

WEST CONCORD TASK FORCE

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The West Concord Task Force (WCTF) was appointed by the Board of Selectmen after 2008 Annual Town Meeting to “seek ways to maintain and enhance the village scale and historic identity of West Concord village, improve traffic circulation and public transportation, and protect and promote the enjoyment of natural resources.” The goal of the WCTF is to maintain West Concord as a pleasant, lively, and affordable place to live, work, play, shop, and own a business.

The WCTF held 28 public meetings, including four public forums at the Harvey Wheeler Community Center and one at Thoreau School. These forums were held to communicate progress to the public and to receive feedback; most forums drew over one hundred attendees. Additionally, subcommittees were formed to address particular areas of master planning, real estate & architecture, and infrastructure for which separate public meetings were held.

To accomplish its mandate, the WCTF has pursued and will continue to pursue several courses of action:

Master Plan

The Task Force determined in 2008 that a detailed and graphic West Concord Master Plan was a vital step in achieving the Selectmen’s ambitious charge. The objective of the Master Plan is to provide a comprehensive map for the village’s future that addresses traffic, parking, wastewater infrastructure, design guidelines, land use, and natural resources in a single document. In consultation with the WCTF, Concord’s Planning Division hired Stantec Planning and Landscape Architecture to create a Master Plan for West Concord Village. Unlike previous studies which established a vision at a macro level, the Master Plan outlines specific actionable items with supporting drawings, recommends potential zoning changes, and proposes tangible steps for working with landowners to implement suggested improvements.

As part of the Master Planning process, two Scenario Building Workshops were conducted during the summer at the Planning Division’s office on Keyes Road. Subsequently, the Task Force coordinated a two-day West Concord Village Community Design Workshop that was conducted by Stantec on a rainy weekend in September. Despite inclement weather, 230 people attended the two-day workshop, an indication of the importance of the village’s future to Concord residents.

Guided by the WCTF with ongoing support from Concord’s Planning Division, a first West Concord Master Plan is expected to be complete by the end of the first quarter of 2010.

Formula Business Restriction (FBR) Zoning Bylaw

As initial steps toward implementing the Master Plan, two zoning articles are being presented at 2010 Town Meeting.

Article 44 proposes to convert the current Business District (primarily Main St. and Commonwealth Ave.) to a new West Concord Business District and to change some of the currently allowed uses. This article also proposes to convert the current Industrial District (Bradford St., Beharrell St., and Winthrop St.) to a new West Concord Industrial District with no change in uses at the present time. The boundaries of both of these zoning districts would remain the same as they are today.

Article 46 proposes to create an FBR. In this article a formula business is defined as a business with standardized features that is operating in seven or more locations. The proposed FBR has three components:

- The number of formula businesses in the combined West Concord Business District and West Concord Industrial District would be limited to ten, which is the current total number of formula businesses in the Village area;
- The size of new or altered formula businesses in the combined West Concord Business District and West Concord Industrial District would be limited to 3,000 sq. ft. Existing formula businesses in West Concord Village larger than 3,000 sq. ft. would be grandfathered;
- New formula businesses or those that want to expand their businesses would be required to obtain a special permit. Criteria for a special permit are outlined to provide the Zoning Board of Appeals with guidelines for making its decision when a special permit is required.

The WCTF expects that more extensive zoning articles will be presented at 2011 Town Meeting, to further implement the zoning portion of the Master Plan.

West Concord Interim Planning Overlay District (WC-IPOD)

At Town Meeting the Planning Board, at the recommendation of the WCTF, presented a zoning bylaw amendment known as the West Concord Interim Planning Overlay District (WC-IPOD). This zoning bylaw provided for a temporary and partial halt on development in West Concord Village while the Master Plan was underway. Article 38, the zoning bylaw which created the WC-IPOD, passed by a near unanimous vote at April 2009 Annual Town Meeting. The WC-IPOD applies to the majority of the area covered by the Master Plan, consisting of the business and industrial zones in West Concord, as well as a portion of the MCI Concord site zoned industrial park. The WC-IPOD will automatically expire following Town Meeting 2011, unless it is removed by an earlier vote.

Design Guidelines

One of the components in the Master Plan, also recommended by several previous Town planning efforts, is a set of design guidelines for the West Concord business and industrial districts. Design guidelines are suggestions intended to provide guidance to property owners and developers when applications are submitted to the Planning Board or Zoning Board of Appeals. Although they are non-binding and do not have the force of law as zoning bylaws do, design guidelines provide property and business owners with guidance on what the community would prefer and are likely to result in more acceptable designs, which could simplify the review/permitting process for applicants. In addition, design guidelines are a first step on the path to form-based code, a zoning tool with regulatory force that will be explored by the task force in the coming year. In consultation with the Planning Board and the WCTF, the Planning Division prepared the initial draft design guidelines in the spring of 2009, which are being expanded by the Master Plan consultant. Design guidelines are expected to be completed in 2010.

Surveys

In 2008, the WCTF created a survey asking Concord residents what they would like to protect, prevent, and

change about West Concord. Approximately 1,500 paper copies, as well as electronic copies of the survey, were distributed. Between November, 2008 and February, 2009, two hundred surveys were returned. The feedback was analyzed, with a report published in the summer. Additionally, Stantec conducted a Visual Preference Survey as part of the Master Planning process during September and October. Results from both surveys have contributed toward content in the Master Plan.

Communications

As noted earlier, residents have provided the WCTF with comments and feedback during public forums, as well as regularly scheduled public meetings. The WCTF publishes occasional articles in the *Concord Journal* and has created an email list to distribute announcements and documents. Interested community members are encouraged to join the list and may visit http://www.yahogroups.com/group/wctf_announcements to subscribe. Additionally, CCTV is a resource that the WCTF uses to broadcast its public forums. CCTV has on-demand clips and these events can be located on the CCTV website, <http://www.concordtv.org>. The WCTF can also be contacted via the Town House.

The WCTF recognizes that change is inevitable. In an effort to ensure that West Concord continues to be a place where people want to live, work, play, and conduct business, the WCTF is utilizing multiple tools, including a comprehensive Master Plan that will allow the community to manage change while still preserving West Concord Village's unique character. Implementing recommendations made in the Master Plan, as well as considering whether to and how to repurpose the industrially zoned land in West Concord, will be part of the WCTF focus in 2011.