

MEMORANDUM

To: Board of Selectmen

From: Joshua Ostroff

Date: May 29, 2008

Re: Natick Center Parking and Transportation Strategy

Cc: Martha White, Town Administrator; Patrick Reffett, Community Development Director; Michael Young, Deputy Town Administrator; Bob Foster, Planning Board; Scott Landgren, Zoning Board of Appeals; Natick Center Associates Board of Directors

This memorandum is intended to bring the Board of Selectmen up to date on discussions concerning parking improvements in Natick Center. The Board may seek to take action on item 1 below, and/or endorse or consider other actions.

Background

Parking in Natick Center has been an issue for many years, exacerbated in part by the Town's waiver of parking requirements for the Municipal Complex in the 1990s without providing additional daytime parking, and by the failure of the upper deck of the Municipal Garage in February 2006. A proposal for an expanded parking facility was brought to the Board in May 2006, but was subsequently put on hold while the Town explored a lease option for the site that would have developed parking and housing at no direct public expense.

One view of this issue is that adequate parking in Natick Center provides very real benefits to the Town as a whole from greater private investment, higher building occupancy, higher property valuations, increased tax revenues, more services and a more robust economy in Natick Center. Yet the cost to create parking is sufficiently great that it impedes easy solutions and the private investment we seek to promote. There is a constructive role for Town government in coordinating and promoting solutions to this problem. At the same time, parking is but one part of a coordinated strategy that also includes public and alternative transportation as well as roadway improvements.

In February 2008, the BOS rejected the sole bid for development of the Middlesex Ave garage site since it failed to provide the minimum number of parking spaces required in the RFP. Subsequent discussions with the developer have revealed that in order for housing and the mandated amount of parking to coexist on that site, a structure much taller than anything else in Natick Center would be required. This is consistent with the Town's consultant's view prior to the issuance of the RFP.

The Board also agreed to have a small working group review a number of issues related to parking. This will provide some preliminary recommendations coming out of that process.

Recommendations

1. **Garage design:** Explore an economical garage design utilizing up to +/- \$28,000 available funds from a 2006 appropriation, as part of a potential public-private partnership with Natick Center Associates to create parking. This will provide a cost estimate for a design that maximizes parking with a three-level structure utilizing approaches on Middlesex Ave, Union Court and Summer Street. *Followup by Town Administration. Requires a vote of the BOS.*
2. **Downtown DIF:** Develop a proposal for a Natick Center DIF (District Improvement Financing) plan for a future Town Meeting Article to earmark increased tax revenues towards parking construction and maintenance. *Followup by Town Administration.*
3. **Residential parking requirements:** The Planning Board would draft an Article for a future Town Meeting to revise the Zoning Bylaws concerning residential parking requirements for Natick Center. The revision would likely maintain the existing requirements, but permit a ratio no lower than 1 space per dwelling unit with a “buy down” option, which would include one-time and/or recurring fees to be paid to a parking development fund. *Followup by the Planning Board.*
4. **Overnight municipal residential parking:** Explore an overnight parking program utilizing existing municipal parking lots and dedicated spaces. This would require input from the Safety Committee, among other boards and officials. *Followup by Town Administration. Cccc*
5. **MBTA station improvements:** Advocate with the MBTA for Natick Center T Station improvements. *Followup by BOS in concert with Town Administration and our legislative delegation.*
6. **Bicycle parking:** Explore new bicycle parking at the Natick Center T Station. *Followup by the Community Development and the Bicycle/Pedestrian Advisory Committee.*
7. **MWRTA station:** Explore an off-street MWRTA bus station to improve service and reduce traffic/parking conflicts. *Followup by Town Administration, the BOS representative to the MWRTA and MWRTA.*
8. **MBTA Commuter garage:** Following up on the August 2007 draft report and subsequent meetings, the BOS should come to a consensus regarding the location of any proposed MBTA Commuter Parking expansion. *Followup by BOS and Town Administration.*

Thank you for your interest, and I look forward to discussions with members of the Board.