



City of Fitchburg, Massachusetts
DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

HOUSING & DEVELOPMENT ♦ PLANNING ♦ ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

March 29, 2019

Mr. Brian Lutenegger, Program Associate & Assistant to Gov. Parris Glendening
Smart Growth America
1152 15th Street, Suite 450
Washington, DC 20005

RE: 6-Month & 12-Month Progress Reports – “(Re)Building Downtown” Next Steps

Dear Mr. Lutenegger:

During the 6-month and 12-month periods following our Smart Growth America “(Re)Building Downtown” workshop, the City of Fitchburg has achieved substantial progress within the downtown district. Many of these benchmark accomplishments directly align with the *Short-term* (3-6 months) and *Medium-term* (6-12 months) actions recommended by SGA. In addition, there have been numerous accomplishments that, although not directly identified in the Next Steps memo, are definitely relevant to our revitalization plans and ongoing aspirations for the downtown.

6-Month Progress:

- Fitchburg formally submits two Census Tracts to Commonwealth (& ultimately U.S. Commerce Dept.) for designation as federal *Opportunity Zones*, including one tract encompassing the downtown
- Fitchburg received \$219,000 Complete Streets grant from MassDOT toward physical improvements to Upper Common section of downtown for enhanced pedestrian safety and greater accessibility
- FSU marketing students teamed with city staff for semester long *Marketing Assessment* of the City of Fitchburg, including SWOT analysis of best assets & suggested actions for city in effectively promoting itself
- Harvard’s Kennedy School of Govt. students (“Community Devt. Project”) prepared a *Water Street Corridor Plan* focusing on incremental aesthetic improvements for this key gateway into the downtown
- City, NewVue Communities, and area realtors partnered for a “*Buying & Selling Fitchburg*” event showcasing Fitchburg’s best assets to attract new homebuyers, to kick-off marketing of Fitchburg
- MassINC (research org.) releases Transformative Transit-Oriented Development (TTOD) report focusing on Gateway Cities in MA and prominently featuring Fitchburg’s potential for such development
- Storefront fit-out grant program (\$10K-\$40K, up to 50% of project cost) launched by ReImagine North of Main to incent new tenancies within targeted section of downtown; supported four (4) businesses on Main Street
- NewVue Communities’ small business technical assistance provided business planning guidance to two ventures tenanting downtown storefronts (Strong Style Coffee, Tryst Lounge)
- City formalizes sale of former B.F. Brown School bldg. (“*Fitchburg Arts Community*”) to NewVue Communities for redevelopment into 62 live/work residential units for artists & creative professionals

12-Month Progress:

- *Economic Development Strategic Plan* formally adopted by City Council & implementation underway; incorporates Smart Growth principles throughout the downtown and elsewhere
- Historic Tax Credits (first round, state-level) awarded to 10 Main Street (former Harper Furniture bldg.) mixed-use redevelopment project, with Federal HTC along with LIHTC next to be secured
- City initiated discussions with several key downtown landlords regarding existing tenancies, recruitment of future tenants, and redevelopment of upper-story space for residential use
- Fitchburg awarded *Transformative Development Initiative* ("TDI") district status from MassDevelopment, including 3-year TDI fellow (mid-career professional) focused solely on downtown revitalization
- TDI Partnership, a collective of downtown stakeholders, is formed to oversee implementation of various downtown initiatives and programming
- "*Activate Mill Street*" design concept prepared by TDI with Harvard students for use in a Patronicity crowdfunding campaign to launch tactical urbanism (placemaking) in targeted downtown corridor; \$40K match awarded by state
- Commonwealth awarded \$60K *Urban Agenda Grant* to Fitchburg State University to support entrepreneurial programming at FSU's new ideaLab facility on Main Street (within Theater Block bldg.)
- *Memorandum of Agreement* signed by city and FSU regarding planned shared-parking structure abutting FSU's Theater Block and directly opposite historic City Hall (now under renovation)
- City Council authorizes \$125K funding allocation to comprehensively revise city's Zoning Ordinance in accordance with Smart Growth principles
- City partnering with NewVue to update local "Smart Growth" zoning (per M.G.L. ch. 40R) to include downtown

Temporary Setbacks:

- *Moran Square Diner* chose to cease operations and property was sold; new owner's plans not yet clear
- *Gallery Sitka* closed after owner relocated out of area; building was sold to new landlord
- *Shack's Clothing* closed after business owner sold building to new landlord seeking to bring in new tenants
- Downtown Fitchburg's *One-Lane Main Street* infrastructure pilot was disbanded by vote of City Council & original 2-lane on-way roadway pattern on Main Street was reinstated until such time as two-way travel is established

Overall, we are pleased to report that the collective work taking place downtown is clearly gaining momentum. The collaborative approach being used to spawn revitalization of Main Street has attracted new participants and brought on additional skills and resources. Currently, Fitchburg is eager to explore the full potential of the newest economic development tool, *Opportunity Zones*, which will be a catalyst to transformative transit-oriented development downtown.

As always, we welcome your feedback and suggestions regarding Fitchburg's progress to date.

Sincerely,



Mary Jo Bohart
Economic Development Director

CC: Tom Skwierawski, Executive Director of Planning & Community Development

Attachment: *Fitchburg Economic Development Strategic Plan* (adopted October 2018)