

Town of Ipswich

Economic Development Strategy

FY 2016 – FY2017



Department of Planning & Development
August 25, 2015

Ipswich Economic Development Strategy

FY 2016 – FY2017

I. Introduction

The *Ipswich Economic Development Strategy* (“*Strategy*”) is intended to serve as the guidance document for the Town of Ipswich’s economic development efforts over the next two fiscal years. The *Strategy* 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*.

There are three components to the *Strategy*:

- Areas of Focus
- Strategic Approach
- Objectives/Action Items

Each of these components, along with the priorities and timetable for the recommended actions, is described below.

II. Areas of Focus

The *Strategy* will focus 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, 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 a community’s business and industry.

E. Business Strategies

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

III. Strategic Approach

The *Strategy* will be built upon the following components:

A. Development/Enhancement of Key Partnerships

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

- ***Ipswich Chamber of Commerce*** (a nonprofit community-based group of individuals and organizations committed to improving Ipswich's economic well-being)
- ***Ipswich Visitor Center*** (a seasonal welcome center that provides information to visitors via volunteer guides, maps, brochures, and walking tours)
- ***Ipswich Partnership*** (a nonprofit association formed in 1995 to foster the revitalization of the downtown and the surrounding town center)
- ***North Shore Chamber of Commerce*** (a 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*** (a regional research center that provides economic development resources)
- ***Mass Office of Business Development*** (a 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

To ensure that the Town's economic development efforts satisfy the interests and expectations of the business community, the Planning Office will undertake and maintain the following communication with the business community:

- 1) Email "flashes" to all businesses in town which provides information about goings on in the business community, economic development efforts, and other matters of interest
- 2) Periodic meetings with business owners, either individually or collectively, at times convenient to the business community. This will likely include a meeting with the Ipswich Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors on a quarterly basis.

C. Establishment of Economic Development Advocacy Group

The Advocacy Group, to be appointed by the town manager, will be comprised of persons associated with the following sectors or organizations: local banking and realtor community; downtown merchants; economic development/marketing professionals; Board of Selectmen; Finance Committee; and representatives of two major Ipswich employers, EBSCO and New England Biolabs. The Advocacy Group will be comprised of no more than ten members, and is expected to meet on a quarterly basis. Their initial meeting will be held in September of 2015.

The purpose of the Economic Development Advocacy Group is threefold: (1) provide guidance to the Planning Director; (2) serve as advocates of economic development strategy; and (3) facilitate the implementation of strategies and recommended actions.

IV. Objectives/Action Items

A. Objectives

The objectives of the *Ipswich Economic Development Strategy* are 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, particularly in the business and industrial districts.
- 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 the following actions:

- 1. Develop design plans/implementation strategy for Hammatt Street lot reconfiguration.**
Town has engaged a design team which developed reconfiguration options and presented them to the several owners of the lot as well as the Selectmen and the general public. Next step is to work with designers on a refined design and attempt to achieve consensus with property owners on both layout and operational issues.
- 2. Work with EBSCO on parking options that may involve public/private partnership.**
EBSCO has found a way to add two to three hundred jobs within their existing downtown campus buildings, but is unable to supply the necessary parking on land that they control. The Town and EBSCO are exploring a cooperative strategy and outside funding that could produce a result that significantly benefits both EBSCO and the Town.
- 3. Implement Phase I of three phase wayfinding sign program and support Phase II development.** The 2015 Annual Town Meeting appropriated \$40,500 to fabricate and install signs identified in Phase I of the wayfinding sign program approved by the Selectmen in the fall of 2014. The signs, which will welcome visitors to town and direct them to points of interest, are expected to be installed by spring of 2016.

4. **Identify and provide technical assistance to downtown retail businesses.** For example, last year the Town hired the consulting firm *Retail Visioning* to host a workshop on best retail practices and then provide a free consultation to five downtown business owners. Each owner received a report with specific recommended actions, and as those are undertaken the Town will provide a small grant as an incentive. More assistance of this nature will be considered.
5. **Communicate with business owners on regular basis by email, phone, or in person meetings.** This initiative will begin in earnest in July of this year, as described in Section III.B. above. The communication will include alerts to businesses about financial assistance opportunities.
6. **In conjunction with DPW, Cemetery and Parks, Police, and Recreation and Culture, manage design and construction of Downtown Riverwalk extension.** Town Meeting appropriated \$75,000 several years ago to support the extension of the Riverwalk. EBSCO has provided an easement to support a southerly extension to the Farley Brook outfall, at which point a small pocket park is envisioned. The extension on the northerly side of the Ipswich River involves the installation of a pedestrian crossing to Memorial Green, and a connecting sidewalk to the Hall Haskell House and possibly the Heard House. The Riverwalk Committee is being reestablished this fall to oversee this effort.
7. **In conjunction with the business community and local partners identified in III.B above, develop and implement a marketing strategy and marketing materials.** Potential funding sources for this activity include the Planning Office's FY16 or FY17 operating budget as well as funds from the Commonwealth's Downtown Initiative Program, which funded the design of the wayfinding program described herein.
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 already underway, as illustrated by the communication effort described in Section III.B. above.
9. **In conjunction with DPW, Utilities, Historical Commission and Planning Board, explore 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 more first period homes than any other street in Ipswich. Its potential as a signification visitor destination, which the Town is working to accomplish through the restoration of the burial ground and other efforts, is hampered by the poor condition of both the road and the sidewalks.

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.

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