

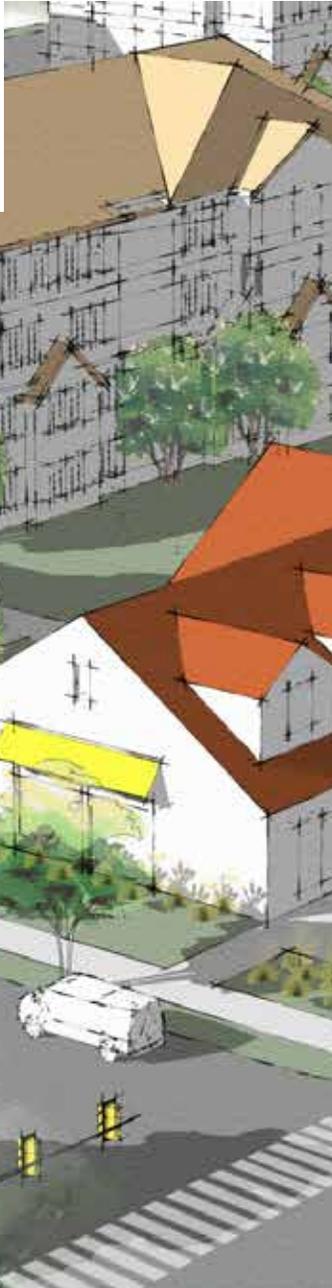
# KELLEY'S CORNER

## Improvement Initiative



“Kelley’s Corner will become a walkable town center, vibrant with a wide range of shops and restaurants. Parking, sidewalks, benches, street lighting and signage are all oriented to the pedestrian. Redevelopment is guided by design guidelines and review so that all buildings are lovely and in keeping with Acton’s character.”

Excerpt from Vision Statement, Acton 2020



## Acknowledgments

### The Kelley Corner Steering Committee Members

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Margaret Busse (Finance Committee)  
Peter Darlow (Design Review Board)  
JD Head (Liaison to ABSD)  
Larry Kenah (Economic Development Committee)  
Eric Solomon (Acton 2020 and KC Neighborhood Resident)

### Former Kelley Corner Steering Committee Members

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The Kelley’s Corner Steering Committee extends its thanks to:

**Acton’s Boards, Commissions, and Committees** whose members provided invaluable information and input.

### The Acton Planning Department

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**The Town Manager and Town Department Heads and Staff** who participated and assisted in the development of the plan.

**And special thanks to all of the residents and business owners of the Town of Acton that voiced their opinions at the public workshops and forums throughout this process.**

### Our Consultants

The Cecil Group  
Greenman-Pedersen Inc.  
Cambridge Economic Research  
Byrne McKinney & Associates, Inc.

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Lynn Horsky- Process Corp  
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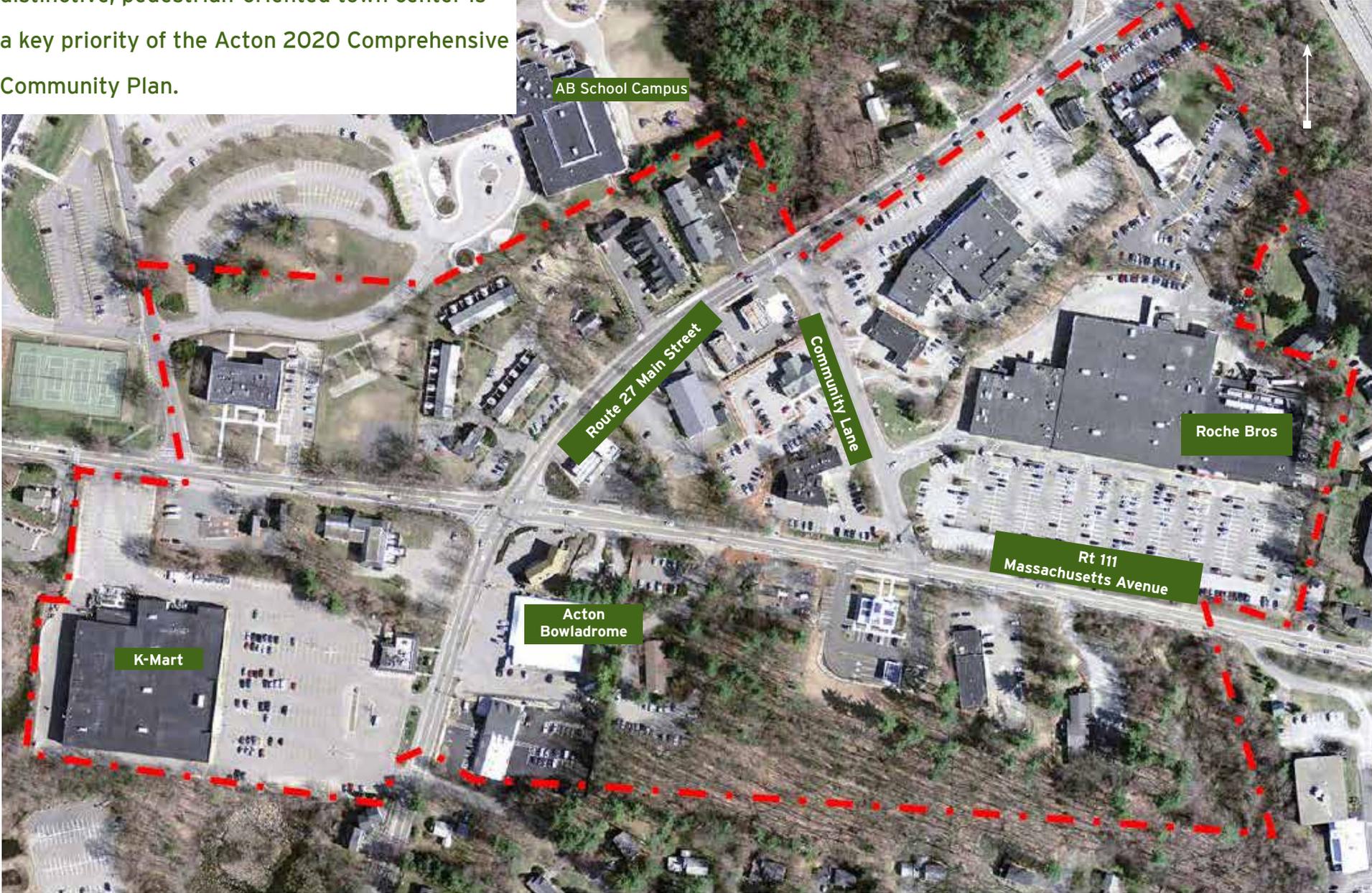
# KELLEY'S CORNER IMPROVEMENT INITIATIVE

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The transformation of Kelley's Corner into a distinctive, pedestrian-oriented town center is a key priority of the Acton 2020 Comprehensive Community Plan.



Kelley's Corner Improvement Initiative Area

# Executive Summary

The transformation of Kelley's corner into a distinctive, pedestrian-oriented town center is a key priority of the Acton 2020 Comprehensive Community Plan. Acton residents continue to voice this priority in meetings and surveys. The overall task for this plan was to determine how to make this vision a reality under a feasible program using the resources and legal powers available to the Town.

## Commercial Area in Need of Transformation

Kelley's Corner is a commercial center with a mix of businesses surrounded by the Town's school campus and houses. The district has evolved into a car-oriented retail and commercial center. Typical of a successful commercial location, new investments and changes have kept the center active. Yet, while the quality and quantity of the businesses have established Kelley's Corner as a regional attraction, the additions and changes have not created the desired pedestrian-oriented character. In fact, the perception is a lack of identifiable character and a pedestrian-unfriendly environment. There are also a few vacancies and

underutilized areas that impact the appearance of vitality.

For many people entering the town, Kelley's Corner is the first part of Acton they see—and the traffic congestion is their immediate experience. This district's congestion is caused by the unique confluence of highway interchanges, regional traffic, and businesses. There has not been a significant growth in traffic over the last few years based on the data performed for this study (GPI, 2014). Growth is still projected at 0.6% per year (Central Transportation Planning Staff projection as referenced by GPI, 2015).

Kelley's Corner evolved into a car-oriented district, which explains why there is a noticeable lack of public spaces for walking, gathering, and social activities. Sidewalks are disjointed and in poor condition. Spaces for pedestrians and sitting are currently lacking, while driveways and parking areas are a dominant characteristic of the street frontage in the center. The Kelley's Corner district is not oriented to walkers and bicyclists.

## Implement the Acton 2020 Plan

Acton 2020 provides a comprehensive approach to improving Kelley's Corner in ways that respond to public needs and goals. The value of Acton 2020 is that it provides the scope of a plan and the desired results; these points serve as the basis for this study. The plan recommends the Kelley's Corner Improvement Initiative with these directives:

- ◆ **Develop Kelley's Corner into a mixed-use Town center and transportation hub in conformance with a specific plan for the area**
- ◆ **Envision mixed use with housing, shops and restaurants with opportunities for socializing, running errands, dining, and community gathering. meet, eat, shop, and recreate**
- ◆ **Attract teens from the school complex and provide them with a safe place to meet, eat, shop, and recreate**
- ◆ **Become both fiscally and environmentally sustainable**



Existing Condition of Route 27



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Traffic Congestion Traveling North on Route 27



Existing Condition of Sidewalks

Acton 2020 describes a mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly future for Kelley's Corner. The plan encourages residential units that support the market for "over-55" and "under-35" age groups. "Guiding the majority of growth to village centers ... makes it feasible to create livelier, walkable places for the whole community to gather." Land use and development regulations are targeted methods for achieving this vision.

"Place-specific guidelines and design review" are recommended as a way to direct new development to include public, active spaces, and create an identifiable character for Kelley's Corner.

## Local and Regional Context

Within Acton there are several centers of commercial and civic activity. Three of them are historic village centers: Acton Center, South Acton, and West Acton. Kelley's Corner, established in its current form during the 1950s, is a contemporary center that lacks a cohesive character.

Kelley's Corner sits at an important crossroads of State highways. Route 2, which frames the northeastern side of the district, is one of the most important east-west highways in Massachusetts. This places Kelley's Corner adjacent to a very busy corridor, which links nearby communities, commercial areas, and village centers that compete in the same market. Main Street, Route 27, and Massachusetts Avenue, State Route 111, complete the triangle of roads and create the main intersection within Kelley's Corner.



Local and Regional Context

The intersection of Massachusetts Avenue and Main Street is a focal point for traffic. Congestion at this location has long been a concern and has been studied for decades. These roads carry regional traffic between Route 2 and the communities of West Acton, Bolton, Boxborough, and Stow to the west and South Acton and Maynard to the south. This regional traffic is the primary contributing factor to the traffic congestion experienced at Kelley's Corner. During the morning and evening peak commuting periods, traffic volumes are at their highest. It has been estimated that during these periods, the amount of traffic that passes through Kelley's Corner is as high as 79%. This type of traffic

is caused by motorists from surrounding communities who are not stopping in Kelley's Corner, rather driving through to another destination. While the number of the cars cannot be restricted, Kelley's Corner needs congestion relief.

Assessment of the real estate market provides useful information on the relationship of Acton to the broader region. The assessments for this plan are on commercial retail, office, and residential opportunities. These opportunities are partially determined by the changes in local demographics where additional residents with higher incomes equate to more

# I.

consumers with greater spending power. This in turn improves the value of potential uses, as determined by comparative rents, and suggests a stronger competitive position for Kelley's Corner while considering regional development.

## Residential Market



- Average Rent/Unit = \$1750
- 20% Below Metropolitan Region

Residential Rent Market Analysis

## Residential Market



- Values increased by 7% over last year
- Projected to increase by 1.5% over next year

Residential Sales Market Analysis

## Existing Conditions Findings

The findings are that Kelley's Corner is "vital." As a commercial center, it has been, is, and will be subject to continuous change. This is borne out in several findings:

- ♦ Market analysis shows a competitive regional market: but there is potential for redevelopment in Kelley's Corner
- ♦ Many properties show "susceptibility to change," and will be subject to reinvestment when conditions are met
- ♦ Recent projects are indicators of what type of changes occur under the existing regulatory and market environment
- ♦ Traffic congestion is a constraint to the attractiveness of the area

- ♦ Continued success will require new public investment to improve mobility and reduce congestion
- ♦ The town's zoning and land development regulations should be revised to advance the town's vision for redevelopment in Kelley's Corner

Overall, the existing conditions indicate that Kelley's Corner is a healthy commercial center within a highly competitive market, where opportunities exist to further improve the center and its competitive position. The land in Kelley's Corner is privately owned and therefore the redevelopment of Kelley's Corner will only occur as a result of private investment. This process can be stimulated by public infrastructure investments.

## Susceptibility to Change

- Low
- Medium
- High



Susceptibility to Change in the Study Area

## Public Input

This plan included both technical analyses and expansive public input. The technical analyses were produced by Town staff and the consultant team in accordance with the work plan, with other primary and secondary data coming from outside agencies, institutions, and other sources. The planning process involved various methods of public outreach

- ◆ **Phone and in-person interviews were held to allow in-depth discussions with individuals who were identified as sources of information and were willing to be interviewed**

The interviews were offered as confidential to allow frank discussions.

- ◆ **The Kelley's Corner Steering Committee met regularly to provide review and feedback to the planning process**

The Committee was made up of Acton 2020 committee members, residents from Kelley's Corner neighborhoods, members of town boards and committees, and a school department staff member. They acted as the sounding board for the overall Kelley's Corner Improvement Initiative project. The Committee was assisted by Town Planning Department staff.

- ◆ **Public workshops, open houses, and online surveys were used to collect views on conditions, ideas on alternatives, and responses to concepts from as broad an audience as possible**



**May 2015 Workshop:  
Recommendations and Decisions**

The ways in which this input was used for the plan included directions for new studies, modifications and refinement of concepts and alternatives, and organization into Guiding Principles.



**Public Workshop Banner**

## The Guiding Principles

One of the important steps in the planning process was to draft a set of findings and principles based on the technical analyses and public input that would form the direction for planning concepts. The findings and principles adopted by the Steering Committee are:

	KEY FINDINGS	GUIDING PRINCIPLES
1. Identity and Image	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Kelley’s Corner does not have the character or qualities to clearly identify as a town center</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ The area should become identifiable as a coherent and distinctive town center that conveys a sense of quality</li> <li>◆ The image of the area should reflect a town-scale environment and support both the business and residential communities</li> </ul>
2. Market Potential, Density, and Mix of Uses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Most sites are not likely to significantly change in the short to mid-term</li> <li>◆ Significant change can be anticipated on a few large sites and areas over the long term and could be managed with Town regulatory standards</li> <li>◆ Incremental changes may be anticipated at any time and could be better regulated</li> <li>◆ Positive market demand exists within the scale of available sites and space for retail, commercial, and multi-family housing uses</li> <li>◆ Market conditions and real estate economics will not support densities dependent upon significant amounts of structured parking</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Redevelopment and new investment is desirable and mixed use development with residential units should be encouraged to improve the district’s vitality and redevelopment potential</li> </ul>
3. Access and Circulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Major restructuring of the Route 2 access network would be required to reduce or redirect regional traffic. Yet this project is beyond the scope of this planning initiative</li> <li>◆ Regional traffic demand is not anticipated to increase significantly in the future</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Traffic improvements in Kelley’s Corner should be made based on local needs, while acknowledging regional demands.</li> <li>◆ Traffic congestion and delays for the local users and those just passing through Kelley’s Corner should be reduced</li> <li>◆ The size, number, location of access driveways and curb cuts need to be significantly redesigned in order to create a shared pedestrian and vehicular environment, and to reduce traffic congestion</li> </ul>

	KEY FINDINGS	GUIDING PRINCIPLES
4. Pedestrian and Bicyclist Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Kelley's Corner does not have complete, safe, or comfortable pathways for pedestrians and bicyclists</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ The entire area should be attractive and safe for all traffic participants, including pedestrians and bicyclists, consistent with the Town's and the State's Complete Streets Policies</li> <li>◆ Pedestrian connections should extend along and across streets and be linked to destinations with safe and attractive paths</li> <li>◆ Both on-street and off-street bicycle accommodations should be provided wherever practical</li> </ul>
5. Expanded Rights-of-Way	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ The existing rights-of-way are not wide enough to implement complete streets and reduce congestion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ The rights-of-way should be expanded as needed to accomplish the improved circulation, land use, and development.</li> <li>◆ Expansion of the rights-of-way should not result in negative impacts on the pedestrian environment or the goals for improved image</li> </ul>
6. Parking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ As a suburban commercial center, a significant amount of area is devoted to surface parking lots</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ The total amount of parking provided in the area should not exceed that which is required to support the uses, and the visual impact of parking lots should be reduced</li> </ul>
7.. Development and its Regulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Redevelopment of private property is accomplished through private market mechanisms</li> <li>◆ The Town's role includes incentives and other financial measures to support private redevelopment</li> <li>◆ The design and improvement of streets, public spaces, and streetscape is controlled by the Town to meet its purposes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Zoning should be revised as needed to accomplish the Acton 2020 Plan goals for Kelley's Corner as refined in this Kelley's Corner Improvement Initiative</li> <li>◆ The Town should establish other supplemental tools, regulations, and guidelines in order to accomplish Acton 2020 Plan goals</li> <li>◆ All buildings should address the public realm</li> <li>◆ Multi-modal connections between uses should be created wherever possible</li> </ul>

# I.

## The Creation and Testing of Alternatives

With the adoption of these Guiding Principles, the next step was to draft alternatives and test them for both feasibility and public acceptance. The tests of alternatives focused on circulation improvements, streetscape improvements, and development programs on private property.

### Circulation Improvements

Alternatives considered were: Major Route 2 interchange realignments; significant roadway widening as suggested in previous planning studies; targeted improvements with focus limited on addressing deficiencies of the existing infrastructure within the current street rights-of-way; balanced network improvements focused on achieving significant relief from traffic congestion, and creating complete streets featuring good pedestrian circulation, bike lanes, vehicle turning lanes, and access management within expanded rights-of-way. The circulation improvement alternatives were designed to be feasible as State and locally funded projects. In addition, an expanded network within large redevelopment projects was considered for internal private streets for vehicle, pedestrian, and bicycle connections to provide for enhanced convenience and limited congestion on Massachusetts Avenue and Main Street; this would be accomplished by private sector redevelopment.

### Streetscape Improvements

The streetscape alternatives were presented as options for different design themes to determine which best fit the character of Kelley's Corner and Acton, and which best fit for various locations within Kelley's Corner.



Circulation and Roadway Alternatives: Target Improvements

All the alternatives were tested first by the public for their opinion on the concepts. A public workshop was held and an online survey allowed people to submit their thoughts. Findings from the financial analysis and public input informed the preferred alternative.



Circulation and Roadway Alternatives: Balance Network

The concepts that were tested included informal and more formal or civic streetscape improvements. Both included an evaluation of various alternatives for streetscape amenities such as light poles, benches, trash cans, trees, and plantings.

#### **Private property redevelopment programs**

Land use redevelopment alternatives were drafted as a reasonable range of possibilities that would improve Kelley's Corner in line with the Acton 2020 Plan goals for revitalization and town center transformation. Due to private ownership and development patterns, the evaluation of the alternatives included scenario redevelopment schemes followed by financial analyses (pro-formas) to determine risk and potential financial return in the same way a developer and investor would approach the question of a project's feasibility. The scenarios were adjusted to help ensure financial feasibility. Then, zoning amendments were drafted to relate to the Acton 2020 Plan goals and the financial feasibility of redevelopment projects.

I.



Main Street and Massachusetts Avenue Design Concept

## The Preferred Alternatives

Forming a feasible and implementable plan to meet the town center vision, while at the same time addressing the alleviation of traffic congestion and improvement of the area's design character, was the main task for this project. The preferred approach was drafted to address existing conditions and improve the character of the area. The recommendations are framed in a three-pronged approach: **Encourage Quality Redevelopment, Improve Circulation and Mobility, and Beautify Public Areas.** The actions that support these approaches are summarized below and are included in the specific recommendations of the Kelley's Corner Improvement Initiative. These themes are linked together to create the concept of a high quality, mixed use, comfortable, and beautiful town center.

### Encourage Quality Redevelopment

Create an environment, through improved regulation and administration, that encourages redevelopment as a planned approach that is consistent with the town's vision of a walkable, vibrant, mixed-use center. To create a better regulatory environment, the amendments include:

- ◆ **Adding Clarity to the Permit Process**  
Simplifying and clarifying the zoning standards and the review process.
- ◆ **Applying Improved Design Standards**  
Including design standards and guidelines that better address the intended outcomes.

- ◆ **Partnering for Excellence in Design**

Drafting regulations with flexibility in the design of buildings and sites, after ensuring a baseline of quality. Review redevelopment plans early in the process in partnership between the developer, the designers, and the Town.

- ◆ **Ensuring Public Amenities**

Requiring private developers to integrate public spaces and amenities into redevelopment plans, which will provide higher quality projects.

- ◆ **Enabling Redevelopment Opportunities**

An adjusted zoning framework is needed to enable higher value redevelopment that fosters a town center environment.

- ◆ **Encouraging Mixed Use**

Incentivizing mixed-use projects, which include integrated multi-unit housing, and improves the potential for walkable, higher quality redevelopment projects with greater investment.

- ◆ **Shared Access and Parking**

Shared street access and shared on-site parking should be provided when possible.

### Improve Circulation and Mobility

To reduce congestion and make the experience in Kelley's Corner safer, more comfortable, and more efficient for all modes of travel, the plan includes:

- ◆ **Implementing the Complete Streets Policies**  
Implementing plans that include full accommodations for vehicular, bicycle, and pedestrian travel options.

- ◆ **Applying Access Management**

Reducing and consolidating curb cuts for safer conditions and lessening congestion in the streets.

- ◆ **Improving Vehicle Turning Movements**

Adding turning lanes and turning pockets to allow left turn movements without adding to the overall congestion.

### Beautify Public Areas

To define the desired character of Kelley's Corner as a uniquely transformed town center and to create safer and more comfortable streets, the plan includes:

- ◆ **Improving the Streetscape**

Applying a palette of streetscape elements that define the character of the district and add value to the adjacent private properties, thereby encouraging reinvestment and improvements of private properties.

- ◆ **Beautifying the Landscape**

Incorporate landscape treatments: trees, shrubs, grass, seating and hardscape that create a comfortable and inviting environment for pedestrians. Apply similar standards for improvements on private property.

- ◆ **Coordinating and Adding Attractive Signage and Wayfinding**

The streetscape and landscape elements must be integrated with a wayfinding and signage program that identifies the center, eases choices made by travelers in different modes, and encourages frequenting the businesses.

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## Achieving the Vision

Implementation of these program concepts requires a series of actions by the Town that include:

### Zoning Bylaw Amendments

**Local action:** Change the KC zoning district regulations initially with amendments to the underlying zoning district that would only apply to smaller, non-mixed use projects. Then, for larger projects, create a new overlay district with more flexible standards including an allowance for mixed-use with housing. These amendments would require building layouts that address the streets and create a walkable town center environment.

### Key Zoning Recommendations

#### Underlying Kelley's Corner District

- ◆ Maximum Floor Area Ratio reduced to FAR 0.20
- ◆ Building setbacks required between 25 and 30 feet
- ◆ Design standards for building design and site layout

#### Master Plan Development (MPD) Overlay District

- ◆ Create new overlay district on zoning map
- ◆ Maximum Floor Area Ratio set at FAR 0.8
- ◆ Building setbacks required between 25 and 30 feet
- ◆ Tiered maximum building height: 45 feet at the street edge and 55 feet on the interior of projects
- ◆ Design standards for building design and site layout
- ◆ Allows 75% of floor area for multi-family housing within mixed use developments.

### Adoption of Design Guidelines

**Local action:** Adopt design guidelines that provide enough information on the character of desired

development, strengthening the process for Design Review. Users are the Design Review Board, the Special Permit Granting Authorities, and the developers. The design guidelines apply to the public realm, which are building forms and spaces that are subject to public view from areas in public use.

### Key principles of the design plan:

- ◆ Support Kelley's Corner with uses and of the district for visitors and patrons of the area
- ◆ Reinforce Kelley's Corner as a civic place with spaces for small public gatherings and discourse
- ◆ Use examples of existing architecture and design in the Town of Acton as pointer and inspiration for renovation and new design



Amenities and Gathering Spaces

### ACTIONS:

Amendments to underlying zoning district  
These outcomes are accomplished first with amendments to the underlying zoning district that would only apply to smaller, non-mixed use projects.

Then, for larger projects, a new overlay district is made available with more flexible standards including an allowance for mixed use with housing. These amendments would require building layouts that address the streets and create a walkable town center environment.

#### Expansion of the right-of-way

These elements are accomplished with the inclusion of additional turning lanes at the main intersection, left-turn pockets, bike lanes, and sidewalks. To accomplish these improvements requires an expansion of the right-of-way, but for the most part does not adversely impact the potential redevelopment of the properties in the district.

#### Wayfinding and Signage

These ideas are implemented through a Streetscape and Landscape Improvement Project with a Wayfinding and Signage program that overall defines Kelley's Corner as a distinct and coherent Town Center.

# I.

## Sewer Utility Connection Program Amendments

**Local and State actions:** Increase permitted sewer capacity; change sewer use allocation policy; and offset the cost of sewer privilege fees.

### Key Sewer Policy Recommendations

#### ◆ Permitted Capacity

Apply to Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) for greater capacity based on actual flow; and apply to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for discharge into the Assabet River.

#### ◆ Allocation Policy

Reexamine the allocations for “external” and “internal” sewer use and evaluate the current method for applying privilege fees.

#### ◆ Tax Programs

Explore State Economic Development Incentive Programs (EDIP) to help offset the cost of privilege fees. Applicable programs may be Tax Increment Financing (TIF), Special Tax Assessments (STA), and Urban Center Housing Tax Increment Financing (UCH-TIF).

## Streetscape and Circulation Improvements

**Local and State actions:** The development of more detailed designs for the roadway and streetscape improvements involves Town staff, engineering consultants, and landscape architects. Plans will require approvals from the Massachusetts Department of Transportation, and other State and Federal agencies, including funding agencies. Design and construction of the improvements require significant funding.

### Key Recommendations to Advance Street Improvements

- ◆ Appropriate funding at Town Meeting to complete engineering design plans
- ◆ Continue to work with MassDOT to advance the design plans
- ◆ Maintain outreach and relationships with potentially affected property owners.

## Development of Funding Sources for Construction

**Local and State actions:** The most appropriate avenue for obtaining construction funding is the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). The MassWorks Program might assist with funding in a limited way. Town funds will be needed for right-of-way acquisition and construction elements that are not eligible for State or Federal funding.

### Key Funding Considerations

- ◆ TIP and MassWorks are competitive funding programs with significant overall fiscal constraints
- ◆ State and Federal policy direct funding for transportation improvements that support economic and housing development

### The Report

This Executive Summary articulates the key recommendations that have emerged from the Kelley’s Corner planning initiative. It accompanies a complete report with appendices that describe the context for the initiative, lists the recommendations and products of this effort, and compiles details of evaluations and analyses.



Preliminary Illustrative Streetscape Concept Plan

RECOMMENDATIONS	ACTIONS	VALUES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Provide significant roadway and sidewalk improvements to reduce congestion and provide a balanced circulation network including turning lanes, signal upgrades, bike lanes, sidewalks and crosswalks</li> <li>◆ Incorporate Community Lane into the public street network</li> <li>◆ Manage vehicle access to and from businesses and private development through coordinated street and site improvements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Endorse the concept design for transportation improvements described in this Report</li> <li>◆ Seek and secure funding and implement the roadway and sidewalk improvements</li> <li>◆ Transfer Community Lane to Town ownership</li> <li>◆ Approve zoning changes that coordinate circulation facilities within larger site development projects with Main Street and Massachusetts Avenue.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Reduced vehicular congestion will enhance the experience for those who shop, work, or live in Kelley's Corner</li> <li>◆ Transforms Kelley's Corner into a pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly town center</li> <li>◆ Increase property values</li> <li>◆ Attract private sector investment for redevelopment that will enhance business and expand the tax base</li> </ul>



Traffic Congestion on Route 27

# II.A.

## Facts and Findings

Greenman Pedersen Inc. (GPI) conducted the traffic analysis, provided the right of way plan, and prepared recommendations and the preliminary improvement plan. Transportation in Kelley's Corner is dominated today by vehicle traffic with frequent, consistent congestion. Pedestrian circulation is served by a limited stretch of public sidewalks, but the sidewalks are typically separated by driveways and parking lots from the stores, office buildings, and residences that compose the district. Bicycle facilities are effectively non-existent. There is an MBTA commuter rail station approximately one mile south of Kelley's Corner and a fixed route shuttle stop will be located in Kelley's Corner providing service to the station. This service is within a reasonable walking or biking distance for residents and employees of the area, and is connected by an existing sidewalk.

## Traffic Congestion and its Causes

The volume of traffic passing through the existing layout of streets and intersections in Kelley's Corner produces congestion that frustrates access to the area and delays Acton residents who need to drive through its streets to reach their destinations. Future trends do not indicate significant increases in vehicular traffic volumes. However, the existing problems will become gradually worse without street and intersection changes. Detailed traffic analyses are provided in the Appendices to this Report.

Kelley's Corner is a crossroads formed around the intersection of Massachusetts Avenue (Route 111) and Main Street (Route 27). Each is a heavily travelled route that carries both local traffic and regional traffic to and



Circulation and Roadway Recommended Concept (Balanced Network)

from Route 2 carrying one lane of traffic in each direction. There are limited turning lanes at the intersection to manage traffic, and the traffic signal controller technology is outdated. Community Lane is a private, two-way connection that provides access to some area businesses and links Massachusetts Avenue and Main Street northeast of their intersection. Because of its location and configuration, Community Lane provides limited relief for the main intersection of the principal roadways.

Route 111 and Route 27 are important connections for the communities of West Acton, Bolton, Boxborough, and Stow to the west and South Acton and Maynard

to the south. Because there are few practical alternative routes for much of the traffic, Kelley's Corner has become a bottleneck. As a result, the regional traffic is the primary contributing factor to the traffic congestion experienced at Kelley's Corner.

Regional links to Route 2 channel traffic through Kelley's Corner. The interchanges at Exit 42 and 43 are directly connected to Massachusetts Avenue and Main Street. Both are sources of substantial traffic volumes traveling on the roadways within Kelley's Corner. Their proximity is a problem; located less than 2,000 feet apart, the separation between the interchanges does

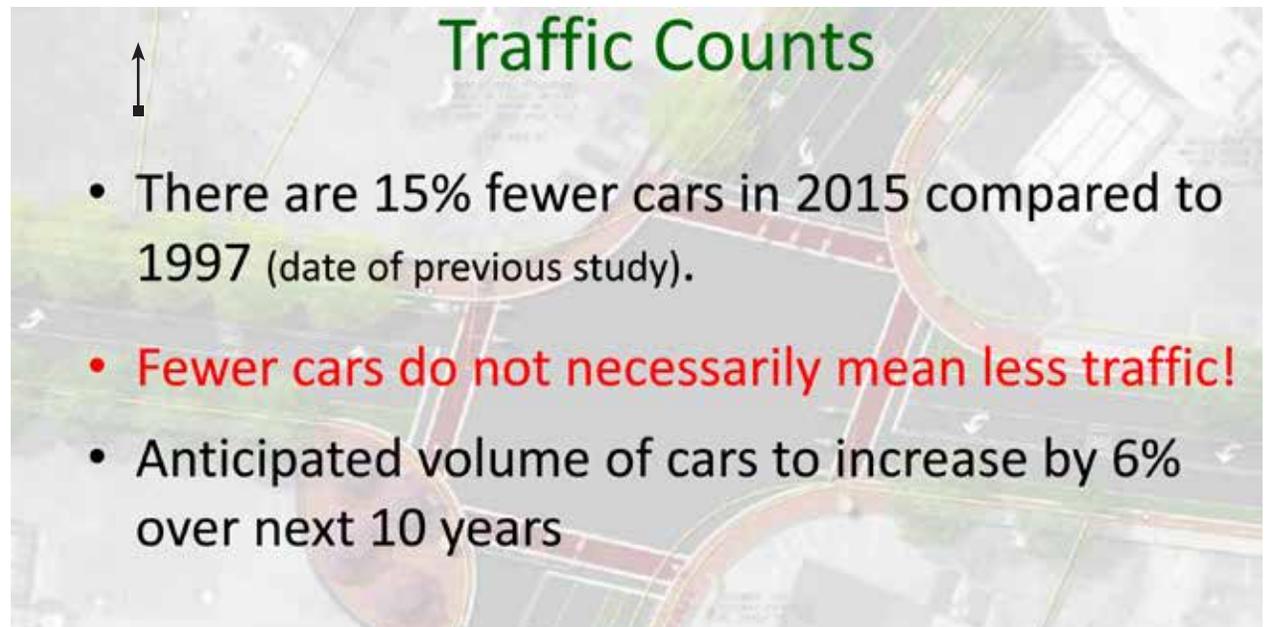
not meet American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) guidelines, which are the standards used by most State agencies.

Traffic planners measure congestion at intersections by calculating the Level of Service (LOS) that is provided. An excellent LOS without delays is classified as level A. In a descending scale, levels B, C, D, and E describe extended delays. A congested intersection causing substantial delays is rated as level F, which is the bottom of the scale and is considered to be failing.

Traffic counts were undertaken during this planning initiative in Kelley's Corner to establish the current volume of traffic at various times of day and days of the week. Using this information, GPI calculated that portions of the principal intersection of Massachusetts Avenue and Main Street are operating at LOS D during peak morning and Saturday hours, dropping to LOS F during evening peak periods. The northbound approach intersection of Main Street at Community Lane is currently failing during the evening commuter peak. The intersection of Massachusetts Avenue and Community Lane is also failing during the same time periods. Looking into the future, conditions will tend to get worse if no improvements are made due to the increases in regional and local traffic volumes that will slowly increase. In ten years (2024), approaches to the principal intersection of Massachusetts Avenue and Main Street will be near or at failing levels (LOS E or F) more frequently, including the morning and evening commuting periods and mid-day on Saturday. The Community Lane intersections will continue to fail during the evening commuting period, and will become worse during other time periods.



Crossing Guard and Students at Charter Road



Traffic Counts

## II.A.

Abundant curb cuts along the roadways in Kelley's Corner provide the access to businesses and properties; this significantly adds to the congestion. Vehicles that stop to make left-hand turns can completely block the flow of traffic behind them because the roadway shoulders are so narrow that there is no space to pass. The traffic flow today is often halted by single left-turning vehicles at nearly any location within the study area. This impact is amplified during peak hours when the opposing traffic offers little opportunity to execute left-turns.

Residents participating in community workshops described how they sometimes follow convoluted driving paths when doing business in Kelley's Corner to avoid making left turns. This includes using shortcuts through certain parking lots to avoid intersections and signals. Others noted that they try to avoid the area, at least during peak traffic times.

### **Pedestrian and Bicycle Environment: Limited Connections**

Pedestrian and bicycle activity is low except for students walking to lunch spots and coffee shops. Kelley's Corner is a difficult area for pedestrians and bicyclists to navigate. The Cecil Group prepared a survey of users of Kelley's Corner as part of the community engagement process. When people were asked why they avoided walking in the area, they gave a clear indication that they do not feel comfortable because the area lacks a consistent sidewalk network with proper construction, proper maintenance, adequate widths, and navigable slopes.



May 2014 Workshop - Pedestrian and Vehicular Movements in Kelley's Corner

An inventory of the public sidewalks revealed major gaps along the street edges. Some of the existing sidewalks are very narrow and are interrupted by utility poles. While there are some crosswalks, several important locations lack this basic safety feature. There are no continuous public sidewalks or paths extending into neighboring residential areas or along the main roads leading to Kelley's Corner. At the main intersection push buttons for pedestrians are not universally accessible, and signal poles obstruct the narrow sidewalks.

In this auto-oriented district, buildings are typically separated from public ways by parking lots and driveways. As a result, pedestrians who attempt to move between blocks and buildings are forced to share their paths with vehicles.

There are several informal pedestrian connections. These include a shortcut that some pedestrians use that passes across the K-Mart site, similar to the route used by some motorists. Students have also found informal paths that wind through properties between Kelley's Corner and the public school campus that lies just to the west.



Signal Poles and Guy Wire Obstruct Narrow Sidewalks

There are no bicycle facilities. Under current conditions, bicyclists must either use the same paths that pedestrians have available, or use the traffic lanes.

**Circulation Infrastructure: Poor Condition**

The physical condition of the roadways and sidewalks is generally poor and includes cracked and damaged paving, incomplete curbing, and uneven surfaces. The consultant team prepared an inventory of the basic condition problems as part of this study. An inventory of existing condition is in the Appendix G.

In many locations, the sidewalks do not meet the requirements associated with either Americans Disabilities Act (ADA) or the regulations of the Massachusetts Architectural Access Board (MAAB). Underground, the storm drainage for the roadways is inadequate in some locations and does not meet contemporary engineering standards. The signal technology that governs the traffic signals at the principal intersections is significantly outdated. For example, the current installation does not have the ability to flexibly manage traffic flows to reduce congestion as volumes shift during the day.



Existing Condition of Sidewalks

# II.A.

## Constraints and Opportunities

To help accomplish the Town's goals for Kelley's Corner, the following key constraints and opportunities frame a thoughtful approach to making changes in the transportation network.

### Constraints include:

- ◆ **Inability of the Town to alter major regional traffic patterns**

Although there would be many benefits to reducing the amount of regional traffic that is channeled through Kelley's Corner, Acton cannot change the regional traffic patterns. The only methods to dramatically reduce the congestion caused by through-traffic would be a major reorganization of the Route 2 interchanges, the construction of a significant bypass roadway, or widening of substantial lengths of both Route 111 and Route 27 to accommodate additional travel lanes. Such large-scale solutions are effectively outside of the control of the Town of Acton and would be within State jurisdiction. None of these methods are currently being planned or contemplated. As a result, traffic solutions must be designed to accommodate current and projected through traffic.

- ◆ **Limited roadway widths**

The restricted width of the roadways does not provide adequate space for the turning movements at Kelley's Corner. This includes restrictions in the number of available lanes at key intersections. Existing roadway widths are also inadequate to accommodate vehicles turning in and out of private properties in key locations.



Local and Regional Context

- ◆ **Limited public right-of-way to accommodate all public transportation needs**

Under current requirements for State roads and key State funding sources, street improvements must be designed to accommodate vehicles, bicycles, and sidewalks on both sides of the roadway. However, in some locations in Kelley's Corner, the public right-of-way is not wide enough to accommodate circulation requirements for all of these modes. As part of this study, a survey was prepared to establish the existing width of the right-of-way. This was used to evaluate the ability to accommodate the vehicle lanes, sidewalks, and bike lanes that are envisioned within the recommendations of this Report. Based on a concept design, acquisition of some private land will be required to expand the right-of-way in several locations. The approximate location and land area required to accommodate street and sidewalk improvements is

indicated in Appendix I. Specific determination of the location and extent of land that would be required and the methods for obtaining it would be established during detailed design phases, should the Town and State decide to advance the recommendations of this Report.

- ◆ **Lack of public control of Community Lane**

Community Lane is currently a private way. It has become an essential public circulation route for this area and will require intersection and pedestrian improvements to reduce congestion and increase convenient access to and from businesses. As a private way, however, the Town cannot practically require private enterprises to implement the improvements that are needed.

## Opportunities include:

### ◆ Complete streets policy

The Town's nationally recognized complete streets policy gives Acton a potential advantage when pursuing State and Federal funding for public infrastructure and circulation improvements. The policy guides a balanced approach to all transportation modes.

### ◆ Sustainability

Acton residents recognize that better walking and bicycling facilities enhances the Town sustainability.

### ◆ Connections to public transit

Commuter rail, shuttle and future pedestrian/bicycle connections.

### ◆ Taking advantage of a State and local partnership

Both the Town and the State have shared interests in improving circulation conditions for all those who travel to, from, and through Kelley's Corner. Massachusetts Avenue (Route 111) is owned and managed by the State, while Main Street (Route 27) is a Town road. Neither jurisdiction can undertake comprehensive improvements without the active involvement of the other and the Town and MassDOT have a good working relationship.

### ◆ Acton's financial condition is good

The Town's AAA bond rating, together with currently low interest rates are favorable conditions for borrowing. The Town must fund the design portion of the project in order to leverage State and Federal construction funding.

### ◆ State and Federal Transportation funds

The State is currently reassessing its policies for where to invest State and Federal Transportation funds. Projects that support housing and economic development are emerging as priorities.

## Recommendations and Rationale

### ◆ Improvements to Enhance Capacity and Reduce Congestion

Past attempts to address congestion within Kelley's Corner resulted in infrastructure proposals that greatly enhanced roadway capacity at the expense of the pedestrian scale environment. As a result these proposals were rejected by the community, sentiments which persist to date. This Report addresses vehicle capacity, but also access

management, accessibility, pedestrian and bicycle needs, and aesthetics. It will enhance the functionality and vibrancy of Kelley's Corner for existing users, and establish the foundation upon which future development can occur in line with the Town's goals of establishing a walkable town center.

The intersection and roadway improvements are designed to enable easier turning movements at key intersections. This would preserve a clear lane for proceeding motorists. Reducing conflicts requires adding turning lanes that separate through-traffic and left-turning traffic; this is particularly necessary at the intersection of Main Street and Massachusetts Avenue. In addition, improving the ability for cars to pass stopped vehicles that are turning left into business driveways would create a better flow.



Streetscape and Roadways Concept Plan

## II.A.



Charter Road /Route 111 Intersection Concept Plan



Route 27/111 Intersection Concept Plan

Through-flow capacity improvements would be accomplished with the installation of the following specific project elements:

- ◆ **Create longer left-turn lanes**  
The design provides lengthened left-turn lanes along all approaches to the Main Street and Massachusetts Avenue signalized intersection so that waiting vehicles do not block through traffic.
- ◆ **Provide center left turn lanes and pockets**  
The design includes left-turn lanes and pockets at key locations; on Massachusetts Avenue onto Charter Road into the public school campus and further east onto Community Lane; on Main Street for Community Lane and Beverly Road. Additional left turn pockets would be provided opposite significant driveways where there are practical opportunities and benefits to overall traffic circulation.
- ◆ **Add a traffic signal at Main Street and Community Lane**  
This will better enable both through traffic and turning movements with coordinated signal timing.
- ◆ **Install modern traffic signal and controller**  
The plan would modernize the traffic signal controller at the signalized intersections of Massachusetts Avenue and Main Street to implement time-of-day plans corresponding not only to commuting patterns but also to the unique patterns created by the school day and the local business activity. The signals would have retro-reflective borders and backplates that make them more highly visible to motorists.



**Community Lane Concept Plan**

Pedestrian signals and controllers would be provided including countdown indications and audio-tactile equipment for enhanced safety and accessibility.

- ◆ **Add right-turn lanes to both approaches of Main Street**

The plan includes additional right-turn lanes along Main Street at its intersection with Massachusetts Avenue so that traffic can move more efficiently in this location.

- ◆ **Provide bus turn-outs**

Turn-outs for fixed route shuttle stops to support transit access and begin the transition of Kelley's Corner into a multi-modal district. One turn-out is presently included in the plan.

These improvements are recommended because of the beneficial and measurable reductions in congestion and better traffic flows. GPI calculated the Average Wait Time and Level of Service performance changes that would occur. Average Wait Time is the duration that it takes to travel through the intersection. Level-of-Service indexes the quality of vehicle traffic flow in terms of such factors as speed, travel time, freedom to maneuver, traffic interruptions, comfort, convenience, and safety. A more detailed definition of Level of Service and intersection performance are provided in Appendix C.



**Route 27 Concept Plan**

# II.A.

## ◆ Improving performance of the principal intersection

Under current traffic volumes, the intersection of Massachusetts Avenue and Main Street would be upgraded.

The resulting improvements for traffic flow in year 2024 are summarized in the following Table:

**Massachusetts Avenue and Main Street Overall Intersections Performance**

Time of Day & Week	2024 without Improvements		2024 with Improvements		Changes in Wait Time (in seconds)
	Average Wait Time (in seconds)	Level of Service (LOS)	Average Wait Time (in seconds)	Level of Service (LOS)	
Weekday AM	70.8	E	44.2	D	-26.6
Weekday PM	155.7	F	108.2	F	-47.5
Saturday Midday	57.7	E	32.7	C	-25.0

**Note:**  
Additional information describing the street capacity improvements is contained in the Appendix C and in digital files that have been separately provided to convey the concept-level roadway designs.

## ◆ Improving performance at the Community Lane intersections

The improvements at both of the Community Lane intersections would contribute to congestion reductions as summarized for year 2024 in the Tables below:

**Massachusetts Avenue at Community Lane**

Time of Day & Week	2024 without Improvements		2024 with Improvements		Changes in Wait Time (in seconds)
	Average Wait Time (in seconds)	Level of Service (LOS)	Average Wait Time (in seconds)	Level of Service (LOS)	
Weekday AM	11.1	B	7.1	A	-4.0
Weekday PM*	600	F	130.0	F	-470
Saturday Midday	108.1	F	51.8	F	-56.2

\*Estimated from 2014 existing conditions

**Main Street at Community Lane**

Time of Day & Week	2024 without Improvements		2024 with Improvements		Changes in Wait Time (in seconds)
	Average Wait Time (in seconds)	Level of Service (LOS)	Average Wait Time (in seconds)	Level of Service (LOS)	
Weekday AM	7.7	A	15.4	B	+7.7
Weekday PM	48.0	E	29.0	C	-19.0
Saturday Midday	34.7	D	22.1	C	-12.6

The proposed traffic signal at Main Street and Community Lane and the left turn lanes at the Massachusetts Avenue intersection at Community Lane substantially aid through traffic. The current and projected traffic flows do not warrant a traffic signal at Massachusetts Avenue and Community Lane. The analysis recognizes that new development in Kelley's Corner will have a marginal impact on traffic volumes.

**Providing for All Transportation Modes:  
Complete Streets**

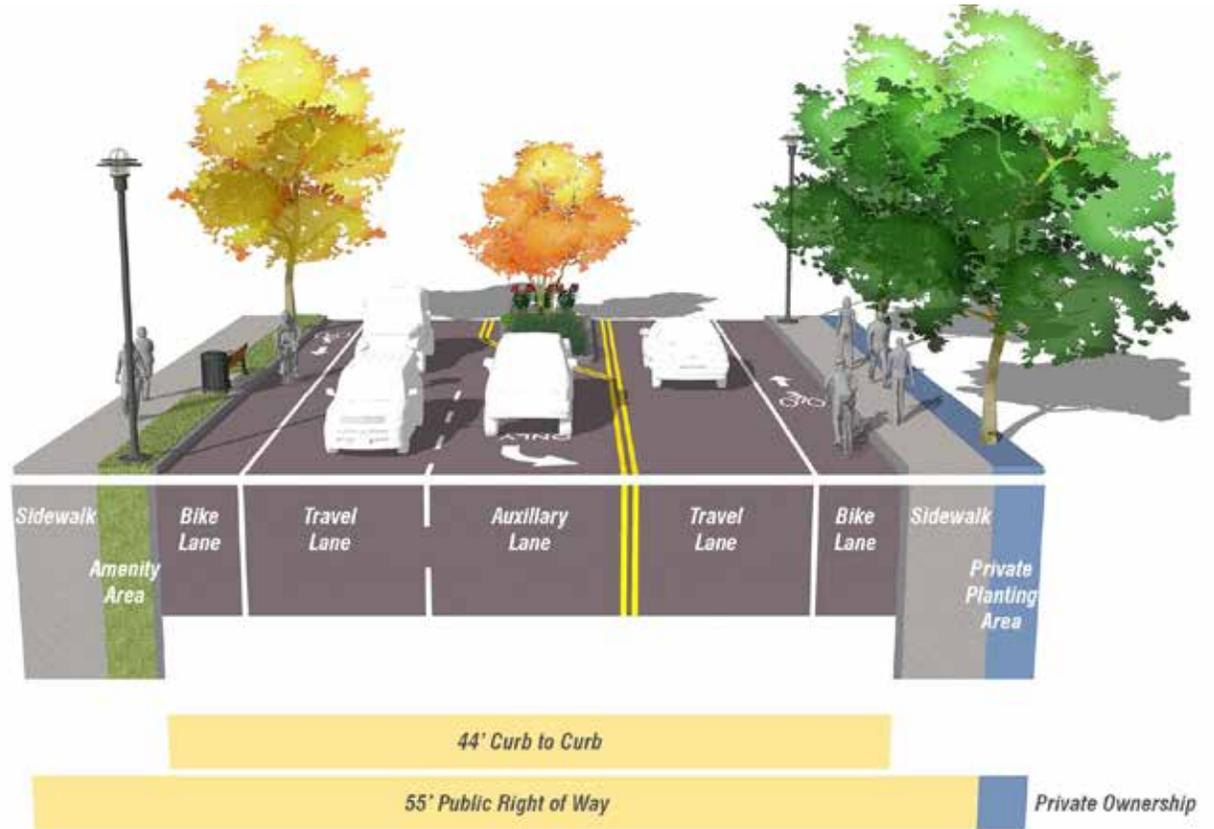
A complete sidewalk network should be extended along the edges of all of the public ways in Kelley’s Corner, linked by crosswalks at all intersections and major access drives into multiple-use properties. Bicycle lanes should be added to all improved streets. Bus turn-outs can contribute to a complete street network. Specific recommendations illustrated in the circulation design include the following:

◆ **Complete continuous sidewalks throughout the area**

The design calls for continuous concrete sidewalks on both sides of Main Street, Massachusetts Avenue and Community Lane. These sidewalks and transitions to crosswalks must meet all applicable handicapped accessibility standards, and should include tactile warning strips at all crosswalks. This recommendation includes replacing all damaged or inadequate walkways and relocating utility poles or other obstructions that block sidewalks.

◆ **Add and reorganize crosswalks**

Crosswalks should be added at both ends of Community Lane. The crosswalk across Massachusetts Avenue west of Charter Road is in an inconvenient location, and should be replaced by a new crosswalk directly at the intersection. On Main Street, the crosswalk on Community Lane should be relocated to the north side of the intersection. Crosswalks should be provided across wide and busy private drives, particularly where they serve multiple uses; specific locations have been provided in the concept layout



**Recommended Cross Section (Balanced Network and Informal Landscape)**

drawings. Center landscaped islands will be constructed along both Main Street and Massachusetts Avenue to complement left-turn pockets. These islands can serve as refuge areas allowing pedestrians to pause halfway across the street.

◆ **Add bicycle lanes**

Bike lanes should be provided on both sides of Main Street, Massachusetts Avenue and Community Lane. These improvements will create a safer place for bicyclists and can eventually connect to a more extensive network of bicycle lanes, links or paths.

◆ **Study options to create new and formalize existing pedestrian short cuts**

The Town should explore opportunities to create and improve paths that would serve as pedestrian “short cuts” to Kelley’s Corner. This could include pavement and appropriate lighting. An informal pedestrian path exists between the school campus and Main Street near Community Lane. Another pedestrian path extends from Francine Road to Massachusetts Avenue.

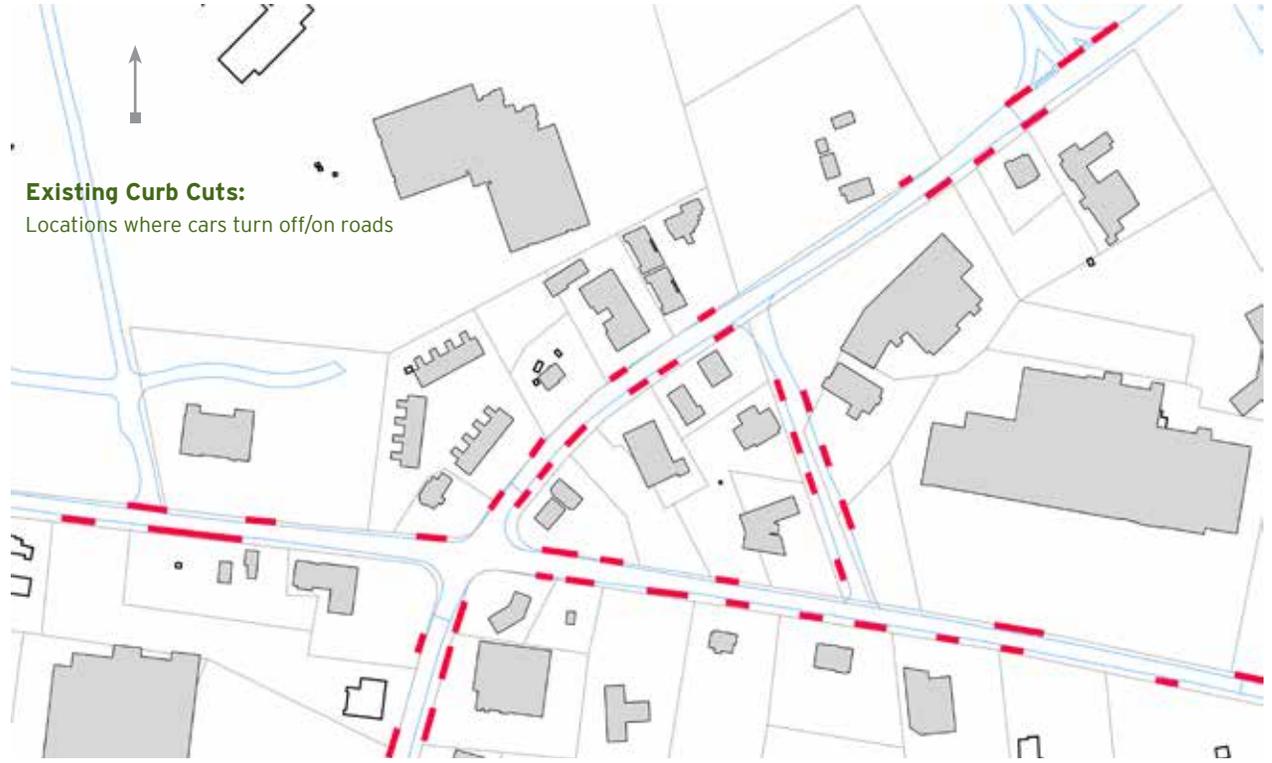
# II.A.

## Access Management

“Access Management” is a technique used to properly organize vehicle turning movements on and off public streets. In the context of Kelley’s Corner, access management means controlling the location, design, spacing, and operation of intersections and driveway openings. Access management enables organized access to private properties while maintaining safety and mobility for vehicles, and increases predictability for pedestrians and bicyclists. For example, curb cuts that are too close together or too wide increase the risk of accidents as drivers try to negotiate their movements.

### Access management recommendations include:

- ◆ **Consolidate and narrow excessive curb cuts**  
As part of the roadway and streetscape improvements, the Town, the State, and property owners should collaborate to rearrange and reduce curb cuts to create a safer place that will operate better for everyone. The concept design includes a series of specific recommendations. For example, removing one of the curb cuts along Community Way for businesses at the corner of Massachusetts Avenue. This curb cut is only about 60 feet away from the street intersection. As part of the changes, the parking spaces within the property would need to be rearranged and adapted to the new and safer circulation pattern. For some properties with existing uses, the curb cuts cannot be practically relocated further away from the intersections because of the site layouts. However, some of the existing curb cuts can be narrowed.



**Existing Curb Cuts:**  
Locations where cars turn off/on roads

Red lines designate size and location of curb cuts



Wide Curb Cuts along Main Street

♦ **Improve access management in concert with site redevelopment**

When sites are redeveloped, the Town can employ its site plan review responsibility to establish better access management than exists today. The State can contribute to access management through its review and approval of driveway access permit applications to Route 111.

**Community Lane and the Town Street Network**

Community Lane is a private way, but it functions as a critical element in the public street network of Kelley’s Corner. The Town should obtain ownership of Community Lane so it can improve it as a public way with State and Federal funding. As a private way, it is not eligible for such funding. In addition to providing access to several different properties, Community Lane is essential as a secondary street connecting Main Street and Massachusetts Avenue. The Town must establish its control in order to construct and maintain the recommended intersection changes, walkways, crosswalks, bike lanes, and other improvements.

**Circulation and Connections within Properties**

Private development provides much of the pedestrian, bicycle, and vehicular circulation in Kelley’s Corner. The proposed zoning amendments include a Master Plan Overlay District that anticipates future redevelopment of land consistent with the vehicle, pedestrian, and bicycle circulation goals of this plan. With this zoning tool, the Town has an opportunity to enhance and extend a safe and convenient network through the

road improvements is finalized. Initial studies indicate that strips of land may be required along the properties indicated in Appendix I. The widened right-of-way does not include existing buildings.

The cost of acquisition would be borne by the Town. The Town can ensure that the development rights associated with the existing parcel sizes remain intact for the benefit of the landowners. A recommended provision is addressed in Appendix M of this Report.

**Phasing the Design and Construction of Transportation Improvements**

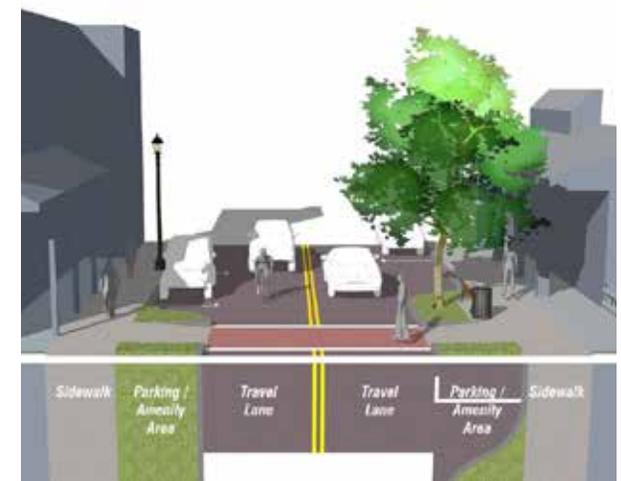
The design of the entire network of improvements should occur in a coordinated, single phase. The construction of the public transportation improvements can be phased if necessary.



Civic Character Example

**Alignment with the Acton 2020 Goals and Implementation Strategies**

One of the Acton 2020 Key Implementation Strategies is to “Guide Growth to Centers” such as Kelley’s Corner. The current transportation infrastructure in Kelley’s Corner is inadequate for existing traffic conditions. Growth and redevelopment requires supportive transportation infrastructure. The infrastructure improvement recommendations will provide the necessary facilities to reduce vehicular congestion, support walkability and bicycle circulation, and attract new development. The conformance of the Transportation recommendations with the Town’s Goals and Strategies is documented in Appendix B. Conformance with Acton 2020 Goals and Strategies.



Recommended Cross Section for Interior Roadways within Private Development (Expanded Network)

# II.A.

## Value

### Costs

#### Construction Costs

The construction cost of the recommended road improvements and streetscape enhancements is estimated to be within a range of \$7.275 million and \$8.775 million based on 2015 construction costs.

The center point of this range is \$8.025 million. This estimate has been prepared at a level consistent with the concept level design that was prepared for this study. Subsequent design phases will provide further information and detail that will allow refinements and more accurate design estimates to be prepared. Because the dates of bidding and constructions have not been determined, escalation of construction prices cannot be estimated and will need to be taken into account.

The cost estimate allocates the roadway and streetscape improvements into three major geographic categories:

#### ◆ State roadway

Massachusetts Avenue is a State-owned roadway. The cost for improvements designed on this portion of the project is approximately \$5.4 million.

#### ◆ Town roadway

Main Street is a Town-owned section of the road. Approximately \$2 million in improvements have been estimated for this segment of the overall improvement plan.

#### ◆ Community Lane

Community Lane improvements are estimated to cost approximately \$600,000.

Federal and State funding for these improvements could be secured in five to ten years. Adjusting the above estimates for future inflation, and adding 25% contingency, the estimated total construction cost are likely in the range of \$9-\$12 million dollars.

#### Design and Engineering Costs

The costs for the design and engineering for a project of this type and scale typically range from about 8% to 12% of the project and will depend upon the final scope, phasing, and complexity of the project that is funded and authorized by the Town and the State.

The design and engineering costs will be allocated to three incremental phases, each of which contributes to the entire project requirements.

#### ◆ Concept Level

The concept level design and engineering conducted for this study established the geographic scope, circulation, traffic engineering, and streetscape design. It provides a basis for more accurate project budgeting than was previously possible.

#### ◆ MassDOT 25% Level Design

This level of design is a specific, technical definition of the type and extent of studies and documentation needed to refine the scope, cost, and other considerations prior to a project advancing as a State funded and approved project. As described in the section on Resources below, the most likely route for

funding approvals and State action on the construction of improvements will be participation in the Federally and State TIP program. The MassDOT 25% Level Design will require advancing the engineering plan for Kelley's Corner to a higher level than was appropriate within the scope of this study. This is a greater level of design and documentation than is necessary for a MassWorks grant application, which had been considered as a potential funding source before the start of this study. The costs for achieving MassDOT 25% design level for the entire project area has been estimated at \$318,000 and would need to be paid for by the Town.

#### Final Design and Construction Phase Engineering Services

The cost of final engineering and landscape design, advancing the 25% design to a final 100% design, is estimated to be \$438,000 and would be the Town's responsibility. Final construction costs will be vetted by the Massachusetts Department of Transportation during this phase. Additional future project costs are not included in the construction and design cost estimates. The cost estimate does not include the costs of acquiring the additional property for the right-of-way to accommodate the road widening and for Community Lane. The process and values established for right-of-way acquisitions will follow Federal standards. The cost will be determined towards the end of the design phase and will need to be borne by the Town.

## Resources

The Town should seek as much State and Federal resources as can be obtained for the project. This should be supplemented by Town expenditures for improvements that may not be eligible under State or Federal programs. This could include items such as upgrading landscape and streetscape materials from what may be funded through some standard roadway programs. Sources of funds could include:

### ♦ Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) Funding

As a State-owned roadway, the improvements on Route 111 should be funded through State or Federal sources. Route 27 is also eligible for State and Federal funding through the Surface Transportation Program. Based on these circumstances and the importance of the project, it is most appropriate to target the regional Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) to prioritize and secure the majority of funding for the project. The TIP schedules projects in 4-year increments. Acton is within the Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), which updates the TIP annually. A criterion for advancing a project through the TIP process is local funding commitment to meet the MassDOT technical design requirements. As a result, this Report includes a recommendation for the Town to fund the incremental design and engineering needed to advance the project for TIP funding. Once the 25% design phase is complete, a public hearing will be held by MassDOT. At this time the Town should have indication of whether it will be considered for TIP funding in the next 4-year increment.

### ♦ MassWorks Infrastructure Program

The MassWorks Infrastructure Program provides funding to municipalities through competitive grants and is often used for streetscape and circulation projects. It is administered by the Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development in cooperation with the Department of Transportation and Executive Office for Administration and Finance. MassWorks grant resources, could be pursued to fund a portion of the total project costs but are not sufficient for the entire project. MassWorks grant awards have typically been for amounts between \$1 million and \$2 million. This source can be used for local public streets that would not be eligible for some State or Federal programs. As a result, MassWorks remains a possible resource to fund improvements to Community Lane if acquired by the Town.

This year's grant review criteria includes: consideration of preliminary design that the community has accomplished at its cost, the ability to rapidly implement the project, and approved private sector development that will benefit from the infrastructure, and other factors.

The concept-level engineering and design accomplished by this study is consistent with the level of design required to meet MassWorks application standards. However, other factors will be taken into account and must be considered as part of Acton's grant strategy. Improvements to Community Lane have been estimated at less than \$1 million (not including acquisition cost) and could be implemented as a separate phase, largely independent from changes to Massachusetts Avenue and Main Street.

However, the Town would need to fully establish control prior to being eligible for funding. The proposed improvements in Main Street and Massachusetts Avenue exceed the capacity of the MassWorks program and will require funding through the TIP. Therefore, the Town would also have to ensure that the engineering design for Community Lane, at least at the Massachusetts Avenue and Main Street intersection approaches, meets the higher level design standards that are required for TIP funding.

### Local Funds

Acton can allocate contributing funds through direct capital appropriations or through infrastructure bonds. Local funds will be needed as noted previously for engineering design; for right-of-way acquisition including Community Lane; and for any construction items that may not be eligible under State and Federal funding programs such as supplemental landscaping, ornamental light poles, benches, pocket parks, and other streetscape enhancements.

### Other Sources

Other sources may be available and appropriate for funding improvements, as new programs and legislated allocations emerge periodically, and the Town should monitor and could seek funding opportunities with MassDOT and the Town's elected State and Federal representatives.

# II.A.

## Benefits

Implementing the transportation recommendations in this Report will provide the following benefits:

- ◆ **Reduced congestion for Acton residents**

The roadway improvements will reduce traffic congestion for all of the Acton residents moving to, from or through Kelley's Corner.

- ◆ **Better business district**

Kelley's Corner will become a better commercial and retail district because it will be more convenient and attractive. The "Complete Streets" design, along with streetscape and landscape components, will significantly enhance the appearance and value of the entire district.

- ◆ **Attract private investment and redevelopment**

The roadway improvement will set the stage for private investment in properties and encourage redevelopment.

- ◆ **A more walkable district**

Kelley's Corner will be significantly more pedestrian-friendly

- ◆ **Bicycle access and connections**

Bicycles will have designated lanes and facilities throughout the district.

- ◆ **Support for transit**

Transit users will have a new bus stop

- ◆ **Integration of new development into a coordinated circulation network**

New development will have internal circulation patterns that complement the public street and sidewalk network.

- ◆ **Improved safety**

The area will become safer for motorists, pedestrian and bicyclists.

- ◆ **Improved access management**

Reduced numbers and widths of curb cuts, together with left-turn pockets on Massachusetts Avenue and Main Street; reduced vehicular congestion; simpler, safer, and more effective ways to access businesses and residences; and an improved pedestrian environment in the district.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- ◆ Create an attractive streetscape along all of the existing and future public streets in Kelley's Corner with generous street tree plantings, pedestrian-scale amenities and lighting, and focused public spaces to create a civic quality in the district
- ◆ Link the public streetscape with site planning and landscape improvements on private properties to extend pleasant streetscapes along the walking paths, sidewalks, and access drives
- ◆ Ensure that the landscaping of new developments includes trees and plantings to reduce the visual impact of parking lots and establish visual buffers where appropriate

### ACTIONS

- ◆ Fund the roadway infrastructure design including streetscape and public landscape improvements
- ◆ Adopt Kelley's Corner Design Guidelines for use in the town's permitting process to ensure attractive landscaping for private redevelopment and to extend a pedestrian-friendly streetscape along private drives

### VALUE

- ◆ Streetscape improvements enhance the property value of retail, commercial businesses and residential properties by creating a more pleasant and distinctive district for shopping, working, and living
- ◆ The district will benefit from a safer and more accessible pedestrian environment that reduces the reliance on vehicles and parking and allows more efficient land use
- ◆ Environmental benefits of landscape improvements provide cleaner water and protection of wetlands and shade for people and property, and reduces the heat island effect of streets and parking lots



Streetscape and Landscape Alternatives: Civic Character

**Facts and Findings**

“Streetscape” is composed of all of the visual elements associated with streets and their edges. The streetscape includes all necessary circulation infrastructures such as paved lanes, shoulders, curbs, crosswalks, and sidewalks. It includes the traffic signals, signage, and street lighting along the street edge, and any overhead utilities and the poles that support them. A variety of utility-related objects are found here, from fire hydrants to traffic signal equipment boxes. It may also include trees and plants along its edges. Walls and fences may frame portions of the streetscape. In commercial areas, business signs compete for attention from motorists. The streetscape can include amenities and features that are termed “street furniture”: benches, trash receptacles, public art, bike racks, and many other components.

The streetscape in Kelley’s Corner, as well as the private land along its edges, has evolved incrementally in response to the predominantly car-centered transportation mode. But the streetscape can be enhanced as a designed place that becomes a cohesive asset, provides aesthetic benefits, and creates a sense of place for gathering and shopping. An enhanced, desirable gathering place is a goal of the Kelley’s Corner Improvement Initiative and the subject of this section of the Report.

Landscape encompasses the planted and natural green spaces including the tree cover, shrubs and groundcover. Landscape also includes the paved open land, whether it serves pedestrians or parking. This



Wide Curb Cuts along Route 27

section of the Report describes how the Town can help shape the landscape in the built environment of Kelley’s Corner in concert with preservation and enhancement of the natural environment.

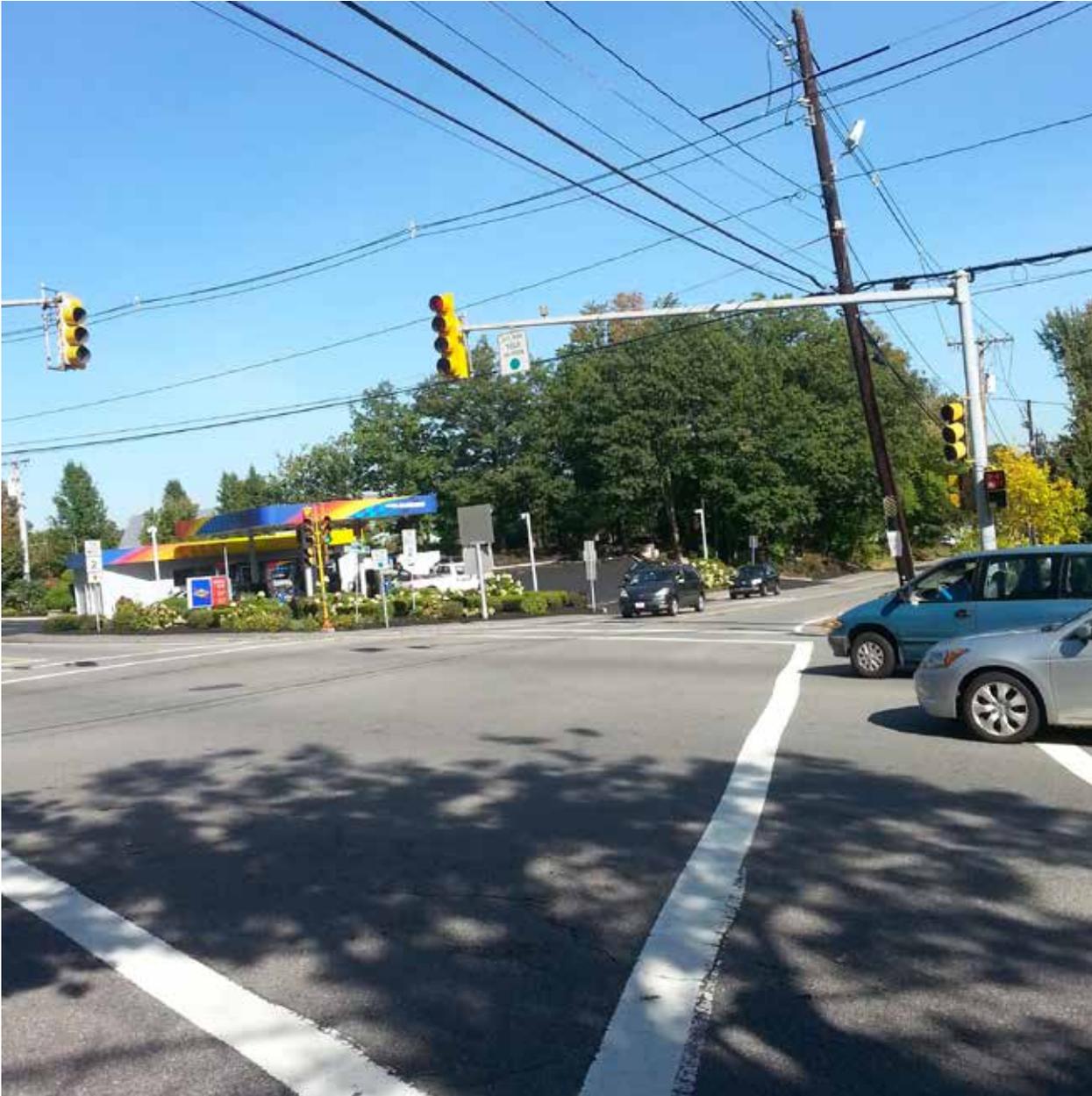
**Existing Streetscape Character**

The streetscape throughout Kelley’s Corner includes some wooded and landscape segments that are the result of natural conditions and development patterns. For example, the west side of Route 27 between the Route 2 interchange and Massachusetts Avenue includes some low-lying land and deciduous woods on either side of the historic Hosmer House. Pockets of wetlands and drainage swales extend to the edges of Massachusetts Avenue near Town House Lane and

the Route 2 ramps. Other segments of Massachusetts Avenue and Main Street leading into Kelley’s Corner, lined with older, low density residential development or school property that have significant clusters of mature trees and plantings.

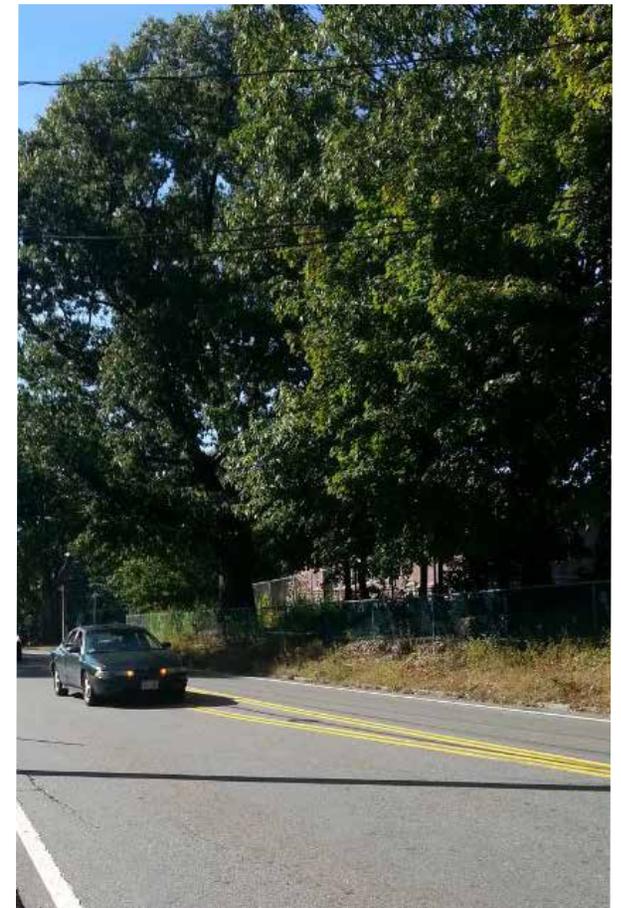
However, the district’s central area is different. The existing streetscape in the center of Kelley’s Corner is dominated by accommodations for automobiles. Wide curb cuts, multiple driveways, and asphalt parking lots lead right to the street edge. Sidewalks have been added and improved over time, but the sidewalk network overall is incomplete and in poor condition. Utility poles and lines follow the streets. Widely spaced “cobra head” lights provide limited illumination.

## II.B.



Intersection at Massachusetts Avenue and Main Street

Within this automobile-oriented area, some properties have significant planting beds, trees, and landscaping while others lack maintained landscaping all together. There is no significant street furniture or pedestrian amenities within the streetscape. Except for a new play park on Community Lane, there are no public spaces for pausing, sitting, and meeting others within the streetscape.



Pockets of Mature Trees along Massachusetts Avenue

### Landscape and Vegetation

The boundaries of Kelley's Corner are defined by narrow bands of woodland. The Route 2 border is wide and heavily wooded, creating a visual separation from the highway. Extensive wetlands and wooded properties compose the northern boundary and extend to the Town's school campus. Wetlands border the K-Mart property in the southwest quadrant of Kelley's Corner, separating it from nearby houses and a synagogue. Steeply sloped land, some of it wooded, separates Kelley's Corner from bordering Nadine Road and the residential neighborhood that lies to the south.

The landscaping within developed parcels varies significantly. A few pockets of mature trees remain. Some parking areas feature ornamental trees and shrubs along their borders and in islands. Other parking lots within the district are uninterrupted planes of asphalt.

### Natural Systems and Topography

The natural systems such as woodlands and wetlands abut Kelley's Corner in some areas. Land within Kelley's Corner has largely been altered by development. Water courses have been captured in drainage pipes. The portion west of Main Street lies at an elevation of between 210-240 feet. Towards the east of Kelley's Corner, the elevation drops to 180 feet.



Constraint of Wetlands

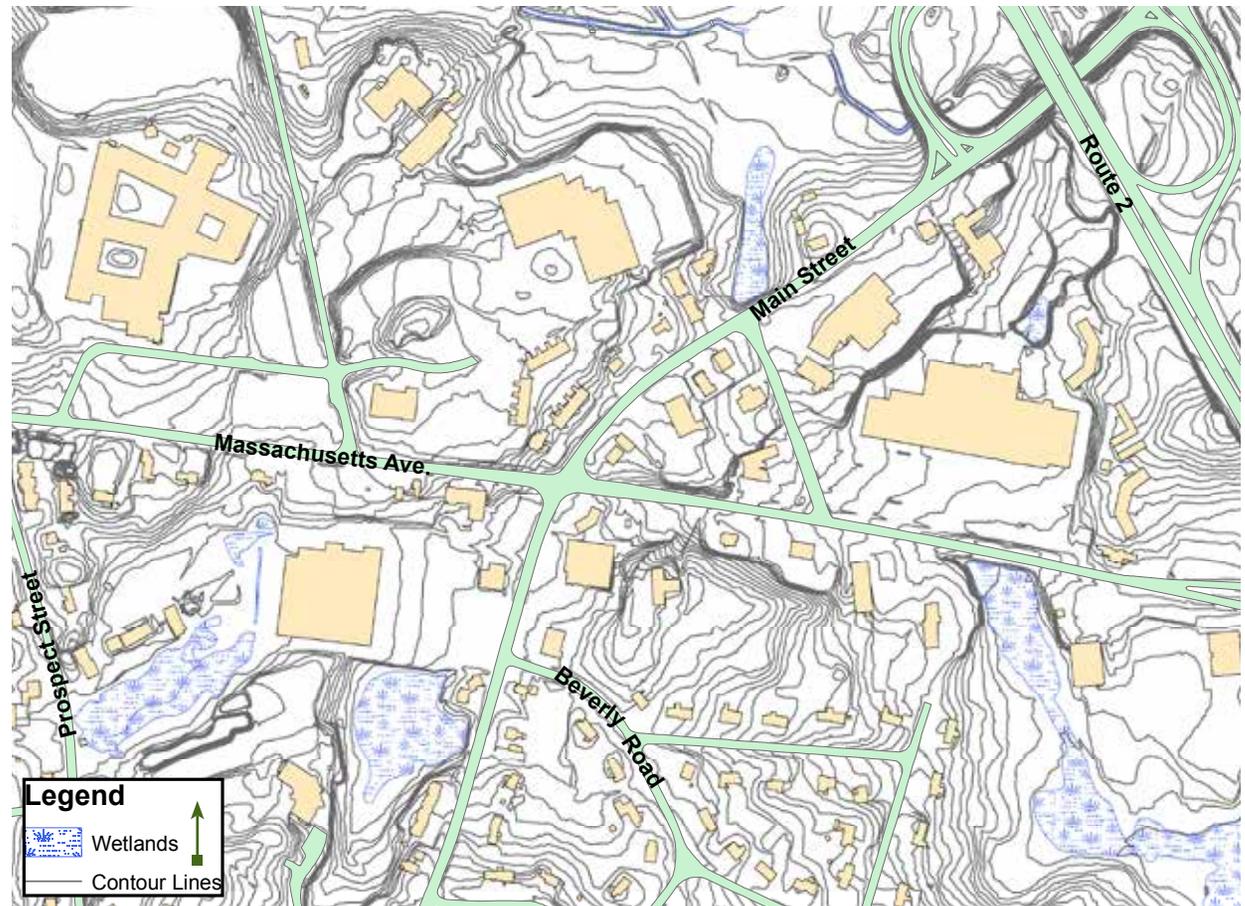
## II.B.

### Constraints and Opportunities

Key constraints and opportunities influence the approach to the streetscape design and landscape management.

#### Constraints include:

- ◆ **Location and character of the wetlands**  
Wetlands are regulated under the State Wetlands Protection Act and Acton Bylaws, which mandates natural buffers and contains development.
- ◆ **Limited right-of-way width to accommodate a complete streetscape**  
The existing street right of way is too narrow to accommodate recommended roadway and streetscape improvement.
- ◆ **Private ownership along Community Lane**  
Although the Town has an access easement along Community Lane, it does not own it. Therefore, the Town cannot implement complete street improvements with public funds, including the recommended landscaping, pedestrian facilities, or other features.
- ◆ **Topographic challenges**  
Several areas of Kelley's Corner have steep grade changes that will influence the type and extent of streetscape treatments and private development.



Contour Lines and Wetlands

#### Opportunities include:

- ◆ **Wooded and landscaped approaches to Kelley's Corner**  
The approaches into Kelley's Corner, with their wooded character, provide the opportunity to create a well-defined and distinctive streetscape and landscape quality within the district that differs from its surroundings.
- ◆ **Large properties**  
The large properties such as the K-Mart site within Kelley's Corner present an opportunity for significant, well-designed landscapes and connections to the public streetscape when they are redeveloped. This can include provisions for meaningful public spaces or gathering areas within large, planned developments.

## ◆ Public ownership

The publicly owned northern boundary of Massachusetts Avenue, the school campus, and the intersection with Charter Road creates a significant opportunity to plan, design, and manage streetscape and public space enhancements.

## Recommendations and Rationale

### Streetscape Composition

The streetscape along the public ways in Kelley's Corner should become an identifying feature that provides generous landscaping and street trees and a cohesive sequence of sidewalks and crosswalks. The streetscape should include attractive and appropriate street lighting to create a consistent, pedestrian-scaled band of well-lit spaces along the street edges. If it becomes financially feasible, the overhead utilities could be placed below ground.

The streetscape design should vary to shape the positive experience and perception of the district. Variations will add interest and correspond to the different landscape and development conditions that characterize different portions of the district. The overall concept design for the streetscape in key areas is illustrated in the drawings in this section of the Report. They have been fully coordinated with the circulation and roadway improvement concept presented in the transportation section in this Report.

## ◆ Street Trees

Street trees should be used to shape the perception of the district and differentiate portions of Kelley's Corner.

## ◆ Informal edges

The edges of several segments of Massachusetts Avenue and Main Street are composed of large deciduous trees in wooded areas that abut the street. For these segments, a limited range of deciduous trees can be added in order to create an informal edge that reinforces the sense of a wooded, natural corridor. The street trees should not be evenly spaced, and they should have varied setbacks from the street edge adapted to the specific constraints and conditions where they are placed. This approach should be used along the northwestern side of Main Street from the Route 2 interchange to the Massachusetts Avenue intersection, and the northern side of Massachusetts Avenue west of Main Street.

## ◆ Formal edges

The other edges of Massachusetts Avenue and Main Street are lined by a variety of developed land uses. Along these edges, a more consistent line of street trees will result in visual cohesion. Along these edges, a single, consistent street tree species should be selected and their planting locations should provide for as a regular spacing and setback pattern as possible.

## ◆ Community Lane edges

Community Lane is the only connector street in the district. The scale and character of Community Lane, the district's only connector street in the district, differ from both Massachusetts Avenue and Main Street. It should be lined with a distinct tree variety with defined shape, color, and flowering characteristics.



Streetscape Elements

## II.B.

### Civic nodes and ornamental trees

There are several locations where small civic plazas can be created within the streetscape network. Two locations in particular present the best potential for the creation of civic places: the Massachusetts Avenue/Main Street intersection and the northern concept identifies the potential for civic plazas in two locations. One is at the Massachusetts Avenue/Main Street intersection; the other one is at the northern end of Community Lane. These locations are appropriate for ornamental trees that have special seasonal color, shapes, and other characteristics that will reinforce their visual prominence.

### Treatments for the Street Edge

Using a similar rationale for the design of the street edges, there should be appropriate variations in the composition of streetscape between the curbs and adjacent properties.

### Treatments should include:

#### ◆ Civic edge

The Center of Kelley's Corner will have the greatest level of activity. This is an area where the right-of-way is also constrained. Beginning at the intersection of Massachusetts Avenue and Main Street, the sidewalks should be highlighted by paving patterns such as brick banding and extend to the curb. Bricks should be placed with concern for accessibility. Landscaping should begin at the back of the sidewalk and be visually integrated with the adjacent property landscape. This will reinforce the pedestrian

environment and provide visual continuity. The color and character of the brick banding and concrete sidewalks should extend across curb cuts but be flush with the adjacent asphalt.

#### ◆ Landscaped edge

Along the approaches to the Center, a generous landscape border between the curb and sidewalk will be appropriate in many locations. This will help create a transition from the landscape approaches to Kelley's Corner and the more developed central parcels and intersections.

### Streetscape Elements

The streetscape will be assembled from elements that establish aesthetic quality and meet practical needs. The streetscape elements envisioned for the Concept Design have been chosen because they are often associated with town centers and mixed-use districts and the pedestrian-orientation that distinguishes them. The recommended constituent elements include:



Streetscape Elements, benches

#### ◆ Sidewalks

Concrete sidewalks with stamped brick segments and brick banding. In some locations, an impressed, colored material should be used to connect brick banding across curb cuts.

#### ◆ Street lighting

Street lighting should be a contemporary interpretation of traditional designs, rather than a reproduction of an historic fixture. The fixture should be of a height and spacing to illuminate the pedestrian environment and crosswalks as a primary objective. The overall illumination level should be moderate.

#### ◆ Walls and stone features

In some areas, there will be modest topographic changes or a need to provide bordering walls or features. Granite blocks should be used with rough or flame-finished surfaces; natural field blocks may also be employed. The goal should be to use the type of large blocks were traditionally used in Acton building foundations, walls, and other structures in Acton's past.

#### ◆ Street furniture

Black metal benches with composite seating surfaces should reflect civic design traditions but with contemporary expressions. A similar approach should be used for trash receptacles and bollards.

◆ **Special features**

The streetscape should provide opportunities for banners and other civic signs that announce Town events and programs. Street lights near the center of Kelley’s Corner should be equipped with outlets to support holiday lighting. In addition, locations and opportunities for public art installations—either permanent or temporary—should be provided.

**Civic Nodes and Public Spaces**

The streetscape concept recommends the installation of formal civic spaces at the intersections of Main Street and Massachusetts Avenue, and at Massachusetts Avenue and Community Lane. These spaces would serve as civic meeting places and express the town center quality sought for Kelley’s Corner. These spaces would need to be deeper than the width of the adjacent sidewalks to create pockets for seating and provide a design opportunity for special landscaping and features. They would require easements or acquisition of private property to allow construction. The illustrative Concept Design envisions special paving, low granite walls and bench seating, and seasonal plantings and ornamental trees.

**Landscaping and Private Development**

Most of the landscaping in Kelley’s Corner will be on private land. The Town can help shape the character of the landscape that emerges through its regulatory role associated with development and environmental stewardship. The recommendations for shaping and preserving a high quality landscape within private landholdings would largely be implemented through



Streetscape Concept Design



Streetscape Elements

## II.B.

regulations. Specific provisions have been provided in the draft zoning and design guidelines included in this Report. The recommendations and their rationale include:

### ◆ Front yard landscaping

Through zoning and design guidelines, the Town should require planted landscaping or plaza-like “hardscaping” in front yards of new projects. This should complement the building architecture and the streetscape, create a buffer to the street, and enhance the area’s aesthetic and economic value.

### ◆ Landscaping and parking lots

The integration of landscaping into parking lots can enhance the quality of sites and benefit adjacent properties by reducing the visual impact of automobiles and providing shade.

### ◆ Plazas and spaces for public uses

Through the recommended Master Plan Development Overlay District, the Town can work with owners and developers to create plazas and public spaces. These spaces should be directly linked to the surrounding pedestrian network so that they connect the entire district.

### ◆ Protection of the wetlands and drainage ways

The Town should continue to protect the wetlands and drainage ways through its regulatory role, so that these parts of natural system remains healthy environmental assets for the district.



Public Amenities and Gathering Spaces



PUBLIC PLAZA/  
OUTDOOR SEATING

### Alignment with the Acton 2020 Goals and Implementation Strategies

The streetscape and landscape improvements for Kelley’s Corner presented in this Report are integral to the district’s economic growth and the enhancement of the public experience by providing

public gathering spaces. The conformance of the streetscape and landscape recommendations with the Town’s Goals and Strategies is documented in *Appendix B. Conformance with Acton 2020 Goals and Strategies*.

## Value

### Costs

The streetscape elements of the Concept Design (roadway improvement project) are estimated at about \$2.1 million, or about 25% of the total project construction costs. The cost estimate components are included in *Appendix E. Roadway and Streetscape Improvement Cost Estimate*. The costs for the private sector landscape enhancements will be part of the private development costs.

### Resources

Most or all of the landscape and streetscape improvements in the Concept Design are eligible for the State and Federal funding sources indicated in Component A. Transportation, depending upon the combination of sources. For some sources, special materials or features such as brick paving or enhanced lighting would not be covered.

## Benefits

Implementing the streetscape and landscape recommendations in this Report will provide the following benefits:

- ◆ **Inviting destination**  
The improvements will help create an attractive destination for shopping, working, and living.
- ◆ **A more walkable district**  
Kelley's Corner will be significantly more pedestrian-friendly with a high quality streetscape.
- ◆ **An improved business district**  
Attractive, high quality streetscapes will have direct positive effects on business and retail sales and property values.
- ◆ **Attract private investment and redevelopment**  
The streetscape improvement will set the stage for private investment and encourage redevelopment.



Streetscape and Landscape Alternatives

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- ◆ Ensure sufficient sewer capacity for redevelopment
- ◆ Improve the street and environmental conditions
- ◆ Relocate utility poles to behind the sidewalks to be consistent with streetscape and roadway improvements.

## ACTIONS

- ◆ Revise sewer regulations to ensure that they are not a barrier for redevelopment.
- ◆ Expand sewer plant capacity as needed to support new redevelopment.
- ◆ Improve drainage system during road improvement project.
- ◆ Relocate utility poles with road improvement project.

## BENEFITS

- ◆ Support redevelopment that will significantly improve the character of Kelley's Corner.
- ◆ Create a district that is visually coherent and safer for pedestrians



Sewer Pump House Located off Massachusetts Avenue

**Facts and Findings**

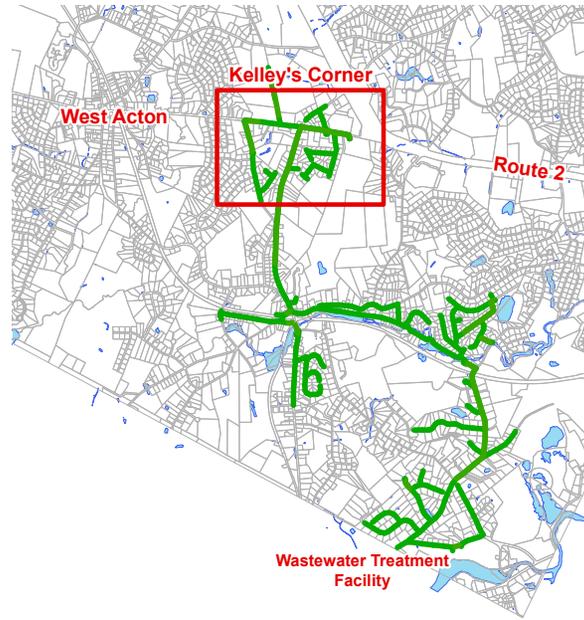
Development and use of property would not be possible without the supporting infrastructure of utilities: water, sewer, roads, electric power, telecommunications, and drainage. Kelley’s Corner has the full complement of utilities to support development. The Town must maintain and manage the sewer, roads, and storm drainage systems, except where another agency has jurisdiction. The varied capacities and conditions of the district’s sewers and drainage system present potential limitations for redevelopment.

**Sewer District**

Kelley’s Corner is the only regional commercial center in Acton serviced by public sewer. It is part of the Middle Fort Pond Brook Sewer District that services approximately 10% of the Town’s development. New development and redevelopment in Kelley’s Corner must be able to depend on the capacity of the sewer district’s infrastructure to accommodate additional wastewater flow. Sewer privilege fees assessed to new development and redevelopment will constitute a significant development cost that must be considered in the economic feasibility of any development project.

◆ **Location**

The location of the sewer district and the properties serviced by sewer are shown in the following map. The sewer district includes Kelley’s Corner and the Acton Boxborough School Campus. It extends south along Main Street to service South Acton Village and continues down River Street, Parker Street, and High Street to the wastewater treatment plant on Adams Street.



Middle Fort Pond Brook Sewer District

◆ **System Design**

The sewer system is generally a gravity fed system with some pump stations where needed. Main lines are “supersized” to accommodate more wastewater flow than the district would generate at full capacity, allowing the system to support additional development without requiring system upgrades or increases. The treatment plant processes the wastewater and discharges advanced tertiary treated effluent into the ground adjacent to the Assabet River.

◆ **Governance**

The Board of Selectmen, in its role as Sewer Commissioners, is the governing body that

establishes and oversees all policies regarding the sewer district. Policies include fees, regulations, and the use and allocations of reserve capacity (both within the district for ‘internal’ expansion and outside the district for ‘external’ expansion). The Sewer Commissioners’ duties and responsibilities are further described in Section D.10 of the Town of Acton General Bylaws.

◆ **Funding and Fee Structure**

The sewer district is financed primarily by its users. Properties in the sewer district, as originally established, were assessed betterment fees beginning in 2000 based on the existing use of the property or its development potential under the applicable zoning regulations. Subsequent development, ‘internal’ or ‘external,’ in excess of the basis on which the initial betterment fee was assessed are subject to ‘privilege fees’ as determined by the Sewer Commissioners.

◆ **Capacity**

The overall system capacity is 299,000 gallons/day. The limiting component is the sewer treatment plant and its leaching beds as constructed and approved by the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). The total sewer capacity currently allocated is 190,000 gallons/day, but only 150,000 gallons/day of wastewater flows are being generated. (Footnote: Allocations are based on regulatory DEP/Title V waste water flow rates. For example: A 100-seat restaurant requires an allocation of 3,700 gallons/day, but may only generate a flow of 3,000 gallons/day.) 23,000 gallons/day of capacity are allocated to properties within the sewer district that

## II.C.

have paid betterments but have not yet connected to the system. 37,000 gallons/day of available capacity are reserved for 'internal' use and 49,000 gallons/day of available capacity are reserved for 'external' use. A feasibility study is currently underway to explore the expansion of the sewer district into West Acton. An expansion that includes West Acton could possibly exhaust the 'external' allocation, and once included in the district also make use of the 'internal' allocation.

### ◆ Drainage Facilities

Drainage generally follows the area's topography; running from north to the south and eventually draining to the Assabet River. The storm drain systems were designed to collect and convey storm water to reduce ponding and prevent localized



Drainage Pipe

flooding. There is very little treatment of runoff and the system is tired.

### ◆ Utilities

Kelley's Corner is serviced by overhead electric and wired communication lines. This requires regularly-spaced utility poles within the road rights-of-way. The poles and the lines they carry distract from the aesthetics of the streets and several are located within the pedestrian paths and sidewalks, which effectively blocks passage and does not conform to accessibility standards (see discussion in Section II.A: Transportation). This also creates a safety concern when pedestrians must pass on the road to get around utility poles.

Verizon operates a notable switching station at their location in the southwest quadrant of Kelley's Corner.

## Constraints and Opportunities

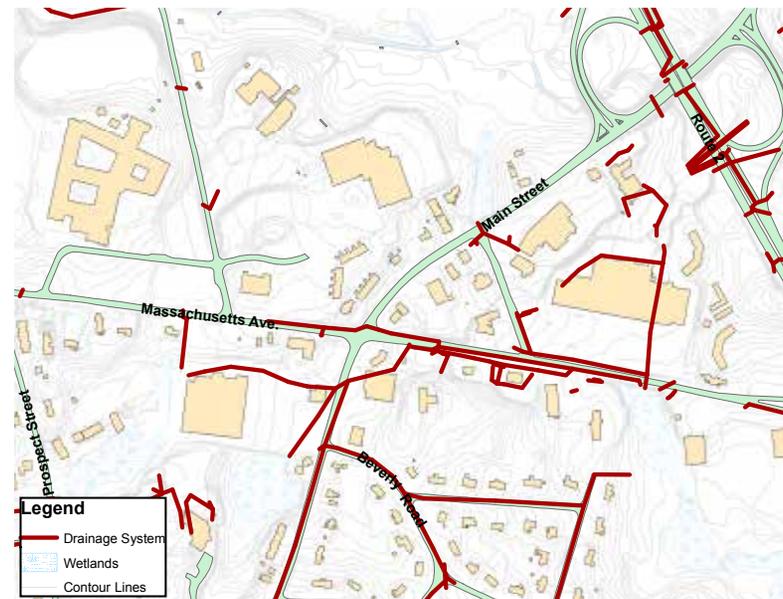
### Constraints:

#### Sewers

Current capacity and the existing privilege fee structure are major constraints to redevelopment in Kelley's Corner.

#### ◆ Current policy of allocated capacity

At this time redevelopment in Kelley's Corner is limited by the available 'internal' capacity of 37,000 gallons/day for the entire sewer district. Significant development in Kelley's Corner will exceed this allocation limit.



Topography and Drainage System in Kelley's Corner

◆ **Overall system capacity**

The overall system capacity is 299,000 gallons/day as approved by the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection. This overall sewer district capacity limit cannot support full redevelopment of Kelley's Corner into a town center.

◆ **Privilege fees**

Privilege fees that are assigned to development in excess of the original assessment add significant additional costs for developers and makes redevelopment less feasible. Development pro formas conducted to test the financial feasibility of redevelopment options in Kelley's Corner indicated narrow profit margins or rates of return before adding sewer privilege fees. The current privilege fee structure can act as a

disincentive for the redevelopment of Kelley's Corner into a mixed-use and walkable center.

**Overhead Utilities**

Utility poles within the public rights-of-way negatively impact the esthetics of the street. The relocation of utility underground cannot be funded through any State or Federal transportation program and it is too costly for Town. Therefore, this plan recommends relocating utility poles along the new edge of rights-of-way and on the backside of the sidewalks.

**Opportunities:**

**Sewers**

It is important that the sewer district maintains sufficient capacity for redevelopment in Kelley's Corner or that additional capacity is secured. To increase capacity at the sewer plant the Town could:

◆ **Approve additional wastewater discharge**

There is a procedure for requesting Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to approve additional wastewater discharge based on the actual flow instead of the current assessed flow. This could add an additional 40,000 gallon per day capacity.

◆ **Seek approval from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)**

The treatment plant adjacent to the Assabet River which suffers from low flow and low water quality, the Town could seek approval from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to discharge advanced treated wastewater into the Assabet River. This could improve the environmental condition of the river and add significant sewer capacity.



Overhead Electric and Wired Communication Lines

# II.C.

## Recommendations and Rationale

### ◆ Provide Adequate Sewer Service Funding Support for Future Needs

To support mixed-use redevelopment in Kelley's Corner, the Town could increase sewer capacity in two ways: increase permitted capacity and change allocation policy. The Town can utilize Economic Development Incentive Programs (EDIP) under Massachusetts Statute to offset the cost of Privilege Fees.

### ◆ Permitted Capacity

Apply to Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) for approval of greater sewer system and treatment plant capacity based on actual flow; and apply to the and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to allow discharge of advanced treated wastewater into the Assabet River.

### ◆ Allocation Policy

The Sewer Commissioners should reexamine the allocation policy for 'external' and 'internal' use and evaluate the current method for applying privilege fees by using a cost benefit analysis that considers equity within the sewer district and the economic development benefits of redevelopment in Kelley's Corner.

### ◆ Tax Programs

There are other methods to mitigate the impact of sewer privilege fees when a reduction may not be equitable or feasible. The Massachusetts Economic Development Incentive Program (EDIP) offer communities the option to implement Tax Increment Financing (TIF) and/or Special Tax Assessment (STA) agreements. These programs are authorized under Massachusetts General Law (M.G.L. Chapter 40 Section 59 and M.G.L. Chapter 23A Section 3E) These economic development incentive programs provide tax relief to private development over time which could help offset the burden of sewer privilege fees. As of 2014, projects that benefit from these economic incentive programs no longer need to be within an Economic Opportunity Area or Economic Target Area as defined by the Massachusetts Economic Assistance Coordinating Council. The Town should pursue these programs for appropriate private development projects with the Massachusetts Office of Business Development (MOBD) and the Economic Assistance Coordinating Council (EACC). The Town must negotiate any such tax incentive agreements, Town Meeting must approve them before review and approval by MOBD and EACC. Another option is the Urban Center Housing Tax Increment Financing (UCH-TIF) program which allows use of a TIF when it supports mixed use redevelopment that includes housing that must be affordable for a minimum of 40 years. The Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) administers this program.

### ◆ Manage Utilities

The relocation of utility underground cannot be funded through any State or Federal transportation program and it is too costly for Town. Therefore, this plan recommends retaining overhead utilities along the streets and relocating them as needed for the recommended transportation improvements. Utilities installed with private property development should be placed underground.

## Value

### Costs

#### ◆ Cost for sewer capacity increases

Reallocation of capacity creates an opportunity for development by allowing redevelopment in Kelley's Corner over other areas. The costs of increased system capacity would be for studies, engineering, legal services, permitting, and possibly construction for discharge into the Assabet River.

#### ◆ Cost for moving utility poles

Moving the poles within the expanded right-of-way is estimated to cost approximately \$0.5 million in total for the district streetscape project.

#### ◆ Cost for storm drain improvements

Upgraded storm water management systems are estimated to cost an additional approximately \$0.5 million in total.

## Resources

### Sewers

Privilege fees for development in excess of the level originally assessed are borne by the private sector when redevelopment occurs. Reevaluating the Allocation Policy and Privilege Fees will require Town staff and board time to evaluate and adopt any changes. The cost of addressing physical or regulatory capacity improvements at the sewer treatment plant will be a Town expense.

### Storm Drains and Utilities

The cost for storm drains and utilities are included in the estimates of the recommended transportation improvements. Resources are outlined in the Transportation Component Section of this Report.

## Benefits

### ◆ Enable redevelopment of Kelley's Corner

Amending the Allocation Policy and increasing sewer treatment capacity is a prerequisite to realizing the full value of the proposed zoning changes and infrastructure improvements.

### ◆ Storm water compliance

New storm drainage will bring wastewater into compliance with Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Best Management Practices and National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES).

### ◆ New infrastructure

Replacing aging infrastructure with new pipes, catch basins, man holes, outlets, etc. is an investment for the next 50-100 years.

### ◆ Relocated utilities

Relocating utility lines make way for transportation improvements that are improve traffic capacity and are universally accessible.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

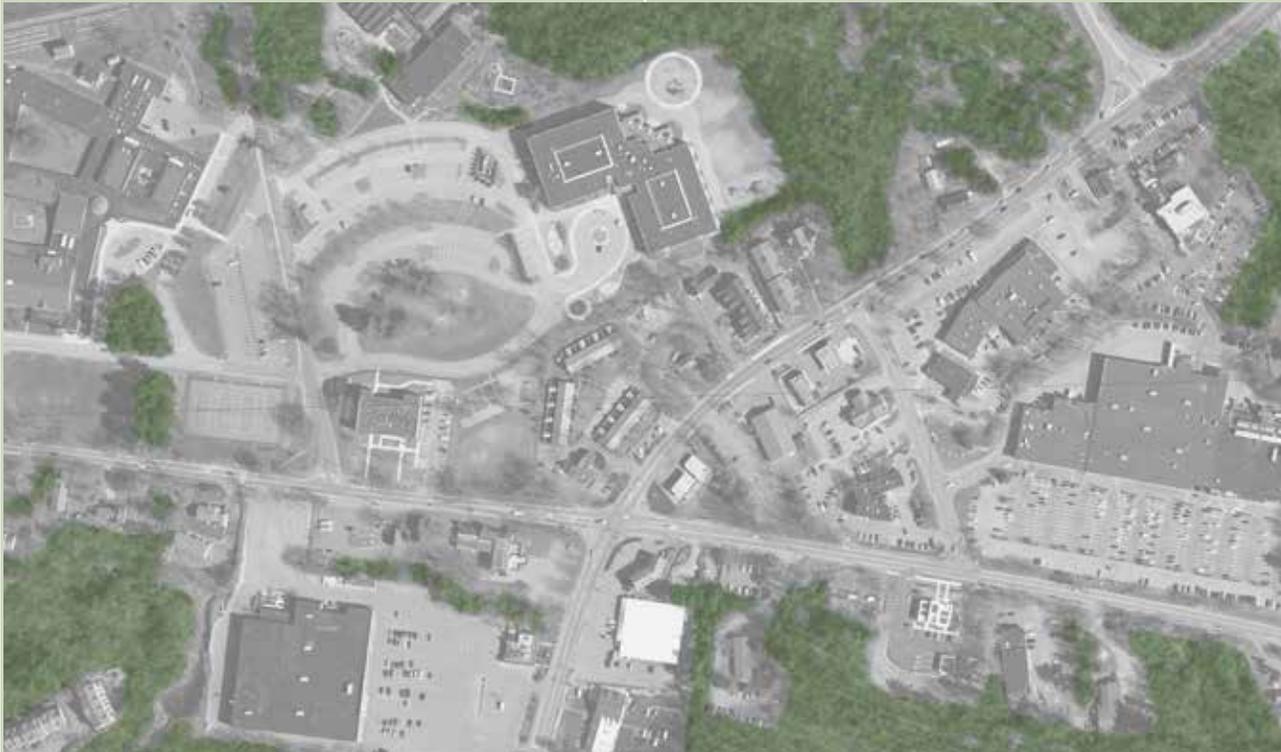
- ◆ Provide incentives for reinvestment on underutilized land to allow the private sector to enhance the mix and value of uses in Kelley's Corner.
- ◆ Allow multi-family housing as a component of a lively mixed-use town center.
- ◆ Incentivize property owners of small lots to coordinate with abutting land owners to produce cohesive development patterns and reduce curb cuts.

### ACTIONS

- ◆ Adopt recommended zoning changes for mixed-use and appropriate densities that encourage a vibrant walkable town center and foster economic development.
- ◆ Implement infrastructure and circulation improvements that set the stage for redevelopment of Kelley's Corner into a mixed-use town center.

### VALUE

- ◆ Reinvestment in commercial and multi-family housing will increase available goods and services, jobs, and housing choices for a wider range of Acton residents.
- ◆ The addition of housing will increase pedestrian and economic activity that will support the vitality of the district by providing more patrons and a better business environment.
- ◆ Based on redevelopment economics, including a significant housing component, enables redevelopment of underutilized properties for business use.
- ◆ Property values are expected to increase, which will directly enhance the tax base.



Aerial View of Kelley's Corner

## II.D.

### Facts and Findings

#### Existing Land Use

Retail businesses comprise the dominant land use in Kelley's Corner. They are accompanied by a blend of commercial offices and service establishments on developed sites. There is a limited supply of vacant and developable land within Kelley's Corner. On the periphery there is some single and multi-family housing. Nearby are the Acton Boxborough Regional School campus, a synagogue, and the Great Hill conservation land.

Kelley's Corner appears on early historic maps as a crossroads that connected multiple village

centers within the Town: South Acton, West Acton, Acton Center, and the communities beyond. Early rail development did not service Kelley's Corner. It remained undeveloped at that time.

During the post-World War II era the transformation of Acton began. Route 2 was constructed as a major regional highway connecting the region around Acton with Boston. The construction included two interchanges near Kelley's Corner linking it directly to the regional highway network. Easy automobile access into Boston changed Acton from a small industrial and rural town into a growing and predominately suburban residential community. People became increasingly dependent on the automobile for transportation.

The crossroads with the nearby Route 2 interchanges made Kelley's Corner an attractive place for businesses to locate. In 1953, the Town introduced business zoning to the area, which has grown into a district with approximately 400,000 square feet of varied commercial uses.

Lots in Kelley's Corner greatly vary in size and shape; there are no regular development patterns. Developers have utilized their sites differently. Large parcels were developed into commercial strip malls.

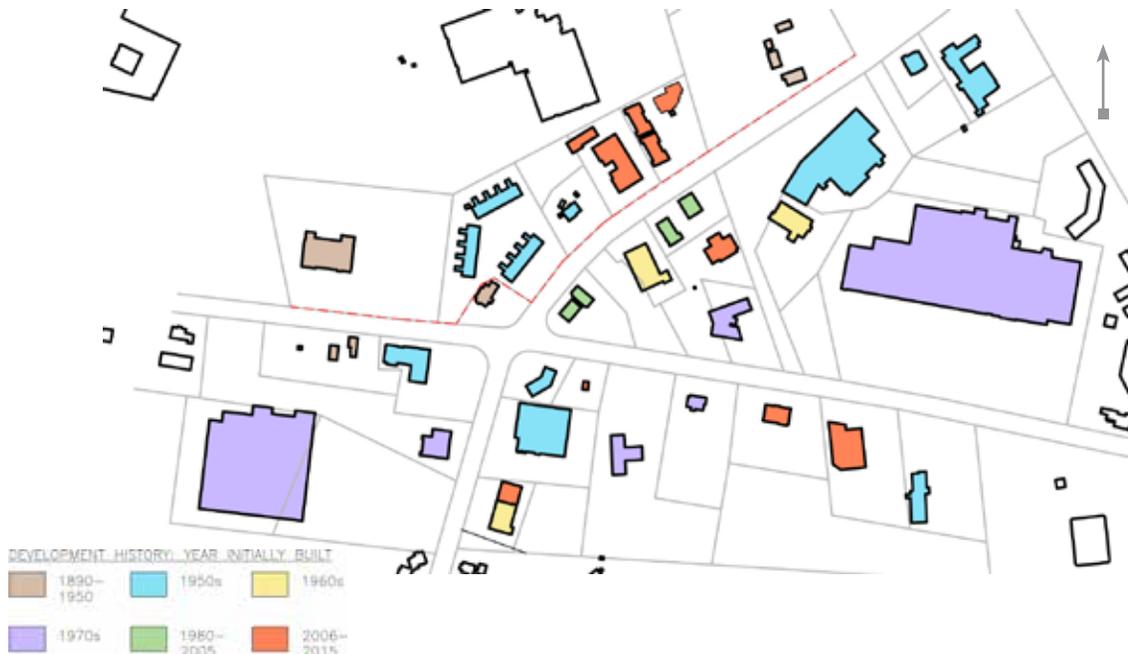
#### Development Patterns: buildings, sites, and parking

Property ownership is fragmented. Building configurations on smaller lots appear disjointed.

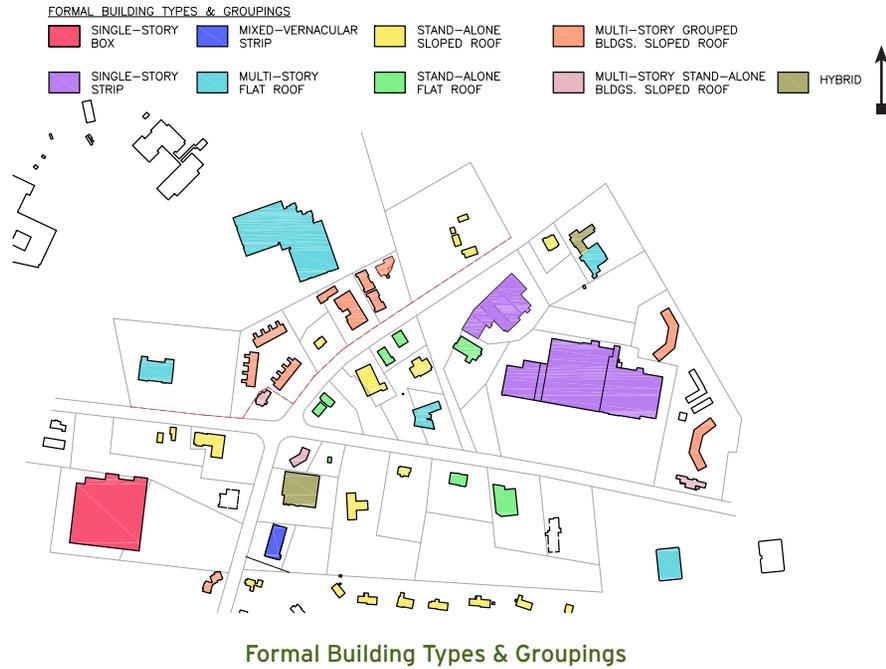
The factors that shaped Kelley's Corner were an expression of their times (1950s-1970s) and considered appropriate, modern, and convenient by a society that viewed the automobile as the universal transportation solution. They included:

#### ◆ Building types and uses

Most of the buildings in Kelley's Corner were designed to provide for specific uses and in compliance with Acton zoning requirements as they evolved since the adaption of zoning in Acton in 1953. Within the zoning envelope, based on market factors and the size of the parcels that they control, owners and developers committed to certain building sizes and shapes, and uses they believed would be financially rewarding. Stand-alone buildings were constructed for specific uses such as a general merchandise bank, restaurant, gas station, and



Historical Development of Kelley's Corner



Example of an Existing Underutilized Parking Lot

housing. Strip commercial buildings were erected for leased commercial space for a grocery store, pharmacy, more general merchandize and other smaller tenants. Once constructed, these building types have limited adaptability to uses other than those for which they were designed.

◆ **Parking lot**

In Kelley’s Corner, the majority of customers or building users arrived by car. Without public parking facilities, each development was required to have its own on-site parking. Acton zoning requirements set minimum standards for number of parking spaces based on use type. Many developers provided more than the required parking based on corporate standards aimed to have ample parking visible from

the road and sufficient parking supply during peak shopping seasons. In suburbs, developing structure parking or underground parking is not economically feasible to construct. Therefore, on-site surface parking takes up precious land area away from buildings, landscaping, walkable amenities, and natural areas.

◆ **Maximized lot coverage**

Most developers and landowners sought to maximize the amount of land that they used for buildings and surface parking, so they could generate maximum revenues in sales or rents within the given zoning requirements at the time of construction.

◆ **Parking in front of buildings**

In the past, the presumed path to commercial success was to present visible and convenient parking lots immediately adjacent to the road and then locate the buildings and uses in the rear of the parking lots. Signs along the streets identified the businesses, and large signs on the building provided additional visibility from the street. Intervening buildings and landscaping were perceived as business detriments.

Applied to Kelley’s Corner over the course of decades, these influences created irregular development patterns with uncoordinated and seemingly random buildings surrounded by parking, each with its own access drives reaching to the street. Nearly

## II.D.

all buildings orient towards their parking lots. This pattern is easily recognizable on a map. There are some recent exceptions to this pattern such as TD Bank North. This development was shaped by the Town's review process that required a landscaped front yard and a façade that addresses the street; parking was located to the side and rear of the building. Retail strategies are also changing, with tenants and owners recognizing the benefits of enhanced landscaping, pedestrian amenities, and more visible building façades. An example is the recent renovation of the Acton I and Acton II plazas owned by Edens (E&A Northeast LTD). In a recent trend not yet seen in Kelley's Corner, large commercial property owners are also finding significant advantages in leasing or selling parcels of land along the street edge, in front of commercial strips or large format stores. These "pad" sites can provide a separate layer of development in front of expansive parking areas.

### Ownership and Parcelization Patterns

According to the Assessors' database, there are about 37 parcels of land with 25 owners in the study area. Among these are several large land holdings that are composed of different parcels. Under a different zoning program as recommended in this report, these large assemblages would provide the owners with significant flexibility in terms of the types of buildings, uses, disposition of parking, subdivision and leasing strategies for their properties. The attached map uses a color code to indicate parcels within the same ownership. Four groups of parcels have particular implications for redevelopment planning because of their size and locations:



Parking Counts and Locations



Building Use

commercial developments that span between Massachusetts Avenue and Main Street. The owners have leases with several national and regional chain stores including T.J. Maxx store and a Roche Brothers grocery store, along with local merchants. Significant improvements have been completed over the past two years, and the owners do not anticipate more major redevelopment in either the short or mid-term.

◆ **Anna Ludwig Investment Trust**

There are several contiguous parcels along the south side of Massachusetts Avenue that are under development, which is adjacent to the residential properties that line Nadine Road.

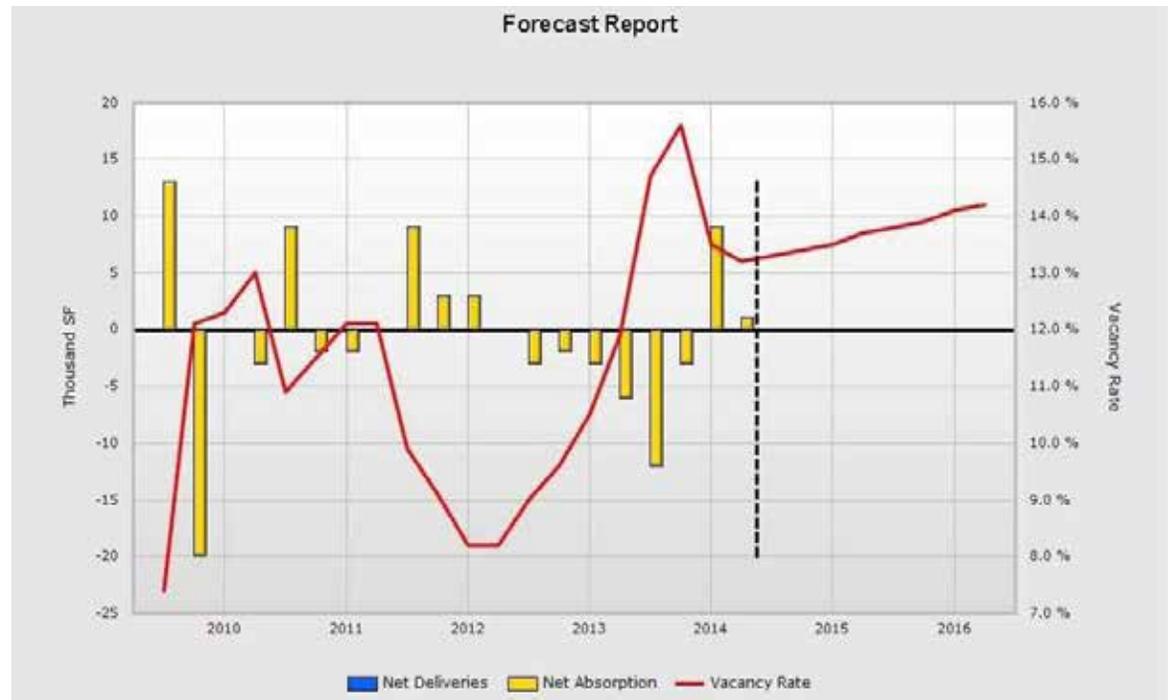
◆ **Stop & Shop Supermarket Company**

The supermarket company owns the land that is largely occupied by the existing K-Mart store at 252 Main Street. A former McDonald’s restaurant sits vacant on a separate lease area.

**Current Business Types and Business Mix**

Kelley’s Corner contains a range of business types that are largely complementary and similar in their market orientation. They provide goods and services to the relatively affluent suburban residential populations that can take advantage of the roadway and highway access. The predominant use types include the following mix, which is organized according to standard classifications:

- ◆ Supermarket
- ◆ Clothing
- ◆ General Merchandising
- ◆ Gasoline Stations
- ◆ Restaurants, Limited Service Restaurants
- ◆ Beer, Wine and Liquor Store
- ◆ Commercial Banking
- ◆ Specialty Goods
- ◆ Convenience Goods
- ◆ Professional Services
- ◆ Medical Offices
- ◆ Commercial Offices
- ◆ Furniture Store
- ◆ Fuel Dealer



Regional Retail Market Projection

- ◆ Bowling Center and Amusement Arcade
- ◆ Recreation and Entertainment
- ◆ Other Consumer Services
- ◆ Telecommunications

**Market Conditions**

Kelley’s Corner is well positioned to retain the retail and consumer goods and services currently located there. Limited amount of available land makes large format retailing unlikely. However, it is well positioned to absorb multi-family housing. Relevant characteristics for various market segments include the following: **Commercial Retail, Restaurant and Consumer Goods and Services**

## II.D.

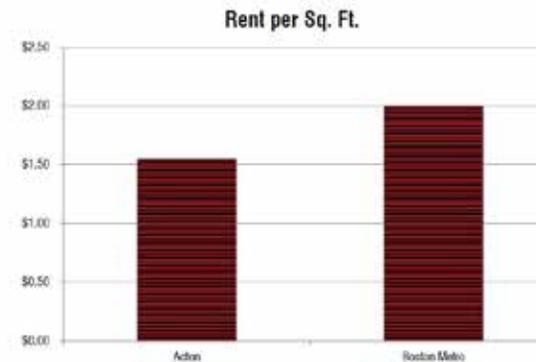
### Commercial Retail

The commercial retail sector provides a moderate opportunity for growth. Retail in the regional submarkets is highly competitive. These submarkets include Acton, Bedford, Bolton, Boxborough, Carlisle, Chelmsford, Concord, Littleton, Maynard, Stow, Sudbury, and Westford. While rents in Kelley's Corner are, on average, similar to other commercial areas in the region (approximately \$17/square foot), new development has been able to draw more substantial rents, (approximately \$30/square foot of rented space), which support new construction. Currently, the conventional strip retail market in Acton provides for rents that range from \$10 to \$24 square foot, with new space rents in the upper \$20s to \$30+/square foot. However, the market research prepared for this initiative indicates that the market area will be somewhat oversupplied with retail space over the next five years. As this occurs, underperforming retail sites likely will be converted to other uses, and new construction will be probably limited to sites and locations that have competitive advantages because of their convenient locations. Both of these conditions are likely to occur in Kelley's Corner.

Based on recent projects elsewhere (see Appendix J), the likely uses that can support rents associated with new construction that can provide mixed-use town center character include food, health, and wellness services; commercial banking; pharmacies; and a variety of restaurants and food and beverage services.

It should be noted that the choice to establish or maintain certain types of chain retail and service businesses is associated with their strategic

### Residential Market



- Average Rent/Unit = \$1750
- 20% Below Metropolitan Region

### Residential Market Rent Analysis

### Residential Market



- Values increased by 7% over last year
- Projected to increase by 1.5% over next year

### Residential Market Sales Analysis

assessment and positioning within a regional context relative to both the market and the competition. These businesses typically pay higher land costs through purchases or land leases than other types of businesses. These characteristics prevail for some branch banks, grocery stores, general merchandising stores, limited service restaurant chains, and pharmacies. Two recent examples are the new TD Bank North and CVS buildings.

### Medical and Professional Offices and Related Uses

The market for medical and professional offices and related uses such as wellness centers will continue to have moderate strength as part of the use mix in Kelley's Corner. These include dental and medical offices, special medical services, accounting, financial and business services and other professional services that cater to the suburban population and can take advantage of upper floor locations and sites that are suited to the size and scale of these operations. In limited cases, the demand may be strong enough to justify new construction.

### Commercial Office

Commercial office demand is anticipated to be low and not likely to be a significant part of new development. The vacancy rate is currently about 25% for the region. Commercial offices have more flexibility for acceptable locations than retail establishments. Prospective office tenants have a wide range of spaces to consider in existing buildings in areas near regional highways and arterials. The typical commercial office units in the competitive market for Kelley's Corner range from 200 to 4,000 square feet. Kelley's Corner



Susceptibility to Change

office space is currently leasing for about \$15 / square foot. As a result, office uses may opportunistically fill upper floors of existing buildings or buildings that are not well suited to other uses, but cannot support new construction costs.

**Residential**

The demand for multi-family housing in Kelley's Corner is expected to be very strong. This type of housing could be a component of new mixed-use development consistent with town center characteristics. The location has the advantage of convenient access to the regional roadway network. Kelley's Corner has a substantial amount of retail, restaurant, and other consumer goods and services geared to a residential population. Because there are limited sites that are adaptable to housing and susceptible to change in the short to mid-term, absorption rates are not likely to be a limiting factor on market demand.

The residential development could be either ownership or rental units. Median rent per unit in Kelley's Corner

is estimated to be about \$1,750, which is at the low end of the range that will support new construction and about 20% below levels in the metropolitan region. During and after the recent economic recessions, sales and values of ownership units in locations similar to Acton tended to decline. However, sales values for ownership units of the type that might be absorbed in Kelley's Corner is strengthening.

**Susceptibility to Change**

The redevelopment goals for Kelley's Corner will be achieved through private sector real estate development and reinvestment. It is important to understand the prospects for redevelopment over time on a parcel-by-parcel basis and anticipate which public actions and regulations can be most helpful in guiding and managing change. As part of this study, an analysis was undertaken to classify existing properties according to the likelihood for redevelopment under the recommended zoning.

Criteria for determining susceptibility of properties to change were ownership and aggregation; property value; current investment based on ratio of building to land value; and interest and capability for development. The information for these criteria was gathered from public records and interviews with property owners. The results of this analysis indicate where current conditions either constrain opportunities for redevelopment or where there are opportunities for market-based reinvestment. The results of this analysis have been mapped and provide the following insights:

◆ **Low Susceptibility to Change**

This category includes properties for which the likely purchase price would be too high to be recovered with market-rate redevelopment in the foreseeable future. These include uses that have specific location benefits associated with their site in Kelley's Corner and relocation to other areas would be difficult, risky, or costly. Some of the parcels appear to be financially productive because they meet significant market or other needs, and the land is efficiently used in terms of lot coverage, building type, and condition. The analysis indicates that most of the properties along Main Street north of Massachusetts Avenue have a low susceptibility to change. This includes the existing multi-family housing, two gas stations, and Plaza I of the Edens property.

## II.D.

### ◆ Medium Susceptibility to Change

This category includes properties that have adequate amounts of buildable land that could be improved with additions or new structures. It also includes underutilized sites with a potential for higher and better uses, and parcels where land assembly could be particularly advantageous. Redevelopment of these properties has some barriers, including provisions for existing uses and tenancies, and challenges in assembling property. There are five properties along Main Street in this category. Plaza II of the Edens property along Massachusetts Avenue has a medium susceptibility to reorganization and redevelopment of some of its lease space or infill development along Massachusetts Avenue if supportive zoning changes are enacted. There is a collection of parcels that may benefit from some level of assembly and redevelopment southeast of the Main Street/Massachusetts Avenue intersection.

### ◆ High Susceptibility to Change

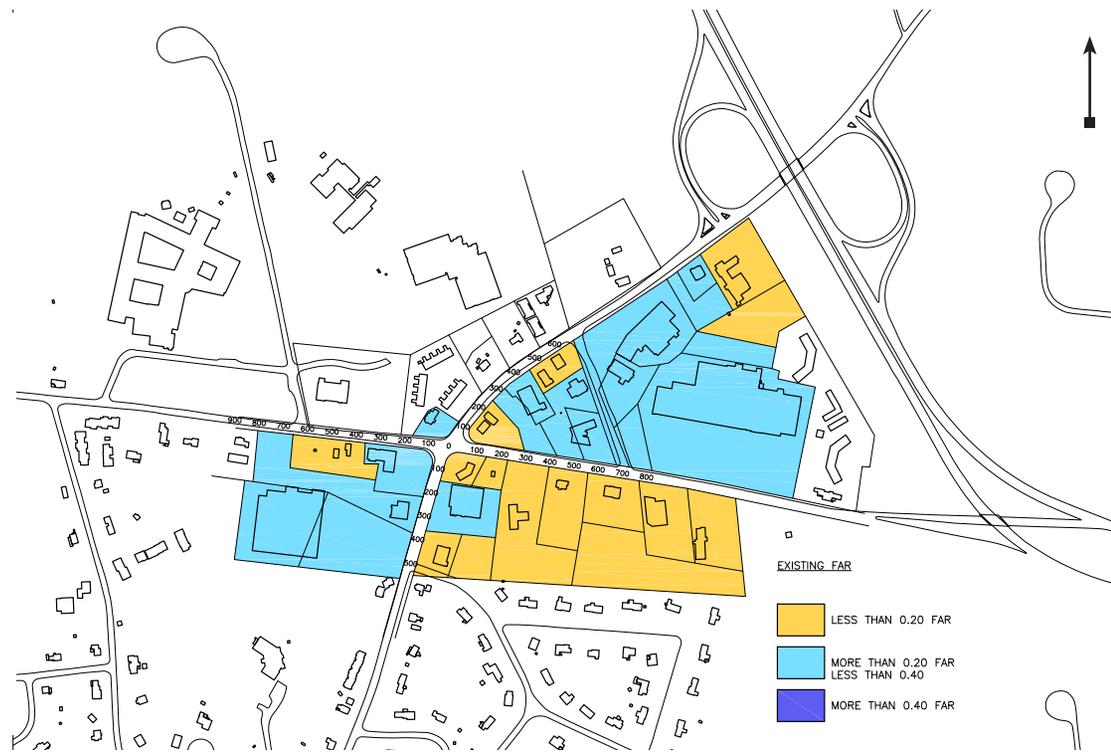
These properties are highly susceptible to change in the short term because they are underutilized or underperforming in the existing market place. The two properties identified in this category are the K-Mart/former McDonald's site in the southwest quadrant between Main Street and Massachusetts Avenue, and parcels that are currently being assembled in the southeastern quadrant of the planning area along Massachusetts Avenue.

### ◆ Redevelopment Economics

In general, private market real estate redevelopment occurs when there is adequate financial incentive to justify the commitment of capital resources. Private real estate investment typically requires a positive rate of return within ten years or less. The financial benefits must be greater than the costs and associated risks with securing permits and approvals, closing rental properties and businesses and losing revenue for a period of time. Costs can be incurred in relocating businesses and demolishing existing buildings. The site improvements and new

construction must be paid for, and the development will incur costs holding the property until the development is fully rented or sold.

If the financial rewards associated with redevelopment are adequate to meet these conditions, then redevelopment is likely to occur. If they are not met, then owners will not redevelop their properties. There are important exceptions to this rule when considering existing ownership motivations. Some owners make personal decisions regarding the use of their properties and the businesses within them,



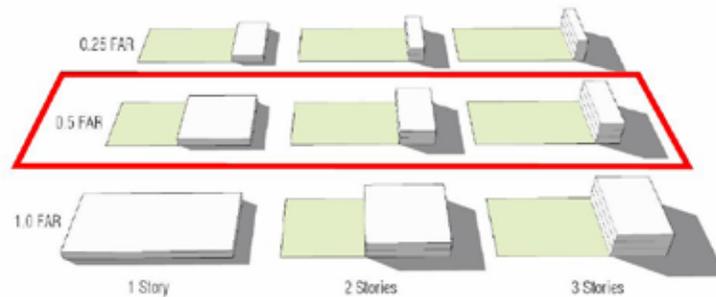
Existing Floor Area Ratio

## Floor Area Ratio – FAR Concept

Ratio of building floor space to area of lot

Example:

5,000SF of building on 10,000SF lot =  $[5,000/10,000] = 0.5 \text{ FAR}$



Floor Area Ratio Example Calculation

regardless of whether it is the best or highest use of the property in terms of their financial return.

Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) was suggested as a possible incentive for redevelopment in Kelley's Corner. Under a TDR program, development rights may be purchased by properties in a target area where development is acceptable from properties in areas where growth is not desirable. The Kelley's Corner Improvement Initiative has considered the economic, practical, regulatory, and design parameters needed for marketable redevelopment. Analysis of the market and development pro formas included in this study lead to the finding that, under current and foreseeable conditions, Kelley's Corner does not have the economic or practical capacity to incorporate additional acquired development rights. Key consideration leading to this finding is Appendix D.



Example of a FAR between (.31 to .76)

- ◆ In order to incentivize redevelopment in Kelley's Corner, significant additional development potential must be granted to the area through appropriate zoning changes at no financial cost to the redevelopment.
- ◆ The economics of structured parking in Kelley's Corner is very limited, leaving most of the parking need to be addressed with exterior surface parking lots, thus limiting building footprints and favoring height instead, and placing constraints on layout, design, landscaping, and amenities.

If there was a requirement to purchase additional development rights, applying them would lead to building heights and site designs that are not likely desirable by Acton residents nor consistent with Acton 2020 Plan goals.

### Development Densities, Use, and Redevelopment Feasibility

The economics associated with the use and redevelopment of land by the private sector is determined by the interaction of factors such as market conditions, types of uses, capacity of land parcels for buildings and parking, and efficient land use. Of these factors, public sector control is largely limited to regulatory powers that manage allowable uses and the density of development through zoning, subdivision standards, or other measures.

## II.D.



Example of a Low Density Site

As part of this study, the consultant team undertook an evaluation of the interaction between development densities, existing site conditions, and financial feasibility for redevelopment.

This evaluation began with an assessment of the existing densities within the planning area. The results were mapped.

The measurement of density used in planning and land use regulations is the Floor Area Ratio (FAR). This factor is the gross floor area of buildings

divided by the total lot area. For example, the FAR calculation for a one-story building covering an entire lot would be 1.0. A two-story building covering one-half of a lot would also have an FAR of 1.0.

In typical suburban commercial areas, a significant amount of a site is taken up by setbacks from property lines and surface parking. The amount of parking relates to the type and size of the use. For example, on a per-square-foot basis, the amount of parking that is typically required to serve housing is less than the amount of parking required to serve a

grocery store. Some sites have natural resource areas such as wetlands or flood plains that are practically undevelopable for buildings or for parking; this reduces the overall achievable density.

The evaluation considered the density within individual parcels and for parcel clusters that are in the same ownership. Relatively high FAR's (.31 to .76) exist for several sites with multi-story buildings, including locations that have a proportion of the parking at the ground level. The typical retail sites including the K-Mart/former McDonald's site, the Edens plazas, the Bowladrome, and a multi-family residential site with surface parking result in FAR's of between 0.16 and 0.30. There is a significant amount of low density development in the southeast quadrant of the planning area, due in part to the undeveloped, sloped land on portions of those parcels; there is a scattering of other lower density sites.

Except for the low-density sites noted above, the typical existing densities are representative of those found in nearby suburban commercial districts. The consultant team undertook redevelopment feasibility evaluations for a range of existing sites that served as test cases. This is called a "pro forma" evaluation that reviews and analyzes information and assumptions about market demand for various uses; the value of existing land and improvements; the capacity of land for different purposes; and the cost of demolition, reconstruction, and site development. Pro formas are a standard analytical tool that developers use to test project feasibility. The results provide guidance for the range and combinations of uses and densities that are necessary for a financially

successful redevelopment project. In this study, the tool helped determine the necessary zoning framework to allow financially feasible redevelopment projects to occur. Different scenarios were evaluated. The initial scenario yielded a negative feasibility. In the second and third rounds, assumptions were changed for density, building height, mixture of uses, and percentage of demolition to achieve a positive feasibility. This informed the recommend zoning amendments. The results of this analysis are summarized in the test feasibility sheets and illustrations shown in Appendix F.

## Constraints and Opportunities

### Constraints

- ◆ **Low Susceptibility to Change**

Properties with Low Susceptibility to Change are likely to remain in the current condition for a considerable time even with zoning amendments that support change and redevelopment. Building new public infrastructure around them will present special challenges and their continued existence will keep the Town from realizing the full value of the recommended access management improvements.

- ◆ **Competition of the Retail Market**

Retail is highly competitive in the submarkets. Except for few high value stores for instance, stand-alone pharmacies, banks, or limited service restaurant chains, the business sector alone cannot drive transformation in Kelley's Corner.

- ◆ **Demand for Commercial Office Space**

The demand for office space is low and anticipated to remain this way.

- ◆ **Relocations and interruptions**

Redevelopment may require existing businesses to temporarily move somewhere else or operate during construction with possible extended interruptions.

### Opportunities

- ◆ **Medium and High Susceptibility to Change**

Areas with Medium and High Susceptibility to Change are more likely candidates for redevelopment into mixed-use properties if supportive zoning is implemented.

- ◆ **Economic Development Incentive Programs (EDIP)**

The Town is eligible to adopt Tax Increment Financing (TIF), District Improvement Financing (DIF), and Special Tax Assessment (STA) programs to incentivize desired redevelopment that aligns with the Town's goals.

- ◆ **Setting the Stage**

The public sector can undertake public improvements that encourage and enable private reinvestment for economic development and housing. State and Federal Programs can assist with public sector improvements. The Transportation Section of this plan recommends that the Town pay for the engineering design plans for the reconstruction of Massachusetts Avenue and Main Street in order to leverage the State and Federal moneys for construction.



Example of a Mixed Use Building

## II.D.

### ◆ Regulatory incentives

The public sector can adopt zoning amendments that encourage redevelopment for higher value commercial, residential, and mixed uses that would be supported by the market. It is important to note that zoning incentives do not change the market demand; they simply allow the private market to respond. Regulatory incentives can also reduce risks to owners, developers, and investors by providing clear, timely, and predictable paths towards regulatory reviews and permits.

### Recommendations and Rationale

Amend Zoning to achieve the Town Center Character Redevelopment of Kelley's Corner into a town center can only occur with zoning amendments that expand the density and mixture of allowed uses so that it will be profitable for the private sector to transform existing development. Adequate incentives must be adopted to replace existing performing uses. Incentives provided for mixed-use including multifamily housing up to 75%, compact development with allowed densities up to an FAR of .8, and building heights up to 55 feet when sited appropriately and not at the street frontage; all are vetted through the special permitting process.

### Support Infrastructure and Transportation Improvement Plan

Fund capital improvements that support the mixed-use redevelopment including the circulation, streetscape, landscape, and infrastructure improvements are described in other portions of this Report.

Adopt Economic Development Incentive Programs (TIF, DIF, STA). The Town should use these programs

in partnership with developers to create desirable redevelopment projects that align with the Town's goals for Kelley's Corner.

### Provide for Multifamily Use within the Mix

In order to achieve the desired character of a town center and to provide economic incentives for redevelopment, multi-family residences should be encouraged in the mix of uses in Kelley's Corner. There is a positive market for residential uses, which can occupy upper floors of buildings or portions of sites not amenable to commercial uses. Residential uses require less than most commercial uses, so it more efficiently utilizes land resources. The presence of a residential population in Kelley's Corner will provide patrons for existing and future businesses, and create a more vital shopping and civic environment.

### Reduce Parking as a Land Use: Shared Parking and Increased Walkability

As noted in this Report, parking takes up a substantial portion of the district and will be needed to support the shopping, dining, residential, and other uses in Kelley's Corner. However, excess parking spaces occupy land that could be used for revenue-producing uses or landscaping that would create a more attractive and valuable environment. By allowing shared parking spaces, the Town will promote higher values and the type of redevelopment envisioned in this Report. Shared parking spaces could consist of spaces to be used by stores or offices during the day and by residents at night.

### Alignment with the Acton 2020 Goals and Implementation Strategies

The recommendations for land use and development align Kelley's Corner with the goals of the Town's Comprehensive Plan, Acton 2020. The redevelopment is integral to a range of goals and actions associated with economic development and the creation of a mixed-use town center environment. It is also aligned with housing goals. The conformance of the Land Use and Development Pattern recommendations with the Town's Goals and Strategies is documented in Appendix B. Conformance with Acton 2020 Goals and Strategies.

### Value

#### Costs

- ◆ Additional development in Kelley's Corner will result in additional Town services associated with that development, which would be offset by tax revenues as noted below (see fiscal impact statement in Appendix H).
- ◆ To the extent that the Town utilizes tax deferral and financing mechanisms such as TIF or STA to incentivize redevelopment, the Town would forgo certain tax revenues for a period of time.

### Resources

Town staff time and capacity for fostering partnerships with developers and property owners in order to advance redevelopment.

- ◆ Private financing of redevelopment projects.

### Benefits

- ◆ The Town will gain tax revenues as a result of additional development. Taking into account the decline in school enrollment projections, the tax revenues will exceed the incremental Town service costs because of the value and type of development, including the multi-family components.
- ◆ Additional development of the type envisioned in this Report will provide employment and tax revenues that more than offset the incremental costs.
- ◆ Mixed-use development will help create a walkable town center with shops, restaurants, jobs, and housing within walking distance that adds vitality that benefits businesses, residents, visitors and citizens of Acton.
- ◆ Kelley's Corner as a mixed-use center enhances Acton's sustainability as it adds housing options near jobs, shops, and restaurants and thus reduces car dependence.
- ◆ Mixed-use development with a housing component offers diverse housing options for Acton residents wishing to age in place.

- ◆ Diverse housing options in mixed-use suburban centers attract young professionals looking to live in suburbs that offer urban amenities; in turn businesses and companies look to locate where their skilled employment base their lives.

## II.E. Built Form Building and Sites

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- ◆ Encourage mixed-use redevelopment in Kelley's Corner that establishes a unified composition of commercial and residential buildings that frame streets and public spaces to form a livable town center and neighborhood
- ◆ Organize vehicular parking so that it is unobtrusive and conveniently accessible
- ◆ Encourage site developments that provide well-connected amenities and public spaces to incrementally foster a civic quality in Kelley's Corner
- ◆ Ensure new developments positively contribute to the character and quality of the area to create a sense of place in Kelley's Corner over time
- ◆ Strengthen walkability by reinforcing pedestrian comfort and vitality through the strategic placement and composition of buildings, outdoor spaces and supporting elements, such as parking

### ACTIONS

- ◆ Adopt Kelley's Corner design guidelines to help the Town and developers achieve district objectives
- ◆ Amend zoning regulations to include revised design standards as set forth in the Kelley's Corner Design Guidelines
- ◆ Promote the design standards and guidelines and educate the public and the development community about the Town's desired goals for Kelley's Corner



Civic Character: Representative Example

### VALUE

- ◆ An improved and coherent town center and neighborhood character benefits property values within the district and the Town as a whole
- ◆ A built environment that is a uniquely recognizable center of regional distinction can create a brand for the Kelley's Corner location that will benefit retail and commercial businesses. This will promote and reinforce the products and services provided in this location and will become a place where people want to live, shop, and work.
- ◆ A center that invites walking and gathering in a high-quality environment increases the potential number of new visitors, customers, and foot traffic for shopping and working
- ◆ Kelley's Corner will benefit from each development investment incrementally by improving the character and quality of the district as a vibrant and walkable center

**Facts and Findings**

The “built form” of a district encompasses the components of the environment that create the land development pattern. The built form includes the buildings, what buildings look like, how tall they are and how much land they occupy. It also describes the relationships of buildings to streets, parking lots, and green spaces that together form the pattern of a place and of a district. The built form relates directly to other built components of the environment, such as landscapes and streetscapes, but is more generally focused on the primary components of how a place is put together and the disposition of those primary components in relation to each other and the land on which they are built.

The built form in Kelley’s Corner has not been proactively managed to reinforce a cohesive sense of place. The district is composed primarily of land development patterns that place the highest value on convenience for drivers. This emphasis led to a



**Civic Character: Representative Example**

visual discontinuity of built environment, which made it difficult to understand circulation and hierarchy. Residents who recognize the value of historic and cohesive town centers and places may not know exactly what is wrong with the district, but know that the overall character of Kelley’s Corner does not provide that sense of cohesion and community value that matches a walkable downtown center. The district’s architectural style and character is varied and diverse, including contemporary, traditional, historic and modern buildings. The diversity of building styles can be embraced or shifted over time, but it is not the fundamental reason why the pattern of built form in Kelley’s Corner lacks continuity.

**Existing Building and Site Design Patterns**

Kelley’s Corner is comprised of older commercial properties, including small and large format single-story buildings that are coupled with expansive parking lots situated in front of the buildings. Examples of this pattern are the Quill and Press building and the Roche Brothers shopping plaza. The buildings are generally non-descript and rely on signage and convenient parking to entice visitors and shoppers. However, the district’s most recent commercial projects have located parking on the sides and rear of contemporary single-story buildings set within a generous front yard setback. In recent years, building design has become more important for defining a business location. An example of this trend is the TD Bank North building on Massachusetts Avenue.



**Existing 2-1/2 Story Building on Massachusetts Ave**

## II.E.

### Existing Building Height, Scale and Form

The building scale in Kelley's Corner is predominantly single-story structures of varying height with different widths and depths determined by their use. A handful of properties in the district are two-story commercial and residential structures. One prominent structure, at 411 Massachusetts Avenue, is a contemporary three-story structure. The building forms in the district have both traditional pitched-roof forms and more contemporary flat-roof styled buildings. Many smaller buildings have pitched roofs, while the larger ones have flat roofs.

### Existing Architectural Styles

The architectural styles within Kelley's Corner are varied and diverse. The district's architecture includes traditional building designs derivative of Colonial or Cape Cod architectural styles. The district includes several utilitarian large-format retail buildings that offer little in terms of architectural style or ornamentation. There is one multi-story commercial structure with a contemporary architectural style defined by elements such as ribbon windows, flat roofs, and minimal architectural embellishment. The district also includes several examples of corporate architectural styles that are closely linked to a corporate identity and brand.



Recent Buildings on Massachusetts Avenue

### Constraints and Opportunities

Key constraints and opportunities affect the future built form of the district.

#### Constraints include:

##### ◆ Incremental change

Building life cycles can extend nearly 50 years and the prospect for changes to reflect community goals will be incremental, as buildings are replaced with new projects. The nature of incremental change also means that the districts may endure periods of awkward transition as it shifts from one model of site planning and building types to another.

##### ◆ Lack of financial or other motivation

Buildings, properties, and real estate holdings in the district are private assets and support the purposes and needs of their owners and tenants. Until they are motivated to rebuild or improve their properties, change will not occur. That means that some buildings will not change in the near future. (See also "Susceptibility to Change Analysis" in this Report.).

#### The opportunities include:

##### ◆ Trends and real estate products

Trends in the design of retail and mixed-use development have changed significantly and are more aligned with architectural and site-

planning principles associated with the image and character of traditional town centers.

◆ **Properties ready for change**

The opportunity for positive change to the built form of several district properties exists in the near term. Some of the district properties appear to have extended beyond their useful life in terms of viable use in the real estate market and repositioning of the properties will become necessary for continued economic viability.

◆ **Large properties**

Several large properties within Kelley’s Corner present an opportunity for significant reinvestment and reconsideration of the built form of the district when the time is right for redevelopment in those locations.

◆ **Integration with public improvements**

A broader opportunity for the coordination of public realm improvements and private property improvements exists where properties are being explored for redevelopment in a timeframe that could coordinate with improvements that are part of the district streetscape enhancements. This type of integration could lead to direct benefits in the coordination of public green space, circulation, and walkability in the district.

**Recommendations and Rationale**

◆ **Adopt Kelley’s Corner Zoning Amendments**

The Town should adopt the recommended zoning amendments that set new fundamental standards for developing the built environment including building scale, placement, and height. The following

recommendations supplement, support, and further explain the recommended zoning standards:

◆ **Adopt the Kelley’s Corner Design Guidelines**

The boards that perform the project reviews and are responsible for issuing development permits should adopt design guidelines for Kelley’s Corner as regulations. Design guidelines are particularly important to the Design Review Board, which provides advisory opinions to the permitting boards. See the Regulatory Framework section for further discussion.

◆ **Improve the Relationship of Buildings to their Sites and the District**

The built form is a reflection of the values that have been fundamental to the creation of Kelley’s Corner. In the past, many of the shared community values were not articulated or unexpressed and the current built environment reflects that. Today, shared community values emphasize distinctive and walkable places, as recognized in community planning documents such as Acton 2020 Comprehensive Community Plan. As real estate tracking has shown, land values and rents are higher in distinctive, walkable places. In Kelley’s Corner the relationship of buildings on their sites should reflect the reprioritization of community values. New buildings will be varied with a range of building sizes, configurations, and roof forms suited appropriately to the uses. However, the orientation of the buildings to the streets, and the arrangement of surrounding public spaces and supporting parking in the rear of buildings should be clear and consistent. The building should be the prominent feature of the site; it should



Existing 1 ½ story building, part of a shopping plaza

## II.E.

be used to frame and address the street; it should be used to frame and activate adjacent public spaces; it should conceal parking that is located either to the sides or rear of the site; and it should respond to distinguishing site features such as primary intersections or prominent views.

At first, redevelopment that is in line with today's community values will be inconsistent with the existing built form that it will replace. When incremental development occurs, it should respect the scale, configuration, and form on adjacent properties that are consistent with this Plan and harmonize with that context.

### Promote a Range of Architectural Styles

A diversity of architectural styles currently exists within Kelley's Corner. Future redevelopment should embrace and encourage creativity for a range of styles and building types with sound architectural principles. In terms of district cohesion, it is more important to regulate the overall site and compositional architectural principles rather than force building design to adhere to a narrowly defined range of architectural styles.

Inauthentic and artificial application of a style should be avoided at both district and individual project scales. The built form of future investment should reflect the use of the buildings and the eras in which the buildings are constructed. Each building should be composed with its own stylistic integrity, rather than a

composite of different styles. The chosen style should be suited to the building type and scale. In the case of large, multi-building developments, multiple styles or expressions should be provided among the constituent buildings, rather than being repetitive and uniform. Regardless of architectural style, the most important aspect for district improvement is to ensure that new development positively contributes to the character and quality of Kelley's Corner over time to overcome the lack of cohesion and sense of place in the district.

### Reorganize the Relationship of Parking to Buildings and Sites

Surface parking lots are a necessary part of the design of commercial and mixed-use projects for suburban communities where structured parking may not be feasible. However, providing for convenient



Recent Renovations



Parking Location Adjacent to the Building Site

vehicular access and storage should not preclude safe and convenient pedestrian and bicycle experiences. The organization of buildings on the site and the relationship to parking must be carefully considered in the site design process. Parking should continue to be provided where it is easily accessible and linked to building entrances. The parking lots must be well-organized for their users, distributed in relation to the uses and buildings they serve, and connected with parking lots on adjacent sites. They should not be the dominant visual feature of a site. The location of vehicle parking beside or behind buildings will reinforce the buildings' relationship and proximity to the street as the first principle of the built form that identifies a town center. Within the front yard of buildings, pedestrian walkways and plazas should be provided and complimented by attractive and comfortable amenities for pedestrians. Over time, this will strengthen district walkability and reinforce a pedestrian-focused environment.

**Alignment with the Acton 2020 Goals and Implementation Strategies**

The recommendations for built form are needed to transition Kelley's Corner to a new and unique, walkable town center as outlined in the Town's Comprehensive Plan, Acton 2020. The improvements are integral to a range of goals and actions associated with economic development and the preservation and enhancement of the Town's character. Civic goals include strengthening planning tools to manage growth pro-actively, preserve and enhance key centers, and foster an appreciation of Acton's history and future evolution. The conformance of the built form recommendations with the Town's Goals and

Strategies is documented in Appendix B. Conformance with Acton 2020 Goals and Strategies.

**Value**

**Costs**

There are administrative costs to the Town in creating and implementing zoning regulations and design guidelines. The design guidelines and standards have been created within the scope of this study. It is assumed that the incremental costs of design review and administration would be absorbed into the existing budgets for Town staff and boards as development proposals are submitted in the future for Kelley's Corner. Depending on the development approach to a particular property, the design guidelines and

standards may result in higher development costs than would otherwise be required, but will result in higher value properties.

**Resources**

The Town has the resources for administering multiple review process and permitting functions in-house with skilled staff in various departments. Established procedures are in place. The plan's recommendations within this section will not create a need for additional resources. The Town has elected and appointed boards to make decisions on development permits. The compact geography of Kelley's Corner limits the number of redevelopment projects that would come to the Town for review and permitting. However, a concentrated stewardship of the built form of the district will require additional time and attention.



Range of Architectural Styles

## II.E.

Therefore, the board presiding over redevelopments in Kelley's Corner should be fully focused on a project and understand its details, and its members should commit to serving for extended periods for multi-phased projects that will take several years to complete. This study produced a draft of new district zoning standards and Design Guidelines for Kelley's Corner that may be found in the Appendices.

Under special certain circumstances when in-house capacity may be strained or unique skill sets are required, the Town could require a review fee from a development proponent to cover the costs of an outside expert peer reviewer. This becomes a cost to the developer and will likely be seen as an additional, though small, burden on the redevelopment effort.

### **Benefits**

Implementing the built form recommendations in this Report will provide the following benefits:

#### ◆ **Inviting destination**

Positive investment over time will help create an attractive destination for shopping, working, and living with substantially improved district cohesion and aesthetic qualities.

#### ◆ **Better business district**

High quality investments in buildings and sites will have direct and positive effects both on spawning investment on nearby buildings and sites and enhancing retail and business sales and the value of property in the district.

#### ◆ **Strengthen walkability**

Kelley's Corner will be significantly more pedestrian-friendly when the district has a reinforced sense of place that focuses on reorganization of buildings, sites, and parking.

#### ◆ **Enhanced oversight and review**

The application of improved design standards and guidelines will provide clear directive to developers and appropriate guidance for the community, reviewing agencies, and permitting boards considering what is appropriate for the future of the district and how best to align current project approvals to an ever-improving Kelley's Corner.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- ◆ Amend existing standards and regulations to create incentives for change that meets the Town's goals
- ◆ Provide new options for larger scale, mixed-use, master planned development
- ◆ Provide additional controls on the physical and visual character of new development

## ACTIONS

- ◆ Amend the existing Kelley's Corner District Zoning Regulations
- ◆ Approve new Master Plan Development Overlay District to allow planned development for larger mixed-use projects including multi-family housing
- ◆ Create Kelley's Corner specific design guidelines

## VALUE

- ◆ Incremental transformation of Kelley's Corner into a town center for Acton
- ◆ Incentives for high value private reinvestment
- ◆ Increased tax revenue from improved property values

TOWN of ACTON



Amended through November 2014

ZONING BYLAW

# II.F.

## Facts and Findings

The Town does not own the land in Kelley's Corner. Therefore, zoning regulations are the Town's only tool for achieving desired development outcomes. Under current Kelley's Corner zoning regulations development occurs in a manner that is inconsistent with the Town's goals. It does not create the environment and sense of place that the Town desires for the district. The solution is to implement changes in the zoning regulations that give the Town the tools to guide and regulate development in a manner that is consistent with Acton 2020 and the preferences of the community. This section describes the existing zoning framework and explains how it affects development. It also evaluates constraints and opportunities for change and provides recommendations for a new regulatory structure.

## Existing Zoning Framework

### Existing Kelley's Corner Zoning District Area

The Study Area comprises land at the intersection of Massachusetts Avenue and Main Street. It includes three zoning districts shown on the official Acton Zoning Map. The area is primarily zoned as the Kelley's Corner District and Residence AA (R-AA). The former school, which was recently converted to multifamily residential use, is the only parcel in the Residential 2 (R-2) zoning district. This study focuses on the Kelley's Corner District. A smaller portion of the Kelley's Corner District, located to the south at the intersection of Main and Prospect Streets, is not included in the Study Area.

### Zoning



Current Zoning Map of the Project Area

### Existing Kelley's Corner District Requirements

#### Existing Dimensional Standards

The Kelley's Corner District is a business zoning district that enables development up to 0.2 FAR of commercial uses (retail and service) on small parcels of land (10,000 SF minimum lot size). Subject to specific design standards a more intense 0.4 FAR may be allowed. Multi-family development is not allowed in the Kelley's Corner District.

Floor Area Ratio (FAR) is the area of building floor space compared to area of the parcel on which the building is sited. FAR is an option for governing development intensity. In Kelley's Corner, the maximum development intensity is capped at 0.2 FAR, or .4 FAR, subject to specific design standards. This is a reasonable approximation of the maximum potential density for non-mixed use, commercial development with surface parking. The building height is limited

to 36 feet; depending on the size of the lot and the need for parking, the height limitation may be more restrictive on the site than the FAR limit. The zoning regulations for the Kelley's Corner District include design standards in Section 5.6 of the Zoning Bylaws that apply to more intense development exceeding 0.2 FAR, up to .4 FAR. The purpose of these standards is to provide guidance for future development proposals that place priorities on pedestrian access and circulation and reinforce the vitality of Kelley's Corner as a business district. The standards govern the form of new construction, provision of public and pedestrian amenities, and location of uses within the building. There are also related provisions for vehicular parking. The Town adopted these zoning regulations in 1996 in order to encourage development that is more pedestrian friendly with buildings situated at the street front. The regulations have not achieved the desired results.

**Existing Allowed Uses**

Zoning in Kelley’s Corner allows a range of commercial uses such as retail, office, restaurants, and services. Single family dwellings are allowed in the Kelley’s Corner Zoning District but none exist; multi-family dwellings are not allowed. Some of these uses are allowed by right, others require use special permits. The Board of Selectmen and the Zoning Board of Appeals are the authorities under the Zoning Bylaw to grant use special permits in Kelley’s Corner.

**Site Plan Review Process**

In the Town of Acton, the Board of Selectmen is the special permit granting authority for Site Plan Review. They review conditions on building development plans such as the parking layout, circulation, drainage, and building orientation and their compliance with zoning.

Town Staff and the Design Review Board (DRB) provide advisory opinions to the Board of Selectmen. There are other Town and State regulatory requirements and processes that may play a role in the development of a site in Kelley’s Corner such as for signage or resource area protection.

**Constraints and Opportunities**

**Constraints**

Existing zoning regulations affect which projects are allowed by-right, by special permit, or are subject to certain conditions and limitations on use, dimension, and form. Market demand determines which projects are proposed to the Town. If zoning regulations make the development infeasible due to the additional cost of compliance or an outright prohibition, then the Town

may lose an opportunity to revitalize Kelley’s Corner. Zoning regulations must be aligned with the planning goals of the Town as expressed in The Acton 2020 Comprehensive Community Plan to encourage desired development and discourage or prohibit development that is not consistent with the community’s vision. In Acton, decisions to amend zoning regulations require a two-thirds majority vote by an Open Town Meeting. Local zoning regulations must be consistent with Massachusetts General Law, Chapter 40A, which is the State’s enabling legislation for municipal zoning authority. It defines which zoning regulations can be adopted and the procedures for zoning amendments, special permits, and public hearings. Changes to municipal zoning regulations must be consistent with Chapter 40A.

As in most suburban commercial settings, on-site vehicular parking is required. The reasons are absence of frequent transit services and lack of on-street or municipal parking. Structured parking is generally not financially feasible, resulting in large on-site surface parking areas. Surface parking limits the overall land that is available for the siting of buildings and pedestrian amenities.

Due to the need for substantial surface parking given the current building height limitations are a constraint on town center redevelopment.

As noted in the Land Use and Development Patterns section of this report, redevelopment economics require significant multi-family components in any new project in Kelley’s Corner, although profitability remains marginal. A requirement for inclusion of affordable

housing as suggested during the planning process could make a project infeasible.

As is customary practice, commercial districts maintain larger setbacks and buffers to single family neighborhoods. This imposes limits on where buildings and parking lots can be located and incrementally increases the cost of redevelopment.

**Opportunities**

The State enabling legislation for municipal zoning authority (Massachusetts General Law, Chapter 40A) gives towns the authority to establish zoning districts and adopt zoning regulations to achieve community goals.

**Recommendations and Rationale**

**Summary of Recommendations**

The proposed regulatory changes include amendments to the zoning regulations and new design guidelines. These changes would only apply to the area currently zoned as the Kelley’s Corner District. No changes are proposed for the adjacent residential districts that are within the Study Area or that abut the district.

The recommended changes are as follows:

- ◆ **Adopt Amendments to the Existing Kelley’s Corner District**

The proposed zoning amendments would set revised standards for site layouts and building designs, which would be conducive to creating a pedestrian friendly environment. They would apply to small-scale commercial development and redevelopment

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projects with up to 0.2 FAR. The FAR limit under these regulations would be FAR 0.2. The stepped up 0.4 FAR limit that currently exists under the Kelley's Corner zoning regulations would no longer be an option. These changes would apply to the entire Kelley's Corner zoning district, including the southerly portion at the intersection of Main and Prospect Streets. The design standards previously triggered above FAR 0.2 would be amended and would apply to all new development for consistency with the Town's goals for strong town center design. Kelley's Corner Design Guidelines will accompany the zoning standards.

### ◆ Adopt New Master Plan Development (MPD) Overlay

The proposed zoning amendments would create a new opt-in overlay district that would allow, by special permit, larger-scale, phased development projects. MPD projects must meet minimum thresholds for land area - 50,000 square feet, and street frontage - 300 feet. Such developments would be allowed up to 0.8 FAR; building heights up to 45 feet near the street frontage, and 55 feet when further set back within a site; and a mixture of land uses with up to 75% multi-family residential uses. A developer can obtain development approval in one master permit or opt for a multi-step permitting process. All permitting processes

will require detail design review based on the recommended Kelley's Corner Design Guidelines. This overlay district would only apply to the northerly portion of the Kelley's Corner district around the intersection of Main Street and Massachusetts Avenue. The Existing Kelley's Corner District would remain as an underlying zoning district.

### ◆ Town Meeting

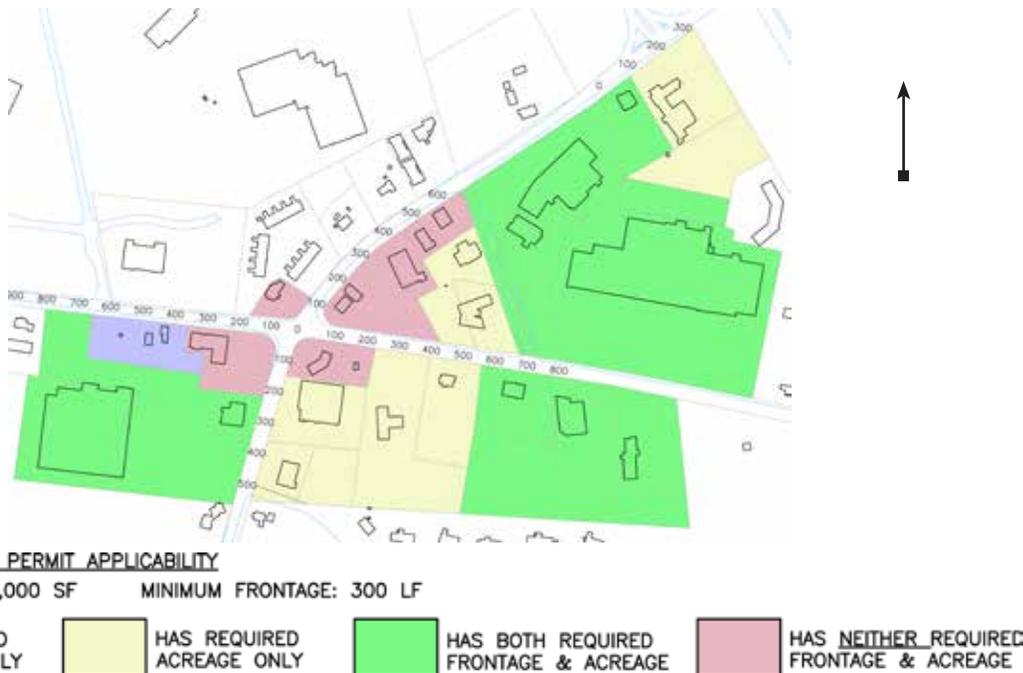
Zoning Bylaw amendments require two-thirds majority votes by Town Meeting. Prior to Town Meeting, the Planning Board must hold a public hearing on the proposed zoning amendments.

### ◆ Adopt Zoning Design Standards and Kelley's Corner Design Guidelines

The above recommended zoning changes include basic design standards for the Kelley's Corner District, which update and modify the standards presently found in Section 5.6 of the Acton Zoning Bylaw. As a companion to the proposed new zoning design standards, the Town should adopt the proposed detailed design guidelines for Kelley's Corner to help guide development through the permitting process in the existing underlying Kelley's Corner District and in the proposed new Master Plan Development Overlay District.

### ◆ Amend the Design Review Board (DRB) charge

The proposed design guidelines would require the Board of Selectmen to change the charge of the DRB to include the review of all development within the Kelley's Corner District and the Master Plan Development Overlay district.



Analysis of Existing Properties and Applicability for Opting into the Proposed MPD Overlay District

**Rationale**

These three recommendations address the constraints of the existing regulations. Benefits from making these changes include the following:

- ◆ The Master Plan Development Overlay provides for multi-family residential uses, which are essential for the creation of a vibrant town center and to support its businesses. It also responds to market needs and therefore supports the likelihood of redevelopment
- ◆ The Master Plan Development Overlay creates an opportunity for mixed-use projects to be designed at a higher density. It also allows the Town to establish and control the character of the proposed development through a comprehensive planned approach with design standards negotiated in an open process. This approach to development is vastly superior to the existing piecemeal development and permitting process
- ◆ The recommended zoning design standards and the Kelley’s Corner Design Guidelines will promote development outcomes that meet the goals of Acton 2020 and the preferences of the community
- ◆ The recommended changes to the Design Guidelines include sufficient flexibility to achieve the best possible building and site design when considering specific projects. These guidelines establish a basis of

understanding and discussion between project proponents and the permitting authorities when discussing the physical and visual character of a project

- ◆ The option for phase permitting steps allows a project proponent to obtain permits based on concept plans in order to leverage financing for final design and engineering, and contracting

**Detailed Description of Proposed Zoning Changes**

The following sections describe in greater detail the recommended changes to the Kelley’s Corner District and the proposed Master Plan Development (MPD) Overlay District.

No changes are proposed for the adjacent residential districts that are within the Study Area or that abut the Study Area .

**Amendments to the Official Zoning Map**

- ◆ **Existing Kelley’s Corner District**  
There are no recommendations for boundary changes to the Kelley’s Corner District shown on the Town of Acton, Official Zoning Map.
- ◆ **Proposed MPD Overlay District**  
The recommended Master Plan Development Overlay District will match the northerly portion of the existing Kelley’s Corner District. The small southerly portion at the Main and Prospect Streets intersection is not included in the Overlay District. The existing

Kelley’s Corner zoning district will remain as the underlying zoning district; the MPD Overlay District does not replace it.

**Applicability**

- ◆ **Existing Kelley’s Corner District**  
Under the recommended changes, the regulations in the underlying Kelley’s Corner District would apply to smaller scale commercial projects with a maximum FAR of 0.2.
- ◆ **Proposed MPD Overlay District**  
The MPD Overlay District would allow, by special permit, larger-scale, mixed-use projects with a maximum FAR of 0.8.

**Allowed Uses**

- ◆ **Existing Kelley’s Corner District**  
No changes to the current use regulations are proposed in the underlying Kelley’s Corner District.
- ◆ **Proposed MPD Overlay District**  
All uses in the underlying Kelley’s Corner District are allowed. Additionally, multi-family dwellings would be allowed as a component in a mixed-use project. The multi-family component cannot exceed 75% of the total floor area on the property and not be located in the ground floor of buildings located at the street frontage. The limits ensure that a project is truly mixed use and not a residential project with only a token amount of commercial space.

## II.F.

### Dimensional Standards

#### Underlying Kelley's Corner District

Proposed changes to the dimensional standards for the underlying Kelley's Corner District are:

#### ◆ FAR

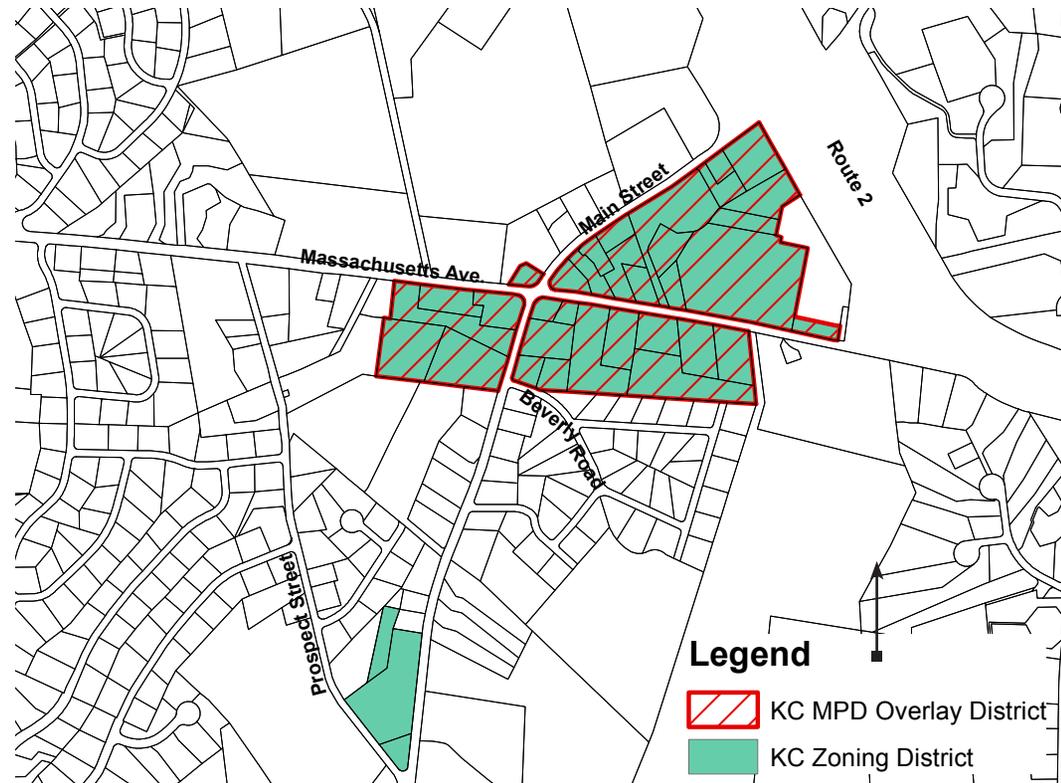
Deletion of the stepped up 0.4 FAR development option. Small scale commercial developments would be allowed up to FAR 0.2.

#### ◆ Setback

Reduction of the minimum front yard setback to 25 feet, and introduction of a 30-foot maximum front yard. The Town of Acton is considering right-of-way acquisitions along the streets in Kelley's Corner to implement "complete streets" improvements with new sidewalks, protective buffers, bike lanes, and added turning lanes. Once the improvements have been completed, an appropriate eight-foot front yard will separate the sidewalks from buildings. Variations on setbacks may occur and could be acceptable. Regulatory building setback adjustments may be appropriate after final design completion of the street improvements.

#### ◆ Active Street Front

At least 60% of street frontages must be occupied by buildings and pedestrian plazas located between the minimum and maximum front yards. This requirement increases to 70% for lots that have more than 300 feet of frontage, and to 80% where frontage exceeds 500 feet. The requirement for the presence of buildings along the streets and sidewalks aims to support redevelopment that



Proposed KC Zoning Map with Overlay

fosters a pedestrian friendly street environment with characteristics that emulate traditional town centers.

#### ◆ Parking Lots and Vehicle Access

Requirements for surface parking lots are modified to closely match the standards for parking lots in the East, South, and West Acton Villages. Emphasis is placed on the quality of landscaping rather than the quantity of landscaping.

#### ◆ Proposed MPD Overlay District

The key alternate dimensional standards recommended for the Overlay District provide more development opportunities than the underlying Kelley's Corner District. They provide a higher FAR limit and increased maximum building height. Other dimensional standards dealing with the placement of buildings and parking lots would apply and be managed through the development and design review processes.

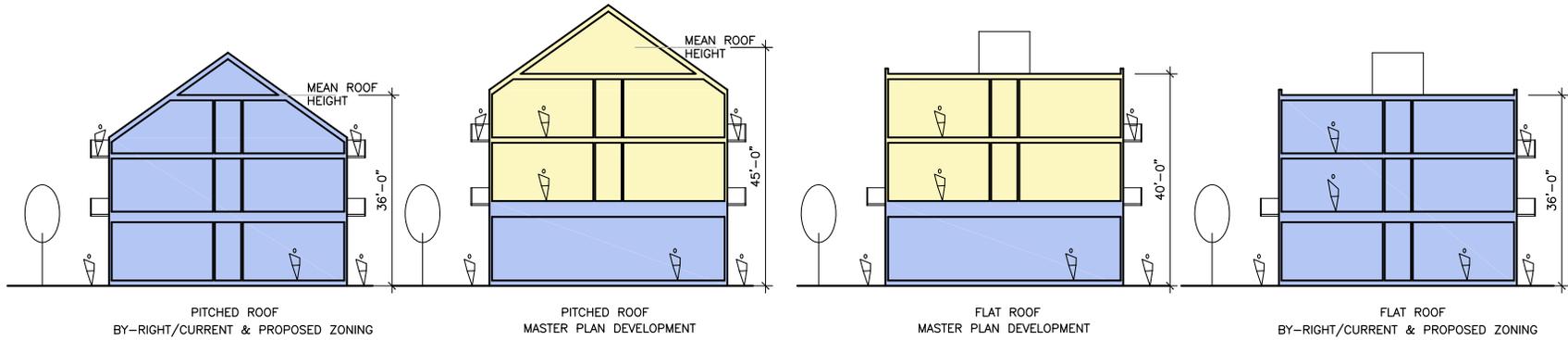
Existing vs. Proposed Key Dimensional Regulations KC Underlying Zoning District Master Plan Special Permit Overlay District			
	Existing KC Zoning (by-right)	Proposed KC Underlying Zoning (by-right)	Proposed KC Mixed-Use Master Plan Overlay District (Special Permit)  Applicant's projects are vetted by DRB and special permit granting authority through a public hearing process.
<b>FAR</b>	Different steps for FAR: • .2 max (contains minimal design element requirements) • >.2 (additional design standards)	.2 FAR maximum  More rigorous design standards apply.  (No option for .35 or .4 FAR)	Up to 0.8 FAR  More rigorous design standards apply.
<b>Maximum Height</b>	36 feet	36 feet	<b>Buildings that abut the street:</b> Flat roof, 40 feet Sloped roof, 45 feet  <b>Building within the interior of the lot:</b> 55 feet not to exceed four stories above the basement.
<b>Front Setbacks</b>	Minimum 30ft. No Maximum	Minimum: 25 feet Maximum: 30 feet	Minimum: 25 feet Maximum: 30 feet

◆ FAR

The recommended maximum FAR is 0.8 This ensures that development and redevelopment will not be artificially hindered by a too restrictive FAR limit. As proposed, the FAR limit is not the primary cap on development; rather it is a failsafe maximum. The increase in FAR should easily accommodate more financially attractive, mixed-use redevelopment with multi-family housing.

◆ Tiered Building Height

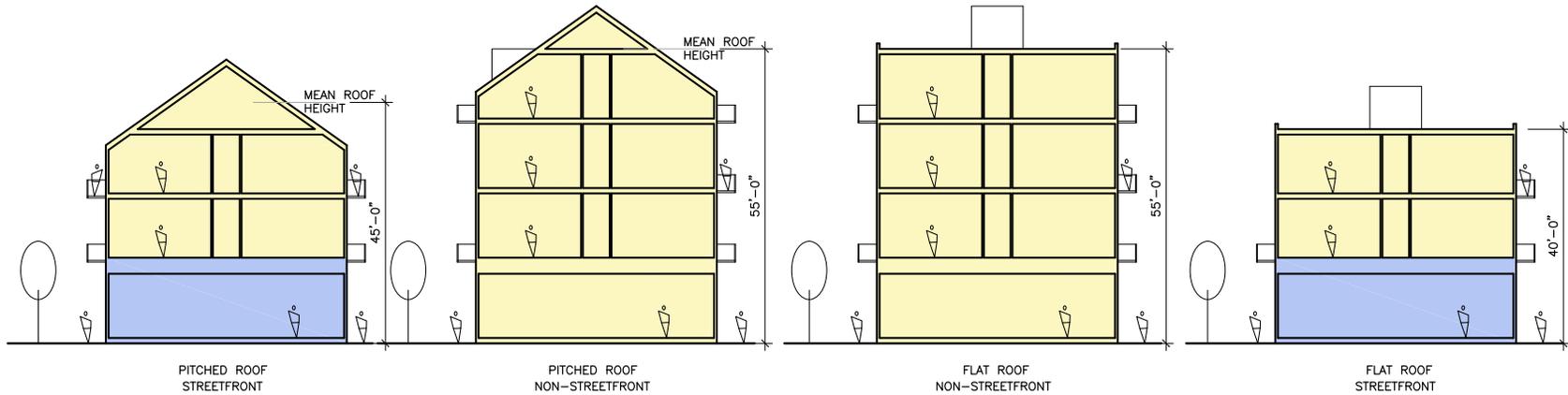
The recommended maximum building height in the interior of a project site is 55 feet and 4 stories above the basement. The recommended zoning includes a requirement that buildings at street frontage locations cannot exceed a height of 40 feet for flat roofs and 45 feet for pitched roofs. This generally accommodates three stories. The proposed height allowances ensure sufficient high-value rentable building floor space given that much land area is needed for amenities, driveways, and surface parking. This allowance would accommodate a 16-18-foot high first floor for commercial uses and approximately 12-foot high upper floors for residential units.



STREETFRONT BLDGS.

COMMERCIAL ONLY ALLOWED

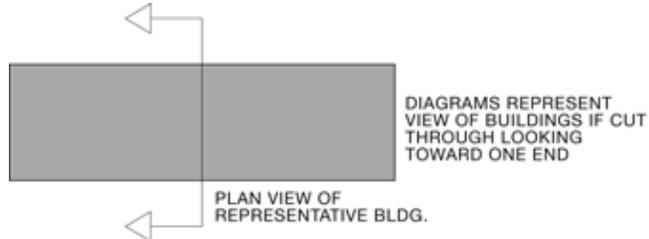
RESIDENTIAL & COMMERCIAL/RETAIL ALLOWED



MASTER PLAN DEVELOPMENT BLDGS.

COMMERCIAL ONLY ALLOWED

RESIDENTIAL & COMMERCIAL/RETAIL ALLOWED



Allowable Building Heights and Uses Diagrams: By-Right and Master Plan Development Comparisons



Example of Tiered Building Height in Downtown Canton, MA

**Process for Approval**

◆ **Existing Kelley’s Corner District**

The existing underlying Kelley’s Corner District approval process would not change, including required site plan and use special permits.

◆ **Proposed Master Plan Development (MPD) Overlay District**

In the MPD Overlay District, a MPD special permit (Master Permit) would be available as an alternate and optional permitting path for development and redevelopment of tracts of land with specific minimum dimensions. It would accommodate phased permitting procedures to ensure comprehensive project planning, to expedite permitting, and to establish certainty intended to facilitate project financing.

◆ **Optional Preliminary Review**

Project proponents, before filing formal special permit applications, would be offered optional,

preliminary reviews and discussions with the Planning Department. In addition, a public informational meeting with the special permit granting authority would be recommended prior to formal submission of an application for a Master Permit.

**Required Master Permit**

The first permitting step for a MPD Project would be to obtain a Master Permit. When granted, the Master Permit would govern the entire MPD Project and guide all subsequent permits, special permits, and review steps, and the associated processes that may be needed for detailed MPD Project implementation, execution, and maintenance. The Master Permit sets parameters for site layout; building locations, designs, and massing; circulation and site access/egress; drainage design; landscaping; locations of public parks and plazas, and other public amenities; signage; uses, and, as appropriate, locations and intensity of uses; and requirements, thresholds, and conditions for subsequent permits; special permits as appropriate, detailed site plan approvals, detailed building design approvals; and Master Permit amendments.

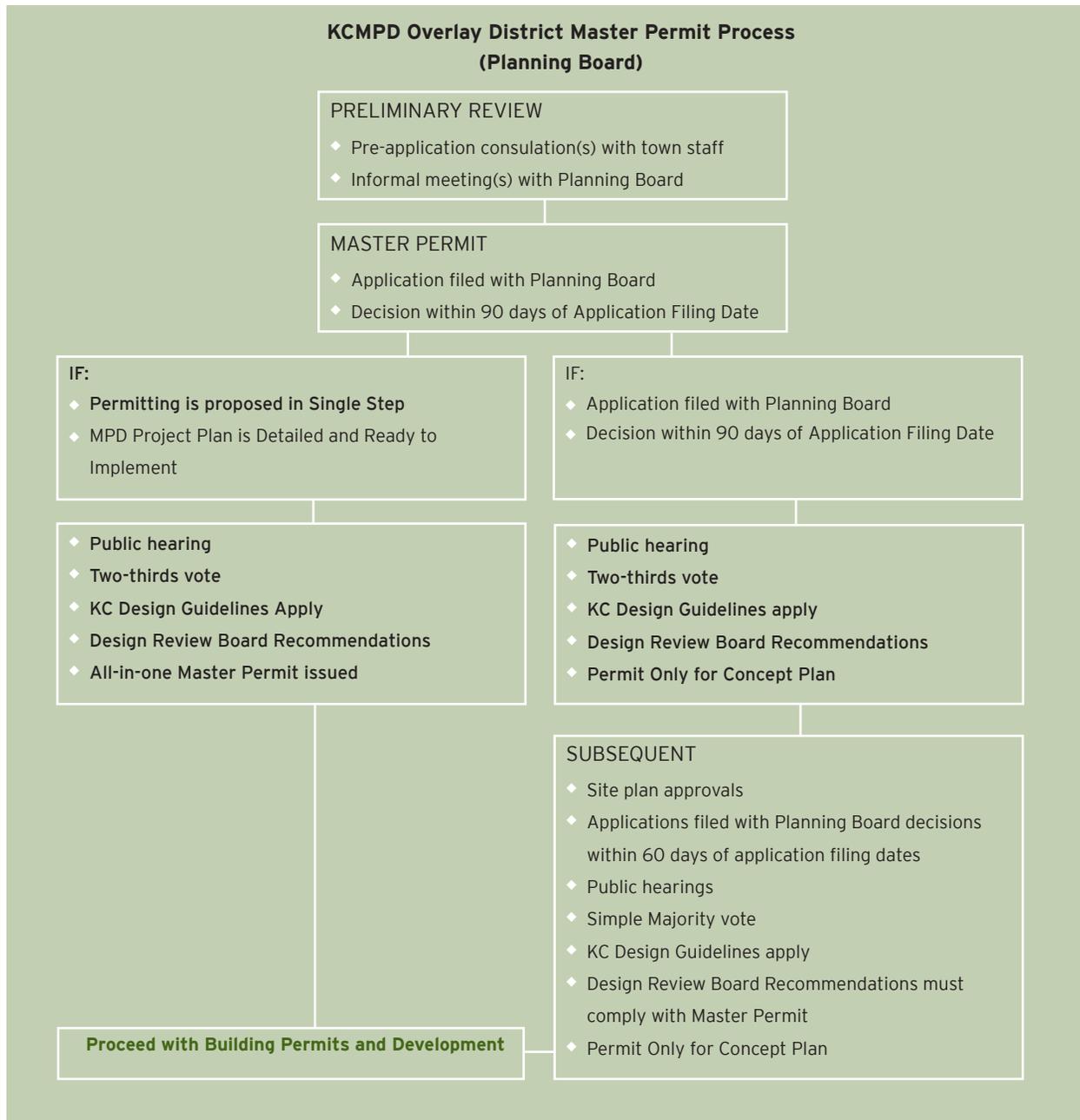
The Master Permit, and the MPD Project plan approved therein, would be deemed the definitive approval of a MPD Project. It would be an all-inclusive permit for all aspects of the development that are regulated and governed under the proposed zoning regulations. It would substitute for and incorporate all other special permits that may be required under other sections of the Acton Zoning Bylaw, and it would replace and supersede all special permits that may have been granted previously for the subject tract of land. The

Master Permit would entitle the MPD Project proponent to rely on its authorizations, including any conditions or limitations, for purposes of proceeding with design, engineering, project financing, and contracting.

Applicants for a Master Permit have choices for the permit process:

◆ The regulations would allow an applicant to apply for, and the special permit granting authority, in appropriate cases, to consider, process, and issue a Master Permit that is all-inclusive and final. The permit would be similar to a conventional special permit with possible plan amendments, conditions, and limitations. The special permit granting authority would authorize the issuance of building permits for construction (a “Final Master Permit”). In order to be considered for a Final Master Permit, the project proponent(s) would be required to submit an application with robust, detailed, and complete plans, analyses, and designs that support an MPD Project.

◆ Alternatively, a Master Permit could be granted on the basis of a comprehensive concept plan that is founded on a thorough feasibility analysis, which determines the approximate site layout, site access, building arrangements, and uses. Other planning and design details would then be deferred to one or more later MPD Project permitting phases requiring subsequent site-plan review procedures. If granted, the subsequent permits and approvals would become part of the Master Permit as addenda or supplements. Any significant changes from the concept plan as approved in the Master Permit would require amendments of the Master Permit.



The Master Plan Process is generally outlined as in the flow chart **KCMPD Overlay District Master Permit Process (Planning Board)**.

### Kelley’s Corner Design Guidelines

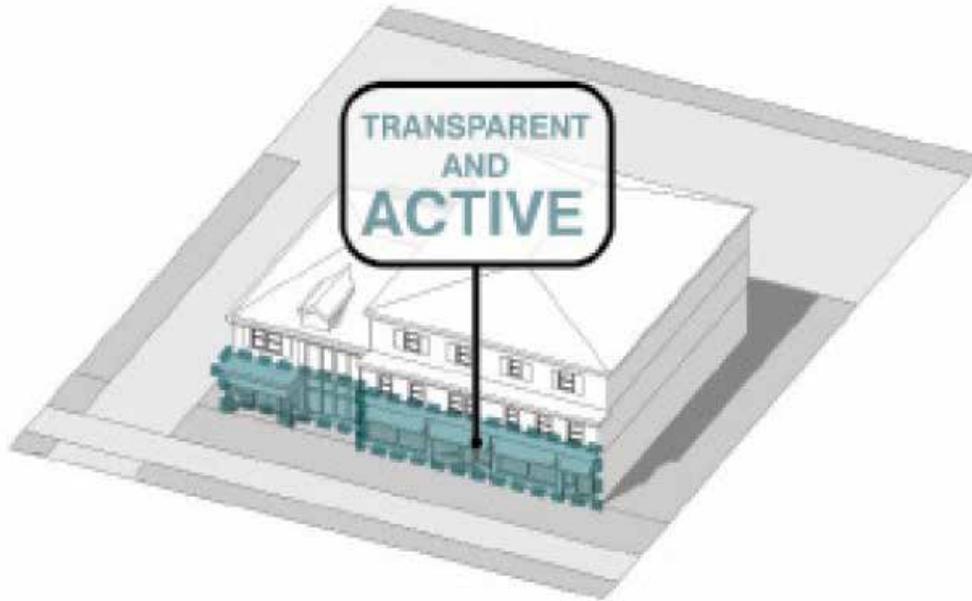
The recommended Kelley’s Corner Design Guidelines would accompany the zoning bylaw standards and apply to both the revised underlying Kelley’s Corner District and the new Master Plan Development Overlay district. Guidelines would provide both the reviewing boards and the project proponents with direction for creating and maintaining a high quality of design as the overall goal consistent with Acton 2020 and the desires of the Town residents.

### Principles of Design

The design guidelines are meant to apply to the public realm, i.e. those building forms and spaces that are subject to public view from areas in public use. Interior spaces and building code compliance are not the subject of these guidelines but may be taken into consideration when applying the design standards.

The overall principles of design, which reinforce Acton 2020 goals and public input for this plan, include:

- ◆ **Support Kelley’s Corner with uses and spaces that contribute to the vitality and appeal of the district, promote opportunities for businesses, and attract visitors and patrons to the area**
- ◆ **Reinforce Kelley’s Corner as a civic place with spaces for small public gatherings**



Design Guidelines—Building Facades

- ◆ **Use examples of existing architecture and design in the Town of Acton as pointers and inspiration for renovation and new design**

**Summary of Recommended Design Guidelines**

The recommended design guidelines include introductory descriptions and a combination of graphic illustrations and text to help define the building height, massing and orientation plus site improvements for parking, drives, walkways, signage, and public space. A summary of the considerations behind the major recommendations follows. (Note: The recommended design guidelines are presented in Appendix K.)

- ◆ **Architectural Style**

The architectural styles within Kelley’s Corner should be varied rather than be limited to a narrow range of

established architectural styles. Each building should be composed with its own stylistic integrity rather than a composite of different styles; the chosen style should be suited to the building type and scale. For large, multi-building developments, styles or expressions within a style should vary among the constituent buildings.

- ◆ **Building Massing**

The building massing within Kelley’s Corner should be varied to create a range of building sizes, configurations, and roof forms. Highly-repetitive and overly-simplified building forms should be avoided. Initial redevelopments should begin a transformation of Kelley’s Corner into a new town center. As redevelopment progresses, building massing should respect the scale, configuration, and form of

redevelopment adjacent properties and harmonize with their context.

- ◆ **Building Orientation**

Buildings near a street should be oriented to address the primary street frontage of the site and respond to distinguishing site features, such as primary intersections or views.

- ◆ **Building Façades**

The composition and components of building façades within Kelley’s Corner do not need to reinforce a consistent architectural style within the district, but should be consistently based upon several important underlying design concepts. Façades should be varied from building to building, and could vary within the same building to respond to orientation and site context. However, each façade should be composed with its own stylistic integrity and design logic. The chosen style should be suited to the building type and scale. In the case of large, multi-building developments, styles or expressions within a style should vary among the constituent buildings.

- ◆ **Signage**

The Town of Acton’s Zoning Bylaw, Section 7, Signs and Advertising Devices, provides standards for allowable and prohibited signage types, signage illumination, and the number and type of signs permitted in each zoning district, including the Kelley’s Corner District. The intent of the signage guidelines is to provide additional assistance in shaping the appearance and character of signs in order to foster a high-quality, pedestrian-friendly environment at Kelley’s Corner. These guidelines

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Outdoor Seating Area

supplement the zoning requirements and are not intended to conflict with any aspect of zoning.

### ◆ Site Improvements and Composition

The composition of the site shall provide for efficient and organized layout of buildings, parking areas, and vehicular circulation, with a particular emphasis on pedestrian connectivity.

### ◆ Pedestrian Areas

Developments within Kelley's Corner shall create an attractive, pedestrian-friendly environment. Pedestrian connections, plazas, and seating areas are encouraged whenever feasible.

### ◆ Site Amenities

Amenities should be located in space that relate to the desired uses, such as nearby entry walkways. The styles of the amenities shall match the context of the area.

### ◆ Landscaping

Site landscaping is critical for maintaining a human-scale, adding visual interest. Landscaping should incorporate low impact design solutions for stormwater management. Landscaping treatments can help frame building entries and demarcate important site circulation relationships.

### ◆ Other recommendations include Parking and Loading, Walls and Fencing, and Site Lighting and Stormwater Management

### Design Review Process

The design guidelines would apply to all projects in the underlying Kelley's Corner District and in the Master Plan Development Overlay District. The Design Review Board (DRB) would apply the guidelines to projects under review by the appropriate special permit granting authority. The DRB would act as it does now, in an advisory capacity.

### Alignment with Acton 2020 Goals and Kelley's Corner Guiding Principles

The proposed zoning changes, including the recommended design guidelines, align with the goals of Acton 2020 for improving the Kelley's Corner District for supporting businesses, providing incentives for redevelopment, creating a town center quality, and improving the physical character of the area. The conformance of the built form recommendations with the Town's Goals and Strategies is documented in Appendix B. Conformance with Acton 2020 Goals and Strategies.

### Costs

The Town will have incremental administrative costs for the zoning amendments and their implementation.

Once the zoning has been amended, applications under the new Master Plan Development Overlay District can be processed using existing staff resources. The review and approval processes would take place as part of the existing schedule for the special permit granting authority and Design Review Board. Depending on the timing and scale of proposed projects, additional staff and Board time may be necessary to implement the requirements of the new review and approval process. In order to give the needed attention to complex and multi-phased development projects.

### Resources

Town staff and Town elected and appointed Boards provide resources for amending regulations and administering project reviews. This study produced a draft of the proposed recommended changes to the zoning regulations. The Town Planning Staff and the Kelley's Corner Improvement Initiative Steering Committee have made modifications to the initial drafts. The modified draft regulations are located in Appendix \_\_\_\_\_. As the draft regulations move through the vetting, further amendments to the text may occur.

Once the recommendations have been adopted, Town Staff, members of the Design Review Board, and the members of the special permit granting authority will undertake the administrative, review, and approval functions as applications are submitted under the requirements of the revised zoning. This process is not expected to require additional resources beyond

existing staff and volunteer time as change is likely to be incremental and projects will be distributed over time.

### Benefits

The benefits of implementing these proposed regulatory changes are:

- ◆ More consistent expected outcomes for redevelopment in terms of process and physical character of projects
- ◆ New opportunities for developers who undertake coordinated projects
- ◆ A revitalized district that meets the Town goals for Kelley's Corner
- ◆ Higher tax revenue from higher property values
- ◆ Transformation of Kelley's Corner into a walkable Town Center
- ◆ Economic development that adds value for Acton residents and the Town's commercial tax base
- ◆ New housing options for young professionals and empty-nesters who wish to downsize within Acton