

Town of Malta Economic Development Committee

Strategic Plan and Report

Fall 2017

Background

The Malta Town Board established the Economic Development Committee in 2016 as a team of local business and economic development professionals to serve as consultants and advisors to the Town Board on matters of economic development, commercial investment and ongoing positive growth.

Tax Revenue and Formula

The Town of Malta does not have a general Town tax, meaning that anyone paying property taxes in Malta pays only County and school property taxes (apart from a small library district tax). While this is good for taxpayers, it means the Town must rely upon their share of Saratoga County Sales Tax Revenue for the majority of revenue to fund the Town budget. The formula that drives sales tax distribution is based upon the total assessed value of all taxable property in Town.

For many years, this had worked well for Malta, as the growth taking place across Saratoga County had driven ample revenue to meet conservative budgeting priorities, allowing the Town to continue to deliver services without considering a property tax. However, in 2016, the enacted budget of just over \$10 million carried a conservative spending increase of about \$250,000, but required tapping reserves of nearly \$600,000 to balance. That is not a sustainable budgetary practice.

Commercial vs. Residential Focus

Without doubt the Town has seen significant change and growth in the last decade, in part due to the location of GLOBALFOUNDRIES in Malta, but also due to a focus on nearly unfettered residential development, whether single family or multi-family. For decades, the Town has focus its philosophy around that of a “bedroom community,” deploying policies that encourage residential growth but discourage commercial.

The result of those policies is that currently multifamily units built, under construction or approved just in the Downtown Malta neighborhood exceed 1500 units – a very large proportion for a Town of 15,000. This excessive growth pattern has frustrated and angered residents in Town and caused backlash against development, as many see endless construction without true economic enhancement.

Further, the philosophy of the former leadership focused on use of Planned Development Districts (PDD) as primary land use tools, rather than market-based zoning laws. This built a perception of favored treatment towards large developers while leading to confusion for residents and developers alike. The rampant PDD use also created administrative and operations challenges for the Planning and Development Department, as each PDD carried its own unique rules, criteria, and application.

As a rule of thumb, it is generally recognized that commercial property carries a higher average assessed value than residential property, meaning that residential growth in Malta wasn't the most efficient approach for the Town to drive tax revenue from the County.

A significant change in philosophy has come to be with new leadership on the Town Board, shifting priorities from a focus on residential through PDD's to a clear blueprint on development through traditional zoning. The new Town leadership has decided to focus on encouraging commercial investment to create jobs, increase assessed rolls and encourage new economic activity in Town.

Development Focus

In a series of public meetings, the members of the Malta Economic Development Committee discussed the change in philosophy by the Town Board and provided their professional expertise on the top. In general, the Committee agreed that a shift in focus from residential to commercial development would benefit the Town in the long run in several ways:

- *Increase assessment base* – by expanding commercial development and encouraging commercial, rather than residential investment, the Town would see a greater expansion of its assessed base, without the related significant demand on increased services.
- *Increase job opportunities* – with new commercial investment, the Committee recognizes that new job opportunities would develop, allowing more people who live in Malta to also earn an income in the Town to support their families. It will be important for the Town and residents to understand how Malta's demographics can impact commercial development, including size and type of retail, as well as commercial office, industrial and other investments.
- *Improve amenities* – the Committee and its members have heard from residents in Malta that there are certain amenities lacking in Malta, including restaurants and retail outlets. With a new focus on commercial investment, the Town will be better positioned to attract these types of investment.

- *Decrease infrastructure demands/environmental impact* – by increasing job opportunities in Town, there is a potential to reduce the number of Town residents required to commute to Albany, Schenectady, Troy and other urban centers, thereby reducing CO2 emissions related to automobiles, reduce the impact on major infrastructure like I-87 and NYS-67, and ultimately reduce stress level for commuters.

Growth Challenges and Open Space

One of the major challenges facing the Town is balancing growth with a desire for open space, greenbelts, buffers, and parkland. Malta has a rich history as a Town built on agriculture and a strong connection to nature and the outdoors. In recent years, even with the growth associated with the Luther Forest Technology Campus (LFTC), the Town has continued to invest in parks and open space.

As part of the Committee's efforts, interaction has occurred with the Town Parks and Recreation Department and with the Open Space, Agriculture and Trails (OATs) Committee to align economic development opportunities with the needs and priorities the Town has set on open space, agriculture, and parkland. Currently, the Town of Malta has 560.5 acres of developed parks and protected open space. The National Parks and Recreation Association recommends 9.6 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents, meaning the Town of Malta has done a great job developing parkland to serve a much large population.

It will be important for the Town to enable a dialogue about development and striking a balance between commercial growth opportunities and desires for both open space preservation and parkland development.

To that end, this committee sought to understand opportunities to strike a balance between these potential conflicting priorities. One area to seize this balance is in recognition of the value agriculture has had on the Town and the value of pursuing new opportunities in Agritourism, Agribusiness and Agri-tainment. These types of activities could stimulate economic activity while maintaining the rural integrity of many parts of Town.

- *Agritourism* – this is defined by the University of California-Davis as a commercial enterprise at a working farm, ranch, or agricultural plant conducted for the enjoyment of visitors that generates supplemental income for the owner. Agritourism and nature-tourism enterprises might include:
 - Outdoor recreation (fishing, hunting, wildlife study, horseback riding).
 - Educational experiences (cannery tours, cooking classes, or wine tasting).
 - Hospitality services (farm stays, guided tours or outfitter services).
 - On-farm direct sales (u-pick operations or roadside stands).

- *Agribusiness* – Brigham Young University defines Agricultural business as “dealing with the management, marketing, and financing of food and fiber, ‘from the field to the table.’ This could mean specialty agriculture, traditional farming and all the business activities related to such.
- *Agritainment* – defined by Penn State University as providing an opportunity for entertainment in an agricultural setting; agritainment creates the opportunity to entice visitors to farms, provide education about agriculture, and increasing overall profits. Nationally more than 50,000 farms with farm receipts of nearly \$1 billion reported at least a portion of their income as coming from agri-tainment.

Balance Between Big Attraction and Small Business

Malta has seen tremendous growth and success due to the attraction of GLOBALFOUNDRIES to the Town, along with the more than 3000 employees that work there every day. However, opportunities for mega projects of that nature are few and far between. While Malta can and should still participate in inquiries for large projects, nurturing and developing small business growth will provide diversified and sustainable economic growth.

A major hurdle for small business identified by the committee is access to capital. Many businesses considering an investment in the Town (or greater area) just can't get the capital they need to invest and grow. The Town could consider a number of new activities to ameliorate this situation, including:

- *Workshops* – working with the local Chambers and SBDC, Malta could host an annual workshop or workshops on funding and business support opportunities in the area. These could focus on funding and capital or more general business categories such as writing a business plan, smart hiring practices, marketing and social media and more.
- *Loan Fund Development* – in collaboration with the MBPA and other organizations such as the New York Business Development Corporation and the Community Loan Foundation, the Town could work to establish a dedicated loan pool to provide additional funding support for small businesses seeking capital for growth.

- *Regional Approach* – Given the ongoing and significant investment being driven by the Regional Economic Development Councils and the Common Fund Application, Malta must identify and embrace the role the Town plays in the larger region. This should mean engaging with the neighborhoods of town to capture the local areas of focus, but also reaching out to neighboring regional communities to ensure our approach is in alignment to the balance of the area. Ultimately, the Town must make decisions to invest in economic development to see their goals reached.

Mission

The mission of the Malta Economic Development Committee is to consider procedures and steps to encourage commercial investments that will increase local job opportunities and help provide and ensure/maintain well-balanced growth among residential, rural, commercial and the remaining agricultural areas of our town. It is also intended to expand our commercial “base” (in the appropriately designated locations) so as to limit Malta’s dependency on any one major business and/or industry.

Specific goals of this ongoing and continuous committee is to:

- Develop strategies, specific goals, operational procedures and policy recommendations.
- Brainstorm and identify various types of desirable and necessary business/commercial enterprises.
- Identify possible sources of funding (grants, contributions, etc.) to assist the committee in meeting its operational goals and plans.

The committee will: make all meetings 1) open to the public; 2) announce all meetings; 3) keep minutes or notes; 4) encourage input and insight from residents, community leaders and various business professionals; 5) once organized, keep record of any votes; 6) periodically report to and update the Town Board of deliberations and 7) obtain Town Board approval of any/all actionable items/topics. The committee will have resources (advice, town maps, traffic control suggestions, zoning/planning experiences/knowledge/input and legal practicality) available from the Building & Planning Department, Town Attorney and Highway Department, if needed.

Members:

Rai Archibold, Greg Connors, Tim Dunn (CHAIR), Jeff Haraden, John Hartzell, Paul Loomis, Sharyn Marchione, , Mike Relyea, Tom Roohan, Todd Shimkus

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1. Background Research

From the inception of the process, committee members sought and reviewed insight from other studies and partners engaged in related activities. The committee sought public input, input from other economic development and community groups and reviewed a myriad of prior studies previously undertaken.

Some of the groups that engaged in the process include:

- Malta OATS committee
- Malta Planning and Development Department
- Malta Business and Professional Association
- Saratoga County Chamber of Commerce
- Chamber of Southern Saratoga
- Saratoga County Prosperity Partnership
- Saratoga Economic Development Corporation

Some of the studies and documents reviewed by the Committee include:

- Malta Townwide Generic Environmental Impact Statement
- Malta Comprehensive Plan
- SEDC Annual Report
- SSCP “Saratoga Strategy”
- Malta Zoning Maps
- Saratoga Regional Traffic Study 2015
- Saratoga Regional Traffic Study 2016

2. SWOT Analysis

As with any thorough business strategy undertaking, the Committee began their efforts by reviewing what they believed to be the Town of Malta's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, or SWOT. What follows is a comprehensive compilation of the Committee's analysis.

Strengths

Committee Organization

- Good foundation documents
- New focus on business

Town government operations

- Active planning department
- Currently no town tax
- **Planning:** Land Use, Transportation, Planning & Zoning documents laws, rules and regulations recently updated or updates in progress.
- **Support Staff:** the town has an established and experienced planning, development, zoning and enforcement staff;
- Form based code
- Strong local government
- Municipal Facilities appear sound

Location

- **Geographic Location:** located centrally in one of the most economically successful counties in NYS;
- Good location to major arterials
- Regional location NYC, Boston, Montreal
- Proximity to social-cultural amenities at Saratoga Springs
- Proximity to Albany area, interstate highways, and other means of transportation

Transportation

- **Availability of Transportation Infrastructure:** access to Interstate Highway System; condition and maintenance of state highway system; proximity to rail (both passenger & commercial); proximity to airport; proximity to deep water port(s); average daily traffic count(s);
- Northway Motor Vehicle Access
- Intermodal Rail Access
- Regional Airport Access within 20 minutes
- 3 Interchanges on the Northway
- Directly accessible from 3 Northway exits and route 9

Sites

- **Development Space:** access to a broad range of commercial occupancies/opportunities;
- Significant tracts of available land exist inside and outside of the Tech Campus
- Undeveloped land in northern and western parts of town
- Desirable parcels available for businesses

Branding

- National visibility to high tech sector businesses
- Growing awareness of Malta/Capital Region as the location of a tech hub
- Aesthetic quality of Town remains high with considerable open space with nice view sheds

Workforce/Assets

- A large workforce
- Local educational institutions are aggressively trying to supply a local workforce with technical training
- Ample water supply is regionally available
- Local construction workforce has been trained in hi-tech construction
- LFTC and STEP
- Healthcare, roads, parks,
- Saratoga Chamber and Malta Business and Professional Association
- TecSmart
- Malta Urgent Care - Health Care
- Innovative/Highly regarded school system
- A \$14 billion investment by GF
- State Farm Insurance Jobs/Operations
- Home to multiple large employers

Amenities

- Relatively strong outdoor recreational opportunities (trails, lakes, parks)
- Access to Saratoga Lake and Round Lake (boat and kayak launches)
- Parks and bike path passageway between Mechanicville and Ballston Spa (route 67/Zim Smith)
- YMCA
- Open Space
- Athletic Fields
- Hotels
- Restaurants and Shops

Weaknesses

Infrastructure

- Power: inadequate availability of supply (gas/electricity); unreliable transmission grid supporting commercial investment and high-tech manufacturing (in the region and in LFTC);
- Water and Sewer infrastructure is not in place to support economic growth, and the Town lacks plans to actively develop same (federal and state funds to support same are increasingly scarce)
- Need strong political champion to get behind funding for water and electricity
- Lack of infrastructure

ED Resources

- Contact: no single point or designated economic development/opportunity contact;
- Financing: no local government or business generated financial support for economic development;
- Interest: lack of broad range community interest in economic development;
- Brand/Marketing: currently there is no focused or target marketing promoting the Town for economic development; lack of an identity
- Integration: the lack of robust and organized participation in economic development within the town by business and social organizations currently functioning within the town.
- No central place of community focus and related absence of social-cultural center of gravity.
- Asset Analysis/Inventory: lack of a comprehensive and current inventory of shovel ready sites or commercial vacancies.

Reputation

- Reputation: a history of decision making impacting only a few and not the whole; frustration in the legislative approval review and approval process;
- Economic: a history of focusing on cost and not investment;
- Malta's reputation is that of discouraging development
- Institutionally, town government has played a regulatory role, and has not actively been involved in economic development
- Perceived handout to developers
- PDD approach to planning of development has caused segmented infrastructure and system development, at a higher cost
- Lack of predictability
- Fees/Regulation = higher rents; fees for mitigation are higher than in other communities.
- Poor planning = missed opportunities
- History of special deals
- SEDC, Prosperity board, 2 groups in county, causes confusion; what is best for Malta?

Planning/Gov Operations

- Confusion about zoning,
- Catching up with competition after being ahead of curve
- Failure to "encourage" new business
- Limited resources/staffing for Econ Dev support
- Regulatory burdens in New York State
- NYS income and property tax (compared to other states)

Transportation

- East- West transportation capacity is limited
- Lack of parking is inhibiting development of retail core in downtown district
- Well-traveled secondary roads only two lanes even though connecting routes between towns (e.g. route 67)
- Lack of public transportation (e.g. buses, trains)
- Speed limit too high throughout Town
- Walkability
- Route 67 is unsafe/under-developed; issues with capacity of the road
- Must drive from homes to jobs/shops
- Northway traffic in rush hours

Economic Diversity

- Local economy is increasingly dependent on a single employer operating in a single industry
- Lack of population diversity
- Lack of diversity of business
- Limited commercial growth
- Lack of 'Tourism' focus
- Store fronts in Ellsworth Commons underutilized

Miscellaneous

- Competition with Saratoga and Clifton Park (e.g. malls, eateries)
- Small YMCA compared to Saratoga and Clifton Park
- Harsh winters (at least as perceived)

Opportunities

People Resources

- Formation of a local Economic Development Committee
- Diversity of talent

Location/Sites

- Reasonable land/building costs
- Center of Northeast Tech Corridor
- More sites than neighbors
- Town Hall land on Rt 9
- Saratoga Hospital, AAC, Church Parcel
- Developable land near 87

Relationships

- Attract businesses by streamlining the approval process
- Regional collaboration w/surrounding towns
- With a 10 year history of cooperation and collaboration between Malta and the adjacent Town of Stillwater including both the legislative branch and planning/zoning departments, the opportunity to share cost/expense and planning opportunities should continue with a more focused and deliberate effort.
- Renewal of efforts to secure going concerns for LFTC
- Take advantage/capitalize on extensive and existing private investment
- More sites than neighbors

Business

- New areas opening for development
- GF, related supply chain
- Small hi-tech startups
- Large hi-tech manufacturers who need access to labor with skills similar to Global Foundries
- Small business growth
- Service jobs (e.g. hotels)
- 'Destination' visits (e.g. Cabela's)
- Attract businesses that produce products or services for export outside the area
- Tourism economy requires hotels first
- Global branding/recognition

Threats

Relationships/Communication

- Reluctance to try again something that may not have been successful in the past or trying something “new” or outside the box;
- Challenges between growth and no-growth constituencies;
- Continued competition/animosity between County economic development organizations
- Measured, sustained and productive economic growth and opportunities could pass and be lost to neighboring jurisdictions if we bog down with more talk and less action or the legislative process (Town Board, Planning Board & ZBA) being unwilling to enact meaningful legislation/approvals promoting economic development because it may not be in the groups or individual(s) political benefit.
- Lack of NYS Support
- Inability to communicate our new attitude for new business

Business

- Competition – local and regional
- NIMBY’s/BANANAS/Save Saratoga
- Instability in global tech sectors
- Global Foundries’ property tax assessment is decreasing
- Taxable commercial development in other Saratoga County towns is outpacing that of Malta, negatively affecting Malta’s sales tax revenues
- Business being diverted to other states, or other localities in NYS, though government incentive programs
- No Fab 8.2
- One Horse Town economically

People Resources

- Uncertain workforce dev
- Growing population in close proximity will likely demand greater level of government services
- Increasing house prices/property taxes
- Saturation of apartment complexes
- More people than jobs

Infrastructure

- Expanded utilities required to grow
- Inability to accommodate additional traffic
- Stronger east west corridors

3. Property Inventory

The Committee review available property and zoning in Malta and identified some positive opportunities and recommendations. The Committee found that Malta has a wide variety of potential sites available and that prior to 2016, much of the core areas of Town were not zoned to reflect market realities.

Sites in Town range from completely undeveloped greenfields ranging in size from 1-100 acres and ranging in infrastructure availability. For most greenfield sites in Town, infrastructure availability varied. The Town's Sewer and Water Committee has looked at existing water and sewer infrastructure and found little Town-wide availability. In fact, the Sewer and Water Committee recently recommended creating a water district to serve the Route 9 South neighborhood, including portions of the LFTC Park to drive commercial investment and serve a significant existing need.

LFTC continues to be an area of focus for the Town and the Committee. Ongoing issues with infrastructure continue to present challenges for the Town and LFTC, but new focus such as the proposed Water District could be a step forward to manage these issues.

When reviewing available sites in Malta and coordinating activities with partner organizations, the Committee found that SEDC had launched a new site tool called SEE Saratoga. This new web tool is a digital and searchable portal of sites available in the County for development. The Committee recommends collaborating with SEDC to feature Malta sites, rather than creating a duplicative tool or catalog. In doing so, the Town should solicit property information from property owners in areas zoned commercial to make them aware of the tool and the information necessary to be listed on the portal.

During the course of the Committee's work, the Town of Malta took aggressive steps to change zoning in certain neighborhoods to align with a focus on commercial development and market realities. Prior to 2016, much of Route 9 and Route 67 were zoned residential, providing a disincentive to development. Prior to the Committee's establishment, the Town rezoned Route 9 South to Commercial, reflecting community sentiment and market realities. While the Committee conducted its work, the Town rezoned Route 67 West to Commercial and is currently undertaking a similar rezoning on Route 9 North.

All of these enacted and proposed zoning changes present a much better opportunity for attracting commercial investment to Town in these traditional commercial corridors and align with market realities.

4. Industry Focus

Each committee member was asked to research an industry focus they thought might be well aligned for Malta to pursue and provide some justification for that pursuit. Further, the research included potential site requirements, recommendations for locations in Town, potential numbers of jobs to be created, and estimated average salary of those jobs.

The industries identified range from large retail operations, tourism/destination amenities, technology/research hub activities, and legacy manufacturing opportunities. While the research resulted in potential jobs that would pay across the wage scale, each selected industry provided some tangible connection to the Town or serves a need in the region

The full research input is captured in Appendix A.

5. Operational Focus

A major positive identified by the Committee was the current strength and ability of existing Town staff in Planning and Development. While the ability of the staff is a strength, recent turnover in the department and ongoing development activity present continuing challenges for operations.

Resources are always a challenge (and will be discussed in a later section); however this section focuses on operations and opportunities for improvement, not finances. The Committee recognizes the challenge presented by a negative perception of doing business in Malta. There are steps that could be taken to change that perception. Some steps could include:

- *Coordination* - Annual meetings between Zoning and Planning board members, department staff and representative of the development community, including SEDC or the County IDA to discuss parts of the process that work and those that are challenges. This could further include outreach to and bilateral discussions with the existing business and real estate development communities to understand their needs and priorities.
- *Economic Development Staff* - Within the Town Planning and Development Department, one staff member (or more) could have their role re-classified as an Economic Development Coordinator or Assistant, rather than in a traditional planning title. Without significant changes in responsibility and workload, that staff member would be better identified as an advocate for business, than as a regulatory representative. In time, the Town could chose to expand this role or even develop a dedicated team for Economic Development, as has been done successfully in Hillsboro, OR. This role could further serve as a conduit for existing businesses, with an eye towards retention.
- *Engagement* - For both the department lead and staff, quarterly goals could be identified to engage in networking and outreach activities with local Chambers, MBPA, or other regional business organizations to have a tangible and direct outreach effort.
- *Communication* - To provide a direct line of communication, the Town could begin producing a quarterly newsletter to the business and real estate community that could be distributed electronically and outline steps taken by the Town to encourage investment. This could provide direct links to helpful forms and applications that already exist on the Town website.

- *Metrics* – The ultimate measure of economic development is job creation. It's a pretty simple premise that if an organization that is charged with economic development can't identify jobs they've created or retained, then that organization is likely failing. The Town Building and Planning Department should update existing forms and applications to include a verifiable statement of anticipated jobs created/retained so as to establish some data points for impact of the economic development efforts in Town. Additional information (and historic information) could be obtained from County IDA records.

6. Potential Funding Opportunities

Given ongoing budget challenges, the time is certainly not ideal to consider new programs or staffing. However, should the Town desire to develop new strategic program and activities, funding streams could be sought for off-budget financial support to fund new programs. Examples could include:

- *LFTC Dedicated Funding* – the Town could pursue a new dedicated funding stream from the County and State to support the development of LFTC beyond the current levels. Pursued as joint funding from the State and County, this could provide resources for the Town and LFTC EDC to collaborate on planning, infrastructure development and marketing of a park that has sat mostly vacant for many years.
- *Utility Funding* – For many years, National Grid (formally) and NYSEG (informally) have provided funds specifically earmarked for economic development, infrastructure development, and strategic marketing to communities across the State. While recipients must be a nonprofit economic developer, the Town could consider creating their own NFP or partnering with an existing organization to pursue specific economic development projects. These grants range from several thousand to as much as hundreds of thousands of dollars.
- *Major Project Mitigation Funding* – Since Malta doesn't have a Town Tax and thereby did not receive direct tax revenue from the development of GLOBALFOUNDRIES, the Town could request a small recurring funding stream to offset burdens associated with the project, similar to those included in a GEIS. This recurring funding could provide the cash flow to amortize larger bonded investments for significant economic development projects.
- *Hotel/Bed Tax Increase* – With legislation for Clifton Park to increase their hotel tax being vetoed by Governor Cuomo, the Town of Malta could request the County enact legislation that authorizes a voluntary hotel room tax increase that individual Town could opt to enact. This would avoid the Town-by-Town concern identified by the Governor, while still producing a dedicated funding stream to Malta that could then be used strictly for economic development.

- *Direct Town General Fund Line Item* – Given the shift in focus from this effort as a cost to it being an investment, it would yield benefits to this effort for the town to dedicate specific a budget line or lines to economic development priorities. This may even be done in conjunction with other priorities, such as water and sewer or other infrastructure priorities. Once this strategy is finalized and adopted, the Town should develop an annual budget to fund priority areas of focus and investment, so leadership can appropriately measure success or lack thereof.

7. Retail/Commercial Needs Assessment

The Committee recognizes that diverse commercial investment is vital for a healthy economy. In addition, members of the Committee have heard from numerous residents and developer about the amenities in Malta and the amenities currently lacking. As such, it may behoove the Town to undertake further study into retail and commercial amenities that would fit well into the existing fabric of the community.

Amenities that could be considered include:

- *Locally Owned/Family Restaurants* - as “A family town,” Malta has seen success with restaurants geared toward a family setting. Examples such as the Recovery Sports Grill, Carson’s Woodside, and Bentley’s all offer standard fare and reasonable prices in a comfortable environment that could offer room for growth.
- *Fast/Casual Chains* - with the growth in and around Malta including significant expansion in the young professional demographic, “Fast/Casual” national brands like Chipotle or Shake Shack could be appropriate fits.
- *Outdoor/Recreation Retail* - As a town with a large amount of parks, trails and open space, outdoor recreation is a key draw in Malta. With growth in recreational amenities in projects like the Adirondack Aquatic Center and the new YMCA, as well as access to creeks and two lakes, Malta is a great location for recreation and outdoors activities, and related retail.

To properly understand community desires and convey hard numbers to site selectors, it may be advised for the Town to consider undertaking an amenity survey of residents to better understand needs and wants. This information will be valuable to the site selection community as well.

8. Recommendations

TBD FOLLOWING BOARD INPUT