

Neighborhood Meeting – Recommendations, October 19, 2105

Following its review of the comments received during the 2014 Neighborhood Meetings, the Board of Selectmen has listed eight areas as areas of special concern and effort for 2016.

- Speed control and traffic
- Communication to residents
- Access – bikes/walkability/trails/sidewalks
- Infrastructure – stay ahead of needs
- Growth and development balance (parking, access, vitality of mall, impacts to community)
- Environment – multiple issues, such as stormwater, plastic bag usage, solar power
- Taxes – efficiencies in service provision, limit new programs, new sources of funding
- Community involvement

Some thoughts on the top priority items. In reviewing the short list, the Board recognized that they all relate to, and connect to each other.

Speed Control and traffic

We are currently looking to expand our police force through consolidation of two vacant part time positions into a new position dealing with Animal Control and traffic. Funding would be from the part time positions and a reduction in overtime costs. This will give us a larger presence regarding enforcement.

Other areas where we are working on traffic issues in general, include consideration of a Lower Village Roundabout to improve and slow traffic flow on lower Main St., re-striping at Topsham Fair Mall Road to reduce lane widths (which tends to lead to slower speeds) while improving opportunities for bike/ped access and usage. Recent re-striping on Green Street appears to have slowed traffic down, and may be a workable option for other roads. Our ongoing consideration of increased width of painted shoulders as new paving is finished can help to lower speed, again while improving safety for alternate forms of transportation on our major roads.

Communications to residents

We have created a Town Facebook page and a Town twitter page to reach out in different ways to residents. Our Town Facebook page has over 275 people who “like” it, meaning we reach that many with every posting. Add to that the over 800 friends the Recreation Page has, and we reach a significant portion of the town. Via twitter we have over 150 followers, and most of what we post is forwarded by the Library to its more than 450 followers. In addition, we have the traditional methods of newspapers, radio and email (our topical email lists of recipients often tops several hundred residents).

We will work on a Welcome Packet (reviewing the existing packet and updating as needed) so that is available at the Clerk/Tax Office Counter, and on-line. We will continue to work to improve use of outside facilities, including the Library, Solid Waste, etc.

Access - Bike/Ped/Walkability

Some of this was noted above, but I will add that we are working with Spectrum Generations, People Plus and AARP to develop a survey designed to solicit input from residents regarding accessibility in town, including walking, information sharing, services, etc. This will help us to identify areas where we have the largest opportunities to make improvements. This can include not only infrastructure, but services (elder activities, transit access, location/quality of sidewalks and crossings, etc.) The data received will also help us in our upcoming Comprehensive Plan update.

Infrastructure

We have expanded our Capital Plan to cover the replacement of all equipment, resulting in a 25-year plan. This plan also includes an increase in our Road Reconstruction budget, which is really our road maintenance line, to a point where we can get close to the 10-15 year repaving scenario favored by Public Works. What we don't have a good handle on is our replacement needs (Elm St. Culvert, Main St. Culvert, infrastructure expansion, etc.) This is an area that we will have to improve our foresight on.

Growth and development balance

Several of the issues listed here reflect the impacts of development, either in town or in the region. In addition to the efforts described, other efforts have been made, are being made, and will be made to create a better balance, including the development new trails and parks, as well as specific efforts related to speed, traffic, access, etc.

Environment

We are currently in the midst of a stormwater management program at the Topsham Fair Mall with a short-term goal of limiting pollutants from entering into the watershed, and a long-term goal of better water quality. Our codes are designed to mitigate negative impacts of new development, and we will evaluate the effectiveness of those standards in our upcoming Comp Plan update.

Taxes

Taxes are a result of the decisions we collectively make, and the valuation of the community. We strive every day to not waste taxpayer's money, while we provide the services requested, and we look to less expensive ways to provide those services, and will continue to do so.

Community Involvement

On the issues of taxes and Town Meeting, we will continue to explore ways to make Town Meeting more accessible, or desirable, for Topsham residents. Some say low turnout is due to a satisfied community, others say it is a result of residents not being involved. We will continue to try and figure this out.