

In a recent meeting of the mayor's 20/20 working group, the participants articulated the need for a more robust economic development platform for Pawtucket. The City of Pawtucket currently has only one staff person dedicated to economic development. The lack of available staffing and financial resources greatly limits the City's ability to properly measure key economic indicators and market the attractive opportunities for new commercial, civic, and residential occupancy throughout the downtown and City.

Within a half-mile walking radius of Pawtucket's nearly vacant downtown, a total of 738 new condominium housing units converted from vacant mills are available or are scheduled to be complete by the end of this year. This residential growth is accompanied by an unprecedented 1,200,000 square feet of planned office, light industrial, retail, and residential space at several private development sites anchored by the development proposed by Urban Smart Growth at the former Conant Street Thread Factory. At capacity, these housing and commercial projects, which are already in design and/or construction, have the potential to create thousands of new jobs and provide housing for more than 1,300 new residents in and around Pawtucket's walkable, urban core. The private sector and City must focus resources to ensure the success of these key housing and commercial development sites within the primary walking radius of downtown by planning the appropriate transportation infrastructure, street and building design guidelines, and marketing strategy to attract new job markets and residential constituents. A failure to do so will likely result in the failure of these development projects. The unfortunate turn of events at the Union Wadding residential development is an indicator of what will happen if we don't continue to guide investment into the city to ensure the success of ongoing and future development projects.

As momentum and the likelihood of a new Pawtucket Commuter Rail stop comes to fruition, the ability to plan and implement job creation and affordable residential opportunities within walking distance to commuter rail and a RIPTA bus hub is a tremendous growth opportunity for Pawtucket and the overall Providence metropolitan regional economy. Pawtucket has an opportunity to capitalize on a FY08 \$1.96M FTA New Starts grant appropriation for the initial design and environmental alternatives analysis for a commuter rail stop. If Pawtucket does not initiate the grant application, this appropriation will disappear as there is a total three year time limit to initiate the grant. To date, the city has not publicly endorsed an official position on a preferred site for commuter rail. The Pawtucket Foundation now believes that the best site for a commuter rail site is near the Providence & Worcester rail yard. We believe this site is most economically feasible, within walking distance to transit-oriented development sites, and can accommodate the necessary rail sidings to alleviate conflicts with Amtrak's regional service.

We recognize Mike Cassidy's effort to negotiate the arduous process of accessing the FY08 FTA New Starts (Section 5309) grant appropriation. This task requires unwavering support from the Mayor, administrative staff, City Council, business community, and residents of Pawtucket. Further, this project will have a tremendous regional impact in driving transit-oriented development and offering transportation choice to every market on the Northeast Corridor rail line (New York, Providence, Boston, Washington D.C., etc.). The Pawtucket Foundation urges every stakeholder to get more involved by taking a more hands-on approach in making this project a statewide and regional priority. There has been little public discussion on where the necessary funds will come from to initiate the New Starts grant process. This will require a significant investment from the City for a 20% match and potential consultant fees that may be necessary.

In order to ensure the success of revitalization and planned development, housing, and transportation projects in Pawtucket's urban core, the City must leverage its historic and cultural resources, address the challenges of its public urban school district, attract innovation jobs and businesses, and create a quality place that promotes a positive self image to its diverse mix of residents, business owners, and visitors. These are complex tasks that require simultaneous investments in four strategic pillars: innovation, human capital, infrastructure, and creating quality places.

To address all of these pressing issues, The Pawtucket Foundation has internally restructured by organizing three distinct committees: Downtown Revitalization Committee, Transportation Committee, and Riverfront Committee. We invite our colleagues, City Council, and municipal staff to join us in demonstrating our commitment to the City of Pawtucket and working together to purposefully outline a vision for prosperity.

**POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1

**Establish a transportation policy:** Establish a transportation policy to integrate opportunities for commuter rail, bus, non-motorized (bicycle) circulation, pedestrian circulation, and 2-way downtown traffic circulation. Of utmost importance, the success of creating a commuter rail station is the single biggest catalyst for economic development in the city. As such, we recommend the following:

1. Reorganize a Commuter Rail Task Force comprised of Pawtucket and Central Falls city officials and planning staffs, The Pawtucket Foundation, and stakeholders (property owners and various business owners) to garner public support for a definitive preferred site and to communicate how a commuter rail stop will positively affect the value and usefulness of adjacent properties. Develop a schematic site plan to use as a basis for promoting the project.
2. Orchestrate a highly-publicized joint meeting with state leaders, GrowSmart RI, The Pawtucket Foundation, New Public Transit Alliance (NuPTA), statewide planning, RIPTA, RIEDC, and RIDOT to showcase efforts to make Pawtucket a host transit community, create innovation-sector jobs, and attract new residents in Pawtucket in a short-term plan to catalyze transit oriented development. Use this opportunity to brief the current status of the commuter rail project and show the potential for accompanying development. In essence, create buzz that this project is feasible and a priority for the City of Pawtucket AND state of Rhode Island.
3. Shift perception of the Pawtucket Commuter Rail Stop from a grass-roots effort, to a regional priority with regional partners.
4. Call on state leaders and RIDOT leadership to organize a state-led meeting with Amtrak, MBTA, and other necessary stakeholders to begin a serious dialogue on a definitive commuter rail service operating agreement with a Pawtucket stop.
5. Create an integrated communication platform to relay accurate information about this project. Publicly release detailed action steps, necessary costs, and a realistic timeline to access the FTA New Starts grant money and start on the initial design and environmental permitting requirements for the commuter rail stop. The mayor went on record stating he expects a commuter stop by the year 2014, yet RIDOT officials state it will take longer. The City should release a realistic, time-phased, and critical path schedule that shows when we might expect a commuter stop to open. This is essential information for prospective investors who may choose to locate businesses in Pawtucket because of a proposed transportation infrastructure.
6. Develop an action plan to guide and orchestrate the appropriate level of transit-oriented development around and near the proposed commuter rail stop. This could involve creating a master plan for the area within a half-mile radius of the site that prioritizes necessary pedestrian/streetscape improvements, infill development opportunities, and design guidelines for rehabilitation.
7. Identify short term, immediate strategies to capitalize on and improve access to South Attleboro's commuter rail stop. Local businesses such as Morris Nathanson Design and large companies like Hasbro have frequent business to conduct in Boston and New York markets. While we wait for a commuter rail stop in Pawtucket, the city can facilitate better commuter rail utilization at South Attleboro by improving signage to the station from I-95, exploring the feasibility of private taxi services, and actively working with RIPTA to deliver time phased bus service that complements peak commuter ridership times.

2

**Establish an Economic Development Strategy for Downtown:** Develop an economic development and marketing implementation plan to drive redevelopment and absorption of specific properties in Pawtucket's downtown. A strategic plan will identify obstacles, quantify long-term tax revenue benefits, and prioritize development opportunities. Further, it can assess supply and demand models for various land uses, assess the overall economy in terms of projected absorption rates for commercial, residential, and other types of development, and can articulate strategies and incentive tools to attract businesses in innovation job sectors. We recommend the following:

1. Create a more robust Economic Development and Marketing Capability to actively promote Pawtucket's resources: mass transit access, diversity, arts, river, historic redevelopment opportunities, manufacturing, and creative businesses. An economic development capability should be a stand alone department that reports directly to the Mayor and works with local and regional agencies in concert with regional economic development objectives. Other Cities can serve as a benchmark:
  - a. City of Davis, CA <http://cityofdavis.org/ed/>
  - b. Grand Rapids, MI [http://www.ci.grand-rapids.mi.us/index.pl?page\\_id=157](http://www.ci.grand-rapids.mi.us/index.pl?page_id=157)
  - c. Chesapeake, VA <http://www.yeschapeake.com/>
  - d. Worcester, MA <http://www.worcestermass.org/business-development>
  - e. Woonsocket, RI <http://www.ci.woonsocket.ri.us/mainst2000.htm>
  - f. Warwick, RI <http://www.movetowarwickri.com/>
  - g. Cranston, RI <http://www.cranstonri.com/generalpage.php?page=23>
2. Hire a consultant to prepare an Economic Development Implementation Plan (New Bedford is an example). Integrate the efforts of statewide and regional agencies in making loan products accessible and readily available to local businesses that need operating capital or funding to open new business ventures. Consider finding alternate funding sources to beef up Pawtucket Business Development Corporation's loan fund; create new, low-interest-rate loan products specifically designed for rehabilitating vacant and underutilized historic buildings in the downtown commercial district. The City should act with a sense of urgency to fully develop vacant or underutilized buildings in the National Register Historic District.
3. Utilize the 20/20 subcommittee to conduct interviews and collect data for an inventory of developable parcels and buildings in the downtown. Research obstacles that prevent development and shape public policy to address these obstacles and catalyze redevelopment.
4. Develop Roosevelt Avenue: **Roosevelt Avenue Mixed Used Development Feasibility & Market Analysis:** The Pawtucket Foundation has long championed the development of a vacant parcel across from City Hall in the heart of Pawtucket's downtown. In 2007, the Foundation hired a consultant to develop a conceptual masterplan. This plan identified a capacity for a mixed use development which can provide nearly 200,000 square feet of developable space with retail at the ground level and office/residential units on the upper levels. The City of Pawtucket and the Pawtucket Redevelopment Agency own the subject land and should consider a marketable proposal for development. Pawtucket's planning department and the Pawtucket Foundation have solicited a proposal for a market study which includes supply and demand models for various uses, a feasibility analysis, and a detailed pro forma. The Roosevelt Avenue Mixed Use Development project is a priority building infrastructure project which is intended to catalyze further development and dramatically increase the density and intensity of uses in the downtown. This project can repair the urban fabric of the city by more intensively utilizing a surface parking lot that has no intrinsic economic value and does not currently garner property tax revenue.
5. Explore creative financing solutions such as tax increment financing, special improvement districts, and subsidies for desired land uses. Additionally, the City could explore the creation of a local revenue allocation district that could implement a distressed community tax credit to encourage growth in Pawtucket's urban core.

3

**Develop the Riverfront:** Establish an implementation plan and incentive package to further develop the riverfront. We recommend the following:

1. Assess the authority and jurisdictional boundary of the Riverfront Commission. Determine how the commission can take a more proactive role in shaping future development opportunities along the river.
2. Involve the Riverfront commission in soliciting a recommended course of action for the hotel site if the City acts on a reverter clause in the current development agreement.
3. Capitalize on the new I-95 bridge to drive economic development. Further, articulate plans to deal with landscaping, a public art project, lighting, storm drainage and potential naming of the bridge.
4. Boost efforts to implement a planned bicycle path along the river.