

Town of Hamilton Update to the Master Plan Focus Group Summary

Prepared by JM Goldson January 18th, 2019

MAIN CONCLUSIONS

Most participants were concerned about the tradeoffs between increasing density and preserving town character and open space.

Many participants felt it's not realistic to expect the town to provide housing types for everyone while others saw community-wide benefits if the town provides a financially-attainable housing pathway for people of all life stages, from young families to retirees.

Most participants were very knowledgeable of 40B and concerned with how the town will meet the requirements in a way that fits the scale and character of existing housing stock.

SUMMARY

As part of a process to update the Housing-related parts of the Hamilton Master Plan, JM Goldson held a series of focus groups in December 2018 to understand more deeply the perspectives around housing issues in town.

Eight focus groups were held with five participants in each, totaling forty focus groups attendees. Participants from a range of viewpoints, leadership positions, and organizations were selected and invited by the Planning Board, Board of Selectment and Planning Department. An informal discussion was facilitated around a list of housing-focused questions. The summary of these conversations is below.

WHY DO PEOPLE MOVE TO HAMILTON?

Some of the reasons why participants moved to Hamilton include:

- Rural feel, and access to open space
- Great schools
- Access to the beach
- Great environment for families
- Commuter Rail

WHY DO PEOPLE LEAVE HAMILTON?

Participants had anecdotal answers for why Hamilton residents move. Some of the top responses include:

- They leave after their kids are out of school.
- Taxes are too high.
- For seniors, there are limited are no downsizing options.
- People eventually prefer warmer climates.
- As a retired person there is more activity in other towns and cities.

WHO DOES HAMILTON NEED HOUSING FOR?

Some ideas for who needs housing in Hamilton include:

- Seniors
- Young married couples
- Young families
- Those on fixed incomes
- Moderate income workers including teachers, firefighters and policemen

WHERE SHOULD NEW HOUSING BE LOCATED?

The participants' ideas for where specific housing could be located include:

- In rehabbed older buildings
- Winthrop school site
- At Gordon College, since many of the college's dormitory units are underused

WHAT TYPES OF HOUSING OR DEVELOPMENT IS NEEDED?

Participants' ideas for what specific types of housing are needed include:

- Cottage housing or cluster housing – since it maximizes open space
- Workforce housing
- Senior housing (for income restricted and those just wanting to downsize)
- Entry level starter homes for families/first time home buyers
- Apartments or smaller homes for seniors to downsize to
- Condos
- Smart Growth initiatives around the commuter rail
- Thoughtful economic development in the downtown area

TENSIONS AND CHALLENGES

Some common challenges and themes from the discussion include:

- New housing should blend in with the look and feel of the town and at the right scale that is similar to the scale of development already in the town.
- There isn't as much socio-economic diversity in comparison to other neighboring towns. Diversity is good for kids, for schools, and for learning.
- Retiring seniors want smaller housing units with a community of supportive neighbors and diverse ages. This can be hard to find and they feel isolated and without options.
- About two thirds of participants wanted Hamilton to stay largely single-family residential and for all remaining open space to be protected, while roughly one third were supportive of some increased density even if it meant developing some open space.
- Getting a greater cross section of the community involved in elections would help to have more innovative housing policy passed.
- It would be great to bring in more corporate employers to ease some of the tax burden and attract more younger professionals and families.
- There is concern about the declining enrollment in Hamilton schools and the costs/tax ratio for students and homeowners.
- Protecting the water supply is an important issue.