

Background

Strategic Planning Overview

Natick, along with every other community in the region, faces serious challenges regarding growth, development, and financial constraints. The future will bring many new proposals for growth and development to the community. In addition, the community will face difficult decisions about the types and level of services offered under increasingly tight financial constraints.

A long-range strategic plan developed through broad participation of community members, under the authority of elected and appointed boards will help Natick prioritize investment of limited resources in the context of a long-range vision for the town. It will also help identify outside funding sources to leverage tax dollars and will increase civic participation in Natick's local government.

Natick 360 is the Town of Natick Long Range Strategic Planning process. It is sponsored by, and run under the authority of, the Town's Board of Selectmen, Planning Board, Finance Committee, Conservation Commission, and School Committee. In April 2006, Town Meeting appropriated funds to implement the Natick 360 process. These funds have been supplemented by private donations from generous corporate sponsors in our community.

There are four major benefits which accrue to the Town of Natick through this planning process. The Natick 360 planning process will:

- Provide a rich source of information about the desires of the community to help boards set priorities

- Promote Natick as a desirable community for investment and identify areas of leverage to attract additional resources to Natick (businesses, investors, outside funding)

- Create a process for autonomous boards to collaborate: identifying areas of shared resources and effort

- Increase public participation and develop a pool of future civic leaders

The Natick 360 Planning process will cover a 16 month time-frame. The final plan document, including specific actions and estimated costs will be submitted for approval at Fall Town Meeting in October 2007.

The Natick 360 Strategic Plan will cover a five year period. The sponsoring boards may call for a committee to be formed to review progress against the Strategic Plan halfway through the 5-year planning period.

The Natick 360 Planning process is being run by the Strategic Planning Oversight Committee (SPOC). There are 9 members of the oversight committee, made up of one designee from each of the sponsoring boards and 4 members of the community-at-large. SPOC members are:

- Rosemary Driscoll, designee of the Natick School Committee

- Terri Evans, community-at-large

- Matthew Gardner, designee of the Conservation Commission

- John Heerwagen, community-at-large

- David Parish, Co-Chair, designee of the Board of Selectmen

George Richards, designee of the Planning Board

Andres Rochwerger, community-at-large

Craig Ross, Co-Chair, designee of the Finance Committee

Harlee Strauss, community-at-large

William Mayhew, alternate, community-at-large

The Strategic Planning Oversight Committee is charged with managing the planning process, recommending professional consultants and overseeing their work on the project, engaging the public to participate in the process, and coordinating involvement by the sponsoring boards. The SPOC is only a facilitation committee. Final authority for all outcomes of the process rests with the sponsoring boards and Town Meeting.

There are four phases in the Natick 360 planning process:

Phase I – Our Community Yesterday and Today

Phase II – Our Shared Vision for the Future

Phase III – Our Strategic Options

Phase IV – Our Strategic Choices

Phase I (June through September 2006) has focused on producing this report which describes Natick's history and the current conditions of the community. Before planning the future, it is important to look carefully at the history and current conditions in Natick. This report provides the baseline conditions in Natick that should be recognized prior to planning for the future.

Phase II (October through December of 2006) will focus on the future of Natick – developing a set of shared visions and values for the Natick community. The cornerstone of the Visioning process will be the “Vision for the Future Weekend” on October 27-29, 2006. The public has been invited to meet with skilled facilitators, consultants, and planners to discuss ideas about what is valued by the community and what ideas exist for the future. This information, and information drawn from on-going surveys and community meetings, will be consolidated in a report “Natick: Our Shared Vision for the Future” available in January, 2007.

The Vision and Values work from Phase II will also produce a group of “Strategic Focus Areas” – that is, themes that need to be explored with different action plans to preserve or change aspects of the community to move toward the future vision.

During Phase III, the elected and appointed Boards in Natick will work with experts to develop a number of Strategic Options – different scenarios for establishing policies or programs that could be implemented in each Strategic Focus Area. The various Strategic Options will be presented in a report “Natick: Our Strategic Options” in April 2007.

Finally, in Phase IV, the public will be invited to prioritize the various strategic options that will shape Natick's future. There will be another community event during which the public will vote on priorities for different actions. The Community Meetings will be backed-up by a scientific-sample survey of the community to confirm the conclusions.

The final Strategic Plan will be created by the sponsoring boards after consideration of the results of the Phase IV votes and the scientific-sample survey. The final strategic plan report will be submitted for approval by Town Meeting in the spring of 2008.