

REPORT

2011 STRATEGIC PLANNING RETREAT



THURSDAY JUNE 23, 2011



TOPICS: Fiscal Issues • Capital Needs • Town Assets (buildings, roads, land) • Public Works Initiative • Pedestrian Safety • Noise & Public Nuisances • Land Use Policy Hot Topics • Master Plan Actions • Town Parking Issues • Development Update • Economic Development • Wireless Communication Facilities



TOWN OF WESTFORD

Office of the Town Manager

Town Hall

55 Main Street

WESTFORD, MA 01886

(978) 692-5501 FAX (978) 399-2557

TO: Board of Selectmen
cc: All Board, Committees, Commissions, Departments

FROM: Jodi Ross, Town Manager *Jodi Ross*

DATE: July 20, 2011

RE: Summary report from June 23 Strategic Planning Retreat

This is a summary report of our June 23, 2011 Strategic Planning Retreat. There is a significant amount of information included in this report, and I would like to thank both the board, and the many officials, department heads, and staff who contributed to the retreat itself, and to assembling this document.

This information was assembled based on verbal and written input received at the event, summaries compiled by the facilitators of the break-out sessions, and feedback we have received since June 23rd. Our intent of this report is to summarize the event and its results for public consideration, and sustain and build upon the cooperative spirit that was on display that evening.

I would like to highlight several key ideas that arose during our retreat and in the many follow-up discussions that have been held in the weeks since.

- There is broad public interest in hosting more events such as this. Our Master Plan calls for regular all-board events, and we believe that such regular collaboration can generate efficiencies by supporting coordinated efforts toward shared public policy goals.
- Some attendees felt that the agenda was ambitious, which resulted in inadequate time to fully consider discussion items, while also limiting their ability to engage in each session. Others supported the range of topics as timely and informative. In future retreat planning, we need to decide what the optimum number of program topics would be. If a smaller number of topics is agreed upon, we may consider other ways of broadly sharing information on a regular basis.
- As a companion to larger events such as this, it was suggested that it may be useful to host smaller policy-specific meetings regarding issues that fall

under multiple local jurisdictions or are of interest to multiple boards and the general public.

- One suggestion discussed among staff was to request periodic meetings with a policy topic or major decision on the agenda, invite all or relevant (to the issue) boards and committees, and encourage attendance by the various interested parties. The parking for the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail would be an example where elements of this topic relate to the Board of Selectmen, Recreation Commission, Planning Board, Tax Possession Sale Committee, public safety, highway and engineering departments, and the public as a whole. It was acknowledged that a topic-driven meeting would facilitate information sharing and advance a given topic toward resolution more efficiently.
- There was support for improving coordination of priorities among multiple boards and committees in order to provide clear direction to staff. An idea to encourage such shared prioritization would be to meet biannually to discuss action items that appear in the Master Plan, which would improve information sharing, ensure that longer-term policy goals maintain momentum, and facilitate regular discussions of overall town-wide priorities.
- We believe the event itself served as a beneficial catalyst, and that we were successful in sharing timely, significant information in a concise format. We also believe we were successful in facilitating public discussion in a relaxed environment (several commented that they enjoyed holding the event outdoors). If events such as this are held on a regular basis, we believe this will improve communication regarding which action items are receiving the greatest attention, and also encourage participants in such efforts to regularly self-evaluate progress and make adjustments as needed.

It is my understanding that future such retreats may be held on a semi-annual basis, as a corollary to Town Meeting, and to facilitate policy discussions in an informal setting. I look forward to working toward this outcome based on your direction and the public feedback received to date and going forward.

Thank you for your consideration of our report.

**Town of Westford
Strategic Planning Retreat
June 23, 2011 ~ 5:00 - 9:00 PM**



2011 Strategic Planning Event

- 5:00 Welcome and Opening Remarks**
- 5:40 Breakout Groups Session 1**
- 6:20 Dinner Break**
- 6:45 Breakout Groups Session 2**
- 7:30 Ice Cream Break**
- 7:45 Final Session**



Are you on FirstClass?

Remember you can access your town email account at www.westfordma.gov/staff. Contact the Town Manager's Office if you need help with your account or would like to request one.

Do you receive meeting agendas to your email?

Visit www.westfordma.gov/meetings for the public meeting calendar, agendas, minutes and general public meeting information.

Also Visit www.westfordma.gov/subscriber to follow us on Email, RSS and Twitter.

Break Out Groups

Session 1 5:40PM - 6:20PM		
1-A - New Development	1-B - Financial Issues in FY13 and beyond	1-C - Economic development with a focus on commercial zoning along Rte 110, Signs
An update of what's going on around town and discussion about how it relates to the town's ability to maintain strong service delivery. This session will have a map and a list describing new development projects. Come to this session to discuss how growth impacts the provision of town services (water, fire, police, schools, etc.). Give feedback about the current steps taken during the development review process to address new residential and commercial growth.	This group will examine the financial issues that impact the town in FY13 and future years including an analysis of revenues and expenditures, explanation of OPEB liabilities, and description of efforts made by PWIC to implement consolidation and centralization to reduce costs. Potential topics will include exploring past and present budget models, policy decisions, the effectiveness of revenue enhancements and spending reductions, and their affect on long range forecasts.	Significant commercial growth is ongoing and anticipated along Route 110, the Town's primary corridor for economic growth, with related infrastructure investments recent and upcoming. The Comprehensive Plan calls for zoning changes to better manage both the form, location and design of commercial development; this discussion will focus on these issues and their importance to ensure that the Town strengthens its tax base in a responsible manner.
Session 2 6:45PM - 7:30PM		
2-A - Examining Municipal Property and Capital Needs	2-B - Parking and Pedestrian/Bicycle Safety	2-C - Wireless Communication Facilities (cell towers), Nuisance/ Public Noise
This group will review how the inventory of town owned properties meets the needs of the departments and expectations of the community. We will discuss short term and long term capital needs and examine the policy impacts of acquiring, disposing, and reusing properties.	How will the town provide for pedestrian safety in a "community of villages" that do not connect with a continuous network of sidewalks and other accessible pedestrian paths? Will an increasing number of cyclists be able to travel safely in and around Westford? How will the town address parking issues at Town Center and the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail? You need to attend this session if you think these are important questions or if you have answers to these questions.	Recent changes in Federal law and increasing consumer demand for new "4G" digital wireless services puts new pressure on Westford's wireless facility regulations. Changes to Westford's bylaw are under consideration and meanwhile, opportunity knocks – municipal land could be part of an overall strategy to manage wireless infrastructure deployment. Noise and nuisance issues, related to wireless and otherwise, will also be considered.

For more information go to: <http://www.westfordma.gov/tm/retreat>

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Breakout Groups	2
1A: New Development	2
1B: Financial Issues	4
1C: Economic Development	6
2A: Municipal properties & Capital	9
2B: Parking and Pedestrian/Bicycle Safety	12
2C: Wireless/Noise/Nuisance	14
Action Item Dot Voting	17
Feedback Survey Results	19
Online Survey Results	21
Appendix: Table of Attendees	26

Attendance

Of the 100 who registered their name upon entering the Strategic Planning Retreat:

- 36 were members of Town or School boards and committees. 20 different boards and committees were represented.
- 27 were Westford employees.
- 22 identified themselves as residents with no other affiliation.

It should be noted that some employees may also be members of boards and committees and that some individuals may have multiple affiliations. These people have only been recorded in one category.

Group 1A: New Development

Chris Kluchman, Town Planner, lead facilitator

Session Objectives:

An update of what's going on around town and discussion about how it relates to the town's ability to maintain strong service delivery. This session will have a map and a list describing new development projects. Come to this session to discuss how growth impacts the provision of town services (water, fire, police, schools, etc.). Give feedback about the current steps taken during the development review process to address new residential and commercial growth.



To view posters presented during this session, please visit http://www.westfordma.gov/pages/government/towndepartments/westfordma_townmanager/documents/Retreatdocs/110622newdevel.pdf

Facilitator Summary Points

The session was a combination of questions / comments from the audience and feedback/education from the staff members in attendance. There were observations that multi-family developments (such as 40B projects) brings a bigger service burden. Problem of limitations for applying mitigation to new development – mitigation requirements from town must have a “nexus” or reasonable relationship to the project's impact. Different departments function in different ways – water department is an enterprise fund and has distinct charges for system impact and hookups for new development. Other services such as Fire and Police must rely on the general fund. The Fire and Police chiefs expressed concern that their ability to provide quality service has reached a “tipping point” where quality of service will start to degrade without increased revenue support.

Discussion Notes

- ◆ # of children in each development because of school? What are overall facilities? Demands?
 - Staffing levels for fire (police) are decreasing with level funding
- ◆ What studies have been done?
 - Avalon Bay said 11 calls/year, reality is 36 calls/year.
- ◆ Big plan to be able to track the impact to town services in relation to planned/permitted developments
- ◆ What about regionalization? Variety of town services
 - Some has been studied mostly appropriate for smaller towns
 - Special equipment can be easily shared
 - Pros and cons; need to charge other towns for use
- ◆ Chapter 40B housing is a problem for Westford.
- ◆ Projection of increased tax revenue->How do we look at that and how does it relate to town services such as police/fire/schools/roads
 - Water department operates differently
 - Other things go into general fund

BREAKOUT SESSIONS

- Ambulance is an enterprise fund and paramedics will soon move to get put into enterprise fund.
- ◆ Town residents don't have way to limit development.
 - How do we work to increase fees and funds that adequately fund our services?
 - Higher density with 40B brings a new demand.
- ◆ Where does the money go?
 - General fund-impacted by reduction in state funds
- ◆ Is there a tipping point where we will see severe reduction in service?
 - FD->"I think we're there" increases in #s in last few years
 - HWY->There is a long term cost to developments e.g. new roads being accepted by town meeting
 - roads accepted in mid 90s are now reaching end of life
 - Budget for future
 - Police-> We are stretched thin – using 1980 min. manning standards
- ◆ Need to increase revenues
 - Grow the industrial base
 - What about Route 40 as another growth area
 - Why limitation to three stories?
 - Look at zoning standards to allow for more tax base
- ◆ Do we know what kind of development brings most \$?
- ◆ What kind of town do we want to be and then make changes to get there
 - High tech is being pursued now
- ◆ Can we quantify the amount of impact to the fire water and then assess the new development a fee?
 - Need a direct nexus to proposed development
 - Catch 22—good town, schools, therefore we attract new residents, more employment, more services
- ◆ Do we have tax incentives?
 - Yes, because no split tax rate
 - Only at state level (TIF)
- ◆ Master planning for services and facilities needs to relate to development
- ◆ Several years ago there was a delay/moratorium on residential development
 - Residential growth management
 - The way it worked was not triggered much
- ◆ Master plan revised these provisions and it didn't make sense to continue
- ◆ New methods of growth management – FAR (Floor Area Ratio) and others
- ◆ New advances in septic
- ◆ District improvement financing (DIF) for sub area improvements
 - How about using the historic villages as districts that could also do physical improvements in addition to zoning districts
 - E.g. use these boundaries for voluntary / funded amenities – benches, banners, etc.

Group 1B: Financial Issues

Dan O'Donnell, Budget Director, Lead Facilitator

Session Objectives

This group will examine the financial issues that impact the town in FY13 and future years including an analysis of revenues and expenditures, explanation of OPEB liabilities, and description of efforts made by PWIC to implement consolidation and centralization to reduce costs. Potential topics will include exploring past and present budget models, policy decisions, the effectiveness of revenue enhancements and spending reductions, and their affect on long range forecasts.



To view posters presented during this session, please visit http://www.westfordma.gov/pages/government/towndepartments/westfordma_townmanager/documents/Retreatdocs/WhatisOPEB.pdf

Facilitator Summary Points

In the first section, the financial model used by the Town was presented to the breakout group. Expenditures are expected to increase at a faster rate than revenues, leaving the Town 2.7M below minimum recommended reserves in FY13 and 7.5M below in FY14. Discussion focused on questions regarding health insurance, fees for school activities, the possibility of an override, and regionalization. Second, a brief overview of the OPEB (Other Post Employment Benefits) was presented to help clarify what exactly the 67M liability is for the Town, and to discuss if and how it should be funded. Lastly, the Public Works Initiative gave a brief overview of their committee, and citizens were interested in hearing reports about their progress and how to become more involved.

Discussion Notes

- ◆ Question about how fees are set and where fees are in the budget numbers
- ◆ Question about what “aggressive” budget projection means
- ◆ Question about parents paying for school children’s activities
 - They already do?
- ◆ What is the level of service we want in the town?
- ◆ Can’t make any project in School or other departments while fixed costs rise and money for our major purposes are reduced. He thinks an override is needed.
- ◆ Do our EEs get better benefits?
- ◆ Can we partner with larger group for purchasing health insurance?
 - We already do
- ◆ Must put together many small things—Direct deposit, less frequent payroll
 - Reorganize with attrition
- ◆ Expand commercial tax base
 - Does commercial pay same tax rate?
 - Should they pay a greater difference?

BREAKOUT SESSIONS

- ◆ Procurement – consolidate procurement
- ◆ Where are we in paying down debt load?
 - “We have one of highest debt loads” – true or false?
- ◆ Reimbursement rate at time when buildings were done received 65%. Now would be 35%.
- ◆ 26% of population is school age kids
- ◆ OPEB
 - What options does the Town have in regards to Retiree Health Insurance?
 - Health plan changes
 - What are you allowed to do according to state law?
 - Is there an option for the Town not to allow a part time person to receive health insurance?
 - Can we outsource more?
 - Can we partner with other towns?
 - Regionalization of services is ongoing
 - Statewide purchasing
 - Outsources school custodians
 - Cafeteria workers – pain vs. benefit?
 - Minimum staffing now
 - Salaries of cafeteria and custodians not exorbitant
 - Can assign your own people
- ◆ Public Works Initiative
 - How do citizens get involved?
 - Is it possible to have evening meetings?
 - Will we get to hear how much the town saves?
 - Quarterly updates
 - Will someone record successes?
 - Any feedback?

Group 1C: Economic Development

Angus Jennings, DLUM, Lead Facilitator

Session Objectives

Significant commercial growth is ongoing and anticipated along Route 110, the Town's primary corridor for economic growth, with related infrastructure investments recent and upcoming. The Comprehensive Plan calls for zoning changes to better manage both the form, location and design of commercial development; this discussion will focus on these issues and their importance to ensure that the Town strengthens its tax base in a responsible manner.



To view posters presented during this session, please visit http://www.westfordma.gov/pages/government/towndepartments/westfordma_townmanager/documents/Retreatdocs/110623EconDevposters.pdf

To view a map of development on Route 110, please visit http://www.westfordma.gov/pages/government/towndepartments/westfordma_townmanager/documents/Retreatdocs/Route110_Recent_Ongoing_Planned.pdf

Facilitator Summary Points

Route 110: The group supported the idea of capturing the design intent of the Rte. 110 Master Plan in zoning bylaws that are clear and enforceable, but acknowledged that conditions have changed since plan adoption in 1999, so this plan would be a starting point requiring analysis. Consider flexibility in dimensional and parking standards if it results in a built environment that is more pedestrian friendly to promote non-vehicular options. A new small business permitting guide is a good idea. Mixed-use may work somewhere on Rte. 110, but exactly where needs analysis. There was support for an improving balance in the tax burden by supporting economic growth, but aesthetics – character – design – are all important, as is the management of infrastructure impacts. We should get a head start on considering the future of Route 40.

Signs: A working group including residents and businesses should work together on a bylaw that allows businesses to function but doesn't detract from the Town's character. The bylaw should be enforceable.

Discussion Notes

- ◆ Power lines – why not buried?
- ◆ Traffic issues on Rte. 110
- ◆ Change on Rte. 110
- ◆ Need town bylaws easily understandable
- ◆ Chris Coutu, GIS Coordinator: Can make a map for any meetings
- ◆ 5 Volunteers from Village at Stone Ridge – Developing a permitting guide for small business

BREAKOUT SESSIONS

- ◆ CH District on Rte. 110
 - 75' setbacks, 70' between buildings (35' side setbacks)
 - Excessive parking requirements?
 - Unwalkable sea of asphalt effect
 - Larger setbacks mean businesses want larger signs for visibility to passing cars - not pedestrian oriented
- ◆ Large businesses have lawyers, budget for permitting; smaller businesses have trouble with this
- ◆ Rte. 110 Master Plan
 - Can be updated
 - Perhaps updating is the first thing necessary?
- ◆ Other actions?
 - Find areas for mixed use? Master Plan calls for it but doesn't say where
 - Character Districts in Rte. 110 Master Plan? Create by different zoning in different areas?
 - Smaller setbacks=traffic calming, smaller parking requirements
 - Incentives in zoning? Currently a slow process
 - Find non-car options
 - Traffic will continue to increase without bicycle, walk, mixed use options
 - Westford has walkability maps available
- ◆ Industrial Parks
 - Potential for mixed use
 - Parks on 110 not yet entirely filled: Tech Park West has 750,000 sq. ft. unbuilt
- ◆ How is retail/office space taxed?
 - Residential, retail, and offices have same tax rate
 - Small business has tax discount
 - Assessments are based on income generated, therefore unoccupied property is assessed lower and generates less tax
 - Westford has maps illustrating this
- ◆ Offices create rush hour traffic
- ◆ Should Tech Park West be all offices considering bad economy?
 - Permits do not have to be renewed until 2013
- ◆ How does the Town change zoning? 2/3 vote at Town Meeting
 - Planning board can initiate a zone change
 - Board of Selectmen can initiate zone change

BREAKOUT SESSIONS

- ◆ Hide industry and commercial behind trees/berms to reduce visibility from road? There is precedent in New England and elsewhere
 - Match character of Westford
 - Zoning has not changed to reflect character districts in Rte 110 Master Plan
 - Problem with narrowness of zone—little room for deeply setback buildings—I-495 on North, residential areas on South
 - Developers want buildings visible from road
- ◆ Get an early start planning for Rte. 40?
- ◆ Signs
 - Businesses like nice areas, need attractive corridor
 - Needs to be not too restrictive/confusing
 - Working group needs residents and businesses—sign up sheet passed around
 - Need a general bylaw instead of zoning so affects existing and new development
- ◆ Rte. 110
 - Need to save trees on project sites
 - As is—unattractive and uninviting
 - Cornerstone broke no rules by clear-cutting trees - is this a bylaw problem?
 - Need more awareness of Rte. 110 Plan
 - Developers drive changes in Master Plan, why work on planning instead of changing zoning?
 - Zoning has teeth
 - Could update plan with design guidelines which zoning would reference
 - Is updating the plan not fast enough? (Out of date by the time it's finished?)
- ◆ Find which pieces of plan have public support
- ◆ Educate citizens about plans vs. regulations
- ◆ Draft regulations based on citizen input

Group 2A: Municipal Properties & Capital

Tom Mahanna, Permanent Town Building Committee, Lead Facilitator

Session Objectives

This group will review how the inventory of town-owned properties meets the needs of the departments and the expectations of the community. We will discuss short term and long term capital needs and examine the policy impacts of acquiring, disposing, and reusing properties.



To view posters presented during this session, please visit http://www.westfordma.gov/pages/government/towndepartments/westfordma_townmanager/documents/Retreatdocs/FacilitiesPoster.pdf

Facilitator Summary Points

Town Properties: The Town owns over 1.1 million square feet of building space that is spread out over 110 buildings. This creates a significant burden on the Town for maintenance. In addition, the Town owns over 3,000 acres of land. The Town's Master Plan contains a directive to identify all surplus property and implement a decommissioning and/or reuse plan for old and abandoned buildings. The Permanent Town Building Committee was identified as the appropriate committee to develop a plan to prioritize building/storage needs and identify what properties can be disposed. The Town Farm Building was discussed as a historical resource and the Town should consider keeping the building.

Capital Needs: There is currently \$37M in capital requests over the next five years. The Town generally includes \$1.5M in the annual budget for capital. Capital requests far exceed available resources. The Town just recently completed two major building projects – Town Hall building addition and renovation, and Senior Center building addition and renovation. Each project cost approximately \$4M. There are two significant building projects that have already been identified – Center Fire Station expansion or replacement, and J.V. Fletcher Library addition. Both projects have initial cost estimates that will exceed \$10M. Feasibility studies have not been funded yet. The Board of Selectmen will determine when funding for these studies will get placed on a Town Meeting warrant.

Town Center Parking: There is a well-identified shortage of parking in the Town center. Future building projects (i.e. Fire Station and Library) could add to the strain on parking. The Town should investigate options to provide more parking (i.e. purchase available property) for Town facilities. However, it was also suggested that the Town should not be responsible for providing sufficient parking for private events in the Center.

Discussion Notes

- ◆ How do we prioritize many needs vs. available funds
- ◆ Tax Possession Sales Committee continuing to look at list for sale or use
- ◆ Question – Why do we have to develop everything?
- ◆ Should we acquire more land to prevent development?
- ◆ How do we maintain all these properties?

BREAKOUT SESSIONS

- ◆ Greater/Urgent needs
 - Library expansion and/or satellite location.
 - New fire station—inadequate now
- ◆ Question about whether fire station should stay in same location. Chief thinks station in center is best location
- ◆ Space constraints-residential properties nearby—parking issues
- ◆ Property adjacent to Town Hall
 - Does it make sense to purchase it? Need a policy so we can better respond
 - Overall parking problems in center – Purchasing
 - Should we address it and if the Town responsible for providing parking for private events in the center?
 - Should event coordinators be responsible for shuttling from remote parking areas?
 - Location of Fire Station on larger footprint will put greater strain on parking
- ◆ Have we prioritized needs for historical or culturally significant town owned buildings – CPA funds
- ◆ Who makes decisions about acquiring land? Should we consolidate that responsibility?
- ◆ What kind of town do you want?
- ◆ How do we prioritize the list of capital requests?
- ◆ How do we oversee capital needs?
 - Boards & Committees can't do it on their own: “Responsible for three buildings and we meet once a month.”
- ◆ Fire Station – Pay attention to other towns’ experience (i.e. Chelmsford). Gather feedback from them. Lessons may be learned
 - Thinks it is a Town’s responsibility to provide sufficient parking
 - General policy—should be enough parking—add it to Fire Station site
- ◆ Large geographic area has caused us to have “village” style buildings. Should we keep it all?
- ◆ Should we let go of some of these little, old buildings
- ◆ Important that we plan enough storage in new Fire Station
- ◆ What is the projection on school building needs?
 - Enrollment is not decreasing—will likely grow—new developments = kids
 - Supt. Olsen reported that no schools will be available in the short term
- ◆ Millennium is a modular building—will eventually need permanent facility for admin offices
- ◆ Should the town look at centralized storage for materials?
- ◆ What is the long term plan for Town Farm Building?
 - Building is former Town Poor Farm and part of our history
- ◆ How do we responsibly fund the upkeep of all these buildings?
- ◆ We need to take a more aggressive approach toward maintenance so it doesn't cost more later

BREAKOUT SESSIONS

- ◆ What body should be responsible to set policy/prioritize building and property disposal?
 - Permanent Town Building Committee – Should they do it?
 - Should we set a new policy?
 - If we buy or build a new building, we should get rid of one at the same time so our inventory does not continue to grow
 - Process typically turns into turf wars; departments generally don't want to give up their facilities
 - Need committee-process assign it
- ◆ Short term/long term plans
 - Stop putting money into buildings that we may get rid of
 - Make a decision—what else is out there—are there other options?
 - Storage—heating, maintenance
 - Do we know what we're storing?
 - We need to know everything, then we can make a decision
- ◆ Could sell Town Farm—Private developer can do things we can't do
 - This would displace Recreation Dept.? Is there space elsewhere?
- ◆ Look at all available space in Town
- ◆ Capital needs will keep growing
 - Must come down to a policy—decisions have to be made
- ◆ Do we have a condition report of all facilities in hand?
 - Yes, but not complete. Asst. Town Manager is completing assessment of buildings
- ◆ Planning is trumped by emergencies
- ◆ The Town should complete a needs assessment

Group 2B: Parking & Pedestrian / Bicycle Safety

Paul Starratt, Town Engineer, Lead Facilitator

Session Objectives

How will the town provide for pedestrian safety in a “community of villages” that do not connect with a continuous network of sidewalks and other accessible pedestrian paths? Will an increasing number of cyclists be able to travel safely in and around Westford? How will the town address parking issues at Town Center and the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail? You need to attend this session if you think these are important questions or if you have answers to these questions.

To view posters presented during this session, please visit http://www.westfordma.gov/pages/government/towndepartments/westfordma_townmanager/documents/Retreatdocs/Pedestrian%20Poster%20Policy%20Retreat.pdf

To view the 2000 Sidewalk Master Plan map, please visit http://www.westfordma.gov/pages/government/towndepartments/westfordma_townmanager/documents/Retreatdocs/Sidewalks_2000_Masterplan.pdf

Facilitator Summary Points

Sidewalks: It is not practical or even desirable to have sidewalks in front of every residential home or business in Westford. The need for sidewalks has been prioritized in the Sidewalk Master Plan as previously adopted by the Selectmen, but there seems to be a disconnect in the implementation of the plan. Perhaps the newly formed Pedestrian Safety Committee will coordinate efforts between the Planning Board, School Department, Selectmen, Planning, Engineering, Police and Highway Departments in order to get sidewalks constructed in the most feasible locations. The group also voiced support for creative alternatives to the traditional concrete and asphalt sidewalks, such as paths and trails that would facilitate safe pedestrian passage.

Parking: It was acknowledged by the group that certain events will always produce overflow parking problems like the Strawberry and Apple Blossom Festivals. During these community celebrations, satellite parking was a desirable consideration of the group. The success of satellite parking was recently demonstrated during the funeral for Sgt. Woitowicz. Discussion about parking for the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail was more emotional and residents from the effected neighborhoods were clearly opposed to having parking lots near their homes. There was also disagreement about the need for parking, but most in attendance agreed that it was a good idea to have the design engineers investigate parking options on two parcels that will be identified by the town.

Discussion Notes

- ◆ Westford is a “Community of Villages”
 - Neighborhoods not connected
 - Not practical to have sidewalks everywhere
 - Planning Board waiver where not practical to build



BREAKOUT SESSIONS

- ◆ Pedestrian Safety Committee
 - Newly formed by Board of Selectmen
 - Recently had first meeting
 - Implementing Sidewalk Master Plan adopted by Selectmen
 - Priority for sidewalks near schools
- ◆ Obstacles to Sidewalks
 - Cost – almost as much per foot to build new road
 - Real estate - easements and land takings
 - Tree removal and utility poles relocated
 - Legacy expense – long term maintenance
 - Snow removal
- ◆ Alternatives to Conventional Sidewalks
 - Paths and trails should be considered
 - Handicap accessibility
 - More innovative solutions to concrete and asphalt
- ◆ Town Center Parking
 - Special events will always overflow
 - Shuttle bus to satellite parking lots
 - Farmer’s Market
 - Additional parking behind Police Station
 - Increase parking behind library
 - Proposed new crosswalk
 - First Parish Church events
- ◆ Bruce Freeman Rail Trail Parking
 - Designer is tasked with looking at Westford options
 - Neighbors are concerned with safety of cars parked on side of road
 - Current zoning restricts parking lot construction
 - Disagreement about need for parking
 - Directing cars to park in Chelmsford
 - Police enforcement
- ◆ Bicycle Safety
 - Increased number of cyclists
 - Bike lanes on major roads (Route 110)

Group 2C: Wireless/Noise/Nuisance

Angus Jennings, DLUM, Lead Facilitator

Session Objectives

Recent changes in Federal law and increasing consumer demand for new “4G” digital wireless services puts new pressure on Westford’s wireless facility regulations. Changes to Westford’s bylaw are under consideration and meanwhile, opportunity knocks – municipal land could be part of an overall strategy to manage wireless infrastructure deployment. Noise and nuisance issues, related to wireless and otherwise, will also be considered.



To view posters presented during this session, please visit http://www.westfordma.gov/pages/government/towndepartments/westfordma_townmanager/documents/Retreatdocs/110622WCFposters.pdf

Facilitator Summary Points

Wireless: Changing legal landscape and consumer demand trends create needs for reform. A new bylaw could provide better local control over siting and design of wireless facilities. The group discussed colocation opportunities, visibility, height, setbacks, and the legal parameters for consideration of health impacts. There was openness to use of public property for wireless if appropriately designed, but this was not discussed in detail.

Noise: A noise bylaw can be quite specific regarding decibels allowed per time-of-day so as to allow for normal business operations. Enforcement is challenging, because an initial noise study to determine ambient noise is required, which is time-intensive and can be costly. Noise meters can be purchased relatively inexpensively. Non-criminal disposition allows for imposition of daily fines for documented violations.

Light: Zoning regulates light differently depending on the type of permit sought. There was support for the idea of adopting a separate bylaw and cross-referencing it so the same light standards would apply to all development.

Discussion Notes

- ◆ Why are so many towers needed?
- ◆ Health effects of cumulative radiation/emissions
- ◆ Effect on home values of towers
- ◆ Permits often come in for towers--need to have clear idea of concerns
- ◆ Federal law: Municipalities cannot prohibit deployment of wireless infrastructure
 - Gaps in coverage on map
 - Currently, no towers allowed in residential zones/require large setbacks including for colocation
 - All carriers need coverage—carriers have right to fill gaps
 - Board considering bylaw allowing infrastructure with guidelines regarding siting and design through special permit, rather than use variances
 - More leverage with special permit with clear performance standards

BREAKOUT SESSIONS

- ◆ Why so many towers when there is coverage already?
 - Need new types of antennas for data/speed
 - Can affect voice transmissions because data and voice use same bandwidth
 - Movies on demand use this technology
 - Federal government frames this as economic recovery/stimulus
 - Contact congressperson with concerns
 - www.broadband.gov
- ◆ Carlisle and Princeton have new bylaws
- ◆ Other factors
 - FCC deemed thresholds of emissions safe—applicant has right to build if they meet standards set by federal law
 - Perception can affect property values and it becomes a financial issue
 - How far should tower be set back from dwellings?
 - Regulations cannot effectively prohibit cell towers, so smaller setbacks are necessary
 - No known health problems associated with antennas in cities that have had them for more than 20 years.
 - New technology allow shorter monopoles
 - Closer tower means less power/emissions from cell phones
 - Multiple carriers can be on the same tower
 - Shouldn't the federal priority be on roads?
- ◆ Noise, dust, and light
 - No stand-alone noise bylaw in Westford; only reference in zoning is applicable only to Major Commercial or Major Retail Special Permits (70 dBA or 10 dBA above ambient, whichever is lower)
 - State Department of Environmental Protection allows 10 decibels over ambient to be enforced
 - iPhone app exists for measuring decibel level
 - Is state standard enough or is local regulation called for?
 - Is there enforcement power for local bylaws?
 - For \$8000: All police could have type 2 meters
 - May need to borrow better meters from state for setting standards
 - Non-criminal disposition so enforcement won't be challenged in court
 - In order for enforcement in a given location, need Ambient Noise study—consultant will set secret meters for one week (“Not cheap.”)
 - Westford's current zoning sets ambient at 70 decibels or 10 dba above ambient
 - Finding ambient noise is more than taking averages, it is an entire analysis

BREAKOUT SESSIONS

- Noise bylaws can be different for different zoning – different times of day
 - They can limit octave levels
 - Fines can be repeated every day for violators
- Light
 - Bylaw regulation right now in specific permits; could be rewritten to apply to all new/commercial development, or as general bylaw to apply to existing
 - Legislation at state level right now requiring light study for endangered animals? Status on this legislation?

Action Item Dot Voting

All attendees were invited to participate in “Dot Voting,” an exercise intended to encourage participants to consider the 126 Action Items from the 2009 Comprehensive Master Plan. Rather than an official study for setting policy, the exercise was an ice-breaker and a launch pad for conversation. Posters were prepared with a list containing the following:

- A short description of each Action Item
- Which Agent (Board, Committee, Commission and/or municipal department) are responsible for leadership on each Action Item
- An area to place dot stickers to vote for each Action Item



Action Items that had already been completed (such as appointment of a Capital Planning Committee, renovations to Town Hall, etc.) were greyed out and unavailable for voting.

At registration, each attendee was given twelve dot stickers and a sheet of instructions, then encouraged to vote for Action Items he or she believed should be the Town’s twelve highest priorities. The instructions are reproduced on the page following. It is understood that there are many more than twelve important issues, but a goal of the exercise was to encourage thinking about priorities. The posters were available for voting throughout the evening.

More than a third of attendees participated in the exercise, resulting in 528 votes (44 sets of twelve). Participants chose a large variety of Action Items as priorities; the top three regarded increasing conversation staff, expanding the J.V. Fletcher Library, and investing in sidewalk improvements. A report of the top ten Action Items is on the page following. However, it should be emphasized that the results do not reflect the beliefs of the entire Town or even of all meeting attendees, but rather they are a snapshot of the priorities of those who chose to participate in the exercise.

Many participants reported enjoying the voting and resultant discussion, and several expressed surprise at the sheer number of Action Items that could be priorities. The exercise successfully communicated the difficulty and necessity of choosing among many competing Action Items while ensuring coordination among the many facets of the Town’s citizenry, government and business community. The exercise also exposed many participants to Action Items outside of the direct area with which they may have been most familiar. These were perhaps the strongest results of the exercise.

To view the posters containing all 126 Action Items, please visit http://www.westfordma.gov/pages/government/towndepartments/westfordma_townmanager/documents/Retreatdocs/110623dotvotingposters.pdf

Action Item Dot Voting Instruction Sheet

As given to all attendees upon registration.

Comprehensive Master Plan Implementation - Strategic Planning Retreat, June 2011

ACTION ITEMS “DOT VOTING”

We hope you’ll participate in this quick, voluntary exercise:

Dot voting is used in workshops to get an understanding of audience preferences. You are invited to vote for your 12 highest priorities of the 126 Action Items from the 2009 Comprehensive Master Plan. We intend this to start discussions about the Action Items and encourage attendees to think about the Comprehensive Master Plan.

- **Read the descriptions of the Action Items, then put stickers next to the items you believe should be the Town’s highest priorities.**
- Action Items are grouped by category, such as “Natural Resources” or “Transportation.” If an Item fits into more than one category, it is listed in all applicable categories, but you should vote only in the primary category.
- When an Action Item has already been completed, the voting area is grayed out. Please don’t vote for completed items.
- Use all 12 stickers, but only one per Action Item.

Please remember, this is not an official poll, and the results are not scientific and will not be used to set policy.



Top 10 Action Item Priorities

# Votes	Item #	Action Item Description
25	93	Increase conservation staff to oversee growing inventory of town-owned and town-maintained (e.g., conservation restriction trails) conservation land.
18	28	Evaluate the needs, options, and feasibility of renovating and expanding the J.V. Fletcher Library.
17	61	Invest in sidewalk improvements within the villages and connecting the villages to adjacent neighborhoods.
16	76	Identify existing town-owned parcels that may be suitable for development as small pocket or neighborhood parks.
16	90	Provide incentives for developers to contribute to the town’s open space goals.
14	5	Establish a Department of Public Works that reports to the Town Manager. The Department of Public Works should include, but need not be limited to, engineering, highway, buildings and grounds maintenance, fleet maintenance, parkland and cemetery maintenance, solid waste and recycling, sewerage collection, and water.
14	18	Explore cost-saving and revenue enhancement opportunities.
13	100	Form a permanent sidewalk committee to develop and implement an updated sidewalk plan.
12	46	Establish an Economic Development Committee.
12	73	Establish design guidelines and a Design Review Committee to improve the appearance of commercial and industrial districts.

Survey Results Summary

26 people returned an evaluation form at the Retreat. Not all questions were answered on every form and some forms contained more than one comment.

Our evaluation form asked respondents to grade the retreat on the overall event, the topics, the break out groups and the facility. The grades ranged from Needs Improvement to Excellent. There were 101 marked grades on the completed surveys as follows:



Comments Section

- 35 comments were recorded either in the comment section or on other parts of the form.
- 13 contained positive comments about the concept of holding the retreat.
- 9 commented that there wasn't enough time to cover topics or that facilitators talked too much.
- 7 said they couldn't hear well enough.
- 5 made suggestions having to do with topics.

Every respondent who answered the question said "Yes," they would like to see another Strategic Planning Retreat.

The majority of respondents said that Retreats should take place twice a year.

The overwhelming majority of grades and comments were positive in nature. The topics were considered relevant by those in attendance. Many of the comments expressed an appreciation for making something like this possible. Only two complaints were repeated a number of times by several individuals. 1. There wasn't enough time to fully discuss all topics. 2. It was hard to hear all the discussion.

FEEDBACK SURVEY

Strategic Planning Survey Results	Needs Improvement	Satisfactory	Good	Excellent
Overall, what did you think of today's event?	1	3	11	10
What did you think of topics?	1	0	16	7
Breakout Group 1	0	1	12	3
Breakout Group 2	0	4	9	5
Facility	1	1	4	10
Total by Grade	3	9	52	35

	Yes	No	Maybe
Would you like to see another S.P. Retreat?	23	0	0

	1/Year	2/Year	Other
How often should such events take place?	9	14	1 in 2 years

Comments

- Positive comments about holding the event 13
- Needed more time to cover topic or presenters talked too much 9
- Couldn't hear well enough 7
- Criticism or suggestion for topic changes 5
- Liked casual atmosphere 1
- Master Plan needs to be simplified 1

There were 26 respondents. Not all questions were answered on every form. Some forms contained more than one comment. Responses: 14

Online Survey Results

After the retreat, an online survey was circulated to all boards, committees, commissions, and staff. Fourteen responded. The responses are recorded below.

1. Please enter your name and any committee affiliation

Answered: 14 Skipped: 0

- ◆ Christine Collins, Tax Collector-Treasurer
- ◆ Jack Wrobel, Library Trustee
- ◆ Dan O'Donnell
- ◆ Karen Hudson, Affordable Housing Cmte & Pedestrian Safety Cmte
- ◆ Kirk Ware, Perm Town Building Committee
- ◆ Jim Sullivan, Board of Selectmen
- ◆ Kate Hollister, Planning Board
- ◆ Penny Lacroix, Westford Museum
- ◆ Kris Erickson, Recycling Commission Chair
- ◆ Rob Downing, AHC
- ◆ Marilyn Frank/Conservation Commission and CPA
- ◆ Peter Mahler-Con Com
- ◆ Leslie A. Thomas, water Commissioner, East Boston Camps Advisory Committee
- ◆ Kelly Ross, BOS

2. Overall, what did you think of the event?

Answered: 14 Skipped: 0

- ◆ I thought it was well attended. The people who participated cared deeply about the issues being discussed. I think a little more time dedicated to a topic may have given more people a chance to weigh in. But it was an excellent start.
- ◆ Was not able to attend rescheduled meeting. Heard it was good.
- ◆ It was successful
- ◆ Nicely done
- ◆ Informative, well attended, could be more effective if the groups were more focused on specific issues or sought more specific feedback
- ◆ Very well run. Good topics, great venue to foster discussions.
- ◆ OK. Summary results were predictable. Thanks for asking people to rank Master Plan ideas. It made people aware of the implementation portion.
- ◆ I'm sorry I wasn't able to attend on the re-scheduled night. I had planned on participating.
- ◆ It was a great start. Well organized, professionally presented, interesting topics. Needs some tweaking but good first effort.

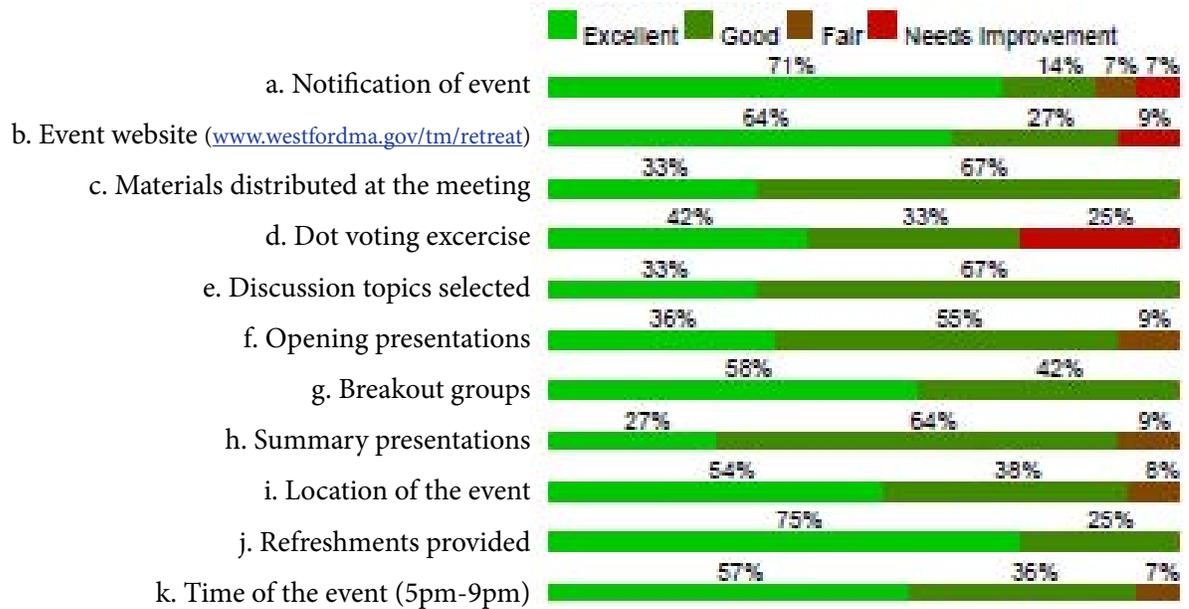
- ◆ Good. I learned of plans for a new/expanded fire station and library for the first time. So good info is available.
- ◆ I thought it was well executed and well thought out. Kimball's was a gracious host. The break out sessions were engaging and thought productive.
- ◆ Pretty well. The only con was that it was difficult to hear at times during the breakout sessions. More room between groups was needed.
- ◆ Excellent venue, relaxed, opportunity to socialize, meet others, discuss issues, food good draw, well organized, presenters did excellent job, good information shared, good to hear others ideas, good to hear Town employees' concerns
- ◆ Well done. My one concern was that it was difficult to hear at times. In the future, there needs to be some combination of more separation between breakout groups and a microphone/speaker system.

3. Which breakout groups did you attend? Do you have any comments or feedback on the breakout groups?

Answered: 12 Skipped: 2

- ◆ Finance/OPEB and Capital. Finance was more informational. People asked a lot of questions and those questions were answered by the Moderator or Superintendent with only a few exceptions. Everyone seemed to come away with an understanding that we are running out of fat in budgets and that more serious cuts may be necessary in the future. The Capital discussion was much more heated. Since the building next to Town Hall was on the list a lot of conversation about parking in the center sprang from that. I think it was the opinion of most that the Town needs to do something to solve the parking problem. As far as all the land and buildings, a responsible party must be identified and that entity must begin to formulate a plan of action to either reduce the town's holdings or create a plan for maintaining them.
- ◆ Financial & Town Owned Buildings
- ◆ don't recall exact names - first re: new development projects in town, second re: pedestrian safety, sidewalks, bike path, etc.
- ◆ Dan O'Donnell's on town finances and Tom Mahanna's on future bldg and capital projects
- ◆ Business development and Town facilities.
- ◆ sidewalks and BFRT (came late). Personally glad that no time to discuss BFRT parking because of the mindset of the people who planned to speak out. It would have derailed the value of the "retreat".
- ◆ Town Finances and Sidewalks/Bikepaths.
- ◆ Capital Assets
- ◆ I commented on these in my evaluation which was turned in at the end of the evening.
- ◆ New development & capital needs
- ◆ parking, pedestrian safety, sidewalks
- ◆ new development
- ◆ commercial zoning, Rt. 110 development
- ◆ I attended the financial session in the first round and the buildings session in the second round.

4. Please rank the effectiveness and quality of each part of the event listed below:



5. Please provide any additional comments to explain your rankings above

Answered: 11 Skipped: 3

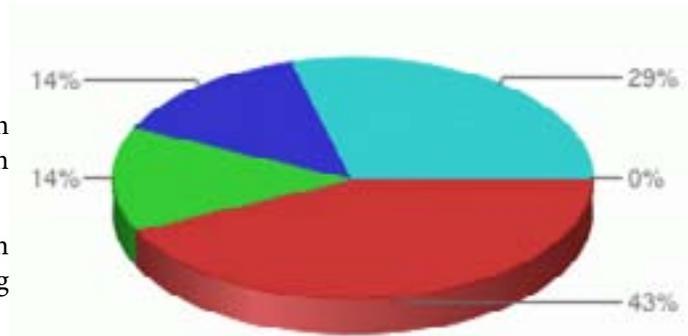
- ◆ Dot voting was a little unreliable but a good exercise. The location was nice and relaxed, but it was hard to hear.
- ◆ Was not able to attend rescheduled meeting but prep was excellent
- ◆ Too many topics to cover. The location was great, but we should plan on having the groups more separated so we can hear better. One group per tent. Also, people seemed to not be out of work quite yet and attendance at the first groups was less than the second groups.
- ◆ Actually missed opening presentations so please disregard my rating for #f.
- ◆ Never went to website so can't rate.
- ◆ Having multiple groups under one tent led to difficulties in hearing everything said
- ◆ Great first event. We may want to consider more pre-work for attendees so discussions can be more focused and not so much time would be spent detailing the topics to be discussed. The amount of time spent introducing each section took a bit of time away from the actual break out discussions and I felt a bit rushed.
- ◆ 4b. did not look at it
- ◆ 4c. What was distributed? (I came late.) The brochure? The info did not accurately present what would be discussed in each breakout group.
- ◆ 4g. The moderators did a good job (P Starratt has the right voice for this), but the venue made it hard to hear some folks.
- ◆ 4j. Nice food, but I wondered how much it cost the town. Same for the "free" umbrellas. The quantity seemed to be a reward for staff for working past regular hours.

- ◆ 4k. Very difficult for people working outside of Westford to get there at 5 pm. Cuts into our paying job's time. Start later and have 1 breakout session (and less food since people could get supper at home?)
- ◆ The dots exercise was too crowded, too small - I'm sure you've heard that. During breakouts too much time was taken by the presenters to summarize the state of the town, rather than leaving time for discussion and suggestions. I loved the time as I work during the day. The food and tent were fun but closed rooms might work better to facilitate discussion and hearing.
- ◆ Location was good and bad. It was often very hard to hear, but the food & ice cream were great. Since dot voting had no impact, i did not participate. I never saw any info on event outside my role on a town committee.
- ◆ I believe enough notice was given for people to plan to attend. I thought the comments were listed to and thoughtprovoking with hopefully some good ideas being further explored
- ◆ I never realized that the current Master Plan had so many detailed topics. It should be condensed to like topics & better organized. Did not seem to hold together

6. How often should the town hold strategic planning events?

Answered: 14 Skipped: 0

- Once per year: in the summer (6)
- Once per year: in the winter (2)
- Twice per year: before Annual Town Meeting and before Special Town Meeting (2)
- Twice per year: after Annual Town Meeting and after Special Town Meeting (4)
- Never (0)



5. Please include any additional feedback and comments.

Answered: 12 Skipped: 2

- ◆ I think there should be a way to follow the topics that were discussed. The “problems” need to be broken down into parts with steps toward solutions that can be measured and then assigned to a responsible board, committee or employee. Periodic review would provide accountability. If we don't show measurable progress then the value of these meetings will be diminished over time.
- ◆ It should be held once a year when we have reasonably good weather but maybe not the actual summer.
- ◆ Once a year should be plenty for this type of event, and it seemed like the right time to hold it. It gave us enough time after town meeting to get ready for it. I can't see holding one of these in the winter with such a tight schedule.
- ◆ be curious to see how this info is helpful moving forward

ONLINE SURVEY

- ◆ Would love to find a way to get some “new” town residents to attend. We should look into ways to involve the public more. By public I mean, those not already on boards, committees, employees, etc. The tax payers who pay the bills but are not actively involved. Not sure how we can do this, but it makes sense to me that there should be a more cross section of residents at these events.
- ◆ 6: Not sure if 1x or 2x per year is better. Definitely after town meeting crunch is over.
- ◆ Were there many non-staff, non-committee folks?
- ◆ Looking forward to being at the next one!
- ◆ I would reiterate that there has to be time for the attendees to talk, ask questions, and brainstorm, and less emphasis on presentations by the group leaders.
- ◆ Holding event 3-4 months before town meeting may get good info out for the meeting but not be too demanding on peoples’ time.
- ◆ Thanks to all who worked so hard to make this a successful event.
- ◆ Thank you for organizing & having the event. Staff as usual works hard and does a great job.
- ◆ summer & dead of winter are good times for events
- ◆ Winter event could be at Stony Brook with apples, donuts, cookies, candy & drinks in rooms & meeting in auditorium

ATTENDANCE

Dept./Board/Resident/Affiliation	No. Attending
Total Number Registered	100
Town & School Employees	27
Boards and Committees:	
Affordable Housing Committee	1
Board of Assessors	1
Board of Health	2
Board of Selectmen	5
Capital Committee	1
Community Preservation Com	1
Comp Master Plan Implementation Com	1
Conservation Commission	2
Energy Com	1
Historical Commission	2
Library Trustee	2
Pedestrian Safety Com	2
Permit Guide Comm	2
Planning Board	3
Public Works Initiative Comm	1
Recycling Commission	2
School Committee	3
Tax Possession Sales Committee	1
Water Commission	2
Westford Permanent Town Bldg Com	1
Subtotal of Boards & Committees:	36
Residents	22
Business/Rotary	4
Land Steward	1
FEBC	1
Parish Center for the Arts	4
Westford Patch	1
Signed in with no affiliation identified	4
Miscellaneous Other	15

Summary Information:

36% of Attendees were members of Boards or Committees

27% of Attendees were paid employees of Westford

22% of Attendees were Residents

It should be noted that some employees may also be members of Boards or Committees and some people who identified themselves as residents also serve on Boards and Committees. People with multiple designations have been placed in only one category.