

RE-IMAGINING WILBRAHAM

Our Vision | Our Future



***Honoring the past
Understanding the present
Imagining the future***

WILBRAHAM COMMUNITY VISIONING PROCESS

Wilbraham Vision Task Force

Mission Statement

To lead a community-driven process to make Wilbraham a better place to live and work by gathering broad-based public input and generating a consensus-based guiding vision to address Wilbraham’s current and evolving challenges and opportunities

The Wilbraham Vision Task Force will be appointed by and report to the Wilbraham Planning Board. Task Force members will be civic-minded residents of Wilbraham who represent a diverse cross-section of the community, support the Mission, and commit to working cooperatively to envision a future for our town that is best-determined by the local people who live and work in Wilbraham.

The guiding community vision will be the result of a broad-based community outreach effort to capture the values and aspirations of its citizens for their future. The Vision Task Force will collect and refine this input to develop a vision statement that is representative of the greater Wilbraham community. In the context of community planning, the vision statement will be a declarative expression of desired outcomes for Wilbraham’s future—a coherent community vision generated by the people who know Wilbraham best—its citizens.

In addition to an overarching vision statement, the vision will consist of key thematic areas that further define the desired attributes of a preferred Wilbraham in 2030 and beyond. The intent of the guiding vision and associated goals is to serve as a potential framework for preparing an updated comprehensive plan that would inform policy decisions and budget allocations over the upcoming decades.

The Task Force will accomplish this mission by various methods including:

- Community-wide citizen participation to gather public input and determine the core values, needs and wants of the community;
- Careful review of previous and current studies, plans and projections;
- Close collaboration with Town officials, business owners and other important stakeholders in the community;
- Balanced and open decision-making process that emphasizes inclusion, transparency, pragmatism, quality of consensus, and adequately considers alternative scenarios to the preferred or chosen point of view;
- Realistic and pragmatic understanding of the dynamics of change and healthy respect for the risk and uncertainty inherent in predicting future trends and desired outcomes.

Introduction and Background

After considerable research, much discussion and spirited debate, the Wilbraham Planning Board has decided to proceed with plans to initiate a community visioning project which represents the first phase of work necessary to prepare a possible updated Comprehensive Master Plan for the Town of Wilbraham as detailed in a proposal prepared by the Planning Board dated March 2011. That document provided some general background on master planning efforts of the past:

The Planning Board is charged with the responsibility of planning for Wilbraham's future development under M.G.L. Chapter 41... The last Master Plan for the Town was completed in 1963 and partially updated in 1971. Since that time, significant strategic planning efforts have been completed on an ongoing basis by various departments, committees, and boards. The 1963 Master Plan established the Town's first planning and zoning framework to guide growth and development and has served the community quite well in that capacity for almost 50 years. Despite the Town's strong record in planning, however, there has been little opportunity for the Town to take a comprehensive look at the overall impact of individual plans, to consider the individual and collective financial implications of such planning, to reconcile differences among plans, and to set comprehensive goals for the Town.

examined the potential benefits and possible pitfalls of preparing a comprehensive plan at this time in history:

The Planning Board recognizes that the current Master Plan is long out of date and has been investigating the utility of preparing a new master plan for the twenty-first century. While the Planning Board acknowledges the importance of planning for the future, the Board also has expressed serious reservations about the value of preparing a traditional master plan due to concerns that we may have entered an extended period of profound uncertainty and unpredictable change.

The last Master Plan was prepared during a period of exceptional growth and affluence that was made possible due in large part to the availability of abundant and relatively inexpensive sources of energy and capital. For nearly a century, our society grew and developed as if economics were divorced from the natural systems we are part of and depend on for our very physical

existence. However, it seems unlikely that the next 100 years will follow the trends of the past 100 years; in fact, it appears likely that the future will be remarkably different from the recent past.

and outlined the scope of work and organizational framework to guide the preparation of an updated plan. Under the March 2011 proposal endorsed by the Planning Board, the process of developing a potential Comprehensive Plan will proceed in two sequential stages and will engage the community in asking and answering the following questions:

Phase One: Community Vision Statement

In Phase One the Task Force will facilitate public participation to build consensus and produce the Community Vision. The Vision Statement will emerge from the collective wisdom of the community as the town's residents deeply engage with the following important questions and generate meaningful answers that will serve the best interests of the Community:

- *Community Profile (the "Snapshot")*: Where are we (as a community) now? What are the existing conditions, situations, issues and values of the Community?
- *The Dynamics of Change*: Where are we going? What are we in the process of becoming if we follow the current course? What will Wilbraham look like in 20 years and beyond if current trends continue?
- *Vision*: Where do we want to be? What do we aspire to be as a community in 10 years, 20 years, and beyond?

Phase Two: The Comprehensive Plan

In Phase Two, the Town will formulate a Comprehensive Plan based on the values and goals of the Community Vision. The Comprehensive Plan will contain an action plan with specific goals, delegated responsibilities, and timetables and benchmarks to measure progress. The Comprehensive Plan will emerge by producing meaningful answers to the following questions:

- *Strategic Directions / Plan Framework*: How to we (as a community) get to where we want to be according to our vision? What are the challenges that may affect the Town's ability to achieve the vision? What are the choices to "change course" in the direction of the Vision? What policies and strategies will be most effective in realizing the goals of the Wilbraham community?

- *Plan Elements:* How can the collective vision for the community be translated into goals and strategies in the Town’s Comprehensive Plan update process? How will the Vision and Plan Framework be applied through strategies and actions identified in the different plan elements? How will the elements be integrated to achieve overarching goals such as sustainability?

It bears reiterating that Massachusetts General Law Ch. 41, §81D, sets forth nine required elements of a Comprehensive plan¹ and these may be expanded as needed depending on issues particular to our town. These issues will arise during the public participation process as detailed in the scope of services below.

- *Implementation:* What are the specific priorities, actions, and responsibilities for Comprehensive Plan implementation? How do we build capacity and leverage resources through partnerships? How will progress in implementing the Plan be monitored and measured?

This document builds upon the previous proposal and presents additional information to further clarify the scope of work and framework necessary for completing the Visioning Process described under Phase One of the March 2011 Comprehensive Plan proposal.

Some Frequently Asked Questions

What is Community Visioning?

Community visioning is a planning process that engages the community in a dialogue to determine its vision for the future. Visioning allows citizens to come together to discuss significant trends and issues affecting our community in a collaborative, proactive way. By focusing on the future, community members can often find common ground for shared goals. Working “backward” from these goals, community members can develop new ideas and approaches for addressing challenges and solving problems. Visioning does not replace traditional forms of planning and decision-making, but it can make these activities better informed, more strategic and effective.

¹ See Appendix A

What is a Vision?

A vision represents a community's hopes and dreams for the future and identifies core community values to help guide the community as it makes decisions to achieve that vision. Think of a vision as a community's preferred "destination"—where it would like to be in the long-term future.

How is the Vision Implemented?

Implementing our vision will take a combined effort and commitment amongst community members, businesses, institutions, and town leadership. Creating a specific action plan to achieve our vision will be developed by the Comprehensive Master Planning process.

What is a Comprehensive Master Plan? How does it differ from a Vision?

If a vision is Wilbraham's preferred community destination, think of the Comprehensive Master Plan as its "road map"—how our community plans to get there. A comprehensive Master Plan is a strategic guide to achieving our vision in the near-, mid- and long-term (e.g., 1-5, 5-10, 15-20 years and beyond). We will develop actions to achieve our community vision as part of our Comprehensive Master Planning process.

What are the benefits of community-visioning?

Visioning is the act of anticipating that which will or may come to be. A clearly articulated realistic vision about the kind of community that citizens want provides a community with a practical roadmap to that destination. A clearly articulated Vision may be used:

- to foster a shared sense of direction for Wilbraham
- to better manage growth and change
- to guide local planning and decision-making
- to inspire and motivate community involvement and action
- to strength the local economy and promote prosperity
- and much more....

Why Begin With A Visioning Process

As long-time residents of the Town of Wilbraham, the members of the Planning Board know first-hand that the Town of Wilbraham prides itself on being a great place to live, work, rest, play and raise a family. As citizens of Wilbraham, we are grateful to those in the past who

nurtured the attractive, well managed, and vibrant town that we enjoy today. And in our role as elected planning officials, we are humbly aware of our current stewardship responsibility and deeply mindful of the fragile nature of much that our town cherishes. We recognize that powerful trends in changing land use patterns, resource availability, evolving responsibilities and expectations, and new technology could dramatically alter the town.

Communities change, as do families, businesses, institutions and natural systems. Retaining conditions just as they are now is no more feasible than turning back the clock to a prior era. While change itself may be inevitable, the direction and rate of change and the kind of places which change produces, are not. The act of planning, in essence, reflects a decision not to passively accept “the inevitable,” but rather to engage uncertainty and guide change at the local level to help shape a future that best meets our social, economic and environmental needs. We have a choice. We can simply accept how the Town evolves or we can creatively confront and proactively manage change to enable Wilbraham to flow with changing conditions and remain a strong and resilient community to live and prosper in.

How can we create a more resilient and prosperous community in a time of big change and daunting uncertainty? We have confidence that the most promising approach to the future is to acknowledge and act upon the values that we share in common. To confront change constructively, we need to know ourselves—our values, aspirations, and the goals we share for our community. We need to identify the core values that bind us together. We need a framework for decision-making that elevates the importance of these shared elements. We need to develop guidelines for analyzing and making decisions that show how well the town corresponds with our values. And to evaluate progress, we need a method for measuring and tracking how Wilbraham changes as a result of our decisions.

The Vision serves as the framework for the Comprehensive Plan through which the community proactively manages change, anticipates and solves problems, and seizes opportunities to make our community better. The process of developing the Vision is an opportunity for Wilbraham to address its difficult questions all at once, in a setting that allows the community to understand the constraints, consequences, and trade-offs as the town makes decisions balancing public costs and public goods. If adopted, ideally, all land development regulations and capital improvements for public facilities and utilities shall be consistent with the updated Comprehensive Plan. Annual monitoring with updates to the Plan as needed following public hearings by the Planning Board insures a framework for coping with changes in the community, unforeseen events, and unintended consequences.

Implementing Phase One

This section of the document focuses on the scope of work and planning framework necessary for completing Phase One of the Comprehensive Plan process. It outlines a collaborative planning process involving town government and the Wilbraham community consisting of the following tasks:

Task 1 Designing the Process

The Planning Board and the Planning Director have conducted considerable research into designing the planning process and the Planning Board has approved a general approach to the organizational design ("Plan for a Plan") of the Comprehensive Plan. The first task is to finalize the specifics of how the visioning process will be developed including project tasks, schedule and public outreach strategy.

Task 2 Assembling the Wilbraham Vision Task Force

The Planning Board is charged with the responsibility of planning for Wilbraham's future development under M.G.L. Chapter 41 and the Planning Board shall be considered the client for this project on behalf of the citizens of Wilbraham.

The Wilbraham Vision Task Force shall be appointed by and report to the Planning Board. It shall be comprised of residents of the Town of Wilbraham and should include key members from town boards and committees, the business community, and local civic organizations. The Task Force is charged with conducting the entire visioning process and developing a comprehensive Vision document built on extensive public participation for review and adoption by the Planning Board. Members shall be appointed to one-year terms and all meetings of the Task Force shall be open to the public and held and conducted in strict compliance with the requirements of the Massachusetts Open Meeting Law. The Task Force shall remain in existence until it completes its work and submits a report or recommendations. Reports and recommendations generated by the Task Force committee shall not be deemed to represent the position of the Planning Board unless specifically voted by the Board.

A small subcommittee consisting of two members of the Planning Board, the Planning Director and appointed member(s) of the Task Force shall be designated by the Planning Board to serve as the Steering Committee to oversee the creation of the Vision, to provide guidance on the process and to review and refine draft materials. The Steering Committee will advise the Planning Board on key elements of the process and will work closely with the Planning Board and Task Force to steward the visioning process to completion.

Task 3 Meeting with Town Staff and Committees

The Task Force will conduct stakeholder interviews of key Town staff, regional agencies, and other government stakeholders to collect visions, goals, and concerns. Interviews will be scheduled either individually or in groups. A week of concentrated and organized meetings is generally required; other interviews can be scheduled as needed.

Task 4 Creating a Community Inventory Database

The Task Force with assistance from the Planning Department and the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC) will begin to gather, review and analyze data about existing conditions in Wilbraham that will inform the Planning Process and provide a snapshot of the community at this point in time. The Community Inventory will include a broad range of data, with chapters devoted to:

- Regional and local population and household growth trends
- Regional and local housing trends (prices, sales, affordability, seasonal homes, types and tenure, etc.)
- Regional and local employment trends
- Regional and local office and retail trends (including market data)
- Regional and local building permit trends
- Land use and land consumption, including agriculture, housing, retail, office, and industrial analysis

Task 5 Public Outreach & Community Engagement

The greatest challenge of the visioning process will be engaging (not just seeking validation from) a variety of stakeholders and interest groups. Special attention must be paid to involving the community as a full partner in the visioning process from start to finish.

The visioning process will include multiple ways of engaging the public, designed to achieve three broad goals. First, the process should reach beyond those who have a history of active participation in planning to engage a broad range of constituencies within the community. This will require new tools and venues for soliciting input, as well as clear and accessible communication and education throughout the process, so that all members of the public are able to offer informed input. Second, the process should seek to narrow areas of disagreement and to define "common ground" as the basis for moving forward. Third, the process should go beyond mere "participation" to encourage citizens and civic leaders to

“take ownership” of the vision through active support and involvement in its development and future implementation.

Engaging the community, and empowering it to make decisions, comes from weaving the public into each component of the technical work program. Examples of this approach are as follows:

1. Consider *key participants*—the stakeholders, groups, demographics, etc. who should be involved in the planning process. These might include, for example, senior citizens, high school or college students, historical societies, business owners, developers, key property owners, etc.
2. Develop a *media outreach strategy* and use, to the maximum extent possible, local TV, radio and newspapers to publicize events and develop excitement about the visioning process.
3. Establish a page on the Town *website*, or a separate website, and/or a web log (“blog”) in order to post key documents, discussion threads, and keep people informed about upcoming events and other ways to participate. Ideally the blog will be interactive, back and forth moderated discussion, For those who do not have internet access, a spiral bound notebook placed at the library would be an “old fashioned” substitute for the blog.
4. *Exhibit* old plans, maps, site designs, and other planning documents at the library, as a way to build interest in the visioning process. Work with the Historical Commission and Athenaeum Society. On an ongoing basis, materials can be exhibited in the library, Town Hall and other public buildings, etc. to keep people informed and up-to-date.

Task 6 Community Forum(s) Issues and Opportunities

The scope of work framework identifies a series of “community forums” to be held at key junctures in the visioning process. These forums will be designed as interactive events in which a variety of means will be used to share information and ideas and receive public input. This will be an important opportunity to educate participants about comprehensive planning—its importance, challenges and the process itself— and the Task Force might consider presenting a brief overview of the Town’s history, demographics, and development trends in the larger context of the role and trends of planning in the 21st century. A sign-in sheet should be provided and attendees should be encouraged to indicate their interest in attending meetings, volunteering, or addressing certain topics that would invite future

involvement.

In this task outreach activities will be conducted to elicit citizen values and aspirations for the future. This effort will include facilitation of the first community forum focused on identifying "Issues and Aspirations" with town citizens. At the first forum:

- A. We will invite people to break out into moderated smaller groups to conduct brief "SWOT" sessions. In these small groups, people will be invited to consider the "strengths, weakness, opportunities, and threats" facing Wilbraham. Strengths and weaknesses represent current conditions and issues; and opportunities and threats represent what people view as the looming conditions and issues.
- B. Each group will then report back to the entire gathering. The moderators will write down the key considerations on large boards for all to see. Then several key topics will be culled from the list and folks will be invited to discuss each topic in small groups. A brief discussion period will follow.
- C. The moderators will collect the notes from each table/group, next steps will be outlined for the participants, and the forum will be adjourned.

Depending on the results of the first community forum, additional town-wide forums may be convened as needed. And it is expected that the overall structure of future outreach efforts will become more flexible and organic in design as the Task Force strives to improvise the process to creatively respond to meet the needs of the community during this unfolding effort. For example, this could include topical workshops to address key concerns or issues run as brainstorming sessions or follow-up "mini-forums" with targeted audiences.

Other means of outreach will also be used to reach those who do not normally attend public meetings, such as community surveys, focus groups, meetings in different settings, an interactive project website, canvassing, speaker's bureau, etc.

The results of all the community outreach efforts, including indication of areas of agreement or "common ground," will be tabulated and made available for public review. If more targeted input is needed, the Task Force may consider developing a series of surveys to be distributed around Town. All residents, property owners and businesses would be given an opportunity to respond to topics as appropriate. The survey could be distributed with a tax bill or in a newsletter.

Task 7 Vision and Goal Formulation

The final task of Phase One is for the Wilbraham Vision Task Force to integrate all of the public input and to prepare the following end products and outcomes:

- Identification and analysis of emerging trends and community issues
- Articulation of core community values
- Development of a general community-wide vision and associated goals based on the community's identified core values

The Task Force will prepare a final report to the Planning Board that will summarize the work performed under Phase One as outlined in the previous paragraph. The Task Force report will also include a recommendation on whether to proceed to Phase Two which will lead to the preparation of the comprehensive community Plan incorporating the community vision or take other action if deemed more appropriate. If the Task Force recommends proceeding to Phase Two, the Final Report shall contain a proposed scope of work for a comprehensive community master planning process, tentative schedule for project completion, and a budget estimate to complete the plan including consultant services if needed.

The final report will be reviewed by the Planning Board with input from the public and town government officials. If approved by the Planning Board, the Community Vision and associated goals statement will represent a critical benchmark in the planning process. The Vision developed in Phase One will articulate areas of common ground on which most of the community can agree, will define and describe the preferred future of Wilbraham, and will provide the framework for future planning efforts in Phase Two. In other words, the Community Vision (Phase One) will represent the "destination" for which the future Comprehensive Plan (Phase Two) will be the "roadmap."

Appendix A

The Comprehensive Master Plan Model

If the Town decides to prepare a Comprehensive Master Plan, the final product will contain an inventory of existing conditions in the community as well as a comprehensive assessment of predicted future trends. The plan will present clear goals, objectives and priorities based on a shared vision for the community's future. The Comprehensive Plan shall be a statement—through text, maps, illustrations, or other forms of communication—that is designed to provide a basis for decision-making regarding the long term physical development of the Town, as well as to guide the delivery of town services and fiscal management. The comprehensive plan shall be internally consistent in its policies, forecasts, and standards shall meet the requirements of Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 41 Section 81D, as well as additional requirements of this charge.

The plan will include the following elements required under MGL Chapter 41:

1. **Goals and policies statement** that identifies the goals and policies of the Town for its future growth and development. These goals and policies shall be based on an interactive public process to determine community values and goals and to identify patterns of development and desires for Town services.
2. **A land use plan element**, which shall be based on materials provided by the Planning Board, and which identifies present land use and designates the proposed distribution, location, and interrelationship of public and private land uses. This element shall relate the proposed standards of population density and building intensity to the capacity of land available or planned facilities and services. A land use plan map illustrating the land use policies of the Town shall be included.
3. **A demographics and housing element**, which shall identify and analyze existing and forecasted housing needs and objectives including programs for the preservation, improvement, and development of housing. This element shall identify policies and strategies to provide a balance of local housing opportunities for all citizens.
4. **An economic development element**, which will draw upon recent studies and input from the business community, and which will identify policies and strategies for the expansion or stabilization of the local economic base and the promotion of employment opportunities.
5. **A natural and cultural resources element**, which will provide an inventory of the significant natural, cultural, and historic resource areas of the municipality, and policies and strategies for the protection and management of such areas.
6. **An open space and recreation element**, which will provide an inventory of recreational resources and open space areas of Wilbraham, and strategies for the management and protection of such resources and areas. This element will draw upon the Open Space Plans and Recreation plans which have been recently completed.
7. **A services and facilities element**, which identifies and analyzes existing and forecasted needs for facilities and services used by the public. This element will draw upon work completed by the Major Projects Committee, Capital Planning Committee, various building committees, town building reports, and other relevant planning and policy documents. This element shall include an inventory of all town facilities.

8. **A transportation and circulation element**, which provides an inventory of existing and proposed circulation, parking, and transportation systems. This element will draw upon existing transportation planning endeavors including regional studies by PVPC.
9. **An implementation program element**, which defines and schedules the specific Town actions necessary to achieve the objectives of each of the elements of the plan. For example, proposed capital improvements, scheduled expansion or replacement of public facilities or circulation system components, and the anticipated costs and revenues associated with the accomplishment of such activities shall be detailed in this element. Moreover, this element shall specify the process by which any changes in the Town's bylaws or operating policies or other regulatory structures shall be amended to be consistent with the master plan.

The plan will also include the following element which is not required under MGL Chapter 41D:

10. **An energy element**, which provides an inventory of existing energy resources, an issues and opportunities analysis based on an assessment of current and future energy use, and the development of an energy plan for the community. Since energy use is central to all human activity and adequate and affordable sources of energy can no longer be taken as a given, the energy element will need to determine local needs, assess local resources, and develop a gap analysis that determines the best energy transition strategy to meet the energy requirements of the community.

The plan may also include the following optional element which is not required under MGL Chapter 41D subject to approval by the Board of Selectmen:

11. **A fiscal resources element**, which provides a review of the Town's existing fiscal policies to determine whether they provide direction consistent with the Town's goals and, if they do not, to propose new policies. This element will draw upon existing plans such as the fiscal options committee, recent Finance Committee Reports, and statements of fiscal policies of the Town. Interviews with financial experts and/or a small Working Group of financial experts may be utilized by the Committee in formulating questions and/or alternatives. Included in this element shall be: any recommendations for changes in the process for determining capital and operating budgets; the identification and evaluation of possible alternative sources of revenue proposed policies which preserve the Town's economic base; recommendations for procedures and/or criteria through which the Town can balance competing and conflicting needs and make the necessary hard choices; and a framework for a long term fiscal model for the Town.

Appendix B
Tentative Timeline for Scope of Work

Task 1	<p>Designing the Process.</p> <p>The Planning Board approves the Community Visioning Process document that outlines the mission of the Task Force, the planning framework, the scope of work and timeline.</p>	January 2012
Task 2	<p>Assembling the Task Force</p> <p>The Planning Board appoints the Steering Committee.</p> <p>The Steering Committee officially launches the visioning project with press releases and information posted on the town website to inform the public and recruit volunteers to serve on the Task Force.</p> <p>Planning Board appoints members of the Task Force.</p> <p>Task Force meets, organizes and forms working groups of volunteers to begin implementing the visioning process. Task Force develops dedicated webpage on town website with current information to be updated and maintained throughout the duration of the project.</p> <p>Task Force maps out strategies and finalizes the visioning framework with oversight from the Steering Committee.</p>	<p>January 2012</p> <p>February 2012</p> <p>February 2012</p> <p>February – March 2012</p> <p>March 2012</p>
Task 3	<p>Meeting with Town Staff & Committees</p> <p>Task Force conducts Visioning Forum with employees of town departments and members of relevant town committees to determine goals & priorities of Town Government.</p>	April 2012
Task 4	<p>Creating a Community Inventory Database</p> <p>Task Force prepares Community Inventory of existing conditions with technical assistance from Planning Office and PVPC</p>	March –April 2012
Task 5	<p>Public Outreach & Community Engagement</p> <p>Task Force and Steering Committee develop a Public Outreach Strategy for implementation to identify diverse community stakeholders, spur community interest in the project, and maximize community participation in the visioning process.</p>	April 2012

<p>Task 6</p>	<p>Community Forums</p> <p>Task Force holds a series of Community Forums with the public at key junctures in the Visioning Process to identify opportunities and challenges facing Wilbraham and to elicit residents’ values and aspirations for the future.</p> <p>All input from the three Visioning Forums and various stakeholder and public outreach efforts is summarized and categorized by Task Force. Task Force analyzes goodness of fit between public input and Town Government input and identifies any significant gaps. Input is then entered on the Town Website and disseminated to Departments and Committees. Summation article placed in the “Times”.</p>	<p>May – October 2012</p> <p>November 2012</p>
<p>Task 7</p>	<p>Vision & Goal Formulation</p> <p>Task Force integrates public input and prepares final report to Planning Board which identifies emerging trends and community issues, articulates a general community-wide vision and associated goals based on core community values and issues a recommendation regarding next steps including the possibility of preparing a comprehensive master plan.</p>	<p>December 2012</p>