

Chester Planning Task Force Meeting Notes

12/4/17

Attendees: Jenny Kitsen, Historical Society, Mike Abramson, Parks & Rec Commission; Allison Abramson, Tri-Town Youth Services; Edward Ward, WPCA; Susan Wright, EDC; Dennis Tovey, Library Trustee; Karin Badger; Sandy Prisloe, Conservation Commission; Terry Schreiber, Library Trustee; Sam Gold, RiverCOG; Chris Hayward, Cedar Lake Watershed Commission; Mark Borton, ZBA; Bob Blair, Inland Wetlands; Jon Joslow, Board of Finance; Lauren Gister, First Selectwoman; David Fitzgibbons, Board of Ed; John Stack Board of Ed; Dawn Parker, Housing Connection, Inc.; Rebecca Augur, MMI; Mike Zuba, MMI

Discussion Summary

- Discussed planning process from data collection and analysis, public engagement strategizing, and POCD and Strategic Plan development
- Discussed role of Planning Task Force as the representative working group shepherding the plans through to draft stage: represent the interests of the various board/ agencies in Task Force discussions; facilitate communication between groups; promote public engagement; establish the community's vision, goals, and objectives through consensus; review work products and recommend draft plans to the Planning & zoning Commission and the Boards of Selectmen and Finance
- Discussed demographic and housing conditions and trends, with some data-specific questions to be followed up on: change in youngest cohorts in Town; latest enrollment projections from BOE; household incomes by age grouping; overall population projections for state of CT, and clarification on median household income margin of error

SWOT Analysis Summary

The Task Force broke into four groups to develop lists of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats for Chester. The lists are summarized below, with those items at the top supported by numerous groups.

Strengths

- Schools
- Community spirit & events, sense of community, community safety
- The Village and community scale
- Natural resources, beauty of the community, that the community is not overdeveloped
- The River and maritime industry
- Location between major cities within CT and surrounding states/ River Valley location
- Arts, tourism, restaurants
- Sewers

Weaknesses

- Aging population
- Walkability issues – lack of infrastructure Town-wide

- Lack of diversity in economic base/ revenue stream
- Lack of housing options for all households/ affordable housing
- Lack of diversity in population
- CT economy and increasing costs
- Lack of convenient parking in the Village
- Limited usable land
- Status quo thinking/ unwillingness to change
- Distance from economic centers
- Lack of community services
- Rule of small numbers
- Insufficient public transportation options
- Lack of community riverfront space

Opportunities

- Increase walkability and community connections/ trails and infrastructure to connect River – Village – open spaces- natural resources – neighborhoods
- Rt. 154 development and place-making – masterplan for cohesive development that incorporates green infrastructure/ communal systems and foster an identity
- Expand use of state parks/ forests
- Develop more community services
- Grow the Village Center with existing infrastructure
- Leverage technology for economic development
- Attract non-residential development
- Satisfy the demands of changing demographics
- Thoughtful development that may require regulatory changes to enable
- Regionalization
- Clarifying design standards
- Sustainable CT program

Threats

- Loss of State funding and the CT economy
- Loss of commercial businesses – both large employer and small business
- Lack of diverse housing stock, affordable housing, threat of 8-30g
- Changing demographics – widening gaps
- Lack of affordable housing, threat of 8-30g
- Chain stores
- Becoming suburban with more development
- Natural hazards – flooding, wind – impacts on energy systems
- Climate change
- Provincial thinking
- Loss of taxable property
- Lack of volunteers
- Tourism that overwhelms
- Inappropriate development

Next Steps

- Task Force members to promote survey and connect with local groups– try to wrap it up by end of the year
- Task Force members to talk about best public workshop strategy and communicate to group over the next week
- MMI to answer data questions for the Task Force
- MMI to post current POCD on www.weknowwhereitis.com as well as meeting summaries and presentations
- MMI to continue data collection and analysis
- Focus group session Jan. 10th 7:30am
- Planning Task Force meeting; January 29, 2018; 6:30pm in the Community Room