



Stoughton Train Depot Reuse Study

Prepared for
Town of Stoughton
Economic Development
Department

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Massachusetts
Downtown Initiative

Prepared by

FinePoint
Associates LLC

Acknowledgements

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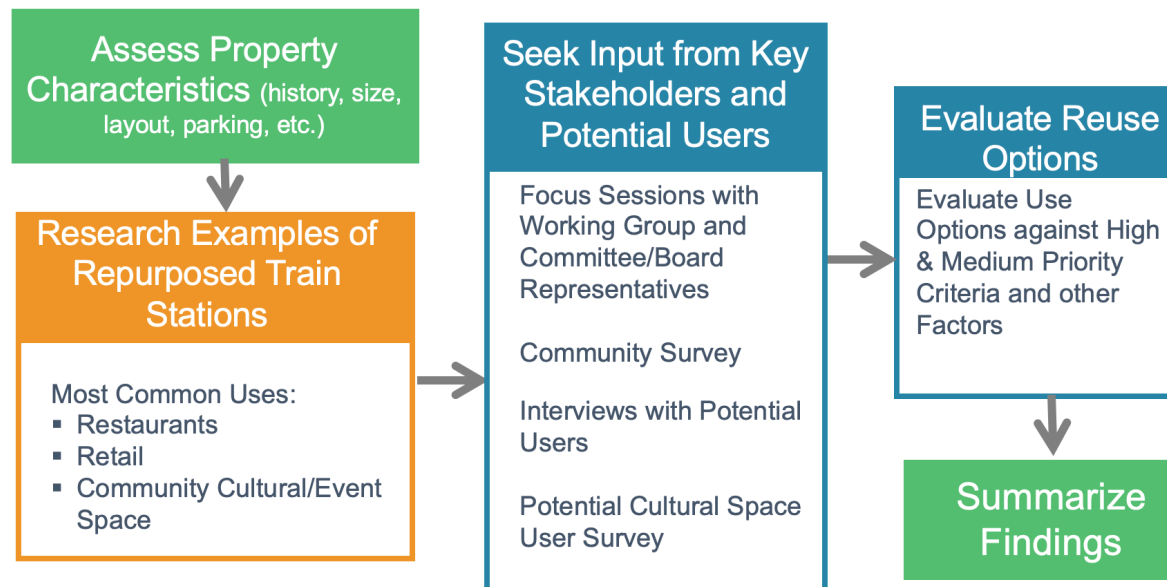
Project Overview and Findings Summary

Project Overview and Findings

Project Purpose: FinePoint Associates was hired to assist the Town of Stoughton in exploring reuse for the Town-owned Train Depot by conducting research pertaining to the site and potential uses, and obtaining input from the community (with the assumption the property would remain in town ownership). Funding for this project was provided by the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development through the Massachusetts Downtown Initiative.

Process: FinePoint worked collaboratively with Stoughton's Economic Development Director throughout the process and received input from a working group of representatives from other Town Departments (Planning, Engineering, Facilities) as well as committee and Board members.

Seeking the Best Reuse Option - The Process



Project Overview and Findings

Summary of Findings: The historic Stoughton Depot has a footprint of approximately 3,100 square feet apportioned into a main lobby area and waiting room, along with 2 small offices and 2 restrooms. The structure also has an attic and a 62-foot tall clock tower. The Depot is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and renovations must adhere to historic preservation guidelines.

We looked at many cases of small repurposed train stations in Massachusetts and beyond; 14 examples are highlighted in our report. The most common uses are: restaurants, retail, and community cultural use facilities (for events, performances, exhibits, etc.).

Stoughton residents support the idea of repurposing the Depot for a multi-use community facility. 73% of survey respondents indicated they are in favor of this use. The types of cultural activities that most residents would like to see take place at the Depot include:

- Festivals, Beer Gardens (68%)
- Art Displays featuring Local Artists (64%)
- Music Concerts (62%, and
- Community/Theater Performances (54%).

A majority of residents (58%) feel it's important for any repurposed use to include providing shelter for commuters during peak hours; 56% feel it's important to provide space for arts and culture performances/exhibits; and 52% feel it's important to provide space for

community events or meetings. Providing space for private events (weddings, parties, etc.) is seen as less important.

We reached out to several organizations that regularly use cultural space to obtain their input regarding the demand for space and suitability of the Depot. These organizations use space for theater productions, music concerts, other types of performances and classes. The respondents were largely enthusiastic about the idea of additional available space.

Representatives of the Little Theater of Stoughton (LTOS) are particularly supportive of the idea and expressed their interest and eagerness to use the Depot for performances. They envision the space being creatively utilized with the addition of retractable seating, the attic used for activities, and the possibility of a temporary tent as needed to accommodate dressing rooms and storage. LTOS indicated they would be interested in using cultural space for approximately 20 performance days and 60 rehearsal days per year. Three other organizations also expressed interest in potentially using the space for a total of 12 additional performance days and 34 rehearsal days. One of the organizations mentioned they would only be interested if the space was offered free of charge; the others could pay a modest rent.

It should be noted, there are challenges associated with using the Depot for performances and several

Project Overview and Findings

cultural space users showed concern about the size (audience capacity) and the layout (configuration restricting sight lines and limiting full use of the space). In addition, performances require specialized infrastructure such as seating, stage lighting, electrical design to support theater lighting, and sound abatement improvements.

A summary evaluation of potential reuse options is illustrated in the following chart. The use options were formulated based on the research of other repurposed train stations and discussions with community representatives. The "High" and "Medium" priorities used as evaluation criteria were the result of resident input. We also added two other evaluation factors -- market/user demand and appropriateness/suitability of the structure.

The "Community Cultural Arts Facility" use scores highly against most criteria and received the strongest support from survey respondents. This use would contribute to Stoughton Center's development as a dining & entertainment destination, bring foot traffic into downtown, and add to the variety of available arts and culture activities. Further, there has been some preliminary interest from potential cultural space users. However, this use would likely not generate much, if any, revenue for the town beyond operating expenses and the use of the space presents some challenges that might limit its use for performances and increase renovation costs.

The initial cost estimate for restoration, mechanical and electrical upgrades and site improvements is \$2.8 million. The Town is currently investigating funding availability and feasibility issues such as capacity by use and additional associated rehabilitation needs.

If further analysis calls for an alternative to be considered, the "Restaurant" use also scores highly against many criteria and received strong resident support (68%). This use would enhance the Center as a dining & entertainment destination, bring customers downtown, and generate some revenue for the town. Plus, in the past, there has been interest from potential business operators that wanted to use the space as a brewery taproom or coffee shop/café. However, restaurant use would not increase the variety of arts and culture activities in the Center and may provide less public access to the historic building.

A "Mixed Use" option could also be considered that brings together the best aspects of both uses. It is conceivable that a repurposed Depot might include a taproom/coffee shop/café and a shared or separate multi-function community space that could be used for cultural events and activities.

Evaluation of Uses

■ = High □ = Medium □ = Low

		Potential Uses for Repurposed Train Depot					
		Community Cultural Arts Facility	Restaurant	Educational/ Museum Use	Retail	Business Incubator	Office Space
High Priority	Enhance Stoughton Center as Dining & Entertainment Destination	■	■	■	□	□	□
	Generate Significant Amount of Users	■	■	□	■	□	□
	Active Nights/Weekends	■	■	□	□	□	□
Medium Priority	Increase Social Gathering Space	■	■	□	□	□	□
	Generate Revenue for Town	□*	■	□	■	□	■
	Allow Public Access to Historic Depot Building	■	□	■	□	□	□
	Increase Arts & Culture Activities in Stoughton Center	■	□	■	□	□	□
Other	Market/User Demand	□	□	□	□	□	□
	Appropriateness/Usability of Space	□	■	■	■	■	■

Potential uses were based on research of repurposed train stations & stakeholder discussions. Priorities were established through Community Survey.

□* = Depending on rental fees that could be charged.




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Property Characteristics

Property Characteristics

The Building

The Stoughton Railroad Depot, built in 1888, is one of only two buildings in Stoughton listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

According to Stoughton historian Dwight MacKerron, its stone turret makes it the only clock tower rail station still standing in Massachusetts.

The Depot has been vacant for over 10 years. It sits unused adjacent to the MBTA commuter rail terminal that brings an average of approximately 700 riders to and from Boston.



Source: "After years of negotiation, Stoughton set to acquire historic train depot", *The Patriot Ledger*, 12/18/2018

Property Characteristics

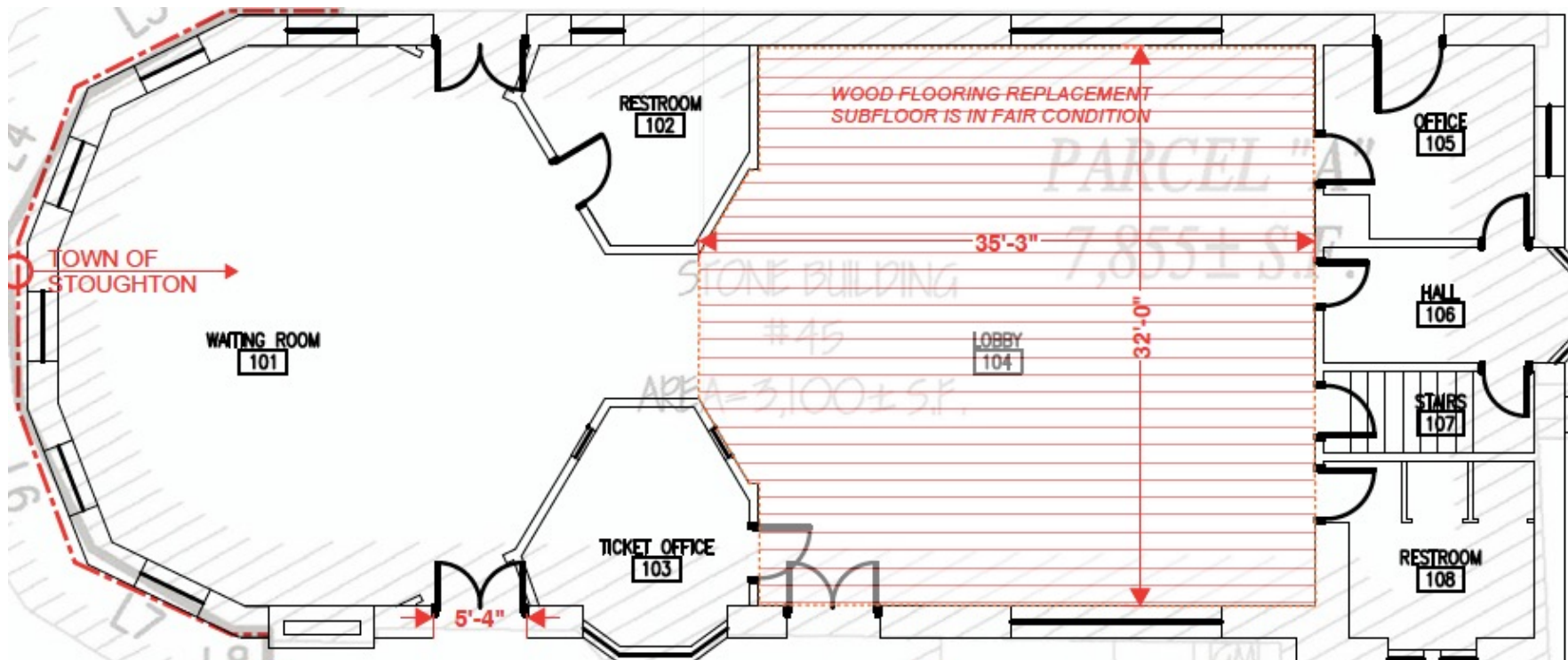
Designed by Charles Brigham, it is a fine example of Classic Revival Style architecture. Brigham, with his partner, designed the Boston Museum of Fine Arts in the 1870s (later torn down in the 1900s) and several houses for well-known Boston business owners.



Source: "The Stoughton Railroad Station One Hundreth Anniversary"

Property Characteristics

The structure has a footprint of approximately 3,100 square feet (88' by 35") apportioned into the main lobby area and a waiting room (approx. 900 -1,100 sf each), 2 small offices and 2 rest rooms. It has an attic and a 62 foot tall clock tower. There is a porte-cochere (covered outdoor area) that was originally designed to protect passengers from the elements.

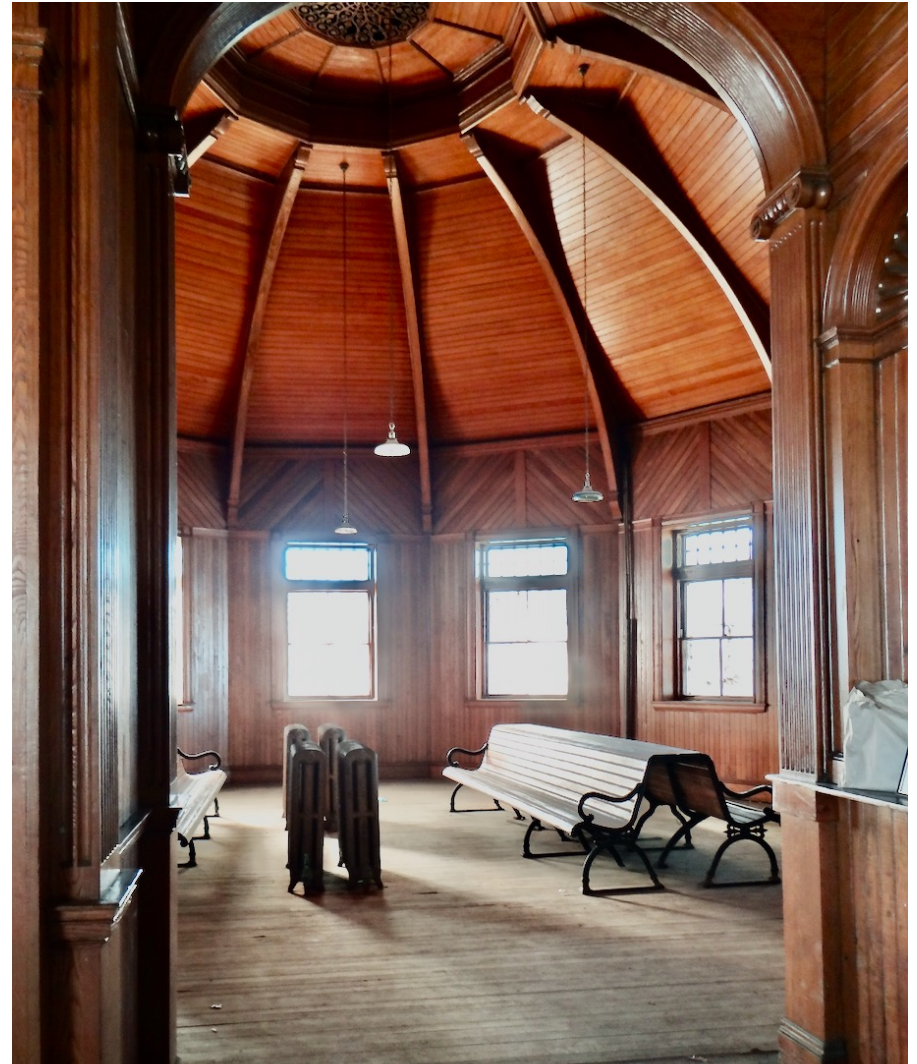


Source: "Soughton Railroad Building Study", Drummey Rosane Anderson, Inc.

Property Characteristics



The interior features beautiful woodworking and the original women's waiting room has a carved oculus on the ceiling.



Property Characteristics

Adjacent MBTA Platform

MBTA Commuter Rail passengers use the covered platform on the southwest side of the building for boarding.



The Town of Stoughton owns 30 parking spaces adjacent to the Train Depot property. These spaces are currently used for general free public parking while the use of the Depot is undetermined. There is a 2-hour limit for the spaces between 6 am and 6 pm and no overnight parking is allowed.

There is on-street parking along Wyman Street in front of the Depot.






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Examples of Repurposed Train Stations

Examples of Repurposed Train Stations

There are many examples of repurposed train stations in Massachusetts and beyond. We have summarized and highlighted over a dozen in the following pages.

Common Uses

The uses fall into the following categories:

- Restaurants (e.g., cantina, bagel shop, Brazilian grill, ice cream café, Burger King)
- Retail (e.g., landscape supply, candy store)
- Community Cultural/Museum/Event Space (e.g., railroad museum, historical exhibitions, event and meeting space)

Ownership

The ownership model in these projects varies among several types.

- Privately owned by user
- Town or MBTA owned and leased to single user
- Non-profit owned and used
- Town-owned and used, with some meeting/event space rental

Repurposed Train Stations: Restaurant Use



Newburyport, MA

Station owned by MBTA, vacant for years, now leased to restaurant

Metzy's Cantina, previously a food truck, moved to the station in 2016

Metzy's used a kickstarter campaign to assist with funding

Photos: <https://www.metzys.com/>



Repurposed Train Stations: Restaurant Use



Framingham, MA

MBTA sold the station to the Town in 1985.

Town resold the building to a developer.

A few different restaurants have operated at the site since.

Photos: <https://www.framinghamstation.com> and wikipedia



Repurposed Train Stations: Restaurant Use



East Longmeadow, MA

Building purchased by private owners and turned into an ice cream shop/café.

Owners recently added a miniature train ride attraction behind the depot.



The Depot
at Graham Central Station

Photos: <https://www.facebook.com/grahamcentralstation>



Repurposed Train Stations: Restaurant Use



Easthampton, MA

Tandem Bagel Company was started in 2012 by two families working in tandem.

Business owners renovated the 2,700 sf train depot for their flagship location: commercial kitchen, fireplace, seating for 50, outdoor patio, "pedal-up" window for adjacent trail users

Previously the depot, owned by the Williston Northampton School had been used as an art studio for 43 years

Tandem bagel has since opened shops in 4 additional communities.

Photos:
<https://www.tandembagelco.com/>



Repurposed Train Stations: Restaurant Use



Bridgewater, MA, Burger King

Photo: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:BK_Bridgewater.jpg/



Bethel Vermont, Babes Bar

Photo: <https://www.babesvt.com/>



Beverly, MA, The Beverly Depot

Photo: <https://www.facebook.com/thebeverlydepot/>



Concord, MA, Club Car Cafe

Photo: <https://www.clubcarcafema.com>

Repurposed Train Stations: Restaurant Use



Newton Upper Falls, MA, Little Luke's Café, Grand Opening: March, 2023, Previously: Depot Café

Photo: <https://www.google.com/maps>

Repurposed Train Stations: Retail Use



Irving, MA

Candy Store

Privately-owned by the business

Source: <https://www.ervingstation.com>



Norton, MA

Outdoor & Landscape Supply

Privately-owned by the business



Source: <https://oldstationlandscapesupply.com>

Repurposed Train Stations: Cultural/Museum/Event Space



Bedford, MA

Freight House is part of Depot Park

Provides amenities for Minuteman Bikeway users and displays honoring railroad history

Owned by a nonprofit organization

Source: <https://bedforddepot.org>



Repurposed Train Stations: Cultural/Museum/Event Space



Lexington, MA

The Depot houses Lexington Historical Society offices, hosts programs, is available for rent, and is slated for transformation into new exhibition space in 2024.

Source: <https://www.lexingtonhistory.org/the-depot>



Farmville, VA

Town owns the station, holds meetings in the facility, and rents it out for events.

Source:
www.farmvilleva.com/facilities/facility/details/farmvilletrainstation-3

Potential Uses for the Stoughton Train Station

The following list of potential uses was developed after reviewing examples of other repurposed stations, considering property characteristics and discussions with stakeholders.

1. Restaurant Use (eating or drinking establishment)
2. Retail Space
3. Private Office Space (e.g. medical, legal, etc.)
4. Business Incubator (public/nonprofit collaborative workspace, aimed at growing new businesses)
5. Educational/Museum Use (exhibits, instruction, etc.)
6. Community Facility that could be used for multiple uses (events, concerts, performances, holiday activities, private functions, etc.)
7. Some combination of the above




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Community Survey Results

Community Survey Results

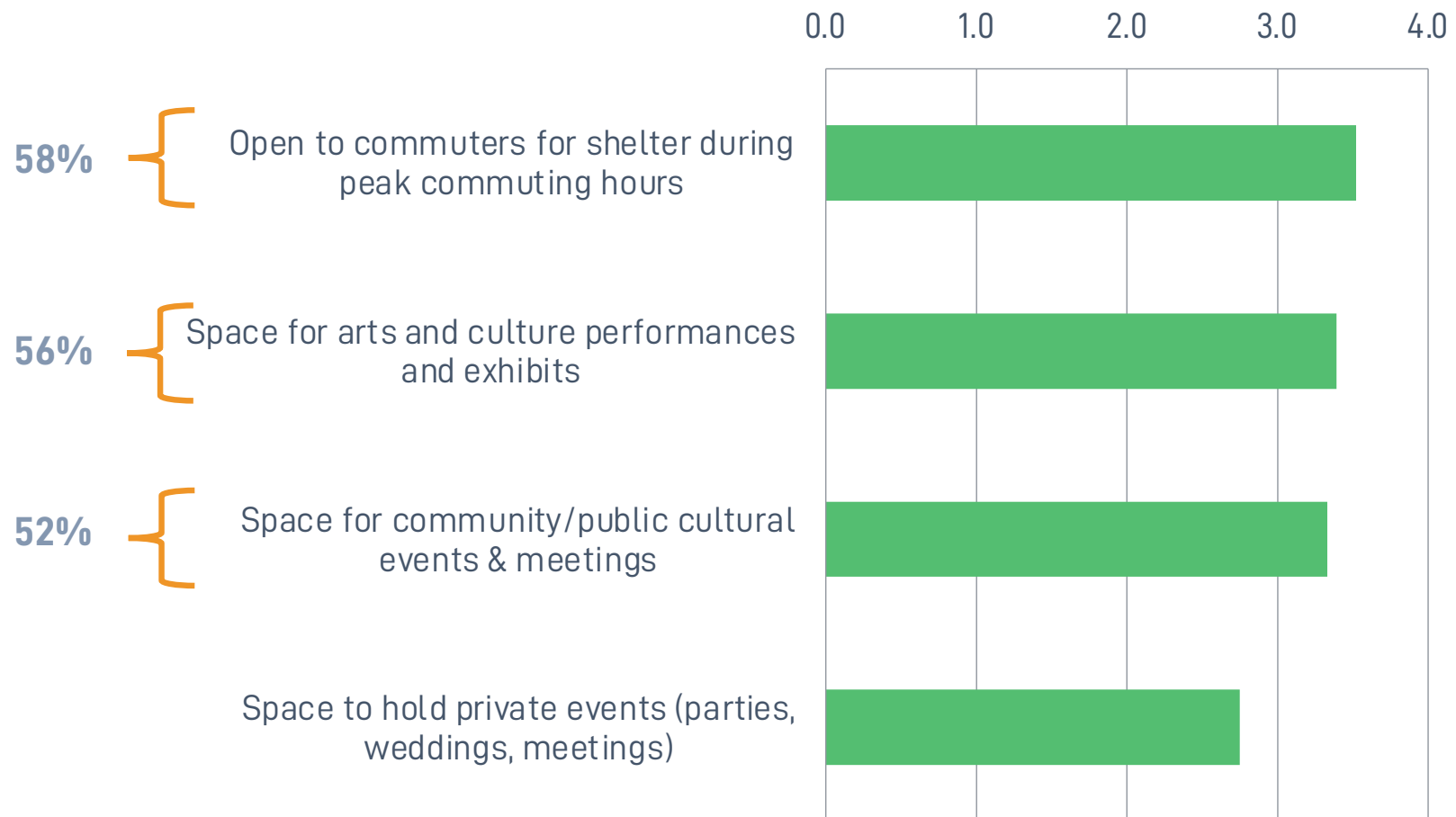
Conducted: May 2023

Total Survey Respondents: 131

Importance of Potential Community Functions of Repurposed Train Depot

**Majority % of Residents Rated
Important or Very Important**

Average Rating (Rated 1 to 5, from Not
Important to Very Important)



Results of Community Survey conducted May 2023

Activities Residents would like to take place in Train Depot if Repurposed for Community Facility

More than 50% of Residents:

- Festivals, Beer Garden
- Art Displays featuring Local Artists
- Music Concerts
- Community Theater/Performances

30% to 39% of Residents:

- Family Movie Nights
- School Performances
- Comedians

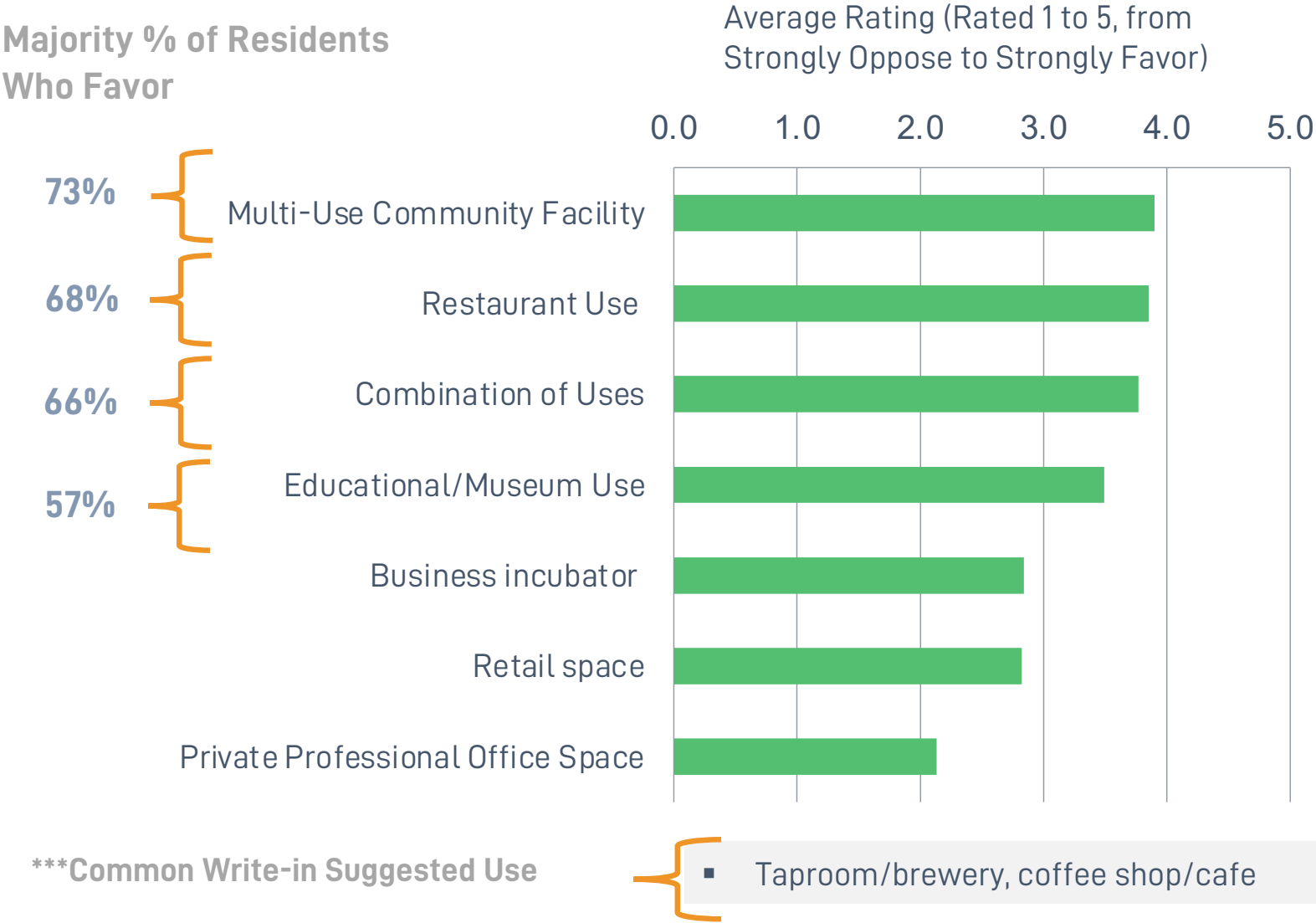
40% to 49% of Residents:

- Lecture Series
- Holiday Gatherings
- Drama/Arts Classes for Children

Less than 30% of Residents:

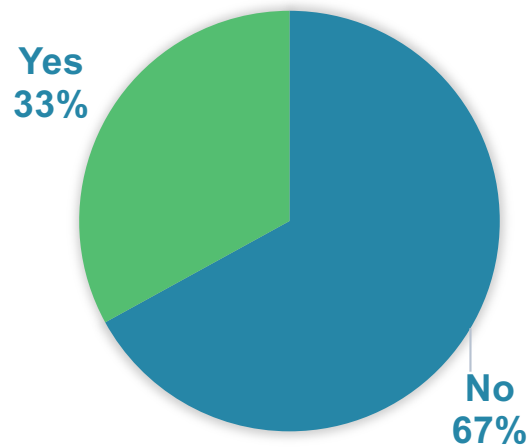
- Municipal Meetings

Desirability of Other Uses in Addition, or as an Alternative to Community Facility if sufficient funds cannot be Secured

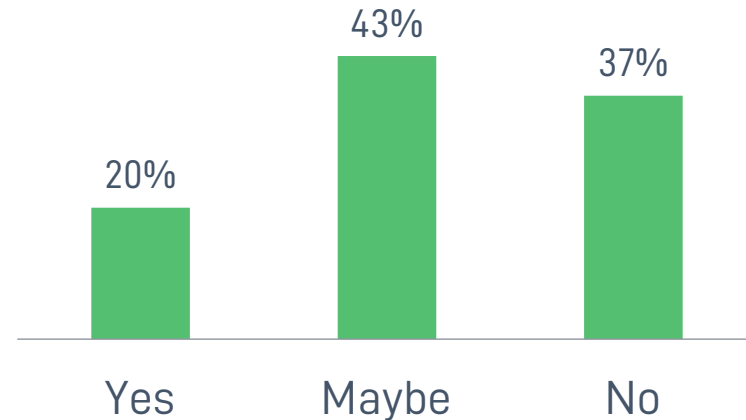


Event Space for Private Events

Have you rented space for a private party, meeting or other event in the last 12 months?

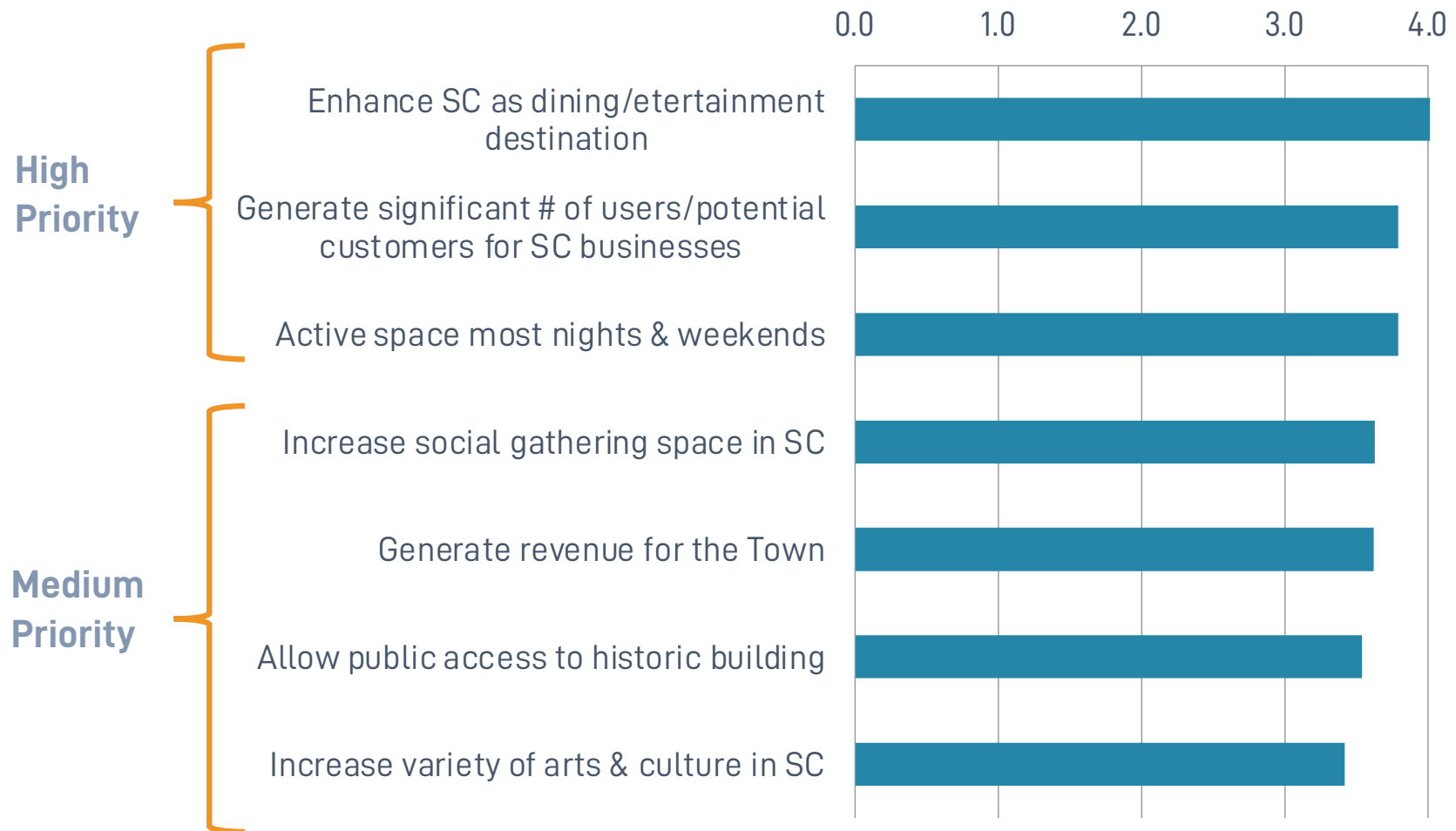


If Depot building was available to rent for private events, would you use it in next 3 years?



Community-Ranked Selection Factors for Repurposed Train Depot Use

(Average Ratings, Rated 1 to 5, from Not a
priority to Essential)



Results of Community Survey conducted May 2023
SC = Stoughton Center




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Input from Cultural Space Users

Input from Potential Cultural Space Users

Interviews: April, 2023

- Friends of State Theatre (FOST)
- Little Theater of Stoughton (LTOS)

Survey Conducted: May - June 2023

- Little Theater of Stoughton (LTOS)
- Old Stoughton Musical Society (OSMS)
- Silversmith Youth Theater (SYT)
- Stoughton Cultural Council (SCC)

Potential Cultural Space Users: Demand for Space

	# of Days/Yr. Might Be Interested in Using Space at Depot	# of Attendees	Space Requirements	Interest in Using Depot Space	Typically Find Space to Meet Needs	Spaces Used for Events
Little Theater of Stoughton	Performance: 20 Rehearsal: 60 Other: 2	140	Electricity to support stage lighting, space for scenery, ticket booth, storage, retractable raked seating.	Extremely Likely	Yes	Stetson Hall, (Randolph), Ahavath Torah (Stoughton), Stoughton H.S.
Old Stoughton Musical Society	Performance: 6 Rehearsal : 26	60 - 125	A piano in good condition, ability to use choral risers and adequate seating space for the audience	Very Likely; would only use if free of charge	Difficult	Trinity Episcopal Church (Stoughton)
Silversmith Youth Theater	Performance: 3 Other: 5	≤ 100		Likely	Don't Know	Trinity Episcopal Church (Canton)
Stoughton Cultural Council	Performance: 2 Rehearsal: 3 Other: 6	25 - 75	Power, room for seating, lighting, sound, A/V, art- mountable wall space	Likely	Yes	Lyons Club, Donated Common Spaces/Yards

Potential Cultural Space Users: Suitability of the Depot Space

Positives:

- **Attractive, Unique Space.** Little Theater of Stoughton representatives are very enthusiastic about the potential of a cultural space at the Depot and did not express any concerns about the space. They remarked about the height of the ceiling being an asset; they felt there could be a retractable seating solution that would work in the space; and they envisioned how they could creatively use the space on the second floor. They also mentioned the possibility of using a temporary adjacent tent for extra space as needed for dressing rooms and/or storage.
- **Connection of History and Culture.** A representative from the Old Stoughton Musical Society said they “love the connection of an historical building with an historical music society”.

Concerns:

- **Audience capacity is a concern.** Old Stoughton Musical Society, Silversmith Youth Theatre, Stoughton Cultural Council and Friends of State Theater all commented on the size and layout of the space and expressed some concern about how many people could be accommodated. The current configuration of the building with the ticket booth and restrooms jutting in at the center of the two major spaces limits sight lines and therefore might constrain audiences seating for performances. (Historic preservation restrictions may likely prevent reconfiguration.)
- **Need for Specific Equipment and Renovations.** We also heard input about the space, as is, not being conducive to a “theatre-quality” event. If the space were to be used for cultural performances, additional equipment and specialty renovations would be needed, such as retractable seating, stage lighting, electrical design to support theater lighting, and sound abatement infrastructure. (In particular, the train whistle and other noise from the active railway would have to be taken into consideration.)




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Evaluation of Potential Uses Against Selection Criteria

Evaluation of Uses

■ = High □ = Medium □ = Low

		Potential Uses for Repurposed Train Depot					
		Community Cultural Arts Facility	Restaurant	Educational/ Museum Use	Retail	Business Incubator	Office Space
High Priority	Enhance Stoughton Center as Dining & Entertainment Destination	■	■	■	□	□	□
	Generate Significant Amount of Users	■	■	□	■	□	□
	Active Nights/Weekends	■	■	□	□	□	□
Medium Priority	Increase Social Gathering Space	■	■	□	□	□	□
	Generate Revenue for Town	□*	■	□	■	□	■
	Allow Public Access to Historic Depot Building	■	□	■	□	□	□
	Increase Arts & Culture Activities in Stoughton Center	■	□	■	□	□	□
Other	Market/User Demand	□	□	□	□	□	□
	Appropriateness/Usability of Space	□	■	■	■	■	■

Potential uses were based on research of repurposed train stations & stakeholder discussions. Priorities were established through Community Survey.

□* = Depending on rental fees that could be charged.