

# Tyngsboro told to market itself

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## Analysis: Tyngsboro has strengths, but nobody knows about them

Number of private industry establishments in Tyngsboro

2001:	299
2003:	345
2005:	362
2007:	365
2009:	341
2011:	366
2013:	353
2014:	365
2015:	365

Average monthly employment in Tyngsboro (private industry)

2001:	3,158
2003:	3,671
2005:	3,462
2007:	3,637
2009:	3,211
2011:	3,455
2013:	3,637
2014:	3,838
2015:	3,540

Source: Dukakis Center study

TYNGSBORO -- Tyngsboro will need to improve its marketing skills and speed up its permit-review process to boost economic development, according to a recent study by the Northeastern University Dukakis Center for Urban and Regional Policy.

Yet in other areas, the town enjoys certain strengths that could attract businesses -- including its proximity to highways, parking availability and a single tax rate, the study found.

Researchers from the institute used a 220-question survey to identify Tyngsboro's strengths and weaknesses in economic development, based on factors that business-location experts consider when deciding where to place a business.

Those factors range from very important, such as traffic and infrastructure, to less important, such as airport proximity and rail service.

The report, funded through a \$4,500 grant, then compares Tyngsboro's answers to the 78 other Massachusetts communities that have taken the survey.

"Tyngsboro did pretty well on some measures," said Barry Bluestone, founding director of the Dukakis Center. "It certainly has parking. It has less traffic congestion than other towns and cities."

The town also allows for some fast-track permitting and has very good development sites, he said.

Yet Tyngsboro could do a better job of marketing itself -- the study found that Tyngsboro doesn't engage area businesses or planning organizations to help market the town.

"Basically, to be honest, not many people have heard of Tyngsboro," he said. "They've heard of Lowell.

And so it's very likely that many of these location specialists would never even think about Tyngsboro, even though Tyngsboro might be a great place for them to suggest to their firms."

The town lags behind in some aspects of its permit-approval process, with building permits and the appeals process taking 9-12 weeks when it takes less than eight weeks in other communities.

The town is also slow in its tax-delinquency process -- the study found that Tyngsboro takes 16 years or more to auction tax-title properties that could free up additional development space.

And although Tyngsboro has more available commercial or industrial land than others -- 151 to 300 acres, compared to up to 150 acres in other communities -- 36 percent to 50 percent of available sites are vacant or "severely underutilized" shopping centers.

But the good thing, Bluestone noted, is that the areas of improvement are fairly easy for the town to address.

"The things they could work on ... are all things that are completely within their control," he said. "This was, I

think, a very positive report."

Town officials could use the report as an outline for future goals, although Town Administrator Curt Bellavance said Tyngsboro ranked pretty well overall.

"We have great highway access, we have available utilities, we have available sites," he said. "It's an attractive community."

Selectmen Chairman Rick Reault noted that Tyngsboro had to cut its town planner position during the financial crisis a few years ago.

"If you have a town planner, I would think he would play a large role in marketing your community," he said. "But we don't have that position."

Part of the issue, he said, is the need for more state aid.

The town has listed police, fire and highway resources among its top needs, he said, but the town hasn't been able to hire any additional employees in those areas for a while.

The sewer-line extension project, which will stretch to parts of Middlesex Road, will hopefully have an economic impact, Reault said.

"When people look at Tyngsboro, it's a great location, great community, great school system, but does it have infrastructure?" he said. "Does it have water and sewer? And that's probably one of the first things a commercial or an industrial property would be looking for. We need a little more work in those areas."

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