

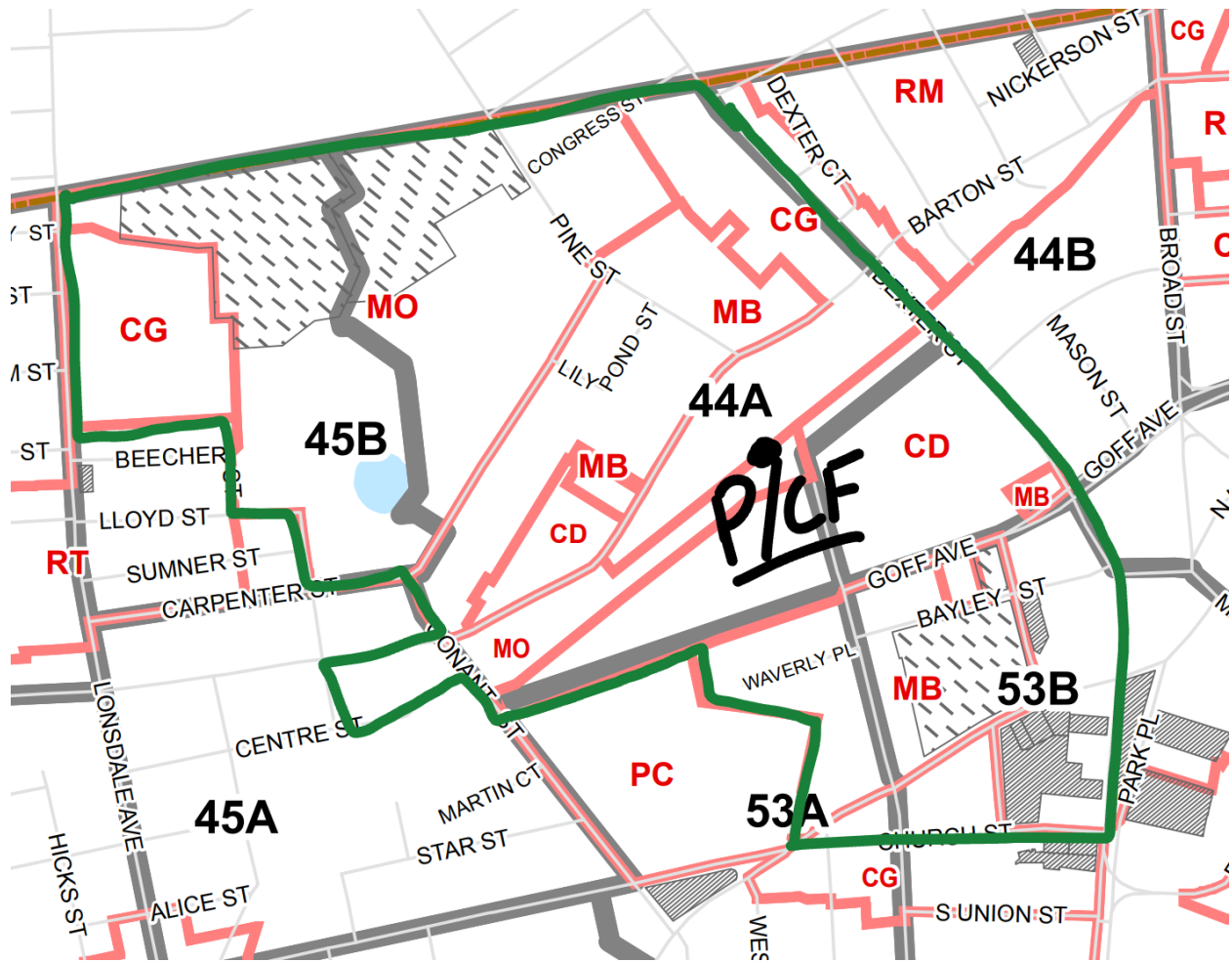
On Zoning: Pawtucket/Central Falls

January 25, 2023

The wonders of college. Here I am figuring out what the hell I want to do with my life after graduating in 2026 (at the current pace), bouncing from field to field within geography / GIS / urban planning / public transit, I decided to take a class on zoning and land use planning. While the class began earlier this month, I took a bit of curiosity into zoning over winter break and continued that curiosity into the new term. Enough about me, so this may be the beginning of a new series looking at the zoning around transit developments.

The Pawtucket/Central Falls train station opened on January 23, 2023 (just a couple of days ago at the time of writing), and is located right in the heart of Pawtucket, within easy walking distance of homes and businesses located downtown. The station serves as the new location of RIPTA's bus hub for Pawtucket-area routes (R, 1, 71, 72, 73, 75, 76, 78, 80, Qx).

However, the current area around the train station doesn't have the greatest of all land use. Of course, I had to dig into the Pawtucket zoning map and code to figure out what was going on in the area, and what resources Pawtucket's zoning had to make the area's land use better for transit usage.



The previous zoning for the area surrounding the new station. The green outline is the boundaries of a new district created to encourage transit-oriented development (to be discussed later in this post). The train station is marked as P/CF.

The area surrounding the station was previously split into four distinct zoning districts, which are outlined below, with a summary of what the district is intended for (Sec. 410-2):

- Commercial Downtown (CD) - This zone is intended to enhance and restore the downtown area.
- Commercial General (CG) - This zone is intended for commercial areas that serve City-wide needs for retail, services and professional office establishments.

- Industrial Built-Up (MB) - This zone is intended for existing high-density industrial structures that are used for manufacturing and storage purposes.
- Industrial Open (MO) - This zone is intended for light industrial uses that accommodate a variety of manufacturing, assembly, storage of durable goods and related activities.

The important part of this is what people want in transit-oriented developments. Dense housing and mixed use developments are very important. Housing is only allowed in the CD and CG districts. The only difference with that is that CG districts allow for 2 or more units per lot, while CD needs 3 or more units. Both the MB and MO industrial districts do not allow any form of residential uses. Only the CD district allows for mixed residential/commercial uses.

Remember that new district I mentioned? In May 2019, the City of Pawtucket created the Conant Thread (CT) zoning district for the planned development of the same name. According to the city's zoning code, the purposes are to:

- Create a transit-oriented development (TOD) zoning district that connects housing, commerce, and transit opportunities.
- Provide standards for high-quality infill development, adaptive reuse, and rehabilitation.
- Provide standards for high-quality urban design that will result in the development of safe, attractive, and comfortable spaces for pedestrians and bicyclists. (Sec. 410-43.8)

Wonderful goals for the area around the station! Going back to the table of use regulations, what exactly can be built in this new district? Dense housing. More dense than before, actually, with any new development requiring at least 5 housing units per lot. Three or four units can also be built, but those require a special permit from the city. One and two unit residences cannot be built anywhere within the district. Mixed residential/commercial uses are now allowed

everywhere within the district as well. Since this is a TOD district, I find it interesting that drive-throughs, gas stations, or other automotive service uses are not allowed either.

This is transit-oriented, so what's the parking situation here? A handful of cities nationwide have eliminated parking minimums in walkable, dense areas. Not only is there no minimum parking requirements for any development in the district, some uses actually have parking maximums. Offices, retail, or professional use buildings may not have more than three spots per 1,000 square feet of building space. Restaurants may not have more than one space per three seats or 50 square feet of bar area. (Sec. 410-43.17)