

Town Visioning
Amherst, Easthampton, Raynham,
Scituate, Westfield, MA

1998-Present

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If master plans for a community are a road map, visions establish the destination. WCA has a strong record of helping communities define that vision. For this process to be successful, broad-based community participation is essential. WCA works with representatives from community agencies and boards to promote participation of the greater community.

Depending on the community and the budget, WCA uses a variety of techniques to solicit public opinion: written or on-line surveys, focused workshops, walking tours of historic districts, and open community forums. Through this process, the community is able to:

Assessing and mapping the existing town character. WCA studies a number of factors—density of development, special places, corridors, environmental resources, zoning districts, distinct character zones—and represents them graphically for participants to study.

1. Identify community strengths, values, special places and character;
2. Define current trends that are shaping or changing the community;
3. Create a written and graphic vision statement to guide future planning; and
4. Establish a prioritized list of goals and actions to realize those goals.

Promoting the public forums is tailored to each town. Local volunteers coordinate publicity and identify key issues that will draw participants to the meetings.

Provide multiple ways to express ideas. Visioning sessions must enable people to participate however they are most comfortable. Some may prefer writing their responses over speaking out in front of others.

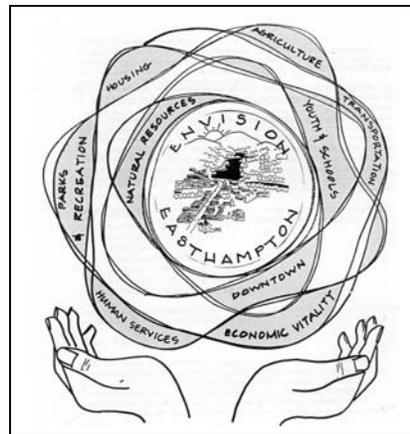




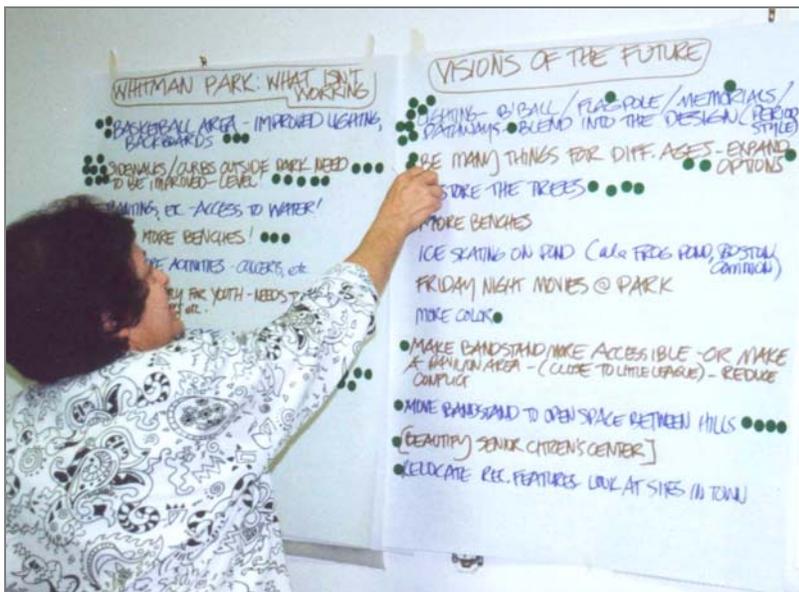
Small groups stimulate discussion. Break-out groups encourage more people to participate actively, expanding the range of voices heard.

Visioning encompasses all aspects of a community.

Interest groups take responsibility for a focus area: land use, housing, education, human services, recreation, economy and environmental resources are among the many complex issues to be addressed.



Each person has five votes. With town assets, citizen concerns, and future visions recorded on newsprint and posted around the room, participants place their votes—in the form of stickers—at the five ideas they most strongly support.

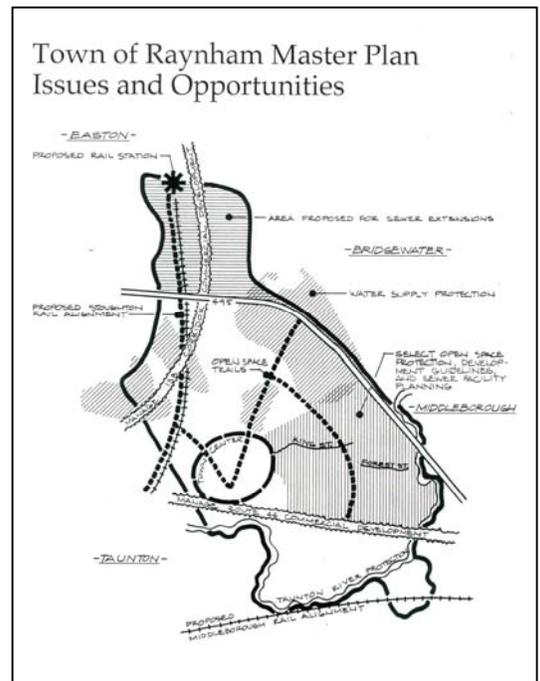


Town Visioning, continued

Facilitating public meetings requires a range of skills. WCA carefully structures the agenda, creating a balance of consultant presentation and group discussion. Moderation is light-hearted but firm. A clear set of ground rules, posted several places, encourages positive participation. Games and exercises help the group to focus discussion and prioritize issues.

Every comment is recorded on newsprint, providing a method for citizens to “vote” their priorities. In this way, all are heard and the ideas that generate the most support are given priority.

WCA summarizes this comprehensive process in a report, lavishly illustrated with graphic representations of the outcomes. The final result is a statement of where the community hopes to be in ten or twenty-five years, with action steps to accomplish this goal. It becomes the beacon to guide future planning.



Graphic representation of the next steps helps the community visualize change.

Maps, concept drawings, and timelines keep the visioning process alive and inform subsequent planning efforts.