Pros and Cons

Primary and Secondary Sites

This graphic presents the Pros and Cons for each development site. It summarizes data taken from the existing conditions analysis and observations from site visits in an effort to explain why these sites are considered to have primary and secondary development potential. In general, primary sites have greater current assets and fewer barriers.

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**Town of Dartmouth**

Route 6 Low Impact Development Study

July 2014
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Para solicitar una traducción de este documento al Español, por favor llame 508-824-1367.

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INTRODUCTION

In 2013, Dartmouth updated its community Priority Development Areas (PDAs) and Priority Protection Areas (PPAs). These are basic designations of where the community would like to encourage growth (PDAs) and conservation (PPAs). Three such priority areas in western Dartmouth are at issue in this report. The “Route 6 West” PDA lines the highway corridor and is intended for “general business and mixed use development and infill.” To its immediate north and south are two PPAs, the “Shingle Island River and Acushnet Cedar Swamp” and the “Town Wells,” which are intended to protect valuable habitat areas and drinking water resources, respectively.

The close proximity of these 3 areas, each of which represent different town priorities, illustrates the tension between the desire to intensify development along the corridor and the need to mitigate the impact of that development. Recognizing this dynamic, the town requested that SRPEDD evaluate the study area under a South Coast Rail Technical Assistance Grant. The task at hand is, first, to identify vacant and underutilized areas for future economic development and, second, to match LID strategies to them.

While the town’s Aquifer Overlay district and its recent progress toward promoting compact development in the Lincoln Park Chapter 40R site both support the town’s LID goals for the study area, this report will identify supplemental approaches for the western part of Dartmouth. These strategies include

1. Strengthening the existing Aquifer Overlay to include additional LID requirements and incentives;
2. Identifying opportunities for transfer of development rights (TDR) within the study area to shift growth away from sensitive areas towards desired locations and desired typologies; and
3. Creating consolidated, comprehensive Site Plan Review and Site Planning Rules and Regulations that emphasize LID.

SRPEDD will provide general descriptions of each technique, case study examples, and action items should the town choose to implement some or all of the recommended measures.

EXISTING CONDITIONS ANALYSIS

SRPEDD conducted a thorough existing conditions analysis along the study area, which was defined by establishing a quarter-mile radius around the Route 6 center line from the Westport Town Line east to Cross Road, a length of just over 2 miles. The existing conditions include a series of 16 thematic maps including study area orthophotography, land use, zoning, PDA and PPA designations, ownership patterns, current economic development assets, water resources and wetlands, open space, habitat areas, agriculture, crash data, hazards, land values, and other information. This information is the basis for identifying appropriate locations for intensified development while also cataloging natural resources. For detailed information, see the map series on pages 1 to 16.
Map 1: Study Area Boundary and Orthophotography

Map 1 depicts the study area boundary over MassGIS orthophotography from 2009. The study area is defined as a 1/4-mile buffer around the RTE 6 center line from Cross Road west to the Westport town line. The length of the roadway within the study area is 2.16 miles.

This map is for the sole purpose of aiding regional planning decisions and is not warranted for any other use.

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Map 2: Study Area Parcels

Study Area Parcels

Map 2 shows all parcels that intersect with the study area boundary as well as all structures in the general area. All subsequent property-related analysis (such as land use and ownership patterns) is limited to these properties. These parcels account of a total of 1,127 acres, or 1.76 square miles.

(Please note that these records date from FY13, and therefore may omit minor changes.)
Map 3: Land Use Patterns

Parcels are portrayed here according to their MassDOR Land Use Classification Codes and with conventional land use colors.

The study area has a broad mix of uses. Parcels classified as residences and apartments combine to make up 28% of the corridor’s land area. Business and Industrial uses combine to make up 20%. Institutional land uses (owned by entities such as municipalities or churches) and vacant land make up 21% and 19% of the land area, respectively.

For the purposes of economic development, promising land use patterns can include vacant land that is fairly distant from existing neighborhoods or clusters of commercial land.
The corridor is characterized by General Business (GB) zoning at a varying depths (of approximately 1,000') from the roadway center line. General Residence (GR) and Single Residence A (SR-A) zones are at the periphery of the study area.

The extensive Aquifer Overlay District covers much of the corridor. It includes several valuable water resources (see Map 8) and places basic Low Impact Development (LID) standards on development.

While the presence of Business zones is positive for economic development, conversations with town representatives reveal that mixed-use opportunities are desired along with expanded low impact development strategies.
In 2013, Dartmouth updated its community PDAs and PPAs as part the land use planning associated with the South Coast Rail project. These sites are basic designations of where the community would like to encourage growth (PDAs) and conservation (PPAs). For more information, please see www.srpedd.org/scr-update.

The town named the PDA along the corridor “Route 6 West”. According to the town’s 2013 report, the intent of this area is “general business and mixed use development and infill.”

To the north and south of the corridor are the “Shingle Island River and Acushnet Cedar Swamp” PPA and the “Town Wells” PPA. According to town priorities, any development in or near these areas should incorporate significant low impact development (LID) strategies. This dynamic demonstrates the tension between increased development opportunities along the corridor and the need to protect water resources and habitats.
Map 6: Ownership Patterns

Map 6 depicts ownership patterns in the study area. Commercial entities are depicted in pink. Various institutions (such as the town, the City of Fall River, and churches) are depicted in shades of blue, purple, and green. Individual land owners are depicted in shades of grey. Undeveloped commercially-owned land and contiguous single-owner properties can facilitate economic development efforts and are taken into account when examining site-specific proposals.
In 2010, there were approximately 111 firms in the study area with a total employment of 1,011 and an average of almost 9.1 employees per firm.

The area has supportive water and wastewater infrastructure. Additionally, Dartmouth is within a Massachusetts Office of Business Development (MOBD) Economic Target Area (ETA) and has identified a potential Economic Opportunity Areas (EOAs) in town. The town can explore the possibility of amending the ETA status to add new EOAs within the study area; this would make these sites eligible for tax incentives in support of economic development.
The southern portion of the study area contains a significant aquifer designated as a MassDEP Zone II Aquifer, MassDEP Medium- and High-Yield Aquifer, and a MassDEP Interim Wellhead Protection Area (IWPA). As was stated previously with regards to the “Town Wells” PPA, any development in or near these areas should incorporate significant low impact development (LID) strategies.

A MassDEP Medium-Yield Aquifer runs along Noquochoke Lake and the east branch of the Westport river on the western edge of the study area.
Open spaces can serve as assets to economic development; they can also indicate areas where the town may choose to avoid any disturbance associated with the built environment. Parcels with permanent conservation easements are, of course, “out of play” for development considerations. However, these and other open space and recreation areas should be accounted for in all development proposals.

The “Caddy Shack” recreation land depicted in red on the western edge of the study area does not have a conservation easement; according to discussions with town representatives, this site presents redevelopment opportunities.
Map 10: Habitat Areas and Wetlands

Much like open space considerations, development impacts on designated habitat areas should be avoided - particularly in a community with strong conservation tradition such as Dartmouth.

The study area has significant BioMap2 habitats on a several large, vacant or underutilized, and commercially-owned properties; this can limit their economic development potential - particularly with other available, unencumbered sites in the vicinity. Significant wetland features protected under Chapter 131, the Wetlands Protection Act, also impact site planning and development potential on several properties.
Agriculture plays an important role in Dartmouth’s history and community character. Moreover, the town’s right to farm bylaw and state Executive Order 193 (no state action should contribute to the loss of farmland of all prime or statewide importance) are important considerations for economic development.
Map 12: Study Area Crashes 2009 to 2011

Map 12 depicts three years of crash data, 2009 - 2011. Crash volumes appear to be highest at several intersections in the study area.

In 2011, the annual crashes per million vehicle miles travelled rate on RTE 177 west of Reed Road was 5.03. It was 3.25 east of Reed Road. These figures compare to the most recent standard rate for a urban minor arterial (such as RTE 177) at 3.63. This indicates that any future economic development should consider its impact on traffic safety along this corridor.
Any hazards such as flood plains, impaired waters, and brownfields impose risks on development activities. These considerations are key to site-specific economic development proposals.
Land values are an important input when considering a project’s financial feasibility and conducting real estate proforma analysis. Map 14 depicts parcels by their “per acre” land value.

Despite being normalized (dividing each parcel’s land value by its acres to “correct” for parcel size), smaller lots with mostly residential uses have significantly higher land values per acre than larger lots. This pattern is also visible in the study area math: the overall land value per acre (total value divided by total acres) is $93,574, far lower than in these small parcels or the median parcel value per acre of $213,504.

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Map 15: Year Built of Primary Structure

Map 15 shows the age of a parcel’s primary structure relative to the study area average (built in 1946, 68 years-old in 2014). A structure’s age or historical significance (and related measures of value) are key considerations for potential re-use or redevelopment.

- **Count|Percent**
  - 1700 - 1899: 31, 7%
  - 1900 - 1949: 156, 38%
  - 1950 - 1999: 192, 46%
  - 2000 - 2011: 35, 8%
  - **TOTAL**: 414, 100%

- **Mean**: 1946
- **Median**: 1950

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Improvement Value to Land Value Ratio is a shorthand, back-of-the-envelope measure of how highly improved a property is. It allows a quick look at how valuable a development is relative to its land. Values less than 1 indicate that a parcel’s land is more valuable than the structure on it; this can indicate either low quality of the improvement or high land values - possible signals for redevelopment. Conversely, highly improved parcels with ratios greater than 1 or 2 may not be prime for redevelopment.
Underutilized Sites for Potential Economic Development

SRPEDD staff and representatives from the Dartmouth Reviewers Committee (a group including the Town Administrator and Town Department Heads), combined findings from the preceding existing conditions analysis with direct site visit observations. The process of synthesizing this information pointed to several primary and secondary development sites, portrayed here.

In general, primary sites have more current assets and fewer barriers to development and environmental considerations. A complete accounting of each site’s characteristics is presented in the form of “pros” and “cons” in the following pages.

Strategies to promote low impact development on these sites are detailed beginning on page 19 of this report.
Primary and Secondary Sites for Potential Economic Development

This graphic presents the Pros and Cons for each development site. It summarizes data taken from the existing conditions analysis and observations from site visits in an effort to explain why these sites are considered to have either primary and secondary development potential.

Pros
- Community PDA (all parcels)
- Lincoln Park Chapter 40R activity
- Existing low-intensity business uses and vacant parcels
- Large single-ownership properties abut large Town-owned properties
- Existing sewer service nearby
- SRTA and OpenCape service
- Low land values on large back acreage
- 0.20 improvement to land value ratio
- Entirely within Aquifer Overlay
- Partial overlap with MassDEP IWPA and Medium-Yield Aquifer
- Moderate wetland, NHESP habitat, and FEMA Flood Zone considerations along Noquoquoke Lake
- Significant area of soils of statewide significance (E.O. 193)
- High crash rates in vicinity

Cons
- Community PDA (most parcels)
- Existing low-intensity business uses and vacant parcels
- Existing sewer service nearby
- SRTA and OpenCape service
- No wetlands, habitats, or hazards
- Only small overlap with MassDEP IWPA
- Low land values on large back acreage
- 0.55 improvement to land value ratio
- Entirely within Aquifer Overlay
- Patchwork of owners
- Entirely within an existing MassDEP IWPA and Zone II Aquifer significant overlap with a Medium-Yield Aquifer
- Significant wetland considerations
- Extensive FEMA Flood Zone considerations

Potential Redevelopment
- 114 acres
- 14.9 acres
- 67.9 acres
- 36.9 acres
- 38 acres

High crash rates in vicinity
- Potential economic development
- In general, primary sites have greater current assets and fewer barriers.

April 2014

This map is for the sole purpose of aiding regional planning decisions and is not warranted for any other use.

114 acres
14.9 acres
67.9 acres
36.9 acres
38 acres

Significant area of soils of statewide significance (E.O. 193)

Abutting property

DRAFT Map X: Underutilized Sites for Route 6 West: Low Impact Development Study

Town of Dartmouth
Route 6 Low Impact Development Study
LOW IMPACT DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

While the town’s Aquifer Overlay district and its recent progress toward promoting compact development in the Lincoln Park Chapter 40R site both support the town’s LID goals for the study area, this report will identify supplemental approaches for the primary and secondary development sites identified above. These strategies include:

(1) Strengthening the existing Aquifer Overlay to include additional LID requirements and incentives;

(2) Identifying opportunities for transfer of development rights (TDR) within the study area to shift growth away from sensitive areas towards desired locations and desired typologies; and

(3) Creating consolidated, comprehensive Site Plan Review and Site Planning Rules and Regulations that emphasize LID.

SRPEDD will provide general descriptions of each technique, case study examples, and action items should the town choose to implement some or all of the recommended measures. In other words, the remainder of this document will attempt to answer the following questions for each of the above recommendations: What is this LID technique? Where has it been used successfully and what did that look like? What resources are available to understand and adapt this technique to Dartmouth’s needs? What are the next steps that Dartmouth should undertake in pursuit of this technique?

Strengthen the existing Aquifer Overlay to include additional LID requirements and incentives

What is this LID technique?

Many towns across the Commonwealth have some form of Water Resource Protection in their zoning bylaws. Dartmouth’s “Aquifer Overlay,” which was added to the zoning bylaw in 1980, is a fairly robust version of this type of regulatory control. The Overlay covers all but the extreme eastern portion of the study area and applies additional development standards to the affected properties in the GB and SR-B zones. Its purpose is to “protect existing and potential groundwater supplies and recharge areas; particularly those areas that contribute to the public water supply . . . from detrimental development and land use practices, and to ensure the adequate quality and quantity of drinking water for distribution within the Town of Dartmouth.”

Where has it been used successfully and what did that look like?

In Dartmouth, the Aquifer Overlay achieves its goal in several ways. It prohibits uses that pose a high risk of contamination such as, but not limited to, landfills, industrial uses that discharge process wastewater on-site, and automotive service and repair. It also limits the types of building materials and systems allowed in the area to those with minimal environmental impact. Lot coverages are also limited to the greater of 10% or 2,500 square feet of lot area, thereby limiting stormwater runoff from impervious surfaces. Lastly, fairly detailed “Performance Standards” seek to incorporate basic LID site planning and construction techniques into new construction or renovation; these techniques include recharge systems for roof and stormwater runoff, utilizing natural drainage patterns and vegetation to maintain pre-development water quality, and the development of stormwater management plans by a registered engineer.

Dartmouth’s Aquifer Overlay is a good foundation for LID regulations in the study area. If thoroughly and consistently enforced, the bylaw already greatly protects groundwater and surface water in the area. Other municipal and model Water Resource Protection bylaws include updated LID practices which go beyond the existing Aquifer Overlay. For example, the state model LID bylaw, written by Horsely Witten Group and passed in several communities including neighboring Westport (LID Site Plan Approval, 2012), includes the following features that are either not present or could be strengthened in the existing Aquifer Overlay:
(1) LID Permits: The state model bylaw establishes procedures where applicable projects receive a permit for properly meeting and implementing the requirements of the LID bylaw.

(2) LID Regulations: Similar to Planning Board Rules and Regulations Governing the Subdivision of Land, the state model enables the LID Authority to adopt, and periodically amend, rules and regulations relating to the terms, conditions, definitions, enforcement, fees (including application, inspection, and/or consultant fees), procedures and administration of the LID bylaw. (For more on Rules and Regulations, see the section on Site Plan Review, below.)

(3) LID Credits and Incentives: The model bylaw presents several “specific non-structural practices called LID credits, or incentives for better environmental site design . . . that will significantly reduce the size and cost of structural practices.” Successfully implementing any of the Credits leads to offsetting reduction in LID requirements and their related costs (or recouping foregone development and its related revenues).

In general (and in the same spirit as the LID Credits and Incentives), the town could consider increased development densities (in the form of increased height) and/or the reduction of other requirements (such as parking requirements) as a means of both offsetting the cost of any additional LID techniques and achieving its goals for increased development in the study area. This type of incentivization is key to maintaining the balance between the desire to intensify development along the corridor and the need mitigate the impact of that development. For more on pairing incentives with LID requests or requirements, see the section on Transfer of Development Rights, below.

What resources are available to understand and adapt this technique to Dartmouth’s needs?

Dartmouth can identify successful bylaws and contact town planners, conservation agents, and boards to draw from their experience. Successful examples LID initiatives are available from towns such as Bellingham, Franklin (both of which completed Stormwater Management Plans with the Charles River Watershed Alliance), and Plympton (which includes country drainage provisions in Planning Board Rules and Regulations). Have these bylaws stymied growth? Or have they lead to more compact and high-value development with less impact? What steps were taken to develop the bylaw? Was the development community involved in its creation or adoption? Was it based on the state model?

Dartmouth can also contact EOEEA and consult the case studies available from the Massachusetts Smart Growth/Smart Energy Toolkit to seek guidance on adopting features of the state model LID bylaw or adapting the entire text to the town’s needs.

What are the next steps that Dartmouth should undertake in pursuit of this technique?

Should the town decide to pursue an update of its existing Aquifer Overlay, it should also pursue funding opportunities to undertake a thorough analysis. Amending or replacing the Aquifer Overlay is a significant undertaking that requires time and technical proficiency. A well-planned civic engagement effort would also likely be necessary to secure Town Meeting passage. As was stated above, any additional LID requirements should also likely be offset by increased development opportunities - a combination that does not have to work at cross-purposes.

Identify opportunities for transfer of development rights (TDR) within the study area.

What is this LID technique?

*TDR is a regulatory strategy that harnesses private market forces to accomplish two smart growth objectives. First, open space is permanently protected for water supply . . . via the transfer of
some or all of the development that would otherwise have occurred in these sensitive places to more suitable locations. Second, other locations, such as city and town centers or vacant and underutilized properties, become more vibrant and successful as the development potential from the protected resource areas is transferred to them. In essence, development rights are “transferred” from one district (the “sending area”) to another (the “receiving area”). Communities using TDR are generally shifting development densities within the community to achieve both open space and economic goals without changing their overall development potential.” On the other hand, some communities are using density bonuses as incentives to preserve certain areas or incorporate design features such as LID.

Where has it been used successfully and what did that look like?
Successful TDR programs are in place nationally in the following locations: Montgomery County, MD; Seattle, WA; and in the New Jersey Pinelands. In Massachusetts, the town of Falmouth has a successful program and several towns, including Carver, Wareham, and Raynham, have TDR bylaws. TDR programs vary greatly in their scale and use of density bonuses; but all programs are similar in their efforts to shift development from environmentally sensitive areas to vacant, underutilized, or underdeveloped areas.

What resources are available to understand and adapt this technique to Dartmouth’s needs?
In 2011, SRPEDD worked with The Planning Center / DC&E, to conduct a regional feasibility study for transfer of development rights. The study indicated that an active regional TDR market would require region-wide incentives (including the establishment of a TDR bank) and regulatory reform of competing programs. TDR programs within municipalities face similar, but smaller scale hurdles that can be navigated by consulting the 2011 study, other case studies, and fellow municipal bylaws.
What are the next steps that Dartmouth should undertake in pursuit of this technique?

Dartmouth should pursue Technical Assistance to draft and pass a TDR bylaw for the study area. The bylaw should include market incentives (in the form of density bonuses or reduced requirements) for including LID component in each project. This would achieve the goal of creating higher-value, lower-impact development throughout the study area.

Create consolidated, comprehensive Site Plan Review and Site Planning Rules and Regulations that emphasize LID

What is this LID technique?

Many municipal zoning bylaws include a Site Plan Review process for projects that meet certain size, use, or location thresholds. Site Plan Review provides the Planning Board and project proponents with opportunities to collaborate and negotiate over project characteristics ranging from architecture and site layout to landscaping and signage. When coupled with Design Guidelines (which can be incorporated into Planning Board Rules and Regulations), the Site Plan Review process can provide the town with a strong negotiating position and justification for its requests and requirements. Site Plan Review and any accompanying Rules provide clarity and consistency to the development process; they set expectations and procedures - including those for LID - for all applicable projects. Many Site Plan Review processes now include LID design features.

Where has it been used successfully and what did that look like?

As was described above, the state model LID bylaw, available from the Massachusetts Smart Growth/Smart Energy Toolkit, includes LID Permits and Regulations that function similar to Site Plan Review or Subdivision Control. Additionally, many have a Site Plan Review process that centralizes site planning and actively incorporates LID requirements for either all applicable development in town or all development within an Aquifer Overlay or similar district.

What resources are available to understand and adapt this technique to Dartmouth’s needs?

Dartmouth’s bylaw achieves many controls similar to Site Plan Review through Section 16 Off-Street Parking Plan Regulations; however, the bylaw does not have a consolidated, comprehensive Site Plan Review process. Existing Site Plan Review language from other municipalities can be reviewed for applicability and desirability. It can be added to Section 16 or merged with it to create a zoning bylaw amendment that governs all features of Site Plan Review in the Aquifer Overlay or for all developments meeting certain thresholds.

What are the next steps that Dartmouth should undertake in pursuit of this technique?

Much like the case with amendments to the Aquifer Overlay, pursuing this option requires study and the drafting of a new or amended bylaw for passage at Town Meeting. The town could apply for grant funding to pursue this work.
CONCLUSION

This report identifies several locations for potential economic development based upon favorable site characteristics. While the sites provide opportunities, they also require future action to ensure that development does not come at the expense of neighboring groundwater and surface water resources. In light of the LID strategies identified above, it is clearly possible to strike this balance and to enable - to even incentivize - high value development that also protects water resources. This report is the first important step in achieving Dartmouth's goal of sensitive development in and around these Priority Development Areas and Priority Protection Areas.

