



**Meeting
Notes**

Attendees: Ken Schwartz
Ralph Willmer
Mike Borsare
Darlene Wynne
Citizens of Charlton

Date/Time: 11/02/2006

Project No.: 09917.00

Place: Charlton Senior Center

Re: Charlton Public Meeting #1: Visioning

Notes taken by:

On Thursday November 2, 2006, the first meeting was held in a series of public workshops centering on updating the Town of Charlton's Master Plan. The last Master Plan of Charlton was adopted in 2000. Since that plan is six years old and the town has met 75% of those implementation steps, the goals and strategies need to be updated. Approximately 25 - 30 citizens showed up for the meeting. The attendees represented a cross section of the community, including business interests, public officials, and citizens; all were there to voice their opinions on the future of Charlton.

The first thing on the agenda was a brief presentation with some facts and observations of Charlton from the perspective of VHB, Inc., the town's selected consultant. This short presentation was given by Ralph Willmer and summarized for the citizens a little bit about their town in planning terms. Following this introductory lesson was the core of the night's activities, public discussion and input on the future vision for the Town.

The crowd proved to be very lively and provided the VHB team with valuable insight about Charlton's goals and expectations for the new Master Plan. Two exercises were completed at the meeting that night. The first was a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) exercise led by Ken Schwartz, where members of the audience compiled, through a call and response session, issues important to Charlton. After they established the list the citizens then voted on which items carried the most importance in their personal opinions. Each participant had eight stickers to vote with in any way they saw fit. The second exercise was a group exercise that looked at the previous Master Plan's main goals in addition to its sectional goals and asked if they had been fulfilled. These exercises are broken down below in more detail.

Exercise 1: SWOT

The following is a record of the SWOT exercise. It should be noted that the higher the number of stickers recorded, the more important the participants found that item. Also, the items of each group (Strengths, Weakness, etc...) are listed in descending order.

► *Strengths*

- Rural Character - 13 Stickers
- Great Schools - 7 Stickers
- Safety - 5 Stickers
- Old Style New England Town - 2 Stickers
- Rt. 3, Dresser Hill Rd (Vistas) - 2 Stickers
- Historical Assets - 2 Stickers
- No Crime - 1 Sticker
- Pride in Community - 1 Sticker
- Birds & Wildlife - 1 Sticker
- Large Tracts of Land in Protection - 1 Sticker
- Large Area (Land) - 0 Stickers
- Accessibility (Commutable to: Hartford, Worcester, and Boston) - 0 Stickers
- Low Tax Rate - 0 Stickers
- Frog Jumping - 0 Stickers
- Large Bodies of Water - 0 Stickers
- Not a Tourist Destination - 0 Stickers
- Can Still See the Stars - 0 Stickers
- Local Support (Business) - 0 Stickers
- Multiple Residential Options (subdivision, traditional, rural) - 0 Stickers
- Many Land Protection Options & Organizations - 0 Stickers
- National History (Grizzly Adams, Dr. Morton, Ridertown) - 0 Stickers

► *Weaknesses*

- 'Flexible' Zoning Unavailable at the Present (New Urbanism) - 12 Stickers
- Lack of Water & Sewer - 8 Stickers
- Update Downtown Zoning for Mixed Use, Village District, Economic Vibrancy, Visual Cues in Downtown - 8 Stickers
- Linking New Developments into Protected Space - 6 Stickers
- Parking (Downtown) - 5 Stickers
- Route 20 Corridor Development - 4 Stickers
- Public Facilities (Senior Center) - 4 Stickers
- No Plan for Residential Growth - i.e. How Much? - 4 Stickers
- Commuter Transportation Options - 3 Stickers
- Public Facilities (General) - 3 Stickers
- Services (Restaurant, Grocery Store?) - 2 Stickers
- Congestion / Points of Access / Egress (e.g. schools, town center, north of 20) - 2 Stickers

- Lack of Access to Water Bodies – 2 Stickers
- Lack of Cultural Resources – 1 Sticker
- Downtown is Not Typical of New England – 1 Sticker
- Integration of Masonic Home – 0 Stickers
- Public Facilities (Fire Station) – 0 Stickers
- *Opportunities*
 - Incentives for Developers to Preserve Open Space – 3 Stickers
 - Design Review Standards – 2 Stickers
 - Wildlife Corridors – 1 Sticker
 - Bodies of Water Inaccessible, Need More Public Access – 0 Stickers
 - Training from Businesses and Schools – 0 Stickers
- *Threats*
 - Uncontrolled Development / Added tax burden / Lack of identity – 10 Stickers
 - New Schoolchildren Maxing Out Current System / Declining Quality – 7 Stickers
 - Fear of Planning ‘Creativity’ – 5 Stickers
 - Route 20, If Not Controlled – 4 Stickers
 - Contaminated and Lack of Water – 4 Stickers
 - Lack of Fire Protection Throughout the Town – 3 Stickers
 - Masonic Homes’ Impact – 2 Stickers
 - Lack of Financial Resources to Support Improvement / Residential Taxes Increasing – 1 Sticker
 - Division of Town by Route 20 Development – 0 Stickers

Exercise 2: Group Analysis

The following is a brief synopsis of the groups’ notes on the state of goals from the 2000 Master Plan.

- *Land Use Goals*
 - To summarize the comments of the land use group, they felt that all of the previous goals were being addressed. However, one of the major items listed in the SWOT exercise was the creation of more flexible zoning districts. As this was a goal of the 2000 Master Plan, it appears that this item was overlooked by the land use group.
- *Housing Goals*
 - The housing group made a couple of observations. First, affordable housing in Charlton is lacking. Standing at ~2.9 % the affordable housing in Charlton is well below the Massachusetts state minimum standard of 10%. The consensus was that the number of affordable units should be increased to meet this minimum. The group also agreed with the continuation of the goal from the 2000 Plan that stated Charlton should continue retaining its rural character. In addition to this agreement, the group also thought the goal of

slowing down residential growth should be put into the 2006 plan.

➤ *Economic Development Goals*

- This group agreed wholeheartedly with each of the 2000 Master Plan's economic development goals, with one note. They thought that instead of increasing business activity through the construction of new businesses, the goal should be to increase it by adding to the allowed uses of Charlton's existing building stock.

➤ *Natural and Cultural Resources Goals*

- The general consensus at the meeting was that all the natural and cultural resource goals from the 2000 Plan need to be carried over to the new Master Plan. The crowd felt that most of the goals were being addressed but there was much room for visible improvement. Specifically, the topics of water pollution and degradation that were mentioned in the SWOT exercise stand out. In addition, wildlife corridors were an item on the opportunities section of the SWOT that the group felt had not been addressed since the 2000 Master Plan.

➤ *Open Space and Recreation Goals*

- This group believed that none of the old goals had been met. They thought that the 2000 goals were rather works in progress, and needed to be reinforced with the updated Master Plan. Under the goal of protecting Charlton's valuable open space, this group noted Charlton did not participate in the Community Preservation Act. They also believed that Charlton should acquire more land through purchase and donation. Lastly, they thought that the public was unaware of the values of open space and lacked incentives from Charlton to safeguard it.
- The next 2000 goal mentioned was to protect Charlton's water resources for health and recreational purposes. The group thought this had not been met. They mentioned sewerage located around some bodies of water in Charlton. Specifically the Glen Echo, Buffumville Lake, and Prindle Lake. As a fix for this, the group thought bigger lot sizes might be in order.
- Additionally, the group noted providing adequate active recreational facilities. Since the 2000 Master Plan the group noted that some new fields had been added. The Maynard field and expansion of the Bond Rd Field were both completed. The group cited new potential for fields on Flint Rd.
- The group went on to echo an item mentioned in the SWOT exercise. They thought that public access to open space needed to be improved. On that subject, they also thought the open space currently accessible to the public was left improperly signed and this needed to change. Lastly, the group said the goal of amending zoning bylaws had been partially met.

➤ *Transportation and Circulation Goals*

- First, this group stated that walking paths are nonexistent in Charlton. Second, they cited a discontinuity between street signs (i.e. Stop, Yield, etc...). The signs are not shaped the same, lack the same fonts, and have no standard supports. Subsequently, the topic of confusing road signs (i.e. Sparrow Ln., Thompson St., etc...) was brought up. The speaker of the group said that

road signs were missing completely or one road was identified differently throughout its course because of old signs not being updated. Because of this there was a slim chance of an outsider navigating Charlton easily. Lastly, the group griped that if the Mass Pike backs up, Charlton's roads become gridlocked.

➤ *Town Services and Facilities Goals*

- The main thread running through this group's conversation was the need for more cellular coverage in Charlton. The group stated that the schools and recreation fields in Charlton have no coverage and this could be a major problem in the case of an emergency. They noted improving cellular coverage might kick start more economic development and also make an emergency management program feasible. The second item mentioned by this group was the need for proportional growth in government facilities with that of Charlton's population. Specifically, they pointed out the need for more fire department coverage as paramount within this growth.