

## Report offers ideas on encouraging growth along Rte. 9

By Brian Benson/Daily News staff

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Local leaders say they are looking at recommendations outlined in a recent study on how to accommodate growth along the Rte. 9 corridor while limiting the amount of new traffic on the busy road.

"Everyone in town knows Rte. 9 is a traffic challenge and it filters out into the neighborhoods," said Southborough Planning Board Chairman Don Morris.

The Rte. 9 MetroWest Smart Growth Plan encourages planners to think about supporting a mix of commercial and residential uses, improving pedestrian access and boosting public transportation. The study, which covers the thoroughfare between Southborough and Wellesley, represents the culmination of a series of public meetings and outreach with town officials and other stakeholders.

It looks at placing buildings closer to the road so the area feels more pedestrian-friendly; fostering denser, compact projects; improving sidewalks, crosswalks and medians and allowing for bus shelters in projects.

The study also recommends reducing the number of curb cuts on Rte. 9 and improving connections between parcels. Open space should be preserved, including wetlands, wildlife habitat and opportunities for trails, gardens and recreational space.

The study presented conceptual visualizations, showing what the recommendations could look like. The visualizations include an enhanced pedestrian bridge across Rte. 9 by Framingham State and development of buildings over the road in the Golden Triangle area.

"We don't like things like this to just sit on the shelf," said Paul Dell'Aquila, executive director of the MetroWest Regional Collaborative, which produced the study with the Metropolitan Area Planning Council. "We tried to work very closely with towns. ... This hopefully represents the vision of communities involved."

Morris said Southborough was already looking at the study's overall concept as it considers revisions to zoning. The study, he said, reinforces that the town is on the right path.

In Framingham, Town Manager Robert Halpin said leaders are examining whether some of the study's concepts could work in the Tech Park area.

"Obviously there are intriguing aspects to it," Halpin said, emphasizing the Tech Park effort is in the very early stages. "The concept seems to make sense."

The town is more active in exploring some of the ideas downtown as it looks at transit-oriented development near the commuter rail station. Leaders hope people will live downtown and take regional transit to work in Framingham and surrounding towns, Halpin said.

Natick Selectman Josh Ostroff, chairman of the collaborative's executive board, said downtown areas are likely to benefit from the concepts first. Natick is looking at some of the ideas as it explores improvements to parking, the commuter rail station and other elements of Natick Center.

"The Rte. 9 smart growth project was a great roadmap for how we look at a commercial corridor that connects our communities," Ostroff said. "In the short term, ... it is important that smart growth principles be implemented where they are most workable. That typically means focusing developments on existing town centers."

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