

# CTfastrak Flatbush Avenue Station Area Transit Oriented Development Primer and Concept Memo for Hartford and West Hartford, CT

2015

**CRCOG** **CAPITOL REGION  
COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS**  
*Working together for a better region.*



**Prepared for:**

**The City of Hartford, the Town of West Hartford and The Capitol Region Council of Governments**

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

The Flatbush Avenue Station is one of 11 stations on the 9.4 mile CTfastrak Busway, which opened on March 28, 2015. In addition, Flatbush Avenue also is slated to have a station on the New Haven Hartford Springfield (NHHS) Rail route running from New Haven, CT to Springfield MA, via Hartford (also known as CT*rail*). To capitalize on these transportation investments, and the new transportation services, the Capitol Region Council of Governments (CRCOG) and the municipalities of Hartford and West Hartford undertook this study to assess the opportunities and potential site capacity for Transit Oriented Development (TOD) around the station.

While the Flatbush Avenue Station and most of the NHHS station are within the Town of West Hartford, a portion of the NHHS station and much of the potentially developable land around the two stations is within the City of Hartford. For this reason, the two municipalities jointly participated in this planning study.

A meeting was held on January 14, 2015 to discuss the characteristics and opportunities for TOD development with representatives from both municipalities, CRCOG, the public and the consultant team. Planning and Zoning Commissioners from both Hartford and West Hartford were present at the meeting.



The aerial photograph above shows Flatbush Avenue Station (yellow star), the quarter mile radius around the station (yellow circle), and the Hartford/West Hartford boundary line (red dashed line).



## 2. TRANSIT ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT PRIMER

Transit Oriented Development (TOD) has been defined by the Federal Transit Administration as “Compact, mixed-use development within walking distance of public transportation.” Others have expanded on that definition to include “serving housing, transportation and neighborhood goals” as well as meeting “transit-supportive standards for land uses, densities and walkable environments.”

### TOD Characteristics

Successful transit oriented developments share a number of characteristics:

- **Mixed-Use:** the goal is to allow people to live, work and play in one district/neighborhood.
- **Density:** the typical minimum density for residential use is 12-15 units per acre, although densities are frequently much higher.
- **High-Quality Pedestrian Environment:** Pedestrian amenities encourage walking between transit and the mix of uses, as well as to adjacent neighborhoods.
- **Sense of Place:** Design guidelines, land uses and the pedestrian environment work together to create an attractive and identifiable district.
- **Low Parking Requirements:** The availability of transit and the ability to walk throughout the

district and to adjacent areas, as well as support for auto and car sharing facilities, reduces the need for private automobile ownership. Parking requirements are frequently reduced, either through reduced minimum requirements or, in many cases, through the introduction of maximum allowable ratios.

- **Demographics:** Millennials (loosely defined as those born between 1982 and 2004), a group with still evolving tastes, prefer walkable communities with diverse mobility options, even if they live in more suburban-oriented settings. ULI’s Emerging Trends in Real Estate® 2015 indicates that millennials are taking these preferences with them as some move into suburban areas as they form families, noting that suburbs with “sufficient density to support live/work/play interactions, and a combination of transit and walkability” have “good bones that will serve them going forward.” And an AARP (American Association of Retired Persons) survey found that 71% of Baby Boomers (persons over 50 years) want to be within walking distance of transit.

*At right, from top: the Kendall Square Station and Marriott Hotel in Cambridge, MA; Station Landing in Medford, MA; new ground level shops with office above and revitalized multi-family housing adjacent to the Davis Square Red Line Station in Somerville, MA.*





*Above, from top: Maxwell Green in Somerville, MA; mixed-use development at Ashmont Station in Boston, MA.*

## TOD Site Typologies

There are five typical TOD site typologies that are relevant to the Flatbush Avenue Station Area:

- **Transportation Centers:** Typically, TOD at transit centers is part of a joint development project

in which the development project is a public/private partnership to build a new station or improve an existing station and add private commercial and/or residential development. An example of this would be the Marriott Hotel in Kendall Square, Cambridge MA, which incorporates an MBTA Red Line Station into the hotel plaza.

- **Commercial and Office Center Redevelopment:** Transit service can be a catalyst for redeveloping aging and underutilized commercial and office developments. For example, Station Landing in Medford, MA, adjacent to the MBTA's Wellington Orange Line Station, was built on the site of a failed office park. Today, the development includes 650 residential units, 100,000 square feet of retail space, a 190-room hotel, 165,000 square feet of Class A office space, and a 1,350-space parking garage, adjacent to a riverfront park and marina.
- **Urban Infill:** Urban infill projects typically involve the development or redevelopment of underutilized parcels in an already developed area. For example, the extension of the MBTA's Red Line to Davis Square in Somerville, MA has resulted in a number of new and rehabilitated residential, restaurant and retail projects in what had been a moribund small commercial center.
- **Industrial Re-Use / Rail Corridor:** Because many transit lines follow industrial rail corridors, re-development of former industrial sites for more transit friendly uses is common. An example of this concept would be the Residences at Maxwell Green, a 184-unit residential development on a former industrial site along the MBTA's green line extension in Somerville, MA.
- **Park and Ride:** These sites tend to have large expanses of surface parking immediately adjacent to stations. They have become prime sites for TOD, with the parking relocated into garages to accommodate mixed-use development of the site. An example of this would be Ashmont Station in Boston, at which the MBTA entered into a long term ground lease with a developer to build a mixed-use development with first floor retail and 100 units of affordable housing on an under-utilized 30,000 square foot parking lot at the terminus for Red Line rapid transit, Mattapan Trolley, and a regional bus station. Proceeds from the development went towards improvements to the aging station. In addition, the MBTA will receive a continuing payment of \$25,000 per year to maintain a new plaza and landscaping at the station for the life of the lease.

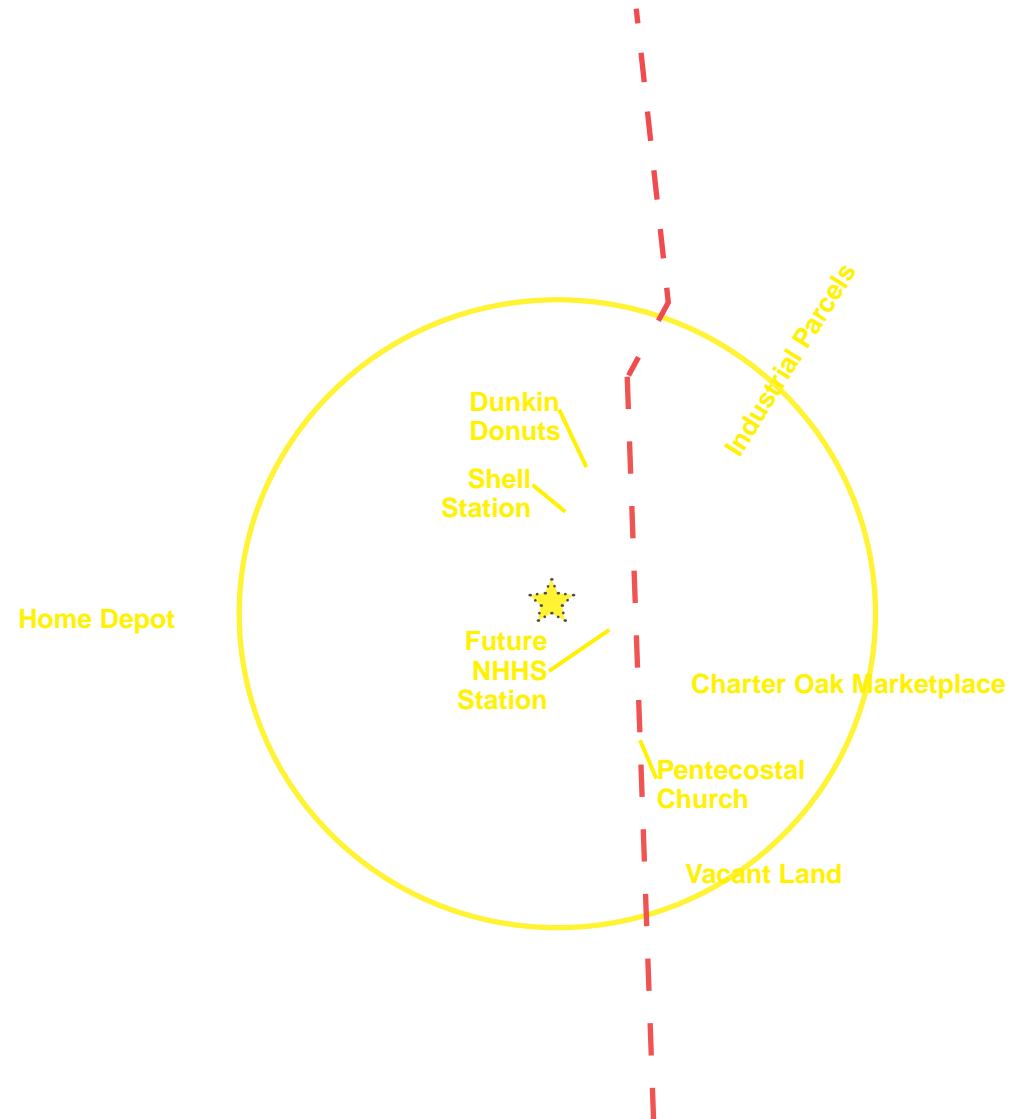
### 3. EXISTING CONDITIONS

#### The Study Area

The Study Area was roughly defined as the area within a 1/4 mile radius of the Flatbush Avenue Station. It is bisected by the railroad tracks which run in a roughly north-south direction (from southwest to northeast).

Major roadways through the Study Area include:

- New Park Avenue, which runs north/south parallel to the west side of the busway/rail tracks.
- Flatbush Avenue, which runs east/west and intersects New Park Avenue at the northwest corner of the CTfastrak station. As part of CTfastrak, Flatbush Avenue was realigned to cross over the tracks on a bridge. Although it meets New Park Avenue at grade, most parcels effectively have no frontage on Flatbush Avenue from Newfield Avenue to New Park Avenue.
- Newfield Avenue, which runs north/south on the east side of the busway/rail tracks, and intersects with Flatbush Avenue on the northeast corner of the planned NHHS station.
- Access roads to I-84 northbound and from I-84 southbound connect to the north side of Flatbush Avenue east of the busway/rail tracks.



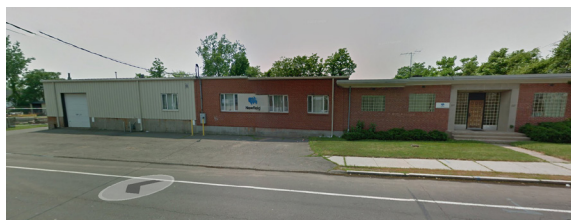
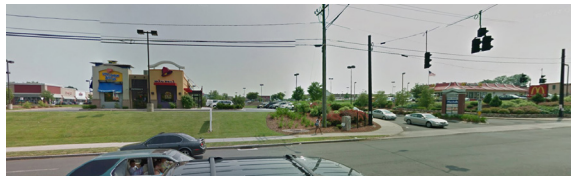
The aerial photograph above shows Flatbush Avenue Station (yellow star), the quarter mile radius around the station (yellow circle), and the Hartford/West Hartford boundary line (red dashed line) with key land uses noted.



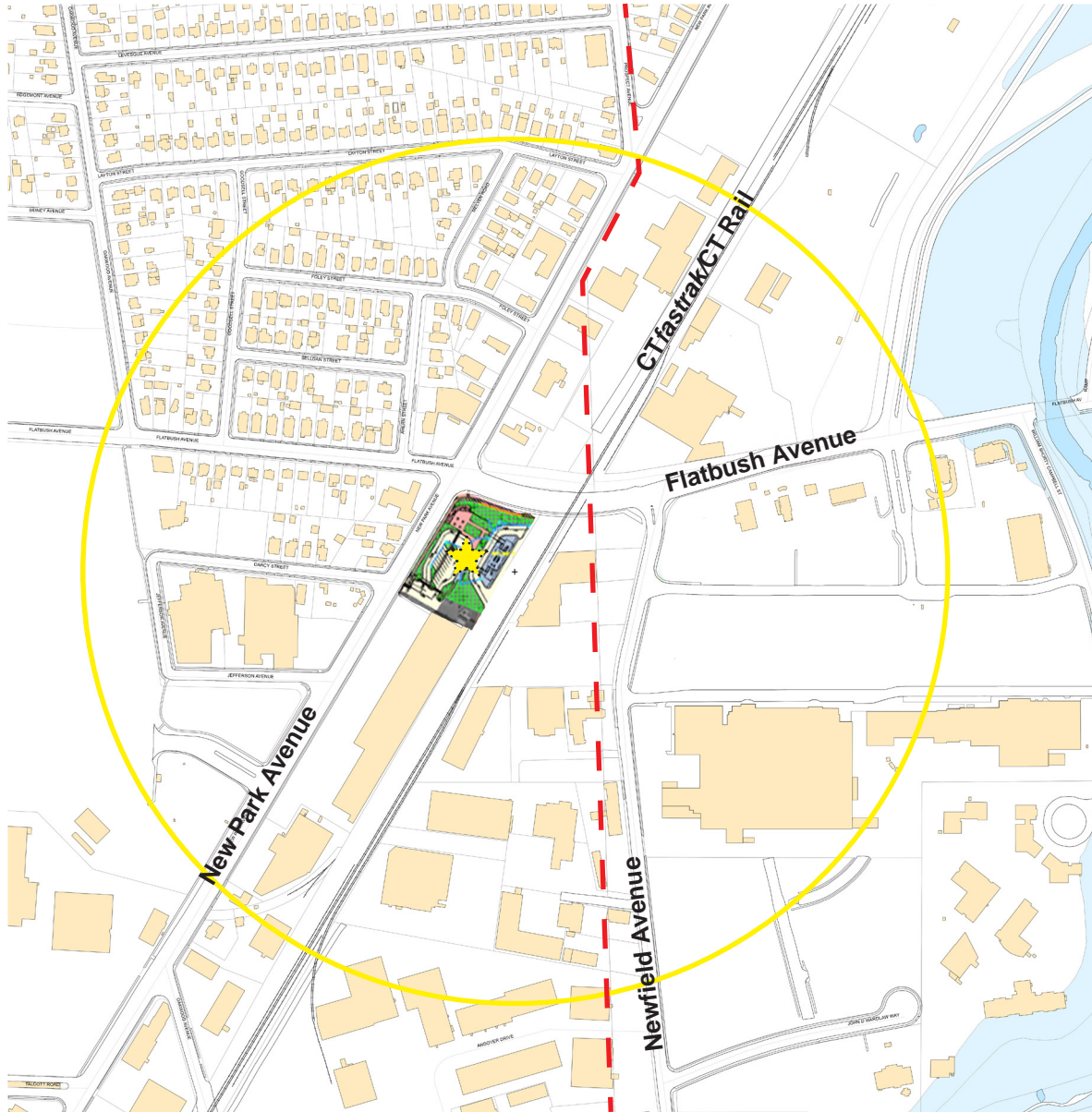
## Land Use

The land use within the Study Area includes mostly retail and auto-oriented uses along New Park and Flatbush Avenues, including several “big box” stores such as Home Depot and BJ’s Wholesale Club on New Park Avenue, along with a Raymour & Flanigan furniture store, Dunkin Donuts, Shell Service Station and a vacant office building. North of Flatbush Avenue and east of the busway, large parcels house industrial facilities (one active, one vacant). South of Flatbush Avenue and east of the busway is the Charter Oak Marketplace with Walmart, several other discount retail stores, a number of fast food restaurants. The west side of Newfield Avenue includes the Pentecostal Tabernacle Church, and a number of industrial buildings/parcels (some of which are vacant). The east side of Newfield Avenue includes the Charter Oak Shopping Center and, to the south, a large vacant parcel (9.96 acres) owned by the Hartford Housing Authority that was cleared as part of the Charter Oak project.

*At right, from top: Flatbush Avenue entrance into Charter Oak Marketplace, industrial parcels on the north side of Flatbush Avenue; Pentecostal Tabernacle Church, Newfield Construction building and entrance drive into vacant Housing Authority Parcel, all on Newfield Avenue.*



*Above, from top: Dunkin Donuts with drive-thru, auto parts store, vacant building and entrance to Home Depot and BJ’s Wholesale Club, all on New Park Avenue.*



## Development Constraints

Development opportunities within the Study Area are constrained by several factors (see Constraints Map at left):

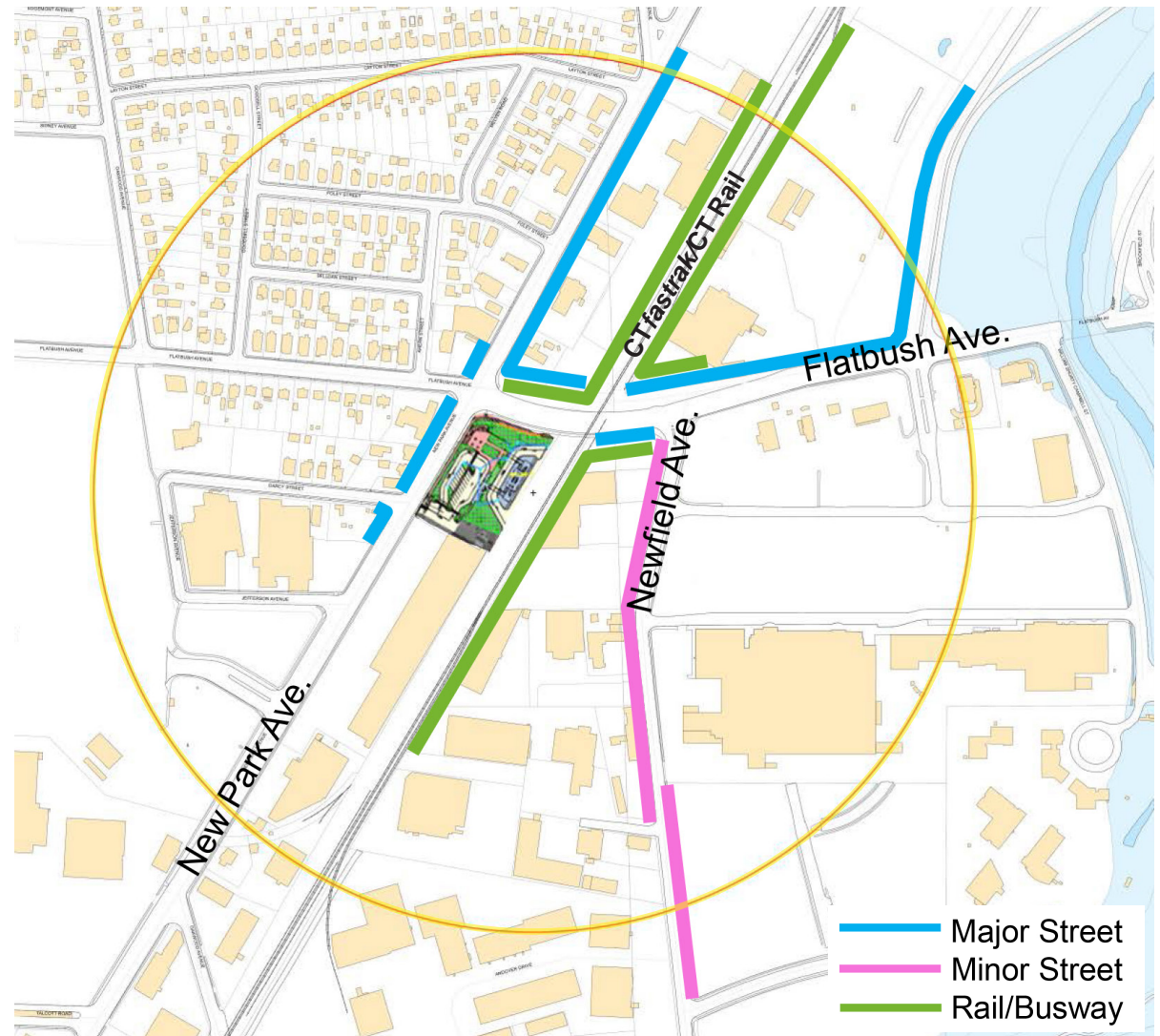
- Parcels are irregularly shaped and in many cases small; consolidating parcels requires working with multiple owners.
- The rail tracks bisect the Study Area.
- Many parcels lie within both municipalities, with zoning (and sometimes ownership) inconsistent across municipal boundaries

*Constraints Map: The map at left shows the Flatbush Avenue Station (yellow star); the quarter mile radius around the station (red circle); the irregular parcelization, including parcels crossing the Hartford/West Hartford boundary line (red dashed line); and the CTfastrak right of way bisecting the Project Area.*



## Parcel Access and Visibility

Many of the potential TOD parcels have good street frontage, providing access to future development as well as good visibility. The figure at right illustrates frontage on, and visibility from, roadways and from CTfastrak.



Parcel access and visibility.



	West Hartford		Hartford		
	Business - General	Industrial - General	Industrial-2	Business-3	Commercial-1
<b>Dimensional Regulations</b>					
FAR (Maximum Floor Area Ratio)	1.25	.5 (1.0 for mixed-use)	NA	2.0	NA
Height	Max: 45'/4 floors	Max: 45'/4 floors; 55' for mixed use with ground floor retail/ commercial	Min: 3 floors	Min: 3 floors	Min: 3 floors
Maximum Site Coverage	NA	50%	62.5%	62.5%	65%
<b>Use Regulations</b>					
Multi-family housing	P	P	I	SP	SP
Personal /Professional Service	P	P	P	P	P
Live /Work			C	C	C
Professional Office	P	P	P	P	P
Medical Clinic			P	P	P
Retail	P	P	I	P	I
Restaurant	P	P	P	C	C
Outdoor Storage		P	I	I	C
Auto (sales, service, wash)	P	P	C	SP	C
Wholesale	P	P	P		P
Manufacturing	P	P	P	P*	P*

*Existing Zoning: Dimensional and Use Regulations:*

*P - Permitted*

*P\* - Certain Manufacturing Uses Permitted*

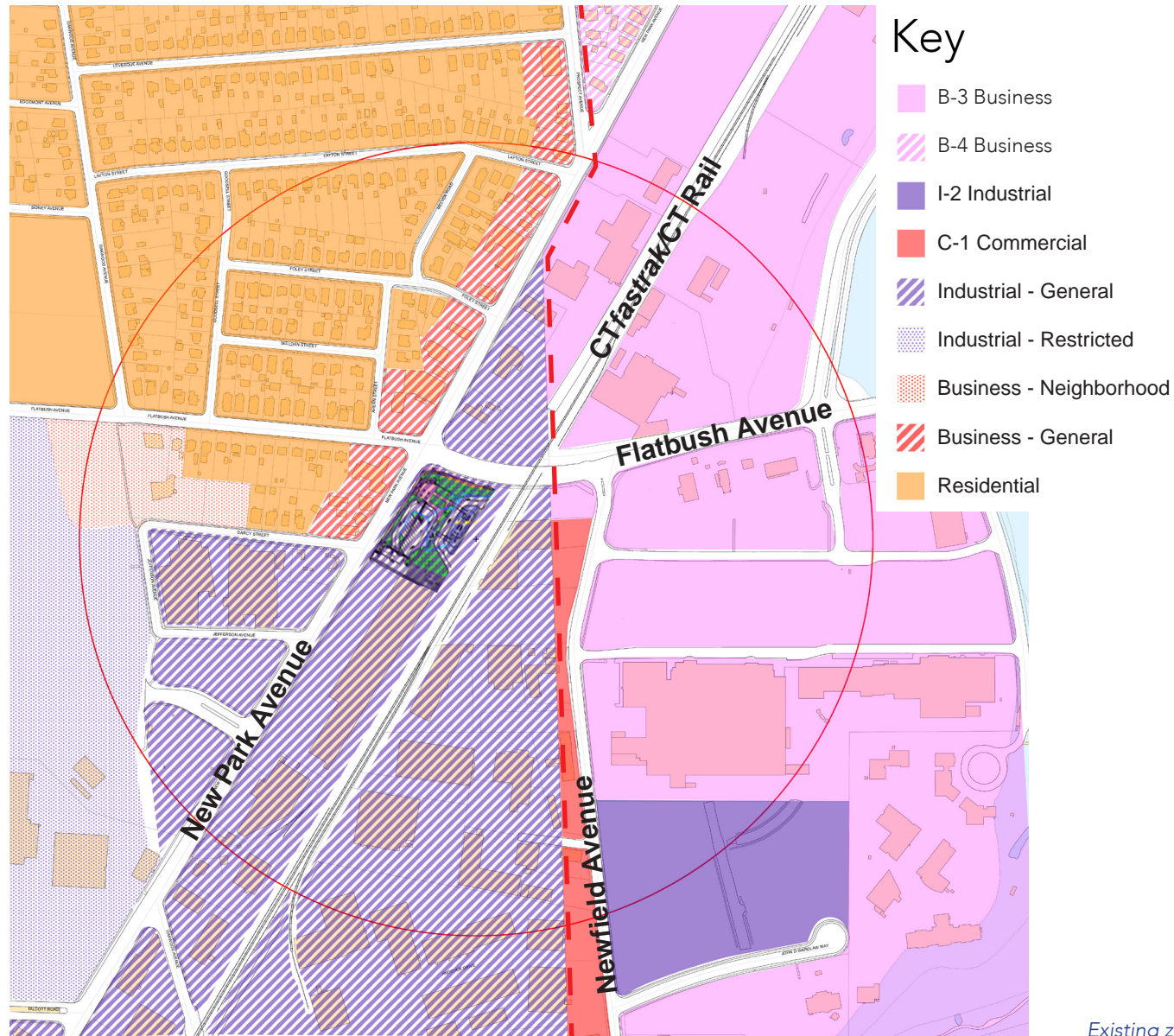
*C - Permitted with conditions*

*SP - Special Permit required*

*I - Permitted in Industrial Reuse Overlay Zone*

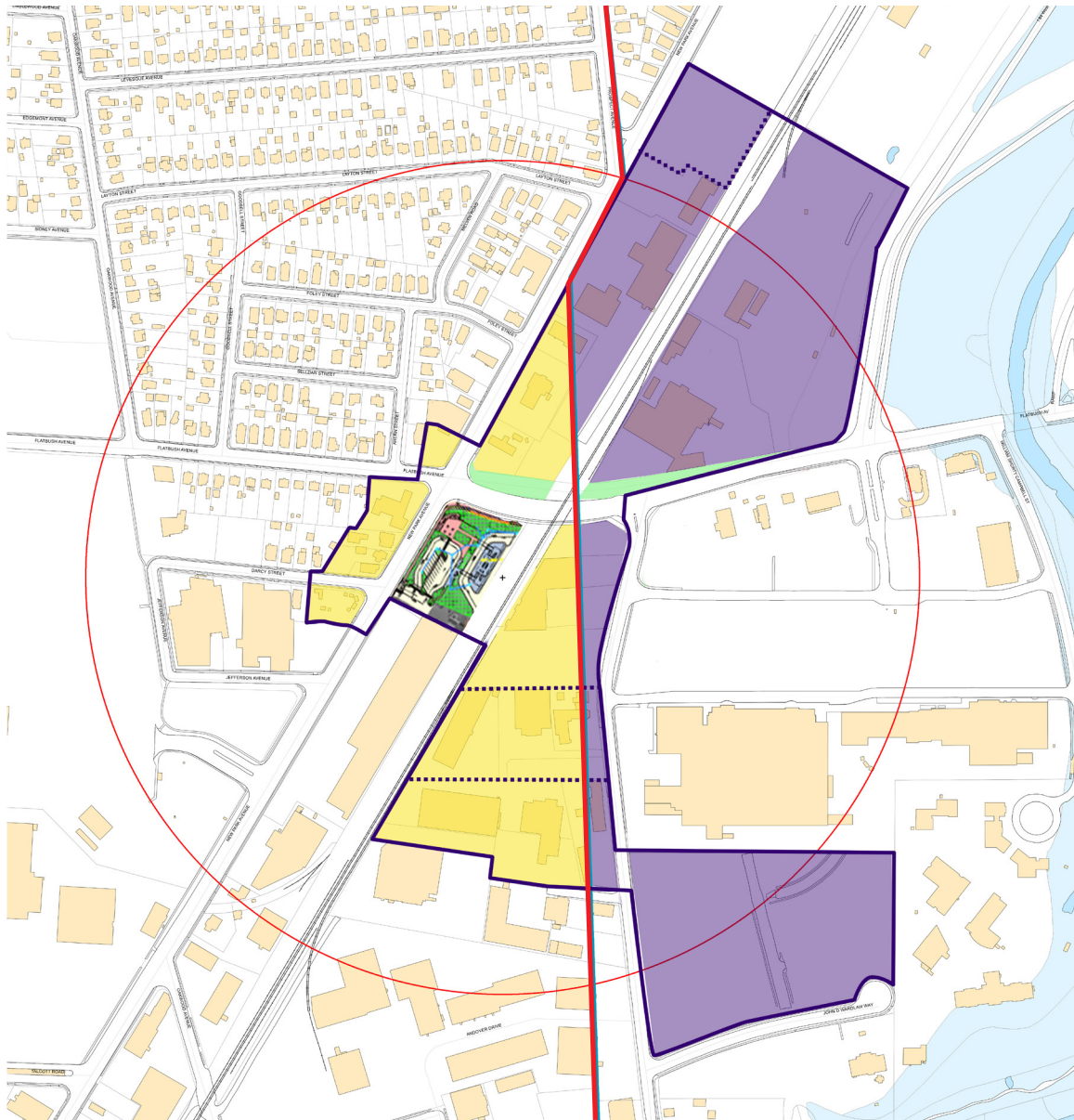
## Existing Zoning

The Study Area parcels fall within three general zoning categories, although the allowable uses, densities and dimensional requirements vary between Hartford and West Hartford (see table above). The location of these zones is shown on the map on the following page.



Existing zoning districts.

## 4. DEVELOPMENT CONCEPT



### Study Boundaries

Following visits to the site, an analysis of existing conditions, and discussions with representatives from both Hartford and West Hartford, a series of parcels were selected for further study. The parcels identified for inclusion in the TOD concept plan (outlined/highlighted on the figure at left) were selected based on:

- Proximity to the station
- Existing use - emphasis was placed on parcels that were currently vacant and/or housed uses that were inconsistent with a mixed-use TOD district (particularly auto-oriented uses and industrial uses with low employment density)
- Size and configuration of parcels: ability to efficiently accommodate desired uses, or to be consolidated with adjacent parcels
- Visibility from major roadways (and potentially CTfastrak and future CTrail passengers).

*Note: Parcels were identified for study purposes only; no actual development is being proposed.*

*Parcels selected for further study are shown at left (parcels in Hartford are highlighted in purple, parcels in West Hartford are highlighted in yellow).*



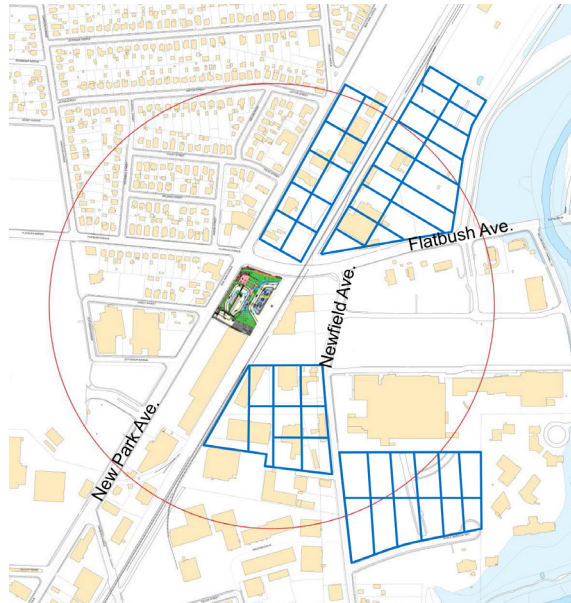
## Potential Land Uses & Densities

The two municipalities agreed that ideally new TOD would include a mix of housing, retail and office space, with a concentration on housing (roughly, 72.5% residential, 2.5% retail and 25% office). Office uses were envisioned as three to five story buildings; close to the station, and on major roadways. The buildings adjacent to the station include ground floor retail space. Residential development was envisioned as three to five story double-loaded corridor buildings, with some townhouse development. Retail uses are located where visible from major roadways to attract patrons.

## Potential Infrastructure Improvements

As a first step, a plan of conceptual infrastructure/ circulation improvements was prepared to create a framework for development concepts. New and extended streets and pedestrian routes break up the large parcels or development zones into more traditional block sizes (approximately 200 feet by 125 feet to accommodate either residential, retail office or hotel use, or some combination of these uses).

- Create a framework of streets and blocks adaptable to a wide range of uses that can be determined in the future through subsequent planning

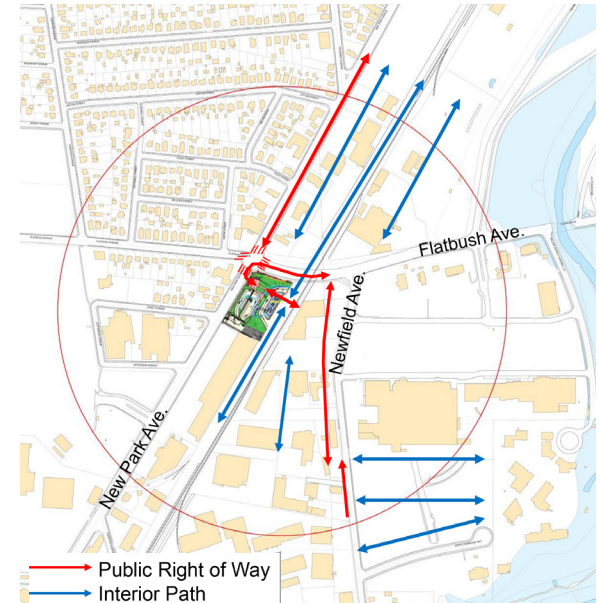


*Conceptual street grid with typical block sizes.*

- Provide for future block sizes adaptable to a variety of different building types that are efficient
- Provide a framework of streets and intersections conducive to pedestrians and redevelopment

Although the grid as shown can be modified, it provides a framework for future development. Three new north/south streets are shown:

- One parallel to New Park Avenue, between New Park Avenue and the CT**fastrak** Busway, north of Flatbush Avenue. This street was relocated to the back of the parcels, adjacent to the



*Conceptual framework of pedestrian and bicycle paths.*

CT**fastrak** Busway, during development of the conceptual development plan,

- One parallel to New Park Avenue, east of the CT**fastrak** Busway, north of and connecting to Flatbush Avenue
- One parallel to Newfield Avenue, between the CT**fastrak** Busway and New field Avenue, south of Flatbush Avenue, connecting to the NHHS Station

In addition, a number of smaller cross streets also are introduced. In combination, these new streets provide



*The yellow arrows indicate the potential for pedestrian/bicycle connections adjacent to the CTfastrak line, continuing under the Flatbush Avenue viaduct.*

good pedestrian, bicycle and vehicular circulation and access to all of the parcels, as well as links to the two stations. As shown in the photo above, pedestrian paths are shown crossing under the Flatbush Avenue viaduct to bring passengers directly to the stations.

## Conceptual Development Plan

The Conceptual Development Plan illustrates potential building uses and footprints that could be accommodated, and a potential organization of buildings to support the following organizing principles:

- All development sites have direct and attractive pedestrian connections to the CTfastrak station.
- New buildings create attractive street frontages, with parking located in back or in garages.

The development program includes:

- Residential buildings, primarily double-loaded corridor apartment buildings, with townhouses on the small infill parcels west of New Park Avenue.
- Office buildings designed to accommodate ground floor retail/restaurant use.

Although individual elements of the conceptual plan as shown are not consistent with the City of Hartford's proposed new zoning and land use, the elements could potentially be incorporated as part of an overall TOD development. The new north/south road, east of the east of the CTfastrak Busway and extending north from Flatbush Avenue, is consistent with the Parkville Municipal Development Plan goal of creating a connector road between Flatbush and Bartholomew Avenues.

## East of the CTfastrak Busway

On the southwest corner of Newfield and Flatbush Avenues, the surface parking lot for the planned NHHS (CTrail) station is incorporated into a garage that will serve both the station and potential office development. The development shown includes two office buildings, with a garage at the southern end of the parcel. The southern office building is shown with a small triangular plaza facing the station. Ground

floor commercial space in the building could include a cafe with outdoor tables on the plaza. This transit plaza helps to create a pleasant, active environment around the station with good sight lines between the station, the garage, potential residential development to the south, and the office buildings, all helping to improve security. The garage stair and elevator open onto the plaza.

Circulation on the site is via a one-way loop road from Newfield Avenue, with bus, taxi and private auto pick-up/drop-off, as well as short-term parking, for the station. The loop continues back to Newfield Avenue on the southern edge of the parcel. The loop road is two-way for a short-distance at the southern end to allow vehicles to access the parking garage.

Parcels south of the station site are laid out to accommodate residential development. The parcels could accommodate either double-loaded corridor multi-family housing and /or townhouse development. The central north-south road through the center of the parcels would bring pedestrians directly to the CTrail station and across the pedestrian bridge to the CTfastrak Flatbush Avenue Station.

North of Flatbush Avenue and east of the CTfastrak Busway, a large new triangular park on the north side of Flatbush Avenue could serve new residential development both east and west of the busway, and

creates an attractive entry into this residential development. The remainder of the site is shown with residential development. The residential development is laid out to create an attractive two-sided pedestrian-friendly street that connects south through the park to the walkway under the Flatbush Avenue viaduct; the street could extend north to support additional development and eventually connect to Parkville.

Another option would be to develop the triangular parcel between the I-84 off ramp and Flatbush Avenue as commercial space to take advantage of the high visibility and large traffic volumes.

### West of the CTfastrak Busway

North of Flatbush Avenue, and east of New Park Avenue, the corner parcel is shown with two office buildings built over a parking garage and defining a plaza facing New Park Avenue. Ground floor retail and restaurant space could spill out into the plaza.

North of this commercial development, the concept plan includes residential buildings. Parking for these buildings is shown as surface parking behind the buildings, and along the new north-south street adjacent to the busway. Pedestrians on this street could continue under Flatbush Avenue via the new pedestrian path described previously. Circulation

*Conceptual Development Plan*





through this area is provided via the new north-south street, and two cross streets - one at Foley Street and one at the existing traffic signal at Layton Street. If possible, a new signal could be introduced at Foley Street.

Parcels on the west side of Flatbush Avenue are shown with infill townhouse development. The three story buildings have parking in the rear.



*The concept plan provides direct, safe and convenient pedestrian access from all new development to both the CTfastrak station and the future CTrail station, as shown by the arrows at right.*



## Precedent Images

In addition to the images of Station Landing, Maxwell Green and Ashmont Station on pages 2 and 3, the images on the next page provide examples of the type and scale of mixed-use and residential development described for the Conceptual Plan.



*Above, from top: Mixed-use development in Lexington, MA and West Hartford, CT. At right, from top: residential development in Arlington, MA; Cambridge, MA and West Hartford, CT.*





At left, from top: Plazas adjacent to mixed-use development, activating the sidewalk in Boston, MA; Chapel Hill, NC and Storrs, CT. Above: Attractively screened parking garage flanking an open space in Boston, MA.



## 4. IMPLEMENTATION

### Phasing & Development Timeframe

The build-out illustrated is very conceptual. It is intended to provide each municipality with an understanding of potential future development that could be accommodated within the Study Area, and the infrastructure improvements to support that development. The scale of development is ambitious and is intended as a 20 to 30 year vision.

Potential first phases could include the first office building on the southwest corner of Flatbush and Newfield Avenues, housing on the large parcel east of Newfield Avenue which is currently vacant, or development north of Flatbush Avenue and east of the busway, where the property owner has already advertised the availability of the land.

### Joint Planning for Transit Oriented Development

As mentioned above, the build-out illustrated is very conceptual, and was created to provide a starting point for Hartford/West Hartford discussions on the future of the Study Area.

At the January 14, 2015 meeting with planning and zoning commissioners, members of both the Hartford and West Hartford commissions expressed an interest in working together on planning for the potential development of the CT**fastrak** Flatbush Station Area.

Several of the parcels within a ¼ mile of the Flatbush Avenue Station straddle the municipal boundary between the Town of West Hartford and the City of Hartford. Commissioners from both municipalities discussed the possibility of forming a joint commission with representatives of both communities that would form a coordinated voice for planning and decision making for transit-oriented development. This group could jointly respond and participate as potential new plans and zoning for the area are developed and as potential development proposals come forth. The Capitol Region Council of Governments volunteered to research current best practices for this type of coordination and identify state legislation that pertains to establishing a joint municipal commission.

There are a number of Connecticut statutes and public acts that address the desires of two or more communities to work on planning, policy making and development in a cooperative manner. Connecticut General Statutes Section 7-148cc establishes that two or more municipalities are authorized to jointly perform any function that each municipality may perform separately.<sup>1</sup> Other more specific topics covered in legislation allowing joint municipal action are economic development, purchasing, revenue sharing, bonding and development projects and police assistance.<sup>2</sup>

Across the country, municipalities have established similar arrangements to allow for coordinated plan-

ning across their geographic boundaries. Many of these joint arrangements are between cities or towns and their corresponding counties, although some do exist for the purposes of planning between two towns.

Should the City of Hartford and Town of West Hartford wish to pursue joint planning and zoning, CRCOG stands prepared to assist with further research or assistance as requested.

<sup>1</sup> CGS Section 7-148cc - Joint performance of municipal functions

*This statute authorizes two or more municipalities to "jointly perform any function that each municipality may perform separately". Each municipality is required to approve the agreement for joint action in the same manner as provided for the approval of an ordinance. The terms of each agreement shall establish a process for withdrawal from such agreement and shall require that the agreement be reviewed at least once every five years by the body that approved the agreement to assess the effectiveness of such agreement in enhancing the performance of the function that is the subject of the agreement.*

<sup>2</sup> Refer to the following list of legislation: PA 09-231 An Act Concerning Regionalism, CGS Section 7-136n – Joint Issuance of Bonds by Two or More Municipalities, CGS Section 7-137 – Regional Economic Development Commissions, CGS Section 7-148bb – Agreement Between Municipalities to Share Revenue Received for Payment of Property Taxes, CGS Section 7-339a – 7-3391 – Inter-local Agreements.

## Potential Zoning Changes

Existing zoning regulations/ordinances will have to be modified to accommodate the development described and illustrated in the Development Concept or to better promote TOD in general. The Sustainable Land Use Code Project Draft Model Regulations: Mixed-Use Transit Oriented Development Districts developed by Clarion for the Capitol Region Council of Governments provides a good basis for revising the existing zoning regulations.

A public process will need to be initiated to provide an opportunity for public feedback to any proposed modification of the existing zoning and redevelopment of the area.

The Development Concept assumes that the zoning within the TOD Study Area will be modified to support TOD and that the zoning will be consistent in Hartford and West Hartford. Specifically, three key changes are recommended:

- Allowing a mix of multi-family residential, office and retail use.
- Prohibiting auto-oriented uses and outdoor storage, or allowing them by Special Permit, only.

- Reducing parking requirements to one space per residential unit and three spaces per 1000 square feet of office or retail use.

	West Hartford (using CRCOG's recommended 25% reduction)	Hartford (using the City's new 50% reduction for the TOD Overlay District: Min/Max)	Approximate Parking Ratios Shown in Plan
Retail (spaces/1000 sf)	5	.875/2.5	3
Office (spaces/1000 sf)	3	.5/2	3
Residential (spaces/unit)	1.13	.75/1.15	1

*Parking Requirements: The West Hartford parking numbers above represent the minimum parking requirements that would result from implementing the recommendation for a 25% reduction of existing non-TOD requirements from "The Sustainable Land Use Code Project Draft Model Regulations: Mixed-Use Transit Oriented Development Districts" developed by Clarion for the Capitol Region Council of Governments. The Hartford Parking numbers represent a 50% reduction over the non-TOD minimum and maximum requirements, as specified in the Hartford Transit-Oriented Development Overlay District regulations.*

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