

## Memorandum

**Date:** June 25, 2012  
**To:** Millville Planning Board and Joe Laydon, Town Planner  
**From:** Trish Settles, Principal Planner  
**Cc:** Dave Foss, Fuss & O'Neil  
**Re:** 2012 Village Vision Project Summary

### Project Background

In September 2011, the Town of Millville requested support from the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC) to assist with the development of a "Vision" for the Millville Village District. Previous planning efforts include:

- Millville has a Master Plan that dates back to 1995. A Master Plan is the foundation for all zoning, land use and other permitting decisions in the future.
- A Community Development Plan was developed in 2005 pursuant to Executive Order 418.
- There is no Open Space and Recreation Plan, or a Housing Production Plan.
- The Town was part of a study of the Blackstone Valley 146 Corridor.
- The Town was the subject of a Massachusetts Heritage Landscape Inventory Reconnaissance Report, completed in 2007.

The Town has several assets including town-owned land, the Southern New England Trunkline Trail (SNETT) and the Blackstone River, all located in the downtown and providing a strong foundation on which to build. The Village Center contains Millville's largest concentration of businesses. The 1995 Town Plan set forth several goals, objectives and recommendations that should be revisited to insure consistency.

Some of the goals from the 1995 Master Plan regarding economic development in Millville included:

- Promote and encourage small-scale businesses in existing or emerging commercial nodes that respect the rural-residential make-up of adjacent neighborhoods.
- Allow some business activity to provide needed goods, services, and meeting places but discourage



“commercialization” in Millville.

- Limit economic activity to a few appropriate locations where businesses can thrive.

Principal Planners Trish Settles and Vera Koliass met with the Millville Planning Board on December 12, 2011 to discuss the project goals and scope. CMRPC proposed to provide assistance with the following activities with regard to the articulation of a Vision for the Millville’s Village Center District.

- Work with the Town Planner and the Planning Board to gather basic information and a broad understanding of issues related to village planning.
- Develop meeting materials; facilitate visual preference survey and workshop
- Provide a summary of the workshop with recommendations for next steps.

The Town Planner and the Planning Board were responsible for all necessary organizing, outreach/publicizing/posting, logistics for public forum. Economic development and commercial land uses received greater attention in the exercise with only secondary attention to residential uses if they were combined in a mixed use project. For the purposes of this project, the Village Center Zoning District was determined to be the focus of the exercise.

### **181 Main Street Site Reuse Plan**

Following the December 2011 meeting, a second component was added to the project. A key property in Millville’s Village is 181 Main Street, the Former United States Rubber Company. In January 2011, CMRPC’s consultant Fuss & O’Neil (F&O), working with resources from EPA’s Brownfield’s Assessment Program, completed a Phase One (1) Environmental Site Assessment of the subject property. The property is owned by the Town of Millville and occupies 9.65 acres in an irregularly shaped parcel between the Blackstone River and the Providence and Worcester (P&W) Railroad. The attached Site Plan shows the location of the site within the Village Center District, the focus of this exercise.



As a possible focal point of new development in the Village, CMRPC made additional resources available to contract with Fuss & O’Neil for a Site Reuse Plan. On March 19<sup>th</sup>, Fuss & O’Neil engineers and designers met with the Select Board and Planning Board to discuss possible redevelopment scenarios that might be considered. Fuss & O’Neil developed the attached Concept Site Plan for use in gathering community input. This Plan delineated the required setbacks, permitted uses, and other limiting conditions as well as abutting lots. F&O reviewed base line sketches (redevelopment of site under current zoning); gathered feedback from community regarding preferred uses given known site constraints. Current environmental conditions and likely cleanup scenarios, other site conditions, zoning

bylaws, limiting conditions and the allowed and restricted uses were all factored into the discussion as well as the town's desire to realize tax revenue and its ability to maintain property.

Also at the March 19<sup>th</sup> meeting, CMRPC and the Town Planner discussed with the Planning Board and Board of Selectmen that the newly shaped village vision plan would follow the development of a 181 Main Street site reuse plan. At this meeting, the general public was introduced to the concept of village visioning role of site visioning within village visioning effort, and the overall visioning approach. Participants learned (generally) the difference between potential based on current zoning, and the potential reuse of the mill site based on preferred uses/vision.

From the feedback provided at the March 19 meeting, F&O developed site reuse plans and boards showing preferred redevelopment of mill site for use. At the April 30 meeting, F&O presented two plans – one with one large building occupying the site and the second with two smaller buildings occupying the site. This plan entailed a foot print of 18,000 square feet (sf) or 36,000 sf on two (2) floors.

Both site reuse options included parking and additional public open space connecting to the river. General consensus was that the two building approach offered more flexibility with a phased approach. One additional site reuse discussed but not drafted into a plan was the possible use of the site or portion of the site for combined waste water treatment for surrounding properties.

Attached are the following Fuss and O'Neil deliverables:

- A site plan,
- Fuss and O'Neil summary;
- The site reuse concept plan;
- The zoning assessment; and
- The conceptualized site layout with vignettes.

### **Visual Preference Survey**

At the April 30 public meeting, following F&O's presentation of the site reuse scenarios, CMRPC then facilitated a Visual Preference Survey to gather feedback from meeting participants regarding attributes that they preferred for the Village Center District. Visual Preference Surveys should give a sense of what participants feel the Village Center District should look and feel like, and what sorts of uses should be permitted or allowed in the district. The results of that conversation are attached.



In addition to Planning Board members, about half a dozen others participated in the Visual Preference Survey. The Turning Point Technologies Keypad Voting System used allowed us to tally results to questions presented. However, we experienced some minor technical difficulties in retaining the key pad voting results.

Many images were from Massachusetts towns, including some Blackstone Valley Mill towns. The survey consisted of 30 slides with images that depicted the following:

- Villages and Town Centers
- Commercial and Industrial Uses
- Mixed Use (Retail/Office with Residential)
- Public Uses and Open Space

For each slide we asked that participants to focus on one of the following elements and to indicate their reaction as Very Positive, Positive, Neutral, Negative or Very Negative.

- Setback
- Height
- Landscaping
- Design
- Use
- Orientation
- Amenities
- Parking

All of the images represented views from the road: what people would see as they drive, bicycle, or walk through a town. This is because people often form impressions of a town based on views from the road. Views of the road matter. Roads and the land uses around them have a significant impact on the character of cities and towns. Participants were asked to set aside hopes or doubts about feasibility, economy and markets since these conditions change.



### Setback

In general a preference was indicated for zero or minimal setback from the street. There was a general sense that the lots sizes were too small to support setbacks including those needed for parking.

### Height

One story buildings were strongly frowned upon, unless they were an existing building. Preference was demonstrated for three and four story buildings. Larger five (5) story buildings were thought to be out of character with existing building.



### Landscaping

For the former mill site, participants appreciated the public open space and the connection to the river front, and also appreciate it in parking areas where needed. Typically landscaping is desired in that it helps controls storm water runoff.

### Design

Traditional New England design was preferred over more modern architecture.

### Use

Mixed use properties were favored. There was a sense that first floor retail should provide the base for upper level professional offices more than first floor commercial with residential uses above. This was almost universal throughout the survey. A common concern was that residential uses required more water and waste water infrastructure needed to support them. Industrial uses were seen as more appropriate to areas closer to Route 146.

### Orientation

Participants preferred street oriented uses, but understood potential/possibilities that might take advantage of various lot configurations and parking schemes.

### Amenities

Public open space that would support farmer's markets or small community gatherings were desired. Sidewalk furniture such as benches and planters were seen as positive.



### Parking

While a minimal setback was preferred, there were concerns about parallel or angled street parking creating backing problems on to heavily traveled roads. If shared parking or public parking can be created with just one or two curb cuts, disruption to traffic flow from entering or exiting vehicles will be minimized.

In addition to the survey, a few questions were asked to ascertain the characteristics, habits, and preferences of the participants in the room.

- Voting results demonstrated that most (58%) of those present had lived or owned property in Millville for greater than 20 years.
- In addition we asked participants what one thing they would like to see in the Millville Village Center -Personal Services: Gym, salon, drycleaners, etc.; Coffee shop/bakery/restaurant/bar; Professional/office; Retail; No change. In our discussion, participants felt strongly that all of these uses were desirable and that everyone presented want some change in Millville Village Center.
- And lastly we asked how often participants visited Millville Village Center. More than 50% said rarely or never.

## **Discussion of a Millville Village Center Vision**

Mill towns were full service towns –live, work and play in the same town. Millville is now a bedroom community. Planners and town leaders need to consider that folks work elsewhere and come home after work to Millville. Participants acknowledged that while Millville is no longer a “Mill Village”, many aspects of Mill Villages should be promoted and where possible resurrected and incorporated in the Village Center Vision. High density or clustered commercial uses support multiple purposes trips. District design/plans with multiple or complimentary destinations/uses would encourage community. There was a strong desire to create community building opportunities. When there were Mills, there was more “Community.”

In a Community or Village Center, more people would be walking down to the Center to get coffee and a bagel or walk to pick up something from the hardware store and then picking up their cleaning. The Village Center should be alive during the day and during the evening. Driving to the public parking area might provide access to the farmer’s market and then the ice cream parlor with your family on a Saturday.

Bringing the access to the Blackstone River back and the promoting the bike path would encourage tourists and visitors to come and visit the Village center. Tourists visiting the oldest meeting house, the nearby Southwick Zoo, or other Blackstone Valley destination might stop by to enjoy the Millville Village Center.

## **Recommendations**

- The 1995 Town Plan (though it is 17 years old) set forth several goals, objectives and recommendations that should be revisited to insure consistency or updated to reflect current perspectives.
- Based on this exercise and further discussions, town leaders should formalize a specific vision of the Millville Village Center District that included a few short descriptive sentences to demonstrate a vision for the future. In addition, “Millville Village Center Design Guidelines and Preferences” can go a long way to formally presenting town preferences that can be shared with potential developers and others.
- The Planning Board and Zoning Board should review bylaws and revise to promote the preferred uses, heights, set back, conditions favored in the visual preference survey. More specificity should be provided with regard to allowed uses. For developers, the ambiguity is discouraging. Developers prefer to know what they can do “by-right”.
- Exploration and discussion of the town’s goals with respect to the redevelopment of the 181 Main Street site should be continued. Questions will involve public versus private ownership, tax revenue versus lease revenue, site disposition process, etc. The redevelopment process will vary depending on the answers to these questions.

We thank the Millville Planning Board for the opportunity to participate in the exciting project and look forward to future work with them to develop the Village Center District Vision.

**Millville Zoning Bylaw Summary**  
(As it applies to the Village Center District)  
The Millville Zoning Bylaw was last revised in May 2008.

Millville has 3 districts –

1. Outlying Residential (OR)
2. Village Residential (VR), &
3. Village Center (VC),

Currently **allowed** in the VC district by right:

- Sales room or stand for the display or sales of agricultural or horticultural products on a seasonal basis.
- Single family detached dwelling.
- Conversion of a single family dwelling existing prior to the adoption of the By-Law to accommodate not more than two families.
- Cellar hole or basement area used as a dwelling.
- Trailer, coach, or mobile home to be occupied, for a period not exceeding six months upon a lot defined in Article I, Section 4 and 5 during the construction of a permanent residence on such lot or by (b) by one or more persons on temporary visits to Millville not exceeding thirty days in any successive twelve (12) months.
- Renting of one or two rooms and tile furnishing of board by a resident family to not more than three non-transient persons.
- Customary home occupation conducted by a resident of the premises provided that not more than one other person is regularly employed therein in connection with such use and that there is not exterior storage of material or equipment, and that no display of products is visible from the street.
- Church or other place of worship, parish house, rectory, convent, and other religious institutions
- Schools, public, religious, sectarian, or denominational.
- Public recreational and water supply use.

Currently **not allowed** in VC district

- Trailer, coach, or mobile home.
- Trailer, coach, or mobile home park.

Anything else maybe allowed **by special permit**