

# Envision Concord

## Focus Group Summaries

11/09/17

### 6/7/17 – Concord Business Partnership meeting

Town's strengths/ challenges and environment for starting and operating a local business:

- Fellow business owners want to see each other succeed
- Real estate is expensive in town; increasing rents
- Zoning, Historic District Commission, Signage bylaws all take time to navigate – possible to streamline the process?
- Consider instituting a business welcoming committee
- How to combat the “Amazon” effect? Need to get people into the shopping districts
- Perception that town is well-off and businesses can handle themselves
- Water and sewage is expensive (based on older data)
- Parking (limited)
- Finding a necessary workforce → lack of affordable housing in town and regional transportation

Would like to see:

- More affordable housing and diversity of housing, including investigating smaller-scale, modest housing
- Stabilization of real estate costs
- Bring in fresh talent
- Expansion of cultural and historical resources
- Expanded roadways, for safer travel and better parking
- Make initiatives regional, not local. Expand water bottle and plastic bag ban to other towns – effects size of customer base.

### 9/14/17 – Concord Historic Commission

- Need to balance preserving “character” with desire for growth/economic growth
- Historical assets include not just structures but also landscapes (esp. agricultural land) and archaeological resources
- Historic landscape preservation is necessary to protect character of the town
- Open space shouldn't be used for development of affordable or other new housing; that should be integrated into existing neighborhoods or buildings
- Concern demolition delay bylaw is falling short of intended impact/effectiveness
- There is a great need to engage and educate the public in a coordinated way about all aspects of the town's diverse historic resources so that they can become allies in their preservation

## 9/21/17 – Wheelhouse Coworking Space businesses

- Co-work space users are a mixture of self-employed individuals, artists, small firms and non-profits; 5 of the 8 participants live outside Concord
- People are drawn to the collaborative nature of the space, interesting mix of entrepreneurs and amenities in West Concord
- Half of the participants have plan to grow their enterprise and would prefer to stay at the Wheelhouse or West Concord
- Ideas for how Concord can support their business/business growth:
  - Support expansion of Bradford Mill Space/other space to incubate businesses
  - Make arts and businesses in Concord more visible & easier to find (wayfinding, Art Trail; maps and apps to provide information on businesses)
  - More town/resident support for businesses
- Priorities for Comprehensive Plan:
  - Improved and expanded bike infrastructure
  - Concentrate businesses around train stations
  - Allow higher density development near train stations (rather than industrial uses)
  - More diversity of population: expand housing stock and support services

## 10/02/17 – Cultural + Historical Organizations

- General feeling is that everyone takes Concord's history for granted
- Landscape and farmland: Farmland is most important thing the town has...more important than buildings or anything else
- Concord very complex...lots of trails and historical tours...hard to see it all and understand how it fits together
- Big Question: Do you preserve what is old and historic, or do you contribute to the town's health by building new and changing?
- Love of town's history leads to desire for no change because residents can't see what positive change could be...it's just a negative

### Communication and Collaboration:

- Town needs more marketing – beyond the little Visitor Center; Lexington coordinates the visitor experience much better
- Regional events, i.e., coming Rev 2025 (250<sup>th</sup> birthday of the country), many events being planned locally and regionally – requiring discussion about parking, possible use of Lexington's Liberty Ride shuttle bus
- Town's website not visitor-friendly; no integrated/coordinated message about the town; Concord Journal not as automatic go-to for calendar events/information as it used to be
- Need a destination map, using historical destinations map as a start (including the Library)
- Need to reach a new level of locals and tourists
- Signage needs improvement; not visitor-friendly and should be better coordinated so there is less but more impactful

- Organizations are competing for the same funding – every organization has spent a lot of time and money cultivating its donor list; also, a lot of competition in town for time and energy of residents
- Nothing to do for youth and young adults

Transportation Issues:

- Traffic in Concord Center is bad – cut-through for commuters; impacts quality of life
- Like the idea of remote parking and a shuttle. Pay for parking; shuttle free. Need to be creative with transportation solutions
- Parking a continuing issue

**10/03/17 – Real Estate Brokers**

Population looking for housing or leaving Concord:

- Downsizers looking for alternatives but not sure if they want smaller SF home, condo, or apartment
- City-millennials to 40s are new to Concord, attracted to new housing and good schools
- Spurt of young families, want a location close to everything – downtown, schools, commuter rail – connected and walkable
- People still moving within Concord
- People leave Concord because the commute is too hard now or want idyllic view but buy in Acton, Needham, and Sudbury due to price

Housing ideas:

- Different housing types (rental and owner) have been doing well – Riverwalk, Brookside Square, Black Birch, Newbury Court, Concord Crossing – they fill up quickly and then prices rise
- Don't have housing supply in \$500,000 range; \$100K earners can't afford to live here
- Could be higher density in certain locations – put two houses on a 0.5 acre lot or townhouses could work; attractive and well-spaced but closer together
- More housing and residents near the town centers; allow some upper floor residential
- Lots of regulations, long processes – streamlining

Businesses:

- Business in Concord Center are hurting due to increasing rents that locals can't pay
- Business growth is key - understand the value of the health of the business community
- We are a tourist town, but we love and hate tourists
- Town should have a staff member for business development

**10/05/17 – Social Services + Financial Assistance providers**

Transportation

- Terrible Traffic – commuter, local, impacts all age groups but affects lower income residents even more (people going to Open Table in Maynard find it hard to get there)

- Families and veterans at the Mews “out there,” need to get to jobs/services with fewer options
- Vans are booked solid and now have to increase buffers between appointments because of traffic; reliability and big windows for appointments a problem
- Carpooling doesn’t seem to happen here; shuttle system like Lexington would help, but previous Concord bus system didn’t work

#### Housing

- For 2-bedroom unit, wait time ~ 6 years for a current Concord resident; wait time for a “senior” unit (might also be a 1<sup>st</sup> floor unit) is 4 years
- There are homeless people in Concord, which is not recognized
- Housing has been changing - the tear-towns and new mansions- leads to wealthy stratum
- Scattered site - harder to give social and other support beyond housing

#### Social Services/ Financial Services

- Providers starting to have to say “no” after having carried clients for many years
- MEWS has changed the demographics for service, a more transient population tends to be in Concord for available housing, not necessarily to be in Concord
- Many financial requests for help are working-age but in need of emergency funds
- Property taxes – significant impact on seniors
- Health care needs increasing
- Collaboration about financial assistance sources and coordinate policies – everyone is being stretched thin
- Would like to see projections of what the financial needs will be to help funders know what to expect and how to try to plan to meet the coming needs

#### Population

- Current seniors are of the “savers” generation (and tend to have pensions); next generations coming are not savers. There’s so much pride in seniors, there’s probably unmet need, but next generation will be asking more.
- Traditionally, Concord not a transient community with generations living here
- “Diversity” goals- valued by people but challenging and needs real support

#### **10/05/17 – Artists + Art groups**

- Concord is a challenging place for artists to sell work... it’s difficult to sell at a high price in the town as Concord isn’t marketed as an arts destination
- Many missed opportunities to incorporate public art into the town: challenges with historic district guidelines that need to be addressed, also opportunities at trail heads and in natural areas
- Retail and artist sales need people to buy goods – retail can’t depend on Concord residents alone. Feeling that town doesn’t support what is needed to keep businesses and artists going. General sentiment against tourism but should be a way to attract tourists who can appreciate history here and art.

- Too many things to get involved in...so many committees and efforts that everyone is spread too thinly...hard to rally enough support for any one initiative
- Must address accessibility issues – access to shops and venues is difficult in older buildings with steps, narrow doorways, small building footprints, etc.

### **10/11/17 – CC High School students**

Words to describe Concord: historic, expensive/people with means, quiet, small, environmentally-aware, charming, welcoming, sheltered (Concord bubble), stress/expectations (for youth)

Things you like about Concord: school system, library, safe, lots of parks/green space, easy to get around, Concord Center, Christmas tree lighting, 400-pound cheese wheel

- Poor walkability in areas of West Concord – lack of streetlights and sidewalks
- Students seemed to agree that the community was relatively sheltered (referred to Concord bubble) and that there were a lot of expectations amount students (somewhat stressful)
- General consensus that many students would like to move back eventually, after some time away (once they could afford it/had kids)
- Many agreed that there was a need for more town-wide events, perhaps during times other than the summer (when many people are away on weekends) – town fair?
- Discussed traffic congestion at Route 2 rotary, “Starbucks corner,” Route 62 – how this delayed school buses
- Many students talked about need for smaller houses; stop tear-down of smaller homes
- Desire for more sustainable practices – could there be solar panels in CCHS parking lot?
- Desire for teen-focused shops in town centers

### **10/17/17 – Boy Scouts troop**

Words to describe Concord: historic, wealthy / affluent / loaded, sustainable / green, educated, small, not diverse, bubble, safe, expensive, fun, liberal, friendly, welcoming, organized, accessible, quiet, athletic, old, leafy, nature, non-industrial, happy, suburban

Things you like about Concord: security, education quality, parks and fields, recreation programs, opportunities, town centers, Walden Italian Kitchen, train stations, layout, historical background, people, Walden and White Ponds

- Many of the Boy Scouts traveled by bike, but acknowledged that it was difficult to travel between the two parts of town
- Lack of diversity can be difficult for minority students despite sentiment that Concord is a very welcoming community
- The majority felt that the recreational opportunities were an incredible resource and enjoyed many of the natural and/or historic areas (Minuteman Park, Walden Pond, Emerson, etc.)
- Desire for more places in town centers accessible to youth, and open later. Feeling that Concord is a “retirement town”
- Poor bus routes and auto traffic also seen as impediment to transportation
- One HS student noted lack of meaningful internship opportunities

## 11/07/17 – Conservation Coffee

- Open Space and Natural Resources are the “invisible visible” – additional resources should be allocated to ensure Concord maintains current open space and natural lands
- Desire for improved bicycle and pedestrian connections, including at Route 2 to avoid dangerous conditions and improve safety on roadways and enable more alternative transportation options
- Concern about new populace moving in that doesn’t understand Concord’s background and replacement of small homes with new, larger developments
- Missed opportunity to create pathways around Mill Brook that better integrate with downtown retail in Concord Center
- Desire for West Concord trail connections along Assabet River bluffs with a bridge connection near Thoreau School and connection to the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail
- Better coordination with the High School on natural resource protection
- Need to make sure there is better coordination so that all Public Works projects are done with a “Concord lens”