

## Towards an Economic Development Plan for the Town of Boxborough

### Scope of Work and Budget

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### Background

The Town of Boxborough, MA saw significant growth in high-tech companies from the 1990s through 2012, most notably as the home of Cisco's East Coast Headquarters. The Great Recession and the ongoing trend of locating industry and tech sectors in urban areas has strained the community and left many office park areas underutilized. There is a 50% vacancy rate in office park districts throughout the town. Combined with a 20-40% vacancy rate in retail centers, infrastructure constraints, and a growing residential population, these issues necessitate an economic development strategy to appropriately position Boxborough to reduce its office vacancy rate, ensure an appropriate balanced tax base, and maintain a high quality of life for current and future residents, including adding more local options for work, shopping and entertainment.

The recently completed Boxborough 2030 Vision identifies two important priorities for the Town:

- 1) Reimagine the traditional suburban Office park model for the live-work-play generation, and
- 2) Develop and maintain quality-of-life amenities in a village center to support the growing residential population's desire for local amenities and a multi-use village core.

In conjunction with these and other priorities, the Town has asked UMASS Center for Economic Development to assist in preliminary work necessary for the development of a long-term Economic Development plan.

## Project Summary

The project will consist of two distinct phases, beginning at the start of September of 2019 and ending in August of 2020.

### Phase I:

The first phase will be to produce an economic development existing conditions report. This work will be carried out by the LARP graduate planning studio course during the Fall semester of 2019, under the supervision of Dr. Camille Barchers. The LARP studio provides an opportunity for second-year graduate students in the UMASS Masters of Regional Planning program to gain first-hand experience working for a client, while affording area communities with access to an affordable source of talent whose work is backed and guaranteed by our faculty.

The existing conditions report will supplement and complement the work already begun through the Vision 2030 process but focus specifically on economic development conditions and needs that were not adequately addressed. In particular, the studio will conduct the following tasks:

- Review recent town and regional plans, reports, survey results, and related documents including data and notes from past meetings and charrettes to better understand community goals within the context of regional priorities, and to identify existing information gaps and data needs.
- Conduct site visits and in-person interviews with key town personnel and stakeholders.
- Collect and analyze the data most relevant for understanding the potential market and demand for office, retail and other commercial space in the region.
- Conduct a commercial/industrial build-out analysis.
- Review zoning codes and other regulations as they pertain specifically to economic development.
- Prepare and summarize several 'best-practice' case studies to profile revitalized suburban office parks and town center/commons-style developments in similar communities.

The final work products of Phase I will be a public presentation in Boxborough by the LARP studio team along with a concise professional report summarizing the findings from the above tasks. Given that there are likely multiple options that meet the Town's objectives, the studio report will recommend at least four alternate development scenarios for a re-imagined office park and town center/commons. This will include a summary of how each scenario capitalizes on the community's existing strengths, possible liabilities and caveats, their relative feasibility, and an initial assessment of the steps necessary to advance each option. This report will be formatted for use both as a professional document and as a handout for public education.

### Phase II:

The second phase of the study will build upon existing conditions report by providing a deeper evaluation of the specific development scenarios proposed at the completion of Phase I. The work will be conducted over the Spring and Summer of 2020, with a final report delivered by the end of August.

More specifically, Phase II will involve the following tasks:

- Provide a detailed analysis of long-term trends and driving for the suburban office and non-office commercial real estate market. Specifically, we will identify the factors underlying changing business and household location preferences and assess the likelihood that these trends will continue. This portion of the study will result in a stand-alone “white paper” that will help inform the remainder of the project.
- Conduct an in-depth market feasibility study to collect and analyze data on the market potential and shopping practices of area residents using primary and secondary data sources.
- Interview public officials, business leaders, community group representatives and other stakeholders to gain their thoughts and perspectives on the alternate development scenarios.
- Conduct a community charette focused on evaluating the alternate scenarios for the reimagined office park and/or town center.
- Hire a graduate Landscape Architecture student to produce preliminary designs / sketches of the Town Center and 21st Century office park development scenarios.
- Analyze current town regulations to determine if they are consistent with the preferred scenarios and identify other potential impediments to growth.
- Provide a thorough assessment and evaluation of physical conditions at prospective sites, including transportation access, infrastructure needs, title and ownership, etc.
- Develop a concrete action plan building upon the above and detailing the necessary steps.

This phase will be led by Dr. John Mullin with help from a graduate research assistant (RA). LARP does not offer a studio for its Regional Planning graduate students in the spring. Nevertheless, we are still able to leverage our abundant student and faculty talent to the benefit of the community while meeting the pedagogical goals of the department. For example, in the past we have hired graduate students from our Masters of Landscape Architecture program to develop prospective designs for different projects. We propose something similar, to help the community envision the different development scenarios based on feedback from the charette. Likewise, in the past, we have also contracted with the graduate Planning Student Organization (PSO) help staff CED charrettes. The students benefit from the experience of working a community charette, while also raising funds for the PSO which is primarily used for other professional development support (such as paying fees for attending professional conferences).

There will be two primary work products from Phase II of the study. The first will be a white paper reporting the findings from the analysis of real estate and business location trends. This will be presented to the town by early May. The second will be a full report of findings from Phase II, providing a detailed comparative analysis of the four different scenarios, including their relative Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats.

### **Proposed Budget and Justification**

Our proposed budget (Table 1) covers the anticipated costs required to complete the scope of work. The major budget items are related to staffing. Phase I of the project will be staffed primarily by the students of the Regional Planning graduate studio, supervised by Dr. Camille Barchers. The students provide their labor in exchange for course credit, and thus there is no charge for their time. We anticipate roughly 10

to 12 students registered for the 19 week Fall studio, for nine-credit hours per week - equivalent to over 1,700 labor hours (or over \$40,000 in student labor costs assuming a rate of \$25 per hour). As studio instructor, Dr. Barchers takes no compensation for her oversight of the first phase of the project. Phase II will be supervised by Dr. John Mullin, who is a Professor Emeritus at UMASS and will be hired as a project consultant. He will be aided by a graduate research assistant, who will work 10 hours a week for the spring semester and summer of 2020, with hourly compensation as negotiated with the graduate student union plus cost of living adjustments. Per university rules, all Research Assistantship must support payments for tuition credit (during the academic year) as well as fringe benefits. In addition, Dr. Henry Renski will lead the analysis of real estate trends, business location decisions, and the market feasibility portion of Phase II, and will assist Dr. Mullin and the Graduate RA with the compilation of the final report. Dr. Barchers will also serve as a consultant to Phase II and assist with the preparation of the final report. There is minimal fringe associated with faculty compensation during the summer.

Apart from staffing, the project will only entail minor expenses. These include support for the Phase II charrette resourced by the Planning Student Organization (PSO); the commission of several renderings to illustrate the preferred scenarios; a one-year membership to the national commercial real estate association (NAIOP) to grant us access to resources and information on real estate trends, domestic travel including at least three full studio trips to Boxborough and several working team trips for meetings, interviews, and site visits. We also anticipate additional work and meeting trips during Phase II. We may also conduct site visits to other office parks and/or town center developments in the region that may serve as case studies. We have also budgeted for miscellaneous supplies, such as printing costs and other charette-related expenses.

Table 1: Proposed Budget

<b>Salary and Wages</b>		
Camille Barchers, PI (summer 2020)	\$	1,000
John Mullin, Co-PI (spring and summer '20)	\$	2,500
Henry Renski, Co-PI (summer '20)	\$	750
Research Assistant (Spring, '20) 10 hr/week, 19 weeks	\$	5,964
Research Assistant (Summer, '20) 10 hr/week, 12 weeks	\$	3,843
<i>Total Salary and Wages</i>	\$	<i>14,057</i>
<b>Fringe</b>		
Faculty	\$	93
Research Assistant (spring, '20)	\$	1,316
Research Assistant (summer, '20)	\$	914
<i>Total Fringe</i>	\$	<i>2,323</i>
<b>Other Direct</b>		
PSO charge for Phase 2 Charette	\$	500
Design Assistance / Renderings	\$	1,250
NAIOP Membership, 1 year (Commerical Real Estate Association)	\$	650
Domestic Travel (site visits, advisory meetings, presentations)	\$	850
Miscellaneous (printing, posters, data)	\$	500
<i>Total Other</i>	\$	<i>3,750</i>
<b>Total Direct Costs</b>	\$	<b>20,130</b>
University Indirect for CED	\$	1,610
Graduate Student Tuition Charge (Spring '20)	\$	3,243
<b>Total Project Costs</b>	\$	<b>24,983</b>

## Biographies

### Camille Barchers

Dr. Barchers is an Assistant Professor of Regional Planning at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Her research focuses on how technology changes the way planners work and engage with their communities. Camille was a planning consultant for Kimley-Horn and Associates for six years and served as project manager for regional scenario planning projects throughout the Southeast and Mid-Atlantic. She served as the Track Chair for Successful Messaging for Public Engagement and the Academic Research tracks for the American Planning Association's National Conference from 2017-2019.

### John Mullin

Dr. Mullin is an Emeritus Professor of Regional Planning at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, and former Dean of the Graduate School. His research and professional interests focus upon industrial revitalization, port development and downtown planning. A Senior Fulbright Scholar, Dr. Mullin has written or edited over 100 book chapters, book reviews, technical reports, journal articles, and conference proceedings. He is a retired Brigadier General from the United States Army National Guard.

### Henry Renski

Dr. Renski is an Associate Professor of Regional Planning at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, Graduate Program Director of the Ph.D. in Regional Planning, and the Director of the Center of Economic Development. His research focuses on understanding the technological and social forces driving regional economic competitiveness and transformation and building upon this knowledge to improve the effectiveness of economic development policy. He regularly teaches courses in the application of quantitative methods in planning, economic development theory and policy, and Geographic Information Systems. He has authored over 30 technical reports and applied studies during his tenure with the Center for Economic Development over the last ten years.