

Section 2: Goals, Objectives and Recommendations

Economic Development Goals and Objectives

Goal:

- Develop an Environmentally Sound Economy that will provide a Wide Range of Economic Opportunities and Employment for the Town and Area Residents.

Objectives:

- Establish a Local Economic Development Committee
- Review Adequacy of Current Zoning
- Identify New Areas for Economic Development Opportunities
- Work to Redevelop “Brownfields”
- Enhance Communication with Businesses
- Facilitate the Existing Permitting Process
- Aggressively seek Funding for Road/Infrastructure Improvements
- Regionalization of Services and Consolidation
- Prepare a Retail Market Study to Identify Potential Business
- Research and Consider Ways to Guide Development and Enhance Connectivity within the Downtown

Proposals and Recommendations

The following is a description of recommendations to enhance economic development in the Town of Winchendon. These will help local officials gain an understanding of the range of possibilities available to the Town to promote economic development while maintaining the character of the community. Generally, these recommendations could be characterized as a mix of both short and long range strategies that could be implemented following community outreach and support.

1. **Establish a Local Economic Development Committee:** The Town should establish a local Economic Development Committee to coordinate all the various elements of an economic development strategy for Winchendon. Some smaller sized communities in the Montachusett Region (Town of Shirley) and even smaller communities (Town of Ashby) have successfully done so and have very active committees. And, just recently, the nearby Town of Templeton has formed such a committee. The committee would work with municipal boards and departments such as the Board of Health, Finance Committee, the Sewer, Water, Fire and Police departments, emergency services and the School Board.

Responsible Municipal Entity: Board of Selectmen.

2. **Review Adequacy of Current Zoning:** the Town could conduct a review of current zoning bylaws and determine their adequacy for accommodating desired land use and development

within the community. The overall intent could be to examine the use and dimensions to identify internal inconsistencies and to make recommendations for removing zoning impediments to economic development.

The current zoning bylaws contain a thorough list of possible land uses that should cover most situations in Winchendon. The intent of this analysis would not be to re-structure but rather to examine the method of approval in commercial and industrial districts. For many low-impact land uses, the zoning bylaw specifies that an applicant must obtain a special permit; however, a simpler design site plan approval can achieve a careful review of a proposed development without jeopardizing the outcome from the applicant's perspective. In addition, new definitions could be drafted to clarify how certain uses will be classified to remove doubt whether, or how these uses will be permitted. Suggestions for making more intensive use of valuable industrial land could also be made.

Responsible Municipal Entity: Planning Board/Department.

3. **Identify New Areas for Economic Development Opportunities:** Without the rezoning of land in Winchendon the location of new businesses could be a limiting factor. The identification of any new and appropriate areas may be best accomplished through a charrette. A charrette is basically a design focused public meeting where boards, committees, departments and the public get together to brainstorm ideas. Those in attendance are divided into small groups to develop ideas and proposal. The groups will then present their schemes to the larger group for discussion. Ultimately the goal is to have at a minimum two possible alternatives for Winchendon's planners to explore more in depth prior to making any final proposal or recommendation. By holding a charrette all the stakeholders will have the opportunity to voice their opinions and concerns, public officials will have the opportunity to respond and the possibilities of reaching a consensus are increased.

Responsible Municipal Entity: Planning Board/Department.

4. **Work to Redevelop "Brownfields"** to eventually allow remediation to take place, redevelopment to occur and generate new tax revenue. An Economic Development Committee as described above would be instrumental in promoting any efforts to redevelop any brownfields sites in Winchendon. Any reuse effort will most likely be difficult and time-consuming with obstacles to overcome. Existing departments do not have the time or expertise to manage a long-term effort required to redevelop any sites. In this case, an Economic Development Committee would also act as a liaison with state economic development officials and be alert for new programs and opportunities that may support the Town's efforts.

The Town should also send a representative to attend meetings of the Montachusett Brownfields Group (MBG) – The MGB is made up of local officials, private sector representatives, MassDevelopment, economic development and environmental proponents, and representatives of the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) who generally meet a few times per year to discuss brownfields related issues. MGB

meetings are staffed by MRPC and meetings are held at MRPC offices in Fitchburg. Because of the wealth of knowledge of meeting attendees, some communities have utilized these meetings as a vehicle to work with others and resolve brownfields questions and sometimes even acquire grant funds - MRPC is sometimes successful in acquiring grant funds from EPA to fund environmental site assessments (ESA) – Winchendon is eligible to apply to MRPC to fund ESA's – several MRPC communities have taken advantage of this program over the years including the Town of Winchendon.

Responsible Municipal Entity: Planning Board/Department until an Economic Development Committee was formed.

5. **Enhance Communication with Businesses:** The town could develop a survey that can be used to solicit information from existing businesses as to their level of satisfaction with Winchendon as the location for their operations. Such a survey - whether a mailed document, web-based form, phone call, or a simple and informal personal visit to a business site - can be used to determine future business needs in the community and help local officials to plan ahead for necessary changes or improvements. Moreover, the town does have a Business Development web site. The Town should put additional local and regional economic information on the webpage including data included within master plan chapters such as the top employers; contact information; economic, housing, demographic, labor, education; transportation; any market information; and current/future projects. This is the easiest and least costly way to make information available to those who need it. The town does have its open space and recreation plan on the business development web site which is positive; firms place a premium on quality of life issues.

It should also be noted that MassDevelopment can provide assistance to potential businesses and manufacturers that wish to locate in Winchendon. MassDevelopment provides low-cost financing to businesses for real estate and equipment. Its programs and tools are especially advantageous for manufacturers including industrial bonds, the emerging technology fund, and the export program. MassDevelopment can also provide real estate pre-development services and various levels. More details are found at <http://www.massdevelopment.com/>.

Responsible Municipal Entity: Planning Board/Department until and Economic Development Committee is formed.

6. **Facilitate the Existing Permitting Process:** The Town could put together a comprehensive development permitting guidebook to assist all customers with projects of any type and scale or that need to obtain any permit and develop separate handouts for more substantive processes that require additional detail or guidance. One potential funding source is MRPC's District Local Technical Assistance Program (DLTA) funded by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. While there is no guarantee that the Commonwealth of Massachusetts will fund the DLTA program from year to year, streamlining the permitting process has been an eligible project in the past. In fact, the Town of Ashby recently drafted such a document with MRPC DLTA assistance knowing

that it would be a valuable tool for anyone pursuing residential, commercial or industrial development or common licenses.

The Town could also consider adopting Chapter 43D to assist with expediting the permitting process. On August 2, 2006, Massachusetts General Law Chapter 43D was signed into law. This program offers communities a tool to promote targeted economic and housing development by providing a transparent and efficient process for municipal permitting, guaranteeing local permitting decisions on priority development sites within 180 days, increasing visibility of the participating community, and targeting development site(s) known as Priority Development Sites (PDS). According to state regulations, a PDS must be:

- Commercially or industrially zoned (including mixed use);
- Eligible for construction of a structure of 50,000 sq. ft. or more;

The Expedited Permitting Program gives a town the ability to promote commercial development on pre-approved parcels by offering expedited local permitting on those parcels. Such development must be primarily commercial however mixed-use properties also qualify for priority designation so long as they conform to the statutory requirements for a priority development site. Other advantages of designating priority development sites in a community include eligibility for and priority consideration for PWED and CDAG funding, priority consideration for other quasi-public financing, brownfields remediation assistance, enhanced online marketing and technical assistance from MassDevelopment and/or the Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission.

Projects located on Priority Development Sites continue to have flexibility; the applicant may still apply for permits and approvals under Chapter 40B to the same extent as if the property was not designated as a Priority Development Site. However the provisions of Chapter 43D relating to permit processing and appeals shall not apply to projects seeking permits and approvals under Chapter 40B. A full listing of additional resources concerning Chapter 43D including fact sheets, frequently asked questions, and contact persons can be found at www.mass.gov/mpro.

Responsible Municipal Entity: The Planning Board/staff could spearhead this project and work with other boards/departments/commissions involved in the permitting process.

- 7. Aggressively seek Funding for Road/Infrastructure Improvements:** Town officials should seek federal and state funds for Road/Infrastructure Improvements including the regular participation in the transportation planning process at MRPC (the Board of Selectmen's appointment regularly attends the Joint Transportation Committee) and ensure that key road projects are listed on the Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP) and continue to press for regular funding of local projects. In the commercial/industry development potential (see page --), the amount of developable land when looking at the non-residential use districts in their entirety is about 1780.82 acres which is more than that occupied by existing development (227.32 acres) and undevelopable acres (255.13 acres). However, it is unlikely that this commercial and industrial build-out would be

anywhere near possible without appropriate infrastructure so the town needs to promote infrastructure in these areas that are suitable to support economic development.

Road/ Infrastructure improvements should also be part of an integrated capital improvement plan (CIP). A CIP is an on-going capital expenditure plan that identifies upcoming capital needs, schedules their purchase, and outlines how they will be purchased. Such plans usually look six-to-ten years down the road in terms of identifying capital needs. A capital need is a tangible item (equipment, building, etc.) that is above and beyond a municipal department's regular operating budget. A CIP can have the following benefits:

- Facilitate the coordination between capital needs and departmental operating budgets.
- Enhance the community's credit rating, control of its tax rate and avoid sudden fluctuations in its debt service requirements.
- Identify the most economical means of financing capital projects.
- Increase opportunities for obtaining federal and state aid.
- Focus attention on community objectives and the Town's fiscal capacity.
- Keep the public informed about future community needs and projects.
- Coordinate the activities of municipal departments so as to reduce duplication of services and share equipment where possible.

Therefore, it is recommended that the town establish a concise plan for infrastructure improvements that sets as a priority, the provision of services to key economic development sites in the community. This Infrastructure Plan should be incorporated into the town's Capital Improvements Planning process so that important projects are considered well in advance of their necessity and so that appropriate and adequate sources of funding are sought to help pay for these projects. It should have a prioritization schedule and a corresponding development schedule and upgrades and expansions should be targeted to those areas planned for future development.

Responsible Municipal Entity:

8. **Regionalization of Services and Consolidation:** Winchendon should explore any regionalization opportunities with neighboring towns that have the potential to reduce operating costs. One resource that could further any effort made by the town is MRPC's District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA) Program. The DLTA program, funded by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, enables MRPC staff to provide technical assistance at no cost to its 22 communities to encourage municipalities to work together to achieve and/or enhance cost-effective service delivery. Over the past eight years, MRPC received funding from the Commonwealth in fall/early winter. Shortly thereafter, MRPC forwarded a Request for Service Delivery to member communities. Last year, examples of eligible projects categorized as municipal partnerships included but were not limited to:

- Shared services (e.g., regional lockup, regional 911 centers, other public safety and emergency response responsibilities, information technology/data

management, school district/regional school district analysis, shared professional and administrative services, agreements to operate shared waste disposal/recycling facilities/programs);

- Collective purchasing (if such purchasing cannot be otherwise accomplished using statewide contracts or can be achieved regionally for less than the state contract price, or items proposed for purchase are specific to municipal and/or school district agreements); and
- Cost saving measures that benefit more than one municipality.

It should be noted that funding from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts is not guaranteed each year, and applications must be discussed in a public meeting and signed by the Chair of the Board of Selectmen.

Responsible Municipal Entity: Board of Selectmen.

- 9. The Town could prepare a retail market study to identify potential business:** A retail market study draws on information from a variety of sources, mainly the US Economic Census, to determine the amount of purchasing demand in the study area for various types of retail businesses. It compares this to sales standards for typical business to determine whether the demand is being met locally, or if there is unmet demand. This unmet demand, or “leakage,” indicates the potential for additional retail establishments in the trade area. A current market study would provide a tool for the town to target its business development efforts.

Responsible Municipal Entity: Planning Board/Department until an Economic Development Committee is formed.

- 10. Research and Consider Ways to Guide Development to Enhance Community Character and Promote Smart Growth and Connectivity within the Community:** With land available to promote economic development in designated zoning districts, the Town could research and consider the concept of design guidelines for development in areas with significant characteristics worthy of preservation. Design guidelines can provide a flexible tool for influencing the visual quality of new development. “Guidelines” are not mandatory, but they provide a vehicle to open dialogue with developers, engineers, and architects about features the community finds desirable. This helps to reinforce community character by identifying development standards that are consistent with the built environment. Design guidelines may be applied to town centers, highway corridors, industrial parks, etc. Guidelines may be prepared by an architect, urban designer or planner, and often contains photographs or renderings that illustrate the preferred design treatments.

Simultaneously, the Town could also consider conducting a study on the downtown area to promote traffic/safety enhancements/crosswalks, sidewalks, appropriate pavement markings and signage, etc. and the identification of links to the towns overall trail/bike

network. The Town should contact the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission to discuss potential funding of this study through MRPC's Unified Planning Work Program.

Responsible Municipal Entity: Planning Board/Department.

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