

**PLANNING REPORT ON:
MULTI-USE COMMERCIAL USE PROJECT
CITY OF CRANSTON, RI**

TROLLEY BARN PLAZA

**PREPARED FOR:
TROLLEY BARN ASSOCIATES, LLC**

**PREPARED BY:
JDL ENTERPRISES
JOSEPH D. LOMBARDO, AICP, PRESIDENT
NOVEMBER 2021**

PURPOSE OF REPORT ~

The purpose of this report is to complete a Planning Report to the City of Cranston with regard to the proposed Multi-Use Commercial Project by Trolley Barn Associates, LLC. This report includes a review of the City's Comprehensive Community Plan, and Zoning Ordinance and support for the proposed amendments to the Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Map applications. In addition, this report provides a recognition and consideration of the applicable purposes of the Zoning Ordinance. It is the express purpose of this Planning Report to provide a Summary and Conclusions with respect to the consistency with the Comprehensive Community Plan and Zoning Ordinance Purpose Statements.

PROJECT SUMMARY ~ (Source: Staff Memorandum dated 10-01-2021)

Description:

The applicant proposes a multi-use commercial project including a bank, gas station/mini-mart, fast food restaurant and a 35,000 ft² AutoZone with both retail and warehousing/distribution components. The bank, mini-mart and fast-food restaurant all have drive-thru features. This Major Land Development application is being proposed in coordination with a proposed change of zone request (Ordinance #09-21-02) to change the property's existing zoning designation of M-2 (General Industry) to C-5 with conditions to allow a warehousing use and the proposed freestanding sign. Additionally, the applicant seeks to amend the Comprehensive Plan Future Land Use Map designation of "Special Redevelopment Area" to "Highway Commercial/Services" and remove statements from the Land Use Element recommending a mixed-use development at this site (Ordinance #09-21-01)

DESCRIPTION OF ZONING DISTRICTS ~

The following Zoning District descriptions are appropriate to this application:

EXISTING ZONING DISTRICT

M-2 (General Industry)

PROPOSED ZONING DISTRICT

C-5 (Heavy business, industry), with conditions to permit warehousing and proposed signage

Trolley Barn Plaza lists the following uses of their project as a Multi-Use Commercial Development:

- **Bank**
- **Gas station/mini-mart**
- **Fast food restaurant**
- **AutoZone with both retail and warehousing/distribution components**

Note: The bank, mini-mart and fast-food restaurant all include drive-thru features

The proposed ordinance states:

A. The Zoning Ordinance’s designation of M-2 for that certain property located at 777 Cranston Street, and more particularly described and designated as Lot 1 on Assessor’s Plat 7-2 (hereinafter, the “Property”), is hereby changed to C-5, with the following conditions:

- 1. Warehousing, commercial, as that use is set out in Section 17.20.030 – Schedule of uses., in the Zoning Ordinance, shall be permitted on the Property;**
- 2. A structure constructed on the Property for use as Warehousing, commercial is permitted to have wall signage having a maximum area of two hundred fifty (250) square feet; and,**
- 3. A single freestanding sign with a maximum height of twenty (20) feet and two-faces, each face having a maximum area of one hundred sixty (160) square feet, shall be allowed on the Property.**

CONSISTENCY AND COMPLIANCE WITH THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO THE CRANSTON COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Section 1. The Cranston 2010 Comprehensive Plan, as adopted by the City Council on September 24, 2012 and endorsed by the Mayor on September 25, 2012, as amended, is hereby further amended:

1. LAND USE ELEMENT, Part III. Strategies and Actions:

a. Proposed areas for Special Redevelopment Areas (Page 45):

Sites that could be appropriate as a Special Redevelopment Area (SRA) are identified below:

DELETE

- Trolley Barn industrial area

b. Land Use Plan Action Program, Table 2-5 Summary of the Actions and Responsibilities for this Plan (Page 55).

DELETE

- Former Trolley Barn Site Redevelopment

LU-21- Continue efforts to implement a mixed-use development at the location of the former Trolley Barn site.

2. FUTURE LAND USE PLAN 2012:

Change the Property's designation from Special Redevelopment Area to Highway Commercial/Services.

The following recommendations are taken from the Comprehensive Community Plan and are deemed applicable and germane to the proposed Multi-use Commercial Development and the amendments to the Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Map requested by Trolley Barn Associates, LLC:

LAND USE ELEMENT ~

LUG-2 Promote mixed use (commercial, industrial, and residential) development that will:

- Focus on a few key redevelopment sites;
- Improve the quality of new development;
- Incorporate ‘smart growth’ principles.

Opinion: This Goal, while general in nature, shows the importance of mixed uses in the community to balance development in these sectors. Commercial and industrial uses generate far more net revenue than most residential uses. In fact, it is that balance that helps keep tax rates more stable over time.

LUP-2.6 Implement policies that protect residential neighborhoods from commercial encroachment through regulation, appropriate buffers, development design standards, traffic planning, and site plan review

Opinion: Equally important to goal #2 above, is designing new projects to provide protection from any nearby residential uses which includes appropriate buffers, design standards and detailed site plan review. Trolley Barn Plaza will provide suitable and existing buffer areas to nearby residential uses.

Part III. Strategies and Actions

Land Use Principles

During the comprehensive planning process, it was determined that there were common themes among many of the ideas, suggestions, and issues regarding land use that also affected the other elements. These themes support the following land use principles and provide a basis for actions proposed in this plan. (Applicable to the applicant)

Principle 1: Direct future commercial, industrial and mixed-use development with two approaches:

- Adopt smart growth principles for new development that maintain the best qualities of Cranston;
- Focus efforts on a few key redevelopment sites by encouraging smart growth to increase the value and job potential from each site and increase the mix and density of uses.

Opinion: The Trolley Barn Plaza project was designed with this Principle in mind. As a Multi-use development, this project encourages growth that will increase value in the City, provide permanent new jobs, and a commercial development that is reasonable given the overall size of the development parcel.

Future Land Use Map.

The Future Land Use Map shows the proposed future land use citywide.

Trolley Barn Plaza, LLC proposes to change the Property's designation from Special Redevelopment Area to Highway Commercial/Services. **This will allow the change in Zoning District designation from M-2 to C-5 (with conditions).**

Economic Development Element ~

As Cranston moves forward, it still needs to address the traditional economic development goals:

- Increase the tax base with new private investment in commercial and industrial properties;
- Promote emerging industries to maintain local shares of jobs and businesses;
- Export new goods and services to regional populations and attract outside money in support of economic development; and
- Create new and better jobs.

Opinion: These goals are typically found in most Comprehensive Plans. The key phrases are: Increase Tax Base, attract outside money for economic development, and create new jobs.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

GOALS (EDG) AND POLICIES (EDP) Rhode Island Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Regulation Act Goal: To promote an economic climate which increases quality job opportunities and overall economic well-being of each municipality and the state.

EDG-1A Preserve and increase employment opportunities for Cranston residents.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT GOALS (EDG) AND POLICIES (EDP) Rhode Island Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Regulation Act Goal: To promote an economic climate which increases quality job opportunities and overall economic well-being of each municipality and the state.

EDG-1A Preserve and increase employment opportunities for Cranston residents.

EDG-2 Attract capital into the Cranston area and expand the City's economic base.

EDP-2.1 Encourage the location and expansion of businesses with wide regional, national or international markets.

EDG-3 Add to the City's taxable property base by constructing industrial and commercial structures which are properly designed and sited in keeping with environmental, planning and design considerations.

EDP-5 Ensure that new and expanded commercial development along major arterials exhibits a high standard of design quality and is compatible with existing roadway functions and adjacent residential neighborhoods.

Opinion: The Trolley Barn Plaza Project certainly meets each of these important goals contained in the Economic Development Element of the Comprehensive Plan. The project will provide many permanent jobs available to Cranston residents. It will not only add to the economic base of the City, but will be an increase of tax revenue produced from this vacant site today. This project is located along a major arterial, Cranston Street, and with proper design for traffic control, will not impact the neighboring area. Lastly, the proposed businesses in this multi-use project will not only serve all of Cranston's residents, but it will attract regionally and that infuses other local businesses nearby.

THE SUITABILITY QUESTION ~

A central theme to any Comprehensive Plan and the Cranston Comprehensive Plan is:

This Comprehensive Plan has been updated to guide future growth and change in Cranston and lays out the means and methods to create the best possible future for Cranston for the plan's horizon and beyond.

TROLLEY BARN PLAZA DEVELOPMENT SITE AND SURROUNDING AREA



The Trolley Barn Plaza project (Project) is a Multi-Use Commercial development situated at 777 Cranston Street, in the City. The property is bounded by Cranston Street to the south, railroad tracks and r-o-w to the east, and a 100-foot wide former railroad spur providing a vegetated buffer to the residential properties to the west. The lot is identified by the City of Cranston Tax Assessor's as Plat 7-2, Lot #1. The current use of the site is vacant land.

Opinion: The Trolley Barn Plaza site in Cranston is truly a mixed-use area, not a homogenous pattern of a single use. All of these factors, plus the high visibility and ease of access point towards a very suitable site for the proposed Trolley Barn Plaza multi-use commercial development, and the mix of uses outlined on the site plan. While the site has been zoned for General Industry, and may have been suitable for those type of uses, none have come forward to develop the site in that manner for a very long time. It has just remained vacant. The report from Mr. Tom Sweeney, a certified commercial appraiser, will corroborate these facts about the site as to it remaining vacant for so many years and reasons why it has not been developed. The proposed Trolley Barn Plaza as a multi-use commercial site is also an ideal location for those type of uses and the applicant has proposed a solid project for consideration.

CONSISTENCY AND COMPLIANCE WITH THE ZONING ORDINANCE ~

As required under state law, the zoning ordinance and all amendments thereto, shall be consistent with the city's comprehensive plan, as described in Rhode Island General Laws Section 22-2 and shall provide for the implementation of the city's comprehensive plan.

Among its findings and recommendation to the city council with respect to a proposal for amendment of a zoning ordinance or zoning map, **the planning commission** shall:

- A. Include a statement on the general consistency of the proposal with the comprehensive plan of the city, including the goals and policies statement, the implementation program and all other applicable elements of the comprehensive plan; and
- B. Include a demonstration of recognition and consideration of each of the applicable purposes of zoning as presented in Section 17.04.010 of this title.

The following purposes are taken from the Zoning Ordinance – Article I General provisions and are deemed applicable and germane to the proposed applications to amend the Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Map by Trolley Barn Associates, LLC:

17.04.010 - General purposes.

The regulations, zones and districts herein set forth are made in accordance with a comprehensive plan prepared, adopted and as may be amended in accordance with RIGL Section 45-.22.2 and shall be designed to address the following purposes.

- A. Promoting the public health, safety, morals and general welfare.
- B. Providing for a range of uses and intensities of use appropriate to the character of the city and reflecting current and expected future needs.
- C. Providing for orderly growth and development which recognizes:
 - 1. The goals and patterns of land use contained in the comprehensive plan of the city adopted pursuant to RIGL Section 45-22.2;
 - 2. The natural characteristics of the land, including its suitability for use based on soil characteristics, topography and susceptibility to surface or groundwater pollution;
 - 4. The values of unique or valuable natural resources and features;
 - 5. The availability and capacity of existing and planned public and/or private services and facilities;
 - 6. The need to shape and balance urban and rural development; and
 - 7. The use of innovative development regulations and techniques.

G. Providing for the protection of public investment in transportation, water, stormwater management systems, sewage treatment and disposal, solid waste treatment and disposal, schools, recreation, public facilities, open space and other public requirements.

H. Promoting a high level of quality in design in the development of private and public facilities.

I. Promoting implementation of the comprehensive plan of the city adopted pursuant to RIGL Section 45-22.2.

Specifically, the following change to the Zoning Map is requested to support the development for Trolley Barn Associates, LLC:

A. The Zoning Ordinance’s designation of M-2 for that certain property located at 777 Cranston Street, and more particularly described and designated as Lot 1 on Assessor’s Plat 7-2 (hereinafter, the “Property”), is hereby changed to C-5, with the following conditions:

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Opinion: All of the above-mentioned Purposes of Zoning should be considered by both the Planning Commission and the City Council in deciding on this important land use application by Trolley Barn Associates, LLC. All of these purposes are met by the project and the applicant’s request before the City.

I have reviewed the overall Site Plans prepared by DiPrete Engineering and the preliminary Landscape Plan prepared by Beta Engineering, and find that, except for future site design, for those zoning items that may apply, either the applicant can make design provisions to comply, or there is adequate land area to accomplish these requirements at subsequent future stages of any future design and approval by the City with the conditions requested in the Zone Map amendment to C-5.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION ~

It was stated that the express purpose of this Planning Report is to provide a Summary and Conclusion with respect to the Applications by Trolley Barn Associates, LLC for a change to the Cranston Zoning Map and Comprehensive Plan for this specific location, Tax Assessor's as Plat 7-2 Lot #1. This report describes the nature of the request by Trolley Barn Associates, LLC and the description of the existing Zoning District M-2, and proposed new zone, C-5 with conditions. The report then outlined those Recommendation Strategies of the Land Use and Economic Development Elements of the Comprehensive Plan as well as the general goals and policies that were deemed to be germane to the proposed Comprehensive Plan amendments proposed by Trolley Barn Associates, LLC, both text and Future Land Use Map.

Further, the Purposes of the Zoning Ordinance which were deemed applicable to this application by Trolley Barn Associates, LLC, were presented in this report. These purposes of Zoning mirror those in the Zoning Enabling Act – RIGL – Chapter 45-22.2. A discussion regarding suitability was presented to highlight that the proposed changes to Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Map for this parcel for future development on the property is in keeping with the current land use pattern of the area.

Finally, the description of the area and uses surrounding the proposed development support the proposed uses which would be allowed by these amendments, namely a new Multi-use Commercial Development and specific range of proposed uses for this project site.

Approval of these amendments is supported by the following Objectives of the Comprehensive Community Plan to:

Add to the City's taxable property base by constructing industrial and commercial structures which are properly designed and sited in keeping with environmental, planning and design considerations

and

Ensure that new and expanded commercial development along major arterials exhibits a high standard of design quality and is compatible with existing roadway functions and adjacent residential neighborhoods

Based on all that has been presented in this written report, it is the professional opinion of Joseph D. Lombardo, AICP, President of JDL ENTERPRISES that the proposed Zoning Map and Comprehensive Plan Amendments at Tax Assessor's as Plat 7-2 Lot#1 requested by Trolley Barn Associates, LLC is:

**CONSISTENT WITH, AND IN COMPLIANCE WITH THE
ZONING ORDINANCE**

AND,

**CONSISTENT WITH, AND IN COMPLIANCE WITH THE
COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNITY PLAN OF
THE CITY OF CRANSTON.**

Submitted by,

Joseph D. Lombardo, AICP

Joseph D. Lombardo, AICP

Date: November 2021