

Visioning Public Workshop Event Summary

June 7, 2023

Marcy Miller and Zainab Kazmi of FHI Studio were joined by Justin LaFountain, Brian Wolff, and Jon Coleman of the Town of Bloomfield to host the first public workshop for Plan Bloomfield at the Human Services Center at 330 Park Avenue on Wednesday, June 7, 2023. They represented the Town of Bloomfield Community Visioning and Plan of Conservation and Development work effort from 4:30 PM – 6:30 PM.

The event was a great opportunity to engage with the various themes of the Plan of Conservation and Development, provide guidance and expertise on each theme, and learn about the project's process and timeline. Following a brief presentation on the planning process, data trends, and engagement themes, participants split up and spent time discussing POCD themes with the project staff. A summary of the key discussion points at each breakout session is listed below.

Number of Participants & Mailing List Sign Ups

- 28 participants
- 18 mailing list sign-ups

Overview of Presentation

- Timeline and process
- Summary of engagement efforts and key themes
- Existing conditions overview
- POCD Themes
 - Fostering Economic Growth
 - Expanding Housing Options for All
 - Preserving Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation
 - Enhancing Mobility and Connectivity
 - Improving Town Facilities and Resources
- Breakout Sessions



Breakout Sessions Overview

- **Preserving Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation**

Environmental Conservation

- Decrease application of chemicals on lawns (BAD, clover lawns good)
- Policies on the use of non-selective herbicides
- Surrounding towns are part of the pollinator pathway, desire for Bloomfield participation

Access to Open Spaces

- More open space access close to home: connections; neighborhood access; bike trails
- Open space configuration to support neighborhood access
- Connectivity between parks

Preservation of Agricultural Land

- Potential for agricultural land, need to preserve it when developing
- Prime agricultural soil should not be developed – work with surrounding towns
- No solar panels on agricultural land
- Keep property on tax roll
- Preserve existing farms and soils after farms transfer
- Special consideration district for land surrounding open space
- Add Auer Farm to Map – protected by deed and has to be open 24/7
- Agricultural/eco-tourism/agritourism
 - Existing and small farms could benefit economically and allow for more creative uses of space
 - Concern from neighbors about noise (mutual concern)
 - Regulations around this would help
 - Address zoning to support more uses on agricultural land

Transportation and Pollution

- Transportation system and pollution

Parks and Open Space

- Regulation and review of open space
- Maintenance
- More money for park maintenance
- Dog parks are popular in town
- Complete LaSalette Trail from Penwood Park to Philly Pond
 - 2 obstacles: 1 property owner and cemetery
- More investment and natural resources
 - Physical conditions

Community Engagement and Education

- Involve youth and schools and education
- Estate planning for large landowners

- **Fostering Economic Growth**

Economic Growth and Town Development

- Need to grow the town, for taxes and service

- Money is spent in neighboring towns
- How can the town position itself to get growth?
- Are tax subsidies an option for small businesses?
- Town Council/Elected officials need to be on the same page, consensus
- Visual cohesiveness, zoning/building standards
- Taxpayers need to tell the government what is important and what it wants to pay for
- Low-density town center will struggle to keep businesses because of rents
- Bloomfield shouldn't be like West Hartford, Thayer Street in Providence should be the goal
- Need viable town center with restaurants
- Many shopping centers are not inviting and not maintained
- Town needs to attract businesses
- Make council terms longer to support plug efforts, relevancy

Improving Local Amenities and Entertainment

- Live here but spend time playing elsewhere
- Huge town, geographically, with nothing to do
- Restaurants, bowling alleys, stores, Mexican restaurants, locally owned
- People went to the old movie theater
- Need businesses with connections
- Spend more time on redevelopment, not new development
- Need viable town center with restaurants
- Many shopping centers are not inviting and not maintained
- No doctors' offices, dollar stores, or liquor stores, especially in town center

Balancing Development and Community Concerns

- Allow agritourism (Farm-to-table dinners, weddings, bands, vineyards) – noise is a concern
- Balance noise and late-night concerns
- Business owners may look at Bloomfield's diversity as a drawback to opening here
- No warehouses, too many already

- **Expanding Housing Options for All**

Housing Affordability

- More affordable housing – clarify how we define affordable housing
- Need a good mix of incomes who can afford to live in Bloomfield
- Need workforce housing for the service-based industry
- I think we're going to drop below the 10% affordable units threshold; need to aim to maintain 15% or more – there is a lack of affordable housing in Bloomfield
- East Side of Bloomfield was originally small houses to serve workers and immigrant communities that worked in Hartford
- Bloomfield is fairly affordable for the people moving here
- Taxes are going up 6% - landlords will likely pass these costs on to renters
- Find creative ways to lower the cost of construction
- Mix affordable housing into the fabric of the town – spread it out
- The developer has to include a sufficient number of affordable housing units to be able to build here

- Obvious wealth disparity in Bloomfield, especially with those who have been here for generations and have generational wealth

Infrastructure and Planning

- The lack of sewer systems in Bloomfield slows down the pace of development and farmland development and has helped Bloomfield maintain its character
- Parking – zoning code updates to meet needs – some new developments do not have enough parking

Town Character & Town Center

- Bloomfield's character has changed, especially Town Center – stop building apartments in Town Center
- Wintonbury Mall has an absentee landlord
- The type of housing is important and should be in line with Bloomfield's character
- Baba is a developer that is building many homes in Town Center
- An apartment was proposed for a lot, an easement sought then sold for millions to a developer

New Developments and Housing Demand

- 70 new townhouses on Country View – has led to the loss of habitat, bears and deer used to pass by there and has increased traffic
- Who is renting these expensive units?
 - Development near COPACO off Cottage Grove Road has units going for \$4,000 a month which is not affordable for many of Bloomfield's residents
- New developments like Heirloom Flats and other luxury apartments are serving a market demand, they all have low vacancies and were quick to rent.

Housing and Development Quality

- There are many housing developments that are below standard and face issues such as mold. They complain and nothing gets done.
- Need to update current housing stock – need upgraded single-family homes, they are not currently marketable

Changing Trends

- Families want to live here, even though the school system is struggling, people like to live here
- Bloomfield has high numbers of remote workers (source CT Insider article by Emily DiSalvo)
- Changing development patterns. 5 years ago, developers were building lots of condos and now the trend is apartments

Balancing Density and Open Space Living

- How do you get a mix of housing types?
- Single-family housing does not build community and we don't want to give up more open space for this; they require more infrastructure, more money, and are worse for the environment
- However, apartments are not family-friendly, we need to find a balance
- Need more single-family homes as well
- Need to find opportunities for transit-oriented development

Senior Housing

- An aging population will need housing – a big gap needs to be filled

- Seniors – handicapped and living in homes that are not accessible
- Integrating senior communities through programs and connecting to youth

Programs and Policies

- There needs to be advocacy for housing issues and tenant advocacy
- Partner with state initiatives to bring them locally – these programs are currently administered through the state and through banks

Lack of Opportunities for Youth

- There is no path to homeownership for young people
- Bloomfield has young adults who have grown up here but are priced out of affording their own place. If you are under 40 you probably can't afford to live here

- **Enhancing Mobility and Connectivity**

Greenway and Pedestrian Infrastructure

- Complete Greenway
- Bikeways/walkways
- Complete streets with landscaping and separated access
- Wintonbury Avenue pedestrian access
- Pedestrian-oriented town center

Public Transportation Access and Improvements

- Expanded bus access on key streets
- Bus stop on Simsbury and Auer Farm Road
- Connection to library
- Blue Hills pedestrian access
- Connection to W. Hartford and Simsbury
- Jitney trolley
- Griffin Line

Traffic Management and Infrastructure

- Vehicle circulation
- Roundabouts
- Wintonbury and school intersection traffic light
- West & Simsbury traffic light

- **Improving Town Facilities and Resources**

Efficient Resource Allocation and Maintenance

- Only build what can be maintained
- Spend money wisely
- More money equates to more resources

Improved Facilities and New Facilities

- Improve indoor facilities
- Town needs to be more proactive

- Jerome Ave and tracks

Community Engagement and Recreation

- More outdoor space is needed
- History of parks
- More community engagement
- Embrace youth – give them more to do so they don't leave town
- Use library for community events, such as coffee shop, open mic events
- More variety of businesses in town
- Farmers markets/festivals/continue music concerts

Local Environment and Sustainability

- Expand usage and awareness of parks in town, town activities, schools – more activities and funding
- Need staff for community gardens
- Beautify streets – medians – Cottage Grove
- Modernize/improve Wintonbury Mall
- New construction should happen in an eco-friendly manner
- Implement renewable energy town wide
- Make sure public buildings are using renewable energy