

Reading Daily Chronicle

SmartGrowth, on a smaller scale

Selectmen give CPDC direction, favor downtown district with a smaller footprint

By PAUL FEELY

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READING - The Board of Selectmen held a joint discussion with the Community Planning and Development Commission recently on a possible 40R Smart Growth District in the downtown area, stating that they would like to see more information developed on such a district, but on a smaller scale than had been previously discussed.

The town continues to receive feedback and hold discussions about a downtown 40R SmartGrowth District, but some residents may still be unfamiliar about what the terminology means, or what it can be used to accomplish.

The Community Planning and Development Commission (CPDC) has held discussions on the downtown 40R smart growth district. At one session, plans were outlined about where the Town could potentially go and what shape the 40R district might take. David Pollack, representing Abacus Associates, felt the 40R would allow the Town to "set things up to attract private investment to build out your Town in your shape."

He also ran a slideshow showing some of the changes that could come from the implementation of a 40R in the downtown area. He highlighted the transformation of one-story buildings into multiple story buildings. Such buildings were prominent 80 years ago, though they have since fallen out of favor.

However, Pollack believed "people want to go back to villages," and he felt "this is an opportunity to rebuild multi-story buildings." He then continued by showing how the Town might look if a 40R were implemented: more public space, outdoor dining, and multi-story shops stretching down Main Street.

In advance of this discussion on January 6, for those unfamiliar with the concept of a Smart Growth District a primer on the subject is presented here, taken from a state website providing free information on the topic:

Chapter 40R of the Massachusetts General Laws encourages cities and towns to establish new overlay zoning districts to promote housing production and, more generally, smart

growth development. Chapters 40R and 40S both provide financial incentives to communities to adopt these new zoning districts.

40R was created to encourage 'smart growth consistent' housing production in the Commonwealth. Under Chapter 40R communities that adopt special zoning districts allowing as-of-right higher density residential development are provided financial rewards.