

BLUE HILLS NRZ NEIGHBORHOOD PROFILE

Blue Hills Avenue Commercial Area



The Blue Hills Avenue Commercial Area is located between Boothbay Street and the Bloomfield town line. This 0.3 mile stretch of State Highway 187 (Blue Hills Avenue) primarily serves the local Blue Hills community, although many businesses draw customers from outside the area, especially the northern suburbs of Bloomfield and Windsor. The average daily traffic along Blue Hills Avenue in 1999 was 12,600 cars. The fact that there are few vacant storefronts or gaps within this corridor points to the presence of a viable community retail environment. A strong ethnic retail base exists in the corridor with a growing core of West Indian businesses.

Most of the retail and service establishments along Blue Hills Avenue are located in single story retail buildings or in mixed-use two story structures with apartments above. These structures range in age from 1900 to 1960, with half dating from 1925 to 1930. As much of the surrounding housing stock was built after World War II, the commercial center was well established as the area continued to grow around it. The age and compact nature of the area has resulted in limited availability of off street public parking. However, on-street parking is allowed.

The Blue Hills merchants Association is “a non-profit organization whose sole purpose is to provide a voice to the interest, needs and development of its commercial district”. Founded in 1980, the association seeks to create work opportunities, advancement, commercial development, growth and professional networking. Its goal is to celebrate diverse cultural backgrounds while promoting communication, understanding and unity with all merchants within and around the Blue Hills business district. The Blue Hills Merchants Association also serves as a link between merchants, residents, state and local officials.

The association sponsors, annual elections, monthly board meetings, job fairs, street carnivals, sales events and membership drives. In addition, the Blue Hills Merchants Association lobbies for commercial development in support of neighborhood needs and to create new job opportunities.

The Blue Hills Merchants Association works in conjunction with the Blue Hills Civic Association and the Blue NRZ to bring a better quality of life to merchants, residents and the community as a whole.

Forty retail and service businesses are presently operating in the commercial center. These include branch banks, personal and professional services, convenience and specialty food and beverage markets, and restaurant/take-out locations. Community retail and services include dental offices, a weekly newspaper, laundry/dry cleaning locations, and a gas station.

All of these businesses are locally owned and managed with some owning the buildings in which they operate. Owner-occupied as opposed to tenant-based establishments are considered to provide an important base for long-term stability of the corridor. This stability has resulted in the absence of blight and abandonment common in many other urban neighborhoods.

Through funding from the Community Economic Development Fund, the “Blue Hills Avenue Business District Improvement Study” was recently completed. The purpose of this report is to serve as a planning resource to neighborhood and business groups in Blue Hills in the on-going efforts to support and enhance business development on the corridor. Specifically, the following areas are addressed:

- To provide a basic understanding of the demographic and economic forces affecting the Blue Hills neighborhood which would impact strategies for business development along the Blue Hills Avenue corridor.
- To provide general recommendations and options to consider in support of business development for the Blue Hills Avenue Corridor.

The report includes an analysis of demographic, economic and market information regarding Blue Hills in general and the Blue Hills Avenue business district in particular in order to provide a framework for evaluating business development options for the district. An inventory of businesses, buildings, commercial transactions and vacancies is also included. Recommendations in support of business development goals for the corridor are then presented (see Appendix D).