

DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT STEERING COMMITTEE
MILLIS TOWN CENTER PROPERTIES
TOWN OF MILLIS/MAPC
COMMUNITY FORUM MINUTES
May 23, 2012
Veterans Memorial Building - Gymnasium
900 Main Street, Millis, MA 02054

CALL TO ORDER: The forum was called to order by Donald Roman at 7:30 p.m. The following persons were present: Charles Aspinwall, Andrea Wagner, Steven Catalano, Bruce Berry, James McKay, Bud Drummey, Rich Malloy, Ray Normandin, Donald Roman, Nicole Riley, MAPC Representative Angela Insinger, and Larry Koff & Roberta Cameron of Larry Koff & Associates.

OTHERS PRESENT: approximately 47 Millis residents; 3 property owners/managers/representatives.

INTRODUCTIONS: Ms. Angela Insinger, Senior Regional Planner from Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) conducted the presentation and explained the function of the Millis Downtown Development Steering Committee. She stated that the Town applied for, and was awarded, grant monies from US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Office of Sustainable Communities, to conduct studies on the usage of town center properties. Ms. Insinger explained that Larry Koff & Associates, an economic development consulting firm, works with MAPC and they have completed a market feasibility study. She stated they are midway through the project and the purpose of this forum is to incorporate the community's thoughts into the final development concept.

"QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS" HANDOUT: Ms. Insinger summarized the handout. She explained that the project is a study of the developmental potential of the former GAF factory on Curve Street and the former Cliquot Beverage factory on Route 109/Main Street. The Herman Shoe building is also included in the study, she said, although not as a primary parcel. Although the Town Center properties studied are privately owned by two separate owners, the Town wants to understand what type of development is possible so it can support and encourage development that is desirable and beneficial to the community, she said.

Ms. Insinger explained the purpose of the feasibility study was to understand the market potential for possible development outcomes of the Town Center properties; to better encourage and support feasible, mixed-use development.

DEVELOPMENT CONCEPTS: Ms. Insinger explained that the three Development Concepts are the products of:

- A **market study**, which determines approximate amounts of retail, housing and other commercial space that the market could support on the properties over the next 5-10 years
- **Zoning regulations**, which control the amount of lot coverage, height and uses of the buildings
- **Parking regulations**, which affect how much land can be used for buildings and for parking
- Assumptions about **building conditions**
- A sense of the **type of development** the Town is interested in promoting, which includes a mix of uses and housing

Ms. Insinger stressed again that these concepts are only ideas or "site sketches" to see what they would look like – they are not plans or proposals. She stated that the purpose of the forum is:

- To provide an overview of the Feasibility Study
- To discuss potential development with the community to get feedback on likes, dislikes, concerns and priorities

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SUMMARY OF MARKET STUDY KEY FINDINGS: Ms. Insinger reviewed the handout entitled “Millis Town Center Properties Feasibility Study, Summary of Market Study Key Findings” (attached). The various possible uses include:

- Housing
- Commercial/Retail
- Industrial
- Office/Other
- Vertical Mixed-Use

Concept 1 is based on existing zoning, she said. This is what would happen in things weren't changed much; warehouse use and retail use. Concept 2 is based on a separate use on each site, or “single, intensive uses” with both retail and housing uses. Concept 3 is based on the Village Mixed Use zoning with single family/multi-family residential, retail, and office. Ms. Insinger presented the Development Scenarios Summary chart (see attached).

Questions from audience members were addressed. Ms. Kathy Higgins asked what type of retail would be considered. Ms. Cameron answered that, based on the retail analysis performed, successful retail development would most likely require anchor stores, which would be necessary to complement the development of smaller retail establishments. The strongest types of retail, for example, would be apparel and sporting goods stores, and additional grocery or drug stores, she said. Ms. Insinger stated that mixed use was explored as the market would not support all retail. Mr. Scott Fuzy questioned what sort of residential uses would be considered. Ms. Cameron suggested that assisted living uses or new residential construction could be feasible. Ms. Lisa Hardin asked if there was any consideration for the feasibility of tearing up the railroad tracks. She also questioned the possibility of contamination on the GAF site and if that could affect residential use. Ms. Insinger stated that Bay Colony Railroad controls the rail line. This rail spur, she said, has been de-activated for the short term, but Bay Colony does not intend to relinquish rights and has indicated their intent is to re-activate the line when/if there is demand. According to Ms. Insinger, GAF is undergoing Environmental Remediation in preparation for other uses – including residential, and this is not an obstacle at this point. Ms. Julia Fredette expressed her concern over the impact new residential would have on the already “busting at the seams” school department. She asked whether using the open space for sports complexes/athletic fields had been considered. Ms. Insinger stated that types of families were not within the scope of this study. As to types of residential uses, no specific impacts were studied, she said. Open space was not the focus of the study at this time as the focus was on development, Ms. Insinger stated. Ms. Cameron stated that they did look into indoor sporting facilities. Mr. Wayne Klocko asked if the owners of the properties had been involved in discussions with the Town, to which Ms. Insinger stated that they were engaged, except for the Herman Shoe building owner. The other owners were interviewed. She stated that it is not the Town's intent to take the properties and develop the sites. The Town would like to work with the property owners toward a development outcome; however, she said there is a limited amount as to what the Town can do.

Mr. Koff stated that GAF will want to put the property on the market once the remediation is done. Ann & Hope would like some flexibility and ranges of uses, however, they may be hampered by current zoning, he said. The Herman Shoe building, he said, has some small portions available to attract an artist/artisan use. Mr. Roman reiterated that the Town does not own the property. He said we are looking at ways to make it easier to develop the properties in the best interest of the Town. Mr. Roman stated that perhaps making some adjustments to zoning; or a streamlined permitting process might be considered, for example.

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BREAK-OUT GROUP DISCUSSION: All in attendance were divided into two groups for brainstorming. “Likes” and “dislikes” were noted for each of the three development concepts presented:

CONCEPT 1

GROUP 1

LIKES:

Buildings are reused, including for industrial uses
Would cost less to reuse buildings
Could provide high quality jobs

DISLIKES:

Zoning should be more flexible so buildings don't sit empty
Potential increased truck traffic
GAF would be very challenging site to redevelop
Don't like potential industrial impacts

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

1073 Main St. not in the study; 79 acres

GROUP 2

LIKES:

More retail vs. residential, fewer fiscal impacts
Maintain feel of Millis
Would prefer small retail
Possibility of indoor sports
Prefer retail & residential tax revenue

DISLIKES:

Warehouse may not be feasible
Clicquot needs a new façade
*Don't like industrial or warehouse on GAF due to potential truck traffic

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

*Façade of any new building should be consistent with Town character
Would like walking bridge over the tracks
Fiscal Impact Analysis necessary
*Walking Village concept
Playing fields on the western trail
Remove RR tracks
Potential for micro-brewery

CONCEPT 2

GROUP 1

LIKES:

Preservation aspects, certain features are preserved
Smaller retail (not big-box)
Keeps GAF historic façade
Over-55/Assisted Living development

DISLIKES:

Traffic increases
Concern for school-age children
Concern for infrastructure
Time/Market completion
No big-box retail

GROUP 2

LIKES:

*Maintaining the façade on GAF
Potential for age-restricted housing on GAF
*Possibility for restaurants
Potential for assisted living on GAF
Layout on Clicquot
Prefer retail on GAF w/ outdoor amenities
Keep Clicquot chimney

DISLIKES:

Housing on GAF
Possibility of drug stores
Residential on GAF
Maintaining GAF façade

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CONCEPT 3

GROUP 1

LIKES:

Affordable for Mixed Use housing & possibly artist lofts
Assisted Living facility
Retail and residential mix
Open Recreation/Green spaces

DISLIKES:

There is no pedestrian connectivity between two sites
No way to integrate transit

GROUP 2

LIKES:

Prefer less parking
Prefer less square footage
Layout matches surrounding properties
Like single family on Curve St. (matching adjacent)
*Retail should be like Legacy Place/Derby St.
@ Millis scale/character

DISLIKES:

Loss of historic façade on GAF
Loss of Clicquot Tower
Residential on Clicquot parcel
Townhouses along RR tracks (Clicquot parcel)
*Residential would burden Town services

* = most important to group

KEYPAD POLLING: A survey was conducted by keypad. The information is necessary to report back to HUD.

NEXT STEPS: Ms. Insinger summarized the next steps. She stated that the feedback provided at the forum will be used to amend, shape and refine the Development Concepts. In the fall, she said, they hope to hold another meeting to show and discuss the refined Development Concepts and discuss the next steps for the Town. Ms. Insinger thanked those in attendance for being an important part of the discussion.

Mr. Roman, on behalf of the Committee, thanked all those in attendance as well.

ADJOURN: At 9:10 p.m.,

Motion by Mr. Roman, seconded by Mr. McKay, to adjourn. The motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted,

Camille Standley, Administrative Assistant

Millis Town Center Properties Feasibility Study



Summary of Market Study Key Findings

Estimated demand and market potential by use

Housing

- There is a market for multi-family housing in Millis' town center to provide alternatives for older residents wishing to downsize, as well as younger households. The location of the study area, with its proximity to shopping and services, is suitable for higher-density housing types, ranging from dense single-family units to multi-story apartment buildings.
- Millis has pent up demand for well priced newly constructed homes, as well as for quality modern townhome or multi-family units.
- Market conditions would support approximately 200,000 sq. ft. of residential development (200 units) over the next 5-10 years, including a mix of single family homes, townhomes, condos, and/or assisted living housing.
- The study area parcels in the Town Center are optimally located to absorb much of this growth.

Commercial/Retail

- The Town Center properties would support some commercial activity.
- The Ann & Hope property is most appropriate for commercial uses, especially retail.
- The retail market is not particularly strong, as evidenced by the difficulty of filling vacancies in Millis Town Center. There may be short-term saturation.
- Successful retail development will likely require anchor tenants, which will be necessary to complement the development of smaller retail establishments. Opportunity areas include apparel and sporting goods stores, additional food or drug stores, and eating places (family restaurants and limited service/fast-food establishments).
- Market conditions would support 50,000-100,000 sq. ft. of new or renovated retail space over the next 5-10 years (assuming improved economic conditions), most or all of which should be located on the Ann & Hope parcel.

Industrial

- Redevelopment of either parcel for build-to-suit industrial, warehouse, or distribution facilities would not likely be feasible given the low value of industrial space in Millis' location at this time.
- Status of Bay Colony rail spur could influence market for industrial space (see below).

Office/Other

- Medical office is the most realistic office use in this location.
- Additional housing density and possible location of assisted living facilities or other senior-oriented housing would increase viability.
- Another potential use is an indoor sports complex.

Vertical Mixed-Use

- Vertical mixed-use on Town Center properties is challenging and risky due to location and lack of pedestrian connections.
- Limited demand for small retail spaces also makes vertical mixed-use challenging.
- More appropriate configuration would be to concentrate retail along street frontage and locate residences in separate buildings behind retail space.
- Allowing phased development (construction of one use at a time) would help to facilitate horizontal mixed use development.

Other Development Considerations

Redevelopment vs. Reuse

- Both properties have obsolete structures that cannot easily be adapted for current or future uses. Redevelopment is the most viable, long-term reuse strategy.
- Both buildings have features with possible historic value. If eligible, historic preservation tax credits could enhance redevelopment feasibility.
 - The Clicquot Beverage Factory chimney stands as a landmark of historic significance to the town.
 - The GAF property's stone building and tower at the front of the property could be incorporated as office or community space in a redevelopment scenario, pending further analysis.

Environmental Conditions

- GAF property has been undergoing environmental remediation since the 1990s. The DEP describes the site as not posing safety risks based on current or reasonably foreseeable land uses, including residential uses.
- The Ann & Hope well would require environmental upgrades to allow drinking water distribution, should this be desired.

Infrastructure

- Existing infrastructure has the capacity to accommodate future growth.
- The Town has stated that they will not continue to reserve the sewer capacity for the Town Center properties if there is not redevelopment activity in within a reasonable amount of time.

Bay Colony Railroad

- Bay Colony Railroad controls the rail spur which runs through Millis and the Town Center Properties. The line has been de-activated for the short term, but Bay Colony has indicated their intent is to re-activate the line when/if there is demand for freight transport.
- The future of the railroad will affect development potential and outcomes.
- While passenger rail service or a rail trail would be more complementary to residential development than a freight rail line, there are no current plans for these uses.

Financial Feasibility of Redevelopment

- Demolition and other site prep costs, plus weak-to-moderate demand for commercial and residential uses will require collaboration between the Town and property owners to identify sufficient incentives to encourage redevelopment.
- Retail or office uses will provide higher return on investment than industrial uses.
- Residential development will need to be higher quality and/or higher density to command the rents and/or unit sale prices necessary to support redevelopment.
- A specialized residential development such as an assisted living facility might better support redevelopment costs.

Zoning

- Current zoning for the Town Center properties is a combination of two base and three overlay districts, which creates confusion for potential developers.
- The Millis Center Economic Opportunity District-East (MCEOD-E) provides for mixed-use development, in keeping with the Town's vision. But this zoning may be limiting (especially in a weak market) because:
 - It requires a special permit, which causes uncertainty and potentially higher costs for developers.
 - It requires each project to be mixed use, which limits prospective single-use development.
- Two groundwater protection districts pose significant limits to development potential, which would apply to development using the base zoning.
- MCEOD-E provides relief from groundwater protection districts' limitations. However, accessing these benefits requires additional costs, in addition to the other MCEOD-E issues described above.

Development Concepts

- Purpose is to:
 - Illustrate what is possible under current zoning.
 - Illustrate the development potential under revised zoning that is better aligned market and site conditions.
 - Include potential reuses of Herman Shoe building for consideration and context.
- Three Development Ideas and their assumptions:
 1. Existing, As of Right Zoning
 - Development occurs through base districts and complies with Zone II (but not Zone A) lot coverage requirements.
 - Uses are grandfathered so that parking requirements do not have to be met.
 - Maintains current open space and current parking areas.
 - GAF building is demolished and redeveloped for industrial or offices uses.
 - Herman Shoe building reused as office space, possible upper floor residential units (which would require using MCEOD-E provision).
 - Assumed zoning changes
 - Amend base zoning to allow retail uses by right would enable additional viable uses such as discount retailers.
 2. Intensive Separated Uses
 - Market improvement provides demand for concentrated single uses on Town Center parcels.
 - Commercial use concentrated along Route 109.
 - Retains portion of building occupied by Ann & Hope and assumes remainder of buildings are demolished.
 - GAF parcel accommodates higher-density residential development compatible with surrounding neighborhood. Possible combination of assisted living and age-restricted units for a senior community, or smaller and more intense elderly housing development.
 - Possible preservation of historic GAF stone structure.
 - Impervious coverage is 50%.
 - Herman Shoe converted to residential or artist loft units.
 - Assumed zoning changes
 - Amend base zoning to allow single-use development of the three parcels so that they together comprise a mixed-use area.
 - Provision to allow 50% (or more) lot coverage.
 3. Village Mixed Use
 - Provides mixed-use development (horizontal) in the spirit of the current MCEOD-E, but with some modifications.
 - Ann & Hope site accommodates commercial (retail or medical office)/residential to create horizontal mixed use.
 - GAF parcel accommodates residential, which might include 1-10-family townhouses or small single-family homes.

Town Center Properties Feasibility Study – Market Study Key Findings

- Rail trail enhances value of residential development on both parcels.
- Herman Shoe building renovated as office space with possible ground floor retail or customer service.
- Assumed zoning changes:
 - Mixed-use overlay district amended to allow single uses in addition to mixed-use buildings.

Development Scenarios Summary									
Features	1. Existing Zoning			2. Separated Uses			3. Village Mixed Use		
	Ann & Hope	GAF	Herman Shoe	Ann & Hope	GAF	Herman Shoe	Ann & Hope	GAF	Herman Shoe
Program	Reuse	Redev't	Reuse	Reuse/Redev't	Redev't	Reuse	Redev't	Redev't	Reuse
Use	Ret, WH	Ind	Off/Res	Ret	MF Res	Res/artist loft	Ret & MF Res	SF & TH Res	Off
Devel. Program	30,000 Ret, 270,000 WH	135,000 sf ind	48,000 sf artisan/manf space	170,000 sf (incl. A&H bldg.)	110-205 DUs; 500-1000 sf/du	30 DUs (1,500 sf/unit)	110,000 sf Ret, 72-108 DUs	110 DU (15 SF and 95 TH)	28,000 sf off; 20 DUs
# stories	1 floor	1 floor	Current	1 floor	2-3 floors	Current	2-3 stories MF Res	2 ½-3 floors	Current
Density	Current (0.35 FAR)	0.26 FAR	0.56 FAR	0.2 FAR	10-17 DU/ac	0.56 FAR	11 to 17 DU/ac; 0.22 FAR for Ret.	10 du/ac	0.56 FAR
Parking spaces	Current*	200	Current or TBD***	685 **	165-305**	TBD***	440 sp. for retail; 108-162 sp. for res.	165	TBD***
% Imp.	60%	50%		50%	50%		50%	50%	

Ret = Retail; Ind = Industrial; Off = Office; Res = Residential; SF = single-family residential; MF = multi-family residential; WH = warehouse; DU = dwelling units, TH= townhouse residential

* Parking requirements are grandfathered as space is being re-tenanted, no additional parking required.

** Residential parking is 1.5 spaces/units , Retail uses require 4 spaces/1,000 sf.

*** Existing building has less than required parking. Expansion of parking area to meet current requirements will exceed allowable impervious surface under current zoning.