



Hudson Master Plan Public Forum Summary Report

On Monday, June 11, 2012, the Town of Hudson convened a public forum to discuss the 2013 Master Plan Update project. Approximately 60 people attended the forum, which was held at Town Hall from 7:00 PM until 9:30 PM. In addition to members of the public, the forum was attended by members of the Master Plan Steering Committee; Town staff; and representatives from the consulting team (Ralph Willmer, FAICP; Jef Fasser, AICP; Geoffrey Morrison-Logan, and Alyssa Sandoval, AICP).

After a presentation on the planning process and Hudson land use and demographic data, a “Strengths, Challenges, Opportunities and Threats” (SCOT) analysis was conducted. Participants were asked to describe aspects of living, working, shopping and playing in Hudson that was both positive and negative. After the lists were generated, they were given four “voting dots” which were to be placed next to those items that the audience thought was most important issues to address in the master planning process. The results are listed below.

SCOT ANALYSIS

Strengths:

- Transportation and accessibility is important (6 votes)
- Town light and electric operation (3 votes)
- Parks and Recreation services (2 votes)
- Public service and tree removal (2 votes)
- Arts organizations (2 votes)
- Downtown center and walking trail (2 votes)
- Location and highway access (1 vote)
- Senior Center services, location and activities (1 vote)
- Strong business community (1 vote)
- Library services (1 vote)
- Diversity (1 vote)
- Affordable public services
- More home ownership than other towns
- Education support
- Communication on website – strong public services
- Effective tree clearing and street cleaning

Challenges:

- Downtown vacancies (16 votes)
- More parking downtown (11 votes)
- Transportation services – lack of options (11 votes)
- Road system in bad shape (8 votes)
- Shortage of vacant industrial zoned land (8 votes)
- Need for community center (6 votes)
- Need curbside recycling (5 votes)
- Sewer capacity is limiting growth (5 votes)
- Need more sidewalks outside of downtown (4 votes)
- Blight (3 votes)
- Character along Rt. 85 (3 votes)
- Need more community involvement (2 votes)
- Housing Authority property issues

Opportunities:

- Create incentives to draw businesses into town (10 votes)
- Route truck traffic around main street (9 votes)
 - Minimize noise and air pollution
- Bike taxi, trolley service (8 votes)
 - Ways to get people downtown
- Older buildings (5 votes)
- Walking trail along Assabet (2 votes)
- Parking garage (1 vote)
- Rail bed/commuter rail (1 vote)
- Renovate river bridge
- Make more use of historic buildings

Threats:

- Loss of small town character if too much growth (11 votes)
- People in their 20's leaving Hudson (9 votes)
- Need sustainable development (6 votes)
- Inability to sustain small town commercial development (5 votes)
- Loss of Intel (5 votes)
- Zoning to guide growth (4 votes)
- Well-designed affordable apartments (2 votes)
- Stay competitive with surrounding towns
- Inability to be consistent and plan proactively
- Sprawl, big box retail – seeking tax revenue at the expense of town character
- People coming into town on rail trail

MASTER PLAN SURVEY QUESTIONS

A sample of survey questions were asked that gave participants an opportunity to quickly give their opinion on six different issues facing the Town. The results were as follows.¹

- 1. Do you favor or oppose mixed-use development with both residential and commercial uses in the same building?**
 - a. Strongly favor – 46%
 - b. Somewhat favor – 28%
 - c. No opinion – 5%
 - d. Somewhat oppose – 12%
 - e. Strongly oppose – 9%

- 2. Do you favor or oppose purchasing farmlands, forests, and open space for conservation?**
 - a. Oppose, not needed – 7%
 - b. Favor, but not with higher taxes – 53%
 - c. Favor, even with higher taxes – 39%
 - d. Not sure/other – 2%

- 3. Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the amount of recreational facilities such as parks, playgrounds, and ballfields?**
 - a. Very satisfied – 39%
 - b. Somewhat satisfied – 32%
 - c. Neutral – 16%
 - d. Not very satisfied – 12%
 - e. Very unsatisfied – 2%

- 4. What would you like to see happen to the Rt. 85 corridor?**
 - a. Leave it as is – 7%
 - b. Allow limited residential development in designated areas – 5%
 - c. Allow small scale commercial development – 31%
 - d. Allow large-scale commercial development – 5%
 - e. Allow a mix of residential and small scale development – 51%
 - f. Not sure/other – 2%

¹ Note that percentages that do not equal 100% are due to rounding.

5. What do you see as the most important recommendation for downtown Hudson?

- a. More mixed use development – 30%
- b. More housing – 2%
- c. More parking – 50%
- d. Streetscape improvements – 12%
- e. Not sure/other – 5%

6. What is the most pressing transportation need?

- a. Improve condition of roadways – 41%
- b. Build and/or repair sidewalks – 12%
- c. Congestion – 9%
- d. Lack of mass transit options – 33%
- e. Bicycle access and safety – 3%
- f. Not sure/other – 2%

7. What is the most important priority for the Town regarding the Assabet River?

- a. Increase access to the water for boating – 10%
- b. Acquire more land to protect the water resource – 25%
- c. Connect trails with the riverfront – 56%
- d. Not sure/other – 8%

8. What is the best way that the Town can protect public health?

- a. Increase walking and bicycling opportunities – 64%
- b. Create Safe Routes to Schools – 3%
- c. Reduce vehicular congestion – 15%
- d. Limit access to sugary drinks – 0%
- e. Ban smoking – 12%
- f. Not sure/other – 5%

BREAK OUT GROUPS

The next part of the forum involved six breakout groups that were asked to answer a series of questions. Each attendee at the forum had an opportunity to participate in one of the groups based on a random selection at the time of registration for the forum. The breakout groups discussed the following topics:

- Housing
- Land use
- Economic development
- Transportation
- Open space/natural resources
- Public services and facilities

The following is a summary of the reports from each of the groups:

Housing

Question 1: Identify the most successful housing developments in Town? What makes them successful?

- Esplanade: structure, 55 and older, close to downtown, mixed use
- Brigham Estates: walkable, near high school
- Murphy Road: country feel
- Cortland Drive: east side, toward city, higher priced homes, comparables
- Sauta Farms
- Habitat for Humanity house

Question 2: Identify the 3 biggest housing-related challenges in Hudson?

- Limits to property values
- Lack of comparables
- Fear that nearby businesses may be short-lived
- Permit process
- Lack of affordable housing
- Lack of capital for home repairs or loans

Question 3: How has Hudson approached these in the past? Discuss remedies to help overcome these challenges.

- Used to have a rehab program
- Grants currently pending
- Community service responses
- Video promos

Land Use

Question 1: What are your top three land use objectives for Hudson? (These could include topics such as mix of uses; density; natural resources; accessibility/connections; Routes 85 & 62).

- Cohesive growth
- Improve on what we have
- Sustain river system and wildlife habitat
- Redevelopment rather than building on open land

Question 2: What are the biggest obstacles to achieving these objectives?

- Lack of public participation
- Lack of communication
- Downtown vacancies, especially around the rotary

Question 3: How can the Town be better prepared to manage growth and development?

- Master planning process
- Develop a clear vision
- Learn best practices from other communities
- Implementation

Economic Development

Question 1: In terms of economic development (jobs, retail, office, industry), what do we want/need in Hudson?

- Restaurants
- Nightlife
- Infrastructure
- Gateway
- Assistance with blight/signs
- Continued building investment
- Historic district delineation
- Historic tour, cemeteries
- Diverse businesses
- Agriculture as economic development/farmer's market
- Low impact office

Question 2: What should the Town be doing to achieve those goals?

- Business cooperative forum

- How to draw nightlife venues?
 - Public transit
 - Alcohol license
- Historic district signage
 - Listing of buildings
 - Walking tours
 - Audio
- 2nd run theater (Strand)
 - Hanover
 - Family movie night in park
- Incentives to historic property owners
- Facilitate grants?
 - Historic, energy

Question 3: Specifically, what are the priorities for keeping downtown Hudson vital?

- Starbucks
- Farmer's market
- Cohesive marketing of:
 - Town itself
 - Vacancies
 - Mill use
 - Resources

Transportation

Question 1: What are your concerns regarding mobility in Hudson (vehicles, pedestrians, bicyclists, bus, Routes 85 or 62)?

- Walkability
- Better sidewalks/maintenance
- Road conditions
- Lack of sidewalks
- Need local bus service
- Public transportation
- Traffic concerns
- Expand bike "system": bike lanes/bike racks
- Traffic controls on Route 85
- Events on I-495 cause local traffic issues
- No expansion of Route 85 North

Question 2: Please tell us of something that has been completed in the last 5-10 years that has improved transportation in Hudson, if applicable. Tell us of something that has made transportation conditions worse.

- Positives:
 - South Street improvements
 - Broad Street bridge
 - Smart traffic lights
- Negatives:
 - Cottage Street – rebuilt sidewalks wider, but street narrowed
 - Old North Road – better conditions increased speeding
 - Houghton Bridge closed
 - Main/Cox intersection poor design
 - Cox/Old Stow Road traffic movement

Question 3: If you could fix 3 transportation problems in Hudson, what would they be? Suggest 2 or 3 remedies for each that may help overcome these issues (assuming no constraints).

- Traffic enforcement (Old North)
- South/Main one way each
- Light at Lincoln/Packard vs. four way stop
- Rt. 62/85 intersection light
- Light at Main
- Light at Park/85 and RK Plaza (both coming)
- Pave roads
- Better snow removal

Open space/natural resources

Question 1: Identify Hudson's most significant open space / natural resource assets? How has the Town performed in preserving/developing/utilizing them?

- Wood Park, Danforth Falls, Assabet River, Gates Pond, Community Garden
- Town has done a great job of obtaining/maintaining open space, but could utilize and promote them better

Question 2: What would you recommend to enhance the Assabet River as a resource for the Town?

- Develop Apsley Park with canoe/kayak launch, picnic tables, and dog park and connect it with Wood Park

- Create opportunities for schools to learn in an open classroom at the Assabet for science, art, history, creative writing, math, etc.

Question 3: Can natural resources be better utilized in Hudson? How?

- It would be great if we could use open space that cannot be developed for renewable energy (i.e. use former landfill space for solar array)
- Recycling bins in parks

Public Services and Facilities

Question 1: What types of new or expanded public facilities are needed in the future? (Consider location of new facilities, if needed).

- Regional transit system
- (Admin DPW) Building/Police Dept
- Sewer capacity
- Water supply
- Roads (condition of roadways)
- Sidewalks new/repair/reconstruction
- Bridge repair and reconstruction

Question 2: Which municipal services serve the community best? What enables these services to perform well?

- Recreation Department
- Light and Power
- Police/Fire
- DPW
- School system and department

Question 3: Which town services or facilities are not meeting the needs of the community? What is needed to improve the performance of these services?

- Funding to support DPW/Fire/Police
- Sewer capacity
- Roads improvements
- Curbside pick up trash/recycle
- Mandatory recycling?