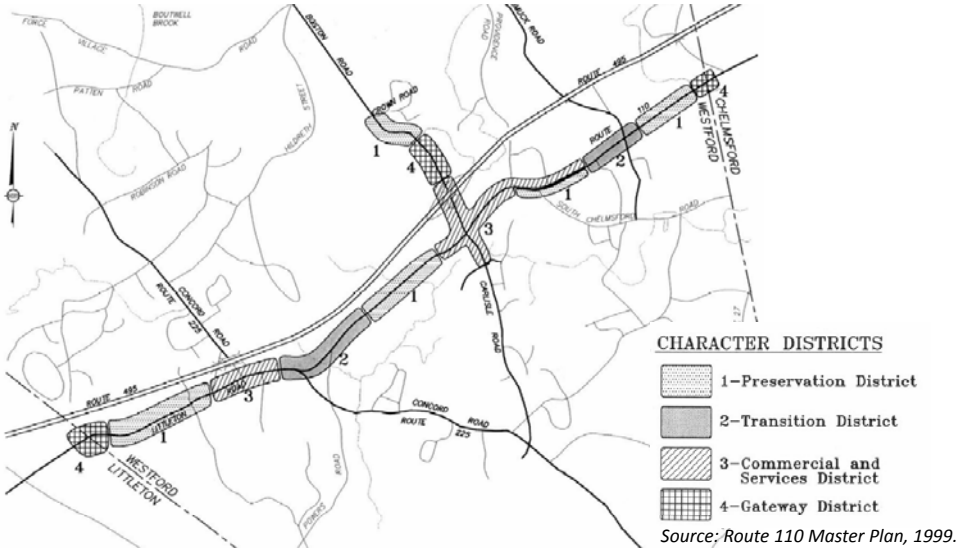
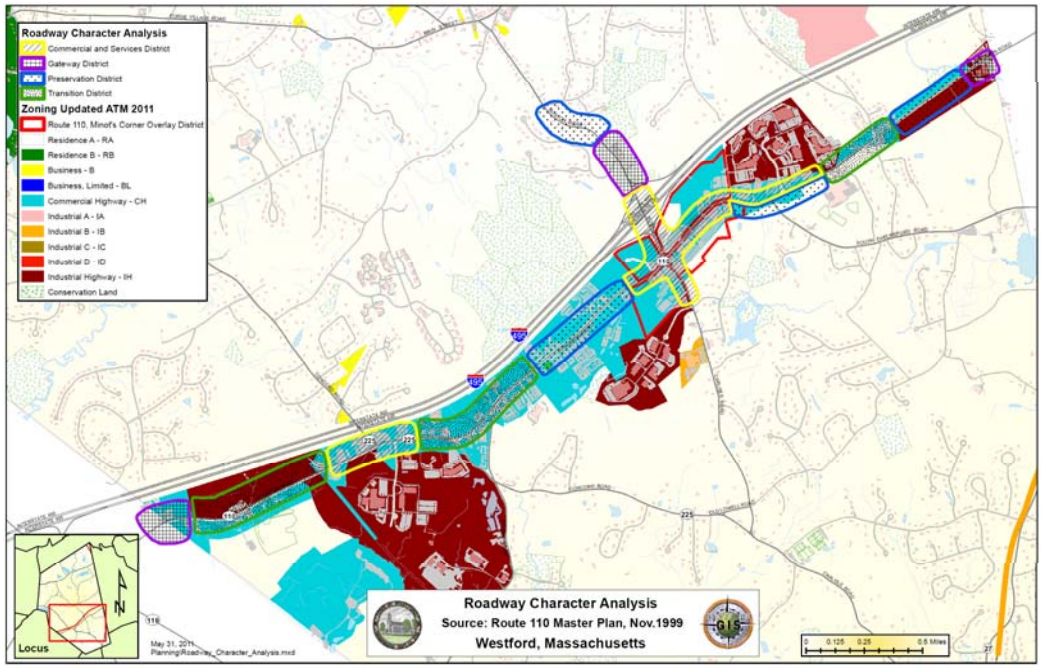
Commercial Highway Zoning / Route 110 Master Plan



Source: Route 110 Master Plan, 1999.



Policy Challenge

- Existing CH zoning doesn't match design objectives per "character district" set out in the Route 110 Master Plan.
- A number of land use changes have occurred on Route 110 since adoption of the Master Plan in 1999.
- Existing CH zoning doesn't maximize opportunities for economic development, or advance policy interests for new development such as walkability and mixed-use.

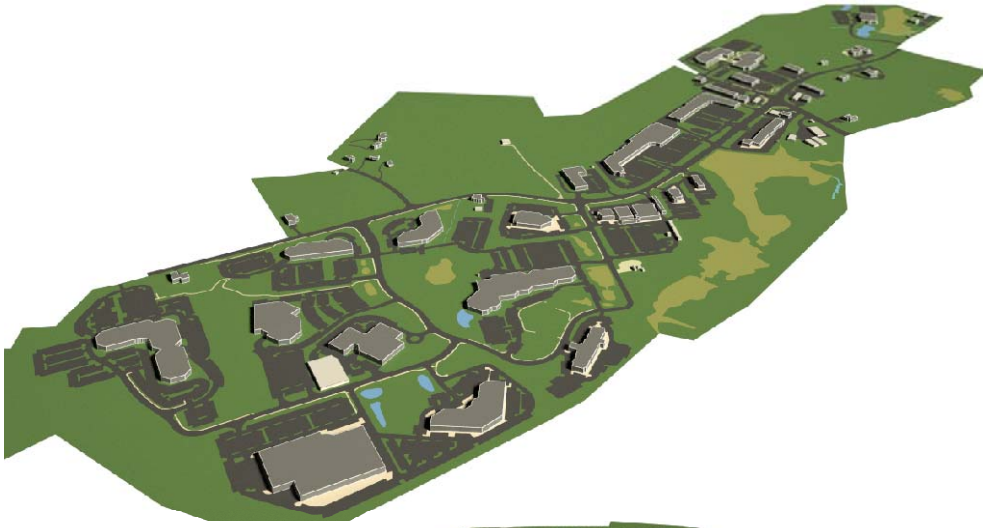
What could be done?

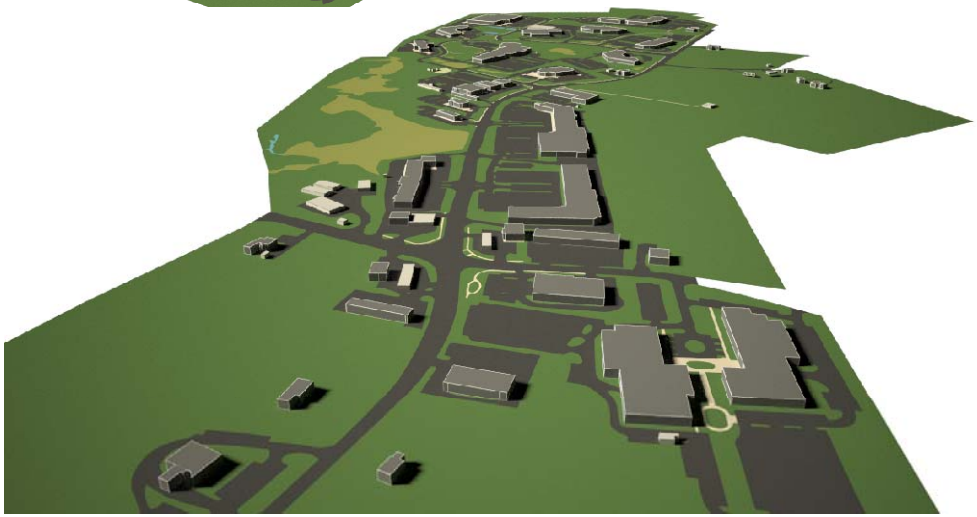
- Evaluate present land use patterns against Master Plan objectives. Update plan as appropriate and codify various forms of preferred development in different portions of the corridor.
- Evaluate required setbacks, parking ratios and open space set-asides, either within defined sub-districts; or on a per-permit discretionary basis.

How to do it? Key Policy Questions

- Would there be public support for zoning amendments that allowed more flexibility on setback, open space and parking ratios if it resulted in more walkable development, and was managed by special permit process with initial public reviews of preliminary site concept plans?

Economic Development / Commercial Highway Zoning

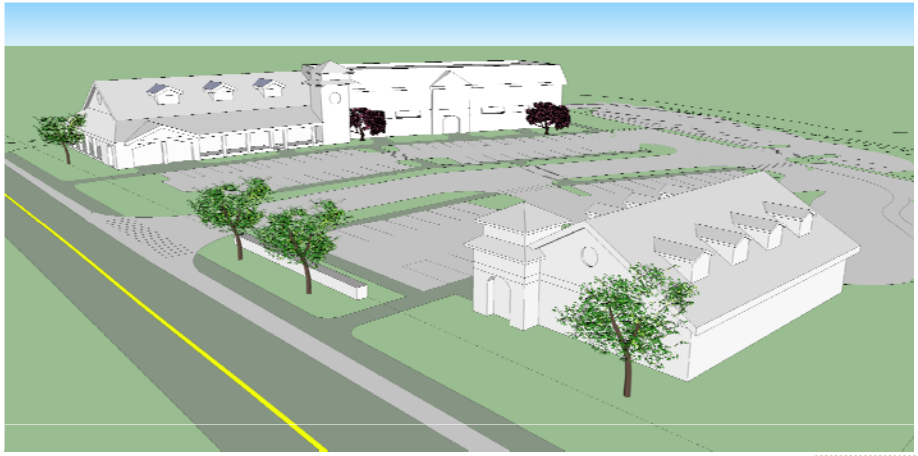




Minot's Corner is the town's primary retail center, with Tech Park East contributing significantly to the tax and employment base. However, zoning amendments enacted after the development of Westford Valley Marketplace brought several lots and buildings out of compliance with zoning, and restricted opportunities for "infill development" that could enhance the area's walkability and mix of uses. (Source: Architectural Image Solutions, LLC)

Master Plan excerpts:

- Current zoning regulations force new commercial buildings to be set back at a considerable distance from the street. They also encourage inefficient land use… caused by a combination of factors: very low building coverage ratios, a suburban height standard of three stories for buildings in all of the business districts, and excessive parking requirements, especially for retail uses. (pg. 64)
- Westford does not allow enough development on commercial lots to make underground parking feasible. As a result, the combined factors of low coverage ratios, building height limitations, large open space requirements and a large amount of land required for off -street parking mean that in many cases, a permitted use would need more land than the minimum lot area required in a commercial zoning district. (pg. 64)



The hypothetical concept plan above is more consistent with "smart growth" principles of walkability and design than what could be permitted under CH zoning.

Economic Development / Commercial Highway Zoning

Land Area by Zoning District, Town of Westford

District	Acres	Percent of Total
Business	62	0.3%
Business Limited	6	0.0%
Commercial Highway	492	2.4%
Industrial A	698	3.5%
Industrial B	77	0.4%
Industrial C	196	1.0%
Industrial D	33	0.2%
Industrial Highway	473	2.4%
Residence A	17,142	85.2%
Residence B	936	4.7%
	20,115	100.0%

Source: GIS analysis, 3/22/10.

Summary	
Business	2.8%
Industrial	7.3%
Residential	89.9%

Westford Property Valuations by Classification

Fiscal Year	TOTAL	Res	Comm	Ind	Total Non-Res	TOTAL
2010	$ 3,749,545,312	87%	6%	7%	13%	100%
2009	$ 3,815,910,505	88%	6%	6%	12%	100%
2008	$ 3,845,315,429	88%	6%	6%	12%	100%
2007	$ 3,837,670,396	88%	6%	6%	12%	100%
2006	$ 3,735,101,208	89%	6%	6%	11%	100%
2005	$ 3,410,385,222	88%	6%	7%	12%	100%
2004	$ 3,162,723,260	87%	6%	7%	13%	100%
2003	$ 2,899,971,892	85%	7%	8%	15%	100%
2002	$ 2,542,348,590	84%	8%	8%	16%	100%
2001	$ 2,098,013,658	88%	6%	6%	12%	100%

Source: Assessors Records

Master Plan excerpts:

- One of the central tenets of smart growth is fairness and predictability in permitting. Under Westford's present zoning, neither developers nor abutters can readily foresee what the town will require as a condition of approval for MRP, MCP, PCD or PID projects. (pg. 66)
- Westford's zoning regulations do not make it easy for small companies to locate in the Commercial Highway District. (pg. 67)

Policy Challenge

- Fixed public costs are rising steadily and new commercial investment will be needed to bring more balance to the residential / commercial tax burden
- The Master Plan indicates that permitting processes have not always facilitated new commercial investment, including reinvestment in existing commercial properties.

What could be done?

- Reconsider the "change of use" threshold for site plan review to encourage small business development.
- Prepare a small business permitting guide to assist commercial applicants that are not represented by an attorney within the permitting process.
- Adopt a development mitigation bylaw for special permit projects to establish clear and consistent criteria for mitigation of project-related impacts. Ensure consistent interpretation among permitting Boards.
- Coordinate public infrastructure and capital planning with development mitigation based on a rational nexus between a project's impacts and public infrastructure.
- Establish an Economic Development Committee to assist with coordinating economic development within growth areas and identifying incentives for preferred forms of commercial investment.