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### **Title**

Planning for Balanced Growth and Balanced Budgets: Exploring a Mixed Methods Framework to Assess Urban Infill Capacity and Value in Context

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## Abstract

Established communities pursue revitalization to transform struggling downtowns into vibrant hubs and walkable neighborhoods. Vacant and underused parcels can help communities grow sustainably by using excess capacity in existing infrastructure. However, many communities experience limited urban infill activity due to persistent bias favoring low-density development at the community's edges. In small communities perceptions and processes can favor low-density growth. Infill development can be complicated due to site conditions and neighborhood context, yet planners work with ad hoc techniques and limited staff time. There is a need for efficient ways to identify suitable sites and generate information to use for community decision-making around redevelopment.

The primary aim of this research is to develop an Urban Infill Assessment Framework (UIAF). It is organized around three questions: Can the framework assess infill's potential in a small post-industrial downtown? Is it replicable? Does the framework change how local stakeholders perceive infill potential? To answer these questions this study will develop and test a UIAF in Turners Falls, MA, then test resulting information through stakeholder interviews. The framework uses mixed-methods to integrate social values, fiscal efficiency, and spatial awareness through procedures organized in three Phases. Phase I examines quantitative and qualitative information (e.g., local planning documents, tax data, site visits, and consultations with local experts) to produce mapped context data, and local building typologies with corresponding tax yield per acre. In Phase II these components are used in scenario building, to calculate composite capacity of infill acreage and annual tax yield for defined areas. Finally, interviews with ten stakeholders test how the information influences perceptions of infill in Turners Falls.

As a result of this research, planners should be able to replicate the framework. Based on preliminary results, the relevance of an infill assessment tool to planning practice is threefold: It promotes strategic land-use planning by generating information to compare development projects across diverse locations, scales, and spatial configurations. It supports structured application of concepts uniquely suited to managing urban environments. Improved redevelopment tools and expertise can offset procedural and perceptual factors that favor low-density growth and sprawl.

## First Advisor

Henry C. Renski

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