

## **Town of Westport Master Plan Public Workshop #1 Summary**

The Westport Master Plan Committee (MPC) hosted the first public workshop on the Master Plan Update on Saturday, April 12, 2014 from 9:00 AM to 12:30 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:

- Natural Resources;
- Open Space and Recreation; and
- Water, Wastewater and Stormwater.

An interactive break-out exercise was used to elicit community input regarding local challenges, opportunities, goals and objectives related to these elements. Twenty-one (21) 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 and provided an introduction to the Master Plan Workshop, which included a summary of the work that has been done by the Master Plan Committee to date as well as an outlook on the work that needs to be conducted for the Master Plan Update in the future. 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 then provided a presentation, which included: an overview of the Master Plan Update process; a summary of the three elements that were the focus of this workshop (Natural Resources; Open Space and Recreation; and Water, Wastewater and Stormwater); and an introduction to the break-out exercise.

The presentation on the overview of the Master Plan update process included: 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.

The next portion of the presentation "set the stage" for the late morning break-out exercise by providing a summary of the challenges and opportunities related to each of the three focus elements. The draft goals and objectives related to each element were also briefly presented. HW then introduced the purpose and directions for the break-out exercise itself.

## **Break-out Exercises (10:00 – 11:30 AM)**

Participants had the opportunity to partake in two break-out groups on two different elements. The first break-out groups were randomly assigned, and the second were chosen by the participants. Therefore, each participant had the opportunity to voice his or her opinions related to the topic of his or her choice.

HW facilitators guided each break-out group through a discussion of challenges, opportunities, goals and objectives related to each of the three focus elements. A group discussion format was used to answer two questions:

1. What are the top challenges and opportunities related to [Element Topic (Water, Wastewater and Stormwater; Open Space and Recreation; or Natural Resources)]?
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. After the facilitator read the first question aloud, group members worked individually for a few minutes to write down their thoughts. Each group member was then provided the opportunity to share one idea. If time allowed, group members could provide additional ideas after each person shared their first idea. After everyone shared their ideas, the facilitator worked with the group to identify the top two or three common themes that emerged from the discussion of the first question, or individual points that really resonated.

This process was repeated for the second question. For the second question, a “bubble diagram” was used. The bubble diagram was presented on a poster, and included key phrases that described each goal and objective. This was intended to discourage word-smithing of the goals and objectives themselves and re-focus the group toward determining whether any larger issues, goals or objectives were absent.

The following includes a summary of the public input received through the break-out exercises for each element.

### Natural Resources

#### *Group #1*

Challenges and Opportunities (prioritized items are in bold font):

#### Challenges

- **Varying opinions based on geographical, political and economic interests/goals.**
- **Development and related planning for development.**
- **Funding for ongoing services and other related needs.**
- Stormwater runoff.
- Balancing public use and preservation/protection.

- Balancing development and infrastructure.
- Who is responsible for maintenance (e.g., downed trees, blocked dams)?
- Pollutants in soils that contaminate wells.
- High demand on resources (e.g., beach permits).
- Abuse of natural resources and litter.

Opportunities

- **Water conservation: education; allow graywater re-use; cisterns; protection; awareness of water recharge issues.**
- **Protect farming way of life, rural character, and Westport’s heritage of hunting, farming and fishing.**
- Public education on Westport’s water resources.

Comments on Draft Goals and Objectives:

- Objective 1.6, *Improve public understanding of actions that will help protect our natural resources*, should either be moved up to the first objective under Goal #1 or it should be its own goal.
- “Securing funding for watershed planning” should be a goal under Natural Resources or under Water, Wastewater and Stormwater.
- There should be an action item under Objective 2.1, *Implement recently adopted by-laws designed to guide sustainable development*, to better incentivize the bylaws (e.g., LID bylaw) for developers so that they are used more frequently.
- In addition to the action items provided for Objective 1.6, *Improve public understanding of actions that will help protect our natural resources*, there should be action items that address the following:
  - Address public apathy about natural resources.
  - Have a multi-pronged approach to communication that incorporates as many mechanisms as possible, which includes direct mail.
  - Recognize the seasonal population and the public education that is required to reach this audience.
  - Provide a central location for communication, and ensure public awareness of it.
  - Work on a watershed scale, and collaborate regionally with other towns in the watershed.

*Group #2*

Challenges and Opportunities (prioritized items are in bold font):

Challenges

- Preventing degradation and pollution of natural resources.
- Achieving understanding of long-term effects of natural resources.
- Balancing protection of resources while allowing public access.
- Enforcement of environmental degradation of natural resources.
- Collaboration and coordination of town departments and resources.
- Balancing current use of land to insure Westport’s heritage.
- Balancing costs versus protection.
- Balance new development and natural resource protection.

## Opportunities

- **Promote spirit of sharing, responsibility and ownership over natural resources.**
- **Educate the public about threats to the aquifer, drinking water; disseminate information effectively.**
- What are our natural resources? There is a need to assess them, prioritize them, and quantify what they are.
- More public awareness of natural resources – education of importance of protecting resources.
- Explore ways to reduce trash and keep the environment clean.
- Work with homeowners and the agricultural community regarding fertilizer runoff for nitrogen reduction and impact on resources.
- Draw more on federal Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).
- Consider replacing current Open Space Residential District (OSRD) bylaw with Open Space Design (OSD) bylaw.

## Comments on Draft Goals and Objectives:

- Objective 1.6, *Improve public understanding of actions that will help protect our natural resources*, should be moved up to the first objective under Goal #1. It should also be expanded to incorporate the concept of improving public sense of ownership over natural resources.
- Objective 1.1, *Improve protections for beaches and waterfront areas*, should explicitly include riverfront areas and streams.
- In addition to the action items provided for Objective 1.1, *Improve protections for beaches and waterfront areas*, there should be an action item that addresses the need to protect beaches and waterfront areas for the purpose of public use of these resources.
- In addition to the action items provided for Objective 1.2, *Decide upon and initiate measures for implementing nitrogen reduction to meet TMDL targets in the Westport River watershed*, there should be an action item that addresses the need to incorporate the projected impacts of climate change.
- In addition to the action items provided for Objective 1.6, *Improve public understanding of actions that will help protect our natural resources*, there should be action items that addresses the following:
  - Need to increase signage about natural resources, similar to the signage provided for Horseneck Beach.
  - Need public education about the importance of wetlands.
- There should be an objective under Goal 2, *To guide and control future development in order to sustain Westport's bountiful natural resources and assure that these resources are enjoyed by future generations*, that addresses the need to work watershed scale, and collaborate regionally with other towns in the watershed. **Note that Group #1 also mentioned the need for this, but suggested it as an action item under Objective 1.6, *Improve public understanding of actions that will help protect our natural resources*.**
  - There should be an action item under this objective relating to the fact that working regionally will help with securing state and federal level grant funding.
- There should be an additional objective under Goal 2, *To guide and control future development in order to sustain Westport's bountiful natural resources and assure that*

*these resources are enjoyed by future generations, that addresses the need to incorporate climate change considerations.*

## Open Space and Recreation

### *Group #1*

Challenges and Opportunities (prioritized items are in bold font):

#### Challenges

- **Entry ways to open spaces, including beaches, are littered with trash**
  - People are not taking out what they take in
  - There are no trash facilities
- **Parking is limited at existing facilities and resources.**
- **Limited river access with parking; limited ocean access with parking.**
- **Additional athletic fields are needed, such as facilities for basketball, baseball, and softball. It is difficult to get practice time.**
- **Not doing a very good job providing recreational opportunities or access to existing resources for the very young and very old. Not necessarily disabled, but may have limited abilities.**
- **It is unclear who does maintenance of public open spaces (trails, trash, etc.) and where resources will come from to support maintenance.**
- Hicks Bridge boat ramp is damaged.
- There are no designated areas for water sports on the river (water skiing)
- Running and biking is difficult on Main Road towards the water
- There lacks a “joyful experience of sharing resources.” Can folks be encouraged to share their access to river or other natural areas for the public good?
- Trash is disposed of at public receptacles
- Forge Pond – there is no maintenance of pathways and they are difficult to pass. Who does this? The Land Trust?
- There is a lack of off-road recreational walking paths and trails. Some should be paved to accommodate those with different abilities.
- Overnight parking for boat ramp is needed.

#### Opportunities

- **An indoor public fitness center at the high school**
- **Work with private property owners to connect with public open space through trails. Develop ways they can be relieved of liability, policing and trash pick-up.**
- **Publish what is available (public open spaces) and where to access. More P.R.**
- Develop trails near the river
- Organize a “hazardous waste day”, and include farmers
- Promote trash collection Creation of a dog park.
- The Town is not recognizing potential opportunities at Horseneck Beach. Could the Town get special access/rates for entry? Holding local events?

Comments on Draft Goals and Policies

- Should the goal *Preserve the quality of natural resources*” and its related policies be in this chapter?
- It was commented that the first three goals and policies did a good job covering open space, but there needed to be more for *Enhance indoor and outdoor recreation*.
  - Promote more recreation
  - Improvements need to be made
  - Use landscapes and natural resources for recreation and provide more access [recreation that has a lesser impact on resources like boating, walking trails, bike paths, etc.]
- Add an objective to make sure public ways are known and accessible. Promote them, improve access, and develop a campaign that encourages the respect of natural resources to instill a sense of ownership by users.
- Use public/private partnerships for maintenance. Look for alternative funding sources.
- Expand *Enhance access for disabled persons* to add or include the very young and very old. Seniors may not be disabled but might have limited abilities.

## Group #2

Challenges and Opportunities (prioritized items are in bold font):

### Challenges

- **There is no disabled access to local beaches. There is a lot of ground to cover from the parking lot to the beach.**
- **There is a need for more pathways for walking. DNRT has done a good job.**
- **There is a lack of information about what open spaces are open to the public. It is not on a website and there is no signage.**
- **There needs to be more town support for “recreation,” including programs for all ages. This includes funding and staff. The master plan should explore this more.**
- Roads are narrow for on-street bike paths.
- A dog park is needed in town. People go to Attleboro.
- Projects are not finished. A lot has been started and not done. Some are public and some are private. Construction of athletics fields was an example.
- A recreation center is needed.
- Preserving open space to benefit the environment and community members.
- Securing funding for recreational opportunities for our youth.
- Balancing real estate tax exemption and public benefit. 4,000 acres was preserved in the last 10 years by the Trust which resulted in a loss of revenue. Need to identify the public benefit.
- Traffic
- We are an increasingly aging community. We are not considered disabled.

### Opportunities

- **To increase disabled access to local beaches**
  - There is an old road behind Horseneck Beach that is used for emergency access.

- The road near Baker Beach – who owns this? State? This might provide easier access.
- Let it be known that state beaches are free to those 65 and older.
- **There is an opportunity to share and integrate resources between the town and the schools. Dartmouth has done a lot of programs. Costs could be shared.**
- **Students doing community service can help with trail maintenance.**
- Connect to a regional bike path system along tracks in the north end. Can connect to Fall River and Cape Cod. Could continue west to Rhode Island/Warren/Bristol. This would tie communities together.
- The Trust is trying to sign its properties.
- Trust members to volunteer with maintaining trails more regularly.
- Have community input to help recreation committee develop programming. Identify low cost projects and programs and look for alternative forms of funding.
- There is unused talent in the community (retirees).
- Look for business partnerships and sponsorships for recreational funding. Example was Fall River Celebrates America.
- Some streets can be made more bike friendly.

#### Comments on Draft Goals and Policies

- There should be a new goal: *Balance real estate tax with public benefit*. Under this goal the town should evaluate the funding impact and public benefit, ensuring there is a public benefit or intended public benefit.
- Broaden “disabled persons”: Enhance access for a range of abilities.
- Enhance recreation by identifying funding sources for maintenance.
- Improve town-wide recreation and include schools. The schools own large amounts of land for recreation.
- Look for alternative ways for maintenance. High school youth; UMASS-D and BCCC have community service requirements; and the Sheriff’s office could also be a resource.
- Increase opportunities for walking.

#### Water, Wastewater and Stormwater

##### *Group #1*

Challenges and Opportunities (prioritized items are in bold font):

##### Challenges

- **Educate public/participation about the overall capacity of drinking water.**
  - **Future projection.**
- Cloudy/green water.
  - Well water.
  - Route 6 side.
  - Filtration.
- Runoff pollution.
- “Creative stormwater.”
  - Town/developers’ reluctance.

- Change people’s way of thinking.
- Farm runoff.
  - Floodplain issues.
- How’s the landfill?
- Pay for improvement.
- More urbanized areas have no centralized services.
- Funding.
- “Don’t tell me what to do” attitude.

#### Opportunities

- **Individual opportunities to remediate existing problems beyond maintenance.**
- Moving away from Title 5.
- People can contribute.
- Nitrogen load metric.
- OSRD rarely used – opportunity to revise.
- Water testing (free).
- Aquaculture as a filter.
- Bridge at East Beach – flushing.
- Subsidies?
- Management system?
- Comprehensive water plan.
- Coordinate with Fall River.
- Water Resource Committee.
- Provide a Big Picture.

#### Comments on Draft Goals and Objectives:

- Generally, there should be more focus on education.
- Need to incorporate the issue that many homeowners in the problem areas with failing systems do not have the ability to pay for upgrades.

#### *Group #2*

#### Challenges and Opportunities (prioritized items are in bold font):

##### Challenges

- Over-development and associated runoff and wastewater.
- Town-owned land – need to clean out.
- Septic system/wells – failures affect neighbors.
- Septic design.
- School system water quantity (e.g., High School).
- Street runoff (volume).
- Title 5 on the river.
- Watershed goes into Fall River, Dartmouth, Little Compton, Tiverton.
- Stormwater Management where State is responsible (Rt. 6 and 177).
- Commercial areas that have small lots.
- Balance with recreation and public access.



- School septic systems are problematic.
- Runoff from Harbor and River; topography is an issue.
- Funding.

#### Opportunities

- Hazardous waste day.
- Identify sites for future wells (1995 study).
- River “Title 5 Endangered Embayment.”
- Bylaws for existing development.
- TMDL values from state.
  - Comp Plan would result.
  - Enforcement issue provides motivation.
  - Where are the pipes?
- Shared systems (specifically as they relate to commercial areas on small lots).
- Incentives for good development.
- Regional approach.
- Coordinate groups.
- Balance Title 5.
- Research and use A/I systems – push this issue.
- Education.
- Options needed for really tough lots.
- Water underlies all decisions.

#### **Closing (11:30 AM – 12:30 PM)**

After the break-out exercises, participants convened into a general session. HW facilitators reported out to participants on the top challenges and opportunities that were discussed among their groups, as well as the modifications that were suggested for the draft goals and objectives. Jim Hartnett, Westport Town Planner, then closed the meeting, thanking the public for coming to the workshop 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. Participants were also invited to attend the next three Master Plan public workshops, which will be held in Fall, 2014.