

## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Rob Hubbard - Director, Department of Community Development and Planning, City of Gardner

**FROM:** Darren Mochrie and Craig Seymour

**DATE:** July 16, 2007

**SUBJECT:** Urban Revitalization Plan Public Forum II Response Summary

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### INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide a summary of the issues and ideas identified by residents and property and business owners during the Urban Revitalization Plan Public Forum II on July 12, 2007 at the Levi Heywood Memorial Library in Gardner, Massachusetts. The goal of the Public Forum was to update participants on project progress, as well as present and obtain feedback relative to the proposed two Development Options and preliminary implementation actions.

Development Options One and Two are conceptual mixed-use redevelopment site plans for the Rear Main Street area. Development Option One proposes the demolition of all but one existing mill building in the area, and construction of over 71,000 square feet (SF) of medical and financial office uses along with 45,000 SF of market rate condominiums (in the existing mill building). Development Option Two offers a more aggressive development program with 56,700 SF of (medical and financial) office space, 45,000 SF of market rate condominiums, and a 16,800 SF police station.

After the Consultant Team presented an update on project progress, as well as the proposed Development Options and implementation actions, participants were divided into three breakout groups with each group being asked to comment on the Development options and implementation actions. This memorandum has been divided into two sections which relate to comments provided by the participants in each group.

### *Implementation Actions*

The following implementation actions received support:

- Promote the City's façade improvement program (adjust program to incorporate the rear of buildings);
- Remove blighted buildings;

- Encourage more market rate housing downtown;
- Introduce incentives such as Tax Increment Finance (TIF) and Business Improvement District (BID);
- Expedite tax title process;
- Incorporate more green space and amenities in the Study Area;
- Review development review process every three to five years;
- Support Square 2 and promote additional festivals and public activities downtown; and,
- Incorporate new police station in Rear Main area.

The following implementation actions were suggested:

- Ensure that the City works hard to maintain existing infrastructure (such as parks, parking lots, street sweeping, etc.)

The following implementation actions were challenged:

- May not be enough support from downtown property owners for a BID.

#### *Development Options One and Two*

After reviewing and discussing the Development Options, each of the three breakout groups supported the design concepts shown in Development Option Two (the more aggressive development program). The following points were presented by each group:

- Development Option 1
  - Does not go far enough in terms of demolition of blighted buildings;
  - Does not visually “open up” the Rear Main area (still many visual barriers along Main Street);
  - Needs to encourage more accessibility or connection to Rear Main area.
- Development Option 2
  - More of an attractive gateway to the downtown area (compared to Development Option 1);
  - Could be even more aggressive (more acquisition/demolition, construction and streetscaping on Main Street);
  - Option provides more accessibility (pedestrian and vehicular) and connection to Rear Main area;
  - Some concern that a new Police Station at the south end of this Option - may not be the most suitable visual gateway building for the downtown;
  - Liked the narrow street to calm vehicular traffic;
- All Development Options
  - Any redevelopment in Rear Main must strengthen and support revitalization along Main Street (such as providing more parking and access to businesses along Main Street);
  - Need to address the appearance of the rear side (façade) of buildings along Main Street;
  - Incorporate pedestrian and bicycle paths in any new Development Option;

- Will new development in the downtown (potentially resulting in vacated buildings) simply shift the blight to new areas?
- Any new Development Option will require a traffic and parking impact study;
- Bring people (residents and visitors) to the Rear Main area and businesses will follow (to capture spending);
- Is there funding for a new structured parking deck for the area?

