

# Transit Oriented Development

## PURPOSE

**To encourage a vibrant mix of residential, retail and commercial development and activities within walking distance of public transportation hubs.**

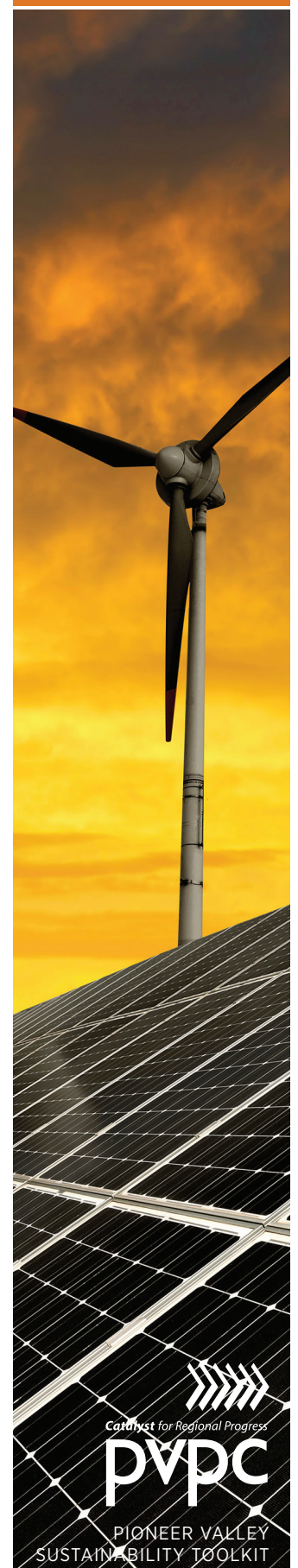
Transit-oriented development (TOD) has been around a long time. Since the colonial era, our homes, shops, eating establishments, businesses, and work places have tended to be grouped within walking distance of ports, roads, trolley lines and train stations. It's only since the 1950s that an automobile-centric approach to development and zoning has largely reshaped communities and made it virtually impossible for many people to live without using a car for every trip they make.

But in recent years, many communities have begun to re-discover the benefits of encouraging the location of more people and jobs near transportation nodes. By returning to our TOD tradition in development patterns, communities are increasing the home values and walkability of their neighborhoods. TOD neighborhoods often include multifamily homes, parks, cafes, restaurants and civic gathering spaces, helping to strengthen the social and economic fabric of the community. These kinds of housing choices and neighborhoods are very appealing to retiring Baby Boomers (ages 55+) and the upcoming Millennials (ages 21 to 35), many of whom are seeking alternatives to single-family suburban homes on large lots.

Although most TOD districts are built around a transit or bus station, not every TOD district requires one. What is required are a walkable environment and multiple transportation options—especially public transit that is frequent, reliable, and easy to use.

## HOW TOD ZONING WORKS

Transit-oriented development (TOD) zoning involves updates to local bylaws or ordinances to give property owners near transit stations greater flexibility to create homes and commercial buildings that are responsive to market demands and create high-quality pedestrian environments that encourage walking and transit use. This can be accomplished by: 1) establishing a new base zoning district with TOD-supporting performance standards; 2) adding TOD standards to an existing zoning base district; or 3) creating (or modifying an existing) overlay district to include TOD standards.



Geographically, a TOD district usually focuses on an area that is within a 5- to 10-minute walk of a transit station, usually ¼ to ½ mile. Critical to the success of a TOD district are dimensional and density standards that foster more compact and fully built-out development near transit—and yet are compatible with the general existing neighborhood context. For example, a residential density of 25 to 40 units per acre (or more) is typically desirable in a downtown TOD neighborhood with high-capacity subways and/or light rail, but 12-15 units per acre may be more appropriate for a village TOD center served by commuter rail. Similarly, building heights, floor-area ratios, setbacks, lot coverage and other standards should encourage greater density while preserving what people like about the existing neighborhood.

## TOD: A MIX OF USES

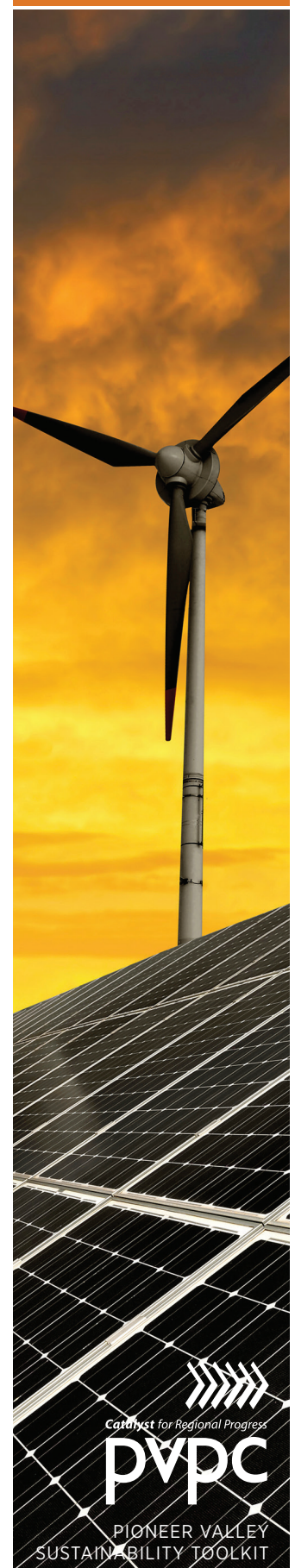
A diverse mix of residential and commercial uses is also desired in TOD districts. The optimal mix depends a lot on the station area context, whether it is a busy downtown area, a suburban location, or even small town center. Typical uses to consider include:

- » **Multi-family homes (townhouses or apartment buildings with at least 3 units)**
- » **Live-work units (in which some occupants are also employed by a business also on the premises)**
- » **Grocery stores**
- » **Restaurants, cafes and bars**

Uses that involve less efficient land use are not usually desirable in a TOD district and include auto sales, large parking lots (more than 50 spaces), mall-style shopping centers, drive-through restaurants and large-scale industry (though some types of manufacturing facilities may be a good fit).

Attractive street design is an important consideration for TOD zoning. Every attempt should be made to improve the safety and appeal of the pedestrian environment by minimizing curb cuts, requiring street-facing windows and entrances on buildings, specifying adequate sidewalk widths, allowing sidewalk café seating, locating parking at the side or rear of buildings, and using other complete streets techniques.

The issue of parking is critical to TOD districts. In many cases, a community will want to consider setting maximum parking limits in a TOD district, rather than minimum parking requirements for various types of uses. This approach relies more on developers' knowledge of parking needs for their respective uses, and can effectively reduce the amount of land that is devoted to autos. Strategies for meeting parking demand in TOD districts include shared parking among residential and commercial/office uses (residents park in the spaces during the evenings; shoppers or office workers during the day); credit for available underutilized on-street spaces; setting an appropriate price for



public parking; neighborhood parking permit systems; and developing public parking—especially parking garages.

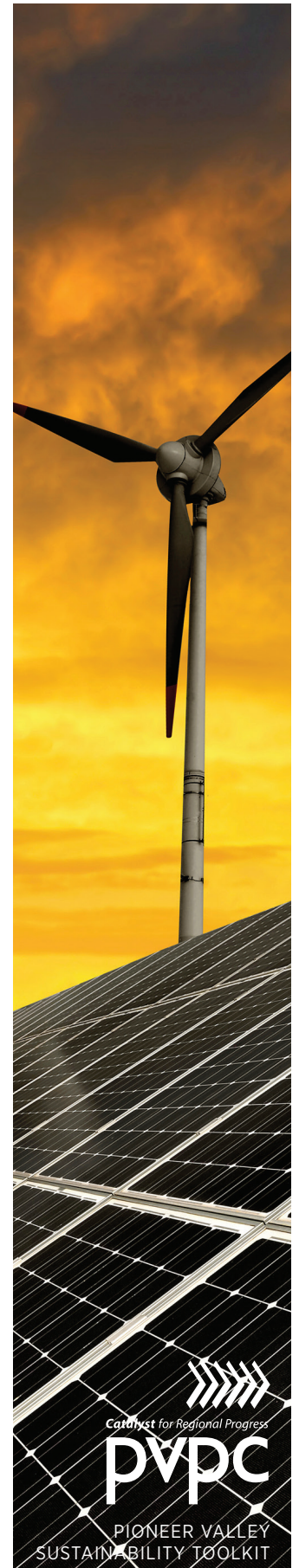
## ENGAGING STAKEHOLDERS

As with other zoning update process, it is important that community stakeholders participate. While TOD is actually a historically well-established development pattern, reaching community consensus about the best regulations and standards for TOD in your community can be challenging—especially because of the emphasis it places on pedestrian and transit access, versus the private automobile. It's also important to understand the existing and potential market for real estate development in the future district; can the market support the densities and uses needed to make TOD succeed? Therefore, it is strongly recommended that any TOD zoning effort include the participation of a local advisory committee. Before drafting the zoning code itself, it may be helpful to produce a station-area plan; this could be a brief vision statement about the goals for the new zoning district, or a more detailed document. Think not only about the land uses and transit services that exist in the area today, but those that are likely to be there 20 or 50 years in the future.

## ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

Now is the time to ask questions about potential barriers to TOD development—and how to overcome them. Consider:

- » Are existing sewer, water and other infrastructure adequate for desired densities and uses?
- » If infrastructure upgrades are necessary, how they be funded? How long will they take?
- » Does the proposed TOD district currently have, or will have, reliable and frequent transit service? (“Frequent” usually means a minimum of every 15 minutes during peak travel hours). Is the service frequent enough to support targeted residential densities? (see below)
- » Is there enough parking for new growth? If not, where will it be provided and by who?
- » Are existing streets pedestrian-friendly? Is funding available for public streetscape improvements, and how long will it take to put them in place?
- » What park and streetscape improvements are needed to attract private investment?



**Table 1: Residential Density Associated with Levels of Service**

Service	Frequency	Coverage	Dwelling Units Per Acre
Commuter Rail	5 Minute Peak Headways <sup>1</sup>	100 – 150 mile corridor	12
Light Rail	5 Minute Peak Headways	20 – 100 mile corridor	9
<b>Bus – Frequent Service</b>	<b>120 Buses per Day</b>	<b>½ mile between routes</b>	<b>15</b>
Bus – Intermediate Service	40 Buses per Day	½ mile between routes	7
Bus – Minimum Service	20 Buses Per Day	½ mile between routes	4

Source: Pushkarev, B.S., Zupan, J.M. and R.S. Cumella. Urban Retail in America – An Exploration of Criteria for Fixed-Guideway Transit. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 1982.

## EXAMPLES OF TOD ZONING

TOD zoning has been implemented in numerous communities in Massachusetts and the United States, including Abington, MA; Ashland, MA; Concord, MA; Needham, MA; Woburn, MA; Atlanta, GA; Columbus, OH; Hartford, CT; Lower Merion, PA; and Seattle, WA.

## LINKS TO MORE INFORMATION

CENTER FOR TRANSIT-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT:

<http://www.ctod.org/>

HARTFORD CAPITOL REGION COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS TOD MIXED USE MODEL CODE:

[http://www.sustainableknowledgecorridor.org/site/sites/default/files/CRCOG\\_MU\\_TOD\\_FINAL%204-4-2014.pdf](http://www.sustainableknowledgecorridor.org/site/sites/default/files/CRCOG_MU_TOD_FINAL%204-4-2014.pdf)

MASSACHUSETTS SMART GROWTH TOOLKIT MODEL TRANSIT-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT OVERLAY DISTRICT BYLAW:

[http://www.mass.gov/envir/smart\\_growth\\_toolkit/pages/mod-tod.html](http://www.mass.gov/envir/smart_growth_toolkit/pages/mod-tod.html)

## FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT

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