

CHAPTER 2

A Vision for Westport

*Westport Master Plan * 2004*

2. A Vision for Westport

2.1 Introduction

Previous Master Plans, prepared and updated from 1964 to 1983, identified issues and proposed policies and solutions to guide decision-making in Westport. During the past five years the Master Plan Update Committee has found that many of these issues remain relevant today. Westport citizens raised additional issues during the many public forums held by the Committee. The Planning Board, also, discussed and commented on the draft of the Plan, and voted to accept the Plan. In order to ensure that this vision reflects a broad community consensus, comments made by the public and by Town officials have been either incorporated into the final draft of the Plan or added as annotations. The Committee itself, while conducting research on the Plan, uncovered new issues and innovative solutions, many of which have been implemented by communities similar to Westport. This vision statement is a response to the issues and concerns that remain relevant today, and will remain relevant for the near future, and stands as our vision of our Town in the twenty-first century.

2.2 Land Use

Westport will zone for land use that balances residential, commercial and industrial growth with the preservation of rural character and the environment

The pattern of past and present land use, current land use issues and community goals guide our recommendations for future land use.

Residential and agricultural use is allowed throughout the Town. The business district covers only seven percent (7%) of the total land area, and one percent (1%) is designated for unrestricted use. Zoning must be tailored to guide growth and support the overall objectives of the Master Plan: to maintain the traditional qualities of the villages as they grow; to give structure and form to the business districts; to provide for residential growth that meets the diverse life styles of our residents; to preserve and nurture the farming and fishing industries; to provide safe drinking water; and to provide for community needs.

Water resource protection is a top priority throughout the Town and town-wide stormwater management is needed. Environmentally sensitive areas must be protected, and Westport's exceptional natural attributes must be preserved for future generations. The Plan suggests actions to accomplish these and other goals.

2.3 Natural Resources

Westport will protect its natural resources in order to preserve its healthy and enjoyable environment.

Westport is blessed with abundant natural resources, and therefore needs to take proactive measures to protect and preserve them in the face of growing development pressure.

The Westport River and Horseneck Beach provide the framework for much of Westport's character. The health of the river and shoreline is key to preserving those qualities that define Westport in terms of its cultural and economic heritage. The Plan calls for continuing and expanding on measures to revitalize the health of the river, including comprehensive dredging, a shellfish propagation program, an effective boat pump-out program, and continued monitoring of bacterial and nutrient levels. Effective stormwater management is important to control erosion and pollution of the river.

Groundwater and wetland resources have received much attention through the Aquifer Protection District and some groundwater protection measures taken by Westport's Board of Health, as well as programs run by the Westport River Watershed Alliance. These efforts need to be expanded.

Nothing is more important to Westport's citizenry than their ability to get good clean drinking water and dispose of their septic waste safely.

The river, wetlands, woodlands and fields also provide habitat for many species of plant and animal life that need to be protected. The Plan outlines measures that will serve these interests.

2.4 Open Space & Recreation

Westport will preserve open space, support farmers and provide a variety of recreational opportunities for all ages and segments of the population.

With the passage of the Community Preservation Act (CPA), the Agricultural/Open Space Preservation Trust Fund, and establishment of the Agricultural Commission the Town has begun to address the preservation of open space and protection of our agricultural heritage. These initiatives need to be continued.

There is a real need to increase and improve recreational opportunities in Town, to provide for playing fields, indoor facilities, trails and other programs for fitness and recreation. By working with private groups, such as the Westport Youth Athletic Association, we should be able to acquire new facilities that are built and maintained without utilizing tax dollars. Westport's Recreation Commission could play an invaluable role in coordinating the Town's participation in these ambitious programs.

2.5 Historic & Cultural Resources

Westport's Historic and Cultural Resources will be identified and protected for the enjoyment and cultural enrichment of present and future generations.

Archeological study and inventory of Westport's historic and cultural resources are needed. Protection and preservation of these resources would be provided by careful regulation by land-use boards to assure that any new development takes precautions to show significant resources, including stone walls, ancient ways, cemeteries, significant trees, and any other features of the landscape that express the historic heritage of the Town.

The Plan also calls for creating a Town archive of Westport's history. This may be in the form of an addition to the Library dedicated to this archive. Funding for historic preservation projects may come from the Community Preservation Fund as well as other funding sources available through grants and state and federal programs.

Westport's historic heritage is best expressed through its farming and commercial fishing industries and its villages. The Town must preserve and protect the rights of farmers and fishermen to pursue their livelihoods and create the controls to protect the character of the villages. The Town should also protect and encourage cultural organizations, particularly those housed in older structures.

2.6 Water & Sewer

Westport residents will have well-planned, adequate water supplies, septic disposal facilities, and stormwater management provisions.

2.6.1 Water

Currently 98% of the Town of Westport depends on private wells for water supply. High priority is given to protecting and preserving existing sources and planning for future needs. Conservative restrictions on water usage, and studies of impact would be prudent in order to

avoid the high costs that would be incurred for emergency supplies and associated infrastructure should our water supply be depleted.

2.6.2 Sewer

Westport has no existing public sewer systems, and therefore relies on private septic systems. Disposal of household wastewater poses the number one threat to groundwater and surface water contamination. Options for proper disposal should be incorporated into future land use to ensure environmentally sound policies.

2.6.3 Stormwater

Westport, under EPA Phase II stormwater directives, will now treat storm water runoff before discharging to watercourses. The Town also has a moral responsibility to: 1) continue to prevent flooding of private properties from future development; and 2) remediate the flooding of private land by runoff from Town roads with inadequate drainage provisions, by implementing design improvements on these roads, and acquiring property or easements to accommodate stormwater. The Town must adopt comprehensive policies and regulations that will address these issues, guarantee the continuance of Chapter 90 funds, and prevent costly remediation.

2.7 Circulation

Westport will have a Town-wide circulation system that is safe and convenient for all users and coordinated with land uses and economic development.

Westport is generally well served by the layout of its roads both for commuting and in-Town travel. Only minor additions to this network may be necessary in the future. Classification of Westport roads according to state and federal guidelines will aid in the development of road design standards.

Safety improvements are needed for pedestrians (especially school children), bicycles and other modes in areas where appropriate, including within the villages and at crossings on Rte 88. The Town needs to support the work of the Rte 6 Task Force to petition the state to address safety and design, landscaping and impacts from future development. Certain dangerous intersections need to be improved.

2.8 Economic Development

Westport will strongly support and maintain the vitality and competitiveness of traditional local businesses, will invite compatible new businesses, and will guide commercial and industrial development through appropriate zoning controls.

While the industries of farming and commercial fishing remain the keystone of Westport's economic activity, they are in need of strong support and creative programs to continue their vitality. The Route 6 and Route 177 corridors contain the most concentrated areas of non-farm relate businesses, yet without adequate water and sewerage it does not appear feasible to develop large retail/commercial projects in these corridors or anywhere else in the town.

New commercial enterprises such as retail goods and services, marine trades, fishing, agriculture, aquaculture, and quality cultural and recreational undertakings could complement and enhance existing businesses. In addition, Westport's scenic beauty and exceptional coastlines on the Atlantic Ocean and Westport River attract visitors who patronize local businesses during their stay. Westport has the potential for increasing tourism through innovative ventures such as a farmers market, bed and breakfasts, and country inns.

Although several Westport business organizations promote economic development, there is a need for someone in town government to coordinate their efforts and nurture business enterprises. There also is a need to revise zoning by-laws to support shopping nodes where there are high concentrations of residences, and the concept of a compact Central Village to combine housing, businesses, and Town offices all within walking distance of each other.

2.9 Housing

Attractive and affordable housing will be available for all types of households.

The 1964 Master Plan identified a misfit between Westport's housing stock of farmhouses and other single-family detached housing and the trend toward smaller families and an aging population. These two demographic trends have continued in Westport, particularly the sharp rise in the number of elderly residents. Over the last quarter century, zoning in Westport, that has predominantly enabled single-family homes in large-lot subdivisions, has only increased the gap between housing needs and available housing stock. In order to address the housing needs of all segments of Westport's citizens and maximize the effect of the Town's investment, a solution must involve a multi-pronged strategy.

Local initiatives such as flexible zoning with possible incentives will encourage the private sector to develop affordable housing for first-time homebuyers and the elderly. Partnering between the Town and private developers or non-profits will help the Town by sharing responsibility and costs of developing such housing, while allowing the Town to designate locations. Creating districts and overlay zones for elderly housing and multi-family housing will allow their location near appropriate infrastructure and convenient support services and public transportation. Increasing the options for accessory apartments will allow families to more easily care for elders at home.

The Town may also support affordable housing by public outreach in the form of seminars for first-time homebuyers and by participating with local lenders on low-interest loan programs. There is an on-going need to continue the grant program to provide housing rehabilitation and septic repairs to existing income-qualified homeowners who find themselves unable to afford to maintain their homes.

If the regulatory environment at the state level were static, and if the Town had adequate funds and staffing resources, the Plan might recommend that a long-term strategy should be implemented to document, monitor and achieve the state-required quota of at least 10% affordable housing units, with interim targets for new units created and an annually updated review of the Town's status relative to number of housing units at projected buildout. However, given the likely changes in M.G.L. Chapter 40B, and the current state of the Town and state budgets, a more reasonable recommendation is that the Town formulate a policy toward affordable housing that is responsive to local needs and concerns, then monitor the status of the regulatory environment, the Town's affordable housing stock, and the zoning and regulatory tools that might be helpful to encourage suitable housing. When it becomes clear what the state mandate will be, the Town will then be in a position to respond to the state mandate in as efficient a manner as possible.

Westport should begin by placing primary emphasis on meeting the housing needs of its citizens identified during the Master Plan process, and next attempt to position the Town in a favorable position relative to statutory requirements as these are clarified at the State level.

2.10 Capital Facilities & Human Services

Necessary Town and Regional Services will be available to Westport residents.

Westport needs to grapple with the dilemma of providing adequate services to a growing community while facing a fiscal crisis that sees less aid coming from the state and federal government. Many Town buildings and facilities are already too small and inadequate to serve present and future needs. The Capital Improvement Planning Committee must be reconvened to update and implement the Capital Improvement Plan of 2001. If the legislature passes a bill, currently in committee, allowing towns to assess development impact fees, which will help Westport accommodate the costs of growth, a more detailed capital improvement plan will be needed to quantify the impacts of each development and to justify the fees. In the process of determining future service and facilities needs, the Town should identify and pursue grant-funding opportunities.

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