



# BOROUGH OF HOPEWELL

88 East Broad Street  
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## Open Letter to Hopewell Borough Residents and Businesses Regarding Redevelopment

Hopewell Borough Mayor and Council  
May 2016

In August of 2015, the Hopewell Borough Council tasked the Planning Board to conduct a “Preliminary Investigation for Determination of an Area in Need of Redevelopment,” as defined under the Local Redevelopment and Housing Law, as a preliminary step in exploring potential redevelopment opportunities in Hopewell. The Council identified several parcels for investigation, most of which are located in the current Service Zone, to determine whether the lot characteristics meet the statutory criteria for redevelopment. A draft report has been completed, and amended, and the Planning Board has scheduled a public hearing on June 1, 2016 to discuss the findings and to take possible action.

The purpose of this letter is to introduce the concept of redevelopment and to invite and encourage dialogue and community participation as the process continues. Redevelopment is typically a lengthy process, with many steps and opportunities for public input; the June 1st public hearing on the preliminary investigation report is just an early one.

According to the Department of Community Affairs, redevelopment is “a process to rebuild or restore an area in a measurable state of decline, disinvestment, or abandonment. Redevelopment may be publicly or privately initiated, but it is commonly recognized as the process governed by the Local Redevelopment and Housing Law and undertaken in accordance with a redevelopment plan adopted by the municipality. **If used correctly, it can transform an underutilized or distressed area into an economically viable and productive part of the community.**”

The two areas under investigation include properties along the railroad at Railroad Place and Somerset Street, east of the train station, and the existing gas and auto repair business at the intersection of Broad Street and Maple Avenue (shaded lots on the attached map). These areas have been identified as underutilized in past versions of the Hopewell Borough Master Plan (2007), and Master Plan Re-examination Report (2014) and the potential could exist, with sound planning, to transform these areas into higher and better uses.

The Borough Council believes that the potential benefits of redevelopment are worth investigating. As with all decisions – land use, general improvements, and local policies in general - the commitment to preserving the character, charm





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and historic integrity of our community remains our highest goal. Redevelopment will only proceed if it can further our goals as a community, in keeping with these guiding principles.

It is important to note that no specific redevelopment plans have yet been discussed, as such discussion would be premature in advance of the properties being designated as “areas in need of redevelopment.” As has been stated, the preparation of a redevelopment plan will involve extensive public outreach as part of the planning process, and will include public hearings, as required by statute, before a redevelopment plan can be adopted.

The word “redevelopment” can elicit negative connotations if misused or misapplied, as has been recorded in examples elsewhere, often due to the heavy hand of eminent domain. The Local Redevelopment and Housing Law requires that the governing body state whether or not condemnation is to be retained as a tool for redevelopment. In our August 6, 2015 resolution (No. 2015-104), we did not include language regarding condemnation, triggering an amendment in October 2015 (No. 2015-111) which stated the study area should be investigated as a non-condemnation area because this body believes that the participation of any landowner in a redevelopment area should be on a voluntary basis. However, over time, and after considerable discussion, we realized that surrendering the power of eminent domain might not ultimately serve the public’s best interests, especially if condemnation of an area or a portion thereof is necessary for infrastructure or other public needs. After careful consideration and debate (and with much concern about the potential for confusion or misinterpretation of our intentions), we reversed that stance on May 5, 2016 (Resolution No.2016-59). The report that the Planning Board will be considering on June 1 and for which the public hearing will be held, will include an examination of the areas with the right of eminent domain intact or, put another way, without relinquishing the power the municipality currently has.

As mentioned, redevelopment is a multi-stage process. Once the Planning Board completes the public hearing on the report, it will forward a recommendation to the Borough Council on whether or not to designate all or part of the proposed area as being in need of redevelopment. The Borough Council will further consider the findings and recommendations, and may accept, reject (or accept with modifications) the findings of the Board. The Borough Council may pass a resolution designating all or part of the study area as being in need of redevelopment. It may defer the enactment of redevelopment plan, or it may develop a plan for only a portion of the studied area. If the Borough Council does designate, by resolution, a redevelopment zone, it must meet the statutory requirements set forth under the law and provide notice to the Department of Community Affairs. The Borough Council must also prepare a redevelopment plan ordinance for introduction and conduct a public hearing prior to adoption, similar to the steps required for the Preliminary Investigation for Determination of an Area in Need of Redevelopment report. Additional material regarding redevelopment, updates and meeting announcements will be made available at Borough Hall and on the website in the time ahead, as available and as needed.

Should the redevelopment project proceed, we will invite and encourage public participation and input at every stage of the process. In addition to the formal meetings, we intend to also host informal monthly sessions with a Planning Board or Council member or two on hand to answer questions and listen to your ideas. As your elected leaders and your neighbors, we are accountable to you, and we expect that you



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will be involved in this process via input and participation. A process like redevelopment requires a commitment by the community, too, and we need to hear from you.

Whatever path we ultimately follow, we will do it together as a community. We look forward to hearing from you in the time ahead.

***The public hearing on the “Preliminary Investigation for Determination of an Area in Need of Redevelopment” will be held on June 1, 2016, in the courtroom at Hopewell Borough Hall, 88 East Broad Street, at 7:30pm.***