

July 29, 2008

CPAC

News of South Hadley's Comprehensive Plan in process

Yes, it is summer. Yes, people are busy. And still, small groups of South Hadley citizens found time to gather in a circle at the high school, or at home in front of Channel 15, on 4 recent evenings (July 23, 24, 28, 29), to both learn about, and share their views on the "issues" that must be addressed in a comprehensive plan which will guide our government for the next 20 years. Although each evening dealt with an announced topic (Municipal Facilities and Services, Economic Development, Transportation, and Housing), overlapping concerns and themes became apparent in participant comments.

How can we make our government more efficient? For a town our size, two fire departments don't seem to make sense. Many hoped for more coordination of services and sharing of resources within our own government as well as with neighboring municipalities.

How can we become aware of and participate more actively in regional efficiencies? A new rail line is opening from New Haven to Springfield through Hartford and Massachusetts must decide if we want to share in the costs and in the benefits. The state of Connecticut is funding 90% of the cost, Massachusetts needs to contribute 10% or \$30 million. The Pioneer Valley Planning Commission is actively promoting new models in the region.

How can citizens more quickly access the resources and information about town services and resources so we enable more participation and collaboration? It was announced that a new virtual town government (website) will be on line within the month so that we can start to see more possibilities for working together.

How can we make South Hadley's public spaces more family friendly? Sidewalks generated much discussion. We need them, we want them, how to afford them. Parks and trails and bike lanes and river access were among the citizen priorities mentioned.

How can South Hadley step up to the national challenge to reduce energy consumption and our carbon footprint? There is quite a bit of support among our residents for adopting a "green" mindset in the way we do business as a municipality, and with our personal choices. The need for all of us to "recycle" is a no-brainer, from both a cost saving and a sustainability point of view and yet this practice is largely underutilized in our town. Discussion involved having our government be a model for moving towards clean energy, and recommended sustainable practices.

How can we build a welcoming business climate, AND, safeguard the entry ways main corridors into town that provide our desired small town charm? The Falls is certainly a zone of opportunity.. Many business persons attending jumped on the idea of a small business committee which begins to advocate for

some solutions. One idea proposed was to make the Texon facility a home for owner occupied small businesses.

How can affordable housing be made available for residents and where should it be located? What groups should be given priority in the creation of affordable housing: the elderly, low-income, middle-class, two-parent and/or single-parent households? Should affordable housing be made available for renters or homeowners or a mix? The location of such housing was discussed at length. Many participants highlighted the benefits of locating new affordable housing in the Falls which would not only enhance the economic development efforts that will hopefully take place there but also serve as a model sustainable practice in avoiding the consumption of open space and re-using existing buildings or structures.

In case you noticed, other hot issues such as historic preservation, open space and land use, and natural resources, in which people have strong views, were not dealt with in this round of conversations, but will be on the table in the fall. Stay tuned for getting involved with these topics! Our thanks to our fellow community members and the many town employees who came to offer expertise and concerns, and contributed much to our understanding of how this town works. The issues discussed will be rolled into a draft document which will be available in the fall for public discussion.

If you missed these meetings, check in with Channel 15 for viewing, and/or send a note with your thoughts to our **CPAC website**, www.vhb.com/southhadley

Contributed by CPAC member, Martha Johnson