

Community Vision

A community vision is a picture of what residents want their community to look like, feel like, and be like.¹ Articulating a community vision is a vital piece of the comprehensive planning process, because this vision defines the goals around which municipal policies are developed. Vision workshops, where residents are invited to share their aspirations for their community, are often the tool used to develop the community's vision. Such was the case in Hallowell.

In addition to hands-on community workshops, the Hallowell Comprehensive Plan Committee also provided a survey for residents who could not attend the meetings. The survey was posted on the web and available at City Hall. Part two of this chapter looks at the finding from the survey results.

1. Hallowell Vision Workshops

The Vision Workshops for Hallowell's Comprehensive Plan Update focused on the community's ideas and comments regarding Hallowell's future. The first evening focused on the downtown, gateways, and the Whitten/Winthrop Road area with an emphasis on commercial uses and design standards. The second evening looked at rural and urban residential development as well as the potential reuses of the Steven's School property.

Why have vision workshops?

The workshop results will help the Comprehensive Plan Update Committee (CPUC) define goals and priorities to guide them as they draft policies for the City's future.

When and where were they held?

The CPC held two evening vision workshops, one on Wednesday, May 28, 2008, the second on Monday, June 2, 2008. The meetings covered many different topics and the public was encouraged to attend both sessions. A total of 68 residents attended the workshops, of these 23 attended both.

¹ Community Visioning Handbook, Maine State Planning Office

Workshop Agenda

Upon arrival, participants were provided with a nametag and asked to sit at a table at random, preferably with people they did not know (or do not normally sit with). The number of tables at the workshops depended on the number of attendees, typically about eight people per table. One CPUC member was asked to sit at each table to act as the scribe for the group exercises.

The workshops began with an introduction from Dawn Gallagher, chair of the CPUC. A brief synopsis of the comprehensive plan process and an outline of the evening's agenda followed the introductions. This included a description of the work done to date by the CPUC and of the next steps in the process as well as the role of the public, and how the plan will inform Hallowell's development policies and the work of the City Council and Planning Board.

The majority of each workshop was spent on a small-group exercise with topics based on the evening's agenda.

First Workshop Findings

The first evening had five topics of discussion - (1) special places, (2) waterfront, (3) downtown, (4) gateways, and (5) Whitten/Winthrop area. Maps of the downtown, waterfront proposal, and Whitten/Winthrop area were provided at each table. In addition, each participant received a handout to record their responses for exercises four and five. The workshop was attended by 43 residents.

Exercise 1: What makes Hallowell Special

In the introductory exercise, participants were asked to introduce themselves to their fellow table members and say one or two things they like about Hallowell. The purpose of the exercise was to have residents identify what is special and important to them about the City. These are the characteristics and the places that residents cherish, and that should be protected and promoted.

Workshop participants place high value on their neighbors and the sense of community. There is a general feeling of living in a unique community with a diverse population including "old-timers" whose families have lived in the City for generations and younger "bohemians" who bring a distinct perspective to the urban areas. There is

a sense of loyalty and pride in the part of Hallowell they call home. Open space and recreational areas were highlighted in particular “the res”, Vaughan Woods, and the Kennebec River. Downtown was highlighted for its historic architecture and walkability as well as the shops, amenities, and people who live and work there.

Across all of the tables, a similar theme emerged - **participating Hallowell residents value the sense of community, the people, the rural open spaces, and the urban amenities.**

Exercise 2: The Waterfront

Changes are happening along Hallowell’s waterfront. The addition of the Rail Trail and the plans for a new Waterfront Park are exciting prospects for the downtown. Participants were asked to look at a map of the proposed design for the new Waterfront Park and to discuss what they liked and did not like and what additional amenities they want to see in the waterfront area from the Rail Trail to the State Boat Launch. Gerry Mahoney of the Waterfront Advisory Committee walked the room and helped to answer specific questions about the waterfront park project.

The discussion at the tables revolved around how best to utilize the park area and connect it to the rest of the community. Many felt that parking should not be included within the park, as it is already such a small open space area. They wanted to ensure amenities such as trails, ample seating areas, picnic tables, restrooms, and landscaping that preserves the views of the river. A rental kiosk for kayaks and bikes was suggested as well as a bandstand, a designated fishing area, historic markers, and carry-in boat launches. One particularly bold idea was to extend the boardwalk from the park to the state boat launch. Practical considerations included planning for flooding, restoring the riverbank, and defining the size of allowable boats.

The waterfront theme across the tables emerged as - **a waterfront park with ample seating, landscaping, restrooms, and recreational opportunities.**

Exercise 3: Water Street - Downtown

Exercise 3 focused on the area just west of the waterfront – including both sides of Water Street from Academy Street to the Rail Bridge and continuing west along Second Street. This area is considered the historic commercial downtown. Participants were asked to list the types of amenities they would like to see in this area in the future.

Attendees focused on four discussion points around downtown enhancement: mixed-use, historic character, beautification, and maintenance. Many saw small-scale local retail business as being a key part of the City's character and wanted to avoid chain stores and conversion from retail to office (retail stores were seen as bringing more foot-traffic than offices). They also wanted to promote apartments on the second and third floors; they saw people living downtown as an important part of maintaining a vibrant community. The City should work to maintain and enhance the historic character by investing in the upkeep of existing buildings and designing new structure to complement the architecture and layout of historic buildings. In addition, beautification efforts such as landscaping, window boxes in storefronts, parks in vacant lots, and historically sensitive and consistent signage and light fixtures would help to enhance the overall feel of Water Street. With regards to maintenance, removing the "crown" on Water Street, cleaning storm drains, and providing ample parking were all mentioned by more than one table. In addition, some mentioned restoring the public right-of-way along Front Street, increasing traffic calming on Second Street, and fixing area sidewalks.

The emerging downtown theme - **a desire to retain and enhance the character of the downtown - maintaining and expanding the historic character and focusing on mixed small-scale retail and residential uses.**

Exercise 4a: Augusta Gateway

Exercise 4a focused on the area north of the railroad bridge to the Augusta line – from the Kennebec River, along both sides of Water Street and up to Second Street. This area is considered the gateway from Augusta. Participants were asked to mark the types of development and streetscape amenities they would like to see in this area on the handout provided. The tables then discussed their findings.

The majority of tables wanted to see a continuation of the downtown feel along Water Street with a focus on building styles and layouts that compliment the historic look, expand small business development in the areas where it is already occurring, and provide for some high-density mixed-use residential development. Participants were particularly interest in streetscape design providing for sidewalks, bike lanes, lighting, signage, and attractive landscaping. The design should promote a distinct look and feel in the gateway so people would know they had left Augusta and entered Hallowell, including a large welcome sign. Along Second Street, participants wanted to keep the area residential.

Exercise 4b: Farmingdale Gateway

Exercise 4b focused on the area south of Academy Street to the Municipal Garage – along Water Street. This area is the gateway from Farmingdale to the downtown. Participants were asked to mark the types of development and streetscape amenities they would like to see in this area on the handout provided. The tables then discussed their findings.

The majority of tables wanted to see a continuation of the downtown feel with a focus on streetscape amenities such as sidewalks and well-maintained landscaping throughout. Development should be mixed-use with a focus on small business and new structures should be compatible with historic style and layout of Water Street (no setbacks – close to road). Parking was discussed and there were comments regarding location (no parking lots on the riverside) and type (lots versus garages). The majority agreed that if there is an expansion of parking that it must be compatible with the historic character and well landscaped/buffered. Many also wanted to see the municipal garage moved off Water Street.

The emerging gateways theme – Gateways with a mix of shops, business, and residential spaces along a pedestrian friendly streetscape that reflects the unique historic character of Hallowell.

Exercise 5: Whitten and Winthrop Area

The final exercise focused on the area around Whitten Road and Winthrop Street. This area just over the turnpike from the elementary school represents a commercial node within Hallowell's rural district. Participants were asked to mark the types of development and streetscape amenities they would like to see in this area on the handout provided. The tables then discussed their findings.

The Whitten and Winthrop area of Hallowell was seen as part rural gateway, part economic development area. Most tables wanted to see the portion east of the turnpike retain a village residential feel with more sidewalk and bike access and no through road to the Augusta Crossing area. West of the turnpike, many felt that Winthrop Street should maintain a rural look with buffers along the road, open space, and a focus on minimizing negative traffic impacts (they did not want it to turn into another Western Avenue) while promoting greater sidewalk and bike lane access. Whitten Road was seen as having economic development potential for small business and some light industrial development. Key was to limit retail (keep retail in the downtown) and focus on business and industry that have limited traffic impacts but provide for a strong tax base. There was discussion as to the type of businesses to be allowed and some felt that efforts should be made to ensure that negative impacts to the environment be limited.

The emerging Winthrop/Whitten theme – **An area that provides a transition between the village and rural portions of Hallowell focused on maintaining the rural character while promoting responsible economic growth.**

Second Workshop Findings

The second evening had three topics of discussion - (1) downtown neighborhoods, (2) rural neighborhoods, and (3) the Stevens School Complex. Maps of City and Stevens School area were provided at each table. In addition, each participant received a handout to record their responses for exercises two, three, and four. Forty-eight residents attended the workshop.

Exercise 1: Downtown Neighborhoods

The first exercise focused on residential development within the historic downtown. The participants were asked (using the handouts provided) to identify the types of uses they would like to see in neighborhoods east of the turnpike. Uses included allowing for lodging (inns and b&bs), professional offices (doctors and accountants), personal services (salons and daycares), niche stores (arts and crafts), and accessory dwelling units (mother-in-law style apartments). The majority of tables felt that all of these uses should be allowed in “some places” within the City so long as they were compatible with surroundings homes and businesses, maintained the historic look of the community, and provided adequate parking options.

The tables also looked at examples of development styles and discussed what they would like to see with regards to new development in the area. The tables were split on whether or not large lot developments should be allowed in the area. Those who did want to see some form of larger lot felt that it should only be allowed in areas west of High Street or outside the downtown. Grid style, small lot, dense developments were favored by the majority of tables who would like to see this style continue in the downtown, with connections to existing City services, and built in a manner consistent with the type and layout of existing buildings.

The tables were asked to talk about their goals for the downtown neighborhoods and most came up with a similar theme – **Hallowell’s downtown should be a mixed-use, pedestrian friendly area where homes and businesses maintain the historic look and feel of the community and are compatible with one another.** Housing opportunities should be made available for all regardless of age or income and infrastructure improvements including street, sidewalk, and sewer system repairs should be a high priority for the City.

Exercise 2: Rural Neighborhoods

The second exercise of the evening focused on residential development in the rural areas of Hallowell. The tables were asked to discuss (using the handouts provided) what types of development they would prefer to see in the area west of the turnpike. The majority of tables felt that large lots (at least one acre in size) made the most sense in these areas. They did however stress that cluster development styles should be used, whenever feasible, to ensure open space preservation. To maintain the rural character participants talked about allowing for agricultural and farming uses in the area, buffering development from the roadway, and enhancing publicly-owned recreational spaces. Critical in the discussion of the rural area was the need to ensure that current property owners continue to receive a fair deal for their land.

The tables were asked to talk about their goals for the rural neighborhoods and most came up with a similar theme – **Hallowell’s rural neighborhoods should provide housing options to a wide variety of residents focused on maintaining the rural look and feel of the area and supporting the agricultural heritage.** Development should include sidewalks and bike lanes, where feasible, to connect into the larger network of pedestrian amenities within the community. Where commercial development does take place the focus should be on avoiding box stores and promote small, locally owned businesses.

Exercise 3: Stevens School

The final exercise focused on the Stevens School complex. Vision attendees were provided a brief overview of the history of the school grounds and State plans for the imminent sale of the land. A City committee was recently formed to address the City’s role in the sale/redevelopment of the property. The goal of the vision workshop exercise was to get an initial feel for what residents think could/should be done with the area.

Tables were asked to rank (on handouts provided) a series of use options for the Stevens School on a scale of “most important” to “least important”. All tables felt that including small business development was very important, so long as the focus was on offices rather than retail space. Providing for municipal space, maximizing tax revenue, and providing affordable housing were also seen as important by most tables. Other uses – open space and market rate housing – had mixed reviews and were seen as less important overall.

The tables were asked to talk about their ideas for the reuse of the Stevens School Complex and they came up with a broad series of uses from community centers, to an office park, to housing. **Key within their discussion was ensuring that the City maintained some form of control over the property outcome possible through the development of a master plan; that the school district not be allowed to dictate the direction of the discussion; and that business development focus on limit traffic office and/or arts spaces – leaving retail development in the downtown.**

1. Hallowell Vision Survey

Designed for residents who could not attend the workshop, the Hallowell survey provided residents with the opportunity to respond to the topics discussed at the public sessions. A total of 17 people responded to the online survey. This survey was available at the Hallowell Comprehensive Plan webpage hosted by Planning Decisions for the duration of the project and at the City's homepage. Half a dozen residents responded via the paper surveys provided at City Hall.

The questions on both surveys were identical, except for questions three, four, and six. In the on-line survey there were two questions (question 3 and 4) concerning the downtown separating between the core and the gateway areas of Water Street, in the paper survey this was consolidated to one question about the downtown overall. Question six was only posed to on-line participants.

Question 1: What are the most important issues facing Hallowell?

When asked to list the issues in Hallowell the many saw taxes, open space, and development as concerns. With regard to taxes there were issues around the current high level of taxation and what could be done to increase the tax base and lessen the tax burden. Open space preservation was a concern and many wanted to prevent degradation of natural resources, preserve open space areas, enhance trails and sidewalks, and mitigate the negative impacts of development. They also saw development in general as an issue and were concerned about sprawl and about large-scale retail encroachment from Augusta. In addition to these points, survey respondents also remarked on needs for affordable housing, preserving historic areas, and the need to provide adequate parking, transit, and recycling facilities.

Question 2: How do you think Hallowell's waterfront should develop? What should go in the new park next to the rail trail? At the boat landing? Other places?

The waterfront and the downtown went hand-in-hand in most of the survey results. Most respondents wanted to see some development of the park area with an emphasis

on restrooms, a bandstand/amphitheatre/gazebo, benches, and picnic areas. Many also talked about boating areas and talked about removing the parking to expand the green space. A select few also felt that the park was a bad idea and that money should be conserved. A number of residents commented on the need for shops and residences downtown that promote an overall vibrant feel for the waterfront area.

Question 3: What amenities would you like to see in Hallowell's downtown?

Survey respondents largely wanted to see a vibrant downtown with an emphasis on local retail stores and second floor apartments, safe pedestrian and bicycle access, ample parking, and amenities such as trashcans, lighting, benches, museums, and an information booth. Many also wanted to see the downtown fixed-up with an emphasis on retaining the historic character but also keeping it simple, as one said without the pomp. Those who answered the paper survey at City Hall also talked about development along outer Water Street, on either end of downtown, and many wanted to see development in these areas that is compatible with the look and feel of the downtown.

Question 4 (survey only): What would you like to see happen along Water Street's gateway from the Rail Bridge to Augusta? What would you like to see happen along Water Street's gateway from Academy Street to the municipal garage?

Maintaining and extending the historic feel of the downtown was important for many of the online respondents when talking about the gateways. They wanted to see development (both commercial and residential) that had a look and feel that was compatible with the historic areas. In addition, there was a desire for sidewalk and bike lane development as well as emphasis on parking, landscaping, and retaining the residential areas behind Water Street.

Question 5): What should happen along Whitten Road, and in the area from the elementary school to the senior center? How should it develop?

There were two types of answers when it came to the Witten Road area – one pro-development the other pro-open space. Those who wanted development felt that the area should focus on small business and industry that is mindful of the historic character along Winthrop Street and that has limited traffic impacts for the area. Many did not want to see chains or box stores and wanted to keep retail centered downtown. In addition, some wanted to see residential options including affordable housing developments in the area along with sidewalk and bike connections to the downtown. Those who wanted to preserve open space felt that development could negatively impact the natural resources in the area. Many were interested in seeing farm development in this area both as a means to protect open space and as an educational resource for the school.

Question 6): The Following are some options for the reuse of the Stevens School. Which do you see as most important? Which are less important?

Online participants were asked to fill out a graph similar to the one provided to attendees of the second workshop. This graph was designed to understand what uses residents feel are most important to consider when looking at the Stevens School. The majority of respondents felt that promoting small businesses/jobs was important for the future development of Stevens School. In addition, open space, affordable housing, and maximizing property revenue are also seen as import concepts to consider.

	Most Important	Somewhat Important	Indifferent	Less Important	Least Important
Maximize property tax revenue	3	5	2	3	3
Provide affordable housing	6	7	1	1	
Provide market-rate housing		5	1	3	1
Promote small business/jobs	5	11			
Provide open space/recreation	7	4	1	2	2
Provide space for municipal facilities	3	7	3	1	2

Question 7): Do you have any other ideas of how the Stevens School should be developed?

Ideas for the Stevens School included everything from housing to business development to education and the arts. Most participants wanted to see a mix of uses in on the Stevens School Campus. They saw opportunities for all types of housing from affordable to market rate to high end; they wanted office and business space; others wanted to turn the grounds into an educational expansion for USM or other colleges;; yet others wanted to see a performing arts center and an emphasis on youth and teen centers. Some also wanted to retain open space, to provide connections to surrounding trails and fields and to restore the historic buildings. A few saw a need for a master planning process and one felt that perhaps the City should purchase the land and then work to figure out the highest and best use.

Question 8): What do you think Hallowell should look like in the rural and historic residential areas?

Keep the rural – rural and the historic –historic; that is the general consensus of the survey respondents. There was some discussion about how to maintain the characteristics of these areas. In the historic areas - some favored stricter enforcement of historic standards; others wanted to maintain the feel but did not want to over-restrict new development. In the rural areas – there was a focus on maintaining the character by encouraging farming and open space preservation and focusing on development that does not induce sprawl. In addition to housing development a few wanted to focus on connective through sidewalks.

Question 9): What general recommendations do you have for the Comprehensive Plan?

Comments range from maintaining low taxes to focusing on zoning and reflect the values of the respondents. The majority wanted the committee to focus on maintaining Hallowell’s unique character (its small town historic look and feel), to work to provide alternative modes of transportation (in particular bus/trolley, sidewalks, and bike lanes), and to use incentives when developing regulations to promote responsible growth without burdening property owners and developers.