

Town of Westport
2021
Master Plan Review/Update

Master Plan Update Committee
Westport, Massachusetts



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Westport Planning Board initiated the formation of the Master Plan Review/Update Committee in October 2020. As Co-Chair of the Committee, I would like to thank all the committee members for their participation in this important assignment. Without their generous investment of time and skills over the past twelve months, this report would not have been possible.

In particular, an enormous amount of credit must be given to my co-chair, David Cole. His tireless efforts in preparing research papers on some of the most critical issues facing our Town have added a great deal to this Report. His remarkable range of knowledge in organizing, writing, and editing many of the sections has been invaluable.

We would also like to thank the many individuals, municipal workers, and members of Town boards and committees, who have contributed their time and expertise in response to this committee's queries and research. Those persons include Tim King, Sue Daylor, Cathy Lanier, Tom Aubin, Irene Buck, Don Krudys, Keith Novo, Don Davidson, Karen Raus, Betty Slade, Terry Provencal, Nicole Pearsall, Beverly Bisch, Chris Gonsalves, Chief Pelletier, Tanja Ryden, Maya Joncas and with apologies, to anyone I neglected to mention.

Thanks also go to Jim Hartnett, the former Town Planner, and his assistant Nadine Castro, whose careful help with the formatting, graphics, and printing was greatly appreciated.

It has been a privilege to serve on this committee and engage with so many outstanding members of this community.

Mark L. Schmid, Co-Chair

The 2021 Master Plan Review/Update Committee:

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Introduction

The Master Plan of 2016 that we are here updating assigned the highest priority to make major investments in the physical infrastructure for the Town's public services of Education and Public Safety as well as devising a plan for addressing critical water quality problems. The Town responded positively to those challenges and voted to fund a new police station, a new central fire station, and a new Middle/Sr. High School, bringing these facilities up to the best of modern standards. Another major project supported by the Town was the development of the affordable housing project at Noquochoke Village. In addition, the Town has invested in several important planning efforts including the comprehensive water plan that lays out a path for future investments in water and wastewater infrastructure to solve serious water quality problems, and the resiliency plan for the East Beach area to address the threats of climate change. All these things were accomplished in the first five years of the Master Plan.



NEW POLICE STATION



NEW FIRE STATION



NEW MIDDLE/SR. HIGH SCHOOL

The challenges for the remaining five years of this planning cycle are to make the best use of the new modern facilities and to implement the new plans to serve the needs and desires of the community. For the schools and public safety facilities, this means adequately funding the personnel and programs that can now be accommodated, supported, and operated more effectively in these new facilities. Implementing the water plan will require both new investment in infrastructure and the creation of a management structure to implement and operate the new systems. Improvements in other public services would also benefit from more modern management and communication systems. Provision of increased funds for all of these services will require finding ways to overcome the constraints of the Proposition 2 ½ limit on annual increases in the property tax levy. The Finance Committee has committed to addressing this issue and their efforts should be supported.



FARM BY THE RIVER



WESTPORT POINT FISHING BOATS

The Town will also need to set forth much more creative zoning regulations to guide development and preserve to the maximum extent possible the highly desired rural, residential, agricultural, and fishing nature of the community. The immediate post-pandemic surge in demand for housing in Westport and neighboring towns together with the closing of nearby retail business outlets due to changes in shopping patterns and other factors will need to be considered in the spatial planning and related zoning provisions to achieve the most desired outcomes.

Major Challenges for the next five years:

The following sections of this document spell out the major recommendations of this report. The headings of each section, as shown below, provide a quick summary of the important proposals and an indication of their scope and direction.

1. Implement the priority projects recommended in the Water Plan. *(Pg. 5)*
2. Pursue new sources of financing for major public infrastructure projects. *(Pg. 6)*
3. Address the Town's structural fiscal deficit. *(Pg. 7)*
4. Strengthen the administrative structure to manage new complex activities. *(Pg. 8)*
5. Provide increased financial and public support for the school system. *(Pg. 8)*
6. Guide Westport's future economic and physical development. *(Pg. 10)*
7. Expand high-speed internet services throughout the Town. *(Pg. 12)*
8. Prepare, adopt, and implement a plan for the disposition of the old High School. *(Pg. 13)*
9. Establish a Climate Resilience Committee to address the effects of climate change. *(Pg. 14)*
10. Develop a comprehensive multi-year Capital Plan. *(Pg. 15)*

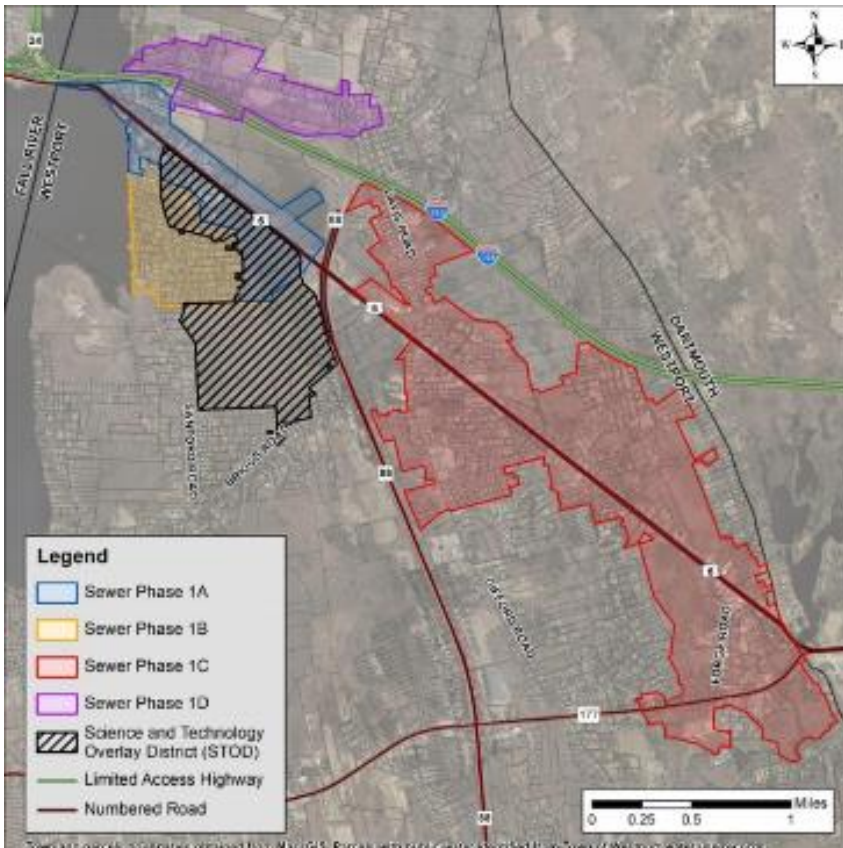
1. Implement the priority projects recommended in the Water Plan

The Targeted Integrated Water Resource Management Plan, completed in January 2021, laid out a set of prioritized actions that would make significant contributions to improving the quality of both potable water and the waters of the Westport River watershed. The full array of recommendations is available in the Plan document. Here only the highest priority proposals will be discussed.



WESTPORT RIVER MARSHES

- a) Top priority is assigned to preparing the detailed engineering plans and then implementing water and sewer lines along the Route 6 corridor. This project, to be implemented in four phases, would run the length of Route 6 within Westport and be tied into the water supply and wastewater treatment facilities of the City of Fall River.



PROPOSED RT. 6 SEWER AND WATER INSTALLATION

- b) Next highest priority is to identify, plan for and then implement community-based wastewater treatment and water supply facilities where such systems can provide the most efficient means for solving urgent water quality problems. The Select Board (SB), working with the Planning Board and potentially a Public Works Department (as recommended below), should study how the Town could implement shared wastewater treatment and water supply facilities for selected areas.

- c) Both the Route 6 sewer project and the community-based wastewater projects will contribute significantly to improving water quality throughout the Westport River and preserving this valuable natural resource that benefits the whole community. In recognition of these shared benefits, the Town will need to reach an understanding of how to divide the burden of initial capital costs between the whole community and the individual property owners who will be linked into the systems.

d) Adoption by the Board of Health of the new Septic System Water Resources Protection regulation (effective Feb. 1, 2021) will also help to address the nitrogen overload in the Westport River watershed and to protect drinking water quality throughout the Town. Implementation of this new regulation is supported in part by loans through the Community Septic Management Program. Additional funds for this program will need to be authorized to meet the expected increase in demand for these loans.

2. Pursue new sources of financing for major public infrastructure projects.

This document recommends numerous major public infrastructure projects be implemented in the coming five years. Normally funding for such projects would have to be derived from debt overrides and grants or loans from the State Government. However, the Federal Government, in its already enacted American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) and possible further funding of infrastructure projects offer the prospect of large amounts of grant and loan funding for such projects. The Town of Westport, with leadership from the Planning Board, should make every effort to position itself to receive its share of these funds over the next few years. This is a unique opportunity to meet urgent needs with substantial support from both the Federal and State agencies. Planning, design, and construction of water and wastewater systems are specifically authorized under ARPA and leave setting priorities to local governments.

The cost estimate for designing the entire Route 6, State Road sewer trunk system with a connection to the Fall River Wastewater Treatment Plant is \$1,300,000. This system has been studied for feasibility; the costs and water benefits identified in the January 2020 Integrated Water Management Plan; the Phase 1A (Fall River to Route 88) section has been advanced to 30% design level with the help of financial assistance from Senator Rodrigues, and a detailed survey of the entire route is in hand.

The Town has already received \$830,000 in ARPA funds and an additional \$2 million-plus is expected by September 30 from County ARPA pass-through funds. The second tranche of \$830,000 of ARPA funds is expected in July 2022. The State has received \$5.3 billion in ARPA monies, of which \$400 million is scheduled for water systems and \$2.8 billion broadly for environmental protection and resilience. Lastly, there is the pending \$1 trillion federal infrastructure bill awaiting congressional action, a large portion of which is allocated for water and wastewater systems over the next five years.

Given the urgent public health, economic development, and environmental protection needs for improved water and wastewater systems, the Town should take the following actions:

- a) Allocate \$650,000 of the currently-in-hand \$830,000 for the design and production of “shovel-ready” contract documents for the Phase 1A trunk sewer (Fall River to Route 88) in Route 6 and the preliminary design of the balance of the Route 6 trunk. Contract documents for Phase 1A can be completed in six months in time to pursue larger construction monies in FY '23.
- b) From the County pass-through funds, allocate \$900,000 to complete the design of the Route 6 sewer (\$650,000) plus develop a water supply master plan and management plan for administering,

managing, and operating the Town's future infrastructure. This allocation could be reduced by the receipt of a \$380,000 grant for wastewater design whose application is pending.

- c) From next year's ARPA tranche of \$830,000, the Town should reserve design monies for water and wastewater needs in the older, dense residential clusters on the river, such as the Point and the Let, or urgent safe drinking water needs, such as in the Harbor. The planning of these systems would come from County ARPA funds in b) above.



THE LET

These allocations of funds would take a giant leap in advancing long-needed public water and wastewater systems, position the Town to capture the subsequent state and federal monies, and still leave in each tranche some funds for meeting other urgent needs.

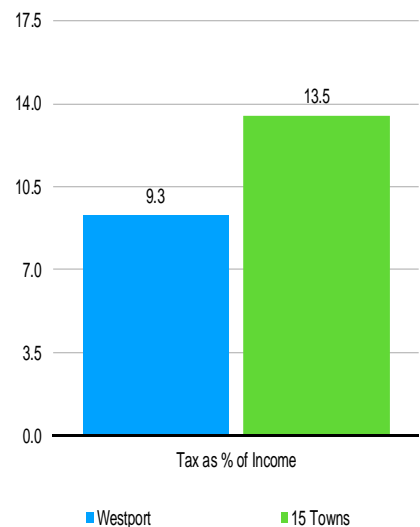
3. Address the Town's structural fiscal deficit.

The Westport Finance Committee stated clearly in its report to the June 2021 Town Meeting that Westport has, and will continue to have, a structural deficit in its annual operating budget due to the failure over many years to approve an override of the constraints imposed by Proposition 2 ½. Without such overrides, the property tax rate tends to fall as property values increase and total tax revenues have not kept up with the rising needs for current budget expenditures.

In the three decades since 1990 Westport voters have approved overrides only twice, in 1994 and 1995, amounting to \$160,000 for public safety current expenses. Override votes to increase funding for operating budget expenses have failed 17 times. As a consequence of the continued failure to approve such overrides, the average property tax bill relative to average per capita income for Westporters is 44% lower than the average for 14 nearby towns of comparable size as shown in the graph. (See Appendix A.2 for more information). Some of these towns have approved a series of overrides over the years to accommodate increased property values, maintain steady tax rates and meet the needs for public expenditures.

On the other hand, debt exclusion overrides for capital projects in Westport have been approved 12 times and failed only 10 times over the same period. These debt exclusion overrides have been used to fund important capital projects such as the new fire station, police station, and most recently the new Middle/Sr. High School.

Average Property Tax as % of Average Personal Income



The repeated failure to approve current expenditure overrides in Westport has led to seriously underfunded operating budgets. If this pattern goes unchanged there will continue to be insufficient funding for the personnel and equipment needed to realize the potential benefits from the new capital facilities and many highly qualified staff will seek more remunerative employment elsewhere.

The Finance Committee, after acknowledging this problem in their recent report to Town Meeting, has committed to working with the Select Board, the Board of Assessors and other concerned parties to try to find the most effective and acceptable ways to solve it both in the near future and over the longer term. The People of Westport need to be informed about the causes of the structural deficit as well as the possible solutions so that they can understand why it needs to be addressed and how best to accomplish it.

4. Strengthen the administrative structure to manage new complex activities

The Town of Westport is trying to address the challenges of providing 21st-century public services such as safe water supplies, pollution-free waterways, high-speed communications, and other public services with a governmental structure designed for the late 19th or early 20th century. We still appoint fence-viewers and the Select Board still fills the roles of Water Commissioners, Cemetery Commissioners, and other public service responsibilities along with all its other duties.

Urgent priority should be given to a study of current and future needs of Town management and the possible changes in the organizational structure of the Town government including the possible formation of a Department of Public Works (DPW) to manage water and sewer districts, road maintenance, the cemeteries, and a town-owned fiber-optic system and thus to be better prepared to carry out the many new public service responsibilities recommended in this report. Such a study - the Barrows Report - was undertaken years ago but never acted upon. It is now timely to revisit those issues, explore alternative solutions and set forth proposals for the reorganization of the Town Administration to be better able to qualify for funding, implement the recommended projects, and manage them effectively.

5. Provide increased financial and public support for the school system.

In the Master Plan of 2016, a separate chapter was for the first time devoted to Education because the Master Plan Committee believed that the many problems in Westport's educational system deserved special attention. The most serious problems that were identified related to the school buildings and the quality of instruction that together were leading to poor performance ratings at many levels. Also, many students, especially at the high school level, were opting out of attending Westport High School in favor of the technical schools, private schools, or public schools in other towns.



NEW MIDDLE/SR. HIGH SCHOOL

The 2016 Plan set out three main goals:

- Improvement of educational quality throughout the public school system,
- Increasing public awareness of the importance of improved quality in the public school system,
- Increasing engagement with the community.

Over the ensuing five years, much progress has been achieved in pursuit of these goals:

- The contaminated Middle School has been removed and replaced by a new Middle/Sr. High School that will serve grades 5-12 and opened in September 2021.
- Educational performance, as measured by State-wide testing has improved significantly.
- The specially appointed Westport School Building Committee, established in 2015, has essentially performed the role of the Special Commission proposed in the Master Plan, in that, in the process of formulating and implementing the plans for the new Middle/Sr. High School, it held extensive public meetings with considerable participation by residents to discuss the broader goals for the community school system and how the new school could best achieve those goals.
- The results of these meetings have been incorporated into the plans for the new school building. Also, the public participants in these meetings gave expression to their hopes and concerns for the Town's educational programs and became more engaged with the community school system. The meetings were also broadcast on Town TV and seen by many viewers.

These positive steps have been somewhat set back by the Covid pandemic that forced the school system to shift to remote learning. While it is difficult to assess how serious the impact has been, the prospect of returning to more normal operations in September 2021 is welcomed by all.



MIDDLE/SR. HIGH SCHOOL CAFETERIA

The new school and improved quality of educational performance, already achieved and expected to continue, seem likely to encourage a higher percentage of school-age children of Westport to continue their education in this public school system rather than transferring to other schools especially at the 9th-grade level. Also, public support for funding of the school system has already been tested and confirmed with approval by both Town Meeting and a Town-wide ballot of debt financing for the new school. Such support may be enhanced in the future because of pride in the new school and broader public awareness of the school system's efforts and achievements.

A new Strategic District Improvement Plan for 2020-2023, formulated by the Superintendent's Office and approved by the School Committee, sets out three strategic objectives of improved teaching and learning, broader family and community engagement, and pursuit of new revenue sources and outreach of educational services to better meet the community's needs. These all seem to be headed in the right direction and are similar to the goals laid out in the 2016 Master Plan. This new strategic plan should be supported by the community particularly by approving more funding for operations and salaries to bring

educational expenditures per student into closer alignment with those of other similar and neighboring communities in Massachusetts.

Future support for and reliance on Bristol County Agricultural High School (Bristol Aggie) and Diman Regional Vocational Technical High School (Diman) depend on future developments. New construction at both of these schools will impose significant financial burdens on Westport residents based on the number of students from Westport who attend those institutions. Possibilities for increasing courses and activities at the new Middle/Sr. High School that could provide alternatives to attending those other schools may affect attendance and the associated costs imposed on the Westport school budget. These remain to be determined through the choices of schools by Westport students once the new school facilities come online.

6. Guide Westport's future economic and physical development by new zoning By-Laws.

The Town is poised to implement water and sewer systems in the Route 6 corridor, as described previously. The availability of these systems in the Route 6 corridor needs to be accompanied by re-zoning regulations that will guide development in ways that reflect the expressed desires of the people of Westport.

In December 2018, SRPEDD produced a study of alternative development possibilities for the Route 6 corridor from the Fall River line to Route 88. That report was based on extensive analysis and discussion with area residents and business owners as well as Town boards and committees. The recommended development pattern that emerged from those discussions was one that involved a mix of residential and commercial development throughout the study area. SRPEDD and Westport Town staff created this scenario as a "best estimate" of what could happen with sewer service along the corridor.

SRPEDD is now undertaking a similar study that will extend the area being evaluated throughout the full length of the Route 6 corridor within the Town of Westport. This new study will not only cover the full corridor, but it will also be able to take into account the impacts of the Covid epidemic on residential and commercial demands in the recent past as well as potential impacts in the future.

Rather than attempting to present and evaluate alternative scenarios in this report, it is the recommendation of this Committee that the Town postpones such considerations until the new SRPEDD study becomes available along with its expected recommendations as to appropriate zoning measures that would guide future development of this area.



RTE. 6 HOTEL

New denser residential development and higher value commercial development would provide increased revenues to support the additional demand for governmental services that they would bring. The 24 used car dealerships on Routes 6 and 177 have property tax liabilities this year of \$80,311. The same liabilities for the LaFrance hotels and restaurants at the west end of Route 6 are \$130,000. Noquochoke Village has a property tax liability of \$37,000 and the residential properties at Lincoln Park in Dartmouth are estimated to have property tax liabilities of \$325,000. Replacing current lower-value property uses with higher-value residential and commercial development in the Route 6 corridor would generate a sizeable increase in Town revenues and also enhance scenic appearances.

Another high priority is the development of more affordable housing. This can be done most effectively by using the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit-financed development. This is the only realistic way to finance affordable rental housing on a large scale. With the experience gained by the Affordable Housing Trust Fund and the Community Preservation Committee in developing Noquochoke Village, such a project would be very feasible and should be started soon.



NOQUOCHOKE VILLAGE

The drafting of new zoning regulations and guidelines should move forward in parallel with infrastructure planning and design to present to town meeting a comprehensive plan for future land uses and their benefits when sewer and water become available. This plan would essentially link infrastructure investment with attractive residential development and increased tax revenues to fund needed public services.

The Town should also explore linking the higher density land uses along the Route 6 corridor with preservation of farmland and conservation land in other areas where public infrastructure is not planned. This could be accomplished through adopting Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) zoning. Under TDR zoning, developers could buy the allowed development rights by imposing permanent restrictions on parcels in the “sending” areas and transferring those future rights to the allowable densities in the “receiving” areas. This creative approach allows density to be concentrated where infrastructure can support it while preserving our farmlands, woodlands, rivers, and coastal areas. Both economic redevelopment and rural character preservation were highly valued in the current Master Plan and remain so now.

Rezoning should also include revision of the current Article 6.6, Science and Technology Overlay District to establish an actual district not an overlay of the underlying Agricultural/residential District and its many earlier-zoning or pre-zoning grandfathered small lots.

Another issue is whether and under what conditions to approve the installation of new cell towers in Westport to improve the coverage and services of various providers. One question is whether such cell towers would have any role if a fiber optic system was extended throughout the town. Another is whether the existing by-laws provide adequate guidance for installing such towers. A recent application to install such a tower has provided a test of the existing by-law and it has proven inadequate. There are other such by-laws, especially those of the Cape Cod Commission, which might better serve the needs of Westport in dealing with these issues.



MAIN ROAD CELL TOWER

Further adjustment of zoning regulations to help protect the natural environment should be considered in connection with the large-scale solar power installations that developers are seeking to install within the town of Westport. Clean energy from solar panels is highly desirable for reducing carbon emissions, but when it involves extensive clear-cutting of woodlands that both absorb carbon and provide desired natural habitat, there need to be limits on such clear-cutting. Such restrictions were recently included in the Town's by-laws, but they may need further tightening.

On the other hand, large-scale offshore wind installations along the South Coast of Massachusetts, which are just getting underway but are expected to expand rapidly in the next few years, offer the prospect of vast amounts of low-cost clean energy for this area as well as many employment opportunities. New training programs at Bristol Community College and investment in support facilities at New Bedford and Martha's Vineyard will also contribute to strengthening the local area's economy. The people of Westport should be preparing to take advantage of this new source of clean energy and economic opportunity.



SOLAR ARRAY

7. Expand high-speed internet services throughout the Town

The use of the internet by Westport residents and businesses has increased exponentially for a decade or more and then exploded during the pandemic. Also, new technologies have been developed and their use mastered by many residents so that they have become important parts of everyday lives.

Recent surveys of both residents and business owners (See Appendix A.5 for the results of these surveys) as to their current internet usage and hopes for the future revealed that there is much dissatisfaction with current services on various counts and strong desires for higher internet speeds, more choices as to service providers as well as reduced cost.



Some respondents indicated that their business has been adversely affected by inadequate internet services. Some even indicated that continued residence in Westport might be affected by the future availability of better internet services. The challenge is how to respond most effectively and efficiently to these new demands and expectations.

The Town has approved, and work has already begun on the installation of a new fiber optic internet cable system that will connect all town-owned buildings including the schools. The system will run from Route 6 down through the center of town to the Harbor Master's office at the tip of the Point with the control center at the new Police Station. This could provide the backbone for a fiber optic internet system that would reach much of the town and achieve greatly increased speeds, more service choices, and potentially reduced costs for those services.

The Town should establish a special Internet Advisory Committee to explore the possibilities of establishing a fiber optic internet system, including the breadth and cost of various alternatives, how they might be financed and managed and the prospects for the people of Westport to support and sign on to such a system. The services of a qualified consulting group should be engaged to work with the special committee to address these questions as was done in the nearby town of Fairhaven.

Massachusetts is likely to receive \$100 million for broadband upgrades from the federal infrastructure bill. Westport needs to determine what portion if any, of the \$100 million it might expect to receive and how best to position itself to obtain its share of this funding. The recent opinion surveys can be a useful tool in lobbying for such funds.

These are issues that the proposed Internet Advisory Committee, working with the Select Board and the people of Westport should address. There is clearly a strong desire for improved internet services in Westport and there are ways in which this could be realized. The challenge is to make it happen.

8. Prepare, adopt and implement a plan for the disposition of the old High School.

In 2020, the Town with a grant provided by Mass Development worked with Utile Architecture and Planning on an adaptive reuse analysis of the high school. Utile reviewed several studies from the recent school building project that analyzed the existing conditions of the site, building structure, and its mechanical system. The study looked at two types of potential reuse strategies for the site: scenarios that adaptively reuse the existing high school building and scenarios that replace the high school with new development. Adaptive reuse included municipal offices, senior living, and other public uses and site redevelopment and new construction scenarios included, single-family low and high density, multi-family, and senior living.



FORMER MIDDLE/SR. HIGH SCHOOL

The study was designed to serve as a resource for the Town officials to engage with the community and future developers in determining the best program development for the site. The next step would be a market analysis to test the feasibility of each scenario. Except for single-family residential, new uses will require re-zoning and possibly public water and sewer systems.

In September 2021 all school activities, except for the school administrative offices, moved to the new Junior/Senior High School and

most of this building will be vacant. This is a large 155,000 s.f. building that will need to be maintained until a new use is determined. Disposition of this property on time is essential to minimize yearly maintenance and operational costs.

9. Establish a Climate Resilience Committee to address to probable effects of climate change.



EAST BEACH



EAST BEACH ROAD

The unanimous top priority of the East Beach Corridor Vulnerability Study, completed in May 2021, was to establish a climate resilience committee. The study said that climate change would affect the entire Town and must be addressed accordingly.

The proposed responsibilities of the Committee would be:

- a) Identify the many ways that climate change is going to impact the Town of Westport, with a particular focus between now and 2050. Such impacts include, but are not limited to sea-level rise, beach erosion, coastal flooding, loss of saltmarsh, potential breach of The Let, increased number of 90 degree days with resulting heat-related deaths, impact on the hydrological cycle of drought and flood, and resulting harm to agriculture, an influx of pests, stress on the electric grid, saltwater intrusion into wells, increased severity of storms, difficulty or impossibility of obtaining property insurance, ocean acidification affecting marine life, invasive species on land or sea, increase in disease because of weaker frost, estuary flooding, interior flooding of rivers, brooks and streams, possible dam breaches.
- b) For every type of impact, assign priorities in terms of urgency and then identify the entity in Town that is most appropriate to understand the problem and prepare a response plan that would include what can be done and what resources are needed.
- c) Identify state and federal grants, private foundations, and other funding opportunities that can support the work of the committee's planning and the implementation of the committee's recommendations.
- d) Compile the responses with their costs into a prioritized list that considers factors of cost, urgency, impact, and numbers of residents affected, and potential availability of funding.

10. Develop a Comprehensive multi-year Capital and Human Services Plan

In the 2016 Master Plan, one of the major objectives was to develop a comprehensive multi-year capital plan to “provide and maintain adequate capital facilities and human services as the town continues to grow and change.”

Over the last five years, the Town completed major investments in public safety, educational, and housing facilities. Although these projects are notable accomplishments, there is still a need to address the deficiencies of all other municipal facilities, many of which are old or historic buildings. A comprehensive plan, with priorities and budgets spread out over 5-10 years, is essential to keep pace with the Town’s growth and meet the needs of its changing demographics. A detailed assessment by qualified consultants is required to prioritize and determine the costs of maintaining, upgrading, or re-purposing these existing facilities. In addition to the physical conditions, each building or facility should be evaluated in terms of its suitability to meet the needs of its intended use.

In 2019, the Long-Term Building Committee (LTBC) surveyed town-owned properties. They noted numerous items of deferred maintenance and repairs, outdated building systems, and upgrades to meet current building codes; for instance, the Cemetery building and the Harbormaster’s office have no indoor plumbing. Several facilities will require major projects:



HIGHWAY DEPT. BLDG.

a) The Highway Department is challenged by the need to store and maintain more vehicles and equipment. The Town has accepted responsibility for new roads in newly created subdivisions while maintaining drainage systems, plowing, and re-paving 137 miles of existing roads. The department needs to replace its repair and maintenance buildings with larger, code-compliant facilities, including replacing the existing salt storage shed which is structurally deficient.

b) Senior Center. The number of seniors over the age of 60 living in Westport has increased by 54% over the period 2010 – 2020. As a result, 44% of the Town’s population is 55 and older and the need for services is growing rapidly. The Town’s Council on Aging provides services from a historic school building built in the early 1900s. To a large degree in recent years the facilities have been maintained with private and CPA historic preservation funding. However, there is a need for additional space for Town-sponsored senior activities which may need to be met in an expansion of the current building or in a separate facility.



SENIOR CENTER, REED RD.

c) Municipal Offices. Many municipal offices are in the historic 1939 Town Hall and the historic school constructed in 1918 known as the Town Hall Annex. CPA funding has been used in recent years to maintain these buildings under the historic preservation category. Decisions need to be

made as to whether to upgrade these buildings to help meet modern needs or to sell the buildings with a historic preservation restriction on them.



TOWN HALL, MAIN RD.



TOWN HALL ANNEX, MAIN RD.

As the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated, underinvestment in public health staffing and infrastructure forces communities to scramble to adequately respond to a crisis in a robust and timely manner. While Westport's Board of Health and other town entities, including the organizers of the Westport Food Pantry, rose to the challenge and the influx of CARES Act funds and state resources supported the response, the lack of planning, resources, and preparedness for future public health threats leave the town vulnerable. More thought should be put into how the town can be proactive to enhance its public health resilience in both the context of future health crises, emergency preparedness, and climate resilience.

In 2008 a Cemetery Task Force recommended the purchase of 20 acres for a new cemetery to meet the future needs for Westport. Consideration needs to be given to such a purchase or alternative ways to meet the cremation and full body burials in Westport. Consideration should also be given to the establishment of a Friends of the Cemeteries group such as serves the Council on Aging or Cemetery Commissioners to provide support to the public and private burial grounds in Westport.

A report on Westport's Municipal Management prepared in 2005 by the Center for Policy Analysis at UMass Dartmouth (the Barrow Report) recommended amending the Town's By-Laws to mandate capital planning in conjunction with long-term fiscal planning. The report recommended that the Capital Improvement Committee be restructured and charged with "developing and regularly updating a 5-year Capital Plan". Sixteen years later, these recommendations remain unfulfilled.

11. Conclusion

This Master Plan Update offers many recommendations for future actions to improve the quality of life and functioning of the Town government in Westport. In most cases, there are existing boards or committees that have the responsibility for following up on these recommendations and inviting public participation in deciding whether and how best to implement them. In other cases, such as improving internet service and addressing climate change, new committees are proposed that would be expected to do the same, i. e. to explore the needs and engage the public in finding the best solutions that will help preserve the highly desired rural nature of the community. The Master Plan Update Committee did not have the charge or the resources to explore these matters in-depth, but rather to assess the progress over the first half of the plan period, identify changed circumstances, uncompleted tasks, and new needs and then recommend priority directions for existing bodies or, where needed, new bodies to pursue these matters.



Appendices:

Note: The following documents and reports are only available in digital format by clicking the blue hyperlink.

A. Documents prepared in the process of formulating the Master Plan Update

1. [Water, Wastewater, and Stormwater](#)
2. [Addressing Westport's Structural Deficit](#)
3. [Westport's Economic Development – Past Patterns and Future Choices](#)
4. [Education](#)
5. [Results of Surveys about Internet Services in Westport](#)
6. [Expand high-speed internet services throughout the Town](#)
7. [Housing](#)
8. [Climate Resilience Committee](#)
9. [Land Use](#)
10. [Traffic and Circulation](#)
11. [Historic Resources](#)

B. Major Reports and Plans reviewed in preparation of this document

1. [Targeted Integrated Water Resource Management Plan \(2019\).](#)
2. [Route 6 Sewer Preliminary Design \(2021\).](#)
3. [Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness \(MVP\) Report \(2018\).](#)
4. [East Beach Vulnerability Study \(2021\).](#)
5. [Westport Community School District Strategic/District Improvement Plan 2020-2023.](#)
6. [Community Wastewater Treatment Plans for the Let and Cadman's Neck \(2021\).](#)
7. [Housing Production Plan, FY2018-2022.](#)
8. [Town of Westport Middle/Sr. High School reuse study \(2020\).](#)
9. [Westport's Municipal Management \(Barrows Report\) 2005.](#)

