

2014 Annual Report Economic Development Commission

The Hudson Economic Development Commission respectfully submits our annual report for the year 2014. The Commission met three times over the course of the year, with Donald Garcia continuing on as Chair and Bill Sullivan continuing on as Vice-Chair. Mr. Garcia also continued as a member of the Master Plan Steering Committee, representing the economic development interests of the Town throughout the planning process. The Master Plan was adopted by the Planning Board in November 2014. The EDC looks forward to working with Town Departments to implement many of the economic development recommendations in the Plan.

In January, the Town began the process of petitioning the State for additional liquor licenses. As Hudson was at its licensing cap, there were no licenses left for the newly-opened Highland Commons plaza. As Highland Commons is fully permitted for several restaurants, this large retail site could not reach its full economic development potential without these licenses available. The EDC sponsored two public forums to gauge community input. Ultimately, the Governor signed our home-rule petition in November 2014, granting the Town five licenses for Highland Commons and five additional licenses to be made available town-wide.

After Intel announced plans to close its manufacturing plant by the end of 2014, the Economic Development Commission has been poised to assist Intel as it markets its site or with any other needs. The Commission Chair, along with other Town Officials and Department Heads, attended a status update meeting at the Intel site in July. Intel does plan to keep its R&D plant open. The EDC also supported Hudson Lock's application to the Town for a Tax Increment Financing Agreement, after it acquired two additional companies and chose to bring those jobs to Hudson rather than close the Hudson facility and move elsewhere.

Downtown parking is another area of concern to the EDC as it is to the merchants, employees and customers who visit Downtown. Due to the historic nature of our narrow downtown originally built for horse and buggies, as well as a downtown built within a river flood plain, this registered-historic area faces many challenges. A comprehensive Downtown Parking Study was conducted throughout the summer and fall, with the final report released in December 2014. Funding for initial recommendations from this study will be sought at the May 2015 Town Meeting.

Throughout 2014, the Commission continued its support of the Route 85/Washington Street road widening and reconstruction project, a project which was completed in July 2014. While no construction project is problem-free, the EDC believes this project went very well and will be a big benefit to the Town. Mr. Garcia facilitated a number of discussions between the Town, MassDOT, and commercial abutters to the Route 85 project, helping to problem-solve and maintain open communications.

Another important project affecting Hudson's business community is the future reconstruction of the Washington Street Bridge. This structurally deficient state-owned bridge is on the state's Accelerated Bridge Program. The EDC advocates for minimizing disruption to the Downtown, adequate pedestrian access, and the consideration of all construction/build scenarios and detour routes, from both a public safety and economic development perspective.

Development continued up at Highland Commons, with the many new stores opening including Michael's craft store, Ulta Beauty, Famous Footwear, Dress Barn and PetSmart. TJ Maxx moved to Highland Commons from its original location on Washington Street, and Lane Bryant moved from its former location in the Solomon Pond Mall. Cabela's outdoor store is expected to be a big regional draw when it opens in spring 2015.

In February, Hudson's resurgence was a focus in the article "I-495 Transformed" in the Worcester Telegram & Gazette. Congratulations to Harvard Sweet Boutique for its feature in Worcester Living magazine, to the Old Schoolhouse Pub for its feature in the Boston Globe, and to the Horseshoe Pub on its renovation. In September, Governor Deval Patrick paid a visit to Rail Trail Flatbread and checked out their new venture across the street, New City Creamery.

New businesses also continue to open in our Downtown and Washington Street areas, and our vacancy rates continue to decrease. While we were sad to see Larkin Lumber, Dragonflies Boutique and Brazil Unlimited close their doors, we are pleased to welcome MetroPCS, New England Airgun, Villa Pizza, the Sudzy Mutt and Cross-Fit Rail Trail, to name a few. Boost Fitness moved from Main Street to the former TJ Maxx location on Washington Street, and 428 Main Street is the new home to a Lindt Chocolate packaging plant. In January, the Board of Selectmen approved the expansion of Rail Trail Flatbread into the vacant storefront next door. We are looking forward to another exciting year as Amaia Martini Bar, Medusa Brewing Company, Crossroads Tap & Table and New City Creamery are all expected to open in 2015.

The commercial/industrial tax rate is always a sensitive topic for any town. Many EDC members and business owners spoke in favor of lower rates at the Town's tax rate hearing held on December 1, 2014. The total value of commercial and industrial property decreased by 2.2% from last year, while total value of residential property saw an increase of 4.3%. Although Town officials were reluctant to raise commercial tax rates substantially, in order to offset the lost tax valuation in the total commercial tax sector, the new commercial rate ultimately rose to \$35.92 per \$1,000 of assessed property value, up from \$34.45 in FY14. The residential tax rate decreased from \$17.42 to \$17.27. The total tax impact to individual properties varies. However, it is worth noting that the reductions in assessed valuation help to ease the burden of this rate increase.

We are excited to see the strong upswing to the financial uncertainty that has been constant throughout the past several years. Throughout 2014, the EDC continued its commitment to encourage and assist our business community whenever possible. We are looking forward toward an eventful and productive 2015.

Respectfully submitted,

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