

Envisioning a Better Future

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WESTBROOK

In a town known for lively meetings with spirited debate, last week's town session to kick-off an update of the 18-year old Plan of Conservation and Development instead demonstrated surprising consensus about the town among the 75 residents attending. Representing all major town neighborhoods, those attending seemed to agree about those town assets of which they were proud and of those things for which they were sorry. Differences of opinion mainly rested on the priorities they placed with respect to topics and concerns that the planning process should address.

The meeting, scheduled by the town's Planning Commission and coordinated by town planner Meg Parulis, was facilitated by the town's contractor, Planimetrics.

As residents arrived at last week's session, they were each

asked to go to one of the four table stations arranged in the multi-purpose room of the Mulvey Center.

At the first table was a town map on which residents were asked to place a green dot to mark where they lived. The second table—the "Prouds Table"—displayed another town map on which residents were asked to place green dot stickers on locations of town assets of which they were proud. At the third table—the "Sorries Table"—residents were asked to put red dot stickers on locations that had something for which they were sorry.

When finished with this work, residents were asked to then reach into their envelope and put the five sheets—labeled in denominations of 5, 10, and 20 points—into the table's ballot boxes labeled with topics typically addressed as part of a Plan of Conservation and Development. With only 50 points available, those attending were forced to

make choices and rank the many topics by the priorities they placed on them.

While the ballots were being tallied, Jason Vincent of Planimetrics stood in front of the crowd and asked residents first to volunteer their reasons for placing green dots on certain sites on the Prouds map and then their reasons for placing red dots on sites that had qualities about which they were sorry.

Revealed through this process by green dot clusters were aspects of the town in which the residents take pride: its beaches, marinas, water, and open spaces; the town library; the Town Green; its historic homes and small-town character; and the town's high school/middle school and athletic facility complex.

Perhaps most revealing was the aspect of the town for which the residents were sorry: that the design and size of the new

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large Walgreens on Boston Post Road in the town center is not consistent with the scale of the other smaller-scale historic structures surrounding the Town Green. Though most agreed that the store was too large in scale for the site, others in the audience also noted that the structure improved on the long-abandoned gas station and deteriorated strip mall that was that location for many years.

One suggestion that received a

number of nods was that the town might want to develop a set of design standards to guide future developments and structures to preserve the character of the village area near the Town Green and similar areas. Several speakers also said the town should improve connections between key public assets like the Post Office, the town schools, the library, the Town Green, the Mulvey Center, and the train station. Sidewalks, bicycle paths, and design elements were all

suggested as a way to unify this corridor.

Most appeared to agree that the outlet mall location was an appropriate location for existing and future business development.

Others placed a high priority on creating more housing options in town that the local workforce could afford.

Last week's kick-off was only the first of several public sessions the town will schedule to air town residents' ideas of their vision for the town's future.