

MEMORANDUM

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

FROM: Darren Mochrie and Craig Seymour

DATE: June 4, 2007

SUBJECT: Urban Revitalization Plan Public Forum Response Summary

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 on May 30, 2007 at the Levi Heywood Memorial Library in Gardner, Massachusetts. The goal of the Public Forum was to have the estimated 50+ participants identify issues, challenges and opportunities relative to Urban Revitalization Study Area, as well as think forward and provide their vision of downtown Gardner in the future.

This memorandum has been divided into five sections which relate to comments provided on each of five topic areas discussed during the Public Forum including; traffic and streets; commercial and retail issues; public amenities and green space; housing issues; and, opportunities and challenges.

TRAFFIC AND STREET ISSUES

- Improve directional/wayfinding signage to downtown
- Adjust traffic signal on Willow Street
- Roundabout or alternative Rear Main vehicle and pedestrian route (from Pine Street) needed
- Reevaluate traffic movements (confusing combination of 1-way and 2-way streets)
- Have police officer direct traffic at downtown square (during peak times)
- Consider and encourage pedestrian movements
- Need signage to show/promote municipal parking areas
- Consider future parking needs
- Consider removing parking meters (to aid traffic flow)
- Establish commuter rail
- Trolley/shuttle between downtown and furniture outlets
- Increase bus frequency
- Ensure pedestrian safety – crosswalk and sidewalk maintenance

- Close a street(s) and create pedestrian mall for special events, etc.
- Widen Main Street north of new drug stores and develop greenway (assemble properties)
- Create attractive gateways to downtown
- Potential truck delivery access in Rear Main
- Develop better connection from Pine Street neighborhood to Rear Main
- Create pedestrian connection between downtown and mills (Nichols & Stone, Simplex, NEWW)

COMMERCIAL AND RETAIL ISSUES

- Downtown buildings need repairs, cleanup and improvements
- Promote City's façade program
- Demolish blighted/substandard commercial and retail buildings (Rear Main, etc.)
- Build on the unique character of downtown
- Encourage artists to live and work downtown (art displays in vacant storefronts)
- Need independent movie theatre, coffee shop and upscale restaurants
- Need stores and attractions for teens (book store and bakery)
- Business counseling for startup businesses
- Encourage specialty stores to locate downtown
- Select one night per week where stores would stay open late (7 p.m. or later)
- Downtown as destination for arts and culture
- Need downtown festivals, sidewalk sales and outdoor cafes

AMENITIES AND GREEN SPACE

- Open-up Rear Main Street area as green space with river
- Demolish blighted/substandard buildings for green space and amenities
- Skateboard park in downtown
- Develop pedestrian access to Rear Main Street area
- Need more garbage receptacles downtown
- Develop dog park
- Reestablish Heritage Museum/State Park
- Need public information kiosk(s)
- Start "Concerts on the Common"
- Add pocket parks and park benches
- Need amenities for all age groups
- Establish a City Youth Commission
- Promote/market amenities to region
- Improve public access/connection to Crystal Lake
- Add more trees and plantings
- Sweep City streets more often
- Need focal point to downtown (move the big chair?)

HOUSING

- Encourage people to live downtown
- Demolish blighted residential properties
- Develop shared parking program for commercial/retail and residential properties

- Encourage the development of loft units for artists
- Perception of too much residential development (not supported by data)
- Need balance between affordable and market-rate (moderate income or upscale) housing
- Revise land use regulations with user-friendly, attractive design standards
- Enforce land use and public health regulations (blighted buildings and property maintenance)
- Preserve salvageable, architecturally-significant buildings

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Opportunities

- Unique building architectural styles downtown – not “cookie cutter”
- Leverage assets of college and hospital to develop downtown space (temporary housing for veteran’s families, adult student housing, medical offices, etc.)
- Many small banks downtown
- Pedestrian access throughout downtown
- Library
- Gardner Ale House
- Pool
- Parking near City Hall
- Affordable housing stock
- Target “beer, bagel and book” establishments and artists
- “Rebrand” City image away from “Chair City”
- Capitalize on effective marketing from local furniture stores

Challenges

- Landlords (absentee and local) and poor condition of many buildings
- Empty storefronts and buildings
- Poor traffic patterns
- Lack of festivals and events
- Lack of trees and greenery
- Lack of “standardized” storefront design elements
- Improve view of Gardner from Route 2

