

**DOVER PLANNING BOARD WORKSHOP
MINUTES OF MEETING
MAY 20, 1997**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Martin Smith, Anthony McManus, Reuben Hull, Brian Preston, Charles Maglaras, Ron Cole, Kathy Taylor, Mike Bobinsky

MEMBERS ABSENT: Paul Beecher, Otis Perry, Dennis Ciotti

STAFF PRESENT: Steven Stancel, Planning Director and Jacqueline Freeman, Recording Secretary

Chairman Cole brought the meeting to order at 7:05 PM.

Steve Stancel stated that last November a joint workshop was held with the Planning Board, City Council, DIDA to go over Task I. Steve stated Russ Thibeault, Applied Economic Research, covered labor force characteristics and trends including wages, poverty and working class poor characteristics, Community patterns, and start-up business enterprises. He added that tonight Russ is going to be covering future demand for land in Dover and has several economic component projections to make. He said Russ will be back to discuss the supply of land in Dover including existing land uses, vacant land by current zoning category, recent land absorption trends and vacant land for development capability. He said by the end of June, we'll get to the final task of this section which is called the Tax Base Diversification Opportunity section. He said Russ will be looking at several different ways that Dover can continue to stabilize its tax base and rates through the future, covering such items as:

1. Tax increment financing, and whether the city should continue to play a strong roll as a real estate developer for industrial sites.
2. What the city can do to enhance its infrastructure to strengthen its performance in the regional retail.
3. Office markets and what the City can do to enhance the City's image through Economic Development activities.

Russ Thibeault stated he looks at the City the same as if it were a private developer. He said Dover's growth is structured more by forces outside of Dover within the Seacoast economy, than within Dover. He said it is how those fit together that will determine what kind of growth pressures Dover experiences and opportunities you have over the next decade. He said he thought Dover is very blessed because it has a very favorable regional setting and because of the following:

- ◆ All the major infrastructure has the capability to accommodate growth.
- ◆ Diversity that is very attractive in an economy that is life style oriented. He said today the best attribute you can have is a good life style and the Seacoast offers that. He said he got a call from

Money Magazine and he feels the Seacoast will come out once again very highly rated. The Seacoast is really the State's premier economic development theater.

- ♦ Successful entrepreneurs, such as Enterprise Park, Pease probably the #1 decommissioned base.
- ♦ Access to Boston 495/128 all of the support functions that accessibility provides.
- ♦ Pease demise has been absorbed by the economy
- ♦ Pease issues as far as privatization are closer to resolution
- ♦ Shipyard may stabilize

Forecast is for Strong Regional Growth.

Russ stated he believes that Dover is facing the following:

- ♦ The repeat of the recession is unlikely
- ♦ The Growth likely to follow the pattern after the 1985 - 1995 trend - Doesn't think it will grow as fast as the 1980's but not as slowly as the beginning of the 1990's
- ♦ The NH portion of the metropolitan area which runs from Seabrook to Portsmouth into Rochester and over around Exeter will add 24, 000 new jobs will add 16,500 new residents, will build 19,000 new housing units and retail sales will probably double.

He said this provides Dover with a lot of opportunities to structure its growth into the way that is best for Dover. He said that since the last Master Plan it shows that strategic planning pays great dividends. Russ said that in the earlier trend analysis, your taxes are similar or lower than other cities of the same size in the area.

Dover Has Emerged as a Major Player.

- ♦ Employment growth is keeping pace and exceeding a little bit of the region's employment growth
- ♦ The tax rate has stabilized and is now competitively attractive.
- ♦ Strategic planning has been sound - Enterprise Park, Sewage Treatment Plant, Riverfront enhancement.
- ♦ Major infrastructure has capacity for growth. Central to all region's growth generators, Pease, Portsmouth, Rochester, Durham, Newington.
- ♦ Offers widest range of housing opportunities in region - affordable housing, historic homes close to town, waterfront homes, newer condos, newer apartments, older apartments and tenement buildings

- ♦ The success of Enterprise Park and the downtown mills despite the recession are powerful indicators of the City's bright economic future - You've done a lot of good things at a time when it was very difficult to do good things.
- ♦ Dover has reached a more balanced mix of housing growth in recent years.

What Could the city's future hold if the Most Recent Trends Continue and the Region Grows as Anticipated.

He said the following is what could happen if the region grows as anticipated and your policies are not modified, if you just kind of take a passive approach.

- ♦ The City will add almost 5,000 new jobs to its base of 14,000, a 30% increase.
- ♦ Most growth - office & service sector
 - Manufacturers are doing more with fewer employees
 - City not major player in the growing regional retail market - Retailing showed a decline - City level has been eclipsed with places like Newington, Portsmouth, and maybe more recently Rochester probably because of site availability they have not marched into Dover.
- ♦ The population will rise from 26,000 to 29,000 and an average of about 300 new housing units per year will be built and retail sales will continue to slip relative to the region.

He stated that the only reason that you only accommodated 50 to 60 housing units a year is that in 1990, even before the bottom of the recession, when the census was done, almost 1 in 10 housing units in Dover was vacant. He said there was a huge inventory of unsold condos and single family homes. He said Dover began to recover in 1992 and at that time, we had a huge surplus of housing but today we have pretty much absorbed all of that. As employment grows it will result in new housing construction.

Russ Thibeault feels retail will continue to slip relative to the region and this is something we need to focus on.

What are the Strategic Implications of this Scenario?

Do we have enough land zoned appropriately and devices to pay for infrastructure such as impact fees are some of the issues that we face regarding land capability.

- ♦ The respite from residential growth is a thing of the past. The market will look to Dover to accommodate new residential growth. Dover needs to be sure it can afford it, that the overall residential mix is balanced and growth is in the right place. Don't think you can choke off residential growth. He doesn't think you end up with a balanced community. He said you end up with a community with a low tax rate but a social structure that probably doesn't let groups

of people like yourselves come together to deal with public policy issues. He thinks maybe it can work in very tiny towns but he said he doesn't think it can work in Cities. He is not convinced you can do it or that it is a good idea.

♦ Dover's role in the regional retail market needs careful thought

- this is the only sector in the city that is under performing the region
- can/should it compete with surrounding communities
- are there appropriate sites for retail - got to have sites and the sites have to be on major highways and have to probably be served with sewer and water - He said he doesn't believe that Dover has the sites right now. That is one of the reasons why you haven't seen the kind of retail growth that other communities have had. We need to look at that very carefully because in terms of location, accessibility to Somersworth, to particularly southern part of Rochester, to Durham, there is enough body count to support more retail that you have. Sales are leaking out of Dover and going into someone else's nonresidential tax base. It is certainly worth looking at.
- downtown is not unhealthy, it's attractive, there is a nice mix of employment and vitality but is under inventoried, undiscovered by many. What can be achieved downtown?
- Are you going to be Portsmouth II or Exeter II?

Mr. Thibeault said both Portsmouth and Exeter are healthy and have major differences. Portsmouth has a lot of cultural stuff, night life and Exeter has a downtown of the 50's and they are both successful. His opinion is that the downtown is under performing its potential. He said he thinks the river is the key right now as far as something that can be done. He said every downtown that is successful has parking problems. A spark to create vitality and the river and the proposed re-use of the river is the right spark.

He said he doesn't think you have the sites for a Wall-Mart right now, but maybe with Planning Board staff help you might find some. Office use looks like it will be big regionally and we need to make sure that your development controls, infrastructure and zoning are accommodated to the needs of large and small but especially large office users which will exert strong demands regionally. Office is almost identical in terms of valuation as high density industrial and there are more job opportunities in office use. He said he thinks Enterprise Park is probably the single most successful quasi-public industrial development in the State that he can think of.

Kathy Taylor said one complaint she gets very often is the traffic in the downtown. She stated she feels it should be incorporated in the plans for the downtown.

Steve Stancel stated he feels the traffic flows relatively easy. He said there have been analyses done to help that flow and the easiest method would be to replace existing traffic systems. Another more complicated solution is to continue two lanes south to Silver Street, which is a little more complicated because you would have to wipe out your on street parking in that corridor. He said an other solution is a possibility of an urban core bus transportation system.

Russ stated that downtown Dover is the crossroad of your arterial road system.

Ron Cole stated that the river and the downtown area are two of the crown jewels of the community. He wants to make Dover a destination instead of just a pass-through. He asked Russ about the possibility of a pedestrian mall, using a trolley system.

Russ stated that the riverfront will be very effective in changing the impression of what Dover is all about. He said that most Cities are getting rid of pedestrian malls. He said they died. He added that we are not a pedestrian society and more malls have been taken out than put in. Burlington is an exception to the rule, somewhat due to the University. He stated that he doubts that it could be done in Dover, maybe in Portsmouth.

Russ stated there is enough job growth in NH right now to support the same level of residential growth that we had in the mid 80's. He said the types of jobs would run the spectrum. Russ said if you have 11,000 housing units, you have 3,400 students. You've had school enrollment growth in Dover with almost no housing that's because of baby boomers' kids are now in school. Russ feels you should get about the 20% of the region's job growth and you should not be getting more than 20% of the residential growth.

Brian Preston asked about increasing of lot sizes.

Russ stated it doesn't slow down the rate of growth. It just means that a 5 acre lot sells for what a 1 acre lot used to.

Steve Stancel stated that developers are looking for multi-family sites. He said we have a UNH grad school class doing a survey of 200 new residences constructed between 1988 and today. We should get the results of that back in a couple of weeks.

Bob Lewis stated that he feels that the riverfront is in the wrong place, it is too stretched out geographically and asked if it will destroy upper square.

Russ stated that the City has an anchor in the pedestrian bridge and the riverwalk. Russ stated that the development will help upper square also. He stated that the riverfront, with activities, will bring people and wallets to Dover.

Reuben Hull asked about mixed use neighborhoods.

Russ stated the strongest example of mixed use is in Bedford, NH and they call it town center zoning. It was vacant land located on Rt. 3, and you could put anything you wanted there. He said the on-site parking requirements were relaxed as an incentive if you put a mixture of things in. He said the way they wrote the ordinance it was very generous to developers. It can make sense in some areas where a mixture of uses is viable in a market sense, but he said he doesn't think it can be done in a single family neighborhood. He said mix-use zoning is probably appropriate closer to a turnpike or an interchange area. But, he added that it is a myth to think that people are going to walk to work and to shopping.

Reuben Hull asked if Dover can support a Minor League Baseball Team?

Russ stated he does not know enough about that. Russ stated that San Francisco hot wired an old mill with all ISDN, T1 lines and converted it completely into home office accommodations for programmers, software development, people that are wired and did tremendously well with it. Russ stated he will look at this.

Russ stated schools are very important.

Chairman concluded the workshop at 8:30.