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Gary Christenson, Mayor

April 30, 2026

Malden City Council
215 Pleasant Street
Malden, MA 02148

Dear Members of the City Council:

Municipalities around the country are struggling. Local governments are challenged to fund critical services. Local economies are strapped by inflation, higher than normal borrowing costs, and reduced consumer spending. In Malden, our economy is proving more resilient than most – thanks in large part to our unique business base, access to quality public transit via the MBTA, and our large and diverse community that powers our local economy. However, as economic headwinds persist, we must take action to ensure Malden remains competitive in these tough times and to set us up for continued success when conditions improve.

Therefore I am pleased to share our economic development package for your consideration. For the past several months, OSPCD has been working with business owners, entrepreneurs, real estate developers, and other stakeholders and experts to identify obstacles and opportunities for revenue generation and economic vibrancy in our City. Under the leadership of our new Deputy Director for Planning and Economic Development Zachery LeMel and Senior Planner Elena Eimert we have identified a series of targeted policy changes, grouped under three strategic priorities, that will make Malden a more welcoming environment for businesses and economic development.

- **Streamline decision-making.**

Cumbersome review processes add time, expense, and uncertainty for businesses looking to operate in Malden. We've identified opportunities to simplify some City reviews while maintaining objective, community-vetted standards to ensure quality results.

- **Allow for what we want.**

Our Zoning Code should enable the type of development we want to see, that will contribute positively to the social and economic fabric of this community. We aim to enable businesses to open and expand in appropriate areas without unnecessary obstacles, adding revenue and job opportunities for the Malden community.

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Strong Past...Proud Future

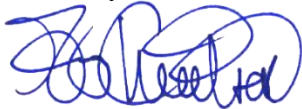
Development controls, instead of being so rigid that they deter the development we want to attract in Malden, should provide clarity and flexibility that will yield new businesses responsive to their context and enrich the built environment for all community members.

- **Support new and existing business growth.**

OSPCD, and the administration broadly, will grow its capacity to serve as a resource to the existing and emergent business community in Malden.

We have faced challenges in recent years and know there will be hurdles ahead. To best position our community to weather the current economic upheaval and thrive in coming years, we must be proactive in pursuing changes that foster business and economic development in Malden. We look forward to discussion about this economic development package, which is integral to that effort.

Sincerely,



GARY CHRISTENSON
Mayor, City of Malden

Attachments:

Attachment A: Economic Development Package - Proposal Summary

Introduction

There are two main strategies to boost economic development in this policy package: streamline City decision-making and allow for what we want are further defined below. An additional strategy, supporting new and existing business growth, involves capacity building within the City to better support Malden's business community (new and existing). OSPCD will work with the City Council and other stakeholders to refine these recommendations into proposed zoning ordinance language.

Streamline decision-making

Sign design review ordinance

Issue: Currently all signs require approval from the Sign Design Review Committee even though the Ordinance provides clear dimensional controls. This adds time and money unnecessarily to an applicant.

Recommendation: Change to allow administrative approval by ISD for compliant signs without needing to go in front of Sign Design Review Committee. ISD can refer unusual cases to the review committee or ZBA as needed.

Demo delay ordinance:

Issue: All properties, regardless of age are subject to Historic Properties review by the Malden Historic Commission. Most other cities or towns throughout Massachusetts set a rolling building date (i.e. 75 years or older) or a set building date (i.e. 1945 or earlier). In addition, to streamline development in specific locations, municipalities have designated areas where historic review or demo delay does not apply.

Recommendation: Exempt buildings built after 1950 unless listed or in process of being listed on the National Historic Register. Set objective measures for decision-making, including updating definitions. Clarify and codify administrative approval by ISD for Non-Significant Buildings without needing to go in front of Historic Commission. If ISD staff determines that the building may be Significant based on objective criteria, the case is referred to the Commission. Reduce costly requirements related to preferably preserved requirements.

Allow for what we want

Update Use Table for Non-Residential Uses:

Issue: Many business or industrial uses require a special permit or are not allowed in Business/Industrial Zones. Many of these uses already exist as pre-existing non-conformities, like warehouses in Industrial Zones, even though a new one would require a special permit.

Recommendation: Allow more business and industrial uses by-right, site plan review, or special permit in appropriate zoning districts. To further limit unintended outcomes, set certain dimensional controls (i.e. size limits) for specific by-right allowances tailored to the zoning district. This would include uses like:

- In Neighborhood Business (BN) zones: Allow the following commercial uses by-right: club or lodge; medical and dental office (new use); recreation, gainful business, secondary to principal club/lodge; body art; and licensed massage therapy salon.
- In Central Business (BC) zone: Allow the following commercial uses by-right: medical and dental office (new use); retail sales (between 5,000-10,000 sf); body art; kennels (with dimensional controls); licensed massage therapy salon; and research and development. Allow retail sales larger than those thresholds by special permit. Allow hotels and supermarkets by site plan review.
- In Highway Business (BH) zones: Allow the following commercial uses by-right: medical and dental office (new use); recreation, gainful business, secondary to principal club/lodge; adult day health center; restaurant (all other); retail sales (between 5,000-10,000 sf); body art; convenience stores; kennels; and research and development. Allow retail sales larger than those thresholds by special permit. Allow hotels and supermarkets by site plan review.
- In Industrial 1 and 2 (I1 & I2): Allow the following commercial uses by-right: medical and dental office (new use); recreation, gainful business, secondary to principal club/lodge; body art; kennel; adult day health center; restaurant (all other); restaurant, fast-food (without drive-thru); warehouse (with dimensional controls); and wholesale and distribution (with dimensional controls). Allow hospital; warehouse (greater than by-right dimensional controls); and wholesale and distribution (greater than by-right dimensional controls) uses by special permit. Allow hotels and supermarkets by site plan review.

Update Parking Requirements for Non-Residential Uses:

Issue: Our parking requirements are often higher than what the business needs, which restricts new development and makes it more expensive. These costs get passed onto the eventual tenant(s) and make Malen less economically competitive. Allowing greater flexibility with parking can lead to better design outcomes for all users since space previously required for parking can now be used for something else like open space. Commercial/industrial developers often know their parking needs and how to manage them better than government officials. Note that non-residential uses within the Central Business District are already exempt from off-street parking requirements, see Sec. 12.20.020.H.

Recommendation: Remove parking requirements in Industrial 1 and Industrial 2 zones. Note: Any use that requires a special permit, like motor vehicle repair shop and motor vehicle storage, will still require discretionary review allowing for parking requirements to be added as a condition of approval.