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Town of Scarborough reviews potential changes to 300-acre Haigis Parkway commercial zone

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Representatives from the town of Scarborough brought property owners, citizens, real estate brokers and economic developers together to discuss potential changes to the Haigis Parkway commercial zone on January 25.

Envisioned as the future home of campus-style office developments serving such areas as information technology and bioscience, this zone features more than 300 acres of commercial land with sewer, water and natural gas lines already in place. Located within a 90-minute drive to Boston, the Haigis Parkway corridor includes some 28 parcels with immediate access to the Maine Tpke. (I-95) exit 42 and U.S. Rte. 1. Parcels range in size from half an acre to 60 acres.

Harvey Rosenfeld, president of the Scarborough Economic Development Corp. (SEDCO), explained to meeting participants that the Haigis Parkway is still one of Greater Portland's premier areas for development, however, it's been ten years since the zone was first developed. In keeping with Scarborough's innovative approach to development, he said the town wanted to review current market conditions to assess streamlining opportunities and additional compatible uses.

Tasked with reviewing the zone, the town's newly formed long range planning committee developed several ideas for the zone, which Dan Bacon, Scarborough town planner, presented at the January meeting. Ideas for the zone include: allowing medical and diagnostic facilities as permitted uses rather than requiring a contract zone, adding health clubs and personal services to allowed uses, allowing assisted living/nursing and elder care facilities, and allowing places of assembly amusement, recreation and culture.

Additional ideas for improving the zone include allowing retail larger than 20,000 s/f in some sections of the existing zone, allowing gas stations to serve the turnpike area of the zone and allowing multi-family housing as part of a mixed use project.

Reacting to the presentation, Barry Feldman, owner of the Gateway Shoppes where Cabela's is located, said, "You are working in the right direction. We highly endorse the concept of increasing the larger format retail without having to do a contract zone."

Feldman also liked the idea of adding multi-family and personal services to mixed-use developments, noting that these types of projects add "vibrancy to an area."

Tom Dunham, principal of The Dunham Group, agreed with Feldman's comments. He added, "Changing the limitations on retail may open new opportunities for junior anchors."

Jerry Applebee, Applebee Commercial, told the group that he's had interest from developers of warehouse and distribution facilities.

Dunham agreed, noting that there are high-end distribution centers that would be compatible with the campus style concept of the parkway.

Dunham also told the group that now is the time to make these changes since he's seeing an increase in development projects. According to Dunham, Scarborough has a competitive property tax rate and is in a good position to capture new development, particularly with the changes presented.

Cynthia Milliken Taylor said, "I'm very supportive and appreciative with what the town is doing. We have more information now, so we can know more precisely what can be done on the properties."

Tom Hall, Scarborough's town manager, thanked all who attended and invited any interested parties to attend the long range planning committee meetings as they review the comments and make final recommendations to the town council.

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