



# Town of Danvers

## Planning & Economic Development Division

Department of Land Use & Community Services

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### Downtown Corridor Executive Summary

**Location:** The Downtown Corridor (DTC) primarily encompasses the existing Industrial I-1 (I-1), Commercial-1 (C-1), and Commercial-1A (C-1A) zoning districts found in the downtown area from Maple Street to High Street. A map of the DTC can be found in the 2020 Special Town Meeting warrant book.

**Purpose:** To support the downtown economy by providing opportunities for living units and small to medium-sized local businesses to be integrated into a traditional neighborhood development pattern characterized by:

- Moderate Density
- Horizontal and vertical mixed-use close to and with the downtown core
- Encouraging alternative transportation modes to the private automobile
- Public services and recreation amenities
- A transitional area from surrounding residential neighborhoods

A primary goal of the DTC zoning initiative is to provide a more consistent and predictable framework for future development opportunities.

**Intent and Benefits:** Danvers is and will continue to be dominated by family-oriented housing. Of the Town's 11,000 housing units, roughly 7,000 are single-family detached homes. This zoning proposal is intended to create some diversity in the Town's housing stock while locating new units in an area that will help the vitality and quality of new and existing businesses downtown. The new zoning will also serve to:

- Offer a full range of housing choices for households of all incomes, ages, and sizes to meet the goal of preserving local character and diversity. The new units in the corridor will offer alternatives to empty-nesters wishing to stay in town and young adults who are looking to return home but cannot afford the price of a traditional single-family home.
- Promote low-impact, sustainable redevelopment that is pedestrian-friendly.
- Provide development standards to allow context-sensitive design, predictability, and creative site planning.
- Encourage quality redevelopment of building stock and new opportunities for business growth and local job creation.
- Encourage incentives for developers to invest in downtown through façade programs, streetscape improvements, additional green space, traffic-related improvements, etc.

**Maximum Development and Timeline for Build-Out:** We expect that the creation of the DTC will kick-off the gradual redevelopment of this area over the next 30-50 years. Typical additions to the local housing stock in Danvers are in the range of 20-30 units annually. While the Planning Division aims to help regulate, guide, and encourage growth, it has no control over the timing of development. The slow pace of redevelopment in the Tapleyville and Danversport areas since they were rezoned are a good example of this.

**Overview:** Danvers has been active in planning and implementing zoning changes for some of its Industrial-1 zoned land since 2006 to promote safe, well designed, mixed-use projects throughout downtown and waterfront neighborhoods. The current zoning initiative builds upon the successful Maple Street Traditional Neighborhood model adopted by Special Town Meeting in December of 2017. The DTC builds upon the core concepts of creating thriving mixed-use and pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods that enhance the livability of our community.

**Current Uses:** The downtown area spanning from Maple Street to High Street is primarily comprised of the Industrial I-1 (I-1), Commercial-1 (C1), and Commercial 1-A (C1-A) zoning districts. Within the existing Industrial I-1 Districts, uses such as self-storage/warehouses, car washes, and wholesaling are allowed by-right. Most residential uses are not permitted in the C1-A district, and no residential uses are permitted in the I-1 or C-1 districts. Several of the single-family residences within the I-1, C-1, and C1-A pre-date current zoning and are considered “pre-existing, non-conforming,” meaning they were built before residential uses were prohibited. Newer residential developments within these districts were approved through use variances from the Zoning Board of Appeals. This system of seeking zoning relief has resulted in mismatched downtown neighborhoods that have uneven transitions between residential, commercial, and industrial uses. The DTC zoning proposal is intended to bring predictability to future development.

### **DTC Zoning Bylaw and Design Standards**

**Building Types:** The proposed zoning allows many different building types, including residential, commercial, fabrication/flex space, and civic buildings. Unlike most current zoning regulations that have one dimensional standard for all buildings (i.e., lot size, frontage, setback, and height), each building type in the DTC has its own dimensional and design standards. For example, residential buildings have a deeper setback, lower height limit and are above grade to provide a sense of privacy and compatibility with the surrounding neighborhood. Commercial and mixed-use buildings have little or no setback with large windows at grade with the sidewalk to create an attractive pedestrian environment and take advantage of business visibility from the street.

**Setbacks:** Unlike most current zoning regulations that have a minimum setback, the proposed DTC has a Build-To-Zone (BTZ) which established a minimum and maximum setback where the front of the building must be placed. The purpose of this standard is to ensure that new development is pedestrian-oriented and creates a strong relationship with the sidewalk and street. This is a common and critical design characteristic in traditional villages and neighborhoods.

**Building Height Limit:** Each allowable building type in the DTC has a specific height limit. Building height maximums in the DTC range from 1.5 stories (20 ft) to 4 stories (45 ft). The purpose of setting these limits is to balance the goal of creating a comfortable level of street enclosure for pedestrian enjoyment without creating a “canyon effect” where tall buildings at the property line overwhelm the street.

**Residential and Bonus Incentives:** The residential density in the proposed DTC is like that of the Tapleyville or Maple Street overlay districts. Under the new zoning, the Planning Board may allow higher densities up to the maximum established in the bylaw if the applicant can provide specific Public Realm Improvements (PRI) that provide benefits to the residents and businesses in the DTC and surrounding area.

Eligible Public Realm improvements include the following:

- Improvements to designated Civic Zones
- Land acquisition or donation to the Town or a designated non-profit agency for publicly accessible active or passive recreation in desirable locations within the DTC or surrounding area.
- Sidewalks and pathways.
- Streetscape improvements such as street trees and furnishings on public streets or contribution of land suitable for a public way or public streetscape improvements.
- Public parking spaces and publicly-accessible parking facilities.
- Additional affordable housing units above the number required.

**Design Standards Guiding Principles:** The proposed zoning will provide the flexibility to adapt to changing market conditions to allow for downtown “lifecycle” housing and business choices by creating a template for an attractive, economically supportive core, including:

- A mix of uses and flexible building space
- Architectural context and adaptive reuse of historic structures
- Relationship with downtown core and surrounding neighborhoods
- Accessible, attractive, active, open, and civic space
- Landscape and streetscape character
- Alternative modes of transportation
- Downtown and neighborhood gateways

**General Design Standards:** General Design Standards cover building and site design techniques such as building placement and orientation, façade articulation, fenestration, massing, roof forms and pitch, and the visual harmony between the individual elements of a building. Standards also integrate best practices in site design, including energy efficiency, sustainable stormwater management techniques, landscaping, and low impact development (LID) techniques.

**Building Frontage and Façade Standards:** The building frontage and façade standards provide a gradual transition and substantial connection between the yards and building interiors and the

sidewalks, and civic spaces. Different frontage and façade design standards are coupled with specific building types to ensure privacy for residential buildings, permeability for commercial and mixed-use buildings, and prominence for civic and community buildings.

**Sign Standards:** Within the DTC, there are principal and accessory signs permitted. These include Sandwich Board Signs, Blade and Projecting Signs, Window Signs, Outdoor Displays, and others that are common in traditional village and neighborhood centers, and that contribute to walkability and an attractive pedestrian environment. For example, projecting blade signs allow pedestrians (as well as drivers) to see businesses ahead on both sides of the street. This is important for a pedestrian-oriented district, as well as providing opportunities for businesses to express their unique identity and creativity through context-based design standards.

**Open Space:** Unlike most current zoning regulations that have a minimum percentage requirement for landscaping, the proposed DTC design standards allow for a variety of Outdoor Amenity Spaces (OAS) that must be included in new development projects. OAS range from neighborhood parks, playgrounds, and community gardens, to plazas, rooftop terraces, courtyards, outdoor dining areas, or even common yards for private residences. The overall purpose is to ensure that the DTC includes a variety of passive and active recreational space.

**Public Realm Standards:** The Public Realm includes publicly-owned or publicly-oriented spaces and facilities such as streets, open spaces, and utilities. The purpose of the Public Realm Standards ensures the development of a well-connected and multi-modal travel network that reinforces the standards designed to create a positive relationship between streets, open spaces, parking, and private development. Design standards for existing and new streets, crosswalks, curb cuts, pedestrian passages, public utilities, and outdoor seating are intended to bolster traditional village and neighborhood center character and activity and to promote the social, environmental, and health benefits provided by a walkable development pattern.

**Affordability Provisions:** The new base zoning includes requirements regarding how developments will assist the Town in ensuring that a portion of the units created in the district will qualify for inclusion on the State's subsidized housing inventory (SHI). Development within the proposed district will help us stay in compliance with Chapter 40B, which requires that 10% of housing units qualify under SHI (currently, the Town is at 10.3%); like the Town's existing Inclusionary Bylaw, smaller developments pay an in-lieu-of fee, more extensive proposals will contribute a portion of the units built toward the SHI.

## DTC Districts

The DTC includes three districts. The districts outlined within the DTC are areas where specific uses, development patterns, and building characteristics are desired or intended to be protected. Each of the three districts has ~~have~~ specific development standards, as outlined below, that incorporate existing design elements and create transitions between existing and new commercial/residential uses.

- **Danvers Town Center – Core District (DTC-C):** The Core District is regulated for mid-scale commercial uses and denser residential development. This district builds upon what is already present in the downtown area by incorporating higher density limits and allowing specific commercial uses by right. The standards for the Core District aim to protect the historic character of existing buildings, improve walkability, enhance public civic spaces, and foster new mixed-uses.
- **Danvers Town Center – Live/Work District (DTC – L/W):** The Live/Work District aims to provide a range of housing choices and small-scale commercial uses that are compatible with the traditional building forms found in downtown neighborhoods today. The by-right development scales and densities within the L/W District are smaller than that of the Core District and serve to facilitate reinvestment in downtown neighborhoods by expanding small-scale uses and housing choices. Providing different housing options appeals to a broad range of age, income, and household types that otherwise may not be able to afford to live in the downtown. Encouraging differing housing and commercial uses within the L/W district will also serve to enhance the vitality of the downtown – an overall goal of the DTC.
- **High Street Mixed-Use Corridor (HSMUC):** Unlike the other districts within the corridor center, the HSMUC District serves to encourage more commercial development rather than dense residential development. Although this District provides more opportunity for commercial development, it also seeks to transform the existing auto-oriented corridor into an attractive, walkable, mixed-use district. Within the HSMU District certain household types (townhouses and multi-family) are allowed by Special Permit and commercial uses (fabrication and civic) are allowed by right.

### Traffic and Parking in the DTC

One of the top concerns voiced by participants in this planning process has been parking and traffic. The proposed zoning text expressly provides for parking demand management (i.e., developments must accommodate their own parking) and traffic mitigation by paying into a town-controlled fund. This aspect of the proposal ensures that when new development occurs, it is contributing to improvements in traffic management to be used in the DTC. The parking standards and regulations within the DTC also provide incentives for new commercial developments that implement alternative transportation mode programs (carpooling, car-share, public transit reimbursement). Based on data and experience, it is expected that some residents drawn to these districts will seek to live, work, and shop with reduced dependence on personal vehicles.

The DTC bylaw also includes site planning and development standards specific to parking (e.g., a minimum of 1.5 spaces per dwelling unit). These standards include requirements relating to access, screening, capacity, setbacks, circulation, and the number of spaces in relation to varying commercial or residential uses. Alternative parking types, programs, and structures are also encouraged under the new proposed zoning. These alternatives include:

- Shared Parking and Mixed-Use

- Car-Sharing Programs
- Stacked and Valet Parking
- Tandem Parking
- Street Side Parking on privately owned lots
- Alternative Fuel Vehicle parking

In 2015, the Town conducted a Downtown Parking Study, which provided steps the Town could take to improve parking availability, use, and programs. One of the key takeaways from this report is that downtown Danvers has significant amounts of parking (more than 1,700 spaces within 0.2 miles of the Square) but is not currently maximizing its use and availability. Some of the suggestions to improve the efficiency of its use included zoning for shared parking, creating a “fee in lieu of” program, improving parking signage, and encouraging better use of off-street parking. The suggestions outlined in the Study were implemented into the new proposed base zoning.