

CANTERBURY PLAN FOR TOMORROW UPDATE VISIONING SESSION SUMMARY JUNE 18, 2022

LAND USE, HOUSING, ECONOMICS & COMMUNITY CHARACTER

The visioning session consisted of two breakout sessions where similar topics were discussed. These included, but were not limited to, understanding community character, where development should take place, what challenges exist for housing and what businesses the Town should encourage. Both sessions had a lot of similar responses with some minor differences in the margins. Both sessions were well attended and had vibrant discussions.

Overall, the participants identified community character as a mix of natural and agricultural landscapes coexisting with the village and residences throughout Town. Additionally, there was a strong sense that the ties and sense of community is part of what defines Canterbury. Specifically, this included volunteers, the sense of “knowing” people, events, and support for the arts. It was noted though, there is a sense that the volunteer base needs to be expanded. Shaker Village, the library, the town store, the farmers market, and the Canterbury Fair also play roles in defining the community’s character.

Both groups identified housing cost as an issue for both downsizing seniors and young people. Further, the group found that the age of the community was increasing while young people were not staying or moving to town. Addressing housing cost would help both groups and would keep the sense of “community” strong. Solutions such as development with a mix of housing for both groups as well as clustered housing could be solutions.

Another issue that was discussed was the tension between development (and certain types of development) and the sense of rural character. Natural and agricultural landscapes, as well as the village itself, need to be protected, but housing needs to be provided and economic development is needed to provide jobs and tax base. Focus on balance and development “scaled” to Canterbury are needed. Care must be given when looking at changes to the zoning to ensure that protections are in place and unintended consequences do not undermine character.

Building off the discussion of development type in Canterbury, a property owner presented an overview of his perspective of mixed-use, higher density development in the village area. The presentation focused on potential results from such development as being more compact in the village as compared with more “sprawl” type development that could result from large lot zoning in outer lying areas. Other participants voiced contrary opinions citing that large lot zoning is often seen as part of the rural character of Canterbury and that the density in the village as currently constituted in the Zoning Ordinance was adequate and should be maintained.

In terms of strictly economic development, the group felt that the more intense economic uses should be near Exits 17 and 18 and the NH 106 corridor. Further, the village should be protected along with natural and agricultural landscapes. In all cases economic activity should be “scaled” to Canterbury, and that home occupations should continue to be encouraged and supported. Finally, agricultural activities are vital to Canterbury’s character and economy and they should be supported as well.

A final area of focus was on infrastructure. This included general discussions on sewer and water and how they can facilitate density and mixed use. With this in mind, the most likely place for it would be around Exit 17 through an agreement with Concord to extend services into Canterbury. Broadband internet and telecommunications were seen as a major concern, especially for those working from home. Broadband was identified as the primary infrastructure concern.

A final topic of discussion was in regard to sidewalk infrastructure in the village. This can be costly and difficult to maintain for the Town.

The following are notes from the two sessions:

Community Character

- Love of rural character (echoes the 1980 Master Plan)
- Historic character
- Defined Town center; identifiable. “know it when you see it.”
- Sense of “community”
- Great place to raise children
- People live here and stay here
- Vibrant sense of “village” in the town center
- Village helps people get to know each other over time
- Lots of forest and backlands
- Sense of home
- Encourages the arts (art, music, etc.)
- Canterbury Fair creates a sense of community and is an example of an event in town
- A sense of welcoming and a tie to the arts
- Everyone has a “Canterbury Story” and everyone loves to hear them
- A sense of volunteerism
- Connections to friends and neighbors
- An ethos and spirit of community going back to the Shakers
- Agrarian landscape and more rural areas are part of Canterbury’s character
- There is an appreciation of open spaces
- Protect the land
- Close to Concord but different housing makes Canterbury attractive
- People are familiar with each other
- A “mixed community” is a healthy community
- Many people live here and work elsewhere; i.e., bedroom community

Challenges and Issues to Consider

- Age of volunteers is typically older
- Town is aging which can be a challenge for the future
- Young people do not return. Due to 1) Housing; 2) Workforce housing needed; 3) Cost of housing is a lot for young people; made worse by COVID; and, 4) Property taxes.
- Housing needs to be provided for retirees and young families

- Some older residents leave because of cost
- A lack of “things to do” can also be a challenge to attracting young people
- Sense of “community” is at risk of declining as fewer people are participating (even before COVID)
- Need more young people to address volunteer numbers declining
- Some young adults return to multi-generational households (to raise children in Canterbury)
- 33,000 cars at Market Basket daily
- Lots of out-of-Town visitors on weekends
- Difficulty generating revenue to support sidewalks
- Traffic can be a hazard during various events
- Difficult to control external forces that impact Canterbury
- Housing cost is a major reason young people leave or do not come back after school
- A lack of evening activities and restaurants also contribute to young people not buying homes in town; i.e., there are things to do elsewhere
- A lack of rental/multi-family housing is an issue
- Some younger people have returned, some are living in ADUs, Many are working from home
- Lots of people working from home in general
- Lot sizes can make the development of workforce housing difficult by contributing to the cost
- Lack of public water and sewer limit density options
- Something like the “Spruces” is a good development
- There is a need to attract young people and they need to be able to build equity

Development And Economic Growth Preferences

- Home Occupations: Yes
- Large Retail: No
- Small Retail: Yes
- Multi-Use/Manufacturing/Storage: Yes – Exit 18 and 106 corridor. Exit 17 split opinion
- Industry: No
- Short Term Lodging: Yes
- Restaurants: Yes
- Farm Stands: Yes
- Professional Services: Yes mentioned: accountant, eye doctor, physical therapist
- Supermarkets: No
- Service Industries/Hair Salon: Not sure
- Small Farming: Yes
- Urgent Care Facility: Split Opinions
- Commercial Solar: Yes
- Educational Facility: Yes
- Outdoor Recreation: Maybe
- Short Term Lodging: Split Opinions
- Restaurants (small): Yes
- Farmers Market: Yes
- Professional Services: Yes

- Residential Medical Facilities: Not big Hospital but exits 17 and 18 and NH 106 corridor appropriate scale assisted living type facility
- Electric Vehicle Charging: Yes
- Exit 17 and the NH 106 corridor is a defined area for commercial development. Exit 18 could be changed from Industrial to Commercial
- Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU) can add flexibility and housing choice
- Zoning (i.e., large lot zoning) can create unintended consequences, including sprawl
- Density directed towards compact centers can be beneficial
- Balance is needed in zoning to reflect different priorities
- The group had a variety of opinions on density in the town center. Wanting more support for the store, church, library, and events. Not wanting the look and the feeling of the center to change.
- Exit 17 development will put pressure on the southern part of town
- Balance development with abutter interests
- Some feel that Exit 17 development is horrible
- Future zoning should take into account the fact that there are large lots in town
- In the 70's building permit limitations were put in place to control the pace of development
- Increase tax base
- Think of development in terms of scalability. For example, a hospital is not coming to, nor is it wanted, in Canterbury but a small doctor's office working out of the home may be a possibility.
- Farms need solutions for seasonal/migrant worker housing
- It is important to consider the role that the Canterbury Store plays in the village's character as well as in the local economy
- Development preferred to areas like Exits 17 and 18 and NH 106 corridor but not in the rest of Town
- Home occupations can be encouraged to allow for more economic development in town
- Affordable housing is needed
- Some people prefer large lots.
- Exit 17 development can help with tax base
- Different views on developing the town center versus developing other areas of town
- Investing in needs in the Town can change its character. For example, this was done with schools in the 19th Century.
- Cluster housing can be a helpful option
- Public/private partnerships can be brought to bear on these issues
- Solutions could try to address housing needs for downsizing seniors as well as first time home buyers. A mix of housing for seniors and young people in the same development could be beneficial.
- A mix of housing that includes affordability options is desirable
- "Things to do" can be a focus

Infrastructure Observations

- Broadband is a significant issue in today's economy. Connectivity is vital to economic activity as well as quality of life

- Exit 17 could be more suitable for development with sewer and water; greater opportunities for density and mixes of uses
- Town would have to pay for water and sewer investments
- Broadband is an immediate concern
- A lack of sidewalks and lights in town a concern, in addition to funding their installation and improvement. Solutions should be “Canterbury specific.”

NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES AND AGRICULTURE

Two well-attended breakout sessions were held to discuss natural and cultural resources and agriculture in Canterbury. Matters that were most important to attendees were identified along with a list of special places in town that are cherished by residents. Finally, threats to these resources were also identified.

It was apparent from the outset of the first session that preservation of the rural character of Canterbury, including preservation of farms and farmland, is of the utmost importance. Issues relating to agriculture dominated much of the discussion. There was a concern that town regulations can sometimes impede agricultural operations with unintended consequences; an example most often cited was the lack of workforce housing for farms due to zoning restrictions. Attendees were also clear that Canterbury's scenic farms help define its rural character and examples were noted from around the room. Lack of workforce housing, development pressures, along with rising land prices and high taxes were all seen as significant threats to farming in Canterbury.

Canterbury's forests and open spaces also ranked high on the list of things most important to residents. Wildlife habitat, passive recreational opportunities and views were all cited as benefits of open space preservation. Continuing to preserve large blocks of unfragmented land by connecting open spaces was seen as critical by attendees. Risks to forests and open spaces were enumerated and were similar to those for agriculture. Development pressures, climate change, and invasive species were all considered threats.

Cultural resources were also briefly discussed in both sessions. Participants said the arts community and traditions in town are a defining characteristic of Canterbury and there was a general consensus that arts should be promoted in town. Participants specifically recognized Canterbury Shaker Village as a very important cultural resource in Canterbury, and some are concerned that if Shaker Village is designated as a National Historic Site, that change could impact the town in many unforeseen ways.

Participants also identified the need to take a landscape view of water management and land (topography) changes as changes on one property can affect many other properties.

Some participants urged the town to use incentives rather than regulation to achieve resource goals, as regulations can have unintended consequences.

While there was some disagreement regarding threats to these resources, there was concurrence regarding what is most important.

The following are notes from the two sessions:

Things that are most important

- Farms and farming
- Wildlife
- Preservation of large blocks of unfragmented land
- Conserving open space and connecting conserved parcels
- Balance between regulations and property rights
- Promotion of the arts and cultural resources

Special places

- Scenic farms in general that define Canterbury's rural character
- Peverley Falls
- Woods near Sunset Hill Road
- Farm and fields on Baptist Road
- Meadowsend property, east of Shaker Village
- Farm on West Road in valley
- Off Borough Road, view over old Osgoodite site
- Off 132, Glines' fields next to big meadow
- Stony Acres on Hackleboro
- Hay fields on Borough Road

Threats, Problems, Needs

- Climate change
- Invasive species
- Conversion of farmland to house lots
- Lack of workforce housing for farms
- Rising land prices and high taxes
- Development pressure in general, and specifically:
 - Class VI roads,
 - Town's commercial zone near Exit 17
 - 'unplanned' development
- Stormwater runoff
- Drought
- Four wheelers/ATVs
- Enforcement vs. balance with landowner rights
- Commercial services spraying for mosquito control
- Maintain wild places for habitat protection

TRANSPORTATION, COMMUNITY FACILITIES, AND UTILITIES

Two sessions were held, each with different participants, but both covering a similar range of topics. These included a range of transportation issues such as safety, road maintenance, bicycling, and public transportation. Broadband and the need for better broadband internet in parts of town was another primary topic. Energy, solar power, and community facilities were also briefly discussed by each group.

For the transportation discussion, road maintenance and road safety were topics that received the most interest in both groups. Roadway condition is important to residents in that they want to know that that they are being maintained effectively and efficiently given financial restraints. There was specific interest in gravel roads and reducing maintenance costs and preventing washouts on lightly traveled gravel roadways. For roadway safety, the groups identified safety concerns and locations that might warrant further study or should be addressed. Highlights include speed and safety concerns along Shaker Road including at Shaker Village, and also the Morrill Rd and Kimball Pond Road intersection.

Bicycling and public transit were also discussed. Relatively high speeds and narrow roads were identified as an impediment to safe and enjoyable bicycling, as well as roadway shoulders that are in poor condition. Participants also expressed the need for, at minimum, quality basic human service public transportation for residents in need.

Broadband internet was among the most important topics to participants in both sessions. There was broad consensus that there are many parts of town that do not have adequate broadband services or wireless services available, and that the town should take a proactive role improving coverage. Participants recognize the importance of broadband for supporting the community. The need to work from home, operating home businesses, and access for students and children were all identified as critical needs. There appeared to be agreement that all homes and businesses should have access to quality broadband, and costs should be reasonable.

Other topics were touched upon more briefly. The desirability of trails for both recreation and getting around the village were discussed, as was the benefits a trails committee or trail related groups can bring. Energy was discussed, primarily community solar, and solar energy on homes and businesses. There was also discussion on how increased commercial development in town might create a need for increased town facilities, including fire apparatus.

Most residents appeared mostly satisfied with the town's services and infrastructure in regards to transportation, community facilities, and utilities. The primary needs are to address the lack of quality broadband access in some areas, as well as a desire to address roadway safety concerns.

The following are notes from the two sessions:

Road Condition and Maintenance

- Baptist Road – It was noted this road has a poor base, and that repeated paving isn't doing much to improve it longer term. It is an important road in the town.
- Borough Road was noted to be in poor condition. It is a gravel road that sees very little traffic, and there were questions about how to maintain gravel road and what materials should be used in maintaining it to improve condition and save money.

- Sanborn Road was noted to be similar. Heavy rain can wash up the road. It requires a lot of maintenance for a very low traffic road.
- Culverts were mentioned as an important feature of roadways, and an inventory was suggested

Traffic Speed and Safety

- Speed was noted as a concern town wide, and that it affected roadway safety and quality of life
- Shaker Rd was specifically cited for multiple safety and operational concerns
 - Can be a bypass for NH 106 when there is traffic
 - Speeding is an issue, especially on the straight section
 - Questions on whether increased enforcement is the answer
 - Questions as to whether speed data could be helpful if collected
 - Safety concern where the road passes through Shaker Village and concern for pedestrians or turning vehicles given high speeds
- Morrill Road Intersection was noted to have serious safety problems, especially in winter, due to the slope and geometry
- There are many blind intersections in town – mirrors are an option that can help but are imperfect
- I-93 It was noted that the section of 93 that includes Canterbury is among the least safe stretches of interstate in the State. It sometimes takes town resources to respond to serious crashes.
- There is no ambulance service in Canterbury due to cost. This is a concern. The cost and fiscal reality was noted.

Public Transportation

- Dial a Ride and senior transit services were discussed as important for those in need
- Some offered that better transit choices and better access is needed
- More awareness of the options that are available is needed, and awareness of existing needs

Bicycling and walking

- Many felt that roads are too fast and narrow for most people to feel safe bicycling
- Most reported they do not feel safe bicycling on Canterbury roads
- It was noted that when a roadway shoulder is in poor condition it is a serious problem for bicyclists, forcing riders into the middle of the road or contending with a poor surface. Many roads in town have roadways crumbling at the shoulder.
- Some felt that bike lanes may not be appropriate for most roads in Canterbury, but a shoulder is very important
- Trails were noted as an option for bicycling/walking instead of walking/biking along roads
 - In the village
 - To the school

Trails

- Trails were discussed as a way to entice economic growth (group 1). Participants cited nearby trail networks that were very popular, including Highlands Mountain Bike Park in Northfield and Green Woodlands in Dorchester. It was thought that a connected network that is well managed could be a good idea for Canterbury and neighboring communities.
- It was noted that trail organizations would be a good thing to have locally. Landowners would have an outlet to address concerns if there were an issue, and there would be an organization to respond. Groups such as a local trail committee or existing organization like Mountain Bike groups were mentioned as possible examples.
- Trails were noted as an alternative to walking/biking along roads

Class VI roads

- Emergency access was a concern if development were to occur along a class VI road.
- General agreement class VI roads were probably not the best place to develop new housing (or other development)
- General agreement the town should have a clearly stated policy on class VI roads, but there was some disagreement on what those policies might be, especially for development that already exists.

Community Facilities

- It was noted that any new commercial development may require new service needs, such as improved fire apparatus.
- Use the church for community use – How is it used? How often? How can it be better utilized? Different opinions and levels of awareness emerged

Broadband

- Strong consensus that everyone should have access to quality broadband
- Strong consensus that the town should be proactive in ensuring quality access for its residents/businesses at reasonable cost
- It was well known that many parts of town have poor or no broadband access and poor or no wireless coverage
- Broadband is very important for rural communities, remote work, home businesses, students and education
- Higher speeds are needed today than in the not too distant past.
- A noted split between haves and have-nots in terms of broadband access in town
- Many options were discussed and should be considered for future evaluation. Potential solutions and considerations discussed include
 - Satellite broadband
 - Fiber
 - Costs of broadband
 - How do you make the financing/cost of upgrades work when a small number of people benefit?

- Be thoughtful/proactive with any future possible communication tower locations for improving wireless coverage
 - Aesthetics and community character are a concern
 - Recognizing more may be needed to fill gaps in service

Energy

- Solar on Community Buildings generally supported
- In support of small-scale solar installations at residences/businesses
- Community Power as an option: Residents/businesses can decide where you buy your energy
Consider solar requirements or incentives on commercial properties