Lenox Dale Neighborhood Memorandum

To: Lenox Board of Selectmen, Lenox Planning Board

From: Gwen Miller, AICP, Town Planner/Land Use Director

Chair Roche and Chair Kueber,

Please review this memorandum which summarizes efforts to date to review land use opportunities and challenges in the neighborhood, and could also serve as a neighborhood planning term going forward.

Overview

Beginning in 2015, the Town began reviewing the Zoning Bylaw to identify areas for improvement. One area identified is the issue of having the same zoning for Lenox Dale as exists for the Village Center. Lenox Dale is not the Village Center: it has a physical setting and location, history, and development pattern unique to it, meriting unique review and recommendations to leverage place-based opportunities to: further improve quality of life; contribute to the broader Lenox economy; address existing challenges specific to the neighborhood. Current land use and activity were in some cases non-conforming with zoning, and a number of parcels are non-conforming due to their lot size, requiring residents to seek Special Permits or Variances for simple modifications. Simultaneously, another planning effort was taking place through an E.P.A. funded Area-wide Brownfields Plan which worked to identify community supported reuse scenario of the four mills in Lee and Lenox Dale. The Niagara Mill is the mill site within Lenox Dale. The Town also began to finalize the design and engineering plans for improving lower Walker Street to Complete Street standards, which will improve pedestrian and cycling connectivity between Lenox Dale and the Village Center, while also commencing its Complete Streets Prioritization Plan.

Process

The Planning Board held a meeting in Lenox Dale in October 2016. A walking tour of the neighborhood was conducted in November 2016. A corresponding Walk Audit was conducted in June 2017.

Following the meeting and walking tour, a consultant worked on developing a unique Lenox Dale zoning district with dimensional requirements and use permissions and prohibitions different of those existing in the current Zoning Bylaw.

Ultimately, the Planning Board brought forward two sets of amendments impactful to Lenox Dale to the 2017 Annual Town Meeting:

✓ Zoning District Boundary Amendments in Lenox Dale
✓ A Medicinal Marijuana Bylaw allowing RMDs (Registered Marijuana Dispensary) By-right subject to Site Plan Review by the Zoning Board in the Industrial zoning district (which, in Lenox, only exists in Lenox Dale)
Neighborhood Resident Input

The three public meetings held in neighborhood gathered a number of comments from neighborhood residents. They are summarized below in text and in a table depicting opportunities and challenges.

Lenox Dale is a tight-knit neighborhood with history and subsequent neighborhood character and feels unique from the village center neighborhood and from other areas of Lenox. Residents like the neighborhood character and sense of community. The history of the neighborhood is another point of interest and pride. The neighborhood has a good number of recreational assets which strong pedestrian connectivity and potential where there is no formal connection or access to the neighborhood. Woods Pond is a popular ice fishing location in winter months, and this draws visitors and a hot dog cart. A pedestrian bridge connects residents to the expanse of open space and trails of October Mountain State Forest. Post Farm is accessible via Lenox Dale. Berkshire Natural Resource Council (BNRC) BNRC owns property in the neighborhood. It is likely that the Lee bicycle path will terminate somewhere at the Lenox/Lee boundary in the Lenox Dale neighborhood. The Berkshire Scenic Railway Museum is another attraction which brings visitors into the neighborhood; residents missed the scenic rides once offered from the museum and would like to see that activity restored. Residents expressed the desire to maintain visitorship along Crystal Street, as continued and increased visitorship would support expanded and new businesses providing services and benefit to residents as well.

One challenge to further attracting new or expanding businesses into the neighborhood has been a zoning map not accurately reflective of on the ground activities. This makes adapting old buildings into new uses challenging for existing owners and unpredictable for prospective owners. This was partially resolved at the 2017 Annual Town Meeting through amendments to the zoning district boundaries.

Residents expressed desire for businesses that could provide local services (i.e., a pizza place or casual family dining) along with a mix of activities that could draw visitors, such as a redevelopment of the Niagara Mill site into a brewery or museum space or re-activation of the scenic train rides at the Scenic Railway Museum. Promoting Crystal Street as a safe roadway for all users—pedestrians, cyclists, parents with strollers, residents in wheel chairs, was another desire.

Lenox Dale’s history is visible throughout the neighborhood, and some of the homes in the neighborhood date back to the 18th and 19th century. Lenox Dale does not have a local historic district, nor is there the same prevalence of inventoried historic buildings in the neighborhood as exists in and around the village center.

The physical condition of certain buildings was noted as a challenge. Weary facades and unkempt front yard areas detract from the “gateway” area at the Crystal Street/Mill Street/Walker Street intersection. A wide intersection across Walker Street to Golden Hill Road lends to an uncomfortable pedestrian environment.

The landscape and industrial legacy pose two question marks to the future of the neighborhood: the extent and duration of the E.P.A. mandated Rest of River cleanup of Woods Pond to deal with the decades P.C.B. contamination wrought by the General Electric Company, and the vacant Niagara Mill
site. The Rest of River will be an extensive project involving dredging and the relocation of sediment and fill, likely resulting in increased construction and freight traffic through the neighborhood.

The Niagara Mill is an anchor site in the neighborhood. It is visible to people entering the Lenox “the back way” and heading into Lee. It is reflective of the neighborhood’s industrial legacy and also a marker for the future. It is an important piece of the land use scheme in the neighborhood, and can further Lenox Dale’s position as a location of jobs in Lenox and also fulfill the goal of attracting visitors and residents into the neighborhood.

Residents in Lenox Dale have long lived near industrial activity; one resident expressed desire in not seeing the physical footprint of industrial activity expanded so as to maintain quality of life for residents.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Opportunities</th>
<th>Challenges</th>
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<td>Strong neighborhood identity and sense of community</td>
<td>Some of the purely residential streets are not marked, and residents noted speed to be a concern in some locations.</td>
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<td>Strong pedestrian connectivity within neighborhood center and pending projects will fill in “gaps” to connect pedestrians and cyclists between Lenox Dale and the Village Center</td>
<td>Not all of these sites have formal access, i.e. parking or trailhead (Hallowell Meadow, Post Farm)</td>
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<td>Open space and recreation opportunities exist directly within the neighborhood</td>
<td>Zoning policy and map results in conflict or potentially onerous permitting procedures for even modest use or structure modifications</td>
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<td>In-fill potential exists on properties zoned commercially, industrially and residentially</td>
<td>Housatonic River remediation lends uncertainty to what the land along the river will look like and be available for well into the future.</td>
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<td>Landscape provides access to Housatonic River, Woods Pond and October Mountain State Forest</td>
<td>The mill site will require building and site remediation, also infrastructure improvements to realize its full re-use potential.</td>
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<td>Former mill site provides a unique space for adaptive reuse potential and has been part of a multi-year reuse study by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC) and the Town of Lee w/ input from Lenox.</td>
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<td>As Lee and Pittsfield develop their bike path plans, Lenox Dale serves as a connecting point.</td>
<td>In the past, Lenox has grappled with adopting an off-road shared use path alignment due to specific property owner concerns.</td>
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<td>Proximity to the Housatonic River provides an opportunity to connect residents and visitors to a natural resource and orient activity and land uses toward a unique landscape feature.</td>
<td>The Housatonic River adds a question mark to future land use and activity in Lenox Dale. The remediation as prescribed by the E.P.A. would involve heavy truck traffic immediately in the neighborhood and along its streets; G.E.’s desire to site waste disposal locally could also impact future land use and development activity in the neighborhood.</td>
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<td>The neighborhood has many historic homes and sites evocative of it’s unique past as both the industrial hub of Lenox and the gateway into Lenox for the owners and employees of the Gilded Age estates</td>
<td>Lenox Dale does not have a Local Historic District; few buildings in the neighborhood are listed in MACRIS. The Scenic Railway Museum is unable to continue its scenic rides from the historic train station at this time.</td>
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Review of Existing Community Planning Documents

Over time, Lenox Dale has been noted in at least seven planning documents developed in Lenox. Goals and observations noted in these plans are summarized below, and are taken from the following documents:

- The 1999 Master Comprehensive Plan
- 2004 Community Development Plan
- 2006 “Our Town, Our Future” Report
- The 2013-15 Open Space and Recreation Plan
- The Lee Northern Mills Brownfields Area Plan
- The 2017 Walk Audit
- The 2017 Housing Production Plan update

The Master Plan notes the following in describing the Lenox Dale neighborhood:

- Lenox Dale is home to a base of industry providing significant employment;
- Stakeholders expressed interest in improving the physical infrastructure and upgrading the landscaping and building facades.
- A number of pedestrian based open space and recreational opportunities exist in Lenox Dale, including access to October Mountain State Park, Woods Pond and the BNRC (Berkshire Natural Resource Council) Hallowell Meadows.

The following strategies are identified:

- Revitalize industrial and commercial areas, particularly in Lenox Dale as necessary
- Continue efforts to extend access for and service by Berkshire Scenic Railway and consider ways of linking this initiative and Housatonic River Initiatives to benefit Lenox Dale
- Coordination of activities between the Town of Lee, private landowners, and businesses to leverage existing resources and opportunities.

The 2004 Community Development Plan highlights the following:

The 2004 Community Development Plan describes Lenox Dale as a priority area for economic development in Lenox. It describes the neighborhood as a place where families can afford to live, and providing a link to key industrial and river recreation points. Lenox Dale “Utilizing and developing this area for recreational purposes can also serve to bolster the economic development potential of the village. Pedestrian based opportunities need to be enhanced in order to contribute to community interaction and quality of life. Walking and biking improvements within the village, between the Berkshire Scenic Railway Museum and Lenox Historic Village should also be pursued. It also notes the assets of Woods Pond, the Housatonic River, and October Mountain State Park.

The 2006 “Our Town, Our Future” Report highlights the following:
This report was the product of a public form intended to catalyze a community-wide dialogue regarding growth and change in Lenox, and what townspeople would like to do about it; garner support for planning activities; and gain guidance regarding priority next steps the Town might take. In this context, the following ideas related to Lenox Dale were identified:

- Retain the current scale and mix of land uses within Lenox Dale and the Village Center
- Preserve the strong community character and identify as a close knit residential area
- Promote business in Lenox, and the Industrial zone along Crystal Street and Willow Creek Road
- Look at

The OSRP notes the following opportunities in Lenox Dale;

- Fill in pedestrian and bike connectivity gaps, such as the gap between Lenox Dale and the Lenox Village Center on Walker Street and connecting Tillotson Park to Crystal Street, Housatonic Street and Mountainview Cemetery.
- Coordinate with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to make clear the community and neighborhood’s desires regarding Rest of River.
- Design Housatonic River Walk to the east of the river.
- Connect Lenox Dale to other municipality’s walking/bike paths, and connect existing recreational assets.

The Lee Northern Mills Brownfields Area Wide Plan notes the following regarding the Niagara Mill in terms of existing conditions:

- The smallest of the four mills in the study area, The Niagara Mill has been vacant since 2008. The building was constructed in 1860.
- The complex is composed of five (5) buildings, with a total footprint of 17,709 square feet and 25,000 square feet of floor space.
- The property has frontage on the Housatonic River and the active fright line (railroad).
- It has road access to Mill Street.
- The property is located in the Industrial “I” zoning district in Lenox Dale, and is in the Residential/Agriculture zoning district in Lee.
- The land area is 5.5 acres.
- The property is connected to Lenox water.
- Gas is available at the site, as is electricity.
- Cable and DSL connections are available at the site, though not broadband.
- The site currently has by a subsurface septic system and leach field. The mill building could be connected to the Lee or Lenox sewer system.
- A Phase I Environmental Site Assessment has been conducted (2008)
- An Activity and Use Limitation has been recorded on the property;
- Historic uses and materials stored on site pose additional concern, but these can be identified specifically through a Phase II Environmental Site Assessment, and the Berkshire Regional
Planning Commission (BRPC) and Town of Lee are managing a grant program through which this could be implemented.

In terms of redevelopment opportunity, the following is noted:

- The location on the Housatonic River and the potential terminus of the Lee Bike Path make the site desirable.
- The concept of a micro-brewery received support in the community visioning and stakeholder group.
- This, or another mixed use scenario, would help to bring people to the area.
- The site could also provide amenities such as a kayak/canoe launch.
- Other attractive redevelopment concepts include:
  - Exhibition space/museum
  - Small business center/medical center
  - Restaurant
- The scale of the mill makes housing through adaptive reuse challenging.

**Lenox Dale Walk Audit (June 2017)**

The Walk Audit was conducted with a group of residents and staff from WalkBoston, BRPC, Town of Lenox and Be Well Berkshires. Walking conditions are considered safe and enjoyable, while the majority of roads are narrow. Residents did not concern regarding high traffic volumes and higher speeds along Mill Street, Walker Street and East Street; this concern was also noted on Crystal Street. The solely residential streets were not all striped or containing pedestrian accommodations. Crystal Street is identified as a potential multi-use link through Lenox Dale. This plan includes general and specific recommendations the Town is incorporating into its Complete Street Plan and into ongoing and pending improvement projects.

**Lenox Housing Production Plan (June 2017, pending amendments)**

Noting the Planning Board had been investigating zoning in Lenox Dale, the Housing Production Plan update prepared by RKG Associates for the observes that the development of mixed-use development could be made easier in Lenox Dale, and notes that the recommended Lenox Dale district provided by RKG to the Planning Board would ease density requirements in the neighborhood, thus helping to increase and diversify housing stock in the neighborhood and broader community of Lenox. The plan also notes opportunity in the broad community to encourage housing development on nonconforming lots; as Exhibit B highlights, there a number of nonconforming parcels within the Lenox Dale neighborhood, and it has traditionally been home to residential density of more than 1 residential unit per acre.
Suggested Next Steps

The improvements residents wished to see take place in Lenox Dale are practical and achievable. Not all of them are related to zoning and land use; all can help to achieve the vision of the community’s Master Plan and implement goals expressed in a number of planning documents developed by the community since 1999.

Following Action Plan lists potential ways to implement neighborhood and community goals in the Lenox Dale neighborhood, as a guide for other community boards and committees to incrementally and collaboratively leverage opportunity in Lenox Dale while improving the quality of life and maintaining its strong sense of community and place.

There a number of ongoing planning initiatives taking place in Lenox that can be leveraged to result in positive actions in Lenox Dale, such as the MassDOT funded Complete Streets program, the E.P.A. funded Area-wide Brownfields Plan and subsequent assessment funding available, the MassDevelopment funded Site Readiness program, the Department of Housing and Community Development’s Block Grant Program, which can provide a community funding to rehabilitate older homes, efforts to improve the Lenox Zoning Bylaw and reduce non-conformities; the local Chamber of Commerce increasing its marketing activities; the local Community Preservation Act (CPA) fund balance reserved for open space acquisition, among others.

To come full circle, sharing suggested goals and strategies with residents and property owners of the Lenox Dale neighborhood will help finalize the action plan and ensure that only actions supported by the neighborhood are taken in the near and far future. The Planning Board may want to hold another meeting in Lenox Dale to gain targeted feedback on the Table of Uses in the Zoning Bylaw and the tentative action plan in this document.
Action Plan

Goal 1: Leverage the unique features of Lenox Dale into a cohesively zoned neighborhood of historic mixed use and residential density to reduce permitting burden on property owners and unlock infill residential and commercial development.

Strategy 1a: Continue to evaluate and improve zoning bylaw and zoning map

Actions:

- Amend existing districts (short-term)
- Create unique Lenox Dale zoning district (medium-term)
- Create a unique Lenox Dale Industrial/Commercial zoning district (medium-term)

Goal 2: Promote targeted private investment in Lenox Dale.

Strategy 2a: Evaluate built and communications infrastructure to identify opportunities for improvement in the neighborhood, including: water and sewer capacity at vacant or for sale sites; internet needs and telephone needs of residents and businesses. Lenox Dale, for example, does not have broadband; some residents not very poor or no cell phone reception.

Strategy 2b: Consider local tax incentive policy as a tool to ease cost burden toward challenging sites such as the Niagara Mill

Actions:

- Inform existing property owners and prospective businesses of this tool.

Strategy 2c: Pursue streamlined permitting and site readiness program for sites such as the Niagara Mill.

Actions:

- Work with existing property owners and MassDevelopment to implement the site readiness program at specific sites.

Strategy 2d: Work with Chamber of Commerce to market sites and connect prospective businesses to available Lenox Dale sites.

Resources: Town of Lenox, E.P.A. Assessment/Remediation funds, Massachusetts Office of Business Development, Economic Development Incentive Program, MassDevelopment, Lenox Chamber of Commerce, 1Berkshire, Local realtors

Goal 3: Maintain distinct historic character and walkability of the neighborhood.
Strategy 3a: Review future zoning and land use policies to see they conform w/ past and present density.

Actions: Review Table of Uses in the ZBL to ensure allowable uses maintain a quality residential neighborhood safe of increased environmental hazards and nuisances

Strategy 3c: Implement recommendations from the WalkBoston Walk Audit

Strategy 3d: Continue to encourage pedestrian and bike accommodations in future road improvements.

Strategy 3e: As funds are set aside or developed for Village Center improvements through the annual town budget or the development of a BID (Business Improvement District), do the same for Lenox Dale to promote green and beautiful public spaces.

Strategy 3f: Encourage green and beautiful improvements to private properties through outreach efforts and volunteer initiatives such as Provincetown’s “Little Fix” program.

Goal 4: Ensure that Lenox Dale is a welcoming, attractive and green gateway neighborhood.

Strategy 4a: Incorporate attractive and sustainable landscaping into public works projects.

Strategy 4b: Foster volunteer and donated efforts to improve public spaces and private areas.

Strategy 4c: Adopt a branded wayfinding concept to help guide visitors to, within and through Lenox Dale to the broader community and the open space and recreation opportunities in the neighborhood.

Goal 5: Highlight and celebrate Lenox Dale history with residents and visitors.

Strategy 5a: Promote historic resources and narrative in Lenox Dale

Actions:

- Create Lenox Dale history walking tour and corresponding map and app (see lenoxhistory.org)
- Create a “historic homes of the dale” home/garden tour
- Promote existing resources celebrating the neighborhood’s unique history
- Continue to capture historic buildings and sites in Lenox Dale through the MHC Form B Inventory
- Evaluate threats to historic resources within Lenox Dale
- Identify barrier to scenic railway rides
APPENDIX A: USES CURRENTLY ALLOWED IN LENOX DALE BY THE 2017 ZONING BYLAW

Existing land use in Lenox Dale includes single-family residential, multi-family residential, commercial and industrial activity. Entities such as GL&V and Lenox Glass produce and manufacture goods; Moonshine’s and Tanner’s Markets meet some local needs such as light groceries, deli service and package store goods.

What uses are currently allowed in the Industrial district?

- Two-family or duplex dwellings
- Multi-family dwellings
- Seasonal rental of rooms
- Bed & Breakfast Inn
- Upper-story units in a mixed-use development
- Religious/educational uses
- Indoor and outdoor recreation
- Non-exempt agriculture
- Professional offices
- Laboratory or research facilities
- Restaurant
- Manufacturing
- Kennel
- Building supply retail store
- Storage and sale of oxygen
- Medicinal Marijuana Dispensary
- Laundry and dry cleaning plants
- Printing, binding and publishing
- Wholesale business & storage in an enclosed structure
- Trucking or freight terminal
- Custom manufacturing of goods sold at retail on the premises
- Bus Storage
- Privately owned garage for rental purposes
- The raising or keeping of animals, other than domestic pets, for use by the residents of the premises, not as a commercial venture, provided that the stable or enclosure for any such animal be not less than 100 feet from any lot line
- Home occupation

What uses are currently allowed in the Commercial C district?

- Detached single-family dwellings
- Two-family or duplex dwellings
- Seasonal renting of rooms
- B&B
Mixed-use development
- Extended care nursing facility, assisted living or congregate care
- Use of land for religious purposes
- Recreation facility owned or operated by an agency of town or other government
- Essential services
- Municipal Use
- Private nonprofit libraries
- Private nonprofit museums
- Adult day care service (which may also be an accessory use to an assisted living residence, nursing home, or extended care facility)
- Childcare facility
- Private membership club or lodge
- Commercial recreation: indoor
- Commercial recreation: outdoor.
- Bowling alley
- Live theater
- Agriculture; exempt
- Business, professional or governmental offices
- Clinics or offices for medical, psychiatric or other health services for the examination or treatment of persons as outpatients, including laboratories that are part of such clinic or office
- Laboratory or research facility for medical, dental, technical, scientific uses and uses accessory to them (but excluding direct services to patients) provided that all uses are in enclosed buildings
- Planned unit office or research center
- Laboratory or research facility
- Retail store
- Eating place serving food and beverages to be consumed within the building or in a designated and permitted outdoor area of the dining establishment.

- Planned Unit Commercial Development
- Establishment Manufacture, assembly or packaging of consumer goods (finished products)
- Personal service establishment
- General service or trade establishment
- Kennel, which may include animal day care service as an accessory use for domestic pets.
- Hotel, motel, inn

- Conversion of existing structures to time sharing or time interval ownership
- Mixed use development
- Motor vehicle and boat sales, rental and repair; indoors
- Motor vehicle and boat sales or rental; outdoors
The storage and sale of oxygen and/or propane gas from a bulk storage in which the volume does not exceed 1000 gallons (3,786 liters) & 150 lbs per square inch pressure for the for the expressed purpose of refueling residential oxygen or propane tanks

- Non-exempt educational use
- Registered Medical Marijuana Dispensary
- Laundry & dry cleaning plants
- Custom manufacturing of goods sold at retail on the premises
- Home occupation
- The raising or keeping of animals, other than domestic pets, for use by the residents of the premises, not as a commercial venture, provided that the stable or enclosure for any such animal be not less than 100 feet from any lot line
- Private greenhouse, tennis court, swimming pool or other similar structure in connection with this off premises occupation provided there is no external change which alters the residential appearance of the building
- Seasonal storage of equipment owned by residents of the premises, such as boats, travel trailers, pickup campers motorized campers, tent trailers provided that at no time will such parked or stored equipment be occupied or used for living, sleeping, or housekeeping purposes. If parked outside of a garage, it shall be parked or stored no closer to the street line than the actual building setback and screened from view
- Seasonal outdoor display
- Privately owned garage for rental purposes

**What type of residential development can take place in Lenox Dale?**

- Detached single-family dwellings in the Commercial and R15 and R1A districts
- Two-family or duplex dwellings in the Commercial and R15 Districts
- Townhouses in the R15 district
- Multi-family dwellings in the R15 and Industrial districts
- Accessory dwelling units (though many of the lots in Lenox Dale are too small according to existing ZBL standards)