

Final Report of the June 19, 2014 Strategic Planning Retreat



Jodi Ross – Town Manager

John Mangiaratti – Assistant Town Manager

October 10, 2014

Table of Contents

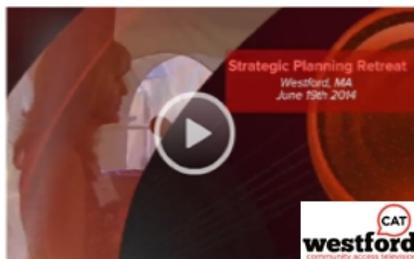
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
SUMMARY OF GROUP DISCUSSIONS:	2
Community Housing	2
Protecting and Improving Our Water Resources	3
Recreation Master Plan	4
Agricultural Commission Initiatives	6
SAMPLE OF PARTICIPANT COMMENTS FROM SURVEY	9
2014 STRATEGIC PLANNING RETREAT PARTICIPANTS	9

Executive Summary

Our fourth annual Strategic Planning Retreat was held on June 19, 2014 at Kimball Farm in Westford. We had perfect weather for the event and 137 participants joined us for an evening of information sharing, questions, and constructive input from our residents. This year we introduced a new format which included diving the group discussions into picnic table-level conversations led by a facilitator knowledgeable in the subject. This format provided a greater opportunity for residents to speak and allowed for a more interactive discussion. As shown in the group summaries below, these sessions produced new ideas and raised important questions for the community to consider. According to responses on the pre-registration survey approximately 52% of the participants attended the event for the first time. We also conducted a participant survey which indicated overall satisfaction with the event and provided constructive comments to help improve the retreat next year.



All of the materials distributed in the packet and presented in the meeting are available online at www.westfordma.gov/retreat.



Westford Cable Access Television (WCAT) produced an excellent video documenting the 2014 Strategic Planning Retreat. WCAT added text to

the screen to help the viewers understand the questions that were asked. Here is the link to view the video:

<http://www.westfordcat.org/channels/education-channel/special/strategic-planning-retreat-2014/> In this report you will find key points highlighted for each group discussion followed by a brief summary of the results of the participant surveys.

Summary of Group Discussions:

Community Housing

In summary there appears to be significant support for affordable housing; the need is noted, and those present were complementary of the work the Committee has done to date. Many were surprised at the number and location of affordable units, not realizing affordable units were in the areas indicated. Feedback was strong and supportive and consistent to some degree with the overall views and goals of the AHC.

Summary of main points:

- There should be a variety of housing in the town; single family, large, small, townhouse and apartment style, rentals and ownership
- Actual consensus among the groups; Westford raised kids can't afford to live in the town they grew up in and seniors can't afford to stay in the town they raised their families in
- Group felt there are not enough options/variety of choices for housing in Westford
- Group felt there were several areas lacking
- Need rentals
- More Senior housing options
- Smaller Single family
- Senior housing important but also needs to be tied to transportation
- Public Transportation is lacking in the town
- Affordable housing should be scattered throughout the Town, not consolidated in one location
- Small homes are being torn down for large ones can the Town purchase them for Affordable Housing?
- Discussion is needed on what is "Westfordable"
- No more large homes –felt Westford has enough big houses
- It is impossible to meet the Commonwealth goals of 10% with just new housing impossible, there is a need to convert existing homes
- Most important was that the group wants their opinions to be heard



Protecting and Improving Our Water Resources

The following summarizes some of the key issues and observations at the four discussion tables at this session:

- Discussed the many benefits of Westford’s plentiful water resources, which included recreational opportunities and drinking water supply. Conversations centered on three existing initiatives that share a common goal of improving and protecting our water assets. The three initiatives are the development of a Stormwater Management Master Plan, the Healthily Lakes & Ponds Collaborative and the Sustainable Water Management Initiative (SWMI).
- Swimming and recreation in and around Westford’s lakes and ponds seemed to be a high priority for the group in attendance.



The group noted that they were happy with the current quality and cost of drinking water. Group members shared personal stories about how they have enjoyed water bodies in town and near their homes – residents value the water-rich scenic landscape and appreciate opportunities to watch the abundant wildlife that make these water bodies and the surrounding area their home. There seemed to be consensus among the participants, that Westford’s water resources make a significant contribution to the quality of life in town and the character of the town.

- Discussed water quality and quantity concerns, which included:
 - Effects of water pollution, such as algal blooms
 - Swimmable lakes all the time
 - Invasive species
 - Encouraging water conservation and water reuse for both residents and municipal facilities
 - Education needed to link water withdrawals for drinking water to environmental impacts
 - Education needed to define stormwater, drain vs. sanitary sewer, and nonpoint source pollution
 - Suggestion that residents should adopt watershed-specific practices, such as no fertilizers, planting drought tolerant plant species, and increased septic system maintenance



- Discussed the cost of investing in our water resources and funding options. The group had many concerns about the cost of the three initiatives introduced during the session. Would the additional costs for SWMI be based on consumption and born by the water customers? How can the increased costs be fairly distributed to all that benefit from the water resources? There was a feeling among some group members that additional cost was expected and acceptable to manage water resources, but rate payers should see and understand the benefits of the increased investment (i.e., rate payers expect a higher level of service). The Town will need to keep residents and businesses informed of progress to meet short- and long-term goals.

Recreation Master Plan

The session on the Recreation Master Plan had participants spread out at five tables. There were a number of people who wandered in and participated or observed. Each facilitator had five questions for discussion:

- What is the best process for surveying the Town's residents for the Recreation Master Plan?
- What facilities should the Town have or develop?
- What programs should be offered or developed?
- How should additional areas, facilities, and programs be funded?
- What strategic goals or objectives should the Commission focus on for the next five years?
- What improvements should be made to areas, facilities, and programs



The Parks and Recreation Commission found the session helpful and it reinforced the need for a Recreation Master Plan. There was a wide variety of answers with some similarities. The information will be helpful as the Recreation Master Plan is developed. Below are the notes from each of the tables.

What is the best process for surveying the Town's residents for the Recreation Master Plan?

- Survey townspeople similar to East Boston Camps Naming survey
- Utilize website, Newsletter, Westford Eagle, Get coaches to pass it out. Piggyback the census. Piggyback on Recreation Brochure.
- School binder distribution to 5th grade and under for info
- Email – send out emails to all lists associated with the town – schools. Enclose something with the census, tax bill, survey the users when they come for activities, put the survey on brochure.



What facilities should the Town have or develop and what programs should be offered or developed?

- American Ninja Gym
- Winter rink
- Dog park, “central park” , dog training, dog agility
- Pool - Swimming, senior, pt, water aerobics, multiple pools with center for multiple uses
- Indoor track. Walking , XC skiing,
- Cricket
- Concerts every week on town common. Movie night on town common or other fields.
- Bike friendly “share the road” sign.
- Teen center
- Gymnastics

What improvements should be made to areas, facilities, and programs

- Restrooms & shade for playgrounds (i.e. Edwards Beach)
- Nutting road restrooms and snack shack
- Refurbish playgrounds and create indoor playground
- Work with Roudenbush for activities, like music and other programs
- Crew is growing
- Find a new, bigger field for cricket
- Could use t-ball field for a BB court – but senior center parking shares w/that field or maybe we could use the t-ball field for activities seniors would like to do – pickle ball, bocce ball, horse shoe pits, croquet
- No gym for adult basketball

What strategic goals or objectives should the Commission focus on for the next five years?

- Recreation provides a way to be healthy, active – gives kids something to do. Improves the quality of life for all.
- Make improvements to town farm. The facility limits potential for the program to successfully self sustain.
- Move recreation dept. to better buildings
- There’s land behind Stony Brook that was intended for recreation but it never happened
- Incorporate walking trails around existing fields into existing trails map
- Provide a map of parks and recreation facilities on town webpage.

How should additional areas, facilities, and programs be funded?

- Collaborate with companies (red hat), Regional – get other towns to help out
- Pool – aquatic center combine with other towns and schools. Pool and rowing tanks would help to fund the programs.
- Look at using solar lights to provide field lighting and solar panels on recreation center

Agricultural Commission Initiatives

The Agricultural Commission, reorganized in the Spring, 2014, engaged the community in a discussion about the future of agriculture in Westford.

Westford has historically been a ‘rural’ community with an agricultural heritage. At one time in our history, nearly every household had a milk cow and a few laying hens in their backyard as well as a garden to provide food. Commercial agriculture was primarily apple orchards, dairy cows, and lumber. In recent years many of Westford’s farms have been developed into neighborhoods.

The Agricultural Commission’s goal is to look forward, not back, and envisions a new kind of agriculture. The vision is for an agricultural economy that benefits the community in the following ways:



- Economic – create local jobs and keep food dollars local
- Environmental – relying on food shipped from the West Coast or foreign countries requires significant use of fossil fuels
- Health – Local foods are healthier because they are harvested and consumed at the peak of freshness
- Community – Farms bring neighbors together and teach children (and adults!) how food is grown

Doing some rough math, the Agricultural Commission estimates an average household grocery bill of \$150/week. With approximately 8,000 households, this means our town’s collective grocery bill is \$62 million dollars. We are asking what percent of this is reasonable to localize. Using a watermelon to demonstrate 5% (\$3.1 million) and 1% (\$624,000), participants were able to visualize what a small ‘slice’ of our food budget would be represented if we could produce 1% to 5% of our food locally. Brian Donahue, a professor at Brandeis University, has proposed a goal of 50% regional food production for New England by 2060. The Agricultural Commission would like Westford to proactively participate in that vision. Strategic Planning Participants were asked to vote on the Agricultural Commission’s Top 10 Priorities using dots to vote and to suggest others. Below are the ten priorities with the number of votes received.

- (57) Explore potential town-owned spaces for community gardening
- (43) Advocate and provide resources for agricultural literacy programs in the Westford public school curriculum

- (39) Address environmental concerns related to insecticide/pesticide use by town & residents
- (27) Map farms and farmlands to match interested commercial and recreational farmers with available land
- (27) Recommend actions by the town on land use programs that would help agriculture thrive, including Chapter 61, tax valuation, APR and other preservation programs and right-to-farm bylaws
- (24) Explore and recommend relevant best practices to maximize residents' access to locally grown produce – through Farmers Market and other potential producer-collaborative models
- (21) Provide homesteading advice and resources – help residents with backyard chickens, beekeeping, gardening, food preservation, etc.
- (15) Create a formal town survey indentifying farmers' and the community's needs, issues, and concerns
- (14) Host community events that promote local connections to agriculture such as town-wide celebration of National Food Day on Oct 24, 2014
- (12) Share information and resources relevant to small farm operations

Additional idea: Encourage a composting business or community composting site.

Summary of the table conversations:

Gardening/Community Gardens

- Brainstorming potential land for Community Gardens:
 - Day Pumpkin Patch (numerous questions about the property – current & potential use)
 - Parks (there is already parking and other amenities at these sites)
 - Meadowbrook Farm
 - Part of the new affordable housing project being expanded at Stony Brook School/Veterans Park.
- Have several community gardens – one in each section of Westford
- Form a committee of one or two Ag Comm members and several other volunteers to gather best practices from other community gardens (namely in Acton & Concord)
- Work with Westford Garden Club to see if there is interest there in getting involved.
- Help people learn how to garden organically



- But we need public support for this idea to work
- Extra produce could be used in community for low income/elderly/schools
- Need some way to keep out deer etc
- We have enough sports fields/rec areas
- Should use rain barrels for water
- Water will be an issue (access)
- Can farmers get a tax break for allowing community gardens? Need land survey?
- We need an incentive to get residents to give up (allow) land to be used for community gardens



Composting

- Composting is a business with tremendous potential because effective Oct, 2014, business rules are changing so that business producing a large volume of compost must compost instead of putting the waste into the waste stream.
- Work with Recycling Commission to promote use of compost bins in every backyard.

Education

- Educate townspeople about agriculture – through something like a weeklong school program, and include a field trip to a local farm.
- Make use of existing learning tools – raised beds and greenhouses – already at schools.
- As a messaging platform, we should emphasize nutrition.
- Work with healthy kid collation to help get Veggie U into the other 2 elementary schools. Also bring in livestock to the schools for the kids to learn about farms and farming

Expand Farms

- Create a Community Farm – land that commercial farmers can lease to grow and sell vegetables, flowers, herbs, or livestock.
- Work with Conservation Commission to identify any available/farmable land
- Work with experienced farmers (such as George Fletcher) to identify the best agricultural use for remaining agricultural spaces.
- Promote local CSAs even if not within Westford boundaries. See if they have any interest in expanding into Westford.
- Need to find out how much land is used for ag in the town
- Farmers should NOT sell to builders - leads to increased development
- Look into resources at Tufts New Entry Sustainable Farming Training program.
- Explore the possibility of an Westford farmstand, allows small farmers a retail location, maybe work with the high school and volunteers to staff it

- Having a market that would allow small farmers to sell without having to commit to the duration on the WFM
- Programs to intro residents into 'farming' (food production) and how to do it
- The farming image
- That anyone can do it
- That it is not just large scale
- Producing food for the community is an obtainable goal

Other:

- Bee keeping & its benefits to ag and gardens

Sample of Participant Comments from Survey

“I am impressed by how involved fellow residents are and how well the town receives our input”

“I wasn't sure I would like the format of having small discussions, since I didn't know as much about the topics. However, the facilitators were very helpful in keeping the conversation moving. The Housing discussion, in particular, with handouts, maps, and a list of questions, really helped to organize the conversation and keep it moving.”

“I liked that each topic was broken into smaller subgroups. That made it easier to participate and to hear than in prior years. In one session, they arranged so that there was an empty table between occupied tables, and that minimized noise and distraction from other subgroups as compared to the other session where subgroups were at adjacent tables.”

“Great venue - always good and current town concerns. Great energy in the participants.”

2014 Strategic Planning Retreat Participants

(Names as they were entered on sign-sheets)

Elizabeth Almeida	Dan Bush	Eli Demetri
Noel Almeida	Joel Cantos	Laura Dickey
Barbara Anderson	Zac Cataldo	Buffie Diercks
Mike Andrews	Ron Caterino	Jeff Diercks
Deb Banerjee	Kacy Caviston	Dawn Dillon
Dan Banks	Sam Chen	Mary Dominici
Kate Barratt	Sharon Chew	Jeremy Downs
Chris Barrett	Chauncey Chu	Muriel Drake
Tom Barry	Tom Clay	Jeanne Drula
Dani Battle	Christine Collins	Patty Dubey
Christine Berthold	Sandy Collins	Dave Earl
Rizvana Bhaiwala	Donald Costley	Connie Elkins
Robert Boonstra	Steve Cronin	carol engel
Dan Britko	Joan Croteau	Kris Erickson
Christopher Brooks	Paul Davies	Danielle Evans
Eddie Bruce	Denali Delmar	Scott Florio

Marilyn Frank
 Helen Fu
 Jeanne-Marie Furnary
 Marcy Gamester
 Jeffrey Geller
 Donna Eve Gould
 Kristina Greene
 David Gutfrod
 Sandra Habe
 Matthew Hakala
 Ken Hanly
 Sue Hanly
 Matthew Hanson
 Ellen Harde
 Scott Hazelton
 Donna Hernandez
 Pam Hicks
 Kate Hollister
 Karen Hudson
 Ernie Hyde
 Bill Kenison
 Andrew Kettering
 Chris Kluchman
 Erika Kohl
 Matthew Lewin
 Darren MacCaughey
 Hugh Maguire
 Tom Mahanna
 John Mangiaratti
 Anthony Martinez

Sandy Martinez
 Patti Mason
 Debbie Mathews
 Mark Mathews
 Bernie Meyler
 Jeff Morrisette
 Emily Mount
 Juliette Mount
 Danielle Mucciarone
 Margaret Murray
 Bill Nussbum
 Leela Obilichetti
 James O'Connell
 Mary O'Connell
 Dan O'Donnell
 Anastasia O'Malley
 John Parker
 Marco Philippon
 Bob Price
 Christine Pude
 Ellen Rainville
 Jodi Ross
 Kelly Ross
 Cori Ryan
 Terry Ryan
 Patricia Savage
 Emily Scerbo
 James Schuele
 Cheryl Serpe
 Timothy Shea

Holly Sheridan-Pritchard
 Mark Sleger
 Lauren Smith
 Ryan Smith
 Tom Spuhler
 Terry Stader
 Mike Stapp
 Zoe Stapp
 Paul Starratt
 Andrea Sweet
 Andrew Sylvia
 Bill Taffel
 Emily Teller
 Barbara and Raymond Theriault
 Susan Thomas
 Gloria Tu
 Bill Turner
 Mary Ellen Tynan
 Chuck Valois
 Drew Vernalia
 Pertti Vulli
 Mark Warren
 Mike Wells
 Karen Wiczynski
 Maciej Wiczynski
 Nancy Wimberg
 Thomas Wimberg
 Diane Wood
 Zhaohui Zhang

