

The following comments were received via four Neighborhood Meetings, held in late 2014. They have been organized by Topic, not by meeting date, and the responses reflect the Board's goals. While much of the text came from various Department Heads (in some cases, multiple departments replied to the same comment), they have been reviewed, and in many cases edited, by the Board.

Cathance Road

4H Speeding is an issue at the Head of Tide Park area, the road is narrow, it dips down to the bridge and there are sharp curves on both sides.

The police department travels along this roadway on a regular basis and is responsible for closing the Head of Tide Park every night. Speeding is a concern throughout the Town on various roadways. The department attempts to run speed enforcement in various locations at least once every shift as call volume and investigative follow up allows.

4I Can we lower the speed limit at the bridge?

The Maine Department of Transportation was asked to look at the speed limit in this area several years ago, and did reduce the speed by 5 mph. We will request that MeDOT look at the issue again.

4F When the Cathance River Bridge was fixed last year, why wasn't it widened to provide a sidewalk on one side? This is important at the Head of Tide Park.

The Town did make attempt to have the Bridge improved. There were public meetings, and presentations at the Board of Selectmen Meetings. Unfortunately the State did not have the funding to make such an improvement at this time.

The bridge work was done by the State because it is their bridge. We asked for the work to include a sidewalk, but the State did not have the funds to do so. However, they did say that this was a temporary repair and that they could include a sidewalk in the design of the permanent fix, but the Town would have to share with the costs. Presently, there are no walks in the area for the State to just assume the total cost of a sidewalk on the bridge. When DOT again has to work on this bridge, we will again request that room be provided for pedestrians and bicyclists.

4G The roads leading to Head of Tide Park are narrow and have no provisions for pedestrians which will become more important as the Park is used more.

The Head of Tide Park Committee does have interest in improving crossing safety as well as water access. With the recent addition of property on the North side of the Park, we

believe we will be able to add upstream water access, additional parking, and street crosswalks. Additional measures are also being contemplated to improve pedestrian access approaching the park.

The police department does not have any data or exercise control over roadway design or traffic volume.

Please see 4F to help explain what the Town hopes to be a long term solution to this concern. The new bridge design that will be the State's responsibility should address these concerns.

We are also looking at the need of lit flashing warning signs on the approaches to the park.

- 4J Could we paint white lines along the sides of Cathance Road leading to the bridge to help slow vehicles down?

Changing the painting patterns on this road would require concurrence from DOT. We would have to present them with information that such an effort would address an identified need.

- 4K The dip in the road leading to the Cathance Bridge is dangerous, especially in the winter, and the Town doesn't do a good job maintaining this area during the winter.

The dip was caused by material washing out under the abutment, and was addressed by the State when the bridge repair was done. The Public Works Department has indicated that it will keep a closer eye on this area during the winter season, recognizing that the geographic layout of the hills and shade by the trees make this a challenging area during winter maintenance operations.

- 4L Maintenance on Cathance is very good up until the railroad tracks, and then it deteriorates

The section of Cathance Road up to the tracks was paved in 2011 and the road condition reflects that. Additional paving will continue as funds are made available.

- 4M There are frequent power outages along Cathance – 10 per year or more – some related to accidents, but many not

This concern should be forwarded to CMP.

- 4N Police Dept. does a good job responding to this area for speeding concerns and emergencies

Thank you.

Codes Enforcement

2S Bootlegger's digital sign isn't always turned off at night

We have looked at this issue, and there is no requirement for Bootleggers to turn the sign off at night. However, in talking to the owner, the intent is to turn it off, but sometimes the staff fails to do so.

Communications

1B How best for Government to communicate with residents?

This was a question posed to residents, and various ideas were presented, including mailings, twitter, facebook and emails.

1Q Communications from Government important – mail is too expensive, should use web pages more

Thank you for the comment. We do have a link on our home page, left hand side, for e-alerts. This allows anyone to request notices by topic for various boards and committees.

1N How can we get information on Topsham – such as Annual Reports?

Documents are available in paper form from the various Town Departments. In most cases, documents are also available via the town's web site, www.topshammaine.com. Documents are generally accessible via the department that created them.

1AA Some printed documents should be available to the public – perhaps use the library

We have reduced the number of paper copies that we produce in an effort to limit spending. We can certainly work on providing reference copies of document at the library. When workable, we also try to distribute copies of project documents to other locations where the public can see them.

1CC The Town should have welcome packets – voting information, general info, services

The Clerk's Office currently has welcome packets available and we are looking at updating to include additional information, as well as making them available on our web site, to include a catalog of services, with contact names, phone numbers and emails.

1DD The post card for these meetings worked well – gave advanced notice, let us plan ahead

Post cards are effective for specific events, however, for town-wide events such as these neighborhood meetings, the cost is quite high, so we limit when we do mailings such as this.

1LL Could the Town send out a weekly email blast of upcoming meetings and events?

We currently have multiple email groups for various committees and boards. We can add a link for people to sign up for a weekly notice of upcoming meetings.

2II Difficulty getting people to meetings

This is an issue we have been grappling with for years. We continue to try different concepts to increase attendance (food, daycare, post cards, etc.). We will continue to work on this.

4VV Bowdoinham has a newsletter that goes out 6 times a year – perhaps you should talk to the Town Manager there and find out how they do it.

Thank you for the tip. Contact has been made, and will evaluate the idea.

2JJ A periodic (quarterly) newsletter would be a good idea for the Town

We will look at the resources needed to put this together, and whether we have staff capacity to accomplish it.

2LL Town has to use different ways to communicate effectively

Based on comments from the first Neighborhood Meeting, we have established both a Twitter page and a facebook page for the Town. There have been a couple of departments that have also established such pages. As with anything new, there are impacts on staff resources that have to be considered, as does the fact that not everyone uses social media. We will continue to rely on newspapers and mail, and try to increase other opportunities as well.

2MM The Town should use the Cryer as a way of getting information out

We have used the Cryer for specific events, such as Town Meeting. However, much of what we do has specific notification time frames that don't always fit with the Cryer's publication schedule. We will continue to use the Cryer when we can. We will contact the Cryer's editor about the possibility of departmental highlights as a regular feature.

1A Show presentation materials at televised meetings

Presentation of Planning Board materials is limited due to budgetary issues and a lack of staff to operate the cameras. We do televise the meetings, and post them on our web page, but we don't always catch all of the presentation material.

4II A town facebook page is a good idea – that is how I learned about tonight's meeting

Thank you. This was a result of an earlier Neighborhood Meeting, and will be used in the future to help get information out to the public.

Elections

2W Handicapped access at polls should be looked at – parking areas, access/egress, lighting, waiting in multiple lines

Will have to discuss with Fair Association and other towns to inquire as to how they handle this situation.

2X Extra ballot machines would make lines at polls move faster

Ways to streamline the voting process, including the number and placement of voting machines and how the room is laid out, will be looked at.

2Z Why are results posted so late?

Looking into adding two more sets of counters for end of election night to tally results. This would speed up the process and give results which could then be posted sooner, and provided to the media sooner as well.

Environmental

3N What can we as residents do to prohibit plastic bags from retail stores?

A prohibition can be achieved via public pressure on the vendors, or via a local ordinance. Any ordinance would have to be adopted at Town Meeting. The first step would be a presentation to the Board of Selectmen.

3O How can we get the Town involved in working on eliminating plastic bags? Ban them? Recycle them?

See above.

3P What can the Town do about a stagnant stream that runs under West Wind? Could be a health issue. Is it blocked downstream?

The town has had Maine DEP to the site, and it is unclear what if anything will occur.

3V The Town has done a good job with Natural Resource Planning.

Thank you.

3T About the stream under West Wind – that used to be a marshy area that was filled, and it fed into a pond. There was a culvert under a road into an old gravel pit that has raised blocking flows.

This is the stream a couple hundred yards in on West Wind from Meadow Road. We are not aware of the Town having filled in the stream in the past. Our DPW has been up clearing the outlet of the drainage pipe under West Wind. The drainage area leaves the right of way and continues onto private property.

4DD The Town has some great open spaces – we should be looking for more and ways to preserve them

The Topsham Conservation Commission continually watches over the lands the Town acquires, and, with the Board of Selectman’s support, is always looking to improve the Town’s Open Space inventory.

Finances

1FF Is the town losing revenue sharing?

The town is losing revenue sharing. When the program was created, a fixed 5% of sales and income taxes were supposed to be returned to towns. At times, budgetary issues have arisen where the Governor and Legislature have reduced the share going to communities by a small margin (90-95% of what the law calls for). However, primarily over the last four to five years, the legislature and the Governor have chosen to reduce that percentage, down to 2 1/2 %. For the FY 16 budget year, the total has been kept the same as last year in dollars, which is actually a further reduction in the percentage. By way of example, if Revenue Sharing were fully funded as intended, Topsham would have received \$1.1 million from the State for FY 15. However, this year we only received \$466,000 (this was actually a bit more than the budgetary figure of \$440,000). This loss of nearly \$700,000 has been made up by Topsham residents both in reduced staffing within the town, through reductions/changes in programs, and through higher property taxes.

3DD I would like the budget process to hold the line on taxes

This is generally the goal each year, but as funding from the State continues to decline, and as costs increase, it is difficult to maintain no increase in taxes. Growth in valuation can help reduce tax increases.

4MM The Town needs to expand its commercial sector to help keep property taxes lower

The Town is certainly working to increase commercial properties’ proportionate share of Topsham’s real estate taxes to help reduce the burden on residential taxpayers. But we are also mindful that commercial development must be appropriate and beneficial for the town, both by seeking businesses that are compatible with our community and by ensuring that new commercial development do not create new costs for the Town that

could offset any increased tax revenues they provide. For example, the Town needs to assess the potential future costs of any public infrastructure that may be created in support of a potential commercial development.

4JJ On behalf of older residents, is there anything we as a town can do to help them with property taxes?

There are programs that the State allows that provide for direct relief from property taxes, based on income. There are also programs that the State allows communities to adopt that would allow Seniors to work off a portion of their property tax obligation. Topsham has not adopted an ordinance to allow this type of program.

4HH At what point is public involvement in the budget process the most effective?

The most effective time for the public to be involved with the budget is during the development stages. The Manager presents the draft budget to the Board of Selectmen and Finance Committee on February 5. Following that meeting, there are a series of workshops held by the Selectboard and Finance Committee where they seek input from the individual departments. These are important meetings to understand the budget requests. These go on until early in March. There are then additional meetings of the Selectboard, as well as the Finance Committee, as the two Boards determine what their recommendations will be. There is then another joint meeting where the two Boards attempt to reconcile their recommendations. Lastly, there is a public hearing in April. If attendance at meetings is not possible, then letters to the Boards is recommended with your budget ideas.

3EE The Town should take a hard look at every position and determine whether it is still needed or not

This is part of the general budget process, determining what services the public has asked to have provided, and what resources are needed to provide those services.

3FF We cannot accede to excessive union demands and retain unproductive or non-essential positions

Collective bargaining is a right of employees, and until those negotiations take place, it is premature to talk about outcomes.

General Kudos

1K Topsham is a great place to live

1II Thanks for the 250th celebration activities. Well done.

1JJ Thank you for holding this type of a meeting.

- 2DD SAD 75 is great – A+
- 2EE Fire department – A++
- 2KK Like the fact that the Town allows residents to speak their minds – very open
- 2OO Commend the Town and the Board for its outreach – keep it up
- 3B Thank you for holding these meetings
- 3M Thank you for holding these meetings
- 4SS Thank you for this type of meeting – it will help me get involved

Getting residents involved is one of the goals of these meetings. Thank you.

- 4GG This meeting is a very good idea
- 4KK Public Works does a great job.

Thank you for the compliment, I will share this with the crew.

Growth & Development

- 2O Can the Town implement impact fees on new development?

Impact fees have to correlate directly to what is being impacted. Currently the Town has a traffic impact fee associated with new development at the Topsham Fair Mall, and we have an open space payment in lieu fee associated with new residential subdivisions.

- 2NN Does the Planning Board look at traffic impacts of new projects?

Yes

- 1L Topsham has done bold things in the past – Mill redevelopment, Mall development, Highlands – we should continue to do more bold things and keep trying to shape Town

The creation of a waterfront park, together with related improvements in traffic flow and access/safety for pedestrians and bicyclists and the extension of our trail networks, would be the same kind of bold project with very important economic and community development benefits for Topsham. The park and the enlarged trail networks are community development amenities that have been demonstrated to attract both new residents and new businesses. These features will also attract more visitors to the Lower Village, providing potential customers for businesses in the area, thus increasing the value (and tax base) of property. Additionally, improvements in traffic flow could actually create new space for high value development – and tax revenue.

3S You asked for areas that the Town can improve – construction management. We have had issues in the Turkey Run area with construction timing, days of the week, loose material blowing around, wetlands being filled.

Construction times are monitored when permitted activities are underway. Maine DEP regulations apply to any wetland filling.

3AA The Town should look at land use rules governing forestry operations in setbacks and buffer areas, particularly where commercially zoned land abuts residentially zoned land

Local timber harvesting is regulated through the Maine Forest Service, even within the shoreland zone areas. Typically, commercial site plans (when approved through the Planning Board) identify no cut buffers to residential properties. The office can look into regulating harvests prior to any PB review, and perhaps work with the Maine Forest Service to identify best management practices in this regard.

3BB I hope the Town will continue to have an open planning and development process

We intend to.

3CC I urge caution in assuming that more commercial development will result in lower property taxes

Point taken.

The Town is certainly working to increase commercial properties' proportionate share of Topsham's real estate taxes to help reduce the burden on residential taxpayers. But we are also mindful that commercial development must be appropriate and beneficial for the town, both by seeking businesses that are compatible with our community and by ensuring that new commercial development do not create new costs for the Town that could offset any increased tax revenues they provide. For example, the Town needs to assess the potential future costs of any public infrastructure that may be created in support of a potential commercial development.

4NN Why can't the west side of I-295 be developed?

While the undeveloped areas on the west side of 295 at the 295/196 interchange would seem to be ideal for commercial development, there are presently several barriers to such development. While current zoning does create challenges for some of the west side parcels, the high cost of extending infrastructure to the west side and the availability of commercial property in Topsham that is already served by infrastructure are the most significant impediments to west side development in the near future. Recent estimates of the cost of extending the level of sewer and water infrastructure necessary for most high-quality commercial development exceeded six million dollars. This level of cost is economically unfeasible for most commercial projects. Even if a project could support

the cost of the initial construction of such infrastructure, the Town and the local utility districts need to be cautious about taking on large amounts of new infrastructure that will require very substantial maintenance and replacement costs in the future.

As part of our upcoming Comprehensive Plan update, we will recommend that the Committee evaluate the current zoning for effectiveness and fairness.

400 Why can't zoning on the west side be changed to encourage development?

The west side is currently commercially zoned, and does encourage commercial development. If there are specific provisions that are in question, those should be brought to the Planning Board's attention.

4E When building in wet areas, building should be raise higher.

Good rule of thumb, but there are no statutes to this effect.

I agree that many of the individual homeowner water issues are because of the elevation dynamics. The foundations should have been higher and the yards raised as well to allow the water to flow away from them. There is not sufficient elevation, nor is there town owned property, to drain the area now that it is developed.

3W The Fairgrounds are a great asset to the Town, but are underutilized – attended Oktoberfest there and saw a lot of potential for them to be used more

TDI has included the goal of supporting more events at the Topsham Fairgrounds in its strategic plan for economic development. The Topsham Fairgrounds provide an ideal – and very attractive - location for large scale events, with plenty of space, lots of parking and great road access. The Town is working with the Topsham Fair board of directors to ensure that buildings at the Fairgrounds are properly equipped and permitted in order be used for public gatherings. Regulations regarding the use of the Fairground have been simplified over the recent past to make non-fair uses easier to run.

Hunting/Firearms

4ZZ Could the town do more to promote hunting/fishing in Merrymeeting Bay?

Topsham tries not to duplicate programs that are already offered by others locally. Since the SAD 75 Adult Ed program already does hunter safety and archery classes, we have not offered similar ones. As for promoting hunting/fishing on Merrymeeting Bay, that is certainly something we could include in our economic development promotional information.

4AAA Could the town sponsor hunter safety, basic firearms or archery programs?

Merrymeeting Adult Ed (SAD #75) does offer these classes locally, we tend not to

duplicate courses that are already offered through our School Districts Adult Ed Office;

<http://www.maine.gov/ifw/education/safety/firearm.htm>

<http://www.state.me.us/ifw/education/safety/archery.htm>

4PP Are there any rules on target shooting?

The laws governing target shooting in summary focus on safety to ensure a safe point of aim and a safe back stop are in place. One may not shoot within 300 feet of another person's dwelling. Noise generated from target shooting may or may not be a violation of criminal law, depending on the circumstances such as time of day.

4QQ What are the rules on hunting and shooting?

The same information listed above applies to this concern. Hunting does have specific seasons, times of day and restrictions such as trespassing on private property. No discharge of a firearm within 300 feet of another's dwelling without prior permission to hunt on that property applies as well. Any location which provides hunting and fishing licenses should have rule books available for more specific information.

Infrastructure

2GG Storm drain system in the Heights needs improvements. DPW has done a great job so far, but it needs to continue to fix the pipes from the Swinging Bridge area downstream

Though our Capital Budget, we attempt to address as many of these types of issues as we can, but it takes time, and many neighborhoods have similar concerns. The FY 16 budget does include some improvement in the Heights.

2HH What is happening with money Town has set aside for Bay Park Phase II project?

The project is moving forward. We are seeking an engineering design contract to design improvements to the drainage system. Once a project is identified and designed, the Town will have to determine how to go about making improvements.

2M Local infrastructure doesn't match growth over last 15 years

What infrastructure specifically? Topsham has seen growth over the past 15 years, but not unforeseen growth. Based upon comp planning dating back to 1992, the Town has planned and encouraged much of the growth seen since then. We continue to plan, and grow, and hopefully the impacts of this growth are handled in a community based manner. Topsham has recently been increasing its support for road reconstruction funding, which enables us to improve more road miles each year.

3F There is a drainage problem at Ward Road across from Country Lane – flooding and icing

Our DPW is aware of this drainage problem on Ward near Country Lane and has tried to address it by reshaping the end of Country Lane, a private road. It will continue to be monitored, and addressed as needed.

- 3U How is Town going to handle the replacing of the Frank Wood Bridge? Will it be moved or done in place?

The Department of Transportation is presently conducting a feasibility study to determine what level of project will be initiated – replacement or rehabilitation. We anticipate a follow up DOT public meeting later in the fall to present its recommended action.

- 4C When is second phase of the Bay Park drainage work going to take place?

The Town has set aside money for this fiscal year to hire an engineering company to look into the specifics of correcting the storm drain issues along the streets. This will be done first to identify solutions for the Town. The Town will then have to look at funding any specific implementation steps.

- 4D Why is the Town responsible for doing drainage work in Bay Park? Why isn't the developer fixing the problems?

This subdivision was built 20+ years ago, to the standards of the time, and the roads and infrastructure were accepted by the Town. They are now our responsibility. We have since improved our design standards to reduce the risk of this type of a problem developing in other areas of town.

Library

- 1E Love the library and staff

Thank you!

- 2CC The Library is great – well funded and taken care of

Thanks! We have huge support from the community in terms of attendance, circulation, donations and interest. We have some gaps in funding vs. services. The Library Board of Trustees will be presenting a public workshop about some of the funding challenges we are facing, particularly this year.

- 4EE We do the Library great

Thanks—we do our best.

- 4Q The library is closed on Mondays because they don't have enough staff

Correct

4CC I support the Library – usage is up as is financial support

Thank you—we need, and appreciate, your support.

4O The Topsham Library is something we do great

Thank you.

4R It is getting harder to keep the library services at current levels without increasing q budgets

We are fortunate to have dedicated long-time staff. We are concerned about our ability to replace any individual at current salary levels. We are also concerned about our ability to retain the quality of the staff. Skill sets needed for a 21st century library are much more demanding. Greg Langraf in an American Library Association e-newsletter states: “Librarians recognize that the idea of libraries as a place for just books is ludicrous and has been for decades.” Not Your Garden-Variety Library Posted Monday, January 5, 2015

1O We have stayed with Curtis Memorial Library – it has more resources and is more helpful

As a member of the Minerva Consortium, Topsham Public Library has access to over 60 libraries, including the Curtis Memorial Library. The Curtis Library is larger and has significantly more resources and especially, staff. We are happy to try to assist our patrons with any reference or material needs. The Library Board of Trustees’ Long Range Plan includes plans for more staff and services. Please contact library Director, Susan M. Preece about any specific need you might have. We may not be able to get what you need immediately, but we will be able to assist you!

1P If residents have questions about the library, or need something, they just need to ask the staff – they are very responsive and helpful

Public service is very important to us. We try to answer the phone before the third ring. If we can’t answer your question immediately, we will get back to you as soon as possible. We offer a variety of services including computer help, storytimes for kids, and activities for Teens, book discussions and the like.

Lower Village

1G How do people feel about the Lower Village Park/trail system?

From the feedback at multiple public workshops and presentations over the past few years, interest in, and support for, both a Lower Village waterfront park and a riverside trail is very strong. This is not surprising since a waterfront park in this area has been identified as a goal in Town planning efforts going back to the mid 1990s.

1H Have some concerns about roundabouts.

Based on comments at public meetings over the past few years, it appears that support for roundabouts has been growing significantly as people have an opportunity to get a better understanding of how they work and have even had a chance to use roundabouts in Bath and Auburn. Also, people now understand that the small, single-lane roundabout that's being proposed for the Lower Village is very different from the large, multi-lane traffic rotaries or traffic circles in Augusta or Boston. Roundabouts are gaining in popularity in Maine because they've been demonstrated to both process traffic more quickly, and simultaneously improve pedestrian safety, when compared to conventional signalized intersections.

1I The Roundabout in Bath works well.

That matches what we been seeing and hearing from users as they get used to a new roundabout.

1S How would a park in the Lower Village increase tax revenue?

By increasing the presence of pedestrians in the Lower Village, a natural outcome would be for businesses to try and attract them as customers. Studies have also shown that public investments in this type of facilities increases the property values in the nearby area.

1T I like the idea of a Lower Village Park

Thank you.

1U A roundabout is OK

Thank you. Glad to hear that the concept of a roundabout is acceptable. They have proven themselves effective in other communities.

2Q Why is there a left turn off of Main onto Winter, when people can turn left at the light?

When Main St. was reconstructed in 2000, there was a desire among some residents that the access to Winter St. not be cut off. Since that time, there has been a growing recognition that traffic stopping to turn onto Winter St. causes significant backups on Main St., and that turning at the light would reduce those adverse impacts. This is an issue that has been discussed by the Lower Village Development Committee.

2V What is going to happen about a Lower Village Park? We have been hearing about it for years.

The Lower Village Development Committee is currently working on this concept, see previous responses.

- 3Q The Town has dropped the ball on the old Fire Station in Lower Village and the bridge that was taken down.

The bridge was taken down by the owner, and is being stored on private property. We have asked to have the pieces removed in the past, and will follow up with the owner to see if that can be accomplished.

As for the Fire Station, this is a complicated issue due to the lease hold arrangement we have with the owner, the location of property lines that cross under the building, and long term development plans for the area that are only now becoming clear. The Lower Village Development Committee is working with the owner to look at concerns of access and parking, as well as the desire for a Lower Village Park. These topics are being brought to the Board of Selectmen this winter for further discussion. Stay tuned.

- 3R What can we do about the dismantled bridge that is still sitting there?

The old bridge by the old fire station is not owned by the Town. When it was dismantled by its owner, initially it was placed on public property. At the Town's request, the pieces were relocated to private property. The Town has had conversations with the owner this past summer about removing it to help facilitate more space for snow storage in the winter.

- 4BB I support the Lower Village park ideas and redevelopment

From the feedback at multiple public workshops and presentations over the past few years, interest in, and support for, both a Lower Village waterfront park and a riverside trail is very strong. This is not surprising since a waterfront park in this area has been identified as a goal in Town planning efforts going back to the mid 1990s.

Natural Gas

- 1C How can the Town get Natural Gas expanded up Tedford Road?

The extension of natural gas is a utility issue. You should contact Maine Natural Gas who is the supplier in Topsham. They can explain the process, and the threshold necessary for them to provide natural gas. Maine Natural Gas in Brunswick @ 729-0420.

- 1R How can we get Natural Gas into Bay Park

See previous response.

- 1EE Can the Town identify gas line locations?

Gas Line identification is conducted through Maine Natural Gas. The gas line is marked by the yellow plastic stakes and the yellow gate boxes in the ground. There is currently limited public digital information available...we encourage people to deal directly with the utility...a service area map is found here <http://mainenaturalgas.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/MNG-ServiceMap2014.jpg>

Neighborhood Issues

- 1M Topsham should continue to move forward and work to preserve neighborhoods – Topsham is a community of neighborhoods

Our upcoming comprehensive plan update efforts will delve into neighborhood scale planning. Identifying needs and desires at this level is no small task, but one that will help us achieve a positive outcome. One longstanding “neighborhood” that has benefited from this scale of planning efforts for some time is our Historic District, and although it may have more regulatory mechanisms involved it is a great example of consistent investment and attention from both the residents and the Town.

- 3I What can the Town do about abandoned homes? Burned out home on Meadow Road, and an abandoned one on West Wind Road should be taken down

Abandoned homes are not addressed under our land use zoning ordinance. The town would need to adopt language that addresses authority to remove abandoned homes (property maintenance code). We do have nuisance rules that can be enforced by the Codes Officer, if a specific home meets the definition of ‘nuisance’.

- 3J What can the Town do about “sale” signs that pop up all over the place – same size as campaign signs, but advertising businesses

They are illegal, and we remove them as time allows and/ or our awareness of them allows. Certain signs are exempt (non-profit/ real estate sale signs/ etc.).

- 3K The area behind Pejepscot is a not a good idea – the Town should do whatever it can to support Grimmel’s plan to build a road to Rt. 196

The Town is working very actively, and collaboratively, with Grimmel Industries to divert it’s truck traffic from Pejepscot Village Main Street and River Road to enter directly onto Route 196. A new entrance onto 196 has already been permitted near the Coastal Metal Fab building, and a private road to connect this entrance to the Grimmel facility is currently in the permitting process.

- 4A Concerned over high-density development on Home Place due to impacts on aquifer protection zone, drainage, impacts on existing homes

This proposed subdivision is an active review under the Planning Board. Input regarding this will be taken during public hearings as well as contact through the planning office to

voice any concerns. We intend to have a peer review (third party professional review) conducted for entirety of this project

4B Concerned that Home Place project will create through road

Currently our subdivision ordinance mandates road connectivity.

2C Concerned about ‘midnight’ openings of stores at the Mall

Topsham has no rules or regulations that would prevent midnight openings in the Mall.

2U I live in the R-1 and the side setbacks won’t allow me to build a 2-car garage. Can the Town look at decreasing side setbacks?

This was recently done (2010)...the office will review current standards to see what issues there may be.

Neighborhood Meetings/Public Events/Town Meeting

1KK The Town should consider hosting more community events.

It appears from the 250th Celebration, that there are certain events that are very well liked, such as the New Year’s Eve Celebration. There has been discussion in continuing this event, or something similar. The concern is the staffing, and volunteer support for Community Events that was an issue that we faced throughout the year in the 250th Celebration. In order to make this effective, we would like to partner with a local business group (an existing one or a new one) to help sponsor such an event. We can consider a local Annual Event Citizen’s Group as well.

2PP Reminder that Town Meeting is May 18, 2016

2QQ Consider additional meetings prior to Town Meeting

The Board of Selectmen has scheduled two follow up meeting on October 19 and 26th to present these findings. On an annual basis, the timing would have to be December/January to help gather public input prior to the budget process..

3X The Board should consider quarterly Neighborhood Meetings

The Board has discussed holding future meetings. No decision has been made, and no schedule has been discussed.

3H Town Meeting participation is low – if town is being well run, then nobody will show up

4LL How can we change Town Meeting to get higher participation?

That is a question we ask every year, and we look to the public for guidance in what it would take for them to attend a Town Meeting. This could also be a topic for discussion during our upcoming Comprehensive Plan, or via a public survey.

4TT How will information from these meetings be shared and passed along?

The Board will have its comments posted as soon as completed, and will hold follow up meetings in October to present the comments. The document will be available via print and electronic for those residents interested in seeing it.

4UU How will we know what the Town is doing to address the issues raised?

The results will be presented at the October follow up meetings. There will also be periodic progress reports to the Board and updates on line and at Town Meeting.

4WW Meetings like this help to establish, and re-establish community

This is one of the goals of holding these meetings.

3Z Is the Town going to have a public Strategic Planning process?

No formal Strategic Planning meetings are planned at this point, but there will be a public process as part of the update to our Comprehensive Plan, and a Strategic Plan component of this process could make sense. The Board will also hold follow-up Neighborhood Meetings to present results of this process.

2RR Remember that the up or down vote at Town Meeting is the finale – the work at drafting ordinances or budgets takes place weeks and months before Town Meeting at the Committee level

This was a comment from the Board of Selectmen, and it serves to remind people that Town Meeting is the last step in the process of establishing budgets and adopting ordinances, and that if residents want to have in-depth input, that needs to be done in the months before Town Meeting at the various budget workshops or meetings with the Planning Board.

Operating Schedules

1HH The Town should consider adjusting open hours – later in the day, 6 days a week

Current Town Hall office hours are 8:30 to 4:30 Monday through Friday. The Clerk and Tax Offices are open early, 7:30 a.m., on Wednesdays until 4:30. The Transfer Station is open Tuesday through Saturday, but closed on Sunday and Monday. To add a sixth day to the schedule, either at Town Hall or at the Transfer Station, would require additional hours, or shorter hours during the week, and limited staff to a single day off during the

week. Having heard this question raised, it will likely be discussed during the budget process.

To better accommodate residents who may not work locally, we have agreed to a trial period of adjusted office hours at Town Hall. The new schedule will be:

Mon – Wed	8:30 – 4:30
Thurs	8:30 – 6:00
Friday	8:30 – 3:00

Recreation

4XX There is a lack of boat ramp access to the Androscoggin in Topsham – is the Town looking to address this?

Issues surrounding ownership, incline, and safety always surface when discussing boat ramp access. The Town has had discussions with the Sewer District regarding their substation area on Pinewood, and is continually looking for other options, including our lower Recreation Fields. Not only creating the Boat Ramp, but safety and oversight to a ramp will also need to be supported and funded.

4YY Water access is limited

See above comment.

4FF We do Parks and Recreation great – great community resource

Thank you.

4U Head of Tide Park – the Town and others have done a great job

Thank you.

2AA Brookfield signs along river are too many

This will be referred to Brookfield for their consideration. Unfortunately Brookfield is required by the Federal Licensing Division to do all it can to protect the river frontage along the Topsham side. The decision to place signs was their first step in addressing safety.

2BB What are future plans of Brookfield re: fencing or other ideas?

The last contact we had with Brookfield was that signage along the river was the only planned step. Results of installing the signage would be evaluated before any additional steps would be suggested and explained to the Board of Selectmen.

Sidewalks & trails

- 1D How can the Town install a sidewalk on Tedford Road?

The Town considered a sidewalk on Tedford Road several years ago as part of the sidewalk bond. After investigating the idea, it was felt to be non-viable, due to the lack of adequate right of way (the road is not centered in the ROW), alternating utility poles and drainage, railroad crossing, and homes very close to the road.

- 1F Love the trails in Topsham.

Thank you. Between the Planning Office (Conservation Commission, Tree Committee, Bowdoin Intershops), Public Works and Parks and Recreation we attempt to maintain trails and provide mapping. The Town also owes credit to the Brunswick Topsham Land Trust, the Greater Topsham Trail Alliance, Cathance River Education Alliance, and the Topsham Trail Riders.

- 1V Walkability is very important

The Town is pursuing several projects to increase and/or improve walkability across Topsham. The largest single project is the effort to complete the next phase of the Androscoggin Bike Path, which would connect upper Main Street near the Town Office to the Highlands and Highland Green. Another important project would be the creation of a trail from Town Landing Road, downstream along the river from there, and then connecting to Elm Street through the Topsham Landing property. The creation of a waterfront park, together with related improvements in traffic flow and access/safety for pedestrians and bicyclists and the extension of our trail networks, would also dramatically increase walkability in the Lower Village, as was demonstrated during the Dan Burden walkability audit and presentation last September (2014).

We continue to address walkability through main street improvements, Lower Village planning, and Planning Board review of new development. As stated above we are looking at complete street policies to add to our road construction standards. The town conducted a RALA (Rural Active Living Assessment) last year, and inventoried all of the town bike-ped facilities that currently exist. This will help in planning for improved areas in the future.

- 1W We should provide capacity for bikes, even just wide shoulders

We agree and have instructed our Public Works Department to consider paved shoulders when possible, during repaving projects.

- 1J Pedestrians can't cross Rt. 196 at Village Drive and Community Drive

A crossing at this location is regulated by the Maine Department of Transportation. Several factors come into play, including width of the roadway, traffic volume, and traffic speed (55 mph). There is a long range plan to place a pedestrian bridge over the highway, but that is still several years in the future.

2D Are bikes allowed on sidewalks? Can they travel the ‘wrong’ way on sidewalks?

Bicycles by law and ordinance are not allowed on sidewalks and shall ride to the right portion of the way as far as practicable except when it is unsafe to do so or when a lane is too narrow for a bicycle or roller skier and a vehicle to travel safely side by side in the lane.

2G Bikes use sidewalks when roadways feel unsafe

Thanks for the comment.

Reading State law 29-A as summarized above, bicycles may use the sidewalks when the roadway is too narrow and there is no shoulder for the bicycles to travel on.

2SS Compliments to DPW and Parks and Recreation for Swinging Bridge and Riverwalk

Thank you.

3D When will the Riverwalk be continued further downstream along the river?

The Riverwalk Committee is a bi-town Committee. Theirs plans have been to develop along the river front by Priority Group, but then loop through Brunswick to the other side of the Swinging Bridge.

The Lower Village Development Committee has produced plans to connect various in town trails/ sidewalks with the existing Riverwalk. Specifically there is a plan that integrates Main Street, Green St. and what is now being referred to as “Town Landing Trail” (off of Town Landing Road, and continuing behind the Riverview cemetery) to offer a water front trail that connects to Elm street at the River Landing Senior Housing facility. The trail will not be a developed trail such as the Riverwalk, but more rustic and natural. We have applied for a grant to build this portion of the trail, and have also received trail easements from all property owners involved.

3E When will the Bike Path be constructed?

We are slated for construction funding by the Department of Transportation in 2016. The current project budget is \$800,000, with \$640,000 coming from the DOT, and the remaining \$160,000 coming from the Town (this budget is subject to change based on State permit review). The Town’s share has been raised, and includes funds raised via taxes, funds privately raised, and funds raised by the Town through non-tax avenues.

2TT Can the Town look at putting in a sidewalk on Maple Street up to Bridge Street?

We can look into a walk along Maple Street from Bridge to Summer Street. Some of the issues to contend with are homes close to the road, high banks and utilities. This should be addressed to the Board of Selectmen as a Capital Improvement.

3G Meadow Road has no capacity for pedestrians or bicyclists – can it be widened, or even have shoulders paved?

Meadow Road is not owned by the Town, it is a State road. The Town is reimbursed for plowing it during the winter months. This would be a question for the MDOT folks out of Scarborough, 885-7000.

4Y Will the Town be installing a crosswalk on Cathance by Head of Tide Park? Will there be warning signs?

The crosswalk is in place, and warning signs are present in both directions. We will continue to evaluate whether warning lights are needed or will be beneficial.

4AA I support the Bike Path Connections in town and to Brunswick

Thank you. We are currently working on the implementation of the 2004 Topsham trails planning effort.

Traffic & Speeding

2N Has the Town considered re-establishing a Traffic Committee?

The issue of establishing a traffic committee has not come up in the recent past. This will be something for the Board of Selectmen to consider.

2H Local traffic issues can cost big bucks to fix

Some local traffic issues can have considerable costs associated with their fix. That's probably why they take some time to solve. They all can't be solved with a stop sign or flashing caution light. The roundabout concept is new, but has been very successful in many of the places where they have been installed.

2R Park Drive and Topsham Fair Mall Road – traffic fails to yield

Park Drive and Topsham Fair Mall Road is a regular travel location for patrol officers who will take appropriate action when a violation is observed.

4V Do the number of accidents in an area lead to lower speeds?

MDOT utilizes various formulas for developing speed limits and traffic crashes may be a part of that formula. The number of accidents can be included in considering a speed limit change, but there are other factors as well, such as road quality & size, population along the road, number of cross streets and line of sight issues (hills, curves, straight).

4W Traffic calming measures can be used to lower speeds

Traffic calming, such as islands, speed bumps, road quality, parking, may be used but some may have unintended consequences as well, such as increase noise as cars travel over speed bumps or speed tables.

4Z Speed is an issue everywhere

Traffic related complaints are one of the highest rated complaints throughout the Town. The department no longer has the Traffic Safety Officer and utilizes grant funding to increase the number of officers available to address these concerns.

4X Has the town considered speed tables on Pleasant St. to slow vehicles?

Speed bumps have been used in other locations in Town, but they created other issues, such as noise and vehicles driving on lawns to avoid them. Speed bumps and tables can be very problematic during the winter plowing, and are not user friendly for bike riders and skate boards.

4S How are Speed Limits established?

The Town Selectmen review the streets and roads within the Town limits and the State does the outside areas. Usually the Selectmen will work with the State officials when reviewing or changing local road's speed limits.

4T Why does MeDOT have a role in speed limits?

MDOT is involved often because of two reasons: most roads are their jurisdiction and they are responsible for setting the speed limits on their roads and highways. Second, many towns request the State's assistance with setting speed limits because of their knowledge and to maintain a standard throughout the State.

Transfer Station

1GG Can the Transfer Station be open on Sundays?

Opening the Transfer Station for a 6th day would be very difficult due to limited staffing. Switching days closed would be an option, but one that could have to be considered carefully.

Utilities

3C What can the Town do to improve broadband service throughout town? How to provide equal access?

Topsham has a contract with Comcast to provide cable/internet services. The requirement is to provide these services to all residences, where there is a specific density of units per road mile. Where that density is not achieved, service is only provided if residents enter into a cost recovery agreement with Comcast. There are other options in the market, including municipal investment in higher speed broadband. However, this does not ensure that this higher speed service is provided to all homes.

3L Very poor cell service in Pejepscot area

This is an issue that should be taken up with your cell phone provider.

4P Poor quality internet service in places (Pleasant Point Road)

The quality of service is an issue for Comcast. You are encouraged to contact them.

Web Page & Technology

1X The Town should have a facebook page

Thank you for the comment. We have now created a facebook page, as well as a twitter account.

1Y The Town should advertise its web page on every notice – tax bills, mailings, receipts

Point well taken – we will try to make our website more noticeable.

1Z The Town should update and utilize its web site

Topsham lacks an Information Technology position – each department is responsible for its own page. Keeping a site active is constrained by staff time and availability. We will try to increase attention to the web page. We continually evaluate whether maintenance should be directed to a third party.

1BB The website is frustrating

We appreciate the sentiment of frustration about our web page, but as noted, each department is responsible for their own section of the web site. This results in uneven usage, mainly due to staffing issues within the departments – not every department has the staff available to keep pages up to date. If there are specific issues with the web site, please let us know and we will do our best to address those issues.

2Y Use the web site more effectively – agendas, election results

We post all agendas on the web page, linked to the calendar found on the home page. Election results are posted once finalized. We have attempted to use the web site more effectively, but results have been uneven since each department is responsible for its own page, and not every department has equal staffing capacity to keep the website up to date.

4RR Has the town considered an RSS Feed Blog?

We have not considered this type of connection. With limited staff, it is not possible to utilize every type of social media to reach out to residents, so we have tried to limit our efforts to the most common avenues.

3Y Where is there a schedule for what is shown on Channel 3?

The schedule for Channel 3 is on the Town Website, or you can reach it by entering; www.topshammaine.com/TV3

Winter Maintenance

2T Why a delay in cleaning sidewalks of snow after a storm? This is a management issue.

The sidewalks are plowed after a storm for a couple of reasons:

1. As we plow during a storm, the snow off the street ends up on many of our sidewalks because there is no tree belt between the walk and street pavement. It only makes sense to wait and plow the walks once, after the snow has stop.
2. All seven employees at public works and the mechanic are needed to plow the streets during a storm. There is no one else available to plow the walks. The selectmen have met in a workshop, and prioritize what walks are plowed first after a storm and PW follows this list. Additional personnel would be needed, at additional costs to the taxpayer if the walks are going to be plowed during a storm and the plowing would still have to continue after the storm.

2FF DPW does a good job on sidewalks

Thank you for the compliment on sidewalk plowing.

3A DPW does a great job with plowing in the Turkey Run area – never have a problem getting out

Thank you for the compliment. I will share it with the plow driver as well.

Winter St

2E Winter St. is too narrow for the volume of traffic it carries

The police department does not have any standards to support the width of the roadway being too narrow for traffic volume. I would defer to MDOT and Topsham Highway Department.

2I Can speed limits be lowered on Winter St.?

Speed limits are governed by MDOT. In the past, when requested, they have not lowered speed limits in this area.

2J Can the Town use more police patrols on Winter St?

The Department does add streets to a list for added attention. If there are specific areas on Winter St. that are of concern, please contact the Police Department. This is a growing concern for several roadways throughout Town and communities throughout the State.

2K Can the Town place a restriction on truck traffic on Winter St.?

Towns are given the authority to limit weights on roads during specific periods. We will have to investigate the Town's ability to create a permanent restriction.

2L Where/when is the snapping point for too much traffic on Winter St.?

Average daily trips, and road classification (the level the road was built to in order to handle trips) can be a determining factor for what is needed in this regard. Currently Winter St./ River Rd. is rated for these traffic levels. If speeding is an issue, this would be a police enforcement issue.

2F Noticed uptick in traffic on Winter St. around the time the Black Bridge was closed, as well as when the new lights went in on Maine St. in Brunswick

As noted previously, we are monitoring traffic counts, and considering traffic-related improvements. Traffic impacts in general will likely be a topic taken up in the upcoming Comprehensive Plan process.

2A Concerned about the volume and velocity of traffic on Winter St.

We are unable to regulate traffic volume on any given roadway in Topsham. However, if there are speeding concerns, please notify the office and we can schedule speed enforcement efforts as staff is available.

2B Concerned about the quality of life on Winter St, particularly the noise at the hill at the upper end of Winter St. (Main St. end)

The hill does cause an acceleration noise as vehicles traverse the incline, especially under adverse weather conditions. We have no regulations that govern the normal noise from

travelling vehicles. The Lower Village Development Committee has been involved in looking at Lower Village traffic issues.

2P Could Winter St. be made one-way at the bottom of the hill?

This was suggested in the 2005 Transportation Study. However, the recommendation was not widely supported at the time. Currently, the Lower Village Development Committee has this as part of their discussions.

From the feedback at multiple public workshops and presentations over the past few years, interest in, and support for, both a Lower Village waterfront park and a riverside trail is very strong. This is not surprising since a waterfront park in this area has been identified as a goal in Town planning efforts going back to the mid 1990s. In order to accommodate a new park, it is crucially important that the Town plan for related improvements in traffic flow and access/safety for pedestrians. Recent traffic and walkability studies, and many comments by many residents at public workshops, have identified the intersection of Winter St. and Main Street as a location where traffic flow is very impaired. Eliminating the left hand turn From Main onto Winter has been mentioned frequently as the cause of lengthy backup during busy times of the day, which would not occur, or occur less frequently, if drivers took advantage of the signal-protected left hand turn at Elm Street. Both these ideas for Winter Street are under consideration and will be presented to the public for further input.

2Q Why is there a left turn off of Main onto Winter, when people can turn left at the light?

Initial designs for Main Street during the 2000 reconstruction called for left turns at the light, but at the time, leaving the left at Winter St. was viewed positively.