

# JM GOLDSON

## MEMORANDUM

12/23/24

To: Michael Wang, AIA, LEED AP BD+C, Principal, Form + Place

From: Jenn Goldson, AICP, Founder & Managing Director  
Austin Smith, Community Planner

RE: Reading Eastern Gateway Project – Summary of the 12/11/24 Community Forum

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The Town of Reading hosted an in-person public forum on December 11, 2024, to gather community input and shape a shared vision for the future of the Eastern Gateway District. Organized by the Reading Planning Division in partnership with consultants from Form + Place and JM Goldson, the event featured an open-house format designed to maximize engagement. The evening began with a presentation outlining the project's goals and context, followed by interactive stations where participants shared ideas through hands-on activities and discussion boards. The forum concluded with an open comment period, allowing attendees to elaborate on their visions, priorities, and concerns. Below is a summary of the key themes and perspectives expressed during the forum. See the appendix for a transcription of public comments.

## KEY THEMES

**1. Community Identity and Mixed-Use Development:** Participants strongly supported transforming the Eastern Gateway into a vibrant, mixed-use area that feels connected to Reading's town center. Ideas included integrating shops, restaurants, and outdoor seating to create a lively destination for both residents and visitors. While most attendees favored mixed-use development, a few raised concerns about ensuring the area maintains its unique identity and does not mimic neighboring commercial districts, such as Market Street in Lynnfield. Additionally, some expressed apprehension about over-commercialization or an excess of retail, questioning how much more is truly needed.

**2. Walkability, Connectivity, and Mobility:** Enhancing pedestrian and bicycle connectivity was a high priority. Residents envisioned safe bike paths, improved sidewalks, and pedestrian crossings, including a trail or pathway linking both sides of the commuter rail tracks. However, some participants highlighted the potential challenge of accommodating pedestrians and cyclists while maintaining traffic flow at key intersections, such as Ash, Bolton, and Main Streets. A suggestion for a second commuter rail station received mixed responses, with some seeing it as a valuable anchor for the district and others questioning its feasibility and potential redundancy.

**3. Open Space and Sustainability:** Attendees highlighted the need for green spaces, such as parks and shaded gathering areas, integrated with commercial and residential uses. Suggestions ranged from programmable event spaces to casual congregation spots that can be enjoyed throughout the year. Sustainability goals included incorporating green building designs and minimizing paved surfaces. A few participants voiced concerns about prioritizing open space at the expense of commercial or revenue-generating uses, emphasizing the need to strike a balance.

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**4. Housing and Zoning:** Community feedback reflected a desire for housing that meets diverse needs, such as affordable options and "missing middle" housing, while limiting redundancy with Reading’s existing stock. Preferences leaned toward low-rise buildings (3–4 stories) with residential units above commercial spaces to maintain a human scale consistent with the town’s character. Some participants expressed reservations about adding too much housing, citing concerns about density, traffic, and impacts on local schools. Others countered that diverse housing options are critical to supporting a thriving, inclusive community.

**5. Economic Growth and Tax Base:** Participants underscored the need for economic opportunities through light industrial or makerspaces and vibrant commercial areas. There was a desire to balance residential development with initiatives to expand Reading’s tax base and attract investment. While many valued the idea of increasing the commercial tax base, a minority raised concerns about the potential impacts of industrial uses on the area’s character and the risk of underutilized commercial spaces if demand doesn’t materialize.

**6. Architectural Character and Design Guidelines:** Residents expressed a preference for architectural designs that harmonize with Reading’s small-town charm. Ideas included using natural materials and integrating contemporary elements without straying from the town’s historic context. Ensuring diverse building sizes and types was also noted to encourage a visually engaging and cohesive district. A few participants warned against overly uniform or “drop-in-a-box” designs, urging planners to incorporate creativity and avoid a “cookie-cutter” aesthetic.

**Conclusion**

The forum showcased a clear vision for the Eastern Gateway District as a dynamic, pedestrian-friendly hub that balances commerce, community spaces, and sustainable living. It also surfaced some important concerns, including managing density, traffic, and preserving the district’s unique identity. The feedback collected provides a foundation for the Town of Reading to develop plans that honor the community’s values while addressing potential challenges and fostering thoughtful, inclusive growth.

This summary reflects the diverse ideas and priorities shared by participants during the December 11 forum, underscoring Reading’s commitment to inclusive and collaborative planning.



Reading Community Development Director, Andrew MacNichol, presenting a project overview.  
Photo credit: JM Goldson.



Participants discussing their ideas and providing feedback at the open house stations.  
Photo credit: JM Goldson.



## APPENDIX: 12/11/24 OPEN HOUSE TRANSCRIPTIONS

Transcribed by JM Goldson LLC on 12/23/24

This document provides a comprehensive transcription of the Reading Eastern Gateway Open House held on December 11, 2024, facilitated by the Town of Reading and consultant team members from Form + Place and JM Goldson. It includes participant demographics, feedback gathered from interactive stations, and community insights from an open comment period. A total of 25 individuals participated, comprising 20 community members and five town staff. Not all participants completed the demographic section, so response counts vary across questions.

The transcription includes three parts:

- Part 1 Participant Demographics
- Part 2 Open House Stations
- Part 3 Community Insights from Open Comment Period.

### PART 1 PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

The demographics section summarizes key details about the participants who engaged in the Open House. This includes their connection to Reading, age distribution, length of affiliation with the town, and racial or ethnic identity.

1. What is your connection to Reading?\*
2. How old are you?
3. How long have you been affiliated with Reading?
4. What is your race or ethnicity?

\*Note: Nineteen participants responded to question 1 and eighteen responded to questions 2-4.

## PART 2 OPEN HOUSE STATIONS: TRANSCRIPTIONS OF COMMUNITY COMMENTS

The following transcriptions capture the community's input collected during the forum. These include participants' written comments on post-it notes at each station and the results of dot-sticker tallies on photos and renderings, which highlight the design elements and features participants most liked and envisioned for the Eastern Gateway site.

### STATION 1 – PLACEMAKING & STREETSCAPES

#### Placemaking: What types of “Usable Open Space” does Reading most need?



Image ID	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
Image Location	Pine Hills, Plymouth, MA	Rockville Town Center, MD	Market Street, Lynnfield, MA	Post Office Square, Boston, MA	Bryant Park, New York, NY	Beaverton TOD, Oregon	Amphitheater, Laguna Niguel, CA	Frog Pond, Boston, MA	Pine Hills, Plymouth
# of Stickers	1	4	2	6	0	1	3	2	2

**Streetscapes: What design characteristics create the most walkable, vibrant streets?**



Image ID	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Image Location	Complete Streets Guide, Springfield, MA	Church St., Burlington, VT	Linden Square, Wellesley, MA	Armory Square, Syracuse, NY	Cambridge, MA	Assembly Row, Somerville, MA	Boulder, CO
# of Stickers	0	0	2	1	3	5	0

**What is your future vision for publicly accessible/usable space?**

Space that brings people together – multi-use – multi-season – accessible
Open space with shade
Streets w/ dining – bike lanes bike path to Quannapowitt would be great
DPW = parks
More accessible public walkways & passages to increase walkability
Parks & playgrounds already in proximity; common public use space with other attraction/activity would compliment
Playground; event space-like walkable around lake
walkability
Some open space but not at expense of commercial retail/dining
Programmable event space
Limit huge parking lots
Walkability + pedestrian paths
Trails and pedestrian pathways – should not compete with center of town but complement – to Reading and to lake + Wakefield
Sidewalks in front parking in back
Limit the “sea of asphalt” as much as possible
Casual congregational areas
Event space accessible to pedestrian so can park away
Walkable and bikeable pedestrian only roads
Low-rise mixed-use w/ some residential

## STATION 2: MIXED-USE DEVELOPMENT & RESIDENTIAL DENSITY

### Mixed-Use Development: What character, scale, & intensity of development do you envision?

**MIXED-USE DEVELOPMENT**

**What character, scale & intensity of development do you envision?**

- District identity? Neighborhood feel; Village center w/ civic space; Destination mixed-use development; Industrial uses?
- Enhancing the public realm: vibrant streetscape through mixed-use with an active ground floor
- Creating a “node” that complements Main Street, the commuter rail area and surrounding residential neighborhoods
- Relating to the scale of Reading: the role of vertically-integrated mixed-use (height, bulk, block structure)

Image ID	A	B	C	D
Image Location	Winthrop Square, Cambridge, MA	Rockville Town Center, MD	Linden Square, Wellesley, MA	Market Common, Clarendon, Arlington, VA
# of Stickers	3	3	0	1

### Residential Density: What density is the “right density”?

**RESIDENTIAL DENSITY**

**Facilitating diverse housing typologies... what density is the “right” density?**

- Reading could seek to promote a diverse array of housing types; What would be the best fit and need?
- Understanding the economics of multi-family development vs. infill housing [townhouses, duplexes, etc.]
- Zoning for mixed-use development, with residential above, as a way to enliven the “public” realm
- Transitioning in scale and providing connectivity to surrounding areas
- Is this a good location for (some) affordable housing?

Image ID	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Image Location	Cypress St., Newton Center, MA	Capital Square, Providence, RI	N. Main St., Winchester, MA	Mayflower Manor, Middleboro, MA	28 Austin S.t, Newtonville, MA	Redevelopment Authority Site, Hull, MA	Trio, Newtonville, MA
# of Stickers	1	0	0	1	4	4	1

**What is your future vision for Mixed-Use and Density?**

No commercial without mix-use and open space
Dense mixed use, keep it objective to be consistent with Walkers Brook
Commercial on first floor, residential above
Max 4 stories in height
Low rise consistent w/ rest of residential identity, ex Market St
Missing middle stock of housing around edges + mixed use in the center
More middle housing that feels connected to town – how much more retail do we need? – easy walk to train and town center
No more housing
Mixed use; residential over commercial; old school downtown style; 3-4 stories
Vertical and horizontal mix of uses (illegible) generating uses with residential above
More middle housing (will help long term)
More restaurants
Let the market decide; more housing + more tax revenue
3 story with good mix of res retail
Accumulate industrial/commercial opportunities. A new kind of mixed-use district that mixes housing with job-(illegible) industries
We should keep housing to absolute minimum. We need more commercial R.E. in Reading
Mixed use w/ low rise residential above, 3 floor max affordable housing included
Housing over (illegible) more walk/bike
I like the idea of complementing Main St

**STATION 3: MOBILITY/ACCESS & SUSTAINABILITY**

**Mobility/Access: How can connectivity be enhanced and roadways improved?**

MOBILITY/ ACCESS

**How can connectivity be enhanced and roadways improved?**

- Integrating recent intersection studies along Walkers Brook Drive
- Minimizing impacts to residential neighborhoods by improving the Ash Street connection to Main Street
- Re-routing commercial / truck traffic through enhanced north-south vehicular connectivity on site
- Improving pedestrian & bicycle access to the site from Main Street, the commuter rail and existing neighborhoods

**Ash Street improvements**

**Walkers Brook Drive Corridor improvements**

**Access points & Ped / Bike connections**

**READING, MA**

Note: This was an informational board - No images were provided for the dot-sticker exercise on this board.

**What are the most important sustainability goals for site and building design?**



Image ID	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
Image Location	Stock image	Northland Masterplan, Newton, MA	Emerald Necklace, Boston, MA	Proposed Bike Trail, Portland, OR	Stock image	Stock image	Watermark Seaport, Boston, MA	Hub 50 House, Boston, MA	Stock image	Post Office Square, Boston, MA
# of Stickers	2	3	0	2	3	0	3	1	6	0

**What is your future vision for mobility, access, and sustainability?**

I love the idea of a welcoming green space that is shady and attractive
It will be huge to make this area more accessible by foot and bike
Accessible but purposeful green open space integrated w/ attractions
Bike trails
A second commuter rail station to anchor district! (would be no closer together than stations in Melrose area)
Carry street grid though site as much as possible. Create rectangular blocks
Giving pedestrians priority at street crossings
There has to be some way for people to get across Ash/Bolton/Main without adding more cars to that intersection
Trail/walkway connecting both sides of tracks; bus stop; better sidewalks
Bike paths and connectivity
Improve Ash street for improved walkability
Ability to connect districts over the tracks
Safe bike routes through + connect to Home Dept Side
On site energy generation
McD
PDA #3 pedestrian + bike access to T station, especially if residential
Incorporate rotary/dedicated merge @ Ash

## STATION 4: SITE DESIGN & BUILDING DESIGN

### How do zoning & design guidelines ensure compatible development patterns?



Image ID	A	B	C	D	E
Image Location	French Square Study, Winthrop, MA	Town Center Study, Wayland, MA	Stapleton/ Northfield, Denver, CO	Assembly Row, Somerville, MA	Market Common, Clarendon, Arlington, VA
# of Stickers	2	2	1	6	0

### How architectural character of buildings promotes contextual development?



Image ID	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Image Location	Dascomb Rd. Study, Andover, MA	Belmar TOD, CO			Trio, Newtonville, MA	2019 Study, Reading, MA	Stapleton/ Northfield, Denver, CO	Capital Square, Providence, RI
# of Stickers	3	2	0	0	2	1	0	4

**What is your future vision for design guidelines and zoning?**

I would like to see more contemporary design which is also not totally out of place with surrounding neighborhoods
I like older style downtown buildings. See some of the older buildings in Melrose 2/3 over bus.
Map height closest to highway
Good street activation
Parking within a garage/limited reliance on street parking
Diversity of building sizes and typologies. Townhouses are a good scale
High ground floor buildings for light manufacturing/manufacturing spaces
Walkable streets w/ street access to shops + dining
Future solar panel installation on roofs
Increase tax base/revenue
Preserve habitat
Pedestrian only walkways
Minimize ped-car interaction
Open space mixed in (not large parking lots as focus)
Arch aligned w/ town feel/downtown
Not look like all these drop-in-a-box housing; a little character would be nice; use natural materials in public spaces
Keep or maximize green space

**Station 5**

**District Vision Images**

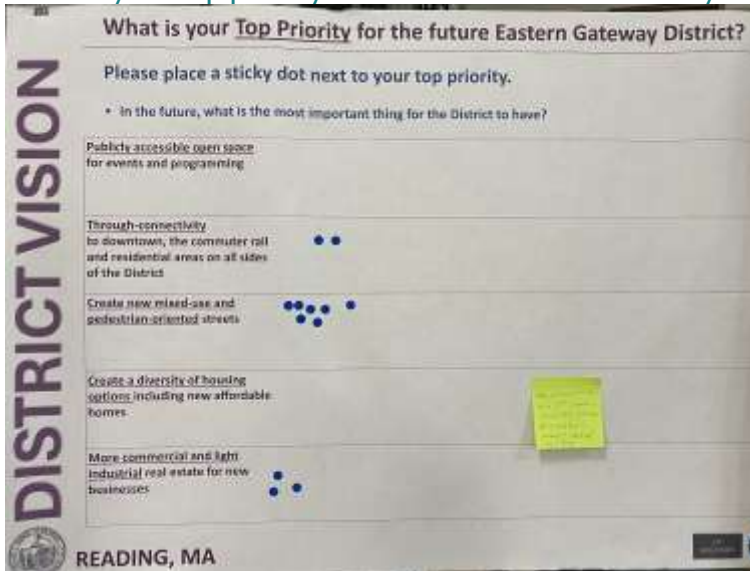


Image ID	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
Image Location	Northland, Newton, MA	Redevelopment Authority Site, Hull, MA	Northland, Newton, MA	Winthrop, MA	2019 Study, Reading, MA		Assembly Row, Somerville, MA	Wayland, MA	Assembly Row, Somerville, MA
# of Stickers	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	2	0

### What is your long-term vision for the Eastern Gateway District?

DPW + park only; RMLD – shops/dining
Priority is mixed use/pedestrian streets but that won't work without connectivity
I would like the Eastern Gateway District to feel like it's a part of the town. It's so close to Reading center but feels like its own ugly island. Rail trail along the tracks walking + biking?
Draws in people from neighboring towns while connecting to main district
Somewhere you can spend a few hours on a sunny afternoon
Shopping, food/drink, outdoor seating
More restaurants + "third" place that doesn't require you to spend money
Mixed use area, avoid redundancy of attractions in neighboring towns
Make eastern gateway, both sides of tracks, seamless integration for mixed-use
Whatever is done have goal of the least impact on taxpayers
Look like some place to stop and investigate rather than drive through. Coffee shops, restaurants, to support pedestrians
Create opportunities for: entrepreneurs/small business, weekend pop-up markets, live workspace, entertainment
Mix use and green space
Mixed-use production district. Residential above/intermixed with high bay light industrial/commercial space. Not market street 2.0
Mixed use, place to meet friends from neighboring towns, multi time-of-day uses

### What is your top priority for the future Eastern Gateway District?



Publicly Accessible Open Space	Through-connectivity	Create new mixed-use and pedestrian-oriented streets	Create a diversity of affordable housing options	More commercial & light-industrial real estate
0	2	7	0	3

### **PART 3 COMMUNITY INSIGHTS FROM OPEN COMMENT PERIOD**

The following section includes notes taken by the consultant team during the open comment period at the end of the forum. These verbal comments reflect additional insights and elaborations shared by community members, offering a deeper understanding of their visions and priorities for the Eastern Gateway District.

#### **Land Use and Development Vision**

- Indoor market; third place
- Traditional Main St.
  - Architectural details
  - Varied heights
  - Limit at 4 stories?
- What does a modern mixed-use with light industrial look like?
  - Makerspaces
- Less focus on residential; Increase commercial tax base
- Multi-family good but preference to incentivize mixed-use
- Life science could be a good anchor

#### **Design and Architectural Preferences**

- Downtown Melrose is a good example – three-story buildings with commercial below residential
- Varied scale would be a positive – not more than four stories
- Natural materials – wood, stone, age well
- Use natural materials that complement the town

#### **Mobility and Connectivity**

- Pedestrian crossings over rail
- Make pedestrian connections to downtown
- Walkability and accommodation of bikes are important
- Bike paths
- Walkable, green space, shade
- Connectivity

#### **Public Spaces and Community Identity**

- Third space – free hangout space
- Create a “third space” – a place to hang out that is safe, where you don’t have to buy something
- Feel like “part of town”
- Incorporate usable open space for events; Add pedestrian crossings over commuter rail

#### **Sustainability and Environmental Concerns**

- Limit asphalt
- Limit “sea” of asphalt
- Passive House

#### **Housing and Economic Considerations**

- Housing for downsizing adults
- What can market support now?
- Seek increased tax base

#### **Lifestyle and Amenities**

- Nightlife



- Add uses that would create a nightlife – more 24/7

## MacNichol, Andrew

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**From:** Northrop Jones <jonesnorthrop@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Thursday, January 2, 2025 1:45 PM  
**To:** MacNichol, Andrew; Jack Sullivan  
**Cc:** Knightly, Olivia  
**Subject:** Re: Harold Avenue Extension - Revised Proof Plan

Andrew,

Per our conversation today can you please continue the hearing with CPDC to the March meeting, as we will be in land court in February. Thank you again.

Regards,

Eric

This email is intended only for the use of the individual(s) to whom it is addressed. This email may contain confidential information and any review or distribution by others is prohibited. If you have received this email in error, please notify the sender immediately by replying to the message and deleting it from your computer.

On Wed, Dec 4, 2024 at 11:25 AM MacNichol, Andrew <[amacnichol@readingma.gov](mailto:amacnichol@readingma.gov)> wrote:

Hi Eric,

Hope the holiday season is going well. Can you please confirm that the request to continue the public hearing for 0 Harold Ave from December 9<sup>th</sup> to Monday January 13<sup>th</sup>, 2025?

Thanks,

Andrew

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**From:** Jack Sullivan <[jacksull53@comcast.net](mailto:jacksull53@comcast.net)>  
**Sent:** Monday, May 6, 2024 4:55 PM  
**To:** MacNichol, Andrew <[amacnichol@ci.reading.ma.us](mailto:amacnichol@ci.reading.ma.us)>; Northrop Jones <[jonesnorthrop@gmail.com](mailto:jonesnorthrop@gmail.com)>  
**Cc:** Chris Alphen <[chris@bbhslaw.net](mailto:chris@bbhslaw.net)>; Len Joseph <[joseph@simpletitle.us](mailto:joseph@simpletitle.us)>; John Sutherland <[jes@brickleysears.com](mailto:jes@brickleysears.com)>  
**Subject:** RE: Harold Avenue Extension - Revised Proof Plan

CAUTION: This email originated from outside your organization. Exercise caution when opening attachments or clicking links, especially from unknown senders.

Andrew,

**BRIAN D. McGRAIL**

**ATTORNEY AT LAW**

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January 7, 2025

John Weston, Chair  
Community Planning & Development Commission  
Town of Reading  
Town Hall, 16 Lowell Street  
Reading, MA 01867

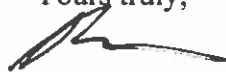
RE: Park Realty Trust  
Special Permit and Site Plan Review for Mixed Use  
346-348 Main Street

Dear Chair Weston:

On behalf of my client, Park Realty Trust, I respectfully request that you continue this case until your first regularly scheduled meeting in February of 2025 in that we are still working on addressing comments and requests made at your last meeting regarding this matter.

Thank you in advance for your anticipated cooperation.

Yours truly,



Brian D. McGrail, Esquire