

Next Steps



Mr. Antonicello commended the stakeholders on identifying the issues the Borough was facing, and suggested that the next step would be the creation of a working group of stakeholders tasked with addressing the land use issues identified during the visioning session. He suggested that the group be comprised of 9 -11 people representing the diverse interests of local government, businesses, and residents. Mr. Antonicello asked that the working group be formed by the end of the year, and committed to meeting with that group early in 2016 to lay the groundwork for the next steps in the process.

Ongoing issues the working group will be asked to consider:

- How can the Borough maintain its historic character while still promoting revitalization and development?
- How can the Borough better promote local cultural diversity?
- How can the Borough best support the local arts initiatives?
- Should the Borough create additional Special Improvement Districts to deal with other areas of town, like the area around the bus terminal and the Park Avenue/Route 33 corridor?



Freehold Borough Technical Assistance Program Interim Report

Freehold Borough engaged Urban Land Institute-Northern New Jersey to conduct a Technical Assistance Program (“TAP”) aimed at helping the Borough manage growth in its downtown area. The TAP panelists conducted interviews in June 2015, and prepared a full report setting forth its findings for the Borough. The panelists’ paramount suggestion was that the Borough engage its many stakeholders directly in the creation and implementation of the Borough’s land use and revitalization strategies. This type of grassroots method, the panel advised, was far more likely to yield positive results than a top-down approach.

Borough leaders took this suggestion to heart, and invited key stakeholders to a visioning session led by Robert Antonicello, who chaired the ULI-NNJ TAP. The events that unfolded that evening

cemented ULI-NNJ’s prior determination that Freehold Borough has a great deal to offer residents, local businesses, and visitors. It benefits from a group of strongly committed stakeholders who have already done a great deal to maximize the town’s inherent charm and to draw visitors from surrounding communities.

Like many of the Borough’s community and business leaders, ULI-NNJ sees these successes as a foundation for greater growth within the Borough. To that end, ULI-NNJ has partnered with the Borough to offer continuing assistance and guidance as it undertakes the process of preparing for development that will help the Borough continue to grow responsibly. The visioning session laid the foundation for the ongoing partnership with ULI-NNJ.

The Visioning Session

On October 1, 2015, ULI-NNJ returned to Freehold Borough to meet with stakeholders about the town's future. The evening began with an exercise designed to draw out the stakeholders' views about the best Freehold Borough has to offer, and the challenges that remain in town. Upon entering the meeting room, participants were asked to jot down their hopes for the Borough, and what they liked and disliked about living and working there. These categories were further divided into short- and long-term goals. As will be discussed in detail below, there was remarkable consensus among the stakeholders across most of the categories.

Mr. Antonicello opened the meeting with a discussion of the TAP process and an overview of the panel's report. After describing the rich assets ULI-NNJ saw in Freehold Borough, Mr. Antonicello discussed the challenges and barriers to growth that the stakeholders themselves identified in their interviews with the ULI-NNJ panelists. One issue that was readily identified by numerous stakeholders was that the parking shortage downtown. Jim Zullo, a parking consultant with TimHaahs & Associates, then discussed the Borough's parking challenges, and ways that communities of similar size have addressed those challenges. Mr. Zullo's presentation led to a robust discussion about the state of parking in the downtown area. The stakeholders did not immediately agree on a proposed solution to the parking problem, but did agree that Freehold's parking problem will require a comprehensive solution.

The stakeholders further agreed that there would need to be a funding solution attached to any new parking projects, and recognized that the parking impact of any new redevelopment slated for downtown needed to be taken into account in developing those short- and long-term parking solutions. Mr. Zullo also advised the stakeholders that municipalities have the option of making a single entity responsible for parking, whether that is a parking authority, utility, or department within the municipality.

Against the framework of this parking discussion, Mr. Antonicello returned the stakeholders to a dialogue about how to generate redevelopment and/or developer interest in Freehold Borough generally. He pointed out that developers want a cooperative experience with the local government and business communities. He suggested that the Borough consider revising its zoning ordinance and regulations to provide clarity to developers, and examine whether it would be possible to establish a local business development entity responsible for facilitating development and investment downtown.

This discussion led the stakeholders into a consideration of the merits of the current redevelopment plan, and ways in which it could be revised to more effectively spur growth downtown. A large number of the stakeholders agreed that the plan should be reexamined and updated, with nearly everyone agreeing that it was critical that a specific person or entity be responsible for implementing the plan.

Short-term Goals:

- Parking strategy resolved and implemented.
- Attract a variety of novel uses downtown that will further distinguish Freehold from surrounding areas.
- Create more bike friendly areas.
- Promote Freehold Borough community.
- Capital Improvements: make repairs to uneven bricks in walks, make sure benches are in good repair, and improve road conditions.

Long-term Goals:

- Solve the school overcrowding issues.
- Create more economic development options/ ratables that include mixed use development that capitalizes on the highest and best use of downtown land.
- Retail to draw visitors that would otherwise go to the mall.
- Revitalize the streets by creating a 24-hour downtown; upgrade storefronts.
- Revitalize Broad and Jackson Streets and the Stavola property.
- Explore and expand alternative commuter options to attract home buyers, grow net parking, create parking garage (structured parking).

Parking expert Jim Zullo stated that there are a variety of ways for municipalities to manage parking so as to minimize the impact of parking fees on particular groups, such as residents. He also stated that a parking consultant could help the Borough devise and implement a parking strategy that would shift the cost of “free parking” away from residents and onto those who use the parking resources. The stakeholders also discussed:

- The possibility of the first 15 minutes of parking being free;
- Collaborative parking arrangements;
- The need for parking enforcement, perhaps by parking enforcement agents so that enforcement responsibility does not fall on local police.

