October 17, 2017

Yarmouth, Massachusetts

A TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PANEL REPORT

Urban Land Institute Boston/New England

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Funding for the project is provided by the Cape Cod Commission through the Department of Housing and Community Development's District Local Technical Assistance program.

Executive Summary

The Yarmouth Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) convened on October 17th at the Yarmouth Town Hall, under the direction of the Urban Land Institute's Boston/New England District Council. Over the course of the day, the TAP, consisting of eight real estate and land use professionals, met with local business owners, representatives from the Town of Yarmouth and other key stakeholders. The purpose of the TAP was to devise a strategy that would enable the Town to re-invigorate its commercial corridor on Route 28, and to assess the redevelopment potential of the site of a former drive-in theater.

Chapter 1: ULI and the TAP Process

Gives an overview of the Urban Land Institute's Boston/New England District Council and its Technical Assistance Panels (TAPs), while also providing a list of the panel members and stakeholders who took part in this particular TAP. The chapter also outlines the study area for the TAP, and describes the process undertaken by the panelists and stakeholders during the information gathering sessions and subsequent charrette. The panelists then presented their recommendations at the Yarmouth Town Hall Hearing Room before the Board of Selectmen.

Chapter 2: Background and History

Provides a brief history of Yarmouth; an overview of the focus area – a section of the 5.2 mile commercial corridor along Route 28 that includes a 22-acre proposed development site; key population and demographic information that provide insight into the issues facing Yarmouth today; and makes note of the difficulties the Town faces due to a lack of wastewater infrastructure. The chapter also includes the series of questions that the Town posed to the panel regarding redevelopment of the focus area.

Chapter 3: Assets and Opportunities

Presents an overview of the sites within the focus area that could be repositioned to create a more vibrant commercial district, including: the former W. Yarmouth Drive-In; Parker's River Bridge; the Cape Cod Rail Trail; the Great Island block; the Whydah Pirate Museum; and the Cultural Center of Cape Cod.

Chapter 4: Challenges

Examines the challenges that Yarmouth faces in its efforts to successfully redevelop the focus area. These include: finding a solution to the wastewater problem; addressing the inefficiencies of the Town's permitting and licensing processes; voter apathy/resistance to changes that will move these economic initiatives forward; and a perceived lack of vision for a Village Center.

Chapter 5: Recommendations

Offers a list of actions that the Town of Yarmouth can implement to achieve its goals. Key recommendations include taking a more aggressive approach to addressing the wastewater issue; redeveloping the focus area streetscape; creating a walkable/bikeable corridor that connects the rail trail to the Town's natural assets; re-branding of the Town with the redeveloped drive-in site as a centerpiece; and streamlining of government processes with regards to development and ongoing business functions.

Chapter 6: Funding Sources

Provides a list of potential funding sources through federal and state agencies, as well an appendix of articles and papers that could be used for modeling some of the recommended actions.

Chapter 7: Conclusions

Offers a final assessment for the redevelopment potential of the Town of Yarmouth, reiterating the challenges and new strategies for moving forward.

ULI & the TAP Process

Urban Land Institute (ULI)

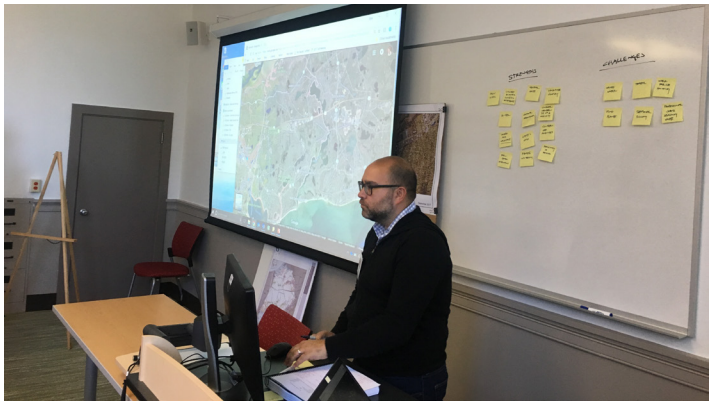
The Urban Land Institute is a 501(c) (3) nonprofit research and education organization supported by its members. The mission of ULI is to provide leadership in the responsible use of land and to help sustain and create thriving communities. Founded in 1936, the institute now has nearly 40,000 members worldwide representing the entire spectrum of land use and real estate development disciplines, working in private enterprise and public service, including developers, architects, planners, lawyers, bankers, and economic development professionals, among others.

The Boston/New England District Council of ULI serves the six New England states and has nearly 1,300 members. As a preeminent, multidisciplinary real estate forum, ULI Boston/ New England facilitates the open exchange of ideas, information, and experience among local, and regional leaders and policy makers dedicated to creating better places.

Technical Assistance Panels (TAPs)

The ULI Boston/New England Real Estate Advisory Committee convenes Technical Assistance Panels (TAPs) at the request of public officials and local stakeholders of communities and nonprofit organizations facing complex land use challenges, who benefit from planning and development professionals providing pro bono recommendations.

At the TAP, a group of diverse professionals specially assembled with expertise in the issues posed spends one to two days visiting and analyzing existing conditions, identifying specific planning and development issues, and formulating realistic and actionable recommendations to move initiatives forward in a way consistent with the applicant's goals and objectives.



ULI TAP panelists at work

The Panel

ULI Boston/New England convened a volunteer panel of experts whose members represent the range of disciplines necessary to analyze the challenges and opportunities facing the Town of Yarmouth in their efforts to revitalize their commercial district. Disciplines represented included architects, engineers, developers, designers, planners, and real estate analysts. The following is a list of panelists:

Chairman

Patrick Campbell, Principal at Commonwealth Development

Panel

Anthony (TJ) DiFeo Jr, LEED AP, Senior Associate, Bergmeyer Associates

Greg Guimond, Town Planner, Town of Marshfield

Kate Kennen, Landscape Architect/Owner, Offshoots, Inc.

Ryan Christman, Real Estate Valuation Manager, PwC

David Kelly, Principal, Kelly Engineering Group

Derek Olsen, Senior VP, CHM Warnick

Carl Frushour, Senior Associate, CRJA

ULI Staff

Sara Marsh, Manager

TAP Writer

Mike Hoban, Principal, Hoban Communications

Panelists have donated their time.

Panelists touring Yarmouth

Panelists brainstorming during charette

Stakeholders

The TAP benefited from the participation of the diverse group of stakeholders – local business owners, representatives from the Yarmouth Chamber of Commerce, Planning Board, and developers – who came together to devise a strategy to create a more sustainable long-term economy.

The following is a list of stakeholders:

Kathy Bailey, Director, Town of Yarmouth Senior Services
Rich Bilski, Member of Drive-In Site Utilization Committee
Chuck Carey, Owner, Carey Commercial Realty
Barry Clifford, Owner, Whydah Pirate Museum
David Darling, Owner/Developer, Hampton Inn
Dewitt Davenport, President, Davenport Companies
Jack Hynes, Property Owner, Developer
Brian Koelbel, President, Gateway Isles Association
Steven Koplow, Owner, Great Island Block
Jack McCormack, Town Volunteer, Resident
Lou Nickinello, Owner, Bass River Sports World
Jennifer Reid, Director, Bridgewater State University, Cape Cod Campus
Andrew Singer, Esq., Law Office of Singer & Singer
Michael Stone, Yarmouth Board of Selectmen
Mary Vilbon, Executive Director, Yarmouth Chamber of Commerce
Norm Weare, Chairman, Yarmouth Planning Board
Lauren Wolk, Associate Director, Cultural Center of Cape Cod

The TAP Process

The Yarmouth TAP was held on October 17th, 2017. Panelists from ULI Boston/New England were greeted at the Yarmouth Town Hall by Director of Community Development Karen Greene and Town Planner Kathy Williams, who led the ULI panel on a 90-minute tour of the proposed redevelopment area along Route 28 in Yarmouth by van. The contingent was also joined by Town Administrator Dan Knapik, Cape Cod Commission Chief Economic Development Officer Leslie Richardson, and Cape Cod Commission Affordable housing specialist Heather Harper.

The tour began with a visit to the focus area, beginning at Seaview Ave. Along the way, panelists observed a mix of shops and restaurants, many of which had been shuttered for the season. A number of the buildings appeared to be in need of structural or cosmetic repairs. The panelists first observed the area which encompasses Captain Parker's, a thriving year-round restaurant, and the Whydah Pirate Museum, a fairly new tourist attraction that also has an educational component. The group then proceeded to The Great Island Block (a strip of underutilized/vacant storefronts) and then on to the former W. Yarmouth Drive-In site, where panelists gained insight into the challenges facing potential redevelopment plans. The next stop was Parker's River Bridge, which is being widened to improve the ecological health of the area. From there, the tour continued to South Shore Drive, a high-end neighborhood comprised of waterfront properties, before returning to Bridgewater State University.

Following the tour, the ULI panel interviewed stakeholders listed in the previous sub-section in two separate panel discussions. The panelists then engaged in an intensive, closed door charrette to develop recommendations, incorporating the information provided in their research prior to the meetings as well as the input from the stakeholders. The panelists then shared their observations and recommendations at the regularly scheduled Board of Selectmen meeting at the Yarmouth Town Hall, which was open to the public.

Yarmouth drive-in site

Background and History

A) History

Prior to being settled and incorporated as part of Plymouth Colony in 1639, the Town of Yarmouth was known as "Mattacheeset" by the native Wampanoag, which means "old lands by the borders of the sea". Originally a farming community, the villages of Yarmouth evolved into a maritime-based economy, participating in whaling and the China Trade. By the late 19th century, developers had begun transforming Yarmouth into a summer resort for city residents.

B) Yarmouth Today

Yarmouth is a Mid-Cape resort community comprised of the villages of Yarmouth Port, Bass River, Great Island, South Yarmouth, West Yarmouth, and Yarmouth. Bordered on the east by Dennis and on the west by Barnstable, the Town's economy is primarily seasonal and tourism-driven. Previously known as summer nightclub hotspot symbolized by the Mill Hill Club – which once featured national rock and pop music acts but is now a memory care facility – the town is viewed by many as a "drive-through" to the more commercially-oriented Town of Barnstable.

C) Commercial District/Route 28

Although Yarmouth lacks a true town center, there is a 5.2 mile commercial corridor along Route 28 with an average daily traffic count of 16,000 (21,000 in the summer months) which comprises the focus area. The commercial stretch is primarily made up of seasonal businesses – motels, restaurants, retail establishments, and family amusements.

The majority of the businesses operate on small lots, and many of the buildings along the route have fallen into various stages of disrepair. Some of the blighted former motel properties have been converted into multifamily housing with an affordable component.

There are two new public-private motel conversion projects totaling 109 rental units currently in the planning and permitting stages. The projects have met with some resistance from the community due to the high number of affordable units and concerns about the loss of commercial space.

The Town was recently granted a four-year extension on its Growth Incentive Zone (GIZ) by the Cape Cod Commission to complete the conversion of the motels into affordable housing. The Town is also interested in redeveloping a promising section of Route 28 that was designated as part of the "Village Centers Overlay District" in 2012. The purpose is to create a pedestrian friendly village that will also promote the natural beauty of the Parkers River.

The focus area, which overlaps with a good portion of the Village Centers Overlay District, is home to a thriving restaurant as well as a pair of popular tourist attractions, and most significantly, a 22-acre Town-owned site (the former Yarmouth Drive-In Theater) that has long been considered for redevelopment. It is hoped that the redevelopment of the drive-in would serve as a key component to building a brand identity that will enlarge the Town's existing tourism trade.

Route 28 running through Yarmouth's commercial district

D) Wastewater Issue

One of the major issues facing the Town of Yarmouth is that – like many of the neighboring towns – it lacks the wastewater infrastructure to support large-scale development. The wastewater also has environmental implications, as communities on the Cape are under a court order to clean up the waters to comply with the federal Clean Water Act.

E) Population/Demographics

Yarmouth has a year-round population of nearly 24,000 that includes a significant number of retirees. The percentage of the population aged 55 or older will exceed 50 percent by 2021, with a full third (34.1 percent) aged 65 or more. Median Household Income is $57,569, compared to the Barnstable County MHI of $63,251. Although primarily a seasonal economy, the Town's largest employer is the year-round operations center for the nonprofit International Fund for Animal Welfare (350 employees). Other large year-round employers include the local government and Stop & Shop. There is limited public transportation, with the Town served by the Cape Cod Regional Transit Authority bus line, as well as the CapeFLYER, a summer weekend passenger train that runs from South Station to Hyannis from Memorial Day to Labor Day. The Barnstable Municipal Airport is also within a 10-minute drive.

F) Questions for the ULI Panel

The panel was asked to address the following questions:

1. In light of development constraints (small lots, local/regional/state regulations, and the lack of wastewater infrastructure), how does Yarmouth encourage diverse, year-round development that can be a source of community pride?

2. How do we engage private property owners who seemingly have little or no interest in redeveloping blighted properties? What incentives can leverage investment/sale of properties that are owned outright?

3. The Growth Incentive Zone (GIZ), originally approved in 2007, requires extension. Based on planning efforts since 2007, a modification to the GIZ may be beneficial to the town in terms of redirecting regulatory incentives to a specific location or in a different manner than originally considered. What modifications to the Growth Incentive Zone should be sought?

4. What outreach or marketing can the Town do to attract investors?

5. How do we best utilize public property located on Route 28 to leverage private investment along the Route 28 Corridor?

Assets and Opportunities

Yarmouth is home to over a dozen salt and freshwater beaches, and also offers a wealth of other outdoor recreational activities such as golfing, fishing, walking, and biking. The numerous amusements include the Cape Cod Inflatable Park, the Dennis-Yarmouth Red Sox, and the Pirate's Cove Mini-Golf, and combined with the historical attractions such as Capt. Bangs Hallet House Museum, the Judah Baker Windmill, and the Baxter Grist Mill, make the Town an ideal family-friendly tourist destination. Yarmouth is easily accessible to visitors, with two traffic exits off Route 6 as well as the CapeFLYER, the weekend rail service that travels from South Station in Boston.

A) The Focus Area

Former W. Yarmouth Drive-In Site

The 22-acre site was acquired by the Town in 1985 and was originally envisioned as a marina, but that use was deemed financially infeasible by 2013. The current project being evaluated for cost and feasibility would feature open space and a walkway along the Parker's River, as well as a potential boardwalk across the marsh to Seagull Beach. The redevelopment would include amenities such as a kayak launch, artist/food shanties, walking trails, public restrooms, and parking, with later phases potentially expanding to include use as an arts and entertainment venue. There is also an upweller nursery (shellfish seeding facility) located on the property.

Any type of redevelopment would need to include a substantial replacement of the topsoil, as it was noted during the site visit that much of the former parking area is covered in weather-worn pieces of glass. The project is also facing opposition from local groups who object to any form of development on the site, citing a need for preservation of natural resources and concerns over increased traffic congestion.

Parkers River Bridge

Located adjacent to the former drive-in site and across the road from the new Whydah Pirate Museum and Captain Parker's restaurant, the Parker's River Bridge project will replace the current 18' bridge with a 30' span. The ecological restoration project will improve tidal flows and restore the ecological health of the upper Parker's River estuary. This enhanced tidal flow will also help to restore the salt marshes and wetlands and reduce the amount of nitrogen in the upper reaches of the river. Working in conjunction with MassDOT, the Town will also increase the size of the sidewalks and install bike lanes. Design and permitting for this project is currently underway with construction planned to begin in the fall of 2018.

Cape Cod Rail Trail (CCRT)

The 22-mile trail follows 19th-century rail lines from Dennis to Wellfleet, with connections to the National Seashore, Nickerson State Park, and the Audubon Society's Wellfleet Bay Wildlife Sanctuary. The trail runs through the diverse landscape of beaches, salt marshes, pine forests, and cranberry bogs, and is a popular destination for families and recreational bicyclists.

The CCRT is being extended from Dennis through Yarmouth and into Barnstable in three phases. The first phase, completed in the Fall of 2017, runs from North Main Street to Peter Homer Park where there is an existing section of bike path that extends to the west. The second phase – extending the trail from North Main Street to the Bass River, is expected to be completed in the Summer of 2018. Once completed, travel on the rail trail between Yarmouth and Wellfleet will be possible. Phase III, which will run from Yarmouth to Mary Dunn Road in Barnstable, is currently in design mode, with construction slated to begin in 2019. It also worth noting that the CCRT intersects with the commercial district in Yarmouth, at Station Avenue, just off Exit 8 on Route 6. This is only the second connection with a commercial area along the 22-mile trail (the other being in Brewster), which could create an additional hospitality opportunity for the Town of Yarmouth.

Whydah Pirate Museum

Formerly home to the Zooquarium and the Cape Cod Aqua Circus, the Whydah Pirate Museum is home to a large collection of artifacts from the pirate ship Whydah, including a life-size replica of the original vessel. Owner Barry Clifford says he is exploring the possibility of expanding the museum to include an 18th century pirate village along the lines of Plimoth Plantation, with an educational component tied to the broader maritime history of Yarmouth. The museum is open year-round.

Great Island Block

Realignment of the Winslow Gray/South Sea/Route 28 intersection, as proposed in the 2013 Cape Cod Commission traffic report, could serve as a catalyst for the redevelopment of the deteriorated Great Island Block, located on the western end of the focus area. The property owner has indicated interest in redevelopment of this parcel, separate from any proposed traffic mitigation project.

B) An Engaged Business Community

As evidenced by the appearance and active participation of some of the Town's largest business owners at the stakeholders meeting – many of whom also operate businesses outside of the Town – there is a strong interest on the part of the business community to see Yarmouth's commercial district become re-invigorated.

C) Abundance of Small Commercial Lots

The focus area (and beyond) is populated by a number of smaller, underutilized lots. Those properties could potentially form the basis of a walkable village center in conjunction with other redevelopment efforts.

D) The Cultural Center of Cape Cod

Located in the South Yarmouth/Bass River Historic District, the Center offers a wide range of programming – from yoga, dance, music, and culinary arts classes to art openings and dance parties. In the last decade, the center has served as an arts and community center for over 200,000 people throughout the region, with over 200 events hosted. According to the assistant director, the center is as busy in February as in the summer, and could become the epicenter of a Cape-wide arts community, in conjunction with other redevelopment efforts.

Wydah Pirate Museum

Parker's River Bridge

Challenges

Yarmouth has a number of issues – some that affect much of Cape Cod, others specific to the Town. The seasonal nature of the region's economy, a pronounced shift in age demographics due to baby boomers retiring to second homes, young native-born residents moving off the Cape to pursue employment opportunities, and the overarching problem of wastewater management are challenges throughout the Cape, particularly the mid-and outer Cape. There are also local problems that the Town needs to address if it wants to revitalize its commercial district. As one stakeholder expressed, "We need to create some destinations so that we compete with the rest of the Cape and the country if we want to maintain our tourist/hospitality designation – because we're in danger of losing it."

A) Wastewater Issue

While wastewater treatment is an issue that many towns on the Cape are working on finding a solution to, it stands as the single largest impediment to development in Yarmouth. As was heard during the stakeholder discussions, developers are not going to pursue large-scale projects without a wastewater treatment system in place. Multiple stakeholders expressed frustration with the lack of action on a plan, specifically in reference to the 2011 proposal that did not move forward.

B) Perception of Town by Business Community

There was near universal agreement among business owners that the Town of Yarmouth (as well as the Cape Cod Commission) is not regarded as business-friendly. A lack of incentives for potential developers, difficulty with the permitting and licensing processes, zoning issues, and excessive regulations were all cited. A hotel representative expressed his frustration with having to renew 14 separate licenses and permits each spring. He stated that in some instances, the process for applying for one permit was contingent upon the issuance of a preceding permit or license, and is extraordinarily time consuming and costly.

The lack of a redevelopment authority for the Town (which had been recommended in a previous study) was also noted by stakeholders. It is worth noting however, that in spite of the challenges cited by the business owners, most stakeholders expressed a willingness to continue to work on the redevelopment of the commercial district and towards reestablishing Yarmouth as a premier tourist destination.

C) Floodplain

Much of the study area and many other potential commercial development parcels lie within the 100-year flood zone. While this does not mean that new development is either imprudent or impossible, it does add a significant additional wrinkle to the development analysis, design and execution process.

It was repeatedly noted that the flood risk in Yarmouth is not from upstream waters flooding down into the town for days or weeks as can occur along major rivers. Rather, it is from high-tide storm surge events associated with major storms and hurricanes. The latter flow in and back out much more quickly than the former.

D) Aging Population

Over one-third of the population of Yarmouth is over 65, with a significant portion of that number being made up of retirees living in second homes. It is also important to note that nearly one-third of the Town's seniors live below the economic security standard. According to stakeholders, it will be difficult to garner support from retirees for initiatives that would help to build the commercial base of the Town if it means raising taxes or increasing fees.

E) Voter Apathy/Resistance to Change

In addition to the aging population, stakeholders indicated that there was a general feeling of voter apathy in the Town, as evidenced by low turnout at town meetings. There is as also an activist segment of the population that resists change of any sort, according to stakeholders.

F) Insufficient Workforce Development

There is a dearth of professional workers in Yarmouth, with many choosing to work off-Cape. The Town also has an abundance of mal-employed residents (employees whose education exceeds the requirements of their jobs), as well as those who work multiple jobs to earn a living wage. Due in part to the seasonal nature of most local economies, the Cape historically receives comparatively little of the funds allocated for workforce development by the Commonwealth. The workforce situation is expected to worsen, as a recent report indicated that by 2030, there will be a 41 percent decline in workers on the Cape that have earned a bachelor's degree or higher.

G) Lack of Vision for Town Center/Commercial District

Although the Town is actively working on redevelopment of the commercial district, the feeling by the stakeholders is that Yarmouth lacks any kind of cohesive vision for improving the commercial district.

H) Declining Commercial Tax Base

As Yarmouth's retail/entertainment popularity has declined in recent years, the revenue generated from taxes on commercial businesses has declined significantly.

Recommendations

Panelists endorsed a number of existing plans being considered by the Town and proposed some new ideas that could bolster the existing tourism business.

A) Infrastructure Improvements

As has been stated in previous commissioned studies, the Town needs to invest in its own infrastructure in order to attract private development or to receive additional funding from state and federal agencies

Wastewater Treatment

The number one infrastructure issue is wastewater treatment, and the panel recommends that the Town aggressively pursue a plan of action. Without a wastewater management system, attracting large-scale development that could revitalize the Town will be extraordinarily difficult, if not impossible. Plans such as the proposed three-town solution with Harwich and Dennis recommended by consulting group CDM Smith should be strongly considered.

The panel also suggested examining smaller scale, green nitrogen attenuation alternatives to sewer systems that could provide a lower cost alternative and that may have a more immediate impact.

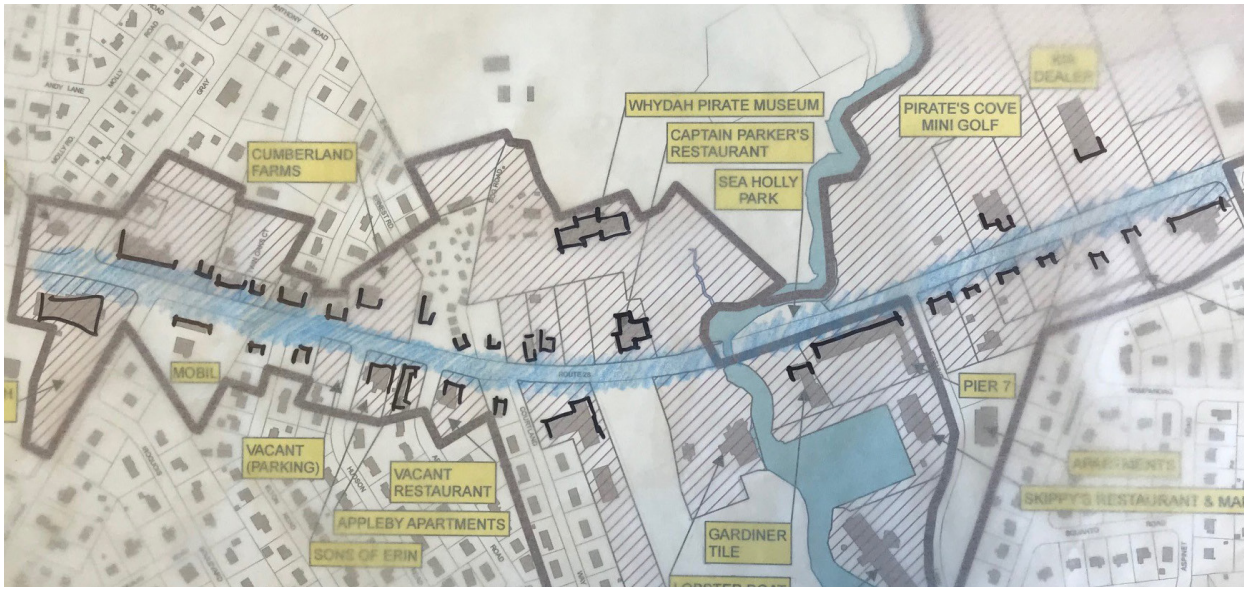
Streetscape

Creating a sense of place is critical to redeveloping the focus area into a destination for visitors. Because of the deep setbacks of the buildings along Route 28, there is an opportunity to use easements to create a significant shared use path that would include a bikeway, plantings, and sidewalks in the front yards of many of the commercial parcels. Such a plan could increase the bike- and walkability between the proposed redevelopment sites and also reduce automobile congestion. Future configuration of the roadway should also explore options that would significantly reduce the number of curb cuts.

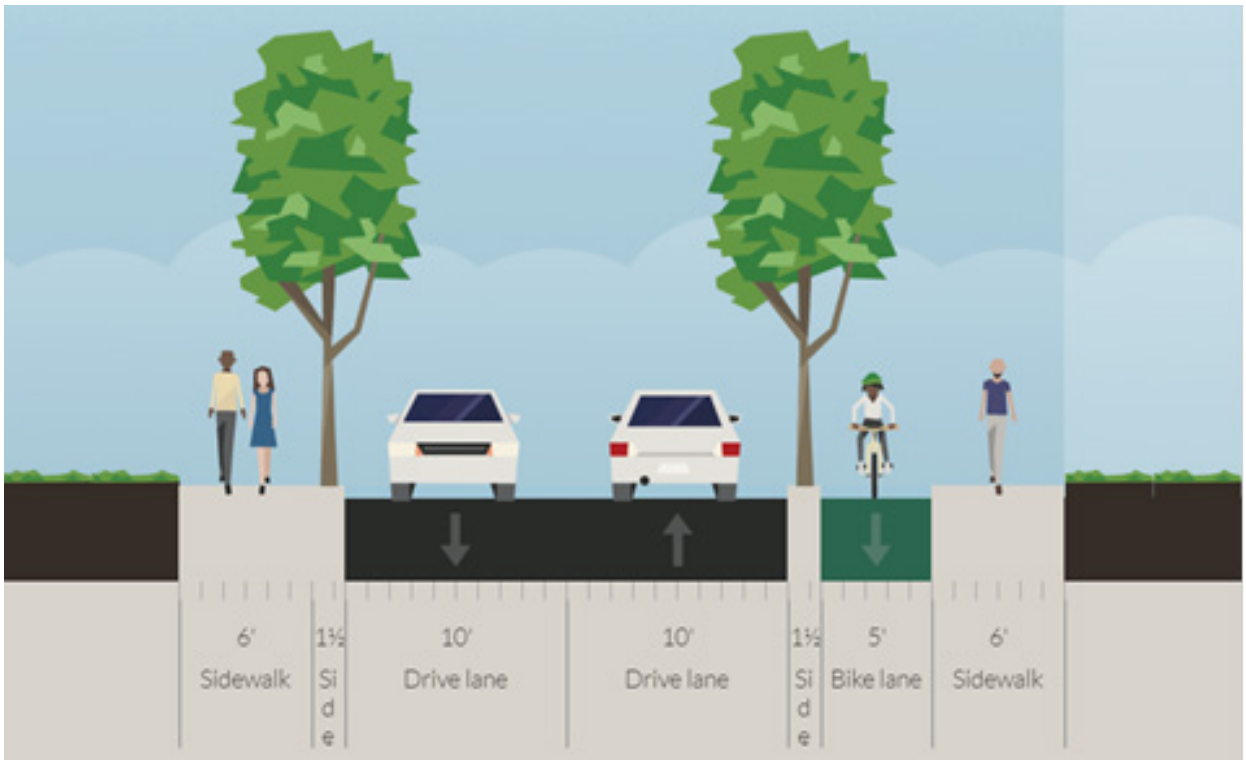
And although it is not practical to undertake a major re-invention of the streetscape until water and sewer upgrades have been substantially completed, the planning and design process should begin sooner rather than later. (See diagrams on page 16).

Shared Parking

Some of the existing commercial parcels are “over-parked” – with more pavement and spaces than they need on even the most active of summer days. In addition, there are potential locations for new shared parking on both publicly owned parcels. Further study should be given to shared parking schemes that would allow for the removal of some parking and curb cuts in front of every individual commercial parcel, while also preserving adequate customer parking in nearby shared lots.



Focus Area - Route 28 running through Yarmouth.



Proposed streetscape idea created by Panelists.

B) Develop North-South Parker's River Corridor

There is a large swath of Town-owned land that extends from Seagull Beach to Route 6 which encompasses a number of areas of ecological interest. During the stakeholder meetings, one property owner with familiarity of the terrain suggested that a nature walk along Parker's River and the cranberry bogs could be developed as a visitor attraction, using a series of underutilized natural paths that offer views of native plant and wildlife.

Expanding upon that idea, the panel determined that the Town of Yarmouth could create a bike path from the Cape Cod Rail Trail all the way through to Seagull Beach, with the new path serving as a destination for bicycle tourism. The CCRT intersects with the commercial district in Yarmouth, at Station Avenue, just off Exit 8 of Route 6. This is one of only two connections that the CCRT makes with a commercial area along the 22-mile trail (the other being in Orleans), thus creating another hospitality opportunity for the Town of Yarmouth.

This ecologically-based attraction could be one of the building blocks of a new "brand identity" that brings visitors to Yarmouth, augmenting the Town's traditional family-friendly attractions. The plan would require less capital expenditure than other redevelopment plans, as it would build upon existing natural assets. It would also not be dependent on the resolution of the wastewater issue.

Additionally, the Chamber of Commerce representative at the stakeholder meeting indicated that there would be solid support for such a strategy, based on the vast numbers of people coming into the visitor centers looking for hiking, biking and nature walks. Investigate ways to more fully participate in the Blue Economy to stimulate year-round economic growth.

Proposed area for a bike path from the Cape Cod Rail Trail all the way through to Seagull Beach.

C) Develop New Village Node at East/West Crossing

A walkable, bikeable Village area that incorporates the redeveloped drive-in (including centralized parking), the family-friendly attractions (Whydah's Pirate Museum, Pirate's Cove Mini-Golf, Captain Parker's Restaurant), and connects to the Cape Cod Rail Trail should be developed. There is one cautionary note, however. The focus area is located in a 100-year flood plain, which should be considered when developing any long-range plan.

Panelists came up with a drawing exemplifying the proposed path.

D) Develop the Drive-In Site as a Branding Centerpiece

The former drive-in site represents a prime opportunity to catalyze other redevelopment. The panel favors previous plans that would feature open space, a walkway along the Parker's River and a boardwalk to Seagull Beach, but also see it as an opportunity for branding the Town as well. The panel also advocates using the site as an event venue, but one that is mindful of the potential noise issues that could arise. Craft fairs, kite-flying festivals, a farmer's market, auto or boat shows, and even a temporary drive-in event may be preferable to rock concerts, for instance. Centralized parking for the focus area would also be part of any plan. The site could also become a venue for public art, as could much of the focus area.

There also exists an opportunity for eco/educational tourism at the site. There is an upweller nursery (shellfish seeding facility) on the edge of Parker's River that is used specifically for seeding that location. The upweller could be combined with eco-based educational sites such as a constructed wetland (that may be part of the Parker's River nitrogen attenuation programming) or a distributed wastewater pilot project.

E) Improve Efficiency of Town Government

During the stakeholder meetings, the business community clearly expressed their frustration with Yarmouth's permitting and licensing processes. It is recommended that the Town establish a staff position (possibly within the planning department) that focuses exclusively on permitting and licensing to streamline the processes.

Also, a permitting handbook should be developed to assist new businesses. The idea was originally developed by the Town of Yarmouth 30 years ago, and has since been incorporated by other Cape Towns. The panel also recommended developing a short (three-minute) promotional video that highlights the advantages to opening a business in the Town.

Funding Sources

Massachusetts Cultural Facilities Fund

MassDevelopment supports the arts with capital grants for the acquisition, design, renovation, and construction of cultural facilities. They also offer grants for development studies. Both MassDevelopment and the Massachusetts Cultural Council administer this fund.

Predevelopment Loans

MassDevelopment provides low interest rate loans up to $100,000 with deferred repayment terms to finance predevelopment real estate projects.

Commonwealth Places

Commonwealth Places provides a creative funding mechanism to advance community placemaking projects throughout Massachusetts. The statewide program will help fund place-based, community-driven projects – art installations, parks, bike trails, markets, and more – that revitalize downtowns and neighborhood commercial districts.

Public Infrastructure Financing

Tax-Exempt Bonds for Public Infrastructure

MassDevelopment issues tax-exempt bonds for improvements to roadways, sidewalks, parks, parking garages, bridges, tunnels, wharves, and a range of public facilities. Infrastructure programs that use this tax-exempt financing includes:

a) Infrastructure Investment Incentive Act (I-Cubed or I3)
b) District Improvement Financing (DIF)
c) Special assessments

Conclusions

The number one impediment to any significant redevelopment for the Town of Yarmouth is clearly the absence of a wastewater treatment facility – or even an actionable plan. There is virtually zero probability that any large-scale developers will invest in a community without wastewater treatment, and smaller businesses are reluctant to redevelop properties until a plan is in place. Although funding is obviously an issue, the Town must come up with a plan and aggressively follow through on it, whether it be the proposed three-town solution or an alternative strategy.

It also became clear during the stakeholder discussions that the Town is perceived by many as a difficult place to do business – whether it be an inefficient permitting and licensing process, a lack of incentives, or additional restrictions imposed by the Cape Cod Commission or Barnstable County. Whether real or imagined, the business community does not feel that the Town is responsive to either its needs or willing to consider possible concessions to investors who are exploring new development in the Town. Perhaps a summit with business owners, the Town, and the Cape Cod Commission could bring the issues into the open and generate solutions.

Based on conversations with stakeholders, there also appears to be a lack of desire by much of the populace to implement change. Whether it is the resistance from groups such as Save the Marsh or the significant segment of retirees now living in their second homes, there does not appear to be much willingness by voters to grow the Town's commercial sector.

On a positive note, the idea of developing a brand identity around the redeveloped drive-in and the focus area would appear to be a step in the right direction. Augmenting any new development with a strategy that incorporates the proposed Parker's River spur of the Cape Cod Rail Trail to run past the natural treasures found within the community could build upon that brand identity.