

General

Because the Commercial District is not a village district, I do not recommend a pure form based code as is used in Jericho Riverside. Instead, I am viewing this district as a “mixed use neighborhood” or “neighborhood commercial” as you might find in more urban areas. These areas serve as bridges between civic centers and traditional downtowns, but don’t require the intensive component of architectural regulation that you want in true villages.

To balance the desire to increase density and development within this location with encouraging open-space and protecting the rural character of the area, I am suggesting a mix of approaches. At its core, my thought is to utilize the “Smart Code Mixed Use Zoning District” as a base to address massing and form, combined with the scoring system which is used in the R5 district of Westford’s Land Use and Development Regulations.

Westford reported that the scoring system has been largely successful, particularly for those developers who are prepared when they come in for review.

Specifics

Massing and Size

I am recommending that a Floor Area Ratio be used as a tool to help determine how large buildings may be in this district, with a “bonus” in size if the developer chooses to go mixed use. FAR is an effective way to calculate the bulk or mass of building volume on a development site, and is often used in conjunction with other development standards such as building heights, lot coverage and lot area (all of which I would suggest continue to be utilized) to encourage a community’s desired arrangement and form of development. In this context, higher FARs indicate greater building volume. See attached .pdf on calculating floor area ratios.

In order to encourage multi-story mixed use development, I suggest a FAR of something like 2.0 be used for mixed use buildings. You could go with 1.25 for all other buildings, which still encourages multiple stories, or you could set the ratio for all other buildings at 1.0.

On a side note: The Smart Code suggests setting a gross floor area cap for commercial establishments at 15,000sq feet – this is counter to what we have discussed in the past. It could be a cap that only applies to single use buildings rather than mixed use buildings.

We will need to settle on a uniform set of setbacks for the area and determine whether they are different based on location (for example keep the current setback pattern on North Main St., allow a smaller setback on more internal roads).

FAR Example

On a one acre parcel, with 60% lot coverage allowed, the buildable area is 26,136sqft (this example does not subtract for parking). With a FAR of 2.0, the total developable floor area is 52,272sqft.

With the lot coverage limitation of 60% imposed, the developer would capture the additional area on multiple floors rather than on one level.

Uses

Uses would remain as diverse as they currently are, perhaps with some minor tweaking of the current list.

Planning and Design Standards

Site planning and design standards would utilize a scoring system similar to what is in the Westford Land Use and Development Regulations. Standards could include:

- Access – This would be designed to encourage limited accesses, giving points for shared access and access on internal roads rather than Route 15.
- View – This would be designed to reward developments that are adequately screened from Route 15 and/or are designed to minimize their visual impact on distant views.
- Buildings – This would encourage development to fit within the landscape by minimizing the visual impact from Route 15 by hiding stories below grade relative to the road. Could also be used to encourage a more Vermont-style of architecture.
- Parking – Would award more points for efforts to minimize parking from the Road (Route 15 and internal roads as well) through the location of the lot on site and screening and landscaping.
- Service Areas – Would award more points for efforts to minimize the visual impact of service areas (such as loading docks, trash, equipment, utilities, etc.)
- Outdoor Storage – More points for commercial and industrial developments that do not store materials outdoors in highly visible areas.
- Off-Site Impacts – Points are awarded for minimizing off-site impacts such as traffic, noise, light, etc.
- Connectivity – Points would be awarded for developers who incorporate connectivity into their designs, including the development of planned segments of shared use paths that may cross their property, or by providing locations where the public can congregate (pocket parks, outdoor recreation areas).
- Renewable Energy and Conservation – Points could be awarded to developers who incorporate renewable energy generation into their site plan (solar) and/or exceed state standards for energy efficiency in their building design.

Each standard would have multiple tiers which award more points for proposed developments that meet the higher criteria. It should be noted that in the Westford example, the community has found that 27 points has been a high bar to meet to be granted a permit and they are considering reducing the minimum number of points to 26 or 25.

Miscellaneous

Parking standards would need to be modified to create parking maximums in the Commercial district rather than minimums.