the only cinema in Belmont. Although there are some revitalized buildings, many of the storefronts do not appear to be in good condition and need to be updated or restored. The LB III zoning regulations are restrictive and will most likely limit opportunities for these Squares. However, there is an opportunity to improve the types of business from marginal, low-end businesses to ones that improve the buildings and increase the property values as described in the Actions and Policies section of the recommendations.

### *Waverley Square*

Waverley Square has two separate districts, LB I and LB III. There is a diverse mix of commercial, mixed-use, and residential properties that line Trapelo Road and several other streets in the Square. A large supermarket, Shaw's, borders the LB I district on the northwest side.

Waverley Square is the main transportation center for the western part of Belmont: it has a commuter rail station and a bus station that serves several bus lines. The combination of uses in and adjacent to these two districts and the existing travel patterns and layout of intersections contribute to the high accident rates in the Square (see Traffic Accidents and Safety).

### Real Estate Inventory and Assessment

This chapter presents information on the quantity and type of real estate in the commercial district along the Trapelo Road/Belmont Street corridor. The consultants used the Belmont Assessor's database as an initial starting point for the real estate research. The Assessor's database was sorted by the map and lot number. Parcels outside the LB I and LB III commercial districts were eliminated from further review. As a result of this de-selection, 126 parcels in the commercial districts were categorized and inventoried. They included many types of uses including commercial, residential, and mixed uses.

In order to gain a better understanding of the real estate issues, the consultants performed a walking survey of all the properties in the commercial districts. The observations provided information relative to the type of space (i.e. commercial, residential, or mixed use), information on the apparent vacancy at each property, and the overall condition of the streetscape and buildings. This information was used to create a property database, based on modifications to the Town's assessor's data.

### Economic Assessment of the Commercial Districts

The properties within the commercial districts utilize a substantial amount of land along the corridor (see Table 9 and Figure 7). The assessed valuation for the study region is \$70.6 million. Given the assessment for all properties in the Town, the properties in the planning area represent approximately two percent of the Town's assessed valuation. The Palfrey and Central Squares district had highest number of vacant properties, including the former VW dealership. This could be reflective of the restrictive LB III Zoning.

*Table 9. Summary of Land Use and Economic Values in the Commercial District Properties*

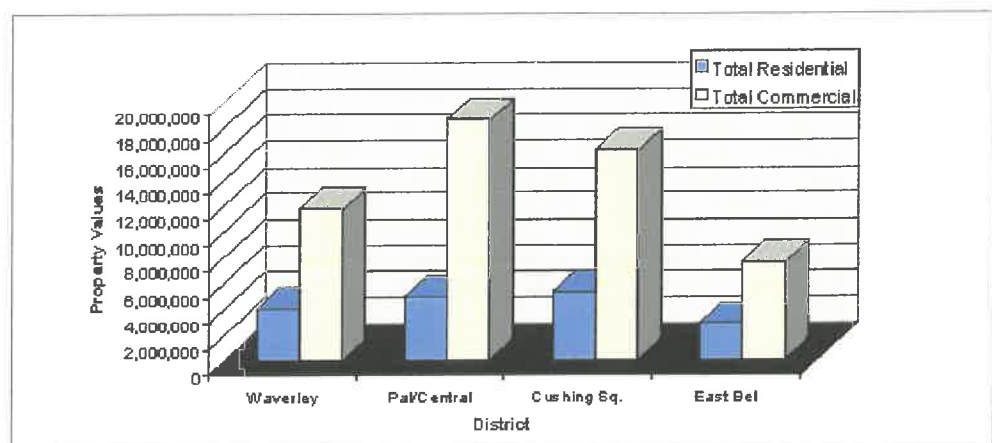
Area	Parcels	Land Area (Acres)	Assessed Valuation (\$Millions)	Value (\$Millions per Acre)	Vacancy Rate (%) <sup>1</sup>
Waverley Square	23	4.5	\$15.6	\$3.4	0
Central and Palfrey Squares	43	8.8	\$23.3	\$2.6	7
Cushing Square	37	5.4	\$21.4	\$3.9	0
East Belmont Squares	23	2.6	\$10.3	\$3.9	4
Total Four Sub-areas	126	21.3	\$70.6	--	--

Source: Belmont Assessor Database, 2002 and The Cecil Group, Inc.

1. Vacancy rates were determined in February 2003.

Although the Palfrey and Central Squares district have the highest assessed values, they have the lowest value per acre. This suggests that the property values could be substantially improved to increase their contribution to the tax base relative to the other districts.

*Figure 7. Property Values in the Corridor Business Districts*



Source: Assessor Data Base, Town of Belmont, Fiscal Year 2002

### *Tax Impacts*

Properties in the study area have an assessed valuation of more than \$70 million (see Table 10). Based on the tax rate for commercial and industrial properties of \$11.19 per \$1,000 of assessed valuation in fiscal year 2002, these properties contributed almost \$0.8 million on an annual basis, excluding personal property tax revenue. Improvements through both revitalization and new developments achieved through rezoning will, of course, help increase the tax base as well as revenues.

*Table 10. Estimated Property Tax Revenue by District*

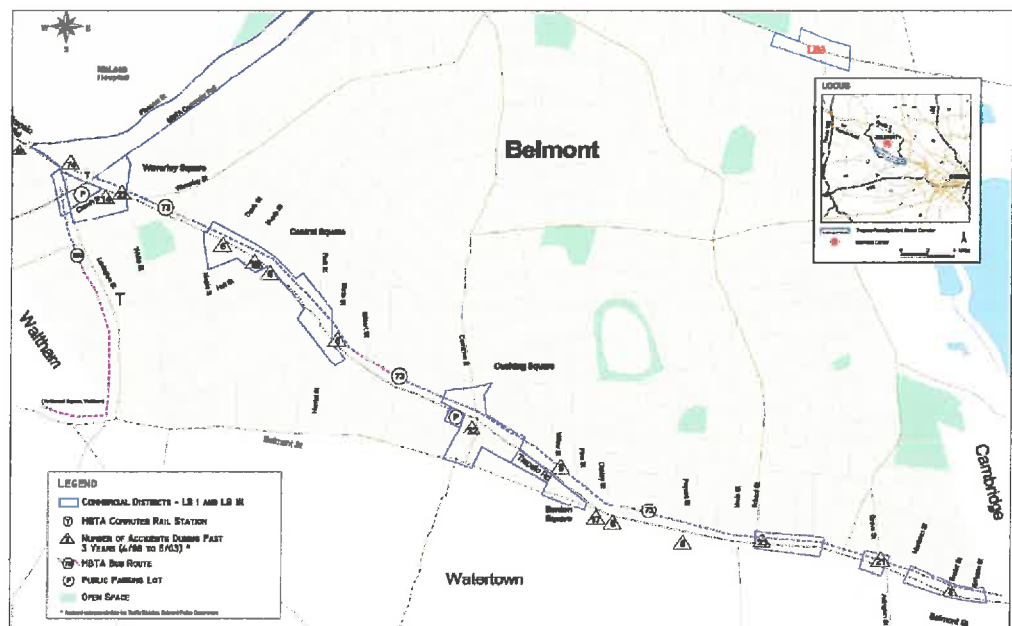
District	Assessed Valuation In Millions	Tax Revenue
Waverley Square	\$15.6	\$115,492
Central and Palfrey Squares	\$23.3	\$239,007
Cushing Square	\$21.4	\$261,074
East Belmont District	\$10.3	\$174,452
Total	\$70.6	\$790,025

Source: Belmont Assessor's Data Base, Fiscal Year 2002 and The Cecil Group, Inc.

### **Transportation**

As previously noted, the Trapelo Road/Belmont Street corridor runs approximately 2.2 miles in an east/west direction along the south side of Belmont (see Figure 8). At the eastern end, almost one mile of it (Belmont Street) borders the Town of Watertown and connects to the City of Cambridge. The western portion runs through Belmont and connects to the City of Waltham after it passes through Waverley Square.

*Figure 8. Existing Conditions*



The Corridor is designated as a principal artery according to the MassGIS database. Although this corridor is striped for one lane in each direction, it supports two lanes of traffic in each direction at various locations and times. In general, this two-lane use allows for the free flow of traffic that passes through the Town, especially during the commuter hours as well as the traffic that stops at places along the corridor and vehicles that traverse the Town.

#### Traffic Accidents and Safety

Accident data and other sources of information, including the configuration of roads, intersections, crosswalks, and signals, provided insight needed to improve the safety of Belmont's roads. Accidents along Trapelo Road and Belmont Street from the past three years were categorized by location and type. There were 596 accidents recorded along the corridor between January 1, 2000 and December 31, 2002 according to accident data from the Traffic Division of the Belmont Police Department. These include all types of accidents including vehicles as well as pedestrian/vehicle occurrences. Of this amount, almost 25 percent were along Belmont Street.

#### *Pedestrian*

Pedestrian and bicycle accident studies are not conducted on a regular basis, and therefore, little data is available that synthesizes accidents for specific areas. However, in one study conducted between 1989 and 1991, there were 22 pedestrian and bicycle accidents along the corridor (see Table 11). Trapelo Road had the highest number of pedestrian accidents in Belmont according to this study. There were pedestrian fatalities in each of the last two years on Trapelo Road.

The Belmont Safety Committee also produced a study of accidents that occurred in Belmont from 1998 to 2002. During this period, there were 137 accidents along the Trapelo Road/Belmont Street corridor.

#### *Vehicles*

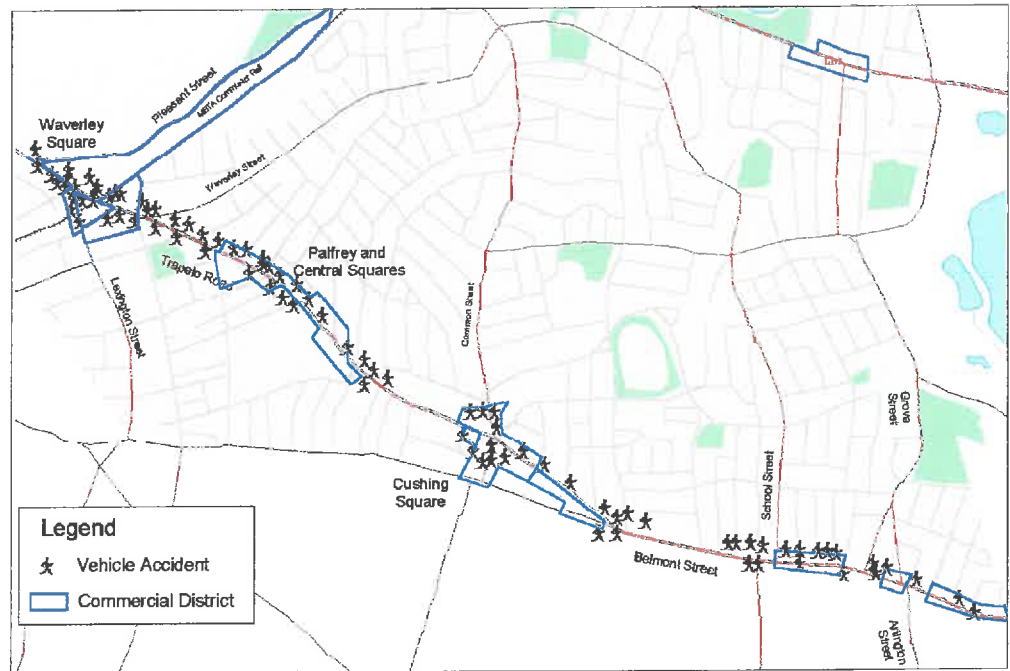
The following table shows there were a high number of bicycle and pedestrian accidents during the three-year period. Almost one-third of the accidents in the town were along the corridor. There were also a significant amount of hit and run accidents.

*Table 11. Bicycle and Pedestrian Accidents Along the Corridor, 1989-1991*

Pedestrian	Bicycle	Total Corridor	Total Town
13	9	22	66

Source: Minuteman-Charles River Bikeway Connector Feasibility Study, MHD, November 1996.

Figure 9. Location of Pedestrian Accidents Along the Corridor, January 1988 to February 2002



Source: MassGIS, 2003; Belmont Safety Committee, 2003.

### *Bicycles*

Bicycle accidents along the corridor deserve attention and improvement due to the high number accidents. There were 9 bicycle accidents between 1988 and 2002 along Trapelo Road and Belmont Street. Waverley Square also continues to be a high accident location according to phone conversations with the Belmont Police Department.



## IV. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

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### IV.A. OVERVIEW

An important component of the Economic Development Study was to solicit public commentary and discussion about the goals and objectives needed to improve the economic climate within the community along the Corridor. A public workshop, organized by the Planning Board, was held on February 25, 2003 at the Belmont Town Hall. At this meeting, the consultant facilitated a discussion of goals and objectives with a group of residents and the Board and staff of the Town of Belmont Office of Community Development (OCD). The focus of the meeting was to provide an understanding of the economic, land use, and circulation issues along the Corridor, options for its improvement, and to develop goals and objectives that would be used to support decisions concerning future improvements.

From this and other meetings with residents and the Board and staff, a list of goals and objectives was developed and subsequently refined. They reflect the main concerns and issues of the Town and the Corridor and provide direction on which improvements are needed.

Extensive public commentary was received by using various methods including planning board meetings, phone calls, correspondence, and the internet. Although many of these items reflect concerns of individuals and various groups at the workshop, some items did not represent a general consensus and were not considered for further evaluation.

### IV.B. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The community's Mission Statement at the beginning of this document serves as the guiding principle for strategies and development recommendations identified within the study. Each goal is designed to fulfill the Mission Statement in some manner. The goals and objectives also express a destination or improvement that the residents want to reach. The objectives identify improvements and programs needed to support the goals as well as the vision of the community. It is noted again here:

#### ***Belmont Economic Development Mission Statement***

*The Town of Belmont has committed to improving the economic vitality of its commercial squares and business districts. The Trapelo Road/Belmont Street Corridor has been specifically targeted for improvements as it consists of diverse uses from dense commercial development at Waverley Square to single-family residential areas near Cushing Square. The Planning Board seeks to balance commercial revitalization efforts with residential and pedestrian needs, the use of business areas as main transportation routes, and other land-use concerns. The Board commits to promoting public participation and involvement in this planning process.*

**Goal 1: Promote pedestrian and bicycle improvements while maintaining traffic operations.**

*Objectives*

- Promote pedestrian improvements while balancing the need to maintain vehicular traffic flow in the commercial areas.
- Improve pedestrian and bicyclist safety.
- Locate bus stops where they can be most effective and safe.
- Support bicycle connections where appropriate.
- Evaluate the number of travel lanes and appropriately define them considering the needs of each area.

**Goal 2: Improve parking in the commercial areas.**

*Objectives:*

- Ensure there is adequate parking for businesses and residents.
- Explore and promote shared off-street parking opportunities.
- Promote actions that will improve the attractiveness of off-street parking areas.
- Promote the off-street parking lots within the commercial areas.
- Identify and employ parking management strategies.

**Goal 3: Improve the character of the commercial streets.**

*Objectives:*

- Create a sense of place and cohesiveness for the commercial areas.
- Create a cohesive urban design standard for commercial areas.
- Promote businesses that serve local needs and contribute to the uniqueness of the Corridor's commercial areas.
- Identify, implement and support programs that promote rehabilitation of significant buildings.
- Promote the adoption of a street tree-planting program.

**Goal 4: Review and update applicable regulations.**

*Objectives:*

- Adopt by-laws and regulations that encourage businesses that generate foot traffic.
- Evaluate the impacts of multi-family housing.
- Adopt by-laws and regulations that encourage mixed-use, diverse, and more intensive development in appropriate locations.

**Goal 5: Promote economic development.**

*Objectives:*

- Identify and establish economic development programs that provide financial incentives for new businesses.
- Encourage and publicize measures to make Belmont friendly to business.
- Identify options that promote a diversity of commercial opportunities.
- Identify and pursue state and federal funds that encourage and support business improvements and revitalization of commercial districts.

## V. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

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### V.A. OVERVIEW

As in many other communities, the Town of Belmont is struggling with the desire to revitalize its commercial areas and village squares by initiating improvements that will maintain civic pride and provide a significant quality of life concurrent with financial benefits in the forms of local goods, services, and municipal fiscal stability. This concept has been expressed in the Town's goals and objectives established within this Study. However, while making these improvements, the community must also address the desires of neighborhoods to maintain a consistent quality of life and mitigate the impacts that may result from the changes necessary to maintain or improve that commercial vitality. These are the issues which economic development plans are meant to address.

*Economic development* is a term used to define the ways in which a community can both spur increases in the commercial tax base from commercial property improvements and provide new goods and services to the local or regional populations. The options for these improvements, however, are limited by the geographic areas zoned for commercial uses, supporting infrastructure, and accessibility of public ways to these centers of commerce. Therefore, each community bases their decisions for economic development on the local desires to both create change and the ability to allocate public funds.

The focus of the Study has been on the Trapelo Road/Belmont Street Corridor and to determine the goals of the community, create a policy framework for improvement, and prepare an action plan that will allow the town to reach those goals. In completing this study, the understanding that Trapelo Road and Belmont Street comprise a major transportation corridor has influenced the planning by requiring consideration for the traffic and street improvements.

## V.B. PRINCIPAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The principal recommendations proposed in the Belmont Economic Development Study focus on improving the streets and sidewalks, the village business districts, regulations and zoning, and the modes of transportation. They are designed to achieve the community's vision and goals for the Town's business areas and have evolved both in response to the existing conditions and community needs for an improved quality of life.

The overall directions of the adopted economic development policies within Belmont seek to:

- Encourage the improvement and expansion of the types of commercial uses that fit with a small-scale community business district,
- Establish regulatory standards that encourage high quality buildings within the commercial areas, and
- Create street designs that ensure safety of travel and encourage pedestrian activity.

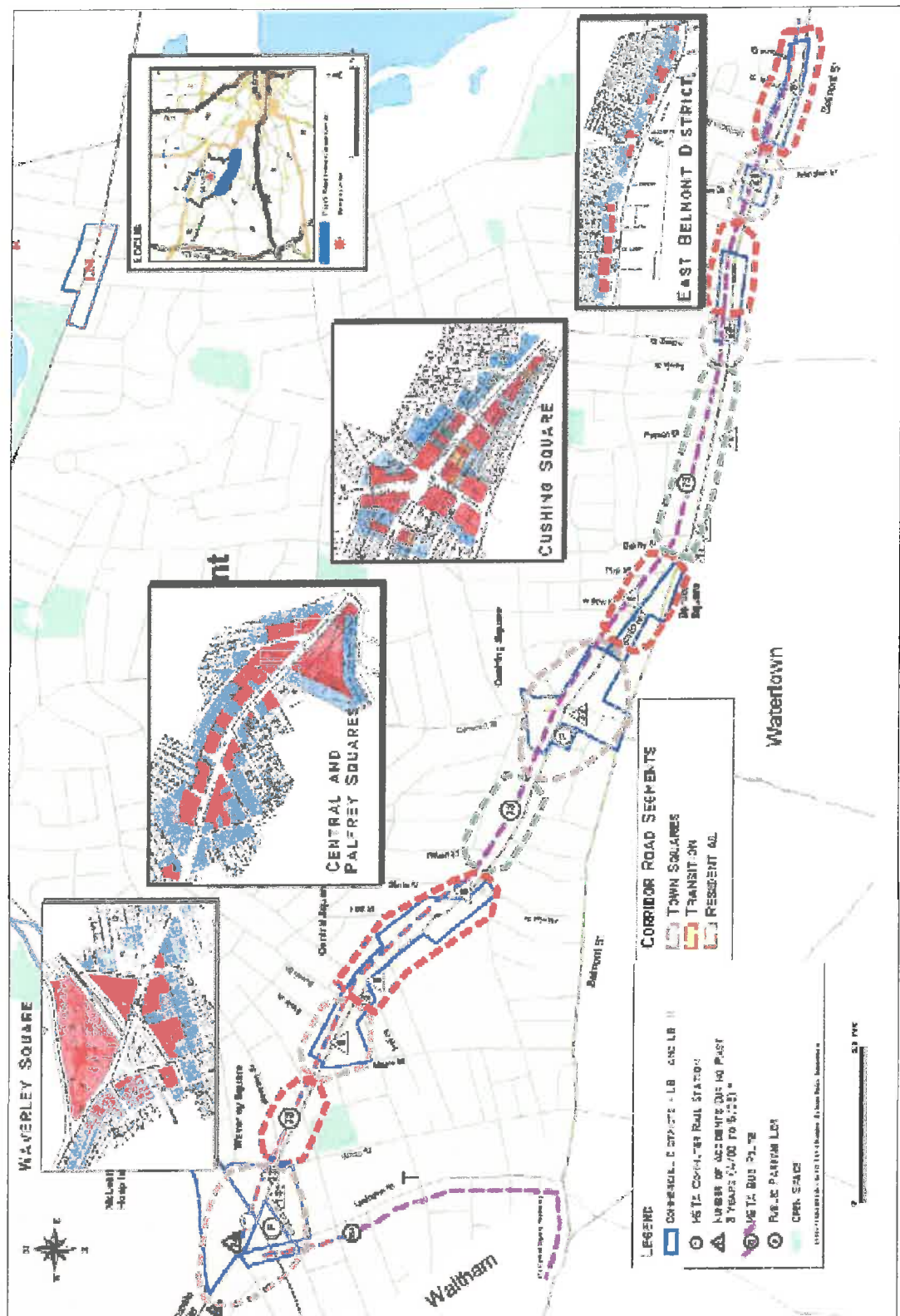
The following guidelines and recommendations are presented as concepts that could largely achieve these goals when applied as a **comprehensive set of actions**. Each of these concepts carries a need to act on regulatory reforms and commit significant public funding to accomplish the goals. Any regulatory changes, however, will not immediately impact existing land uses, and most of the capital ideas can be developed as phased improvements that minimize the fiscal impacts over time.

## ACTIONS AND POLICIES

### Establish Distinct Districts

Distinct districts should be established to define the commercial areas and adjacent or connecting traffic corridors with different land use and public investment criteria. Four general categories and at least one subdistrict are proposed to distinguish each of the commercial villages and the connecting street corridors. These categories should be established with overlay zoning districts or otherwise resolved with the existing zoning (see Figure 10). The categories will also direct capital improvement projects in accordance with the criteria incorporated within the districts. These districts are based on the connection between access and land use and provide guidelines for both the streetscape and buildings.

Figure 10. Proposed Overlay Districts



The proposed district categories are:

### **1. Belmont Center**

Belmont Center should be distinct from the other LB I zoned areas. It should be the true center of commercial and civic activity, and therefore, should have a different set of guidelines and characteristics to represent its civic, historic, and commercial uses and values. This district applies only to the existing downtown and corresponds to the current zoning (LB I). Within this district, the following guidelines shall apply:

- a. Only retail and service uses are allowed on the first floor; residential and office space is only permitted on upper floors.
- b. “Formula” or national chain type businesses will be allowed within structures that conform to the downtown design standards.
- c. Scale of development will be allowed to range from a Floor Area Ratio of 1.0 and up, but large buildings (more than 30,000 sq. ft.) will be subject to special permit reviews.
- d. Building designs will require zero setbacks for front and side yards, maximize windows and visibility into the storefronts, and create a high degree of variability in the façades within an approved palette of materials and colors.
- e. Regardless of the building design, formal open space areas will be included to break up visual lines and create variety in the public spaces.
- f. Signage shall be reasonably small, but variable to complement the building designs, based on conformance with material, size, and positional standards. Internally lit and neon signs will be permitted when the signs only advertise the place of business and not just products.
- g. Public parking will be provided, predominantly supported with public lots and on-street spaces, and will be used to reduce parking requirements for uses to allow maximum building footprints.
- h. Streetscape improvements will be urban in form to maximize pedestrian crossing safety and allow full range of vehicle stopping, parking, and turning movements.
- i. Street cross sections will allow different travel modes and movements to occupy multiple lanes.
- j. Street furniture will be maximized according to space available.
- k. All utilities (excepting the existing trolley lines) will be placed underground or in the rear of buildings that front the main street.

## 2. Town Squares

The Town Squares district applies to Waverley, Central/Palfrey, Cushing and possibly other town squares to be determined by the Planning Board. The intent is to promote new growth and higher densities within these areas.

- a. Land use is predominantly small-scale, neighborhood-oriented service and retail.
- b. Only retail and service uses are allowed on the first floor; residential and office space is only permitted on upper floors.
- c. "Formula" or national chain type businesses will only be allowed within structures that conform to the town square design standards and can be no larger than 10,000 sq. ft.
- d. Allowed densities are below a Floor Area Ratio (FAR) of 1 and individual businesses are limited to no more than 5,000 sq. ft. without a special permit.
- e. Designs of buildings will encourage zero setbacks for front and side yards, maximize windows and visibility into the storefronts, create a high degree of variability in the façades within an approved palette of materials and colors, and require peaked roofs for low structures.
- f. Signage shall be reasonably small to complement the building designs but variable and limited to non-internally lit signs.
- g. Parking will be provided predominantly by public parking lots and on-street spaces to allow maximum footprints of buildings.
- h. Streetscape improvements will be urban in form to maximize pedestrian crossing safety and allow full range of vehicle stopping, parking, and turning movements. Bicycles may be expected to mix with vehicular traffic.
- i. Street cross sections within the village squares will organize traffic and channel different travel modes and movements to specific lanes.
- j. Street furniture will be maximized according to spaces available.
- k. All utilities (excepting the existing trolley lines) will be placed underground or in the rear of buildings fronting the main street.
- l. These areas should have a unique identity so that visitors can recognize each square as a distinct place by its streetscape amenities, building designs, and other visual cues that support an individual theme or design.
- m. Distinctions will be made between town squares as follows:
  - i. Waverley and Cushing to loosely correspond with the LB I district
  - ii. Central and Palfrey to loosely correspond with the LB I district



- iii. East Belmont to loosely correspond with the LB III district
- iv. Other small commercial centers should correspond with LB III district to maintain the focus on the more active and larger squares.

### 3. Transition

The transition district applies to the short sections of connecting roadways that lead into the town squares or Belmont Center. These areas may be changing to predominantly commercial use or from commercial to residential. The idea is to (1) provide visual cues within the public rights-of-way that inform travelers that they are entering a different district, and (2) allow a transition of land uses.

- a. Land use will be predominantly residential with commercial uses permitted by special permit.
- b. Multifamily and apartment buildings will be permitted up to 16 units per acre by right.
- c. Setbacks will include minimum distances to setback buildings from the street and adjacent buildings.
- d. Landscape buffers will be required on site to separate commercial from residential uses.
- e. Streetscape improvements will respond to the transitional or mixed character of the roadway segments that lie between purely residential and commercial districts with site and land-use-appropriate green space, plantings, curb cuts, and pedestrian crossings. Pedestrian safety should be maximized by reducing the number of street crossings and signaling them.
- f. Street cross sections will clearly and safely accomplish transitions, where necessary, between the number of lanes; accommodate bicycles; and organize and protect pedestrian crossings.
- g. Utilities may be above ground except when entering the Belmont Center or Town Square districts.
- h. All utilities will be placed underground or in the rear of commercial buildings fronting the main street, except where the placement in the rear of properties may create visual conflicts with residential properties.

### 4. Residential

The Residential district applies to sections of main corridors that feed into commercial districts, but are outside the Transition districts. The intent is to maintain and promote their residential character. The land use is predominantly residential but may include some commercial properties and uses.

- a. Land use is predominantly single and two-family residential. Multifamily is allowed by special permit.
- b. Commercial uses are not allowed as primary uses but may be allowed by special permit

as a Home Occupation as currently exists.

- c. Streetscape improvements will be based on a residential street form. Pedestrian safety will be maximized for traveling along the corridor and pedestrian crossings will be minimized to the key intersections.
- d. Street cross sections will include large shoulders to keep travel away from the street edge, restrict on-street parking to residents, and allow bicycle travel.
- e. Utilities may be above ground. The residential street form is to involve a less significant public investment than the commercial areas.

## SPECIFIC OPTIONS FOR IMPROVING ECONOMIC VITALITY

### Improve the Appearance of the Business Districts

The business district areas should be revitalized with design guidelines and an improved landscaping program. Although the town currently has sign, parking, landscaping, environment, and other regulations, the following recommendations provide additional means to increase the attractiveness of buildings and facades in these commercial districts (see Figure 11).

#### *Design Guidelines*

The Town should adopt design guidelines for each district as part of the Zoning By-law and apply them to each new project to improve the business areas over the long term. As new buildings are either rebuilt or replaced, they would have to meet specific guidelines that steer the building, façade, and landscape designs in a direction that is more attractive and matches the character of the district. The typical requirements could include maximized windows on the facades, requirements for reduced front and side-yard setbacks, signage that fits the square's character, and minimal landscaping on site. Street trees should also be required where applicable and strongly promoted in all other cases.

#### *Streetscape*

A palette of streetscape improvements will help distinguish the variety of neighborhoods and town squares. Appropriate arrangement of and materials used for benches, crosswalks, trees, signs, and other streetscape amenities will create continuity along the corridor as well as improve its appearance and attractiveness. The most significant investment for street treatments are proposed for the LB I and LB III districts.

#### *Landscaping*

New street trees should be planted in appropriate locations within the business districts with respect to the needs of businesses and pedestrians. Appropriately sized tree varieties, such as Kousa Dogwood, Columnar Crab Apple, Japanese Cherry, and Callery Pear should be used when planting under power lines. Spacing will be determined by the existing utility poles, street furniture needs, and the width of sidewalks. Generally, spacing of 35 to 50 feet is preferable. Flowering trees should be planted in the business areas (town squares and transition areas), while large canopy trees, such as Maples, in the residential areas.

#### Establish Gateways at Main Entrances to the Town of Belmont

Gateways should be installed to identify the main entrances for people leaving and entering the Town of Belmont. Possible gateway sites within the corridor include the intersection of Belmont, Grove, and Arlington Streets, and Waverley Square. Improvements could include a welcome sign or monument, sidewalk extensions, street pavers, and landscaping.

#### Identify Each Commercial District as a Distinct Place

Commercial districts should have their own identity as a place and should be recognized by distinct, visual cues regarding streetscape amenities, building designs and facades, and their overall characteristics and qualities. The entrances to these districts could have signs, landscaping, and special lighting to identify the individual places.

#### Support Reuse of the Waverley Square Fire Station

The community is very interested in preserving its cultural and historic assets. It would like to see one of them, the existing Waverley Square Fire Station located at the intersection of Trapelo Road and Waverley Street, restored and rehabilitated so the property can generate revenue back to the Town. It could be converted into a mixed-use facility with housing and limited retail uses, such as a coffee shop. The town recently discussed options for its reuse. There are two considerations for its reuse:

1. The parcel would have to be rezoned from residential to allow a business.
2. The Town may decide to use the building as a mixed-use facility, an option that has been shown to be successful in other communities. This would also require a rezoning.

#### Establish Economic Development Programs

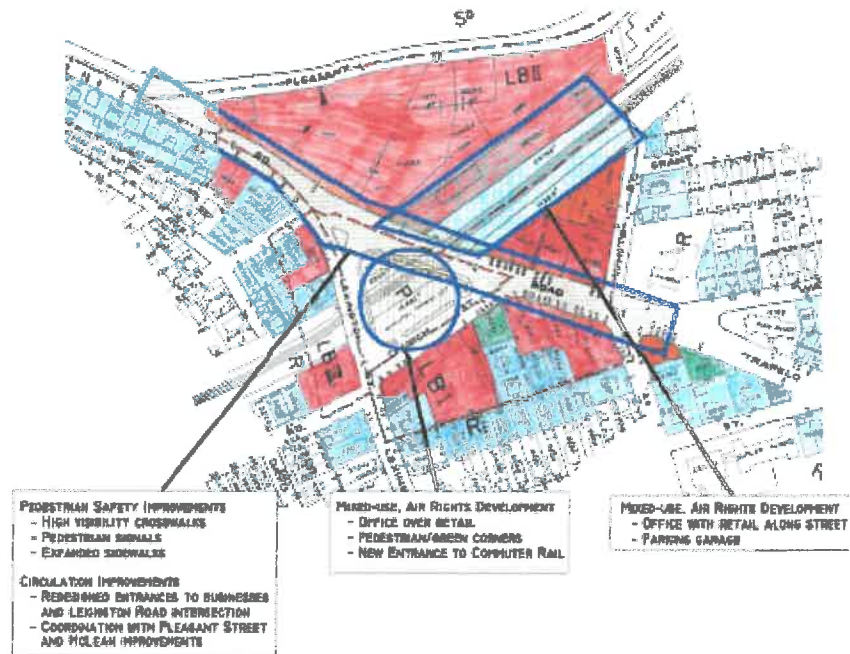
Economic development programs should be established to support businesspeople such as Business Improvement Districts (BID), Businesses Improvement Areas (BIA), or façade improvement programs. For example, there are substantial opportunities to improve the facades and streetscape along the dense clusters of business that line the Trapelo Road at Central and Palfrey Squares and within the Belmont Center district.

#### Increase Density of Development with Air Rights Uses Over the Commuter Rail Lines

Persue the feasibility of constructing mixed-use, multilevel office and parking developments over the MBTA commuter rail lines on the north side of Waverley Square and along Trapelo Road. A multilevel office building could also be built over the existing MBTA commuter stop. These types of developments would support utilization of several modes of public transit and the existing businesses and infrastructure at Waverley Square. The abutting Shaw's supermarket could be approached to participate in such a venture in Waverley Square, as there is always a need for additional parking for this use. This concept is explained further in Section V.D. Illustrative Design Concepts.

Figure 11. Improvement Areas

## WAVERLEY SQUARE BUSINESS DISTRICT

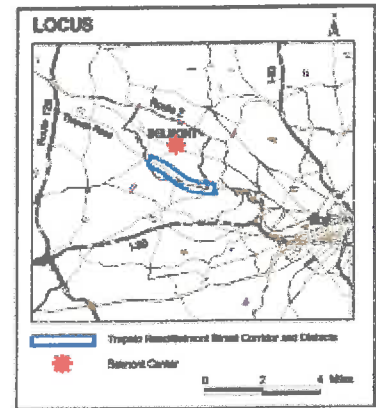
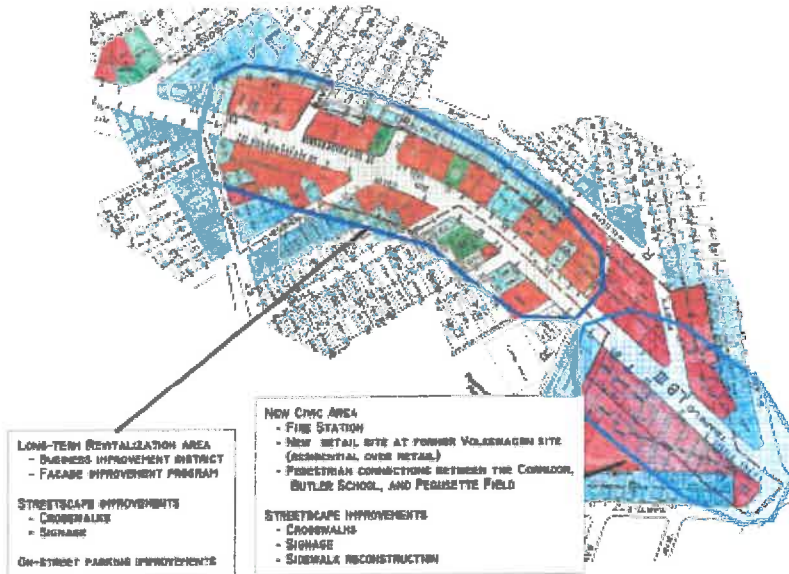


## CUSHING SQUARE BUSINESS DISTRICT

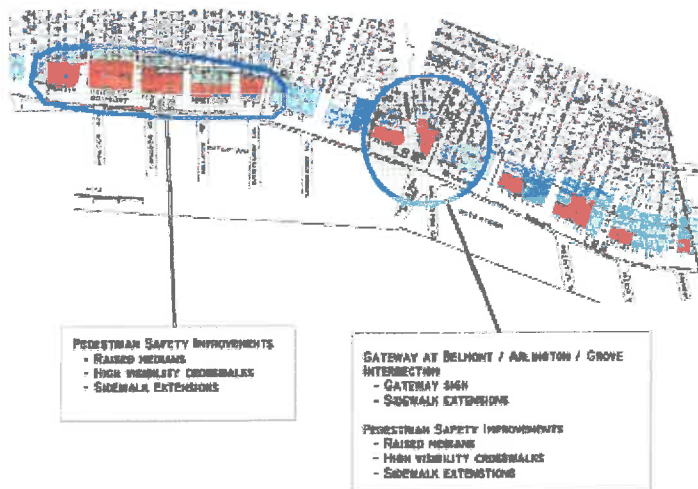


Figure 11A. Improvement Areas

## CENTRAL AND PALFREY SQUARES



## EAST BELMONT STREET BUSINESS DISTRICT



### GENERAL CORRIDOR IMPROVEMENTS

**GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS**

- CREATE DISTINCT VILLAGE AND RESIDENTIAL AREAS ALONG CORRIDOR
- WORK COOPERATIVELY WITH WATERTOWN ON TRANSPORTATION HUBS

**ZONING CHANGES**

- ALLOW FOR RESTAURANTS
- EXTEND DISTRICTS TO LOT LINES
- ENCOURAGE MIXED-USE DEVELOPMENT (RESIDENTIAL OVER RETAIL)

**DESIGN GUIDELINES**

- FACADES
- SIGNS

**TRANSPORTATION**

- CONTINUITY OF DESIGN THROUGHOUT CORRIDOR
- STANDARD CROSS SECTION WITH OPTIONS FOR TWO-WAY LEFT TURN (TWLT) AT MAJOR INTERSECTIONS
- ONE LANE AND BIKEWAY EACH WAY WITH CENTER TURN LANE
- NEW STRIPING

**PARKING IMPROVEMENTS**

- PARKING STRATEGY (MANAGEMENT, TIMING, AND ENFORCEMENT)

**PEDESTRIAN SAFETY IMPROVEMENTS**

- HIGH VISIBILITY CROSSWALKS
- PEDESTRIAN SIGNALS

**STREETSCAPE IMPROVEMENTS**

- TREES, BENCHES, SIDEWALKS, CURBSIDE, BUS STOPS

### LEGEND

- LAND USE**
- RESIDENTIAL
  - MIXED USES, PRIMARILY RESIDENTIAL
  - COMMERCIAL
  - MIXED USE, PRIMARILY COMMERCIAL

## ZONING AND REGULATORY CHANGES

Changes to the Zoning By-law must be made to complete the recommendations outlined above and accomplish several different objectives. Basic zoning specifies how land is used and may be developed under the framework of state law but according to community decisions. Zoning can address: land uses, dimensional standards, special or performance standards, and procedures for approval of a development project. Note that zoning applies to properties and not the rights-of-way defining the street. These proposed changes will reinforce existing land uses as well as those that increase the overall development potential within the districts, such as increased density with mixed uses and reduced restrictions on parking requirements to allow development where public parking spaces are available.

### Land Use and Development

The following zoning concepts are based on the policy guidance laid out in the previous section.

#### Encourage Mixed-use Developments and Increase Density in the Town Squares.

Numerous studies have proven that increased densities improve the economic vitality of commercial areas. Allow mixed-use developments up to 4 stories i.e. up to 3 stories of residential or office over first floor retail or services in order to increase mixed-use developments and density.

#### Change LB III Zones Similar to Central and Palfrey Squares to LB I.

Consider changing LB III zones such as Central and Palfrey Squares to LB I since they are well developed commercial centers and should be enhanced.

#### Reduce Front Setback Requirements.

The front setback requirements should be reduced to allow a greater density of buildings in the commercial districts and to encourage redevelopment and revitalization of existing buildings. The Town has already reduced the side-yard requirement in the LB 1 and LB III districts to zero. The side yard setback for those properties abutting residential districts was retained.

#### Restrict Residences and Office Uses to Upper Floors in Commercial Districts.

First floors should be used for retail and services that encourage foot traffic and pedestrian activity on the street level.

#### Move Zoning District Lines to Property Lines.

Make each property under single ownership fall under one zoning designation in order to reduce the need for variances and land use conflicts. This also allows the Town to create zoned areas that fit with modern commercial construction requirements for area of buildings, parking, and access.

#### Allow Restaurants with Seating and Liquor Licenses in Specified Commercial Zones.

Food is a significant enticement to increase activity within the village squares. With a liquor license and evening dining, restaurants add to the range of hours of street activity, and patrons can take advantage of parking freed up after daytime use.

Prohibit Vehicular Drive-up Window Uses in LB I Zones.

Drive-up facilities that require two curb cuts across sidewalks are not conducive to encouraging pedestrian activity and should be prohibited.

**Parking**

Make Parking Space Requirements for Retail and Service uses in LB I Zone Less Restrictive.

Increase the number of parking opportunities by allowing shared parking and reducing restrictiveness of commercial parking requirements. For example, there will be no parking requirements for businesses that are within 500 feet of a public parking lot, or significantly reduced parking standards for uses within the town squares.

**Design Guidelines**

Restrict Outdoor Displays of Products Sold by the Business Except During Permitted Special Events.

Normally, sidewalks should be fully available to pedestrians and for the amenities that make the sidewalk experience enjoyable. Therefore, display of goods within the public rights of way should be carefully regulated (during special events such as village-wide sidewalk sales, for example).

Prohibit Flat Roofs on One and Two-story Buildings.

To improve attractiveness of the area and to provide continuity of the roof lines and character of the town squares, prohibit flat roofs on one and two-story buildings. The roofs added to commercial buildings should be shed or gable forms. If gable, the pitch should be no less than 6:12 and no more than 12:12, with or without intersecting gable roof forms. For large commercial buildings, these pitches may be impractical. As an alternative, pitched or gabled roofs may be added to flat-roofed structures to create variety. In some cases, vault-form roofs or roofs covering truss structures may also be employed. However, avoid the appearance of applied roofs as purely decorative elements, such as applied mansards or abbreviated false fronts.

Make Signage Standards Conform to Design Guidelines.

Signage standards should conform to the architectural style determined to be acceptable for the district, such as requiring signs to be shaped and sized to fit into architectural building bands.

Allow Projecting Signs.

Historic village areas utilized projecting signs. Today, a person traveling in a vehicle needs projecting signs even more to quickly identify goods and services.

Require Continuous Variability in Façade Treatments.

Do not allow large unbroken expanses of any façade treatment. This is not in character with the classic New England style that has highly variable buildings along historic streets.

Require Large Windows in the Façade.

Pedestrians should be able to see into the store from the sidewalk. This encourages street activity and allows merchants to improve displays.

Allow Awnings.

Awnings can provide shelter for pedestrians in the often temperamental New England weather, thereby encouraging street activity for longer periods.



## V.C. TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT PLAN

The following transportation options will provide the framework for creating the supporting infrastructure and accessibility on public ways to the centers of commerce. The overall directions of the adopted transportation policies within Belmont are to:

- Provide for continuous pedestrian activity,
- Create street designs that ensure safety of travel, and
- Establish unique and variable streetscapes that recognize the historic character and land uses, and the utilization of the rights of way.

Transportation improvements and land use are inter-related. Consequently, the development of these types of improvements, which are mostly public expenditures, must follow a strategy similar to that for land use and private development. The following section discusses both a strategy for making transportation improvements and some specific ideas to consider while implementing this strategy.

## ACTIONS AND POLICIES

### Circulation Improvement Strategy

Roadway and traffic-related improvements need to be considered as the Economic Development Study is implemented. While the primary focus of this plan is to enhance the pedestrian and business environment along the Trapelo Road/Belmont Street corridor, vehicular traffic must be taken into account. Creating congestion, distractions, or unsafe conditions for drivers will lead to a reduction in pedestrian safety that could significantly offset the benefits of the remainder of the plan. The following short-term steps will help ensure that both pedestrian and vehicular users of the corridor are accommodated over the long term. They can also be easily adapted for implementation within Belmont Center.

Each of the following seven steps should be implemented for each different section of the corridor and each commercial area outside the corridor to determine the proper level of change in design and improvement that is needed. In some cases, limited change may be appropriate. However, within Belmont Center and town squares, specific concepts should be generated to distinguish each of these areas from the remaining sections of the corridor and neighboring districts.

#### Step 1 – Develop a Standard Cross-Section.

The design concept for the corridor should start with a standard cross section to be implemented along the entire corridor and adjusted as needed. Based on a review of the streets and intersections, discussions with the planning department and the Planning Board, as well as public input, it appears that the most realistic crosssection is a single travel lane in each direction with width to accommodate bicycles and a parking lane flanking either side (see

Figure 12. Potential Corridor Road Section

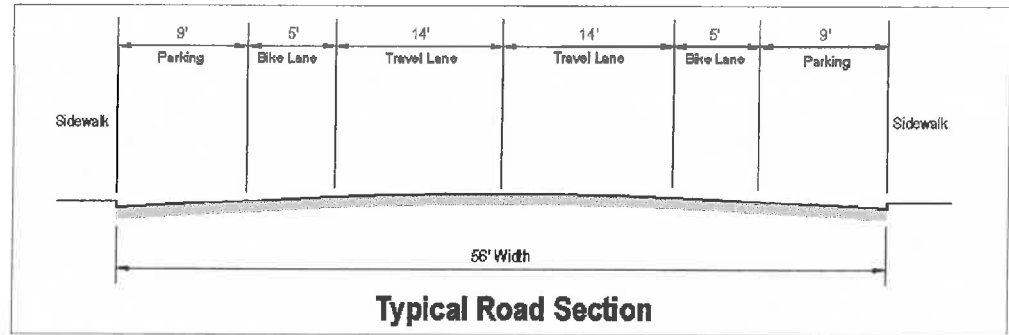
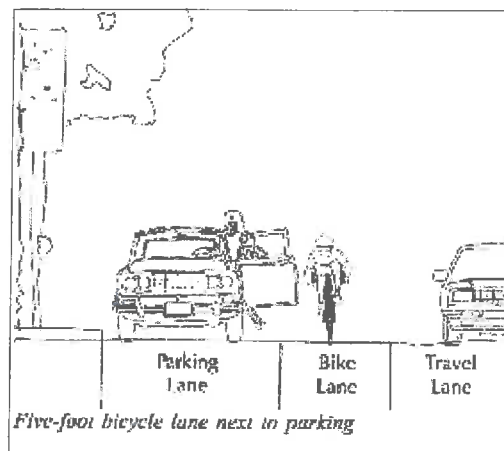


Figure 13. Potential Lane Designations



Figures 12 and 13). Although a bicycle lane is not designated, these figures illustrate the approximate lane widths and arrangement if one was designated. This concept could be applied along the corridor and then adjusted at intersections as needed, especially in the commercial areas.

#### Step 2 – Develop Lane Requirements for Key Intersections.

Intersection turning movement counts during the weekday evening and Saturday midday peak hours should be conducted as a basis for determining what the lane requirements are at each of the key intersections. Key intersections are all those that currently have signals or where there is a high percentage of turning traffic, such as the intersection at Waverley Square and Shaw's market. Traffic counts should include truck classification to determine the number of large and medium size trucks traveling through the intersections that need to be accommodated. Along with the traffic count data, information on pedestrian flows and accidents should also be collected. The traffic associated with known projects, like the redevelopment of the McLean Hospital, should be accounted for as well as a general growth factor.

#### Step 3 – Evaluate Each Roadway Segment.

Once each intersection is considered individually, all the roadway segments should be evaluated in relation to their adjacent intersections and adjacent land uses. In some cases, it may be necessary to maintain a different cross-section between nearby intersections that have multi-lane approach needs. At the completion of this step, the basic traffic layout for the corridor will have been determined.

#### Step 4 – Coordinate Traffic and Pedestrian/Streetscape Improvements.

Once the basic traffic layout is established, the remaining paved areas can be “reclaimed” for pedestrian or streetscape uses, which includes crosswalks and handicap ramps, bus stops, loading zones, and street signage and lighting. As much as possible, the streetscape vocabulary (i.e., materials, style, pattern of fixtures, pavement treatments, and signage) should be consistent throughout the corridor where there is interaction with traffic control measures. The uniformity and predictability of these features enhances public safety considerably. Commercial areas, however, may have “signature” design features that distinguish them from other commercial districts as well as from adjacent residential districts.

#### Step 5 – Adjust Specific Sites and Situations.

While the corridor as a whole needs to have consistency, every intersection and roadway segment is unique in some way. This step considers adjustments to individual locations, such as accounting for an extra leg to an intersection, a one-way pattern that might occur on the adjacent streets, or even the grades of the roadways through the intersection (e.g., Slade Street).

#### Step 6 – Design Traffic Control Measures.

Determine all the traffic control measures necessary along the corridor, including pavement striping, regular and directional signage, parking restrictions, signal equipment selection, and similar traffic control measures. Traffic design controls, including signage, should be consistent throughout the corridor so that important traffic information is obvious and easy to understand for non-local drivers.

#### Step 7 – Develop a Parking Strategy.

A parking strategy is needed to maximize parking along the corridor and within Belmont Center to the greatest extent feasible. A parking strategy, however, should be conducted separately from the corridor plan since parking represents a much broader concern for all neighborhoods and districts in the Town. It should address the management, timing, and enforcement of parking areas. Furthermore, the corridor planning process will be complicated and delayed unnecessarily if parking regulation decisions are incorporated into the Plan.

### **SPECIFIC OPTIONS FOR TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENTS**

#### Create Unique Segments.

Each segment of the corridor will have its own uniquely defined character within a general framework of design criteria. The proposed criteria will conform to the overlay districts as described starting on page 24 of this report. The purpose for unique segments is to identify individual centers of commerce and to inform travelers that they are both entering and in a distinct commercial area, which generally has more pedestrians and street activity than other parts of the corridor.

#### Support the Proposed Town and Regional Bicycle Networks.

There have been several proposed bicycle networks that pass through, along, and connect the corridor with other trails in and out of Belmont. The community supports certain aspects of these proposals as well as general improvements to accommodate bicycles in order to help keep bicyclists safe and direct them to their destinations. Many comments to improve the bicycle network were voiced at several public meetings that were part of the planning process for this Study.

The pavement widths of Trapelo Road, Belmont Street, and Leonard Street are very wide for town streets. In fact, there is room for one and a half to two vehicles in each direction along much of the corridor. Some of this area could be used for pedestrians and bicyclists without adversely impacting traffic flows. The Town should analyze each section of these streets and reconfigure the layout based upon the planning principles noted in this report.

#### Construct a Parking Deck on the Municipal Lot at Cushing Square and a Parking Garage over the MBTA Tracks at Waverley Square when Funds become Available.

A parking deck at the municipal lot at Cushing Square was originally proposed in the “Belmont Parking Study” by the BSC Group in 2002. The Belmont Economic Development Study also recommends a parking deck based on the previous study, the existing site conditions, observations of parking use at Cushing Square, support for existing and potential businesses in the Square, and conversations with the Town officials. A new parking deck would provide short and long-term parking spaces and increase the parking options for customers and businesses in Cushing Square.

A parking garage should be constructed near the Waverley Square MBTA commuter rail station as a means to support new mixed-use developments and demand for short and long-term parking in and near the Square. It would be developed by use of the air rights over the MBTA tracks. This recommendation is a result of potential air rights development, utilization of an excellent transportation resource, conversations with town officials, and design concepts and illustrations that show the potential for this type of development (see section V.D. Illustrative Design Concepts, Waverley Square). This recommendation was also supported by a prior analysis and conclusions of an earlier parking study. The BSC Group stated in the “Belmont Parking Study” that “The Waverley Square municipal lot was over capacity during part of the day indicating a strong demand for long-term parking.” This parking study also suggested that the Town of Belmont could lease parking spaces from a nearby church so that commuters could use them.

#### Increase Parking Opportunities for both Short and Long-term Users.

High turnover rates are typically applied to busy commercial areas. People tend to want to park close to a business if their stay is expected to be a short-term visit. Customers generally avoid areas that do not have nearby or convenient parking as compared to workers who need to park their vehicles for long terms and will walk further to their place of employment. Therefore, the town should force high turnovers at the retail areas and establish one-hour parking limits on Trapelo Road and Common Street and a 30 minute restriction in the town squares.

A planning method to improve parking opportunities and to increase utilization of parking spaces is to include shared parking options in the zoning bylaws that can be negotiated under special permits. This would allow property owners to arrange parking spaces on adjacent lots so that more vehicles could fit and would allow their underutilized lots to be shared with other businesses.

#### Ensure Pedestrian Connections are Continuous.

Some of the sidewalks in the study area were identified during site visits as missing or not continuous. For example, there is no sidewalk along a portion of Common Street in Cushing Square. Frequently visited places such as the Butler School and Pequosette Field were also identified during field visits and need to be linked to other pedestrian ways. Furthermore, vehicles were seen parking on sidewalks and should not be allowed to park on these public passageways because they block pedestrian travel, especially those in wheelchairs or with carriages, and force them to walk in the street. Pedestrian connections should be continuous throughout the corridor and especially in busy commercial districts in order to allow safe and convenient pedestrian activity.

#### Widen Sidewalks to Increase Pedestrian Safety.

Residents at several Planning Board meetings have expressed the importance of improving pedestrian safety as part of the corridor study. Sidewalks should be widened where appropriate as an incentive to cross the street and to increase their safety. This could involve making the whole sidewalk wider along portion of a street or adding sidewalks extensions or bump-outs at crosswalks to create a shorter and safer path across a street.

#### Establish Visual Cues and Signature Signs to Identify Special Places.

When places have identities, they tend to get more attention and recognition. This concept should be applied along the corridor. Stone mile markers or similar visual place markers along the corridor would help pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorists identify places and their location along the corridor. A mile marker/gateway concept is recommended at Benton Square at the introduction to Cushing Square.

#### Initiate an Intra-municipal Trolley Service and Explore BRT.

Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) is an evolving form of public transit that is seen as a legitimate option to traditional bus and rail service. Given the large right-of-way width of Trapelo Road/ Belmont Street that would allow a dedicated lane for BRT, this long-term option for alternative transit should be recognized while the town is planning street improvements. Regardless of the type of transit, the town should help establish a route that connects Belmont Center and the town squares and is coordinated with MBTA trolley service for in-town trolley service. This would help those in need of transit between the main commercial centers within Belmont and beyond.

## V.D. ILLUSTRATIVE DESIGN CONCEPTS

Conceptual design layouts have been explored as part of the Belmont Economic Development planning process in order to illustrate the applicability of some of the proposed land use and urban design recommendations. They were developed in conjunction with other current planning documents. Although these concepts are specific to locations along the corridor, they can be applied to commercial areas throughout the Town.

The explorations focused on the main Town Squares along the Trapelo Road/Belmont Street corridor, by that meaning, the key roadway intersections where businesses have naturally developed and grown through the years. The purpose of the analysis was to identify potential uses for the improvement of publicly owned parcels and other available parcels that could result in positive benefits for the corridor and the community. The following locations were studied:

- Benton Square
- Cushing Square
- Palfrey Square
- Waverley Square

Each one of these locations already has a particular urban design character given the type and intensity of uses that surround them. Therefore, each one of the conceptual designs illustrates developments that exhibit different types of land use and character, and are intended to be compatible with the prevalent conditions and planning issues at each location.

### BENTON SQUARE

The proposed design concept consists basically of streetscape improvements aimed at creating an identifiable gateway into the Cushing Square business district at the point where Trapelo Road and Belmont Street intersect. The intersection was recently enhanced with traffic lights, a new intersection configuration, and a bus turnaround. Enhanced pedestrian crosswalks are proposed to make them more noticeable to drivers and safer for pedestrians, and to distinguish the Square from the surrounding neighborhoods. The bus turn around island is highly visible to traffic on Trapelo Road, Belmont Street, and Pine Street. It provides a unique opportunity for the location of a monument, public artwork piece, or a town marker that could become a symbol of the surrounding district.

### CUSHING SQUARE

Cushing Square, at the intersection of Cushing Avenue, Common Street, and Trapelo Road is a busy area due to the high number of businesses in the area. A high volume of vehicles, complex road geometry, and a diversity of businesses combine to make this an important Town Square.

The proposed illustrative design concept calls for streetscape improvements to the intersection, which improves vehicular and pedestrian traffic patterns, enhances the image of the Square, and creates a new sense of place (see Figure 14). To that effect, sidewalk extensions are proposed in order to increase pedestrian safety areas to the maximum possible extent by shortening crosswalks and pedestrian crossing times. The conceptual layout proposes the elimination of the island that defines the right-turn lane from Common Street into Trapelo Road in favor of wider sidewalks and pedestrian areas at the corners (the right-turn lane itself would not be eliminated, only the island). New and wider sidewalks would provide opportunities for the provision of benches, planters, bollards, bus shelters, and trees, which would enhance the image and perception of the Square as a pedestrian-friendly environment.

*Figure 14. Cushing Square*



The roadway intersection could also be enhanced by means of a special pavement pattern using brick or concrete pavers appropriate for vehicular traffic areas. These could add an interesting note of color and texture to the space, and help calm traffic through the intersection by gently slowing down cars to the benefit of pedestrians and bicyclists.

The illustrative concept layout also represents the potential redevelopment of some parcels currently occupied by one-story buildings (shown in a lighter shade of color). The diagram illustrates the possibility of two or three floors being added to the existing buildings, providing new space for mixed-uses. The ground floor would continue to be used as retail while the upper floors could include office or multi-family residential uses as proposed in the zoning

recommendations of this report. Some of the typical parking requirements for these sites would need to be modified or waived, since on-site parking would not be feasible. At the same time, adequate provision of on-street public parking should be ensured to sustain a healthy and active business district. This could be accomplished through a parking strategy that would combine short-term parking along the street (one-hour) with longer-term parking on municipal parking lots.

Potential development volumes based on the illustrative design concept include two to three new floors above the existing single story buildings. These buildings would include approximately 20,000 sq. ft. of retail space on the ground floor (provided either by renovation or replacement of existing retail space) and approximately 20,000 to 40,000 sq. ft. of new office or residential space on the upper floors.

The diagram also illustrates the possibility of constructing a parking deck above the existing municipal lot at the corner of Trapelo Road and Williston Road. This could add up to 90 new spaces to the existing public parking supply. However, building a new parking deck would likely require the acquisition of two adjacent properties in order to have a site large enough to allow for vehicle circulation and the necessary access ramps, which may represent a significant constraint for its development. The construction of a deck on this public lot should be the long-term goal to address parking needs from the anticipated economic growth.

#### PALFREY SQUARE

The area in and around Palfrey Square area is mostly residential in character with several commercial properties. Some of the commercial buildings are vacant and some need to be rehabilitated. A new retail development was recently approved for the former VW dealership site. Town-owned and operated recreational facilities are located nearby, including tennis courts, and soccer and baseball fields.

Based on this character, the new development, and the Study's goals to encourage mixed-use, diverse, and more intensive development in appropriate locations, the illustration provides a concept for additional developments that could occur on other appropriate properties along the corridor (see Figure 15). It would include mixed uses with commercial space on the ground floor, residential uses on the top two or three floors, and parking in the rear. Furthermore, the streetscape should be improved with new and wider sidewalks, street trees, new bus shelters, and improved crosswalks, as mentioned in the recommendations section for the entire corridor.

Several vacant and underutilized buildings along this part of the corridor would also need to be rehabilitated. The Town could help improve these and other properties in several ways. It could support programs such as business improvement districts or provide financial incentives or tax breaks. The Town's recent approval for a new fire station across the street from the recreational area will help trigger additional improvements and private investment in the Palfrey Square area.



Figure 15. Palfrey Square



#### WAVERLEY SQUARE

Waverley Square, at the intersection of Trapelo Road, Lexington Street, and the MBTA Fitchburg commuter rail line, is where the tightly knit scale of Trapelo Road, so prevalent along most of its length, disperses into wide expanses of roadway space and parking lots. In great part, this is due to the fact that a large portion of the area is occupied by a municipal parking lot (with a capacity of approximately 35 vehicles), an MBTA commuter rail station and tracks that are below grade, parking areas for a large supermarket, a car wash business, and other small commercial venues.

Waverley Square is also the main gateway into the Town of Belmont and the Trapelo Road/Belmont Street corridor from Waltham, Lexington, and other western suburbs. Other elements that make this square prominent in addition to its strategic location are the presence of a major Shaw's supermarket and the neighboring McLean Hospital. Part of the extensive hospital site is undergoing a conversion process into large-scale office and residential developments. Two MBTA bus lines that provide access to Harvard Square and downtown Boston also service the Square.

The combination of these factors contribute to make this area a visible and well known location in spite of the fact that there are very few buildings and the Square does not convey a strong identity as a place. On one hand, the large open expanse of parking lots and MBTA track air rights contributes to the lack of an architectural and urban design character in this area. On the

other hand, this is one of the very few locations in Belmont where there is potential for relatively large-scale development if air rights over parking areas and MBTA tracks could be used. The development advantages of this location would include excellent access to transportation and retail services, prominent location and visibility, potential for the development of a gateway image and identity, and additional new mixed-use developments. Altogether, these factors may transform Waverley Square into a new high-density, transit-oriented growth area.

The proposed design concept illustrates the potential development of mixed-use buildings over the existing municipal properties and the MBTA air rights (see Figure 16). The diagram also includes a few adjacent parcels including existing low-rise commercial and automotive uses as part of the redevelopment site. These parcels have been included on a speculative basis, considering the possibility that some property owners may be interested in participating in a new development, but this does not necessarily mean that additional parcels need to be acquired in order to assemble a large development site.

Furthermore, the MBTA and the Town of Belmont are conducting a joint planning study at this location. They are determining the feasibility of this type of development using air rights. This opportunity should be fully investigated as the policy of the MBTA toward such development has changed considerably over the past two years.

*Figure 16. Waverley Square*



The potential development program for this area would include Class A office space, market rate and affordable multi-family housing, retail space at the ground level along Trapelo Road, and structured parking to the rear of the site. Parking would include spaces for the new development, MBTA commuter parking on air rights to serve an increased ridership in the future, and a public parking component to replace the existing municipal parking lot. The economic feasibility of the project would largely depend on its size, market conditions, the area of parcels and air right space assembled, and the cost premiums associated with the technical issues of building on air rights.

The conceptual design diagram illustrates approximately 15,000 to 18,000 sq. ft. of new retail space located along Trapelo Road, approximately 140,000 to 200,000 sq. ft. of commercial and residential space on two to three upper stories, and a 400 to 500-parking space garage.

Air-rights development with mixed uses on the west side of Lexington Street was explored as part of this study. It would be too expensive to build a mixed-use development based on the limited area between the residential parcels, and new residential development would not fit with the scale and character of the existing residential properties.

#### V.E. LOW, MODERATE, AND MIDDLE-INCOME JOB CREATION

The recent significant increase in local jobs coupled with a less than significant increase in new businesses is indicative of the types of jobs being created within the period of record. The largest job growth during this period has been in construction-related jobs, which can be well-paying but skill-required jobs. With new commercial investment in the four town squares spurred on by transportation improvements, zoning changes and public infrastructure investment as proposed in this plan, job development will take on two forms.

The first will be in the construction-related fields for both improvements and creation of infrastructure and commercial space. As previously noted, these construction jobs are on average, local well-paying jobs. The second area of job growth will be new employees for the expanded or new businesses that are housed in the new commercial space. The focus here will be on retail and service trades that support lower income jobs that are less skilled but add to the vitality and variety of the town squares. As these businesses grow, the related jobs will increase in value and may demand consequently higher wages.