

# Falmouth Shopping Center - Future Development

## Community Event & On-Line Survey Report



Prepared for  
Falmouth Community Development Committee,  
Falmouth Town Council, and JPA Companies

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## Executive Summary

### Community Event and On-Line Survey Future Development of the Falmouth Shopping Center

#### A. Introduction and Background

The Town Council's Community Development Committee held a **community event** on Saturday, November 14, 2009 to solicit input on the possible expansion/redevelopment of the Falmouth Shopping Center (FSC). Following the community event, many of the questions used at the community event for the key pad polling exercises were converted into an **on-line survey** that was posted on the Town's website for approximately two weeks. Approximately 65 people participated in the event and more than 300 people completed the on-line survey.

The **community event** included background information about the current shopping center and the land north of the existing building that is potentially available for development. It also included a presentation on recent concepts in commercial development.

Participants in the event took part in two different activities. One part involved small group discussions about their vision for the type of development they would like to see at the FSC site and issues related to large-scale retail uses. The second part involved responses to a series of questions using key pad polling in which the results were immediately tabulated and presented to the participants.

It is important to note that the **on-line survey** provided a very different environment than the community event – respondents did not see the introductory presentations, the site walk video, or the presentation on new development concepts (unless they viewed them on-line), and did not hear the audience questions, nor did they participate in the small group discussions prior to answering most of the questions.

#### B. Cautions on the Use of the Findings

Besides the differences noted above, the overall results of the Falmouth Shopping Center Community Event need to be used recognizing their limitations. In short, the results of both the community event and the follow-up on-line survey are not considered "statistically reliable" data. The results should be viewed only as indicators

of the community's views. Appendix A describes the characteristics of the event participants and the survey respondents.

The participants in the community event decided to spend a Saturday morning discussing the future of the Falmouth Shopping Center and are probably not representative of the community as a whole. It appears that many of the participants had a specific interest in the center and/or the Route One business district. Therefore the results from the community event should not be viewed as the views of the larger Falmouth community. These results are important however since they probably do represent the views of people who will be active in any proposal to change the zoning and/or develop or redevelop the shopping center.

The respondents to the on-line survey also "self-selected" themselves to participate in the survey and therefore may not represent the broader community. While the characteristics of the people who responded to the on-line survey more closely match the known characteristics of the community as a whole, the results still need to be viewed as qualitative. In addition, there may have been efforts by individuals and groups to encourage people to participate in the on-line survey. There is no way of knowing if this biased the results in any way.

### C. Key Findings

A number of key findings emerged from the community event and on-line survey dealing with possible future development/redevelopment at the Falmouth Shopping Center property on the east side of Route One:

In a number of areas below specific differences between the views of the *participants* in the community event and *respondents* to the on-line survey have been noted.

#### **General**

- There was a sense that the re-occupancy of the current vacancies in the existing shopping center should occur *before* additional development takes place.
- There is strong support for the creation of a walkable, pedestrian friendly Town/Village Center with a mix of uses in smaller scale buildings.
- There is very strong support for requiring any development to protect residential areas from negative impacts of the development and to protect the natural environment.

#### **Footprint Limitation**

- There is significant opposition to large-scale retail uses and support for a cap on building sizes that would preclude the development of such uses although this opposition is much stronger among residents of the Route 88 corridor and lower among *respondents* to the on-line survey.

### Mix of Uses

- There was strong support for a mix of uses as part of any development although this feeling was lower among *respondents*.
- While there was support for allowing residential units that are part of a mixed use building, there was only moderate support for including other residential uses in a development.

### Uses

- Preferred uses within the development include small-scale retail uses, sit-down restaurants (without drive-thru service), residential uses as part of mixed-use buildings, medical and business offices, and a free-standing post office. *Respondents* also included mid-scale retail uses, banks and credit unions, and research/lab facilities in this group of uses that should be encouraged.
- There were mixed views on the appropriateness of hotels, auto service centers, and affordable housing such as apartments or low-cost condos.
- There was a split view on restaurants and coffee shops with drive-thru service with a majority of *participants* feeling they should not be allowed while opposition to this use was much lower among *respondents*.
- In addition to large-scale retail uses, there was significant opposition to allowing automobile sales/car dealerships as part of a development.

### Building Height

- There was no consensus on the appropriate maximum height of buildings with some support for allowing taller buildings (4 or more stories) as well as some support for limiting buildings to two stories.
- There was mixed support for requiring buildings to have at least two usable stories. *Participants* were more supportive of this concept than were *respondents*.

### Transportation

- There is strong support for requiring pedestrian and bicycle facilities within the development and to link the development to the Route One sidewalks but mixed views on a linkage to the nature preserve or Route 88.
- There was strong support among *participants* for the use of an internal street(s) within the development but support of this concept was lower among

*respondents*. (It is important to note that the *respondents* did not see the illustrated presentation on this concept, unless they viewed it on-line.)

- There was strong support among *participants* for requiring that parking be minimized and located in small lots that are hidden from view but there was not support for requiring that parking be located to the side or rear of buildings.

### **Turnpike Ramp**

- There was moderate support for the Town exploring the replacement of the Route One Turnpike Spur ramp with an at-grade intersection with limited support for the Town's financial participation in this effort, if necessary.

## **D. Comparison of 2009 Findings with 2005 Route One Study Recommendations**

The 2005 Route One Study proposed that the area of the Falmouth Shopping Center be included in a new VC-1 Core Commercial District. This section compares the findings from the 2009 Falmouth Shopping Center (FSC) Community Event/On-Line Survey with the applicable sections of the 2005 proposed zoning requirements for the VC-1 District in the study.

**1. Intent of the Zone** – The draft purpose or intent statement for the proposed VC-1 District in the 2005 Study appears to be consistent with the results of the 2009 Community Event/On-Line Survey.

**2. Space and Bulk Standards** – The proposed 2005 Study standards for the VC-1 District may not be fully consistent with the results of the 2009 Community Event/On-Line Survey:

- the 2009 Community Event/On-Line Survey notes only limited support for mandatory setback requirements that may create a conflict with the proposed 2005 Study 55' build-to-line requirement of the VC-1 District.
- the 20' front setback requirement for lots without Route One frontage, the 10' side setback requirement, and the 15' building separation requirement in the proposed 2005 Study may limit the potential for creating a "town center" style of development with an internal street, as suggested by the 2009 Community Event/On-Line Survey. (Note: Such internal streets may only be feasible on the largest sites along Route One, such as at the Falmouth Shopping Center and Wal-Mart sites and, therefore, may not have been a large consideration in 2005.)

- while the results of the 2009 Community Event/On-Line Survey indicate that the community would like to see buildings with two or more useable stories, there was not widespread support for making this a broadly applicable requirement.
- the results of the 2009 Community Event/On-Line Survey with respect to maximum building height are inconclusive although there was some level of support for a limit of 4 or more stories.
- however, the building footprint limits of 60,000 SF and 90,000 SF are supported by the 2009 Community Event/On-Line Survey.

**3. Site Design Guidelines** – The site design guidelines of the proposed 2005 Study are generally consistent with the results of the 2009 Community Event/On-Line Survey. The proposed 2005 Study standards are focused on buildings being oriented to Route One (setback, façade articulation, orientation of structures, architecture) and, therefore, could make development of a Town Center based on an internal street, as suggested by the 2009 Community Event/On-Line Survey, more difficult. (Note: Such internal streets may only be feasible on the largest sites along Route One, such as at the Falmouth Shopping Center and Wal-Mart sites and, therefore, may not have been a large consideration in 2005.)

**4. Architecture Design Guidelines** – A number of the proposed 2005 Study standards repeat earlier requirements dealing with setback, height and orientation of the building and the issues are the same. There is a provision in the proposed 2005 Study that requires mixed-use buildings for lots with Route One frontage. There was not support in the 2009 Community Event/On-Line Survey for requiring mixed-use buildings.

**5. Permitted and Conditional Uses** – The proposed list of permitted and conditional uses in the 2005 Study is generally consistent with the results of the 2009 Community Event/On-Line Survey with a few exceptions:

- the 2009 Community Event/On-Line Survey notes a preference for residential uses within mixed use buildings, but some concern about other types of residential uses in entirely residential buildings.
- the 2009 Community Event/On-Line Survey identifies automobile service centers as a “questionable use” since there was a significant level of opposition to that use as part of a development on the FSC property while the proposed 2005 Study VC-1 draft makes auto repair and service stations a permitted use.
- the 2009 Community Event/On-Line Survey also identifies hotels as a “problematic use” while the proposed 2005 Study VC-1 draft makes hotels a permitted use.
- the 2009 Community Event/On-Line Survey found mixed views on restaurants and coffee shops with drive-thru service with significant opposition to this use among community event participants. (Note: Allowing carry-out and drive-through

restaurants as a conditional use may not be consistent with this finding given court decisions dealing with how communities can treat conditional uses.)

**6. Parking Design Guidelines** – The parking standards in the proposed 2005 Study are generally consistent with the results of the 2009 Community Event/On-Line Survey including provisions to break-up parking areas and to allow for shared parking to reduce the amount of parking required.