



Economic Growth Initiatives

Issue Three | Fall 2008

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THE SALEM PARTNERSHIP

A private/public membership organization directly involved in determining the outcome of issues critical to the greater Salem Community

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Harbor Plan Moves Forward

Salem Receives \$2.3 Million for Wharf Development Project

At its September '08 meeting, the Seaport Advisory Council awarded the city additional funding to purchase the Blaney Street lot, finalize the permitting process and obtain needed engineering and pre-construction documents.

This was a major step forward toward the completion of the \$20 million project, which is a key component of the Salem Harbor Plan. The wharf project includes the construction of a concrete and steel pier and a multiuse terminal building. Mayor Kimberley Driscoll wants to be "in a position within the next 12 months to have construction under way." Mayor Driscoll sees this port project as a major economic initiative aimed at attracting more and larger cruise ships, whale-watching boats, private leisure boats as well as commercial fishermen.

The purchase of the Salem Ferry only two years ago was a first step in the development and utilization of the Blaney Street Site. The Salem Ferry carried over 40,000 passengers in 2006, its first year of operation. Last year, close to 80,000 made the round trip from Salem to Boston and by the end of this year (November 1, 2008), it is expected that over 100,000 will enjoy this sea-faring mode of transportation. The wharf where passengers board the ferry is on Blaney Street on land owned by the Dominion Power Plant but leased to the city for use by the ferry. It is this land that the city will purchase so as to expand Salem's economic options. As Mayor Driscoll responded to a question from the Salem News, "We don't have 128 but projects like this provide us with an opportunity to grow our economy in a whole host of ways."

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...Harbor Plan Continued

Attorney George Atkins, President of The Salem Partnership, notes that the Partnership has been involved in the Port of Salem revitalization and expansion for a long time. Recently the city and the Partnership asked Dr. Lorrie Krebs, an economic geographer and a member of the faculty at Salem State College, to undertake an economic impact study to determine potential financial benefits of the port expansion. The city has already reaped benefits from the wharf as two cruise ships arrived in Salem for a 24-hour stay over. This enabled passengers to disembark, enjoy the historic sites, visit tourist attractions, eat and shop and thus bringing additional dollars into the city.

Another important part of the Salem Harbor Plan is the building of the South River Harbor walk, which will link Pickering Wharf to downtown Salem by means of an attractive waterfront walkway. Construction on this is scheduled to begin in the winter of '09.

In the 17th century, Salem was founded and flourished because of its waterways. In the 21st century, it has found its way back to the sea and will again flourish using its natural gateway to the sea.

A Parking Garage? A Panel of Experts Discuss Future Use of Salem's Church Street Site

The Boston chapter of the Urban Land Institute (ULI) selected Salem as a location for its fall Technical Assistance Panel (TAP). ULI's TAP Program is designed to provide objective, expert advice to municipalities on the feasibility, design, or implementation of development initiatives. This pro bono program brings expertise in real estate, design, and finance to bear on local land use planning and development projects. Salem submitted an application for assistance on the Church Street Lot to see how development of the site could be structured to be financially feasible while fostering the City's development goals and catalyzing additional investment downtown.

The ULITAP was held on September 23, 2008. Prior to coming to Salem, the team was sent background information by the city planning and community development department. Upon arrival, members of the team were given a tour of the downtown and the Church Street site and then met with 12 organizational leaders. The panel was interested in learning about each organization's relationship to downtown, their perspective on opportunities and challenges downtown, and any specific ideas they may have about the Church Street Lot site. The team then met and discussed what they had seen and heard and gave a presentation at a public meeting held that evening.

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parking
garage

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A final written report will not be available for 4-6 weeks but some preliminary recommendations are as follows:

Preliminary Recommendations

1. The traditional belief by many in Salem was that a parking garage should be built at the Church Street site. The TAP team pointed out that it did not make sense to build a parking garage next to a parking garage.
2. The team heard many varied opinions on the parking situation in Salem. They heard everything from there is no parking problem to no one can find a parking space in Salem. Their recommendation is that the city should conduct a comprehensive objective downtown parking study to determine how much capacity (if any) should be added and where. The study should also include recommendations for a comprehensive pricing and management strategy.
3. At this time, given the economic climate and the readily available retail and office space in the downtown, the team's recommendation is for residential development of the Church Street site.

Gordon College's Goal

"To See History and the Arts Thrive in Downtown Salem"

So says David Goss, Co-Director of the Public History Institute at Gordon.

The college was recently awarded a five-year lease on Old Town Hall and Pioneer Village by the Salem City Council. Their plan is to continue productions of "Cry Innocent" which they have been performing there for 17 seasons but much more is also planned. The second floor space will also serve for Gordon concerts and art exhibits. A "Salem Museum" is planned for the first floor space, a place for both visitors and residents to learn of their community. Yes, colonial but also industrial history, Salem's immigrant cultures throughout the 19th century, the great Salem fire of 1914 and right up to the mid 20th century. According to Goss: "This is a perfect opportunity for Gordon to have a real presence in the great city of Salem." But the college will also open the space for independent organizations such as the Salem Theatre Co and Arts Salem. Old Town Hall will not only be in the center of the city but will become the center of history and art for the city with its constantly changing cultural opportunities.

At Pioneer Village (a replica of Salem in 1630), the staff will be expanded and there will be living history interpreters there on weekends. During the week, for a nominal fee, visitors will be able to have self-guided tours. Pioneer Village is located at Forest River Park, outside of the downtown district but it is hoped that the use of Old Town Hall as a focal point in such a key location will build a level of support and visitor attendance for the village. Plans are underway to provide shuttle service from both locations.

Gordon College is providing \$125,000 in initial funding and other fundraising efforts through grants and donations are well underway. According to Mayor Kimberley Driscoll, "We are very excited about having Gordon there long-term". The college's stewardship will launch a new era for the two properties, as there will be creative offerings and greater use. It is anticipated that the additional visitors to the theatre, art, music events and history reenactments will generate additional business for all of the merchants in Salem and will provide a great economic boost for the city.

Creative Economy Plan Moves Forward

Update on the Creative Economy Initiative on the North Shore

In our last newsletter, the key research findings and action plan that resulted from a study commissioned by The Salem Partnership, The Enterprise Center at Salem State College and the Creative Economy Association of the North Shore (CEANS) were outlined. The Executive summary and full report can be found on www.salempartnership.org.

Since then, the research findings and action plan have been shared with government officials, key institutions, chambers and other organizations. A “toolkit” has been developed that local officials can use to promote their community as a great place for creative organizations to thrive. The study identified the creative economy businesses in each of the 28 cities and towns so we now know who they are and where they are. Events have been held or are being planned in the ten cities and towns with the largest number of creative economy businesses (these ten cities and towns represent 73% of all of the North Shore creative economy enterprises). The purposes of each event is to bring these companies together to meet, do business, discuss successes, opportunities, challenges and ways to overcome the challenges. There has been an average of 50 people at each event to date and positive feedback from the surveys sent after each event. For example, many participants are grateful for the events because they provide a venue for creative economy businesspeople to meet their peers and explore potential collaborations. In fact, at the first event in Salem one person was hired and others found leads for new projects.

Events are also being planned for organizations in the largest creative economy clusters (design, business and management consulting, engineering research and design, the arts and advertising) so as to identify specific industry needs and how to meet them.

Once events have been held in all of the ten cities and towns, partnerships with local government officials, economic development intermediaries and other regional shareholders will be cultivated to solidify the creative economy as a significant economic initiative through leadership, collaboration and resources.

A website that reflects the creativity on the North Shore and acts as an on-line convergence center has been designed and can be seen at:

www.creativenorthshore.org.

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Your Navigation Problems Solved

New Signs Make Salem Simple

Finding a place to park just got easier! New parking signs will direct people to the more than 1,700 off-street public parking spaces in the downtown. The design is consistent with the historic image of Salem and the signs are easier to see both during the day and at night. New pedestrian kiosk maps will help people find their way to cultural heritage sites, attractions, shopping, and accommodations downtown.

“It Is Now Or Never” Mayor Driscoll Expresses Need For Salem Station Parking Garage

Salem needs a parking garage at the MBTA station. It needs it now and there has never been a more opportune time to do it. Thanks to Congressman John Tierney, the federal transportation budget includes \$3.6 million for a parking garage and the state Division of Capital Asset Management (DCAM) has committed to \$3 million to secure 150 spaces for the new J. Michael Ruane Judicial Center. The state must construct 1000 additional parking spaces at commuter facilities by 2011. This is part of a settlement requiring that some monies be used for public transportation improvements in exchange for the major investment in highways that made up the “big dig”. In addition, there is \$15 million in a transportation bond bill sponsored by Representative John Keenan to aid in the construction of the new garage. The garage is estimated to cost \$30 million (up from \$24 million in 2005). In order to close the funding gap, local officials want to pursue a mixed-use component that would enable a private development partner to be part of this effort as well. Time is of the essence here as the federal and state funds will not be available indefinitely and 2011, the year that additional parking for commuter facilities must be completed, will be here sooner than we think.

Mayor Driscoll has formed a working committee of federal, state and local officials to explore funding options. The Salem Partnership’s Executive Committee voted to make the parking garage one of its major priorities. The President and the Executive Director of the Salem Partnership will also serve on the working committee. This committee has already begun its work.

Joseph Cosgrove, Director of Development for the MBTA said at a Salem Partnership’s meeting on October 17, 2008, that the Salem Station is the “Most heavily used station in the MBTA commuter rail system”. Cosgrove showed an early concept of a new train station for Salem with a three-level structure with 1,000 parking spaces. He also showed photos of the existing stations. After seeing those photos, it was noted that Salem has NO train station, “Only a platform next to a river where people freeze while waiting for a train at the busiest station in the state”. The current parking lot has 460 parking spaces, of which 340 are on land owned by the MBTA and 120 spaces are on city-owned land. After 7AM, commuters must park on busy Bridge Street or on neighborhood streets. It was noted that the MBTA has not invested a dime at the station in years. Mr. Cosgrove was told that the MBTA must make this a priority. It was noted that the 2011 deadline is what is driving the urgency of this. Mr. Cosgrove agreed that if that money is spent elsewhere, it is likely that it will be years before the MBTA has the funding needed to build a parking garage in Salem. City, state, federal and business leaders present assured Mr. Cosgrove that this community will work to make sure that this garage is built in Salem by 2011. All were in agreement with Mayor Driscoll, “It is now or never”.