



WELLESLEY COMMUNITY MEETING SUMMARY

Saturday, April 7, 2018

The first of three community-wide meetings for the Wellesley Housing Production Plan (HPP) took place on Saturday, April 7, at 9:30.

Approximately 45 people attended, including two who did not sign the attendance sheet.

The meeting included informal small-group discussion time during registration, a presentation by the consultants, and an hour-long discussion period designed to enlist ideas about two topics: the ideal vision of housing in Wellesley, and an assessment of opportunities for and barriers to achieving the vision. Each table had a volunteer from the HPP working group whose job was to facilitate and record the group's discussion (about five to seven participants per table and a total of seven tables). At the end of the one-hour discussion period, each facilitator summarized what group members had said. The notes that follow represent ideas that participants shared at the meeting. However, it is not a literal transcript. The consultants have tried to summarize points of agreement and potential disagreement as well as apparent inconsistencies.

Informal Discussions – Registration Period

- Many of the attendees were long-time Wellesley residents – people who had lived in town for 20+ years, either in the same house or in a few homes in Wellesley
- The attendees were asked to talk about changes they have observed in Wellesley as residents of the town. The most common answers included the increasing frequency of teardowns, exceptionally high property taxes, and traffic congestion. People also mentioned the recent increase in Chapter 40B development proposals.
- The attendees were also asked to comment on what they think the Town's main housing issues are today and what they hope the HPP will address.
 - Teardowns
 - Age-friendly housing
 - Protection of neighborhood character
 - Control of Chapter 40B process
 - Strategies to reach Chapter 40B "safe harbor" status

Housing Vision for Wellesley

- Protect the character of established neighborhoods
- Strategically locate affordable housing near public transportation, goods and services, and schools, and in walkable locations
- Site more densely developed housing in and near the business districts, e.g., mixed-use buildings or multifamily buildings adjacent to commercial buildings
- Geographically distribute affordable housing throughout the town so that no neighborhood is overburdened
- Allow more housing choices in established neighborhoods, such as the ability to convert existing single-family homes to two-family or small multi-family dwellings
- Develop Town-owned property, e.g., the North 40 parcel or the Tailby Lot as a preferred way to create more housing
- Provide for additional development, infill, or reuse of existing properties in office park settings, e.g., Harvard Pilgrim or Sun Life, or the public housing on Barton Road (Wellesley Housing Authority)
- Remove the value of land from the cost of housing: consider a community land trust approach

Housing Opportunities

- Pursue development of Town-owned property, e.g., North 40, Tailby Lot, Wellesley Middle School, Morton Circle
- Create more housing for employees at major institutions, e.g., Babson, Wellesley, Dana Hall, Tenacre
- Develop housing on surplus land at MassBay Community College or the Sisters of Charity/Seton Residence
- Allow accessory dwelling units and “age friendly” multifamily use of existing residences
- Identify redevelopment possibilities along Worcester Street/Route 9
- Zone for more diverse housing with overlay districts or reducing regulatory barriers, e.g., multifamily conversions
- Preserve existing small homes

Housing Barriers or Constraints

- Conservation restrictions limit the amount of Town-owned land that can be developed for housing
- Tension between the desire to avoid, isolated large developments, preserve the character of existing single-family neighborhoods, and accommodate 400+ additional Chapter 40B units into those neighborhoods without scale and density
- The Town's zoning substantially restricts what developers can do: use regulations, maximum density, maximum height, parking
- Wellesley's high income/high household wealth profile, prestige, very high land values, and the economics of teardowns contribute to loss of smaller, relatively affordable homes
- Lack of opportunities for seniors to downsize interferes with "natural" turnover in housing stock and forces them to sell to a developer or let the house fall into disrepair because they cannot maintain it
- Lack of funding for affordable housing
- Lack of public awareness or understanding of Chapter 40B and affordable housing needs
- Perceptions of affordable housing
- Lack of public consensus and public commitment to housing
- Traffic, parking, limited in-town public transportation all contribute to mobility constraints