

# Focus Groups Summary of Results

## Mansfield 2030 Master Plan

On Wednesday, June 12, 2019, the Master Plan consultant team held six focus group discussions—each for a specific element of the Master Plan (excluding Land Use)<sup>1</sup>: Economic Development; Housing; Circulation and Transportation; Open Space, Natural Resources, and Recreation; and Historic and Cultural Resources. The purpose of these initial discussions with key stakeholders is to identify key issues, challenges, and needs in the community.

### MAIN TAKEAWAYS

	Master Plan Element					
	Economic Development	Housing	Circulation & Transportation	Open Space, Natural Resources, & Recreation	Historic & Cultural Resources	Public Facilities & Services
Need a cohesive downtown identity to improve vibrancy and economic activity.						
Challenge in retaining and inviting diverse residents of all ages.						
Need for affordable and senior housing.						
Increasing development pressure.						
Lack of awareness and communication.						
Limited connections and accessibility.						
Auto-dependent; lacking infrastructure and services for alternative transportation.						
Threat of tear downs and lack of protections for historic structures.						
Lack of collaboration and political will (working in silos).						
Aging school facilities.						
Lack of public gathering spaces.						

<sup>1</sup>As a foundational and encompassing topic, land use issues were addressed within each focus group but not discussed in an independent focus group.



Participants included the Town Manager, and members from the Planning Board, Industrial Development Commission, Southeastern Regional Planning and Economic Development District (SPREDD), and *Keep Mansfield Beautiful*. Participants identified the following as some of the issues, challenges, and economic development needs that the Mansfield community faces today (organized by economic activity centers):

### **Downtown & TOD Area**

- Zoning, regulations, and permitting limit commercial options and viability.
- Current businesses are mostly service-based. Increasing retail businesses or activities that draw people to the downtown area (such as a YMCA, music, or events) would increase chances of passive business activity and downtown vibrancy.
- Road closures which manage Xfinity Center event traffic negatively impact downtown business and accessibility—but could be harnessed to bring more visitors downtown before or after events.
- Old fire station is an opportunity for redevelopment.
- Untapped opportunity in the TOD zone. Town should consider increasing the density allowances and revisiting performance standards.
- Need to build off of current momentum to revitalize the downtown and invest in smart growth; need a cohesive strategic plan for the TOD zone and downtown area.
- Downtown lacks a coherent, cohesive, and inviting identity. The area could use landscaping improvements, placemaking, and design standards.

### **Francis and Cabot Industrial Parks**

- Potential expansion of the Biotech incubator (Francis).
- IDC is looking to hire a marketing or PR firm to help promote Mansfield as a good place for business, especially among Biotech and R&D firms.
- Desire for industrial parks to be improved to attract a greater diversity of business types and building modernized to meet the needs of 21st century R&D, Biotech, and manufacturing firms. Concerned owners, businesses, and the community-at-large are not aware of expanded opportunities through recent zoning updates to the I-2 district.
- TIFs have had variable success.

### **Xfinity Center**

- Slowly decreasing activity and less investment in the property may lead to the asset becoming available for redevelopment in the future. It's most active three months out of the year and only the biggest events tend to sell out.
- Potential opportunity to capture these audiences for downtown business, such as parking downtown with a shuttle to the Xfinity Center.<sup>2</sup>
- Redevelopment into a hotel, resort, or golf course has been considered—or it could be well-suited for last gaming license in state.
- Mass Music and Arts (MMAS) moving to the site across from the Xfinity Center. Potential to create a district focused on music.



Participants included members from the Planning Board, the Housing Corporation, the Mansfield Health Department, and the Housing Authority. Participants identified the following as some of the issues, challenges, and housing needs that the Mansfield community faces today:

### **Demographics**

Participants noted that there is a high level of turnover in Mansfield with many empty-nesters leaving and attracting fewer long-term families. Many new residents are older higher-level professionals. Many young families, young professionals, grown children, and seniors have difficulty moving into or staying within the community due to housing costs and options.

[Housing continued]



## HOUSING

### **Affordable and Financially-Attainable Housing**

- Almost all new development is high-end and economically out of reach for many households.
- Town has few financially-attainable rental options.
- Existing affordable housing cannot accommodate needs as many units are old and in need of improvements and maintenance. Many people are on the waitlist for public housing units and there have been many emergency applications submitted.
- Inclusionary zoning bylaw should be revisited, especially the payout option.
- Challenge to incentivize and offer financially-attainable senior housing options, including senior housing communities and small single-family homes. The town particularly needs family units and more elderly units.

### **Development Constraints**

- Challenging political climate surrounding new development, including resistance to rental.
- Western Mansfield is not connected to the sewer. This can be particularly challenging for large-scale senior housing development which often needs a sewer-connection.

### **Development Opportunities**

- Housing Authority land.



## OPEN SPACE, NATURAL RESOURCES, AND RECREATION

Participants included members from the Natural Resources Trust of Mansfield, the Parks and Recreation Department, and the Conservation Commission. Participants identified the following as some of the issues, challenges, and open space and recreation needs that the Mansfield community faces today (organized by topic):

### **Open Space and Recreation**

- Increasing development pressure.
- Working on accessibility and connectivity between open space and recreation areas. Many trails lack parking, signage, or official trailheads.
- Difficult to maintain trails adequately.
- Lack of ADA accessibility and compatibility.
- Lack of accountability for implementation of the Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) (2016), especially in the creation of an Open Space and Recreation Committee.
- General lack of support for Recreation Department's activities, needs, and initiatives, particularly lacking a central location for its operations.
- Need and local desire for a dog park.
- Need more collaboration between Recreation, Open Space and DPW.
- Need more public awareness and wider representation for open space and recreation.
- Consider public access and recreation options at Rumford River backwash site.

### **Cross-Element Issues**

- Improve accessibility to open space and recreation areas via transportation networks and/or local transit.
- Lack of parking in areas that provide access to recreational resources.
- Need to link open space and recreational resources with the Cultural District, Downtown, schools, Mansfield Public Library, Recreation Headquarters, Council on Aging, and other key town facilities.
- DPW capacity is adequate in the summer with seasonal workers. However, in the fall and spring, this workforce drops off during the time when there is increased pressure on facilities (due to back-to-school and other fall/spring programming).



HISTORIC AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

Participants included members from the Mansfield Public Library, Cultural District Initiative, Cultural Council, and Historic Commission. Participants identified the following as some of the issues, challenges, and historic and cultural needs that the Mansfield community faces today:

**General Challenges, Concerns, and Opportunities**

- Tear down threat to historic structures, especially around N. Main Street.
- Need to invest in older buildings and implement stronger regulations of alterations and demolition.
- Consider opportunities in the old Fire House on N. Main Street for potential redevelopment as a museum, cultural or performance space, artist space, or other community-oriented business.
- Consider ways to better harness local cultural assets and improve collaboration.
- Continue and increase use of historic and cultural resources as educational opportunities through displays, events, and school field trips.
- Continue cultural district initiative in Downtown, especially to improve awareness of town history and cultural resources and improve the vibrancy and identity of the town.
- Reconsider adopting the Community Preservation Act (CPA).
- Continue to support and consider ways to improve or expand community gathering places and cultural centers.
- Improve coordination and collaboration with the Tri-Town Chamber of Commerce.
- Create more collaboration between businesses and local groups and organizations to spread awareness of events.
- Significant funding challenge. Consider hiring a grants and funding coordinator specifically to support cultural and historic efforts and programming.
- Improve diversity of representation in town leadership.



CIRCULATION AND TRANSPORTATION

Participants included the Town Manager, and members from the Department of Public Works (engineering and highway divisions), Southeastern Regional Planning and Economic Development District (SPREDD), and Fire Department. Participants identified the following as some of the issues, challenges, and transportation needs that the Mansfield community faces today (organized by location and topic):

**General Challenges and Needs**

- Continue to fund pavement improvements to maintain adequate Pavement Condition Index.
- Improve and extend bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, such as through a bike path extension project, and bike and pedestrian strategic plan.
- Lacking local public transit and very auto-dependent.

**Route 106 Corridor (Route 140 to Main Street)**

- Lack of bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure along this corridor. Buildings close to the road may limit improvement options.
- High water table has created challenges at underpasses.
- Cross-town improvement project identified but will require major reconstruction and potential land takings (TIP project). Participants noted that the project is stagnating and that the town needs to maintain momentum to advance the project.

**Route 140/I-495 Interchange**

- Utilize and implement findings from the Southeastern Regional Planning and Economic Development District (SPREDD) study.
- Town has developed a concept to provide a new ramp to reduce traffic in neighborhoods. Project not on TIP
- New hotel planned across the street from Xfinity Center.

*[Circulation and Transportation continued]*

### **Main Street and Downtown**

- Investigate effects and viability of traffic management downtown, especially on N. Main Street and Crocker Street.
- Consider prohibiting trucks on N. Main Street.
- Consider parking and shuttle system between downtown and Xfinity Center.
- Consider making the north end of Main Street two-way



Participants included members from the Department of Public Works, the Fire Department, the Police Department, Public School District, the Planning Department, Mansfield Electric, the Town Manager, and informed residents. Participants indicated that there have been many improvements over the last few years. Overall there were fewer concerns or challenges compared to other focus groups. However, participants did identify the following as some of the issues, challenges, and public facilities and service needs that the Mansfield community faces today (organized by service):

### **Police**

- Need to improve processes and productions.
- Consider mutual aid agreement for training space.
- Ensure that challenges are addressed at the local, regional, and national scale.

### **Fire**

- Response times have dropped by about five minutes on average.
- Anticipated additional staffing needs in the future.
- Increased development places pressure on staff; need for expanded staffing

### **Schools**

- Ensure that schools are making small improvements, like technology upgrades.
- Declining student population but increasing special-needs population and multiple languages.
- The Pre-K and Middle School are both aging facilities. The Town needs a school-wide improvement plan to strategically identify how to address these issues.

### **Water**

- Continue high-quality maintenance of water distribution and collection.
- No plans to extend sewer to West Mansfield at this time.
- Coordinate with ongoing transportation projects.

### **Airport**

- Recently upgraded buildings
- "Hangar 12" is an active restaurant and destination

### **Mansfield Municipal Electric**

- Upgraded LED fixtures
- Planning to conduct town-wide audit of town facilities

### **Other**

- Need for more public use and community gathering spaces. Consider additional space at the Mansfield Public Library.
- Memorial Hall is in need of improvement.
- Strive for innovation and leadership at the local, national, and regional level.
- Will need to update and write a new Capital Improvements Plan.