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POLICY WHITE PAPER Downtown Business Development in Pawtucket

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Overview

On April 27, 2010, Mayor James E. Doyle, City of Pawtucket, unveiled a report titled ***Blueprint to Prosperity: Downtown Business Development in Pawtucket***. The report was written and coordinated by a Downtown Task Force appointed by the Mayor through the Pawtucket 2020 Committee. The Downtown Task Force included members of the local business community, nonprofit sector, City Administration and Planning Department staff.

The “***Blueprint Report***” outlines the economic development and redevelopment that has occurred in Downtown Pawtucket over the past decade and outlines 14 recommendations the City Administration should implement over the next ten years.

The 14 recommendations, created primarily from private sector interests with coordination through the administration’s staff, are aimed at improving the quality of life in the downtown, increasing residential density to drive service-based business development, marketing/branding and creating the regulatory/financial framework to guide appropriate future growth in the Downtown.

Blueprint Action Items:

1. **Assess and design improvements to traffic, multi-modal and pedestrian circulation in Downtown.**
 - a. In Progress
 - b. Status: The City of Pawtucket, in cooperation with The Pawtucket Foundation, has contracted Thurlow Small Architecture to devise a Pawtucket Downtown Design Plan with recommended traffic flow improvements, streetscape design proposals and zoning change recommendations.

2. **Implement zoning reform that makes Downtown Mixed Use development permitted outright and eases dimensional and permitting requirements to better allow mixed use, transit oriented development.**
 - a. In Progress
 - b. Status: Mayor Doyle appointed Michael Lozano to chair a Task Force to study how the existing code impedes development. Further, the Task Force will work with the zoning consultant as part of the Pawtucket Downtown Design Plan.

3. **A Business Improvement District (BID) or similar merchants association should be created in the Downtown to implement a coordinated management and marketing program.**

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- a. No action to date
 - b. Status: While there has been no formal action to date, a local neighborhood association called Pawtucket Alliance for Downtown Success (PADS) has emerged and could take on this role. Currently, the organization does not solicit donations or have a financial mechanism in place to assume the role of a traditional BID.
- 4. Create access to capital. Explore ways to create more funding for a community capital and loan guarantee program to assist business development and focus investment in the Downtown.**
 - a. In Progress
 - b. Status: This objective is also aligned with the ongoing KeepSpace Initiative in Pawtucket. The KeepSpace Initiative is exploring ways to determine the financial needs of local business owners and intends to focus resources on building a framework to encourage more participation from private sector lending institutions in local redevelopment initiatives.
- 5. Conduct and Visioning and District Planning in four priority geographic areas:(1) Proposed commuter rail stop (2) Downtown Retail Corridor (3) Riverfront (4) Armory Arts District.**
 - a. Partially in progress
 - b. Status: The Armory Arts District study group has been formed. The KeepSpace initiative is considering organizing a project in partnership with The Pawtucket Foundation to conduct scenario-based land use planning around the proposed commuter rail stop.
- 6. Existing off-street and on-street parking should be integrated into a comprehensive parking system with coordinated access, design and management.**
 - a. In Progress
 - b. Status: This is under review as part of the Pawtucket Downtown Design Plan. An existing conditions report will identify current standards and trends and will identify best practice approaches to accommodate development and parking standards.
- 7. Assess the needs of the owners of vacant or underutilized buildings and properties. Create a local “distressed community tax program” or tax increment finance district to encourage development in specific geographies within the city.**
 - a. No action to date
 - b. Status: This will require extensive interviews with property and business owners. This may also require inspections of facilities to determine what life safety and building improvements are necessary to accommodate future business and residential growth. Many building owners may not be open to any inspections nor would they want to expose any potential code issues.
- 8. Create an economic development and marketing implementation plan to drive redevelopment and absorption of specific properties in Pawtucket’s Downtown. A strategic plan will identify, quantify and prioritize development opportunities in the downtown with “regional impact.”**
 - a. No action to date
 - b. Status: Various business members met with a representative from FXM Associates to find out about the firm’s capabilities and past experiences. This may be a good potential consultant to advise on future strategies.
- 9. Work with The Pawtucket Foundation to create and market a brand identity for the Downtown that markets living, working, visiting and doing business. Develop marketing collateral in print, online and on radio/television.**

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- a. In Progress
 - b. Status: The Pawtucket Foundation has created a committee of marketing and volunteer design professionals from several local firms including Embolden, Hasbro, Schwa Design, Gladworks, Highchair Designhaus and Orange Square. The committee is outlining a process and expected deliverables for such a campaign.
- 10. Consider a “Red Carpet Program” that packages incentives to market and attract new companies in targeted economic sectors to Pawtucket.**
- a. No action to date
 - b. Status: Nothing significant to report
- 11. Create a stronger alliance with the City of Providence and other communities in the Blackstone Valley to capitalize on close proximity and metropolitan resources/amenities.**
- a. No action to date
 - b. Status: Nothing significant to report
- 12. Stringently enforce the real estate non-utilization ordinance which imposes a tax on vacant and abandoned properties.**
- a. No action to date
 - b. Status: Nothing significant to report
- 13. Coordinate streetscape and infrastructure enhancements with large-scale private redevelopment projects.**
- a. No action to date
 - b. Status: Nothing significant to report
- 14. Continue to increase residential density in the Downtown. Promote mixed-income residential development and various housing typologies that will create a mix of market-rate/subsidized, multi-tenant apartments, townhouses, live/work units and condominiums.**
- a. No action to date
 - b. Status: With the exception of existing housing projects in progress, there has been no attempt to increase residential density

Recommendations:

The City should implement the 14 action items outlined in the Blueprint Report to encourage economic development in the Downtown. The recommendations in the report may require significant scrutiny and revision of the City’s ordinances as they relate to economic development, zoning, land use, signage and property taxes.

In order to implement the recommendations in the report, the City may need to reallocate financial resources in the City’s annual budget. The City should also evaluate the structure of the administration to determine if any organizational changes such as staffing levels and funding are necessary to better support economic development activities.