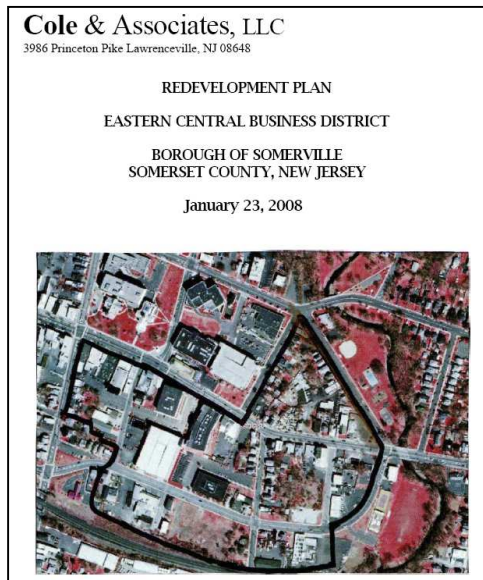


East Central Business District Redevelopment Plan

Review

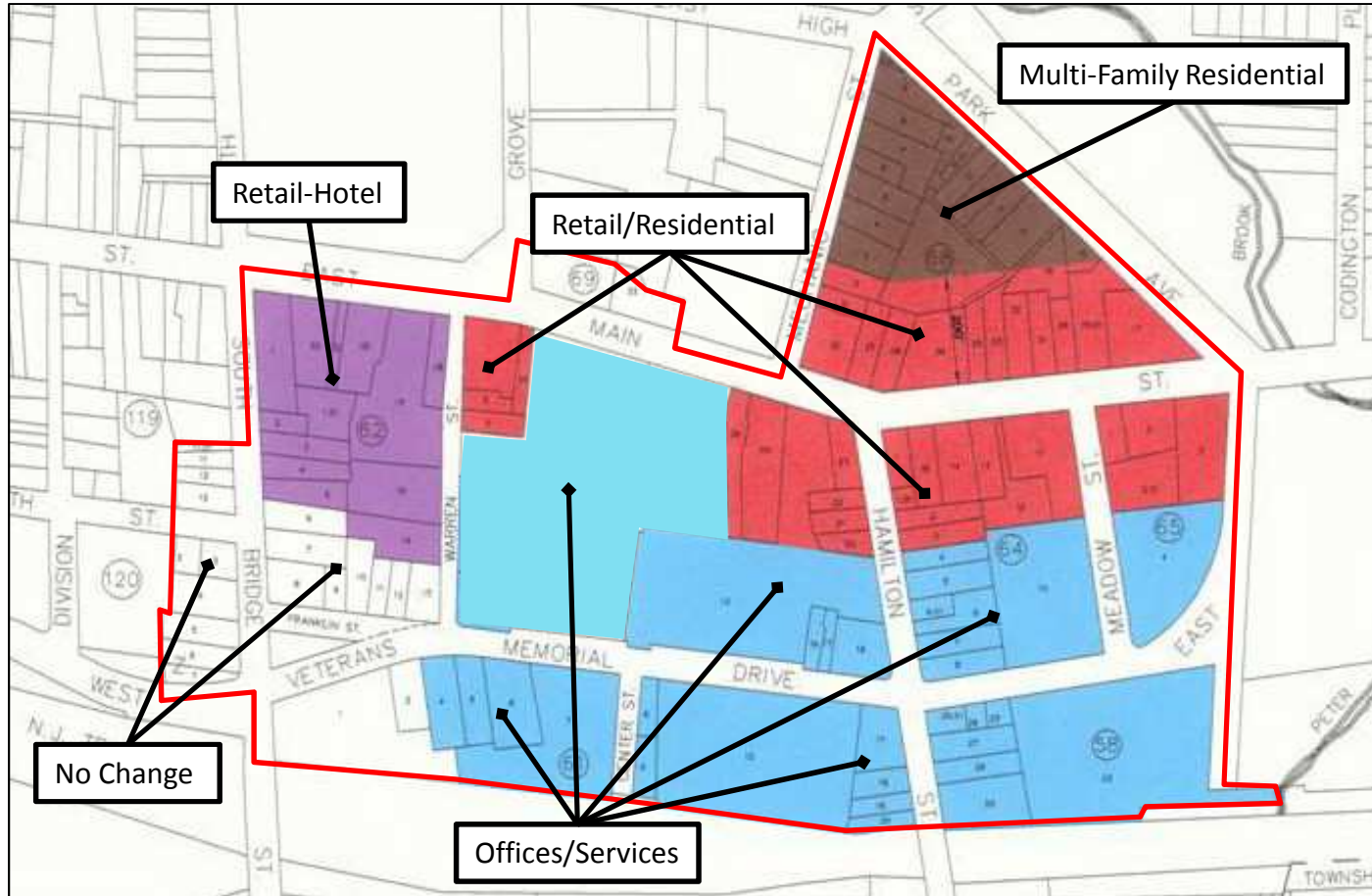
January 12th, 2012



Original Stated Benefits to Community

- To Revitalize older portion of Main Street
- To Allow Mixed Use – stores below, residential above
- To Incorporate Urban Design Principles
- To Create New Residential opportunities
- To Create New Retail/Commercial destinations
- To Return unused properties to tax roles

Land Use Concepts



Purpose of This Meeting

To Review The Results Of A Property/Business Owner Survey

- On November 10th, 2011 the Borough Planning Board held a stakeholders meeting to review the current Redevelopment Plan for the East Central Business district.
- The reason for the stakeholder meeting was due to a number of factors, including the poor economic climate, property owner requests for use variances within the ECBD and a desire within the borough to keep redevelopment moving forward.
- The Planning Board was asked by Council to review the Redevelopment Plan, to determine if:
 - The Plan is still valid
 - If market conditions require us to amend the plan
 - A plan is still required for the area
- At this meeting all participants agreed the best approach to review the plan was for the Borough to circulate a questionnaire and have every person who wishes to, answer the questions and return in order for the Planning Board to understand the concerns.
- As in the past when a plan has come for review we engage the public, residents, business, and property owners in the process.
- On November 21, 2011 a letter was sent to every property owner in the area with a questionnaire enclosed
- We envisage at least three possibly four meetings extending into the first quarter of 2012.

The Survey

- 87 Questionnaires distributed plus an unknown number by email.
- 7 Responses received by Monday January 9th.
- 8% response rate

Responses

Overall responses fell into three categories;

1. Let market forces determine the uses within the area
2. Zoning regulations are too stringent/obtaining a variance is too expensive
3. Economy is affecting the ability to redevelop

Reviewing each question the following appears to be the consensus:

Q1 The plan has had no impact on development and has discouraged it

Q2 Zoning is seen as too restrictive in this economy and the overlay should be modified

Q3 Appears that residential/non-industrial commercial/office uses are acceptable to be next to each other, however all uses were acceptable to some respondents

Q4 Relating to the flood plain, encouraging development in non-flood prone area while protecting the rights of property owners in the flood prone areas was acceptable, as was eliminating flood prone areas from the overlay zoning

Q5 Not transferring the development rights from flood prone to non-flood prone areas was marginally ahead of allowing the transfer of rights

Responses

Q6 It was unanimous that incentives should be given to all willing to redevelop in the area and not be limited to those controlling 24,000 sf

Q7 The majority felt that building heights can be increased to allow more flexibility

Q8 Maintaining cash flow in this economy was second to those believing a more coherent land use plan was slightly more important

Q9 Asked respondents to share their vision for the area [Slide 17](#)

Q10 All answering this question felt the area should maintain/create its own look and feel

Q11 Marginally respondents felt the proximity to NJT's station will influence the types of use in the area

Q12 The majority believe the transit Village designation will influence the types of use in the area

Q13 Most believe the DSA does or will have an influence in attracting business to the area.

Comments

Question 1

Do you believe the current redevelopment plan has:

- | | |
|---|---|
| A) Encouraged new development in the area | 0 |
| B) Discouraged new development in the area | 3 |
| C) Had no impact on new development in the area | 3 |

Comments:

1. Difficult to say whether the plan or economy is culprit
2. Has had no impact – no changes to area
3. No impact due to economy
4. Property owners should have the “right” to use their property with uses that are in “demand”
5. Need more lenient regulations to stimulate redevelopment
6. Variance process ‘too costly and time consuming”
7. Concern about “national” entities renting space, possibly forcing out smaller “local” businesses
8. Need a market demand analysis

Question 2

The permitted uses in the zoning for this area have been in place since 1998 with little change, the Bulk Standards (set-back, density, height) were modified in the plan, do you believe they:

- | | |
|--|---|
| A) Are too restrictive in this economy | 2 |
| B) Are the permitted uses too restrictive in any economy | 0 |
| C) Are the permitted uses not restrictive enough | 0 |
| D) Should the overlay bulk standards be eliminated | 0 |
| E) Should the overlay bulk standards be modified | 1 |

Comments:

1. Any attempt to channel development will “stifle it”
2. Market forces will determine development
3. Dependant on location, flexibility in the application of bulk standards
4. Revert to old standards
5. Uses should reflect the type suitable for existing buildings
6. Permitted uses must be broadened to encourage development
7. Variances are to costly and discourage change of use
8. Bulk Standards can be changed if each property is treated individually
9. Standards should include more innovative methods

Question 3 If the permitted uses are changed, how would you feel about:

- | | |
|---|---|
| A) Having industrial uses next to residential uses | 1 |
| B) Mixing residential and office uses | 2 |
| C) Having non-industrial commercial uses next to residential uses | 2 |
| D) Having retail and residential mixed together | 1 |

Comments:

1. Market forces will dictate the appropriate mix of uses in any economic time frame
2. Lack of development in the west end and landfill has had an impact on the lack of development in the east End
3. Fragmented ownership has prevented meaningful assemblages envisioned by the board
4. Mixed use will boost property values and enhance appearance
5. Uses should remain as what existed before the plan, let future projects take own course
6. Allow owners to use property as market demands (requires?)
7. If Borough envisages extensive development it could institute Eminent Domain
8. Tax rates should be reduced to compensate for restrictive zoning regulations
9. Mixed use is a good thing for a town, business and residents rely on each other for vitality and sustenance

Question 4 Certain portions of the area are flood prone and subject to increasingly restrictive DEP rules Should the Borough:

- | | |
|--|---|
| A) Eliminate these flood prone areas from the overlay zoning | 3 |
| B) Using DEP rules, include in the plan with conditions limiting the type of use | 1 |
| C) Should we encourage development in non-flood prone areas if we protect the rights of property owners in flood prone areas | 4 |

Comments:

1. Borough should encourage development that makes sense and protect tax paying property owners impacted by flooding
2. Protecting the rights of property owners would create a balance in development
3. Development should be encouraged in non-flood prone areas while protecting the rights of property owners in those areas
4. Borough should eliminate flood prone areas from overlay zoning as no bank will finance construction in these areas – engineering too costly to be financially viable
5. Existing buildings (in flood plain) will likely remain as is; allowable uses reflect the existing buildings (uses?)
6. Encourage development outside the flood prone areas
7. Allow development in flood prone areas if owner is willing to take risk of investing in these properties
8. Residential dwellings should be offered replacement housing
9. Commercial/industrial have alternatives to deal with flooding

Question 5 If you answered yes to 4C, would you be agreeable to a property owner either transferring the density or acquiring the rights to the development density of property within the floodplain and transfer them to property not in the flood plain as a density bonus for not developing in the flood plain.

Yes 2

No 3

Comments:

1. Yes in general, need more detail. should be zero sum to all parties
2. Only benefits developers

Question 6 This plan has certain benefits for developers who own (control) 24,000 square feet (approximately one half acre) of land do you believe this is:

- | | |
|--|---|
| A) The right amount | 0 |
| B) Too much | 0 |
| C) Not enough | 0 |
| D) A good idea, however incentives should be given to ALL willing to redevelop property within this area | 5 |

Comments:

1. If an incentive leads to meaningful development it is worthwhile to all parties
2. All owners in the area should have equal incentives
3. Size of property should not entitle owner to greater or lesser incentives
4. In this economic climate the town is giving too many incentives to developers at the expense of the business owner and taxpayer
5. Incentives should be fairly given to all property owners, especially businesses that have a long term stake in town

Question 7 This plan limits the height of buildings in various sections of the area, do you believe:

- | | |
|---|---|
| A) These maximum heights are right for the sections they are in | 0 |
| B) These heights can be increased to allow more flexibility - within limits | 4 |
| C) The existing building heights are fine, do not change | 1 |

Comments:

1. Let market dictate building height, it is the only way to offset escalating land costs
2. The higher the building (is) will require a parking deck
3. Heights should be increased for developers to feel comfortable about cost/revenue
4. Buildings may be required to be build on pylons due to DEP regulations; to attract developers additional floors may be required to offset cost, but should be in line with other building heights in Borough
5. If a reasonable plan is proposed and is beneficial to the community it should be allowed
6. Every change puts a burden on the sewer and water utilities
7. Form based zoning would be the answer

Question 8 What is the more important to you as a property owner

- | | |
|---|---|
| A) Maintaining any form of cash flow in the current economy regardless of the use | 2 |
| B) Planning for the long term appreciation of property and higher rents through better tenant use | 1 |
| C) A more coherent land use plan through out the area | 3 |

Comments:

1. A comprehensive “Market driven” plan that encourages development is the best way to maximize the borough which has suffered since 1962 from attempts to “channel” development
2. Should allow any use in current economy, cash flow is critical
3. Let market dictate long term development
4. Example: building sat vacant several years before tenant was found. Borough advised new tenants use inconsistent with prior tenants use; despite an application no hearing is scheduled, paying \$17,000 in annual taxes for a building that cannot be used. This is fundamentally unfair.
5. Vibrant mixed use must be encouraged and flexibility in use reggs must be in place to foster this
6. Cash flow is the reason for going into business
7. The town should be focused on its financial position and debt ratio
8. Traditional models for development from the 1980’s don’t work; the very nature of Somerville's plan is flawed

Question 9 Forgetting the redevelopment plan for now, what is your vision for the area, near, mid and long term? For example if the short term goal is to maintain existing revenue and the intermediate goal is to begin the elimination of non-preferred uses and the long-term goal is to transform the area into a vibrant mixed use community suitable to a central business district how would this transformation take place?

i) Would you please share your vision

Comments:

Short-term

1. Identify and encourage meaningful assemblages of land to foster economically viable development
2. Maintain the existing conditions
3. Allow market to dictate uses
4. Fill vacancies
5. Ask each property owner if they are interested in upgrading their properties

Mid-term

1. If and when the economy turns development will seek efficient parcels. Leigh High Valley is perfect model
2. Would like to see more positive redevelopment through new developers/new property owners
3. Believe this area will have many high-rise buildings with thousands of apartments
4. Allow market to propose a developer that will buy-out all existing properties and redevelop
5. Non-preferred uses should be encouraged to be replaced through incentives, not by disallowing them
6. Concentrate on seamless access to major highways

Long-term

1. Encourage proposals by not being unreasonable in the development process
2. Living downtown will become a trend for the future due to energy, transportation and logistic issues
3. If borough seeks complete redevelopment they can either condemn or allow investors to purchase and redevelop
4. Vibrant mixed use community achieved with incentives for certain uses, not by prohibiting some uses that currently exist
5. Redevelopment not meant to threaten existence of businesses, take survey of businesses asking about progress?

Question 9

ii) Can you explain how the transformation would take place?

Comments:

Short-term

1. Refer Leigh High valley Model
2. Current property owners need to maintain properties, do not let deteriorate
3. Borough should buy “old” gas station and clean the property, this will encourage new construction on Main Street
4. Reduce high taxes as they discourage redevelopment
5. Abatement of property taxes on redevelopment projects is key
6. Revisit Master Plan and put a realistic budget together

Mid-term

1. ECBD should be promoting the area to potential developers
2. Invite large scale developers to area
3. Borough should encourage investors to transform the entire area and facilitate buy-outs of property owners
4. Finish what you started, should there be a Redevelopment agency or economic market department

Long-term

1. Invite large scale developers to area
2. Allow the markets to dictate transactions free from zoning uses that are not in demand in the ECBD
3. Survey train passengers to see if they shop here

Question 9

iii) Do you believe any of these visions steps are in conflict with each other.

Comments:

Short-term

1. Current market lacks demand for this area; current uses are pre-existing and non-conforming uses
2. Any plan for the Eastern section will be dated by the time anything is built out

Mid-term

1. Borough has no investors willing to redevelop areas
2. You need to get ideas from the Boards

Long-term

1. Flood plain prevents/restricts financially viable projects

Question 9

iiia) If the answer is yes, can you explain where and how the conflict exists?

No responses [Slide 8](#)

Question 10

Do you believe:

- | | |
|--|---|
| A) East Main Street should blend with West Main Street | 0 |
| B) Maintain/create it's own look and feel | 3 |

Comments:

1. The area can become an extension of Main Street with compatible and complimentary uses when economy is viable
2. Because of the nature of the land-design unique footprint?
3. Need more information on restrictions on West Main street
4. The ECBD is in a flood plain which has a fundamental and substantial impact on ability to redevelop area
5. Let market forces & industrial tenants & property owners mold the look and feel of the area as it has in the past. Homogeneity is not as interesting as individuality even as it pertains to a business district
6. It needs its own identity, the County Buildings have changed the character of the East End

Question 11

Do you believe proximity to the train station will influence the type of uses in the area.

Yes 3

No 2

Comments:

1. Not until a commuter can get to NYC on one train
2. Yes, provides better transportation to Somerville
3. With direct train to NYC commuters will pour into area
4. Station is too far from ECBD
5. Allow the type of uses in the area to flow from the proximity of the station, not from zoning laws regulating usage
6. Peak traffic will cause major problems

Question 12

Do you believe the Transit Village designation will have an influence on the types of uses in this area A Transit Village encourages, walking, bicycling and the use of public transport.

Yes 4

No 1

Comments:

1. Not a lot of foot traffic in this area
2. Buildings not designed for mixed use
3. People still tend to drive a world class food store will create an “auto dependent town

Question 13

Do you believe the Downtown Somerville Alliance (DSA) will have an influence in attracting businesses to this area

Yes 3

No 1

Comments:

1. Never has, never will
2. For 20 years they have existed and kept Somerville in a positive mode
3. DSA needs to create an Arts program (similar to Grand Rapids) to attract more people to town
4. ECBD is historically commercial in nature and should remain left alone until private sector demands uses more akin to “downtown”
5. Possibly, if the DSA and Borough work together to encourage business growth and provide incentives (tax, grants, expert advice, etc.)

Thank you