

**Town of Westport
Master Plan Public Workshop #3 Summary**

The Westport Master Plan Committee (MPC) hosted the first public workshop on the Master Plan Update on Saturday, October 25, 2014 from 9:00 AM to 12:00 PM at the Westport Public Library. The purpose of the workshop was to introduce and gain public input on three of the ten Master Plan elements:

- Creative, Cultural and Historic Resources;
- Capital Facilities and Human Services; and
- Land Use.

An interactive break-out exercise was used to elicit community input regarding local challenges, opportunities, goals and objectives related to these elements. Eighteen (18) participants registered on the sign-in sheets representing a variety of Westport stakeholders. The following is a summary of the feedback received at the workshop.

Registration (9:00 – 9:20 AM)

As participants arrived at the workshop, they were greeted by the Town Planner, members of the MPC and/or the consultant team from the Horsley Witten Group, Inc. (HW). Agendas, nametags, and handouts were provided as they signed in at the registration table. Refreshments were donated by the MPC members. There were posters showing the community survey results and community maps on display for participants to view during this time as well.

Opening Remarks and Presentation (9:20 – 10:00 AM)

Jim Hartnett, Westport’s Town Planner, greeted the participants. The Town’s consultant, HW was introduced and their role in the process, facilitating the four public workshops that will take place as part of the Master Plan update. He introduced the Town’s consultant, HW, and described HW’s role in the process, which is to facilitate the four public workshops that will take place as part of the Master Plan update.

HW provided an overview of the Master Plan, the update process, including the background and purpose of the Community Master Plan, some example projects that came out of the 2004 Master Plan, and the tasks to accomplish for updating the Master Plan. The Westport Master Plan will be comprised of ten elements, three of which were the focus of the day’s workshop.

HW then “set the stage” for break-out exercise by reviewing draft goals and objectives related to each element that would be discussed. HW then introduced the purpose and directions for the break-out exercise itself.

Break-out Group Exercise I: Creative, Cultural and Historic Resources and Capital Facilities and Human Services (10:00 – 10:45 AM)

The group was divided among two tables. HW facilitators guided each break-out group through a discussion of challenges, opportunities, goals and objectives related to two focus elements: Creative, Cultural and Historic Resources and Capital Facilities and Human Services. Each topic was addressed individually. For each topic, the group was asked two questions:

1. What are the top challenges and opportunities related to the topic?
2. Are these challenges and opportunities addressed sufficiently and accurately by the proposed Master Plan goals and objectives or do you have any suggested edits or additions?

Each question was allotted approximately 20 minutes for discussion of each topic. After the facilitator read the first question aloud, group members worked individually for a few minutes to write down their thoughts on a worksheet. These worksheets would be collected at the end of the workshop. Each group member was then provided the opportunity to share one idea, noting that their other ideas written down would also be considered. If time allowed, group members provided additional ideas after each person shared their first idea. Responses were recorded on a flipchart.

This process was repeated for the second question. Instead of writing responses on the flipchart, a “bubble diagram” was used. The bubble diagram poster-size in the center of the table, and included key phrases that described each goal and objective. Word-smithing of the goals and objectives themselves was discouraged and the group focused on determining whether any larger issues, goals or objectives were absent. Responses were noted on the bubble diagrams.

The following is a summary of the discussion that came out of both groups.

Creative, Cultural and Historic Resources

Group #1 Flipchart

Challenges and Opportunities

Challenges

- Zoning does not allow for artist space and other mixed uses.
- The survey already performed reached a small portion of the town’s residents. How do we reach more people to understand their concerns and interests? To get more volunteers?
- Getting newer residents to accept rural culture.
- The limited school curriculum restricts outreach to students about local history.
- The Town has limited financial resources to maintain structures.
- Competing uses for land.
- Some organizations have difficulty managing their administrative duties versus maintaining their historic buildings (e.g. finances).

- How do we monetize our culture and history without being Disney? Keep it authentic.
- Insufficiently defined hubs. The town is geographically large and resources are dispersed.
- No marketing – can we leverage the Bristol County Tourism Bureau, local universities and colleges?
- There are a number of town buildings that are not being used.
- Transportation is limited and it is difficult to get students/seniors to sites.
- There is a disparity between the villages and the rural areas of town. There is a different mindset (ethnic, social, economic). Residents rarely cross paths, and tend to stay in their neighborhoods.

Opportunities

- There are 500 members of the Historic Society. There is great interest in the town's historic resources.
- The Handy House is open and there are a lot of activities happening there. 350 people attended Artisan Day.
- Community wide there is a heightened awareness of historic structures.
- Historic structures have not been destroyed. For example, the town farm (poor farm) is preserved, and there are lots of activities. Many towns no longer have their historic town farms.
- There are lots of engaged families.
- There are lots of creative citizens of all ages. Many are working artists and historians. They are an untapped resource. There is room for collaboration.
 - W.A.G. (Westport Art Group)
 - Dedee Shattuck Gallery
- Villages have the potential to become creative hubs.
- Schools offer many opportunities to engage students in historic and cultural activities/awareness.
- The Town has approved Community Preservation Act funds.
- Opportunities to be part of South Coast artist gallery tours.
- Westport's rural culture is important to protect, right to farm, fish, hunt, burn wood. It's important to articulate what it means to be rural, have acceptance by the community.
- Each village has a different character, and there are opportunities for collaboration to promote community's culture and history.
- There may be an opportunity to create an arts district.
- There should be more events to celebrate and promote Westport's culture that includes agriculture, fishing, and maritime heritage. Both historic and on-going.
- There are a lot of religious institutions that could be partners.
- Need to tap "local legends" through discussions, lectures and storytelling.

Group #2 Flipchart

Challenges and Opportunities

Challenges

- Walkability throughout the Town.
- Lack of connectivity between separate unique areas.
- A range of demographics throughout the Town.
- Mapping of and access to information is limited.
- Access to historical documentation is limited.
- Funding for education, arts, and music within the school system and Town overall is limited.
- The value of the Town's cultural identity is vaporous.
- Pedestrian safety throughout the Town (limited sidewalks).
- Lack of public transit options.
- The identification of new talent and energy for improved participation.
- Unmonitored demolition of built environment (history of the Town).
- The need to educate the youth on the Town's cultural history.
- The ability/capacity to implement a long-range plan.
- Establishing a coherent vision amidst conflicting viewpoints.

Opportunities

- Town is not yet fully built out.
- Richness/diversity of the Town's existing history and culture.
- Opportunity to build on existing successes.
- Range of demographics.
- Variety of evolution of village development.
- Utilization of farming/agricultural preservation efforts.
- Creation of a community identity (Westport Matters).
- Creation of a cultural district.
- Incorporating retail and restaurants as a critical part of the existing culture.
- Where appropriate, the capacity for mixed-use zoning.
- Specific community groups (outside of government) need to come forward and rise up as stakeholders.

Comments on Draft Goals and Objectives (combined from both groups)

- There was general agreement that the draft goals and objectives would address the challenges and opportunities discussed.
- There as a comment that the terms "agriculture" and "maritime" are specific. Using the term "rural" would be more appropriate and encompass Westport's culture.

HW recommendations moving forward

- The identity of Westport as a rural community rich in local heritage could be one of the most important aspects of the Master Plan and should be a focal point for the Master Plan document as a whole.

- Residents are divided on many issues and, anecdotally, the tension often arises with folks who moved to the Town in recent years in contrast with those who were raised in Westport or have lived there for decades. Issues related to tax rates, housing diversity, infrastructure investment, public access to the water, and school facilities often show a sharp split in opinion between these two broad groups. It is the strong opinion of HW staff that the promotion of the local rural heritage in Westport is the best opportunity to create town-wide excitement and pull people together before tackling some of the more challenging questions. We believe this should be one of the top priorities for the Town emerging from the Master Plan process.
- HW recommends the Master Plan call for a citizen-led group (e.g., Working Group, Task Force, etc.) to begin shaping a brand for the community that promotes these strengths through a more formal marketing strategy.

Capital Facilities and Human Services

Group #1 Flipchart

Challenges and Opportunities

Challenges

- Limited funding and revenue
- There town's geographic size makes it difficult to get things done. Services are spread out.
- There is a perception of needs and a perception of how much it costs for town services (e.g. fire, police, and transportation for students).
- PCBs
- Lack of awareness by the general public of what it takes to run a program or department – the human resources needed.
- The town owns a lot of buildings, old buildings. Which are no longer useful? Which should be rehabilitated? Which are historic?
- Maintenance is a cost burden. Money is going down and needed services are going up.
- There is a general common goal in the general use of facilities, but cost drives how facilities are getting used.
- There is an increase in the number of seniors, and their needs will be changing in the future.
- 2 ½ override, structural deficit
- Getting utility costs down. There is a committee but need town staff to manage.
- There are shared services programs through Central Planning, but Westport is not involved. There could be opportunities with 911 services and rubbish collection.
- There is no long-term planning.
- Only one town staff person is designated for building maintenance.
- Technology is needed at town hall, but requires money.
- The single tax rate cannot support what is expected. It is too low and does not bring in revenue.

- There is an imbalance of age groups. The town is getting older and worries about keeping families in town.
 - Declining school age population and increasing elderly population.
- Land conservation reduces tax revenue.
- There is lack of consensus.
- Need to protect the right to water resources.
- The large number of water courses results in a large number of crossings. The challenge is to keep them maintained, and protect water quality.
- There is limited public transportation.
- There is a lack communication between government departments which results in duplicate efforts. It reduces opportunities to share and coordinate resources.
- Some areas of town do not participate in government and their voices are not heard.
- Funds to maintain buildings compete with programs that go on in each building.
- Can the number of polling stations be reduce?

Opportunities

- Can we share resources with neighboring communities, such as dispatching, veterans' services, and water supply?
- Share resources within the town (e.g. software), but difficult to coordinate
- There are people committed to the town.
- The talented people that live in town are underutilized. They need to be involved.
- There are lots of access to opportunities to be active and healthy, open space and recreation.
- People have historic perspectives.
- It is a small town and people know each other.
- There is a common pursuit to protect rural culture.
- The low tax rate makes the town affordable.
- Town debt is low.
- The Council on the Aging is strong, and provides great services, has capacity to meet future needs.
- The town has enough buildings to meet needs.
- Buildings can support multiple uses. E.g. schools can offer adult education after hours, after-school programming.
- There are a lot of private groups to tap to help fill the gaps in town services. E.g. watershed group, fishing association, art group.

Group #2 Flipchart

Challenges and Opportunities

Challenges

- Individual departments function in silos.
- Lack of top-down management (based on form of government...lack of information sharing).

- Low tax base (and pride in this).
- Limited institutional awareness of municipal services.
- Dated/antiquated website.
- Lack of a local newspaper for information sharing.
- Presence of PCBs in construction materials at the middle school share concerns for reuse.
- Priorities/attitudes towards spending within the Town.
- Accessibility/awareness of services available.
- Looking at new facilities...needs vs. costs, and secondary impacts on sense of place.
- Limited daycare, assisted living, elderly housing offerings.
- Non-centralized municipal services...no one really knows where to go, a directory is needed.
- Determining the highest and best use of town facilities.
- Public meeting space is limited.

Opportunities

- Improved opportunity for better communication, information sharing, etc. with an improved website.
- Expansion capacity at Town Landing/docks for better utilization.
- Model the success of the C.O.A. for other programs/departments.
- Creation of a newspaper/newsletter for improved public relations.
- Centralized meeting space at Town Hall annex.
- Expansion of aquaculture.
- Expansion of new technologies for septic designs.
- Expansion of public parking through Town holdings and improved pedestrian safety.
- Creation of a forum where existing residents are engaged and can contribute (engagement of existing talents).
- What more can the Town do regarding alternative energy?

Comments on Draft Goals and Objectives (combined from both groups)

- There was general agreement that the draft goals and objectives would address the challenges and opportunities discussed.
- There was specific discussion around the fact that the Town should be doing more green/alternate energy projects.

HW recommendation moving forward

- Although not discussed in the breakout groups, HW believes the Town may benefit from some training for the purposes of streamlining their operations. There are several groups that provide this type of training, sometimes referred to as “Lean” training. This type of outside perspective is often very valuable for addressing many of the issues brought forward in the break out groups (e.g., departments working in silos). The Master Plan language could call for the exploration of this type of training as part of economic development/facilities planning.

- The Master Plan language should also call for a state-of-the art website. This came up in discussions around facilities, but it also dovetails with discussions around culture and economic development.

Break-out Group Exercise II: Land Use (10:45 AM – 11:30 AM)

For this exercise, each group had a zoning map and was asked about the character of existing commercial and residential areas, which areas could be transformed and which need support to maintain their existing character. Specific questions were:

1. How would you characterize the different commercial areas? How do you envision them in the future? Staying the same or being different?
2. Are there unique residential areas with their own character? How do you envision them in the future? Staying the same or being different?
3. Are there areas with a mix of commercial and residential? What is unique about these areas? How do you envision these areas in the future?

The following is a summary of the discussion that came out of both groups.

Areas Zoned Commercial

- Route 6
 - Traditionally Route 6 supported those driving to Cape Cod before the interstate was built (e.g. hotels, restaurants). Right now it is predominantly used car dealers, auto repair shops, metal recycling and restaurants. It was noted that there are not chain establishments.
 - There was a study of Route 6 that identified three distinct areas: (from west to east) commercial, residential, and mixed use. There was a recommendation to expand zoning boundaries along the roadway to encompass an entire lot, as well as changes to the use table in the zoning bylaw.
 - A 43R mixed use arts district is envisioned at the intersection of Route 6 and Route 177. Coordination with Dartmouth is needed, but there is little interest. The area lacks water and sewer. There is a grant for the state to improve the intersection.
 - Route 6 has ultra-high speed Internet appropriate to high-tech businesses. This is preferred rather than retail. How does the town attract these types of businesses?
 - Water and sewer is available from Fall River, but the developer would have to pay to connect to the service lines in the roadway. The Town doesn't have these resources.
 - Uncertainty of 'unrestricted area' in proximity to commercial corridor.
- Route 177
 - The boundaries of commercial zoning along Route 177 could be different at the intersection with Route 88 to accommodate larger commercial concepts that look for highway access.
 - Area between Route 6 and Route 177 is referred to as the "Crossroads". Boundary size may need to increase in its distance from the road to enable commercial development.
 - Traffic/capacity is a major concern here and commercial use needs to take this into account.

- The potential for conflicts with residential component exist.
- Central Village
 - The southern boundary of the commercial zoning around Central Village should be further north. Perhaps it could stop around Perry's Bakery.
 - Increasing density and making the area more walkable is desired, but the lack of water and sewer is a barrier. Is a public water supply the answer?
 - Adaptive reuse should be a priority as there are some historically significant structures. These structures aren't registered...but are significant nonetheless.

Areas Zoned Residential

- Distinct neighborhoods in Westport are:
 - Harbor
 - The Point
 - South Westport
 - North Westport
 - Head of Westport
 - The Factory (though probably more commercial than residential)
- A marine zone or overlay might be a tool to promote maritime uses.
- Open space residential development is allowed under special permit. Should it be by right?

HW recommendations moving forward

- Language in the Master Plan should reflect the desire to explore improvements to the Open Space Residential Development Bylaw. The Commonwealth's model bylaw was recently replaced by a Natural Resources Protection Bylaw. The most important aspect of this new guidance is the use of by-right zoning for these innovative subdivisions. This approach makes it more advantageous for the developer to apply these more environmentally sensitive techniques.
- Although not discussed in the break out groups, HW recommends the Master Plan include language calling for the exploration of other housing models such as Cottage Zoning. This traditional neighborhood model has shown great promise in several Massachusetts and Rhode Island communities. The quality of design is excellent, the market demand is high, community satisfaction is high, and the development of this style of housing helps to create options for single homebuyers and seniors looking to down-size.
- The Master Plan should call for a specific examination of zoning boundaries. HW recommends the inclusion of a map that generally circles areas that should be reconsidered. For example, rezoning the lower portion of the Main Street commercial district to residential going south from Perry's Bakery seemed to make sense to participants at the meeting.
- There are other overarching issues related to zoning districts beyond the extent of commercial district boundaries. HW recommends the Master Plan call for the creation of a Zoning Bylaw Revision Committee (ZBRC). This group would have a two to three-year charge aimed at making significant changes to the bylaw. Issues that would be addressed could include (but would not be limited to):

- Where appropriate, altering the delineation of certain districts to better reflect the needs of desired uses and the current delineation of property lines. The use of fixed distances from a road to delineate district boundaries may be a hindrance to economic development.
- New housing types (see comment above).
- The development of design guidelines for different districts.
- Creating distinct commercial districts for Main Street, Route 6, and Route 177.

Closing (11:30 AM – 12:00 PM)

After the break-out exercises, participants convened into a general session. HW facilitators reported out to participants on the common themes that were discussed among their groups. Jim Hartnett closed the workshop by thanking the public for coming and for providing valuable input for the plan. Participants were encouraged to contact the Planning Department, Planning Board, or Master Plan Committee with any follow up questions or comments. The next workshop will discuss education and will be scheduled after the first of the year (2015).

ATTACHMENT A – Worksheets: Creative, Cultural and Historical

ATTACHMENT B – Worksheets: Capital Facilities and Human Services