

The Westwood We Want: Visioning Workshop,
October 2, 2010
The Kickoff to the Comprehensive Plan Update
Thurston Middle School, 9:00 am to 12:00 pm

WELCOME & OVERVIEW BY TOWN OFFICIALS

- 1) Board of Selectmen Chairperson Nancy Hyde made welcoming remarks and introduced town officials and explained how important it was to begin the Plan update process. She also gave a report on the Westwood Station land sale.
- 2) Planning Board Chairman Steve Rafsky explained the central role of the Planning Board in long-range planning, established by state law in every community. He also summarized the makeup of the newly appointed Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee.
- 3) Planning Board Secretary Jack Wiggin, who was involved in the process leading up to the 2000 Plan, gave an overview of that effort, explaining that the driving issues were growth in general, preserving open space and community character. Growing the economic base and upgrading community facilities were major secondary issues. He pointed out that Westwood and the world were significantly different today. He showed PowerPoint images of growth and development since 2000 and the protected open space supply in that same time frame, as gauges of balanced land use.
- 4) Town Administrator Mike Jaillet added to the dialogue on the pressing need for an updated plan and introduced the breakout group structure for this Workshop.
- 5) From the participants in attendance, Diane Thornton asked what would happen if other issues emerged in the discussion and Mr. Rafsky replied that certainly other topical issues and groups could be added in the future.

BREAKOUT GROUP REPORTING SUMMARIES

Community Character

Spokesperson: Carol Lewis

Facilitator: Nora Loughnane

- 1) In defining Westwood's character, a number of terms come to mind: rural or semi-rural, green, historic, small, 4 principal roadway corridors, safe to live in.
- 2) What are the risks to community character from changes to the town?
Residential and other growth can have a negative impact on schools and municipal facilities. Economic diversity of WW residents is declining, reducing the ability of others to move or to stay here. The visual charm decreases as trees and fields are turned into housing.
- 3) What tools and resources can we build upon to protect or enhance community character?
Some are physical, some involve human interaction.

Community participation in civic affairs, special projects (e.g. community garden)

Community events, such as a Westwood Day, preferably in rotating locations

Physical connections between different parts of town, even modest ones such as signs, trees, sidewalks and trails, etc.
Intra-town transportation and improved pedestrian and bike access
Fostering better communications: web; direct outreach to entire town.

- 4) The questions/comments from other participants included the following:
Sel. Chair Nancy Hyde asked about examples of community events/projects. Westwood Day or Old Home Day; annual Police and Fire open houses, were cited. Other resident mentioned interfaith activities.

Breakout Group Members:

Jane Wiggin
Kathy Ready
Mark Luhtanan
Ed Cortas
Carol Lewis
Gloria

Community Services, Facilities and Recreation

Spokesperson: Dave Krumsiek
Facilitator: Mike Jaillet

- 1) The following public (and in some cases private) facilities were cited, in no particular order:

- A town-wide bike route and trail system
- Improvement or relocation of Islington Fire Station
- Expansion of senior center
- Improvement or expansion of main Fire Station
- Assuring water quality protection at University Ave, regardless of what develops there.
- Expanding natural gas distribution system
- Enhancing public affairs with greater use of technology, such as webcam coverage of more than just town meeting.
- Upgrade of town hall
- Development of town center into an enhanced central village
- Better maintenance of existing facilities
- Upgrade of older schools
- More senior housing alternatives

- 2) The questions/comments from other participants included the following:
John Cummings talked about starting to recycle old schools to new uses.
Mary Beth Persons felt that sidewalks should be built on Nahatan St. as well as Gay St.
Dave Krumsiek talked about the need to add and upgrade various recreation facilities, as did Mary Beth Persons.
Bruce Montgomery brought up the idea of a single town center instead of two disconnected ones.

Breakout Group Members:

Dave Krumsiek

Diane Thornton
Mary Beth Persons
Jennifer Kinnear

Housing

Spokesperson: Barbara McDonald

Facilitator: Barbara McDonald

- 1) The diversity of housing stock, and thus the diversity of the population, had decreased.
- 2) The town now has about 20% elderly (about 3400 persons) and their housing needs are increasing. About 50% of the town is now over 50 years old. This market is extremely underserved in terms of housing options within WW. Both affordability and other the available types of dwelling units are deficient.
- 3) Young adults, many of whom grew up here, are another underserved population segment; they can't afford to live here.
- 4) The Housing Authority owns only 8 or 9 units.
- 5) There are issues of reaching out directly to seniors to determine and begin to address their housing needs; this group does not always have the mobility or technological or logistical know-how to pursue options.
- 6) The location of new units will be a tough issue.
- 7) Energy efficiency is important and new units or rehabilitated units should follow the stretch code if adopted.
- 8) The questions/comments from other participants included the following:
 - A resident suggested sending a questionnaire about housing needs out with the town census.
 - Pam Kane said the houses built here are much too big to be affordable; WW needs more modest housing, but to do that, we need to give developers enough incentive (unit Density) to be economical.
 - Dan Evans: we should allow more conversion of single family homes.
 - John talked about a Youth Lot subsidized land purchase program.

Breakout Group Members:

Barbara McDonald
Jerry Wolfe
Gayle
Pat Larkin
Mary Gens
Angie Tibets
Stephen Shinopoulos

Open Space, Natural Resources and Historic Preservation

Spokesperson: John Masterson

Facilitators: Jack Wiggin
Assisted by Karon Catrone

- 1) Find the right balance between conservation and development.
- 2) Conservation land not always cared for adequately. Mark conservation land better and establish a system of marked walking trails. Improve access for seniors; maybe transportation to the sites.
- 3) Improve quality of the open spaces; establish a program to remove invasive plant species.
- 4) Create educational information about invasives for homeowners.
- 5) Cemeteries need attention and maybe consideration about whether there is sufficient space.
Related idea to create a green cemetery: interment of non-embalmed bodies in biodegradable coffin or shroud, without concrete vaults or liners; no raised stones. Usually serve a dual purpose of natural burial and conservation of open land. Allowable under Mass. law. Often established by nonprofit organization.
- 6) Pursue "green community" status.
- 7) Create a government center encompassing fire, police, town hall, veteran's sites.
- 8) Another civic center area encompasses the cemeteries, Obed Baker House, and Veterans Park. Improve connections among these properties. Improve the condition of the pond at the new cemetery.
- 9) Address McMansionization. Largest houses are energy inefficient, resource consumptive.
- 10) Update Open Space and Recreation Plan. There are still grant funds tied to it.
- 11) Limit growth by preserving land.
- 12) Adopt OSRD bylaw.
- 13) Acquire Buckmaster Pond
- 14) Dumping debris on conservation land is a problem.
- 15) Review the adequacy of fire and police access to and protection of conservation land
- 16) Establish a community garden
- 17) Focus on water resources: water conservation practices, educational information on limiting fertilizer usage
- 18) Pursue single-stream recycling to encourage greater participation. Establish recycling committee.
- 19) Improve decision making processes by local boards.
- 20) The questions/comments from other participants included the following:
Greg Agnew: The town cemetery is not in great condition.
Barbara McDonald: Likes the idea of community gardens.
Carol Lewis, Jane Wiggin: open air classrooms for learning about agriculture, plants and the environment are a good idea in schools.

John Masterson: The Boy scouts tried to establish a community garden at Currier Field but there seemed to be no interest.

Other resident: Recycling should be weekly, not every two weeks.

We need to think about resources long term, not in a short term expedient way, and this points to intergenerational commitment.

Breakout Group Members

Joe Clancy
John Masterson
Pam Kane
Karon Catrone
Dan Evans

Transportation

Spokesperson: John Craine

Facilitator: Jeff Bina

- 1) A town-wide bicycle route and trail system should be created.
- 2) Traffic is increasing, regardless of the economy.
- 3) Cut-through streets and dangerous intersections can often be improved and made safer by low-cost measures (signs, channelization and pavement markings, traffic enforcement, as well as with more intensive measures such as traffic calming
There should be a Safe Walk to School system constructed and a town-wide Walking master plan.
- 4) The town should seriously consider an intra-town shuttle bus or even a sub-regional system with abutting towns. Possibly school buses could be utilized.
- 5) The questions/comments from other participants included the following:
 - Mike Walsh—East St. Bridge is in poor condition and there's no crosswalk.
 - John Masterson—People do not respect the 20 mph school safety zones with the yellow blinking lights.
 - Mary Masi-Phelps—Many unneeded auto trips involve transporting kids to school, or other destinations.
 - Dan Evans—Traffic calming and sidewalks often go hand-in-hand.
 - John Masterson—Islington Commuter Rail Station—parking lot needs upgrading, it's gravel.
 - Other resident: Sidewalks are needed in many more locations.
 - Pam Kane—Idling cars at schools from waiting parents create CO pollution needlessly.

Breakout Group Members:

Steve Olanoff
Jan Marino
Warren Mayhew
John Craine

Economic Development

Spokesperson: Greg Agnew

Facilitator: Chris McKeown

- 1) There are empty storefronts and spaces on High Street.

- 2) Southwest Park at East St. Circle could become another ED node but there are some zoning constraints.
- 3) Nothing has really been done since the last Plan to address the enhancement and strengthening of the two town centers.
- 4) WW must be more business-friendly; "we're open for business."
- 5) The town's reputation with the state govt. in terms of business is of concern.
- 6) The non-Westwood Sta. parts of University Ave. represent underutilized industrial land and should be addressed.
- 7) Route One corridor needs to be addressed.
- 8) The whole zoning bylaw needs to be more "pragmatic" for business.
- 9) Send businesses who want to locate here to EDAB.
- 10) We should survey vacant land for development opportunity.
- 11) The sign laws are too strict or confining in some instances.
- 12) We should have more streamlined permitting processes across the board. There should be better lines of communication between the town govt. and the business community, and possibly a local trade association.
- 13) The questions/comments from other participants included the following:
 - Sel. Chair Nancy Hyde suggested a "Buy Local" campaign.

Breakout Group Members:

Mary Masi-Phelps
Greg Agnew
Marie Cortas
Mike Walsh
Bruce Montgomery
Randy Fay

Mr. Rafsky thanked everyone and adjourned the Workshop, just before noon.