

Town of Randolph



A TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PANEL REPORT

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Executive Summary

The Randolph TAP convened on June 19 at the Randolph Intergenerational Community Center under the direction of the Urban Land Institute's Boston/New England District Council. Over the course of the day, the TAP, consisting of eight real estate and marketing professionals, met with local business owners, representatives and residents from the town of Randolph and other key stakeholders. The purpose of the TAP was to devise a strategy that would help transform the Crawford Square Business District into a vibrant commercial and cultural area that is reflective of the diverse population of the town.

Chapter 1: ULI and the TAP Process

Offers an overview of the Urban Land Institute's Boston/New England District Council and its Technical Assistance Panels (TAPs), while also providing a list of the panel members and stakeholders who took part in the exercise. The chapter also outlines the study area for the TAP, and describes the process undertaken by the panelists and stakeholders to arrive at the recommendations presented at day's end during a public presentation at the Intergenerational Community Center.

Chapter 2: Background and History

Gives a thumbnail sketch of the Town of Randolph and its diverse nature, providing key population and demographic information. It also details the town's emergence as a manufacturing community and subsequent transition into a residential suburb supported by light manufacturing and service industries. A brief background on the study area is provided, including descriptions of a number of sites being considered for redevelopment. The chapter also includes a series of questions posed by the Town of Randolph designed to provide insight into the challenges of redeveloping the Crawford Square Business District.

Chapter 3: Assets and Opportunities

Provides a brief description of the strengths of the town, focusing on those assets that can be parlayed into the fulfillment of the vision for a redeveloped business district. These include a diverse, solidly middle-class population; superior location in relation to the City of Boston, and access to public transportation to deliver commuters into the City;

and substantial public investment in infrastructure needed to lay the groundwork for redevelopment.

Chapter 4: Challenges

Details the obstacles that the town must overcome in order to realize its vision for redevelopment, including: zoning issues; excessive traffic congestion on routes traversing the district; an excessively restrictive Table of Allowable Uses; and fractured ownership of key parcels within the district.

Chapter 5: Recommendations

Provides a number of suggestions to help the town achieve its redevelopment goals. Panelists recommended an overhaul of zoning regulations, including a re-write of the Table of Allowable Uses; changes in the code to allow greater height and density for mixed-use multifamily projects as of right; and allowing developers to build multiple structures on a single parcel. The chapter also recommends providing education and support for local entrepreneurs, devising branding and marketing initiatives, and implementing wayfinding and signage throughout the district.

Chapter 6: Funding and Resources

This section lists a number of programs and financing tools available from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, the federal government, and quasi-public agencies such as Mass Development to assist in the redevelopment efforts.

Chapter 7: Conclusions

Offers a final assessment of how the town can energize Crawford Square Business District, reiterating the challenges and new strategies for moving forward.

ULI & the TAP Process

Urban Land Institute (ULI)

The Urban Land Institute is a 501(c) (3) nonprofit research and education organization supported by its members. The mission of ULI is to provide leadership in the responsible use of land and to help sustain and create thriving communities. Founded in 1936, the institute now has nearly 40,000 members worldwide representing the entire spectrum of land use and real estate development disciplines, working in private enterprise and public service, including developers, architects, planners, lawyers, bankers, and economic development professionals, among others.

The Boston/New England District Council of ULI serves the six New England states and has over 1,200 members. As a preeminent, multidisciplinary real estate forum, ULI Boston/New England facilitates the open exchange of ideas, information, and experience among local, and regional leaders and policy makers dedicated to creating better places.

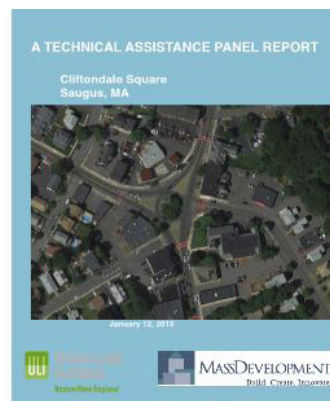
Technical Assistance Panels (TAPs)

The ULI Boston/New England Real Estate Advisory Committee convenes TAPs at the request of public officials and local stakeholders of communities and nonprofit organizations facing complex land use challenges who benefit from planning and development professionals providing pro bono recommendations.

TAPs are a specially assembled group of diverse professionals with expertise in the issues posed by the specific project. Each TAP spends one to two days visiting study sites, analyzing existing conditions, identifying specific planning and development issues, and formulating realistic and actionable recommendations to move initiatives forward in a way consistent with the applicant's goals and objectives.

MassDevelopment

MassDevelopment is the state's economic development and finance authority. The quasi-public agency works closely with state, local and federal officials to boost housing and create jobs. With the power to act as both a lender and developer, MassDevelopment also works to fill in gaps in infrastructure, transportation, energy and other areas that may be holding back economic growth. MassDevelopment has worked with ULI since 2011 to help sponsor and support the TAP process in cities and towns across the Commonwealth.



Randolph TAP Panelists with Town Manager and Town Planner

The Panel

ULI Boston/New England convened a volunteer panel of experts whose members represent the range of disciplines necessary to analyze the challenges and opportunities facing the Town of Randolph in their efforts to make the Crawford Square Business District more representative of the town's diverse population while bringing economic vitality to the district. Disciplines represented included developers, designers, planners, attorneys, town managers and marketing professionals. The following is a list of panelists:

Co-Chairs

Patrick Campbell, principal, Commonwealth Development Consulting

Dick Lampman, director of business development, ASCON Construction

Panel

Amanda Chisholm, vice president, RE Services, MassDevelopment

Eliza Datta, president, E3 Development LLC

Christine Lewis, vice president, InkHouse Media + Marketing

Elizabeth MacFarland, intern, MassDevelopment/UMass Amherst

Paul Momnie, commercial real estate attorney, Goulston & Storrs

David Panagore, town manager, Provincetown

Kartik Shah, senior urban designer, Harriman

ULI Staff

Manikka Bowman, director, policy & outreach

Sara Marsh, manager

TAP Writer

Mike Hoban, principal, Hoban Communications

Panelists have donated their time.

All images used were taken by the panelists.



ULI TAP Panelists at work

Stakeholders

The TAP benefited from the participation of the committed group of stakeholders – local business owners, residents, and a representative from the Randolph Chamber of Commerce

The following is a list of stakeholders:

Robert Curran, owner, FJ Curran Plumbing & Heating

Paul DeFederico, owner, Rocco's Tavern

Mary Fernandes, owner, Vermarje Tea Co.; co-founder, Artisans at Stetson Hall

Pam Hickey, owner, Shaw's Plaza

Kathie Ludecker, branch manager, Bank of Canton; president, Randolph Chamber of Commerce

James McDonough, president & CEO, Envision Bank (formerly Randolph Savings Bank)

Carline Olivier-Guerrier, branch manager, Harvard University Credit Union

Jenny Prime, recent graduate, Randolph High School, future entrepreneur

Gary Ratliff, Jr., town resident

Shaun Robinson, founder, IAMBK, Inc. (Non-profit community organization)

Todd Sandler, owner, Todd Sandler Real Estate, Inc.

Rob Schiavo, owner, Schiavo Enterprises, LLC; property owner

Chris Robbins, member, EDC

The TAP Process

The Randolph TAP was held on June 19, 2018. Panelists from the ULI Boston/New England District Council were greeted at the Randolph Intergenerational Center by Town Planner Michelle Tyler, Town Manager Dave Murphy and other Town officials. Following the meet and greet session, panelists were taken by trolley on a guided tour of the Crawford Square Business District, narrated by Tyler and Murphy.

The tour began with a viewing of the Glovers Brook building, a mixed-use project that combines eight residential units with 18,000 square feet of commercial development, now under construction. The tour then proceeded to North Main Street to the former Sudbury Farms Plaza, which is currently anchored by America's Food Basket, the latest grocery store to operate at that location. The plaza also includes two different "dollar stores", a hardware store, a restaurant and several empty storefronts which have been vacant for some time. Panelists observed that the parking lot of the plaza is also used as a cut-through for locals and large trucks seeking to avoid traffic. The panelists were informed that the plaza is owned by three separate entities, with complex parking and lease agreements.

After driving past a Wendy's franchise, the trolley stopped by a six-acre vacant lot that is located at an intersection that links the district's two commercial areas and abuts existing multi-family housing. The site was formerly home to Chase & Sons, a manufacturing facility, and is now zoned for mixed-use. Town officials see the parcel as a key development opportunity in the Crawford Square Business District. The tour continued past the former VFW Post, a site being considered for redevelopment, and the Highland House, a three-story, 172-unit, market-rate apartment complex, before proceeding down Memorial Parkway to Shaw's Plaza, the

grocery-anchored shopping center that also contains supporting retail. The panel observed a large, seemingly underutilized parking lot, located across the street from Randolph High School. The trolley then drove past a number of municipal buildings that had been part of a capital re-investment program by the Town. These included the Fire Station and the Turner Free Library, the Police Station, and Stetson Hall, a historic building used for events and office functions, now launching a co-working space. Panelists also viewed South Main Street, home to a number of restaurants, personal and financial services businesses, as well as municipal offices. The tour then drove down North Street and past a Burger King that has been closed for over two years, before returning to the Intergenerational Community Center.

Upon returning to the Center, the ULI panel interviewed stakeholders, listed in the previous sub-section, in two separate panel discussions. The panelists then engaged in an intensive closed-door charrette to develop recommendations based on the input from the stakeholders as well as the research conducted prior to the discussions. Panelists then presented their observations and recommendations in an open public forum at the same location that evening.



Town Planner, Michelle Tyler, giving tour to TAP panelists

Background and History

The Town of Randolph is a largely residential suburb located 15 miles south of Boston, home to one of the most ethnically diverse middle-class populations in the Greater Boston region. Located at the intersection of Routes 128 and 24, the Town is bordered by Milton and Quincy to the north, Braintree and Holbrook to the east, Canton to the west, and Avon and Stoughton to the south and southwest. Randolph is centrally located with convenient access to those major highway transportation corridors, and is serviced by the MBTA commuter rail and bus public transportation systems. The town is also traversed by Route 28 (North Main Street), a heavily congested stretch used primarily as a pass-through by commuters who live in the surrounding towns.

Randolph's commercial base consists mostly of light manufacturing and service industries, with the downtown business district, Crawford Square, primarily focused on retail and services. The town has made significant infrastructure investments to improve the downtown, as well as renovating existing buildings and constructing new municipal buildings. Much of the retail is uninspired, and there are a number of vacant storefronts and underutilized parcels, as well as complex ownership and parking issues. Randolph would like to re-invigorate the Crawford Square Business District by creating an identity for the district that highlights the diverse nature of its population. One goal is to create a restaurant/retail destination that highlights the diversity of the Town and recaptures some of the retail leakage lost to surrounding communities.



Randolph's Town Hall

Questions for the ULI Panel

The Town of Randolph sought the help of the TAP to devise a viable redevelopment strategy for Crawford Square, and presented these questions to the panel:

1. Is mixed use development feasible in Crawford Square?
2. How can Crawford Square zoning be modified to better facilitate development?
3. How can we incentivize more immigrant entrepreneurship/small business owners in Crawford Square?
4. What are the redevelopment strategies we can employ for Sudbury Plaza?

Town History

Originally inhabited by the Cochato and Ponkapoag tribes, the town was named in honor of Peyton Randolph, the first president of the Continental Congress. Formed from a section of the southern precinct of Braintree, Randolph was incorporated in 1793. Randolph was primarily a farming community at its inception, but by the mid-1800s, shoe manufacturing became the dominant industry. At its height, Randolph was home to 35 companies producing nearly 500,000 pairs of shoes and boots per year. By 1975, however, the nearly 200-year tradition came to an end when the Randolph Manufacturing Company, at one time the third-largest footwear manufacturer in the U.S., closed its doors. Taking advantage of Randolph's proximity to regional transportation routes, new industrial parks took the place of the footwear manufacturing facilities.

Population and Demographics

Randolph saw its population grow from 30,963 in 2000 to 33,335 in 2016, an increase of approximately 8%. Estimated median household income in 2016 was \$67,104, which is slightly below the MA figure of \$75,297, but Randolph's proportion of families living in poverty is lower than the county average. There are fewer households with incomes under \$25,000 (and over \$150,000) than in either the county or state. The median home value in Randolph is \$345,900 as of May 2018 (Zillow), compared to the Norfolk County average of \$489,000, with home values increasing by 7% year-over-year. In a state and county (Norfolk) where the population is nearly 80 percent white, the population of Randolph is almost half black/African American, with strong representation from Haitian and other West Indian immigrant households. It is also one-third (33%) white, 14% Asian, and 8.5% Hispanic.

The Study Area

The panel was asked to focus on the area known as the Crawford Square Business District (CSBD), comprised principally of North Main Street and Crawford Square. Currently the CSBD is populated by a diverse mix of retail businesses including restaurants (local and chain), financial/legal services, convenience and grocery stores, health services, automotive-related businesses, municipal buildings, and no fewer than 21 personal services (hair, skincare, and nail salons) establishments. There are also a small number of residences scattered throughout the district.

Also residing within the CSBD is the High School, Turner Free Public Library, Stetson Hall, the Fire Station, Police Station, the Town Hall and a variety of public memorials and community gathering areas.

The town would like to re-energize the CSBD and to solidify its standing as the principal focus for civic, cultural and social functions. There are some challenges, however, including zoning issues, fractured ownership of key parcels within the district, and periodic traffic and parking congestion.

The town has made significant infrastructure improvements within the CSBD, including upgrades to its municipal buildings. Following the recommendations of the master plan produced by the Cecil Group in 2012 that specifically targeted the district, improvements included the burial of overhead utilities, traffic calming measures, lighting and signalization infrastructure/elements, and streetscape improvements. The town is also leading the development of a co-working space at Stetson Hall, the former town hall listed on the National Register of Historic Places, which also contains office space and serves as an event venue.



Map of the Study Area, parcels identified on page 13 of report

There are a number of parcels being considered for development/redevelopment including:

336 N. Main Street – Also known locally as Sudbury Farms Plaza, the site is anchored by America’s Food Basket, which is located on a 5.5 acre central parcel owned by a Boston-based entity with a land lease held by Hannaford’s. There are a total of six vacant storefronts on the parcel which have all been vacant for a minimum of 10-15 years. There are two other separately owned parcels within the plaza with occupied storefronts, and the owners have agreements to share parking spaces.

The plaza parking lot is also a well-trafficked cut-through for locals and large trucks seeking to avoid traffic congestion on North Main Street.

18 North Street – The site of a Burger King franchise which has been closed for 2.5 years.

19 Highland Avenue – A six-acre vacant lot located at a signalized intersection (Highland Avenue/Warren Street) that was once home to the Chase & Sons manufacturing facility for industrial coatings, which was demolished in 2015. There is an active Activities & Use Limitation on the property relative to ground floor residential and recreational use, but owners are considering development options, including gas station/retail uses.

10 Highland Avenue – The .7-acre site that was formerly home to the Veterans of Foreign Wars building was purchased in 2017 by private investors. The current owners have not presented any plans for redevelopment to date.

49 North Main Street – Part of a larger area known as “Porter’s Block”, the property is home to Fred’s Seafood, a popular local restaurant, and a hair salon, which occupy the first floor, but the property has vacant and/or underutilized second-story spaces. The structure is also adjacent to Rocco’s Tavern, a multifamily home and a large parking lot, which are currently on the market. The combined parcels are being viewed as a potential redevelopment site by the Town.

Assets and Opportunities

The Town of Randolph has a number of strengths that can be parlayed into a workable redevelopment plan for the Crawford Square Business District, including:

A) Diversity

Randolph's racial and economic diversity is a rarity among middle-class suburban communities in the Greater Boston region, and the immigrant and second generation families appear to be committed to seeing the community succeed and prosper. The diverse population may also create an opportunity to develop a truly unique retail and restaurant destination for the Town. In addition to the African-American, Haitian, Jamaican, Nigerian, and Vietnamese residents, there is a strong draw from the wider region's Southeast Asian community to the St. Bernadette's Parish services on weekends, as well as to the nearby Saigon Market – both located in close proximity to Crawford Square.

B) Location & Public Transportation

Randolph is well-positioned for commuters and commerce, with Interstate 93 and Route 24 traversing the northeast portion of the Town, and the exchange between I-95 and I-93 in Canton in close proximity. The town is also traversed by the heavily trafficked Route 28 (North Main Street) and Route 139 (Mazzeo Drive, the connecting link from Route 24) which could provide potential consumers for the town's businesses. Randolph is also well-served by public transportation, with commuter rail service to Back Bay Station and South Station available on the Lakeville/Middleborough Line at the Randolph/Holbrook Station and the Providence Line from the nearby Stoughton, Canton Junction, and Route 128 (Westwood) Stations. The MBTA Red Line is accessible in the neighboring towns of Braintree and Quincy. Randolph is also served by an MBTA bus line and the RIDE, as well as the Brockton Area Transit Authority, all of which provide links to the surrounding communities and Boston.

C) Significant Household Income to Support Local Commerce

Despite being perceived as a lower-income community, the average household income of Randolph (\$67,104) is attractive to a wide range of retailers and businesses. As part of the Town's 2017 update of its Comprehensive Master Plan, a retail gap analysis was conducted for the study district, which determined that Randolph could support at least 11 new stores, mostly smaller specialty retailers, and absorb a portion of the area's consumer spending that currently takes place outside the Crawford Square retail area.



Randolph Intergenerational Center

D) Strong Public Investment

Randolph has done an extraordinary job in terms of preparing the Crawford Square Business District for potential redevelopment. Within the past five years, the town has made considerable investments to its infrastructure, particularly in the CSBD, including the burial of utilities and significant streetscape improvements (historic lighting, decorative banners, planting beds, and pedestrian accessibility enhancements). There has also been substantial investment in the town's municipal facilities, including the construction of a new fire station, a renovated Turner Free Public Library, and an expanded police station. There was also the construction of the new Intergenerational Community Center, a recreational and learning center which opened last fall. According to town officials, the Center now has approximately 6,000-7,000 members. It should be noted there was robust activity at the Center by a diverse population throughout the course of the 12-hour (weekday) of the TAP.

E) Engaged Local Entrepreneurs

Based on the input from those who attended the panel discussions, there appears to be a willingness on the part of the local property owners and entrepreneurs to participate in an exchange of new ideas to grow their businesses in the Crawford Square Business District.



Community board and Diversity Mural located in the lobby of Randolph's Intergenerational Center

Challenges

Despite the many positive attributes of the town, there are a number of issues that must be addressed in order for a redevelopment plan to succeed, including:

A) Restrictive Zoning

The zoning code is extraordinarily restrictive and prescriptive, and it appears that the primary purpose of the Table of Allowable Activity (which governs uses for the district) was to discourage a particular type of development in the past rather than to encourage development in the central business district today. Development professionals noted that the zoning may be the most restrictive they have seen in their collective experience with towns in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

B) Traffic

There is significant traffic congestion along Route 28 (North Main Street) and Route 139 (Mazzeo Drive, which serves as a connector to Route 24) particularly during commute times. An annual average daily traffic count of 27,033 vehicles was recorded for North Main Street in 2006, and the congestion has only worsened since the study was taken, according to Town officials. The traffic problem is further exacerbated by North Main Street's use as a state-designated truck route and an MBTA bus route, and there are no cutouts for bus passenger pickup/drop-offs, which adds to traffic slowdowns. This issue also represents a missed opportunity for retailer curb appeal, as the on-street parking is extremely limited along the routes in proximity to the CSBD businesses.

C) Parking

The parking issue in the Crawford Square Business District may have less to do with the number of actual parking spaces than the way that spaces are utilized. There appears to be parking

lots within the district that are often at capacity while others were observed to be underutilized, and there is limited connectivity between the lots.

D) Lack of Vision for Crawford Square

The overwhelming sense of those interviewed is that outside of Randolph, few see Crawford Square as a retail destination. In this environment the lack of brand identity and need for a cohesive vision for the district among the property owners and small businesses is paramount.



Crawford Square Parking Lot

E) Inadequate Branding & Wayfinding

Crawford Square not only lacks a brand identity, but it is unclear what the boundaries of the district are, where it begins or ends, or where retail destinations are in relation to one another. Although the district is eminently walkable, the absence of a wayfinding system to assist consumers who may want to shop and/or dine in multiple retail/restaurant locations is noticeable. There is also lack of signage to alert the high volume of traffic on the main thoroughfares to the local businesses.

F) Lack of Downtown Evening Activities

There is a shortage of entertainment activities in the CSBD after 6PM, and too few dining options, according to the stakeholders.

G) Limited Engagement Among Property Owners

Although a number of property/business owners who attended the stakeholder discussions voiced a desire to see redevelopment, there is no unified or official group of owners in the CSBD to help formulate a cohesive development or branding plan. Such merchant associations are usually seen across the state and nation in successful suburban villages/town centers.

H) Multiple Ownership of Key Parcels in CSBD

Because there are a number of owners of smaller parcels in the CSBD, versus a dominant owner who could create a vision to spearhead redevelopment efforts, it may be difficult to find a consensus among the parties to execute a workable plan.

Recommendations

In order to adequately answer the questions that were put forth to the panel by the Town of Randolph regarding the redevelopment of the Crawford Square Business District, it is important to look at the broader context of what is happening in similar districts throughout the Greater Boston region. It will also be helpful to define what types of redevelopment are financially feasible in the CSBD.

For context, the Greater Boston metro region is facing a well-documented shortage of housing. In order for the region to maintain its economic status, more housing – particularly multifamily rentals, which serve the needs of a broad swath of the population – needs to be developed. The preferred model in the region and throughout the Commonwealth is mixed-use housing, specifically apartments over retail in downtown transit-oriented locations such as Crawford Square. The model requires higher density (three-to-five stories) and lower parking ratios than are allowed as of right by the current zoning in the Town of Randolph. It is also the type of development that many investors find attractive in today's marketplace, particularly since Randolph has met its 40B affordable housing threshold and the apartments could be market-rate. [Sats on the housing issue reported by MAPC: http://www.mapc.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/MAPC-MetroBoston-Projections_ExecSumm-1_16_14.pdf]

This model of residential development creates a density of households that helps to bolster existing retail while also supporting a wider range of new retail/business uses that Randolph is hoping to attract. This type of residential/retail development can also help to create an environment that would enliven the CSBD beyond the close of the business day. Multifamily rental housing also offers a greater diversity of housing types (studio, one- two- and three-bedroom units), which is important to a community like Randolph that has a higher percentage of single-family homes than the state or county. There are two principal cohorts that this type of housing principally appeals to – young professionals and empty-nesters who would like to remain in Randolph but no longer want to maintain a single family home. Multifamily buildings with elevators also help to resolve mobility issues for active aging seniors. It is also worth noting that those cohorts bring disposable income to a neighborhood without putting an additional strain on the school system.

These are the recommendations of the panel that can facilitate new development:

A) Update Zoning to Encourage Mixed-Use Development

Revise the Table of Allowable Uses

If the town wants to achieve the goal of revitalizing the CSBD and to create an 18-hour, seven-day-a-week environment, the zoning must be changed to allow underutilized properties to reach their full redevelopment potential. The current Table of Allowable Uses acts as a hindrance, rather than a tool for development, as it is overly restrictive and prescriptive.

Other suburban communities that have successfully re-imagined their downtown/village centers – using a higher density mixed-use model – have adopted tables that not only enumerate the uses that are prohibited, but also includes suggested uses that the community would support in order to help them to achieve their development goals. Such a table provides a higher degree of certainty for developers going before a planning board or zoning commission, and acts an enticement for developers to invest in the community, rather than as a deterrent.

Allow Greater Density and Height as of Right

Given the close proximity to Boston and the ready access to public transportation for commuters to and from the CSBD, allowing for greater density and height would make the CSBD extremely attractive to developers of transit-oriented, mixed-use multi-unit housing development. The current zoning code allows for uses as of right for smaller projects, but not for the type of larger multifamily projects necessary to have a transformative effect on the CSBD. These potentially transformative projects currently require a special permit which may or may not be granted following the investment of many months of pre-development effort and tens of thousands of dollars by an applicant.

Revise the Multi-family Unit Requirements

In addition to allowing for greater height for multifamily/retail mixed-use projects, there should be more flexibility with regards to the minimum size and the number of bedrooms in the units. Currently, the zoning for multifamily development (minimum size requirements for units, restrictions on the number of bedrooms per unit, no shared laundry facilities, etc.) is prohibitively restrictive for most developers pursuing transit-oriented development projects.

Reduce Parking Ratios/Examine Shared Parking Strategies

Transit-oriented development reduces the need for parking spaces, and frees up land for income-generating development. Combined with the trend away from car ownership by young professionals – one of the primary cohorts who would potentially occupy the units – the parking ratios for the buildings should be reduced to reflect that trend. Shared parking strategies should also be examined to more efficiently utilize the available number of parking spaces. (See Appendix for additional information). The current parking requirement for multifamily use is two (2) spaces for each dwelling unit (#200-22). This requirement may constrain mixed-use developments with multifamily units as new developments are required to provide two (2) spaces per unit regardless of the number of bedrooms or unit size.

Consider reducing the parking requirements for multifamily residential uses in the mixed-use developments from two (2) spaces to one (1) and one half (1.5) spaces per unit. The town can also introduce parking requirements based on bedroom counts. Also, consider reducing the parking requirements for the commercial and business uses within the District while encouraging shared parking strategies for mixed-use developments.

Alter Lot Coverage Requirements for Parcels

The lot coverage requirement prescribes a 10% open space requirement in the Crawford Square Business District. This requirement may restrict the redevelopment of the smaller parcels, as smaller parcels may require a larger impervious area for parking or building footprint. Consider eliminating the open space requirements for smaller parcels. The town can also consider introducing variable open space requirements depending on the parcel sizes to provide more flexibility to parcel owners while maintaining the overall distribution of open space in the district.

Allow for Multiple Buildings on Commercial Parcels

The current zoning only allows for one structure per parcel on commercial lots. If the zoning were changed to allow for the construction of multiple buildings on a property, the potential additional cash flow may serve as an enticement for current owners to reinvest in their properties or to attract new investors. Allowing for additional buildings would also help to fill in gaps in the streetfronts of the massive parking lots

Adopt Design Standards

By establishing mandatory design standards for the CSBD, property owners and potential developers could simply refer to a checklist where compliance would ensure that they will have a greater probability of approval for their projects. Design standards would be comprehensive and encompass elements such as architectural style, materials, number of openings, ground floor activity, landscaping, and parking.

Utilize Zoning Tools: Chapter 40R/40S

Massachusetts 40R Smart Growth Overlay Zoning provides funding for “smart growth” projects, and 40S provides funding for the schools to accommodate the new students that reside in the new multifamily developments. (See Appendix).



Example of a mixed-use development that could be replicated in the study area

Source: Gilbane Co (<https://www.gilbaneco.com/development/projects/257-thayer-street/>)

B) Create an Environment that Allows New and Existing Businesses to Succeed

In keeping with the stated aim of the Town of Randolph, which “seeks to be a diverse, inclusive, and unified community that leverages the benefits of its proximity to the wider region,” the panel makes these recommendations as to how to incentivize more immigrant entrepreneurship/small business owners while also supporting and encouraging the existing businesses in the Crawford Square Business District to grow.

Develop a Unified Vision for the Crawford Square Business District

Working in conjunction with the newly created Redevelopment Authority, input from the business community and residents should be used to create a workable redevelopment plan for the Crawford Square Business District. This plan should advance the stated goals of the town as laid out in the master plan, “to create a diverse, inclusive, and unified community that leverages the benefits of its proximity to the wider region” using the CSBD as a focal point, but drawing from the surrounding communities to support the culturally diverse businesses, restaurants and retail.

Engage the Community

The town should engage the community through an outreach/marketing campaign to help develop and determine what the vision for the CSBD should be. Some creative approaches should be considered to effectively involve residents and businesses, particularly when reaching out to Randolph’s immigrant communities. Creative approaches that have been effective include organizing teams of volunteers (who speak multiple languages) to go to cultural and sporting events, churches (such as St. Bernadette’s) and community meetings to gather information. Social media should also be utilized, such as setting up Facebook pages in multiple languages and monitoring comments, as well as employing text, Snapchat, Instagram and Twitter campaigns. The Intergenerational Center may be a valuable resource to recruit both social media-savvy younger people as well as seniors to accomplish these tasks.

Utilize Stetson Hall as an Asset

With the launch of the co-working space at Stetson Hall (“the HUB”) already underway, it is important to co-locate businesses that can offer wraparound services (finance, legal, accounting, small business loans). The town should also consider enlisting the help of either a nonprofit with co-working experience or an entrepreneur panel to guide the development of Stetson Hall and provide mentorship opportunities to new businesses.

Form a Crawford Square Business Association

Currently Crawford Square lacks a business association to address concerns and establish goals for the CSBD. Organizing an association that can help to create a vision, identity and branding for the district is essential to the success of any redevelopment efforts.

Branding and Wayfinding

Once a vision for the Crawford Square Business District is established, a branding campaign should follow. Currently there are no banners or signs that distinguish the CSBD from the rest of the town, or that establish a sense of place. Marketing materials should be developed to promote the new vision of the CSBD. Signage indicating where local businesses are in the district should also be put in place. Further along in the process, wayfinding kiosks can be added.

Employ Social Media

An important component of any branding campaign is social media, and there appears to be a lack of any social media presence for the Town of Randolph Chamber of Commerce, Crawford Square or most businesses in the district. Hiring a person (or finding an intern/volunteer) to develop and coordinate social media initiatives across multiple platforms to appeal to diverse age groups is strongly recommended.

Encourage Small Entrepreneurial Activities

Allowing food trucks, vendor carts, or even pop-up stores in some of the vacant storefronts and underutilized parking lots are ways to create a vibrancy in the CSBD, and should be considered for the Sudbury Farms and Shaw's Plazas. Weekend events featuring food and music from the diverse populations should also be considered to bring a level of activity to the plazas that is currently missing, and to raise awareness of existing and new businesses.

Conduct a Traffic Study

Any redevelopment plan that is undertaken must include a provision for better traffic management, whether that includes radical measures such as re-routing trucks during commute times or adding cutouts for bus dropoff/pickups. A Traffic Study for the Crawford Square Area was conducted in 2006, but the City should consider hiring a traffic consultant to conduct an analysis of the current traffic flows within the Study Area. This traffic study should identify existing traffic challenges in the Crawford Square Area, as well as an analysis of what future traffic flows would look like under various development scenarios. The study could also help identify potential solutions for roadway network and bus transit improvements needed to respond to the future development scenarios.

Develop a Comprehensive Parking Strategy

A utilization review needs to be conducted in order to determine the extent of the Town's parking issues, as there were conflicting appraisals of the availability of parking in the district from the various groups of stakeholders. Once completed, the Redevelopment Authority may be the vehicle to coordinate an effective parking strategy between property owners and the town to ensure that there is sufficient parking to support the businesses. Any plan should include wayfinding measures to ensure that all lots within the walkable proximity of Crawford Square are locatable.

C) Redevelop Sudbury Plaza

While Sudbury Farms Plaza is currently an underperforming marketplace with a number of empty storefronts and complex ownership issues, it is considered a vital component of any long-term redevelopment strategy for the Crawford Square Business District.

The panel recommends the following steps for the initial stages of redevelopment of this sub-area:

Address Parking Lot Issues

The parking lot, which is also used as a traffic cut-through by the locals, is poorly lit and is not pedestrian friendly. The owners should be brought together to formulate a plan for making aesthetic improvements, upgrading the lighting and improving the pedestrian experience. In order to pay for improvements, the town should consider providing funding assistance in exchange for providing municipal parking access. The parking lot could also be employed for alternative uses, such as hosting events or food trucks during times of low utilization.

Facilitate Owner Investment

The town should meet with the owners of the parcels to discuss ways to either improve their properties through re-investment, or consider selling the property, either to the town or investors that share the Town's vision for redevelopment. One potential way to encourage investment would come through zoning changes proposed earlier. If the zoning allowed for new multi-story mixed-use buildings or the construction of pad buildings on the parcels, as opposed to the single building per parcel zoning currently in place, that new in-fill development would generate new cash flow that could be reinvested into the remaining structures.

Develop a Strategy That Allows for a Singular Vision for Redevelopment

Given the importance of Sudbury Farms Plaza into the overall scheme of the redevelopment of the Crawford Square Business District, the town should make every effort to find a cooperative solution with the owners of the parcels. However, if the Redevelopment Authority is unable to reach a cooperative solution with the property owners, the town has the ability to take the properties by Eminent Domain if they have been deemed to be blighted, that power should be used only if after all other solutions have been exhausted.

Funding Sources

MassDevelopment Real Estate Technical Assistance Program

The program works with municipal officials, planners, local stakeholders, and others to provide technical assistance that uses creative solutions and clear action steps to address site-specific and district-wide economic development challenges . Next application round is Spring of 2019.

Public Infrastructure Financing

- Tax-Exempt Bonds for Public Infrastructure
- State Revolving Fund (SRF)
- MassWorks Grant

MassDevelopment issues tax-exempt bonds for improvements to roadways, sidewalks, parks, parking garages, bridges, tunnels, wharves, and a range of public facilities. Infrastructure programs that use this tax-exempt financing includes: District Improvement Financing (DIF) and Special assessments

- Tax Increment Financing – TIFs could be used to finance the pad buildings if the zoning is changed. The Town should also consider modeling and pre-designing a TIF package, and include the documentation in any marketing materials that may be included in RFPs as a way to entice developers.
- Community Preservation Act (CPA) funds could be used for targeted vacant storefront improvements within the CSBD.
- Community Development Block Grants
- DHCD-Mass Downtown Initiative – may be helpful in resolving wayfinding and parking issues

Massachusetts Cultural Facilities Fund

The Commonwealth supports the arts with capital grants for the acquisition, design, renovation, and construction of cultural facilities. They also offer grants for development studies. This fund is administered jointly by MassDevelopment and the Massachusetts Cultural Council.

MassDevelopment Commonwealth Places

Creative funding program, Commonwealth Places, in partnership with the crowdfunding platform Patronicity to help improve public spaces around the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Current crowdfunding projects funded by MassDevelopment can be found at <https://www.patronicity.com/commonwealthplaces#!/>

Predevelopment Loans

MassDevelopment provides low interest rate loans up to \$100,000 with deferred repayment terms to finance predevelopment real estate projects.

Conclusions

The Town of Randolph has demonstrated tremendous initiative in laying the groundwork necessary to transform the Crawford Square Business District into a vibrant town center that will be reflective of its diverse population. Although there are a number of issues that need to be addressed, the town and its engaged populace appear to have the willingness to enact the types of change needed to overcome many of these obstacles.

The first of these is the zoning. It cannot be overstated how excessively prescriptive and restrictive the current Table of Allowable Uses appears to developers that would otherwise be attracted to this well-located, transit accessible suburb. Given the demand for multifamily housing in the Boston metro region, the buildable sites around the multiple transportation nodes in the district would presumably have enormous appeal to mixed-use multifamily developers – if the restrictions were eased. In order for Randolph to realize their vision of a vibrant Crawford Square, there must be a critical mass of residential units, which also means allowing for increased height and density to support the redeveloped/new retail and restaurants, as well as the existing service businesses in the district.

One prime parcel that should be a cornerstone of multifamily development in the district is the six-acre vacant lot at the Highland Avenue/Warren Street intersection. Although recent developer interest has centered on a desire to construct a single-story gas station/convenience store or formula restaurant, the site would be ideally suited for mixed-use residential, if the zoning allowed for a five-story development. The number of units such a project could produce would provide the type of new density which would make the overall redevelopment of Crawford Square more feasible.

In addition to the residential component, commercial zoning changes will be necessary to unlock the full value of the Crawford Square Business District. The most meaningful change would be to allow property owners to construct multiple buildings on a property. Shaw's Plaza in particular would benefit from such a change, allowing the owner to add density around the perimeter of the plaza, particularly along the edge facing the high school.

Although the Sudbury Farms Plaza is considered to be the “anchor” of the Downtown, and could potentially be a major asset to any redevelopment strategy, the complex ownership picture may make that scenario unlikely in the short run. It should be noted that property owners do not typically have the same mindset of real estate developers, instead functioning more in the role of asset managers, whose objectives are more geared towards maintaining a steady cash flow rather than taking on the risks associated with development/redevelopment.

The types of long-term investments and adjustments required for shared parking, placemaking, and branding that this study and the Redevelopment Authority deem important to the success of the redevelopment efforts may not be consistent with the current goals of the property owners.

The first priority for the Town should be the revitalization of Crawford Square itself. If the redevelopment of Crawford Square is successful, that may serve as a motivating factor for the Sudbury Farms Plaza owners to either buy into redevelopment or to sell their properties. A clear-eyed assessment of property owner's capacity to engage in a workable redevelopment strategy needs to be made by the town, and although Eminent Domain is a tool of last resort for the Redevelopment Authority, it still remains an option if a cooperative agreement cannot be reached.

As the town moves into a new era with a Redevelopment Authority to lead the way, and a common goal shared by the developers and townspeople alike, the town's vision for a Crawford Square Business District that reflects the identity of the town is achievable.