

Crighton envisions new look for downtown Lynn

By Thor Jourgensen / The Daily Item | Posted: Saturday, June 7, 2014 3:00 am

LYNN — City Councilor at large Brendan Crighton will ask fellow councilors Tuesday night to share his vision of a downtown neighborhood with taller buildings, more restaurants and more people living in new and converted lofts, condominiums and apartments.

“We want to create really walkable neighborhoods,” Crighton said.

To reach that goal, Crighton mapped out zoning changes with the help of local business organization leaders, including Lynn Area Chamber of Commerce Chairman Taso Nikolakopoulos, who called the changes “smart zoning.”

“We want to influence zoning to bring in jobs. We want to build up — we want to increase the community down there,” he said.

City zoning ordinances are rules dictating types of construction that can be built in different parts of the city. When applied to downtown’s central business district, the rules are over restrictive and slow development, said Nikolakopoulos and Crighton.

Changes proposed by Crighton include altering a zoning restriction called “by-right” in order to allow a variety of businesses and organizations, including restaurants and research firms, to open downtown without undergoing lengthy special permit review.

Crighton sees downtown from Lynn Common to the waterfront and Union Street gradually transforming into an area dotted with restaurants, including microbreweries, as well as residential buildings mixed in with businesses, including research-based firms.

“Our hope is to get more residents and businesses downtown. We want to encourage more jobs,” he said.

The changes, drafted with help from Nikolakopoulos, Lynn Business Partnership representatives and Ward 5 Councilor Dianna Chakoutis are scheduled for a vote during Tuesday’s council meeting.

Several changes are intended to reshape the way downtown looks by encouraging building construction up to 10 stories and making sure buildings border downtown sidewalks.

“I’m 100 percent behind the changes,” Nikolakopoulos said.

Downtown attorney and Partnership member James Moore supports expanding by-right development in the central business district.

“Someone who wants to build a movie theater or a hotel ought to be able to do it by right. A developer

ought to know that if they have to go through some sort of process, that — in the end — they will be allowed to go forward,” Moore said.

Although existing businesses are not affected by the proposed changes under “grandfather” provisions, the proposal bars future automotive-related businesses, including gas stations, and banks with drive-thru lanes.

The proposed changes also seek to shift downtown’s borders to include relatively new additions to the central business district, including the All Care Visiting Nurses building on Market Street and Ernie’s Harvest Time.

Crighton credited past efforts to redefine downtown zoning with revitalizing the area, but said more needs to be done to make it a place where people want to live, dine and shop.

“We’re seeing a lot of growth, but there is a need to pursue additional changes,” he said.

Moore, a Lynn native who has done business downtown for decades, said Crighton’s proposals are “geared toward allowing things to happen.”

“If the council wants restaurants in downtown Lynn, it’s time to make the decision now,” he said.