



July 15, 2010

Mr. Andre Leroux
Executive Director
Massachusetts Smart Growth Alliance
andre@ma-smartgrowth.org

Dear Mr. Leroux:

We are writing to propose a partnership between the Massachusetts Smart Growth Alliance (MassSGA) and the organization that we founded, Newton Villages, under the auspices of your Great Neighborhoods Initiative.

Projects

We are developing a number of projects where a partnership with your organization would be appropriate and productive. For the sake of space and clarity, we will discuss only two here. Our other work is outlined on our website.

Village-centered participatory planning

We are doing community visioning and planning work in a few of our village centers. In Newtonville, we are developing a partnership with the City's Community Preservation Program and the Planning & Economic Development department to develop a participatory process that will result in an actionable plan for the village. In 2008, interns from Sasaki Architects swooped in and created concepts for the village, but those concepts lacked political power. In 2009, a volunteer group conducted a beautifully participatory process that resulted in an RFI for the redevelopment of a city-owned parcel in Newtonville. We intend to build on their work to build a plan less detailed than the RFI, for the entire business district, with an equally powerful constituency.

We are also doing preliminary work to build consensus for the establishment of one or more Business Improvement Districts in Newton's village centers. We have partnered with Emmy Hahn of the Mass. Downtown Initiative, the Newton-Needham Chamber of Commerce, and Village Bank to begin the process. A local college president has already expressed interest, and we are currently developing a strategy to engage other key stakeholders and narrow the field of candidate villages for our first effort.

Education & advocacy on parking

As a city-wide organization, much of our work centers on city development policy and practices. The focus of that work, thus far, has been on parking regulation. Newton's approach to minimum parking requirements is outdated, and strangles commercial

development in our compact village centers, where providing extra parking on-site, as is required by our ordinance, is physically impossible. We wrote a guest column on this problem in the June 9 edition of the Newton TAB. We are writing a follow-up column, and contemplating a public forum, in partnership with the League of Women Voters and the City. In addition to the education, we are meeting regularly with restaurateurs, the Chamber of Commerce, and City of Newton planners and aldermen to develop regulatory approaches to mitigation.

Assistance needed

Charrette design & implementation

Both projects described above will entail substantial public participation. Consulting that the MassSGA could offer on event design and management would be invaluable. Our volunteer staff has some experience with charrettes, but innovative approaches and best practices that your experts could provide would make our efforts more effective.

Educational campaign design

In our work to facilitate change in parking regulations (and eventually, other development policy), an effective education strategy will be essential. We will be attempting to reach new ears and build new constituencies for good planning. In those efforts, we could profit greatly from consulting in issue advocacy, publication strategy, and marketing campaign design.

Legal advice

By August 1st, 2010, Newton Villages will be a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt corporation. We anticipate needing sporadic legal advice on maintaining that status, especially as it relates to the limits on lobbying.

Grant assistance

The vast majority Newton Villages' work is done by volunteers. However, volunteer development and coordination is labor-intensive. We anticipate that revenues from memberships and sponsorships may need to be augmented by project-specific grants or other funds. We would appreciate assistance from MassSGA in identifying those opportunities.

Newton Villages

Formed in 2009, Newton Villages is a group of citizens committed to improving the village centers throughout the City of Newton. Improving the village centers, to us, means making the pedestrian-oriented business districts more appealing, energetic, and economically viable. The ultimate goal is to ensure strong community connections among Newton's residents and business owners, by sustaining the commercial community centers that invite us all to interact. We aim to create social and economic value in our the city's most compact, mixed-use, pedestrian-oriented districts. We see this as perfectly aligned with the principles of smart growth.

Our approach is explicitly cooperative and participatory. As you can see in our logo and

on our website, www.newtonvillages.org, we consider ourselves a *coalition*. We are connecting numerous groups whose functional foci overlap in our *geographical* focus, the village center. Such groups include the League of Women Voters, the Newton-Needham Chamber of Commerce, Green Decade-Newton (an environmental advocacy group), Bike Newton, and others. Also, education is a key element of our strategic approach. We have an active blog, and have written two guest articles in our local paper, the Newton TAB. That is, in addition to aiming at key smart growth objectives, we are committed to a complementary process that is open, inclusive, informative, and just.

We look forward to an active partnership with the Massachusetts Smart Growth Alliance. We would strengthen each other through our cooperation. If you would like to discuss this further, please contact us at the addresses below.

Sincerely,

<signed>

Matt Cuddy and John Sisson

Co-Founders

Newton Villages: A City-wide Coalition to Improve Our Village Centers

www.newtonvillages.org

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