

Natick 360

Honoring Our Past. Planning Our Future.



Joint Boards and Committees Meeting Joint Meetings A, B and C * April 3, 4 and 5, 2007

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Introduction

On April 3, 4 and 5, 2007, members of the five *Natick 360* sponsoring boards and committees¹ met to consider focus areas, goals, and policies, programs and projects for the five-year planning horizon of the *Natick 360* community strategic planning process. Members could choose to attend any of three meetings during the week, to ensure that all 40 members of the five sponsoring boards and committees have an opportunity to weigh in on these critical elements of the *Natick 360* process.

Prior to the meetings, the members of the sponsoring boards and committees had an opportunity to provide preliminary input through a web-based survey. The survey instrument showed a list of issues based on previously-identified gaps between Natick today and Natick’s vision for the future, or barriers to achieving Natick’s vision. These issues were grouped into eight focus areas. The survey process was closed after ten days, and the comments received from 16 board and committee respondents (40%), plus two members of the Senior Staff, were summarized and distributed to the board and committee members a few days before the joint meetings.

Members of the public could also respond to the survey, and 21 members of the public responded. A verbatim compilation of the public’s responses was also distributed to the board and committee members a few days before the joint meetings.

During the meetings, participants broke into small groups to write goals and policies, programs and projects for one of the eight focus areas. Then the small groups reported on their work to the larger group. The facilitators then asked the participants to respond to each small group report by framing their comments two ways: “What you like about this group’s report” (“like abouts”) and, “How to change the report to address a specific concern” (“how to’s”).

¹ Sponsoring boards and committees are: Board of Selectmen, Conservation Commission, Finance Committee, Planning Board and School Committee.

The following pages show the results of this process for the eight focus areas that were addressed in this meetings. The “A” meeting on Tuesday, April 3, addressed four focus areas, and the “B” meeting, April 4, addressed the other four focus areas; the “C” meeting, April 5, addressed four areas that the facilitators selected for additional attention. The compilation of results that follows adds the work of the “C” meeting to the work products of the other two groups.

Addressed by “A” Meeting April 3, 2007	Addressed by “B” Meeting April 4, 2007	Addressed by “C” Meeting April 5, 2007
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Improving public education ● Enlivening Natick center ● Planning for change and managing growth ● Balancing town financial resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Increasing civic engagement and leadership ● Improving the Natick environment and the health of the population ● Improving the town’s infrastructure and transportation options ● Leveraging regional resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Improving public education ● Improving the Natick environment and the health ● Balancing town financial resources ● Improving the town’s infrastructure and transportation options

Participants in the “B” meeting were also given copies of the “A” meeting results, and they provided handwritten feedback on those results. Similarly, participants in the “C” meeting were given copies of the “A” and “B” meetings results, and at least one person provided feedback on those results. The feedback is shown in the following pages as annotations in *italic typeface*.

A total of 24 board and committee members (60%) participated directly in these meetings. Three of the board and committee members who did not attend one of the meetings were among the 16 who provided input through the on-line survey. They are listed below with an “on-line” notation. In all, 27, or 68%, of the 40 board and committee members provided input.

Joint Meeting Participants April 3, 4 and 5, 2007

<p><i>Board of Selectmen:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Carol Gloff ● Charles Hughes ● Josh Ostroff ● Kristine Van Amsterdam 	<p><i>Finance Committee:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Cathleen Collins ● Paul Griesmer (on-line) ● Tony Lista ● John Moran ● Michael Reardon ● Peter Robbins ● Bob Severance ● Richard Sidney (on-line) ● Richard Sullivan ● Christine Weithman (on-line) ● Bruce Wright 	<p><i>Conservation Commission:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Kathy Rehl ● Doug Shepard <p><i>School Committee:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Karen Adelman Foster ● Dirk Coburn ● Stephen Meyler ● David Murphy ● Rick Wynn ● Anne Zernicke
<p><i>Planning Board:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Terri Evans ● Bob Foster ● Julian Munnich ● Kenneth Soderholm 		

Observers of various meetings included Recreation and Parks Commissioner Ronald Ordway, Craig Ross and David Parish, co-chairs of the *Natick 360* Strategic Planning Oversight Committee. Blackerby Associates consultants Phillip Blackerby, Kevin O’Sullivan and Elizabeth Reuthe facilitated the meetings.

Improving Public Education

Small Group Report: Goals, Policies, Programs and Projects

Increase financial investment

- Provide more information and time for the budget process
- Increase community support: grass roots campaign to get the public involved and out to vote.
- Increase commercial tax base.
- Increase local aid (State and Town Representatives)
- * More proactive with grants

Continue to improve educational outcomes for students at all levels

- Make teacher salaries competitive with surrounding communities (“W” towns)
- Encourage and increase parental involvement
- Decrease class sizes
- Improve curriculum (especially in Math)
- Technology in classroom – *Purpose? Which? Better method(s) for teachers; use of IT by students in daily curriculum – Duplicates third bullet item in next goal section*
- Recruit outstanding Administrator
- *Mentoring programs for “kids at risk” – see John Andrew Mazie Memorial Foundation (www.mazie.org)*
- Define, identify and periodically update the community’s expectations for the schools
- Provide sustained funding that reflects the community’s goals for public education, and supports competitive salaries
- Regularly communicate to the community and celebrate school accomplishments

Improve educational facilities to improve the quality of education

- Invest in educational facilities that reflect Natick’s standards and price: build a new high school; renovate Kennedy Middle School; maintain current facilities
- MIS: Maintenance Information work-order system for maintenance of facilities
- Technology: laptops; interactive classroom techniques; provide professional development training for teachers – *Duplicates fifth bullet item in previous goal section*
- Green facilities (LEED)
- Grants
- *Flexibility of space, auditoriums, gymnasiums*

Like Aouts:

- * Looking for various sources of funding (not just taxes and state aid) – *Like what?*
- Provide more time for the budget process
- Emphasis on community support
- Green facilities, especially energy efficiency – *Yes*
- Technology: laptops; professional development for teachers
- New High School should incorporate green design and technology to model behaviors and encourage teachers and students
- Defining and updating expectations makes everything else easier (several concurrences)

** Regarding the use of grant funding, we need to carefully evaluate any new positions funded with grants since, historically, when the grant runs out the position stays and is moved to the Town’s budget.*

How To's:

- *Engage a full-time grants writer and manager– *Delete this item – Town-wide, not just schools*
- Determine if we should build new or renovate the High School
- *Engage with grants without having the rug pulled out from under the program later: longer term grants, not just 3-4 years) – *Delete this item*
- Zero in on the high school level for technology
- Share with other neighboring towns specialties, such as non-Western language classes – *Already being done; TEC in place already – Yes*
- Have young teachers in schools – *Delete this item*
- *Expand business and school partnerships*
- Improve fundraising from private sources; such as through “Friends of the Arts” programs – *Yes*
- Make choices to invest in programs and technologies that can be kept up-to-date, and not become obsolete
- Expand identification of community expectations to the broadest definition; for example, multiple uses of schools
- Clarify policy positions regarding expectations of Board of Selectmen; for example, capital expenses for high school, technology. How to do it (see Balancing Town financial resources)
- Define community expectations for use of school assets
- Define community benefit from education; help community understand what schools do well, as well as what schools need

Increasing Civic Engagement and Leadership

Small Group Report: Goals, Policies, Programs and Projects

Improve communications to citizens

- Newsletter
- Town website, including directory, with dedicated volunteer or staff support
- Support Natick Pegasus
- Provide Town documents at the Library, digitally
- Provide customer service training for Town employees

Ask citizens to participate

- Press releases, website announcements of vacancies
- Leverage single issue interest in wider participation
- Create framework for public questions and ideas; respond to public input through multiple media
- Teach civic participation to K-12 students
- Provide information to new arrivals about government and involvement; work with Realtors, businesses
- Outreach to low-turnout neighborhoods. – *voter registration*

Timely and clear information

- Use less jargon
- Present all revenues and expenditures for consideration
- Start budget process earlier

Foster an environment in which people find it easier to participate by modifying government operations

- Enter split budget/non-budget items into two groups (two Finance Committees), or modify Charter to direct non-budget article review to Board of Selectmen only
- Schedule regular cross-board meetings
- Review all services outsourcing, or potential privatization
- Adapt means of participation to be flexible, and respond to residents' schedules (asynchronous input)
- Adjust Town office hours to accommodate residents who do not work locally
- Support change in open meeting law to accommodate on-line interaction
- Educate board and committee members about the Charter to improve communications

Like Abouts:

- Comprehensive
- Cheap!
- Pegasus: support and promote; what percentage of citizens have basic cable?
- Teach civic engagement to K-12; reference philanthropy forum, grants
- The more you engage, the greater the skills and energy

How To's:

- Increase information outreach to new residents and families; Realtor links, train schedules, Pegasus, school information, web site information, etc.
- Leverage Town Clerk's Office to assist in the welcoming – *and voter registration*
- Find existing “welcoming” organizations, and help and encourage their work
- Develop a Town “owner’s manual”
- Reach renters with the Town’s current quarterly newsletter
- Know the “why” behind “Modify Government Operations”
- Add civic education to K-12 curriculum
- Ensure any website is good, useful and functional
- Have Town Government work with Schools Superintendent for better Town information-sharing
- Leverage and tap into *Natick 360* participation for more volunteers
- Tap new sources of citizen energy and skills – *development, fundraising*
- Explore opportunities to engage asynchronously

Improving the Natick Environment and the Health of the Population

Small Group Report: Goals, Policies, Programs and Projects

Increase open space and availability

- Purchase land for green space
- Acquire open spaces using FAR funds (floor area ratio, transferable development rights payments) from continuing development
- Encourage reuse of industrial sites to preserve existing open spaces by providing favorable (FAR, floor area ratio) conditions to attract development
- Pursue Agricultural Preservation Restrictions (APR) for the rest of local farms
- Adopt the Community Preservation Act
- Use green space fund to buffer aquifers while providing usable recreation space

Reduce Town impacts on the environment

- Encourage green building standards (LEED certification) for all new construction and renovations of Town buildings
 - Train Town employees in the Building Department in LEED standards
 - Train Building Committee members in LEED standards
- Undergo Town-wide energy audits for all Town buildings and vehicles

Continue to pursue protection of the water supply, conservation of water, and storm water management

- Use inflow and infiltration (I&I) techniques to prevent storm water from going into sewer, to save unnecessary sewage treatment costs
- Ensure sewer and storm drainage water is not running off into streams and rivers in estuaries

Build additional sidewalks

- Ensure that all commuter streets have at least one sidewalk which is ADA compliant
- Should be funded in the capital budget whenever streets are improved or accepted, to achieve ADA compliance
- Use open space funds or increased trash bag prices to fund sidewalk expenditures.
- Ensure sidewalks provide access to schools, potentially reducing bussing costs
- Require through easements and permitting that ADA-compliant sidewalks and bike trails are incorporated into all developments

Reduce traffic congestion

- Establish a study of traffic patterns and use on major access routes, including Rtes. 9, 16, 27, 30, 135, etc.
- Establish methodology for measuring car pollution during peak traffic time

Like Aouts:

- Green building standards have recently passed a tipping point into mainstream thinking
- Poses environmental focus in a complementary fashion to development
- Forces us to think about lifetime facility costs, or total costs of ownership (TCO)
- APR doesn't fundamentally change property rights; they freeze future uses
- Overlays with infrastructure—good!—sidewalks, open space, smart growth principles

How To's:

- Ensure analysis of options and costs for Town building projects
- Address green building standards—use of proven green technologies—for public buildings
- Regulate impervious ground cover in existing residential neighborhoods, such as where residents may want to pave the front yard
- Avoid sidewalks to nowhere!
- Use FAR funds more flexibly, creatively; reference the zoning bylaws.
- Add Oak St. to traffic congestion, and other non-state routes, such as Speen.
- Anticipate and respond to public health issues: substance abuse, domestic violence, health emergency, wellness, referrals, etc.
- Make public health its own stand-alone category
- Capture social and behavioral health issues

Enlivening Natick Center

Small Group Report: Goals, Policies, Programs and Projects

Insufficient parking: Increase parking – *Yes*

- Build Town garage(s); bond financed by revenues [*or*]
- Seek private development of parking structure(s)
- Pursue State and MBTA funding – *MBTA funding is MBTA control – How about the public transportation to get to and from downtown Natick? Wrong to have focus of dense development build around parking.*

Insufficient mixed use: Encourage “Planned” mixed-use development downtown – *Yes*

- Create alternative zoning options (e.g., HOOP)
- Encourage residential use in existing structures

Level of policing: grow with increase in business and residential development – *Yes*

Insufficient playgrounds: no major problems now – *Yes*

Like Aouts:

- Private funding of parking garage
- Condo idea – mixed use – residential living in town
- Attracting in businesses: see if businesses can stay open later – *Yes*
- Satellite parking
- Better walkways, shuttle busses, etc., in day
- Alternative zoning: don’t have to have parking spaces for every tenant – *Wrong! No development should be approved in downtown that doesn’t come with sufficient parking – Yes*

How To’s: All these “how to’s” are unrealistic; not really “how to’s”

- Influence how liquor and beer & wine licenses are given out – *What does this mean? – Delete this item*
- Put increased parking in context with transportation options
- Provision downtown residents to walk to get groceries, deal with their transportation needs, parking – *change “provision”*
- Deal with increased traffic flow
- Encourage people living in a different part of Natick to shop downtown
- Make downtown a destination
- *Reduce parking requirements in zoning*
- *This ignores economic development issues – promoting small business and retail/restaurant*
- *Brew pub/restaurant – open late enough for TCAN*

These are not goals; can they be rewritten, using change verbs?

Balancing Town Financial Resources

Small Group Report: Goals, Policies, Programs and Projects

Actively seek “desirable” businesses to locate in Natick

Use overrides (capital and services) to let taxpayers pay for desired services

Board of Selectmen develop financial policies with input from the School Committee and Finance Committee

Re-establish financial planning process

Increase public awareness about Town finances

- Provide voters with a clear choice between level of service and current level of taxation by identifying and communicating costs: – *Revenues also; how revenues are currently expended*
 - cost of service (direct and indirect);
 - cost to taxpayer (property tax, which is 2/3 of budget, and fees);
 - cost of infrastructure (capital and bonding, plans and options);
 - variability of other revenues (state aid and local receipts);
 - impact of current policies (for example, Fire Department stations and equipment, and collective bargaining agreements)
- Budgeting process
 - Follow bylaws and charter, which require earlier due dates – *For what? Town budget, capital plan, school budget?*
 - Incorporate longer-term forecasts
- Financial transparency: link benefits with costs

Like Aouts:

- More collaborative approach in local government
- Overrides as a tool for people to decide what they want
- Awareness of costs (don’t always know the cost)
- Highlighting variability of state aid
- Longer term planning
- Collective bargaining should not be a policy-making process – *What does this mean?*
- Complete disconnect between what people want and what they think it costs – *Very true!*
- Examining the impact of current policies

How To's:

- Desirable business is a mix of employees at various levels, low environmental impact; for example, staffing/temporary, call center, incubate start-up technology businesses
- Better utilize industrial park property for business development, as well as housing
- Fix the problem: doubling the cost of trash bags won't fix the problem; neither will the Mall
- Merge pension fund into the state fund
- Collaborate while meeting legal requirement of School Committee to say what's needed for schools; each board and committee has its own responsibilities
- Implement and encourage smoothing out of state aid; like to put money into one-time costs when more money is available – *What does this mean? – Delete this item*
- Get people to prioritize: communicating costs isn't the whole thing
- Boil down the value proposition for each choice – *what does "value" mean?*
- Share with other towns to understand creative solutions with a conduit and method to share and discuss
- *No discussion of regional (inter-town) solutions?*

Improving the Town's Infrastructure and Transportation Options

Small Group Report: Goals, Policies, Programs and Projects

Improve transportation options

- Board of Selectmen enact decision to join the Regional Transportation Authority (RTA), while maintaining THE RIDE program, door-to-door transportation services for people with disabilities provided by MBTA
- Create bus system along Oak St., Speen St., and Rtes. 9, 27 and 135, for use by the public and school children.

Invest in capital improvements

- Update the five-year capital plan and Town-wide priorities
- Foster private/public partnerships to help finance capital investments
- Use bonding options to finance capital improvements when they would reduce operating expenses by an economically larger amount.
- Consider a capital override, a one-year (or multiple-years) property tax assessment to acquire specific capital assets.
- Consider opportunities for capital assets to be shared by different populations within the town.
- Ensure that operating funds are available to maintain capital assets appropriately
- Identify state and federal funding sources for these assets

Implement four major capital investments

- Senior / community center in downtown
- New high school
- Downtown parking garage, with retail or housing on edge of garage
- Rail trail

Improve traffic flows on major routes

- Engage Wellesley and Framingham in regional solutions for Rte. 9
- Engage the state in solutions for Rte. 9
- Eliminate tolls on the Mass Pike
- Build overpass at Oak St. and Rte. 9 intersection to eliminate traffic light
- Rebuild Rte. 27 and Rte. 9 intersection
- Build pedestrian/bike bridges over Rte. 9
- Complete traffic design plan
- Implement recommended improvements in traffic design plan

Promote bicycle riding

- Dedicate bike lanes on major roads
- Create bike sheds at train station and downtown

Build sidewalks on major roads

- Identify arterial and main roads without sidewalks
- Build sidewalks on main roads, using sidewalk funds

Like Aouts:

- Like all of it (several concurrences)
- We're not reinventing the wheel; we are taking advantage (updating rather than re-creating) of existing efforts and plans.
- Facility-sharing is good for the Town; we're thinking ahead if we're thinking about sharing; sharing enhances flexibility.

How To's:

- Make downtown MBTA system accessible to people with disabilities
- Engage the state and federal governments to take action
- Tie needs together; regional system, airport transportation, etc.
- Get the most benefit out of the train station
- Get an effective north-south corridor
- Fix and maintain our roads
- Incorporate or set priorities within the five-year capital plan.
- Expand the frequency of MBTA services.
- Ensure there are sufficient mechanisms for public education.
- Ensure the various boards and committees champion specific initiatives.
- Be more aware of public/private partnerships; this will require cross-board cooperation and collaboration; for example, downtown parking garage requires cooperation between the Planning Board and the Board of Selectmen

Planning for Change and Managing Growth

Small Group Report: Goals, Policies, Programs and Projects

Plan proactively for growth

- Planning Board proactively plan for areas deemed next for development:
- Consult with developers to create blueprint for managing growth
- Enhance zoning where large developments are likely, so that developers will prefer non-40B projects (40R, HOOP, etc.)
- Examine the process of “mansionization:” pro’s and con’s; how the Town feels about it
- Re-examine zoning of older neighborhoods consistent with existing lot sizes – *Yes*
- Participate in MetroWest Growth Management Committee and other regional planning organizations – *Yes*
- Recruit specific businesses to the area!!! – *Yes*
- Add a full-time staff planner to Town Community Development Office!!! – *Yes*

Educate the public about growth issues – *How about ensuring all zoning bylaws, subdivision regulations, and Town bylaws are available on the web site?*

- Help the public understand the law – *Yes – ...relating to...*
- Hold community-based planning exercises (charettes)

Encourage population diversity

- Examine the 40B law to make it more workable – *What does this mean? – What does “examining the law” do? If we don’t work to change it, it’s not worth it!*
- Direct 40B developments to build apartments – *This and the item below are inconsistent*
- Encourage Natick to grow more diverse; encourage neighborhoods to be welcoming
- Develop senior housing downtown and around town, with lower parking requirements, complemented with transportation services
- Increase sensitivity to residents having difficulty paying property taxes
- Encourage 40B and 40R projects that include single-family “starter homes” instead of condos and apartments, even if modest in size – *This and the previous item are inconsistent – The days of single-family affordable housing won’t return until or unless housing prices stop being driven by the high cost of land; cluster and multi-family development (smart growth) was to be the way to go – Yes*
- Identify what Housing Authority is doing!!!
- *Connectivity*
- *Finalize Natick’s Housing Trust in time for approval at Fall Town Meeting*

Like Aouts:

- Overlap between “Plan for growth” and “Natick Center” – *Yes*
- Enhance zoning so developers will prefer non-40B developments
- Proactively recruit specific businesses – *Why only specific ones? – Yes*
- Develop consultative relationship with developers, a collaborative win-win culture
- Re-examine zoning in older neighborhoods – *Yes*

How To's:

- Balance what you want to do with costs: making improvements and making the town more affordable may not be consistent goals
- If 950 condominium units are built, how to finance a school for another 450 students: facilities may be available, but will still need teachers – *Delete this item*
- Allow old Victorian homes to convert to two families or condominiums, so seniors can stay in them – *Delete this item – Yes*
- *Identify opportunities for start-up and incubate businesses (in conjunction with Natick Labs or local colleges)*

Leveraging Regional Resources

Small Group Report: Goals, Policies, Programs and Projects

Improve transportation options

- Board of Selectmen enact decision to join the Regional Transportation Authority (RTA), while maintaining THE RIDE program, door-to-door transportation services for people with disabilities provided by MBTA

Improve management of employee benefits through participation in larger groups

- Continue to support state legislation requiring underperforming funds to join the state Pension Reserves Investment Trust (PRIT) fund, to increase investment returns and reduce administrative costs
- Join the Group Insurance Commission to obtain better Town employee health insurance rates and get assistance with cost containment, when coalition bargaining is not required
- Move elderly Town retirees to Medicare to reduce Town health care costs

Engage in regional planning activities

- Continue to maintain membership in the MetroWest Growth Management Committee (MWGM)

Reduce Town costs through participation in purchasing cooperatives

- Continue to use the state purchasing list
- Continue to participate in the 14-town insurance collaboration for health, workers compensation and liability insurance

Like Aouts:

- Focus on saving money.
- Participation in RTA will result in better service and less cost.
- Focus on human capital savings: turn over management to others; save people power for other jobs.
- Lend themselves to “easy” approval; they make sense.
- Participation in RTA and MWGM go together to improve traffic problems.
- Address problems starting outside Natick borders.
- Solutions don’t pit one group against others; they are unifying solutions; they remove emotional components of the issues

How To’s:

- Develop and get the Town’s legislative agenda clearly in the hands of legislators; more formalized
- Track yearly progress in achieving the Town’s legislative agenda; “balanced scorecard;” legislative breakfasts
- Regional focus and consideration of natural resources issues; example: get MWGM to look at Lake Cochituate, which crosses Natick’s borders.