

## Littleton at the Crossroads: Rt. 2 @ I-495 Public Forum May 31, 2012 Meeting Summary

The Town of Littleton has begun a planning and visioning process focused on economic development for the industrially-zoned land near the intersection of Routes 2 and Interstate 495. The project goal is to develop a community consensus/vision for development of the Upper Foster Street/Taylor Street/Porter Road area and the Littleton MBTA commuter rail station. The development vision will guide regulatory changes and infrastructure planning.

The initial meeting was held on Thursday, May 31, 2012 at 7 pm in the Community Room at the Littleton Police Headquarters. The meeting was facilitated by staff from the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC), the regional planning agency serving 101 cities and towns from Boston to Route 495. The Town of Littleton has contracted with MAPC to perform planning analyses and facilitate the Forum.

Introductory remarks were given by Board of Selectmen Chairman Gregg Champney, Planning Board Chairman Mark Montanari and Town Administrator Keith Bergman. Cynthia Wall, Senior Regional Planner at MAPC presented background information on the project area, including existing zoning, land use and environmental issues. This area was identified by the Town for additional economic development potential and this potential was confirmed by the State when the area was designated a Priority Development Area (PDA) as part of the 495/MetroWest Compact Development Study. The PDA designation is expected to enhance the potential for state funding for infrastructure and other grants.

As part of this project, property and business owners in the Crossroads study area met with Town officials and Mark Racicot, MAPC's Director of Land Use on May 2 to discuss their views of the area. The assets noted included good access to Route 2 and I-495 and the commuter rail, proximity to IBM, ample availability of water and power, and relatively inexpensive rents. Constraints identified included a lack of amenities such as restaurants and retail, no sewer system, and a lack of sidewalks, particularly for access to the train.

Mark Racicot then discussed some potential changes to the area, such as adding retail and restaurants at the commuter rail; creating a mixed use transit village at the commuter rail that could include a mix of retail, restaurant, housing and office uses; adding retail uses in the industrial areas, and enhancing food options in the buildings currently used for research and development (several of the former Digital Equipment Corporation/Hewlett Packard buildings). Examples of the scale of retail and mixed use were shown, and are included as part of the presentation at [http://www.littletonma.org/filestorage/1261/15311/LittletonCrossroadsPresentation\\_2012-05-31.pdf](http://www.littletonma.org/filestorage/1261/15311/LittletonCrossroadsPresentation_2012-05-31.pdf)

Meeting attendees made the following comments about the project, organized by topic:

### **Project Background/Context**

- A participant indicated that they needed to understand the context for this project. Why is this area being examined? How does this project fit in with the rest of the Town?
- A selectman noted that the Town desires to maintain the quality of life for the community, for the future; the Town goal is to maximize the development of (and the tax revenue from) the already-developed areas of Littleton (rather than develop greenfields), as well as to balance the needs of both industrial owners vs. residents.
- Need data. Value per lot size. What is the impact of existing property values on development? Do we have data from other Towns?
- How much land is actually available for development?
- How much can the Town support? How many restaurants, how much retail?
- We should wait and see about the impacts from The Point (formerly the Cisco Systems site to the west of I-495 at the Common) before making changes now. We need to know the impact of this new project.

### **Buildings in the Project Area**

- Industrial buildings in the Foster Street area may need infrastructure updates to be competitive.  
One prospective tenant said that projected rents were not competitive with new construction after required upgrades were factored in. Are there grants available to do this infrastructure improvement to private industrial properties?
- Chicken/Egg: Some investment in the properties (and surrounding amenities) may be needed before the area becomes attractive to tenants.

### **Traffic/Transportation**

- A goal, as part of any changes in this area, should be to minimize additional traffic on Foster St.
- Foster Street very heavily travelled. It should be "off the table".
- There are very few locations along I-495 that are near both a commuter rail station and also interchanges with I-495 (Route 2). This is a big advantage for Littleton.

### **Restaurants/Amenities**

- Restaurants are limited in all of Littleton, not just this area.
- Restaurant on Taylor Street would be a positive.

- Question whether amenities will be in the existing buildings, or nearby? Businesses want workers to stay in the buildings.
- Businesses are looking for a small scale sandwich shop, not a large restaurant.
- Some businesses need a higher end restaurant, to entertain clients (not just a typical chain restaurant).
- Is the Town offering any incentives for restaurants?
- Need a dinner crowd to support a restaurant, not just workers. Retail is not working now. A bigger picture is needed for this work.
- Is there any information (data) available since IBM has come to Littleton? Has there been any impact on the nearby sub shop, or other local eateries? Is there a difference with IBM now in Littleton?
- Many IBM employees eat on-site/bring lunches.
- Need a business hotel for clients.
- Buildings are spaced far apart in this area. Bike paths/sidewalks would be a real benefit.
- Infrastructure is needed: sidewalks and bike paths.

#### **Mixed Use/Transit Village**

- If a mixed use village was developed, what would be the impact on Town services?
- Shops near the train station, with apts/offices above would make better use of the land. Rents from the upper floor uses could make the retail feasible.
- Mixed use would likely put renters into an area of owner-occupied homes. Prefer people invested in the community (owners rather than renters), and people with fewer children.
- Would prefer no residential use at all. Want revenue, not cost, to the Town.
- Planning Board Chairman: regarding the scale of retail, looking for something that fits in with what is out there now. Small mixed use/retail, for local residents. Buildings similar to the former "King's" (now the wine shop at the old depot area).

#### **Other**

- Other sections of Littleton may be better for this—more supportive of these ideas.

- Need to clean up the Depot Area-make it better looking. Perhaps rezone from Industrial B – the area is zoned I-B and this allows for outdoor storage of materials, because of a particular use, since 1955.
- In planning for the future meeting, it was requested that the town make information available in advance of the meeting, and clearly define what the meeting is going to discuss.
- Are there concepts/ideas already decided for this area?  
Answer: No, this is the beginning of a planning process.

At the end of the meeting, the participants indicated they needed additional information and wanted a follow-up meeting. They were not prepared to vote on uses, etc. to develop a community vision at this time. As one participant said: “Now that I know what this project is about, I’m going to think about things when I drive around in that area. I’m going to ask: should we have a restaurant here? Should we have some retail? What could we do here?”

**Forum Attendees Identified Themselves:**

Residents	33	Residents in Study Areas/Nearby	25
Business Owners	1	Business Owners in Study Area	7
Both owner and resident	7		

The next meeting is tentatively scheduled for Thursday, September 13, 2012 at 7 pm.