



Community Opportunities Group, Inc.

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MEMORANDUM

To: Dedham Master Plan Steering Committee
From: Community Opportunities Group, Inc.
Date: October 30, 2008
Re: Neighborhood Meetings Summary

This memo provides a summary of the three Neighborhood Meetings held for the Master Plan Update between late September and mid-October, 2008.

We were very pleased with the outcome of the meetings. Although attendance was low at some of the meetings, participants generated a lively discussion nevertheless. The turnouts for each meeting are as follows:

Precincts 1 & 2

September 23rd, Community House, 6:30pm—8:30pm
Number of attendants: 8 (plus 2-3 who did not sign in)

Precincts 5 & 7

October 8th, Greenlodge Elementary School, 6:30pm—8:30pm
Number of attendants: 14 (plus 2-3 who did not sign in)

Precincts 3, 4 & 6

October 14th, Endicott Estate (in conjunction with the Oakdale School PTO meeting), 6:30pm—8:30pm
Number of attendants: 27 (plus 3-4 who did not sign in)

Participants kept the discussion going throughout the allotted time period (and sometimes beyond). Each meeting was attended by at least one Steering Committee member. Thank you for making an effort to support the meetings.

This summary document compiles all the notes taken at the three meetings and organizes them by relevant Master Plan element. We also added another category, "Neighborhood Life, Civic Engagement, and Civic Pride" to capture some of the unique, community-related comments offered at the meetings. The intent of this document is to provide you with a record of the meetings with as much detail as possible and with minimal paraphrasing and abstraction of comments. However, we did edit and



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summarize the comments to some extent to make the document more relevant to the Master Plan. In addition to categorizing comments by Plan element, we also broke the comments out into town-wide issues and neighborhood-specific issues (except for the Community Services and Facilities and Governance elements which lend themselves almost entirely to town-wide issues). When the same comments were voiced at different meetings, we indicated this in the notes. Overall, the comments reiterate some of the issues that have already been discussed by the subcommittees, present some new town-wide issues to consider, and illustrate some of the strengths and needs of Dedham's individual neighborhoods.

The consolidated notes from the three Neighborhood Meetings are as follows:

TRANSPORTATION

Town-wide issues

- **Trucking-related issues** were brought up at two of the neighborhood meeting. Residents felt that not enough roads were prohibited to trucks, and that the police department does not do enough to enforce no-trucking regulations on roads where trucks are prohibited.
 - o Residents have tried to ask for stricter enforcement, but nothing is done. This is a chronic problem.
 - o Residents want to know whether it is possible to make more "no truck" zones. They also want to know who decides what areas will be truck routes and what the Town's policy is on trucking on local loads.
 - o Trucks have a particular problem at the interchange with I-95: trucks get off on Exit 14 (East Street exit) and the signage is not clear.
 - o This issue called into question whether the Town's priority is to serve businesses or residents.
 - o However, one resident also acknowledged that truck transportation is crucial to businesses and services – there needs to be a way to coexist.
- There are a number of transportation-related issues in **Dedham Square**.
 - o There is too much illegal parking in front of the Post Office.
 - o Dedham Square intersections are huge and unfriendly to pedestrians, especially for seniors, the disabled, children, etc.
- Reducing the volume and speed of **cut-through traffic** on residential streets was raised as an issue at two of the three meetings.
 - o Dedham is a cut-through for people looking to avoid Rte. 128/I-95.



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- There should be more traffic calming efforts to keep traffic off residential streets and on main corridors.
 - There was a traffic study done for Dedham at some point. It's time to revisit that and make some changes (for example, look at where stop signs are placed).
- One resident wanted to know if there was a plan to **get rid of double telephone poles** in neighborhood.
- There were a number of **positive comments about transportation** in Dedham.
 - Dedham has great access to highways.
 - The Highway Department has been making major improvements on roads, sewers, and sidewalks. The changes and improvements to infrastructure maintenance need to be given time to progress before positives effects are seen.
 - In general, the police department is responsive to resident complaints, questions, and requests.
- **Dedham's sidewalks** were cited as an issue at all three meetings (see also neighborhood-specific comments).
 - The Town needs to improve the quality and design of sidewalks. In their current state, many are crumbling. This sends a message that walkers aren't welcome and is a major safety issue. Poor sidewalk conditions also mean that runoff from streets is not properly handled, and this damages peoples' property.
 - Residents are concerned about the quality and lifespan of infrastructure, including sidewalks. Does the Town refrain from making upgrades because of costly ADA requirements?
- **Biking** in Dedham is very limited and walking can be unsafe due to fast speed of traffic and limited sidewalks. Often runners and bikers go on the streets because there are no sidewalks.
- **Commuter rail stations** are an asset, but they need to be more accessible, particularly Dedham Corporate station. In its current state you cannot even bike there, even though there are bike racks at the station.
- **Snow removal** raises challenges for sharing the street – when snow is plowed, it winds up on the sidewalk. When it is shoveled from the sidewalk, it winds up in the bike lane.
- Dedham needs to improve **the aesthetics of its transportation corridors**. Exit 15 is especially unattractive – one resident advises visitors to seek an alternate route when coming to Dedham.



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Neighborhood-specific issues

Precincts 1 & 2

- Route 1 has major impacts on residents of adjacent neighborhoods. However, it is also an asset.
 - There is too little pedestrian access across Route 1 and the roadway is confusing and dangerous in its current state.
 - Route 1 blocks access to important amenities—such as recreational facilities—for residents in Precincts 1 & 2. One attendant commented that she would like to be able to use the soccer fields on the other side of Route 1, but it is too difficult to get there on foot.
 - The sidewalks along Route 1 are crumbling.
 - More pedestrian crossings and better signage are needed to improve the connections across Route 1.
 - The visual quality of Route 1 is poor. There should be more greenery and landscaping.
 - There are significant impacts from Route 1 businesses on nearby residences.
 - Some businesses along Route 1 have put up fences to protect neighborhoods, but it is unclear who owns or controls them.
 - There is a concern with noise and light pollution along Route 1. The Town needs to enforce lighting regulations for businesses along Route 1. There should be a lighting policy to make this clear.
 - Route 1 is an asset. Having access to major big box retailers is very convenient and it adds to Dedham’s unique mix of historic homes, regional shopping destinations, and open space.
- Traffic is an issue at major intersections in Riverdale, and these areas require more traffic enforcement.

Precincts 5 & 7

- The construction work on the Sprague Street bridge has made traffic worse in the area around Turner Street.
 - Truck and car traffic comes in from Hyde Park. It is worse now for residential neighborhoods because drivers learned cut-throughs while the Sprague Street bridge was under construction and continue to use them.
 - There has been an increase in truck traffic and increased traffic speeds in general.
 - The police have not been very responsive.
- Trucking on East Street is a particular concern. The road has the third highest truck traffic volume of all routes in Dedham. Trucks travel at high speeds, produce a lot of noise, and wear out the roadway. However, one resident pointed out that East Street was designed to be a major cross-town route, so a higher volume of traffic should be expected.



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- The sidewalks in the Ashcroft neighborhood (Precinct 5 in the area north of what is known as Greenlodge neighborhood) are in poor condition.
 - o Reed Street's sidewalks are in particularly bad shape.

Precincts 3, 4 & 6

- East Dedham's roads are especially neglected. This is significant because the neighborhood is the gateway to Dedham but looks neglected.
- East Dedham lacks sidewalks.

LAND USE and ZONING

Town-wide issues

- There should be greater **diversity of retail** in Dedham, particularly along Route 1.
- There should be more **green building**. The Town should push for this by offering incentives.
- There was a concern at two of the meetings over the Town's control and handling of zoning for **adult entertainment uses**. It was acknowledged that there are 1st amendment issues here that need to be addressed when considering changing zoning.
 - o The zoning district that allows adult entertainment should be kept on Route 1 and should not be moved to Allied Drive area.
- Residents recognized the **positive aspects of Dedham's business base**: businesses pay double the residential tax rate, and this helps to pay for town services. Residential development, on the other hand, costs the town.
- Residents like the "**country-life**" **atmosphere** of Dedham. The town's neighborhoods of single-family homes make it feel safe
- Dedham should improve its **aesthetics**. It should be more distinctive-looking and beautiful to people coming from outside of town. This should be accomplished through more landscaping, not just through banners and signage.



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Neighborhood-specific issues

Dedham Square¹

- The diversity of retail in Dedham’s neighborhood commercial centers—including Dedham Square and the Bridge St. Commercial—is a concern. There needs to be a greater diversity of retail to meet more of residents’ daily needs.
- Dedham Square also has many positive attributes:
 - o There is a diversity of restaurants, and this has been an improvement over recent years.
 - o Other Dedham Square amenities include the movie theater and the Museum of Bad Art.
 - o Dedham Square provides a European village feel there that is absent in surrounding towns.

Precincts 1 & 2

- Legacy place may help improve the aesthetics and appearance of this part of Dedham by “raising the bar” for other development.

Precincts 5 & 7

- Residents in the Greenlodge/Ashcroft neighborhoods said they want to keep the area as primarily residential and do not want commercial uses.
- Oakdale Square is a major asset, but it needs revitalization. Currently, there are not many services or establishments residents would have reason to visit.
- Readville Yards should be kept residential – do not make it into a mixed-use or commercial area.
- In the Allied Drive commercial area, the Town needs to make sure agreements with developers are enforced. Residents are concerned about new development and how the town will make sure agreements with neighborhood are kept.

Precincts 3, 4 & 6

- Residents said that recent changes in the Oakdale neighborhood are not good. Residents were generally dissatisfied with land use—especially commercial land-use—decisions that were recently made. They feel that Town needs to protect Town resident interests when dealing with big developers.

¹ Most of the comments about Dedham Square were generated by the meeting for Precincts 1 & 2. However, since the Square includes several precincts, we treated it as a separate area for the purposes of this summary.



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COMMUNITY SERVICES and FACILITIES

Town-wide issues

- Residents identified and offered ideas about the need for **new community facilities** in Dedham.
 - o The town should use the facilities it already has rather than build new ones.
 - The town should have a multi-generational community facility that accommodates youth, families, seniors, etc. instead of building a new senior center.
 - Also, the Town should look at the cost of reusing its existing vacant building versus the cost of building new. This should always be considered in facilities decisions.
 - o Residents suggested that community facilities should be concentrated in the center of town.
 - The Ames Street building should be converted to the Town Hall, and the police station should be moved to the existing Town Hall.
 - o Dedham needs a capital plan.
 - There was a facilities study done at one point, and it found that new construction would be better than trying to expand existing buildings.
 - o Residents should vote on priorities, the top ten priorities should be chosen, and the order of implementation should be subject to a town vote.
 - o Dedham needs a new senior center.
- Residents mentioned a number of **positive aspects to Dedham's community facilities**:
 - o Dedham's libraries are a major asset and should be kept open.
 - o Dedham's neighborhood schools are major asset. They allow children to walk to school and need to be kept open.
- There was considerable concern over the state of **Dedham's public safety facilities**, especially the fire department facilities.
 - o The East Dedham Fire station is badly outdated, yet it covers 1/3 of the town's land area and 50% of its population.
 - o Currently, both fire stations serve two times the population they were originally designed to serve.
 - o Also, Dedham needs a new police station.
- The **Avery School** is a concern– it's out of code compliance and may be shut down.
 - o There is also a concern whether all elementary schools are being used to full potential, and whether school children are distributed well among the facilities available to them.
- The Town's **paving plan** should be structured so that no road goes for a very long time without being paved or treated.



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GOVERNANCE

Town-wide issues

- There were several comments on the need for more **transparency** within Dedham's government.
 - o Residents identified the Planning Board in particular as being non-transparent in their decision-making and procedures.
 - o There should be more fiscal accountability and transparency. Residents need to know where tax dollars are going: taxes are high in Dedham compared to surrounding towns, yet schools are perceived as being inferior, facilities aren't as good, etc.
 - o There should be transparency in the assessing process.
- There was particular concern and dissatisfaction with the way Town government handles **development**:
 - o It is felt that there is bias in favor of commercial development and business in Dedham and for people who are passing through rather than living there.
 - o It is generally unclear how the Town makes land use decisions.
 - o There was general concern over slowing down the "building frenzy" in Dedham. Residents said that the Town (Planning Board) needs to tighten criteria for special permits & variances.
 - There are developments going on that do not comply with zoning and developers are using variances for many aspects of the development.
 - o Residents commented on the amount and type of power of the Planning Board and ZBA.
 - The Planning Board has a lot of power and there may be a need to consider how much authority is given to them.
 - Dedham has an appointed ZBA, and they are responsible for issuing variances. They may have too much discretion. Also, the ZBA seems to be a pro-businesses board to the detriment of the needs and concerns of residents.
 - o There is a problem with zoning enforcement in Dedham. The Town's current zoning enforcement officer has only been on the job for a short amount of time.
 - o Continuity from one official's tenure to the next is a major problem. This is why enforcement of agreements between businesses and residents drops off. Agreements with neighborhoods need to be protected over time.
- There is a lack of sufficient **communication** from Town Hall to residents. In general, there needs to be a better "info pipeline" between town, citizens, business-owners, etc.
 - o Postings in Library and Town Hall are not sufficient for public notices. There should be more use of post mail and email to communicate with residents, especially when there is a project, event, or other happening affecting a certain area.
 - o The Town website is under-utilized. However, it was recognized that the website cannot be the sole source of information.



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- The town meeting minutes exist, but there must be a way to disseminate information more effectively. There should be more creative solutions to citizen outreach.
- Residents felt that Town Hall has been **resistant to citizen concerns**, input and efforts.
 - Town departments are not really open to resident feedback, ideas, or concerns.
 - There was a general concern about what town officials are doing to uphold community interests.
 - Citizens wants more input, more involvement in decision-making, and more influence in town affairs.
- There needs to be more citizen **education on voting and governance**. At present it is not user-friendly.
 - There needs to be more citizen education about the town meeting process, even for town meeting members.
 - Mini-town meetings have been the town's answer for citizen education, but they don't always make a difference.
- There needs to be **training for town staff** to help them meet demands for using new technology.
 - Town departments are "required" to post minute and agendas on the town website, but there has been no training to help departments accomplish this.
- Residents wondered if there should be a change in Dedham's **form of government**
 - Some felt there is a need for a more organized structure for making Town decisions and more strong central leadership.
- Regarding **Town services**, one resident thought that the glass wall at front desk of Town Hall is off-putting and communicates an "us-versus-them" mentality.

HOUSING and POPULATION

Town-wide issues

- Residents commented on several **positive aspects of Dedham's housing and demographic mix**.
 - Dedham's diverse mix of housing allows for its economic diversity among residents, and this is a positive aspect of the community.
 - Some residents think it would be good to have more racial diversity. However, Dedham is more racially diverse today than it was twenty and thirty years ago. In this regard Dedham has come a long way.
- Residents identified **housing-related challenges** for the town.



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- Median home prices in Dedham have increased a lot in recent years. However, there is more affordable housing in Dedham than other towns.
- There need to be more housing options for the aging population and young families.
- Dedham has a particular challenge with housing because it has little land left to develop and must work with what it has.

Neighborhood-specific issues

Precincts 1 & 2

- Residents thought the housing mix in Precincts 1 & 2 should stay the same.
- The amount of affordable housing in Precincts 1 & 2 should be maintained but not increased.

Precincts 5 & 7

- Residents were concerned over the new 40B developments
 - In particular, they were concerned about the prices the units will rent for and, therefore, the types of people that will live in the development.
- Residents are generally concerned about upkeep of rental properties. There is a problem with absentee landlords.
 - One resident suggested having a landlord education program or network in an effort to get at this problem
- Residents in Precincts 5 & 7 were not in favor of housing other than single-family homes; however they wanted a mix of different *looking* single-family homes.

Precincts 3, 4 & 6

- Residents are concerned that dense housing developments being built will have negative effects and impacts on the town, including increased traffic and demand for services.
 - These developments will leave the town “damaged” and “infected.”
- Residents feel powerless over the 40B developments that have been built in or near to their neighborhood.
- There are too many group homes in the Oakdale and East Dedham neighborhoods. Residents want to know why these are allowed to be built and why there is no notice to neighbors.



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OPEN SPACE and RECREATION

Town-wide issues

- Residents thought there should be more **access to the Charles**, including biking/walking trails and boating access.
 - o In particular, there needs to be certain amenities at boat launches to make them more convenient, including parking and a community boathouse where people can leave their boats overnight. A boat rental facility would also be good.
- **Playgrounds** are a major asset in Dedham.

Neighborhood-specific issues

Dedham Square

- The Keystone property in Dedham Square could provide access to the Charles River.
- Dedham Square needs more green space or public space, e.g. a place to eat lunch that is close to take-out establishments.

Precincts 1 & 2

- There need to be more playgrounds in Precinct 1. The Ames school used to have a playground before it was converted to an industrial park.
- Riverdale lacks recreational opportunities for special needs children.

Precincts 5 & 7

- Residents in the Greenlodge neighborhood have been active in creating recreational opportunities. In the late 1980's there was a playground fund raising and volunteer group, which involved PTOs and other community members. They organized, fundraised, and built a playground.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Town-wide issues

- Residents are interested in seeing principles of **sustainability and "green" development** reflected in the Master Plan.



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Neighborhood-specific issues

Precincts 5 & 7

- Trees are a major asset in the Greenlodge/Ashcroft neighborhoods, but they are also a maintenance issue. There is concern that larger trees are not treated properly because their limbs are cut off to make room for utility lines.
- Dedham seems to provide ad hoc tree maintenance. Residents wanted to know if there is a policy, plan, or technique for caring for trees.

Precincts 3, 4 & 6

- There was a concern that trees were being cut down in the Oakdale neighborhood.
- Residents commented that the Town should recognize and promote the importance of the Mother Brook. It is the oldest man-made canal in the USA and is both an historic and natural resource.

HISTORIC and CULTURAL RESOURCES

Town-wide issues

- Dedham's **historical buildings** are a major asset for the town.
- Residents pointed out that **Dedham is historically significant**. Since 1793 it has been the County Seat of Norfolk County, but its prominence in this regard has fallen away. There is a need to revitalize this aspect of Dedham.

NEIGHBORHOOD LIFE, CIVIC ENGAGEMENT and CIVIC PRIDE

Town-wide issues

- Residents cited many **positive aspects of Dedham's social fabric**, including pride in the community, involvement and volunteerism, and the production of many social events such as parades and concerts.



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- Dedham's **neighborhood associations** are growing. Citizens should encourage this and use email and websites for greater community organization and connection.
- **The people of Dedham are the town's greatest asset**, and the town should capitalize on their energy, generosity, and creativity.
- The **arts community** is a rising force in Dedham. There needs to be more promotion of the arts.
- Residents thought the **town feels safe** and like the fact that it is close to the city but not the city.
 - o One resident liked that Dedham feels "a little gritty" and in this way is not like other suburbs.

Neighborhood-specific issues

Precincts 5 & 7

- The (social) fabric of the (Greenlodge) neighborhood is important. There are many families with children who are interested in connecting with each other and taking on projects together.
 - o The neighborhood used to and still does have block parties.
- Precinct 5 is divided in many ways and in general, neighborhood identities do not align with Precinct boundaries. There are different school catchment districts within it and the train tracks divide it.
 - o These overlapping boundaries make it difficult to have discussions about neighborhood issues when organized by precinct.
 - o There may be a rationale for identifying neighborhoods by some other geography than precincts.