

Meeting Minutes

R&C Project: **Bolton Center Study**

Date: **April 3, 2013**

Time: **6:30 PM to 9:30 PM**

Location: **Town Hall, 222 Bolton Center Road**

Purpose: **Bolton Town Center Public Meeting - No. 1**

A meeting was held with the Project Team, the Bolton Town Center VCI Stakeholder Committee and members of the public at Town Hall. The purpose of the meeting was to introduce the team to the public; review the study findings to date and solicit input on the site concept diagrams. An overview of the Town Center analysis information was presented along with the project tasks and objectives, and study approach. An overview of the architectural review of the key buildings in the Center was presented along with possible recommendations for future use.

Cultural Heritage Tourism was discussed with a brief overview of comparable projects. The opportunities and challenges that support the community vision were presented with a review of the Stakeholder input to date. Further discussion of Heritage Farm and Heritage Tourism was presented along with a list of possible activities for the Farm and Bolton Center. Finally, four concept diagrams were presented with varying levels of modification and improvement to the Center. Discussion related to the concepts followed the presentation, with the final part of the meeting allowing individuals to talk with the consultants and make additional comments on the concepts.

Attendees were encouraged to forward ideas/comments/suggestions to the Project Team through the Richter & Cegan email address.

Comments include:

- In general, the proposed recommendations and site concept studies were well-received with Concepts 3 and 4 preferred.
- There was a general consensus that people were supportive of the connectivity of the Town Center, its assets and area trails.

- There was much discussion relating to the Town Hall expansion and why it was beneficial to focus all municipal offices in core area adjacent to existing Town Hall.
- There were a number of positive comments regarding the benefits of re-aligning and extending Toomey Road to Meadow Road.
- Use of Stagecoach Tavern as a community center or business – how does Town balance use of public versus private properties for business use? Glenn Chalder, Planimetrics stated: there are regulatory tools for achieving that. One possibility is the establishment of a Village District – a firm direction can be determined once the Vision Plan is finalized.
- Have locations, other than adjacent to the current Town Hall, been looked at for a new Town Hall building? Someone made the suggestion to remove the 1959 addition at current Town Hall and restore building to former existence, in turn, restoring village look in Center. Move “modern” Town Hall elsewhere. The proposed plans prepared by Schoenhardt showed a building that would blend with the current Town Hall and church. This has been the approved approach by Town officials.
- Bob Morra, First Selectman stated: over the last 20 years, the Town has looked at many alternatives for the Town Hall expansion and possible other locations, including conversion of school at Notch Road, conversion of Library and build new library, etc. Pistritto Property was acquired to bring community “center” into the village center. What is currently in the village center is a mix of architecture and has evolved over time – Town is not looking to recreate a historical center representative of a specific point in time. In addition, the open field in the northwest corner of Heritage Farm provides the opportunity for septic that could service all municipal buildings in the Center. This would prove cost effective long term. It would utilize the current building and reduce the need for a larger free standing facility.
- It was suggested that if the Town wants to build a new Town Hall in the Center, consider locating it adjacent to the Library since that is not a historical building.
- Cece Saunders, Historical Perspectives stated: there is historical evidence and several studies that show moving Town Hall out of the Center “fractures” a community. By keeping key civic uses in the village center, it results in better community integrity and maintains Bolton’s sense of place.
- Parking off road is key to getting people more interested in attending events in the center. Currently, people are discouraged to attend certain events due to limited parking.
- Responding to the concept diagrams that were presented, several people commented positively on the idea of re-aligning Toomey Road and extending it behind Town Hall and aligning with Meadow Road. This would remove some of the traffic off of Bolton Center Road, making it safer to walk the area.
- The question was asked why the Town Hall expansion is so large. Response from a number of Town officials is that Town Hall doesn’t function properly now. There is a deficiency in office space, the building is overcrowded, a number of town employees and facility space are housed in other buildings, the current building doesn’t meet accessibility codes, etc.

- There was a question regarding the size of the proposed Town Hall expansion. It was confirmed by the Town that the previous study completed by Schoenhardt Architects (2008) reflects a total of 14,600 SF addition on two levels.
- There was concern by some that an expansion of this size would have a negative impact on the character of the center. Bill Crosskey, Crosskey Architects, stated that between the substantial drop in grade behind Town Hall and the use of context-sensitive materials and sympathetic architectural detailing, the expansion could be designed in such a way to complement existing buildings and minimize visual impact in the center.
- Senior housing was looked at several years ago on the 65-acre Minicucci Property across from the Library Green. Investigation of soils shows the property is not suitable for development. A question was asked as to what the Town's plans are currently for senior housing in the center? Bob Morra responded that the Town has no plans at this time. The senior housing market is overbuilt in Connecticut. If higher density housing was ever proposed for the Center or somewhere else in Town, it is highly unlikely that it would be age-restricted.
- There was discussion regarding the Town's potential future acquisition of the key parcel (Minicucci Property) across from the Library Green, as well as some smaller undevelopable parcels adjacent to Bolton Center Road and the Minicucci Property. The consultant team feels the Minicucci Property is an important property and would be instrumental in preserving the Town's agricultural character. Its proximity to the Center and visibility from Bolton Center Road and the Green make it worth preserving. In addition, the parcel could be used for future recreation expansion. Town officials agree with this and also stated that the property has very limited potential for development due to drainage/soil conditions. Therefore, it may be cost effective to purchase at some future point. It would be a small investment for the preservation of the center's character.
- In response to the concept diagrams, someone asked regardless of what direction is taken, what would be the first phase? Although there is no specific phasing plan for the improvements, Bob Morra stated that there are a number of things that could be started immediately, such as improving/expanding some of the pedestrian connections between Town assets. A following phase might be road improvements. The acquisition of the key parcel and/or adjacent vacant properties would be dependent on when any one identified parcel became available and the cost of the parcel.
- A member of the audience commented that expansion of Town Hall will require a bond issue – therefore, it will need community support to move forward. All the other proposed improvements (aside from the expansion) may inspire community confidence and momentum to put the Town Hall expansion in the Center adjacent to the existing building.
- Several people commented that the Municipal Center at Notch Road should be torn down. The building has had "bare bones" maintenance over the last several years. There seemed to be community consensus that the existing Notch Road Facility would not be conducive to a Town Hall use. However, the comment was made that a new building could be built in its place to house the Town Hall. Expanded septic would need to be addressed on this property as well as parking.
- Soils are a major issue in the Center (as they relate to high water table or wetlands). What soils studies has the Project Team done or reviewed? Mike Cegan responded that the

team has reviewed existing information from CRCOG, USDA, soils report for Pistrutto Property, etc. No official wetlands mapping has been completed for the study area at this time.

- There was a general consensus that people were supportive of the connectivity of the Town Center, its assets and area trails. A question was asked as to how these pieces can connect for users who live outside of the immediate center. A comment was made to provide more usable trails for bikers.
- The concept diagrams show a pedestrian connection from the Town Center to Herrick Park through the Minicucci Property. A question was asked about the potential for a connection to the park at the end of Westview Drive. This connection would require an easement through private land. This would be a relatively inexpensive option to provide access at this point until the key parcel becomes available. The key parcel offers a direct connection back to the Center.
- A question was asked regarding the existing and proposed trails – what level of improvement is required along with what level of accessibility? Mike Cegan responded this would depend on the level of use of each trail. If a trail is used more for multi-use (i.e. pedestrians, bikes, etc.) the improvements would need to be greater. However, many trails may be more informal and used primarily by pedestrians and could have minimal improvement. The goal is to make all trails 100% accessible, but this may not be practical.
- A comment was made that an existing building equals a “green” building. There are many existing buildings that have been renovated for other uses and look and work perfectly fine. Bob Morra commented that utilizing the existing Municipal Center for a use such as Town Hall would be more expensive than building new, partly because the inefficiencies in the building. The existing structural layout of the municipal center is not conducive to the layout of a Town Hall, resulting in significant wasted space. In addition, building a Town Hall on Notch Road would require building a new meeting space, which would duplicate what already exists at Town Hall, further lending to the inefficiency and greater costs.
- The question was raised if there are changes to the roads in the Center (i.e. re-alignment of Toomey Road) how would this affect Bolton Center? The response was the change to the roads is proposed to both relieve some of the traffic on Bolton Center Road, making it safer for pedestrians, etc.) and to provide alternative access to uses such as an expanded Town Hall, the existing Congregational Church and Heritage Farm. The additional green space and connections would be a positive upgrade.
- A member of the audience complimented the consultants on their work, but felt the Town would benefit more from spending money on actually building something rather than completing the current study. Bob Morra stated that the study is a Vision for the Town Center and is funded by a grant specifically for this purpose. The restrictions of the State grant do not allow the Town to spend the money on anything else.
- A comment was made that it might be less expensive to do minimal maintenance on the Notch Road Municipal Center rather than tear it down. Future use of the building might be to serve as an incubator for home businesses that need additional space.
- It was noted that the re-aligned Toomey Road would provide both open views to Heritage Farm (much more than can be seen from Bolton Center Road) and views of the Center.

- What is the role of the Public as the process moves forward? Response is the intent of this meeting is to solicit input from stakeholders and the public regarding ideas presented in the concept diagrams. Feedback provided to the Project Team by members of the public will help to guide the process and refine the concept for the Town Center.
- It was reiterated that the concept plan is a Vision Plan for the Center and will be used as a guiding tool for the community as improvements are made in the Center. The intent is to allow for flexibility while providing guidance on how the Center could evolve over time. A Vision Plan provides a “road map” on how to get to an end point and avoid making piecemeal decisions that may have to be redone at a later date.

Comments made after Meeting on Concept Diagrams:

- Green parking – great, like conceptually re-aligning Bolton Center Road for 4-way stop
- Likes re-aligning Bolton Center Road to achieve bigger green at Town Hall and Church
- Community supported agriculture – garden locations at Heritage Farm
- Views east from proposed re-aligned Toomey Road are great – provides vistas over Farm
- Trails/paths – ways to get pedestrians off roads – provide sidewalks?
- Bolton 5K Road Race – need bathroom facilities and parking
- Want an idea of how many parking spaces are needed for Town Hall expansion and Bolton Center events
- Make path to Notch Road Municipal center from Toomey Road more walkable and bikable.
- Like the idea of Westview Drive easement connection to Herrick Park
- Town Hall expansion area – make circle on plans smaller (looks large / frightening) – maybe show building footprint for reference
- Town Hall expansion area – label as “Option”
- Access to Library is a problem in Concepts 2, 3 and 4 where the road in front is removed
- Montessori School drop off and pick-up is problematic in this new design – needs to be worked on (drop off on west side, staff parking on east side) +/- 30 students
- Bike / walk path along Bolton Center Road to Westview Drive would be great
- Location for CSA (Community Supported Agriculture)? Educational posting on Farm would be great
- Facilities at Farm – barn for x-country running series / indoor space for registration
- Concept #4 – likes the pond idea; “very green” overflow parking very necessary; present a “picture tour” of vistas from re-aligned Toomey Road to Meadow Lane
- Road behind Town Hall should not be constructed without Town Hall
- The primary role of Heritage Farm is education – connectivity to both schools is crucial

- Thoughts about Final Plan – must be incremental; must be prioritized, which should be determined by the public at the next public presentation
- How are phases set up? Long term vs. short term? Fluidity of improvements/phases
- We need consensus on agreement of stakeholders to drive next steps piece by piece