

Targeting design for the Thoreau/Depot area

"Food," "errands," "under-served," and "practical services" are some of the terms residents associate with the Thoreau/Depot area. Frequently overlooked by the shadow of Concord Center, Concord residents are working to assure the future vibrancy in the Thoreau/Depot area. The Thoreau/Depot Task Force, a subcommittee of the Villages Committee, is focusing on issues that include traffic improvements, pedestrian enhancements and growth potential raised through its public process as well as evaluating the Cecil Group's planning options for Thoreau/Depot.

Since April, the Thoreau/Depot Task Force has participated in an extensive public outreach campaign, assessing the planning options for Thoreau/Depot area with its unique development opportunities, existing mixed uses and potential for expansion. The subcommittee received public comments that favored maintaining the diversity of business uses and local convenience, while requesting changes to expand commuter parking and limit the number of professional offices in storefronts on Thoreau Street. Residents also expressed interest in encouraging more restaurants and entertainment options for younger residents.



At the public workshop held back in April, Concord residents engage over map of the Thoreau/Depot area.

Courtesy photo

In response to public comments, the Cecil Group devised three design alternatives for the Thoreau/Depot, varying the degree of potential change (ranging from low, to moderate, to high). Some of the planning topics suggested by the Cecil Group are:

- Parking management strategies;
- Encourage more mixed use development;
- Improve the "streetscape," and
- Consider encouraging professional office use in existing

houses adjacent to the business area.

With the Cecil Group offering these ideas at the July public meeting, the Thoreau/Depot Task Force began assessing the options (For details of public comments and the Cecil

Group's alternatives, go to www.concordvillages.org).

Suzanne Fondriest, task force member, views the Cecil Group's three options as "out, up and as-is," meaning, respectively, expanding mixed use along Sudbury Road to link the Thoreau/Depot area with Concord Center, encouraging uses upward into a second story, and maintaining current uses, while adding aesthetic enhancements. The task force is looking at the various suggestions, which include:

- 1) Improving traffic flow through Sudbury Road and Thoreau Street intersection to address the major issue of traffic congestion. Recommendations will be to further study the possibility of coordinating the traffic signals at the Sudbury Road/Thoreau Street intersection with the commuter train and to assess creation of a turning lane on Thoreau Street, along with exploring other traffic calming techniques;
- 2) Implementing parking management strategies to provide guaranteed parking for residents, commuters, employees and visitors/customers;
- 3) Encouraging greater diversity of retail businesses with recommendations to continue

promoting a variety of independent stores as a means of continuing economic growth.

4) Creating a more attractive streetscape by enhancing pedestrian connections on Thoreau and on Sudbury Road near commuter rail, to make it more appealing (i.e. increase foot traffic) for local businesses; and

5) Examining the potential development of the area; recommendations will likely include further study of the correct mix of housing, commercial, office and retail uses the possibility of expanding business use down Sudbury Road.

The task force will present its feedback to the Villages Committee in late September or early October, awaiting the Cecil Group's report in October, and afterwards will host another public meeting to receive additional comments from the consultant's report.

Next week, the last article in this series will focus on Village Concord. This article will highlight the public comments give an overview of the Cecil Group's planning options preview the work of the Village Concord Task Force as it prepares to make their recommendations to the consultant.