



WELLESLEY COMMUNITY MEETING SUMMARY

Meeting #2

Thursday, May 3, 2018

The second of three community-wide meetings for the Wellesley Housing Production Plan (HPP) took place on Thursday, May 3, at 7 PM. Approximately 30 people attended the meeting, including Planning Board members. The meeting was in the gym of Sprague Elementary School and ran from 7:00 pm to about 9:00 pm.

The purpose of the meeting was to get community feedback on a set of goals for the HPP. It included a presentation by the consultants, followed by an open house-style activity designed to inform participants of the purpose of each goal and gather public opinion on the importance of incorporating the goal into the HPP. The results from this exercise and additional feedback from participants are summarized below.

Main Conclusions

- Participants feel strongly that Wellesley should strive to reach the affordable housing goal of 10 percent to maintain local control.
- Many participants were in favor of at least slightly increased density, more housing choice, and increased racial and socio-economic diversity.
- The most major concerns were increased traffic with the increase in density, the lack of public transportation access that some new developments might face, and the potential change in the character of Wellesley with new housing development.
- Participants were in favor of creating more housing through redevelopment of existing buildings, as long as those units allowed for residents to be a part of the community and have access to town services and resources.

Meeting Design

After registration, participants were asked to read a couple of introductory boards and make a note of what was at the “heart of the matter” for them regarding housing in Wellesley. Next was a presentation by Judi Barrett of Barrett Planning Group LLC and Jennifer Goldson of JM Goldson community preservation + planning, after which the meeting was opened up to an open house style exercise. Participants walked around the gym to observe five different boards with one goal on each of board. After reading the information and asking questions to the Planning Board members stationed at each goal, participants could write comments on the strengths and weaknesses of the goal and vote on

whether they thought the goal was very important, somewhat important, or not important.

A sixth station was more general: it asked participants what their ideas were for addressing housing needs in Wellesley, and what they think should be further explored in the planning process. After participants had finished giving their input at each station, they were free to leave the meeting.

Summary of Community Feedback

Heart of the Matter

When asked what is at the heart of the matter for them when it comes to housing in Wellesley, participants primarily responded with a desire for a greater range of housing choice, housing that would protect the character of the town, and housing that would create a more welcoming environment for people of different racial and economic backgrounds.

Draft Housing Goals

Goal 1: Create a variety of affordable and mixed-income housing that helps to make Wellesley a welcoming community for people with diverse socio-economic backgrounds.

Twenty-two participants marked this goal as “very important”, and three marked it as “somewhat important”. Many commenters saw the benefits of having a more diverse community, and some asked how to best educate the public on these benefits. Some suggested developing support systems for the socio-economically diverse population and to promote diverse businesses to help integrate the community. Several comments mentioned MassBay as an opportunity to meet this goal. Others expressed concerns about neighborhood resistance to any housing other than single-family and worry about how to meet this goal.

Goal 2: Provide more housing options, including affordable and market-rate housing options, for low- and middle-income families, seniors, and individuals with disabilities, through a variety of mechanisms to increase housing choice.

Twenty-one people marked this goal “very important”, and four marked it “somewhat important”. Some strengths of this goal were that it would

enable people who work in town (i.e. teachers, police officers) to live in town, it would diversify talents and skills sets in town, and it would offer more opportunities for intergenerational interaction by helping out young families and elderly residents. Some participants noted opportunities, including promoting smaller projects in residential neighborhoods, creating higher density zoning on upper floors in commercial business districts, and creating cluster developments on larger parcels. Some concerns regarding this goal were that the increase in density would increase traffic and have the potential to change the character of the town, and that while the focus on low- and middle-income families is important, families with 80% to 120% AMI also have a need for affordable housing in Wellesley.

Goal 3: Actively strive to incrementally achieve state's MGL c.40B 10% goal for affordable housing by producing at least 45 units annually that count on the state's subsidized housing inventory, through local actions and approval of private development, especially development of rental housing units. Create at least 400 housing units that are permanently affordable to income-eligible households by 2028.

Twenty-three people marked this goal as “very important”, three people marked it as “somewhat important”, and one person marked it as “not important”. Most commenters emphasized the importance of Wellesley being able to control its own destiny by striving not just for safe harbor but for the full 10 percent. Some commenters felt that this goal could help to meet other goals, but others expressed concern that if meeting this goal is not done in a thoughtful way, other goals, such as housing choice and diversity, could be at risk.

Goal 4: Encourage new development and repurposing of existing buildings to create affordable and mixed income housing that:

- Reinforces the development patterns of Wellesley's residential neighborhoods and maintains a predominantly single-family character in established single-family neighborhoods
- Strengthens the vitality of business districts and commercial corridors with diverse housing types

- Promotes housing development in walkable areas with convenient access to shops, services, public transportation, parks, schools, and other neighborhood destinations

Every participant rated this goal as “very important” (25 people). Participants emphasized the repurposing of existing buildings to be an important aspect of the goal, and they feel that walkability and access to public transportation and town services is essential when considering placement of affordable housing. Some opportunities discussed were selling and developing St. Paul’s Sisters of Charity and creating more mixed-use housing in Wellesley Square. A couple concerns residents had were the availability of parking and the question on whether development that isn’t necessarily walkable but has easy access to highways should also be prioritized. One comment suggested that this type of development might not be good for the community aspect of residents living there.

Goal 5: Promote the development of surplus institutional and town-owned land as well as the redevelopment of office parks and existing affordable housing complexes to create desirable mixed-income and mixed-use neighborhoods, where feasible.

Twenty-three participants rated this goal as “very important”, and two rated it as “somewhat important”. Commenters mostly wanted to focus on redevelopment rather than new development in order to preserve as much open space as possible. It was emphasized that it was important for these developments, whether they were new or redevelopments, to be close to services and able to connect to town life. One concern was regarding the potential decrease in parking in town. Another commenter was enthusiastic about redevelopment, but acknowledged that a large amount of development projects would have to take place to realistically maintain SHI growth.

Strategies

A final station asked participants what their ideas were for addressing housing needs in Wellesley, and what they think should be further explored in the planning process. Here are some of the responses.

- Talk to people who live in affordable housing
- Share what other towns are doing across the country
- Improve access to public transportation

- More community education about the benefits to children and families of a diverse community
- More accessory apartments in limited areas
- Change zoning to create slightly denser development
- Engage the neighborhoods to consider how to integrate new residents before they come, to be welcoming and integrate into the community.
- Local incentives to support affordable housing
- Mixed-use properties in places such as Wellesley Square and Central Street
- Mass Bay rental units to allow students to live nearby; could also support Mass Bay faculty and staff

*Prepared by JM Goldson
05/2018*