

# Noroton Heights Station Area Study

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**Transit-Oriented Development (TOD)  
Case Studies**



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### Introduction

One of the key elements of transit-oriented development (TOD) planning for an established community like Noroton Heights is to understand how similar communities have successfully implemented this type of mixed-use development focused within a quarter- or half-mile (or a 10- to 15-minute walk) of a train station.

This document presents three TOD case studies from towns in the Northeast—Canton, MA; Cranford, NJ; and Westport, CT—that are relatively similar to Noroton Heights in terms of scale, population, median household income level, density of development, and rail ridership. The case studies highlight the elements that make each TOD successful socially, environmentally, and economically and also identify aspects of each project that might be applicable to Noroton Heights.

### Noroton Heights Station – Darien, CT

#### FAST FACTS

Location: Heights Rd and Edgerton Street on  
Metro North -New Haven Line

Darien CT Population: 20,732

Median HH Income: \$199,444

Density: 890 persons/sq.mi.

Rail Ridership: 1,464 weekday AM inbound riders

Noroton Heights Station

Heights Road

Edgerton Street

## Canton Center Station - Canton, MA

### FAST FACTS

**Location:** Providence/Stoughton Line,  
Washington St

**Canton MA Population:** 21,561

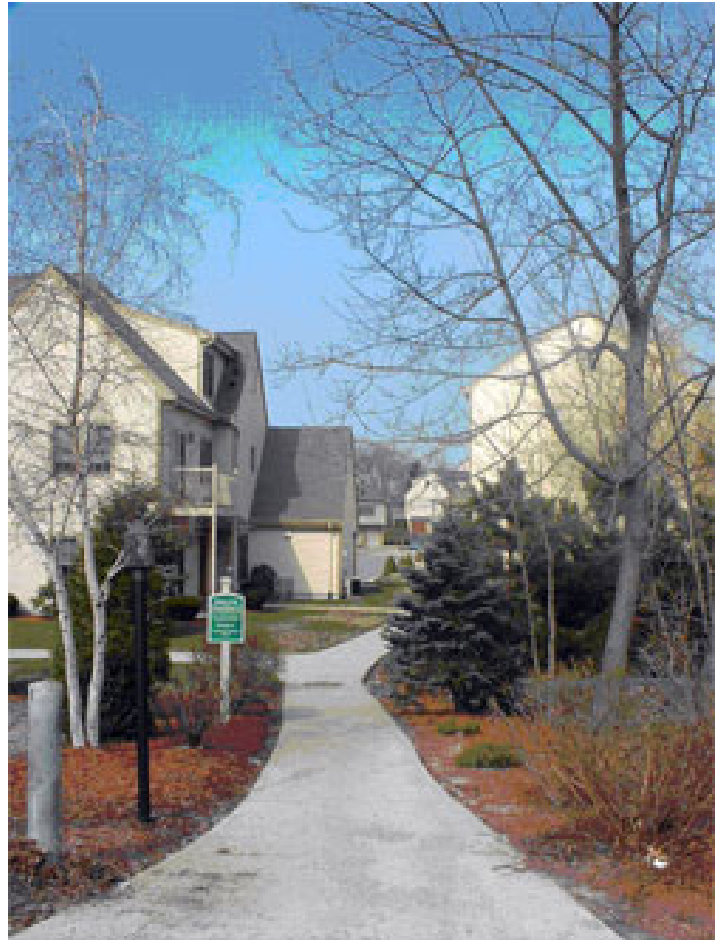
**Median HH Income:** \$90,878

**Density:** 1,140 persons/sq.mi.

**Rail Ridership:** 1,113 daily inbound riders

The Town of Canton, Massachusetts is located 18 miles southwest of Boston. It is served by two commuter rail stations that provide daily service to Boston's Back Bay and South Stations. The Canton Center station is located in the downtown business district, within walking distance of stores, offices, and the center of government.

Canton developed as a center of industry, with the Town's waterways providing electricity. Paul Revere sited his copper rolling mill in Canton shortly after the American Revolution, and later rubber, chemical, and woolen manufacturers located in the Town. As industry expanded, the downtown grew to accommodate industry and the growing population.



Grover Estates - Pedestrian Pathways to street and station



View North along Washington Street



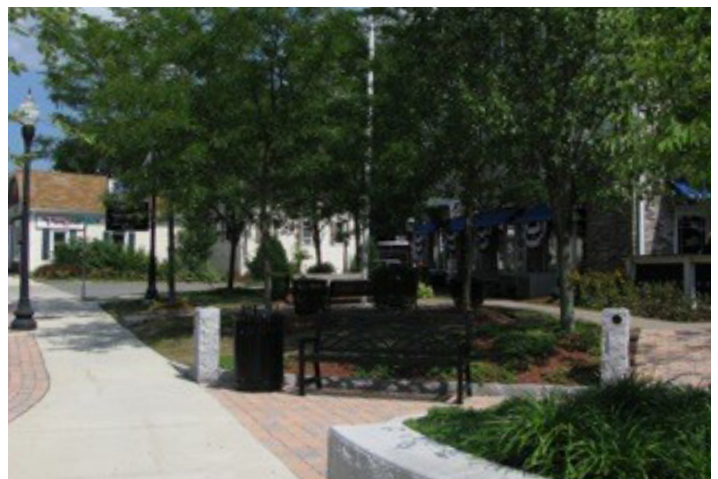


TOD around Canton Center Station

However, by the late 1990s, downtown became characterized by small lots and deteriorated buildings, all of which were at least 50 years old, as the majority of commercial/retail had moved to nearby shopping malls and strip centers. Seeking to reverse this period of decline, the Town developed a vision plan and action strategy for the revitalization of Canton Center. The plan identified the Canton Center commuter rail station as a key catalyst for downtown redevelopment.

As a first step in the redevelopment process, developer John Marini of the local Marini Management Company bought a collection of small lots in downtown. Working with architects, engineers, and multiple community groups, Marini designed the Washington Place Condominiums to fit with 1950s look of the town. The revitalization strategy led to the adoption of the Canton Center Economic Opportunity District Bylaw in 2000, which encourages transit-oriented development and better connections between the station and downtown. Prior to the bylaw, overall, mixed uses were not encouraged, and residential

development was limited to one or two apartments above retail uses. The new bylaw increased allowable development to one unit per 2,000 sq. ft. and 3,000 sq. ft. of commercial development per 10,000 sq. ft. of land area, and encouraged mixing residential and commercial uses. It also allowed shared parking for two or more uses that can demonstrate different peak demand, and changed the parking requirement to one space per residential unit.



Washington Street Streetscape Improvements



After the zoning change, the existing buildings were torn down and replaced with the Washington Place development. Subsequently, Canton undertook a multi-year project to extensively improve the streetscape with brick sidewalks, new signs, historic traffic lights, enhanced pedestrian crossings, planting areas, recessed curbing and public parks and seating areas, as well as burying the utility wires along much of Washington Street.

The zoning overlay district was a catalyst for new residential development in downtown concentrated around the transit station. Five new residential developments (which include Washington Place, The Village at Forge Pond and Grover Estates) comprising 207 new residential units have been built within a five-minute walk of the train station. The close proximity of the developments to transportation and landscaped walkways have created walking traffic in Canton Center, bringing new life to the retail spaces. The downtown has a new positive atmosphere and healthy neighborhoods.

The Town also required that the approval of The Village at Forge Pond was contingent on the developer cleaning up the waterfront, which was previously hidden to most of



Forge Pond - Ground floor retail with residential above

the community. In addition, in order to increase density, the Conservation Commission required the developer to setback development 50 ft. from the waterfront (as opposed to the mandated 30 ft. no-build zone on land abutting a waterway), clean the pond and establish open space around the pond with trails, benches and space for passive recreation.



Forge Pond - Open Space



## Applications to Noroton Heights

- Use of shared parking to reduce the need to build excess spaces.
- Reduced parking requirements for new development to encourage transit use and reduce traffic congestion.
- Inclusion of landscaped walkways to train station in new development.
- Inclusion of open space in new development.
- Publicly funded streetscape improvements including brick sidewalks, signage, enhanced pedestrian crossings, etc., as well as burying overhead utility lines.

## Cranford Crossing - Cranford, NJ

### FAST FACTS

**Location:** Union Ave & South Ave at Cranford Station on Raritan Valley Line

**Cranford NJ Population:** 22,625

**Median HH Income:** \$107,052

**Density:** 4,684 persons/sq.mi.

**Rail Ridership:** 1,264 average weekday ridership

The Township of Cranford in Union County, NJ, which was incorporated in 1871, developed around its train station and the Raritan River. Since its inception, the community has always had a vibrant and walkable downtown with a mix of small businesses, restaurants, and shops. Despite this success, Cranford, like many New Jersey towns, has struggled to maintain the vitality of its downtown, particularly in the face of sprawling suburban development.

Cranford took several steps to ensure a well-planned and successful downtown. This included creating the first special improvement district, or business improvement district, in the 1980s. Creating this type of district enabled the Town to assess an additional levy on property-owners, the funds from which were dedicated to downtown development, marketing, and investing in streetscape improvements through new lighting fixtures, brick pavers, decorative planters, and benches.

Continuing its careful approach to planning for downtown, in 2000, Cranford applied for and was awarded one of the first Smart Growth grants from the NJ's Department of Community Affairs, which the Township used to develop a comprehensive Downtown Vision Plan. More than 88 percent of Cranford residents surveyed for the Downtown Vision Plan agreed that redevelopment and rehabilitation of the downtown should be a high planning priority. The Downtown Vision Plan identified growth areas and



Cranford Crossing





Cranford Crossing

addresses traffic, parking, pedestrian and public space improvements.

This local commitment resulted in Cranford Crossing and a 2003 designation as a Transit Village. The project, conceived by the town, was initially delayed because of a change of developers, but developer Westminster took over the project, and embraced the mixed-use concept as well as increased the number of residential units in the project from 20 to 50.

Cranford Crossing, which was completed in 2003, is the largest redevelopment project undertaken in Cranford's downtown in a century. It is located in the center of the Township's Special Improvement District (SID). The development includes 22,000-square-feet of ground-floor retail space and 50 for-sale condominium homes

in one three- and one four-story building. In addition, the project contains Cranford's first municipally-owned parking garage, providing 310 parking spaces to be shared by commuters, shoppers, retailers, and residents. The garage is housed in the four-story building and wrapped by retail and residential space that screens it from the street. The buildings are designed to complement the rich architectural history of downtown and integrate seamlessly into its welcoming pedestrian environment. In 2005, New Jersey Future awarded Cranford Township and the developer, Westminster Communities, a Smart Growth Award for the project, citing the development's respect for Cranford's historic, walkable downtown.

The success of this project, led to a second TOD project in downtown: Riverfront at Cranford Station. This project,



which was completed in 2013, includes 127 luxury one- and two-bedroom apartments located just a two-minute walk from Cranford Station. The five three- and four-story buildings that make up Riverfront sit a block south of the train station. The mixed-use structures also house 20,000 sq. ft. of retail at ground level and feature 20,000 sq. ft. of office space.

It should also be noted that through its Master Plan, which was updated in 2009, Cranford adopted new zoning regulations that demonstrated its commitment to this form of redevelopment. Most significantly, the Township increased the residential population near the train station. The Master Plan designated two redevelopment districts that permit mixed uses. Both the Cranford Crossing and the Riverfront Development districts were planned to allow for the Township's two TOD projects. These districts permit additional residential and retail space close to the train station.



Cranford Crossing - Ground floor retail with residential above

## Applications to Noroton Heights

- Creation of a Special Improvement District to fund development and marketing efforts, as well as infrastructure improvements.
- Wrapping the municipal garage with residential and retail space to screen it from the street.
- Revising existing zoning to allow for more complex, mixed land use combinations.

## Saugatuck Center - Westport, CT

### FAST FACTS

**Location:** Riverside Avenue by Saugatuck Station on Metro-North New Haven Line

**Westport CT Population:** 26,391

**Median HH Income:** \$151,771

**Density:** 503 persons/sq.mi.

**Rail Ridership:** 1,557 weekday AM inbound

The Saugatuck neighborhood is one of the earliest areas settled in the Town of Westport. In fact, was the Town's first center, growing initially as a major port for manufacturing and maritime commerce because of its location at the mouth of the river, followed by the construction of the New York and New Haven Railroad in 1848 which continued to allow it to grow as a commercial center. Over the next century, Saugatuck evolved into a working class neighborhood comprised of charming homes and small-scale businesses and shops. Unfortunately, the construction of I-95 in the mid 1950s cut the neighborhood in half, and while it has managed to maintain much of its charm, the area south of the highway took on the role of serving as a transportation hub for commuters traveling into New York City on Metro North Railroad, with large portions of the area devoted to surface parking.

However, Saugatuck has recently started to experience some economic interest, with new mixed-use development being constructed near the station. The first of these projects, Saugatuck Center, was a developer led effort that used land owned by the developer Gault-Hamilton to build a mixed-use project. The project was designed in three phases, with the first phase consisting of 4,000 sq. ft. of retail space at street level, 5,000 sq. ft. of office space overlooking the water, and six apartments on the second floor. The second phase included 21 apartments, a coffee shop and marketplace filling in 4,400 sq. ft. of retail space. The third phase involved renovating a 20,000 sq. ft. office building. Four of the residential units in the second phase were leased as affordable units, or rent-controlled, while 20 percent of all residential development at the center has been set aside as affordable units. All three phases of this 4-acre development were completed by 2013.

Other important components of the project include a new marina and public boardwalk along the Saugatuck River and a 35-space underground parking garage. In addition, all of the buildings were designed to reflect traditional New England forms to fit the character of the existing neighborhood.



Saugatuck Center - Mixed use development with riverfront boardwalk





Saugatuck Center

Prior to getting approval for the project, Gault-Hamilton and its planners worked with the Town to amend its regulations to add residential uses in the general business district, where only office and retail uses were permitted. Today, the project is a success, being almost fully-occupied with tenants such as Garelick and Herbs, Saugatuck Sweets, The Whelk, and Fleishers Craft Butcher.

To continue to plan for Saugatuck's future, the Town applied for and received a TOD planning grant from the State of Connecticut, and is currently developing a plan to envision examine future redevelopment, traffic and circulation, and streetscapes.



Saugatuck Center TOD

## Applications to Noroton Heights

- Inclusion of publicly-accessible open space (a boardwalk, in this case).
- Use of underground parking to minimize visual impact to the surrounding neighborhood.
- Buildings were designed to fit the character of the traditional New England style of the neighborhood.

## Citations

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