Agricultural and Economic Development

I. Issues, Goals & Recommendations

Town planning creates a forum for local officials, residents and business owners to explore ideas and set goals for their local economy. Hamilton residents clearly appreciate the downtown area, and many would like to see more offices and a wider variety of shops there. They also support home occupations and agricultural and equestrian businesses. In addition, a growing number of residents support strategies to promote economic development because it could reduce the town's dependence on homeowners to pay for town and school services.

These ideas call for different approaches and of course, public support does not exist equally for all of the initiatives that Hamilton could pursue. Possibly residents would support methods of tax base expansion that meet other goals of the Master Plan, such as a vibrant downtown or protected open space. Hamilton has many opportunities to retain and strengthen the qualities that residents care about: a small, thriving, diverse downtown, the benefits of working at home, farming and equestrian businesses, plenty of open space, and great community services. For Hamilton and many small towns like it, a major challenge to any local economic program is the lack of organized advocacy for economic development.

Important Questions

The agricultural and economic development element addresses six questions that form the basis for policies and recommendations outlined in the master plan:

- What are the key characteristics of Hamilton's economy?
- Does Hamilton have a coherent vision and realistic expectations for its downtown area?
- Within sound limits, what types of policies make sense to promote in-home businesses?
- How important are agricultural, equestrian and institutional establishments to Hamilton's economic base – and why?
- If Hamilton wants to expand its tax base, how could the town do so – and where?
- What is local government's responsibility for managing and fostering economic development?

Discussion

Hamilton's economy is small and largely suburban, yet it has features that make the town a unique and strikingly beautiful place. The most visible element of Hamilton's economic base, Downtown Hamilton, is a pleasant, low-key business district with a mix of small stores, professional offices and service businesses. Sized for a business area that caters mainly to local shoppers, Downtown Hamilton is the town's only commercial zone. For those who associate "economic development" with "commercial tax base," downtown would appear to be Hamilton's only source of economic development. However, a town's economy involves much more than the tax levy. Businesses may generate surplus tax revenue that helps to pay for town and school programs, but to provide these fiscal benefits, they must be profitable establishments: not only well managed, but also located in attractive, convenient, business-friendly areas that support a steady flow of patrons. Further, while some organizations do not generate any tax revenue, they provide jobs and their employees purchase goods and services in the community. Farming and equestrian businesses make only a modest contribution to town treasuries, yet they enrich a community's quality of life, enhances the market (and taxable) value of surrounding properties and indirectly increases local wealth. Hamilton's economic base has all of these features.

Traditional sources of data (mainly federal agencies) supply an incomplete picture of small-town economic life. They do not systematically record self-employed individuals and home-based businesses, and except for large commercial farms, agricultural and equestrian employment often goes unreported. The practice of reporting jobs by place of employment ignores the reality that today, many professionals work at home in order to avoid the inconvenience and lost hours that come with suburban commutes. Technology, changing lifestyles, congested highways, the growth rate among women in the labor force, and new ideas about corporate management have converged to redefine the meaning of "workplace." The same factors have profoundly influenced the organization of local economies. According to the Census Bureau, 1,837 people work in Hamilton, including 603 local residents, but this estimate does not capture everyone whose job involves a mix of telecommuting and traveling to an office elsewhere in the region. Instead of buying lunch or making a convenience stop on the way home in a nearby city's business zone, telecommuters and home-based business owners patronize Downtown Hamilton establishments – if they can find the goods and services they want.

Public, non-profit institutional, agricultural and equestrian establishments are more prominent in Hamilton than in most Boston-area suburbs. By choice, the town has no industrial base. Local government and the Hamilton-Wenham Regional School District are the town's largest employers, but two other non-taxpayer institutions also employ a significant number of people: Gordon-Conwell Seminary and Pingree School. Myopia Hunt Club and several equestrian and farm enterprises provide a small but historically stable pool

of equestrian, recreational and service jobs. Ironically, the composition of Hamilton's in-town employment base differs quite a bit from the occupational and earnings profile of its 3,800-person labor force. Local residents are well-educated, experienced people whose high-paying jobs often take them a considerable distance each day, for while telecommuting is in vogue, it is not the norm for most workers. Compared to the size of its labor force, Hamilton's employment base is quite small and local wages are low by regional standards. However, what appears to be a depressed pay structure is most likely a distortion caused by averaging relatively good full-time salaries with the hourly wages earned by part-time employees of the stores, restaurants and service establishments in Downtown Hamilton.

Hamilton is fortunate to have its downtown in a gateway location. Along with a large shopping plaza and commuter rail platform, both recently improved, Downtown Hamilton has many small, well-maintained retail and office businesses on Bay Road, Railroad Avenue and Willow Street. About half of downtown's 120 businesses serve customers from Hamilton and surrounding towns while the others serve a larger trade area. More than two decades ago, Hamilton commissioned a study that culminated in a plan with several proposals to improve downtown. Local officials tried to implement the plan, and sometimes they still use it as a guide. However, lack of funding prevented Hamilton from following though on many of the study's key recommendations: wider, accessible, tree-lined sidewalks, street lighting, bikeway access, more parking, public realm enhancements and notably, a wastewater treatment facility. While the town has tapped the 20-year-old downtown plan to explain common-sense design principles to developers, it stopped short of making supportive public investments. As a result, residents and local business owners today cite many of the same urban design and public facility weaknesses that were identified in 1980.[1]

Portions of Downtown Hamilton are quite attractive, but local regulations cannot be credited for the district's visual appeal. Though Hamilton is a sophisticated town, its downtown zoning is strikingly antiquated. The zoning bylaw has no design guidelines, its off-street parking rules are excessive, and it disallows the mix of commercial and residential uses that were the hallmark of traditional village centers. Today, communities with active downtown programs publish design guidelines to achieve several objectives: to educate residents, property owners and developers, to convey the requirements for downtown improvement projects, and to assure that local officials apply consistent standards to development review. In Massachusetts, some communities fold design guidelines into their site plan review process and others create a design review board under the aegis of the Planning Board. Text, drawings and photographs that illustrate acceptable architectural features, rooflines, colors and materials, lighting, signage and landscaping can help everyone understand the goals for a downtown area.

Thriving downtowns have several characteristics: an attractive pedestrian setting, good vehicular access, variety in goods and services, and public activities. Ultimately, the success of any downtown is measured by the profitability, continuity and diversity of its businesses because these conditions show that patrons value, support and make use of all that a downtown has to offer. A mix of business and residential uses – such as small housing units above the ground floor of a commercial building – brings life into downtowns and makes

[1] Phillip Herr, Downtown Hamilton Plan (1982).

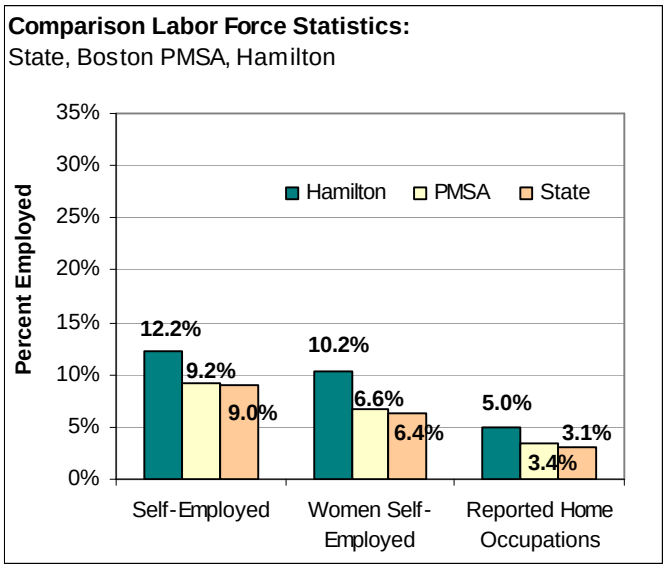
them more versatile. By providing more than one investment opportunity, mixed-use development allows property owners to respond to changing market conditions. Moreover, residential uses keep people in the downtown area and they, in turn, shop in the stores, eat in the cafés and restaurants, and provide vitality to the district. In Downtown Hamilton, land use is an either/or proposition: business and residential uses may co-exist, but they may not be co-mingled. Hamilton's regulations reflect a conservative, largely archaic approach to downtown development.

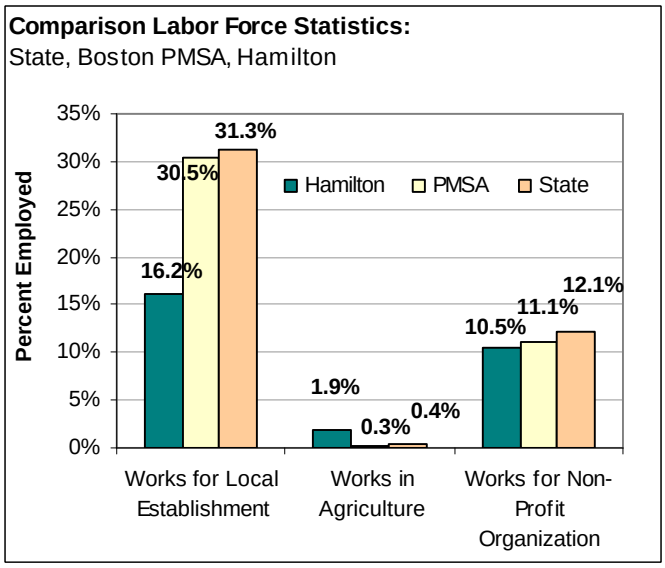
Hamilton has not grown dramatically in the past 20 years, but it has changed and so has the practice of town planning. Only 30% of Hamilton's present households lived in town when the last downtown plan was developed. New residents and business owners may share some of their predecessors' ideas, but for downtown plans to be living documents, they must periodically be re-energized. A recent CAPC-sponsored survey indicates that most residents like Downtown Hamilton and they agree about many of the improvements they would like to see. Pedestrian and bicycle access, appropriate landscaping and benches, convenient parking, social and cultural activities, and more office and retail space, food establishments, restaurants and bakeries seem to have considerable public support. However, there is less agreement about how these improvements should be financed or by whom, and what the town's responsibility is for a vital downtown zone. While Hamilton should update and refine the downtown plan toward a coherent, realistic vision of the future, the town's more compelling need lies with solving downtown's long-standing needs for adequate wastewater disposal, public parking, and beautification of the public realm. In communities with successful downtown programs, these are traditionally public-sector functions carried out by local government.

Few aspects of daily life give more convincing proof of post-1980 change than the Internet. Particularly in affluent towns, residents often have the resources and the types of jobs that allow them to work at home and for most, the Internet and the technology behind it provide the infrastructure that makes telecommuting and e-business possible. Today, many people in Hamilton move seamlessly between a non-local office and home, conducting business in both locations and in the car. Local officials estimate that at least 400 households (about 15%) have in-home offices, either as self-employed business owners or telecommuters. Although working at home is often associated with start-up businesses, about one third of Hamilton's self-employed people have worked in home occupations for more than a decade. Overall, the town seems to like the concept of at-home employment, and for good reason. Residents who work at home are more apt to support downtown merchants, and they are also more available for public service. In addition, they provide an informal security network in their neighborhoods.

Despite the support that exists for work-at-home activity, residents are not equally enthusiastic about Hamilton's "hands-off" approach to regulating home occupations. When the CAPC conducted a town-wide survey last year, 40% of the respondents registered concerns about noise, traffic and parking generated by businesses in their neighborhoods. Of course, much depends on the type of business and the perceptions of nearby homeowners. Some businesses require on-site contact with customers and clients while others operate unobtrusively, generating no more traffic or noise than a conventional single-family residence. Unfortunately, Hamilton offers few opportunities for successful home-based ventures to stay in town as they grow. Nearly 75% of the home business owners responding to the CAPC's survey said that if they had to relocate to larger quarters, they

would not move to a commercial location in Hamilton. Ironically, Hamilton's land use policies mean that successful at-home entrepreneurs who pay residential property taxes in Hamilton today will most likely pay their commercial property taxes to another town in the future.





No image inspires a more loyal response in Hamilton than the town's farms and vestiges of old family estates. As is true throughout Eastern Massachusetts, Hamilton's agricultural and equestrian land tends to be used for rural-residence farms, i.e., by landowners who do not depend on agriculture as their primary source of income. Regardless, Hamilton's farms play an important role in the local economy and many residents care deeply about them. Pastures, trails, equestrian sport and the Myopia Hunt are integral elements of Hamilton culture, even for those not actively engaged in agriculture. Not long ago, farm owners, horse enthusiasts and conservation-minded residents worked closely with the Trust for Public Land and the Appleton family to preserve Appleton Farms and Appleton Farms Grass Rides, together accounting for about 1,000 acres of permanently protected agricultural land in Hamilton and Ipswich. Of course, Appleton Farms is an unusual property, a former commercial farm owned and controlled by the same family for nine generations. More common in Hamilton are small farms ranging in size from five to 125 acres, often associated with equestrian interests.

There is also some interest in developing new farms and making existing farms more economically viable. However, farm advocates say that Hamilton's regulations and policies do not match the town's stated support for open space, agriculture and equestrian activity. They also say that new development makes it increasingly difficult to preserve and use Hamilton's remaining agricultural land for farm and equestrian purposes. In a position paper developed for the master plan, the CAPC's Agriculture and Economic Development Subcommittee noted that often, the very qualities that attract homebuyers to Hamilton

become sources of conflict once people move into town – conflicts ranging from cars and farm equipment on local roads to noise and odors from routine farm practices. The Subcommittee also said that zoning, public health and wetlands regulations sometimes conflict, making it difficult for agricultural and equestrian businesses to understand what local authorities want. Hamilton cannot expect to keep its farms unless the town is willing to reduce regulatory barriers to thriving farm and equestrian businesses.

Hamilton's land use policies raise concern about whether local rules exceed the town's jurisdiction over farming. For example, the zoning bylaw defines permitted agricultural uses as "agriculture, horticulture and floriculture, including gardens, growing and storing of fruits, berries, vegetables, hay, fodder and ensilage; woodlots, forestry and greenhouse," and it subjects to a special permit "the raising or keeping of poultry, horses, or cows, for other than the use of the occupants of the residence; maintenance of dog kennels or riding stables." However, two state laws work together to exempt agriculture from local zoning: the state zoning act, and the body of law that governs agriculture statewide. G.L. c.128, Section 1A defines "agriculture" this way:

> "Farming" or "agriculture" shall include farming in all of its branches and the cultivation and tillage of the soil, dairying, the production, cultivation, growing and harvesting of any agricultural, aquacultural, floricultural or horticultural commodities, the growing and harvesting of forest products upon forest land, the raising of livestock including horses, the keeping of horses as a commercial enterprise [emphasis added], the keeping and raising of poultry, swine, cattle and other domesticated animals used for food purposes, bees, fur-bearing animals, and any forestry or lumbering operations, performed by a farmer, who is hereby defined as one engaged in agriculture or farming as herein defined, or on a farm as an incident to or in conjunction with such farming operations, including preparations for market, delivery to storage or to market or to carriers for transportation to market.

Possibly Hamilton's zoning intends to regulate agriculture only when carried out on smaller parcels, i.e., smaller than five acres, but the bylaw is not at all clear. Until the mid-1980s, state law excluded horses in the definition of "agricultural livestock" and as a result, horse farms could not qualify for differential tax assessments as farms under G.L. c.61A. Instead, they had to establish themselves as forest management operations under G.L. c.61. Although the state has granted horse farms the same protected status as other forms of agriculture, zoning bylaws in many towns, including Hamilton, still contain outdated language and do not conform with state law.

The suburban-farm conflicts identified by the CAPC have become problematic in many towns and as a result, regulations targeting agriculture of all kinds have begun to surface in municipal zoning bylaws – only to be rejected by the Attorney General. Hamilton authorities should reassess all of their farm-related rules, not only to identify conflicts but also to update and streamline them, considering the myriad of state licensing and public health requirements that farms are already required to meet. If Hamilton wants to be a "right to farm" community, local government needs to limit the extent to which it makes that right a conditional one. In addition, the town must recognize that by limiting land development privileges to single-family homes, it effectively forces farmers who need capital to subdivide their property – thereby making agriculture more difficult and perpetuating neighborhood-farm conflicts.

Economic Development Goals

1) Create and sustain a vibrant, economically viable and walkable downtown area with entertainment, hospitality and other businesses that attract local patrons and meet the town's needs for goods and services.

2) Provide adequate public facilities to support a diverse business base in downtown Hamilton, including but not limited to parking, public realm and beautification features, facilities maintenance, and solutions to the area's long term wastewater disposal needs.

3) Provide an environment that enables residents to work at home and also protects surrounding neighborhoods from unreasonable traffic, parking and other impacts of business activity

4) Maintain and strengthen agricultural and equestrian activity as part of Hamilton's economic base.

5) Increase the non-residential share of Hamilton's assessed valuation in ways that are compatible with other goals of the Master Plan.

Economic Development Policies

1) The use of Hamilton's land for crops, hayfields, polo fields, horse trails, paddocks and pastures is of great benefit to the town and its residents. Agriculture preserves open space, provides jobs, and costs less in town services than it generates in tax revenue, even when the land is differentially assessed under G.L. c.61A. Accordingly, Hamilton encourages farming and equestrian activities for economic, fiscal and quality of life reasons, and recognizes the right to farm. Local policies will not create impediments to farmland protection and new agricultural and equestrian development.

2) Development in Downtown Hamilton will be of appropriate scale, design and character for a small suburban business district. In furtherance of this policy, the town will provide clear, understandable design guidelines for new construction and alterations to or expansion of existing commercial and mixed-use buildings. Activities that do not comply with the design guidelines are prohibited.

3) Hamilton's Business District is small, but its 26-acre area is appropriate for a suburban community and it is not feasible to expand the commercial zone at this time. Future needs for goods and services will be met in the downtown area through flexible development regulations, provisions for greater use intensity where feasible, and mixed-use development.

4) Where possible, Hamilton seeks to channel new development away from single-family homes and toward a more diverse mix of land uses, including commercial uses, in a manner that preserves large amounts of open space and farmland, respects the character of traditional neighborhoods, provides tax revenue to support the cost of town and school services, and is generally consistent with Map 10 of this Master Plan.

5) Hamilton encourages residents to work at home, whether as owners of home-based businesses, including farms, or as telecommuting employees of other business establishments. Local regulations to manage the impacts of at-home employment on surrounding property owners will be limited to the minimum necessary to reduce use conflicts, considering factors such as traffic, signage, noise or lighting, and to protect the

residential character of Hamilton neighborhoods for all who live and work in the community.

Economic Development Recommendations

Bylaws and Regulations

1) Develop downtown design guidelines and integrate them with site plan review under the direction of the Planning Board. Where appropriate, charge a peer review fee and secure the services of a qualified architect or landscape architect to assist the Planning Board or design review board with an analysis of submitted plans.
2) Amend the Business District regulations to allow accessory dwelling units in commercial buildings, by special permit from the Planning Board.
    a) Restrict accessory dwelling units to the second and/or higher floors of any development in order to preserve the first floor exclusively for commercial use. Encourage commercial use on the second and higher floors.
    b) Limit residential uses by setting a maximum number of accessory dwelling units or a maximum percentage of total gross floor area for residential uses so that the district remains predominantly commercial.
    c) Consider requiring a percentage of accessory dwelling units to be affordable and eligible for listing on the Subsidized Housing Inventory.
3) Revise the development regulations for the Business District so that small commercial projects for allowed uses may occur as of right, subject to abbreviated site plan review, while larger projects or higher-impact uses of any size may be controlled by special permit.
    a) Set a maximum floor area ratio for all projects.
    b) Consider establishing a maximum front yard setback.
    c) Adopt access management regulations, e.g., curb cut consolidation and shared driveways.
4) Review zoning and board of health regulations to assure the permissibility of shared septic systems in the Business District.
5) Amend the town's parking regulations by adopting standards appropriate for a downtown or central business district.
    a) Reduce off-street parking requirements to more realistic amounts relative to total floor area.
    b) Tailor parking requirements to categories of land use and size of commercial facilities, and provide a modest allowance for compact cars.
    c) Allow waivers from parking compliance by special permit in the Business District in exchange for developer contributions to an off-street parking fund.
6) Amend the site plan standards to require bicycle facilities at appropriate commercial locations, including shared facilities maintained by two or more businesses.

7) Amend the home occupation bylaw by defining classes of home-based businesses in terms of their potential effects on neighborhood areas, and differentiating those which may be conducted as of right, as of right with abbreviated site plan review, and by special permit.

8) Establish a mixed-use development overlay district that allows alternatives to single-family home development on large land holdings and agricultural land by special permit from the Planning Board:

   a) Within the overlay district, allow certain commercial uses such as conference, hospitality, recreation, agri-tourism, office and accessory uses, and consider integrating them with residential uses.

   b) Allow assisted living facilities, independent elderly housing and age-restricted housing, and combinations thereof.

   c) Require substantial open space and farmland protection, including mandatory agricultural preservation restrictions on farmland in planned development projects.

   d) Require preservation and extension, or new interconnections where appropriate, to existing networks of equestrian and walking trails, and require appropriate public access.

Policy, Program and Capital Investment Actions

1) Provide the Planning Board with consulting services to conduct a design analysis of Downtown Hamilton and write design guidelines that can be incorporated into the Zoning Bylaw or adopted and administered by a design review board.

2) Sponsor the design and construction of a package treatment facility to serve commercial and mixed-use properties and public facilities located in Downtown Hamilton. Finance debt service with a combination of general fund revenue and special assessments on downtown properties, and finance operations with user fees paid by property owners connected to the facility.

3) Change existing parking regulations in Downtown Hamilton so they express appropriate expectations for a small suburban downtown and allow more commercial development (in floor area) per required parking space. Provide leadership to improve the parking supply and management, emphasizing shared use of existing off-street parking areas and developing additional, small public parking lots as opportunities arise. Finance public parking with fees paid to the off-street parking fund, along with ticket revenue, and consistently enforce local parking regulations.

4) Establish an inter-departmental Development Cabinet to strengthen and sustain coordination among the Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals, Conservation Commission, Board of Health and Historic District Commission.

5) Develop, adopt and implement a downtown capital plan in the context of the town's long-range capital improvements plan. The plan should address all aspects of the public realm, including sidewalks, landscaping, parking, pedestrian amenities, informational signage and banners, lighting, and accessibility. By adopting a capital plan for downtown, Hamilton will be in a better position to forecast costs, identify local and non-

local funding sources, especially grants, and set development fees that relate rationally to the cost of improving the district.

Implementation Capacity

1) Establish an Economic Development Committee, appointed by the Board of Selectmen, to advise the town on economic development policy, to promote economic development, agricultural, equestrian and other businesses, and to act as an advocate for local businesses. The Committee's charge should include:

   a) Facilitating communications between local government and the business community.

   b) Sponsoring a public review, reassessment and update of the 1980-1982 Downtown Plan working in conjunction with the Planning Board and the (proposed) Department of Planning and Community Development.

   c) Working with downtown businesses to prepare a comprehensive public realm plan and financing strategy.

   d) Researching and making recommendations on the merits of establishing a Business Improvement District (BID).

   e) Analyzing the opportunities and constraints of redeveloping land at the town's former landfill for a new mixed-use commercial district, working in conjunction with the Planning Board.

   f) Providing a point of contact for prospective new businesses, including home-based businesses, and locating and coordinating small business resources.

   g) Promoting the development of commercial activities in the proposed mixed-use development overlay district.

   h) Promoting agricultural and equestrian business growth in Hamilton.

2) Establish an Agricultural and Equestrian Commission, appointed by the Board of Selectmen, to act as an advocate for agriculture and equitation. The Commission's duties should include:

   a) Advising the Selectmen, Town Meeting and other local government bodies on issues that affect agriculture and equitation, including development regulations.

   b) Studying and making recommendations about the creation of Agricultural Incentive Areas under G.L. c.40-L.

   c) Exploring other land preservation incentives such as town-sponsored markets and Agricultural Preservation Restrictions (APR).

   d) Publishing a report in the Annual Town Report.

II. Agricultural and Economic Development Analysis

The strength of a town's economy depends on the industries and businesses located within its boundaries and the surrounding area. Businesses create jobs, provide services, pay taxes and often participate in community improvement initiatives. Some communities consider it important to nurture and develop a vital, diverse economy. Toward that end, they establish economic development programs to help retain and recruit businesses, encourage start-up ventures, or build roads, water and sewer systems, and other public facilities to attract their "fair share" of regional business activity. Other communities see economic development as a force to be reckoned with, one that could damage the character of their town. In the midst of a deepening recession between 1989-91, a number of small towns and suburbs that had traditionally resisted commercial or industrial development began to rethink their land use and community development policies. Local revenue shortages and cutbacks in state aid forced municipal officials throughout Massachusetts to make difficult decisions: reduce local expenditures, override Proposition 2 ½, or find new ways to generate tax revenue. Many chose the latter – only to find that economic development is rarely accomplished by zoning alone. Rather, building a local economy takes time, effort, strategic planning, and readily usable land.

Hamilton citizens have traditionally focused on preserving their small-town way of life. They pride themselves on Hamilton's picturesque open space, historic buildings and land, quaint downtown and equestrian activities. The Master Plan goals suggest that today, residents would like to see some new business in their community and manage future growth without sacrificing Hamilton's special character.

Economic Profile

The local economy in Hamilton consists mainly of small downtown businesses, equestrian and agricultural establishments, institutional employers, and a sizeable contingent of home-based entrepreneurs. The town has no manufacturing base and no industrially zoned land, a condition that is unlikely to change because of long-standing zoning policies. Hamilton's zoning bylaw provides for three residential districts (R1, R2, RA) and one commercial district, all designed to reinforce the qualities that residents value about their town. In 2001, nearly 85% of all land parcels in town represented single-family homes whose owners paid the state's 35th highest average property tax bill, or $4,399.[2] Between 1990-2002, the average single-family tax bill doubled in Hamilton and the surrounding towns of Wenham, Ipswich, Topsfield, Essex and Manchester. Consistent with regional trends, the median home sale price has increased almost 100% in Hamilton since 1990. Homes in Hamilton are more valuable than in 301 other towns in the state, which reflects not only the town's proximity to Boston but also its desirability as a place to live.[3]

Significant to Hamilton's history was the opening of the Eastern Railroad line in East Hamilton. Its purpose was to provide a mode of transportation for the Essex ice industry. Today, the MBTA offers commuter rail service from Hamilton to Boston at its station in

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[2] <yourtown.boston.com/town/Hamilton>, INTERNET [cited 21 October 2002]

[3] Massachusetts Department of Revenue (DOR), Municipal Data Bank [online database], filename: "bill90.xls" to "bill00.xls" sequentially, in EXCEL format [cited March 2002].

Depot Square in the downtown area. Throughout the 1800s, agriculture was the primary use of land in Hamilton. However, the number of farmers decreased in the late 19th century as farm properties were bought by wealthy summer residents who desired lavish seasonal estates. In 1892, the Myopia Hunt Club was incorporated. Not only had the landscape and societal structure of Hamilton begun to change, but also the occupations of its residents. In addition to farmers and farm workers, there was an increase in "carpenters, masons, blacksmiths, storekeepers, laborers, doctors, lawyers, painters, brokers, real estate and insurance agents, contractors, a florist, railroad employees, ice company employees, teachers, dressmakers and bookkeepers."[4] Hamilton's physical evolution from farm country to a renowned hub of equestrian activity has left an indelible impression on the land, the local economy and the culture of this small North Shore community.

Labor Force Characteristics

Hamilton's labor force consists of about 3,800 people. Though many residents telecommute – meaning they work at home for some portion of the week – most travel to non-local places of employment, generally a half-hour away. Nearly 84% hold jobs in north-metro cities and towns, Boston, and other New England states (Fig. 1).[5] Hamilton commuters are not significantly different from commuters elsewhere in Essex County, except that very few local residents carpool. For the most part, Hamilton residents drive their own car to work because they have little choice: the commuter rail system is designed to serve Boston, where less than 20% of the town's labor force is actually employed.

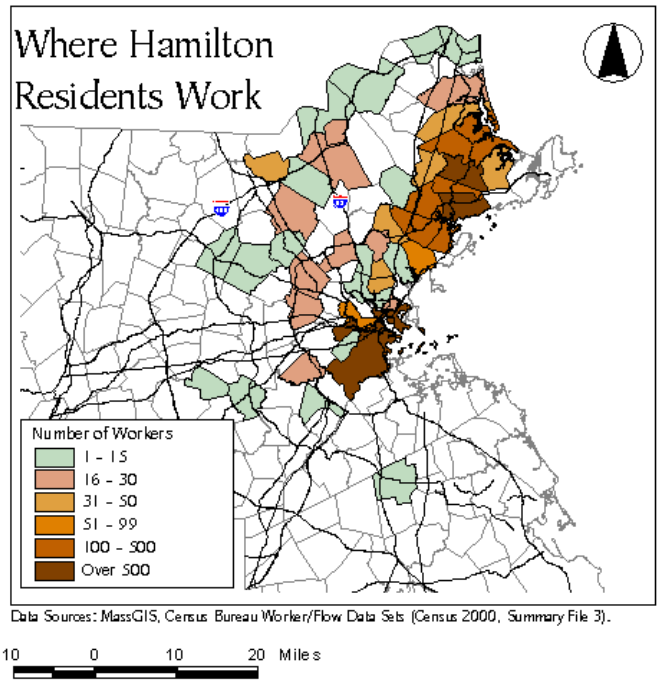


Fig. 1. Map represents journey to work for 99% of Hamilton's labor force. Approximately 50 residents work outside the Boston metropolitan area or in the other New England states.

Hamilton residents have impressive educational backgrounds, a condition that applies equally to men and women. Sixty percent have an associate's degree or higher while 21% hold a graduate or professional degree. As a result, the town's labor force includes many

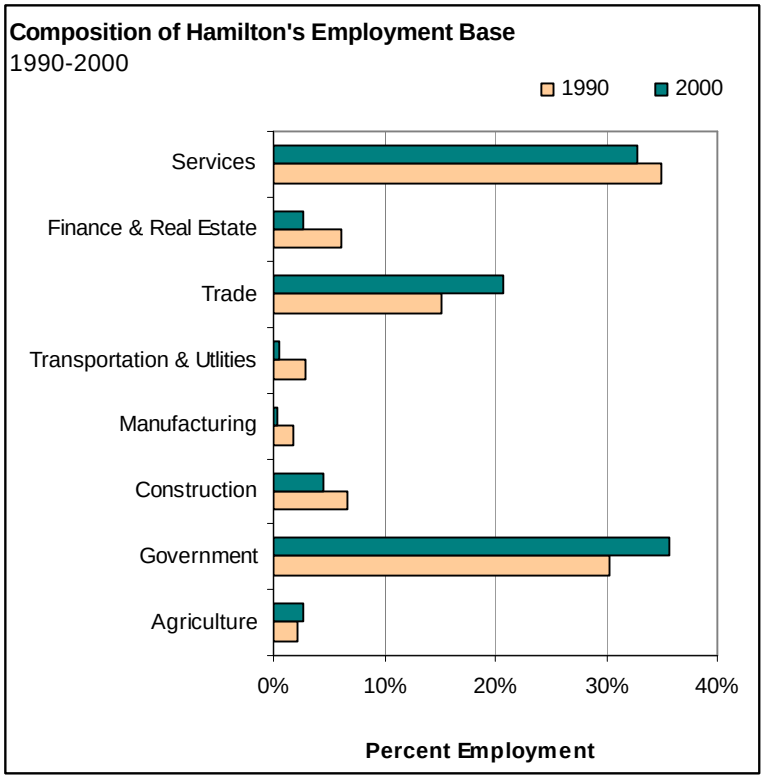
[4] Janice P. Pulsifer, Changing Town.

[5] Bureau of the Census, Census 2000, [online database] "MCD/County-to-MCD/County Worker Flow Files," filename: 2Kresmcd_MA.txt [accessed 30 July 2003].

professionals and managers in finance, science and technology, law, medicine, architecture, the arts, and business operations. Approximately 66% of Hamilton women work and a majority hold jobs in education, health care, personal services and administration. The earnings gap between men and women in Hamilton is slightly larger than for the state as a whole, not because the town's women earn less but rather, because so many men in Hamilton have high-salary jobs.[6] Given the competitiveness of Hamilton's labor force, the local unemployment rate is usually quite low. In 2001, the local unemployment rate of 2.5% was well below the state average of 3.7%. These rates represent a dramatic decrease for both Hamilton and the state since 1990, but unemployment rates have inched upward in response to a weakening economy.[7]

Local Employment

Much of the business activity in Hamilton today serves local residents. Other than Talbot's, a renowned specialty clothing store, Hamilton does not have destination businesses and it is not a destination town – i.e., one that attracts people from a much larger trade area for such facilities as a good restaurant, retail store, or sports complex. A noteworthy exception is Hamilton's complement of equestrian establishments and service providers. According to the Massachusetts Department of Employment and Training (DET), Hamilton's 206 businesses employ 1,443 people. Fig. 2 shows that most local employment is in the public sector (34.6%) and personal and business services (34%). Hamilton's largest private employer is reportedly Anthony & Dodge, CPA, located on Railroad Avenue.[8] Since 1985, local employment in



[6] Bureau of the Census, Summary File 3, Tables P49, P50.

[7] Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC), Regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy: 2002.

[8] Carl V. Swanson to Mary Coolidge, 23 October 2002.

Hamilton has decreased 15%, or 250 jobs. Trade, construction and manufacturing account for a majority of these lost jobs, while the largest increase has occurred in government employment.[9] Today, the jobs-to-labor-force ratio in Hamilton is only .38.

Wages paid by local employers have increased by 60% over the past 15 years. This is significantly lower than the state's wage increase of more than 100% and the Southern Essex region's increase of 82% for the same period. In 1999, the average annual wage paid by Hamilton business establishments was $27,046: 67% of the statewide average. Boston, Beverly and Danvers provide Hamilton residents with jobs, goods and services that are currently unavailable to them in their own town. In Beverly and Danvers, for example, local wages rose 69% and 57% respectively between 1990-2000, yet in Hamilton, wages grew by only 42%.[10] However, wage growth on the North Shore generally has not kept pace with other parts of the Boston region. While North Shore wages increased by 11% during the 1990s, communities south and west of Boston experienced wage growth of 46%. The Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) reports that particularly on the North Shore, an important employment trend lies in the increase in service-sector jobs, from 35% of total employment in 1990 to 40% in 2000. Service jobs often pay lower wages than jobs in other industrial sectors such as manufacturing or construction. In Beverly alone, service employment increased by 26% in ten years.

Home-Based Businesses

Local officials estimate that approximately 400 residents operate a home-based business in Hamilton.[11] The types of business range from tax return preparation, computer repair, advertising, childcare, consulting, and therapists to a variety of agricultural and equestrian operations.[12] When the CAPC conducted a town-wide opinion survey last spring, 31% of respondents said they presently have an in-home office, studio or business, or they telecommute one or more days of the week. Although some concerns have been raised about traffic and other impacts of home-based businesses on residential neighborhoods, Hamilton seems overwhelmingly committed to encouraging home-based employment.[13] Residential properties with an accessory business use – the technical definition for most home-based businesses – do not generate commercial tax revenue to the town and in most cases they generate very little wage-and-salary employment. However, they are important to the quality of life for many households and by keeping people in the community each

[9] The increase in government employment may not measure an expansion in local government or regional school district jobs. Rather, as of 1997, DET began to report state government jobs by their location across the Commonwealth, not by the address of the employer agency. As a result, government employment in Boston seemingly declined when in fact, the "lost" jobs had been reallocated to communities elsewhere in the state.

[10] Massachusetts Department of Employment and Training (DET), [online database], "ES 202," [updated 2002; accessed October 2002, August 2003].

[11] Carl V. Swanson to Mary M. Coolidge, 9 December 2002.

[12] Peter Twining to Mary M. Coolidge, 11 October 2002.

[13] CAPC Economic Development Subcommittee to Mary M. Coolidge, 23 October 2002.

day, home-based businesses contribute to the customer base of Downtown Hamilton's shops, eating establishments and business and personal service providers.

Agricultural and Equestrian Development

Agricultural and equestrian businesses have had an enduring impact on Hamilton's land use pattern and development characteristics. In addition to the Myopia Hunt Club's 410-acre facilities, about 50 properties in Hamilton provide some type of equestrian service – stables that raise and board horses, equestrian events, related agriculture, and accessory business and hospitality uses.[14] Collectively, these properties form Hamilton's equestrian community and they are an important part of the local economy, though to some extent they operate independently of other businesses in Hamilton. It appears that overall, Hamilton's equestrian commercial and recreational establishments obtain very few of their business products and services in town. Similarly, they tend to attract a predominantly non-local clientele.[15] There are no data available to measure the direct or indirect impacts of these establishments on other Hamilton businesses. However, while employment in other industry sectors has changed significantly over time, agricultural jobs have remained remarkably constant: about 3% of Hamilton's total employment for the past 15 years.

Several properties with active agriculture or equestrian facilities are present or former family estates, but the entire equestrian community shares a common concern: the need for adequate open land and facilities to sustain a base of equestrian and farm enterprises.[16] Since most of the town is zoned for conventional residential development, the equestrian community's concerns are appropriate, but elusive. For example, an obvious risk to equestrian activity in Hamilton is the disruption or loss of riding trails caused by new

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[14] Estimated number of establishments based on distribution list for survey conducted by CAPC Economic Development Subcommittee, August 2002.

[15] Charles Chivakos, "Hamilton Equestrian and Agricultural Survey," statistical analysis and compilation of survey results [unpublished report].

[16] Peggy Donovan, Hamilton Assessor's Office, to Evelyn Shuman, Planning Board, "List of Properties-Hamilton," (13 December 2000). The memorandum identifies 11 equestrian-agricultural properties as present or former family estates, though the list is presently under review.

development. Though regulatory tools exist to guide growth away from significant natural and man-made features, Hamilton has traditionally been skeptical of zoning that encourages creative development. In addition, since the town does not have a long history of acquiring public open space, Hamilton owns few large tracts of conservation and recreation land. The retained elements of Hamilton's equestrian and agricultural base reflect the preservation interests of private landowners, local organizations and town officials who have worked together to protect as much open space as possible at strikingly little cost to the general public.

Hamilton's farms and large family estates bring scenic, cultural, economic and fiscal value to the town. Their scenic and cultural benefits may be more obvious than their economic and fiscal benefits, however. Aside from being a small but steady generator of local employment, the estates and equestrian and agricultural businesses make Hamilton a highly desirable place to live. They help to retain high property values throughout the town, and by remaining largely undeveloped, they create very few demands for municipal or school services. In at least two cases, former estates have been converted to institutional uses: the Pingree School and Gordon-Conwell Seminary. Though both are non-taxable land uses, these institutions provide a major source of local employment.

Downtown Hamilton

Downtown Hamilton occupies 26.2 acres (less than 1% of the town's total land area) along Bay Road from the Wenham town line north to Asbury Street, west to Willow Street and to the east for about .6 miles on Walnut Road (see Map 11). The downtown area is a suburban-scale business district with a mix of commercial, residential and transportation uses, notably a commuter rail station and associated parking facilities maintained by the MBTA. Elsewhere in Hamilton there are about 12 acres of land used for commercial purposes, either as "grandfathered" non-conforming uses or permitted agricultural and equestrian business establishments.[17]

Today, Downtown Hamilton has about 190,400 ft^2 of built commercial space. Between 1965-1980, the amount of space devoted to business uses grew by only 1.6%. However, over the last 22 years, commercial development has increased by 62%, from 117,655 ft^2 to its present level.[18] The increase has occurred mainly as a result of two conditions. First, a number of former residences have been converted to commercial buildings since 1960. For example, in 1966 a residence at 121 Bay Road was turned into the Gulf Service Station. In 1982, a residence at 161 Bay Road was converted to office and retail space; two years later, a residence at 169 Bay Road became a real estate office.[19] Second, the redevelopment of Hamilton Shopping Center in 1990 resulted in additional (second-story) floor area. The Shopping Center now houses a mix of retail, service and restaurant uses including a CVS Pharmacy, Villager Market, Fleet Bank, Dunkin Donuts, along with a Chinese take-out

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[17] Ibid.

[18] Carl V. Swanson to CAPC Economic Development Subcommittee, "Analysis of Hamilton Commercial Growth Area," 6 December 2002 [unpublished document].

[19] Several businesses technically located in Wenham serve as an extension to Downtown Hamilton, and some of them are former residences as well, such as the offices at 225 Main Street.

restaurant, fine jewelry and gift store, a café, dry cleaner, thrift shop, liquor store, dance school and art center.

Twenty-five percent of Downtown Hamilton's recent business growth has occurred in the traditional shopping area, defined locally as the Shopping Center, Railroad Avenue, Willow Street south of the telephone exchange building, and Route 1A from the railroad tracks south to Linden Street. During the late 1980s, new offices were built at Willowdale and on Willow Street. In addition, the former bowling alley at 284 Bay Road was converted to office space. Not only has development within Downtown Hamilton nearly doubled, but also the nature of businesses located there has changed. For example, what was formerly Gates Welding on Railroad Avenue is now Anthony & Dodge Accountants. Hamilton Hardware is now Talbot's, a specialty women's clothing store. Wallace Auto Body and Chittick Hardware, which were also on Railroad Avenue, became the post office and office/retail space respectively. Over time, Downtown Hamilton has witnessed a decrease in heavy vehicle and manual labor-based businesses and a corresponding increase in professional service and retail operations. The district will likely maintain this trend and as identified in the CAPC's Downtown Business Survey, additional retail and office space appears to be preferred by existing business establishments.

The boundaries of Downtown Hamilton are largely coterminous with the Business District defined in Hamilton's Zoning Bylaw. According to local regulations, the purpose of the Business District is to provide retail and local neighborhood shopping and office uses, but homes and agricultural businesses are permitted as well. Currently, the Business District has a limited mix of these components. Almost 16% of the Business District's land is used for housing while 84% is used for commercial purposes.[20] The majority of businesses are located along Bay Road and Railroad Avenue. Willow Street, which runs parallel to Bay Road and defines the western boundary of the Business District, also has several service and retail operations.[21] The side streets between Willow and Bay Road are primarily in residential use, including single-family and multi-family homes. At the Asbury Street end of Willow Street there are a few businesses, including a lumberyard and an auto body shop. Since the Business District still has a number of residential uses, business conversions remain possible and they will be an important part of downtown's evolution because Hamilton has no vacant commercial land left for new development.

Hamilton's Tax Base

In 2002, residential taxpayers accounted for almost 95% of Hamilton's total assessed valuation and property tax revenue each year while commercial and industrial taxpayers accounted for 4.1%.[22] Though located in a residential zoning district, the Myopia Hunt Club is assessed as commercial property and it constitutes a significant percentage of Hamilton's commercial tax base. Naturally, most business taxpayers are located in Downtown Hamilton and on average, they generate more revenue to the town than they cost in

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[20] MassGIS [library on-line], "lu119.dbf," available at <www.state.ma.us/mgis>, INTERNET, (updated January 2002; cited 29 October 2002).

[21] The centerline of Willow Street separates the Business and R-1A Districts, i.e., land east of Willow Street lies in the Business District and land to the west is zoned R-1A.

[22] DOR, Municipal Data Bank, "asva02.xls," in EXCEL format [cited October 2002].

municipal services: about a 70-cent surplus from every dollar paid in taxes and fees by downtown property owners.[23] Since Hamilton's commercial base is so small, however, the actual revenue surplus from downtown properties is about $270,000.

Zoning and Infrastructure

The 26.2-acre Business District allows for both commercial and single-family residential uses. The Zoning Bylaw defines appropriate uses for the Business District as retail store or establishment, business or professional office, bank, restaurant or other food service, municipal, state or federal government buildings, nonprofit buildings, public utility, parking, signs advertising goods or services and accessory buildings. By special permit from the Board of Appeals, certain other business uses may be allowed including gas stations, rail or bus terminals, funeral homes, manufacturers, auto body shops, auto sales, and wind energy conversion systems. Except for single-family homes, all uses in the Business District are subject to site plan review. The purpose of site plan review is to give local officials the authority to review and grant conditions by which development may occur, considering public safety, traffic, infrastructure, neighborhood character and appearance. Site plan review helps to maintain many of the visual and operation qualities and sense of place that residents feel strongly about in their downtown area. However, Hamilton's Zoning Bylaw does not prescribe architectural design standards or a formal process for design review.

All of Downtown Hamilton has access to public water supplied by the Hamilton Water Department. Hamilton does not provide sewer service anywhere in town, though options for a district-level package treatment plant or shared septic systems have been discussed for the downtown area. One of Downtown Hamilton's development constraints is the lack of adequate wastewater disposal facilities to support a larger variety of business establishments, notably restaurants. The district's on- and off-street parking facilities include 59 spaces along Bay Road and Railroad Avenue, 42 spaces in municipal parking lots, a 226-space parking lot at Hamilton Shopping Center, and a new, 200-space commuter parking area built by the MBTA when the commuter rail station was relocated in the summer of 2002.[24]

Past and Current Planning Initiatives

CAPC Community Survey (2002)

In March 2002, the Citizens Action Planning Committee (CAPC) conducted a town-wide survey that highlights many of the concerns and desires that Hamilton residents have for their community. The survey asked residents to comment on a number of topics that relate to the Master Plan, ranging from growth management to open space and downtown planning, and it produced a commendable 17% response rate. In terms of economic development, a majority of the respondents said that Hamilton should:

- Encourage more agricultural business activity.

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[23] See Community Facilities and Services Element, Cost of Community Services Analysis.

[24] Courtesy of Jean Nelson, Hamilton Planning Department, "parkingspacesdowntown.xls," in EXCEL format, 4 November 2002.

- Work to facilitate more commercial development in Hamilton to expand the tax base.
- Provide more short term parking, and more parking for commuters.
- Improve pedestrian and bicycle access to downtown.
- Locate community services downtown.
- Adopt zoning that encourages office or research developments in Hamilton.

Residents also said that they would like to see a bakery/deli, retail stores, restaurants, a senior center, additional offices and other service businesses in Downtown Hamilton. They clearly were opposed to using taxes or other local revenue to bury public utilities in the downtown area, presumably due to the high cost. Some of the concerns expressed by survey respondents have already been addressed. For example, the MBTA relocated the Hamilton/Wenham train stop and provided more parking spots for commuters in the summer of 2002.

Downtown Business Survey (2002)

In October 2002, the CAPC's Economic Development Subcommittee conducted a Downtown Business Survey. All businesses in the commercially zoned downtown area were asked to participate, including businesses technically located in Wenham, just over the town line. Only 29 of the 129 businesses identified in Downtown Hamilton returned a questionnaire. Despite the small number of respondents, their answers are important because business owners have a unique perspective on the downtown area's strengths and weaknesses. The CAPC survey indicates that many downtown businesses think Hamilton should:

- Encourage the development of more retail space in the downtown area.
- Encourage the development of more office space in the downtown area.
- Encourage more evening activities to attract more people to the downtown.
- Encourage and facilitate the development of a business district organization to address problems and manage the localized area.
- Add parking for employees and customers.
- Require that new developments in the downtown include some open space.
- Use zoning to improve the appearance of the downtown.
- Promote landscaping and benches on town land.
- Enforce parking regulations in the downtown area.
- Allow residential apartments above commercial space in the downtown area.

Many of the questions in the town-wide survey were duplicated in the downtown business survey so the CAPC could compare business and resident viewpoints. Interestingly, most business owners and residents agreed about actions that Hamilton should take in terms of downtown parking, facilitating more commercial development, and zoning policies to control development. Many of the same ideas have surfaced in Hamilton before – during previous studies of the downtown area and in the town's first master plan (1965).

Prior Recommendations

Hamilton engaged Philip Herr in 1980-82 to evaluate Downtown Hamilton and make recommendations for the business district's future. Community meetings conducted by Herr and the Hamilton Planning Board resulted in several priorities for the downtown area, including:

- Beautifying Depot Square.
- Moving the MBTA station.
- Planting trees on Bay Road, Railroad Avenue, and in the Shopping Center.
- Redesigning Walnut and Bay Road intersections.
- Constructing of off-street parking to support shop owners without parking in the downtown commercial area.
- Improving street lighting, widen Bay Road sidewalks and protect with grass strip from traffic.
- Constructing of a package sewage treatment behind Railroad Avenue for entire commercial district use.
- Improving bike path connections and add bike racks downtown, install street furnishings to make pedestrian use of sidewalks and open space more inviting.
- Implementing a sidewalk program to make them more handicapped accessible.
- Burying utilities.
- Linking Railroad Avenue to other nearby streets by better access.

In Hamilton's first master plan (1965), Charles W. Eliot made several recommendations that shaped the development of Bay Road. For example, Eliot urged Hamilton to establish a local historic district in Hamilton Center. He also recommended that the town reserve land for additional parking, not only to support foreseen commuter parking demands at a time that the MBTA was improving service north of Boston, but also to support new business growth in the downtown area, notably along Railroad Avenue. Many of Eliot's ideas about the Business District are still being discussed today, as suggested by responses to the CAPC's recent surveys.

Issues and Conclusions

1) Agricultural and equestrian businesses. Hamilton should consult with town counsel, the Attorney General and the Department of Food and Agriculture on the legality of its existing zoning regulations. The Attorney General has recently disapproved several local zoning bylaws adopted by towns that sought to regulate agriculture, including horse farms and commercial stables, through the use of special permits. Boards of health may adopt reasonable regulations to protect animal health and welfare, and under the Wetlands Protection Act, the conservation commission must regulate work within 100 feet of a wetland resource area. However, state laws constrain the power of local authorities to interfere with normal agricultural practice.

   Long-term, it will be important for Hamilton to give farm owners more choices about the disposition of their property. Some residents would like to stop development on

agricultural land altogether, but unless they are willing to buy the land or development rights thereto, they cannot save their agricultural open space unless they agree to zoning regulations that encourage preservation. The town has established a clear preference for homes on large house lots and unfortunately, this policy all but dictates the nature of Hamilton's land market. A combination of planned development options for large parcels, special setback rules for individual lots adjacent to farms, and a cluster bylaw that covers moderate-scale subdivisions could help Hamilton accomplish many of its open space goals without detracting from established housing traditions.

2) Downtown capital improvements. Downtown Hamilton is a pleasant, walkable area that could be easily enhanced with updated sidewalks, appealing streetlights, trees and benches. Public amenities such as these are typically a responsibility shared by private businesses and local government. Hamilton should develop a downtown capital improvements plan and establish a special fund for public and private revenue dedicated to these improvements. The advantage of dedicated revenue is that capital projects with public safety, beautification and community facility benefits would have a predictable source of financing.

   One technique used in a few communities across the state is a Business Improvement District (BID). Under the state's BID law, commercial district property owners may agree to an additional assessment on their taxes in exchange for improvements that will benefit the district as a whole. The revenue supplements, but cannot replace, traditional municipal services. Another technique is to establish a downtown capital projects fund and, by special legislation, earmark a percentage of downtown property tax revenue for projects identified in a locally approved downtown improvements plan. The CAPC's Downtown Business Survey results suggest that there is considerable support for public improvements in the Business District. It is less clear whether businesses think that they or the town should pay for these improvements, but a shared approach – a true public-private partnership – needs to be explored.

3) Use regulations in the Business District. There are commercial buildings along Railroad Avenue with some business, office and storage uses above the ground floor, but no residential uses. The second and third floors of these buildings appear to be partially utilized, a condition that affects their taxable value and attractiveness for new investment. In Hamilton, the Zoning Bylaw does not provide for mixed residential and commercial development. Residential uses are allowed in the Business District subject to R-1A use and dimensional regulations. Since Hamilton's residential land use regulations discourage uses other than detached single-family homes, it is virtually impossible to carry out mixed-use development on one parcel. The town should consider more flexible use regulations that will help downtown property owners stabilize or increase the value of their property in ways that are compatible with other objectives of the Master Plan.

4) Downtown parking. For a limited number of hours each week there appears to be a shortage of parking along the first block of Railroad Avenue and south of the railroad tracks on Route 1A (Bay Road). This translates into a perception of parking shortage to slightly less than half of the citizens, based on the CAPC's resident survey, and to about one-third of business owners, based on the downtown business survey. There is no shortage of parking in the shopping center, on Route 1A north of the railroad tracks or

on Willow Street. However, additional public parking and better use of private parking will be needed if more intensive commercial development in the Downtown is to occur.

The off-street parking requirement in Hamilton significantly exceeds what most communities impose on a regional shopping mall or a strip commercial zone; it is not the vocabulary of downtown or village center design. If local officials systematically enforced their own regulations, Downtown Hamilton would look like a "big box" commercial area. It makes more sense to require off-street parking that is realistic for property owners and appropriate for a small downtown. Property owners who cannot comply with more reasonable standards could seek a waiver by special permit and contribute to an off-street parking fund if the town had one.

Railroad Avenue, a one-way road perpendicular to Willow Street, has a total of 37 on-street parking spaces. A municipal lot accessed by Railroad Avenue provides an additional 22 spaces, five of which are reserved for adjacent businesses. Another municipal lot, located on Bay Road in front of Talbot's, provides 25 spaces while Bay Road itself has 22 on-street parking spaces. Hamilton Shopping Center has 226 spaces, and the adjacent MBTA lot has 200 spaces for commuters who pay $1 per day to use the facility.[25] Hamilton authorities may waive strict compliance with the bylaw's parking requirements in exchange for other concessions, but zoning should prescribe outcomes that a community wants. It should not be used to exact design, landscaping and public realm enhancements that can be accomplished more appropriately by clear zoning regulations.

5) Downtown wastewater disposal. In 1994, the Board of Health reported that there is a lack of available space for additional holding tanks in downtown's 26.2-acre area. This presents a constraint against further development and redevelopment. New and emergent wastewater technology will make additional septic systems possible in the future, but shared systems – that is, septic systems that serve more than one property – are already in use in many business districts around the state. However, a wastewater treatment facility that serves all of Downtown Hamilton should be explored with downtown businesses. A treatment plant co-financed by the town and private property owners, perhaps using state bond funds as a low-interest source of financing, would provide a permanent solution and if sized properly, it will support additional investments in downtown development.

6) Commercial building design. Since Downtown Hamilton is small and it occupies a key gateway location in Hamilton, future development and reuse must be carefully planned and articulated. Regulations can create incentives for new investment or discourage it, intentionally or unwittingly. Under current zoning, the Business District's minimum lot area is 20,000 ft^2 unless modified by special permit from the Zoning Board of Appeals. Buildings for business use may not cover more than seventy-five (75) percent of the lot and they must comply with the town's height maximum of 35 feet and three stories. These standards are appropriate for a small, suburban downtown. However, Hamilton's unusually high parking requirement of one space per 100 feet of gross floor area means that for new development, the 75% building coverage would be very

[25] Jean Nelson, 4 November 2002.

difficult to obtain. In effect, the town's parking regulations make the coverage ratio moot – unless local officials grant a parking space waiver.

While the town's dimensional and height regulations address the amount of development that can occur on a lot-by-lot basis, they provide no design guidance to developers and property owners. This is a common problem in many suburbs, though less common in communities that have initiated comprehensive downtown programs. Generally, Hamilton's regulations do not fit the design objectives of its 1980-82 downtown study and they conflict with the most basic of design principles for downtown development. It would be very helpful to applicants if the Planning Board created and distributed a design guidelines booklet or made one available for review at the Building Inspector's office. Of course, the guidelines need to be incorporated by reference in the site plan review bylaw. The guidelines should convey the design elements that Hamilton authorities want developers to address in their projects, ranging from building locations and placement to façades and openings, window placement, roofline articulation, materials and colors, lighting, landscaping and signage. It is important to avoid writing overly prescriptive design regulations because architects need freedom to explore design solutions that will work on a given site. However, effective design guidelines should articulate the organizing or visual principles for the district to which they apply, and thereby give developers and their design teams a sense of direction, i.e., context.

7) Mixed-use development. Historically, Hamilton has preferred single- family homes on large lots. This policy limits the choices available to landowners for the disposition of their property. It also increases the cost of government and therefore, property taxes, because single-family homes typically house families with children. Furthermore, it consumes large amounts of land for small amounts of development, the result being low-density sprawl along Hamilton's roadways. If this policy continues unchecked, it will eventually change Hamilton's visual character and make the town an increasingly expensive place to live.

   Some residents want to stop new development altogether, but unless they are willing to buy land or development rights, they cannot save Hamilton's farms and open space. Moreover, the town will not be able to reduce the cost of growth unless residents agree to zoning regulations that encourage preservation by making it economically feasible. A mixed-use planned development (MPD) bylaw could allow alternatives to single-family homes on large parcels in designated areas, with a mix of compatible uses such as age-restricted housing and commercial uses such as an office building, a conference center, an inn, eco-tourism and recreation. Regulations for the MPD should include design standards and incentives to preserve the natural contours of land and scenic views, and suitable buffers from adjacent single-family home neighborhoods. This type of bylaw would help Hamilton preserve open space, encourage agricultural use, generate additional tax revenue and help to maintain the unique character of the town.

8) Home-based businesses. Hamilton regulates home occupations in very broad terms. The zoning bylaw neither defines "home occupation" nor differentiates types of home occupations allowed as of right or by special permit, and it explicitly exempts home occupations from site plan review. Hamilton allows homeowners to establish and operate a home-based business that does not perceptibly intrude on the surrounding neighborhood with commercial signage, noise, glare, or parking of more than two

commercial vehicles. In addition, a home-based business may employ up to two persons other than member of the household, and the business must be of a type that preserves the residential appearance of the building.

9) The bylaw does not impose any traffic-related performance standards on a home occupation, but at the same time, traffic and noise are among the concerns about home occupations that residents identified in the CAPC's town-wide survey last spring. Given the number of home-based businesses in Hamilton, it seems that residents generally support the concept of working at home. Regulations that make at-home businesses more difficult to establish and operate would be inadvisable, but regulations that assure reasonable guarantees to abutting residents also seem fair.