

# **Appendix A-2009**

## **WALPOLE MASTER PLAN AND E0 418 COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2004 - 2024 FIVE-YEAR UPDATE NOVEMBER 2009**

Master Plan Implementation Committee

## **Background**

The Town of Walpole Planning Board acknowledged the completion of this accompanying Walpole Master Plan/and EO 418 Community Development Plan for the period 2004 to 2024 in June 2004. The Board's formal vote to adopt the Plan was taken on September 9, 2004. The Master Plan Implementation Committee (MPIC) was established shortly after the completion of the Plan, in August 2004, pursuant to the Plan's recommendation to establish the MPIC as a steward to oversee the plan such that balance and coordination are achieved between the various elements of the plan, in order that Walpole develops as a viable community environmentally, recreationally, educationally, and commercially well into the 21st Century. In this role, the MPIC is an advisory body, functioning as a subcommittee of the Planning Board, and as an advisory body to town officials and the citizenry regarding pending and future projects as they pertain to implementation of the Master Plan per Master Plan goals and activities. The Town of Walpole Town Charter states that the Planning Board "...shall develop a master plan for the Town, and update it at no less than ten (10) year intervals". Further, the Charter and Bylaws of the MPIC state that "every five years, public meetings should be organized to review and modify the principles and priorities of the Master Plan, as well as implementation progress so that it remains a useful guide for town decision making". The intent for the Plan remains to guide the Town of Walpole, through its various agencies, with the process to carry out the elements contained within the Plan over the twenty-year time horizon spanning the period 2004 to 2024. This report serves to give the MPIC's five-year update on plan progress and plan activities that have been completed or partially completed, changes in implementation tools that have become available from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts over the past few years that may not have been available in 2004, and additional plan activities to be completed over the remaining 15-year period of the 20-year planning cycle. Its purpose is to allow the Planning Board, or the MPIC in conjunction with the Planning Board, as may be most appropriate, to conduct the referenced public meeting or meetings to present this report. The purpose of these public meetings is for obtaining further public input that will provide additional information for continual updates to the Master Plan. In this way the Plan will continue to remain a useful guide for town decision making, as it has been since its inception in 2004.

## **Master Plan Implementation Progress and the Update Process**

Under the guidance of the MPIC, through working with various Town agencies, several functional area objectives in economic development, housing, historical preservation, and land use that were listed as short term to mid term implementation activities in the Master Plan have been achieved over the past few years, for further implementation by various Town agencies. Further detail is given in the next section of this report.

The chief tool employed in the Five-Year Master Plan Update has been the *Task Table Sorted by Priority*. The Task Table is appended hereto and may be reviewed for further details on the status of the various Master Plan implementation activities. Thus, the Task Table has been used as a Master Plan Progress Log. It includes measures to implement the activities identified in the Plan as put forth when the plan was completed in 2004 and as updated. In April - May 2009, requests for updates to the Task Table were sent out to all of the municipal, state, and private

organizations that were listed in the original implementation tables as having various Master Plan implementation duties. By June 19, responses to the requests had been received from the MBTA, the Economic Development Officer, the Housing Authority, the Board of Selectmen, the Sewer & Water Department, the DPW/Engineering Department, the School Department, the Walpole Historical Society, the Trustees of Reservations, the Town Forest Committee, the Historical Commission, and the Walpole Housing Partnership. No further updates were received after that date, so the MPIC decided to use information received up to that date as the basis for implementation activities completed to date. This updated Task Table, which is appended to this report, should be referred to for further details beyond the narrative of this report.

The MPIC recommended, in reviewing the Task Table updates and through information presented in MPIC meetings, that the Master Plan Update will include references to the following implementation tools that were not available when the Plan was created in 2004:

- The Green Communities Act and green economic development opportunities that will be coming forward in the near future in general,
- Chapter 40R in relation to the Downtown in particular and the town overall in general, and
- Low Impact Development in general and in relation to specific changes to the Wetlands Protection Act and Stormwater Design requirements that were created in 2008,

all of which are of extreme importance and significance in planning activities at this point in time. These programs were not on in place when the Master Plan was completed in 2004, but nevertheless these programs have become important implementation tools for bringing about the Master Plan goals and objectives.

## **Key Master Plan Implementation Excerpts: Key Actions to Meet the Challenges and Achieve the Vision**

This section of this report includes the original key master plan implementation excerpts, found in the *Executive Summary* section of the Plan with the original *Recommendations* for implementation of these goals and objectives. This is followed by *Progress to date on these activities* in terms of key actions taken to meet the challenges and achieve the vision of the Master Plan as identified in the Plan, both those accomplished to date and those recommended to be continued over the next 15-year planning horizon.

### **Revitalize Walpole Center into a “smart growth” center with apartments or office space above shops, a new civic center for municipal facilities, improved streetscape and parking, and a new Town Green.**

Downtown Walpole has many assets: a commuter rail station, several viable “Main Street” style blocks, land for parking, civic land uses that anchor the downtown district, public assets that can be leveraged to make improvements, and underutilized properties that could be redeveloped. A new campus of public buildings with a Town Green and public investments such as streetscape

improvements can combine with new zoning and financing incentives to attract more private investment. Apartments over ground floor retail uses encourage more variety in goods and services by providing more customers. Because apartments have fewer bedrooms and therefore fewer schoolchildren, they are likely to create a net tax benefit to the Town.

***Recommendations:***

- Establish a Downtown Opportunity Overlay District with design guidelines for all new development and redevelopment.
- Plan for a municipal facilities campus or civic center for public safety departments, town offices, the library, a new senior center, a new Town Green, and a parking deck.
- Designate the Center for District Improvement Financing to fund public realm improvements such as streetscape amenities and new parking options.

***Progress to date on these activities includes the following:***

- The initiation of design guidelines and parking standards for the Central Business District (CBD) was implemented in March 2008 as part of the comprehensive rewrite of the Town's Zoning Bylaw. This effort has helped to bring about the process to further initiate a related recommendation in the Plan, the creation of a plan for a municipal facilities campus (Town Hall, Senior Center, Recreation Department, Police, Fire, and, notably, a new Public Library, which has been approved by the Town for construction within a new site at the corner of Stone Street and School Street). As an implementation component of that recommendation, the Town has previously submitted grant applications to the state for technical assistance to develop a conceptual design plan for public safety and pedestrian improvements. Unfortunately these applications were unsuccessful, but at this writing the Town is expected to apply again in the near future for the Downtown Initiative Grant. The implementation of the design plan will give the Town an opportunity to establish a common vision for the CBD and surrounding area that would help to provide a pedestrian link between downtown businesses, the MBTA station, and municipal uses, thereby providing a Smart Growth initiative for downtown Walpole.
- Because of stricter environmental regulations mandated by DEP in 2008, as well as ongoing provisions of the Wetlands Protection Act, the original “Downtown Campus” area may not necessarily have the land-carrying capacity to be able to be developed to the extent envisioned in 2004. Any design for the Downtown Campus must be mindful of these physical constraints.
- Subsequent studies since 2004 may have indicated that the best place for the Police Station, given the limitations of space in the downtown area around other municipal uses and needs of the Police Department, may not necessarily be within the “Downtown Campus” area envisioned in 2004.
- In 2007, the Town initiated a relationship with Walpole Woodworkers to establish four 40R overlay district areas within the downtown. Although these overlay areas were not established, the legal work done for Walpole Woodworkers by their attorney in concert with the Town, in the form of a draft bylaw, has been made available to the Town for further refinement by the Town when the Town determines when and how to use this implementation tool as a component of downtown revitalization.

- Since late 2008, the Board of Selectmen and the Economic Development Commission have been conducting joint meetings, along with subcommittee meetings, on downtown revitalization. Chapter 40R is viewed as a key component in this effort, and LID techniques will likely be a factor in revitalization/reconstruction of key downtown sites in this effort. Traditional state grant programs are likely to be an important implementation tool as well. Two members of the MPIC are members of this joint committee, and the Town Planner and Economic Development Officer regularly attend the committee meetings.
- The Town has submitted an American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, Stimulus Fund, Fire Station Construction Grant application, to build and equip a new central fire station, in the amount of approximately \$5,000,000, for the same location as the present fire station. No response has been received as of this writing.
- Because of economic conditions to date, DIF has not been considered as a viable downtown revitalization option.

**Target economic development efforts to create a higher-value nonresidential tax base and improve the appearance and traffic function of all business zones.**

From a transportation, environmental, and overall neighborhood impact point of view, the best location for office or industrial investment in Walpole is the area along the northern segment of Route 1 and between Route 1 and I-95. However, although most of it is zoned for business, there are also pockets of housing whose residents need to have their interests protected even if the Town decides to promote nonresidential development there. Throughout Walpole, as commercial and industrial establishments redevelop over time, new standards can promote higher value and more attractive development that minimizes impacts on nearby residents. Brownfield sites and the industrial park on Route 1A need long-term solutions that take into account remediation and infrastructure needs and traffic and environmental impacts.

***Recommendations:***

- Unlock the economic development potential of the Route 1/I-95 area by establishing a zoning overlay district to facilitate higher value office, R & D and retail business development while protecting the interests of current residential property owners.
- Establish design and development standards to improve design, reduce curb cuts, relocate parking to the side or rear, and provide sidewalks and plantings at the street edge.
- Complete assessment and remediation of brownfield sites for redevelopment and connect future uses of the Superfund site to downtown opportunities.

***Progress to date on these activities includes the following:***

- The 2004 Fall Town Meeting voted to establish the Highway Business District (HBD) for commercial properties adjacent to Route 1.
- In 2006, a Tax Increment Financing (TIF) agreement was used to assist in the expansion of Bayer (now Siemens) at their present Coney Street location.
- A Smart Growth Technical Assistance Grant for a joint planning project between Walpole and Norfolk was completed from 2006 – 2007. The grant provided the funding for a study of the Route 1A corridor between the Walpole Industrial Park and the neighboring industrial sites along Main Street and the former Caritas health care property in Norfolk for potential

impacts to growth in that area under various scenarios. This study is helping provide the basis for further study for the area, presently through a grant application that is being developed under the Economic Development Fund administered by DHCD.

- In 2007, the Town Meeting voted to opt into the state's 43D Expedited Permitting program. The Siemens and the Walpole Mall sites were designated as Expedited Permitting sites under that program. Further, a study funded by a grant received by the Town under that program identified additional sites to be designated as potential future Expedited Permitting sites. In that study, 13 potential sites were identified on the short list, and 2 of those 13 sites were presented as conceptual designs. The study was completed in 2008.
- A complete zoning bylaw rewrite has been adopted, and the process is further ongoing to provide a revised use schedule. This rewrite has and will continue to provide further clarity and efficiency necessary to properly enforce the bylaw and promote desired forms of development, and, thus, by extension, the accomplishment of Master Plan elements in Walpole. In the context of the discussion of the update to the zoning bylaw's use schedule, there has been much consideration given to the economic development opportunities to the town available through the further development of biotech.
- In 2009, the Town, through the Planning Board, drafted four Scopes of Service for the zoning bylaw amendments needed to create four potential zoning overlay districts for four sites in town based on the results of the 43D report and the Smart Growth Technical Assistance Grant report. These Scopes of Service are ready for application when funding sources for their study and implementation become available.
- Through Town Meeting and a Special Act of the Legislature, an Economic Development Industrial Corporation (EDIC) has been established to oversee the redevelopment of the town's Superfund site on South Street.
- Potential funding sources to be made available for the implementation of various economic development and planning activities identified in the Master Plan as updated are continually monitored and watched for. Opportunities for funding to the Town for green/environmentally friendly economic development under the Green Communities Act and ARRA/EECBG are currently under review as of this writing.

### **Manage housing development to preserve open space character and create affordable housing.**

Although there are relatively few large parcels of land that could be subdivided for housing, and some of them are not expected to be developed any time soon (such as golf course or county-owned parcels), it is important to put zoning frameworks into place so that any future development on these lands would require preserving blocks of open space. This can be done by requiring a sophisticated, cluster-type development model known as conservation subdivision. A requirement for 10% affordable housing in all housing developments, with incentives where appropriate, can help Walpole keep up with its Chapter 40B obligations, and a Walpole Housing Partnership can take on the responsibility for pursuing affordable housing opportunities compatible with Walpole's town character.

- Establish mandatory, by right conservation subdivision zoning (cluster) for all subdivision projects of 4 acres or more – with site plan review by the Planning Board.
- Meet state goals for permanent affordable housing (10% under Chapter 40B) by creating a permanent Walpole Housing Partnership to coordinate affordable housing strategies.

- Establish required affordable housing (inclusionary zoning) in all residential developments of 10 or more units, with incentives where appropriate.

***Progress to date on these activities includes the following:***

- The Affordable Housing Committee established in 1999 has transitioned to the Walpole Housing Partnership in 2008, whereby the Partnership will take an active role in the provision of affordable housing as desired by the Town.
- The MPIC facilitated the coordination of Town agencies and a consulting firm to create the Affordable Housing Production Plan that will guide the Town to its 10% affordable housing requirements pursuant to Chapter 40B of the General Laws as desired by the Town, which was approved by DHCD in February 2008. Town Administration with the Town Planner and members of the Walpole Housing Partnership have commenced implementation activities of the Affordable Housing Production Plan.
- The zoning bylaw rewrite adopted by the Town Meeting in March 2008 included a comprehensive revision to the Open Space Residential Development (OSRD) section of the zoning bylaw, whereby the 4-step design process generally employed in current OSRD developments is now in place, providing the means for better designed and more functional OSRD projects that provide more useful and valuable open spaces. The establishment of mandatory, by right conservation subdivision zoning (cluster) for all subdivision projects of 4 acres or more with site plan review by the Planning Board is not considered feasible at this time, based on studies during the Zoning Bylaw rewrite, and based on recent case law in this subject area. The Town continues to monitor developments of planning principles and case law in this subject area.
- As a result of the 2008 zoning bylaw rewrite, the bylaw now includes language that encourages incentive zoning in OSRD and Age Qualified Village (AQV) projects through a density bonus for the provision of affordable housing units.

***Protect natural and cultural resources in a Green Network and a Heritage Network.***

Environmental resources are interrelated systems. Protecting and restoring the integrity of Walpole's natural resources focused on the Town's rich river, stream and wetland systems in a Green Network will also provide robust opportunities for nature based recreation. Walpole has many historic buildings, sites and landscapes that are known to some residents but need much more widespread acknowledgment and recognition. They too can form a Heritage Network that tells the story of the town. Marked pedestrian and bicycle routes linking natural, historic and scenic destinations can create greater awareness of these town-wide and regional systems.

***Recommendations:***

- Identify private lands near wells and Zone II areas for purchase or management outreach.
- Extend greenways along the Neponset River, Mine Brook and School Meadow Brook with trails and canoe access where feasible.
- Inventory historic buildings and landscapes and explore official recognition and protection options such as a historic landmarks bylaw.

***Progress to date on these activities includes the following:***

- The Town Forest Committee has received a Town Forest Stewardship Grant to help them update their Town Forest Management Plan, thereby improving the greenways therein and providing improved management for the Town Forest, much of which is near Town wells, within DEP designated Zone 2 areas, and adjacent to School Meadow Brook.
- The update to the Open Space and Recreation Plan, for which the Open Space and Recreation Plan Committee has been convened and has been meeting for the past several months as of this writing, is under way. The update of that Plan is expected to include recommendations for the upgrading and multiple uses of the various open space and recreation facilities already established in Town, including trails.
- The Town has worked with WalkBoston to develop the brochures and routes for five fitness walks, 2 of which are centered around East Walpole and 3 of which are centered around downtown.
- The Town, through the Recreation Department, created the Athletic Fields Master Plan, which was completed in November 2008.
- A grant received from the Massachusetts Historical Commission has provided the means to implement the Historic Properties Survey and Inventory that was listed as an objective in the Master Plan. Under coordination between the Walpole Historical Commission, the Town Planner, the Massachusetts Historical Commission, and the historical consultant hired under the provisions of the grant, this project was completed in July 2008. In March 2009 the historical consultant gave an extremely well-received public presentation of the project and its resulting report.

***Invest in people and new processes in town government.***

Walpole's goals for the future require more refined tools and techniques to manage development. Volunteer boards and commissions will need more staff assistance to evaluate projects; to work with residents, businesses, and state departments; and to pursue technical assistance and funding for Town projects. Although new development requirements may demand a higher standard, they should also communicate clearly what the Town wants. If businesses and developers understand what the Town is looking for, they will be more likely to provide it early in the permitting process. This is equally true for housing and business. New processes and procedures to coordinate and streamline the permitting process for projects that meet Town goals are essential to attracting more investment to Walpole. Finally, as part of the recently approved I-495/95 South Regional Technology Economic Target Area, the Town now has access to economic development tools like tax increment financing (TIF) to help attract new investment. The Town must designate and pursue state certification of the Economic Opportunity Areas, such as brownfields sites, that can benefit from this tool. Another kind of TIF is available through District Improvement Financing area designation. Walpole needs to take advantage of all the economic development techniques available to it.

***Recommendations:***

- Hire planning and economic development staff to assist boards and commissions in applying new standards, coordinating land use, housing and economic development strategies, and pursuing funding for Town projects.
- Streamline the permitting process for development projects that meet Town goals.

- Explore tax increment financing options for purposes such as redevelopment of brownfields, upgrading industrial park infrastructure, and providing a parking deck in the town center

***Progress to date on these activities includes the following:***

- Planning and economic development staff have been hired, who provide much of the staff support for the implementation activities of the Master Plan.
- The Town's overall permitting process has been updated and streamlined, under a portion of the grant received under Chapter 43D, such that the permitting process is conducive to desirous economic development. The culmination of the efforts of three consultants working on this project, in coordination with Town agencies, particularly the Economic Development and Grants Officer, the Town Planner, and the Building Inspector, has resulted in the streamlining of the Town's permitting processes. The key factor in this effort is the Design Review Committee (DRC), which consists of the Building Inspector (who chairs the Design Review Committee), Town Administrator, Town Planner, Conservation Agent, Health Director, Director of Public Works, Town Engineer, Water and Sewer Superintendent, Fire Chief, Police Chief, Economic Development Officer, and other staff or representatives of other municipal boards, with the exception that no member of the Zoning Board of Appeals may sit on the Design Review Committee. The purpose of the DRC is to help guide projects through the permit process and make recommendations on what should be included in the permit applications to the various boards, commissions and committees involved in granting the various permits that may be required for a development project to proceed to completion.
- A portion of the grant received under Chapter 43D also provided upgrades to the Town's permit tracking software, which has assisted the Building Inspector in his overview and coordination of the various permits that must be obtained for the commencement of building construction activities and the obtaining of occupancy certificates.
- Because of economic conditions to date, TIF through a District Improvement Financing area designation has not been considered to be a viable economic development option for the Town to pursue.

## **Recommendations for Ongoing and Future Master Plan Implementation Activities**

In general, it is recommended that the Town continue on with the successful practices to date in the implementation of the Master Plan. The Town should continue to use the *Task Table Sorted by Priority*, which is appended hereto and may be reviewed for further details on the status of the various implementation activities, as the key tool in concert with specific detailed implementation activities found in the chapters of the Plan to carry out its further implementation.

Perhaps most important in going forward with the ongoing Master Plan implementation activities, it is essential to recognize that the word “**Green**”, with the recent advent of the Green Communities Act and various similar or related state and federal programs, has come to refer to more than open space and natural areas. “**Green**” now refers to a lifestyle whereby conservation and wise use of resources are a daily way of life, with an emphasis toward the development and

use of renewable energy technologies as our energy supply source for the future being the ultimate goal of green technology. As throughout the Commonwealth and the Nation, green technologies are destined to become extremely important tools in much of the Town's future development as our economy moves toward wiser uses of traditional energy sources and increased use of renewable energy sources. Thus, through the Master Plan's implementation activities and tools utilized therefor, the Town must recognize that green technology has a predominant role in Walpole's economic, physical and social future. As such, the implementation of the Master Plan's goals and objectives must continue to include the utilization of green technologies from this point forward.