



**Weston Town Plan Update  
Community Survey and Public Kick Off Meeting Summary Notes  
November 29, 2023**

**Background**

The purpose of this document is to provide a summary of the results of the community survey completed for the Weston Town Plan update and the feedback received at the two public kick off meetings. The full survey results and a copy of the public meeting presentation were made available at the public meetings and posted on the town's website.

A community survey was available from August 30<sup>th</sup> to October 4<sup>th</sup>. A total of 204 responses were received. The survey was available online and hard copies were left at the town office and post office. A postcard was mailed to all property owners in town to make them aware of the survey and information was posted on the town's website and social media sites.

Following the completion of the survey, two public kick off meetings were held on October 26<sup>th</sup> and November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2023 at Mildred's Grill at the Vermont Country Store on Main Street. The October 26<sup>th</sup> meeting was held at 6:30 pm and the November 8<sup>th</sup> meeting was held at 4:00 pm. Each meeting had approximately 30 attendees. The meetings provided an overview of the Town Plan update process and the results of the community survey. In addition, attendees participated in a small group exercise to identify on maps areas they would like to see maintained, evolved, or transformed in town.

During the Town Plan update process, this document will be used to guide the Planning Commission's work on identifying goals and strategies that respond to community priorities. To help with the Planning Commission's review of this public input, feedback has been organized by the chapters in the Town Plan. The Planning Commission will be reviewing and updating the plan chapter-by-chapter and this approach will allow them to easily review relevant comments for each chapter. While there were differing viewpoints that came up during this public engagement process, the Planning Commission's goal for the Town Plan will be to focus on areas of agreement.

**Land Use**

*Zoning Regulations and Enforcement*

When asked about current zoning regulations, administration, and enforcement, 49% of respondents said that existing controls should be continued and 15% reported they had no opinion. The results on whether regulations should be relaxed or increased were mixed – 20% said controls should be relaxed compared to 16% who said they should be increased. Year-round residents were more likely to say regulations should be relaxed at 28% compared to seasonal residents at 5%.

In the open-ended questions in the survey, the following comments were provided relevant to zoning regulations and enforcement:

- In general, development should be encouraged north and south of the village center along Route 100 in order to avoid any further development in the village due to flooding concerns.
- There needs to be thoughtful planning in the village area due to flood vulnerability.
- More focus on scale and design review criteria for development
- Need for improved enforcement of property maintenance standards
- Home occupations should be supported but properly regulated
- Simplify approvals process for building
- Allow for a simpler process to subdivide property
- Limit sprawl and development around the edges of the village center
- Add off-street parking requirements in the zoning bylaws
- Preserve existing Rural and Residential zoning districts

At the public meetings, there was feedback on how any new residential or business development should be done consistently with the scale and architectural and historical character of the community. For the survey question, “What are your 3 most favorite things about living in Weston?”, some the highest number of responses were related to the town’s rural character and small-town scale.

#### *Residential*

Approximately 54% of survey respondents indicated the rate of residential growth has been about right and 21% had no opinion. 18% of respondents thought residential growth had been too slow and 7% too rapid. Year-round residents were more likely to say housing growth was too slow at 24% compared to seasonal residents at 5%.

When asked about where new homes should be encouraged in town, the greatest support was for within already existing residential neighborhoods followed by along the Route 100 corridor and immediately around the village center area. There was less support for residential growth in the village center itself and in undeveloped areas in town. Numerous respondents also indicated no additional growth should occur. In addition, the following comments were provided in the survey and at the public meetings regarding where housing should be focused:

- Along Route 100, if significant setbacks and landscaping are required
- In areas that are walkable to services in the village
- There are opportunities for additional housing south of the village center

#### *Commercial*

Compared to residential development, respondents were more likely to say that commercial growth has been too slow at 52% overall. Only 1% of respondents said commercial growth has been too rapid and 37% indicated it’s been about right. There was less noticeable difference in the response to this question from year-round versus seasonal residents, with 55% of year-round and 45% of seasonal residents saying there has not been enough commercial growth.

As a follow up question, respondents were asked about the types of businesses that should be promoted in town. The following types of businesses received the clearest support: restaurants/cafes, agriculture and farm stands, outdoor recreation, convenience/grocery stores, arts and entertainment, and small retail stores. A majority of respondents were not in favor of small-scale industrial/manufacturing uses, short-term rentals, and chain stores. Finally, there was majority support for the

following uses, but also a high rate of “neutral” responses: childcare, home occupations, long-term residential rentals, gas stations, property/landscape management, professional services/offices, hotels/inns, and auto repair. In addition, respondents noted the following other businesses they would like to see in Weston: medical office, pharmacy, bank, farmers market, and brewery/winery.

### **Transportation**

The primary area of concern regarding transportation at the public meetings and in the survey results was around traffic and pedestrian safety in the village center, in particular along Route 100 and around the Town Green. For the survey question, “What are the 3 things that most need improvement in Weston?”, there were a high number of responses related to traffic management and road design of Route 100 and the need to improve pedestrian facilities in the village.

At the public meetings, there was discussion on the need for pedestrian crosswalks in the village to improve safety. Specific locations for crosswalks included in front of The Little School on Lawrence Hill Road and on Route 100 in front of the Vermont Country Store. The intersection of Lawrence Hill Road and Route 100 was highlighted as particularly dangerous and in need of redesign. Other ideas included installing speed indicator signs on Route 100 on either side of the village, constructing a sidewalk in the village, and improving the parking around the Town Green property.

Survey results included several comments about needing to better manage stormwater runoff on town roads, many of which are unpaved. With the increase in heavy rain events, towns are needing to make improvements to ditching and culverts to handle larger amounts of runoff.

### **Town Government, Community Facilities, Services and Recreation**

#### *Town Government*

There were several comments in the survey about the need for improved communications and transparency from town government. It was also noted that it would be helpful to have more information about events in the community. One comment in the survey was regarding promoting social connectivity and addressing diversity, equity, and inclusion.

#### *Community Services*

Generally, there was strong support for community services provided by the town, including road maintenance, fire services, community programs, regional ambulance service, and the library. Approximately 23% of respondents indicated being somewhat or very unsatisfied with services provided by the state police. One of the responses in the survey indicated they would like to see more police presence to respond to speed violations, crimes, and emergencies.

Broadband and cellular service is one of the community services most in need of improvement. For the question “What are the 3 things that most need improvement in Weston?”, both broadband and cell service ranked high in the responses. The survey also showed that 76% of respondents thought it was very important to improve internet and cell service infrastructure and 19% said it was somewhat important.

#### *Community Facilities*

Both at the public meetings and in the community survey there was very strong support for finding a new location for the fire station due to the multiple incidents of flooding that have impacted the building. At the public meetings, there were some discussions on possible alternative locations and how

much land would be needed. It was brought up that if Route 100 is flooded in the village, depending on where the station is located, parts of town could be inaccessible. As part of this discussion one recommendation was to look at consolidating municipal services, such as the town office and fire station, in a new facility for efficiency purposes.

There were also several comments on needed improvements for the Wilder Memorial Library. These included adding a restroom to the building and expanding the building's footprint.

### *Recreation*

The survey included comments about the need for improvements to the Weston Recreation Club facility. It was also noted that this facility is in a flood prone area. At the public meetings, there was discussion about Cold Spring Park and interest in increasing awareness about this resource. It was suggested there could be collaboration between the library and Cold Spring Park given their close proximity.

Access to outdoor recreation opportunities in the adjacent Green Mountain National Forest ranked high for what survey respondents love the most about living in Weston. There were several comments about how trail connections could be improved and at one of the public meetings it was suggested a river walk could be developed from the village to the Weston Recreation Club. Finally, one survey respondent appreciated being able to walk on the town roads for recreation.

## **Natural, Scenic, Historical and Cultural Resources**

### *Natural Resources*

The continued protection of natural resources ranks high with Weston residents, with 77% of survey respondents saying it is very important to protect open space and natural resources and 16% somewhat important. The town's open spaces, natural beauty, and access to outdoor recreation ranked as some of the highest responses to the question about what residents love the most about Weston.

### *Scenic Resources*

Specific scenic areas that were mentioned in the survey and at the public meetings were Route 100 and the views of surrounding mountains from many of the town roads.

### *Historical Resources*

81% of survey respondents indicated it was very important to protect historical resources and the character of town and 14% said it was somewhat important. Specific historical resources brought up in the survey and at the public meetings included the village center, Town Green, and historic stone walls on residential properties. It was also noted in the survey that the town could consider revising zoning bylaws to strengthen the protection of historic buildings.

### *Cultural Resources*

Arts and cultural facilities like the Weston Theater Company, Kinhaven Music School, Weston Priory, and the Old Mill Museum were all noted in the top 3 things that many residents love the most about the town. 65% of respondents said it was very important to support local arts and cultural non-profit organizations and 19% said somewhat important. Some survey respondents noted they would like to see more and a greater variety of community and cultural events.

## **Education**

The main comment regarding education was related to The Little School, which is an early childhood program that serves children ages 2 to 5-years old. The Little School is located in a building that is owned by the Town of Weston and the school leases the facility. The survey included a comment that this building needs improvements.

### **Energy**

54% of survey respondents were very supportive of encouraging energy conservation and renewable energy and 20% were somewhat supportive. At the public meetings there was discussion on opportunities for large-scale solar, particularly on open fields, but there seemed to be less support for wind turbines. The need for more electric vehicle charging stations was also brought up in the survey responses.

### **Housing**

Survey respondents and those attending the public meetings noted a particular need for housing that is suitable and affordable for the local workforce, young families, and seniors. In the survey, 64% of respondents said developing housing that is affordable to all income levels is very or somewhat important and 50% said developing more senior housing was very or somewhat important.

The survey included a specific question about what steps the town should take to support the creation of more affordable housing options. The two strategies that received the most support were encouraging small multi-family buildings and accessory dwelling units and allowing for greater density and smaller lots in certain areas of town. There was also support for providing incentives for projects that provide affordable housing and considering a community water and/or wastewater system in the village. Additional suggestions included looking at the 2-acre minimum lot size requirement and reducing this to 1-acre and offering incentives for rehabbing existing buildings to include affordable units. 50 respondents indicated the town should not take any steps to promote the development of affordable housing.

There were numerous comments about the need to create regulations for short-term rentals. Approximately 61% of respondents were somewhat or strongly against short-term rentals and only 20% were strongly or somewhat in favor of them. However, the survey also included comments on the economic benefits associated with people visiting Weston and staying at short-term rentals and spending money at local businesses.

### **Economic Development**

The survey showed support for economic development, with 95% of respondents saying the continued vitality of the village center was very or somewhat important and 70% saying it was somewhat or very important to support local job growth through business development. As discussed under the Land Use section, there was clear support for ensuring any economic development is not detrimental to the character and scale of the community. One comment was that the town should be developed more into what it already is.

Some specific recommendations from the survey included renovating and repurposing existing buildings in the village for businesses like small scale retail shops and developing more year-round activities and

programs to attract tourists. There were also several comments about the need for a convenience store and gas station, which was impacted and is temporarily closed due to the July 2023 floods.

### **Flood Resiliency**

The need to recover from the July 2023 floods and better plan for future flood resilience was very prominent in the survey responses and the comments at the public meetings. Nearly all survey respondents said it was important for the town to consider the July flooding as it plans for its long-term future, with 77% of respondents saying this is very important. Flood resiliency, planning, and recovery was also one of the areas that ranked the highest in terms of the areas most in need of improvement in Weston.

Specific comments related to flood resiliency included needing to develop a plan and strategies to mitigate future flood risks, especially for existing buildings in the village area. It was also noted that removing the West River dam should be considered and the bridge at the bottom of Lawrence Hill Road should be replaced.

## Appendix

At the public kick off meetings on October 26<sup>th</sup> and November 8<sup>th</sup>, attendees participated in small group discussions and a mapping exercise following the presentation by Windham Regional Commission staff. The images below are of the maps completed. All of the comments provided on the maps were incorporated into the summary notes for each chapter of the Town Plan in the section above. Participants were asked to identify areas in town they would like to maintain, evolve, or transform. The following definitions were provided as guidance:

- **Maintain (Green):** areas where limited change should happen
  - *Examples:* natural resource areas, open spaces, historic areas
- **Evolve (Blue):** areas where incremental change should be encouraged
  - *Examples:* new small-scale commercial or housing development, improvements to existing community facilities
- **Transform (Red):** areas where more significant and transformational change should be encouraged
  - *Examples:* Fire Station relocation

### Town Maps















