

October 4, 2008 Economic Development Forum
Notes from Five Small Group Table Discussions

Group 1: Maryann McCall-Taylor, Ann Redmon, Andy Friedlich, Pat Costello, Norman Cohen, Jeanne Canale, Elizabeth DeMille Barnett, Narain Bhatia, Margaret Heitz, Betsey Weiss
Table Notes by Betsey Weiss

- Waltham, Woburn, Burlington are all going to have new businesses so there will be more traffic – discussed at MGIC meeting.
- Wood Street is a cut through and if it blocks up here traffic will go elsewhere.
- We are now at Level E. At 9:15 am traffic is backed up to Route 128.
- Sidewalks on Bedford St are not maintained and people speed at 6:15 pm.
- Know of a company that looked at Hartwell Avenue location but turned it down due to traffic problems.
- Parking lot – who would enforce staggered times?
- Commercial development should be scattered throughout town to be equitable to everyone.
- .15 FAR \$90 million valuation tax revenue assumed today
 - .35 FAR is \$105 million valuation
 - .9 FAR is \$180 million
 - Pay for land value – should assess land at true value, eg. Eldred Street cf. Manor area
- Traffic volume (avg. daily traffic):
 - Today 21,000
 - As zoned – loss
 - .35 24,500 – 24,900
- What about busing? How would we enforce a busing regulation? What about an express bus from Alewife to Hartwell Avenue?
- Highest accident area in town – Eldred @ Bedford, and 128 @ Bedford
- We can have traffic that we get tax revenue from, or do we want someone else's traffic
- Can't put an exit in the landfill – too close to present exit.
- Need to discuss FAR and traffic and tax revenue – there are tradeoffs of revenue vs. traffic (at .9 there would be a lot of traffic)
- 4 & 225 is a state road – 25 years ago the State was going to do the jug handle.
- What are additional maintenance costs – sewer, utility, public safety?
- \$70 million to \$110 million base would generate a 50% increase in tax revenue.
- Need traffic light at Eldred & Bedford – like at Simons Road.
- Add stores, retail so we can buy lunch on Hartwell Ave
- Campus design with green park would be more attractive to developers – look at Wyeth at Alewife, built with a unified plan.

Group 2:

Table Notes by Evelyn Roman

I participated in this Saturday morning's meeting/workshop in Cary Library, and represented the participants at my table (the group of participant who divided their dots). Here is the list of the different opinions held by those participants:

1. Traffic is a nonlinear function of density, e.g. a traffic bottleneck can quickly develop from just a small change in density.
2. Traffic lights are needed at the intersection of Bedford St. and Eldredge St., and on Hartwell Ave. near Westview St.
3. Tough economic times are predicted but we are at a perfect storm for job and development opportunities, since now the Air force at Hanscom and the developers can work with the town.
4. Some of us in 2006 successfully challenged the past landlord of Lexington Corporate Center on Maguire Road and the town of Lexington, when we appealed a Special Permit granted by the Lexington Board of Appeals allowing Homeland Security (ICE) to process chained criminal deportable aliens (pedophiles, murderers, violent gang members) brought in vans 24 hours a day to Lexington Corporate Center. Now, particularly for our residential area on Westview St. across the street from Maguire Road, we will oppose any change in town Bylaws or FAR which would make it easier for undesirable Usage (ICE being one example), greatly affecting residential property values or safety, to be approved.

Group 3: David Kanter, Edith Sandy, Ed Grant, Elaine Dratch, Nan Husband, Charles Husband, George Burnell, Richard Thuma, Charles Hornig, Susan Yanofsky

Table Notes by Susan Yanofsky

This discussion is valuable – would be reactions to density scenarios.

Reactions to pictures:

- Attractive or ugly at any FAR
- Building surrounded by other commercial rather than smaller footprint and taller.
- The problem with increased density is traffic.
- Need to balance somehow – possible lessening of height.

Semantic problem in communicating true FAR

- Would not be sitting here if the Town were able to handle the financial situation better.
- Override vs. revenues
- OK if it is functioning well as a commercial district and therefore brings in the revenue.

Bates/Wood St intersection has gotten worse – appreciate sidewalk and T bus; don't appreciate not being able to get out of house and worry about fender benders.

In 1984 we had a FAR of .25, and most development in the '80's – as a result, seen an 11.9% shift – pretty successful with overrides but when fail, it's because residents are feeling it. Cecil points out that there are community decisions to be made.

Definitely the impact on residents is top concern – don't see these documents help us a bit. Question if something as low density works well. The turn lane has impacted a bit – but if increased density more of a problem.

Out of balance – land finite, so don't see any way but to maximize the land development to balance revenue

- We've worked on traffic - since '80's, tremendous development in Waltham & Burlington – we're going to see an increase whether we do anything at all – might as well recoup some benefit
- Encourage everyone to look out 20 years – what should this look like 20 years from now?

Manages commercial development for a living

- Any landowner has a sophistication to figure out the definition
- Town has opposed mansionization – now have to see commercial mansionization
- Useless until the Town is willing to deal with cut-through traffic.
- No one in town wants to be accountable
- Taller is better – don't know anyone who is wrapped around aesthetics – huge front yards are silly, bring buildings forward and put buildings as close to ROW as people would tolerate, and make as tall as Lexington can stand.
- Structured parking has to do with rent.

We are doing FAR to limit development in the entire district, are not doing it because of building types. It's all about a maximum.

Involved with transportation since 1978 – own concern is Town bylaw

- Question of who sits, question of authority, so developer knows what is expected in the way of transit support (bus shelter)
- Should require some space for bike path.

Suggestions:

- Cecil recommendation focused on traffic, which needs to be quantitatively addressed.
- Is someone going to bring quantitative information on how these have worked. I would like to know what has actually been done, and how successful.
- Whether mechanism should provide predictability for developers – is there a need to change the mechanisms by which projects get compared?

Think Town Meeting would like lack of opposition

- Short of someone stopping commercial cut through traffic, believe residents will oppose.
- Scary thing is, it is tax relief for all and our residents pay the price.

Group 4: Reid Zurlo, Mary Ann Stewart, Wendy Manz, Ann Kane, Mark Andersen,
John Bartenstein *Table Notes (none submitted)*

Group 5: Bob Bicknell, Peter Kelley, Chris Barnett, Deb Mauger, Glenn Parker, Francine T, Sheri Mahoney, John McWeeney *Table Notes by John McWeeney*

- Get more revenue from commercial uses
- Put emphasis on getting highest possible value on all existing and new commercial development i.e. expensive buildings with expensive leasehold and equipment
- Try to attract uses that require fewer employees relative to size of building. Get more taxes- seek public transit to reduce car use.
- The users drive the bus in determining what and when to build
- Extend Lexpress to Hartwell Ave
- Provide safe Bedford St crossings for pedestrians particularly those working at the motel and arriving by bus and Eldred neighborhood taking bus towards city.
- Discourage traffic on Woos St- not safe to walk
- Group not concerned over detail of buildings but recognize existing under utilization.
- Improve traffic flow before increasing traffic
- Eliminate arbitrary constraints on approval-traffic level D
- Measure development on tradeoff of benefits vs. detriments
- Examine concept of lot coverage vs. FAR
- Emphasize doubling of FAR doesn't increase traffic
- Stick to CD as zoning tool instead of widespread rezoning
- Allow up to .9 FAR. Change process to only 1 level of approval - TM ,PB or ZBA – no need for multiple levels.
- Get signals at Eldred St.
- How does Base fit in?