

Update on EDAT's Ayer Road Commercial Development Investigation

In the interest of keeping all Harvard residents informed and involved with respect to our ongoing investigation of the Ayer Road commercial district development potential, the Economic Development Analysis Team (EDAT) would like to report on what we have learned to date and our vision for moving ahead in the future. This report will also be posted on the Town website.

EDAT is conducting its work in three phases:

- 1. Opportunity and needs analysis:**
 - a. polling the town residents to determine their desires and concerns for new commercial services and how they are implemented
 - b. assessing the development potential of the individual properties in the commercial district
 - c. investigating the existing infrastructure (road/water/sewer) and its shortcomings
 - d. exploring different models for tax assessment of commercial properties
- 2. Vision definition and analysis:**
 - a. defining the highest leverage development opportunities that best match the Town's needs
 - b. analyzing the tax revenue potential and implementation desires/requirements for each type of development opportunity
 - c. defining and cost estimating the necessary infrastructural investments
- 3. Implementation recommendations:** defining the next steps to make the vision a reality

EDAT has concluded the opportunity and needs analysis phase of its investigation. Through a very detailed review of all the commercial properties and a focused set of landowner interviews, EDAT has concluded that, beyond the approved projects behind Dunkin' Donuts, there are presently but 4 sets of parcels that offer high potential for commercial development or re-development in the reasonable future. These parcel sets are:

- **40.94 acre** area on the northwest corner of Old Mill Road and Ayer Road (current site of Sorrento's Pizzeria and Rollstone Bank)
- **13.69 acre** area across from Old Mill Road (former site of Toreku Tractor)
- **10.03 acre** area on the southwest corner of Old Mill Road and Ayer Road (currently vacant wooded land)
- **15.93 acre** area across Ayer Road from Dunkin' Donuts

To add to the information collected at the last Town Meeting, EDAT resurveyed the residents of N. Harvard to collect their inputs on commercial development alternatives. Your feedback reinforced the data from the Town meeting participants, with a majority of respondents favoring some development based around specific retail uses such as a grocery store, pharmacy, restaurants, small shops and office buildings.

With respect to the existing infrastructure, EDAT reviewed the detailed traffic and road safety analysis conducted by CDM in May 2008, as well as inputs from the survey and discussions with local residents. There are some clear problems that need to be addressed relative to traffic speed, traffic flow and entry from side roads, and pedestrian safety. EDAT also looked at the limiting

factors of water and septic capacity on the high potential commercial properties, and explored alternatives for creating shared services for these properties.

EDAT is now entering the second phase of its investigation – vision definition and analysis. Based on resident feedback, the input from owners of commercial property, and the current restrictive economic climate, EDAT is recommending a very focused initiative as a first step in further commercial development of Ayer Road. The vision is a limited commercial expansion that offers the highest benefit to the Town in desired services and tax benefits, while starting to address the infrastructure deficiencies for the future.

One element of the vision is the development of a small shopping plaza that would provide a grocery store, pharmacy and other small shops. It should incorporate Town-appropriate building aesthetics, hidden parking, adequate green space and visual buffering to abutters. EDAT is also exploring the costs and benefits of an assistive living facility (elderly housing with 24-hour medical and personal care) that would offer the Town a housing alternative that it is missing for senior members of Harvard's existing families. The third commercial element being explored is a small office park. For all three elements of the vision, EDAT is investigating the appropriate aesthetics, the infrastructure requirements, and the tax revenue opportunity. In addition, EDAT will identify relevant zoning and regulation opportunities/issues for the Planning Board to consider.

Additionally the vision will begin to address the basic infrastructure requirements for current and future needs. We will continue our analysis of traffic flow and safety on Ayer Road, and offer specific recommendations to improve both. We are also looking into requiring all new commercial development to build pedestrian/bike paths along their frontage. EDAT is also investigating the possibility of a small, isolated sewer district using a low-pressure sewer to connect the three high-potential parcels near Old Mill Road to the Devens sewer system. Because all three of these property owners may require extensive and expensive individual septic systems, this plan looks to coordinate their efforts by splitting the costs of this isolated low-pressure system between the three owners and the town.

EDAT invites you to email your comments to catalina@massmed.org. The committee plans to host an interactive meeting with all interested citizens in the March timeframe, and will be sending out a meeting time soon.