

CHAPTER 1

Introduction and Background

*Westport Master Plan * 2004*

1. Introduction and Background

1.1 Introduction

Westport's updated Master Plan is designed to assist Town officials in the decision making process for the long-term physical development of Westport. It provides a vision for the future developed through numerous processes, including public meetings, presentations, surveys, and discussions with Town officials, regional planners, community leaders, business owners, and residents of all sections of Westport. Some recommendations of this Plan reflect a broad consensus and indicate actions which should be taken immediately to fulfill agreed-upon community needs, goals and objectives. Other recommendations request further study to more clearly identify strategies and to refine this vision so that it truly reflects the best data available and the consensus of the community.

The Master Plan conforms to the requirements of Chapter 41, Section 81D of the Massachusetts General Laws. It addresses the nine elements specified in the law: 1) Goals and Policies Statement; 2) Land Use Plan; 3) Housing; 4) Economic Development; 5) Natural and Cultural Resources; 6) Open Space and Recreation; 7) Services and Facilities; 8) Circulation; and 9) Implementation. The chapter titles and organization of the chapters that reflect these required elements have been customized to pertain more specifically to Westport's issues. This updated Master Plan describes many complex issues that will affect the future viability of Westport and the quality of life of its residents.

1.2 Master Plan Update Committee

The Master Plan Update Committee is comprised of Westport residents who volunteered to undertake the task of updating the previous Master Plan to reflect changes that have occurred since the last update in 1983. The Master Plan Update Committee respectfully presents this Plan to the Town in the hope that it will help Town officials to take advantage of existing opportunities when planning for the future and to respond to the many challenges which confront our growing community.

1.2.1 Composition of the Master Plan Update Committee

The Master Plan Update Committee was a successor to the Citizens Committee for a Master Plan, the formation of which was proposed by the Strategic Growth Committee in the spring of 1998. Among other activities, the Strategic Growth Committee had studied growth management issues in Westport and had sponsored several Town Meeting warrant articles. Many of the members of that Committee became active members of the Master Plan Update Committee. The first meeting of the Master Plan Update Committee was held on July 30, 1998, chaired by Planning Board Chairman Timothy Gillespie, with sixteen persons in attendance. In addition to Gillespie, the Planning Board was represented by members David Emilita, Jack Penney, and David Wallace. Members of other Town Boards, Departments, and community groups in attendance were: Jean Borges (Farmer's Association), Joe Keith (Board of Appeals), Stephen Medeiros (Assessors), and William Tripp (Fire Chief). The following individuals also were present: Joe Carvalho, Dawn Clifton, Louise Houghteling, Carlton Lees, John Perry, Tom Richardson, Byron Trefonides, and Greg Werthessen.

From 1998 to 2003 more members were appointed and several resignations were accepted. The Committee voted Timothy Gillespie and David Wallace as Co-Chairmen, and Barbara Hanley as Consultant to assist them. The membership organized into teams representing the various Master Plan elements with each element having a Team Captain, whose tasks were to coordinate the volunteers for that element and to oversee the production of that element of the plan. Over time, several teams whose elements contained multiple topics subdivided their volunteers and

Westport Master Plan

appointed team captains for each of these sub-groups. The subcommittees and members who served on them for any period of time are as follows:

Land Use - David Wallace, Team Captain

Betsy Acheson
Dave Aguiar
Jeff Bull
Ingrid Davidge
Gregg Swanzey

Housing - Carlton Lees, Team Captain

George Cataldo
Ann Chandanaïs
Barbara Hanley
Selena Howard
Donna Lambert

Economic Development - Phil Hudner, John Perry, Jr., Team Captains

Jack Baughan
Ann Boxler
Barbara Hanley
John Margarida

Natural Resources - Gay Gillespie, Team Captain

John Borden
Anthony Cucchi
Susan Pedreira
Gary Sherman

Historic & Cultural Resources - William Wyatt, Team Captain

Barbara Hanley
Sean Leach
Carlton Lees

Open Space and Recreation - Anthony Cucchi, Team Captain

Brenda Burke
George Cataldo
Steve Fors
Gay Gillespie
Fernando Laguinha
Steven Ouellette
Gregg Swanzey

Water and Sewer - Sean Leach, Team Captain

Judy Beavan
Ann Boxler
Brenda Burke
Robert Carroll
Deana Chase
Todd Cormier
Gay Gillespie

Westport Master Plan

Norm Michaud
Dale Thomas

Capital Facilities and Human Services, Timothy Gillespie, Team Captain
Deana Chase

Circulation - Melissa Quinn, Team Captain
Timothy Gillespie

Committee member Philip Hudner compiled and edited the manuscript and wrote numerous articles for local newspapers. David Aguiar, Susan Pedreira and Betsy Acheson videotaped Committee meetings. Anthony Cucchi of the Trustees of Reservations/Westport Conservation Land Trust and Sarah Wilkes of the Buzzards Bay Project updated the protected lands inventory from the 1999 Westport Open Space Plan. Wayne Sunderland, who became a member of the Planning Board several years after the Master Plan Committee was established, attended the 2003 public presentation of the action plan, and contributed many valuable comments and recommendations to the plan. Planning Board Administrative Assistant Gale Nigrelli wrote and coordinated portions of the plan.

Additional Master Plan Update Committee members and persons who contributed to this 2004 Master Plan Update are as follows:

Deborah Barnes	Bob Grillo	Jack Penney
Jean Borges	Tom Hancock	Brian Pontolilo
Ann Boxler	Clayton Harrison	Ann Rosinha
Colin Boyle	Cal Hopkinson	Tanja Ryden
Paul Cabral	Louise Houghteling	Peter Streng
Joe Carvalho	Joe Keith	Dale Thomas
Frances Clark	Donna Lambert	Byron Trefonides
Dawn Clifton	James Long	Daniel Tripp
Dave Cummings	Cathy Madsen	Steve Tripp
David Dionne	Debra Manchester	William Tripp
David Emilita	Stephen Medeiros	Wayne Turner
Marsha England	William Medeiros	Greg Werthessen
Gregory Franchetti	Norm Michaud	
John Gifford	John Montano	
Michael Guilmette	Sean Pariseau	

1.3 Master Plan Process and Preparation

The committee of citizen volunteers first met on July 30, 1998, and thenceforth met, in general, once or twice per month. Most meetings were taped for broadcast on the local cable TV channel. The Master Plan Update Committee, originally proposed by the Strategic Growth Committee, started, as mentioned above, as the Citizens Committee and later changed its name to Master Plan Update Committee, henceforth "the Committee".

1.3.1 Gathering Information

The Committee determined its first year's goal would be to complete an Executive Summary. This document would briefly summarize the community's planning goals and objectives, based on previously prepared planning materials and public input from Westport citizens and officials, but would not propose specific actions. The Committee organized into subcommittees based on the

Westport Master Plan

elements of the Master Plan required under Massachusetts General Law, but modified these categories as shown above in Section 1.2.1 in order to more efficiently addresses issues important to Westport.

The Committee initiated the information-gathering phase of preparing the plan by hosting the following presentations:

Date	Presenter	Organizational Affiliation	Topic
9/10/1998	Claude Ledoux	Former Selectman, Farmer's Association	History of Zoning & Growth Management in Westport
9/10/1998	Carlton Lees	Former Town Counsel, Cable Advisory Committee	History of Zoning - Maps
12/3/1998	Gay Gillespie	Westport River Watershed Association	Open Space & Recreation Plan
12/3/1998	Normand Michaud		Water Supply Protection & History, Dam Maintenance
12/3/1998	Richard Wertz	Historic Commission	Cultural Resources - Historic Districts, Native American Burial Grounds
10/12/2000	Paul Vigeant	UMass - Dartmouth	Economic Development - South Coast Development Partnership
2001	Dave McCurdy	Atlantic States Rural Water and Wastewater Association	Drinking water issues
3/21/2001	Chris Modisette	Southern New England Forest Consortium	Fiscal impact of various land uses and cost of community services associated with each type of use.
4/11/2001	Craig Lindell, Susan Peterson	AWT/Aquapoint and Teal, Ltd.	Distributed community wastewater systems.

In 1998, the Committee prepared a Scope of Services to hire someone to review and summarize 27 existing Westport planning documents and hired Glen Miller of Bridgewater State College who finished this 64-page document in 1999.

The Committee meanwhile prepared matrices of Issues, Goals, Objectives and Strategies for the various elements of the plan, and collected additional information by reviewing literature and consulting with department heads and board members in Town government, members of local civic organizations, other Towns, and the regional planning agency, SRPEDD. The Committee also completed the Executive Summary document.

In early 2001 the Committee issued a Request for Proposals and hired the consulting firm of Beals and Thomas, Inc. Planners from the firm met with the Committee and the Planning Board staff. They reviewed the current Zoning By-Law and suggested changes. They also facilitated a more accurate revision of the Build-Out Analysis done by the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs, a computer model which shows projected development of Westport under the existing Zoning By-Laws and other regulatory provisions. Thirdly, the firm prepared a Resource Sensitivity Analysis, which assessed and ranked Westport's natural and cultural resources, and depicted these "environmental and cultural receptor" areas on a map, to be used to guide future development and preservation efforts to appropriate areas of Town.

1.3.2 Reaching Consensus Through Public Meetings, Surveys, Newspaper Articles

In addition to its regular bi-weekly and subcommittee meetings, the Committee held three community meetings in February and March of 2000 to solicit public comment on the Executive

Summary document which was published in May, 2000 and approved by Town Meeting. Over the course of plan development, the Committee wrote over 35 newspaper articles, which were published in the Chronicle's Westport Forum, Shorelines, the New Bedford Standard Times and other publications. In addition to these initial community meetings, meetings were held to discuss alternative development strategies for Central Village, to solicit the views of residents of various neighborhoods, to discuss various other activities undertaken by the Committee during the course of plan development, and to explain and solicit citizen opinion on several specialized studies done during this period.

1.4 Action During Plan Development

The Committee held a session to list immediate objectives and then focused on those with the highest priorities: increase Town funding for agricultural and open space protection, obtain a water study so all could understand the nature of our drinking water supply, and obtain Town approval of a "right-to-farm" by-law. After researching each of these, slots were reserved on the Town Meeting Warrant for several articles, which are discussed below.

1.4.1 Phased Development By-Law

In 1999 the Committee, along with the Planning Board, Conservation Commission, Inspector of Buildings and Board of Health, supported the proposed Phased Growth Zoning By-Law which was passed by the Annual Town Meeting in the spring of 2000.

1.4.2 The Community Preservation Act

The Community Preservation Act (CPA) of 2000, passed by the state legislature and signed by the governor, gave each town the option to participate in a state program that matches local funds for several purposes. These purposes are: the acquisition, creation and preservation of open space; the acquisition and preservation of historic resources; the acquisition, creation and preservation of land for recreational use; for the creation, preservation and support of affordable housing (which may take many forms, including housing for the elderly or assisted living.) and for the rehabilitation and restoration of the above resources. The Act required approval first by Town Meeting, then by voters in a general election. In 2001 and 2002, Westport citizens approved the Act at both Town Meeting and in the General Election, respectively. Westport subsequently established a Community Preservation Committee (CPC) composed of representatives from major Town Boards, Commissions and departments with an interest and expertise in the above resources. CPA essentially acts like a savings account, to be spent in specified amounts for the stated purposes. While there are many advantages to the CPA, one disadvantage is that the CPA funds would take time to accumulate. The local tax surcharge levy started in January of 2003; the state would make its contribution of matching funds in the fall of 2003. While supporting the CPA, the Master Plan group also began looking for a quicker solution.

1.4.3 The Preservation/Open Space Trust Fund

The Preservation/Open Space Trust Fund article for the 2001 Town Meeting was modeled after Dartmouth's that had successfully been passed by the legislature under the Home Rule provision. While the CPA acts like a Town savings account, the Trust Fund would be a non-renewable line of credit, against which the Town could borrow at a low interest rate, similar to bonds. The MPUC drafted the by-law for a debt of up to \$1.5 million and included the provision that the funds could be used for recreational land. The Trust Fund article was approved by Town Meeting, and then required approval by a Town-wide election. On voting day, many members of the farming community visibly supported passage of the Trust Fund by spontaneously bringing tractors and farm equipment to public parking areas near polling places with signs asking voters

to vote "Yes". The Trust Fund was approved at the polls by a comfortable margin. The Town then established a Committee to administer the Trust Fund, with, like the CPC, representation from relevant areas of Town government.

1.4.4 The Agricultural Commission

The Agricultural Commission article began as a "right-to-farm" statement. As the Master Plan group considered right-to-farm by-laws from other communities, it also met with farmers to draw upon their expertise and gain their support. We came to realize that what we needed *first*, was an Agricultural Commission to give the farming community a stronger voice in the future of Westport. A group of farmers asked that the creation of a Commission be substituted on the Town Warrant, and with the Board of Selectmen approval, the article was placed on the warrant. At Town Meeting, the vote was unanimous to create the Commission.

The seven-member, five-alternate Commission began meeting as a steering group and became official with the Board of Selectmen appointments in June 2001. The "AgCom" established its own goals for its first year, including advocacy for farmers, establishing a relationship and dialogue with important Town boards such as the Board of Health and the Conservation Commission, and mailing the farming community questionnaires for their input into the work of the AgCom. The first six months of the Commission saw a workshop with forty-plus Town board members and numerous complaints or referrals from Town Boards researched and handled on behalf of farmers. Future goals will include continuing advocacy for farmers and the challenge of getting technology, marketing, and value-added expertise from resources such as the state into the hands of the farmers themselves.

1.4.5 Heritage Landscape Pilot Program

The Town applied for and was selected for participation in the Heritage Landscape Pilot Program of the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Management. The purpose of this program was to identify and describe the various types of landscapes reflective of the cultural and natural heritage of the Town, to generally survey them, and to record certain of those sites, which were surveyed in greater depth, with the Massachusetts Historical Commission. In addition, a guidebook was created to help communities preserve their heritage landscapes.

1.4.6 Civic Initiative for a Livable New England

In the fall of 2000, Co-Chair David Wallace submitted an application on behalf of the Committee for Westport to participate in the Civic Initiative for a Livable New England's Urban Sprawl Workshops, and proposed the Central Village as a case study area. Before attending the workshop in Boston, Wallace held a meeting at Lee's Market to solicit the opinions of the business owners in the Central Village. Co-chairs Dave Wallace and Timothy Gillespie, along with John Montano from the Planning Board and Jeff Bull and Gregg Swanzey of the Committee participated in the Workshops. After the workshops in Boston, Wallace again presented the results to the Central Village business owners for their consideration and also invited residents of the Central Village to express their opinions. Each of the local meetings drew between 20 and 30 business owners, residents, and workers from the Central Village. The results of this study are presented in Appendix A.

1.4.7 Demolition Delay By-Law

The Cultural and Historic Resource Subcommittee, after reviewing several model by-laws, drafted a by-law which would require anyone who wished to demolish a structure which is listed in the Massachusetts Historical Commission Survey for Westport, to delay such demolition for a brief period of time, until the Town was able to review the value and importance of the property

and perhaps develop a plan to move the structure or otherwise preserve it. This by-law was approved by the 2002 Annual Town Meeting.

1.5 Master Plan Organization and Format

This document is organized by chapter in a similar manner to the organization of the Executive Summary approved by Town Meeting. In general, each chapter reflects an element required by statute, but with the titles changed somewhat to reflect Westport's unique challenges and opportunities. Each chapter discusses the issues raised during preparation of the Executive Summary, additional issues and information gathered during plan preparation, analyses of those data, and proposed actions. These recommendations are presented in the final chapter. Additional technical data and information are presented in the appendices.

1.6 Continuing the Planning Process

The Committee recommends that an on-going Master Plan Implementation Committee be created to ensure that the recommendations of the Plan are explored and achieved. This Committee, if created, will assist and encourage the various Boards, Commissions, and departments of Town government to pursue the suggested actions assigned to them by the Plan. This Implementation Committee might also be charged with assisting the Planning Board in updating the Master Plan when that becomes necessary and with creating or helping to create, in concert with other committees and task forces, detailed plans to address specific areas of Town, such as the villages, or to address specific needs, such as a drinking water supply study or a highway corridor study.

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