

ULI TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PANEL REPORT

# NORTH GROVE PRIORITY DEVELOPMENT AREA FRANKLIN, MASSACHUSETTS

JUNE 8, 2022



**Boston/  
New England**

## URBAN LAND INSTITUTE (ULI)

The Urban Land Institute is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit research and education organization supported by its members. The mission of ULI is to shape the future of the built environment for transformative impact in communities worldwide. Founded in 1936, the Institute has grown to over 45,000 members worldwide, representing the entire spectrum of land use and real estate development disciplines working in private enterprise and public service. ULI membership includes developers, architects, planners, lawyers, bankers, and economic development professionals as well as other related disciplines.

The Boston/New England District Council of ULI serves the six New England states and has nearly 1,400 members. As a preeminent, multidisciplinary real estate forum, ULI Boston/New England facilitates the open exchange of ideas, information, and experience among local and regional leaders and policy makers dedicated to creating better places.

## TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PANELS (TAPs)

The ULI Boston/New England Real Estate Advisory Committee convenes TAPs at the request of public officials and local stakeholders of communities and nonprofit organizations facing complex land use challenges, who benefit from the pro bono recommendations provided by the TAP members.

A TAP consists of a group of diverse professionals with expertise in the issues posed. The Panel spends one to two days visiting and analyzing existing conditions, identifying specific planning and development issues, and formulating realistic and actionable recommendations to move initiatives forward in a way consistent with the applicant's goals and objectives.

A recent independent study by Rivera Consulting surveyed municipalities that received assistance from the TAP programs and reported a positive impact by the TAP process on communities. Eighty-two percent of participating municipalities said their behavior and approach to municipal planning and economic development strategies were affected; 67% said there were increased municipal investments related to the stated goals and recommendations of their TAP report; and 62% said at least one key developable asset addressed in their TAP report had been redeveloped, consistent with ULI Boston/New England recommendations.

Learn more at: [boston.uli.org](https://boston.uli.org).



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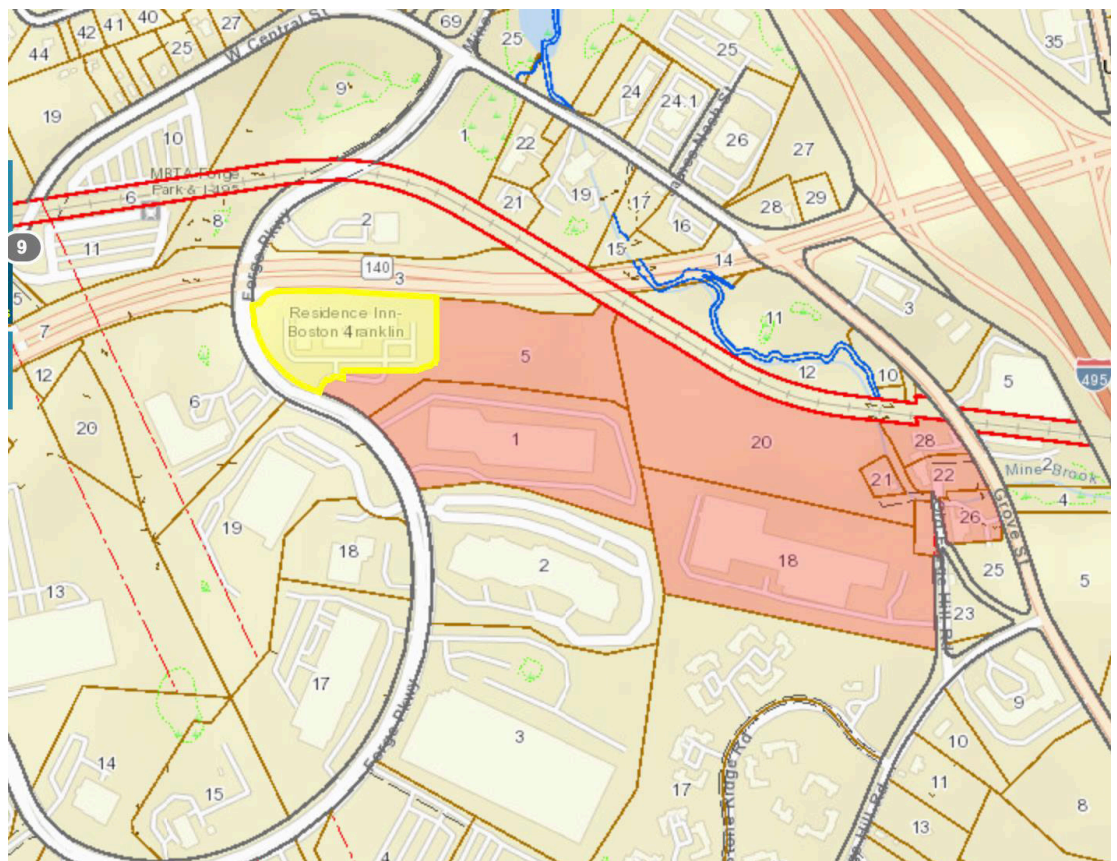
# Executive Summary

The Franklin North Grove PDA Technical Assistance Panel (TAP), under the direction of the Boston/New England District Council of the Urban Land Institute (ULI), was conducted on June 8, 2022. The purpose of the TAP was to provide guidance to the Town of Franklin regarding redevelopment options for a contaminated site located in the Town's industrial/business district.

Panelists convened at the Franklin Town Hall and were given a tour of the project area, a site consisting of eight parcels within the North Grove Economic Development Area and Forge Park Economic Opportunity Area. Seven of these parcels are privately owned, and

one, the former Nu-Style brownfield property, is owned by the Town. Following the tour, panelists returned to the Town Hall to interview several stakeholders to gain additional insight into the opportunities and challenges of redeveloping the site.

Panelists then reconvened to assess the information and to develop recommendations for the revitalization of the project area. The TAP presented their findings at the Town Council meeting that evening, with the presentation broadcast via the Town of Franklin's video streaming service, Town Council TV, available on the internet.



The TAP study area . Source TAP briefing materials.



# ULI and the TAP Process

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## MassDevelopment

MassDevelopment is the Commonwealth's economic development and finance authority. The quasi-public agency works closely with state, local and federal officials to increase housing and create jobs. With the power to act as both a lender and developer, MassDevelopment also works to fill in gaps in infrastructure, transportation, energy and other areas that may be holding back economic growth. MassDevelopment has worked with ULI since 2011 to help sponsor and support the TAP process in cities and towns across the Commonwealth.

## Panel Members

ULI Boston/New England convened a volunteer panel of experts whose members represent the range of disciplines necessary to analyze the challenges and opportunities and present recommendations that could help the Town of Franklin assess a redevelopment concept for revitalization of the northern end of Grove Street. Member



TAP Panelists touring the study area. Source: ULI Boston.

practice areas included an engineer, a real estate attorney, a commercial real estate advisor/broker, a finance expert, and a business development professional. The following is a list of panelists:

**Co-Chairs**

James Heffernan, real estate attorney, Rich May Law

Ed O'Rourke, business development manager, Azzur Group

**Panelists**

Mary Ellen DeFrias, vice president of community investment, MassDevelopment

Phil Giffey, executive director, Neighborhood of Affordable Housing (NOAH)

John Kucich, principal, Bohler Engineering

Joe Marini, broker, Gibson Sotheby's International Realty

*Panelists have donated their time.*

**ULI Staff**

Tim Moore, manager

**TAP Writer**

Mike Hoban, principal, Hoban Communications

The TAP also benefited from the participation of several stakeholders, including property owners, Town officials, residents and business owners.

**Stakeholders**

The following is the list of stakeholders who provided input:

Paul Compton, business and Lot 19 owner (7 Old Forge Hill Road)

Ralph F DeLucia, resident and Lot 21 owner (15 Old Forge Hill Road)

Jamie Hellen, Town Administrator, Town of Franklin

Mike Maglio, Town Engineer, Town of Franklin

Doug Martin, Water & Sewer Superintendent, Town of Franklin

Margaret Reniere, owner, Lot 20 (Grove Street)

## Study Area Tour

Panelists were greeted at the Franklin Town Hall by Bryan W. Taberner, director of planning and community development for the Town of Franklin, and Town planner Amy Love. Prior to the tour, panelists had been given a comprehensive briefing book to familiarize themselves with the Town and the project site, including a community profile, as well as property and zoning information within the project area. Following introductions and a short briefing, Taberner, Love and the panelists boarded a school bus and were taken to the project site, parking on the property adjacent to the Town-owned parcel at 21 Grove Street, owned by World Marble & Granite at 15 Grove Street. The group viewed the grass covered Town-owned parcel where an industrial building (Nu-Style Building I) once stood, and also observed a dilapidated building attached to a smaller, functional building on an adjoining parcel owned by World Marble & Granite.

The group proceeded across a small bridge over Mine Brook. The bridge is no longer passable for vehicular traffic, as the Town has abandoned the roadway it sits on (Old Forge

Hill Road) as a public way. On the other side of the bridge to the right, panelists observed a 1,340 square foot single family home, which panelists were informed is within the Town business district and is only accessible through an easement of the adjacent, privately owned, 9.3 vacant parcel (Lot 20) that wraps around the residential property. To the left is a 6,900 square foot commercial building, which is currently occupied by a martial arts school.

The group then boarded the bus and were taken to Forge Park, a mixed-use commercial park. Panelists observed an extended stay hotel as well as a vacant parcel that was intended for a hotel expansion or an additional hotel. Panelists were informed that the four hotels in the Town of Franklin had a pre-COVID occupancy rate of 85%. The parking lot adjacent to the vacant lot connects to the 9.3-acre parcel (Lot 20) along Old Forge Hill Road. The group then returned to the Town Hall and conducted stakeholder interviews. Panelists then reconvened to assess the information and to develop recommendations for the steps needed to revitalize the project area, and made their recommendations to the Town Council that evening.

# Purpose of the TAP and Background

## Town of Franklin

Franklin, officially the City known as the Town of Franklin, is a suburban industrial community located within 35 miles of the major cities of Boston, Worcester and Providence. First settled in 1660, the Town was officially incorporated in 1778, becoming the first town in the U.S. to be named after Benjamin Franklin, and is also home to the nation's first public library. Franklin has a total area of approximately 27 square miles, and is bordered by the towns of Medway, Millis, Norfolk, Wrentham and Bellingham.

According to the briefing book provided to panelists by the Town, Franklin is a growth community with a pro-business environment, a low stable single tax rate, streamlined permitting processes, and modernized infrastructure. Predominately a manufacturing town, Franklin is home to dozens of research and development and manufacturing companies, and has attracted innovative technology companies in a wide range of industries, including nanotechnology, data storage, specialty materials, life sciences/biotechnology, and medical devices. Franklin is home to two 300-plus acre office industrial parks, Forge Park and Franklin Industrial Park, as well as the Grove Street Business Corridor, which consists of several hundred acres zoned for business and industrial uses.

## Transportation and Highway Access

Franklin enjoys a solid transportation network, including Route 140, two exits to Interstate 495, and easy access to major routes such as Interstate 90 (Massachusetts Turnpike),

Interstate 95, Route 1 and Route 126. In addition to a well-integrated roadway system, Franklin is host to two MBTA commuter rail stations, and has fixed route bus service through the Greater Attleboro Taunton Regional Transit Authority.

## Population/Demographics

The population of Franklin was estimated at 33,243 by the 2020 U.S. Census Bureau, up from 31,852 in 2010, a 4.4% increase. The population is 89.5% White and 5.9% Asian, 2.9% Hispanic/Latino, and 1.4% Black. The median household income is \$118,193 with a poverty rate of 5.3%. The typical value of homes in Franklin in June of 2022 is \$620,291, and home values have increased by 16.6% over the past year, according to Zillow.

## The Project Area

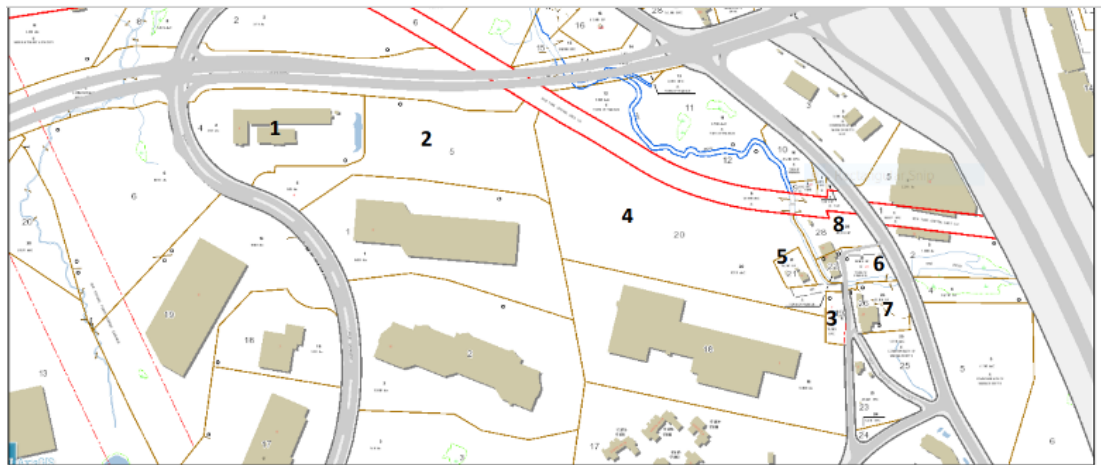
The North Grove Street Priority Development Area (PDA), which runs along Grove Street, is 900 feet south of Route 140, three-quarters of a mile to Forge Park Commuter Rail Station, and one-quarter of a mile from Interstate 495. The area is sorely in need of remediation and redevelopment. The project area consists of one Town-owned parcel, Lot 22, and five privately owned parcels – Lots 19, 20, 21, 26 and 28 (see Map below) within the North Grove Priority Development Area (PDA) and North Grove Economic Opportunity Area (EOA), and two privately owned parcels in the adjacent Forge Park Economic Opportunity Area (Lots 4 & 5). In total, the Project Area consists of 23.6+/- acres, of which 16.9+/- are developable if an access roadway were to be constructed.

The .82-acre Town-owned parcel (Lot 22)

is a brownfield site that has been partially remediated at a cost of approximately \$600,000 (to date) through the combined efforts of the Town, MassDevelopment, and the EPA (which has provided the majority of the funding). Previously home to two industrial buildings owned by the Nu-Style Corporation, Nu-Style Building I was demolished in 2012, with more than 500 tons of contaminated soil excavated and disposed of offsite. The second structure, Nu-Style Building II, will need to be demolished in order to continue the Town's environmental assessment and remediation activities. It is anticipated that the soil beneath the structure will require

comparable remediation, given the similar nature of the production process to Building I.

The other properties within the North Grove PDA area include a 9.3-acre undeveloped parcel (Lot 20) to the west of the Town-owned parcel that is landlocked and not developable without an access roadway. The other lots in the project area have nonconforming zoning issues and/or contaminated soil and ground water. The Town is considering building an access roadway (the North Grove PDA/ Revitalization and Access Roadway Project) in order to stimulate private investment in the North Grove PDA. The Forge Park lots include



- 1 Map 272, Lot 4
- 2 Map 272, Lot 5
- 3 Map 276, Lot 19
- 4 Map 276, Lot 20
- 5 Map 276, Lot 21
- 6 Map 276, Lot 22, Town of Franklin owned Former Nu-Style Property
- 7 Map 276, Lot 26
- 8 Map 276, Lot 28

**Below is a list of properties within the Project Area.**

Parcel	Address	Owner	(Size) Acres	Zoning	Structures	Notes	Former Nu-Style Property	Developable Acres	EOA
272-004-000	4 Forge Parkway	Franklin MA Owner	4.520	Industrial	Yes, 130 room Residence Inn	Access to back lot (Map 272, Lot 5)	No		Forge Park
272-005-000	6 Forge Parkway	Donegal LLC	6.45	Industrial	No.	Undeveloped lot in Forge Park, adjacent to hotel. Adjacent to North Grove EOA.	No	6.45	Forge Park
276-019-000	7 Old Forge Hill Road	Franklin Alloys Inc	0.365	Business	No.	Vacant parcel. Industrial facility (Forge) demolished 10+ yrs ago. Parcel zoning is nonconforming.	No	0.365	North Grove
276-020-000	Grove Street	Margaret C Ranieri TR, C R Miller TR	9.312	Business	No	Vacant developable parcel, with access through Town and private property easements. Parcel zoning is nonconforming.	No	9.312	North Grove
276-021-000	15 Old Forge Hill Road	Ralph F Delucia	0.348	Business	Yes, 1,340 SF single family home.	Access through private property easement. Parcel zoning is nonconforming.	No	0.000	North Grove
276-022-000	21 Grove Street	Town of Franklin	0.825	Business	Yes, dilapidated structure (4,034 SF footprint) needs to be demolished	Former industrial site with contaminated soil and groundwater.	Yes	0.825	North Grove
276-026-000	25 Grove Street	Unified Ventures LLC	0.940	Business	Yes, Ind./Commercial building with 6,900+SF footprint	Property may have contaminated soil or groundwater.	Yes	0.000	North Grove
276-028-000	15 Grove Street	15 Grove Street LLC	0.806	Business	Yes, 2,076 sf Industrial facility. Connected to Town building on Lot 22.	Property may have contaminated soil or groundwater.	Yes	0.000	North Grove
			Total Acres					Developable Acres	
			23.567					16.952	

a 130 room Residence Inn (Lot 4) as well as the only undeveloped parcel (Lot 5) in the park, at which a hotel has been proposed.

## Current Zoning

The majority of the project area is in the Business zoning District. The two parcels in Forge Park are in the Industrial zoning district. Both zoning districts allow substantial uses by right or by special permit. The Town feels that the zoning in the project area is sufficient to attract the desired investment once the proposed project moves forward, however, rezoning would be “seriously considered” in order to attract the appropriate type of development.

## Questions for the TAP

The Town of Franklin asked the TAP panelists to address the following questions:

1. Is the Town’s North Grove PDA/EOA Revitalization and Access Roadway Project actually feasible given existing constraints, or are there better options to clean up and redevelop the Town’s Nu-Style property and stimulate private investment in the North Grove PDA?
2. Can the Town create a public/private development partnership to implement the Proposed Project (or other project conceived during the TAP) where all parties gain in the end?
3. What specific process should the Town (and/or public private partnership) take to implement the chosen revitalization project?

## Input from Stakeholders

Stakeholders provided additional insight for the panelists in two separate sessions, leading panelists to make the following observations:

- All parties agreed that no matter what redevelopment plan is chosen, cleaning up the site must be a priority.
- Any development plan on Old Forge Rd will present challenges because of the

layout, topography, and the fact that the Town no longer recognizes the road as a functioning throughfare.

- The principal stakeholders (the Town, multiple owners of the various parcels) lack a shared vision for the site.
- Each stakeholder has explored the market potential of their property, i.e., considered the possibility of selling outright, acquiring adjoining parcels for various redevelopment scenarios, etc.
- There was little interest on the part of the stakeholders to move forward with the proposed Access Roadway Project

## Existing Conditions of Site

The Town estimates that there has been approximately \$600,000 invested in testing and remediation (including the removal of toxic heavy metals from the ground) of the Town-owned parcel to date, funded in part by the Town and a grant from MassDevelopment, but largely through the EPA. There is a former industrial building (Nu-Style Building II) on the Town-owned parcel that has totally collapsed and contains hazardous materials. It will need to be demolished and disposed of as hazardous waste.

The Town-owned and surrounding parcels have varying levels of environmental contamination, and these chemicals include:

- CVOCs (chlorinated volatile organic compounds)
- PAHs (polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons)
- Heavy Metals
- TCE (trichloroethylene)
- PCE (tetrachloroethene)

In order to determine the level of contamination on the Town-owned parcel, the dilapidated industrial building will need to be demolished and disposed of as hazardous waste. The ground beneath the building will then need to be analyzed for contamination levels.

# Assets and Opportunities

**Ownership of Key Parcel by Town** – The Town already owns and controls the fate of Lot 22 (also referred to as 21 Grove Street), and has begun the remediation process in conjunction with state and federal agencies to prepare it for the next steps of redevelopment.

**Accessibility of Site** – The site is within close proximity to Route 140 and I-495, and that connectivity makes it ideally suited for commercial development – particularly for industrial uses such as manufacturing and warehouse/distribution. The site is also within a short drive to the Franklin Commuter Rail Station on the Franklin/Foxboro Line which connects to South Station.

**Favorable Existing Zoning** – Much of the project area is in the Business Zoning District, with two parcels in Forge Park located in the industrial zoning district. Both zoning districts allow substantial uses by right or by special permit. The Town is also amenable to making the appropriate zoning changes to allow for other commercial or residential uses.



Ownership of key property and interstate accessibility make the area particularly attractive. Source: ULI Boston.

# Challenges

**Site Contamination** – As previously stated, there is an indeterminate amount of contamination on the Town-owned site as well as presumed contamination on other sites. The level of contamination and the cost of cleanup would likely be factors in determining redevelopment options.

**Multiple Parcel Ownership** – The eight parcels are owned by eight separate entities, which could potentially impede the probability of an optimal solution for any redevelopment plan.

**Lack of Frontage** – Some of the parcels are landlocked (no roadway access), and some also lack frontage. Without adequate frontage, the lots would not be legally buildable without obtaining zoning relief.

**Location of Mine Brook** – The brook is located on the perimeter of the Town parcel, and any redevelopment plan would need to take the cleanup process into account

– ensuring that the brook is adequately protected from any further contamination. It is worth noting that 44.3 tons of contaminated sediment was removed from the millrace that ran under the building that the Town demolished in 2012 (Nu-Style Building I), and that a similar amount will likely need to be removed from the existing (Nu-Style II) building once it is demolished.

**Difficult Topography** – The topography on the site varies in elevation, which would likely result in construction cost premiums associated with extensive earthwork requirements, blasting, and/or the construction of retaining walls needed to level the site for construction.

**Unknown Condition of Building on Town Parcel** – The dilapidated building (Nu-Style Building II) on the Town parcel will need to be demolished and removed before it can be determined what level of contamination lies in the soil beneath.



Site contamination, topography, and existing zoning make development here challenging. Source: ULI Boston.

# Recommendations

## Question 1

***Is the Town's North Grove PDA/EOA Revitalization and Access Roadway Project actually feasible given the existing constraints, or are there better options to clean up and redevelop the Town's Nu-Style property and stimulate private investment in the North Grove PDA?***

While the Town-proposed Access Roadway Project is an attractive solution, the panel concluded that given the existing constraints, there are better options to help the Town achieve its stated goals of stimulating private investment in the site through remediation and development of the Nu-Style property 21 Grove Street (Lot 22).

One of the options would be to have the Town of Franklin become an active partner in facilitating a land swap between the owners

of 15 Grove Street (Lot 28, Map 276) and 25 Grove Street (Lot 26, Map 276). The Town-owned parcel (Lot 22) and 15 Grove Street (Lot 28) would then create a larger, contiguous parcel, which could be properly investigated to determine the levels of contamination – something the Town is unable to do under the current ownership conditions. The larger parcel could then be remediated, with the additional benefit of creating a site with enhanced curb appeal. (See slide 19 and 20). The larger, remediated site would have greater market appeal for investors/developers.

Additionally, the panel recommends extending the biotechnology use overlay district, which currently includes the lots on Forge Parkway. The extension of this overlay district to Grove Street would enhance the market appeal to potential developers and increase the likelihood of private investment



The current planned land swap (left) and the Panel's proposed reconfiguration of the land swap (right). Source: Briefing Materials and TAP Panel.

## Question 2

**Can the Town create a public/private development partnership to implement the Proposed Project (or other project conceived during the TAP) where all parties gain in the end?**

The panel recommends that the Town works with the EPA, Mass DEP and MassDevelopment to leverage available funding through those agencies to create a comprehensive remediation plan. It is recommended that this work with funding partners begin ASAP, as the timeline for the funding to be committed can often be lengthy. In addition, an overarching environmental plan needs to be developed to determine the best use of available funding. Once remediated, the likelihood of private investment at the site would increase dramatically, given its outstanding location and increased size after reconfiguration.

## Question 3

**What specific process should the Town (and/or public private partnership) take to implement the chosen revitalization project?**

Panelists determined that given existing constraints (slope, private takings, excessive amount of asphalt), a strategy involving an

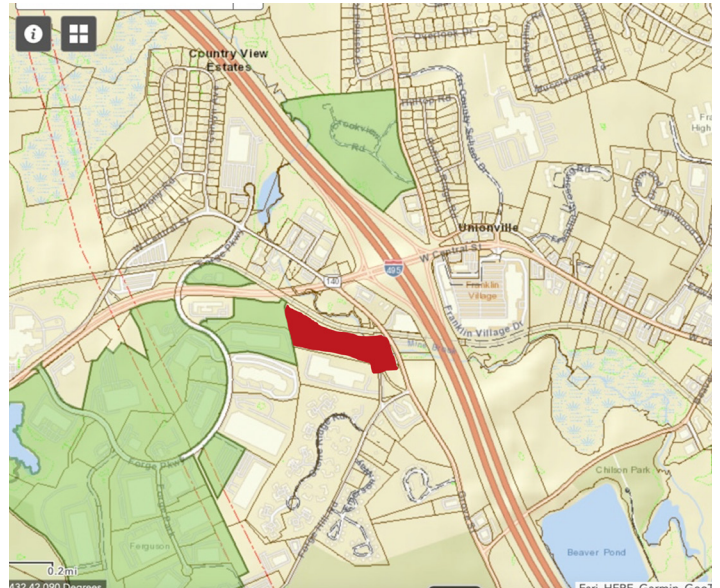
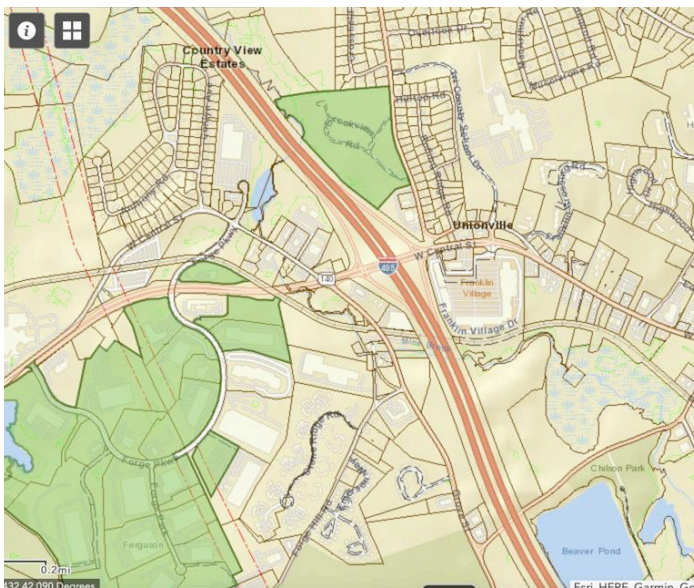
acquisition and land swap between property owners and subsequent site remediation may be the best avenue to help the Town achieve its stated goals of stimulating private investment. The panel recommends the following:

### Property Acquisitions

- Discuss acquiring 25 Grove Street, located to the south of the Town property, with the property owner.
- Approach owner of World Marble & Granite property at 15 Grove Street about an opportunity to relocate to 25 Grove Street in a land swap.
- Once 15 Grove Street is acquired by the Town of Franklin, it can combine the lots and use grant money to properly remediate the combined lots (21 Grove Street and 15 Grove Street). Such a strategy would also enable the Town to demolish the conjoined buildings as one, without the additional cost of shoring up the existing building as the Town-owned building is being demolished.

### Remediation

- Using a combination of additional EPA, Mass DEP, Mass Development funding, a site assessment and remediation of 15 and 21 Grove Streets should be



The current North Grove biotechnology overlay (left) and the Panel's proposed reconfiguration of the overlay (right). Source: Briefing Materials and TAP Panel.

completed. Combining the two properties would allow the Town to apply for the \$264,000 in grant funds set aside in the Governor's budget. Only the Town can apply for the grant. If the property stays with a private owner, they would not be eligible for funding. By combining the lots, the town can ensure the total parcel is cleaned.

- Concurrent with the remediation effort, the Town should amend the existing biotechnology use overlay district to extend to Grove Street. If all of the parcels along Grove Street were re-zoned to include biotechnology, it could potentially attract companies or developers in the biotechnology/biomanufacturing industry, which continues to expand in Greater Boston and beyond.

#### **Preparation for Marketing Site**

- **Create “Pad Ready” Site** – Once remediation is complete, the Town should invest in additional hardscaping and landscaping to create a site that is “pad-ready” (i.e., ready-to-build, including access to utilities) to increase the marketability of the site.

- **Expand Current Zoning** – The site, which is currently a business district, will benefit from highly flexible zoning, and as previously mentioned, the panel recommends expanding the biotechnology overlay district to include all of the parcels.
- **Work with Local Brokerage** – The panel believes that working with a local commercial broker to assist with the sale (or ground lease) of the property will provide a wider range of options for potential uses of the site. These may include coworking space, makerspace (artists or the creative economy), retail, gym/yoga/fitness, and other community-focused business uses.
- **Report Plan to the Town** – Generate a positive parcel repositioning public message when appropriate to get buy in and support from the community.

# Funding and Resources

## MassDevelopment

**Finance Programs** – Developers may be eligible for various types of financing from MassDevelopment, subject to acceptable underwriting and required approvals. Capabilities are described at <https://www.massdevelopment.com/what-we-offer/financing/> and includes loans for environmental site assessment and remediation; predevelopment financing; loans and loan guarantees for building acquisition and renovation; and low-interest rate tax-exempt bond financing for qualifying projects by manufacturers or rental housing developers.

## EPA Brownfield Grant Funding

EPA's Brownfields Program provides direct funding for brownfields assessment, cleanup, revolving loans, environmental job training, technical assistance, training, and research. To facilitate the leveraging of public resources, EPA's Brownfields Program collaborates with other EPA programs, other federal partners, and state agencies to identify and make available resources that can be used for brownfield activities.

- [Assessment Grants](#) provide funding for brownfield inventories, planning, environmental assessments, and community outreach.
- [Revolving Loan Fund \(RLF\) Grants](#) provide funding to capitalize loans that are used to clean up brownfield sites.
- [Cleanup Grants](#) provide funding to carry out cleanup activities at brownfield sites owned by the applicant.
- [Multipurpose \(MP\) Grants](#) provide funding to conduct a range of eligible assessment and cleanup activities at one or more brownfield sites in a target area.
- [Job Training \(JT\) Grants](#) provide environmental training for residents impacted by brownfield sites in their communities.
- [State and Tribal Response Program Grants](#) provide non-competitive funding to establish or enhance State and Tribal Brownfields response programs.



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