



MEMORANDUM

TO: Lee Hartmann, Director of Planning and Development

FROM: Tyler Maren, AICP, Senior Planner
Judi Barrett, Principal-in-Charge

RE: Initial Analysis: Potential District Compliance, MBTA Communities Law

DATE: July 10, 2023
(Revised July 17, 2023)

In 2021, the Massachusetts legislature enacted Section 3A of the Zoning Act, requiring that municipalities in the MBTA service area adopt zoning to allow multifamily residential development by right (i.e., without the need for a discretionary permit). The MBTA service area consists of 175 cities and towns, excluding Boston. Plymouth is subject to the new law because it is adjacent to Kingston, a community with an MBTA Commuter Rail station. The Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC) issued final “Compliance Guidelines for Multi-family Zoning Districts under Section 3A of the Zoning Act” (Section 3A Guidelines) in October 2022. Under these guidelines, communities have until December 31, 2024, to certify to EOHLC that they have adopted a conforming zoning district.

Shortly after EOHLC issued the Section 3A Guidelines, the Massachusetts Housing Partnership (MHP) announced that it had established a “3A-TA” grant program to help communities work toward compliance. The Town of Plymouth applied for a 3A-TA grant in March 2023, and Barrett Planning Group was retained to provide support to the Town to assess potential locations for a district that will comply with MBTA Communities requirements.

Technical Review: Scenario Modeling

Plymouth's MBTA Communities district requirements include all of the following parameters:

- Minimum Area: 50 acres

Plymouth's MBTA Communities district must be at least 50 acres in size, but this acreage may be spread out between multiple non-contiguous sites, as long as two main criteria are met:

- At least half of the total district area must be contiguous.
- All non-contiguous portions of the district must be at least 5 acres in size.

- Minimum Area within station radius ("Station Area"): 0%

No part of Plymouth is located within one half-mile of an MBTA transit station, so station area requirements do not comply, meaning the Town is free to choose any location that meets its local planning needs.

- Minimum district unit yield ("Unit Yield"): 1,506

Plymouth's MBTA Communities district must allow for the development of 2,807 units of multifamily housing by right, a number equal to 15 percent of the community's current number of housing units.. This does not necessarily mean 2,807 *new* units, or that the units must be constructed. As long as the zoning could result in the required number of units, Plymouth will be in compliance.

- Minimum Gross Unit Density: 15 units/acre

To determine whether a proposed district meets the minimum density of 15 units per acre, the compliance model uses a formula that is more complicated than simply dividing the number of units by the total district area. Instead, we calculate the site's "gross density" by removing designated wetland areas from the district area before calculating density, thereby avoiding penalizing communities for including wetlands in a district. The densities reported in this document are derived from this formula.

About the Model

The analysis in this document is based on an official compliance model that aims to estimate whether a proposed district is compliant with MBTA Communities guidelines. Communities must demonstrate compliance by inputting information about a district into the model, including total acreage, required parking, maximum lot coverage, a list of parcels included in the district, and more. By adjusting these inputs, we can arrive at a district location and set of regulations that will comply with the MBTA Communities law. Note that compliance is subject to manual review and favorable results from the compliance model do not guarantee that there are no other issues with the district.

Staff asked us to consider several sites across Plymouth with multifamily development potential, many of which have already seen successful multifamily projects completed. The description for these sites includes a table summarizing how each might fit into a compliant MBTA Communities district. Maps 1 through 7 in Attachment A show each of the potential sites, and Map 8 zooms out to the entire Town to place all the sites in the context .



SUMMARY OF POTENTIAL DISTRICT LOCATIONS

Rather than craft detailed scenarios for a few potential district locations, we tested basic parameters for seven different sites to determine a potential range of unit yields and residential densities for each. With a basic summary for each site, the Town can work with residents to make informed decisions about which areas we should focus on in subsequent rounds of modeling.

Our recommendation is to select only a handful of these sites. If the district is too large, the Town may need to zone for more than the required 2,807 multifamily units to maintain the required minimum density of 15 units per acre. Density calculations in the model are site-dependent, but as rule of thumb, a district with a total area of up to around 150 acres should be able to accommodate Plymouth's required 2,807 units without much risk of falling below the minimum density. The "Summary Table" below shows the potential unit yields of each site added together.

Summary Table: All Modeled Scenarios			
Site Name/Number	Min. Modeled Units	Max. Modeled Units	Size (acres)
1: Cordage Park	675	872	50.9
2: TL Edwards Site	597	896	42.0
3: Colony Place: Sawyer's Reach & The Walk	804	1,205	63.1
4: Commerce Way	275	412	19.0
5: The Oasis at Plymouth	320	733	31.6
6: The Pinehills	1,134	1,767	53.8
7: Redbrook Apartments	288	944	24.1
<i>All scenarios total:</i>	4,093	6,829	284.5

Finally, the unit yields for all of these sites could be increased if necessary, but we wanted to begin by providing an overview of what is possible in each location. Once the Town narrows its selection, we will explore regulatory options in greater detail.



Table 1: Cordage Park	
Model Results	
Area (acres)	50.9
Gross Density Range (units/acre)	13.8 - 17.9
Unit Yield Range	675 - 872
Basic Dimensional Assumptions*	
Min. lot size (sq. ft.)	20,000
Max. building height (stories)	3
Max. lot coverage	50%
Parking spaces per unit	1.5
Max dwelling units per acre	20
<i>*Consistent between min. and max. scenarios unless otherwise noted.</i>	

The Cordage Park site has an existing Chapter 40R Smart Growth District (known as the Cordage Park Smart Growth Overlay District) that has already resulted in significant multifamily development. There is currently a district-wide unit cap of 675 (shown as the minimum yield in Table 1), but Town Staff have discussed the possibility of increasing this cap if the area was included in the Town's MBTA Communities district.

Table 2: TL Edwards Site	
Model Results	
Area (acres)	42.0
Gross Density Range (units/acre)	14.8
Unit Yield Range	597 - 896
Basic Dimensional Assumptions*	
Min. lot size (sq. ft.)	40,000
Max. building height (stories)	3
Max. lot coverage	50%
Parking spaces per unit	1.5
Additional lot area per unit (sq. ft.)	2,000-3,000
<i>*Consistent between min. and max. scenarios unless otherwise noted.</i>	

This site is zoned for industrial uses and currently houses a quarry, but the Town asked us to consider its multifamily redevelopment potential. The major limiting factor on this site is the requirement for 3,000 additional square feet of lot area per unit. Reducing that requirement to 2,000 gains about 300 additional units, and reducing it further would yield even more. The same is true for the next two scenarios, shown in Tables 3 and 4.



Table 3: Colony Place: Sawyer's Reach & The Walk	
Model Results	
Area (acres)	63.1
Gross Density Range (units/acre)	12.9
Unit Yield Range	804 – 1,205
Basic Dimensional Assumptions*	
Min. lot size (sq. ft.)	60,000
Max. building height (stories)	3
Max. lot coverage	30%
Parking spaces per unit	1.5
Additional lot area per unit (sq. ft.)	2,000 - 3,000
<i>*Consistent between min. and max. scenarios unless otherwise noted.</i>	

The Colony Place retail development is adjacent to several recent multifamily projects, including Sawyer's Reach and The Walk. More so than most other sites, these have significant potential issues the Town should be aware of when considering them for inclusion in its MBTA Communities district. The Walk is subject to a comprehensive permit (also known as a Chapter 40B project) and many other units have age restrictions limiting occupancy to adults aged 55 and older. While neither of these factors should categorically exclude a site from inclusion in a district, there may be unforeseen consequences to doing so and EOHLC has yet to release guidance on what those might be.

Like the previous sites, the area's final unit yield is largely dependent on how much additional lot area is required per unit.

Table 4: Commerce Way	
Model Results	
Area (acres)	19.0
Gross Density Range (units/acre)	14.5 - 21.7
Unit Yield Range	275 - 412
Basic Dimensional Assumptions*	
Min. lot size (sq. ft.)	60,000
Max. building height (stories)	3
Max. lot coverage	30%
Parking spaces per unit	1.5
Additional lot area per unit (sq. ft.)	3,000
<i>*Consistent between min. and max. scenarios unless otherwise noted.</i>	

Located near Colony Place, this site is comprised of mostly vacant land adjacent to the Market Basket on Commerce Way. We excluded the supermarket from the model as it is not a desirable site for redevelopment. Like the previous two sites, Colony Place's final unit yield is largely dependent on how much additional lot area is required per unit.



Table 5: The Oasis at Plymouth	
Model Results	
Area (acres)	31.6
Gross Density Range (units/acre)	10.1 – 23.2
Unit Yield Range	320 - 733
Basic Dimensional Assumptions*	
Min. lot size (sq. ft.)	3,000
Max. building height (stories)	3
Max. lot coverage	30%
Parking spaces per unit	1.5
Lot area per unit (sq. ft.)	3,000
<i>*Consistent between min. and max. scenarios unless otherwise noted.</i>	

The Oasis is an existing project adjacent to Route 3 that has 320 units, so we used that number as the minimum unit yield in Table 5. This site is another existing Chapter 40B project that could potentially be impacted by rezoning the area. HLC plans to provide guidelines to help towns consider whether they should include a Chapter 40B site in their MBTA Communities districts.

Table 6: The Pinehills	
Model Results	
Area (acres)	53.8
Gross Density Range (units/acre)	21.1
Unit Yield Range	1,134 – 1,767
Basic Dimensional Assumptions*	
Min. lot size (sq. ft.)	3,000
Max. building height (stories)	3
Max. lot coverage	30%
Parking spaces per unit	1.5
Lot area per unit (sq. ft.)	3,000
<i>*Consistent between min. and max. scenarios unless otherwise noted.</i>	

Town staff identified a portion of the major Pinehills development adjacent to Route 3 that could be included in an MBTA Communities district. This area is adjacent to commercial uses, but the commercial parcels have not been included. The modeled area consists mostly of existing apartments with some parking areas and undeveloped land included.



Table 7: Redbrook Apartments	
Model Results	
Area (acres)	24.1
Gross Density Range (units/acre)	12.0 - 39.2
Unit Yield Range	288 - 944
Basic Dimensional Assumptions*	
Min. lot size (sq. ft.)	120,000
Max. building height (stories)	3
Max. lot coverage	30%
Parking spaces per unit	1.5
<i>*Consistent between min. and max. scenarios unless otherwise noted.</i>	

Redbrook is a recent large mixed-use project in the southern part of Plymouth. The Town identified the portion of the project containing apartments as a potential component of the MBTA Communities district. There are currently 288 multifamily units on the property, but the site could potentially yield more.

Recommendations and Next Steps

The Town should examine the draft district boundaries and zoning regulations presented in this memo and ensure that staff have enough information to conduct their community outreach efforts. The two main questions the Town needs to answer through its public participation efforts are:

- Which potential district locations have the most community buy-in?
- What kinds of multifamily regulatory parameters are the community most comfortable with?

Once we get feedback on these questions, we will be able to model up to two fully fleshed-out scenarios for Plymouth's MBTA Communities district. Once we reach a scenario that works in the compliance model and incorporates as much feedback from the community meetings as possible, we will begin to craft draft zoning bylaw language for the district.

At that point we will need to address issues like inclusionary zoning requirements for affordable housing and how to incorporate site plan review and design review into district regulations. Plymouth's zoning bylaw requires that 10 percent of units in projects of 6 units or larger be set aside as affordable, which complies with the MBTA Communities guidelines.

If the Town wishes to pursue an inclusionary requirement in excess of 10 percent for its district, EOHLC has released an economic impact analysis model for communities to use to justify inclusionary housing requirements that exceed 10 percent (but not more than the maximum allowable 20 percent).

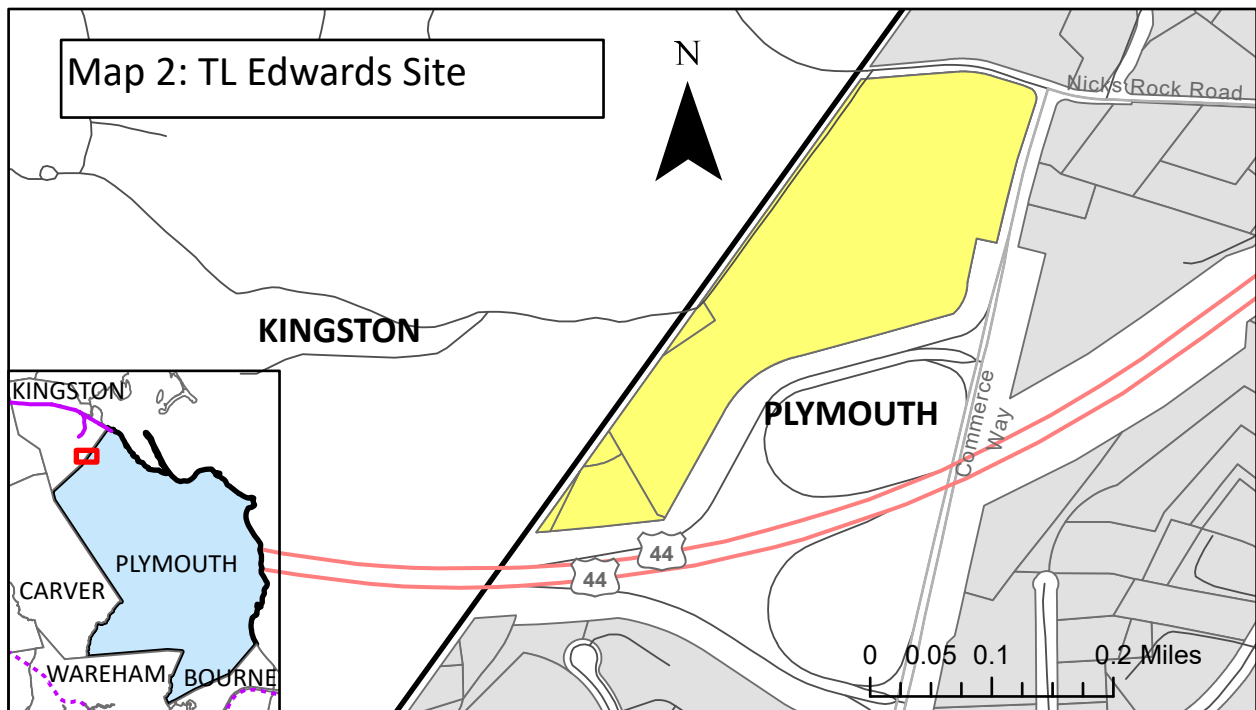
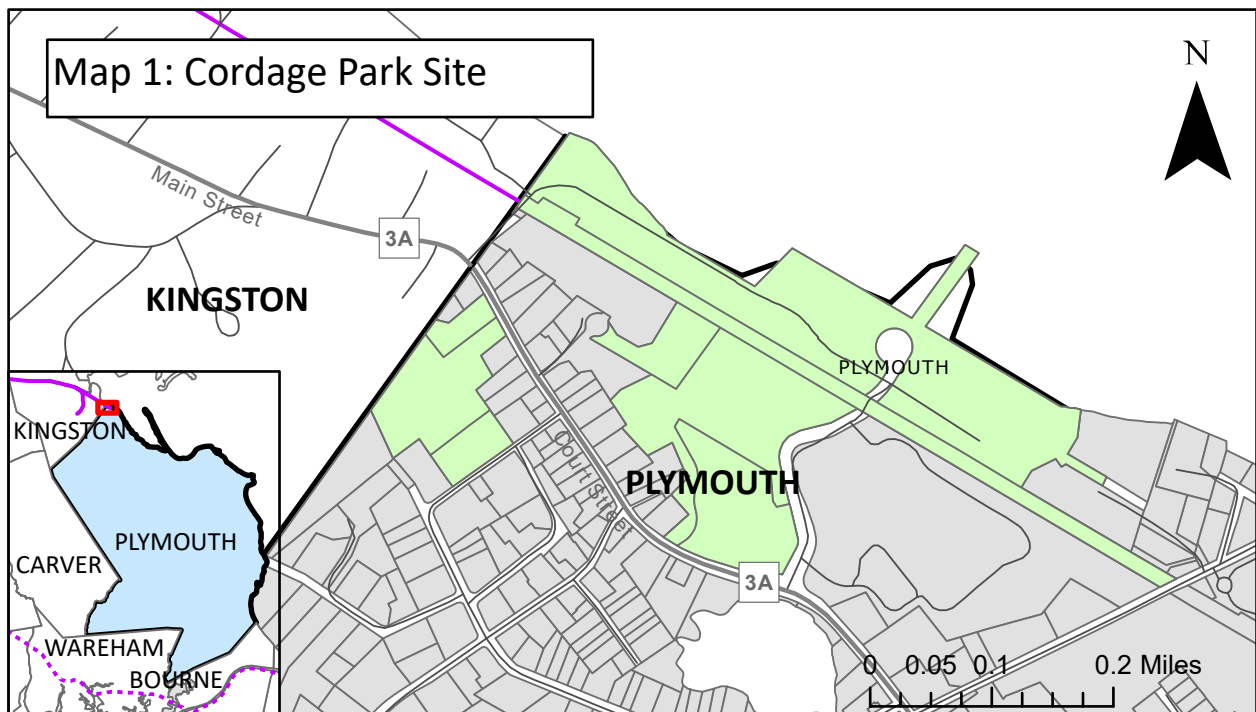
Please let us know how you would like to proceed.



Attachment A

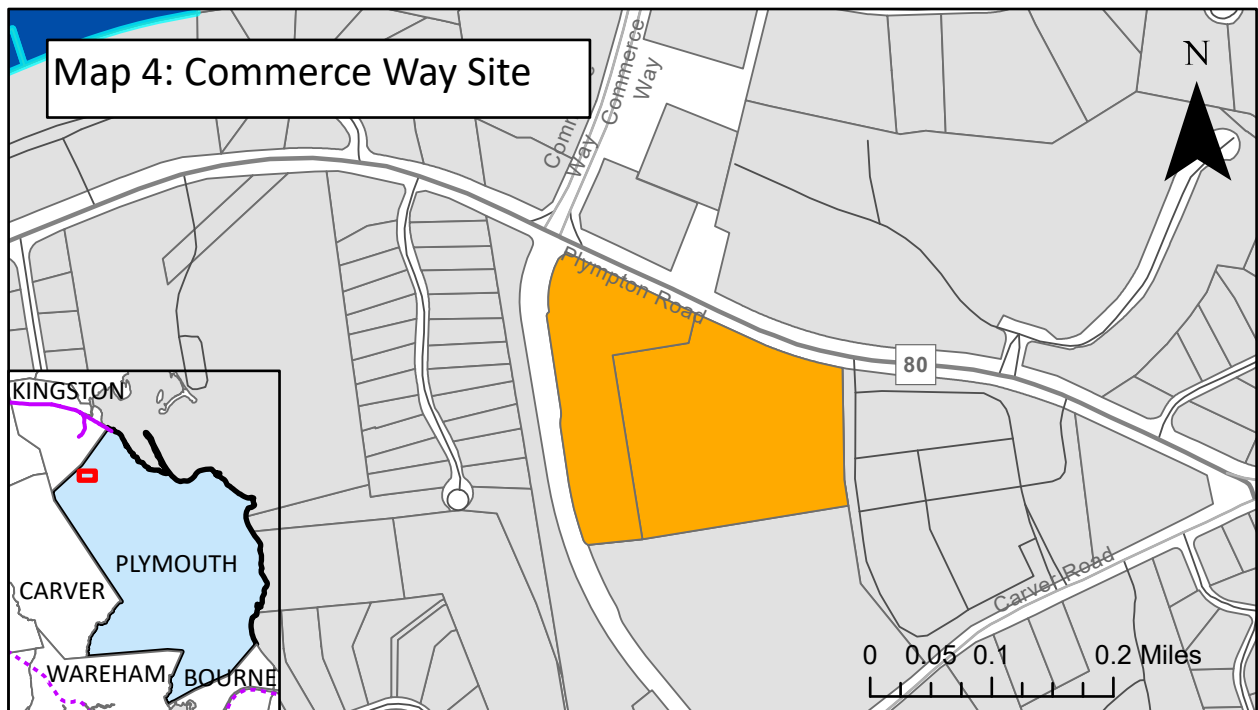
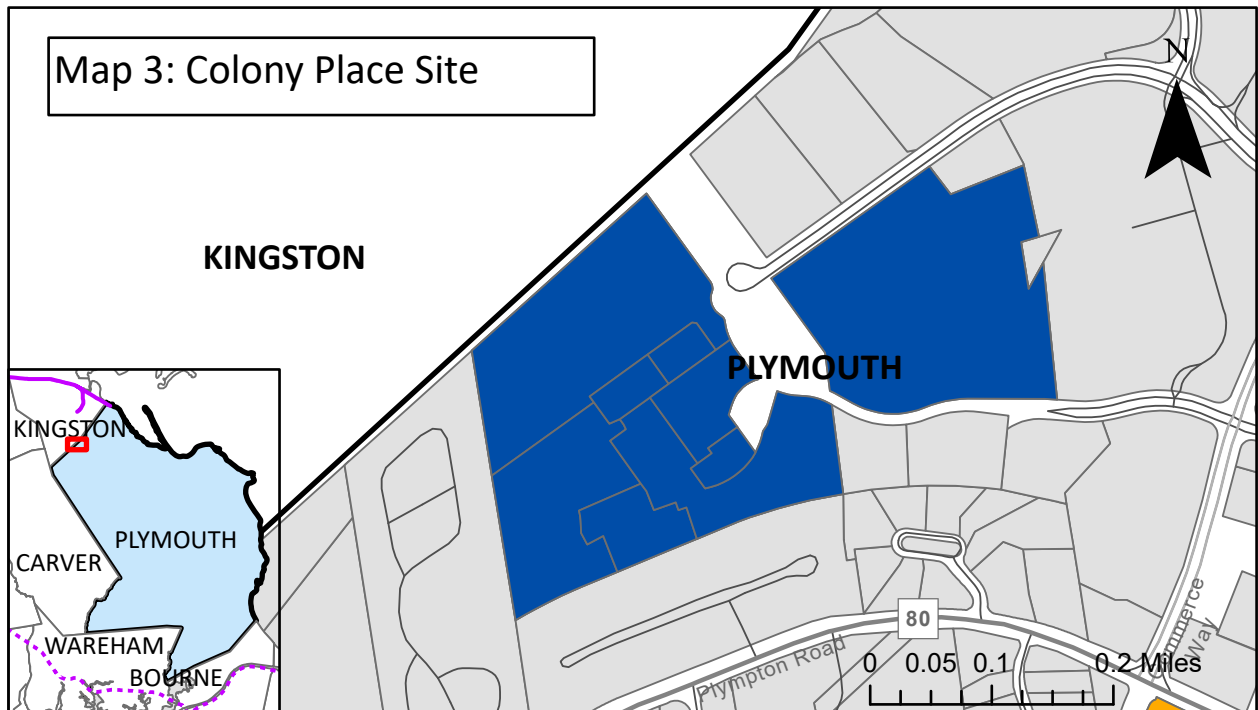
Maps of Draft MBTA Communities District Locations: Maps 1-8





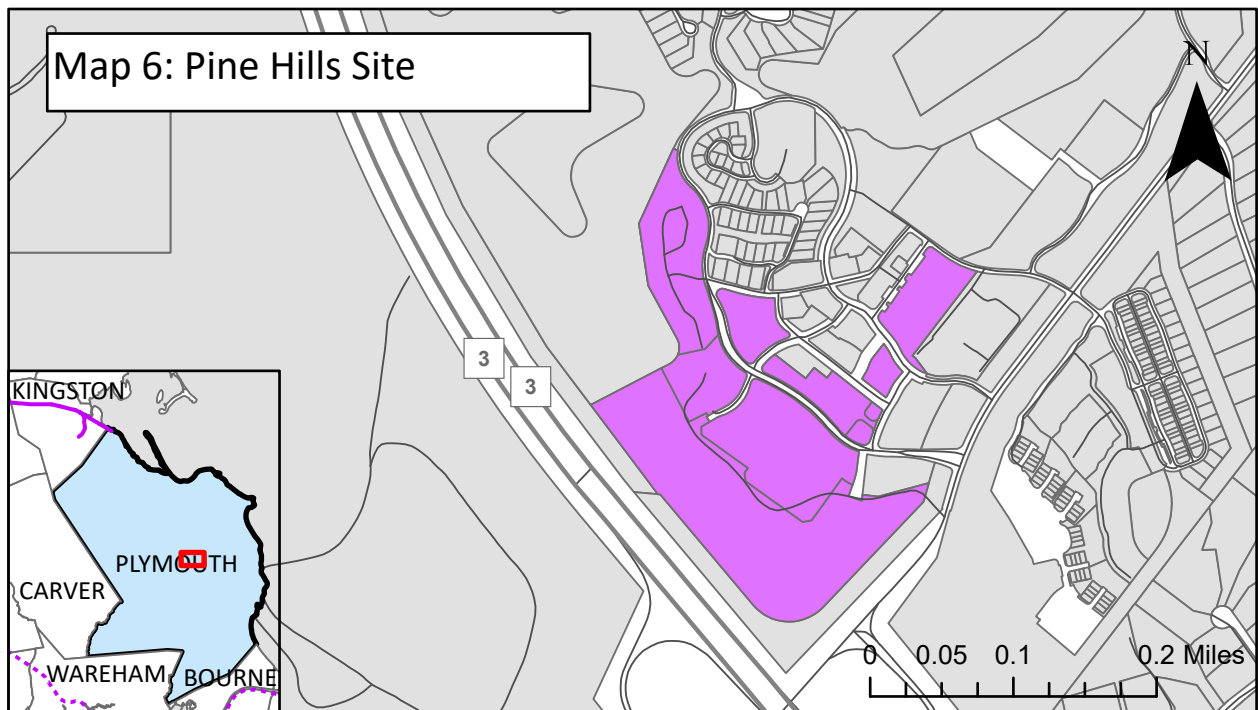
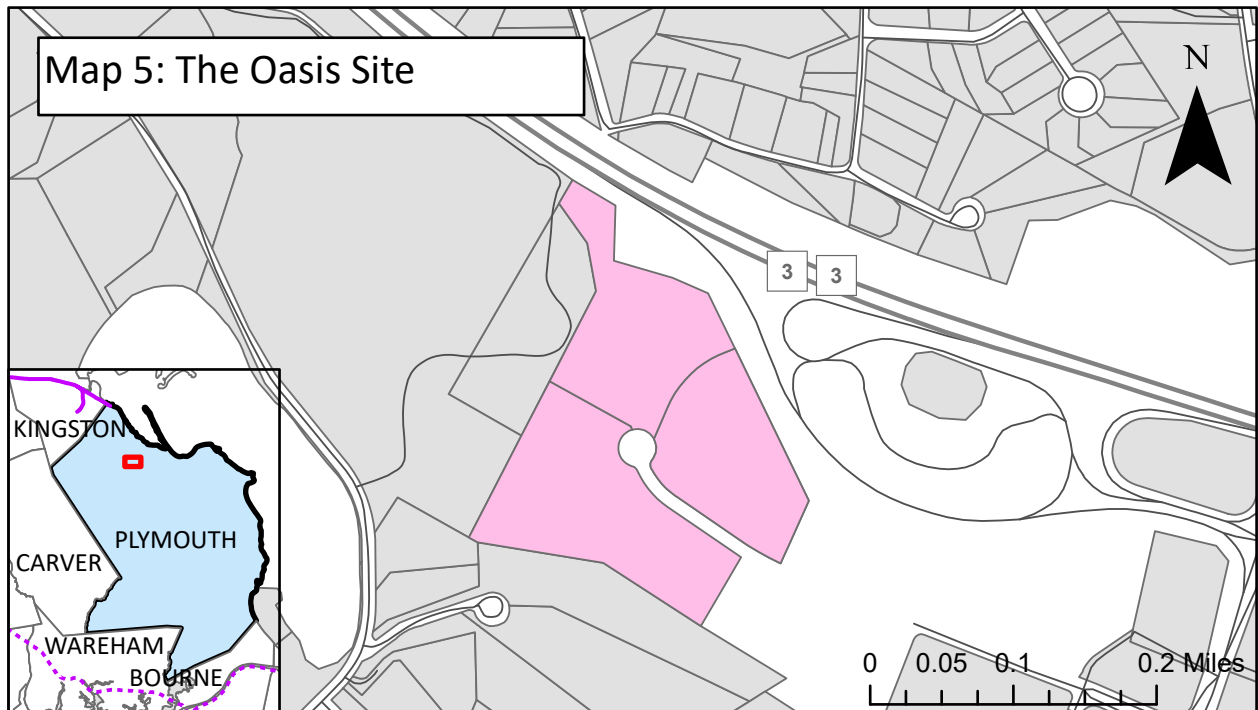
Legend (for all maps)

- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Regular Service Commuter Rail | Limited Access Highway | Cordage Park Site |
| Used Seasonally or for Special Events | Multi-lane Hwy, not limited access | TL Edwards Site |
| Density Denominator Deductions | Other Numbered Highway | Parcels Outside District |
| Transit Station Half Mile Radius | Major Road, Collector | |
| | Ramp | |



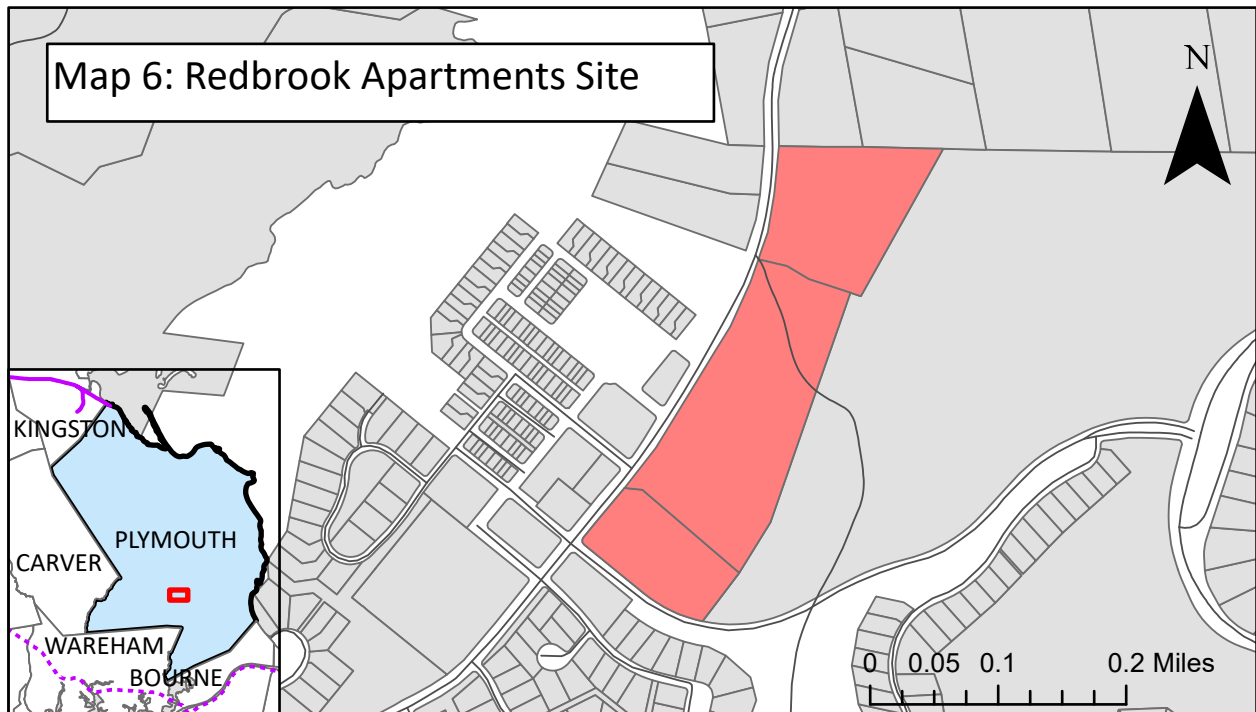
Legend (for all maps)

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|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Regular Service Commuter Rail | Limited Access Highway | Colony Place Site |
| Used Seasonally or for Special Events | Multi-lane Hwy, not limited access | Commerce Way Site |
| Density Denominator Deductions | Other Numbered Highway | Parcels Outside District |
| Transit Station Half Mile Radius | Major Road, Collector | |
| | Ramp | |



Legend (for all maps)

- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Regular Service Commuter Rail | Limited Access Highway | Oasis Site |
| Used Seasonally or for Special Events | Multi-lane Hwy, not limited access | Pine Hills Site |
| Density Denominator Deductions | Other Numbered Highway | Parcels Outside District |
| Transit Station Half Mile Radius | Major Road, Collector | |
| | Ramp | |



Legend (for all maps)

- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Regular Service Commuter Rail | Limited Access Highway | Redbrook Apartments Site |
| Used Seasonally or for Special Events | Multi-lane Hwy, not limited access | Parcels Outside District |
| Density Denominator Deductions | Other Numbered Highway | |
| Transit Station Half Mile Radius | Major Road, Collector | |
| | Ramp | |

Map 8: Townwide Site Locations

