

Town of Auburn – Economic Development Strategic Plan

Public Meeting – January 26, 2017

This document provides the notes taken during a public meeting held on the development of an economic development strategic plan for the Town of Auburn, Massachusetts. The notes are annotated slightly from what was recorded at the meeting to ensure clarity. Attendees were asked to provide input and ideas on two overarching topics: 1) the key challenges and opportunities to enhancing economic development in Auburn; and 2) specific strategies and actions that Auburn should pursue to boost economic development.

Key Challenges and Opportunities

- Need to determine how Auburn can attract more office users
- Auburn has a small town feel, and needs more events that draw people to town
- Need more “mom & pop” shops owned locally rather than so many chain stores and restaurants
- Need a recognized town center to attract shoppers and keep them here
- Need to streamline the town’s permitting process and make it a more predictable process
- What is the resident’s view on business growth? There’s the perception that many in the town may not want growth or change.
- Need to diversify commercial mix of businesses and diversify employment opportunities in town (currently dominated by retail trade)
- Need to be creative in future use of Auburn Mall as residents are concerned that since other malls are closing and shrinking nationally, this might happen in Auburn too
- There’s an interest in implementing Complete Streets (better lights and walkability), with plans and funding underway for Auburn Street improvement
- There’s interest in using zoning and site plan guidelines along corridors as tools to become more mixed-use (e.g., first floor commercial, residential on upper floors) and walkable
- The town should look into how it can increase and diversify housing options (note: Auburn is separately creating a housing plan)
- Improve the physical connections between commercial and residential areas
 - Also connecting open space resources
- Auburn has a lot of parks and recreation areas that should be accessible and safe and usable
 - Make sure parking is available near parks/recreation areas
- Capitalize on the tourism / hotel market in the region as an economic opportunity
 - Determine the impact of (new) Worcester hotels on Auburn hotels (competition?)

- Auburn needs a location for large meetings, conventions, weddings (currently lacking in town)
- Some of the retail buildings may need to be upgraded for better visual appeal and to help raise (improve) the presentation of Auburn to visitors and prospective residents
- Auburn should consider creating active business associations to host events, and help create a stronger identity for the town
 - This could include pop-up events such as food trucks, a farmer’s market, etc.

Specific Strategies and Actions

- Simplify zoning and provide greater clarity on district delineation
- Streamline permitting for building permits, etc to make it easier and more predictable
- Develop a forward-looking strategy for the potential evolution of Auburn Mall (e.g., if it is no longer viable as a retail-focused traditional mall entity)
- Auburn should link its community vision with land use zoning to ensure compatibility
- Auburn has a range of wetland and aquifer issues and challenges. For example, the Mall is built on filled land, and Drury Square is in a floodplain.
- Look at changing height restrictions/zoning in certain parts of town as height restrictions are currently prohibitive and easing them in strategic locations could help attract development
- Address potential conflicts between commercial corridors and residential areas, looking into design guidelines and transitional areas between uses
 - Look at buffers between commercial and single family residential such as multi-family or mixed use as a transition
- Look at commercial centers in Auburn’s villages as examples of business use outside of the Rt. 12 and 20 highway corridors (e.g., Southbridge, Stoneville)
- Public transportation needs to be improved / enhanced in Auburn
- Based on the lack of property sales for some larger sites, there was a comment that anticipated land values by property owners may be too high for the market.
- An idea is to help pre-permit key parcels so that they can be ready for development – this would require working with current property owners.