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## **State Permitting Board approves the Forge Park Priority Development Site in Franklin, Mass.**

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On July 8th the state's Interagency Permitting Board approved an application designating 30 parcels within the Town of Franklin as the Forge Park Priority Development Site. The priority development site designation provides a transparent and efficient process for municipal permitting, and guarantees municipal permitting decisions on priority development sites within 180 days. The town hopes to use the priority development site designation as an incentive to encourage existing businesses to expand, and to attract new businesses.

Forge Park Priority Development Site consists of 30 privately owned parcels totaling 259.8 acres on 3 roadways (Forge Parkway, National Dr., West Central St. - Rte. 140) and is located a half mile from I-495's exit 17.

Several parcels contained within Forge Park Priority Development Site are within the town's Biotechnology Use zoning overlay district. Currently several buildings within Forge Park are either empty or underutilized, and several parcels are undeveloped, including two prime locations at the intersection of Rte. 140 and Forge Parkway.

In addition to being a priority development site, the 30 parcels are also part of the Forge Park Economic Opportunity Area, and as such owners of these parcels are able to negotiate tax increment finance agreements with the town for proposed projects that will result in creation of new permanent jobs, and also either result in redevelopment of empty or underutilized industrially zoned properties, or development of new research and development or manufacturing facilities.

A tax increment finance agreement is a 5 to 20 year property tax exemption based on the increased value of the property due to new construction or significant improvements.

The Forge Park Priority Development Site and Economic Opportunity Area is within the town's industrial zoning district and can quickly accommodate substantial expansion and development.

The Industrial zoning district allows light and medium industrial uses, warehouse and distribution uses, and business uses. Some commercial uses (e.g., office park, restaurant, conference center) are allowed by special permit.

Current tenants include General Cable, Pierce Aluminum, Berry Plastics, Covalence Specialty Adhesives, Draka USA, JEM Electronics, Vacumet Corp., Last Armor/Foster-Miller, Eastern Propane Gas, Keebler, CiscoSystems, Dynisco Instruments, Tetra Medical, Echo Therapeutics, Sontra Medical, PLC Medical Systems, Thermo Fisher Scientific, Kuehnet Nagel, The Taylor Group, Speedline Technology, MPM Corp., NMT Inc., Mass. Secondary School Administrators Association, Mass. Interscholastic Athletic Association, and Marriott Residence Inn.

The Town believes establishing large priority development sites that are also economic opportunity areas, will help create conditions favorable for business expansion, and assist property owners fill the Town's currently empty or underutilized industrially zoned manufacturing, warehouse and office

space. The Town is hopeful expanding businesses will take advantage of these opportunities. Massachusetts General Law Chapter 43D was enacted to provide municipalities with a tool to promote targeted economic development. The Act provides for local option, site-specific, expedited permitting for commercial and industrial projects in locally defined "priority development sites." Chapter 43D provides an opportunity for a community to proactively target commercial or industrial sites and to recruit developers by offering a predictable and short permitting process (180 days or less).

Expedited Permitting, as described in Massachusetts General Law Chapter 43D, was approved by Franklin Town Council in November 2008; at the same time Franklin Town Council designated a 33.95 acre Town-owned parcel on Pond Street as Franklin's first priority development site, Pond Street Priority Development Site.

Franklin's Department of Planning and Community Development is currently working with consultants to establish new procedures for expedited permitting of the Town's two existing priority development sites, and all other priority development sites to be designated in the future. These new streamlined site plan review and permitting processes will amend Franklin's rules and regulations on permit issuance to conform to Chapter 43D, and will include concurrent applications for all priority development site related projects. The new processes will streamline and expedite permits by simultaneous and concurrent review of development applications. The Town expects the new expedited permitting processes to be complete and approved for utilization by the end of August 2009.

In addition, Department of Planning and Community Development Staff have been working to obtain permission from Franklin Industrial Park property owners for their parcels to be included in an additional priority development site, the proposed Franklin Industrial Park Priority Development Site. It is hoped the State's Interagency Permitting Board will approve the Town's application to create the Franklin Industrial Park Priority Development Site at their meeting in August 2009.

Acceptance of Chapter 43D and creation of priority development sites has given the Town access to benefits not previously available. Communities that have accepted the provisions of Chapter 43D are given priority consideration for Public Works Economic Development grants, Community Development Action Grants, brownfields remediation assistance, and other infrastructure funds and financing mechanisms, such as training programs.

In addition, upon a community's acceptance of Chapter 43D, Massachusetts Office of Business Development and the Massachusetts Alliance for Economic Development will provide enhanced marketing of priority development sites. These agencies will highlight each participating community's economic development efforts through aggressive online marketing and publicity for the designated sites. This means priority development site locations will be marketed with a priority to the real estate and business community nationwide before other non- priority development site locations.

The Town has been fortunate in attracting a substantial number and variety of businesses over the last thirty years, however, with the recent slowdown in the economy and a substantial amount of empty and underutilized industrially zoned properties, the Town is focusing a sizeable amount of resources towards attracting new and retaining existing businesses. Creation of priority development sites within the Town's office and industrial parks is an effective business recruitment strategy, and an important component of the Town of Franklin's ongoing economic development plans.

Please contact Planning and Community Development Director, Bryan Taberner, if you have questions or require additional information regarding the Town of Franklin's priority development site

initiative or other business recruitment and retainage plans.

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