



Town of Brookline

Massachusetts

**Department of Planning and
Community Development**

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Kara Brewton
Director

To: Select Board

From: Meredith L. Mooney, Economic Development Director

Cc: Chas Carey, Town Administrator
Kara Brewton, Planning & Community Development Director
Chestnut Hill Commercial Area Study Community Advisory Group

Date: April 3, 2024

Re: Chestnut Hill Commercial Area Study Project Update

Overview:

In November 2023, the Select Board endorsed the attached project scope and objectives for the Chestnut Hill Commercial Area Study (CHCAS). Staff committed to presenting project updates to the Select Board on a quarterly basis. Economic Development staff will present its first project update, summarized in this memo, to the Select Board on April 9, 2024.

Recent Project Developments:

- 1) **Engaged Project Consultant:** During the first quarter of 2024, staff finalized the project timeline and scope of consulting services, and on-boarded project consultant [RKG Associates](#) to complete the scope of work outlined below by the end of the this fiscal year.
 - a. **Commercial Market Study:** Complete a commercial market study that quantifies local and regional supply and demand for retail, office, medical office, hotel, industrial/warehousing, and lab/life science spaces. This study will provide the Town with information on the supply of different types of commercial space in the local and subregional market, future projections for space by use type, trends in absorption and vacancy, and lease rates. A retail gap analysis will quantify retail opportunities and describe potential types of retail and restaurants that are underrepresented in the study area. Typical building, floor plate sizes, and parking requirements of companies across industry sectors most likely to be located in the Chestnut Hill area will be analyzed.
 - b. **Financial Feasibility Analysis:** Once the commercial development potential for the study area is identified, the consultant will work with the Town, with input from the project's Community Advisory Group, to select some catalytic parcels to test financially feasible massing models of future change/development. This component will also be informed by earlier conversations with

property owners to learn if any are considering change in the near term. Financial returns of different commercial development scenarios on the catalytic parcels will be tested.

- c. **Massing Models:** Graphic representations of the study will be produced in both two dimensional and three dimensional formats. Three dimensional massing models will showcase height, bulk, placement, parking, and interaction with the surrounding environment. For this effort, the models will not include significant detail for the buildings themselves but more so to represent how the built form could evolve over time.

- 2) **Recruited and convened the project's Community Advisory Group:** Staff's work is informed by a Community Advisory Group, chaired by Select Board Member Mike Sandman and comprised of representatives from the list of key stakeholder groups and Town board and committees. The Community Advisory Group will be updated and consulted by staff during public meetings on an as-needed basis.

CHCAS Community Advisory Group Members:

- Mike Sandman, Select Board
- Janice Kahn, Chestnut Hill Village Association
- Lynda Roseman, Town Meeting Member (Precinct 14)
- Jane Flanagan, Town Meeting Member (Precinct 15)
- Ken Lewis, Economic Development Advisory Board (EDAB)
- Zeina Talje, Economic Development Advisory Board (EDAB)
- Carlos Ridruejo, Advisory Committee
- David Pollak, Advisory Committee
- Mariah Nobrega, School Committee
- Mark Zarrillo, Planning Board
- Carla Benka, Chestnut Hill resident (non-direct abutter)

The CAG convened for the first time on March 27, 2024. The kick-off meeting agenda included a project overview, member introductions, feedback on the project's draft Community Engagement Plan, as well as an initial analysis of the study area's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (i.e. SWOT analysis). The SWOT analysis slides are attached. All meeting materials and the meeting recording are all available on the [project webpage](#).

- 3) **Launched project webpage:** Project background, documents, Community Advisory Group membership information and meeting documents, all upcoming project-related meetings and events can be found at <https://www.brooklinema.gov/3716/Chestnut-Hill-Commercial-Area-Study>
- 4) **Developed and initiated the implementation of the project's Community Engagement Plan** (attached)

Project Timeline:

2024	April – May	Community outreach & engagement
	March – July	Real Estate Analysis: Market Study, Massing Models, Financial Feasibility, Fiscal Impact Analysis
	July – August	Development of Draft Zoning & Design Guidelines
	September – October	Finalize draft zoning & design guidelines Follow-up community outreach & engagement efforts
	October – December	Developer presentations on redevelopment proposals Finalize zoning & design guidelines Develop design renderings
2025	January – February	Board and committee presentations Submit rezoning warrant article(s)
	March – April	Warrant article public hearings
	May	Town Meeting vote on CHCAS rezoning warrant article(s)

Important Upcoming Community Engagement Opportunities:

- **Project Kick-Off Community Workshops:**
 - In-person Community Workshop
 - Wednesday, **April 24, 2024 @ 6-8pm**
 - Robert T. Lynch Municipal Golf Course, 1281 W Roxbury Pkwy, Brookline, MA
 - Virtual Community Workshop
 - Wednesday, **May 8, 2024 @ 6-8pm**
 - Via Zoom
- **Community Site Walk:** The in-person and virtual Community Workshop sessions will be followed by a site walk of the study area with Town staff, project consultants, and members of the Community Advisory Group. This event will be an opportunity to explore the study area in-person and review key takeaways and themes that emerged from community workshop events. Two site walks are tentatively scheduled for **Friday, May 10 and Saturday, May 11**. Times are TBD. Please visit the project [webpage](#) for updates.
- **Community Workshops Recap:** Key takeaways and themes that emerged from the Community Workshop events will be presented and discussed at the next Community Advisory Group meeting on Monday, **May 13, 2024 @ 6-8pm via Zoom**. Visit the project webpage or Town Calendar for event details.

Next Anticipated Select Board Update:

We anticipate the next Select Board project update will be in early-mid July 2024, when staff will be in a position to present findings from the real estate analysis and refined project objectives based on community input.

Chestnut Hill Commercial Area Study: Project Scope & Direction

Approved by the Select Board on November 14, 2023

The Select Board supports the Planning & Community Development Department's Economic Development & Long-Term Planning Division's examination of opportunities for incentivizing significant net new commercial tax growth, as well as enhancing the livability and identity of the Chestnut Hill commercial area.

Staff's work will be informed by a community advisory group, chaired by a Select Board member and comprised of representatives from the list of key stakeholder groups and Town boards and committees (outlined below). The community advisory group will be updated and consulted by staff during public meetings on an as-needed basis.

The Economic Development & Long-Term Planning Division is responsible for delivery of a final report to the Select Board with recommendations, implementation measures, and if appropriate, a rezoning proposal and design guidelines for Town Meeting's consideration. Staff will present quarterly updates on the status of the Chestnut Hill Commercial Area Study to the Select Board.

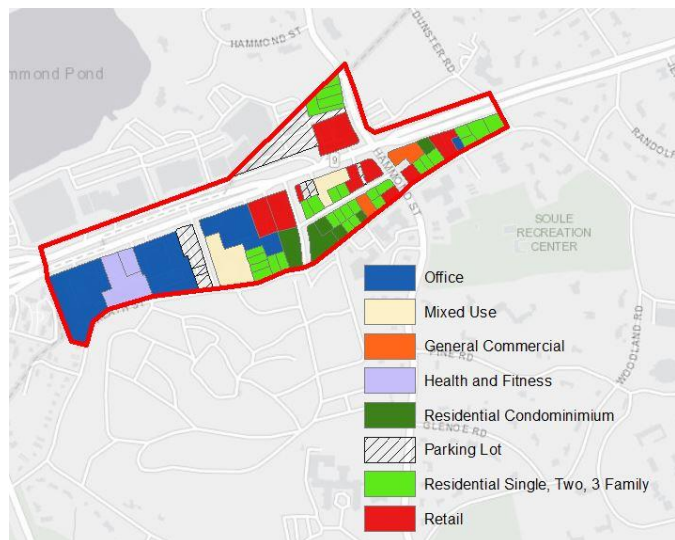
Spring 2025 Annual Town Meeting will be the target date for any rezoning proposals and accompanying design guidelines.

Study Area:

Work will primarily focus on the area between Boylston Street (Route 9) and Heath Street extending from Dunster Road to the Newton-Brookline border, but may also include other adjacent areas as deemed appropriate. [See study area map.]

Community Advisory Board Representatives:

- Select Board, Chair
- Chestnut Hill Village Alliance community group
- Chestnut Hill resident (non-direct abutter)
- Town Meeting Members from precincts adjacent to the study area, i.e. Precincts 14 and 15
- Economic Development Advisory Board
- Advisory Committee
- School Committee
- Planning Board



Process:

- **Collect & Analyze Data:** Staff will review existing conditions, including zoning, parking requirements, design guidelines, infrastructure capacity, pedestrian and bicycle safety, connectivity, open space, existing housing stock, existing businesses, market opportunities unique

to the corridor, parcel geometry and ownership, and other issues related to the built environment and user experience.

- **Refine Goals & Objectives:** Goals and objectives for the study will be further refined through the integration of community input and any additional issues identified through the existing conditions analysis.
- **Formulate Strategies:** Staff will study the feasibility of different policy recommendations, redevelopment scenarios, and infrastructure improvements aimed at improving the appearance, function, connectivity, and safety of the corridor.
- **Finalize & Adopt Plan:** Staff will develop a set of recommendations and implementation measures. Such implementation measures may include proposed capital improvements to infrastructure, creation of policy programs or regulation change to incent desired outcomes, changes to zoning, and revised design guidelines, among others. After staff has gathered and integrated input from key land use boards, the Select Board will determine whether to adopt staff's recommendations and advance any proposed zoning changes to Town Meeting.

Planning Methods: Tools that will be utilized in this study include:

- Inclusive community engagement processes
- Conceptual building massing of redevelopment scenarios
- Financial feasibility of policy recommendations and redevelopment scenarios
- Conceptual capital infrastructure improvements that may be made by private developers or by the Town, including open space
- Phased redevelopment that may be proposed along the corridor over time, including potential accessory uses that could provide support to other parcels (e.g. shared parking)

Standards & Expectations:

- **Community Engagement Best Practices:** Staff will utilize community engagement best practices on a consistent basis throughout this study process. Input should be sought from the general public, as well as key stakeholders including major property owners, real estate developers, business owners, residents (renters and homeowners), and other users of the corridor. Once a consultant is selected through the RFP process for the Comprehensive Plan, Planning & Community Development Department staff will closely coordinate on the community outreach efforts for these parallel planning processes.
- **Equity Lens:** The promotion of social equity will be a focal point of community outreach and engagement efforts for this project, and in the development of this study's recommended policies and implementation measures.
- **Sustainability Principles:** Urban sustainability best practices and pursuit of the Town's climate action goals will be integral to this study process and its recommendations.
- **Consultant Support:** Qualified consultants will be hired to advance this work.

**Chestnut Hill Commercial Area Study
Community Engagement Plan: 2024-2025**

Project Overview

The Town of Brookline’s Chestnut Hill Commercial Area Study is a planning study to examine opportunities for incentivizing significant net new commercial tax growth, as well as enhancing the livability and identity of the Chestnut Hill commercial area.

Stakeholders

Community	Government	Institutional
Chestnut Hill Commercial Area Study (CHCAS) Community Advisory Group (CAG)	Select Board	Boston College (Newton and Brookline campuses)
Chestnut Hill neighborhood	Town Meeting	Brimmer and May
Town Meeting members (Precincts 14 and 15)	Planning Board	Longwood Cricket Club
South Brookline residents	Economic Development Advisory Board	Longyear Museum
Elderly, caregivers, and visitors at senior living (The Residence at Boylston Place)	Advisory Committee	Beaver Country Day
Existing Chestnut Hill businesses	Brookline School Committee	Holyhood Cemetery
The Street employees and customers	Public Schools of Brookline	
Study area property owners	Town Administrator’s Office	
Route 9/Boylston Street commuters from the western suburbs	Regulatory Division (Planning)	
Patients at Longwood Medical Area hospitals and Brookline medical offices	Economic Development & Long-Term Planning Division (Planning)	
Newton residents (study area abutters)	Transportation & Engineering Division (DPW)	
	Transportation Board	
	Assessors	
	Town Counsel	
	MassDOT	
	City of Newton	

Decision-makers for Potential Study Recommendations

Recommendations that emerge from this study (i.e. policy recommendations, redevelopment scenarios, and infrastructure improvements aimed at improving the appearance, function, connectivity, and safety of the corridor) will be developed by staff, informed by the Community Advisory Group and community input, and ultimately approved by the entities outlined below. The Select Board will determine whether project recommendations will be put forward for consideration by the decision-makers indicated below:

- **Rezoning** (i.e. proposing changes to the designated uses and massing of property within the study area): Town Meeting
- **Design Guidelines** (i.e. guidelines, which are supplemental to the standards outlined in the Town’s [Zoning By-law](#) under Section 5.09(d) Environmental Impact and Design Standards and utilized by the reviewing authority in

considering future redevelopment proposals, that promote building design compatible with the Town and Chestnut Hill neighborhood's character, and minimize the potential for negative impacts on the Chestnut Hill neighborhood through future redevelopment): Planning Board and Department of Public Works (DPW)

- **Changes to parking and transportation on the public ways within the Town of Brookline:** Transportation Board and DPW
- **Infrastructure capital improvements along Route 9:** MassDOT

Opportunities for Community Input

- **Project Kick-Off Community Workshops:**
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- **Online Survey:** Community input will be gathered through an online survey.
- **Public comment during Community Advisory Group meetings:** All CHCAS Community Advisory Group meeting agendas will have time allotted for public comment. The public is welcome to submit written comment for staff and the Community Advisory Group's consideration, as well. All CAG virtual meetings will be recorded and accessible through the project [webpage](#). Comments can be emailed to Meredith L. Mooney, Economic Development Director, at mmooney@brooklinema.gov. Upcoming Community Advisory Group meetings:
 - Wednesday, March 27, 2024 @ 6-8pm via Zoom
 - Monday, May 13, 2024 @ 6-8pm via Zoom
 - Monday, June 3, 2024 @ 6-8pm via Zoom
 - Monday, June 24, 2024 @ 6-8pm via Zoom
- **Community Advisory Group-hosted Mini-Community Workshops:** CAG members will host small-scale community workshop sessions with their neighbors and community networks to supplement community input gathered through the project kick-off community workshops. Each session will include 6-12 participants.
- **Select Board Meetings:** At least once a quarter, staff will provide regular project status updates to the Select Board. Opportunities for public comment are provided at every Select Board meeting.

Communications Activities

Communications Channel	Content	Channel Access
Chestnut Hill Commercial Area Study Project Webpage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Link to subscribe to project updates and meeting notifications • Project documents (reports, slide deck presentations, CAG agendas, background reference material) • Upcoming project events and CAG meetings, CAG meeting notes • Staff contact info • CAG membership info 	https://www.brooklinema.gov/3716/Chestnut-Hill-Commercial-Area-Study
Town of Brookline and Planning & Community Development Department Instagram accounts	Project events and CAG meetings	https://www.instagram.com/townofbrookline/ https://www.instagram.com/brookline_planning/
Planning & Community Development Department News Flash Notifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project events and meetings updates • Occasional project status updates 	Subscribe to the: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic Development Division’s ‘Business News’ News Flash • Planning & Community Development Department’s ‘Highlights – Planning & Community Development’ News Flash • Town Administrator’s Newsletter • Select Board meeting notifications • Chestnut Hill Commercial Area Study Community Advisory Group meeting notifications Via → https://www.brooklinema.gov/list.aspx#newsFlash
Town Administrator’s Newsletter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community workshop event information • Updates about project milestones 	
Select Board Meetings	Project status updates as needed (at a minimum of once a quarter).	
Direct mailing	Notification and information about the Chestnut Hill Commercial Area Study, as well as details about the Community Workshop kick-off events will be sent to Brookline residents, commercial property owners, and businesses in or abutting the study area.	
Flyers	Flyers with project information and Community Workshop kick-off event details will be hand-delivered to all business tenants in the study area.	
Posters	Posters promoting awareness of the project will be distributed to Chestnut Hill businesses and property owners to display in their windows.	
Lawn Signs	Lawn signs promoting awareness of the project will be displayed on public property within the study area and made available to residents interested in displaying the signs on their property.	
Soofa Signs (i.e. the Town’s digital message boards)	Signage promoting general project awareness and information about upcoming community engagement events.	

Reporting Back to the Community

Updates on feedback received through the outreach and community engagement process, as well as how that input was integrated into the project recommendations will be shared at Community Advisory Group meetings. Upcoming meetings where community input will be reviewed and discussed:

- Monday, May 13, 2024 @ 6-8pm via Zoom
- Community Site Walk (May 2024, exact date TBD)
- Tentative: Community Workshop on Draft Zoning and Design Guidelines (September 2024 , exact date TBD)

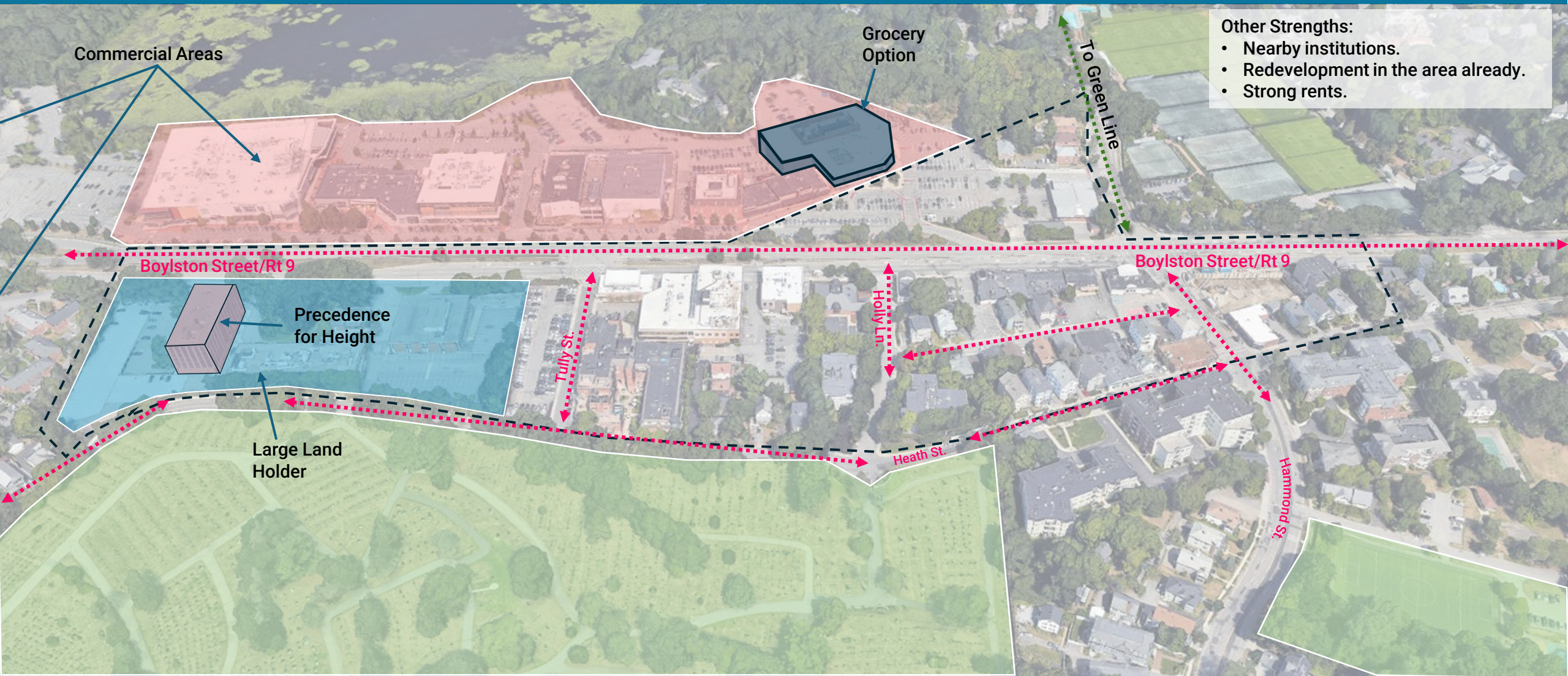
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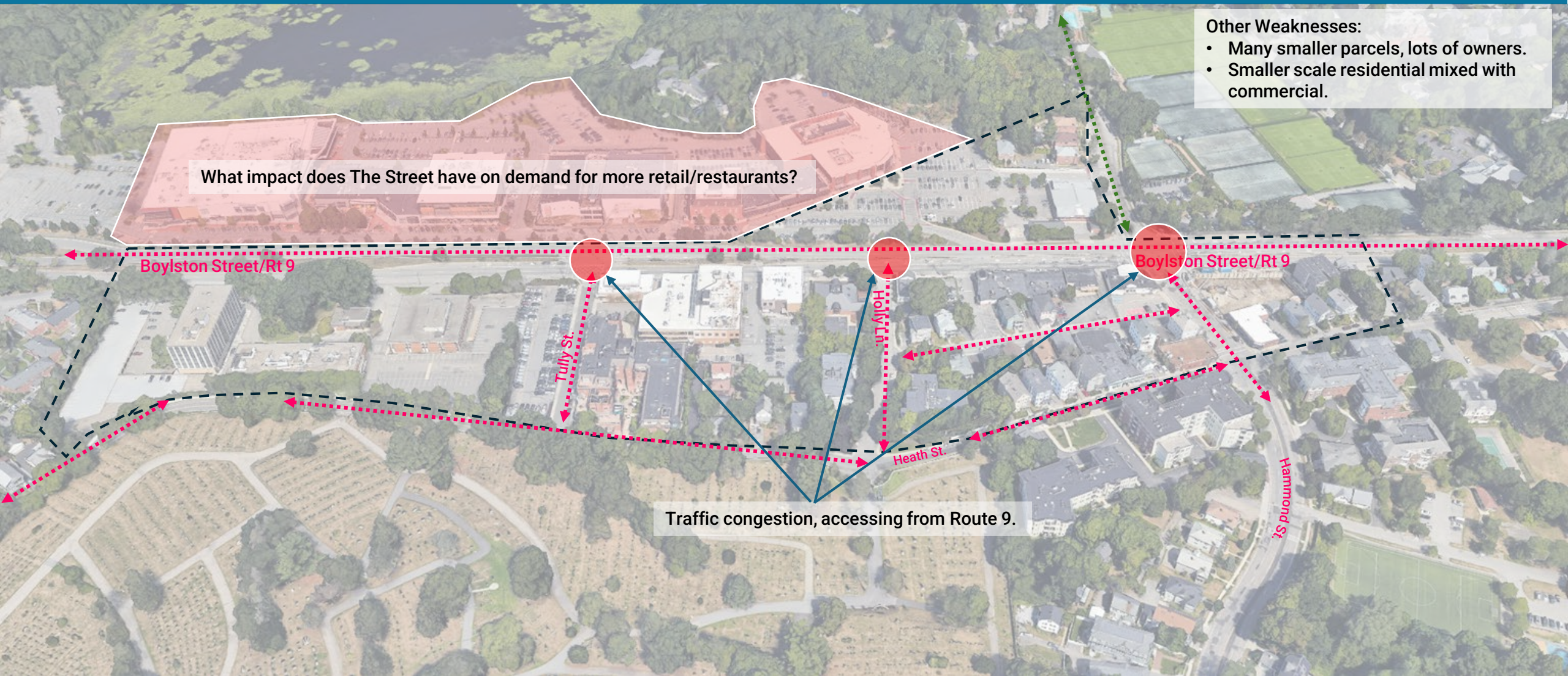
Community Advisory Group Role & Responsibilities

- Provide guidance and feedback on staff and consultant analysis and draft project recommendations.
- Amplify the Town’s community outreach and engagement efforts, promoting awareness and dialogue with neighbors and community networks about the project’s objectives and recommendations.
 - Conduct mini-community workshop events (6-12 participants) with your neighbors and community networks to gather additional community input.
- Once project recommendations are finalized, assist staff with translating the study recommendations’ estimated fiscal impact into real things that contribute to quality of life for Brookline residents.

Current Strengths



Current Weaknesses



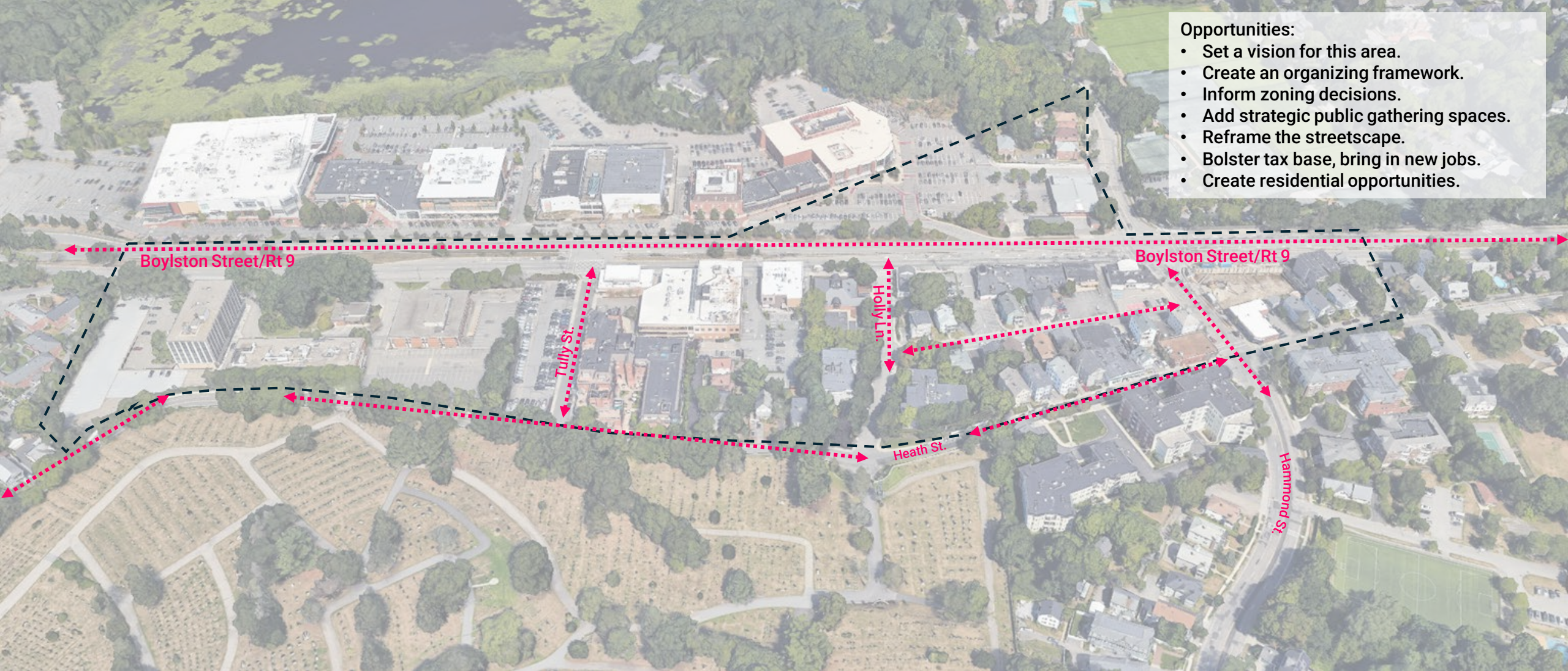
Other Weaknesses:

- Many smaller parcels, lots of owners.
- Smaller scale residential mixed with commercial.

What impact does The Street have on demand for more retail/restaurants?

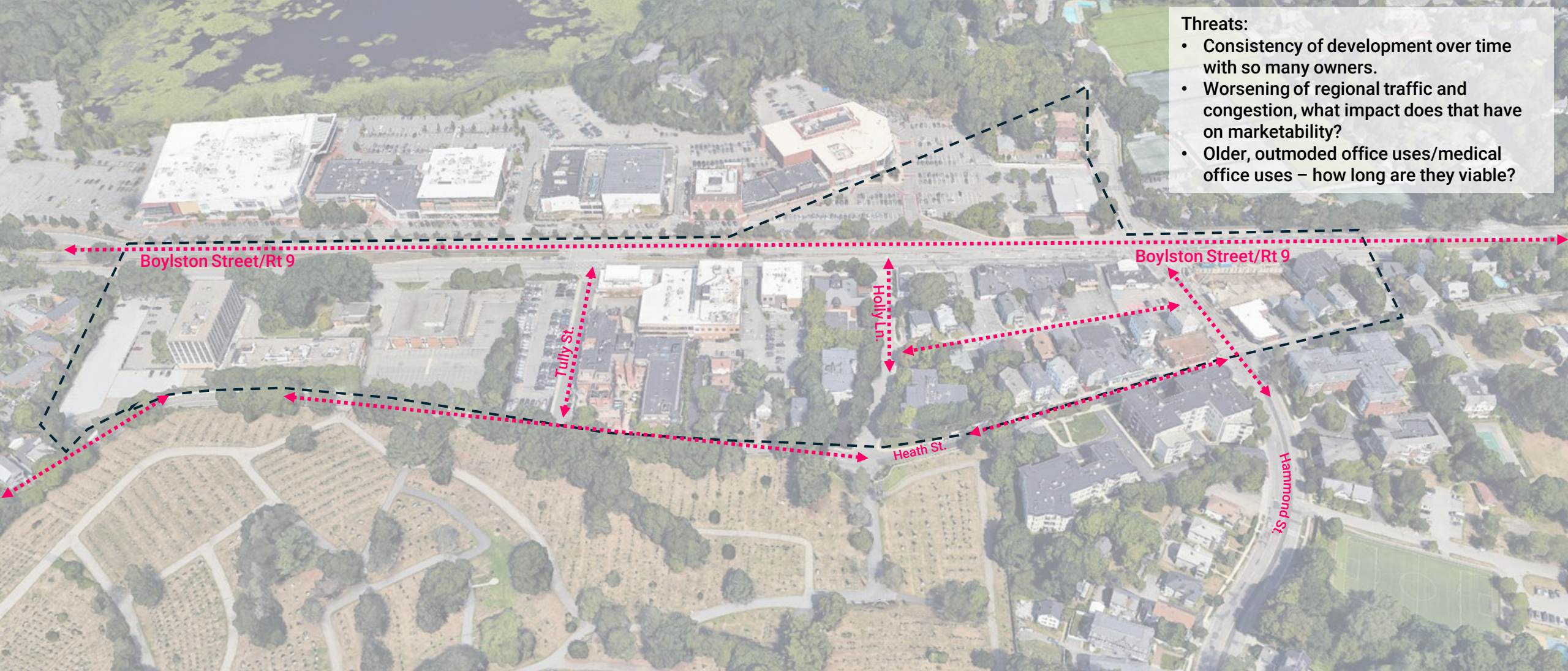
Traffic congestion, accessing from Route 9.

Future Opportunities



- Opportunities:
- Set a vision for this area.
 - Create an organizing framework.
 - Inform zoning decisions.
 - Add strategic public gathering spaces.
 - Reframe the streetscape.
 - Bolster tax base, bring in new jobs.
 - Create residential opportunities.

Future Threats



Threats:

- Consistency of development over time with so many owners.
- Worsening of regional traffic and congestion, what impact does that have on marketability?
- Older, outmoded office uses/medical office uses – how long are they viable?