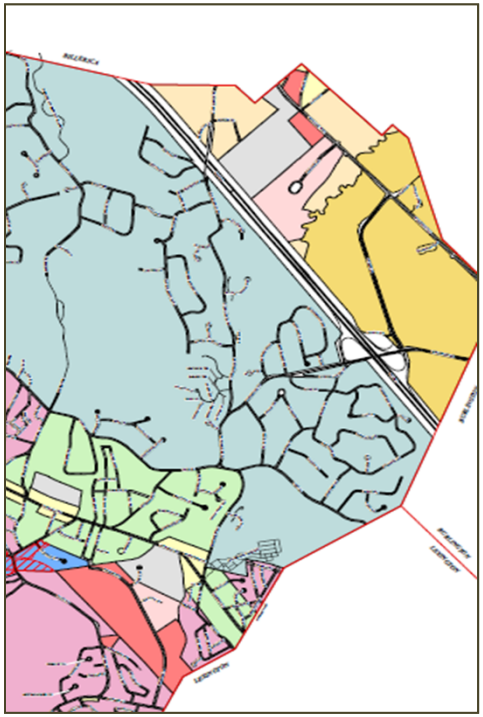
Bringing Bedford's Industrial Zoning Laws into the 21st Century



Special Town Meeting

November 2, 2015

Bedford Planning Board

Did You Know That…

- **Parts of Bedford's current Industrial/Office zoning are nearly 55 years old – even the newest I/O districts date back 40 years – and were sometimes created only in response to a specific development?**

- **The allowed land uses in these districts do not reflect today's economic activity and the real needs of business enterprise?**

- **Bedford's existing industrial/office development densities are on the lowest rung of suburban density classifications (Urban Land Institute)?**

- **Planning Department studies in 2014-2015 show that under existing zoning, Bedford's I/O areas are generally under-built?**

Did You Also Know That…

- **Vacant I/O parcels in Bedford are all but gone; to gain any additional floor area, properties must either be redeveloped and/or built a little higher?**

- **In spite of having a tax rate that is more than twice as high as that of residential property ($14.62 Res to $32.12 Comm/Ind), the town struggles to maintain the ratio of Residential-to-Industrial/Commercial tax revenue, currently 62.2% to 31.2%.**

- **Bedford is a major player in information technology, life sciences and defense contracting, but increasing obsolescence of buildings, sites and infrastructure will make the town less desirable over time in the highly competitive suburban commercial real estate market**

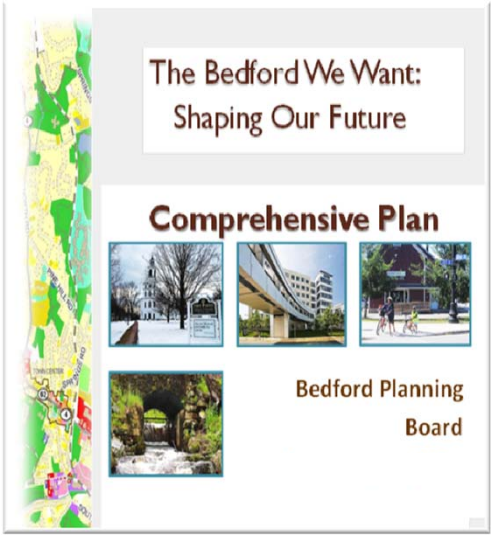
The Zoning Bylaw Is an Important Piece of the Puzzle

SENSIBLE INDUSTRIAL ZONING CHANGES CAN PROVIDE INCENTIVES TO THE MARKET TO DEVELOP AND REDEVELOP IN BEDFORD, BY ESTABLISHING:

- **Maximum floor areas that create opportunity, while avoiding excessive expansion.**
- **Dimensional standards (setbacks, yards, frontage, etc.) that align with real development patterns on the ground.**
- **Zoning district classifications that fit the needs of today's market, rather than that of projects from 50 years ago.**
- **Uses and site features that reflect the Massachusetts economy now, not as it was in 1963 or 1976.**

Some Recent History…

- Planning completed a new Comprehensive Plan in 2014, with a vision, goals and policies for the next 10-20 years.
- The Plan covered every aspect of life and governmental operations in Bedford.
- Broad post-Plan outreach and extensive policy discussions were conducted by the Planning Board for several months.
- The first priority emerged: undertake prudent, well-thought out economic development initiatives to stabilize and balance tax revenues and support Bedford's quality of life.



...and Further Recent History

- In order to contemplate changes to any zoning, it is first necessary to understand what currently exists in a zoning district: density, number of stories, lot coverage, parking, etc. are all closely examined.

- Planning Department staff conducted studies of gradually-increasing detail during the summers of 2014-2015, starting with general surveys and ending with site-specific case studies.

- Every Industrial/Office zone was analyzed: all areas across Route 3, as well as Wiggins Avenue and the Depot/DeAngelo Drive districts

- These studies gave us a baseline against which to consider amendments, and did so by specific location.

...and the First Major Initiative

- **The Planning Board's first post-Plan initiative was to craft a new Industrial Mixed Use zoning bylaw to replace the old IMU Section 15.**

- **The new IMU itemizes state-of-the-art uses in industrial, office and selected business in order to encourage harmonious blends of economic activity in I/O districts.**

- **The new IMU allows more flexibility in conception and design and offers an incentive to the market through small floor area bonuses.**

- **The bylaw was passed at the November 2014 Special Town Meeting and is already spurring market activity.**

A Few Initial Observations about Existing Industrial Development

- **Overall, our current I/O zoning is a disarray of often illogical and conflicting dimensional requirements and archaic usage restrictions.**
- **Historically, Bedford's Industrial zoning bylaws were a reaction to a particular project, not the result of a careful, visionary process.**
- **One large office park off Middlesex Turnpike is zoned General Business – not Industrial - the same as The Great Road Shopping Center. Likewise, part of the Wiggins Ave. complex is also zoned General Business; a location where retail is highly unlikely to locate.**
- **IND A and IND C are nearly identical.**
- **Even our highest allowable floor area still falls below industry and regional norms.**
- **Our maximum height of 45' – some zones are lower – is extremely low-rise development for the Route 128 belt, given the scarcity of land.**
- **Heavy vehicular dealerships, warehouses & storage yards are still permitted by right in the Depot/DeAngelo area.**
- **The Middlesex Turnpike corridor is fragmented into 4 different non-residential districts, for no currently valid reasons.**

A Few Changes the Planning Board is Considering…

- Analyze permitting & location options for specific uses, such as hotels, banks, restaurants
- Specify where, and in what districts, 1 or 2 story height increases might be feasible

- Rezone IND A & General Business along Middlesex Turnpike to a revised IND B
- Adjust landscape requirements to allow balanced site development

…and others being contemplated as well.

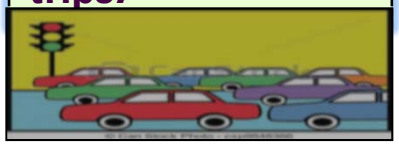
- Raise IND B 42’ height limit to match IND C 45’ limit
- Raise IND B .25 floor area limit to .40
- Raise IND C .35 floor area limit to .40
- Adjust IND B minimum lot size from 60K sf to 2 acres

Next Steps…

- The Planning Board hopes to bring a substantial package of industrial zoning amendments to Annual Town Meeting in March, 2016, containing the most important provisions.

- The effort for ATM 16 will involve outreach to the public and business community. Related zoning articles are likely to follow in future town meetings.

- Parking requirements will be studied and analyzed in detail and presented in a future phase of Industrial zoning proposals.

- For more information in the coming months, you can subscribe to Planning Board Agenda notifications and link to Planning's Facebook and web pages through the town web site. Or contact the Planning Department at 781-275-1548.

Planning Board also has worked extensively on Transportation Demand Management policies and will be introducing those in the future as a means of reducing individual auto trips.