

A Message from Attorney Pamela Brown about Article 3

Dear Bedford,

I have been hearing a lot of negativity related to the Bedford Marketplace rezoning and will state up front that it was my suggestion to seek this rezoning. Let me explain why, as there is a lot of misinformation out there. Almost all of the negative comments that I've heard related to the Bedford Marketplace fall into the following categories - 1) dislike of the shopping center redevelopment/proximity of the building to the street, 2) fear of change and 3) a belief that rezoning will bring big box tenants.

The facts:

1) I recommended making the front portion of the Marketplace consistent with the rear as the most expeditious way to deal with the current challenge (explained below). By making the entire shopping center with consistent GB zoning, we do not change the zoning for many other Limited Business sites in town. An overall update to the Great Road zoning makes sense but it will take much analysis and discussion to come up with a good bylaw.

The challenge: Tenant commitments are typically made during the construction stages. Presently, we have an outdated 2,000sf limit on retail and personal service shops in the Limited Business district. Most retailers require shops larger than 2,000sf to survive. Toy stores, sporting goods stores, and gift shops are typically larger than 2,000 sf.

2) The approved shopping center site plan will not change - 3 buildings, better parking and circulation for cars and pedestrians and added green space and landscaping. Buildings located up to 10 feet from the property line are allowed in both the LB and GB district. The ongoing redevelopment was permitted and approved by the Town of Bedford in 2009, with minor modifications made in 2014 and 2015. There is no proposal to change anything related to the project under construction.

3) The purpose of the rezoning was simply to allow quality tenants with a mix of restaurants, services and goods that would complement each other. Many are already committed, but the new buildings along The Great Road have several remaining tenant spaces available. Interested tenants desire space from 3,500 to 5,000 square feet (for context CVS is almost 11,000 sf), but cannot sign leases as they would not be permitted under our current bylaw.

4) Big Boxes are impossible here - regardless of zoning. Why should you not be worried about getting a big box? a) A Costco is the size of all 3 of the Marketplace buildings combined; b) large retailers pay much less rent than a 2,000-5,000 sf tenant so it makes no economic sense; c) despite Bedford's traffic, we do not compete with Burlington or other locations with the volume of traffic a big box wants.

5) Traffic - everyone hates traffic, but most know that the majority of Bedford's traffic is not people visiting our shops. It is commuter traffic flowing through Bedford from abutting communities. They might stop to shop or eat in Bedford, but for the most part the shopping is a detour, not a new trip.

If the zoning does not pass, Bedford risks having less desirable uses fill the remaining spaces. Or worse, empty retail spaces. We need a fully tenanted, quality shopping center to service the needs of Bedford residents, those who work here and its visitors. This in turn helps our tax base and attraction of quality corporate office/R&D businesses to Town.

Please do come to Town Meeting Monday night at 7:30PM at BHS and consider the facts along with what I call the unrealistic hypothetical (what some appear to be worried about) before you vote. I ask for your support of Article 3.

Pam Brown