

CITY OF AMESBURY

MERRIMACK RIVER DISTRICT PLANNING PROJECT

Public Forum #3

June 22, 2022

Website for Merrimack River District:

<https://www.amesburyma.gov/579/Merrimack-River-District>



Agenda

- 6:00-6:10 Welcome & Project Introduction (Mayor Gove, Dodson & Flinker)
- 6:10-7:00 Presentation (Dodson & Flinker, Barrett Planning Group, BETA)
- Project process
 - Takeaways
 - Scenarios
 - Decision-making tool [Barrett]
 - Recommendations [BETA, D&F]
 - Next steps—ongoing efforts
- 7:00-7:45 Q&A and Discussion
- 7:45-8:00 Final thoughts and Closing

Project Scope & Process

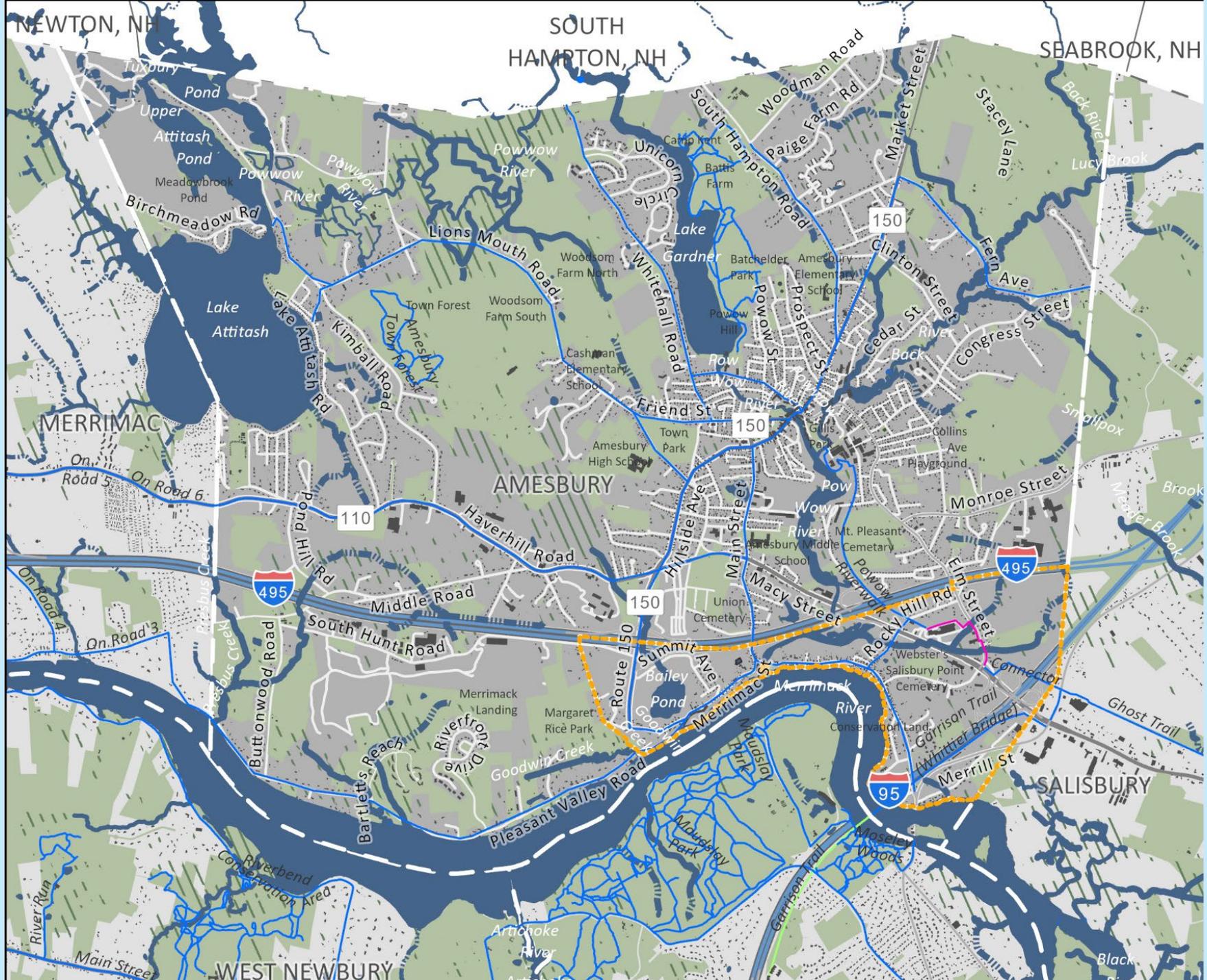


Origin of this Project

Community input for East End Smart Growth District (40R) showed the need to look at the neighborhood and how land use decisions are made more broadly

- What might change in the broader area—the Merrimack River District?
- How do changes in one part of the neighborhood affect other parts and the City as a whole?
- What kinds of changes are desirable and undesirable for different parts of Merrimack River District?
- What factors should the City consider when making decisions in this neighborhood and throughout the city?

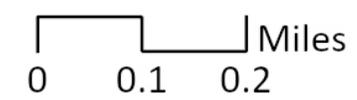
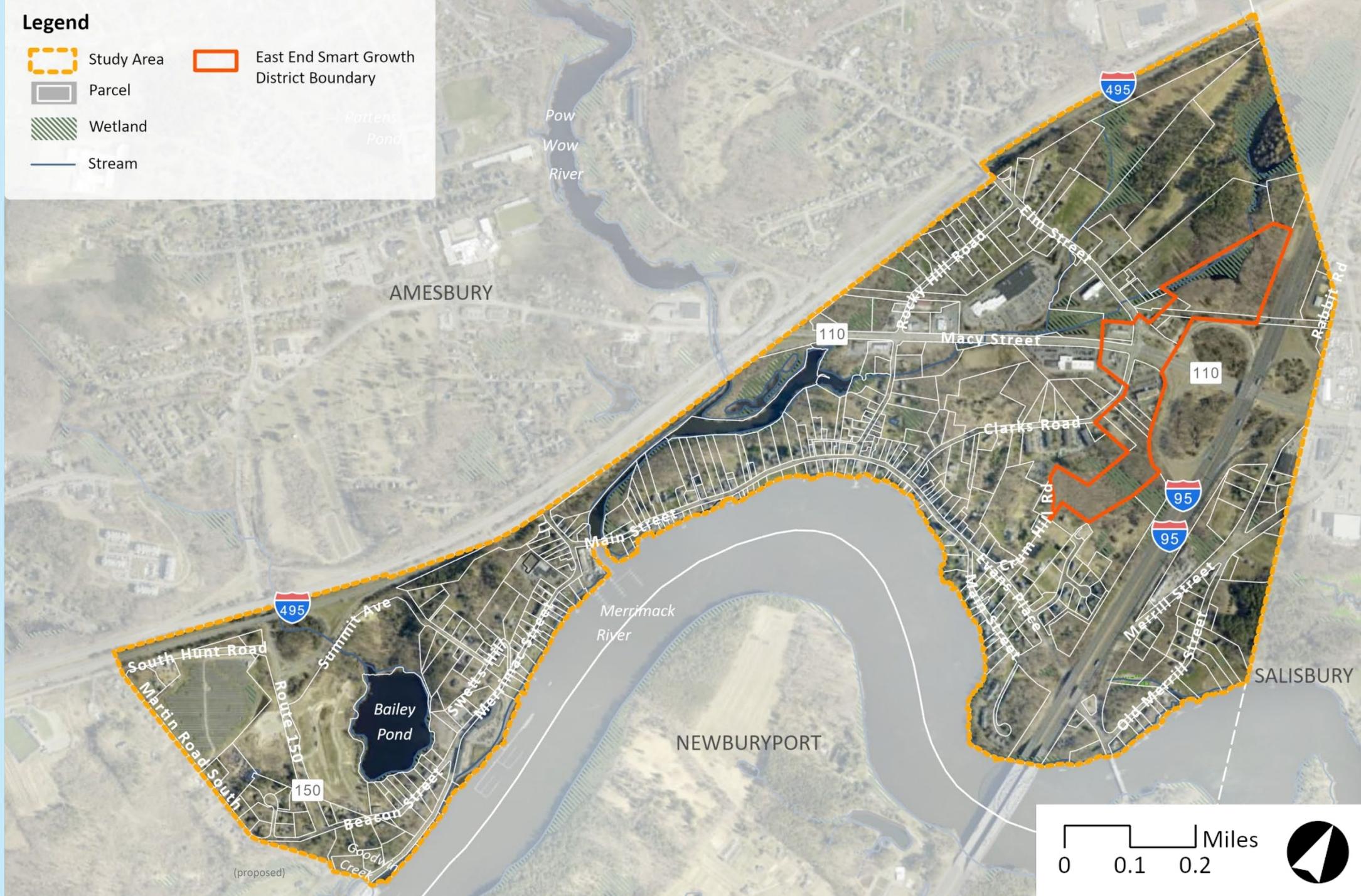
City of Amesbury



Merrimack River District

Legend

-  Study Area
-  East End Smart Growth District Boundary
-  Parcel
-  Wetland
-  Stream



Recent and Current Projects in MRD

Projects	Land Use	Status
MassWorks Projects	Transportation	Complete
Complete Streets Project	3 Crosswalks (Beacon, Main and Swetts Hill)	Complete
Hatter's Point	40 new Housing Units	Complete
Point Shore Meadows	13 Unit Cluster	Complete
Bailey's Pond	132 Housing Units	Approved/In Construction
Eagle Point 40B	56 Housing Units	Approved – not constructed
Trader Alan's/21 Pond View Avenue	To be determined	Committee in progress
East End Smart Growth District	Mixed Use/Housing/Commercial	Application submitted to DHCD
Larry's Marina Redevelopment	To be determined	Conceptual
Golden Triangle	Various ideas over time: Commercial or Housing	Conceptual

Project Process

- Develop scenarios for the future of the MRD
 - Land use
 - Circulation
 - Open space
 - Cultural and natural resources
 - Placemaking
 - Etc.

- Develop a tool to support decisions about land use change in Amesbury
- Use the tool to evaluate MRD scenarios



Community input (working group, survey, public forums, previous plans)

Public Input

January

Kick-off Meeting

February

Working Group Meeting #1

March

Working Group Meeting #2

Working Group Meeting #3

April

Site tour and Public Forum #1 & #2

Working Group Meeting #4

Public Survey (425 participants)

May

Working Group Meeting #5

June

Working Group Meeting #6

Public Forum #3

Working Group Members

Tracey Chalifour, Coastal Trails Coalition, Resident of District
Carol Finn, Resident of District

Ann Ferguson, Amesbury Improvement Association and Resident
Jon Hickok, City Councilor and Resident of District

Bob Labadini, Deacon of Union Congregational Church and
Resident of District

Alex Loth, Minco Development, Landowner in District

Joel Nice, Planning Board Members and Resident of Amesbury

Sally Nutt, Member of Union Congregational Church and
Resident of District

Nina Regan, Landowner in District

Christine Remus, Resident of District

Cory Riley, Natural Resources Professional and Resident of
Amesbury

Linda Rodier, Resident of District

Herb Sears, Landowner in District

Peter Suorsa, Landowner in District and Resident of Amesbury

Steering Committee Members

Kassandra Gove, Mayor

Angela Cleveland, AICP, Director of Community & Economic
Development

Nipun Jain, Director of Planning

Takeaways



Strengths

- **History**—unique historic character, sense of continuity with past
- **River**—scenic beauty, recreational asset
- **Access**—convenient transportation options: car, walk, bike, boat
- **People**—sense of community and neighborhood, personal connections
- **Overall Sense of Place**—buildings, lot patterns, streets, open spaces
- **Large Parcels**—a few large parcels with developable land

Neighborhood Concerns

Traffic/Walkability

- Traffic volumes, especially on Main Street/Evans Place and Merrimac Street
- Traffic speed and unsafe driving
- Sidewalk and bicycle facilities that are missing or in poor repair

Neighborhood culture and character

- Loss of open space, key views, trees, areas with high ecological value
- Lack of sense of place at The I-95 and I-495 Gateways. They don't reflect the history or culture of the Merrimack River District or Amesbury
- Route 110 business area is not serving as a village center. It isn't comfortable for walking or biking and does not have public gathering spaces.
- Merrimack River District is cut off from rest of Amesbury by 110 and highways
- Potential impacts from new development: noise, traffic, property valuations

Planning/Decision Making Processes

- How are City decisions being made? Are residents being listened to?

Other Priorities for Amesbury

Housing

- Need for more housing, especially units for smaller households, lower cost housing, and accessible units

Economic Development

- Diversify tax base and reduce the burden on residential properties
- Encourage existing businesses to stay in Amesbury
- Attract new compatible businesses
- Stimulate creation of well-paying jobs

Managing Change

- Improving the “brand” of the City so want people to want to live in Amesbury
- Maintain socioeconomic diversity. Seniors, people who work in Amesbury should be able to afford to live in Amesbury

Improvements to Public Infrastructure

- Maintenance and improvements to infrastructure
- Balancing revenues and expenses

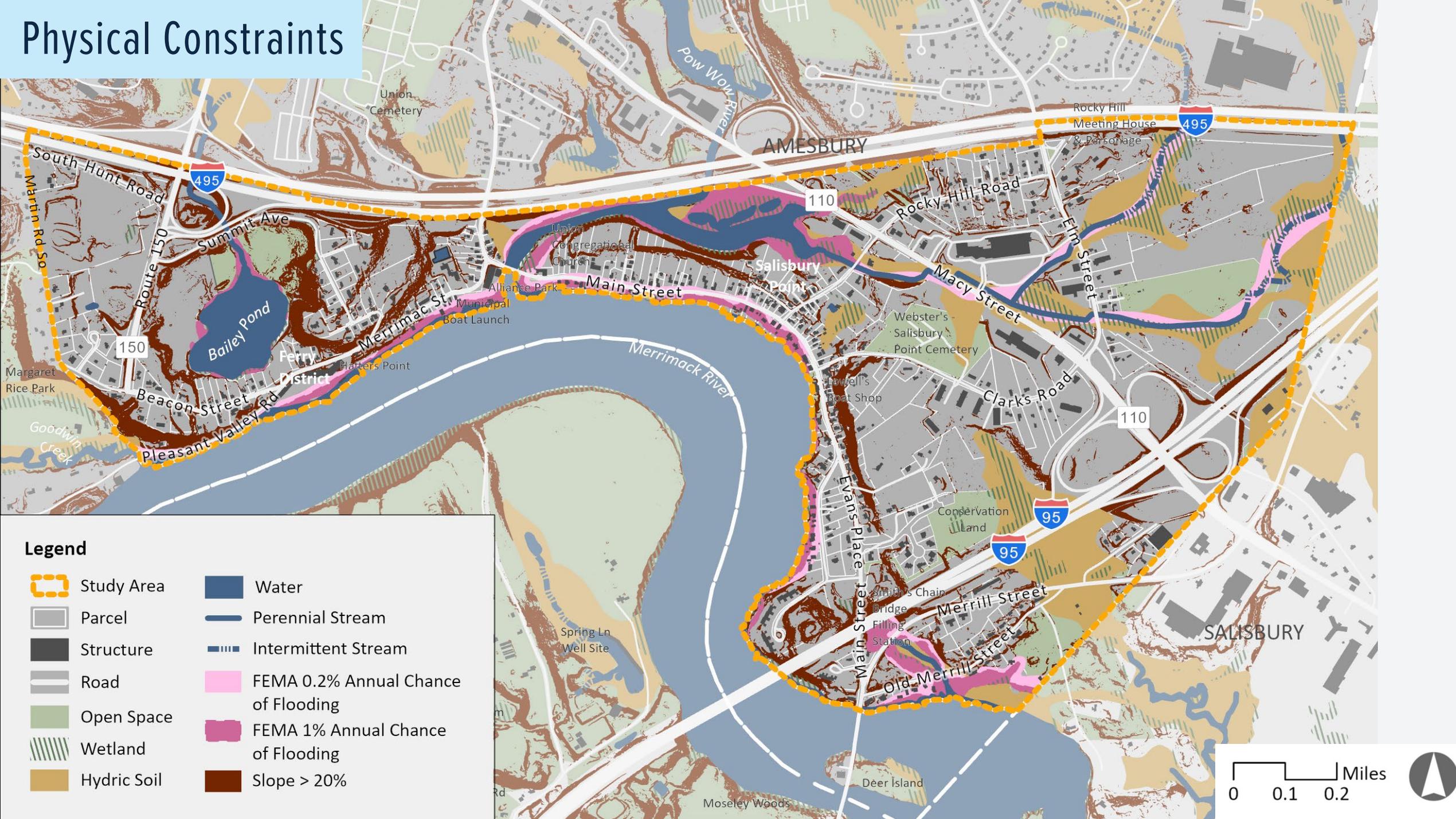
Goals for the Merrimack River District

- Manage impacts from **automobile traffic**
- Improve **streets, multi-use paths and trails** to make walking, biking, and transit more convenient, safe, and comfortable
- Protect **open space and natural resources**
- Increase **access to the river and open spaces** and connect them
- Ensure that **building & site design** reflect **neighborhood precedents** and result in **attractive walkable neighborhoods** and centers
- Revitalize **commercial corridors and gateways**
- Expand the range of **housing choices**
- Attract **small businesses** and **businesses that provide good-paying jobs**
- Increase **climate resilience**
- Provide a **high quality of life** for current and future residents

Creating and Testing Land Use Scenarios

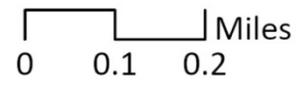


Physical Constraints

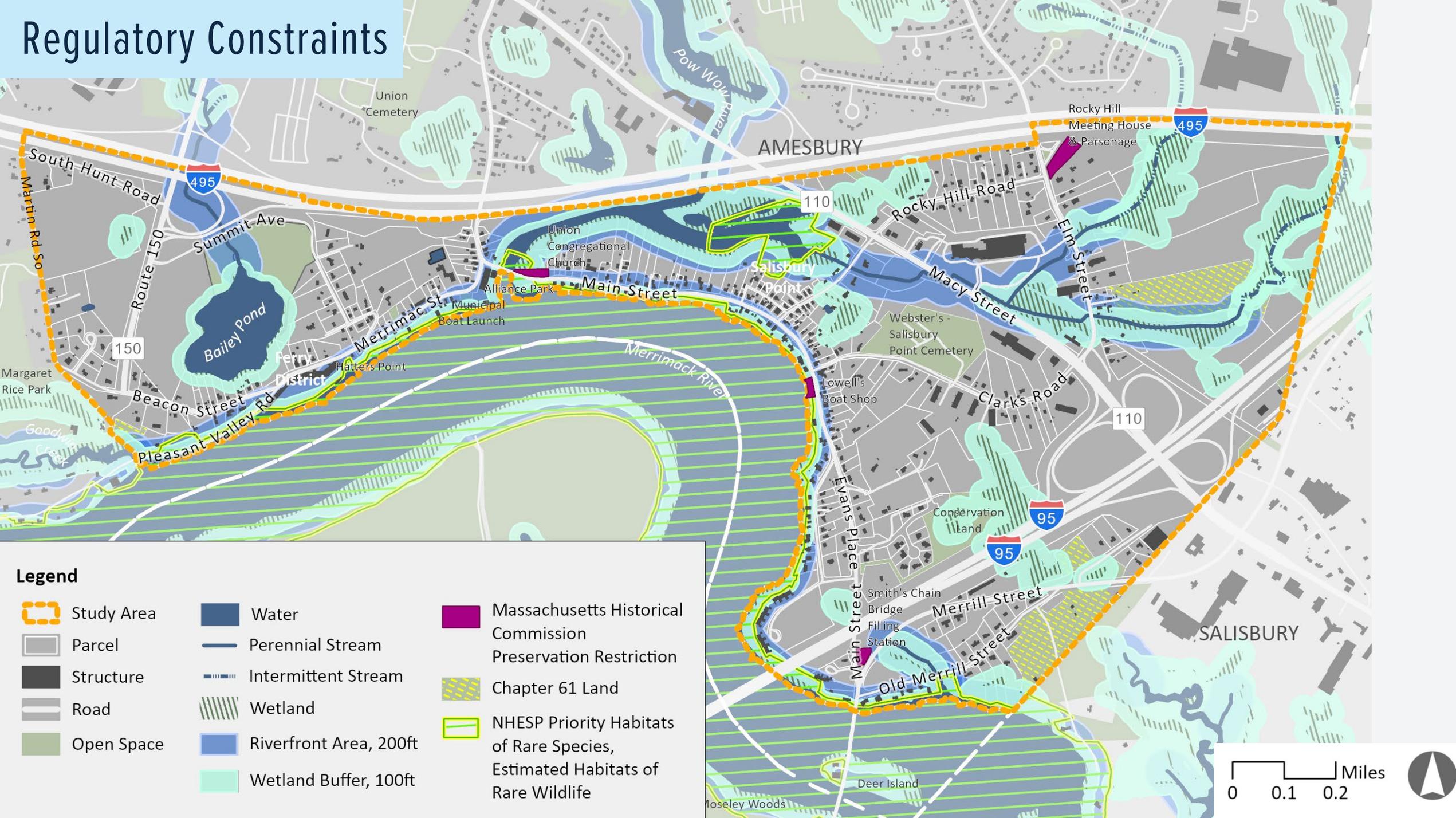


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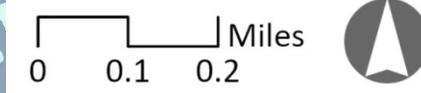
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|--|---|
|  Study Area |  Water |
|  Parcel |  Perennial Stream |
|  Structure |  Intermittent Stream |
|  Road |  FEMA 0.2% Annual Chance of Flooding |
|  Open Space |  FEMA 1% Annual Chance of Flooding |
|  Wetland |  Slope > 20% |
|  Hydric Soil | |



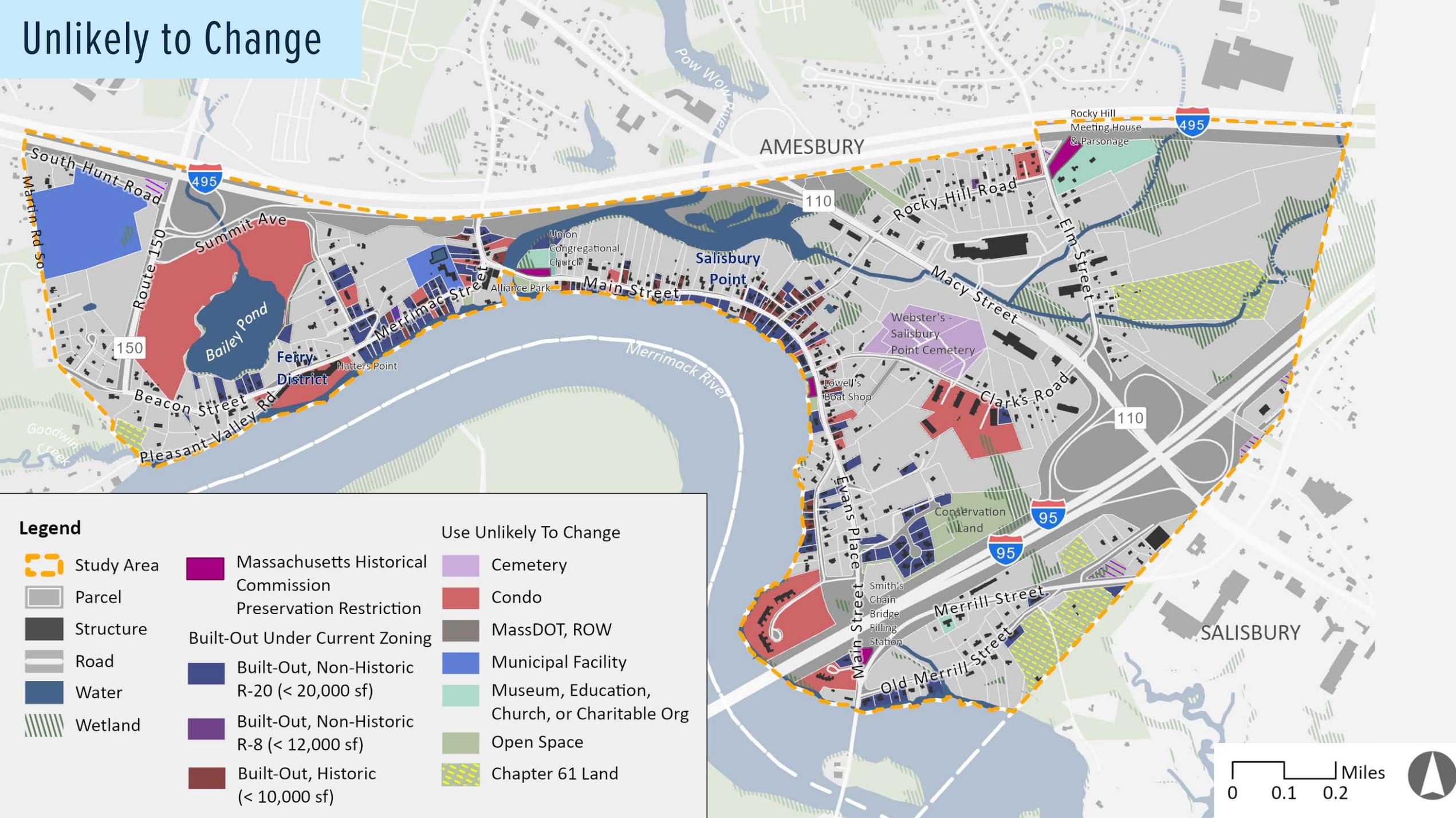
Regulatory Constraints



- Legend**
- Study Area
 - Parcel
 - Structure
 - Road
 - Open Space
 - Water
 - Perennial Stream
 - Intermittent Stream
 - Wetland
 - Riverfront Area, 200ft
 - Wetland Buffer, 100ft
 - Massachusetts Historical Commission Preservation Restriction
 - Chapter 61 Land
 - NHESP Priority Habitats of Rare Species, Estimated Habitats of Rare Wildlife

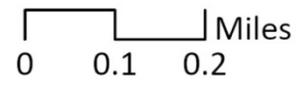


Unlikely to Change

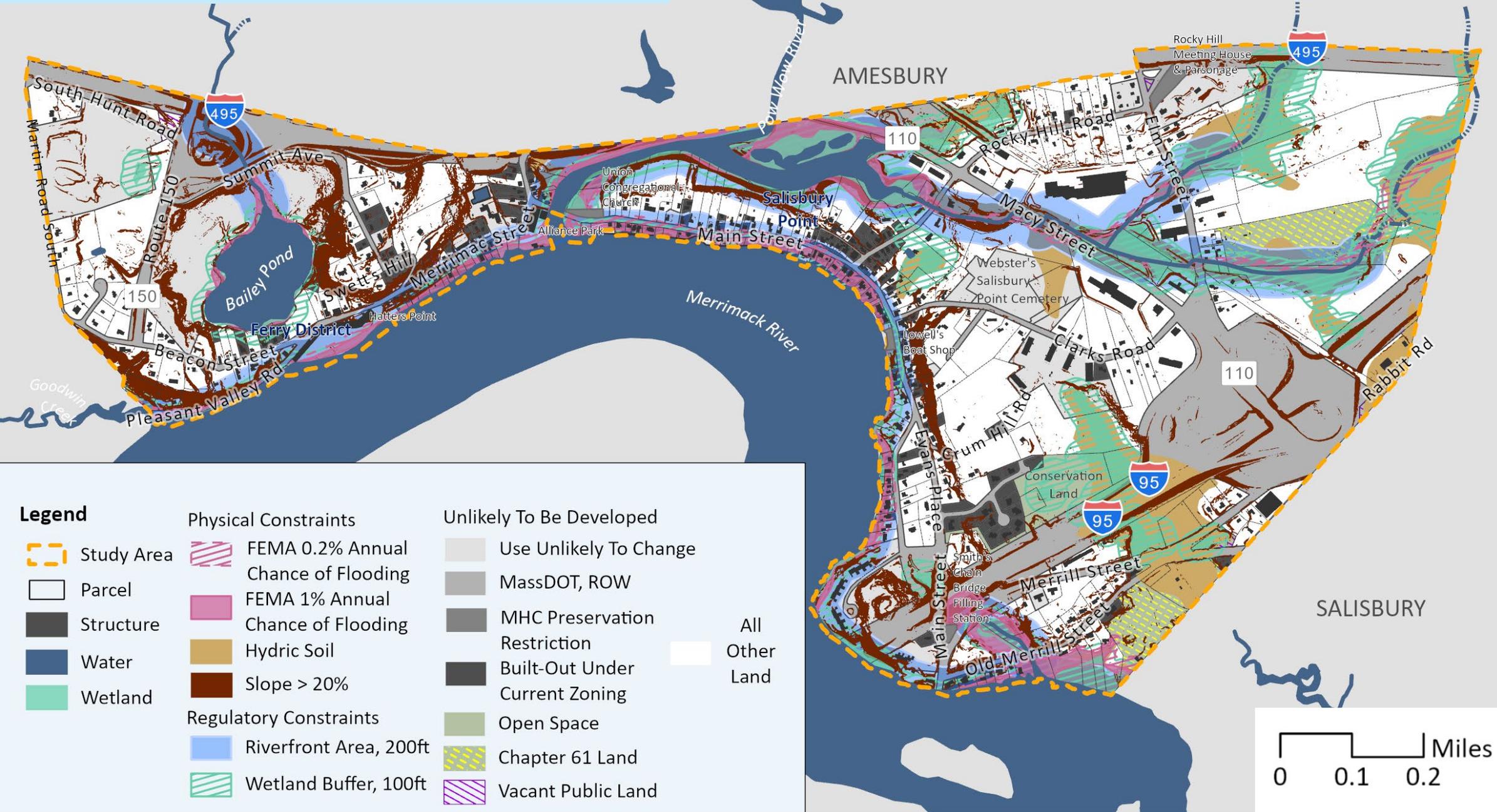


Legend

- | | | | | | |
|--|------------|---|--|---|--|
|  | Study Area |  | Massachusetts Historical Commission Preservation Restriction |  | Cemetery |
|  | Parcel |  | Built-Out Under Current Zoning |  | Condo |
|  | Structure |  | Built-Out, Non-Historic R-20 (< 20,000 sf) |  | MassDOT, ROW |
|  | Road |  | Built-Out, Non-Historic R-8 (< 12,000 sf) |  | Municipal Facility |
|  | Water |  | Built-Out, Historic (< 10,000 sf) |  | Museum, Education, Church, or Charitable Org |
|  | Wetland | | |  | Open Space |
| | | | |  | Chapter 61 Land |

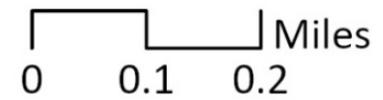


Combined Development Constraints



Legend

- | | | | | | | | |
|--|------------|--|-------------------------------------|--|--------------------------------|--|----------------|
| | Study Area | | FEMA 0.2% Annual Chance of Flooding | | Use Unlikely To Change | | All Other Land |
| | Parcel | | FEMA 1% Annual Chance of Flooding | | MassDOT, ROW | | |
| | Structure | | Hydric Soil | | MHC Preservation Restriction | | |
| | Water | | Slope > 20% | | Built-Out Under Current Zoning | | |
| | Wetland | | Riverfront Area, 200ft | | Open Space | | |
| | | | Wetland Buffer, 100ft | | Chapter 61 Land | | |
| | | | Vacant Public Land | | Vacant Public Land | | |



Build Out Status—Large Undeveloped Areas



Build-Out Status Map

Merrimack River District Planning Project, Amesbury, MA
Draft 5/24/22

- Legend**
- Parcel
 - Water
 - Open Space
 - Physically Constrained
 - Industrial
 - Mixed Use
 - Commercial
 - Office
 - Public or Quasi-Public
 - 2-Family, Multi-family
 - Single-Family
 - Road Right of Way
 - Vacant
 - Outside of Study Area

0 200 400 Feet

Data:
City of Amesbury, Merrimack Valley
Planning Commission, MassGIS

0 0.1 0.2 Miles



Focus Areas for Land Use Scenarios

I-95 Gateway: Four Corners, Clark's Rd, Elm Street

I-495 Gateway: 21 Pond View Ave



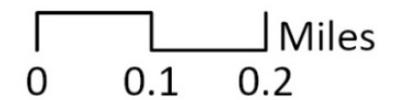
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Data:
City of Amesbury, Merrimack Valley
Planning Commission, MassGIS



Three Scenarios:

- Build-out: What's possible under current zoning?
- Market-Driven: What is in demand right now?
- Mixed-Use: What would enhance neighborhood character and support revitalization of community gateways?



Community Benefits Model



What is a Community Benefits Model?

- Weighs challenges and benefits of land use policy changes and potential development opportunities
- Allows decision-makers to assess a proposal's compatibility with the goals that Amesbury residents have for their community and its future
- Gives the City a way to analyze hard-to-quantify values and priorities and to advocate for the wants and needs of the community
- Supports important land use policy conversations among Amesbury's leadership, staff, residents, and developers.
- Guidance; not the actual decision, and not the only input



Why?

- Methodical
- Assumptions:
 - “Intangibles” (such as the ideals and aspirations of a community) can be quantified
 - May help to reach agreement, or reduce disagreements, about proposed land use changes
 - If a decision is based on best available information and previously agreed-upon framework, people may still disagree but will appreciate transparency
 - Provides a framework for discussion



Design Process



Review of Amesbury's past community plans and studies to identify topics of significant public interest



Data collection and analysis



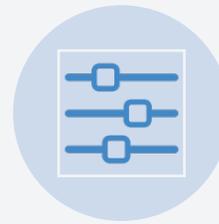
Community feedback (April workshops, Working Group meetings, staff interviews)



Community survey



Development of draft model and application to development scenarios



Refinement and next steps **(We are here!)**

Survey Design



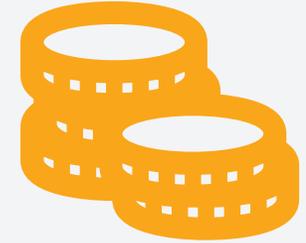
Social Benefits:

Support a healthy and equitable community in Amesbury



Cultural Benefits:

Contribute to what makes Amesbury special including history, art, and learning



Economic Benefits:

Support local businesses and jobs



Fiscal Benefits:

Generate tax revenue for the City or diversify the tax base



Transportation Benefits:

Improve traffic and circulation in Amesbury or improve safety and connectivity for pedestrians and bikers

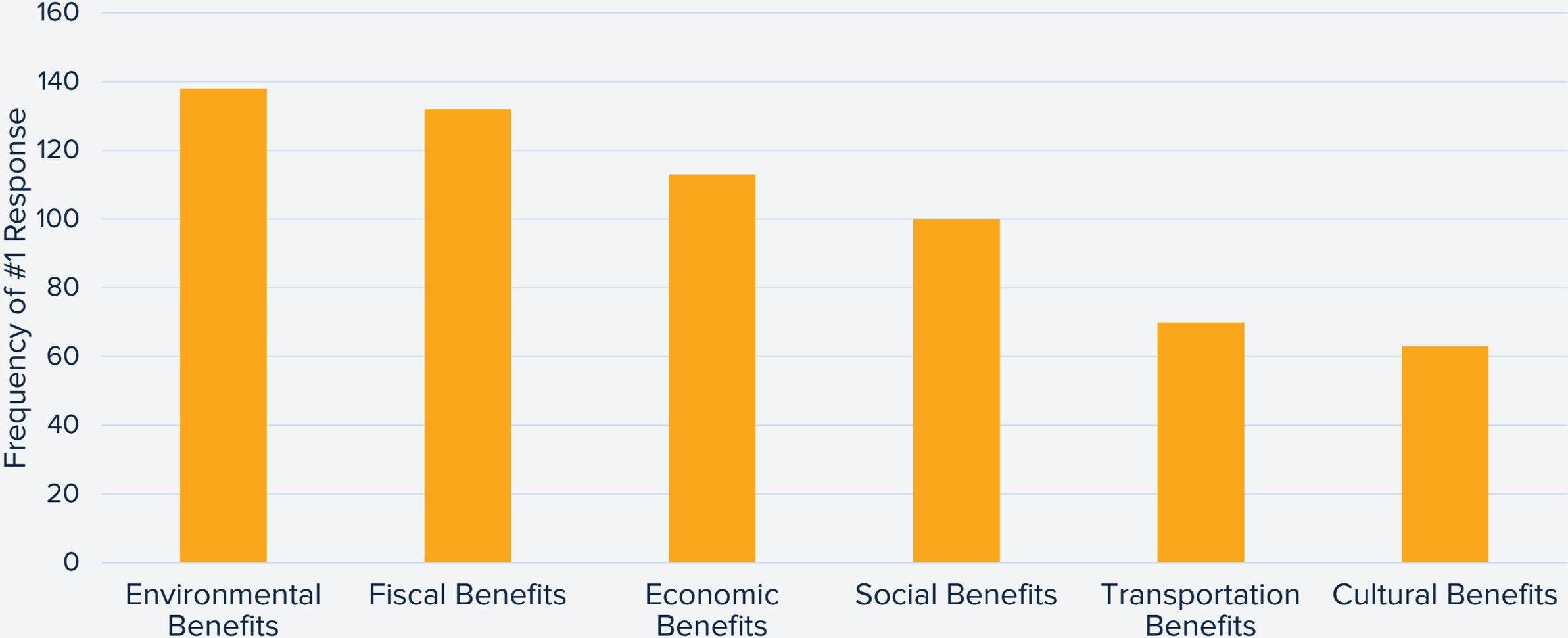


Environmental Benefits:

Protect Amesbury's natural resources and support climate resilience

Survey Results

Community Benefits Ranking



Building and Using the Model

- Results of the survey were used to develop criteria and corresponding point values for each community benefit.
- Evaluator assesses the *degree to which* a proposal satisfies the criteria as follows:
 - **0%** - Criterion is not met
 - **33%** - Criterion is minimally met, but it could be improved upon
 - **67%** - Project or proposal more closely approximates the criterion and should receive credit for doing so, but does not fully satisfy it
 - **100%** - Project or proposal meets or exceeds the criterion
 - **N/A** - Criterion does not apply to project or proposal
The criterion's possible points are removed from score calculations and do not negatively impact the overall score
 - **TBD** - More information is required
Zero points are awarded. This approach penalizes incomplete proposals and encourages applicants to provide comprehensive information.

Recommendations

- Consider surveying the community at regular, reasonable intervals to update the criteria and determine their relative importance.
- Share the criteria and their relative weights with residents and developers to support transparency as well as community conversations about the City's future.
- If using for proposals, consider asking applicants to self-assess their projects as part of the pre-application process.
- Remember: The model is intended to be subjective, and scoring is not absolute. Scores may differ between members of a board, or between a developer's self-evaluation and a board's assessment. **These differences are a feature rather than a weakness of the model because they facilitate discussion, which is a primary purpose of the model.**

Fiscal Impact: Tread Carefully

- A fiscal impact analysis (FIA) helps determine whether a development can “pay for itself.”
- An FIA can be an important consideration — but should never be the *only* basis for decision or even the most important one.
- **For legal reasons, it cannot be the determining factor, especially if the proposal under review involves housing.**
 - Land use policy or zoning practice can result in discrimination if it is likely to cause “disparate impact” on a protected class, or if it creates, increases, reinforces, or perpetuates segregated housing patterns.
 - As a recipient of federal CDBG funds, Amesbury has a legal obligation to affirmatively further fair housing.



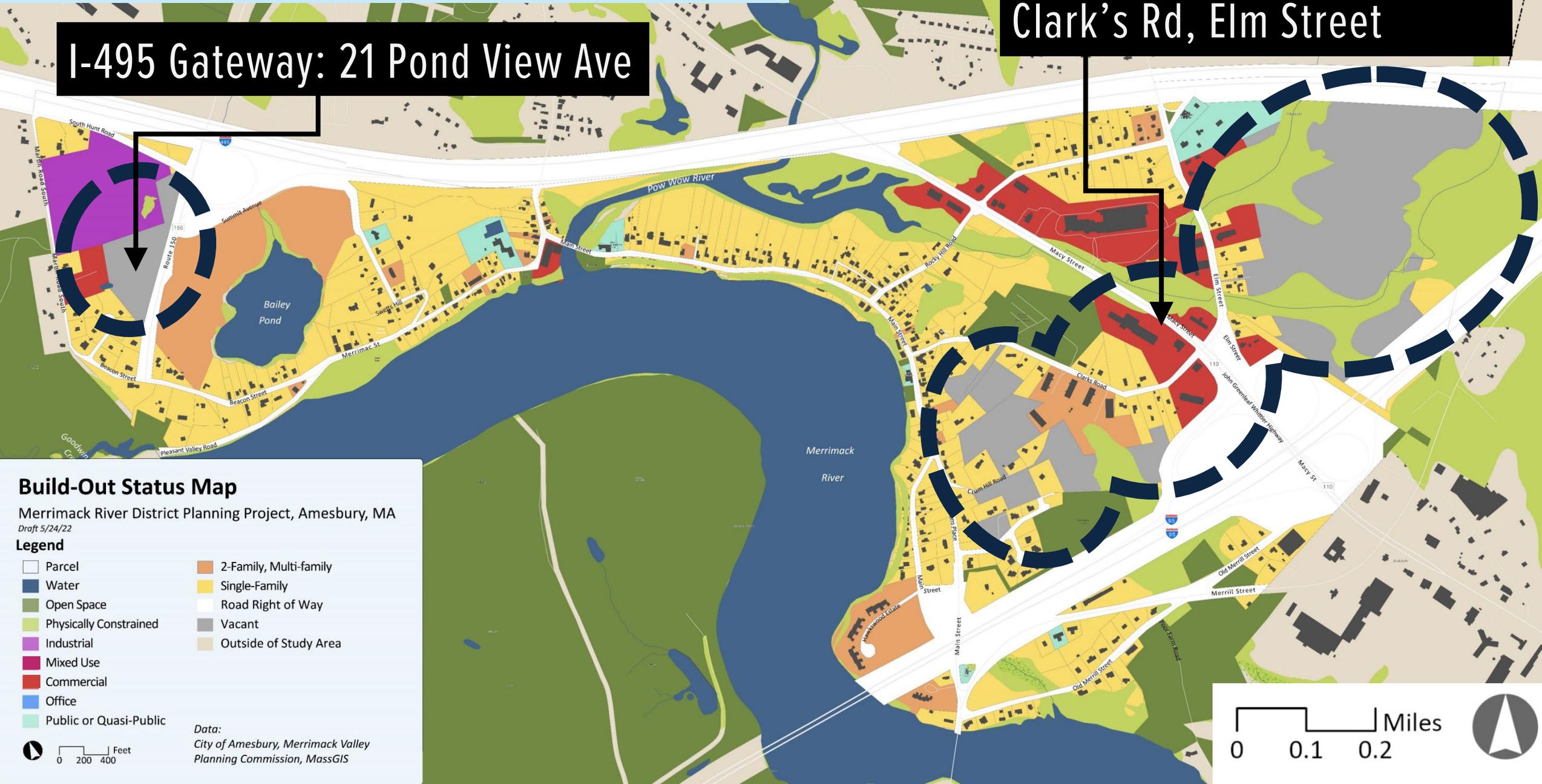
Scenario Evaluation



Focus Areas for Land Use Scenarios

I-95 Gateway: Four Corners, Clark's Rd, Elm Street

I-495 Gateway: 21 Pond View Ave



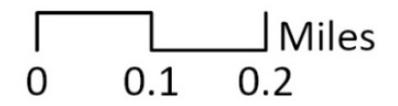
Build-Out Status Map

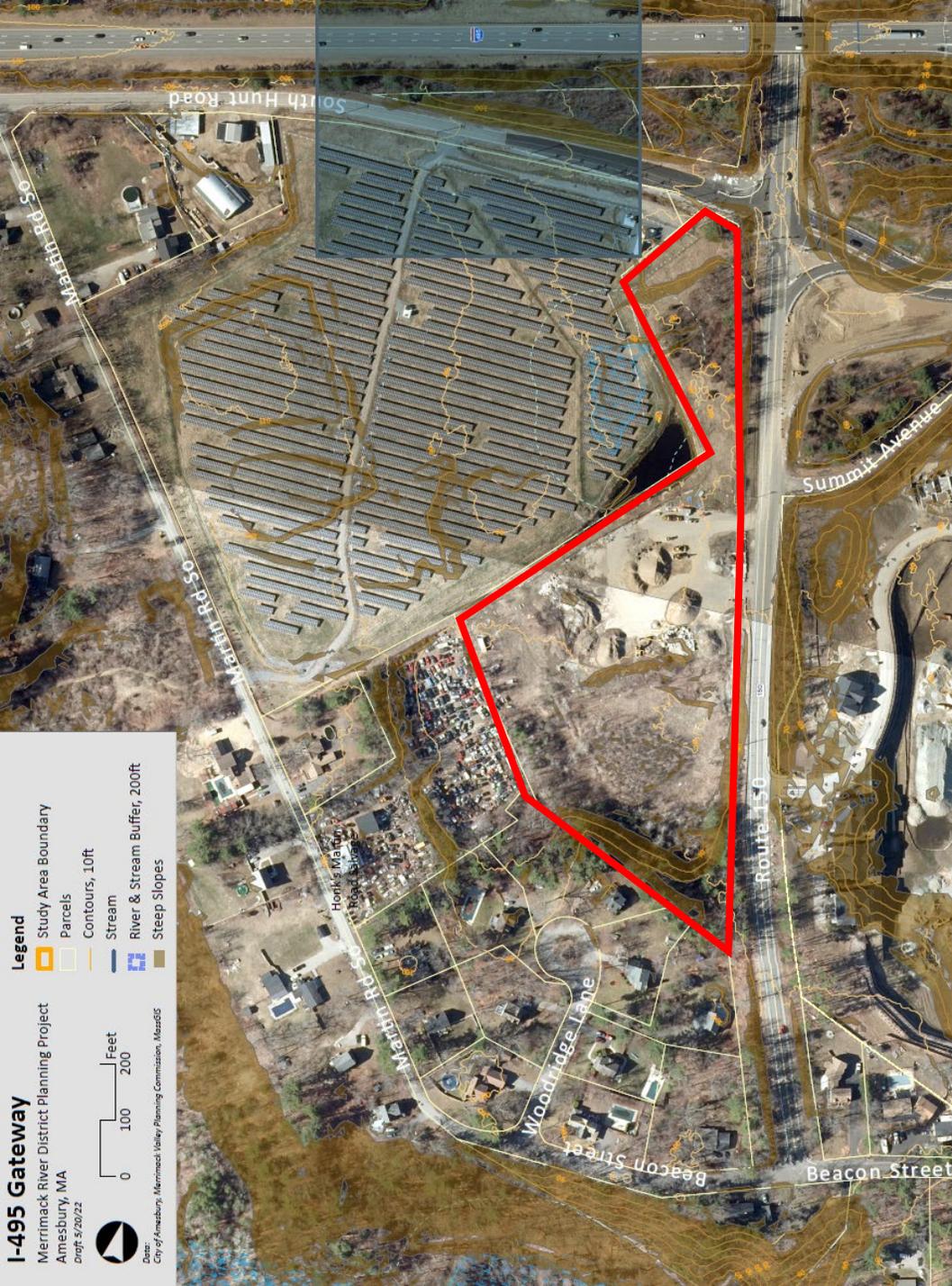
Merrimack River District Planning Project, Amesbury, MA
Draft 5/24/22

Legend

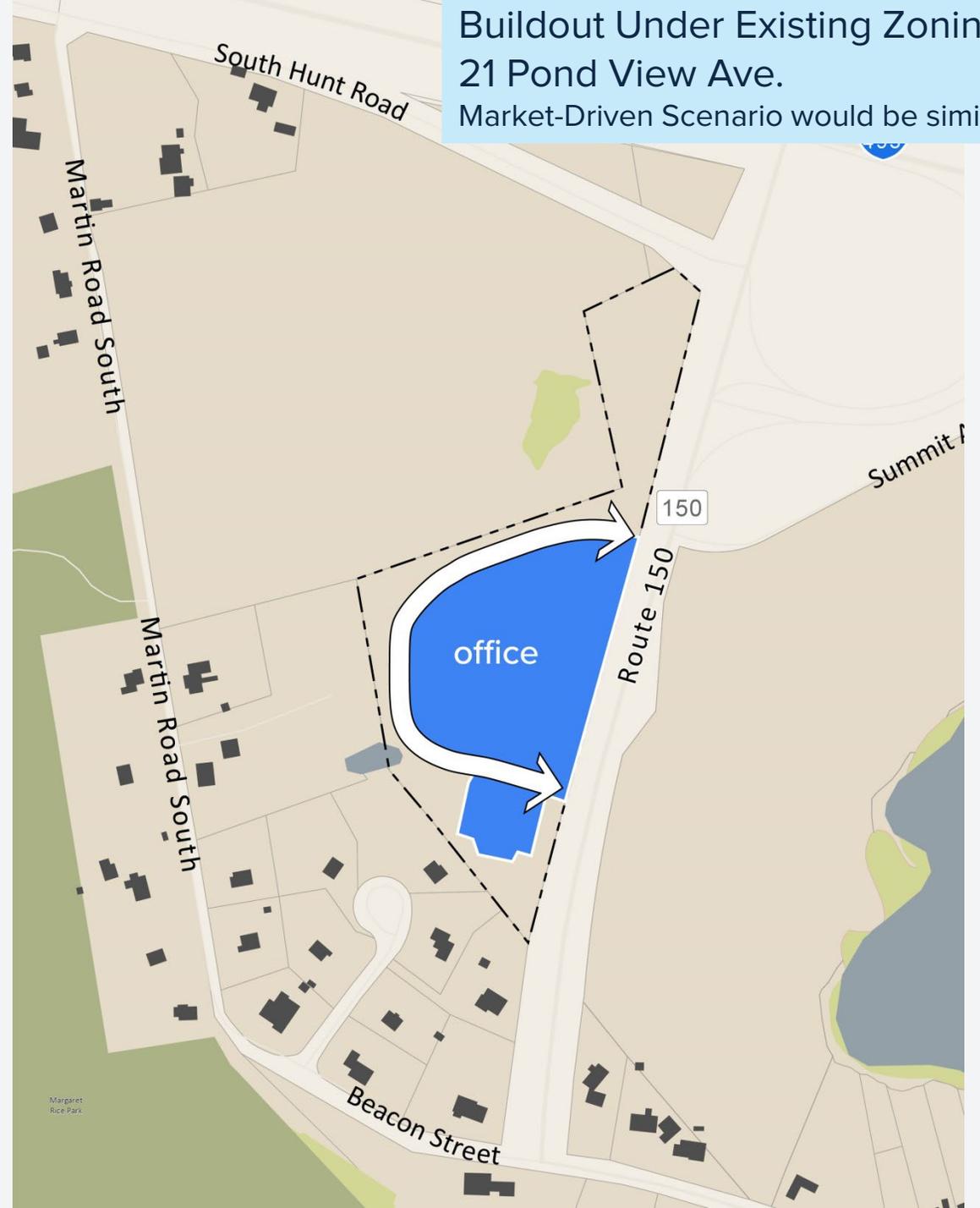
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- Industrial
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- Office
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- 2-Family, Multi-family
- Single-Family
- Road Right of Way
- Vacant
- Outside of Study Area

Data:
City of Amesbury, Merrimack Valley
Planning Commission, MassGIS





Buildout Under Existing Zoning
 21 Pond View Ave.
 Market-Driven Scenario would be similar



Build Out Status

I-95 Gateway, Clark's Road, Elm Street

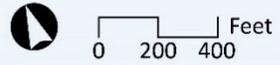


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Draft 5/24/22

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Build-out Under Existing Zoning

I-95 Gateway, Clark's Road, Elm Street

Build-Out Under Existing Zoning

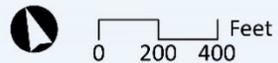
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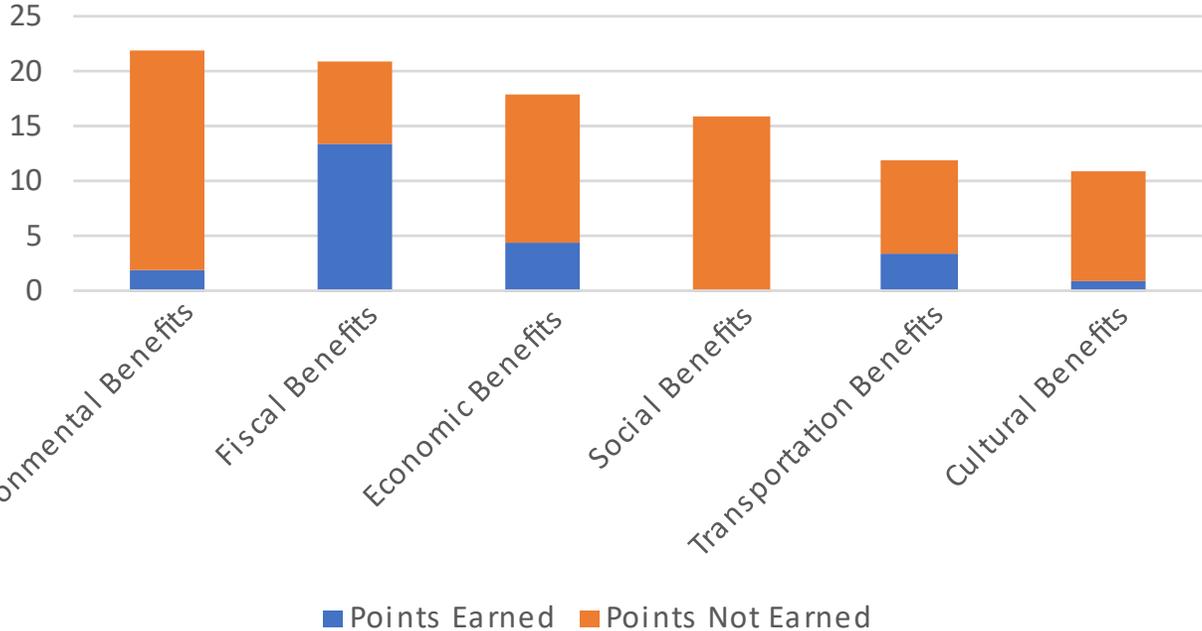
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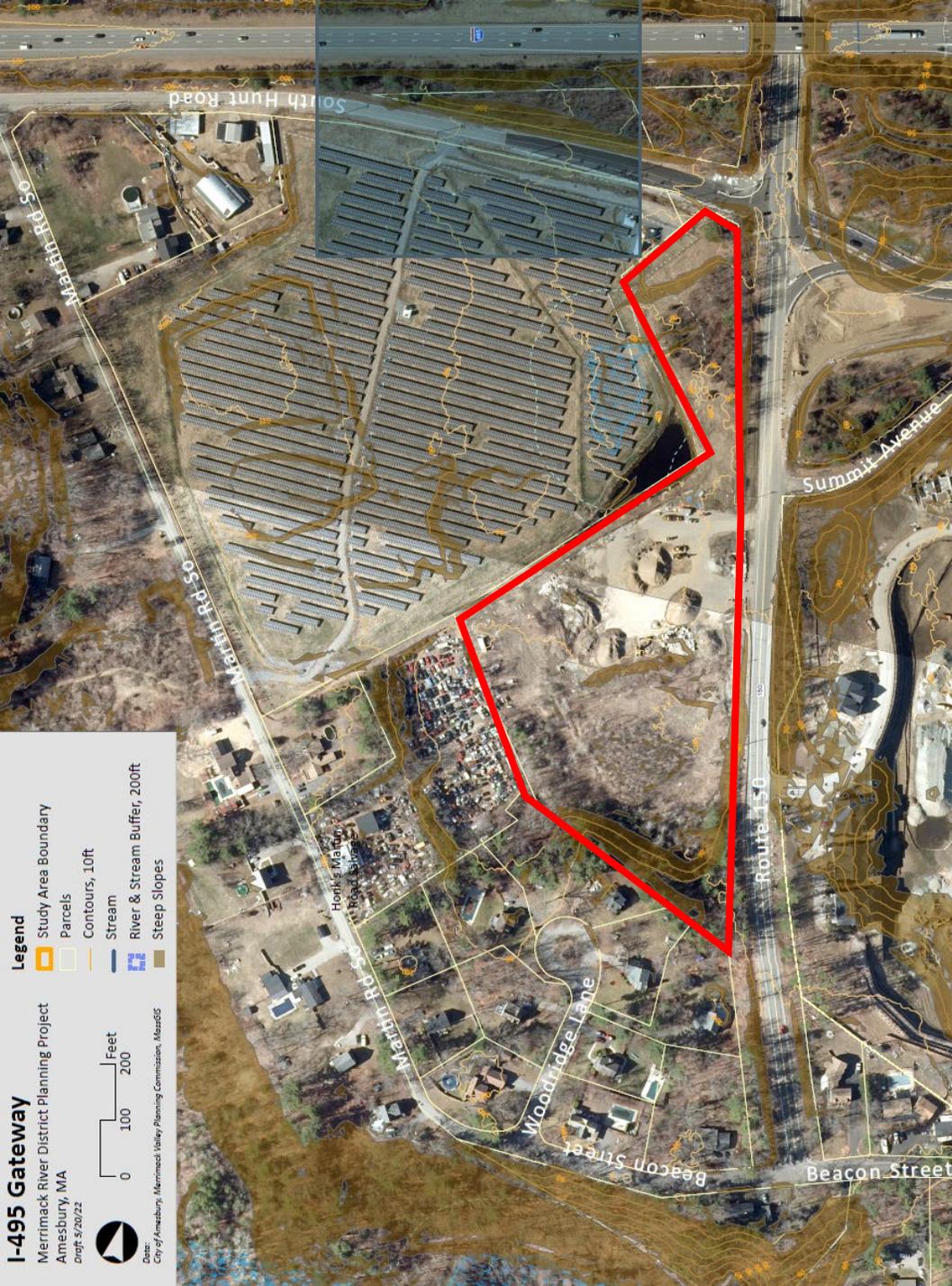


1. Build-out under current zoning

Summary of Benefits



	Potential Points	Points Earned
Environmental Benefits	22	2
Fiscal Benefits	21	14
Economic Benefits	18	5
Social Benefits	16	0
Transportation Benefits	12	4
Cultural Benefits	11	1
Total (Rounded)	100	24



Market Driven Scenario

21 Pond View Ave.
 Residential also has potential, but not allowed by current zoning



Market-Driven Scenario

I-95 Gateway, Clark's Road, Elm Street

Market-Driven Scenario

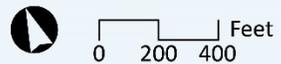
Merrimack River District Planning Project, Amesbury, MA

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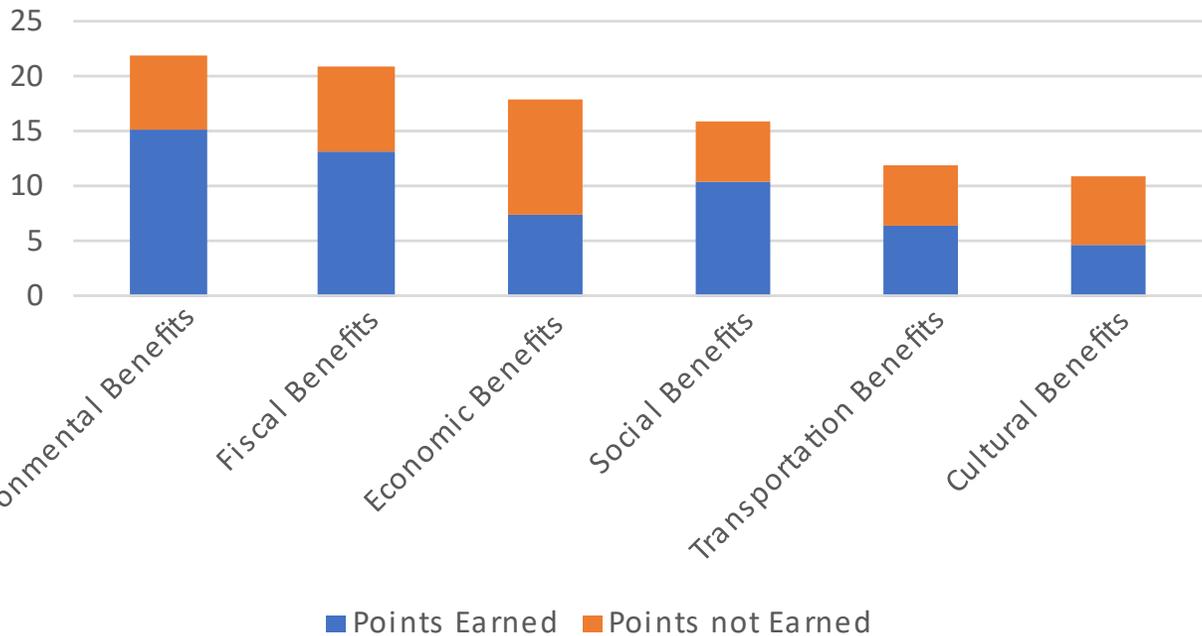


Data:
City of Amesbury, Merrimack Valley
Planning Commission, MassGIS



2. Market-Driven

Summary of Benefits



	Potential Points	Points Earned
Environmental Benefits	22	15
Fiscal Benefits	21	13
Economic Benefits	18	7
Social Benefits	16	11
Transportation Benefits	12	7
Cultural Benefits	11	5
Total (Rounded)	100	57

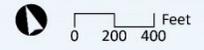
Mixed-Use Scenario

Merrimack River District Planning Project, Amesbury, MA

Draft 5/24/22

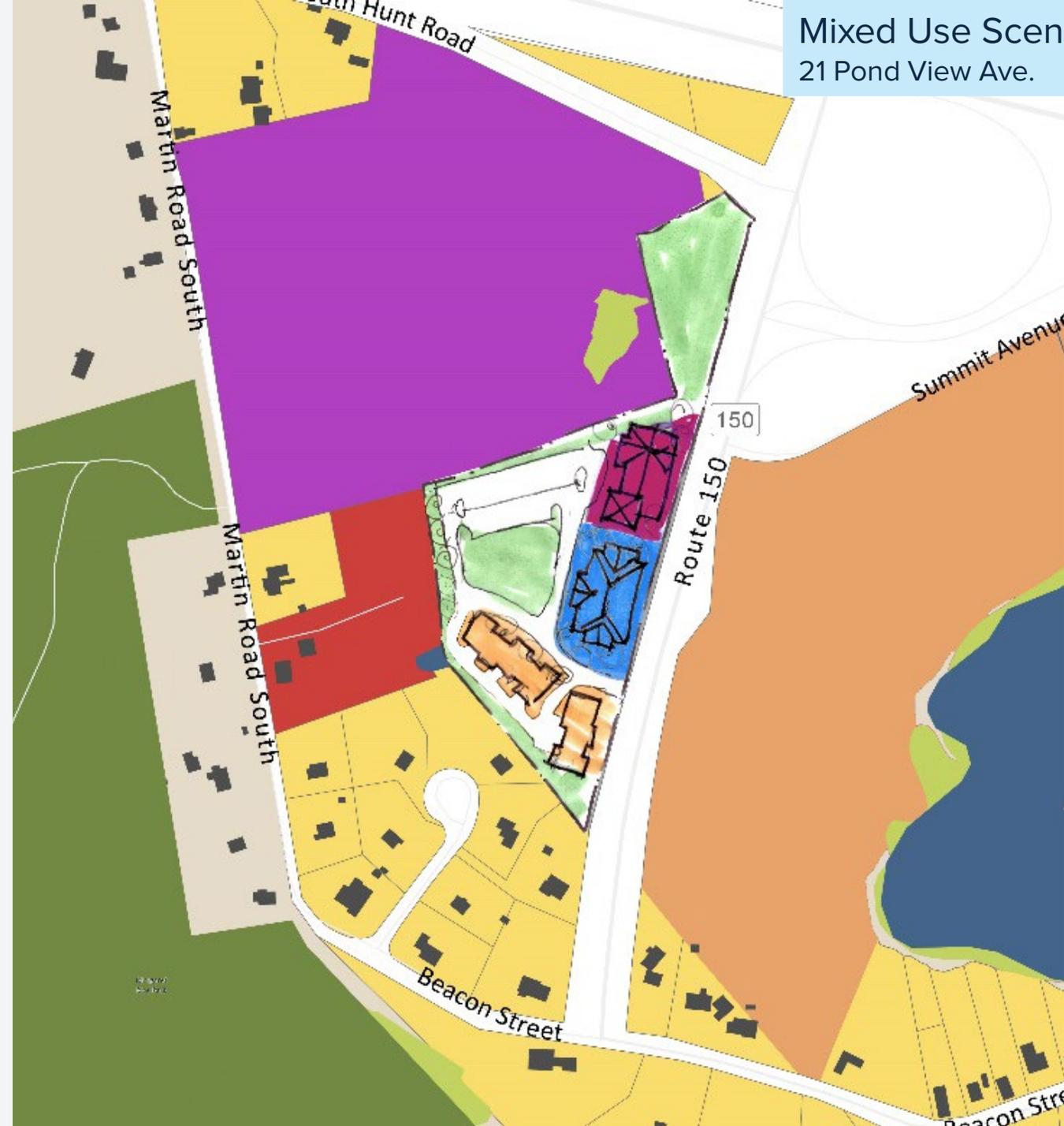
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Data:
City of Amesbury, Merrimack Valley
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Mixed Use Scenario
21 Pond View Ave.



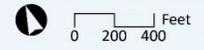
Mixed-Use Scenario with Auto Salvage Parcel

Merrimack River District Planning Project, Amesbury, MA

Draft 5/24/22

Legend

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Data:
City of Amesbury, Merrimack Valley
Planning Commission, MassGIS

Mixed Use Scenario 21 Pond View Ave. + Auto Salvage Property



Mixed-Use Scenario

I-95 Gateway, Clark's Road, Elm Street

Mixed-Use Scenario

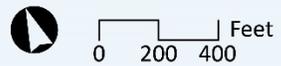
Merrimack River District Planning Project, Amesbury, MA

Draft 5/24/22

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Data:
City of Amesbury, Merrimack Valley
Planning Commission, MassGIS





Macy Street

Elm Street

Connector

John Greenleaf Whittier Highway

Wood Ct

Mixed-Use Scenario

Illustrative view





Mixed-Use Scenario

Illustrative view



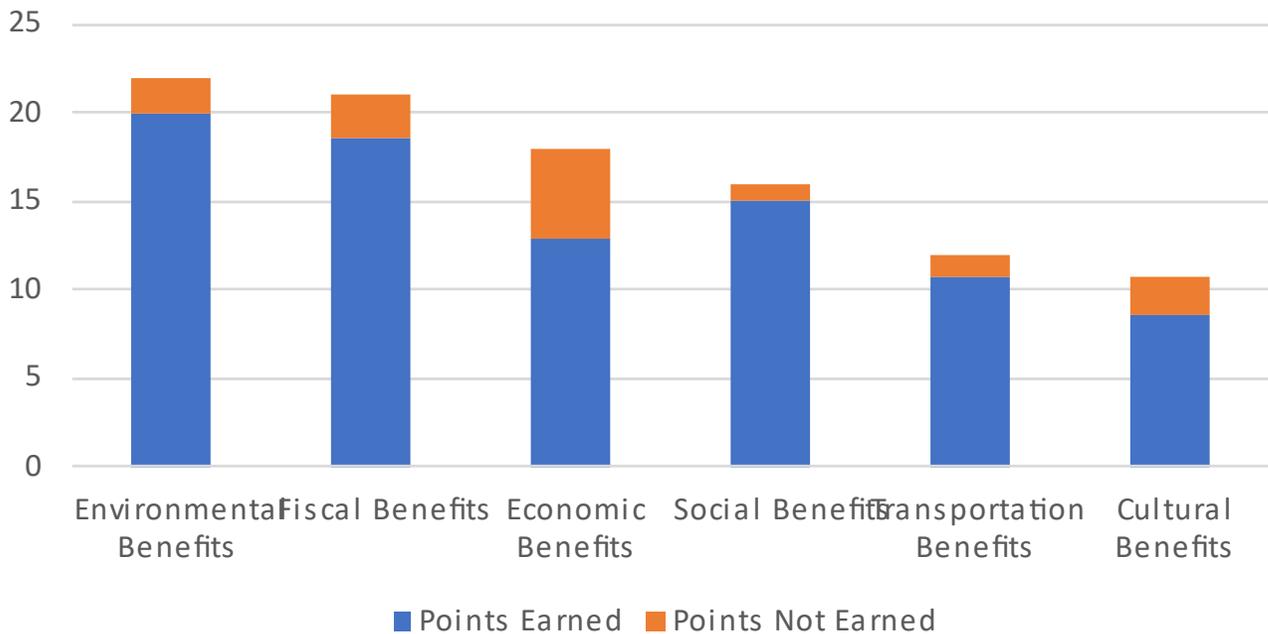
Mixed-Use Scenario

Illustrative view



3. Mixed-Use

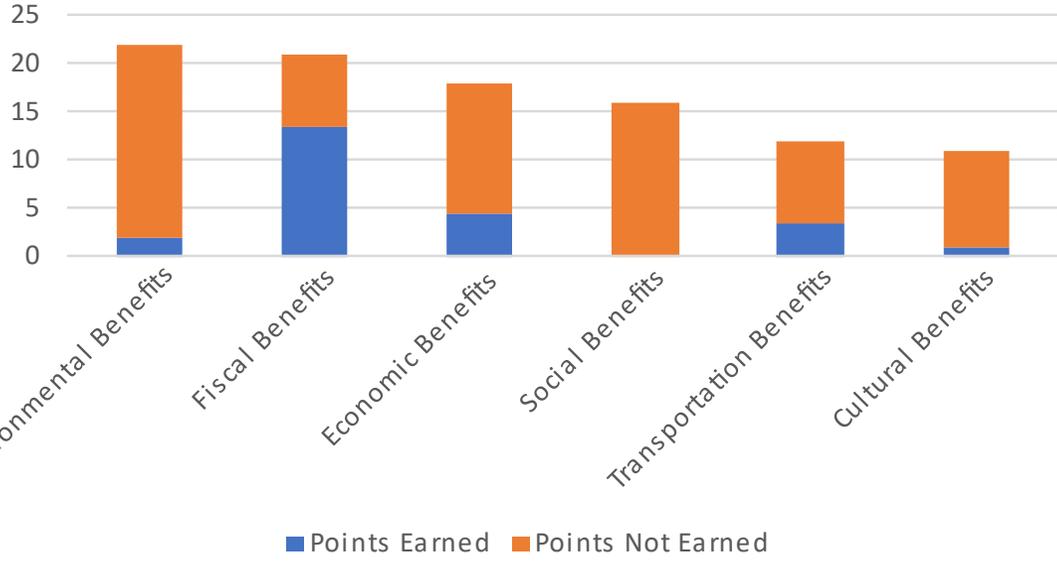
Summary of Benefits



	Potential Points	Points Earned
Environmental Benefits	22	20
Fiscal Benefits	21	19
Economic Benefits	18	13
Social Benefits	16	15
Transportation Benefits	12	11
Cultural Benefits	11	9
Total (Rounded)	100	86

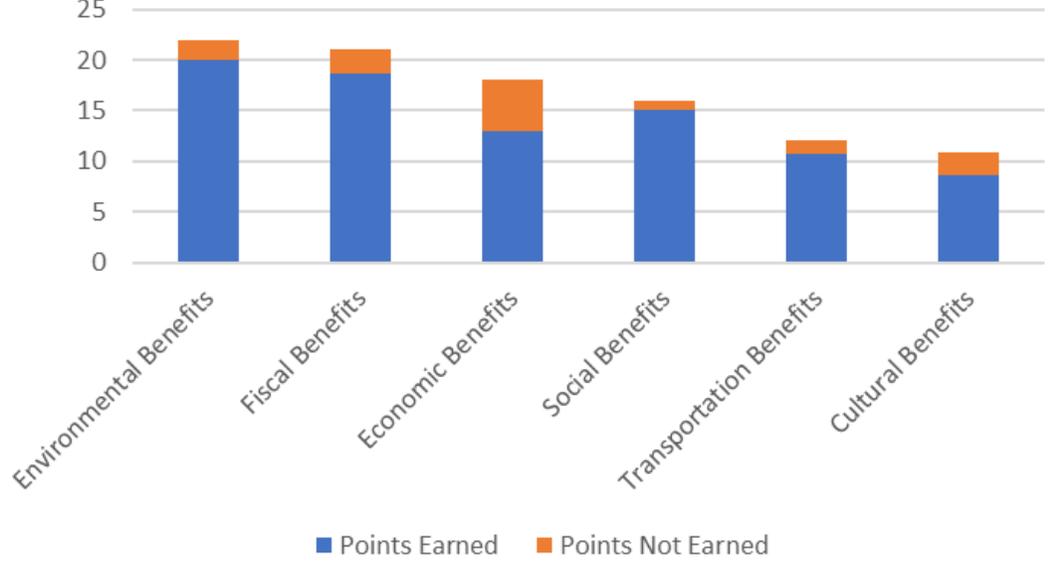
1. Build-out under current zoning

Summary of Benefits



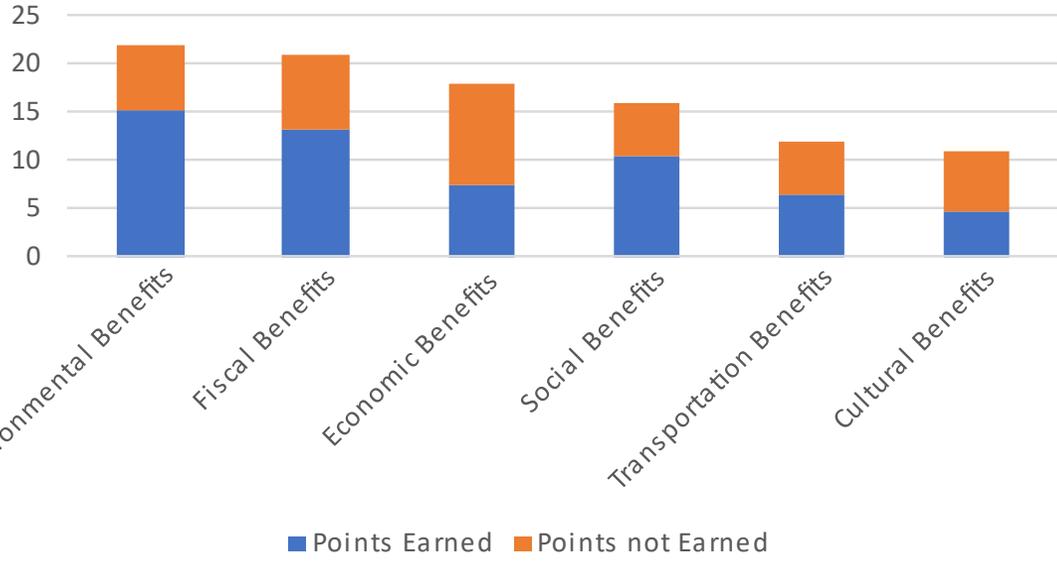
3. Mixed-use

Summary of Benefits



2. Market-Driven

Summary of Benefits



Recommendations



Recommendations—Transportation

Short Term: Safety

1. Collect new traffic data
2. Speed Feedback Radar Signs
3. Movable In Street Yield to Pedestrians Sign
4. Pedestrian flags and canisters at crosswalks
5. Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacon or Hybrid Beacon at crosswalk on Rt. 110 east of Rocky Hill Road
6. Install No RTOR on Rt.110 eastbound/Clark's Road
7. Evaluate All Way Stop at Main Steet/Merrimac Street
8. Consider 20 MPH Safety Zone at Alliance Park

Recommendations—Transportation

Short Term: Circulation Changes

1. Conduct Pilot Study for changing Main Street to reduce westbound traffic onto Main Street
2. Conduct Pilot Study for changing Rocky Hill Road to one way northbound and Clark's Road to one way southbound

Short-Term: Speed Reduction Devices

1. Conduct Pilot Study for installing temporary vertical traffic calming devices (raised crosswalks, intersections) on Main Street at selected locations

Recommendations—Transportation

Long-Term: Pedestrian and Bicycle Facilities

1. Provide new sidewalk on Main Street between Crum Hill and I-95
2. Consider shared use path on north side of Main Street
3. ADA and streetscape improvements on Main Street
4. Rebuild sidewalks that are missing or not in good condition: portions of Merrimac Street, Clark's Road, Beacon Street, Main Street north of Merrimac Street, etc.
5. New sidewalk and/or crossing at marina redevelopment and boat ramp & driveway access/egress improvements/consolidation on Merrimac Street
6. Complete shared-use path on Rt. 150 between Summit Avenue and Beacon Street

Recommendations—Open Space and Trails



Add Shared Use Path from Summit Ave to Beacon St

Consider including public open space use at 21 Pond View Ave

Improve poor sidewalk quality and unsafe roads for bicyclists.

Manage volume and speed of traffic to improve walking, biking along River

Conserve adjacent to Pow Wow River

Improve sidewalks, bike facilities along Merrimack, Main St., Evans Place

Improve connections between Merrimack River District and the rest of Amesbury

Conduct a design study for Margaret Rice Park. Connect it to Bailey's Pond and sidewalk on Beacon St.

Improve the Municipal Boat launch

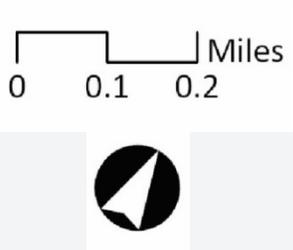
Add access to Alliance Park (more parking and/or better pedestrian access)

Conserve "Bailey's Green" Open Space & Views of River

Publicize and connect with trails and open space further north.

Conserve farmland

Improve pedestrian and bicycle access to the visitor center.



Recommendations—Placemaking

1. Create Gateways:
 1. Redevelop key nodes into walkable mixed-use centers
 1. Design sites with buildings close to streets to frame streets and intersections. Require prominent pedestrian entrances facing streets. Hide parking behind buildings
 2. Encourage multi-story mixed-use buildings whose design reflects local precedents
 3. Require functional open spaces
 4. At Elm St/Clark's Road/Route 110 Gateway: significantly improve public realm with wide sidewalks, street trees, street furniture, etc.
 5. At Pond View Ave Gateway: add shared-use path
 2. Add wayfinding to and from key destinations
 3. Promote history: create walking tour and/or interpretive signs, consider adopting a local historic district
 4. Make streetscape improvements throughout area: sidewalk improvements, street trees, pedestrian-scale lighting, bury powerlines
 5. Establish events that take advantage of river & celebrate history and culture
 6. Activate the Visitors' Center

Recommendations—Land Use

1. Revise zoning for 21 Pond View Avenue and Golden Triangle to allow mixed-use development.
 1. Require significant open space protection and key trail connections
 2. Require mixed-use
 3. Require diverse housing types
 4. Establish design guidelines that reflect the highest-ranking scenario
2. Move forward with East End Smart Growth 40R district
 1. Create 40R Design Standards focused on:
 1. Ensuring creation of walkable mixed-use node at Clark's Rd/Elm St/Rt 110
 2. Managing scale transitions to adjacent residential districts
 3. Diversity of housing types
 4. Open spaces and trails that connect to current and future open spaces
 3. Explore creating a special permit for additional use of marina properties when redevelopment will result in significant public benefits—like improvements to intersections, sidewalks, and/or public access to the river
4. Enhance zoning requirements for sustainability and climate resilience

Recommendations—Planning and Process

- Implement use of the Decision-Support Tool
 - Incorporate into zoning permit processes for development projects
 - Use to evaluate potential policy changes
 - Update the tool every five years to reflect citizens' changing priorities
- Continue proactive planning for Merrimack River District and other neighborhoods
- Continue to use scenario planning to make it easier for citizens to envision and plan for long-term change
- Use short-term, low-cost, full-scale mock-ups to test infrastructure improvements before final design is complete. These demonstrations can be used for transportation and park improvement projects, among others
- Develop a web-page that briefly summarizes key policy takeaways from planning projects and tracks implementation of actions

Next Steps-How to Participate



Ongoing Efforts

40R District

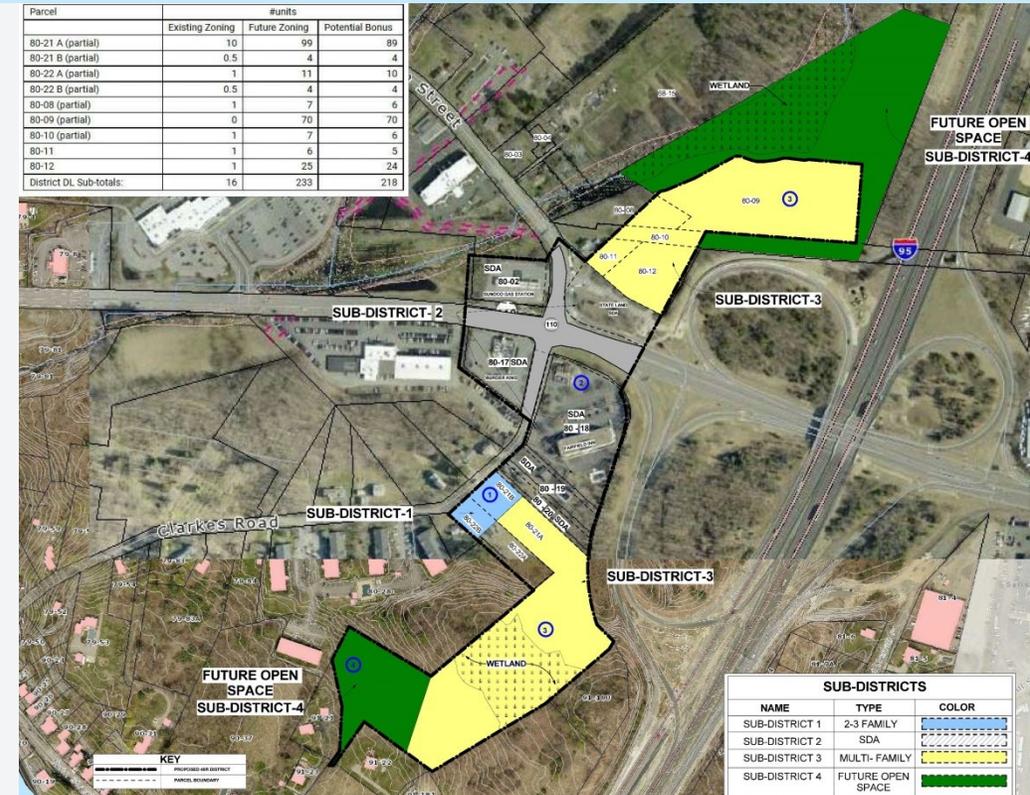
- Process:

1. Local public hearing
2. Application to DHCD
3. DHCD Letter of Eligibility
4. Local Zoning Adoption
5. Evidence of Adoption
6. DHCD Letter of Approval
7. Local Project Approval

- City is awaiting DHCD Letter of Eligibility.

➔ Participate in Local Zoning Adoption process: attend meetings, contact decision makers

➔ Project website: <https://www.amesburyma.gov/259/East-End-Smart-Growth-Overlay-40R>



Ongoing Efforts

21 Pond View Ave/Trader Alan's Disposition

- Process:
 1. File surplus order with City Council
 2. Establish Disposition Committee
 3. Disposition Committee determines reuse of property. Survey now open.
 4. Disposition Committee makes reuse recommendations to Mayor
 5. Project Development. Review by Mayor's office. OCED drafts scope for reuse and RFP
 6. Procurement
 7. Proposal Review
- Currently at Step 3
- ➔ Complete the survey by July 8 (<https://www.amesburyma.gov/584/Community-Survey---21-Pond-View-Avenue>).
- ➔ Attend public meetings

Ongoing Efforts

Golden Triangle and Marina at Amesbury Point

- Owners of these properties are exploring options for the sites
- Some redevelopment options may require zoning changes
- The City does not currently have next steps planned for these sites
- ➔ Pay attention to news, social media, City website for information about these sites. Attend public meetings.
- ➔ City website with information about various projects:
<https://www.amesburyma.gov/249/Community-Development>

Ongoing Efforts

Transportation Improvements

- Pay attention to news, social media, City website. Attend public meetings.
- Traffic & Transportation Committee Website:
<https://www.amesburyma.gov/406/Traffic-Transportation-Committee>

I AMesbury 2030, Master Plan

- Website:
<https://cleargov.com/massachusetts/essex/city/amesbury/projects/1946/i-amesbury-2030>

Discussion



Discussion Questions

- Does our description of the area match your experience? Did we miss anything crucial?
- What do you like about the recommendation ideas?
- How could the recommendation ideas be improved?
- What is your experience with similar efforts before? What has worked? What hasn't? What can we learn from that?
- Which recommendations are most important? Why?