

An Economic Vision for Camden

by

Community & Economic Development Advisory Committee

The Camden Comprehensive Plan – Chapter 4 – Downtown: *“The encouragement of a year-round business district is the best strategy to maintain the economic health of the Town, and to create a core where the human dynamics of daily living finds variety, interest, and a sense of shared community. A thriving downtown preserves a sense of place and promotes the economic well-being of its residents.”*

Our premise: A year-round core business district is the key to the vitality of the town. Many other good things flow from that.

Our Vision: Downtown Camden as a dynamic and compact center of the community opening up onto a picturesque harbor. A unique sense of place would be fostered by access corridors to the harbor, harbor-side parks, and attractive architecture with protected pedestrian access. Residents and visitors would be drawn to the center by essential public services and a balanced mix of vibrant year-round businesses that support good livelihoods and that cater to residents, tourists and markets outside of Camden.

“You are likely to stop for a friendly chat with several people as you walk around downtown doing your errands”

Our Goal: Assist in the retention and creation of interesting, year-round, higher-income jobs within walking distance to a pedestrian-friendly downtown and harbor. Attract 21st century knowledge workers.

Strategies

A. Facilitate the creation of Class A office space in the walking part of town.

If we are to be competitive with other towns in retaining our current attractive businesses and jobs and in courting new business we need to have office space that is in keeping with the standards in larger cities and business areas such as Boston’s Route 128 corridor. Class A offices are characterized by modern, clean construction with excellent lighting, air conditioning, open flexible space of substantial size on each floor, elevator access to upper floors, excellent telecommunication infrastructure and parking. Class A does not have to be a glass tower. Actions include:

1. Inventory and characterize existing office space in the downtown area.
2. Determine options for upgrading existing space such as outside elevator access to upper floors on Main Street and Elm Street.
3. Propose zoning changes to stimulate investment in new Class A downtown space.
4. Identify convenient parking facilities for existing upgraded space.

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B. Increase the appeal of downtown as a pedestrian friendly place on the harbor.

Businesses seek out locations that are attractive to employees. Camden has a wealth of natural beauty in the harbor, bay, mountains, lakes and streams all with world class opportunities for outdoor recreation.

The use of the public landing as a major parking facility does not appear to be the best use of the space and detracts from the attractiveness of the harbor. A more pedestrian friendly landing would improve the appeal of the downtown to businesses and their employees as well as to tourists and residents alike. We should support the Downtown Planning Group that is developing a plan around this goal. Actions include:

1. Limit parking to fishermen and service to water-front businesses.
2. Limit access to the landing by one-way alleys.
3. Replace paving with lawn and plantings.
4. Compensate parking reduction with new downtown parking areas, such as a multi-story garage.

Heavy Route 1 traffic separates the town from the harbor, and is especially onerous in the summer season. It serves as a barrier between business areas of the town and complicates pedestrian and vehicular access to the harbor from current and potential new downtown business locations. Actions include:

1. Support Gateway 1 plans to upgrade alternative routes through town.
2. Initiate a campaign to have a route for through-traffic around the town.

Summary

A year-round business district is the best strategy to maintain the economic health of the Town. Our goal is to create conditions for the retention and creation of interesting, year-round, higher-income jobs in walking distance to downtown and the harbor.

Our recommendations to accomplish this goal are:

1. Facilitate the creation of Class A office space in the walking part of town.
2. Increase the appeal of downtown as a pedestrian friendly place on the harbor.