

Natick 360
Honoring Our Past. Planning Our Future.



Joint Boards and Committees Meeting
Joint Meeting B * April 4, 2007

On April 4, members of the five *Natick 360* sponsoring boards and committees¹ met to consider focus areas, goals, and policies, programs and projects for the five-year planning horizon of the *Natick 360* community strategic planning process. This meeting was one in a series of three meetings during the week, to provide all 40 members of the five sponsoring boards and committees an opportunity to weigh in on these critical elements of the *Natick 360* process.

During the meeting, participants broke into four small groups to write goals and policies, programs and projects for one of the eight focus areas. Then the small groups reported on their work to the larger group. The facilitators then asked the participants to respond to each small group report by framing their comments two ways: “What you like about this group’s report” (“like abouts”) and, “How to change the report to address a specific concern” (“how to’s”).

The following pages show the results of this process for the four focus areas that were addressed in this meeting:

- Increasing civic engagement and leadership
- Improving the Natick environment and the health of the population
- Improving the town’s infrastructure and transportation options
- Leveraging regional resources

Participants in this meeting included:

- Cathleen Collins, Finance Committee
- Terri Evans, Planning Board
- Charles Hughes, Board of Selectmen
- Julian Munnich, Planning Board
- Kenneth Soderholm, Planning Board
- Richard Sullivan, Finance Committee
- Kristine Van Amsterdam, Board of Selectmen

Recreation and Parks Commissioner Ronald Ordway attended as an observer. Craig Ross and David Parish, co-chairs of the *Natick 360* Strategic Planning Oversight Committee, also observed the meeting. Phillip Blackerby and Kevin O’Sullivan of Blackerby Associates facilitated the meeting .

¹ Sponsoring boards and committees are: Board of Selectmen, Conservation Commission, Finance Committee, Planning Board and School Committee.

Increasing Civic Engagement and Leadership

Small Group Report: Goals, Policies, Programs and Projects

Improve communications to citizens

- Newsletter
- Town website, including directory, with dedicated volunteer or staff support
- Support Natick Pegasus
- Provide Town documents at the Library, digitally
- Provide customer service training for Town employees

Ask citizens to participate

- Press releases, website announcements of vacancies
- Leverage single issue interest in wider participation
- Create framework for public questions and ideas; respond to public input through multiple media
- Teach civic participation to K-12 students
- Provide information to new arrivals about government and involvement; work with Realtors, businesses
- Outreach to low-turnout neighborhoods.

Timely and clear information

- Use less jargon
- Present all revenues and expenditures for consideration
- Start budget process earlier

Foster an environment in which people find it easier to participate by modifying government operations

- Enter split budget/non-budget items into two groups (two Finance Committees), or modify Charter to direct non-budget article review to Board of Selectmen only
- Schedule regular cross-board meetings
- Review all services outsourcing, or potential privatization
- Adapt means of participation to be flexible, and respond to residents' schedules (asynchronous input)
- Adjust Town office hours to accommodate residents who do not work locally
- Support change in open meeting law to accommodate on-line interaction
- Educate board and committee members about the Charter to improve communications

Like Abouts:

- Comprehensive
- Cheap!
- Pegasus: support and promote; what percentage of citizens have basic cable?
- Teach civic engagement to K-12; reference philanthropy forum, grants
- The more you engage, the greater the skills and energy

How To's:

- Increase information outreach to new residents and families; Realtor links, train schedules, Pegasus, school information, web site information, etc.

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- Leverage Town Clerk's Office to assist in the welcoming
- Find existing "welcoming" organizations, and help and encourage their work
- Develop a Town "owner's manual"
- Reach renters with the Town's current quarterly newsletter
- Know the "why" behind "Modify Government Operations"
- Add civic education to K-12 curriculum
- Ensure any website is good, useful and functional
- Have Town Government work with Schools Superintendent for better Town information-sharing
- Leverage and tap into *Natick 360* participation for more volunteers
- Tap new sources of citizen energy and skills
- Explore opportunities to engage asynchronously

Improving the Natick Environment and the Health of the Population

Small Group Report: Goals, Policies, Programs and Projects

Acquire open spaces using FAR funds (floor area ratio, transferable development rights payments) from continuing development

- Pursue Agricultural Preservation Restrictions (APR) for the rest of local farms

Encourage green building standards (LEED certification) for all new construction and renovations of Town buildings

- Train Town employees in the Building Department in LEED standards
- Train Building Committee members in LEED standards

Continue to pursue protection of the water supply, conservation of water, and storm water management

- Use inflow and infiltration (I&I) techniques to prevent storm water from going into sewer, to save unnecessary sewage treatment costs

Build additional sidewalks

- Ensure that all commuter streets have at least one sidewalk
- Should be funded in the capital budget whenever streets are improved or accepted, to achieve ADA compliance
- Ensure sidewalks provide access to schools, potentially reducing bussing costs

Like Abouts:

- Green building standards have recently passed a tipping point into mainstream thinking
- Poses environmental focus in a complementary fashion to development
- Forces us to think about lifetime facility costs, or total costs of ownership (TCO)
- APR doesn't fundamentally change property rights; they freeze future uses

How To's:

- Ensure analysis of options and costs for Town building projects
- Regulate impervious ground cover in existing residential neighborhoods, such as where residents may want to pave the front yard
- Avoid sidewalks to nowhere!
- Use FAR funds more flexibly, creatively; reference the zoning bylaws.

Improving the Town's Infrastructure and Transportation Options

Small Group Report: Goals, Policies, Programs and Projects

Improve transportation options

- Board of Selectmen enact decision to join the Regional Transportation Authority (RTA), while maintaining THE RIDE program, door-to-door transportation services for people with disabilities provided by MBTA

Invest in capital improvements

- Update the five-year capital plan and Town-wide priorities
- Foster private/public partnerships to help finance capital investments
- Use bonding options to finance capital improvements when they would reduce operating expenses by an economically larger amount.
- Consider a capital override, a one-year (or multiple-years) property tax assessment to acquire specific capital assets.
- Consider opportunities for capital assets to be shared by different populations within the town.
- Ensure that operating funds are available to maintain capital assets appropriately

Implement four major capital investments

- Senior / community center
- New high school
- Downtown parking garage
- Rail trail

Like Aouts:

- We're not reinventing the wheel; we are taking advantage (updating rather than re-creating) of existing efforts and plans.
- Facility-sharing is good for the Town; we're thinking ahead if we're thinking about sharing; sharing enhances flexibility.

How To's:

- Incorporate or set priorities within the five-year capital plan.
- Expand the frequency of MBTA services.
- Ensure there are sufficient mechanisms for public education.
- Ensure the various boards and committees champion specific initiatives.
- Be more aware of public/private partnerships; this will require cross-board cooperation and collaboration; for example, downtown parking garage requires cooperation between the Planning Board and the Board of Selectmen

Leveraging Regional Resources

Small Group Report: Goals, Policies, Programs and Projects

Improve transportation options

- Board of Selectmen enact decision to join the Regional Transportation Authority (RTA), while maintaining THE RIDE program, door-to-door transportation services for people with disabilities provided by MBTA

Improve management of employee benefits through participation in larger groups

- Continue to support state legislation requiring underperforming funds to join the state Pension Reserves Investment Trust (PRIT) fund, to increase investment returns and reduce administrative costs
- Join the Group Insurance Commission to obtain better Town employee health insurance rates and get assistance with cost containment, when coalition bargaining is not required
- Move elderly Town retirees to Medicare to reduce Town health care costs

Engage in regional planning activities

- Continue to maintain membership in the MetroWest Growth Management Committee (MWGM)

Reduce Town costs through participation in purchasing cooperatives

- Continue to use the state purchasing list
- Continue to participate in the 14-town insurance collaboration for health, workers compensation and liability insurance

Like Aouts:

- Focus on saving money.
- Participation in RTA will result in better service and less cost.
- Focus on human capital savings: turn over management to others; save people power for other jobs.
- Lend themselves to “easy” approval; they make sense.
- Participation in RTA and MWGM go together to improve traffic problems.
- Address problems starting outside Natick borders.
- Solutions don’t pit one group against others; they are unifying solutions; they remove emotional components of the issues

How To’s:

- Develop and get the Town’s legislative agenda clearly in the hands of legislators; more formalized
- Track yearly progress in achieving the Town’s legislative agenda; “balanced scorecard;” legislative breakfasts
- Regional focus and consideration of natural resources issues; example: get MWGM to look at Lake Cochituate, which crosses Natick’s borders.

Feedback:

Plusses – Things That Worked	Deltas – Things That Should Be Changed
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Try to make it work● Didn't add new stuff – worked with in the framework● More achievable than last night's work<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Be more specific● Some issues should not go to the public	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Work on other issues● Didn't know enough; didn't want to just make stuff up● What happened to the notion of "connectivity?"