

Doing Business In Southborough

On Thursday, November 30, 2017, Southborough's Economic Development Committee (EDC) hosted a public workshop at the Town House, 17 Common St. The goal of the workshop was to outline key elements of opportunity, in which to study the Downtown Business Village.

Notes from Downtown Initiative Workshop

Investment Opportunities and Challenges - Moderated by Craig Nicholson & Julie Connelly

- Confined by geographical and physical constraints, old buildings, expensive to renovate.
- Lot at the corner of Newton St. stands out because it is the only vacant lot.
- The few lots behind the vacant lot could potentially be conjoined - one is for sale, others may be willing to be bought out.
- Difficulty now is that Town does not control the real estate - if we have a large lot (Newton St. corner expanded) that is properly zoned and Town is willing to work with brokers/developers/businesses and provide incentives.
- Possible actions: We could work with the owner of the Newton corner and lots behind it to enter into a Purchase Agreement contingent on approval by Town Meeting in the spring. We would have to reach out to land owners and get appraisals.
- Town Meeting request should also include a list of the types of businesses we would approve in that space, to avoid having to go back to Town Meeting for use permits.
- Potential for introducing a utility surcharge for the Downtown Business District only to support ED efforts?

Zoning - Moderated by Kathy Bartolini, Dave McCay, Don Morris

- Discussed limitations of current zoning that have limited development projects in the past - should look into this more to see what the practical road blocks have been historically.
- Possible expansion of Village Business District down Newton Street and Park Street.
- Need to consider "by right" zoning to incentivize desired uses Downtown, e.g., boutique retail, family-run restaurant or pub.
- Important to institute design controls, restrictions on "chains" or businesses of certain size. This will also help developers envision and know what would be a good fit.

- EDC role will be to recruit businesses identified as viable for the area and make zoning and recommend zoning changes to support new business.

Infrastructure - Paul Pisinski, Claire Reynolds

- Two major issues are waste management and parking.
- Most significant obstacle is that there is no municipal sewer, and soil downtown is not ideal for onsite systems. There are wetlands and tributaries that have setback requirements that limit the ability to build septic. Onsite septic may require additional land purchase.
- The private treatment plant owned by Tony Kwon of Newton St may be an option. He may be interested in tying in private businesses. Appropriate panel needs to be identified (Selectperson, Paul Pisinski, business (es), etc.) to meet with Mr. Kwon.
- Treatment plant for downtown is an option - in Weston which is similar in size and scope to Southborough they put in a hydroponic technology based plant (done by Peter Lombarto Associates - customized treatment plants). Other private systems are membrane//filtration based. May (or may not be an option as not enough is known as to how Weston built this system. Appropriate person(s) should be identified to discuss with Weston officials or Peter Lombarto Assoc.
- Feasibility study needs to be done to determine costs and options for new construction, existing businesses (currently on septic) and other stakeholders.
- Infrastructure plan needs to be formulated in order to be prepared if a developer shows interest.
- Consider private vs. public funding, or combination of both.
- Off-street parking may be an issue - if new businesses are opened, additional parking may be needed.

Beautification/Connectivity

- Three major areas - connectivity, underutilized assets, and beautification.
- Connectivity to other parts of town is key - increase access, publicity. Additional parking, trails, bike racks, connection to other trails will all be key.
- Park Street area is underutilized, Santander plaza is underutilized.
- “Stump dump” property on school street - potential for parking; also “dirty” sites on Newton Street (old Ted’s and mechanic) could be potentials for parking
- Newton St. vacant lot could be used as a park with benches, picnic tables, bike racks.
- Beautification - sidewalks (“fancy” sidewalks) will be important for connectivity and walkability.
- Rail Trail - Currently there are two train tracks next to each other going right near downtown. Only one is being used. Both owned by CSX. Other communities have built rail trails, even right

next to live tracks that have been successful. If we could purchase/lease from CSX this would be huge for downtown connectivity.

- Trails/walkability/bike paths/bike racks will all increase foot traffic and community feel (and help solve for parking).
- Consider electronic vehicle charging stations.