

**Town of Sharon
Economic Development Committee
Virtual Meeting via Zoom**

**EDC Meeting Minutes
12/20/21**

EDC Members

Rob Maidman, Chair	Alan Lury
Jim Berish	Pasqualino Pannone
Eli Hauser	Xander Shapiro
Milena Virrankoski	Aleksander Tomic absent

Other Attendees

Elizabeth Ellis	Maria De La Fuente
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Administration

- Chair Maidman called the EDC meeting to order at 7:01 PM via ZOOM. He stated topics to be discussed include Master Plan Implementation, Zoning Regulations up for rewrite, Energy Advisory Committee update.

Minutes

- Mr. Shapiro moved to accept the minutes of 10/25/21 and Mr. Berish seconded the motion. The Committee voted 5-0-2 unanimously in favor of approval.

Master Plan Update

- Ms. Ellis said there is an available Massachusetts grant which allows for a feasibility study to connect the train station and PO Square with future site of the Gallery. This would allow for ways to connect points in town. There is a potential for a district increment financing. The study can be funded if sewer were implemented. Financing may be able to pay for the infrastructure.

Zoning Regulation updating and re-codification status

- Ms. De La Fuente said we need to change the mixed use overlay district. DHCD released new guidelines of what's near a train station. We comply with most: 15 units per acre, cannot be aged restricted, appropriate for children, multifamily housing. We need to determine how to comply to keep state monies. We need to say we will comply with guidelines by 5/2/22.
- Regarding economic development, she said we need to delete boarding houses from zoning. We need to group elder care facilities under 1 category. For the Dover Amendment uses, childcare needs to be in all districts. For solar, this has to be allowed wherever schools and churches are. Regarding separate retail uses, think of specific cases/scenarios to shape. Allow drive thru stores by special permit to be done the way we want.

- Mr. Shapiro asked that when discussing solar, Ms. de la Fuente discuss with the Energy Advisory oversight committee.
- Mr. Hauser said for PO Square, residential over business, and raise to three stories. He will send a zoning summary previously compiled to Rob and Pat. He said he and Mr. Pannone worked with Sue Price in 2011 to create a cultural pathway from center to lake with amenities and signs. We need to mitigate speed to reduce the number of accidents on Pond Street. He suggested signs be put up.
- Mr. Shapiro said the Historical Commission can help with signs.
- Mr. Pannone said it would be nice to have historical signage to give a path or destination like Pond Street to the lake. He would like to see a traffic study for pedestrian, bicycle and vehicle traffic overland.
- Mr. Hauser said he will share the Waste Water and Traffic Study with Maria.
- Mr. Maidman asked Ms. de la Fuente with what we know now do we have exclusion from financial penalties regarding the DHCD guidelines. She said we are in the clear from that aspect.
- Mr. Maidman said the goal is to get all this done so it can be voted on at Town Meeting.

Individual Module Updates

- Chair Maidman presented a PowerPoint document as follows regarding **Route 1**:

Slide 1 - Route 1 corridor - Light Industrial District

Slide 2 - Light Industrial District: Current Ownership, Usage, and Vacant Parcels:
 GIS map with property and infrastructure delineations
 Parcel ownership, business name, longevity, and SICC
 Parcel Prior 3 Year valuations and tax yields

Slide 3 - Business District Zoning Regulations: Permitted and Excluded Uses
 Business District inclusions
 Exclusions
 Overlays

Slide 4 - Light Industrial District: Development Constraint Summary
 Conforming/Non-Conforming Lots
 Water
 Sewage
 Wetlands
 Abutters
 Traffic

Slide 5 - Light Industrial District: Preliminary Findings, Recommendations, and Tax Yield Projection
 Location assets
 Infrastructural constraints

Target opportunities and zoning by-law changes
Tax yield potential

Slide 6 - Light Industrial District: Next Steps

1:1 contact with parcel owners and businesses: ascertain future growth plans and support requirements
Apply for feasibility grants from Metro Area Planning Council and MA. Office of Business Development: identify viable, constraint-focused opportunities and infrastructural upgrades
Select Board initiatives
Next meeting dates

- Mr. Berish said this is an opportunity to encourage redevelopment. The obstacles are infrastructure in place. Encouraging redevelopment doesn't happen overnight.
- Mr. Shapiro and Ms. Virrankoski presented **Heights Plaza**, Economic Development Committee Reviews and Recommendations. This area is a smaller opportunity but most immediate impact for infrastructure and beautification.
- Heights Plaza Economic Development Committee Review and Recommendations 18 December 2021 Draft for discussion at EDC meeting on 20 December 21 Not final recommendation.
- Current Situation
 - Heights Plaza is a typical single-story suburban strip mall with a large parking lot, with a range of restaurants and other service establishments like pet grooming, nail salons, international food store and a karate studio.
 - The mall appearance is clean but not contemporary and in need of some improvements; it has the original narrow sidewalks, no seating area, lack of vegetation/beautification, inconsistent signage, interiors of some the businesses are dated.
 - The plaza is somewhat less welcoming and appealing than strip malls in nearby towns. It has many long-term tenants and some newer restaurants including Simcha and Griddle and Grill, among others.
 - During a recent Friday early evening visit by two EDC members, over a 45-minute period, the old-style long-term pizza restaurant was quite busy with approximately 20 orders, 90% for takeout. They have good walk-in and online takeout business. One EDC member placed order online for pickup and the other ordered at the counter. This restaurant seems like a healthy business, likely at pre-COVID levels. There are four or five staff including cashier/front of house and kitchen staff.

Potential Economic Development Projects and Benefits Facilities and Amenities

- o Beautification, planting along façade and S. Main Street
- o Landscaping could create more privacy as well as coziness to experience relaxing dining/shopping.
- o A fountain and/or small play area for kids could create welcoming meeting spot.
- o Outdoor seating, Bigger sidewalks, Upgraded signage
- o Potential 2nd story addition for offices like accounting/taxes, community organizations, shared office space, rentable meeting space (12-step meetings, etc.)
[Note: Septic system sufficient for adding second floor]
→ Good for Tenants/Property Owner
- o Higher Traffic Overall

- More frequent visits and possibly keeping resident dollars in town from aesthetic Improvements and addition of seating (friends and families can gather (including place for students to hang out after school for snacks))
- If second floor added, more reasons to visit
 - o Higher Per-Visit Spending
 - More cross-shopping for those coming for restaurant pickup -- visit grocery store or look at other restaurant menus -- or for karate studio families to pick up dinner etc.
 - Larger tickets due to groups of families coming to eat meals together at outdoor seating instead of individuals or single families for takeout
 - o Architectural improvements, interior as well as structural, 2nd floor and possibly L or U shape plaza would increase the square footage of the plaza and create more commercial space for exciting and new business.
 - o with ample parking and improved facility/amenities, Heights Plaza mall would be perfect for kids, young adults, families as well as seniors to make Heights Plaza one of their go-to places in town.
- Good for Town
 - o Higher tax revenue from higher traffic
 - o Better town businesses/amenities appeal to current and potential new residents
 - o Deliver some of the Master Plan goals

Potential Economic Development Projects and Benefits

Real Estate Taxes

- o Valuation – check comps to ensure property valuation is not far below market
- o Tax Rate – move to split tax rate to match comps (strip malls) or overall town commercial rates
 - Impact from 33% tax increase per SF to tenants is about \$50/mo. or less than \$2/day
 - → Good for Town
- o More real estate taxes from corrected valuation
 - 20% undervalued, would yield \$7,500 in increased tax revenue to town
 - 10% undervalued, \$3,300
- o More tax revenue from staggered implementation of split rate taxes to match surrounding towns
 - Increasing tax rate from \$20.43 to \$21.51 to match avg of comparable strip malls in surrounding towns (+5.3%) would yield \$1,600/yr
 - 10%, \$3,000
 - 20%, \$6,000
- o More tax revenue from second floor (added SF)
 - While the upside from real estate taxes may seem low, it is representative of changes that could be made across the board for commercial tax split and commercial property valuations consistent with neighboring towns.

Recommendation:

- Explore grants re beautification and signage – to partner with mall owner, possible town brings something and owner agrees to do something in addition to grant money from town
- Explore commercial owner's interest in improvements (modest effort for benefits to residents and town finances) and possible expansion for more services from clothing store, gift store, hardware stores etc. to serve consumer needs
- Explore valuation increase
- Commercial tax rate increased (only as part of town wide changes)
- Promote businesses and retailers at Heights Plaza online

- Mr. Hauser said if you can get grants for beautification, people might be interested.
- Ms. de la Fuente said she will research the availability of grants for beautification. She said the Town cannot put rain gardens on the property as it is privately owned.
- Ms. Ellis said there are grants for signage beautification.
- Mr. Pannone said come with something in hand. Create a path for the landlord to lessen the burden.
- Mr. Lury suggested a drive through business on the property.
- Chair Maidman said this was a good discussion and what we start and end with will be different.

P.O. Square was presented by Mr. Pannone and Mr. Hauser. They said there is no revenue opportunities at P.O. Square. It is very low. What are cultural amenities that can be created that the town wants. There are 10 owners that own the majority of the properties. It's not a business but cultural development recommendation. Make restaurants in the center. Make We Works office environment. Create a street of business but need a developer. This is hard to do. Ms. Virrankoski said she thinks walkability is good to add. The Town Center is missing this. Mr. Hauser said there are a lot of driveways and pathways behind the Delappa property. The town center is a triangle from the center lights to Alice's restaurant and Alice's restaurant to Town Hall.

- Ms. de la Fuente said she applied for a grant to beautify places around town. It's for \$10,000 to paint the utility boxes. There are age friendly committees working on a podcast about what to expect as you age with regards to health and mental health.
- Mr. Maidman said continuity at PO Square is important. How to keep existing businesses is important. Perhaps through aesthetics.
- Mr. Hauser said we need to capture vitality and cultural dimensionality to decide what to do.

Adjournment

- Mr. Berish moved to close the meeting and Mr. Shapiro seconded the motion. The vote was unanimous 7-0-0 via roll call to conclude at 8:30 PM.
- The next scheduled EDC meeting dates include: 1/31, 2/28