

Reading— Downtown Revitalization



Site Details: 25.8 acres- Smart Growth Overlay District
Zoning: 40R Overlay District
Funding: State , MassDOT, Private Developer
Date(s): 2007– present

Goals: by-right mixed use through smart growth rezoning, design guidelines. downtown revitalization, transit oriented development, affordable housing opportunities, historic preservation, pedestrian oriented redevelopment



Urban design upgrades in Reading's downtown district, 2011.

Background

Reading seized the opportunity to enhance its downtown district through infrastructure improvements and Smart Growth Zoning. A decade and a half ago town officials met to conceptualize infrastructure improvements that would create a more vibrant and pedestrian friendly downtown. A Streetscape Improvement plan was developed as well as broader thinking about rezoning downtown to begin to reshape it as more vibrant pedestrian friendly downtown, and to allow mixed use development as a “by-right” use. The \$6.1 million dollar downtown improvement project was designed and funding sources explored. The downtown improvement plan included redesigned streets to improve vehicular and pedestrian access, brick crosswalks, new sidewalks, new traffic signals, period lighting, landscaping, and other streetscape improvements.

Rezoning downtown was the next step. The Community Planning and Development Commission (CPDC) had previously sought and received Town Meeting approval for a “Mixed Use overlay” for downtown, but that zoning yielded no applications to provide mixed use development. The CPDC began the process of drafting the 40R Smart Growth Zoning and accompanying design guidelines for downtown when the Town’s remaining downtown supermarket closed, and a developer came forward to redevelop the site with mixed use development. The zoning was completed over the summer of 2009 and in the Fall of 2009 Town Meeting approved the 40R Downtown Smart Growth district.

Site Development

With the streetscape improved and the Smart Growth zoning in place, the private redevelopment followed. The first two redevelopments were large vacant properties located in the Smart Growth district. Oaktree Development was first with 30 Haven Street with plans for a 100,000 square foot mixed use redevelopment of the former Atlantic Supermarket site. The 30 Haven project will be comprised of 20,000 square feet of first floor commercial/retail and 53 units of residential above (with 20% affordable housing as required under the Smart Growth zoning). The 30 Haven project broke ground in July, 2011 and will be completed in 2012.

The next redevelopment project being planned is 600 Main Street (formerly the M.F. Charles building) which is a phased mixed use redevelopment of an historic brick and masonry building. Plans are currently being developed with permitting and construction to follow. The MF Charles building’s designation on the National Register of Historic Places will insure that its historic fabric will be preserved as part of any renovation. The M.F. Charles building, was occupied by Bank of America,



Reading's Downtown M.F. Charles building, 2011.



The existing site of the former Atlantic Supermarket slate for Oak Tree development, 2011.

concerns expressed over density and parking. A consensus was developed and the minimum parking requirements were increased and the increased height was accepted because of the way it would need to be designed under the step back requirements. The importance of the design guidelines can not be understated in reassuring the community that the new zoning would work. The CPDC’s role in reviewing projects under the Town’s strong Site Plan Review process reinforced the 40R zoning.

Reading Downtown Revitalization and MetroFuture Goals

Sustainable Growth Patterns

It is projected by the MAPC that Reading will grow slowly over the next couple of years, and although most of the Town’s residential development is single family homes the new downtown smart growth district seeks to promote more dense and mixed use development that differs from the standard model for suburban growth.

Transportation Choices

The Downtown Smart Growth district redevelopments are highly accessible to the Reading Commuter Rail station. The 30 Haven Street project is directly adjacent to the commuter rail station and the M.F. Charles building is just 2 blocks away. The downtown streetscape improvements have improved pedestrian access to the downtown with sidewalk renovations and better crosswalks.

Contact Information

For more information about the Reading Downtown Revitalization project, please contact Town Planner Jean Delios at jdelios@ci.reading.ma.us.

and Sense of Wonder, a small gift shop. The first phase will focus on the first floor retail improvements. Northern Bank and Trust Company will occupy the former Bank of America space and a restaurant is expected to be a future tenant of the former Sense of Wonder gift shop space. The restaurant plans to have outdoor dining extended into an adjacent courtyard area. The second phase will involve the residential development of the second and third floors of the building.

Development Process

The community supported the proposal to rezone downtown into a mixed use 40R Smart Growth district and saw the spin off benefits of the new zoning. During the planning and public outreach process, there were



Source: Town of Reading Planning Department Concept plans for the Oak Tree development (top) and M.F. Charles (bottom), 2011.

“The community is looking forward to completion of our first DSGD project – the Oaktree development. This will be a real shot in the arm for our downtown, and set a pattern for the community’s expectations for Reading’s new downtown.”

-Peter I. Hechenbleikner, Town Manager, Reading.