

Michael Ainslie  
596 N. County Road  
Palm Beach, Florida 33480

September 12, 2021

To the Honorable Mayor and Members of the Palm Beach Town Council;

Dear Friends,

I am writing to encourage you to vote to undertake the long awaited retail strategy study that you approved in a vote last spring. While much has taken place since last spring, I still believe strongly that the study is still needed.

First, our retail sector has had a recovery. Many of our vacant stores have been occupied, so the reduced vacancy rate may lead some to feel our problems are solved. However, many of these new tenants are on short term, one year leases. Many are art galleries that may move back to New York as markets stabilize. And for sure, Amazon is not shrinking.

However, vacancies were not the only rationale for the retail strategy study. We have many other issues. We have too much retail space in our town. We have a vacant department store that will never be a department store again. We have other retail spaces that have been vacant for years. We have second and third floor spaces above retail that lie empty, failing to contribute to the vitality of our commercial areas. We have antiquated zoning rules that make it difficult to see creative solutions be implemented.

We have aggressive new retail arriving in West Palm Beach and in North Palm Beach. Undoubtedly, these new merchants will draw customers from our retail establishments. We cannot stand still or we will go backwards.

Much time was invested in selecting an outstanding firm, Yard and Company, to study and advise the Council on all of these and other issues. In addition to Yard's talented team, they included Michael J. Berne one of the country's outstanding experts on downtown retail districts. His advice could be invaluable to our town.

Timing should also be considered. Having already been through the RFP process, Yard and Company could undertake their work this fall with recommendations hopefully by early 2022. The yet to be selected comprehensive zoning review consultant will not be underway with their work for a few months. They will not have the in depth knowledge of retail that Yard and Michael Berne possess. Secondly they will be in a position to review Yard's recommendations and integrate them with their more in depth review of our residential and commercial zoning.

We need to stay on the path you endorsed in June and bring in the experts you selected after a thorough process to advise us on making our town's retail sector something that thrives and makes us proud.

Sincerely,

Michael Ainslie, Chair  
Planning and Zoning Commission