

Letter: A different approach to economic development

To the editor:

The editorial of March 18 assumes that residents must choose between the benefits of traditional economic development and the open space values that support our quality of life and also provide their own economic benefits.

But it's a new day in planning for our future. We have new information, new tools and new resources to consider. Just one example is the state's Commonwealth Capital program, used in awarding grants to cities and towns. You can read about it at www.mass.gov/ocd/comcap.html. The Daily News should help readers understand these new options because "smart growth" and "smart conservation" principles provide a third choice that makes preservation of open space and economic development mutually supportive.

An exciting prospect for Newburyport is a technique called "transfer of development rights," in which owners of important conservation land - such as the 102-acre NAID parcel in the Little River watershed area, a "sending area" - are offered financial incentives to sell their development rights. These rights can then be purchased by buyers in a "receiving area" - in this case, the area around the train station and traffic circle. The city works with these buyers to shape development that is denser - and more profitable - than would otherwise be allowed. With this approach, both buyers and sellers undertake smart business transactions, significant open space is preserved and the city manages growth in a way that best serves residents.

Perhaps the folks at NAID could put their business acumen to work in this new direction. It would be a good move for the non-profit to support new approaches to economic development. It's a new vision for a new day.

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