

Belmont Center Overlay Summary



What is the Belmont Center Overlay?

A zoning proposal designed to:

Secure a vibrant future for the Center by increasing foot traffic & attracting more businesses.

Address a critical unmet need for smaller housing units, allowing more seniors to downsize and stay in town, while also providing options for young professionals and town employees.

Put Belmont on a more financially sustainable path by diversifying the town's tax base.

Protect the historic character of Belmont Center by implementing a form-based zoning code.

The Belmont Center overlay proposal will be considered at a **Special Town Meeting on March 4, 2026**.

What Problems will the Overlay Help Solve?

Empty Storefronts and Turnover

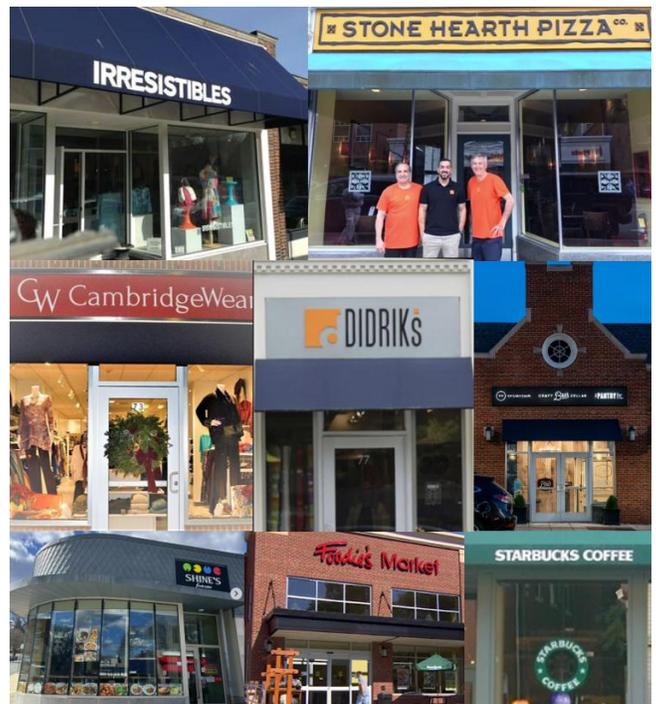
- Decades ago, Belmont Center was a thriving shopping destination, with a wide variety of stores, including major chains like Macy's.
- There is now significant turnover, as well as long-term vacancies, such as the old Bank of America building.
- With no mixed-use development, Belmont Center businesses lack a built-in customer base.

Insufficient Commercial Tax Revenues

- Belmont relies heavily on residential taxes and receives very little tax revenue from businesses.
- Due to its less diversified tax base, Belmont has fewer resources, **which leads to service cuts and larger, more frequent operating overrides.**

A Critical Need for Housing Options

- Belmont has few small-form housing options, which prevents many seniors from downsizing and staying in town.
- Lack of housing diversity also prevents many young people who grew up in Belmont from living in town after graduation.
- Housing limitations also prevent many town staff from residing in Belmont.



More than a dozen businesses have closed on Leonard Street in recent years.

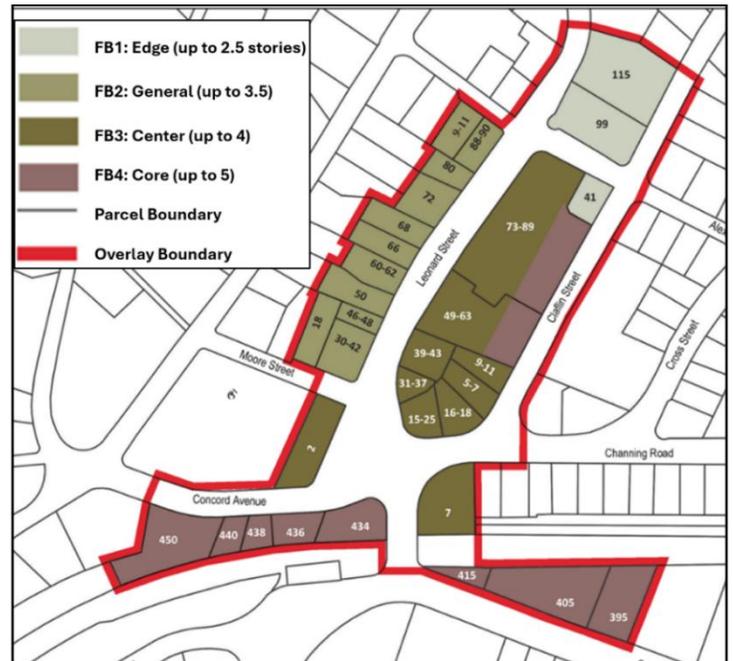
Belmont	95% residential	5% commercial
Wellesley	89% residential	11% commercial
Newton	86% residential	14% commercial
Lexington	76% residential	24% commercial
Watertown	50% residential	50% commercial

“A vast majority of residents (89%) report that it is very or somewhat important for them to remain in Belmont as they get older...but [many] felt they might eventually be forced to relocate because of housing constraints.”

- Belmont Council on Aging: Planning for the Future, October 2025

Where Will the Overlay Apply?

- The overlay is concentrated around Belmont Center on both sides of Leonard Street, plus portions of Claflin Street and Concord Ave.
- It does **not** include the town-owned Claflin parking lot (where the farmers' market is held).
- The Planning Board is proposing a separate Gateway Overlay on Concord Avenue, where hotels would be an allowable use (see separate handout).



What is Allowed in Each Zone?

- Four zones make it possible to tailor each area of the overlay, minimizing impacts on adjacent residential areas (see chart below).
- Allowable heights in each zone vary from 2.5 stories in Zone 1 to 5 stories in Zone 4.
- At least 2 stories of commercial space are required in all zones.
- In addition to the two minimum stories of required commercial space, limited residential development is also required.
- Studies and local developers confirm that studios and one bedrooms are likely to be built above retail in downtown districts. This small form housing is extremely profitable for the town.

FB1: Edge	FB2: General	FB3: Center	FB4: Core
Buildings up to 2.5 stories	2.5 to 3.5 story buildings	3 to 4 story buildings	4 to 5 story buildings
Architectural appearance consistent with single- and two-family homes, but commercial and office use allowed.	Mix of semi-detached and attached mixed-use buildings. Flat roofs allow for green or roof-top uses.	Attached mixed-use buildings with continuous street wall. Flat roofs allow for green or roof-top uses.	Urban street wall with minimal setbacks. Flat roofs allow for green or roof-top uses.

Will the Zoning Overlay Protect the Character of Belmont Center?

Yes, the new Zoning Overlay will use a form-based code, allowing the town to more tightly control building appearance. Our current zoning **does not** protect the Center's historic charm, which has led to mixed results over time and resulted in long-term vacancies.



Change is needed to secure a vibrant future for our Center and our Town.

Vote Yes on the Belmont Center Overlay on March 4 to help make that future possible!

For more information, visit <https://www.belmont-ma.gov/Belmont-Center-Zoning-Project>

This handout was produced by the Belmont Planning Board