

**Economic Development Study Conducted by the
Center for Economic Development at
UMASS Amherst - School of Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning (LARP)**

Boxborough Economic Development Committee Report Summary

I BACKGROUND

The Town of Boxborough commissioned UMASS Amherst, Center for Economic Development under its School of Landscape Architecture (LARP) to conduct an economic development study to help define a framework for implementing the economic development objectives envisioned in the Boxborough2030 Master Plan. This was viewed by the EDC as an important step forward to close the gap between what is specified in Boxborough2030 with what is actually possible given market and infrastructure constraints, as well as what residents and businesses desire.

Boxborough agreed with UMASS to conduct the study in two phases, for a total fee of \$25,000 (\$2,000 for Phase I and \$23,000 for Phase 2). This, combined with \$2,000 of estimated town costs brought the total study cost to \$27,000. The study was conducted from Aug 2019 – Dec 2019 (Phase 1), and Jan 2020 – Dec 2020 (Phase 2). Phase 2 was modified as delayed and modified as a result of the Commonwealth mandated shutdowns and elimination of in-person public meetings due to COVID-19. That said, the study was successfully completed despite the restrictions and challenges during Phase 2, with the final report being provided in January 2021.

II APPROACH

Phase 1 of the study was performed primarily by the 2nd year LARP Graduate Students and their professor Dr. Camille Barchers, with focus on research, community feedback, the creation of four economic development scenarios, including story maps, a mid-term and final presentations, and a technical memo. Phase 2 was performed by Dr. Henry Renski, with support from Drs. John Mullin and Barchers. Phase 2 included an in-depth analysis of the data collected during Phase 1, including a market analysis and town-wide community feedback sessions to secure feedback on the development scenarios and creation of an action plan. The market analysis is a significant step toward 2030 Action 3.1.1.4.

III ANALYSIS

Phase 2 of the study completed an analysis of the data collected during Phase 1 and the market area for business types in Boxborough. The data analysis focused on the four development scenarios developed during Phase 1:

- Scenario 1 - Baseline / Current Course
- Scenario 2 - Rural / Agricultural Heritage

- Scenario 3 - Village Style Development
- Scenario 4 - Comprehensive Approach

The analysis arrives at the conclusion that Village Style Development is highly rated by the majority of residents across age and town longevity lines. Rural / Agricultural Heritage is also highly rated, particularly by newer and younger residents. The Comprehensive Approach is also rated strongly, particularly among older and more longer-term residents, which group may be more concerned about tax considerations and affordability of living in town. The Baseline/Current Course is the lowest rated across all surveyed groups.

The market analysis focused on regional supply and demand of commodity types and businesses in order to identify areas of opportunity for Boxborough, which could help guide our focus for economic development initiatives. The market analysis, focused on two specific areas in town - Adams Place with an eye toward a Boxborough Village, and Beaver Brook Road / Cisco Campus with an eye toward a 21st Century Office Park. The analysis looked at both local (Boxborough and neighboring towns) and Regional (495) markets.

The analysis shows significant household expenditures in Grocery, Restaurants, Entertainment, Pharmacy/Healthcare, Hardware, Pet businesses, Personal services. Grocery far exceeds all other categories at \$260M/year in the local market, with Restaurants coming in second at just over \$30M/year in the local market. It is clear in the analysis that there is a significant gap between consumer demand and current supply in restaurants/taverns, pharmacies/medical, personal services and dry cleaning/laundries. There is also room for grocery, sporting goods, specialty food stores and other miscellaneous retail.

IV DELIVERABLES

The final deliverables of the UMASS study include a Technical Report from each phase, as well as final and mid-term student presentations, scenario summary vinettes and story map. The Phase 2 Technical Report provides the full summary of the entire study, the analysis, observations and recommendations.

V KEY FINDINGS

The EDC identifies the following items as the key findings from the study:

- Continued strong interest and demand for a village common, including a cafe, restaurant, tavern, retail shops and services
- Consensus that doing nothing (Baseline Approach) is not working or desired future state
- Regulatory (zoning) and administrative changes are necessary to yield community desired results
- Desire to utilize existing commercial spaces before/in place of new development

- Need to reshape office park zones to allow for multi-use in order to achieve potential
- Current Town Center District land and infrastructure not conducive to commercial center - potential role as rural village, with civic amenities, artisan shops, small cafe
- Market study shows room for consumer businesses in the local and/or regional markets despite neighboring commercial development
- Public water approaches must include economic development considerations (2030 Action 3.1.2.1)

VI Recommendations and Actions

The EDC provides the following prioritized recommendations and actions for the Town

1. EDC lead focused effort with cross-board & committee participation to realize a village center (2030 Action 3.1.3.1)
2. Augment work with office park land owners to identify re-development opportunities (2030 Action 3.1.5.3)
3. Implement administrative changes to drive process simplicity & transparency for land owners and businesses (2030 Strategy 3.2.1)
4. Implement zoning changes necessary to enable a village center and office park re-development (2030 Action 3.1.3.2)
5. Pursue opportunities for rural / civic village in current/expanded Town Center District (2030 Strategy 1.1.2)

The above recommendations and priorities are specific priorities resulting from the study work completed with UMASS. EDC will continue to work all actions identified in Boxborough 2030.