

Zoning review eyed to bolster downtown

By Thor Jourgensen
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LYNN — Spurred by success in attracting new residents to downtown in the last 10 years, business and city leaders are ready to rework the city center's zoning to attract restaurants and development projects. City Councilor at large Brendan Crighton said councilors will discuss downtown zoning suggestions in two weeks and work over the next several months to assemble zoning change suggestions.

'We're prepared to be flexible,' Crighton said.

Crighton and Council President Daniel Cahill discussed zoning concerns with Lynn Business Partnership members on Wednesday. Councilors have also heard Lynn Area Chamber of Commerce members' ideas on the subject.

Partnership members and councilors agreed a simple approach to zoning changes focused on downtown will create ideas that can be incorporated into city ordinances and increase downtown's ability to be a business magnet.

"We'll know pretty quickly if they are the right choices or not," Cahill said.

Zoning codes dictate what sort of property uses are allowed in different parts of the city and downtown has seen its share of use suggestions in the last three decades. Proposals for a downtown cyber district gave way to creating an arts district and — as partnership members noted Wednesday — even a "house wares district." Former councilor — and now top city planner — James Cowdell spearheaded zoning changes 11 years ago to bring residents into former downtown commercial buildings.

"We wanted people living there. We put in the zoning, then got out of the way," Cowdell said.

Partnership members urge a similar approach to boosting business interest in the area roughly bound by Essex, Market and Broad streets and Central Square-Union Street. Allowing new restaurants to open downtown following required city inspections makes sense, said partnership executive board member James Moore.

"If more come in and open up, we think we've made some progress," he said.

Cowdell said councilors and business community members offering zoning change suggestions "need to remove all obstacles" keeping a developer interested in building in Salem or Lynn from coming to **Lynn**. RCG development managing principal Matt Picarsic said flexibility is critical to achieving that objective. Somerville-based RCG converted three downtown loft buildings into residences. Picarsic said downtown zoning changes ideally need to allow a wide variety of businesses to locate in the city's center.

Crighton envisions zoning changes aimed at attracting businesses like a microbrewery downtown, and he said service stations and automobile body repair shops don't belong in the area. He stressed existing auto shops are "grandfathered" under existing zoning rules and will not be impacted by changes.

He also said a rough definition of downtown should include major buildings, such as the All Care Visiting Nurses Association building and Eastern Bank building, both on Market Street.