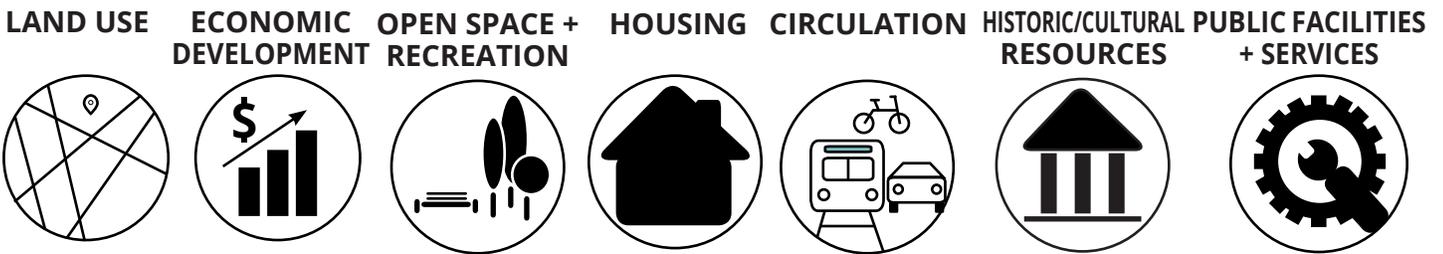


Winchester Master Plan Focus Groups Summary of Results

Prepared by JM Goldson 10/11/2018

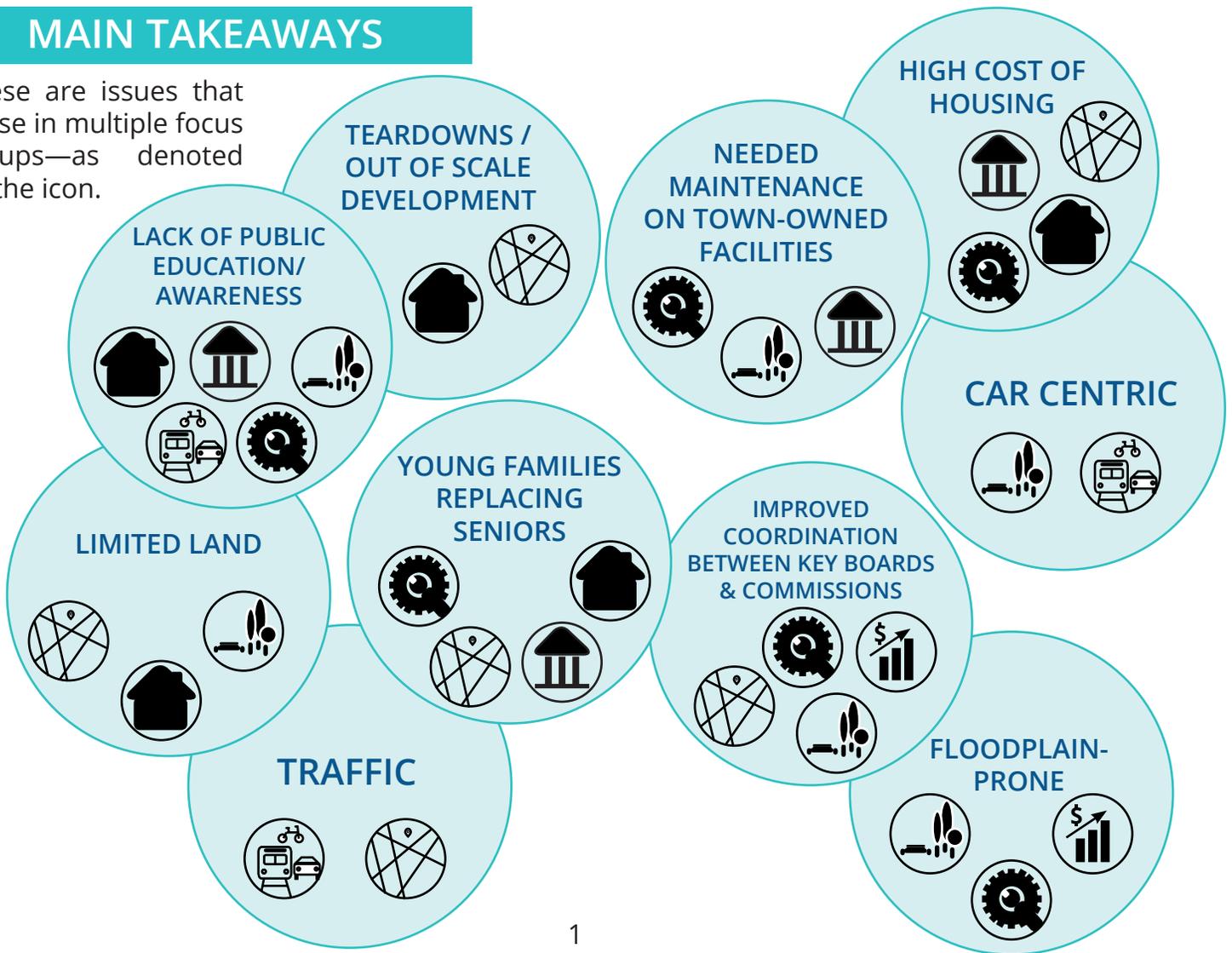
SUMMARY

On Tuesday, October 2nd, and Wednesday, October 3rd, 2018, the Master Plan Project Team held six focus groups—one on each of the master plan elements: Land Use, Housing, Economic Development, Circulation, Open Space and Recreation, and Historic, Cultural and Natural Resources. The team also conducted a series of interviews with public officials. There were a total of 44 participants across all six groups and interviews.



MAIN TAKEAWAYS

These are issues that arose in multiple focus groups—as denoted by the icon.





Participants identified the following as some of the issues, challenges, and land use needs facing Winchester today include:

LAND USE

- **Large-Scale Neighborhood Change**, due to the increasing number of teardowns and out-of-scale new development. Teardowns are accelerated by the booming housing market and encouraged Winchester's pro-development zoning and general attitude.
- **Limited Land for New Development** - there's a need for new development types, such as commercial and senior-oriented housing but a feeling among stakeholders that there is nowhere to build.
- **Lack of Coordination between Boards** - There were diverging opinions and feelings from stakeholders on this issue. Some participants argued that the development process is too long and boards are not well-coordinated. Others noted that the process is running smoothly.
- **Traffic**, aggravated by new developments located far from the city-center
- **Out with the Old, In with the New** - young families replace older residents increasing the school population and adding stress on an already at-capacity school system. Empty nesters—capitalizing on the high property values—sell their homes and move to smaller units with minimal maintenance in places like Boston or Cambridge. There is little incentive to remain in Winchester after their children leave the school system. Other seniors are priced out due to high property taxes and lack of affordable downsizing options.
- **Lack of True Open Space**



Participants identified the following as some of the issues, challenges, and economic development needs facing Winchester today include:

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- **Too Much Residential** - dominant land-use is residential and the current zoning favors the construction of residential over commercial, particularly in the Central Business District (CBD).
- **Limited Land for New Development** - there's a need for new development types, such as commercial and senior-oriented housing but a feeling among stakeholders that there is nowhere to build.
- **Anti-Development Process** - A disorienting permitting process, a lack of coordination and communication between Town boards/commissions, and strict zoning policy contributes to a feeling from some stakeholders that the town is anti-development. Other stakeholders also argued that the town is too pro-development (see *Land Use*).
- **Strict Parking Requirements**, particularly for new development in downtown. At the same time, parking is also an existing issue in the CBD.



Participants identified the following as some of the issues, challenges, and housing needs facing Winchester today include:

HOUSING

- **High Cost of Housing / Booming Housing Market**
- **Loss of Diversity** - both in housing types and demographically. Both in part due to the rising cost of housing.
- **Limited Homeownership Options**, despite being a highly desirable place to live.
- **Limited Downsizing Options for Seniors** - seniors living in single-family homes have nowhere to downsize to after their children leave the school system.



[continued]

HOUSING

- **Loss of Moderate-Scale Homes / Out-of-Scale Development**
- **Housing Stock Quality** - deferred maintenance on residential properties may be contributing to the high number of teardowns
- **Increasing Number of Teardowns**
- **Changing Standards for Homes** - existing Cape-style homes are considered to be too small by some modern families while single-family homes are too large for seniors who are looking to downsize.



Participants identified the following as some of the issues, challenges, and open space and recreation needs facing Winchester today include:

OPEN SPACE + RECREATION

- **Lack of True Open Space** - the town possesses a lot of highly programmed open space, including a farm, golf course, athletic fields, and cemeteries—but lacks passive recreation space. Middlesex Fells is the largest contributor of passive space.
- **Climate Change** - Scientists predict that five-hundred-year storms and mega-storms will become more common as well. As the planet warms, Massachusetts will become a warmer and wetter climate—affecting flora, fauna, housing, water quality, and more.
- **Rising Riverwater Levels, Stormwater, and Flood Mitigation** - Many buildings in downtown reside in a floodplain. Hundred-year floods are becoming more frequent leading to increase number and potency of flooding incidents. Winchester’s lack of non-developed land and pervious surfaces only further contributes to higher rates of floods.
- **Water Quality**
- **Lack of Public Education Around Environmental/Conservation Issues** - residents do not know where public access points are to Winchester’s natural areas.
- **Lack of Access to Open Space/Conservation and Recreation Land** - the majority of natural areas and recreation fields are only accessible via car. Residents report feeling unsafe when biking on the streets.



Participants identified the following as some of the issues, challenges, and circulation needs facing Winchester today include:

CIRCULATION

- **Morning School Traffic** - All three schools begin at the same time (8:30 AM) which causes major traffic issues, particularly in the downtown area.
- **Lack of Public Education Around Alternative Transportation** - residents do not take advantage of alternative transportation options. For example, dock-less bikes are not well understood. Public outreach and education would help cultivate an alternative transportation culture, encouraging residents to take up walking, biking, and other different modes.
- **Auto-centric Streets** - cars dominate the streets, particularly downtown. Residents report feeling unsafe when biking on the streets.
- **Sidewalk Maintenance Needed**
- **Speeding Cars** - slow zones, particularly in downtown, are needed to slow down cars across town.



Participants identified the following as some of the issues, challenges, and historic/cultural needs facing Winchester today include:

HISTORIC/CULTURAL RESOURCES

- **Money** - some groups better than others at raising funds
- **Lack of Public Awareness Around Historic/Cultural Issues** - residents do not know/care about Winchester's history. There is no connection to school curriculum about Winchester's history.
- **Lack of Volunteers** - Despite a high demand for volunteers across Winchester's many organizations, it is difficult to recruit new volunteers due to the steep time commitment.
- **Division between Families and Non-Families** - Due to the high cost of housing, both parents in many Winchester families work to afford to live in town. Families are the easiest to contact due to their connection to the school system—but also the most difficult to recruit due to their busy schedules.
- **Quality of Historic Resources**, particularly the Sanborn House, Wright Locke Farm, and Griffin Museum
- **Poor/Incomplete Records** - many records were lost after the Town's basement was flooded. Historic archives relies heavily on volunteer-time.
- **Lack of Stewardship for Historic Resources**
- **Lack of Local Historic District**
- **Lack of Cohesive Tourism Identity**
- **Changing Demographics, Shifting Histories** - as newcomers arrive in town, town's history and culture must shift to welcome new diverse cultures.



Participants identified the following as some of the issues, challenges, and public facility needs facing Winchester today include:

PUBLIC FACILITIES & SERVICES

- **Increased Demand on Services** - As taxes continue to rise, residents demand levels of service that meet their expectations. This places added pressure on departments to do more with their budgets while maintaining adequate levels of service.
- **High Cost of Living Outpacing Wages** - The high cost of housing in Winchester creates a situation where many municipal employees cannot live in the town where they work. This, and other factors, are creating challenges of holding on to staff longer-term and ensuring succession plans for senior staff members entering retirement age.
- **Capital Versus Operational Expenditures** - Town Meeting has been willing to spend money on large capital projects, but operational budgets for maintenance, staffing, programs, or supplies/materials have not kept pace over time. This has led to a backlog of maintenance issues for some town-owned facilities.