



On Saturday, May 9, 2009, the Town of Bedford convened a public forum to discuss the 2010 Master Plan Update project. Approximately 35 people attended the forum, which was held at the Ross Lurgio Middle School Cafeteria from 8:30 AM until 12 noon. The forum was attended by Rick Sawyer, AICP, Planning Director; Cynthia May, Planner; members of the Master Plan Steering Committee; and representatives from the consulting team (Ralph Willmer, AICP; Gordon Leedy, AICP; Robert Ballou, AICP; and Darren Mochrie).

After a presentation on Bedford land use and demographic data, a Strengths, Challenges, Opportunities and Threats analysis was conducted. Participants were asked to describe aspects of living, working, shopping and playing in Bedford that was both positive and negative. After the lists were generated, they were given four green and four red “voting dots” which were to be placed next to those items that the audience thought was most important (green) and least important (red).

The results are listed below.

STRENGTHS

- Location
- Country atmosphere (**4 green**)
- Education/schools (**5 red**, 2 green)
- Walk in woods (1 green)
- Proximity – airport, coast, mountains (3 green)
- Space (2 green)
- Commercial accessibility
- Organized sports (**18 red**)
- Historic center/historic properties (**6 green**)
- Great place to work (1 red, 1 green)
- Incomes (**5 red**)
- Low crime rate
- Town facilities/library (3 green, 2 red)
- Proximity to Manchester (1 green, 2 red)
- Sense of community (2 green)

CHALLENGES

- Getting people involved (2 red)
- Overdevelopment (4 green)
- Commercialization (3 red)
- Traffic – too much; roads not pedestrian/bike friendly (**7 green**)
- 101 corridor – auto dominant (arterials especially) (1 green)
- Better pedestrian access to Village Center/high school (**15 green, 2 red**)
- Not bikeable/need better linkage/connectivity
- Better pedestrian linkage in commercial areas – must use car (2 green)
- Location is also a challenge – in line for more growth & traffic impacts (1 red, 2 green)
- Energy challenges (1 green)
- Challenge to keep our character – historic/rural character (2 green)
- Historic sites are threatened by growth pressures (2 red, 2 green)
- Need adult education programs planning for growing senior population (4 green)
- Community spaces – need more space for common activities high demand on existing space (3 green)
- Transportation for growing senior population – also need more sidewalks (3 green, 1 red)
- Water/sewer demands (2 green)
- Econ/financing – continued pressure (1 green)
- Impact of turning existing single family housing stock into duplex units (**9 red**)
- Plan for affordable housing (2 green, **6 red**)

OPPORTUNITIES

- Not too late to put plans into place – plan now (1 green)
- Stimulus money to direct needs (2 green)
- Using our education system to attract new families – good for our tax base – also to attract seniors (2 green, **2 red**)
- Use high school students/mentoring opportunities with senior community (2 green)
- Airport road/transit station – opportunities for housing variety (1 green, **2 red**)
- Protect more land to maintain character (**10 green, 2 red**)
- River Road area (**4 green**)
- Rt. 101 “800 lb. gorilla” (**4 green**)

THREATS

- Overdevelopment – impact on quality of life – be smart (**4 green, 1 red**)
- Political divisiveness – need to focus on the issues
- Traffic (**5 green**)
- Ex-migration – 25-40 year old cohort (1 green)

- Community apathy **(4 red)**
- Water/sewer access may also encourage unwanted development **(4 red)**
- Limited financial resources (1 green)
- Waste management challenges – solid waste (2 red)
- Limited land for development – need to balance tax base (2 green)
- Energy – reliance on fossil fuels and pollution (2 red)

Note: Top two green and red vote getters are highlighted for each category.

The next part of the forum involved several breakout groups that were asked to answer a series of questions. The breakout groups discussed the following topics:

- Historic Town Center
- Residential areas
- Rt. 101 commercial corridor
- Rt. 3 commercial corridor north
- Rt. 3 commercial corridor south

The summary of each groups responses to the questions posed are provided below.

Break-Out Group Questions

HISTORIC TOWN CENTER

Group 1

1. What do you consider to be Bedford's greatest cultural and historical assets in the Town Center? Briefly evaluate their condition.
 - Town Hall/Gray
 - Presbyterian Church
 - Green House
 - School House/Town Campus
 - Marconi Museum – sick building – restorable
 - Old homes
 - Town cemetery
 - Library
 - Wagon Wheel/flower cart
 - Common
 - Benedictine Park
 - Pond
2. What is the appropriate role of Bedford's historic town center to the community and the region?
 - Community gathering space
 - Destination for access/network
 - Smart dwellings
 - Footbridge
 - Braided Town Center

3. How can Bedford better take advantage of its cultural and historic resources? What can be done to enhance the character of the town center?

- Bedford Common circle spaces exist in and outside the common gathering place
- Venue for artists
- Footbridge over 101 – public/private partnership
- Pedestrian mall in historic district on Sundays
- Carnival

Group 2

1. What do you consider to be Bedford's greatest cultural and historical assets in the Town Center? Briefly evaluate their condition.
 - The best cultural/historical assets in the Town Center are: Town Hall, Presbyterian Church, old school house, Green House, old library, new library, town cemetery, Wagon Wheel, Dorcy Pond, mill foundation, Benedictine Park.
 - Best: Presbyterian Church
Worst: Marconi

2. What is the appropriate role of Bedford's historic town center to the community and the region?
 - Importance of town center to town and region is that the town center is the best example of a braided town center, that the "Common" is being developed in stages, and it could be a terminus for a footbridge linking the two sides of 101.

3. How can Bedford better take advantage of its cultural and historic resources? What can be done to enhance the character of the town center?
 - Taking advantage of cultural and social resources to link the outside and inside spaces, seeing it as a multifaceted destination and a place to mingle, it also provides opportunities for public/private partnership for possible events in the center of Town.

Summary: we can take advantage of social capital – Town to accomplish what we need

RESIDENTIAL AREAS

Group 1

1. Identify the 3 biggest housing-related challenges in Bedford.
 - Multi-generational
 - Afford housing – taxes/cost of upkeep
 - Livability
 - Property tax
 - Planning for higher density/cluster
 - Retrofit bigger homes into multi-family units
 - Well/septic issues
 - Lack of sidewalks
 - Sense of community
 - 55 & over housing

2. How has Bedford approached these in the past? Discuss remedies to help overcome these challenges.
 - Sidewalks-don't count walkers – low density – connect public space/network
 - Transportation
 - Multi-family – affordable/livable – access to transit
 - Market driven

3. Identify the most successful new housing developments in Town. What makes them successful?
 - Bedford Village Housing/Village Green
 - Randolph Woods
 - Mews
 - All have sense of neighborhood, community, walkability

Group 2

1. Identify the 3 biggest housing-related challenges in Bedford.
 - Multi-generational families – 1 house
 - Disability/senior housing
 - Boomerang babies, returning children, no options for 100/no d--- housing for parents/children
 - “livable”/ affordable residences
 - Property tax issue
 - Density – could be more dense –possible conversion of large houses to duplex
 - Sense of community (i.e. Halloween visits)
 - Road standards changed to allow shoulders to be used
 - Multi-family homes – Transit-oriented design type of development
 - Conversion of older properties to condos
 - Moratorium over 55 housing?
2. How has Bedford approached these in the past? Discuss remedies to help overcome these challenges.
 - Sidewalks where appropriate
 - Concern on “workforce” housing and impact on
 - Approach to housing has been essentially market driven

Remedies

- Sidewalks – town to repair
 - Pedestrians/ped traffic included PB amount – “road usage”
 - Increase density
 - Connect facilities/network of recreation areas
 - Transit access
 - Accessory housing
3. Identify the most successful new housing developments in Town. What makes them successful?
 - Randolph Woods
 - Mews
 - Village Green
 - Reasons:
 - Walkable/public space
 - Access/transit

- Sidewalks
- Multi-family that are livable/affordable
- Neighborhood developments: not development of house lots

ROUTE 101 COMMERCIAL CORRIDOR

Group 1

1. What is the appropriate character for this section of Rt. 101?
 - New England architecture and signage not like South Willow Street
 - Consider the highway work a median
 - Increase businesses and density at intersections
 - Consider mixed use with residential
 - Discourage development in residential areas where there is no commerce now
 - Connect commercial development

2. What do you consider to be the most significant issues/problems facing the Rt. 101 corridor other than traffic?
 - Lack of diversity of businesses in a close area
 - What types of businesses go in seems to have no plan. They lack continuity. We need to coordinate.
 - Lack of pedestrian paths across 101
 - Mixed use to be considered in undeveloped area

3. What design improvements can be made to the corridor?
 - More trees as accent to existing trees
 - Pedestrian access across or along the side
 - Could we take advantage of underutilized parking lots
 - Parking in back – not as visible
 - Consistency and covenants – create nodes

ROUTE 101 COMMERCIAL CORRIDOR

Group 2

1. What is the appropriate character for this section of Rt. 101?
 - Limited access and combined access to lighted intersections
 - Existing zoning should apply – appropriate architectural
 - Softer landscaping (streetscaping) – trees, sidewalks, setbacks etc.
 - Preserve suburban character by bypassing 101 from airport access road to south/west of Bedford center

2. What do you consider to be the most significant issues/problems facing the Rt. 101 corridor other than traffic?
 - Availability of sewer and water for development
 - Lack of pedestrian/bicycle access
 - Difficulty in pedestrian/bicycle crossing 101, especially at Nashua Road
 - Not all of 101 is zoned commercial, so isn't controlled by zoning restrictions
 - Commercial zones aren't deep enough – too narrow – nodes of commercial buildings

3. What design improvements can be made to the corridor?
 - Pedestrian/bicycle overpasses – like Arthur Fielder Footbridge and check out CMC's footbridge
 - Turning lanes
 - Bicycle lanes
 - Sidewalks
 - Medians
 - Softer streetscaping – trees, setbacks

ROUTE 3 COMMERCIAL CORRIDOR – NORTH

Group 1

1. How can the Town be better prepared to manage growth and development in this area?
 - Add walking area/sidewalks
 - Add service roads
 - Readdress parking areas
 - Add secondary roads/interconnect existing back roads

2. Is the current mix of development appropriate for the area? Yes
 - Supports the growth/need of commercial area
 - Develop for retail (be it clothing/food/etc...) healthcare, etc.
 - Diversity in performance zone is liked now. Do not change – doing good job of having a mixture.

3. What would you like this area to look like in the next 10 – 20 years?
 - Interconnected parking lots/access roads
 - Walking/biking area

ROUTE 3 COMMERCIAL CORRIDOR – NORTH

Group 2

1. How can the town be better prepared to manage growth and development in this area?
 - Transportation plan
 - Traffic – assess, plan
 - Connectivity: perhaps more streets – only one way in and out
 - Vary traffic pattern hours
 - Area Plan
 - Architectural standards
 - What is the right fit?
2. Is the current mix of development appropriate for the area?
 - More residential and commercial
 - But need fixes for transportation
 - Area is fixed but still pockets
 - Parks?
3. What would you like this area to look like in the next 10-20 years?
 - Mixed use – denser
 - Mixed use buildings
 - “professional” jobs vs. retail
 - Mixed commercial
 - More affordable housing and easy walking access to services
 - Keep borders where they are

ROUTE 3 COMMERCIAL CORRIDOR – SOUTH

1. What type of redevelopment opportunities do you foresee in this district? What types of uses would you like to see as a result of opportunities created by the airport access road?
 - Mixed use development
 - Freight movement/train station
 - Availability of work force housing
 - High rise housing
 - Waterfront
 - Retail (good access)
 - Housing development for all ages
 - Access to Boston
 - Maximize land usage
 - Would need zoning changes
 - Railway will provide access for employees to come from distances

2. Assume that a train station will be built near the Town's border with Merrimack. Will this have a positive or negative impact on Bedford? What should be done to mitigate potential impacts?
 - All say positive
 - Negative – create parking issues
 - Pollution
 - Widen Rt. 3
 - Mitigation
 - Provide walking trails/bike paths
 - Park
 - Negotiate with PanAm for station

3. Again, assuming that the train station will be built, should the Town encourage transit-oriented development that might include a mix of residential, retail, office, and services? What is your vision of the area?
 - Yes-see above
 - Change zoning laws
 - NE style "village" center, housing, shops, parks
 - Re-adopt TND in a modified form
 - Concord, MA
 - Lexington, MA
 - Part of Portsmouth