



REZONING KING STREET

Findings & Recommendations

Submitted to
CITY OF NORTHAMPTON
ZONING REVISIONS COMMITTEE &
PLANNING BOARD

By the
GREATER NORTHAMPTON CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
DENNIS BIDWELL, CHAIR
SUZANNE BECK, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

JUNE 10, 2010



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	p. 3
Zoning Recommendations At-a-Glance	p. 6
Developing our Recommendations	p. 11
Findings	p. 13
Recommendations	p. 16
<u>Appendices</u>	
Appendix A – List of Participants	p. 26
Appendix B – Detailed Findings	p. 27

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Greater Northampton Chamber of Commerce is pleased to bring forward recommendations for the rezoning of King Street that, we believe, will help create a softer, greener, more pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly King Street while helping spur new commercial investment and the increased property taxes that accompany such investment. We believe the King Street corridor can become an even more vital contributor to a Sustainable Northampton than it is today.



The Chamber has been concerned for some time about the physical appearance and under-developed nature of King Street and the many factors, including zoning, that have contributed to the King Street that most of us see every day. We therefore proposed to the City's Zoning Revisions Committee in November, 2009 that our Economic Development Committee undertake a process of outreach and study aimed at developing recommendations for changing the zoning now in effect for King Street ¹. That process has yielded the findings and recommendations we present here.

Our vision is that the role of upper King Street as a regional destination for everyday goods and services will expand to include medical offices, hotels and other business uses. We also foresee the day when the corridor's residential population will grow. We believe every stretch of the King Street Corridor can become inviting and convenient for pedestrians, bicycles and automobiles. We envision an attractively landscaped environment and robust commercial zone that will enhance the street's important role as a gateway to Northampton's vital Downtown.

Several **key themes** are woven through the recommendations we are presenting:

- King Street needs to have more flexible zoning in place that will allow property owners to respond to emerging opportunities as the economy gradually rebounds. Zoning changes are needed to create a climate conducive to investment, and to badly-needed increases in the City's commercial property tax base that will come with such investment.
- At the same time, King Street needs to become greener, softer, and more pedestrian and bicycle friendly. Some of this can be accomplished by setback and screening requirements in zoning. But the greening of King Street will also require publicly-funded investments in pedestrian amenities, traffic control, landscaping, etc.

Key Themes (cont.)

- King Street has now, and will have for some time in the future, several distinctive characters as one travels the length of the corridor. These different characters need to be recognized in different approaches to zoning at different spots along the corridor. One size does not fit all.
- An especially important part of the King Street Corridor is the automobile- and retail-oriented section to the north of the new Bike Path. This zone serves an important economic role in the City and the region, and generates substantial property tax revenue for the City. This vibrant economic zone should be appreciated for its vital role. In the future it should be enhanced and made more attractive, not denigrated and apologized for.
- A rezoning of King Street needs to be grounded in the economic and market realities of King Street’s lot sizes, existing development, infrastructure placement, and ownership patterns. Solutions possible for other parts of the country – where lots are more uniform in size and more “clean slate” in nature, where property ownership has been consolidated, where population growth patterns are more robust – are worthy of study, but may not necessarily fit the circumstances of Northampton.
- The Highway Business zoning in place since 2002 has been one of several factors that have contributed to some of the vacant lots along King Street today. Other factors have also undoubtedly been at play, e.g. aggressive pricing of some parcels, site-specific environmental and legal issues, a decline in the economy. But the role of zoning in impeding some development, and slowing what might have been a growth in the commercial property tax base along King Street, cannot be denied.



The Chamber’s vision for King Street is that zoning should recognize three distinct zones along the Corridor:

- A **Highway Business district** would run from the Bike Path north, characterized by an attractive planted buffer zone of at least 25’ between the street and buildings or landscaped parking. This zone would continue to thrive as a primarily retail zone, driven by high volumes of automobile traffic from the City and the region. A variety of City improvements would make this zone more appealing for bicycles and pedestrians. Property owners would have some flexibility in configuring buildings and parking behind the 25’ buffer zone, to fit with the various-sized lots in this section of King Street and to respond to emerging market opportunities. Buildings would be at least 20’ high at some point on their King Street façade (and could be much higher, if there were markets to support such development), but complete second floors would not be required.

Three distinct zones (cont.)

- **A General Business zone**, serving as a transitional zone between Highway Business to the north and Central Business in downtown, would run from Trumbull Street to the Bike Path, encompassing a range of small businesses and buildings of various sorts. These businesses abut vibrant residential neighborhoods whose health is an important part of a sustainable Northampton. Buildings would be set behind an 8' buffer consisting of benches, bike racks and plantings. Over time this section of King Street will continue to experience increased pedestrian traffic, provided pedestrian amenities such as crosswalks, benches and trash receptacles/pickup are provided. This area won't feel like downtown until such time as parking solutions serve the businesses in the area that now often rely on residential side street parking, to the growing consternation of residents.
- **A Central Business zone** would continue to run north along King Street to Trumbull Road. This increasingly-pedestrian oriented part of the King Street Corridor can accommodate modestly greater density over time, consistent with the character of downtown. Availability of parking (City lots, on-street, and privately-provided), a pedestrian-friendly nature and buried utilities characterize this zone, along with the trash pickup provided by the BID under contract to the City.



The accompanying tables provide highlights of the zoning changes we are proposing. The following report provides details on our findings, a more complete list of recommendations, and a summary of the seven-month process leading to this point.

Our recommendations, though detailed in some areas, are largely conceptual in nature. Great care will be required in the months ahead in translating the intent of these recommendations into the detailed words and graphics of a revised Zoning Ordinance.

¹ Starting in December, 2009, the Chamber has convened a monthly meeting of business and community stakeholders, land use and development professionals, lawyers, bankers, members of the Zoning Revisions Committee and the City Council, realtors, economic development professionals, and staff from the Office of Planning and Development and Office of Community and Economic Development. In addition, two widely advertised listening meetings were organized to gather additional input from residential and business owners up and down the King Street Corridor.

ZONING RECOMMENDATIONS AT-A-GLANCE

OVERALL, CITY-WIDE	Current Zoning	Chamber Recommendation	Rationale
Tables	There are separate tables for allowed uses, special permits, dimensional requirements, parking, landscaping, etc.	Consolidate these tables in order to provide one table for each zoning district with most of the essential information a property owner needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is one way the Zoning Ordinance could be made clearer and more user-friendly.
Allowed Uses	Many uses in many zoning districts require routinely-granted special permits, rather than being allowed by right.	Greatly reduce the uses requiring special permit, placing more emphasis on a streamlined site plan approval process.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage greater mix of uses allowed by right. • Reduce time spent on routine SP approvals. • Reduce subjectivity inherent in the SP process.
Site plan approval process	The Site Plan Approval process and requirements are described in 15 pages of confusing and dense text in the existing zoning ordinance.	Site plan approval requirements should be illustrated with clear graphics embedded in the zoning ordinance as applied to each zoning district.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visual illustrations of dimensional standards, lot layout, parking and traffic requirements, landscaping, etc. will increase the clarity of the requirements. • Clarity will provide greater predictability for property owners.

ZONING RECOMMENDATIONS AT-A-GLANCE

HIGHWAY BUSINESS	Current Zoning	Chamber Recommendation	Rationale
Zoning Boundary	Highway Business runs from Summer/North to River Valley Market	Highway Business should run from Bike Path to River Valley Market	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The automobile-oriented and retail-oriented character of King Street exists primarily north of the Bike Path.
Vegetative buffer zone	None required	25' buffer zone should be required, with plantings to create a continuous street element throughout HB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • King Street needs softening and greening to make it more pedestrian and bike friendly. • A more consistent and attractive streetscape will partially shield parked autos, making it less important whether parking is at front, rear or side.
Setback from the street	Retail buildings cannot be built more than 55' from the street (allowing at most one row of parked cars in front of buildings). Incentives are provided for building at the street.	Eliminate the 55' maximum setback. Property owners should have flexibility, beyond the 25' buffer, in placing buildings and parking, based on lot characteristics and market demand.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lot depths and sizes vary enormously. Property owners should have reasonable flexibility to configure buildings and parking to fit their lots, so long as it is buffered by a 25' planted zone. • If property owners wish to develop buildings right up to the buffer zone, this would be permitted.

HIGHWAY BUSINESS (cont.)	Current Zoning	Chamber Recommendation	Rationale
Minimum height/second story	20' minimum, with requirement to build out a full second story	20' minimum at some point along King Street façade, but with no requirement to build a second story	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The cost of building a second story isn't justified by obtainable rents, making it uneconomic. This was one of the reasons at least one proposed King St. development did not proceed. • As market conditions allow, the proposed zoning would allow 2, 3, or 4 story buildings, but not require them.
Maximum height	35' or 40' maximum allowed	65' maximum should be allowed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the market for upper story residential or office uses some day comes to this section of King Street, zoning should allow greater height to accommodate such potential demand.
Open space requirement	5% to 30%, depending on various factors	There should be no % open space requirement. Rather, landscaping and screening requirements should be made quite specific.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A fixed percentage requirement can lead to random patches of lawn that are there for no other reason than to comply with zoning. It would be better to specify what types of plantings and screening should go where.

ZONING RECOMMENDATIONS AT-A-GLANCE

GENERAL BUSINESS	Current Zoning	Chamber Recommendation	Rationale
Zoning Boundary	General Business runs from Trumbull to Summer/North (except URC on East side of King)	General Business should run from Trumbull to Bike Path (except URC on East side of King)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This section from Trumbull to Summer/North is gradually becoming more pedestrian-oriented. It does not have the large lots sizes and other characteristics of the Highway Business zone beyond the Bike Path.
Buffer zone/minimum front setback	None required	An 8' buffer zone should be required, with plantings, benches, bike racks, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A greener, softer edge to King Street will enhance pedestrian-friendliness over time. The treatment in front of Amazing.net is an example.
Minimum height	None	20' minimum at some point along King Street façade, but with no requirement to build a second story	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This section's transitional nature (from CB to HB) warrants having some part of the King St façade being at least 20'. The Northampton Coop Bank in Florence Center is a good prototype.
Open space requirement	5%	There should be no % open space requirement. Rather, landscaping and screening requirements should be made quite specific.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It would be better to specify what types of plantings and screening should go where.

ZONING RECOMMENDATIONS AT-A-GLANCE

CENTRAL BUSINESS	Current Zoning	Chamber Recommendation	Rationale
Zoning Boundary	Central Business goes north to Trumbull Road	No change recommended	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Until parking solutions north of Trumbull are devised to alleviate existing parking tensions between businesses and residents, and until more pedestrian amenities extend north of Trumbull, CB should not be extended north along King Street.
Maximum height	55'	65'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One way to accommodate greater density in downtown is to increase maximum heights allowed.
Minimum rear setback	6' to 30'	There should be no required rear setback, except for a 15' buffer strip bordering residential zones.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This would be another way to allow modest increases in density downtown.
Open space requirement	5%	There should be no % open space requirement. Rather, landscaping and screening requirements should be made quite specific.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It would be better to specify what types of plantings and screening should go where.

DEVELOPING OUR RECOMMENDATIONS NOVEMBER 2009 TO JUNE 2010

In November 2009, the Greater Northampton Chamber of Commerce proposed to the Zoning Revisions Committee (appointed by the Planning Board) an extensive outreach plan for a much needed public discussion of the future of King Street and its zoning, with the expectation that this process would lead to proposed recommendations to make changes to the zoning now in effect. (The current Highway Business zoning for King Street from Summer Street north was put in place by the City Council in 2002.). The outreach plan proposed by the Chamber was accepted by the Zoning Revisions Committee and the Chamber immediately began its work.



Beginning in December, 2009, the Chamber's Economic Development Committee convened a King Street Subcommittee, including a broad cross section of business and community stakeholders as well as land use and development professionals. The group included King Street property owners, realtors, lawyers and planners, and current and former City Council members. At one point or another five different members of the Zoning Revisions Committee participated in the meetings of this Chamber subcommittee. Wayne Feiden and Carolyn Misch of the City's Office of Planning and Development, as well as Teri Anderson, Office of Community and Economic Development, were regular participants in this subcommittee. The group was chaired by Dennis Bidwell, who chairs the Chamber's Economic Development Committee and is a member of the ZRC. (See Appendix A for a complete list of participants.)

The information collected through this process provided a vivid picture of current market conditions and the attributes of King Street that make it such an important commercial corridor. The result of the Chamber's study and analysis is a set of zoning recommendations that will, we believe, lead to an improved climate for investment on King Street, if implemented. This new zoning approach also contributes to a vision for King Street that has the flexibility to evolve as the market and environment change.

The Subcommittee's process has included:

1. Compiling and analyzing existing feasibility studies that estimate future demand for residential and commercial development in Northampton, including King Street.
2. Reviewing the ownership of parcels available for development and proposals that have been considered to date.

Subcommittee process (cont.)

3. Meeting with developers to learn about projects that moved forward and those that didn't under the current zoning.
4. Studying the current real estate market in Northampton and on King Street for tenants and developers
5. Understanding the requirements of lenders asked to finance commercial projects in today's market.
6. Investigating the terms related to location, lot configuration and parking that retail tenants and other users require.



The subcommittee also organized and broadly advertised two outreach meetings in the community.

The first, held February 24 at Potpourri Mall, was targeted at property owners, business owners and neighborhood residents between Trumbull Road and Finn Street. Residents on the streets adjacent to King Street were invited, as well as Edwards Square residents. Invitations were mailed and delivered door to door. About 20 people attended, representing a good cross section of the neighborhood. A major message from this listening session was the extent of conflict over parking issues felt by neighborhood residents who have experienced an increase in the numbers of employees from Downtown and King Street businesses parking on side streets.

The second outreach meeting was held May 17, also at Potpourri Mall. Property owners, business owners and neighborhood residents between Finn Street and River Valley Market were invited to this meeting. About 12 people attended, again representing a good mix of those invited. A major theme here was the desire of property owners for greater clarity, flexibility and infrastructure support as they consider their options for re-development of King Street properties.

The last meeting of the King Street Subcommittee (for now) was held on May 25, at which recommendations were debated and refined. The recommendations that emerged were discussed and endorsed by the Chamber's Economic Development Committee on May 28. Also, on May 27, the Chamber's Board of Directors gave its enthusiastic encouragement to this effort.

FINDINGS

Our process of outreach and study has led to a series of findings, which are summarized here and detailed in Appendix B. These findings in turn form the basis for the recommendations that follow.



City-wide Findings

There were a number of issues that emerged that apply to zoning throughout the City. The rezoning of King Street can be a good place to begin to make these changes.

1. Zoning is one of a number of factors that can combine to promote economic development.
2. Zoning by itself can't create a look and a feel for a section of a City.
3. The City's existing zoning ordinance needs a complete rewrite. But important fixes can be made in the meantime.
4. The City's existing zoning ordinance provides too little predictability, and too much subjectivity and City discretion, for property owners.
5. Zoning change shouldn't be tackled in isolation from badly needed publicly funded traffic, parking and pedestrian improvements.

King Street Findings Overall

1. The King Street Corridor is a vitally important commercial corridor, providing a range of goods and services to residents of the City and region.
2. The retail-oriented sections of King Street have the potential to generate considerably more property tax revenue for the City than is presently the case.
3. The Highway Business zoning in place since 2002 has been a factor contributing to the vacant lots along today's King Street. It's not the only factor, but it's an important one.



King Street Findings Overall (cont.)

4. The King Street corridor needs to be thought of as having different characters, and different zoning districts. One size doesn't fit all.
5. Parking conflicts, lack of pedestrian amenities, and traffic issues along King Street require attention by the City.
6. Developers are not likely, in the near future, to invest in substantial residential development along King Street.
7. The health and vibrancy of existing residential neighborhoods abutting King Street are a critically important part of a sustainable future for Northampton.

Findings – from Main Street to Trumbull Road

1. Central Business zoning works when there is an availability of parking and amenities for pedestrians. It is not appropriate to expand CB zoning district into areas where there is inadequate parking and insufficient pedestrian-friendly features.
2. The existing Central Business district can accommodate greater density.
3. Central Business zoning can accommodate a greater range of uses by right, without requiring special permits.
4. The likelihood of a new multi-modal train station, with structured parking, near downtown at some point in the future, will open up further opportunities for increased downtown development, some of which will eventually work its way up King Street.



Findings – from Trumbull Road to the Bike Path

1. The section of King Street from Trumbull to the Bike Path has a different character from downtown, and a different character from the automobile-oriented northern sections of King Street. Zoning should reflect these differences.
2. There are significant parking conflicts between the residential neighborhoods and businesses in this section of King Street.
3. This section of King Street is not particularly conducive to pedestrian traffic, and won't become so without public investments.
4. The Bike Path's King Street crossing will bring growing bicycle-oriented opportunities to this section of King Street.



Findings – from the Bike Path to River Valley Market

1. The character of this part of King Street is defined by high traffic counts, an automobile orientation, availability of parking, and businesses relying on visibility from the street.
2. This section of King Street serves an important regional retail need, and in doing so generates a significant amount of property tax revenue for the City of Northampton. These attributes should be celebrated and reinforced, not denigrated and wished away.
3. This section of the King Street corridor could be made much more visually attractive and much friendlier to pedestrians and bicycles.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall Recommendations

The City's entire Zoning Ordinance should be rewritten to promote greater clarity and usability. Recognizing that that is a costly undertaking that will take some time, we recommend a variety of changes to the Zoning Ordinance that should be made in the meantime, many of which would promote appropriate development and job creation in the City consistent with the objectives of the Sustainable Northampton comprehensive plan.

1. The Zoning Ordinance should make greater use of consolidated tables that combine in one place, district by district, information on uses, site plan approval, dimensions, landscaping, and parking that are now scattered throughout the code in separate tables.

Discussion: OPD staff should be commended for initiating this much-needed improvement in the way the various requirements of the Zoning Ordinance are displayed.

2. The Zoning Ordinance should generally move in the direction of allowing more uses by right, relying less and less on Special Permits. With some obvious limits, the City should recognize that evolving market forces and physical constraints will shape the mix of uses throughout much of the City, not overly prescriptive or proscriptive zoning.

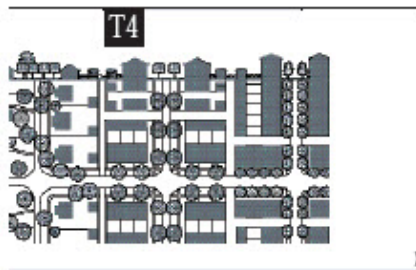
Discussion: There is broad agreement that the emphasis should be on the visual appearance of property development, not the uses inside the building (with some exceptions, of course.) This suggests more uses should be permitted by right, meaning avoidance, for the most part, of the time consumption and subjectivity of the Special Permit process. This would be consistent with movement in the direction of so-called Form-Based Zoning, something being considered by the Zoning Revisions Committee and the Planning Board.

3. The City needs a streamlined and clearer site plan approval process. The aim should be to create a Site Plan Manual for each zoning district, or better yet a set of site plan standards and graphics embodied in the Zoning Ordinance itself, that provides clear guidance on dimensional standards, parking and traffic requirements, permitted signage, lot layout, etc.,

Discussion: We are not proposing a Building Design Manual. Rather, we are proposing the use of clear visual illustrations of the Zoning Ordinance's requirements pertaining to *site plan*. This would be very helpful in furthering clarity and predictability of outcomes for prospective property developers.
(see example p. 17)

Example of Site Plan Diagrams recommended for Northampton's Zoning Code From Hampden Connecticut

FORM-BASED CODE GRAPHICS - T4



BUILDING HEIGHT	
Principal Building	2 stories min / 35' max
Outbuilding	20'-0" max.

BUILDING LOCATION	
Edgeyard	permitted
Sideryard	permitted
Rearyard	permitted
Courtyard	not permitted

SETBACKS - PRINCIPAL BUILDING	
(g1) Front Setback Principal	6 ft. min. 18 ft. max
(g2) Front Setback Secondary	6 ft. min. 18 ft. max
(g3) Side Setback	10 ft. min.
(g4) Rear Setback	15 ft. min.*
Frontage Bulldout	60% min at setback

SETBACKS - OUTBUILDING	
(h1) Front Setback	20 ft min. + bldg. setback
(h2) Side Setback	3ft at corner
(h3) Rear Setback	3 ft. min

PRIVATE FRONTAGES**	
Common Lawn	not permitted
Porch & Fence	permitted
Terrace or Light Court	permitted
Forecourt	permitted
Stoop	permitted
Shopfront & Awning	permitted
Gallery	permitted
Arcade	not permitted

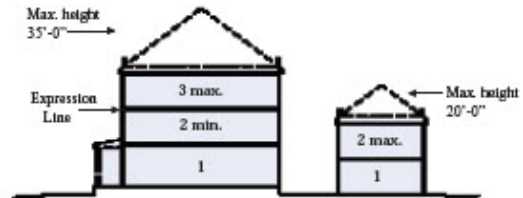
*or 15 ft. from center line of alley

**"N" stands for any Stories above those shown, up to the maximum. Refer to metrics for exact minimums and maximums

** Any protrusion into the Town or State right-of-way will require approval from the appropriate entity.

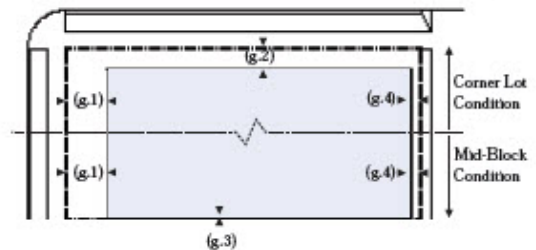
BUILDING HEIGHT

1. Building height shall be measured in number of feet.
2. Stories may not exceed 14 feet in height from finished floor to finished ceiling, *except for a first floor Commercial function which must be a minimum of 11 ft with a maximum of 25 ft.*
3. Buildings shall have an Expression Line on the exterior facade at the top of the 2nd story level.



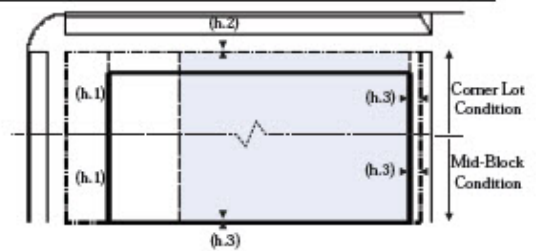
SETBACKS - PRINCIPAL BLDG

1. The facades and elevations of principal buildings shall be distanced from the lot lines as shown.
2. Facades shall be built along the principal frontage to the minimum specified width in the table.



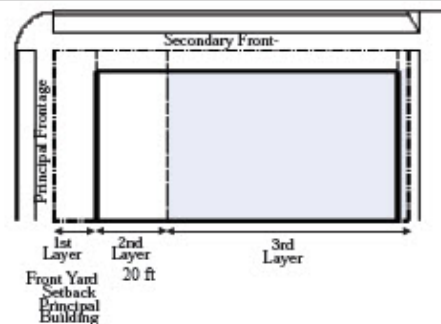
SETBACKS - OUTBUILDING

1. The elevations of the outbuilding shall be distanced from the lot lines as shown.



PARKING PLACEMENT

1. Covered and uncovered parking spaces may be provided within the 3rd layer.



TRASH PLACEMENT

1. Trash containers shall be stored within the 3rd layer. (See also Section 520.7.1)

King Street Recommendations

- A. Keep the existing northern boundary for Central Business at Trumbull Road, while making improvements to Central Business zoning aimed at providing greater flexibility and predictability for property owners.

1. Parking. Eliminate the existing requirement that one parking space per 500 sf of building be provided in Central Business, or that a payment of \$2000 per required space be paid into the City's parking mitigation fund.



Discussion: Central Business operates on the basis of publicly-provided parking and parking provided by employers and property owners. The current parking requirement triggers unnecessary site plan reviews, and should be eliminated.

2. Mix of uses. More uses should be permitted by right in CB, with only a very few uses (utility or telecommunications,) requiring a Special Permit. Uses now permissible only with Special Permit that should become allowed by right include: Hotels/Motels, medical center, artists' space/studio, R&D facilities, light manufacturing.

Discussion: The Central Business zone would be a good place to start using the new consolidated tables being developed by OPD staff.

3. Dimensional requirements. A variety of changes should be made to dimensional requirements in Central Business:

- a. Maximum building height should be increased to 65' (currently 55')

Discussion: If market conditions allow building to a greater height, this is a logical way to bring greater density to downtown.

- b. Rear setbacks should be decreased to 0 (currently 6' to 15'), except for parcels adjacent to residential districts.

Discussion: This too would promote greater density downtown.

- c. Eliminate open space requirements (now at 5%), and instead rely on clear landscaping/screening requirements.

Discussion: One example: Continue to require a vegetated buffer strip bordering residential zones, but reduce it from 30 feet to 15 feet.

King Street Recommendations – A. Keep the existing boundary of Central Business District at Trumbull Road (cont.)

4. Potential further expansion. There has been some discussion of extending CB to Finn Street. We view King St. north of Trumbull Road as having different characteristics than downtown, e.g. a narrow linear commercial corridor sandwiched between railroad tracks and strictly residential neighborhoods with smaller, detached buildings on separate lots south of Finn St., mostly set back from the sidewalk and served by on-site parking (and as we learned with undesirable spill over onto residential streets).

Discussion: The character of CB is defined by a broad district with multiple blocks of commercial and mixed uses, taller attached buildings primarily built to the sidewalk, public gathering spaces, the availability of public parking and by a comfortable and safe flow of pedestrians. The differences are substantial enough that King St. from Trumbull to the Bike Path is better suited to a transition zone connecting CB with HB.

- B. Expand and redefine the existing General Business zone to include areas now zoned HB between Trumbull Road and the Bike Path, excepting the Edward Square residential properties.

1. Vegetative buffer zone. All new development should require an 8' buffer zone between the property line and any buildings, to include plantings, benches, bike rack, etc.

Discussion: A greener, softer edge to lots in this zone would greatly increase pedestrian-friendliness and the overall appearance of the district and would be consistent with the setback of some existing buildings in the district. This can be done while still allowing for greater density in future years.



2. Parking. A range of parking solutions should be implemented to address the growing conflict between residents in neighborhoods adjoining the King Street corridor and business uses in this zone. Possibilities include: resident sticker parking; securing long-term business parking commitments from Elizabeth Ann Seton Catholic Church; extending two-hour parking meters up King Street, a public parking structure or lot.

Discussion: A City parking lot or parking garage serving this stretch of King Street is many years off as a solution due to limited resources. Nonetheless, it is recommended that the City seek additional public parking along this stretch of

King Street Recommendation B2 – Parking (cont.)

Discussion (cont.): King St. Such structured parking could emerge as part of a multi-modal station in the Registry lot but would only serve the lower portion of this segment. In the meantime, the lack of parking deters new commercial development and the interest of businesses in vacant existing commercial space and alternative solutions should be investigated.

3. Pedestrian-friendly streetscape. This transitional zone needs considerable government attention to make it more pedestrian and bicycle friendly, for the benefit of residents and businesses both. Specifically, this zone needs: more signaled cross walks; improved traffic and pedestrian flow at the North/Summer Street intersection; more landscaping and trees on public property; more trash and recycle barrels; implementing solutions to traffic concerns, possibly including some of the solutions identified in the King Street corridor plan.



Discussion: Multiple curb cuts and driveways make this area difficult to walk safely. Trash blowing into residential areas is a problem. Street crossings are a problem.

4. Mix of Uses. More uses should be permitted by right in GB, with only a very few uses requiring a Special Permit. Uses now permissible only with Special Permit that should become allowed by right include: Hotels/motels, movie/live theater, medical center, wholesale bakery/laundry/dry cleaning, artists' space/studio, R&D facilities, light manufacturing.

Discussion: The mix of allowed uses in GB should be very similar to the mix of uses allowed in CB.

5. Dimensional requirements. A variety of changes are recommended to dimensional requirements in General Business:

- a. Maximum building height should be maintained at 50'.

Discussion: If the economics worked for provision of parking as part of new structures, an increased building height would make sense.

- b. Minimum height should be 20', but there would be no requirement for a second story. (There is currently no minimum building height requirement for GB.)

Discussion: The visual attractiveness and consistency of a minimum 20' height makes sense for this zone.

King Street Recommendation B5 – Dimensional Requirements (cont.)

- c. Eliminate rear setbacks (now at 6') except where property abuts a residential zone. In those cases the minimum setback should be 15' (rather than the current 30') with multi-layered plantings and fencing requirements.

Discussion: This remains one of the things that differentiate this section of King Street from the buildings closer to downtown.

- d. Eliminate open space requirements, instead relying on landscaping/screening requirements. For example, a 15' buffer zone separating GB from parcels zoned URC should be required.

C. Redefine a Highway Business district that would run from the Bike Path to River Valley Market

- 1. Vegetative buffer zone. All new development should require a 25' vegetative buffer zone between the property line and any buildings. This zone would include plantings that could be varied in height and density depending on the visibility needs of the structures being developed. (Allowance should be made for some types of uses, e.g. automobile sales, where less dense plantings could allow for more visibility from the street.) Where parking abuts this buffer zone shrubbery to screen vehicles should be required.



Discussion: Several recent developments have begun to establish a visually appealing planted buffer zone between lanes of traffic and buildings. This trend should continue as a requirement of zoning. This increasingly consistent buffer zone will provide visual continuity to this section of the King Street Corridor, and allow for greater flexibility in building location on the lots lying behind the buffer.

Some existing buildings without such a buffer zone would continue in place perhaps for many years. But eventually the aim would be to achieve an attractive and uniform buffer zone along this section of King Street.

King Street Recommendation D. Redefine HB (cont.)

2. Lot Coverage Flexibility. Because of the effects of a 25' vegetative buffer zone, building configuration on these lots should be considered on a site-by-site basis, consistent with these objectives: safe circulation and access (automobile, bicycle, pedestrian) within the site and with adjacent sites; inclusion of cross easements.



Discussion: Most retail users will continue to require visible parking -- preferably in the front of their buildings, and/or along at the sides of their buildings. The current incentives for a setback of no more than 55' have contributed to the lack of development in this section of King Street in recent years.

The lot depths and other factors in this zone don't lend themselves to one lot coverage solution. Because visual continuity from one site to the next would be provided by the 25' vegetative buffer, flexibility should be allowed regarding placement of buildings and appropriately landscaped parking (see below).

3. Pedestrian-friendly and softer streetscape. Zoning changes should be accompanied by publicly funded improvements to make this section of King Street also more pedestrian friendly and visually attractive. This could include: more signaled cross walks; more landscaping and trees on public property; traffic calming measures; and the eventual burying of power lines.

Discussion: At the same time, large traffic volumes on this section of King Street – US Highways 5 and 10 – are a reality, and must be recognized for their potential to retail businesses.

4. Uses. More uses should be permitted by right in HB, including medical/office, manufacturing, upper floor residential, with only a very few uses (utility or telecommunications, junk cars, heavy public use, etc) not permitted or requiring a Special Permit.

Discussion: Preparedness for a rebound in the economy means establishing a greater range of uses as permissible in this zone.

King Street Recommendation D. Redefine HB (cont.)

5. Site Plan Approval process. The Highway Business zone would be an excellent place to “pilot” a streamlined Site Plan Approval Process, relying on a Site Plan Manual or a set of site plan standards within the ordinance that clearly illustrates dimensional standards, parking and traffic requirements, permitted signage, lot layout, etc.,



Discussion: Perhaps in this section of King Street more than anywhere else in the City, developers of property will want to know with clarity and predictability what the constraints will be in developing sites. The best way to provide this clarity is with a site plan guidelines with detailed drawings.

6. Dimensional requirements. A variety of changes should be made to dimensional requirements in Highway Business, in addition to requiring a 25' vegetative buffer zone:

- a. Maximum building height should be increased to 65' (currently 35' to 40'')

Discussion: If future market conditions allow – including market conditions for upper story residential – greater heights should also be permitted along this section of King Street.

- b. Minimum height should be 20', but there would be no requirement for a second story.

Discussion: The visual attractiveness and consistency of a minimum 20' height makes sense. But the second story requirement in the existing zoning should be removed, as it has been one of the factors contributing to at least one proposed development failing to proceed.

- c. Rear setbacks should be decreased to 6' (they are currently as much as 20') or 15' where they abut a residential zone (with the screening discussed for the Central Business District zone).

Discussion: A reduction of this setback requirement would provide greater site design flexibility.

King Street Recommendation D. Redefine HB (cont.)

- d. Eliminate open space requirements, instead relying on landscaping/screening requirements and the vegetative buffer zone requirement. Planted islands between parking lot bays should be required. Landscaping requirements should be reduced when parking is placed at the rear of buildings.

Discussion: Parking can be made more aesthetic along this section of King Street. Landscaping requirements should be less burdensome when onsite parking is in the rear of a building, as an incentive to placing the building closer to the street with parking in the rear.

- 7. Reuse of existing buildings. Eliminate the current requirement that any improvements with an estimated cost greater than 15% of the property's assessed value require coming into conformance with current zoning.

Discussion: An important component of sustainability is the reuse of existing building stock where feasible. Current HB zoning requirements are at odds with this objective.

- 8. Signage. Permit increased signage size for larger buildings.

**Illustration of Zoning Recommendations in Practice
King Street View South Highway Business Zone**



King Street View South – Before



King Street South - After

Rendered by Berkshire Design group

APPENDICIES

APPENDIX A

Participants in meetings of the King Street Subcommittee of the Economic Development Committee of the Greater Northampton Chamber of Commerce.

APPENDIX B

Detailed Findings

APPENDIX A

Members of the King Street Sub-committee participated in the process to develop the recommendations, approved by the Economic Development Committee

King Street Sub-Committee

Dennis Bidwell, Bidwell Advisors, **Chair**

Teri Anderson, City of Northampton

Suzanne Beck, The Chamber

Frank Colaccino, The Colvest Group

Andrew Crystal, O'Connell Development Group

Ed Etheredge, Etheredge & Steuer P.C.

Wayne Feiden, City of Northampton

Rick Feldman, Ostberg & Associates

Jack Finn, A2Z Science and Learning Store

Pat Goggins, Goggins Real Estate

Tom Growski, Doherty, Wallace, Pillsbury & Murphy P.C.

Joe Henefield, ServiceNet

Andrew Henson, Pearson Realty Corp.

Rick Klein, Berkshire Design Group

Peter LaPointe, The Colvest Group

Carolyn Misch, City of Northampton

David Narkewicz, Northampton City Council

Jim Nash, Careerworks

Bob Reckman

Joel Russell, *Chair*, Zoning Revisions Committee

Joel Spiro

Dillon Sussman, Zoning Revisions Committee

Mark Tanner, Bacon & Wilson P.C.

Joe Traczynski, Florence Savings Bank

The Chamber's Economic Development Committee

Teri Anderson, *City of Northampton*

Dennis Bidwell, *Bidwell Advisors, Chair*

Julie Cowan, *TD Bank*

Dawn Creighton, *Associated Industries of Massachusetts*

Andrew Crystal, *O'Connell Development Group*

Edward Etheredge, *Etheredge & Steuer, P.C.*

Rick Feldman, *Ostberg & Associates*

Daniel Felten, *Environmental Compliance Services, Inc.*

Laurie Fenlason, *Smith College*

Patrick Goggins, *Goggins Real Estate*

Mike Graney, *Economic Development Council of Western Mass*

Al Griggs, *A.L. Griggs*

Rich Horton, *Community Staffing*

Phil Korman, *Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture*

Don Lesser, *Pioneer Training*

Richard Madowitz, *The Hampshire Property Management Group, Inc.*

David Murphy, *The Murphys Realtors, Inc.*

David Narkewicz, *Northampton City Council*

Jim Nash, *CareerWorks*

Robert Reckman, *former member, Northampton City Council*

Joel Spiro

David Starr, *Berkshire Natural Healthy Vending*

Bud Stockwell, *Cornucopia*

Gene Talsky, *Valley Community Development Corporation*

Joseph Traczynski, *Florence Savings Bank*

APPENDIX B

Detailed findings

CITY-WIDE FINDINGS

1. Zoning is one of a number of factors that can combine to promote economic development.

Zoning by itself can't make economic development happen – create jobs, create investment in improved properties. But the right approach to zoning can combine with other factors -- a healthy economic climate, conducive infrastructure and other public improvements, availability of financing, dependable public services, and fair regulatory approaches -- to foster economic development.

Experience also tells us that the wrong zoning can thwart economic development by being too prescriptive (e.g. too many requirements regarding lot configuration, mandated density, open space percentages, etc.) or too proscriptive (e.g. arbitrarily prohibiting certain uses).

A reasonable expectation of zoning is that it put in place an understandable and predictable framework within which property developers, business owners and investors can respond with creativity and flexibility to opportunities provided by emerging markets as the economy rebounds over time.

2. Zoning by itself can't create a look and a feel for a section of a City.

The experience of the Highway Business zoning in place since 2002 tells us that zoning alone can't create multi-story buildings located at the street in an intensely automobile and retail-oriented corridor.

Neither would an extension of Central Business zoning, in and of itself, create a more pedestrian friendly and trash-free zone of brick buildings. Central Business zoning wouldn't disallow retail uses that some residents find bothersome because of their automobile traffic or trash generation.

3. The City's existing zoning ordinance needs a complete rewrite. But important fixes can be made in the meantime.

Over time the City's zoning ordinance, through countless amendments and refinements, has grown to be very complicated and anything but user-friendly. At some point in the near future, the City needs to bite the bullet and undertake a complete rewrite of its zoning ordinance. Such an undertaking would be costly and time-consuming. In the meantime, a variety of important fixes can be undertaken.

City Wide Findings (cont.)

4. The City's existing zoning ordinance provides too little predictability, and too much subjectivity and City discretion, for property owners.

A common refrain heard not just from would-be developers of large parcels but also from residential property owners seeking to make changes to their property (e.g. add an apartment, add a home office) is that one cannot easily read the zoning code and predict whether a proposed change will be approved or not. For large developments, this can mean an unwillingness to invest in necessary pre-development planning and engineering work.

Where too much discretion is left to the subjectivity of staff and boards, as opposed to specifying clearly-delineated standards and requirements, property owners and potential property owners will look to invest in other jurisdictions.

5. Zoning change shouldn't be tackled in isolation from badly needed publicly funded traffic, parking and pedestrian improvements.

KING STREET FINDINGS -- OVERALL

1. The King Street Corridor is a vitally important commercial corridor, providing a range of good s and services to residents of the City and region.

Upper King Street has become one of the significant destinations where City and regional residents shop for groceries, automobiles, auto parts, fast food and other goods and services. This identity has developed because the high traffic volumes and opportunities for business visibility along this section of the street are conducive to profitable retail activities. This identity isn't, and shouldn't, change in the near future.

2. The retail-oriented sections of King Street should be generating considerably more property tax revenue for the City than is presently the case.

The City's financial future cannot be predicated on expectations of increasing state revenues shared with localities. The City must recognize the need to control as much of its fiscal future as possible by developing the tax base from which property taxes are generated. The importance of commercial property growth can't be underestimated – currently 20% of the City's property taxes are generated by commercial property that constitutes only 6% of the City's land.

Upper King Street has all the attributes – except appropriate zoning – to contribute greater property taxes than it now does. In fact, the undeveloped lots on King Street represent a significant lost revenue opportunity for the City, year in and year out. Conservative estimates show that if just two now-undeveloped lots -- the former Honda lot, and the former Hill 'n Dale Mall had been developed, they would be contributing about \$250,000 a year in additional property taxes.

King Street Findings #2(cont.)

From 2002 – when the current Highway Business zoning went into place – until 2007 the regional economy was relatively healthy and financing for retail projects was relatively available. Yet these lots were not developed, costing the City \$250,000 a year in badly needed property tax revenue.

3. The Highway Business zoning in place since 2002 has been a factor contributing to the vacant lots along today's King Street. It's not the only factor, but it's an important one.

The King Street zoning in place since 2002 is one contributing factor – along with aggressive pricing of some parcels, economic trends, and site-specific issues -- to the fact that several key parcels on King Street remain undeveloped at this time. Other factors include: some property owners with inflated expectations as to land value, and pockets deep enough to sit on their undeveloped properties for extended periods of time; site-specific issues (including environmental challenges) that complicated development plans; legal challenges to certain proposed developments.

But the fact remains that some of the requirements of the Highway Business zoning that went into place – specifically the requirement to build out full second stories whether or not there was market demand for such space, and the very large financial incentives to provide parking only at the side and rear of buildings – were major contributing factors to the lack of development along upper King Street.

4. The King Street corridor should be thought of as having different characters, and different zoning districts. One size doesn't fit all.

From Main Street to Trumbull Road is currently zoned Central Business, and for good reason. It is predominantly commercial properties, some attached, some detached, mostly built close to the sidewalk. Public parking (lots and garage) are accessible, and on-street parking is provided. Many private properties provide their own parking.

From Trumbull Road to the Bike Path (now zoned as a mix of General Business, Highway Business, and Urban Residential C) is a mix of commercial and institutional buildings and residential buildings converted to business uses. The properties tend to be detached buildings, set back approximately 6' from the sidewalk. Parking is often provided on-site for the benefit of business tenants.

From the Bike Path to the River Valley Market (now zoned Highway Business), the properties tend to be larger lots (though of a wide variety of depths and sizes) with buildings set back from the street. The uses are exclusively commercial. All businesses provide their own on-site parking – no on-street parking exists.

King Street Findings (cont.)

5. Parking conflicts, lack of pedestrian amenities, and traffic issues along King Street require attention by the City.

Zoning alone can't make King Street greener and more pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly. Public investments are necessary to accomplish these things. These investments include implementation of solutions to parking conflicts along the King Street Corridor, as well as public investments to make the corridor more visually attractive/greener, and more pedestrian and bike friendly.

6. Developers are not likely, in the near future, to invest in substantial residential development along King Street.

Despite a great deal of national attention for its arts and recreational amenities, Northampton – even in periods of relative economic prosperity – has not attracted a great number of new residents on an annual basis. Market studies undertaken to project potential new home sales for Village Hill projected minimal numbers of new home/condominium sales absorbed in the market. And these studies were undertaken when markets and the economy generally were quite strong.

Land on King Street will remain priced at its highest and best use, which is generally retail, in order to take advantage of the high traffic volume along King Street. Residential development on such high-priced land might only make sense with multi-story high-end units. And for the foreseeable future, there just isn't likely to be that kind of demand in Northampton. And to the extent such demand emerges, there are many more better-located developable parcels – nearer to downtown – which would presumably be developed for residences before King Street parcels would become attractive for such development.

7. The health and vibrancy of existing residential neighborhoods abutting King Street are a critically important part of a sustainable future for Northampton.

Our conversations with neighborhood residents drove home the point that one of the things that will contribute to a sustainable Northampton is the existence of health residential neighborhoods near downtown, off of the King Street Corridor. Residents in these neighborhoods often walk or cycle to work and walk or cycle for their shopping. Retailers depend on the business from these neighborhoods.

Yet many of these residents report growing competition with employees of Downtown and King Street businesses for limited parking available in front of their homes.

Retention of these vibrant neighborhoods should be a priority in rethinking King Street zoning. Existing parking tensions should not be exacerbated by encouraging further growth of businesses without addressing the parking needs in this section of the King Street corridor.

FINDINGS – FROM MAIN STREET TO TRUMBULL ROAD

1. Central Business zoning works when there is an availability of parking and amenities for pedestrians. It's not appropriate to expand CB zoning district into areas where there is inadequate parking and insufficient pedestrian-friendly features.

Properties between Main Street and Trumbull Road along King Street are generally built close to the sidewalk. On-street public parking is generally available, as are spaces in City lots and the City parking garage. Many properties provide their own parking.

This section of King Street is also relatively friendly to pedestrians – crosswalks, trash receptacles, and regular trash pickup provided by the BID.

2. The existing Central Business district can accommodate greater density.

The location of some existing single story buildings – where CVS is located on Main Street, the TD Bank building – could be developed to greater densities when the economy will support such development.

Greater density can also be accommodated by reducing required setbacks, and by modestly increasing the maximum height allowed for Central Business buildings.

3. Central Business zoning can accommodate a greater range of uses by right, without requiring special permits.
4. The likelihood of a new multi-modal train station, with structured parking, near downtown at some point in the future, will open up further opportunities for increased downtown development, some of which will eventually work its way up King Street.

FINDINGS – FROM TRUMBULL ROAD TO THE BIKE PATH

1. The section of King Street from Trumbull to the Bike Path has a different character from downtown, and a different character from the automobile-oriented northern sections of King Street. Zoning should reflect these differences.

Properties in this section of the King Street corridor are mostly detached, shorter, linear in nature, with a mix of on-street and on-site parking. The East side of King Street is primarily commercial in this zone (except Edwards Square), and the West side is primarily residential with commercial properties lining King Street adjacent to residential neighborhood.

This is a mixed-use zone, with a range of small businesses primarily on King Street, as well as significant non-profit property owners, notably Elizabeth Ann Seton Catholic Church, ServiceNet and the Valley Community Development Corporation.

Findings for Trumbull Road to the Bike Path #1 (cont.)

Businesses report a growth in pedestrian traffic in this area, but habits are slow to change: many business customers and employees are reluctant to walk more than a block or two in this section of King Street.

Residents living in the increasingly stable neighborhoods adjacent to King Street are the customers who walk to patronize businesses for this section of King Street and downtown.

2. There are significant parking conflicts between the residential neighborhoods and businesses in this section of King Street.

Residents jockey for access to on-street parking during the day. Downtown employees use the on-street parking spaces to avoid paying for parking in the downtown area.

There is insufficient parking on many commercial parcels to accommodate employee and visitor parking needs. The lack of parking forces employees to park on adjacent residential streets and in spaces reserved for customers.

The lack of parking deters new commercial development and interest of businesses in vacant commercial space.

3. This section of King Street is not particularly conducive to pedestrian traffic, and won't become so without public investments.

Multiple curb cuts and driveways make it difficult to walk safely. Access between the adjacent residential neighborhoods and King Street could be improved.

There are few public conveniences to help support pedestrian needs. There is a significant amount of trash that accumulates in bushes and on the sidewalks, which blows into residential area, and no trash cans to dispose of litter. Crossing the street is very difficult; cars do not stop for pedestrian crossing as they do in the Downtown.

4. The Bike Path's King Street crossing will bring growing bicycle-oriented opportunities to this section of King Street.

FINDINGS – FROM THE BIKE PATH TO RIVER VALLEY MARKET

1. The character of this part of King Street is defined by high traffic counts, an automobile orientation, availability of parking, and businesses relying on visibility from the street.

Hundreds of vehicles per day travel this section of King Street. And retail businesses have traditionally situated themselves in ways that they are visible to the street and have visible and readily available parking. This makes this section of King Street a good place to sell cars, car parts, groceries and many household necessities.

Findings for the Highway Business section of King Street from the Bike Path to River Valley Market (cont.)

2. This section of King Street serves an important regional retail need, and in doing so generates a great deal of property tax revenue for the City of Northampton. These attributes should be celebrated and reinforced, not denigrated and wished away.
3. This section of the King Street corridor could be made much more visually attractive and much friendlier to pedestrians and bicycles.

There is widespread agreement that no matter how automobile and retail-oriented King Street will be in the future, it could be greatly enhanced by efforts to soften and “green” its image. Some of this can come through the requirements of zoning, but much of it will come through public investments in traffic and pedestrian improvements, the eventual burying of utilities, etc. These changes can be made in ways that further enhance the retail strengths of this zone.