



DOWNTOWN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN

**WORKING DRAFT
FOR DISCUSSION ONLY**

What this draft report covers:

- 1. The Lee Downtown Task Force's approach.*
- 2. What has been accomplished.*
- 3. Recommendations for further considerations within the plan.
(FURTHER PUBLIC INPUT)*
- 4. Links to technical information to assist in public participation, the further development of the plan and implementation of strategies.*

PLEASE CONTACT THE LEE CDC WITH COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS.

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Executive Summary:

This Downtown Economic Development Plan is meant to be a guide for the community, the Lee Selectboard, and other town boards in considering policies, actions and initiatives for economic development in downtown Lee. It is meant to complement the Master Plan and the Community Development Plan and provide an action oriented guideline and information source to furthering economic stability and sustainable growth principles, attracting ideas and investment and helping to create jobs and economic opportunity.

This is a working document and guide that recognizes that downtown development is a multi-project marathon, not a one project sprint. Accordingly, the form of the document is meant to be dynamic. It will change as more input is received and more incremental progress is made. The document itself has two basic parts, *Strategies* (I-V) allowing an uncluttered view of recommended strategies and action steps and *Endnotes, References and Links* which allow an in depth look at the details of major issues and provide links to background material, programs and organizations.

In the electronic version (and when it is posted on w website), the Endnotes and detail section can be immediately found by clicking on the endnotes as they appear within the text, in the listings of strategies and action steps.

The draft plan thus far is the result of input from many individuals and organizations, residents and business owners. It is contemplated within this draft plan that further and wider public input will continue to be sought and that a public process will be undertaken by the Selectboard in the form of a series of public planning sessions, charettes, and other public participation before the overall plan is adopted. Once adopted it should become part of or at a minimum strongly linked to the Community Development Plan and/or the Town's Master Plan.

Approaches to Strategic Planning.... Realizing Downtown Potential.



Lee's Unique Downtown.

In 1981, as part of a downtown revitalization effort, a conceptual plan was developed which was later used in part to implement many improvements in the downtown streetscape in the 1990's undertaken by Lee Economic Action Downtown (L.E.A.D.),. These initiatives were very effective in improving the look and feel of Main Street, and served to promote stability and encourage investment.

However, despite the success of these excellent earlier efforts, much important work remains to be done. L.E.A.D., which was an essentially grant funded organization, was not able to secure continued funding and support after the streetscape improvements were completed, and subsequently the organization was dissolved.

Lee's Downtown has since seen a rise in vacant storefronts. Some of the locally familiar aspects of downtown have changed (for example the closing of the town's much loved McClelland's Drugstore, complete with old fashioned soda fountain, and the closing of the 5&10 nearby). Aging infrastructure and buildings owned by the town on the west side of Main Street (the Airoidi building and the DPW complex) are also significant challenges. The closure of the Eagle Mill in downtown Lee adds further serious challenge (and opportunity) as we approach strategies for downtown revitalization.

Moving Forward.

The Town Selectboard has sought the assistance of the Lee Community Development Corporation in undertaking an assessment of the downtown and to help lead the effort to develop strategies for economic development. In May 2006, at the direction of the Lee Selectboard, the Lee CDC formed the Lee Downtown Task Force to undertake a downtown assessment and begin to look at redevelopment planning.

The Task Force early identified the following broad goals:

- Gather current and reliable information
- Meet with citizens and community leaders to begin the process of defining a plan for downtown revitalization.
- Attempt to match the consensus and vision to the reality of available resources, funding opportunities, and development challenges.
- Develop an action plan for downtown and consider an update in whole or in part of the existing Master Plan and Community Development Plan and perhaps other planning documents and policies.
- Be mindful of immediate critical opportunities that might be presented and be prepared to take action.

The Task Force includes business owners, community members and Town and regional planning officials. All residents and business owners are welcomed to participate.

What the Task Force has done so far.

In March of 2006 the CDC together with the Chamber of Commerce had already conducted a survey of businesses downtown. The CDC drafted a simple questionnaire and the Chamber distributed the survey to businesses in the downtown area. The survey was also offered on the Lee CDC and Town websites. The CDC and the Chamber also polled many downtown residents.¹

The task force met several times during the summer of 2006 and during this time the Lee CDC pursued funding sources to provide support for the downtown initiative. In October of 2006 The Lee CDC submitted a grant application to the Mass Executive Office of Environmental Affairs (EOEA) in order to secure funding for planning activities. The grant round was very competitive, with \$2.2 million requested statewide and only \$900,000 available. Of the 104 communities that submitted a proposal only 50 were funded. Lee was not selected.

By December of 2006 the task force had the assistance of several business owners and community leaders. There was a renewed interest in taking on the task of downtown development. The CDC helped to facilitate meetings of work groups in several areas including parking and traffic flow, walkability in the downtown, open space, recreation and entertainment downtown, liaison to town government, economic development and housing preservation and development downtown, as well as beautification downtown. Meetings of some of these groups took place through the summer of 2007.

Also during this period the Lee CDC at its own cost commissioned a downtown “walk and talk” with Wayne Feiden, AICP, senior planner for the City of Northampton, MA. On

August 10, 2007 Mr. Feiden helped the group to identify opportunities and challenges, engaging with participants in a discussion and tour of the downtown. The resultant Lee Downtown Strategic Review recommended that a number of steps be taken. Many of these recommendations have been incorporated into or have informed this draft plan.²

At the same time that the Lee CDC was facilitating these meetings, there were a number of immediate opportunities that were explored, including opportunities surrounding the possible redevelopment of 40-50 Main Street (the Bookless Block). This prominent Main Street building's upper floors have stood vacant for decades. The CDC explored re-development opportunities with the owners and other downtown property owners and was able to secure a grant from the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) to determine the feasibility of developing a parking facility on the east side of Main Street in order to unlock the economic potential of the building and make redevelopment happen. At the same time that the feasibility study was being completed the CDC had taken preliminary steps to qualify for funding the construction of the needed parking lot for this project through the Community Development Action Grant (CDAG) program and other funding sources. Although ultimately the project was unable to move forward during the grant cycle owing to the inability of the prospective private developer to negotiate an agreed upon price for the purchase of the Main Street building, the CDC was able to bring the project concept several significant steps forward for future consideration. The need to unlock the potential for this building remains a priority item among the recommended initiatives contained in this plan.³

The Lee CDC and the Task Force pressed for and assisted in the completion of a number of preliminary studies and projects downtown in an effort to move the Town into a more competitive position for future state and federal assistance, and to take advantage of some immediate opportunities. Among these projects was delineating a downtown target area and completing a building use and condition inventory to qualify for assistance in funding projects that aim to prevent and eliminate deteriorating conditions.⁴

The task force and the CDC also continued to assess the potential for redevelopment on the West side of Main Street. This draft plan recommends an aggressive pursuit of the development of the parcels currently owned by the town near the river which have been identified as barriers to revitalization.⁵

An additional approach of the Task Force has been to attempt to identify short, medium and long term plans and implementation schedules in order to “triage” the many and varied issues and challenges in the downtown and take advantage of any current opportunities to encourage and catalyze investment and job creation/retention..

Who will be the leaders of downtown re-development?

Much work remains to be done and the final strategic plan for downtown needs to be adopted as an action plan. But the question remains who will undertake all of the various actions that are needed to revitalize downtown? Who will lead the efforts that will be needed?

For a successful downtown revitalization effort in Lee there will need to be several different entities that will perform various functions.

The Lee CDC's role and the Task Force's role are to collectively make recommendations in this draft plan based on specific findings. The Lee CDC is also now (and hopefully in the future) participating in individual project development downtown (such as the current activities with respect to repositioning of the Eagle Mill as a priority development site, or further attempts to encourage development of key areas on the East and West sides of Main Street and in other areas of town, including the mills, Quarry Hill Business Park, and the Lee Corporate Center, and industrial and commercial areas along Route 102).

While the CDC role downtown may be key in project planning and development, the CDC is not the proper entity to take on organizing downtown stakeholders and providing downtown programmatic leadership over the long term. This is typically done by a "downtown" organization.

This strategic plan recognizes that a downtown entity or core group of stakeholders is needed to work with the merchants, businesses, property owners and residents in the downtown to form a "center of gravity" and a solid consensus which will be needed to help revitalize the downtown and to create and sustain real prosperity among the merchants and businesses downtown (See *Strategy I on page 8 and endnote # 6*). A robust downtown is a benefit to the entire community and can be a tremendous catalyst for growth and stability community wide.

How to Use the Draft Strategic Plan Document:

This document is meant to be dynamic, subject to continued input and change. It contains both a broad overview of recommended actions and a toolkit of detailed information that will help move the actions forward.

The **Strategies** (currently I through V) are the real substance of the plan. They are simple and straightforward suggestions for what the task force sees as specific necessary actions.

The **detail** in the plan is supplied by the **Endnotes** (1 - x) beginning on page X , and the **Appendices** (A- G) which appear just after the Endnotes and are listed in the Table of Contents. Both the Endnotes and the Appendices contain links to more detail to assist in implementation.

Strategy I – Foster and encourage public participation and identify and support strong leadership groups downtown...

Action Steps:

- Continue to engage diverse planning organizations, professionals, educational institutions, individuals, developers and investors.
- Attract ideas and innovation in the planning process.
- Task Force break out groups should meet regularly on particular issues
- Update Selectboard, Town boards and the public regularly.
- Encourage the Chamber of Commerce, downtown businesses, downtown residents and property owners to consider forming a “Downtown” entity that could provide long term leadership in the efforts to revitalize downtown.⁶
- Hold a series of public meetings and charettes involving stakeholders and the general public⁷
- Consider further strategies to get as much public input as possible, including additional surveys and opinion requests as well as small group or individual meetings.

[PHOTO PLACEHOLDER HERE]

STRATEGY II. Define the Downtown Target Area

Action Steps:

- Analyze the zoning and use patterns downtown and pay particular attention to those areas undergoing change.
- Define the downtown target area through public meetings and discussion with residents and business owners. Research state and federal regulations with regard to qualifying for economic development project funding.⁸
- Conduct an analysis of building type and conditions in the downtown (COMPLETED)
- Conduct an analysis of present uses and consider geographical expansion of zoning districts where appropriate.
- Consider where infill development may take place.

[GRAPHIC OR PHOTO PLACEHOLDER HERE]

STRATEGY III. Gather Current Key Information

Action Steps:

A. DOWNTOWN BUSINESS

Determine current conditions of downtown business

1. Downtown Retail Market Analysis⁹

a) Undertake an analysis of Downtown's current retail climate and market orientation including:

- Assessment of the commercial mix (composition and linkages);
- Assessment of customers and business practices;
- Evaluation of the real estate market;
- Analysis of locational factors and unique features;
- Determination of markets served by the Downtown;
- Estimation of current sales leakage and market penetration.
- Assessment of business assistance programs and incentives for job growth¹⁰.

b) Determine Downtown's future retail potential (expressed in total dollar volume and square footage).

c) Identify retail business types that have the potential to successfully expand in or be recruited to Downtown.

2. Downtown Office Market Analysis

a) Analysis of Downtown's current office climate and market orientation.

b) Evaluation of real estate market; Determination of future office potential.

c) Identification of office business types that have the potential to successfully expand in or be recruited to downtown.

B. DOWNTOWN HOUSING

Determine current conditions of downtown housing:

1. Downtown Housing Market Analysis

a. Assessment of Downtown's current housing market and climate.

b. Assessment of existing housing stock within Downtown:

- Housing conditions; Identification of substandard units targeted for demolition or rehabilitation;
- Livability of existing neighborhoods within Downtown.
- Distribution of housing types and price levels within the Downtown.

c. Identification of barriers to affordable housing creation in Downtown.

d. Identification of opportunity sites for new housing creation:

- Adaptive reuse of commercial and/or industrial buildings;
- Rehabilitation of the upper floors of commercial buildings;
- Conversion of single-family houses and infill development.

e. Projection of Downtown's future housing development potential.

f. Description of housing types most appropriate for Downtown.

C. DOWNTOWN PHYSICAL CONDITION AND DESIGN

Determine current physical conditions and design:

1. Streetscape

a. Assessment of Downtown building inventory; identification of severely deteriorated or obsolete buildings ----- (Completed November 2007))

b. Evaluation of current code enforcement programs to address conditions identified in building studies. (check for funding programs)

c. Evaluation of Downtown's architectural fabric relative to historic integrity, street and pedestrian orientation, rear facades, business signage, and accessibility. Research grant

opportunities and volunteer efforts to complete this evaluation. Integrate the completed evaluation into the overall downtown development plan.

d. Find ways to assist the First Congregational Church in its capital campaign (don't lose sight of the fact that the church's steeple is Lee's icon and identity. In fact, the wide publication of images of the church and its classic New England setting has arguably made this building an icon of the Berkshires). Continue the dialogue with the church and the Lee CDC in considering the benefits of pursuing additional parking for 40-50 Main Street, and work with church leaders to assist in developing cultural programs and events.

e. Assessment of existing public improvements (signage, seating and other street furniture, lighting, landscaping, public art, and traffic calming devices).

f. Evaluation of flexibility of existing Downtown building stock to accommodate the desired mix of uses.

2. Park/Open Space and Pedestrian Linkages

a. Assessment of adequacy of existing park/open space resources.

b. Identification of existing and potential pedestrian linkages to Downtown businesses, to historic sites and other tourist attractions, public recreation/open space amenities, and neighborhoods.

c. Identification of opportunity sites for creation of open public plazas ("people places") to serve as important focal points for Downtown.

d. River walk and vista opportunities.

e. Bikepath opportunities.

3. Circulation, Parking, and Infrastructure

a. Examination of Downtown circulation pattern; identification of existing or potential conflicts among modes of travel.

b. Assessment of existing parking resources in the Downtown; identification of parking management issues.

c. Evaluation of opportunities to reduce the impact of motor vehicles and to promote foot traffic and the use of bicycles.

d. Analysis of infrastructure conditions, improvements needed, and on-going maintenance requirements.

STRATEGY IV: Determine needs and issues

Through further public meetings of the task force, and all stakeholders ...

- Determination of the right mix of commercial, residential, institutional uses within Downtown Lee.
- Identification of specific niche businesses appropriate to recruit to Downtown;
- Identification of Downtown entertainment and cultural uses needed to serve residents and visitors.
- Suitability of existing commercial and residential building stock to meet current and future market demands.
- Ability of the Downtown area to provide a diversity of housing types and a range of affordability.
- Ability to replace existing deteriorated or obsolete housing and vacant lots with new housing units; Ability to minimize impacts on existing Downtown residents.
- Adequacy of Downtown's physical layout to foster local market demands and tourist-based economic development.
- Adequacy of effective linkages with Prime Outlets so that Downtown is not competing but strengthened.
- Ability to enhance the identity and visual cohesiveness of Downtown beyond Main Street façades.

- Determination of public and private roles in Downtown investments and improvement projects.
- Determine the Adequacy of Current Infrastructure Downtown:
- Consider means to accomplish updated infrastructure mapping in Target Area
- Consider and promote wireless and broadband issues.
- Review WiFi portal concepts such as “unwired village” ¹¹

Determine the Adequacy of Current Zoning within the Target Area relative to infill and new development downtown:

Review Uses --- identification/expansion

- Smart Growth District – allowance of by right mix of commercial and residential space.
- Consider Health/Wellness establishments – review and develop use criteria
- Creative Economy analysis -- Artist Live-work space in Commercial areas (Infill).
- Encourage Green Business models and energy projects and policies consistent with sustainable principles.
- Hospitality/Tourism analysis
- Overlay zones analysis.
- Consider form based zoning.¹²

STRATEGY V. Match the consensus and vision to the reality of available resources, funding and development opportunities. Develop an Implementation Plan.

Action Steps:

- Create a 43D Priority Development Site at Eagle Mill (Completed May 2008)
- Apply for assistance from Mass Permit Regulatory Office (up to \$100,000 to put priority sites in place and streamline permitting process for site, develop site master planning). (Completed – two sites identified and Grant awarded to Town)

Consider a Mixed Use Development Site at Eagle Mill:

- Work with site owners, residents, stakeholders to develop an overall plan to maximize economic development impact downtown. (Underway)¹³
- Develop site criteria
- Infrastructure needs analysis.
- Determine business cluster interest (market analysis)

Consider a Mixed Use Development Site at 40-50 Main Street:

- Encourage redevelopment of endangered and underutilized building.
- Revisit discussions of constructing a parking facility to unlock development potential.
- Consider Developing Incentives Programs for Downtown Investment
- Create Economic Opportunity Area for the East Side Development Project upon submission of a feasible development plan for 40-50 Main Street.
- Explore Housing TIF's

Develop an Aggressive West Side Strategy

- Complete parking and circulation data.
- Continue discussions with Price Chopper and others.

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Working Draft - For Discussion Only

- Determine strategy for municipal buildings¹⁴.
- Determine riverfront opportunities and strategies¹⁵.
- Develop outreach to developers, investors and partners

To access additional information please visit the Lee CDC website at www.leecdc.org

End Notes, References and Links

(click on the endnote number to return to the main text)

¹ The issues that were of the highest importance to the largest number of respondents were: expansion of parking availability; development of the “Bookless Block”; and encouraging more downtown events. Of note, although not an item on the survey respondents were emphatic in their interest in an improved. Larger grocery store. Note: As of November, 2008, the Lee Chamber of Commerce has begun to plan an updated survey of downtown businesses, property owners and residents.

² See the complete strategic review by Mr. Feiden at www.leeccd.org (click the downtown link).

³ The complete feasibility study funded through Mass Department of Housing and Community Development is available at www.leeccd.org Click Downtown and go to Mass Downtown Initiative report.

⁴ The Determination of “Slums and Blight” was completed in November 2007 This determination, which is effective for the downtown target area for a period of ten years beginning on January 22, 2008, is a prerequisite in many cases to obtaining federal community development block grant funding for various projects. To see the entire report log on to www.leeccd.org and click “Downtown” Follow the links to the study. Printed copies are available for review at Town Hall and at the Lee CDC office.

⁵ The barriers to economic development on the west side of Main Street include the continued existence of publicly owned buildings that are deteriorating and/or exist in a location which hampers assembly of contiguous parcels in a critical area of downtown that would likely be highly desirable for redevelopment. This Plan recommends that both the publicly owned Airolodi building and the DPW garage and the deteriorating Quonset hut nearby be removed, with the DPW garage and office functions moved to a new facility on Route 102 on property already owned by the Town at the wastewater treatment plant. Alternatively, if there is a restructuring of the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority, the town may want to propose that the state transfer the current Mass Highway facility on Route 102 to the town in light of the fact that there is a similar facility at the Turnpike garage. In this way, the town could remove the barriers to economic development on the west side of Main Street near the river.

⁶ The CDC and the taskforce have provided a number of downtown organizational models. It is hoped that these models will be explored and that at some not too distant point in the future a downtown organization or entity can be formed to help drive some of the initiatives contained in this plan. There are a number of models for organizational strategies to provide leadership in downtowns. The following list and associated information is compiled for consideration:

Business Improvement Districts (BID)

A business improvement district (BID) is a public-private partnership in which businesses in a defined area elect to pay an additional tax in order to fund improvements to the district's public realm and trading environment. In some areas, a BID is referred to as a business improvement area (BIA), a business revitalization zone (BRZ), or a community improvement district (CID), A BID is, in some ways, similar to a residential community association, but an appropriate analogy would be that of a suburban shopping mall, from which the

idea for BIDs is, itself, modeled. Malls are generally single properties managed by one entity that rents out retail spaces to various tenants. Tenants pay a common maintenance fee to pay for services that enhance the appearance of the mall's common areas and provide cooperative advertising for the mall and its various stores. BIDs operate in much the same way.

BIDs are often grassroots organizations driven by community support. They do, however, require legislative authorization by the government in which it resides, in order to be established. BIDs typically provide services such as street and sidewalk maintenance, public safety officers, park and open space maintenance, marketing, capital improvements, and various development projects. The services provided by BIDs are a supplement to the services already provided by the municipality.

In many countries such as the US, BIDs are funded through special assessments collected from the property owners in the defined boundaries of the district. Like a property tax, the assessment is levied on the property owners who can, if the property lease allows, pass it on to their tenants. In the city of New York, the operating budgets of BIDs range from \$53,000 to over \$11 million. Typically, an individual property owner will pay an assessment of approximately 6% of his/her annual real estate tax charge. A BID is often overseen by a board of directors.

BIDs first emerged in Toronto, Ontario, Canada in the late 1960s and have subsequently spread across Canada and the USA and into New Zealand, South Africa, and Europe. There are 3 BIDs within the city of Albany, New York. Central BID, Downtown BID, and the Lark Street BID.

For specific examples see also: <http://www.hackettstownbid.com/> (Hackettstown NJ).

<http://www.downtownalbany.org/> (Albany NY).

<http://www.auburndowntown.org/> (Auburn, NY)

<http://www.glencovedowntown.org/> (Glenn Cove, NY)

<http://www.hyannismainstreet.com/> (Hyannis, MA)

An excellent resource for understanding these structures is:

<http://www.planning.unc.edu/courses/261/actman/bidweb1.html> see especially the “Resources” link on this site.

See also recently in the press:

Northampton merchants organizing against downtown business improvement district
by The Republican Newsroom

Wednesday June 04, 2008, 6:15 PM

By FRED CONTRADA fcontrada@repub.com NORTHAMPTON - The plan is still in the talking stage, but a group of property owners is already organizing against a proposal to create a downtown business improvement district. The idea of the district began circulating a couple of years ago when some business owners in the Chamber of Commerce met with Ann M. Burke of the Western Massachusetts Economic Development Council to discuss aspects of it. Although there are more than 1,000 business improvement districts in the country, there are only a handful in Massachusetts, including ones in Springfield and Westfield. As Burke explained it at the time, the districts are intended to help business owners enhance the value of their properties. They can, for example, sponsor Christmas lighting or pay for higher levels of maintenance or security.

The district would be run by a board of directors, and financed by additional property fees. A majority of property owners within the designated district must agree to its creation. Although the plan has not yet reached that stage, efforts are continuing behind the scenes. But some downtown property owners are advising their neighbors against it. Concerns about costs, participation Among their concerns are costs and questions about whether they would be forced to participate. Eric G. Suher owns such properties as the Iron Horse Music Hall, the Pearl Street Nightclub and the Calvin Theater, said today that the city does not need a bureaucratic body governing the business district. "I'm very against this," he said, "because I feel Northampton and property owners and merchants are quite capable of managing our own affairs, as opposed to a committee making decisions for all property owners." Although he acknowledged some problems in the downtown area that need to be addressed, Suher said that property owners can pay for extra cleaning and security themselves. "What's broken can be fixed without an additional tax," he said. Alan Scheinman, who owns a building on Pleasant

Street, said he is concerned that his neighbors do not fully understand all the implications of joining such a district. Suzanne L. Beck, executive director of the Greater Northampton Chamber of Commerce, could not be immediately reached for comment.

Downtown Business Associations

Another model for downtown organizing and development leadership can be a business association. See, for example:

Downtown Holyoke Business Association <http://www.doho.biz/>

Pittsfield MA downtown organization <http://www.downtownpittsfield.com/>

Appleton, WI <http://www.appletondowntown.org/>

News Articles RE Downtown Organizations:

The following News Articles may be helpful:

“Downtown Partnership has new office”

FRANKLIN —

A local property owner has donated office space to the Downtown Partnership, and several companies have supplied furniture, technology and equipment, to help the group continue its work to revitalize downtown.

"It's exciting we now have a downtown office," said Jane Curran, secretary of the Partnership and owner of Jane's Frames, 11 East Central St. Her landlords, Diane and Michael Glass, gave the partnership some office space at 9 East Central St.

The Partnership is a nonprofit organization dedicated to making downtown Franklin "an exciting place to live, work, shop and learn," and is comprised of residents, merchants, community leaders and town officials. Dean Bank donated a computer, printer, desk and chair for the office, and Joel Carrara of Printsmart Office Products at 109 Marvin St., gave office supplies, said Curran, who donated framed art and Web access through her shop.

"We're excited to be downtown, and it's really exciting to have an office downtown and continue to work closely with Brian (Taberner, Planning Department director) and (Town Administrator) Jeff Nutting," said Lisa Piana, executive director of the Downtown Partnership and former downtown manager.

Last month, Town Council voted to stop funding the downtown manager position, which was a nine-hour-a-week job, so Piana works solely for the partnership now.

"It's just exciting to be autonomous and to be able to forge our own direction. It is a good thing, there are things Lisa can do now that she couldn't do before," while working for both the town and the partnership, Curran said.

"We can speak our minds more readily without feeling we're beholden to anybody," Curran added.

At a general meeting Thursday, the partnership also announced that Sen. Karen Spilka, D-Ashland, and Rep. James Vallee, D-Franklin, officially secured a \$50,000 grant for the partnership for the third consecutive year.

The partnership can use the money, from the state Office of Tourism and Travel, for improvements to the Cultural Corridor and walking trail, or to install banners on light posts, Piana said.

"Those are just a few of many ideas being discussed," she said.

Right now, the partnership is gearing up for the Harvest Festival, which is slated for Sept. 21, and has a rain date of Sept. 28, Piana said.

The group is seeking sponsorship for the event, which attracts an estimated 2,000 people and will take place on both Main and East Central streets this year, Piana said.

Benjamin Franklin Charitable Foundation, which donated \$10,000, is the event's main sponsor, she said.

"Without them, the event really wouldn't happen," Piana said.

Joyce Kelly can be reached at 508-634-7582 or jkelly@cnc.com. This story and others about Franklin can be found at www.milforddailynews.com.

DIF (District Improvement Financing):

DIF is authorized by M.G.L.c. 40Q and its implementing regulations 402 CMR 3.00 et seq. New to Massachusetts, DIF has been implemented in other states with considerable success. A city or town wishing to utilize DIF must first designate a development district and a corresponding development program. The district and program must then be certified by the State Economic Assistance Coordinating Council ("EACC"). A development district may be as small as one parcel or may comprise up to 25% of a town or city's land. A district can be in effect for a maximum of 30 years. Each district must have a unique development program. The development program spells out the goals of the district and the means to achieve them. The program will identify the following:

- Existing uses and current zoning,
- Proposed uses and any needed zoning changes,
- Any planned construction or renovations,
- Current and planned infrastructure,
- A financial plan.

Application forms, with detailed requirements for submittal, are available from the [Massachusetts Office of Business Development \(MOBD\)](#). Once a district and program have been certified, the city or town has the ability to use various tools to implement the program. These include acquiring land, constructing or reconstructing improvements (such as buildings, roads, schools and parks), incurring indebtedness and pledging tax increments and other project revenues for repayment of these debts. Initial funding for these activities is usually accessed through the posting of a bond by the city or town. DIF also allows for public/private development partnerships

⁷ During 2008 the CDC sponsored several meetings of the task force as well as a field study done by students from Harvard University Graduate School of Design. This study can be accessed at the Lee CDC website at www.leeccd.org Click the "Downtown" link to see this and other studies.

Further public meetings are planned through 2009 concerning this draft plan and also concerning individual projects such as the Eagle Mill that are integral to downtown redevelopment.

⁸ **Defining the Target Area.** The downtown target area comprises the commercial area bordered by High Street to the East and the Housatonic River to the south and west. The area extends from Housatonic Street to the Eagle Mill (see Maps in Appendix _____). Much progress has been made in defining the downtown area and making it eligible and competitive for state and federal funding programs (See Mass General Law Chapter 121A and 121B). In 2007 a study of the condition, use and ownership of buildings in the downtown commercial center and the immediate surrounding area was completed (See appendix _____).

⁹ As part of the Chapter 43D grant, the town has engaged consultants that will accomplish some of the downtown market study insofar as it affects the range of proposed uses for the Eagle Mill priority development site.

¹⁰ Currently there are a number of programs in Berkshire County which help businesses with various aspects of business development. Among these are the Small Business Development Center in Pittsfield (help with

business plan development) and the Pittsfield Economic Revitalization Corp., or PERC (a county wide organization which makes loans and technical assistance grants to small business, etc.

¹¹ See www.unwiredvillage.com

¹² A form-based code is one that is based primarily on “form”—urban form, including the relationship of buildings to each other, to streets and to open space, rather than based primarily on land use. A Form-Based Code is a development code that provides the developer/applicant greater flexibility in permitted land uses in exchange for more stringent regulations controlling urban form. These types of codes support mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly and mixed housing development more effectively than conventional codes do because they provide greater guidance on how buildings are expected to face the street, adjacent residential neighborhoods and open spaces. Form-Based Codes are becoming increasingly attractive to municipalities that want greater control over how buildings look and feel. For further information about form based zoning go to www.leecdc.org and follow the links to downtown.

¹³ Currently the town, the Lee CDC and Berkshire Economic Development Corp. are working with Eagle Mill Development, LLC, the purchasers of the Eagle Mill site to develop a mixed use project. Through the winter of 2008 and spring of 2009 a base site plan will be developed. There will be public discussion of development components and design scheduled for the spring of 2009.

¹⁴ The town should continue to pursue the idea of moving the town activities on these sites to route 102 properties either currently owned by the town (such as the wastewater treatment plant property) or that could be acquired (State Highway Garage).

¹⁵ River-based opportunities and river stewardship should be a key element in downtown planning as well as in other parts of the town and the region. Among the initiatives that should be pursued are river walks and vistas, preservation activities, recreation and cultural activities and the investigation of hydroelectric opportunities. The Lee CDC has proposed an initiative to investigate some of these opportunities as part of the MGL 43D activities (see Appendix ____) and also as part of an initiative to link economic development incentive programs with the development of these opportunities along the river.