

# **Ayer Office of Community & Economic Development**

Monthly Report: April-May 2017

*Respectfully submitted by Alan S. Manolian, Director of Community & Economic Development*

**Redevelopment of Historic Ayer Central Fire Station:** The AOCED is progressing well with the selected developer, C. Donell Homes, Inc. of Shirley, MA, on the sale and comprehensive redevelopment of the Historic Ayer Central Fire Station. Over the last month, the AOCED has engaged in meetings with the developer's team, and with developer's architecture firm in order to prepare conceptual exterior & interior architectural design plan, and preliminary construction budget, required for the Mass. Dept. of Community & Housing Development "pre-application" submission in pursuit of the \$500,000 CDBG-EDF Grant. The AOCED identified and contracted with the environmental firm of Williamson Environmental of Shirley, MA to conduct a full Phase I Environmental Analysis & Report on the Historic Fire Station. Environmental field work was completed and report issued showing low-levels of asbestos in the building, and showing significant levels of lead-paint throughout the entire building. No other significant environmental contamination was detected & reported; (all favorable news for redevelopment costs). Also, the AOCED engaged and worked together with our municipal legal counsel, Kopelman & Page, to compose a new Purchase & Sales Agreement between the Town of Ayer, MA & C. Donell Homes, Inc. The P&S is completed and has been forwarded to the proposed buyer's attorney for review. The AOCED went before the Ayer Community Preservation Committee, on 5/10, to submit a request for \$30,000 in Community Preservation Funds to be directed specifically for the restoration & preservation of the original 1934 cupola, slate roof and stepped brick gables architectural features as part of the overall Fire Station redevelopment project. The Ayer Community Preservation Comm. voted unanimously in favor of recommending the funding request for the Ayer October 2017 Town Meeting. The AOCED made contact and had lengthy conversation on project status and strength with Mass DHCD Grant Program Administrator on 5/18; with the result that Mass DHCD is strongly encouraging submission of full grant request. The "pre-application" for the \$500,000 CDBG EDF Grant will be completed and submitted by 5/26.

**IDFA Loan Administration:** On 4/25 the Ayer Industrial Development Authority conducted a regular meeting to review, discuss and vote on a commercial loan application, submitted by Mr. Siwei "Ken" Huang in the amount of \$25,000. Mr. Huang is the owner of SAWA Restaurant in Gardner, MA, and has recently purchased the mixed-use (residential & restaurant) property located at 9 Main Street in Downtown Ayer; (known as the former New England Flat Bread Co./O'Hannlon's Building). Mr. Huang proposes to redesign the space into a first-class traditional Sushi/Asian Cuisine fine dining establishment. The requested \$25,000 Ayer IDFA loan would fund the purchase & installation of a fire sprinkler system for the renovated commercial building. The Ayer

IDFA voted unanimously to approve the commercial loan in the amount of \$25,000. The AOCED believes that Ken Huang will emerge as one of the new young professional business & community leaders of our socially, culturally & economically revitalizing Downtown Ayer.

**Cains Property Future:** On 4/26 the AOCED organized and conducted a strategic roundtable discussion with representatives of the commercial property brokerage firm, the prospective new Cains plant property owner, and the prospective new Cains plant tenant, as well as, Ayer Town Administrator, several Town of Ayer Department Directors, and a representative of the Massachusetts Office of Business Development to dialogue, share information, exchange future plan/improvement concepts, and to determine if the former Cains Plant and the Town of Ayer would provide a favorable opportunity for prospect tenant to locate in Ayer, MA. The roundtable meeting proved most useful and the AOCED continues to energetically work with all parties to advance the prospect for the attraction of a new world-class company to the former Cain Plant site.

**Depot Square & Commuter Rail Parking Deck Design:** The AOCED continues to develop and advance high-quality public space design concepts and specifics for the landmark Downtown Ayer Commuter Rail District redevelopment. AOCED contacted design engineering consulting firm of Weston & Sampson, scheduled and participated in an urban space design concept work session at W&S Foxboro Offices on 5/15. It is most important that Downtown Ayer's Depot Square is redesigned as a high-quality urban space focal-point that serves as an attractive, lively, public gathering and meeting place for Downtown Ayer's residents, rail commuters, customers, visitors and rail-heritage tourists/fans. Depot Square must be transformed from harsh, barren, deadened place to park cars, back into its original and authentic civic-place for people to linger, enjoy and socially interact.

**Ayer Master Plan Process:** The Ayer Master Plan Process is moving forward well. During the month of April & early May the Transportation & Circulation Work Group conducted very successful sessions including local municipal officials, local industry representatives, regional planning & transportation officials, bicycling advocates, etc. In support of the Transportation & Circulation Group's work & our Complete Streets program, on Saturday, May 20<sup>th</sup> the 1<sup>st</sup> Town of Ayer Master Plan "Slow Ride" Bike Tour was conducted with great success. The next Group to gather and engage in work sessions will be the Community Facilities & Government Work Group. Also, the AOCED has proposed three new Master Plan Community Engagement events to be conducted in June-July 2017; the "Young Ayer Town Plan Slam Night at Union Roaster", the "Talk & Taste Ayer Master Plan" to be conducted at Ayer's local eateries, and the "Ayer Master Plan Pecha Kucha Night!"