

## FINAL WHITE PAPER

### WHITE PAPER – HARTLAND BUSINESS COMMUNITY

Date: May 3, 2021 Updated: March 20, 2022

Subj: PROPOSAL FOR ACTION BY THE TOWNSHIP MANAGER (What we proposed as the Manager's position)

**PROPOSAL:** Based on input received during my months in office, I believe the Township should take action to a) become significantly more business friendly, and b) be perceived by the business community in Hartland and elsewhere as **actually** having become a better place for them to do business.

**WHY?** Because a strong and profitable business community is a necessary component of the entire Hartland Community. Our business community became weaker and less profitable over the last two decades, and may be providing fewer opportunities for shopping and employment.

- Pre-pandemic
  - Weakness was dramatically demonstrated by the abrupt departure of Walmart, and by Ramco-Gershenson's failure (over ten years) to land even a second retail store.
  - Length of time to fill existing structures such as Foodland, the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of Walmart, and the abandoned Burger King structure.
  - These parting comments were left by Menards – after having pursued a Hartland location for over eight years: **“fancy aesthetic improvements they were demanding that would have cost us huge dollars up front and more dollars down the road.”** Menards walked away because of the oppressive regulatory environment. Hartland's official position remains: **“They really didn't want to come here...”**
  - Comments by professional advisors regarding business locations that **the approval process in Hartland is long, uncertain, and costly** – it is much easier to just go elsewhere.
  - Business surveys spanning 2012 thru 2019 that consistently document and demonstrate that Hartland fails to create a positive regulatory climate.
  - To the contrary, the Planning Commission refers to increasing intensity of use as being a bad thing. The corollary to this is that its bad for local business to increase Return on Investment (ROI), or profitability.
- Post-Pandemic – Whatever the problems before the pandemic – those problems and new ones are amplified:
  - The need for actual brick and mortar has been dramatically reduced – both for office and retail
  - Online alternatives (most dramatically Amazon) make it harder for local business to survive, particularly if physical or operational changes are required.
  - Costs and processes in the Township continue as before – any relief proposed has been temporary, not permanent. Underlying regulations are as complex as ever.

**IS ALL THIS TRUE?** Importantly, the business community believes it to be true. One thing the Chamber and the HBA agree on is that Hartland has acquired a reputation for being a difficult place to do

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business, from initially obtaining approval and continuing right on thru operations and marketing. Many believe they cannot do what they must do to succeed.

Businesses perceive that the Township is in denial. The Township's declaration that it is already "*Business Ready, Business Friendly*" rings hollow in the ears of those within this community, and to those who learn the difficulties they will experience directly from the mouths of those already here, or those who previously tried and went elsewhere. The real-life experience is one of permanently closed stores and restaurants, laid off workers and even worse a shortage of workers who continue to earn more from unemployment and relief checks than from actually working. While perceiving themselves under siege due to regulation, the pandemic, supply chain problem, inflation, woke culture – they often feel they cannot take corrective action and do not perceive the Township to be their friend.

## WHAT CAN WE DO?

**I -ACKNOWLEDGE THAT THIS IS A REAL PROBLEM**, that Hartland is not nearly as business friendly as it says it is, and commit to becoming TRULY business friendly. Some say this is the most important step.

Unless a majority of our Township Board will so commit, the business community will: continue to hurt; there will be more empty storefronts and restaurants; opportunity for employment may further decline. Hartland will become a measurably less desirable place to live or attempt to build a business

*Some have advised that we should not even begin this change unless a solid Board majority are so committed.*

### II – COMMIT TO CHANGE – FIX THE PROBLEM

1. **Regulatory and Process Reform** – with an end in mind. Regulations have steadily expanded from just a few pages to thousands of pages! - now so voluminous that it is rarely printed).
2. **Objective of Such Reform** – Slashing of Cost and Time to get into business in Hartland. Include reduction of the cost of requirements that continue for the life of the business (such as landscaping), that negatively impact profits. Get out of the way and let businesses be competitive again. Instead of an approval process that routinely takes months and even years, **cut it to a month or two.**
3. **Ask businesses what they need to succeed** and if possible **grant what they need!** Or help them get it! They need to be free to exploit their physical presence, including outdoor sales, and by **increasing intensity of use – to achieve and increase profitability.**
4. **Regulatory review** – Demand that the persons who should be most qualified (members of the Planning Commission) make changes to the current processes and regulations – so that they are less burdensome and more business friendly. If they refuse, appoint new members and, if necessary, the Township Board itself should cancel or change regulations.

**III – MEASURE PROGRESS** – That should be the purpose of conducting Surveys and Assembling Statistics.

1. **Resume Surveys of the Business Community**, including those not previously surveyed:

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- a. Developers who have attempted and/or succeeded in developing new commercial developments,
  - b. Applicants planning to open new retail/restaurant/office/processing operations in existing buildings – by rent or purchase
  - c. All business that leave Hartland, by closure or by leaving for a new location
2. **Recordkeeping and Statistics** – The Hartland Board, as well as Businesses interested in coming to Hartland are entitled to data – information that summarizes time and costs that parties have actually experienced. – or data (clearly for different reasons). Information based on real information including
- a. Type of business including description of project size (including square footage), Dollars to be invested, and potential employment.
  - b. Length of time between initial contact and receipt of necessary approvals.
  - c. Result: Approved/Rejected; Chose Hartland or Elsewhere
  - d. Reasons: Developer and Township explanation or reasons for the result
  - e. Cost burden on prospective business/developer, including
    - Costs of documentation, studies and fees paid by business, and
    - Cost of review by Township passed thru and imposed on the business/developer.

**IV – COMMUNICATION AND TRANSPARENCY** – Meetings are the Township’s opportunity to interface with the public. Of course, there are informal meetings, one on one and usually not documented. And then there are the formal required meetings with the Township’s Planning Commission and Board – required by regulations. Three areas provide opportunities to become more transparent and business friendly.

1. **Tele-viewing** – The Township has an opportunity to provide live streaming of meetings (internet and via Comcast). While progress has been made, live streaming has been unreliable. Importantly, the Township has decided that sometimes important meetings, or portions of them, will neither be televised and/or recorded for later viewing. The public’s view of this is that the Township has something to hide – by having remote meetings, by recording only a portion of meeting and then adjourning to the side room, and by not recording Special Meetings. Progress in eliminating these exceptions would result in an improved perception by the business community (who are often too busy to attend in person). This Board should commit to recording all meetings and to recording the complete meeting (except for legally exempt portions where the public must, by law, be excluded). If a remote meeting is held, it should be recorded by video camera and posted as if conducted in Township facilities.
2. **Calls To The Public** -A common complaint is that the Call to the Public is sometimes viewed as an inconvenient interruption. Board policy is that the Township will neither provide a response at the time of the Call, nor commit to provide a response at a later time. Hence it has involved as a one-way process that only allows a speaker to let off steam.. Calls to the Public are the Township’s version of a press conference; in a meaningful Call to the Public, the Board should expect critical and potentially embarrassing questions.

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3. **Legal Exposure** – While some of the specifics of lawsuits may be privileged information, (especially negotiating strategies), the legal issues and financial exposure should be shared with the public, who will bear the end result of the litigation. Many believe that a venue should be provided to at least disclose existence of lawsuits and the potential exposure of the Township and therefore the public