

Residential Compatibility Standards Subcommittee

Initial Meeting
June 12, 2025

Purpose:

The Residential Compatibility Standards Sub-Committee is formed by the Planning Board to review the merits of amending the provisions of the Zoning By-Law to codify Residential Compatibility Standards, and/or amend any other provisions of the Zoning By-Law related to the creation of residential Compatibility Standards, such as:

- Minimum Open Space Requirements: Ensures sufficient open space remains on each lot and in proportion to adjacent lots.
- Lot Coverage Ratio: Restricts the footprint of structures, potentially including detached buildings and hardscaping.
- Floor Area Ratio (FAR): Limits total development envelope relative to lot size
- Dimensional Standards: Minimizes the impact of new construction, renovations, remodels, and additions to existing buildings on surrounding properties in residential neighborhoods.

Current Zoning And Site Plan Review Challenges:

Under the current Zoning By-Law, Site Plan Review guidelines provide limited direction on construction dimensions, with only:

- Lot Setbacks
- Maximum Height (35')
- Performance Standard C, "Character and Scale of Buildings," offering broad guidance.

The vague and subjective language of this standard creates uncertainty for project applicants and abutters regarding acceptable deviations from existing neighborhood character.

Recent Zoning Changes Have Intensified These Challenges:

- In 2020, the threshold for Site Plan Review was lowered to 5,000 square feet of land disturbance, increasing the number of projects requiring review.
- The "Hatfield Amendment" permits large-scale redevelopment on small lots.
- Growing demand for larger homes, driven by Hingham's location, amenities, and desirability, has contributed to an increase in large-scale residential redevelopments.

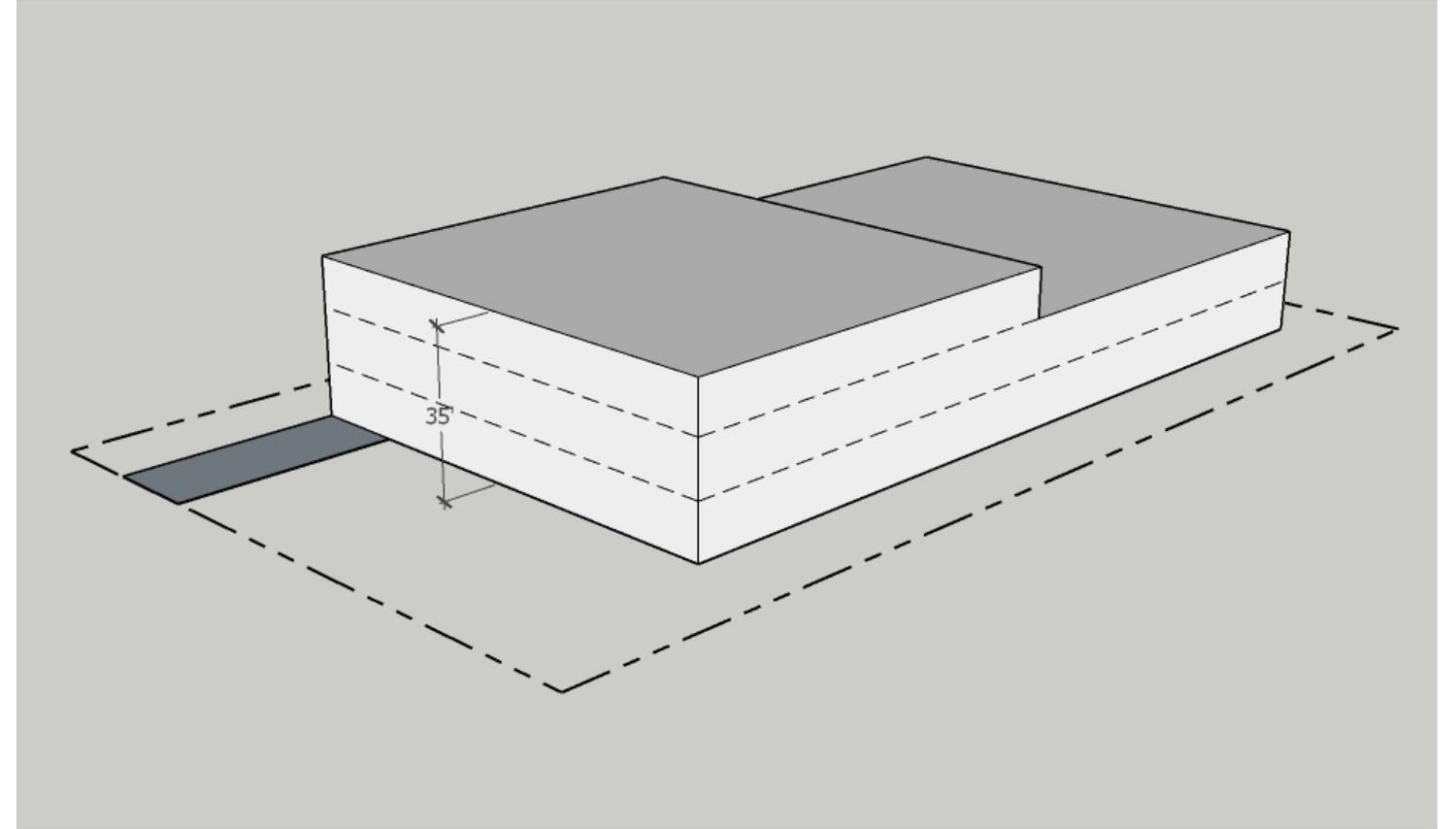
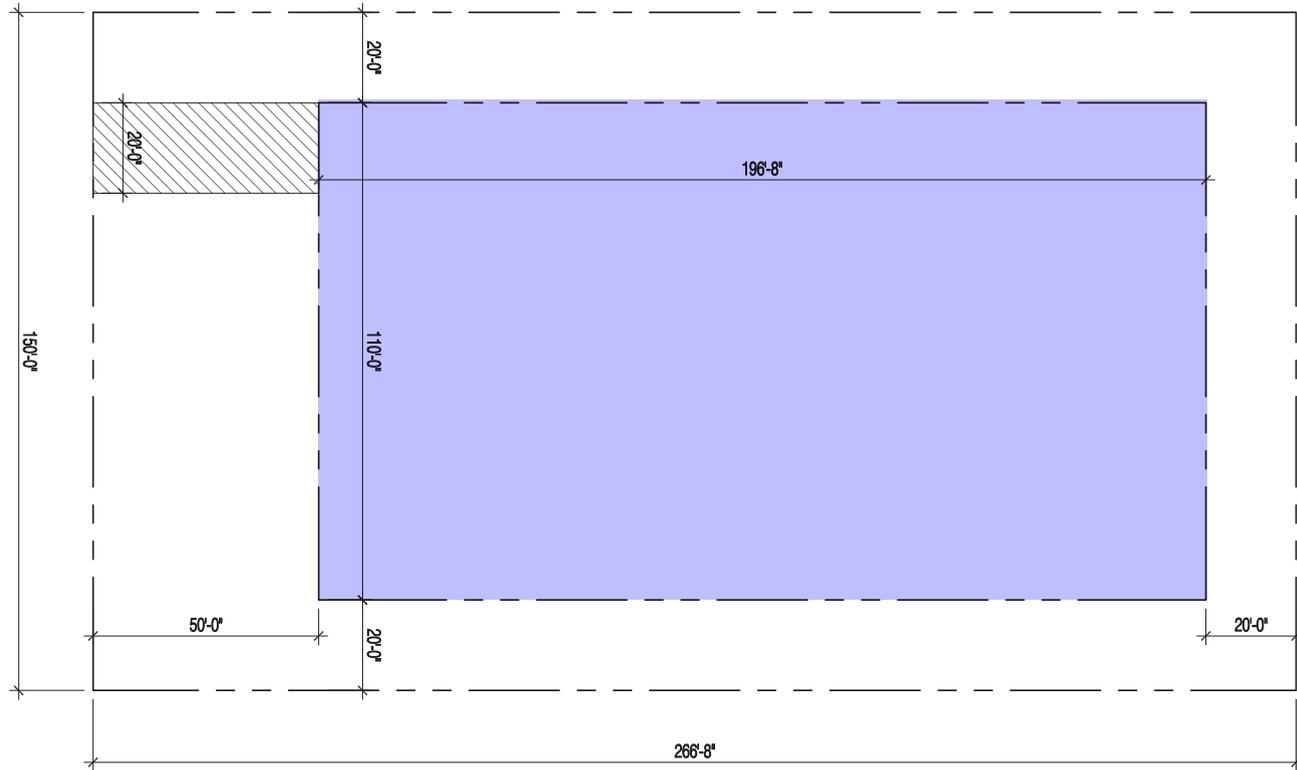


Residence District C

**40,000 SF Minimum Area
150-foot Minimum Frontage**

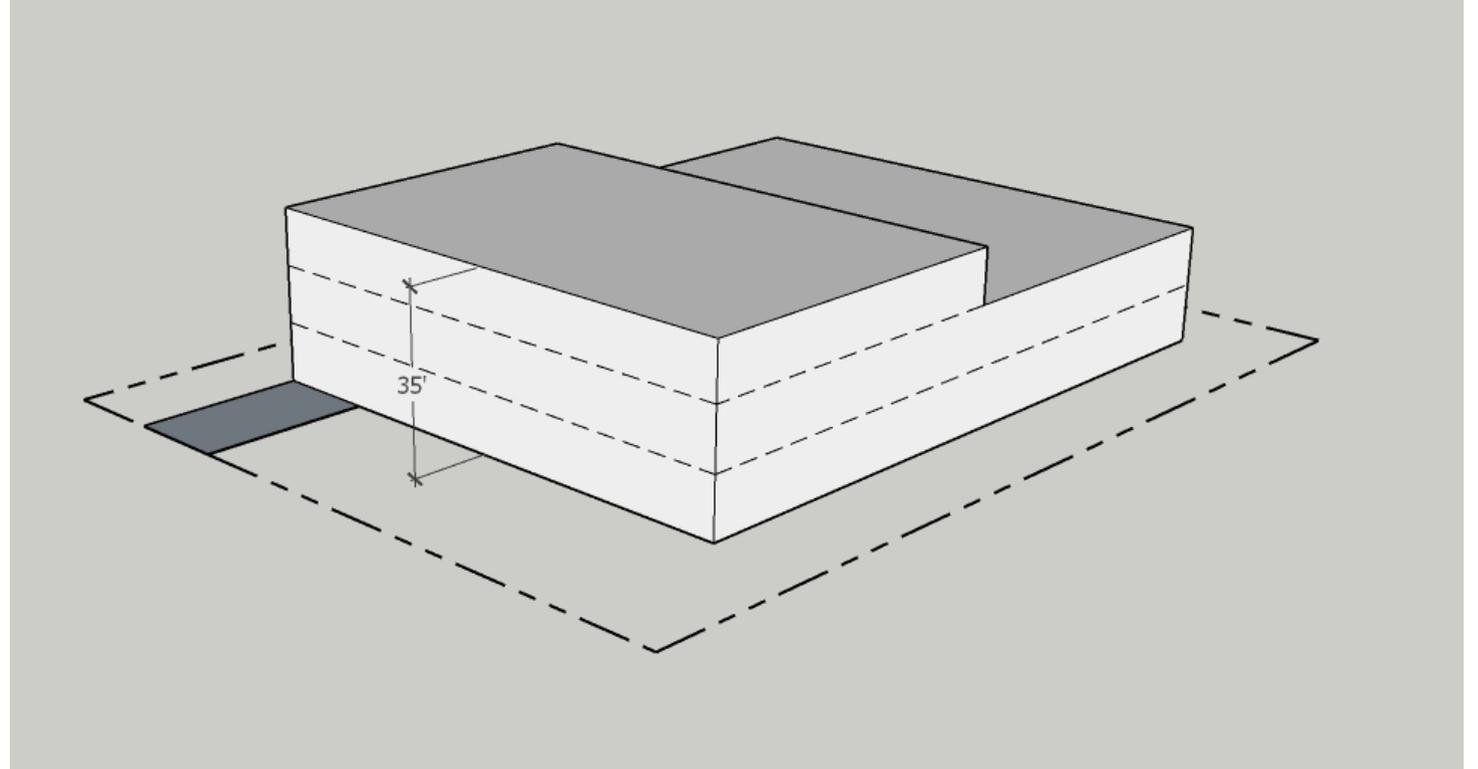
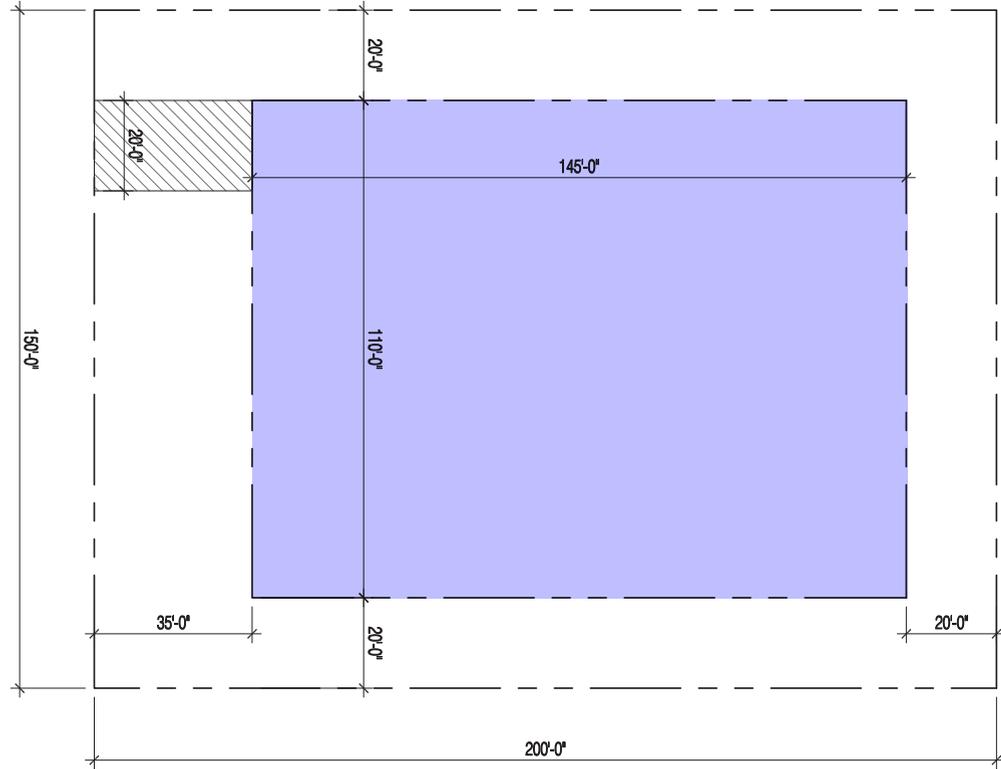
150'-0"

266'-8"

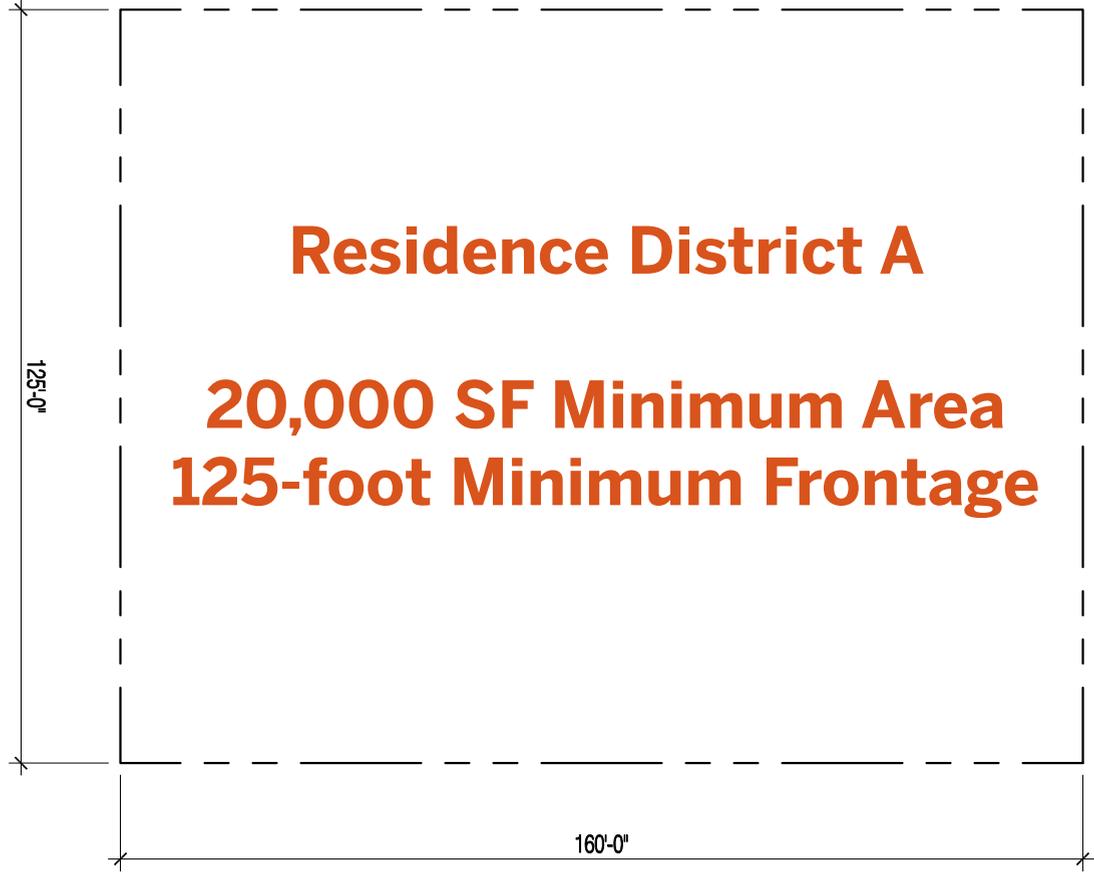


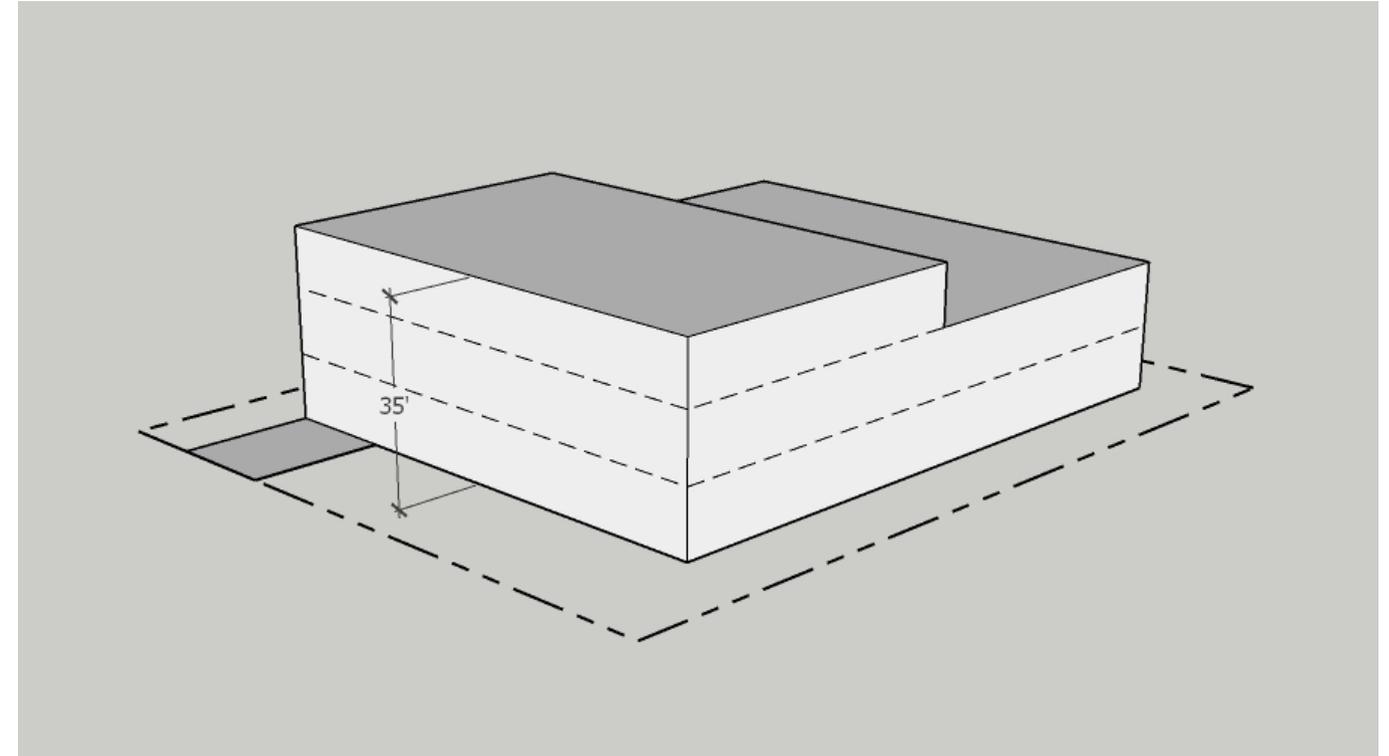
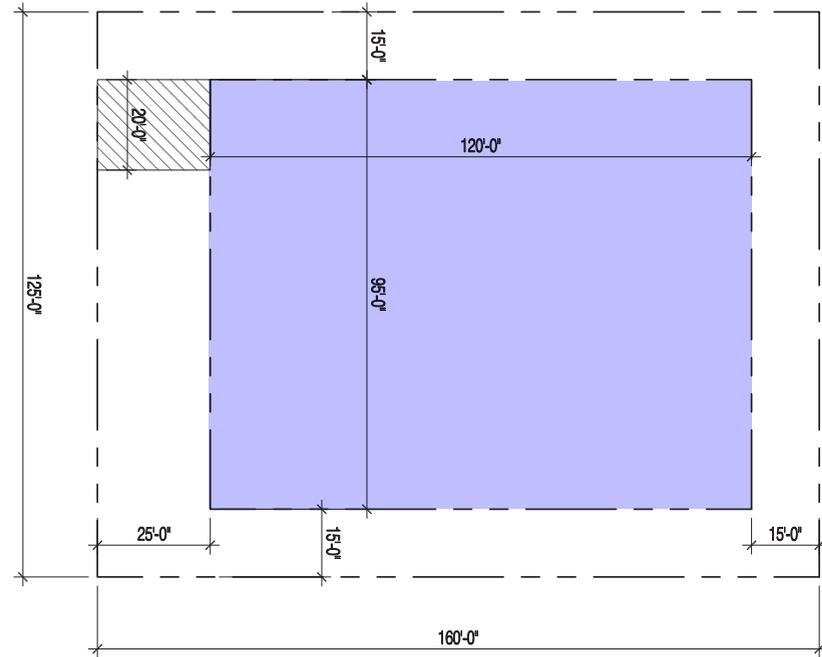
Lot Area: 40,000 SF
Buildable Area: 21,633 SF
Lot Coverage: 54%
+ Paving/Walks within Setbacks (56.5%)
Potential Development: 2.5 Stories: 54,083 SF
Potential FAR: 1.35





Lot Area: 30,000 SF
Buildable Area: 15,950 SF
Lot Coverage: 53%
+ Paving/Walks within Setbacks (55.5%)
Potential Development: 2.5 Stories: 39,875 SF
Potential FAR: 1.33





Lot Area: 20,000 SF
Buildable Area: 11,400 SF
Lot Coverage: 57%
+ Paving/Walks within Setbacks (59.5%)
Potential Development: 2.5 Stories: 28,500 SF
Potential FAR: 1.425

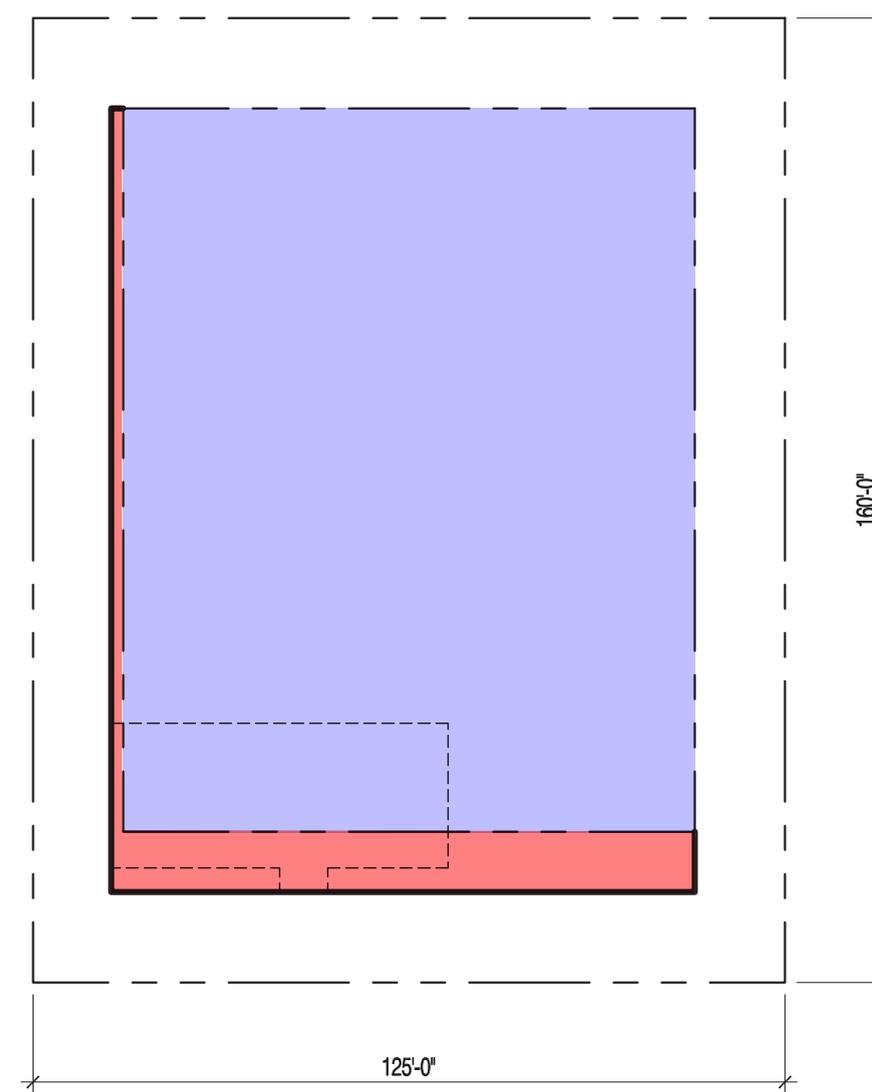
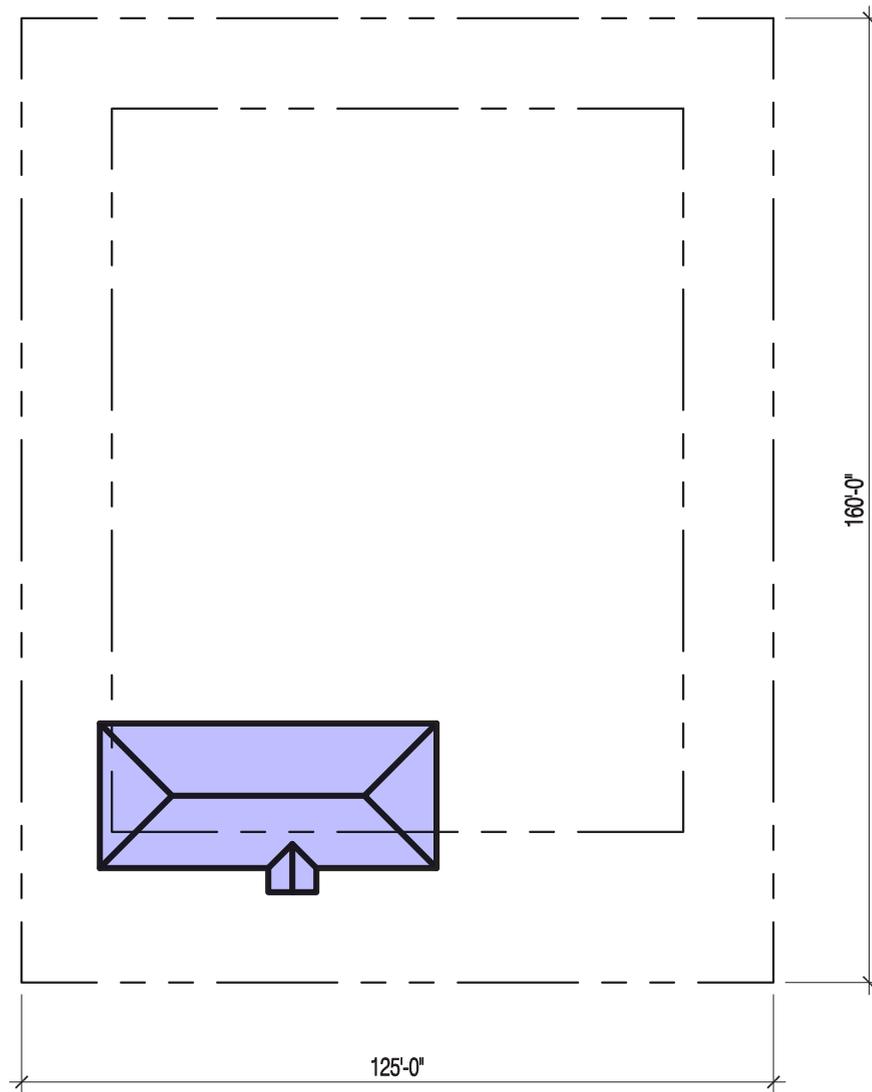
Issues With Large-Scale Redevelopments:

The Planning Board has seen a steady rise in “raze and replace” applications. Many of these projects propose significantly larger homes than those they replace, often out of scale with the neighborhood. This trend raises concerns about:

- The impact on neighborhood character, including viewscales, sunlight, and tree canopies.
- The loss of smaller, more affordable homes, making it harder for first-time homebuyers and downsizing seniors to remain in Hingham.
- Potential adverse effects on abutters and the broader community, as larger homes often dominate small lots.

Impact Of The Hatfield Amendment:

Originally intended to allow modest modifications to non-conforming structures, the Hatfield Amendment has contributed to the proliferation of large homes on small lots. Despite initial assurances that it would not lead to excessive over-development, actual experience has demonstrated otherwise.



"Hatfield Amendment"

2. For the purposes of this Section III-I, the alteration of, addition to, reconstruction of, extension of, or structural change in an existing nonconforming Single or Two-Family Dwelling shall not be considered the extension of a nonconforming use or structure..."

Subjectivity In Design And Performance Standards:

Applicants often seek clarity from the Board regarding acceptable project dimensions. While some developers have voluntarily adjusted their designs in response to community concerns, the lack of clear, enforceable guidelines risks setting precedents for ever-larger structures.

Example of recently requested “Neighborhood Analysis”

	LOT SIZE	LOT SIZE SF	FRONTAGE	GROSS (SF)	LIVING AREA (SF)	FAR
	1.377	59,982	170'	11,808	8,158	0.197
EXISTING RESIDENCES WITHIN 300' RADIUS						
ADDRESS	LOT SIZE	LOT SIZE SF	FRONTAGE	GROSS (SF)	LIVING AREA (SF)	FAR
	0.988	43,037	83'	8,809	4,053	0.205
	0.918	39,988	147'	7,357	4,042	0.184
	0.962	41,905	193'	5,834	3,168	0.139
	1.1	47,916	149'	7,722	3,256	0.161
	0.937	40,816	148'	5,041	2,756	0.124
	1.377	59,982	170'	5,995	3,209	0.100
	0.938	40,859	188'	5,183	2,899	0.127
	0.938	61,463	153'	6,710	2,846	0.109
	1.593	69,391	150'	5,408	2,885	0.078
	1.01	43,996	corner	5,976	2,830	0.136
	0.921	40,119	corner	8,732	5,119	0.218
EXISTING AVERAGES		48,134		6,615		0.144

Alignment With The 2020 Master Plan:

The 2020 Townwide Master Plan identified concerns about over-development, large home construction, and the loss of starter homes. Policy 4.5 of the Master Plan recommends:

- Establishing a maximum Floor Area Ratio (FAR) to regulate home massing.
- Amending zoning bylaws to set rear and side yard setbacks based on building height.
- Regulating the footprint of new construction to maintain neighborhood consistency.

Considerations For Regulation:

Potential mechanisms for regulating residential development include:

- Floor Area Ratio (FAR): Limits total building square footage relative to lot size.
- Lot Coverage Ratio: Restricts the footprint of structures, potentially including detached buildings and hardscaping.
- Minimum Open Space Requirements: Ensures sufficient open space remains on each lot.
- Residential Compatibility Dimensional Standards: Minimizes the impact of new construction, remodels, and additions to existing buildings on surrounding properties in residential neighborhoods.
- Tree Removal Guidelines: Review existing tree yard restrictions and how it can enhance open space requirements.

Alignment With Other Town Initiatives

Residential redevelopment affects not only neighborhood aesthetics but also climate and environmental goals.

The Town's Climate Action Plan seeks to reduce carbon emissions, and larger homes inherently consume more energy.

Additionally, increased lot coverage often leads to tree loss, impacting both aesthetics and environmental sustainability.

With new state legislation allowing Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) by right, well-crafted zoning provisions could prevent excessive lot coverage and overcrowding.

Next Steps:

Given the increasing frequency of large-scale residential redevelopment and growing community concerns, the Planning Board should consider adopting clearer zoning provisions. Peer town research provides a strong foundation for evaluating options such as FAR or lot coverage limits.

To ensure a balanced approach, we seek input from residents and stakeholders. Community feedback will guide potential zoning amendments, ensuring that future residential development aligns with Hingham's character while respecting property rights.

We look forward to engaging with the community and working together on this important issue.