

**Mixed-Used Overlay District (MUOD) Working Group Meeting #1 – February 16, 2022**

Meeting Opened @ 6:00p.m.

Meeting Adjourned at 7:45p.m.

Attendees:

Jennifer Gingras, Cheryl Lutzca, Peter Flinker, Stephen Themelis, Bentley Herget, Gruprecht, Ann Marie Finn, Sue Smith, GR, Janet Glenn, Wayne Razzaboni, Wes Ritchie, David Ganong, Margaret Scarsdale, Joyce Morrow, Lora Woodward, Janet Glenn, April Healey, Evelyn Bagley, April Babbitt

Jenny Gingras, Town Planner provided a presentation on the Mixed-Use Overlay District (MUOD).

Ted Brovitz (Brovitz Community Planning and Design), Lead Design; Nate Burgess and Peter Flinker (Dodson and Flinker, Inc.) and Planner and Landscape Architect, provided an overview of projects in other towns such as Medway, Portsmouth, NH, Danvers and North Hampton. They said that they are in the process of finishing Task 1 (Scope of Services) and have reviewed all of Pepperell's rules and polices. They said that a lot of good planning has been done in the Town of Pepperell. And they have been looking at opportunities and existing conditions (all in report distributed this week).

Peter Flinker provided a presentation, via screen share (Working Group and Public Participation Process) and explained that there will be a series of three Working Group meetings, as well as a Public Design Charrette (hopefully in March over a Friday evening and Saturday morning), followed by a second Working Group meeting to review the results. The third Working Group meeting will have a draft and conceptual plan, as well as a draft of the MUOD. A public forum will be held at the end to have a presentation to the public. This is designed to track the planning and design process as they go through it. The description of the process was emailed out to the Working Group, however it was an older version of the process, which had two separate Public Charrettes, so an update will be mailed out to the members of the Working Group. He asked if there were any questions. None.

**Ted Brovitz provided a presentation and overview, via screenshare, of the following:**

- Existing Conditions Analysis – Property Characteristics
- Existing Conditions Analysis - Town Plans and Policies
- Existing Conditions Analysis – Zoning Bylaws
- The Project Area (broken down into five sections)
- Opportunity Sites
- The Police Station site will be added to the list

- Paula Terrassi (Conservation Agent): Asked about the Mill site contamination. She said that the site has been taken to ground level. The Prudence Wright Overlook and the Rail Trail are both State properties, however, could those properties be included. Mr. Brovitz responded and said that they are not in the zone and are natural the way it is we don't really know about the conditions at the Mill site, and at this point it is unknown and a challenge.

**Mr. Brovitz resumed his presentation and overview, via screenshare:**

- Mixed Use Project Area – Segment 1
- Segment 1 Character Examples (pictures)
- Segment 1 Typical Street Cross Section (pictures)
- Segment 1 Issues, Opportunities, Priorities? – Would like feedback from the Working Group on this

**Comments and Questions followed:**

- Renee D'Argento (18 Prospect Street): Feels this section should stay the way it is due to grandeur and historic aspect
- Nita Casey (28 Main Street): Lives in the yellow gingerbread house and had an art gallery in it for 25 years. She likes the way the Historical sign starts at her house and would like it to stay that way and does not want to see change
- Kris Hartwell (30 Main Street): Sidewalks are almost too narrow on her side of the street and her house is very close to the road. Could we kick out/extend the sidewalk on that side a little bit to allow for more walking/biking space. Maybe some galleries, antiques, professional offices could be allowed
- Lora Woodward: Would like to see bike lanes or some way of facilitating bicyclists getting to the Library or Town Hall from other parts of Town. Mr. Brovitz responded and said that he was not sure if there is extra space for that due to the right of way.; you need 5-feet to make a legitimate bike lane, hopefully we can get a sense (with the layout) if there is any additional space
- Renee D'Argento: Bike lanes and the width of sidewalks are important, but why do we have to have them on both sides of the street. Mr. Brovitz responded and said that could be possible to have a sidewalk on only one side. Ms. D'Argento commented that we need good crosswalks

**Mr. Brovitz resumed his presentation and overview, via screenshare:**

- Mixed Use Project Area – Segment 2
- Segment 2 - Character Examples (pictures)
- Segment 2 - Typical Street Cross Section
- Segment 2 – Issues, Opportunities Priorities?

**Comments and Questions followed:**

- Renee D'Argento: Pictures maximizing of vertical space (here and other places along corridor). Mr. Brovitz responded and said that there is not a lot of depth to these lots, you sort of have to go up to get any sort of mixed-use opportunities in there. It may mean taking down and rebuilding properties. The parking would be behind the buildings, with shared parking lots

**Mr. Brovitz resumed his presentation and overview, via screenshare:**

- Mixed Use Project Area – Segment 3
- Segment 3 - Character Examples (pictures)
- Segment 3 - Typical Street Cross Section
- Segment 3 – Issues, Opportunities Priorities?

**Comments and Questions followed:**

- Paula Terrasi: Intersection (Mill and Main) is a horror show, with minimal head-in parking for white building (hair salon; barber shop; liquor store; apartments above). Mr. Brovitz responded and said that parallel parking could be done on one-side of the road, which would create a better sidewalk and street trees. There is another building, further to the West where there is head-in parking (Pleasant Street)
- Wes Ritchie (New England Craft Cultivators): Said that they will be starting construction on their location in the Paugus Mall soon, and they envision improving the site. Mr. Brovitz responded that he likes that the Paugus mall building is up against a sidewalk, however he wishes there were some windows along the sidewalk. He further commented that if the building was set back about 10 feet, you could have outdoor dining
- April Babbitt: Asked if consideration is being taken regarding the commercial spacing in Town that is currently vacant. Ms. Gingras responded and inquired as to which vacancies Ms. Babbitt was referring to. Ms. Babbitt said she that she was referring to the older bank/Comfed building, Paugus Mall vacancies, and Railroad Square vacancies, and asked if those were being taken into consideration. Mr. Brovitz responded and said that the MUOD takes into consideration redeveloping these properties and could attract new businesses coming into town. Ms. Babbitt asked doesn't this section of Main Street already allow apartments upstairs. Mr. Brovitz responded and said it is very limited, maybe a couple of apartments. The numbers don't work

unless you allow more. Ms. Babbitt asked if they were talking about adding additional stories to buildings. Mr. Brovitz responded yes; the Mall could have residential apartments above it. Ms. Babbitt asked if parking was being taken into consideration. Mr. Brovitz responded and said yes, what we are looking at is a series of small, mixed-use developments/properties

- No name was provided by question asker: Has there been any outreach to current residents? Mr. Brovitz responded and said that is part of the outreach that needs to be done/next step, hopefully the Public Design Charrette will help. Question Asker: The Mixed Use came out of the Master Plan, which was primarily for the Peter Fitz property, and she is concerned that if it goes before Town Meeting with too much in it, the Peter Fitz building will suffer. Ms. Gingras responded and said that for the Peter Fitz School, we will have the Adaptive Reuse Bylaw proposal at Spring town Meeting, and if it passes, Peter Fitz may be able to do a lot of what they envision
- Paula Terrasi: We have tried to redo zoning on Hollis Street, down by rotary and community center, and we missed a few people. Will every abutter and private property owners be notified? Ms. Gingras responded that they would. Discussion ensued
- Mr. Brovitz said that as far as the police building and the Peter Fitz, the Town could put out an RFP to developers, so that the Town would have more control
- Lora Woodward: Said that she lives near the intersections of Main/Canal and Mill Streets, and it is pretty dangerous; could there be any attention given to facilitate people getting across the street there. Mr. Brovitz responded and said that could be addressed during a work session and the DPW Director/Town Engineer may want to chime in
- Renee D'Argento: Maybe a blinking pedestrian sign with the crosswalk being in the right place and visible to traffic
- Nita Casey: There needs to be better signage at the crosswalks; if the road is made bigger, people will drive faster, and we will need sidewalks

Discussion ensued regarding travel lanes and the Complete Streets plan which calls for better crosswalks and signage.

**Mr. Brovitz resumed his presentation and overview, via screenshare:**

- Mixed Use Project Area – Segment 4 (Railroad Square/E. Pepperell Village (Main Street and Groton Street)
- Segment 4 - Character Examples (pictures)
- Segment 4 - Typical Street Cross Section
- Segment 4 – Issues, Opportunities Priorities?

### **Comments and Questions followed:**

- Renee D'Argento: Some of us on the Master Plan Committee talked about the owner of Hotel Place making improvements. She said that she likes the idea of commercial on both sides of the streets, however there is a lot of neighborhood along there, so we need to be sensitive to that. There is also a lot of traffic, so safety is important, especially with Rail Trail
- Unknown Question Asker: Any possibilities for public bathrooms for the Rail Trail? Ms. Gingras said that there used to be an agreement with Kemps, but she is not sure if that is still in place. We have talked about getting public bathrooms put in, but that is financial. Renee D'Argento inquired about using the Boy Scout building for this purpose. Ms. Gingras said that could be a possibility
- David Ganong: Is this is a good opportunity for a public/private partnership. He also commented that at the intersection of Main and Groton Streets, adjacent to the Rail Trail, the Stop sign at that intersection comes down about once a week
- Wayne Razzaboni: Said that he owns Hotel Place and is interested in working with the team regarding the investment and development of that property

Ms. Gingras spoke and said that the plan is not to put a rotary in Railroad Square and that the recent survey that the Town had done shows there are encroachment issues that would require a lot of easements. We are applying for a Shared Streets and Spaces Grant, which is due March 1<sup>st</sup>. We are looking at safer crossing along Main Street near Charlotte's and Breen's., as well as putting in some ADA compliant ramps for the crosswalks; new curb cuts for the sidewalks, and maybe widening them to allow for streetscapes and street beautification. Mr. Brovitz commented that this is difficult due to the non-alignment of streets

- Deb Fountain: As you are coming down Groton Street and need to take a left onto Main Street, it is very visually distracting driving through there, with traffic coming from businesses, the Rail Trail, etc.; and this should all be taken into consideration for redesign
- Ms. D'Argento: Parallel parking would be better in that area.

### **Mr. Brovitz resumed his presentation and overview, via screenshare:**

- Opportunity Site – Segment 4 – Former Pepperell Paper Mill (2015 MUOD Site Plan)
- Next Steps: Conceptual Planning and Context-Based Mixed-Use Zoning Standards

### **Comments and Questions followed:**

- Deb Fountain: Asked if the Design Guidelines are halfway in process and is the goal to hold off until this is complete. Ms. Gingras responded and said possibly; we stopped working on it because NMCOG ended technical assistance, however we wanted to see what was going on with this. Mr. Brovitz responded and said that as we put this together, we could sort of develop hybrid form-based codes. Discussion ensued regarding standards and guidelines
- Renee D'Argento: Asked about the Mill site. Ms. Terrasi said there was a design in the last set of plans (riverwalk – there is conservation land that connects)
- Kris Hartwell: Said we should build up the existing and beautify with streetscapes. Mr. Brovitz said that this could be part of site plan requirements to develop incrementally over time
- Jack Visniewski: Changing zoning to allow businesses to put residential units above their buildings could possibly give them more funds, but would that be enough? Are there any other economic opportunities, funds or programs? Mr. Brovitz discussed tax--increment financing and district-increment financing. There are some grants to renovate old facades. The Town would have to apply for a small community block grant
- Jack Visniewski – Asked about some sort of opportunities to trade land with the Town (area owned by Wayne Razzaboni). Mr. Brovitz said he saw some sort of 1974 plan that was similar. Discussion ensued
- Discussion ensued regarding food trucks and potential locations (such as under-utilized parking lots). Someone commented that food trucks turn into restaurants. Mr. Brovitz said that he was surprised that there weren't more restaurants in town. Ms. Gingras responded and said that the most common thing she hears people say is that they would like to see another coffee shop along Main Street.

Ms. Gingras announced the dates of future Working Group meetings:

- April 6<sup>th</sup> and May 25<sup>th</sup>
- The hope is to have a draft wrapped up by July, with the goal of a Fall Town Meeting

Ms. Gingras asked if there were any questions/comments from people that were online. None.

Mixed-Used Overlay District Meeting Minutes of February 16, 2022, respectfully submitted by:

Cheryl Lutcza, Planning Assistant