



# Northern Middlesex Council of Governments

## MEMORANDUM

To: Dracut Economic Development Committee  
From: Jay Donovan, Assistant Director *JJD*  
Subject: Economic Development Visioning Session Results  
Date: November 20, 2013

A Multi-Disciplinary  
Regional Planning

Agency Serving:

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Beverly A. Woods  
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As part of the work plan for the Dracut Economic Development Strategy, the Northern Middlesex Council of Governments (NMCOG) worked with the Dracut Economic Development Committee to host two Economic Development Visioning Sessions – one for the public and one for the business community– at Harmony Hall during the month of October. The purpose of these Visioning Sessions was to provide an overview of the project, summarize previous economic development strategies developed for Dracut, outline the timeline for the completion of this project, describe the Table of Contents for the document, and then receive public input through the use of a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) Analysis exercise. The results of the SWOT exercise will be used to provide the “grassroots” input into the development of the Dracut Economic Development Strategy so that it reflects the economic development needs of the Town of Dracut.

The Public Visioning Session was held on October 24, 2013 and attracted eight (8) participants. NMCOG staff led the SWOT Analysis exercise, which provided an opportunity for the attendees to voice their opinions on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats associated with economic development in Dracut. NMCOG staff recorded their thoughts, opinions and ideas on large sheets of paper, and after the discussion, participants were given an opportunity to indicate their priorities by placing colored dots next to each idea on the sheets of paper. For this exercise, red dots (4 points) indicated their first priority, green dots (3 points) indicated their second priority, blue dots (2 points) indicated their third priority and yellow dots (1 point) indicated their fourth priority. Based upon the point totals for each idea, the top five priorities for the Public Visioning Session for each category were as follows:



SWOT participants rank their priorities at the Public Visioning Session.

### **Strengths**

- Water and Sewer Infrastructure
- Affordable housing
- Opportunities for growth and redevelopment
- Cultural amenities (e.g. UMass Lowell and Middlesex Community College)
- Locally grown produce and farming (tie)
- Between two major airports (tie)

### **Weaknesses**

- Lack of defined priorities
- Poor roads
- Sales tax - border community
- Lack of access to a major highway
- Lack of trust in government (tie)
- Lack of time to get involved/go to meetings (tie)

### **Opportunities**

- Vacant industrial buildings - redevelopment
- Brox site and land along Merrimack River
- Re-invest in Brownfield sites
- Farms as tourist attractions
- Dracut has major natural gas lines, and moving forward natural gas is energy of the future. This could attract industries.

### **Threats**

- Lack of school funding
- Zero growth
- Charter schools drain from public schools
- Lack of funding for proper police and fire staffing
- Lack of young families coming to town because of the schools (tie)
- Opiate addiction (tie)

The complete results for the Public Visioning Session, as well as the agenda and sign in sheet are outlined in Attachment A. The results are summarized by category and the ideas are listed by total dots and points based upon the values assigned to each dot.

The Business Visioning Session, which was co-sponsored by the Greater Lowell Chamber of Commerce, was held on October 30, 2013 and also attracted eight (8) participants. In addition to hearing what the participants at the Public Visioning Session heard, this session provided an opportunity for businesses to share their opinions on what the Town of Dracut could do to help their businesses grow. For this session, NMCOG staff followed the same procedures for the SWOT Analysis exercise and the participants had an opportunity to prioritize the ideas identified through the placement of the colored dots on the large sheets. The top five priorities established by the participants for each category at the Business Visioning Session were as follows:

**Strengths**

- Tax rate for businesses
- Proximity to local universities
- Close to airports
- Newer municipal buildings and school buildings
- Access to cities - Boston, Lowell

**Weaknesses**

- School system funding
- Business community not proactive
- New Hampshire border (competition)
- No Dracut Common or Town Center
- Bylaws may work against businesses (tie)
- Negative Media

**Opportunities**

- Creation of Town Center
- Promote Dracut's positive qualities and community resources
- Chamber of Commerce
- Harness local spending to benefit school system and/or community
- Marketing the community (tie)
- Market schools through showcasing student success – build school pride (tie)
- Town and Chamber work together to promote businesses (e.g. promote buying locally) (tie)

**Threats**

- New Hampshire competition
- Positive images/attributes of surrounding communities may draw people/resources from Dracut
- Development impact on quality of life
- Perception of unemployment
- Perception of poor community

The complete results for the Business Visioning Session, as well as the agenda and sign in sheet are outlined in Attachment B. The results are summarized by category and the ideas are listed by total dots and points based upon the values assigned to each dot.

While these results do not represent a scientific sampling of local opinion, they do represent the views of the participants who attended the Visioning Sessions. The information developed through the SWOT session will be utilized as important input in the development of the Dracut Economic Development Strategy.

Please feel free to contact me directly at (978) 454-8021 x 16 or [jdonovan@nmcog.org](mailto:jdonovan@nmcog.org) if you have any questions or require additional information.

Attachment A

Public Visioning Session

**DRACUT ECONOMIC  
DEVELOPMENT  
VISIONING SESSION**

October 24, 2013  
7:00 - 9:00 p.m.  
Harmony Hall

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**AGENDA**

- I. Welcome and Introductions - Glen Edwards, Assistant Town Manager/Town Planner
- II. Overview of Dracut Economic Development Strategy - Jay Donovan, Assistant Director, Northern Middlesex Council of Governments (NMCOG)
- III. Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) Analysis - Jay Donovan

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**15-minute break for prioritizing input using color coding dots**  
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- IV. Next Steps and Future Opportunities for Public Input - Jay Donovan

## Public Visioning Session Results

### Strengths

Strengths	Priorities				Total	
	Red	Green	Blue	Yellow	Dots	Points
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th		
Water and Sewer Infrastructure	2	1	3	1	7	18
Affordable housing	2	2	1	0	5	16
Opportunities for growth and redevelopment	3	0	1	1	5	15
Cultural amenities (e.g. UMass Lowell and Middlesex Community College)	3	1	1	0	5	17
Locally grown produce - farming	2	1	1	0	4	13
Between two major airports	1	3	0	0	4	13
Community Pride	3	0	0	0	3	12
High quality medical care	1	1	2	0	4	11
State forest plus opportunities for recreation	1	1	1	1	4	10
Proximity to Boston (half hour)	1	2	0	0	3	10
Disposable income	1	2	0	0	3	10
Family community	2	0	0	0	2	8
Last community on 93 corridor with farmland	1	1	0	0	2	7
Borders on a large city	1	0	1	0	2	6
Quiet community	0	1	1	1	3	6
Open land	0	1	1	1	3	6
Generous business community	0	1	1	0	2	5
Diverse economic community	0	1	1	0	2	5
Business needs/opportunities	1	0	0	1	2	5
Natural Gas	0	1	1	0	2	5
Near average state income per family	0	1	1	0	2	5
Safe community	1	0	0	1	2	5
Single tax rate	1	0	0	0	1	4
High quality school system and dedicated staff	1	0	0	0	1	4
Active Sports (youth) program	1	0	0	0	1	4
Educated workforce	0	1	0	0	1	3
Historical society	0	0	1	0	1	2
Accessibility to major routes, including Routes 38, 110, 93 and 113	0	0	0	1	1	1
Public transportation: LRTA access	0	0	0	1	1	1
Newer public buildings	0	0	0	1	1	1
Tax free NH close by	0	0	0	0	0	0
Golf course	0	0	0	0	0	0
Churches	0	0	0	0	0	0

### Weaknesses

Weaknesses	Priorities				Total	
	Red	Green	Blue	Yellow	Dots	Points
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th		
Lack of defined priorities	3	1	0	0	4	15
Poor roads	2	0	1	0	3	10
Sales tax - border community	1	2	0	0	3	10
Lack of access to a major highway	2	0	0	1	3	9
Lack of trust in government	1	1	1	0	3	9
Lack of time to get involved/go to meetings	2	0	0	1	3	9
Lack of school resources	2	0	0	0	2	8
Need to educate people on how to be a member of town meeting (e.g. a class)	1	0	2	0	3	8
Lack of East/West road	0	2	1	0	3	8
Lack of community services (retail and business opportunities)	1	1	0	0	2	7
Hazardous sites in town are hard to redevelop	1	0	1	1	3	7
Lack of central area in the community - spread out	1	1	0	0	2	7
Operating budgets of municipal buildings	0	1	0	1	2	4
Lack of communication of town websites	1	0	0	0	1	4
Lack of collaboration among boards in town (e.g. tri-board meeting)	1	0	0	0	1	4
Anti-business sentiment/feeling	1	0	0	0	1	4
Lack of knowledge on knowing what to expect (reputation of town)	1	0	0	0	1	4
Perception that a group of developers has access to boards in town	1	0	0	0	1	4
Narrow streets - barriers to traffic on 113	0	1	0	0	1	3
Lack of retail center	0	1	0	0	1	3
No big industrial areas	0	0	1	0	1	2
Lack of interest in how town develops projects	0	0	1	0	1	2
Lack of understanding in what is being done in town	0	0	0	1	1	1
Lack of recognition from state for gateway towns along state borders	0	0	0	1	1	1
Lack of streamlined approval process for businesses - it is a cumbersome process	0	0	0	0	0	0
Lack of planning/funding/planning ahead (e.g. funds for town needs, such as the Master Plan)	0	0	0	0	0	0

### Opportunities

Opportunities	Priorities				Total	
	Red	Green	Blue	Yellow	Dots	Points
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th		
Vacant industrial buildings - redevelopment	3	1	1	0	5	17
Brox site and land along Merrimack River	2	2	0	0	4	14
Re-invest in Brownfield sites	1	2	1	0	4	12
Farms as tourist attractions	2	1	0	0	3	11
Dracut has major natural has lines, and moving forward natural gas is energy of the future. This could attract industries.	2	0	1	1	4	11
Wind and solar sites (there are some in Lowell - what about Dracut?)	1	0	2	0	3	8
UMass Lowell proximity - Expand opportunities for innovation	0	1	2	0	3	7
Locally grown foods - people from other towns come for local farms. Farms can be promoted/advertised outside of Dracut	1	1	0	0	2	7
Opportunity for oil pipeline from Dracut to ocean	0	0	3	0	3	6
Hydroelectric opportunities in Dracut	0	0	1	0	1	2
Waterfall along road - tourist attraction	0	0	0	1	1	1
Chipotle Restaurant	Comment from public forum on website					

### Threats

Threats	Priorities				Total	
	Red	Green	Blue	Yellow	Dots	Points
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th		
Lack of school funding	5	0	0	0	5	20
Zero growth	3	2	0	0	5	18
Charter schools drain from public schools	0	3	1	0	4	11
Lack of funding for proper police and fire staffing	2	1	0	0	3	11
Lack of young families coming to town because of the schools	1	1	0	1	3	8
Opiate addiction	0	2	1	0	3	8
Crime from Lowell coming to Dracut	0	0	0	1	1	1
Greater Lowell Vocational School is taking students away from Dracut Public Schools	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mental health issues in town impact economic opportunities	0	0	0	0	0	0



Northern Middlesex Council of Governments  
 Dracut  
 Economic Development  
 Visioning Session  
 October 24, 2013

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15.				

Attachment B

Business Visioning Session

**Dracut Economic Development  
Visioning Session  
For the Business Community**

October 30, 2013

7:30 - 9:00 a.m.

Harmony Hall

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**AGENDA**

- I. **Welcome and Introductions**  
Cathy Richardson, Chairperson, Economic Development Committee
  
- II. **Overview of Dracut Economic Development Strategy**  
Jay Donovan, Assistant Director, Northern Middlesex Council of Governments (NMCOG)
  
- III. **Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) Analysis**  
Jay Donovan  
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**15-minute break for prioritizing input using color coding dots**  
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- IV. **Next Steps and Future Opportunities for Public Input**  
Jay Donovan

## Business Visioning Session Results

### Strengths

Strengths	Priorities				Total	
	Red 1st	Green 2nd	Blue 3rd	Yellow 4th	Dots	Points
Tax rate for businesses	4	2	0	0	6	22
Proximity to local universities	5	0	0	0	5	20
Close to airports	4	1	0	0	5	19
Newer municipal buildings and school buildings	4	0	0	0	4	16
Access to cities - Boston, Lowell	4	0	0	0	4	16
Proximity of hospital	3	0	0	0	3	12
Availability of town staff	2	0	1	0	3	10
Dracut Access TV	1	1	1	0	3	9
Financial Resources	2	0	0	1	3	9
Access to healthcare facilities	2	0	0	0	2	8
Dracut Old Home Day	2	0	0	0	2	8
"You can't get there from here" encourages internal market	0	2	0	1	3	7
Employment Opportunities	1	1	0	0	2	7
Proximity to major highway (93)	1	1	0	0	2	7
Affordable Housing	0	1	0	2	3	5
Volunteerism/Community Support	0	1	0	1	2	4
Emergency Medical Services	1	0	0	0	1	4
Bedroom Community	1	0	0	0	1	4
Water/sewer	1	0	0	0	1	4
Primary care office in Dracut (Family Practice)	0	1	0	0	1	3
Room to grow - open land	0	1	0	0	1	3
Farming Community	0	0	1	0	1	2
Small business community	0	0	0	0	0	0

### Weaknesses

Weaknesses	Priorities				Total	
	Red	Green	Blue	Yellow	Dots	Points
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th		
School system funding	5	0	0	0	5	20
Business community not proactive	4	0	0	0	4	16
New Hampshire border (competition)	3	1	0	0	4	15
No Dracut Common or Town Center	2	0	0	0	2	8
Bylaws may work against businesses	2	1	0	0	3	11
Negative Media	2	1	0	0	3	11
"Not in my backyard" attitude about building and development	1	1	1	0	3	9
Lack of business awareness of local events	2	0	0	0	2	8
Economic Development Committee is not well known to the business community	2	0	0	0	2	8
Communication	1	1	0	0	2	7
Traffic (including bridge traffic)	1	1	0	0	2	7
Bridges may have isolating effect	1	1	0	0	2	7
Restrictions on signs and advertising in the bylaws	1	0	0	0	1	4
No "Main Street"	1	0	0	0	1	4
Lack of businesses networking with each other	0	1	0	0	1	3
Politics/leadership	0	1	0	0	1	3
Type of development and balance between residential and commercial development	0	1	0	0	1	3
High number of restaurants	0	0	0	0	0	0

## Opportunities

Opportunities	Priorities				Total	
	Red	Green	Blue	Yellow	Dots	Points
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th		
Creation of Town Center	4	1	0	0	5	19
Promote Dracut's positive qualities and community resources	4	0	0	0	4	16
Chamber of Commerce	3	0	0	0	3	12
Harness local spending to benefit school system and/or community	1	2	0	0	3	10
Marketing the community	2	0	0	0	2	8
Market school through showcasing student success - build school pride	2	0	0	0	2	8
Town and Chamber work together to promote businesses (e.g. promote buying locally)	2	0	0	0	2	8
Satellite location for healthcare facility	1	1	0	0	2	7
School system - promote to increase funding	1	1	0	0	2	7
Bring youth back to the community (possible in Dracut because of affordable housing)	1	1	0	0	2	7
Business Directory	1	1	0	0	2	7
Providing healthcare to NH residents	0	2	0	0	2	6
Connect with alumni/past students to promote success stories	0	2	0	0	2	6
Rotary Club	1	0	0	0	1	4
Business Network International (BNI)	1	0	0	0	1	4
Infrastructure (e.g. natural gas, water, sewer)	1	0	0	0	1	4
Improve the image	1	0	0	0	1	4
Healthcare merger - opportunity to recruit quality specialists	0	1	0	0	1	3
Increase healthcare opportunities in Dracut	0	0	0	0	0	0

### Threats

Threats	Priorities				Total	
	Red	Green	Blue	Yellow	Dots	Points
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th		
New Hampshire competition	3	2	0	0	5	18
Positive images/attributes of surrounding communities may draw people/resources from Dracut	3	0	1	0	4	14
Developments effect on quality of life	2	1	0	0	3	11
Perception of unemployment	0	3	0	0	3	9
Perception of poor community	2	0	0	0	2	8
Change in town management	1	0	1	0	2	6
Per capita income may create negative perception of poor community	0	2	0	0	2	6
Increased health insurance costs for municipal and business employees	1	0	0	0	1	4
Pension costs	0	1	0	0	1	3
Economy	0	1	0	0	1	3
Security	0	0	0	1	1	1



Northern Middlesex Council of Governments  
 Dracut Economic Development  
 Business Visioning Session  
 October 30, 2013

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