

## 2 | the community speaks: public participation

Successful comprehensive plans are grounded in an understanding of the values, character, and concerns of the community which they are intended to guide. The Winchester Comprehensive Master Plan is based on extensive public outreach that gave residents, business owners, and institutional representatives multiple opportunities to provide their opinions on issues and opportunities facing the Town in the short and long terms.

The goals for the first phase of public participation included reviewing the Envision Winchester vision and goals and other past planning documents and holding a series of structured meetings to engage residents in discussions about what they desire for Winchester's future. Later public participation included opportunities to review and discuss draft recommendations for plan elements and the final draft document that was submitted to the Board of Selectmen for its approval.

The community process included multiple activities and outreach methods, including a major town-wide workshop, neighborhood meetings grouped by precinct, a series of newsletters, a plan webpage on the Town website, and the opportunity to submit online comments about the plan. A set of community goals and priorities emerged from this process and forms the basis of the Comprehensive Master Plan.



### Winchester Comprehensive Master Plan Webpage

The consultant team created a webpage that was hosted on the Town's website ([www.winchester.us/wcmp/wcmphome.htm](http://www.winchester.us/wcmp/wcmphome.htm)). This page included information about the purpose of the plan, the structure of the plan, the planning process, meeting schedules, and a document library that included draft documents and maps and images created for the plan. In addition, the page contained a "Tell Us What You Think" link that allowed viewers to send comments via e-mail to the Town planner and the consultant team.

Residents were invited to use this feature throughout the planning process to provide feedback on the public meetings and draft plan documents.

## Town-Wide Vision and Goals Workshop

Held on 31 March 2007, the town-wide workshop served as a kick-off event for the Comprehensive Master Plan. The workshop was designed to provide a forum for participants to review the outcomes of past planning processes, including the 2002 Envision Winchester vision statement; think about and discuss the town as a whole; and prioritize short- and long-term goals. The workshop was not intended to present recommendations or discuss specific implementation actions, but to identify residents' major hopes and concerns about Winchester's future.

Thirty-four people participated in the Saturday morning event. As participants arrived, they were asked to place stars on a map of Winchester to identify where they live. Participants came from all parts of the town, with the largest concentration from Precincts 1, 2, and 4, and they received a packet of fact sheets containing data about Winchester's population, housing, and economy. Participants also could view multiple



**Residents discuss community issues and opportunities.**

maps on display that provided information about Winchester's precincts, neighborhoods, natural resources and open space areas, land use, zoning, and recent housing "tear-downs."

The workshop was divided into three parts: a formal presentation by the consultant team, small group discussion, and reports from the small groups to the group as a whole. In their presenta-

tion, the consultants reviewed why Winchester needs to update its comprehensive plan; the vision and goals from Envision Winchester and the 2004 Community Development Plan; and population, housing, land use, business, and financial trends and challenges for the town. The purposes of this presentation were to summarize major goals from past planning processes and to provide participants with information about change and continuity in Winchester over the past decade.

Divided into three small groups facilitated by members of the consultant team, participants discussed what they would like to preserve for the future, desired changes for Winchester, and potential opportunities for change. Participants were given Post-It notes on which to write their individual comments. Each group member identified his or her



**Workshop participants identify what they would like to preserve and change in Winchester.**

top two items for preservation and change, and the group as a whole identified its top priorities for Phase One elements (housing and neighborhoods, economic development and the town center, and the fiscal environment). Each group also briefly discussed the vision statement and goals from the Envision Winchester process and the Community Development Plan and determined whether these goals are still relevant to 2007 conditions in Winchester. After a short break, the group convened as a whole and spokespersons reported the results from the small groups. The reports revealed that the three groups shared many of the same priorities and concerns about Winchester’s future.

The small group participants identified a number of town assets that they would like to preserve. The following are representative comments in the participants’ own words:

## What Should Winchester Preserve?

### **Beauty of the town**

- “Beauty and architectural character of the town”
- “Congruity of the neighborhoods and the town center . . .”

### **Housing, neighborhoods, and historic character**

- “Beautiful (old) neighborhoods”
- “Sense of Winchester as a residential town”
- “Interesting housing stock”

### **Open space**

- “Streams, Middlesex Fells, ponds, etc. add to Winchester’s beauty; this beauty is not found in Winchester’s peer communities”
- “The little open space we have (large tracts and not subdividing lots)”

### **The attractive and active town center**

- “The town center [is] the heart of the community”
- “A vibrant, walkable town center”
- “Maintaining the appearance, viability, and historical sense of a New England community in downtown Winchester”

### **The education system**

- “[We have] excellent schools with high community value placed on education”
- “Winchester as an educational center”
- “The industry of Winchester is a really good educational system”

**Strong sense of community and high quality of life**

- “Winchester is a clean, well-run town”
- “The town has a sense of community with strong community involvement”
- “Cohesive neighborhoods with caring, involved citizens”
- “Physical and social community cohesion”

The responses to the question “What do you want to preserve?” showed that many Winchester residents believe that the town has a high quality of life that should be maintained for future generations. Workshop participants find great beauty and community identity in Winchester’s older neighborhoods and the town center, and want to protect the town’s suburban nature, its tree-lined streets and neighborhoods, and strong architectural character. Residents also want to preserve open space for its beauty, environmental benefits, and contribution to community identity.

Participants then focused on what they consider major issues in Winchester and what they would like to change:

## What Are We Worried About?

**Loss of neighborhood character/aesthetics**

- “New residential development doesn’t enhance or conform to the beauty of existing neighborhoods”
- “Destruction of neighborhoods through teardowns and inappropriate development”
- “Increasing homogenization of the town . . .”

**Loss of social and economic diversity**

- “[Winchester is] becoming a wealthy ghetto”
- “Decline of socioeconomic diversity of population; middle and lower class is being shut out”
- “Lack of diversity: people, housing stock, economics”

**Development issues**

- “Development of open space; loss of open/green space”
- “Limitations on infrastructure (roads, water, and draining in particular)”
- “Impact from out-of-town actions (*e.g.*, Burlington and Woburn build-out)”
- “Underdeveloped/underutilized light commercial space”

**Fiscal problems**

- “Lack of public funds versus increase in public costs”
- “‘Budget busters’—health care, energy, salaries”
- “Reliance on residential tax base only”
- “Diminution of school quality and municipal services”

**Open space/environmental concerns**

- “Loss of open space”
- “Flooding problems”

**Affordability/affordable housing**

- “Lack of housing for special groups (e.g., empty-nesters and lower incomes)”
- “Need to expand and maintain range of housing types (e.g., smaller houses, garden apartments, condos)”
- “Lack of ‘moderate’ to affordable housing”

Fiscal problems, loss of neighborhood character, and affordability issues received the highest number of individual comments. Winchester residents want to preserve the town’s distinctive character, and most of their concerns focus on forces that they perceive as eroding these special community characteristics. Workshop participants also want Winchester to continue to thrive and welcome a socially and economically diverse population. However, they are concerned about financial issues and the town’s ability to sustain its high quality of life in the long term.

The three small groups also discussed the 2002 Envision Winchester vision statement and the 2004 Community Development Plan (CDP) goals that relate to Phase One Comprehensive Master Plan elements. Each group concluded that most of the assets and concerns identified in these past planning processes are still relevant. When asked what they would like to revise, participants focused on adding more language about business improvements, ensuring financial stability in order to provide better public services, protecting neighborhood character, and enhancing Winchester’s walkability.

Each group identified its highest priorities for Phase One topics. Priorities that emerged from the small group discussions include:

**Housing and Neighborhoods**

- Control of housing design/character
- Housing type diversity
- Affordable housing
- Preserving trees and greenscape
- Enhancing walkability
- Historic preservation



**A group spokesperson reports his group’s priorities.**

**Economic Development/Town Center**

- Identifying commercial development sites in locations outside of the town center and the North Main Street commercial districts
- Diversifying the mixture of downtown businesses
- Increasing density in the downtown area through redevelopment
- Encouraging downtown cultural activities and programming
- Preserving the character of the town center

**Fiscal Environment**

- Decreasing the reliance on property tax revenues
- Increasing the commercial tax base by encouraging mixed-use and non-residential (re)development

After small group priorities were identified, the workshop participants met again as a whole and reviewed outcomes from the three small groups. With the exception of fiscal concerns, most priorities involved protecting and building on existing assets. Group reporters noted the overlap between group priorities, and some tensions were pointed out, such as the conflict between the desire to preserve open space and the need to promote new development to enhance the tax base.

At the end of the small group reports, the consultants asked each participant to take four adhesive “dots” and vote on his or her individual priorities. Participants could distribute their votes among different items or place them all on a single item that they deemed of great importance. No single priority emerged with a clear majority of votes.

## Precinct Meetings

Three precinct meetings were held in the weeks following the Town-Wide Workshop. These meetings were designed to focus on neighborhood-level issues. The Comprehensive Master Plan Steering Committee determined that, for the purposes of these meetings, precincts in similar locations and having similar neighborhood issues should be grouped together. The meetings were held as follows:

- 5 April 2007: Precincts 5 and 6
- 10 April 2007: Precincts 1, 2 and 8
- 11 April 2007: Precincts 3, 4 and 7

A total of fifty-six residents attended these two-hour weeknight meetings. Many attendees also had participated in the Town-Wide Workshop, but some neighborhood meeting participants had been unable to attend the March 31 meeting.

As with the Town-Wide Workshop, attendees were given fact sheets containing data on Winchester’s population, housing, and economy and GIS maps of town-wide existing conditions were on display. Each meeting followed a format similar to that of the Town-Wide Workshop: 1) consultant presentation of goals from former planning processes and



**Participants vote on individual priorities.**

ISSUE	NUMBER OF VOTES
Protect and enhance the look/feel/beauty of the entire town	14
Economic/fiscal concerns alone should not drive land use	13
Promote housing diversity	12
Pursue appropriate redevelopment in the town center and other potential sites	11
Preserve and enhance walkability/connectivity and greenspace	11
Manage design and impacts of development better <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Control mansionization</li> <li>• Control neighborhood design (character/streetscape)</li> <li>• Control development process</li> </ul>	10
Fiscal stability	8
Parking garage/parking solution for downtown	3
Take a proactive approach to affordable housing	3
Mixed-use development	2
Increase the commercial tax base	2

*NOTE: Some small-group categories were consolidated due to subject overlap.*

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population, housing, land use, and business/financial challenges; 2) small group discussion; and 3) report-backs to the large group. Unlike the town-wide meeting, the consultant presentation involved data specific to the precinct groupings, such as development capacity, open space acreage, and recent housing “teardowns” in each set of precincts.

Meeting participants were asked to separate into small groups according to their voting precincts. In some cases, groups with a small number of participants were combined (Precincts 4 and 7 and Precincts 1 and 2). In the small-group discussion, facilitators asked each participant to identify aloud what he or she would like to preserve and change in Winchester. Answers could be neighborhood-specific or could identify larger issues. Some of the responses included:

**PRECINCTS 5 AND 6:**

**Preserve/protect**

- Open space, especially conservation land
- Neighborhood character
  - > Maintain single-family uses
  - > Keep non-residential traffic out of neighborhoods
- Neighborhood schools
- The fire station on Lockeland Road
- No sidewalks in Precinct 6 neighborhoods

**Change**

- Improve neighborhood character and pedestrian safety through enhancements such as sidewalks, streetlights, and street signs (Precinct 5)
- Consider development along the Route 3 corridor near Mahoney’s
- Control drainage and flooding problems
- Control sewage problems, especially in Precinct 6
- Stop subdivision of residential lots and “mansionization”
- Provide more public access to conservation land
- Add more public transportation
- Improve dangerous vehicular intersections along Johnson Road, Ridge Street, and Lockeland Road
- Decrease traffic congestion along Route 3
- Create a walkable neighborhood retail node along Route 3

**PRECINCTS 1, 2 AND 8**

**Preserve/protect**

- The wooded and quiet character of neighborhoods in Precincts 1 and 2
- Safe, walkable neighborhood streets
- Wildlife diversity and the natural landscape (including trees)
- Open spaces at Davidson Park, Muraco School, Loring Field, and Leonard Field
- The financial viability of the town
- The strong sense of community and neighborhood character in residential areas off of North Main Street
- The diversity of people and housing stock in Precinct 8

- Affordable housing
- The excellent school system
- The beauty of the town center

**Change**

- Protect open space and trees from new development and require appropriate landscaping in new development
- Maintain the town’s open spaces and wetlands
- Control “mansionization”
- Address flooding problems in Precincts 1 and 2
- Promote redevelopment in the town center
- Improve the North Main Street streetscape
- Provide traffic calming in residential neighborhoods and consider traffic impacts created by higher-density development (such as along North Main Street)
- Revise and enforce the Zoning By-Law
- Redevelop underutilized properties
- Precinct 8 should not have to bear the entire burden of redevelopment and new affordable housing
- Improve recreation programs and facilities by building new bike paths and greenways and adding more organized sports
- Improve maintenance of public facilities



**Precinct 8 residents discuss North Main Street issues.**



**Precinct 3 group participants offer opinions about improving the town center.**

**PRECINCTS 3, 4 AND 7**

**Preserve/protect**

- Neighborhood character and the architectural integrity of the historic districts
- The walkable nature of the town
- Open space, such as the Middlesex Fells and Manchester Field
- Street trees
- Winchester’s two train stations
- The quality of Winchester’s schools
- The continuing vitality of the town center

**Change**

- Explore the possibility of local historic districts to protect historic neighborhoods
- Improve parking management in the downtown and around the two commuter rail stations
- Open up the greenway along the Aberjona River
- Provide better access to the town’s open space
- Improve walkability by ensuring continuous sidewalks
- Protect existing trees and plant new street trees
- Make new housing and additions compatible with existing neighborhood character

- Limit the number of gas stations in the town center
- Provide additional recreation opportunities for youth and teens

Many of the responses in the neighborhood meetings focused on precinct-specific problems. The Precinct 8 group, for example, felt very strongly that proposed development along North Main Street would have negative impacts and is incompatible with neighborhood character. Additionally, this group expressed concern that Precinct 8 residents are being asked to bear burdens associated with commercial redevelopment and higher-density housing that residents in other precincts do not have to share. Most of the localized issues discussed in the meetings relate to broader concerns shared across precincts, such as preservation of open space, flooding and infrastructure problems, and protection of neighborhood character. Moreover, most of the precinct issues were subsets of broader concerns expressed at the Town-Wide Workshop. Precinct small group results showed that—as at the Town-Wide Workshop—no single issue dominated resident concerns. Meeting participants had a range of concerns for their neighborhoods and generally understood how these concerns relate to larger issues for the town.

## **Business and Institutional Community Workshop**

Representatives of Winchester’s businesses and non-profit institutions were invited to participate in an early-morning meeting on 24 April 2007. Consultants gave a condensed version of the presentation from earlier public meetings, focusing in particular on business and financial trends and challenges. After the presentation, the ten attendees identified specific concerns and gave their views on how businesses, institutions, and the Town could work together to address these issues.

Workshop participants determined that several things are working well for Winchester’s business community, including:

- The beauty, charm, and economic success of the town center
- The walkability of the town center
- Development processes that involve neighborhood residents, such as the Immaculate Conception property

However, participants would like to see changes made to improve the business environment. They would like the Town to:

- Encourage mixed-use redevelopment in the town center and along North Main Street to enhance the tax base and ensure that there are enough residents to support commercial district businesses
- Solve town center parking problems by developing parking management strategies
- Recruit new types of businesses for economic diversification, such as more restaurants in the town center
- Make streetscape improvements to eliminate the “visual blight” on North Main Street

The major goal that emerged from the discussion was the need to implement parking



***A business leader comments on how mixed-use development could benefit Winchester's commercial districts.***

improvements. Participants noted that some residents will leave Winchester to shop because they anticipate being unable to find parking in the town center. Increasing the number of parking spaces, possibly through structured parking; improving management of existing spaces; and providing signs to direct people to parking areas were viewed as key steps to encouraging new businesses to open and getting more residents and visitors to patronize the town center on a regular basis.