

CITY OF NEW BEDFORD

**ACUSHNET AVENUE CORRIDOR VISION PLAN
COMMUNITY MEETING**

OCTOBER 14, 2008



City of New Bedford
Mayor Scott W. Lang

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Acushnet Avenue Corridor Plan is an effort undertaken by the City of New Bedford's Office of Planning, Office of Housing and Community Development (OHCD), and the New Bedford Economic Development Council (NBEDC) to create a blueprint for the revitalization of the Avenue, the city's north end commercial district.

The City recently completed a comprehensive and detailed analysis of the North End Acushnet Avenue Corridor. This work has largely been lead by the Office of Housing and Community Development and has provided telling data in the areas of population demographics, housing stock, retail vitality, zoning, transportation, infrastructure, public safety, and problem properties. Additionally, business surveys conducted by the New Bedford Economic Development Council and MIT students prepared an analysis of commercial district marketing, management and governance as part of the overall assessment process.

The study area extends along Acushnet Avenue from Coggeshall Street north to Tarkiln Hill Road, and includes the gateway intersections located at Tarkiln Hill Road, Wood Street, Nash Road and Coggeshall Street.

Public input has been sought throughout this period of analysis and has been a vital component to the Upper Harbor District community visioning process, which includes Acushnet Avenue. Community planning workshops, public outreach meetings, and one-on-one surveys has provided a rich perspective to developing the vision for future development of the Acushnet Avenue Corridor.

Visioning Workshop

The NBEDC staff conducted a door-to-door survey in September 2008. The purpose of the survey was to gain baseline knowledge about the existing businesses along the Avenue. During the survey, the staff personally invited shop owners, managers, and staff to attend the public visioning workshop on October 14th, 2008.

The public visioning workshop was held at the Breakfast Klub, located at 1232 Acushnet Avenue. The business and property owners along the Avenue were notified through the personal invitations and fliers that were dropped at each establishment. The City's Planning Office also sent out emails to the North End Business Association and the Bullard Street Neighborhood group.

This process consisted of everyone having the opportunity to review maps and visuals of the study area and discuss ideas, concerns and visions for what the plan should focus upon.

PUBLIC INPUT ON THE VISION

The meetings presented lively discussion and common themes emerged. The common themes expressed by the participants during this session included business development, housing and quality of life issues, infrastructure and parking.

The visioning workshop began with participants being greeted by the Planning, OHCD, and NBEDC staff that encouraged them to review the visuals, and ask any questions they may have regarding the draft vision plan for the entire Upper Harbor District, the process for the workshop, next steps, etc.

Each community meeting included a brief presentation from the NBEDC to provide the participants with an understanding of how the Upper Harbor draft plan was developed. Public input and discussion was facilitated at each meeting by the vice chair of the New Bedford Planning Board. The planning staff through flipcharts documented the participants' input on the vision plan. The following input was gathered at each of the three community meetings from approximately forty participants.

Public Visioning Workshop – The Breakfast Klub

Business Development

- Develop education/technical assistance for small business planning
 - Provide a mentoring program for new business owners
- Create a website for the Avenue
 - Links to individual businesses/restaurants
- Expand collaborative marketing
 - Emphasis on web-based marketing
 - Utilize mass email to connect with other tourism/marketing sectors of the city
 - Utilize coupons and discounts as incentives to attract customers
- Advertise ethnic businesses in diverse newspapers and media
- Expand storefront façade program
 - Better marketing of the program
 - More information on the program (contacts, boundaries of program)
 - Investigate the use of installment payments/micro loans
- Create a vacant window program using local resources (students, artists)
- Create a brand for the Avenue
- Encourage diverse “mom & pop” style businesses; discourage big box retail
- Establish North End Market Place (Portuguese, Spanish, European feel)

Housing & Quality of Life

- Highlight the beautiful gardens and encourage the creation of more
- Conduct garden tours in the North End
- Create more green space
- Provide immediate code enforcement and public safety
- Address tax title properties
- Utilize vacant properties for public parking
- Zero tolerance for crime (petty crime leads to more serious crime)
- Establish a feeling of safety and comfort level on the Ave
- Keep the Ave free from trash and crime
- Address homelessness and crime on the Ave

Infrastructure (streets, sidewalks)

- Develop regular street cleaning schedule with signage
- Enforce cleaning of sidewalks by both the city and businesses
- Improve and widen sidewalks for café and outdoor seating
- Enhance pedestrian lighting/replace cobra-head lighting
- Create uniformity of storefront facades

Parking

- Develop better transit system with links to downtown, waterfront
 - Must be well marketed with regular/predictable service
- Enforce parking along the Ave
- Utilize vacant lots for parking
- Create better signage for current city parking lots
- Enforce and regulate use of city parking lots

SUMMARY FINDINGS

Strong support was expressed from the participants that the City needs to better harness the assets of the study area to ensure that they are utilized to their fullest potential. The Acushnet Avenue Corridor received enthusiastic support for complete planning and development. Many participants articulated that marketing existing assets and short-term successes are needed to build momentum in what could be a 10-year development plan.

A summary of consistently expressed comments during each of the sessions has been grouped together and are as follows:

Acushnet Avenue Corridor

- Create collaborative marketing for web presence, print, and media
- Revitalize the Ave as a safe, successful, and lively commercial corridor
- Intensify and improve code enforcement immediately
- Develop the Acushnet Avenue Corridor as an international market with a greatly enhanced physical identity and character that emphasizes local and independent shop owners and encourages an increase in pedestrian activity
- Regulate and enhance parking, from on-street to city parking lots
- Provide support to businesses through lending programs, mentoring and education

As the visioning process concludes, public outreach must be continued and intensified to overcome skepticism and apathy regarding the future development of the Acushnet Avenue Corridor. The City and the NBEDC are hopeful that as progress is made along the Avenue, that these accomplishments will increase businesses' and residents' awareness and participation in future planning and development projects will continue to expand.

APPENDICES

Appendix A – Flier

Appendix B – Public Visioning Workshop Sign-in Sheets

