

**Hamilton Development Corporation
Board of Selectmen
June 22, 2015**

The Hamilton Development Corporation met at Hamilton Wenham Public Library at 7:40 p.m. on Monday, June 22, 2015 with Brian Stein, Bill Gisness, Rick Mitchell, Dave Carey, Anthony Nickas present. Consultant Rachel Meketon, and Board of Selectmen: Scott Maddern, Marc Johnson, Jeff Hubbard, Shawn Farrell, Bill Wilson as well as other Town board members also present.

Call to order/introduction

Brian Stein summarized visioning meetings that HDC had held in the fall looking at zoning, density and building heights downtown. He explained that comments from these meetings had questioned the economic benefit of doing any changes downtown. This was the reason for having the Urban Land Institute do a one-day charrette to evaluate potential financial benefits of developing downtown and mixed used by-law. ULI has worked in a variety of areas including communities the size of Hamilton.

ULI TAP presentation

Dick Lampman of ULI introduced diverse group of volunteer panelists that could bring insight to the process. ULI is an international organization that deals with a full spectrum of communities to research, recommend, and educate on all aspects of land use. The Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) brings expertise to the community and included residential developer and Executive Director of ULI Boston, CRJA landscape architect, DiMella Shaffer architect, associate from Goulston & Storrs, as well as representative from Windover Development, etc.

The ULI presentation started with results from walk in the downtown neighborhood (Hamilton village area) that ULI representatives did with HDC to view the different zones: retail, residential, etc. Stakeholder interviews had occurred with Selectmen, Planning Board, business owners, local developers, and local real estate agents to understand what is important to Hamilton (consensus and vision for Town).

Common themes heard were need for wastewater treatment system and how this infrastructure could allow and fuel new growth and help it happen quickly in downtown, and misconception associated with parking which might not be convenient and need for a strategy to address. Also analyzed was the vision for commercial district (i.e., mixed use or not, retail and office, more residential). There are some vacancies

downtown in office and retail space and how this could be resolved. Another theme was it is hard to get things done in Hamilton and what could be done to fix that and streamline process for business owners.

Assets identified for Hamilton were the charm and quaintness of the Town, opportunity for Town to be more pedestrian friendly with improved sidewalks, and that many studies have been done on vision and future. An opportunity for the Town is to infuse rental housing into Hamilton village through mixed use or residential development. This is especially important for residents interested in downsizing but staying in Town, returning to Hamilton, or families wanting to live in Town for the school system. Constraints consisted of managing wastewater in downtown, infrequent commuter train schedule, introducing mixed use while retaining small community feeling, zoning by-law, lack of developable land.

Development potential for Hamilton was classified into three options: no change, mixed use by-law introduced with no infrastructure improvements, and mixed use by-law introduced with infrastructure improvements. Also evaluated was economic analysis and financial feasibility of wastewater treatment plant. The Willow Street overlay district allows for residential, mixed use and height, and HDC property is available for development. In addition, that downtown area should have a specific name (i.e., the village).

Discussion addressed broadening the Willow Street overlay district and if three stories was acceptable to all residents, also that tenants could be found for first floors (i.e., retail or office space), vacancies tend to occur on second and third floors where business owners would potentially like to use these for residential in the village area to maximize their properties. So expanding mixed use to the whole business district might be an easy step to take; if there is wastewater capacity. Some landowners are making investments in septic and would like to expand use of their properties beyond office and retail to residential.

Parking was also evaluated relative to residential units being introduced where it was thought this would not result in a parking shortage. Specifically addressed was need to enforce two hour parking limits in downtown area so cars parked for commuter rail would only be in MBTA lot, and to help people understand what lots have to remain open. It was not clear if residential units on second and third floors would present a parking challenge, especially if MBTA lot is used for commuters. Also mentioned was whether or not a significant amount of residential units would be added in the village area or just here and there. There is interest to change the tax base and bring in an overlooked demographic to Town. There was also uncertainty about whether or not

adding a few second or third floor units would make an appreciable difference. The Town needs to understand if residential would be a noteworthy component of the village identity. Proposed ideal scale could be what is available under current zoning.

In addition, ULI looked at possibility of zoning change relative to growth opportunities for Hamilton. Height limitation affects growth and what it could do for Railroad Avenue as well as branding and establishing a village identity. Changing uses along the street could include flipping and activating upper and lower floors with businesses shifting to upper floors and commercial activities on ground level to activate streetscape. ULI analyzed redeveloping existing buildings for mixed use and creating different residential opportunities for multifamily options (i.e., Willow Street where Dodge Tree is located). As well as better options for new restaurants beyond the existing opportunities.

Zoning was reviewed, and sketches drawn with options considered including commercial opportunity at corner where shopping center is located and activity adjacent to MBTA station. Also along Willow Street to create a denser multifamily building that would be three stories tall. ULI analyzed possibility of generating 10 to 300 residential units valued at \$350,000 with existing tax rate and higher level of development could reduce tax rate. It was determined that 30 units or less would not impact tax rate or pay for wastewater improvements. A significant constraint is there is not much undeveloped land in downtown area. When there is a limit to land to increase density building height would go up and this is contrary to interest in Hamilton so discussion would be needed. For example, 50 units at \$350,000 a piece would yield \$300,000 in annual taxes and tied to a bond it could bring in \$400,000 for downtown development.

ULI recommended widening sidewalks and creating internal courtyards at restaurants, use of street trees, seating, sidewalk materials (i.e., brick down Railroad Avenue), lighting, trash cans, benches, power lines put behind buildings, increase parking ratio from 1 space for 400', enforce parking regulation so commuters do not take up spaces outside of MBTA lot, residential uses such as senior citizens who want to be renters by choice and stay in their communities, zoning change to pick up tax dollars, demographic change to create desirability in housing for millenials to maintain, build consensus incrementally with smaller sewer treatment facilities, introducing 50 units to the area that would likely not be noticed except for a few more cars on street.

ULI spoke to the need for the village to have its identity defined. Discussion addressed importance of infrastructure and wastewater capacity relative to zoning changes and development. Although it was noted that development would be needed to help pay

for wastewater infrastructure. The concept of option 2 was reiterated as a possibility for Town to maintain existing character and be open to residential development as well as the importance of building consensus in Town.

ULI mentioned if Hamilton does not want to create more density in the downtown it could spread development out further since it currently has one dwelling unit per three acres without altering the character of the community. It was noted that the Town in working toward the future considers what is best for the entire community.

In response to audience inquiry, ULI recommended that retail should be on street level with residential above (i.e., Willow Street overlay ideal area). People will come for retail to an activated, walkable area. ULI heard a strong interest in retail space that would be useable and rentable (i.e., bakery). Also, for the three options for growth ULI opined if nothing was changed in Town residential growth could be as many as 50 units. Changes in zoning by-law would incentivize greater development. Beyond 50 units this larger scale development would change character of Town and other areas in Hamilton other than downtown could be identified to maintain Town's rural character. Such a development could be phased in.

ULI stated ways to inexpensively increase walkability and aesthetics of downtown including establishing village area identity through use of different sidewalk materials, signage, lighting, street furniture, plantings done incrementally within a five-year plan. Improving the quality of the village center experience for pedestrians would draw more people and higher quality retailers supported by the consumer base. So the village area becomes a destination.

Realtors in Town have said there is demand for rental housing across the demographic spectrum. Hamilton is primarily a single family home community with two condominium developments. Market rate rental housing could be added incrementally (i.e., new families and downsizing seniors). Affordability by size and cost of rent, single floor living for seniors, living space for divorced parents. Discussion addressed when a housing development has over four units and compliance with accessibility regulations (i.e., need for elevator and sprinklers).

Residential developer Tom Ford spoke to existing challenge in Town to rent retail space. He suggested that new homes for \$1.3 million outside of downtown area are desirable in Hamilton and that he found investing mighty in downtown to reinvigorate it was confusing. ULI stated that residential/commercial brokers suggested demand for rental housing units could net \$2,500 to \$3,000 a month, and \$22 a square foot for retail but there is an excess of office space available in Hamilton. Discussion revisited that 300

units developed incrementally would bring in additional revenue to Hamilton but it was agreed that this was not a panacea for reducing the tax rate.

Also addressed was option 2 and potential expansion of Willow Street overlay district since there is quite a bit of parking available in that district. ULI noted two stories and mixed use zoning to make second floors available for residential and how this would not yield many units. In addition, how Special Permit process does not guarantee housing outcome and permitting costs and timeline are considerations for downtown property owners and developers when considering pursuing residential use. ULI noted how Northampton had allowed mixed use in the 1980s and as a result it is thriving. It was reiterated that if mixed use is allowed in the downtown it would happen gradually, Hamilton would not be overrun with development.

Discussion was on interesting mixes of housing and cluster apartments inside and outside of downtown with consideration for best use for first floor in downtown as retail. ULI mentioned how larger properties in Town have become only affordable for a smaller percentage of the population and big houses could be turned into multi-family or multiple apartments which could make sense for Hamilton to keep the Town's character and have some development.

Discussion addressed whether or not ULI got a good sense from downtown neighborhood residents about their desires and concerns relative to downtown development. ULI stated that it heard more from business owners about how to maximize their properties it did not talk to downtown residents and their input would be important. This is an issue that is recognized and part of process for next stage.

Stein thanked the ULI panel for time and input and encouraged anyone in Town to come to future HDC meetings or send emails to HDC to provide input.

The meeting adjourned at 8:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Jane Dooley, Minutes Secretary

ATTEST: _____
Brian Stein, President