



The City of Brockton recently unveiled three documents aimed at revitalizing our downtown. The Downtown Action Strategy sets a vision for downtown and lays out the actions needed to achieve that vision. The Downtown Urban Revitalization (Renewal) Plan authorizes the Brockton Redevelopment Authority, in close cooperation with the City, to implement the Action Strategy, particularly the portions dealing with property reuse and redevelopment. The District Improvement Financing (DIF) Program creates a dedicated funding stream for the City to help finance redevelopment projects and to leverage state, federal and private sector dollars to accomplish Action Strategy and Urban Renewal Plan.

Frequently Asked Questions

How do the three Plans support commercial development?

- The “Restaurant Incubator” would assist budding restaurateurs navigate the complex process of opening a restaurant and provide downtown residents and workers with new dining opportunities. Short-term leases provide a fresh cycle of new restaurateurs the opportunity to enter the space, while the “graduates” of the programs would be assisted in finding new space (in Brockton) to grow their business.
- A “Co-Work” center would provide small business owners, entrepreneurs and startups affordable space where they could work collaboratively, take client meetings and have access to the latest high tech office equipment.
- The relocation of Father Bill’s/Main Spring will greatly improve the appearance of downtown and increase the sense of personal security, allowing downtown residents and employees to enjoy what downtown has to offer.
- A new technical assistance provider would work with existing merchants to improve their storefronts, merchandizing and business operations.
- The rehabilitation of the old Shawmut Bank, on the corner of Main and Centre Streets, would modernize approximately 30,000 square feet of underutilized office space for new tenants. New windows, etc.
- A new office building on the southeast corner of Centre and Montello Streets could provide over 40,000 square feet of office space with 5,000 – 10,000 square feet of first floor retail. (Currently, 28 Convenience)
- The construction of a new parking garage will support the continued expansion of W. B. Mason, the Brockton Neighborhood Health Center, and the rehabilitation of existing commercial structures that are now vacant because of the lack of convenient parking. The proposed temporary parking surface lot provides opportunity to allow Trinity to start Phase II and the parking garage at the same time rather than make one wait for the other.
- The creation of a high capacity fiber optic network would provide current and future businesses with cutting edge telecommunications access. Fast internet and fast wi-fi for Downtown.
- The rehabilitation of several city owned properties for mixed use will bring new retail opportunities to the street level while providing opportunities for office development on the upper floors.

- The redevelopment of the CSX yards into an urban industrial park will eliminate blight, create new jobs and provide much needed tax increment.
- Additionally, the Plans support the existing 300,000 square feet first floor retail space throughout downtown by building the necessary demand for retail and restaurant goods and services that an increase in residential population drives. Many of our storefronts are vacant or underutilized because there is not enough dollars being spent downtown to justify higher quality retailers.

What happens to fire station #1 on Pleasant Street?

- Fire Station #1 is on the National Register of Historic Places but is in desperate need of repair which the City can't afford. If a new fire station were to be built, the Plans call for the historic restoration of the building to preserve it for future generations. The best way to do that would be to have a private developer use state and federal historic tax credits as part of a conversion to commercial or mixed use development with retail or restaurant space on the first floor.

What happens to the Police headquarters on Commercial Avenue?

- The current police headquarters is well beyond its useful life and is in serious need of replacement. If a new police headquarters were to be built, the Plans call for the redevelopment of that site into a Transit Oriented Mixed Use development with some retail on the first floor and residential units above. This strategy supports our goal of a walkable downtown with a mix of housing, retail and commercial space.

When the Brockton Redevelopment Authority (BRA) acquires a property, when will the environmental assessment be done?

- The current draft states on page 81 that *“Environmental assessments will be undertaken upon the acquisition of the properties by BRA.”* It was not the intention of the authors of this document to imply or communicate that the BRA would not be doing everything within its power to assess the environmental condition of a property before acquisition.
- The draft will be amended to read as follows *“An ASTM Phase I Environmental Site Assessment will be prepared by a Licensed Site Professional before any site is acquired, regardless of method of acquisition. Where BRA can negotiate site access, and where the ASTM Phase I indicates that the existence of a pollutant is probable a full MCP Phase I Environmental Site Assessment will be prepared in accordance with MGL Chapter 21E. Where an ASTM Phase I indicates that the existence of a pollutant is possible, and where site access is not afforded, as with acquisition by means of eminent domain, BRA will employ other methods to assessing environmental contamination including the right to conduct environmental testing in the public right of way or on adjacent sites where it can gain site access in an effort to determine the potential existence of environmental contaminates.”*
- The BRA reserves their right to recover the cost of site cleanup from the former owners and potentially responsible parties.

Do the Plans support two-way traffic downtown?

- Yes, two-way traffic is a significant goal of the plans. However, it's not as easy as repainting the lane stripes. Approximately 15 traffic signals will need to be replaced and wired so they communicate with each other. So without state funding, converting to two-way traffic is not going to be done any time soon. The Plans propose using DIF funds to leverage economic development funds from the Commonwealth's MassWorks grant program to upgrade a couple of streets and intersections each year. In the mean time we continue to prepare the appropriate studies and engineering reports that MassDOT requires to list this work on the local Transportation Improvement Program to be eligible for state funding.

Does the City lose control over development in a MGL 40R Smart Growth district?

- Absolutely not!
- In fact, 40R provides more control to the City. First, the maximum number of units, height of buildings, and required parking are established BY LAW, not by a variance from the Zoning Board of Appeals. Second, the look of a building, its relationship to other buildings and the land are governed by our 40 R Design guidelines (see 40R Design Standards on Planning Website) as required by MGL 40R. That means we already know with certainty what we are going to get out of any 40R project. Third, proposals go through an extensive design review process where the applicant must provide more detail than an ordinary ZBA case. Each proposal is fully reviewed by a representative from each City Department involved in the permitting process (Technical Review Committee) and is required by law to be reviewed and approved by an independent technical review consultant at the applicant's expense (professional engineers, designers) to insure the proposal meets our 40R Ordinance and Design Standards. Finally, the project must be approved by the Planning Board at a Public Hearing.

Is this too much, too fast?

- The Urban Renewal Plan has a 20 year lifespan and is broken down into three phases. Each phase is designed to be sensitive to the demand for development and the ability to finance itself. The Commonwealth requires us to provide a potential timeline for redevelopment so that residents, businesses and land owners have some idea what the future holds. This said, market conditions and available funding may cause projects to shift from one phase to another.
- Something else to consider is that Brockton has been stagnant for more than two decades. Other Gateway communities like Lowell, Quincy and Worcester have progressed substantially AND have been successful in their growth in the late 1990's and early 2000's. Brockton needs to become more competitive and this provides the opportunity to catch up and surpass other Cities.
- From the start of this initiative, it was clear that the City had undertaken numerous planning activities focused on downtown but lacked the tools, diverse community involvement and strategy to implement. The Action Strategy, Urban Renewal Plan and DIF Program incorporate these previous studies' key recommendations and will be the tools to move forward.

How accurate are the DIF revenue projections for the next couple of years?

- The projections are based on the best available information, and in some respects are conservative. When the City Council approved the Downtown Brockton DIF District last summer, it “locked in” the assessed values in effect at that time. This did not yet reflect full valuation of the Enterprise Block, so there is known revenue – from the Enterprise Block – that would be subject to capture using DIF. This does not mean it all needs to be captured every year, but it provides real options for the City and the Council.

How do you expect to get all of this infrastructure done in [ten] years?

- First, the budgeted amounts provide the maximums that could be spent, over 30 years, on that purpose. So yes, here in Year 1, the numbers can seem big.
- Second, we understand that the timeline for implementation will be a function of market trends, actual private sector investment, as well as policy and budgeting decisions of the BRA and City Council – and day-to-day efforts associated with implementation of this work. Our assessment of the development potential in Downtown Brockton – building on the fact that current land values are low – suggests great potential to leverage private investment to support public improvements. So while we’re optimistic, the Council can be assured that there are several checks in the DIF budgeting process against unsupportably rosy projections.

How many people is too many people? Why do you think we need more housing?

- Some of the most successful urban areas in our nation are those that have the highest residential population densities. The goal in Downtown Brockton is, and always has been, mixed-use. But we understand that significant amounts of residential housing are not only helpful to – but are essential for – the type of dynamic mixed-use development we’ve proposed through these plans. As was featured during the Action Strategy charrette in September, demographic trends show that the neighborhoods such as we’re working for here in Brockton are expected to grow and thrive in this new century.

You’re proposing to spend \$7 million for public improvements, but what assurance do you have that any of the private development projects will occur which will be needed to fund it?

- A core idea of DIF is that growth drives growth. The idea here is not to spend millions of dollars of public funds and then wait. The idea is to have an accurate expectation of the real estate investment market and trends in Downtown Brockton, then to coordinate debt service in ways that match actual DIF cash flows; and coordinate public investment to complement and support private growth.
- Also – the DIF Program states that in no instance will annual DIF budgeted expenses exceed projected revenues. Therefore there will be an annual review of how costs and revenues are lining up.

What are these revenue projections based on?

- Where actual development has not moved forward since the Council’s enactment of the DIF District last summer – in which case revenue projections are based on actual differences in assessed values, every dollar of projected revenue is based on estimating the difference between assessed values under a proposed development scenario and the actual assessed values of the same property today. Development scenarios are consistent with the URP, and the Assessor assisted in preparing estimates of future values for those scenarios.

The Urban Renewal Plan proposes acquiring 24 properties. That seems a lot. Is that really necessary?

- The plan is not about acquiring properties but about causing change. State law requires us to list those properties that **may be** acquired during the life of the Urban Renewal District. In some cases we will need to acquire property to make the change happen, like the temporary parking lot on Montello Street, which will be redeveloped as mixed use in a later phase. In other cases, properties have been identified for acquisition so that the BRA can play a role in the redevelopment process. It becomes a way of encouraging long term speculators who have done nothing to the property for years to “play the cards they have been dealt, or to fold their hand and move on.” The City can’t afford to be held hostage by a disinterested land owner.

