

## **Policy Area 8 Responses to public comments:**

The questions below are summaries of numerous individual public concerns that the Comprehensive Plan Update Committee received. Following each question, the Committee has provided additional information that explains changes that have been made to the January draft recommendations, and the Committee's reasoning in thinking through the issues that have been raised.

### **1. How does the NASB closure affect the timing of development of a business park?**

NASB closure does affect the timing of business park development. The Naval Air Station closure will allow the NASB site to be comprehensively reused beginning in 2011, according to the current timetable. Long-term, there will be room for substantial business development once active military use of the base ends. Current planning for a business park should thus focus on Brunswick's needs for the next 6-10 years before the base can realistically be utilized. It is possible that planning for a pre-sell or lease agreement for property at the current NASB site, such as the original 55 acre dual-use site planned in 1995, can take place so that a public benefit conveyance can be expedited. Obviously, the military mission of the base will remain paramount until closure, but the NASB property is the most desirable site for a business park, and every effort should be made to explore early planning and preparation for the development of job opportunities at this site.

In the meantime, Brunswick and the entire region are already feeling the economic impact of the imminent Base closure through loss of contracts for services, construction, and military staff departures. The need to increase business interest in the Brunswick community in advance of a significant economic downturn is immediate and crucial to the Town. We must look first at in-fill options as well as the above exploration of opportunities at the NASB site.

### **2. Does the availability of the NASB site change the need to rezone for a business park outside of the existing growth zone?**

Only after all infill possibilities within the current growth zone are fully exhausted and if there is a significant gap in the time-frame between possible development at the NASB site and development of businesses with jobs that match Brunswick's vision, only in these circumstances would it be appropriate for the Town to approve an expansion of the growth zone boundary in order to create jobs. Thus the Comprehensive Plan Update Committee finds it necessary to allow for possible rezoning for the proposed Route 1 business park.

The Director of Economic Development has reviewed all available sites for an industrial park, both within and outside of the existing growth zone, with these main considerations:

- a. The size of the park must be a minimum of 100 acres. This allows the extension of infrastructure – required for every site reviewed – to be cost-effective. In addition, the layout of the property should enable flexible combinations of acreage to best suit the needs of businesses within the park.
- b. Vehicle transportation access in and out of the site should be close to a major artery, and not impose traffic burdens upon residential neighborhoods if possible. Rail should be considered as an additional potential asset.

**3. Is “infill” property within the existing growth zone adequate to meet the need until the NASB property is available?**

Infill is a very important part of avoiding sprawl and encouraging additional business growth within the community. It should be our first priority. As stated above, Brunswick is facing a fairly short-term economic crisis at a time when the Town’s existing business park is virtually full. All possible means must be explored to make the many infill sites as productive as possible. However, available infill sites may not be sufficient to give the community the required level of economic momentum that can be actively marketed to provide the quality and quantity of jobs that Brunswick’s economy will need. Nevertheless, developing infill sites must become a critical part of the short-term and long-term economic development plan for Brunswick in addition to a new, large, business park.

**4. How will existing residences near the proposed Route 1 Business Park be protected, given that this would be a zoning change that would result in greater development than that which is currently permitted on the site?**

The existing MU5 zoning of the proposed business park location allows for mixed-use development within the rural zone. Buildings of up to 10,000 sq ft and 40 ft high are currently permitted and industry class 1 uses are permitted allowing businesses up to 25 employees. A change to industrial zoning would allow larger buildings occupying a higher percentage of impervious surface and employing larger number of employees. Any such change in zoning obliges the Town to establish higher standards than would otherwise be required to minimize impacts to the surrounding predominantly residential community. The Committee recommends that these standards include that:

- a. There will be no entrance to the proposed park from Durham Road.
- b. The Town will maintain a visual gateway to Brunswick from Freeport that is a clear, attractive and rural entrance to the community from Rt. 1 and I-295.
- c. Landscape buffers around the proposed business park function to visually protect neighboring residences and to keep Rte. 1 an attractive artery.
- d. Standards are developed for the types of businesses accepted by the Town for inclusion in the business park to attract businesses that provide a living wage and benefits to their employees.
- e. Noise standards are developed to limit off-site noise.
- f. Traffic issues are safely resolved at the Rte. 1/Durham Road intersection and at the intersection of Rt. 1 and Pleasant Street.
- g. There are functional setbacks from current residences.
- h. Setbacks will be enhanced to a minimum of 200' from existing residences.
- i. Limited, ambient lighting will be allowed during regular nighttime hours and there will be zero lumens lighting at the buffer.
- j. Specific outdoor task lighting should be designed to have minimal off-site impact.
- k. There will be no off-site water quality environmental impacts.
- l. An efficient use of impervious surface is designed to adequately provide for business needs.

Concern has been raised that rezoning a portion of the existing rural zone into the growth zone and the extension of public facilities implies a “slippery slope” towards sprawl, which could occur again in future Comprehensive Plans, resulting in an ever-expanding growth zone. The Committee believes that Comprehensive Plan considerations must include the possibility for rezoning. The reason for planning efforts is to carefully consider the need for growth and change for the entire community, rather than to do so incrementally. For the long-term, the availability of the NASB property, its size of over 3200 acres, and its location between two commercial areas, make the NASB property the appropriate site to enable the Town to enjoy considerable long-term business growth.

**5. How will this site interact with the community’s other goals concerning protection of the environment?**

Portions of the original area proposed for rezoning have been removed from the current proposal,

due to their inclusion in the Aquifer Protection Zone. There appear to be no significant environmental impacts that would impede the development of the current proposed site, although additional investigation for wetland functions and values and rare plant surveys are warranted. The property is located within a fragmented landscape, bordered by a highway and a major roadway. The site itself has a history of intensive forest management and horticulture resulting in compromised habitat conditions.

**6. As this site was specifically rejected by the Town Council in 1999, why is it appropriate to consider it again now?**

A significant concern raised in 1999 was that major rezoning considerations should take place in the context of comprehensive planning efforts, and not handled in a piecemeal fashion. The major reason for the rejection of the rezoning request was that the Comprehensive Plan and zoning revisions that were in effect in 1999 zoned this area as rural. At the time, the Planning Board was faced with stiff opposition to recommending a zoning and Comprehensive Plan amendment, and unanimously voted against it. Under these circumstances, there was little advocacy for the project and the Town Council declined to pursue it.

Circumstances today, in the face of the current and impending impact from the NASB closure with anticipated short-term negative impacts, are significantly different and we are completing the long process of a Comprehensive Plan.

**7. Is providing infrastructure for a business park an appropriate use of public resources, and who will actually pay?**

Developing business parks enhances the community's ability to pay for the costs associated with residential development. Residential development actually costs more to provide local services than is generated in property tax revenues. Additionally, maintaining a balance between business and residential property helps Brunswick ensure that jobs are available within the community. Brunswick has a relatively short-term opportunity to pay for the infrastructure needed at a business park with substantial resources to be made available by the State and Federal governments because of the impending closure of NASB. Local resources may also be required, but at a much lower percentage of the total cost than would be otherwise expected for a local business park development. The most cost-effective way to use these resources is to maximize the acreage that is made available by the costly extension of infrastructure for a new business park.

It is agreed that if the Town were the owner of the business park, it would be responsible for all costs as well as reap all benefits. Publicly funded utility extensions to benefit one large property owner are, and should be, a rare occurrence for highly unusual circumstances. Part of the evaluation of whether or not the Town should commit public resources to provide infrastructure for a new business park is whether or not increased tax revenues from the future business park would offset the public investment. Therefore, it is once again clear that an absolute requirement for approval of a business park requiring any public resources is that long-term tax revenues from such a park are assured.

Strong consideration should be given to having future business parks (including the possible Route 1 and NASB business parks) be developed on a regional basis, where the costs and benefits are shared among all participating municipalities. This would allow for a more efficient use of public funds, greater ability to attract public funds from outside the region, less competition for businesses between municipalities, and better promotion of regional interests.