

Town of Littleton

MBTA Communities Act

FAQs

What is the MBTA Communities Act?

The MBTA Communities Act is Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 40A, Section 3A. This law established a requirement that each of the 177 designated MBTA Communities (MGL c. 161A Section 1) must have zoning that:

- Provides for at least 1 district of reasonable size in which multifamily housing is permitted as of right.
- Cannot have age-restrictions and shall be suitable for families with children.
- Must have a minimum gross density of 15 dwelling units per acre.
- Part of the district must be located within 0.5 miles from a commuter rail, subway, ferry, or bus station, as applicable.

Why is this Act important?

The MBTA Communities Act addresses four critical components of our state's economy:

- Massachusetts has a housing shortage, and we need to produce more housing.
- The amount of housing that is financially attainable to most households is dwindling.
- The Commonwealth is at a disadvantage to compete for businesses, jobs, and talent.
- Placing housing near transit is good housing, economic, transportation, and climate policy.

Why is compliance important?

Compliance with the law allows the Town to **support housing to meet its own needs** for different housing types, different levels of affordability, and support for economic development.

Compliance also allows the Town **access to sixteen different grant programs** administered by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and related agencies.

What else is important to know about the MBTA Communities Act?

The MBTA Communities Act is **not**:

- A mandate to build housing.
- A housing production target.
- Restricted to only addressing affordable housing needs.
- A one-size fits all tool to address all housing needs in a community.
- Viewed as optional by the Commonwealth and Attorney General.

What are the requirements for Littleton?

The Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC) defined the following requirements for Littleton:

Community Category	Commuter Rail
2020 Housing Units (Census PL-94)	3,889
Minimum Multifamily Unit Capacity	750
Minimum Land Area Developable Station Area	50
Developable Station Area	244
% of district to be located in station area	20%

Note that the requirement that a percentage of the district be located in the station area means that **20% of the total land area and 20% of the units** must be in the station area. This calculation is made **on the total district area**, not the minimum requirements above. Also, **half of the land area must be in one contiguous district**. The proposed strategy on the next page includes two districts; one of those districts meets this requirement.

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What is Littleton's Strategy?

Littleton has a two-part strategy that includes achieving MBTA-compliant zoning in two areas of town. The first area is the King Street Common area and the second is the Littleton Station area. The existing King Street Common District, with a minor modification, would account for 80% of the requirements. The remaining 20% would come from the proposed Littleton Station MBTA Communities Multi-Family District (Article 19).

	King Street Common	Littleton Station	Total
District Area (acres)	40.63	10.75	51.38
<i>% of Total</i>	80%	20%	
Estimated Unit Capacity (# of units)	813	204	1,017
<i>% of Total</i>	80%	20%	
Estimated Density (dwelling units per acre)	20.5	19.0	19.8

I thought we only had to build 750 units? Why does the table show more?

Great question! Remember, the Town is not responsible for building anything. The Town's responsibility is to zone for at least the minimum required capacity. The private market is responsible for production, and many other factors influence how many units can be produced, including interest rates, the physical characteristics of the lots, cost of labor, and number of units already built in the community.

The table shows more than 750 units because 20% of the units and 20% of the acres must

be in the station area. The unit capacity of the existing King Street Common District is estimated at 813 units, therefore the estimated unit capacity at the proposed Littleton Station District must increase so that the number of units is 20% of the total unit capacity.

Was the planning process to develop the strategy a public process?

Yes! The Planning Board sponsored six meetings during this process: a policy workshop for elected officials on November 16, 2022, and public meetings on February 2, February 9, March 8, June 8, July 28, and August 17. February 9 and March 8 were advertised as public meetings specific to this planning process.

What happens now?

Article 19 of the warrant contains the zoning changes to bring the Town into compliance. The Planning Board held a public hearing on October 12 for this article and continued it to October 26. Town Meeting is on November 1, 2023. **Article 19** requires a majority vote of Town Meeting.

What happens next?

That depends on Town Meeting's vote. If **Article 19** passes, then the town will submit its application to EOHL to determine whether it is in compliance with the requirements.

If the vote fails, then the Town will need to reconsider its strategy.

Where can I find more detailed information about the MBTA Communities Act and the requirements?

This is EOHL's page with all their information:

<https://www.mass.gov/info-details/multi-family-zoning-requirement-for-mbta-communities>

The Town of Littleton has a lot of information about the process here: <https://bit.ly/LittletonMBTAZoning>