
MEMORANDUM

TO: Town Center Initiative File
FROM: Drew Bottaro
SUBJECT: Update on Town Center Initiative
DATE: August 18, 2013

Summary of Town Center Initiative (TCI) status

1. Progress on TCI Tracks: All progress reported is subject to revision and adjustment, as the TCI proceeds.
 - a. Vision: The PB has established the broader context in which the CBD is set, by identifying seven distinct areas [map], with different land use patterns, that surround the Town Center. Within the broader center, PB has established boundaries of the subject area (essentially the current CBD, with some changes around the edges), along with subdistricts [map].

For the subject area, proposed heights have been established (subject to PB vote), with sensitivity to edges and as-of-right/ permit required heights discussed. Broadly, and subject to input, the working model is 35' as-of-right, and higher heights by special permit.
 - b. Zoning code: The table of uses has been populated and has been reviewed, and is being edited. The key new feature is a distinction between allowed uses on the ground floor, vs. upper floors. This strategy aims explicitly to promote and maintain active 1st-floor uses, for an active streetfront.
 - c. Public: Outreach to community groups is beginning, through nascent efforts staffed by MCN and supported by MSGA grant. Plan is to communicate about current zoning and challenges, and then analyses and working proposals, via several channels (e.g. WinCam panel interview). Interest group dialogue and interaction is just beginning (informal basis), while the PB begins to prepare for public meetings – both open forums and formal posted hearings.
 - d. Pre-development: Progress on a/b above permits initiation of this track. Time to activate this, working with Town Manager, and enlisting state support.
2. Activities planned or desired to complete analysis and energize support
 - a. Establish better the case for the initiative; build on qualitative; add quantitative (fiscal) – PB is beginning to engage FinCom to develop and vet this aspect.
 - b. Vision: Presenting this clearly to the public, and to Town Meeting, will be essential to generating support for the initiative. Toward that end, PB believes

that some, most, or all of the following activities and projects are necessary to “do the job right” and to answer questions about the rationale for what’s being proposed. At this point, no additional funding is requested, due to the generous assistance from the MSGA.

- i. Modeling: Building 3D images of the subject area, with terrain, design/ elevation concepts illustrated, is critical to articulating the results of the TCI visually – people can see “what they will get” from these efforts.
 - ii. Parking strategy, related to potential new housing capacity and business requirements: Building on Nelson-Nygaard study, PB needs to address need for any public/ shared parking. Study purpose, plan design will be discussed at 8/22 PB meeting.
 - iii. Development of design criteria: Town acceptance of expanded zoning critically depends upon citizen comfort and belief that zoning, when it unleashes economic forces, will result in buildings that townspeople want. Establishing appropriate design criteria helps to set citizen and developer expectations.
 - iv. Clarifying protected historical structures: PB has preliminarily identified a handful (single-digits) of “consensus” significant structures; it plans to revisit to determine if other structures should be added to the list. This list and the design criteria interact, and integration must occur that balances historic preservation with the economic requirements that will motivate redevelopment.
- c. Zoning code:
- i. The dimensional requirements need to be articulated, especially regarding zone/ subzone “edges” and upper-story & subzone setbacks. Design studies are likely to be pursued to help articulate the interplay between FARs and setbacks, in a way that can be visualized and sets expectations regarding the sorts of structures that would fit within the proposed zoning.
 - ii. Parking strategy [b.ii above] needs to be integrated into the zoning.
 - iii. Governance, especially clarification of the SPGA for any Town Center upper-story special permits, needs to be crisp. There is a strong need for zoning predictability – by land-owners, developers, and citizens – to build credibility in the zoning process, and hence in any proposed zoning, especially in the sensitive Town Center.
 - iv. The replacement zoning is being drafted to reflect and integrate the above, and is targeted for initial review by PB on 8/22.

- d. Public: Communication of the above, which is still being developed, is essential and challenging. The PB is of the belief that a coherent proposal, with strong positives for the Town, will be ready for the fall Town Meeting. There are concerns that the timeframe for effective public engagement may be too short. PB expects public engagement to inform the proposal substantially, and has a growing belief that the information flow and exchange will, in the long run, best serve the Town if the process is slightly extended.
 - e. Development: The above is specific enough to begin testing development economics. That process needs to be conceptualized and initiated.
3. Infrastructure and institutional asks:
- a. Floodplain, especially along the Quill rotary to Elliott Square (Q-E) stretch of Main, will require buildings to be 1-2' above current street grade. This drives up development costs. Still too early to be specific, but redevelopment is likely to benefit from state assistance – e.g. removing spur [flood storage; activation of West Core], managing street height, perhaps upstream watershed flood mitigation/ coordination.
 - b. Parking and parking fund: Ultimate proposal may include requirement that developments access a shared parking facility or shared parking arrangements. Toward that end, PPB requests BOS/ Town Manager to begin exploring how to establish a shared/ public parking fund. Exact requirements will likely vary, as details of parking strategy evolve; nonetheless, we recommend that the legal parameters and requirements be researched, beginning immediately or very shortly.
 - c. Housing fund: Related to the parking fund (and competing with it for future developer funding), PB recommends the initiation of strategies, and pursuit of opportunities, to use and grow the current joint housing fund. This likely needs to be a coordinated effort among Town Manager, PB and Planner, and BOS initially (design coordination), with involvement by HPB and WHA.
 - d. MBTA and Town working committee:
 - i. Pursue aggressively the removal of the spur (to create flood storage capacity, and to activate development and the Horn Pond Brook public space)
 - ii. Integrate redevelopment needs with station design project efforts. Examples might include: rail commuter walkway [not necessarily platform] north of rotary; re-working/ lighting rotary; tunnels through wall (e.g. Waterfield); etc.