

Topsfield Downtown Revitalization Plan

Downtown Strategic Plan Working Group Meeting

June 26, 2019

Topsfield Town Hall

Attendees

- Tim Collins
- Steve Hall
- John Spencer
- Andrea O'Reilly
- Nicole Manseau
- Brian Woodland
- Lynne Bermudez
- Sarah Lodewick Guido
- Alex Qirjazi
- **Absent: Josh Rownd** (alternate Steve Hall was in attendance on Josh's behalf).
- **Metropolitan Area Planning Council:** Betsy Cowan, Chief of Economic Development and Alex Koppelman, Housing and Land Use Planner

Members of the public also attended the meeting.

The Meeting began at 6:35pm

Introduction

Betsy Chief of Economic Development, MAPC, and the project manager for the Topsfield Downtown Revitalization Plan introduced herself. Ms. Cowan introduced Alex Koppelman, Regional Housing and Land Use Planner, MAPC, who will be providing technical assistance for the project.

Then each member of the working group (listed above) introduced themselves. Ms. Cowan proceeded to present the first portion of the presentation (posted on the Town website). The working group was prompted for a discussion regarding their interest in participating in the working group.

Working Group Motivations and Expectations

Several members said they were motivated to volunteer for the working group due to sentimentality about Topsfield's past and what the downtown used to be. The group mentioned that the downtown used to have grocery stores, a hardware store and pharmacy, and more things to do. Several members also noted they have lived in Topsfield their whole lives and want to see the town succeed and live up to its true potential. Others shared their perspective as business owners, and noted the amount of talent in the town that could be better utilized. They shared a feeling of responsibility and commitment to Topsfield and the hope that the plan could position the town to take advantage of future opportunities.

Presentation: (posted on the Town website)

Betsy Cowan presented an overview of MAPC, and an overview of the goals and timeline of the Downtown Revitalization Plan. The Plan will be conducted by MAPC, through \$30,000 in funding provided by the state through the District Local Technical Assistance Program.

Ms. Cowan noted that this Plan will be done in partnership with the Topsfield Parking Study which has recently begun. The Parking Study is funded through the Massachusetts Downtown Initiative, and will be conducted by Stantec.

The remainder of the presentation focused on the Business Context and Housing Context (business mix and customer base), two key elements of the Downtown Revitalization Plan.

Demographic Presentation

Alex Koppelman presented key demographic data for Topsfield. Questions centered around the population projections (MAPC will clarify the data elements behind the population projections) and discussion centered around key trends such as an aging population in Topsfield and the lack of a strong 25-34 year-old demographic. The group also discussed housing options in Topsfield, as well as the amount of disposable income in Topsfield and surrounding communities.

Business Context

Ms. Cowan then presented key data on the business context, highlighting the zoning in the study area and describing the residential, employee and business counts within a 5-10-15 minute drive of the downtown. Discussion focused on competing business districts and downtowns. The MAPC team will now analyze elements from those business districts to determine key competitive advantages and disadvantages of Topsfield to discuss at the next Working Group meeting.

Discussion: The Working Group discussed the Demographic and Business Context data. The following themes were discussed:

- **Future Data Analysis:**
 - Employee base: The employee figures do not accurately represent telecommuters. MAPC will investigate ways to gather information on that population segment.
 - Business district comparisons and SWOT Analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats): MAPC will investigate what helped the other communities grow – what competitive advantages they built upon, and what they added to their towns. Analysis of their zoning will also be conducted in order to compare it to the zoning in Topsfield.
 - Traffic analysis to determine the flow of the cars and the opportunities for additional customers for local businesses.
- **Topsfield Advantages:**
 - Rt 1 is a big advantage for us – lots of traffic passing by Topsfield – just need to put up signage or other ways to let them know what's downtown.
 - Strong amount of disposable income in Topsfield and surrounding communities.

- Attractions in Topsfield such as the Topsfield Fair and open space/hiking trails and bike trails bring people to Topsfield.
- Playgrounds also bring people to Topsfield from other communities.
- Several strong existing businesses as well as large employers that draw employees from outside of Topsfield.
- Dedicated citizens and significant interest in improving the downtown.
- Strong retail and restaurant market potential could attract developers and entrepreneurs.
- Challenges
 - Changing nature of retail, competition with Amazon
 - Density of different retail, restaurant and other attractions that will bring people to the downtown
 - Lack of available space—small business village district compared to other towns with larger commercial districts.
- Competitive Business Districts:
 - Georgetown: grocery stores and good restaurants.
 - Hamilton: cute boutiques and restaurants, good feel in the downtown.
 - Danvers: Large selection of goods, services at the mall.
 - Beverly: 15 minutes away and has everything someone would need.
 - Newburyport: close to the water and has lots of restaurants.
 - Ipswich: High employee base (EBSCO and others) and good selection of restaurants.
 - Peabody: shopping venues along Route MA-114.
- Previous efforts:
 - There was a similar efforts done several years ago through which significant data was collected through a survey. MAPC will follow up with Brian and Nicole to gather the results of that survey and discuss the lessons learned from that effort.

Housing Context

Alex Koppelman presented an overview of the housing context in Topsfield, highlighted the high percentage of single-family homes, recent home and condo sale trends, as well as the limited rental housing market in Topsfield.

Discussion: The working group discussed the housing context in relation to the goals of attracting additional customers to the downtown. The group highlighted the key questions regarding the various options to attract additional customers to the downtown, such as

- Improving the business mix and enhancing marketing/branding efforts to attract residential customers and employees from Topsfield and surrounding towns
- Increasing the employee base in Topsfield to increase the customer base
- Increasing affordable housing options and options for seniors within Topsfield, in the downtown and elsewhere to provide additional customers and workers for downtown businesses.

There was a discussion about whether the public would be comfortable with changes to the downtown and the potential for increased housing density. The group also discussed whether to focus on business development or housing development, and if they needed to be planned for simultaneously. Household demographic information was also referenced in conversation about how the town could become more multidimensional and attract more young professionals to complement the older segments of the population. Another topic was walkability and housing in the downtown. It was mentioned that people like to walk downtown when the weather's nice. The downtown is a place where people see others they know and can socialize. Nearby playgrounds were also mentioned as places close to the downtown that allow for congregation.

The working group discussed the various implications of each option (adding businesses, adding employers, adding housing), such as zoning, infrastructure needs, state tax incentives such as TIFS and other tools, traffic and parking considerations, length of time needed to build momentum, etc. These questions will be discussed in future meetings.

Outreach: Ms. Cowan described the outreach element of the Plan, based on discussions with Town representatives regarding the need and interest in engaging residents and other key stakeholders.

Discussion: The Working Group discussed goals for outreach, including educating the public regarding the goals and objectives of the Plan in order to get quality feedback to inform the Plan. There was a discussion about the need to capture multiple viewpoints about Topsfield and make an effort to talk to specific segments of the public that could represent different views. Others said that business owners should be engaged in the process. Some members of the group would like to use a survey for public outreach and possibly a dedicated Facebook page to keep the public updated on the plan. After further discussion the group agreed that it's important the public is aware of the plan at its outset so they can be better informed for events where public input is gathered to support decision making.

Targeted outreach will be conducted over the summer with key stakeholders, such as business owners, property owners and developers, and will build on the information gathered in the survey that was conducted in the previous effort.

The outreach will then focus on the community visioning event to be held in the fall. The outreach will be designed to gather informative feedback from members of the public to shape the development of the plan.

There was a discussion regarding ways to capitalize on the email networks from previous efforts, such as Nicole's email network. Discussion also centered on other ways to share information, such as print media, the Town website and postings in local businesses.

Volunteer Opportunities:

Betsy highlighted the following volunteer opportunities for the working group:

- Assistance with outreach:
 - Business outreach: Alex Qirjazi volunteered to assist with business outreach

- This outreach will be focused on the Business/Developer Roundtable in August.
 - Residential outreach:
- Review of previous data collected:
 - Brian Woodland volunteered to provide this information to MAPC
- Review of housing context and residential information
- Assistance with public space improvement ideas
 - Tim Collins offered to discuss these ideas further

Next Meeting:

The Working Group will meet monthly throughout the 8 months of the Plan development. The next meeting will be held at the end of July, either July 25, 30 or 31.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:35pm.