

# State approves application - Franklin open for business

By Joyce Kelly/Daily News staff

**GHS**

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FRANKLIN —

In an effort to make Franklin a more enticing place to do business, the town and state are working together to market 30 parcels of land to prospective developers.

On July 8, the state's Interagency Permitting Board approved Franklin's application to designate 30 parcels of land at Forge Park as a priority development site, said Bryan W. Taberner, director of Franklin Planning and Community Development.

A priority development site helps the town in three major ways, Taberner said: The state gives such sites priority for grants, the state helps property owners and the town market vacant properties, and developers are attracted to the site because participating towns offer a streamlined permitting process.

"I'm very happy. It took a bit longer than expected to get signatures from all the (30) property owners at Forge Park," Taberner said.

Town Administrator Jeffrey D. Nutting called the state's approval "excellent."

"It's huge for us. Bryan Taberner and the Planning and Community Development staff have been working extremely hard to market our commercial-industrial areas, and it's just a great thing," Nutting said.

"The stronger the message we send out to the business community that you can get both streamlined permitting and possibly tax incremental financing (a prerequisite for larger tax breaks from the state), the better for attracting folks," Nutting said.

One of Franklin's appeals for developers is its council form of government, which enables the town to approve an application for tax incremental financing in just a few weeks, rather than waiting for a town meeting, he said.

In exchange for the tax break on property improvements, companies must convince the town its proposed project will create new, permanent jobs, result in redevelopment of empty industrial space, or the development of new research and development or manufacturing facilities, Taberner said.

The priority development designation guarantees permitting decisions within 180 days, Taberner said.

Franklin hopes to use the new status as an incentive for both existing businesses to expand and to attract new development, he said.

The Forge Park site, which was also designated an economic opportunity area this spring, comprises 260 acres on three roads - Forge Parkway, National Drive, West Central Street (Rte. 140) - and sits a half-mile from I-495's Exit 17.

Its current tenants include Draka USA, Keebler, Massachusetts Interscholastic Athletic Association, Sontra Medical and The Taylor Group.

Several buildings in Forge Park are either empty or underutilized, and several parcels are undeveloped, Taberner said.

The entire site is zoned industrial, and several parcels are within the town's biotechnology-use zoning overlay district.

Taberner estimates Franklin has 1.1 million square feet of vacant industrially-zoned space.

At Forge Park, there is about 300,000 square feet of space available, and several parcels (2 and 3 Forge Park) that are buildable lots, he said.

The state's commitment to help the town market empty properties is a significant benefit of establishing an area as a priority development site, Taberner said.

"The state will direct people coming in looking for property, like a company from Europe or another part of the country, or whatever the case," he said.

"We have so many empty properties, we really need this."

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