

**BOROUGH OF BERNARDSVILLE**  
**COMMON QUESTIONS REGARDING DOWNTOWN REDEVELOPMENT**

***What is the Borough's broad vision for the future of the community?***

The Borough's vision for the future is to be considered among the most vibrant, attractive, sustainable and caring communities in New Jersey, which is captured the Borough's motto – *Small Town, Big Community*.

This vision is built on the four pillars of: 1.) Safety & Security; 2.) Health, Wellness & Culture; 3.) First Class & Sustainable Infrastructure; and 4.) Economic Growth and Resources. It is within this framework that the Borough regards a strong, attractive and vibrant downtown as a critical part of this vision.

***What was the level of public input in this process?***

High engagement by the public is not only important to the Borough, but vital to the success of revitalizing our downtown. In 2018 over 1,000 residents participated in the Downtown Revitalization Survey through which an overwhelming majority (98%) identified downtown revitalization as important, very important, or extremely important priority for the future of the Borough.

Following the survey, the Mayor and Council appointed a Downtown Redevelopment Committee (DRC) made up of citizens with expertise in the field of development and revitalization. The DRC hosted multiple workshops, open to all residents and business owners, through which hundreds of hours of community input was received, resulting in the redevelopment goals now being actively encouraged.

The Borough is greatly appreciative of the efforts of our volunteers on the DRC, who have played a key role in advancing the project to this point, and for all the residents who took the time to participate in the survey and workshops.

***How can the Borough improve the downtown area and make it more viable?***

The downtown area represents the Borough's strongest opportunity to improve its economic base, address vacant storefronts, support surrounding neighborhoods and property values, contribute to the overall quality of life in the Borough, and promote Bernardsville as a premier community in which to live, work, socialize, visit, invest in a business and raise a family.

The best way to meaningfully transform the area, based on the experience of many similar communities in the region, and attract quality investment, is through the redevelopment process with a clear vision that the community helped develop and supports.

### ***What is redevelopment?***

Redevelopment is a process outlined in New Jersey's *Municipal Land Use Law* that provides municipalities with important tools to make its planning goals for a specific area more achievable. It must be demonstrated through studies and hearings that otherwise could not be accomplished without the benefit of the redevelopment process. There may be a variety of obstacles that prevent the transformation and improvement of an area in a positive direction based on standard zoning. These can range from environmental concerns, undersized and poorly configured lots, foreclosure and ownership problems, antiquated layouts, and lack of public infrastructure, to just name a few. When taken as a whole, these challenges can often stand in the way of attracting investment which will otherwise move on to opportunities with fewer obstacles and related costs.

Unfortunately, the challenges discussed above can also contribute to the slow downward decline of a downtown. Therefore, another very important aspect of the redevelopment process is that it allows the Borough to have greater control over architectural standards and layout, which is not permitted under standard zoning. There are many examples of where once charming and elegant downtown areas have slowly become unattractive commercial strip centers. Over the years, Bernardsville residents have expressed concerns over this trend beginning to appear in our own downtown area.

### ***Where are the redevelopment areas in Bernardsville?***

There are currently two designated redevelopment areas in Bernardsville. They are generally referred to as the Quimby Lane Redevelopment Area and the Audi Dealership Redevelopment Area. Additionally, Council has asked the Planning Board to investigate the area known locally as the Palmer Property Redevelopment Area. You can click on this link for more studies and plans related to each area, which is updated regularly.

<https://www.bernardsvilleboro.org/government/downtown-redevelopment>.

### ***When an area is designated as a Redevelopment Area, can the Borough take the property through eminent domain, sometimes called "condemnation" or "a taking"?***

Eminent Domain refers to a government's (Federal, State, County, & Local) ability to undertake a forced purchase of property at fair market value to accomplish a public policy priority (i.e. highways, sewers, parks, schools, etc.). The New Jersey *Municipal Land Use Law* does extend the power of eminent domain for redevelopment purposes. However, if a municipality pursues this option, it must specifically identify the property by owner and address within its Redevelopment Plan for the redevelopment area. The Quimby Lane Redevelopment Area was

initiated by Council specifically without eminent domain. Any effort to incorporate eminent domain in a project can only be approved by Council, and only after it has been advertised, affected property owners notified, and the public has been afforded an opportunity to comment on the proposal. In summary, please note:

- When the Borough adopted the Redevelopment Plan for the Quimby Lane Redevelopment area, it **did NOT designate or identify any Quimby Lane properties for eminent domain**. While this can be amended, this is not something the Borough is currently considering.
- The Borough **DID designate and identify the Audi Dealership for potential eminent domain** for the reasons identified in the study.  
<https://www.bernardsvilleboro.org/government/downtown-redevelopment>.
- The Borough anticipates that the Palmer Property, if it progresses through the designation process, **will NOT include the eminent domain option**.

### ***Who has the Borough selected as the designated redeveloper?***

After careful consideration in public forums and multiple rounds of Requests for Proposals, the Borough has designated Advance Realty Investors as the Borough redeveloper for the Quimby Land area. <https://advancere.com/>. Advance has identified the renowned architecture and planning firm of Robert A.M. Stern as its key design partner <https://www.ramsa.com/>.

A redeveloper has not yet been officially designated for the other redevelopment sites. However, Advance has acquired an interest in the Palmer property; which is not yet designated as an area in need of redevelopment.

### ***What will happen to the existing businesses in the redevelopment areas?***

The Borough has adopted a flexible timeframe for redevelopment to occur. The Borough's expectations are that the designated redevelopers for the different areas will enter into constructive conversations with each business and property owner that will result in mutually beneficial outcomes. In the meantime, the Borough is also considering and promoting other development proposals that would provide suitable space for either temporary or permanent relocation options for our existing businesses.

To be clear, the Borough values its businesses and wants to create an environment in which they will thrive, where other businesses will be created, and where residents and visitors will want to spend their time.

### ***Is there a timeline for construction activity to commence?***

This is question is best addressed separately for each redevelopment area.

- Audi Dealership Redevelopment Area –The Borough is working with the current landowner on purchasing the land that can then be transferred to a designated redeveloper. It is hoped that the borough will be in a position to name a redeveloper by June this year and begin the process of final approval for the site. The goal is to find a developer that has an intended use that adds to the current commercial operations within the Borough and serves as another attraction that will support surrounding existing businesses. Once a developer is designated the time to having the property developer is expected to take between 18 to 24 months.
- Quimby Lane Development Area – The Redevelopment Agreement, which can be reviewed at <https://www.bernardsvilleboro.org/government/downtown-redevelopment>, provides a timeline of milestones for the redeveloper to address in Appendix A. The first and most significant step is for the redeveloper to acquire each of the properties. If satisfactory progress is not made in a reasonable amount of time, the Borough will then need to reconsider the existing redevelopment plan and evaluate its options to promote redevelopment. As previously noted, the Borough is sensitive to the current economic environment and desires to provide the parties every opportunity to reach mutually beneficial arrangements.
- Potential Palmer Property Redevelopment Area – If and when this area is designated an area in need of redevelopment, a separate redevelopment plan will need to be created and adopted for this property. It is anticipated that the Planning Board will receive and consider the redevelopment investigation report in May.

### ***The big picture?***

For the Borough to pursue the vision for the downtown that the community had an extraordinary hand in shaping, we will need patience, good will, flexibility, civic-mindedness, and cooperation. The Mayor and Council are committed to promoting all of these while also pursuing the challenging goal of recreating a downtown that serves as a point of pride and affection for the community and generations to come.