

Chapter 1 COMMUNITY VISION

Introduction

Hudson is a large town with a small-town feel. It enjoys an enviable location with convenient access to major employment centers, transportation, shopping, and recreational opportunities while retaining much of its historic rural character. Hudson residents appreciate the town's public facilities, parks, schools, and natural areas, and a strong sense of community prevails. The town seeks a balanced approach to growth and development that protects the features of Hudson that residents cherish while maintaining a strong tax base, preserving open space and mitigating the through-traffic that congests its most heavily traveled corridors.

Defining the essential character of the town, identifying, and addressing its challenges, and translating the desires of its residents and other stakeholders into goals, objectives and recommended actions is the essence of the Master Plan. This chapter summarizes the outcomes from the series of surveys, workshops and public input sessions that established the vision and goals of the Master Plan. The Vision section is one of only two Master Plan sections required under state law. As stated in NH RSA 674:2, the Vision section "[] serves to direct the other sections of the plan." The statute further states that "[T]his section shall contain a set of statements which articulate the desires of the citizens affected by the master plan, not only for their locality but for the region and the whole state. It shall contain a set of guiding principles and priorities to implement that vision." In order to articulate the desires of Hudson residents, an extensive public input and engagement process was undertaken.

What we Heard

To help obtain the input necessary to inform the Master Plan, a comprehensive online survey was conducted in September of 2019. A total of 390 people completed the survey. In addition to answering survey questions, respondents were also able to comment on each question. A total of 417 comments were received, some of which are quoted in this section. Interestingly, only 31% of the respondents considered themselves to be Hudson natives, while 69% did not. Most respondents or their families, therefore, chose to move to Hudson and those choices are reflected in the ways they perceive and value the town.

In addition to the survey, two public engagement workshops were held in October and November of 2019. Each workshop included a Saturday morning session and a Wednesday evening session to provide multiple opportunities for participation. A total of 45 people participated in one of the two workshop A sessions and 41 people participated in one of the workshop B sessions.

Workshop A was organized as a *SWOT* (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis. During the SWOT analyses, participants were randomly organized into small groups to discuss and then prioritize Hudson's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. The results from each of the four categories were recorded on large sheets of paper by each group and were subsequently posted around the meeting room. At the end of the session, participants were able to view the results from all groups and vote for their top selections within each of the four categories using adhesive colored dots.

During the SWOT analyses, the groups also discussed a wide range of issues impacting Hudson. The notes taken by the individual groups reflected several common themes including issues related to community character, small-town character, growth, development and planning, conservation and open space, and traffic.

In the survey and at the initial public input sessions, residents overwhelmingly selected the town's location, including proximity to employment, highways, the mountains, the ocean, Boston, and other attractions, as Hudson's greatest strength and its most important feature. The resident comment quoted below sums up the sentiment of many Hudson residents:

"I can sit on my porch looking into the woods while drinking coffee, but 3 minutes down the road I have all the immediate amenities I need. Ten minutes away I have movies, malls, and restaurants and 30-45 minutes away I have cities, nightlife, and corporate working environments."



October 30 SWOT Analysis at Hills Memorial School

Other highly valued features include Hudson's small-town feel, its parks (especially Benson Park), open spaces and natural areas and sense of community. The following quotes typify many residents' feelings about Hudson's sense of community:

"I have lived in Hudson all of my life and would not want to live anywhere else. I love the sense of community, people helping people, low tax rate and the quality of our school system. Generally, people feel like they can participate in our town government which helps to bring people together to get things done for the good of the community."

"I have a wonderful neighborhood on a quiet road with 1+ acre wooded lots. But the best thing about my neighborhood is my neighbors. Hudson's greatest asset is the people who make our community what it is. After all, it's the people who live, work, volunteer, support local businesses, and make a difference in our town."

When asked to identify issues that concerned them, survey respondents identified the loss of open space and natural areas as their top concern (76%) followed by traffic congestion (73%), loss of rural character (71%) and issues related to residential and commercial development (62% and 60% respectively). Similarly, when asked "how much attention should the town pay to the following issues," the issues where most respondents indicated that the town should "do more" were traffic congestion (58%), controlling residential development (53%), land/open space conservation (52%) and controlling commercial development (51%).

Concerns over the loss of open space, as noted in the following comments, were cited by many of the people who responded to the survey:

"I am saddened by the amount of land that has been developed over the last 5 years. My main reason for moving to Hudson was the small town feel and country setting. I spent years saving and dreaming of living here and to see it changing so much is heartbreaking to me."

"I am hoping Hudson doesn't lose all the beautiful space it has available for outdoor activities. I just don't want us to go too fast."

Not surprisingly, traffic generated many comments. The following comment seems to succinctly express the views of many residents:

"Traffic is a nightmare!! It's like driving the gauntlet trying to get to and from work."

Many traffic-related comments were focused on specific roadways (especially Lowell Road) and various intersections. Several comments specifically addressed *Hudson Boulevard*; a proposal to construct a two-lane limited-access road in the former Circumferential Highway right-of-way from Route 111 to Route 3A at the Sagamore Bridge. Comments included those in support and opposition to the project as well as those who support the project, but only if it were mostly state-funded. The examples below approximate the feeling of many residents. (Note that people used both the name "Hudson Boulevard" and "Circumferential Highway" to describe the project.)

"I am really hoping that the Hudson portion of the Circumferential Highway goes forward, with a character similar to Albuquerque in Litchfield. Traffic to and from Nashua is at a critical, chronic level. I haven't heard of any ways to make the Rt. 111 river crossing less congested, but I am hopeful that positive change can be put into place at Lowell Rd."

"Hudson Blvd concept is a state responsibility. The town should pay its fair share but not most of the cost."

“A Circumferential Highway would raise everyone’s property taxes by \$300/yr for the next 30 years. For what?! To make it easier for people to commute around Hudson, and bypass the businesses on Lowell Road? No thanks!

Many people who responded to the survey or participated in the public input sessions expressed a need for more sidewalks and some for bike lanes.

“[] I wish we could get some sidewalks. I can’t go for a walk except on my side road...but can’t go anywhere else due to speeding, windy roads and cars can’t see us. We need sidewalks.”

Issues related to residential and commercial development generated many comments on the survey and were also a major subject of discussion during the public input sessions. These included concerns over the extent of residential development generally and subsequent loss of open space, and a consensus that commercial and industrial development should be limited to existing commercial industrial areas as expressed in the survey comment below:

“Let’s keep the commercial businesses along the river and the main routes and keep the residential areas residential.”

Generally, a balanced approach to development, as noted in the following quote, seems to be the goal of most of the people who provided input into the planning process.

“The town’s growth and economic viability depend on a balanced approach to development and land protections. Development opportunities and sound land use regulations provide Hudson a way to compete with surrounding communities for better employment and a strong tax base while not sacrificing the overall character of the community.”

Like people who participated in the survey, public input session participants raised many concerns related to traffic and development. Public input session participants also identified a lack of community vision and a lack of investment in community facilities (especially schools) as major concerns together with concerns over low voter turnout and public participation. These concerns align with several of the comments expressed in the survey as well, such as the following:

“Hudson is at a turning point. Currently the town is holding onto its low taxes and small-town thought process, not wanting to embrace change. Inevitably the town is growing whether we like it or not. If we do not have a vision to steer growth into a harmonized and balanced direction our town will change based on what developers want, not based on what the vision should be collectively. Balance is critical. Aiding healthy growth while also targeting environment protection efforts so that the town character stays overtime.”

“All town facilities require "active maintenance" to enable our staff/employees to serve our residents, students in safe, secure, efficient facilities. This not only takes planning and funding. The CIP process needs to be elevated to a status where it not only becomes a tool for future planning but has the support and commitment from our Board of Selectmen and School Board to execute in a coherent and "affordable" way.”

“We need to have more citizen involvement. Many people have been negative about the Town but ask them to join a board, commission, or a committee and all they can say is, "I don't have

the time to do it." We have 18,000 + registered voters and less than 25% participate in local elections."

Several comments received through the online survey and in public input sessions expressed a desire for Hudson to have a more clearly defined town center. The comment highlighted below echoes the views of many participants:

"I wish the town had a type of downtown area like other towns. Where you can park your car and visit a bunch of stores, shops, stop for a bite to eat at a small cafe etc. This would also be a place where the town's people gathered for events for holidays etc."

One section of the survey asked people to rate various town and school facilities. Overall, the level of satisfaction was high, especially for Benson Park and the Library. The Rodgers Memorial Library was rated as "excellent" by 64% of survey respondents and "good" by 20%. Benson Park ranked even higher at 63% "excellent" and 32% "good". Benson Park was also identified as one of Hudson's most important assets during the public input sessions. The schools also generally ranked well though many participants were not familiar with specific facilities and frequently selected "no opinion." The simple survey comment below summarizes the views of many residents.

"Love the school, parks and library!"



Rodgers Memorial Library

Many people also called for both specific and general improvements to various parks and schools as noted in the comments below.

"We have long overlooked the Merrimack River and having access for passive recreation would be a great addition. The Lowell boat launch is a great example of what could be accomplished. Merrill Park could be improved to accomplish this idea."

"Many of the schools need some serious TLC and the high school really needs an auditorium. Hudson has great musical talent with their bands and music programs. An auditorium at the high school would not go to waste and could be used for so many things. The playing fields in

Hudson also need much TLC and it would be great if we could have more fields for our teams to play and practice.”

Following the SWOT Analyses, the workshop B public input sessions were held to dive deeper into the main issues raised during the SWOT analyses and the online survey. Once again, participants were broken up into random groups and asked to brainstorm on four themes: Vision /Community Character, Land Use Development (Planning & Zoning), Natural Resources Conservation/Recreation/Open Space and Traffic. Topics included the following themes:

- Vision – Community Character; what is our vision? What does small-town character mean? What is it about Hudson’s character that we want to preserve; to change?
- Land Use Development (Planning & Zoning) – what do we mean by uncoordinated growth? What does good planning & development look like? How do we get there?
- Natural Resources conservation/recreation/open space: what types of areas should be prioritized? Where? How should conservation land/open space be used? How do we get there?
- Traffic – where are the greatest problem areas? What are the solutions?

The results of these sessions brought together the public input received from the online survey and the four public input sessions to create a multi-part vision statement outlined below.

Session B Conclusions

One of the greatest planning needs identified by participants in the public input sessions is the need for a community vision. The following were identified by participants as elements to be included in this vision.

Town Center. Most groups discussed the need or desire for a defined, walkable town center that provides a sense of place and a venue to bring the community together. Possible locations include:

- The town’s historic, walkable economic center in the vicinity of Library Park.
- The Town’s “official” historic center near Benson Park in the vicinity of the intersection of Central and Greeley Streets.
- Other locations along Lowell Road or Derry Street.

Natural Resources. Many participants identified Hudson’s natural resources as one of its most valuable assets citing the following goals:

- Expand Conservation areas and increase open space.
- Build on existing open space assets such as Benson Park and Robinson Pond.
- Expand the existing trail network and facilitate connections between schools, parks, conservation areas, and other community facilities.

Traffic. While Hudson’s location is certainly a strength, it brings with it the challenges of effective transportation and traffic solutions. The following goals were identified:

- Increase and expand transportation mobility options including public transportation (buses), sidewalks, bicycles, and commuter rail.

- Alleviate congestion on Lowell Road.
- Mitigate commuter traffic passing through Hudson including through residential neighborhoods.
- Consider another Merrimack River bridge crossing.

Land Use Participants indicated a desire for a balanced, planned approach to Hudson’s land use development, with goals including:

- More open space conservation and protection in new developments.
- Focus commercial and industrial development within existing commercial/industrial areas.
- Encourage reuse or redevelopment of existing commercial buildings and sites rather than on undeveloped land.
- Improve design standards landscaping, architecture, and site design.

Due to the onset of the COVID-19 Pandemic and other challenges, progress on the Master paused in the spring of 2020. In the fall of 2022, the Planning Board resumed the Master Plan update effort. As a part of that effort, a second survey was conducted that built on the themes of the 2019 survey. 725 people responded to the 2022 survey. The results of the 2022 survey largely validated the results of the 2019 survey with strong support shown for expanding conservation land and open space (79%), creating a defined, walkable town center (64%), expanding sidewalks and trails (76%), preserving the character and integrity of existing neighborhoods (80%), protecting the town’s rural/residential character (78%) and protecting the Town’s historic resources (77%). There was also a strong sense that commercial industrial development should be focused in existing commercial and industrial areas (84%), encouraging the reuse and redevelopment of existing commercial/industrial sites (91%), and that design standards should be improved and energy efficient designs encouraged (71%). Traffic remained a major concern, but there was no overriding consensus on the Circumferential Highway (aka Hudson Boulevard).

To provide an opportunity to dive deeper into each of these key issue areas, two additional public input sessions were held in October of 2022; one virtual session and one in-person session. Every issue that was discussed among participants did not, of course, result in consensus, however, there are some definite outcomes that emerged from these sessions that supplement the results of the 2022 survey. These are summarized below by topic followed by a summary of the outcomes from each of the participating groups.

Transportation

Traffic congestion, the impact of through-traffic, speed, and safety were top priority concerns in all groups. Traffic issues on Wason Road and Lowell Road in particular were cited in every group. The proposed Circumferential Highway, also known as Hudson Boulevard, was discussed in all groups. The general consensus was that the project would serve mainly through traffic from surrounding towns and provide little benefit to Hudson residents, though this view was not universal. Concern was also expressed that the project would result in unacceptable environmental impacts. Though traffic related problems were a focus in all groups, there was little consensus on how to address these challenges. As was noted in one group: “If not the Circumferential, then what?” Overall, there was a strong consensus that that Hudson needs more sidewalks, particularly along major corridors and in the vicinity of schools.

Land Use/Zoning

There was a consensus in almost all groups that the General (G & G1) zoning districts need to be pared back significantly or eliminated entirely. Most participants felt that existing developed areas such as established residential neighborhoods in the G zones should be rezoned to reflect existing conditions. Consideration should also be given to making sure that there are adequate transitions or buffer areas between different types of uses such as between commercial and residential areas. Providing opportunities for commercial and industrial development in appropriate areas was also stressed as well as providing opportunities for small businesses. Concern was also expressed that important natural areas in the G zones should be conserved.

Aside from addressing the G zones, the need to protect groundwater, wetlands, woodlands, and other natural resources was stressed by multiple participants. Many also expressed a desire to see more walkable, mixed-use development, especially within a defined town center area.

The concept of fostering the development of a defined town center was raised in several groups. Though there are differences of opinion on where the town center is or ought to be and on the elements that make a town center, there was a general sense that it should be walkable, include green space, contain a mix of land uses, and have some form of public gathering space.

Community Design

Except for the need for more sidewalks and more walkable development, there was little consensus around issues related to community design. Better buffers between commercial and residential developments were raised in a few groups. In terms of building and site design, the barn at Countrybrook Farms Nursery & Garden Center on Lowell Road was cited as a good example of commercial development by several participants. Other individual sites mentioned included the Starbucks on Lowell Road and cluster of shops across from Fox Hollow.

As previously stated, Hudson seeks a balanced approach to growth and development that protects the features of Hudson that residents cherish while maintaining a strong tax base, preserving open space and mitigating the impact of the through-traffic that congests its most heavily traveled corridors. The goals outlined in the Master Plan are designed to help achieve these ends while guiding the development of the town into the future. Each of the eight Master Plan chapters also contain specific goals, objectives, and recommendations designed to build upon the vision expressed in this section.

