

RLF mall redevelopment public forum (February 29, 2024)

Rural Land Foundation (RLF)

RLF is a private non-profit organization. It currently consists of 17 trustees and 3 staff (all Lincoln residents). Our sister organization is the Lincoln Land Conservation Trust (LLCT). RLF's mission is to help preserve the rural character of the town. RLF helps the town conserve land through conservation development. Through the years RLF and LLCT have helped protect over 2,500 acres of land and establish over 80 miles of interconnected trails which the LLCT and town conservation department steward.

RLF and the mall

As part of its creative conservation development model, in the 1970s RLF stepped in for the benefit of the town and purchased a portion of the Codman Estate that was coming up for sale. Four acres were set aside for commercial development (the mall), 20 acres for the development of Lincoln Woods (Lincoln Foundation) and 55 acres of land were permanently conserved (including farm meadow). RLF originally ground leased the mall property to a developer with a favorable buyback option which it exercised.

Mall operations

RLF owns and operates the mall for the benefit of Lincoln residents. RLF's goal is to maintain a mix of retail and commercial uses. Proceeds from operating the mall directly fund our land conservation. This creative model has helped conserve land in town for over 50 years.

Mall redevelopment 2000

In 2000, the post office threatened to leave the mall unless a bigger space was built and they had a standalone loading dock. Donelan's also requested more space (it was undersized for a full-service grocery) or it also threatened to leave. Residents also wanted a full service restaurant. After a 7-year public process culminating in town meeting approval, the project moved forward. RLF invested a considerable amount of its own funds and time and took out a large mortgage (which it still has today) to help save the po and grocery store. The mall went from 32,000 SF of commercial to 45,000 SF of rentable space.

2011 Donelan's roof collapse

In 2011, the Donelan's roof collapsed due to heavy snow. The town was without a grocery store for over a year. Donelan's threatened to not come back after repairs. RLF searched for other grocery stores — no interest. RLF worked diligently with Donelan's and made concessions to ensure they stayed in Lincoln. A grocery store is critical to having a retail center in Lincoln.

Retail at the mall

Brick-and-mortar retail trends across the country continue to head downward. Lincoln is not immune to these trends and given our rural population density we may be even more susceptible. RLF feels very

fortunate that the mall has three anchor tenants (grocery, po and bank) and also a variety of other specialty tenants including restaurant, café, gift shop, dry cleaner, a fitness and dog trainer, and several professional offices including Nosy Crow.

RLF's previously stated and continued goal is to help maintain a vibrant and sustainable town center for current and future residents. In the spring of 2020, RLF began looking again at options to improve the long-term viability of the mall. Providing much-needed housing for Lincoln (a stated town goal) seemed like a potential opportunity to attract outside investment in the mall. As part of its due diligence, RLF has explored many options, including maximizing housing on the site while still maintaining a substantial amount of commercial space.

Based on our preliminary analysis, 100 units of housing was determined to be the maximum amount for the site while still including a substantial, but likely reduced, amount of retail. In our preliminary analysis, this option was deemed to be the most financially viable redevelopment plan.

Redevelopment plans

Over the past year-plus, RLF has continued to work with a developer/architect to look at various scenarios and concluded that site constraints make redevelopment of 100 units very challenging unless Donelan's and/or the post office building were removed or substantially altered. Based on feedback we received, RLF has now decided to move more slowly and in the short term focus only on opportunities to redevelop the SS and bank buildings (50+ year-old buildings)

Preliminary design studies

Working with Union Design and a developer-consultant to explore a couple of architectural design options for a portion of the site. These options provide 40+ units of housing (max for this portion of the site) and a substantial amount (6,000–10,000 SF) of first floor commercial and/or street activated use space. Preliminary site plans for parking and circulation have now been developed. Removing/redeveloping two anchor tenants (Donelan's and/or post office) is not an option at this time since RLF's primary goal in any redevelopment scenario is to maintain the long term viability of our anchor tenants.

Initial design feedback

- Fewer housing units
- Bigger sized units (family friendly)
- Adequate parking
- Protect roadside trees
- More green space
- Play spaces
- Train station
- Connections
- Public bathroom

Hurdles to overcome

- **Leases** — must work with and honor all tenants with leases
- **Septic** — negotiation with TCB
- **Capital** — must attract developer willing to invest
- **Lender** — negotiation to allow project to happen (RLF has a large mortgage on the property)
- **Town processes** — HCA town meeting approval, community forums, neighborhood meetings, Planning Board site plan review, other town approvals, traffic study

Myths

- **RLF is going bankrupt:** No — the organization is financially sound but is hoping to attract reinvestment in the mall to ensure the long-term viability of an important town asset.
- **RLF is in bed with a developer (Civico)** — No, Civico (Andrew Consigli) has been a helpful advisor to explore redevelopment options at Lincoln Station. We have no legal agreements with Civico or any other developer.
- **RLF overpays its staff** — Certainly not on an hourly basis!
- **The grocery store is going to leave** — No, Donelan's is a critical anchor tenant at the mall and has given no indication that they plan to leave Lincoln. We urge residents to shop there as well as our other businesses at the mall to keep all of them in Lincoln for the long term.