

Grafton Gateway

Grafton, Massachusetts

June 26, 2020



UNION STUDIO
ARCHITECTURE & COMMUNITY DESIGN



Acknowledgements

Town of Grafton

Timothy P. McInerney, ICMA-CM – Town Administrator
Christopher McGoldrick, AICP – Town Planner
Joseph Laydon – Town Planner (former)
Rebecca Meekins – Assistant Town Administrator
David Robbins – Planning Board Chair
Paul Cournoyer – Department of Public Works Director
John Allen – Economic Development Specialist
Bill McCusker – Zoning Board Chair
Leah Cameron – Conservation Agent
Sandra Brock – Conservation Commission Chair
Cindy Ide – Administrative Assistant
Brian Szczurko – Assistance Town Engineer
Karl Moisan – Economic Development Committee Chair
Jen Andersen – Recreation Commission Director
Jennifer Thomas – Community Preservation Committee Clerk
Robert Berger – Building Inspector/Zoning Enforcement Officer

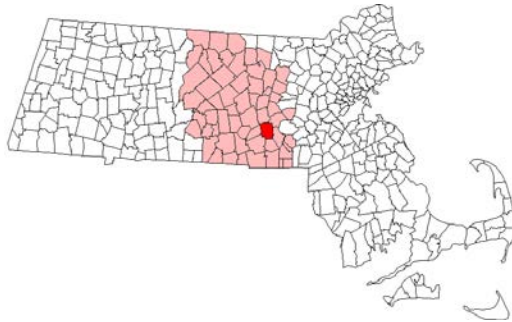
Project Sponsor

MassDevelopment

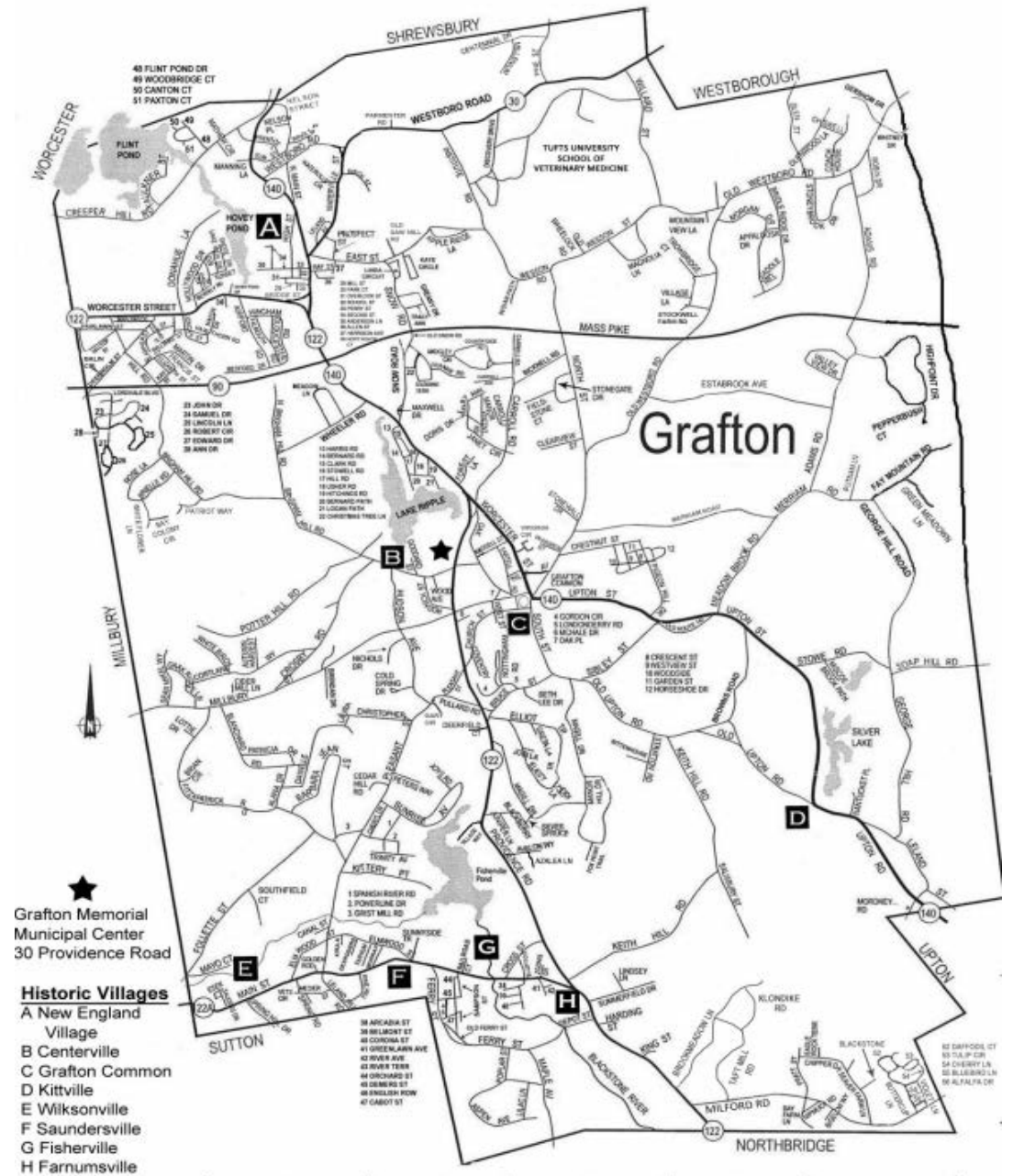
Project Consultants

Horsley Witten Group, Inc.
Union Studio Architecture and Community Design

Project Location



The Town of Grafton is located in Worcester County, approximately eight miles from the center of Worcester (above). As part of the Blackstone River Valley, Grafton has a rich industrial history and is home to a number of historic villages (right).

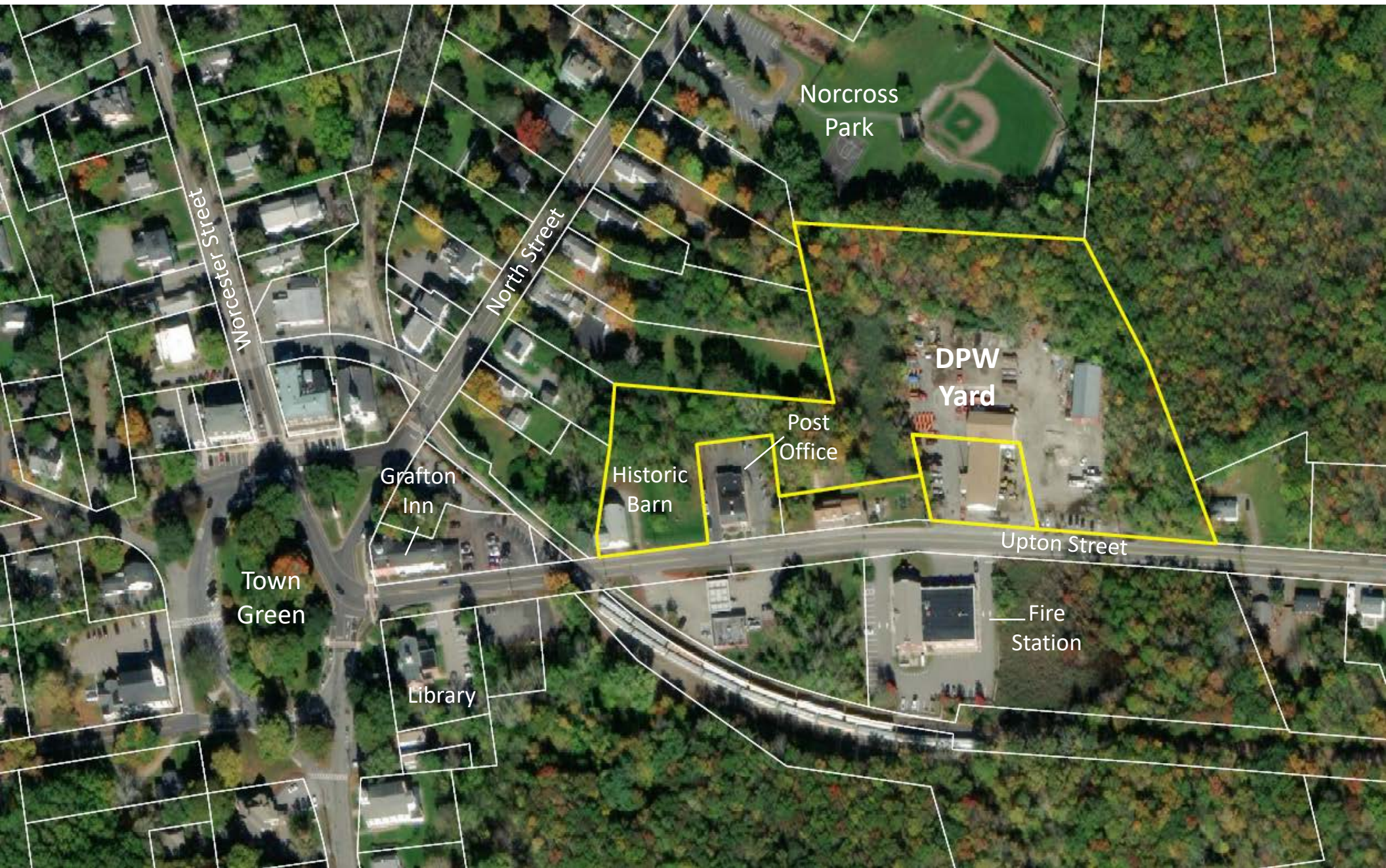


Introduction

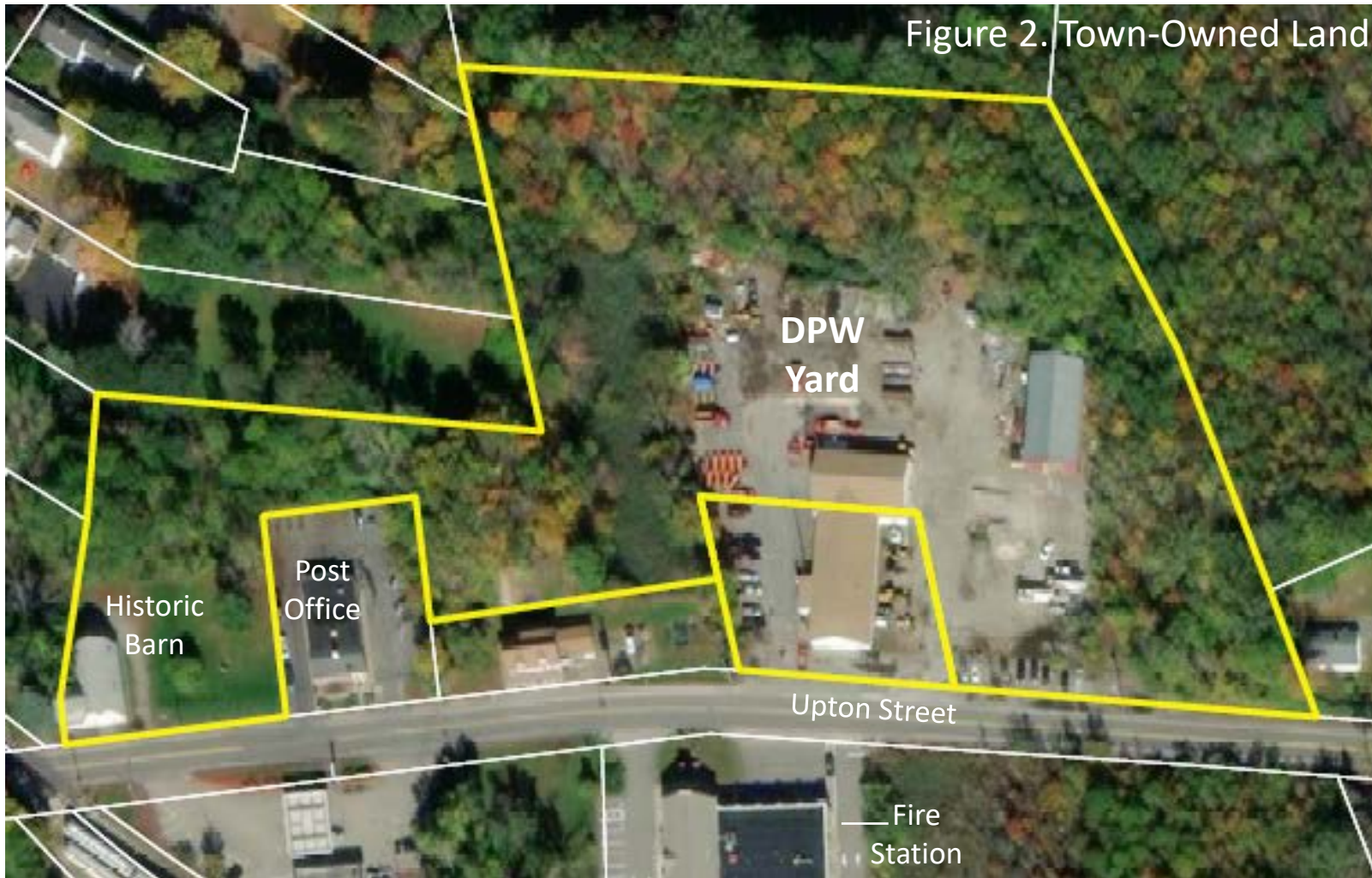


The Town of Grafton is transitioning its Highway Department/Public Works to a new facility, with the old facility scheduled to be vacated in 2021. The property is currently used as a DPW yard and is located across the street from the local fire station. (Figure 1). The historic Town Center is a short walk away, creating a golden opportunity for redevelopment in a key “gateway” location. While the ultimate goal of the project is to sell the property to a private developer, this phase focused on creating a vision for future development and drafting the Zoning Bylaw language needed to facilitate that investment.

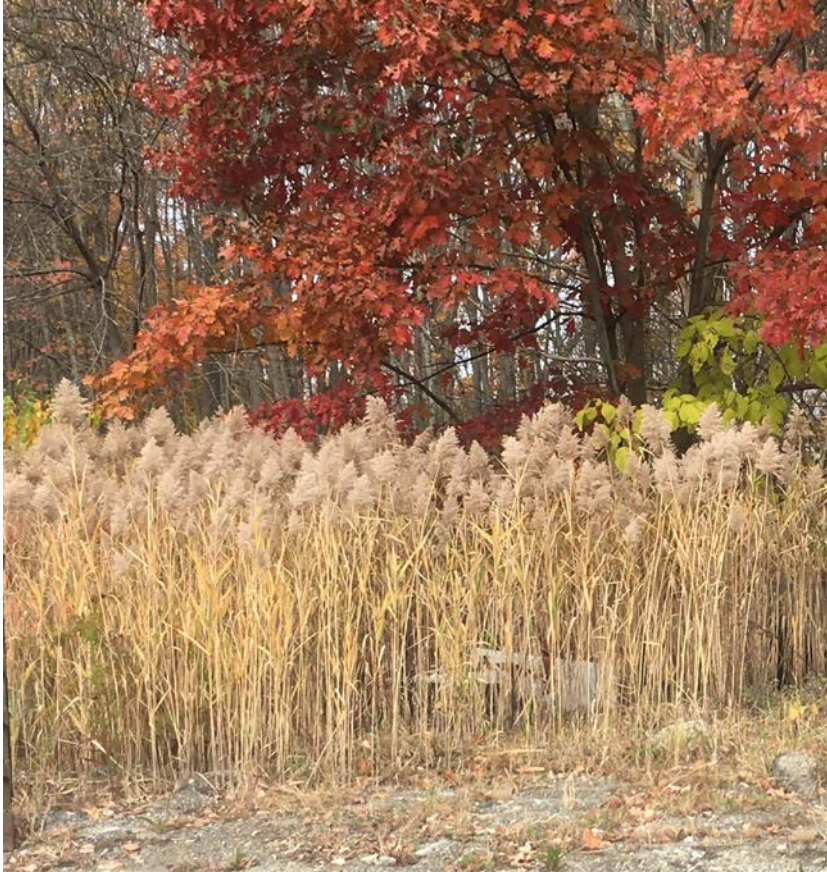
Figure 1. Neighborhood Locus



The parcel on which the DPW yard lies has an irregular shape, wrapping around several other parcels along the street in a “U” shape (Figure 2). The frontage on the DPW yard is substantial. The other frontage is smaller, connecting to Upton Street farther west where a historic barn structure sits along the street. The land that lies off of the street, between the historic barn structure and the DPW yard, is almost exclusively wetland.



Wetlands and Vegetation



Linear stands of phragmites are common around the DPW site, spreading from much larger patches, one to the west of the site and one very large one across the street.

As part of HW's work, the extent of wetlands surrounding the DPW yard were flagged and surveyed, showing the site is completely surrounded with wetlands in various conditions. Notably, the extent of wetland observed on the ground was much larger than what is depicted in the MassGIS database.

Vegetation immediately surrounding the site is typical of more opportunistic, invasive species that thrive in fringe areas often too hostile for other plants. Japanese knotweed, phragmites, and poison ivy are present in many areas where the pavement from the DPW yard transitions to rubble and then forest. The forested wetlands adjacent to the site are healthy with intermittent streams, a strong canopy, and indications of highly variable seasonal water levels. (See attached Wetlands Report)

Public Process

The Town deployed a public engagement process that included:

- Numerous meetings with department staff
- In person survey at the holiday festival
- Project website
- On-line survey
- Public Visioning Session
- Presentations to the Planning Board



Grafton Common Gateway

Visioning Session

Let's reimagine a new Grafton Common Gateway!

With the Grafton Public Library expansion and the DPW relocating, now is an opportunity to envision a new gateway for the Grafton Common.

Come share your ideas on the DPW site.

January 16, 2020

Apple Tree Arts
1 Grafton Common,
Grafton, MA

7:00-8:30 PM
Registration at 6:30 PM

Questions? Contact John Allen, Grafton Economic Development Specialist, at (508) 839-5335, x 1186, or allenj@graffton-ma.gov.

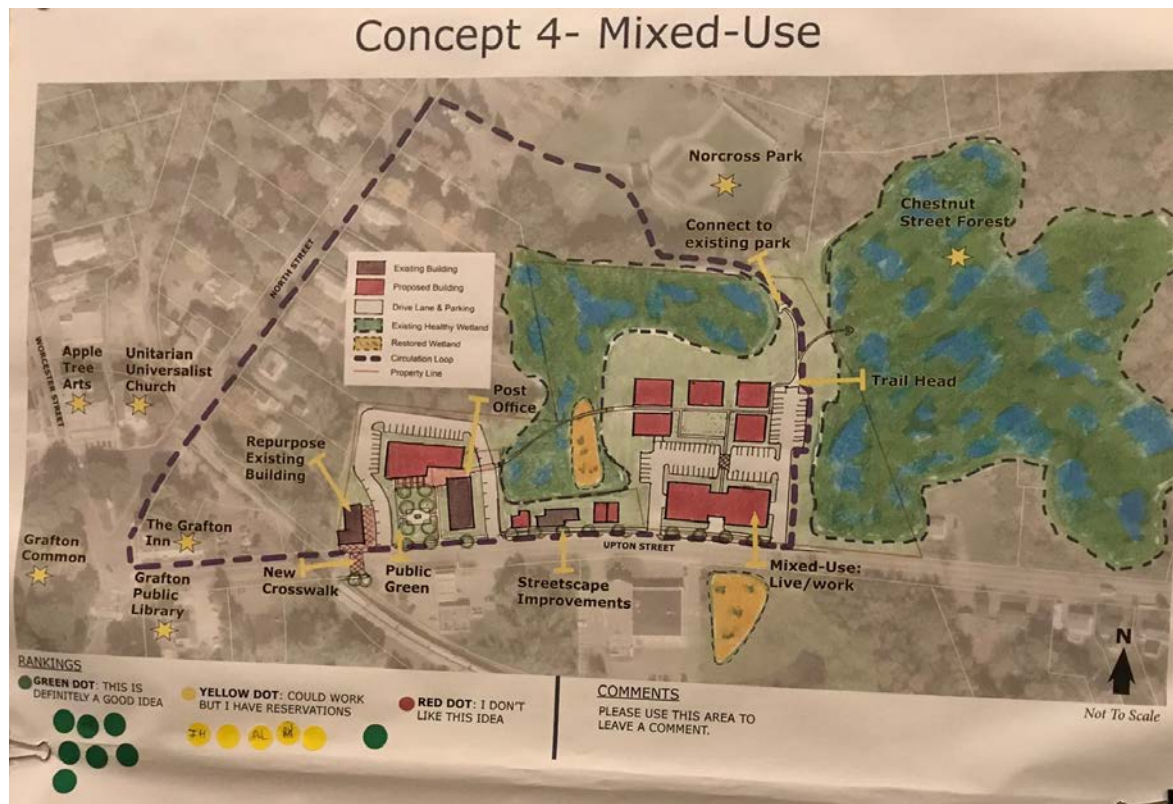
Public Process

HW developed a short on-line survey, which was publicized through social media and holiday gatherings. The results of the survey were presented at a public meeting held on January 16.

	1 – Not appropriate for this site at all	2 – My first reaction is not a good idea, but I'm willing to listen	3 – Unsure	4 – A good idea but I have some questions	5 – Best use of the site
Residential	47.2%	33.3%	10.2%	5.6%	3.7%
Senior Housing	36.7%	29.4%	10.1%	16.5%	7.3%
Mixed-use	9.3%	14.8%	24.1%	33.3%	18.5%
Retail	6.5%	10.2%	13.0%	38.0%	32.4%
Office	22.6%	18.9%	22.6%	26.4%	9.4%
Government	35.2%	21.3%	22.2%	16.7%	4.6%
Parks and Recreation	15.9%	8.9%	8.0%	33.6%	33.6%
Light Industrial/ Maker space	41.5%	18.9%	17.0%	16.0%	6.6%

Public Process

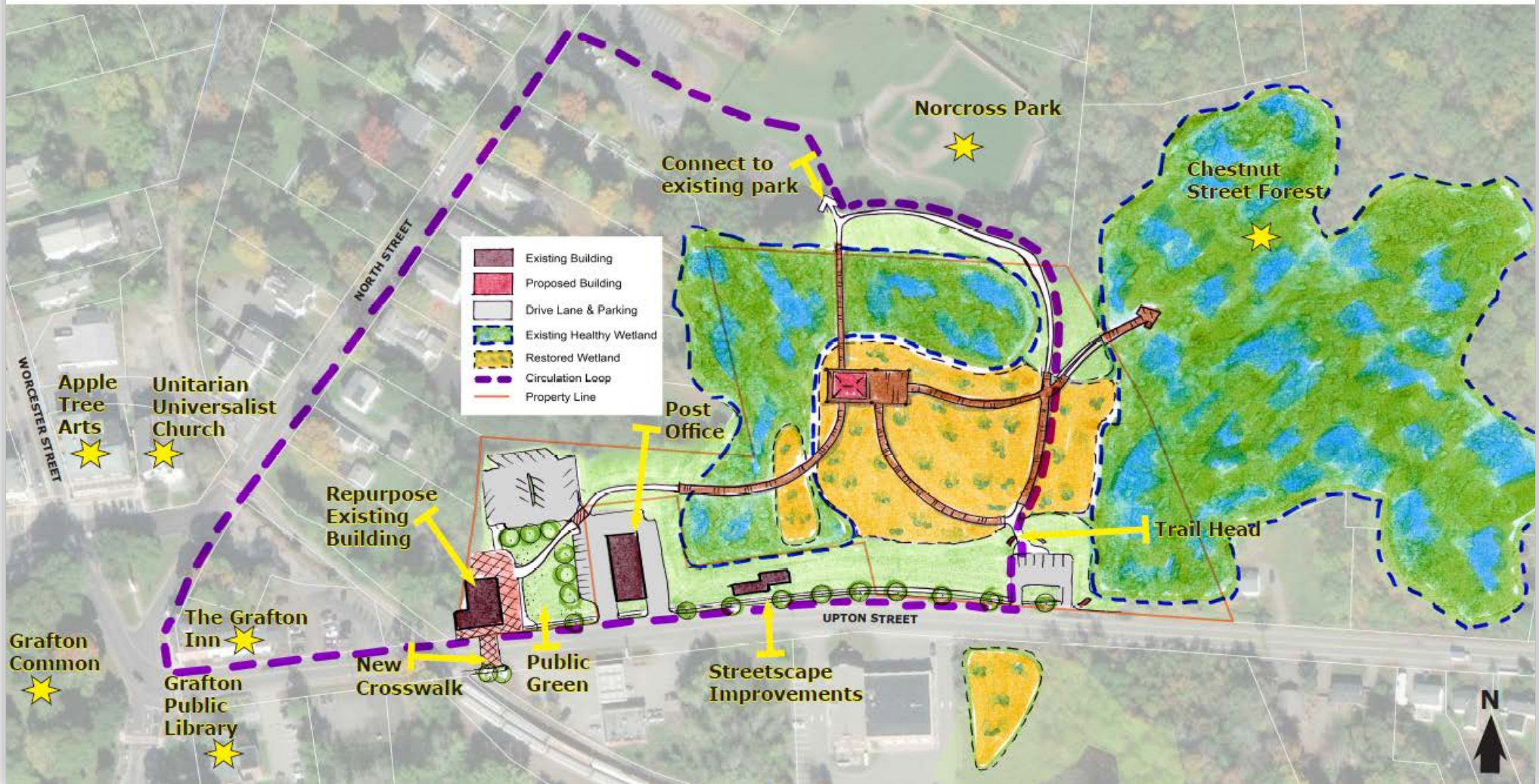
A group of residents, municipal officials, board members, and business owners met at Apple Tree Arts on January 16, 2020 to share their thoughts on the future of the site. These included a restored wetland park, a senior housing development, a small-scale commercial development, and a more intensely developed mixed use concept. (See attached Visioning Session Summary)



One of the posters at the visioning session showing dot voting in progress.

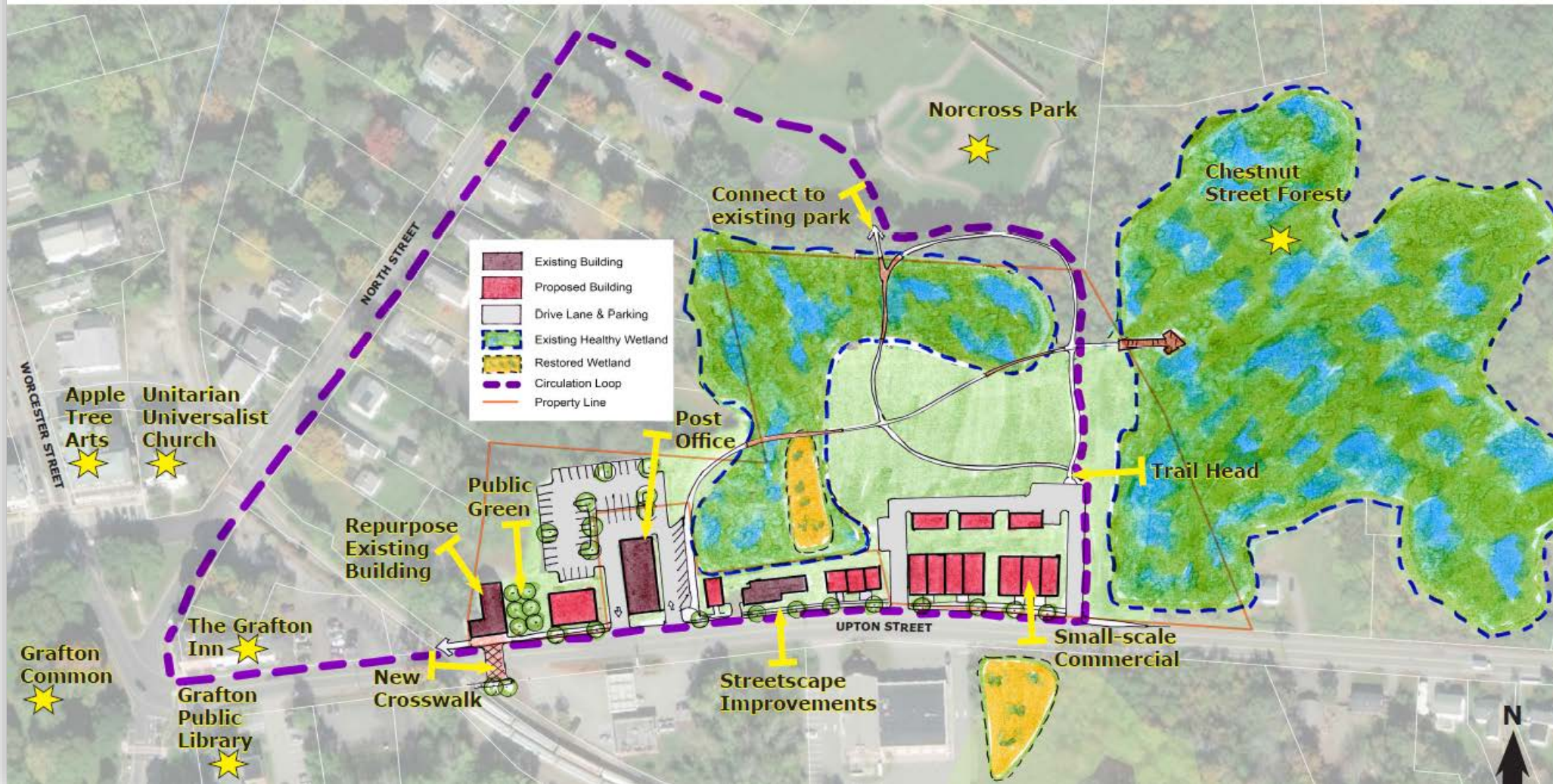
This first concept showed the site being completely “undeveloped,” returning to a vegetated wetland that has a boardwalk network and overlook viewing platform. The concept of having access to the forested area with a trail network was favorably received, but most people wanted to see the current DPW yard redeveloped.

Concept 1- Open Space and Eco-Restoration



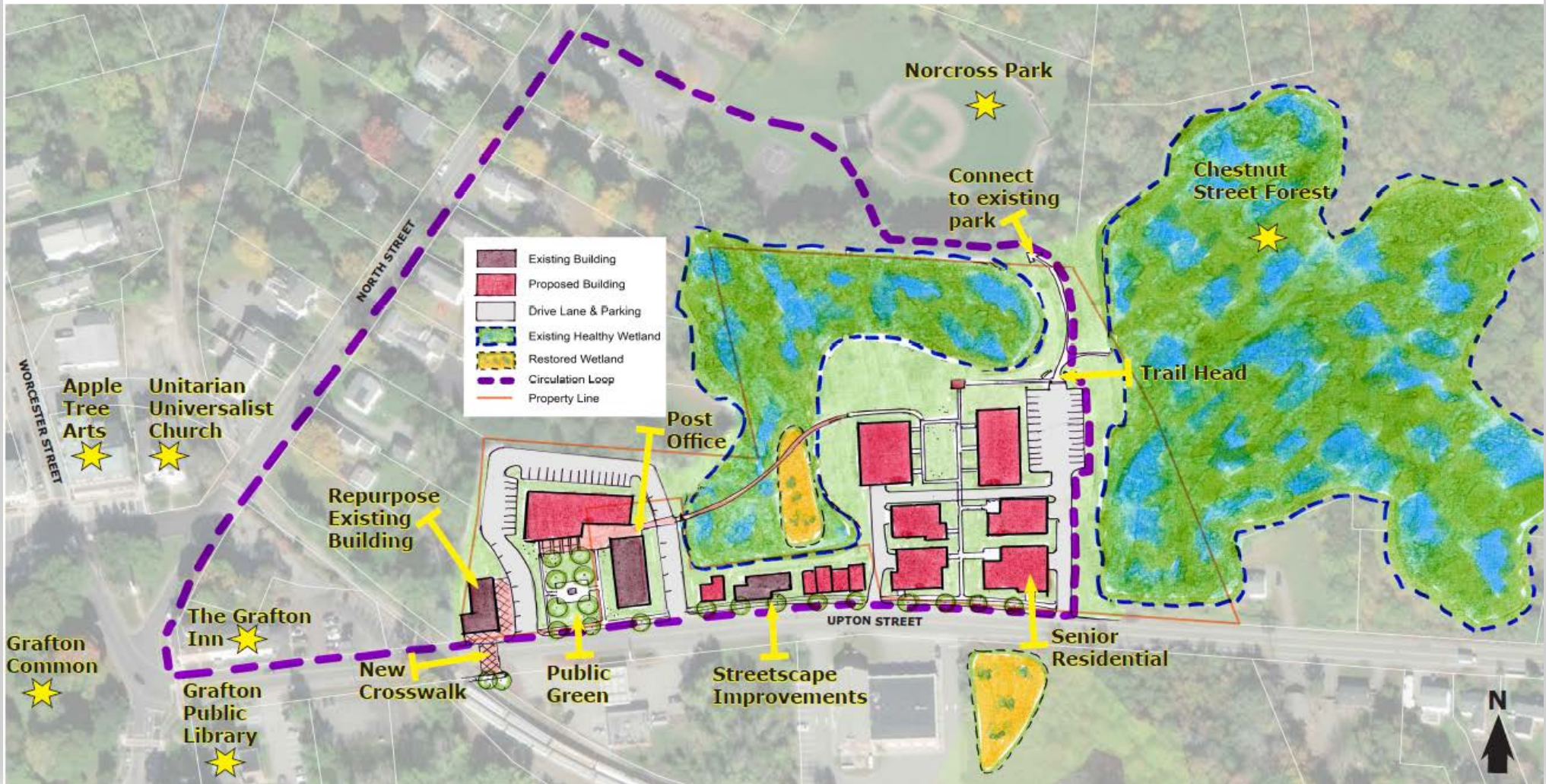
This second concept showed a very modest commercial redevelopment with small shops along Upton Street. A trail network through the wooded area is included connecting the site to Norcross Park and the Town Center with a larger loop (purple dash). Participants at the forum were in favor of this concept.

Concept 2 - Small-Scale Commercial



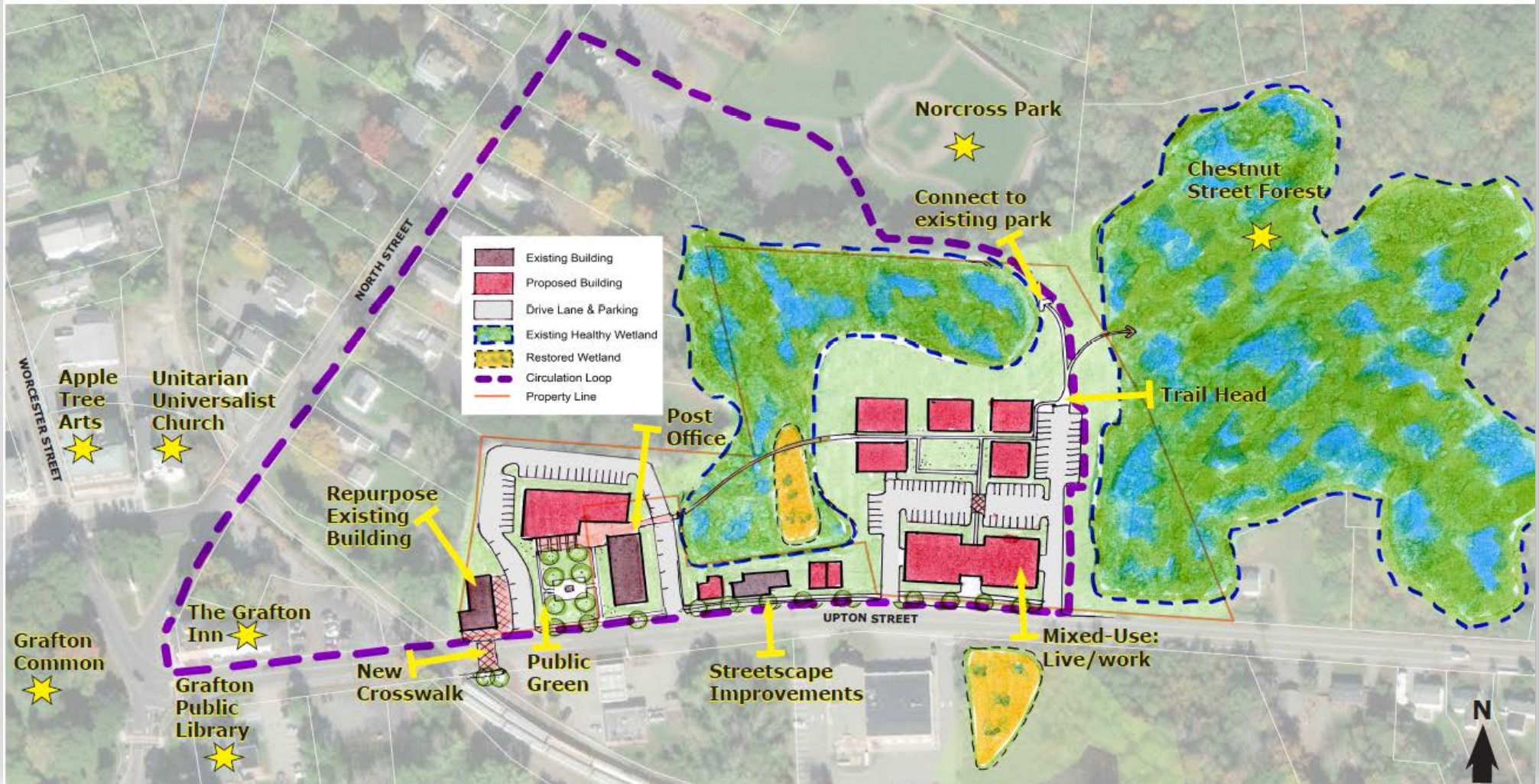
This third concept showed the site more densely developed than Concept, showing a configuration that might accommodate a mix of uses or senior housing. Participant liked the mall green adjacent to the Post Office, but several suggested the new building depicted in that area might be impossible to construct due to wetland constraints. Overall, opinions on this concept were mixed with some opposed to senior housing and others in support.

Concept 3- Housing (Senior or Mixed)



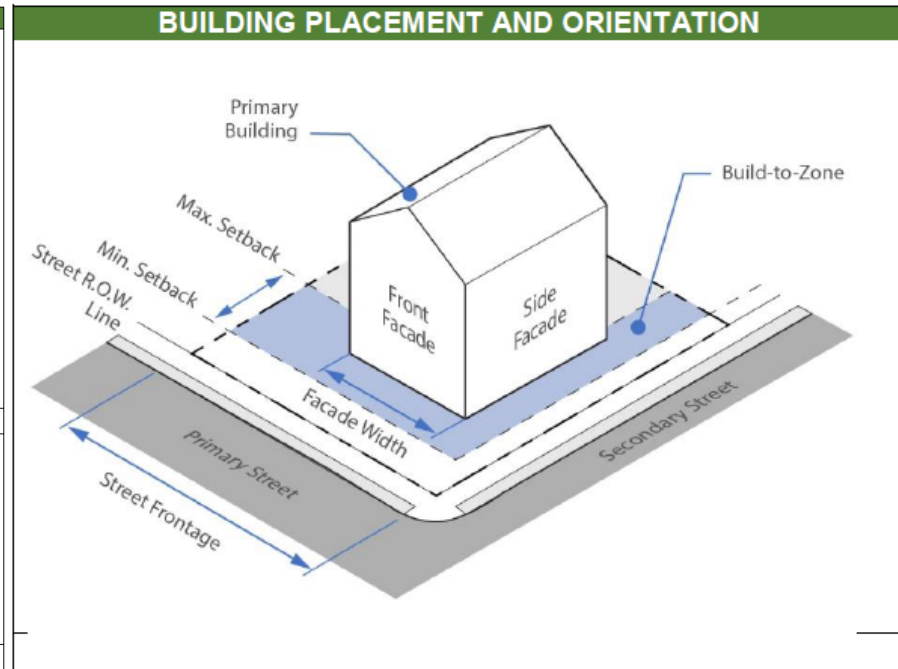
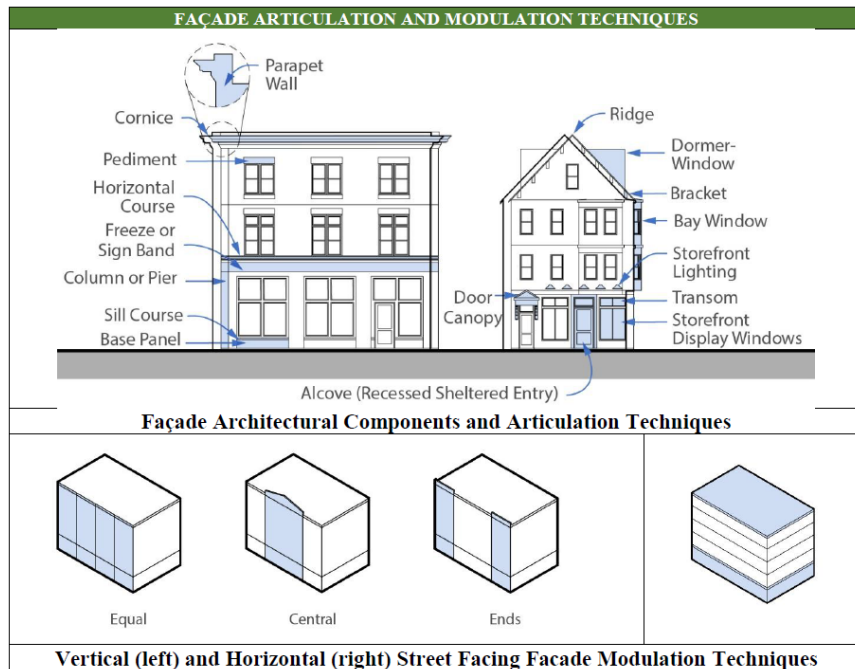
The fourth concept showed the most densely developed mixed use concept. Participants at the forum were in favor of this concept. Based on the discussions with municipal staff, the results of the survey, and the results of the public forum, HW determined that overall this was the preferred alternative when considering new Zoning Bylaw provisions.

Concept 4- Mixed-Use



The Zoning Approach

Grafton's Zoning Bylaw already contained the Village Mixed Use (VMU) provisions that could be tailored to the study area. The VMU – Gateway District was adopted at Town Meeting on June 20, 2020.



12.6.2.A. COMMERCIAL AND MIXED-USE BUILDING TYPES AND DESIGN STANDARDS			
1. BUILDING TYPES AND DEFINITIONS			
	LIVE-WORK SHOPHOUSE (LW)	GENERAL COMMERCIAL BUILDING (GCB)	MIXED USE BUILDING (MUB)
1.1 BUILDING DIAGRAM			

Visualizing the Zoning

The consultant team's architect (Union Studio) used the proposed zoning to develop a more refined development scenario than those produced for the public visioning session. This visualization shows how future development would relate to the neighborhood.



Visualizing the Zoning

This visualization shows how development might occur along Upton Street.



Visualizing the Zoning

The final visualization provides a “bird’s eye view” perspective to better illustrate the architectural design and building scale.



Recommendations

TASK	DESCRIPTION	LEAD
Environmental Reporting	The Town should continue to follow the recommendations of its environmental consultant regarding the presence of any subsurface contamination on site	Town Manager
Wetland Verification	As part of the project funded by MassDevelopment, HW wetland scientists and surveyors flagged the wetland areas surrounding the DPW site. The surveyed flag locations were provided to the Town in multiple electronic formats for future use. The Town should verify the locations of these flags and have digital information ready for any future development proposals. Developing an Abbreviated Notice of Resource Area Delineation (ANRAD) should be considered while the flags are in place. HW provided a wetlands report under separate cover.	Conservation Agent, Conservation Commission

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Recommendations (continued)

TASK	DESCRIPTION	LEAD
Property Subdivision	<p>The Town-owned parcel has an irregular shape with considerable acreage of land that would be of no use to a future owner due to wetland constraints. Further, this land includes an important historic structure along the other frontage of Upton Street and also abuts municipal park land, making it more valuable to the Town. The Town should consider either subdividing the parcel before selling it or incorporating this into the terms of the RFP for property sale. This should be coordinated with the Town’s environmental consultant to ensure all proper notifications or recordings occur related to any on-site contamination.</p>	Town Planner, Planning Board

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Recommendations (continued)

TASK	DESCRIPTION	LEAD
<p>Trailway Design and Construction</p>	<p>During the visioning process for the property, HW identified an opportunity to create a loop that would connect the DPW site to the ballfield (north), and to the Town center (west). These connections could occur through a combination of trails (off-road) and sidewalks (on-street). The Town should decide, with guidance from the Conservation Agent, whether this is a desirable amenity. Grant funding from the Commonwealth’s <i>Shared Streets and Spaces</i> grant program could be considered for this effort.</p> <p>As important note, the Town will want to consider whether Grafton will want to maintain control over access to the forest from Upton Street through the DPW yard site. This will be an important discussion in developer negotiations.</p>	<p>Conservation Agent, Town Planner</p>

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Recommendations (continued)

TASK	DESCRIPTION	LEAD
Subsurface Infrastructure Identification	<p>HW staff members identified what appears to be a culvert running from the northwest corner of the property to the southeast corner. The Town should research any previous engineering plans for the site to determine the extent of any subsurface infrastructure. Absent this information, the Town might consider the use of ground penetrating radar to locate this infrastructure. This information will be important to any prospective purchaser of the property.</p>	Town Engineer

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Recommendations (continued)

TASK	DESCRIPTION	LEAD
Property Redevelopment Request for Proposals (RFP)	Town Meeting approved the future sale of the property and the new zoning. The Town is now positioned to develop an RFP soliciting proposals for purchase and redevelopment of the property. This document can be developed concurrently with the subdivision of the property, approval of an ANRAD, conceptual planning of a trail network, and additional subsurface investigations.	Town Administrator