

# Draft Dracut Economic Development Strategy

## A. Summary of Economic Development Strategy (1996)

The Town of Dracut outlined its previous economic development strategies in the Dracut Economic Development Strategy in 1996.

### Goals

The following five goals were developed to provide a framework for guiding Dracut's future economic development efforts:

- 1. Strengthen the Town's existing commercial/retail base in order to provide residents with more convenient access to needed goods and services, create part time and entry-level jobs for young people and fill existing building vacancies.**
- 2. Maintain and increase a variety of job opportunities within the Town to match the diverse skill levels and needs of the resident labor force, including low and moderate income workers.**
- 3. Encourage Dracut employers to form a local business organization in order to build a stronger working partnership with Town government on economic development issues;**
- 4. Pursue resources to enable local firms and residents to develop, diversify and enhance job skills, and**
- 5. Support regional efforts to develop cooperative marketing, training, financing and other business development programs that might be accessed by Dracut businesses and/or augment local economic development initiatives.**

### Actions, objectives and recommendations

In order to achieve the above goals, the Economic Development Strategy sets out ten strategy objectives and associated recommendations, under three broad categories of action, as summarized below:

1. Build long term organizational capacity to sustain an economic development effort
  - 1.1. *Create a permanent economic development organization that includes broad-based representation.*
    - a) *Form the Dracut Economic Development Corporation/Local Partnership -a corporation with broad based representation*
    - b) *Hire a Community Development Coordinator to provide staff support to the Corporation and implement related economic development strategies*
    - c) *Maintain contacts with existing property owners, brokerage agencies and developers*

- d) *Maintain accurate listing information*
- e) *Coordinate joint marketing/promotional campaigns*
- f) *Externally market Dracut to industries that are not presently being targeted by industrial park owners*
- g) *Consider "optioning" one or more privately owned sites in order to preserve land resources for a "high impact" employer*
- h) *Establish working relationships with the ownership of the Town's two local mill complexes*
- i) *Provide a point of contact for participating in regional economic development initiatives*
- j) *Provide policy recommendations to Town Government*
- k) *Pursue outside funding support for implementation*

1.2. *Encourage local businesses to organize to promote the community.*

- a) *Explore options for organizing Dracut businesses under the umbrella of the Greater Lowell Chamber of Commerce*
- b) *Consider an independent local organization, i.e. a local Chamber of Commerce or Board of Trade as an alternative*
- c) *Use the vehicle of The Partnership to support/advocate the creation of a business organization*
- d) *Allocate staff time to support member recruitment*
- e) *Long term, seek to establish a business organization with an aggressive work program and physical office presence in Dracut*

1.3. *Establish and maintain routine communication with local employers.*

- a) *Establish a formalized business visitation program or business retention team.*

2. Plan for long range infrastructure improvements and support other local and regional initiatives that help make local employers and workers more competitive:

2.1. *Initiate long range plans to extend sewer into I-1 Zones.*

- a) *Periodically survey industrial property owners to determine interest in joint financing of infrastructure extensions along Rt. 113*
- b) *Investigate the Town's eligibility for outside funding assistance*
- c) *Include sewer extensions within the Town's capital improvements planning process.*

2.2. *Encourage local and regional economic development promotion, financing, data sources and capacity building.*

- a) *Encourage the Greater Lowell Chamber of Commerce or other entity to produce a regional marketing brochure and campaign*

- b) *Support NMCOG's efforts to improve collection and delivery of economic development data*
  - c) *Support creation of a regional loan pool, venture capital fund or similar financing vehicles that could be accessed by local companies.*
- 2.3. *Support efforts by local companies and residents to access job training.*
- a) *Identify available job training providers in the region and make these services known to Dracut companies and residents*
  - b) *Refer qualified Dracut companies to appropriate providers*
  - c) *Support local and regional efforts to secure school-to-work and welfare-to-work training funds for local residents*
  - d) *Encourage the Regional Employment Board to increase outreach efforts to local companies and residents, particularly the self-employed*
- 2.4. *Work to attract a retail anchor and undertake other activities to stabilize Dracut's retail base.*
- a) *Support efforts on the part of the Town's existing major supermarket to expand*
  - b) *Advocate the formation of a local business organization as outlined in recommendation*
  - c) *Encourage owners of local shopping centers to consider reconfiguring those properties to accommodate larger anchor tenants*
  - d) *Encourage retailers to undertake joint marketing initiatives, establish unified store hours and other measures to foster increased retention of consumer spending within the local economy*
3. Adjust zoning flexibility, streamline procedures and reduce the potential for future conflict in the local regulatory and permitting process
- 3.1. *Increase the Town's land use and permitting management capacity.*
- a) *Consider hiring a Town Planner to manage permitting coordination*
  - b) *Absent of a full-time staffing commitment, consider allocating to the Community Development Coordinator, responsibility for coordinating non-residential permit applications.*
- 3.2. *Educate the public concerning the Town's regulatory process.*
- a) *Draft clear policy statements to guide Planning Board Officials and the public concerning the purposes of the site plan review and permitting process*
  - b) *Use these policy guidelines to educate the public concerning the limitations of Board discretion in controversial permitting matters*
- 3.3. *Consider zoning changes and other measures to facilitate future investments in the Town's mill complexes.*

- a) *Consider adoption of a more flexible industrial overlay district which permits a broader range of uses and more flexible dimensional controls than the Town's I-1 District*
- b) *Specifically encourage mill owners and tenants to participate in future joint marketing and business retention efforts to be conducted by the Dracut Partnership*
- c) *Closely monitor the activities of the Brownfields Advisory Committee and other ongoing State initiatives to encourage redevelopment of urban industrial properties*
- d) *Periodically review code enforcement practices to make sure enforcement promotes rather than discourages investment*
- e) *Actively participate in any future effort to sell or redevelop mill these properties by offering appropriate incentives*

## **B. Summary of Dracut Master Plan (1999)**

The Dracut Master Plan, 1999 contains a series of economic development goals and recommendations in order to encourage desired commercial and industrial development outcomes and attract prospective businesses.

### **Goals**

The following goals evolved from the community survey, neighborhood meetings, public forums and other community input:

- 1. *Attract environmentally acceptable businesses and industries to the town which will help to maintain the quality of life through providing real estate tax income, employment, entrepreneurial opportunities and convenient goods and services.***
- 2. *Enhance the unique role, character, and scale of commercial areas within the town including retail, service, and industrial uses.***
- 3. *Encourage the viable reuse of the older mill properties in the Navy Yard and Collinsville neighborhoods.***
- 4. *Coordinate vehicular traffic, pedestrian traffic and parking in commercial areas so that they function in an optimal manner.***
- 5. *Maintain high standards of design and maintenance in existing and new commercial developments.***
- 6. *Maintain and increase a variety of job opportunities within the town to match the diverse skill levels and needs of the resident labor force, including low and moderate income workers.***
- 7. *Encourage Dracut employers to form a local business organization in order to build a stronger working partnership with Town government on economic development issues.***

- 8. Pursue resources to enable local firms and residents to develop, diversify and enhance job skills.**
- 9. Support regional efforts to develop cooperative marketing, training, financing and other business development programs that might be accessed by Dracut businesses and/or augment local economic development initiatives.**
- 10. Build long term organizational capacity to sustain an economic development effort.**
- 11. Plan for long range infrastructure improvements and support other local and regional initiatives that help make local employers and workers more competitive.**
- 12. Streamline procedures and reduce the potential for future conflict in the local regulatory and permitting process.**

### **Recommendations**

The Master Plan also includes a number of economic development recommendations summarized as follows:

#### 1. Location of Economic Activities

- a) *Avoid overzoning for commercial and industrial development and instead direct these uses into the selected areas.*
- b) *Concentrate large-scale commercial development mostly along the northern part of Route 38 and limit all other commercial areas to smaller-scale uses.*
- c) *Consider extending sewer service into the industrial areas.*

#### 2. Town Center

- a) *Strengthen the Town Center near the intersection of Routes 38 and 113 with a concentration of municipal uses, including:*
  - *Moderate-scale business and cultural uses, which are an important component of the Town Center to support the Town employees and visitors, although they may not form the defining character of the Town Center.*
  - *A cohesive Town Center design including landscaping, parking, traffic circulation, and other amenities.*

#### 3. Types of Uses

- a) *Seek to attract a broad range of commercial and industrial uses that provide employment opportunities and are compatible with the residential character of surrounding neighborhoods.*
- b) *Provide ample space for small scale retail uses that can provide specialty shopping and neighborhood convenience, rather than large scale uses,*

- c) *Light industrial uses appropriate for Dracut include non-polluting high tech, warehousing, light manufacturing, assembly, and research and development.*
- d) *Discourage transportation and distribution related uses.*
- e) *Based on the Economic Development Strategy, target the following industrial markets:*
  - *companies with specialized facility requirements that cannot be easily accommodated by the region's inventory of existing vacant space;*
  - *cost sensitive users that cannot afford the higher cost of new construction in communities closer to Route 128;*
  - *industries with low sewage disposal requirements; and*
  - *companies which may place value in Dracut's existing base of agricultural and extractive resources.*

#### 4. Mill Structures

- a) *Support the viable reuse of the historic mill structures at Collinsville and Navy Yard. Types of uses that might be appropriate for these structures, include office use or "incubator" space for smaller industrial businesses, or mixed commercial and residential use.*

#### 5. Organizational Capacity

- a) *Consider the need for an additional economic development entity to help landowners, developers and Town officials, and provide information and support to marketing efforts.*
- b) *Establish (or revive) an economic development organization in the town, such as an Industrial Commission/Economic Partnership, or expand the capacity of the Town Manager's office to focus on economic development issues.*

The Master Plan also reiterates the 1996 Economic Development Strategy's recommendations regarding business advocacy and marketing and development activities as follows:

#### Business Advocacy

- *Serve as the Town's contact with State, neighboring local and possible future regional economic development organizations/initiatives.*
- *Provide policy recommendations to the Board of Selectmen.*
- *Pursue outside funding support for local economic development initiatives.*
- *Advocate the formation of a local Chamber of Commerce, Board of Trade or similar private business organization in Dracut.*

#### Marketing and development activities

- *Maintain an updated contact list of major industrial/commercial property owners in Dracut, particularly those which are known to be actively marketing land or buildings.*

- *Encourage all interested property owners to provide the Town with updated, active property listing information, including names of current marketing representatives.*
- *Establish early working relationships with other significant land owners who are not actively marketing sites at present, but may represent longer range opportunities.*
- *Encourage property owners to financially participate in a joint venture to produce professionally prepared marketing/community information materials.*
- *Target marketing initiatives to the “desired” industry groups described above.*
- *Gain control of an industrial site in order to augment marketing efforts.*
- *Form a local rapid response team.*
- *Create the capacity to offer financing assistance to local businesses.*
- *Establish contact with the ownership of the Towns two mill complexes.*