



TOWN OF SHREWSBURY

Richard D. Carney Municipal Office Building
100 Maple Avenue
Shrewsbury, Massachusetts 01545-5338

MEMORANDUM

TO: Board of Selectmen
FROM: Moe DePalo, Chair
Beal Reuse Committee
SUBJECT: Recommendations for the Reuse of the Beal School Property
DATE: July 8, 2019

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide the Board of Selectmen with recommendations for the reuse of the existing Beal School site at 1 Maple Avenue. The Beal Reuse Committee believes that whatever use and or design is chosen through the RFP process, the proposal should generate the highest and best outcomes for the Town.

The Beal Early Childhood Center Reuse Committee (henceforth known as “the Committee”), was established by the Board of Selectmen in November 2017. The charge of the Committee was to undertake a comprehensive analysis of potential reuse for the Beal School property that included: reviewing existing building plans, the Town’s Master Plan, and other studies; conducting site tours and appraisals; developing conceptual plans denoting potential use options; identifying resources required to carry out this charge; providing a final report and recommendations of the most appropriate reuse to the Board of Selectmen.

The Committee believes it has fulfilled its charge by holding a public hearing since its formation to solicit opinions from the general public as well as from Town staff. The Committee also held 9 public meetings, 2 of which included participation from the public. One meeting included discussion with the Historic District Commission and the Planning Board. The Committee worked closely with Bernard Cahill, Town Planner, and Kristen Las, Assistant Town Manager. The Committee also met several times with the consultant Horsley Witten Group, and Claire O’Neill of MassDevelopment.

In 2018 the Town was also the recipient of a MassDevelopment technical assistance grant to develop a report that could act as a tool for envisioning and guiding the future development of the Town Center in general, and the Beal School site in particular. MassDevelopment hired the consulting firm Horsley Witten Group to work with the town to create the report with the support of the Planning and Economic Development

Department and with the input of the Committee. The data for the report was gathered through an extensive public outreach process that included two separate paper-based surveys, two online surveys, and a public forum. Horsley Witten Group provided several conceptual-level plans of the Beal School site in order to and encourage feedback and critical thinking from survey respondents and public forum participants.

The final report, dated May 28, 2019, summarizes the survey responses in regards to the Beal School site, identifies the most commonly repeated opinions that emerged from discussions with the Committee, Town staff and the public at large, and articulates how those opinions can be used when drafting a policy framework for potential buyers or developers of the Beal property.

The Committee feels that it has fulfilled the charge set out by the Board of Selectmen and offers the following recommendations:

Committee Recommendations

Impact on Town Center

- The redevelopment of the Beal School site should make a significant positive impact to the aesthetic appeal and overall economic vibrancy of the Town Center district by including uses that will increase foot traffic and draw visitors from other parts of Shrewsbury and beyond.
- The RFP should not restrict the tax status of a proposed use on the parcel. The Committee believes a proposal should be accepted based on the holistic view of the project's overall impact on cultural and economic activity in the Town Center.
- Proposals for the development of the existing Beal School property should be subject to design review by an architectural peer reviewer, paid for by the developer, to ensure the site elevates the experience of the Town Center through the use of high quality site and building design techniques.

Building Re-use

- Developers should be allowed to explore the possibility for adaptive reuse of the existing Beal School building. However, the Committee recognizes the challenges and costs related to adaptive reuse and therefore believes developers should also be allowed to propose wholesale replacement of the existing building and redevelopment of the site.

Design

- Development along Maple Avenue should be prioritized to be vertical mixed use (e.g. commercial/retail with residential or office above) in order to create a more “New England style” town center look and feel.
- The veteran’s memorial shall be preserved either in its current location or in a prominent location along Maple Avenue as agreed to by the Board of Selectmen and the developer.
- The developer should provide a public messaging system as part of a reuse or reconstruction of the site to replace the existing public message board as agreed to by the Board of Selectmen.
- Any new building should engage the street and maintain access to the veteran’s memorial. Engaging the street means the space between the façade of the building and the street should be designed for pedestrians and bicyclists. This space could include park space, walkways, bikeways, bike racks, street furnishings, etc.
- New buildings should be located along the primary sidewalk. Whether immediately adjacent to the sidewalk or not, ground-floor uses facing Maple Avenue should be non-residential.
- The number of curb cuts on Maple Avenue should be minimized or prohibited altogether in order to create a more contiguous town center streetscape.

Open Space and Public Access

- A majority of the current baseball field area along Wesleyan Street should remain as open space or as a recreation area accessible to the public.
- Areas that are not designated for buildings or parking areas should be designed as easily accessible gathering places making the site a hub for activity in the Town Center. Café seating, picnic areas, playgrounds, and courtyards are examples of features that will help to achieve this vision.

Parking

- The site shall include parking spaces that can be used as a shared resource for businesses in the Town Center. Different ownership models, (e.g., town-owned vs privately owned), for parking areas should be open for negotiation with the developer.
- Regardless of the ownership model, access to parking spaces that serve the Town Center must be guaranteed.

- Parking and interior travel lanes for automobiles should not be constructed any closer than thirty (30) feet from the front property line along Maple Avenue.
- Consideration should be given to encouraging and allowing underground parking for any proposed buildings.
- Development proposals should strive to balance a variety of mixed uses so that demand for parking is distributed throughout different times of the day.

Site Access

- Circulation on site shall consider the best ways for automobiles to enter and exit the site without exacerbating existing traffic problems.
- Circulation on site shall consider the best ways to connect pedestrians and bicyclists to the larger system of biking and walking in the Town Center.

Zoning

- Zoning changes to parking requirements, setbacks and yard requirements, lot size requirements, design guidelines, and mixed uses should be considered and implemented in order to foster traditional New England town center development.

Prohibited Uses

- Prohibited uses should include, but not be limited to:
 - Large retail or commercial single story, single use buildings
 - Gas Stations
 - Motor vehicle repair or display
 - Drive thru of any type
 - Large scale manufacturing/industrial uses
 - Storage facilities
 - Adult use establishments
 - Marijuana establishments of any type

We look forward to discussing our recommendations with you at your July 9, 2019 regularly scheduled meeting.

Attachment: Beal Reuse Committee Charge



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The Board of Selectmen is establishing the Beal Early Childhood Center Reuse Committee to be comprised of seven (7) members. Individuals shall be appointed who, by reason of their current or prior background in such fields as construction, architecture, real estate, land use and development, engineering or other relevant experience, have special knowledge to assist in evaluating and recommending future uses of the property. The membership shall be comprised of the following:

1. One member of the Board of Selectmen or Designee, who shall chair such committee
2. One member of the Shrewsbury Housing Authority
3. One member of the Parks and Cemetery Commission or Designee
4. One member of the Beal Early Childhood Center Building Committee
5. The Superintendent of Public Buildings
6. Two members at large with one being appointed by the Board of Selectmen and one being appointed by Town Manager

Town staff members including but not limited to the Assistant Town Manager/Economic Development Coordinator, Town Planner, Town Engineer and the Director of Parks, Recreation and Cemetery shall be engaged by the Committee to inform their decisions.

The Committee shall undertake a comprehensive analysis of potential reuses for the Beal Early Childhood Center property. The analyses should include future public uses as well as the potential benefits of disposing of the property.

The Committee's work should include by not be limited to the following:

- Review existing building plans, studies, conduct site tours, conduct appraisals and obtain other information as needed to inform themselves of property
- Review the Town's Master Plan and other documents related to the development goals of the Town Center
- Develop conceptual plans denoting each potential use option with an attendant cost/benefit analysis
- Identify resources required to carry out this charge
- Provide a final report and recommendation of the most appropriate reuse to the Board of Selectmen which includes a review of all alternatives considered

The Committee should ensure their approach incorporates robust input from the public, boards and committees and Town departments. All meetings are to be held in a public location, properly posted and open to the public in accordance with the Massachusetts Open Meeting Law. A majority of the membership of this committee, four (4) members, shall constitute a quorum.