

Final Draft – 7/24/17

**Town of Ipswich
Economic Development Strategy
FY 2018 – FY2019 (Phase II)**



Department of Planning & Development

July 28, 2017

Town of Ipswich

Economic Development Strategy

FY2018 – FY2019 (Phase II)

I. Introduction

The *FY15-FY17 Economic Development Strategy* for the Town of Ipswich was accepted by the Town Manager in July of 2015 as the guidance document for the Town's economic development efforts for the period between July of 2015 and June of 2017. This current document, which will serve as the Town's *Economic Development Strategy for FY 2018 and FY2019 ("Strategy II")*, contains the same components as the initial *Strategy*: *Areas of Focus*, *Strategic Approach*, and *Objectives/Action Items*. The *Areas of Focus* and *Objectives* for *Strategy II* are identical to those established for FY16-17. The remaining components have been updated and/or modified for the FY18-FY19 time period, including a status report on each Action Item recommended in the initial *Strategy*. As before, *Strategy II* is informed by, and consistent with, the *Downtown Retail Assessment (2014)*, the *Central Business District Plan (2009)*, the *Town Character Statement (2004)*, and the *2003 Community Development Plan*.

II. Areas of Focus (same as for FY16-FY17 time period)

Strategy II focuses on the following areas:

A. Business Mix/Clusters

Having a good mix of industry, retail, office, and service uses is beneficial not only to the residents of a community but also to the health of the local economy. Equally important is to build upon existing or burgeoning business clusters in town, such as distilleries/breweries, restaurants, and antique/resale businesses, with a focus on the use of locally grown or produced goods.

B. Mixed use

Providing a mix of commercial and residential uses in one building, especially in the downtown, promotes activity during the evening hours and provides a built-in customer base.

C. Marketing

Promoting businesses and business districts, especially when promotional efforts complement each other, is a significant part of any successful economic development strategy.

D. Built Environment

Providing adequate and well-maintained public infrastructure for use by motorists, commuter rails users, pedestrians, and bicyclists, as well as directional signs to direct visitors and customers to places of interest and businesses, is a meaningful way for town government to facilitate the success of its commercial and industrial sector.

E. Business Strategies

Another way that local government can help business owners grow their businesses is by offering them technical assistance.

III. Strategic Approach

Strategy II is built upon the following components:

A. Development/Enhancement of Key Partnerships (Updated to include Downtown Roundtable)

The Department of Planning and Development, working cooperatively with the Recreation and Culture Department, has developed and will maintain relationships with the following entities as part of its economic development strategy:

- ***Ipswich Chamber of Commerce*** (nonprofit community-based group of individuals and organizations committed to improving Ipswich’s economic well-being)
- ***Ipswich Downtown Roundtable*** (community-based group of individuals and downtown business owners committed to improving the business climate in downtown Ipswich, with a specific focus on the area fronting on South Main Street)
- ***Ipswich Visitor Center*** (seasonal welcome center that provides information to visitors via volunteer guides, maps, brochures, and walking tours)
- ***Ipswich Partnership*** (nonprofit association formed in 1995 to foster the revitalization of the downtown and the surrounding town center)
- ***North Shore Chamber of Commerce*** (regional economic development organization which serves business and professional firms from every industry on the North Shore)
- ***Center for Economic Development & Sustainability at Salem State College*** (regional research center that provides economic development resources)
- ***Mass Office of Business Development*** (state agency whose mission is to strengthen the economy of and increase job growth throughout Massachusetts by assisting businesses seeking to expand or locate in the Commonwealth)

B. Communication with Business Community *(updated)*

To ensure that the Town’s economic development efforts satisfy the interests and expectations of the business community, the Planning Office maintains the following communication with the business community:

- 1) Posts “News Flashes” on the website and sends emails to business/property owners which provide information about goings on in the business community, economic development efforts, and other matters of interest, such as construction schedules for major infrastructure projects.
- 2) Holds periodic meetings with business owners, either individually or collectively, at times that are convenient to the business community. They include meeting with the Ipswich Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors on at least a semi-annual basis, and a meeting with the Downtown Roundtable on at least a quarterly basis.

C. Support of Economic Development Advocacy Group *(updated)*

The Economic Development Advocacy Group (“EDAG”), which was established by the town manager in the summer of 2015, is comprised of up to ten persons associated with the following sectors or organizations: local banking and realtor community; downtown merchants; economic development/ marketing professionals; Finance Committee; Historical Commission; and representatives of two major Ipswich employers, EBSCO and New England Biolabs. EDAG’s purpose continues to be threefold: (1) provide guidance to the Planning Director; (2) serve as advocates of economic development strategy; and (3) facilitate implementation of strategies and action items. Including its initial meeting in September of 2015, EDAG has met about 11 times to date.

IV. Objectives/Action Items

A. Objectives *(same as for FY16-FY17 time period)*

The objectives of ***Strategy II*** continue to be as follows:

- Focus business recruitment and retention efforts on businesses that strengthen existing and burgeoning business clusters in town.
- Align tourism activities/efforts with local businesses, both within and without the town center.

- Facilitate efforts by the business community to use social media and technology to promote and grow their businesses.
- Identify and solidify a sufficient mix of merchandise and service offerings in the downtown.
- Provide an organized system for directing visitors to points of interest in town
- Enhance private investment by expending public dollars to improve and upgrade roads and other public infrastructure, with an emphasis on enhancing accessibility for pedestrians and bicyclists.
- Ensure that local regulatory and permitting processes are clear and efficient, and are fairly and consistently implemented.

B. Action Items

To achieve the objectives identified above, the Planning Office, in collaboration with stakeholders and appropriate town officials, will undertake, or continue to work on, the following actions:

- 1. Develop design plans/implementation strategy for Hammatt Street lot reconfiguration.** Over the past year the Planning Office has worked with the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) on a use and capacity parking survey of the Hammatt Street Lot and the streets surrounding it. MAPC transportation planners also prepared a report assessing the challenges and necessary steps involved with the development and execution of a management plan for the Hammatt Street between the Town and other lot owners. The final report was completed in early June. The planning staff has begun work on some its recommended steps, in preparation for meeting with property owners this summer relative to layout and operational issues. The design team which developed the reconfiguration options will be involved in that process as needed. *(updated)*
- 2. Work with EBSCO on parking options that may involve public/private partnership.** EBSCO has developed a plan to add nearly 250 jobs within its existing downtown campus buildings, but is unable to provide sufficient parking for these new employees on land it owns. The Town and EBSCO are exploring a cooperative strategy as well as potential outside funding sources (including MassWorks) that could produce a result that significantly benefits both EBSCO and the Town. EBSCO estimates that it will likely outgrow its current parking capacity within three years. *(updated)*
- 3. Continue implementation of wayfinding sign program.** Last fall 22 wayfinding signs were installed at various locations in Ipswich, as phase I of the Town's comprehensive wayfinding sign program. Four were "welcome" signs, a few were "identity" signs, and the rest were "directional." Public reaction to the new signs has been very positive. After the new signs were installed, a number of existing signs were removed, and many more will be taken down coincident with future wayfinding sign installations. This past spring the Town awarded the Phase II contract to the Cape Ann Sign Company, which installed the Phase I signs. Installation of ten new wayfinding signs, including a digital community bulletin kiosk in front of the post office, is scheduled for summer of 2017. The May 2017 Town Meeting appropriated funds to implement the third phase of the overall way finding sign program. Those signs are slated for installation in the summer of 2018. *(updated)*
- 4. Identify and provide technical assistance to retail businesses.** Although the Town has not provided any direct assistance to businesses since it funded the retail consultations in December of 2014, it remains open to doing so if the opportunity presents. The Town did obtain, as noted in Action Item 1. above, technical assistance from MAPC to facilitate effort to increase the number and function of parking spaces in the Hammatt Street Lot. The Town applauds the Ipswich Chamber of Commerce for sponsoring a June 2017 information session for local business owners about using social media to grow their businesses, and encourages the continued efforts of businesses in this regard, including greater use of Facebook. *(updated)*

5. **Continue regular communication with business owners by email, phone, or in-person meetings.** This effort began in July of 2015, per Section III.B of this *Strategy*. Besides the described modes of communication, the Planning Director also spoke at several organized forums and at multiple meetings of the Downtown Roundtable. *(updated)*
6. **In conjunction with DPW, Cemetery and Parks, Police, and Recreation and Culture, manage design and construction of Downtown Riverwalk extension.** In 2016 the Town installed a pedestrian crossing to Middle Green and a connecting stone dust path to the Hall Haskell House; in 2017 a similar stone dust path will be extended along the north side of South Main Street easterly to the Elm Street Parking Lot, and possibly as far as the Heard House. If the State ultimately agrees to undertake street and sidewalk improvements to the South Main/Central Street per the Town's request, the crosswalk will be upgraded to a colored stamped asphalt treatment, and the path will be upgraded to a concrete sidewalk. With oversight from the Riverwalk Task Force, appointed by the Town Manager in summer 2016, work is underway on a southerly extension of the Riverwalk to the Farley Brook outfall, where a small river overlook will be created. The improvements will take place within an easement provided by EBSCO. If the Town can obtain an easement from abutting property, the Riverwalk will be extended even further to connect with Market Street. The design and some of the construction costs for these improvements will be funded by \$75,000 appropriated by Town Meeting about ten years ago. Once the designer provides a construction estimate, the Planning Office will request 2018 capital improvement funds to pay for construction costs that exceed the current appropriation. *(updated)*
7. **In conjunction with the business community and local partners identified in III.B above, develop and implement a marketing strategy and marketing materials.** On June 14, 2017, after much review and discussion over the past year, the EDAG approved a request for proposals for the marketing plan. A \$15,000 budget has been established for the first phase of this effort, and the funding sources have been identified. The current plan is to budget at least an additional \$15,000 in 2018 to begin implementation of the marketing plan. *(updated)*
8. **In conjunction with the business community, develop strategies for facilitating a Town/business partnership on continuing efforts to enhance the vitality of the town's business and industrial sector.** This effort is ongoing. Partly as a result of these cooperative efforts, two important initiatives will be undertaken by early summer of 2017: (1) establishment of a year-round, fully handicapped accessible bathroom at the Visitor Center, open seven days a week from early morning to late evening; and (2) installation of flower boxes at various businesses downtown. *(updated)*
9. **In conjunction with DPW, Utilities, Historical Commission, Planning Board, residents, and the historic preservation community, begin conceptual planning and exploration of grants and other funding resources for reconstruction of central High Street, including sidewalks.** High Street between Lord's Square and Wilcomb's Corner serves not only the historic Old North Burying Ground but also has more first period homes than any other street in Ipswich. Its potential as a major visitor destination, which the Town is working to achieve through the restoration of the burial ground and other efforts, is hampered by the poor condition of both the road and sidewalks. With the assistance of a consulting engineer, the DPW has recently completed an existing conditions plan, in preparation for developing a conceptual opportunities analysis for discussion among the stakeholders. *(updated)*
10. **In conjunction with Police and DPW, develop both a near and long-term improvement plan for improving the condition and enhancing the use of the Elm Street Public Parking Lot.** *(new)*

V. Priorities/Timetable

The priority and timetable for each of the action items described in Section IV are shown on the Gantt chart in Appendix A.