

Woonsocket Comprehensive Plan, Steering Committee Meeting

March 15, 2022

Attendees

- **HW Team**
 - Jeff Davis
 - Nate Kelly
 - Kellie King
 - Gabby Queenan
- **Kevin Proft:** City Planner
- **Carl Johnson:** Zoning Official
- **John Hoyceanyls:** CVS Health, VP of property
- **Meg Rego:** NWBRV NeighborWorks Blackstone River Valley (CDC). CDC focuses on affordable housing and other activities (small kitchen start-up, after-school programs, etc.)
- **Brad Fesmire:** Artistic Director at Riverzedge Arts (arts/design focused youth-serving organization)
- **Jon Pratt:** Planning Board & City Engineer
- **Veronica Vega:** Woonsocket Building Department
- **Adam Remick:** Woonsocket Police Department
- **Steve Crisafulli:** Activitas
- **Herson Gonzalez:** Vida Church
- **Linda Plays:** Woonsocket Director of Human Services

Notes

Steering Committee Makeup

- [Jeff Davis]: We heard from the group some support and interest in further diversifying the Steering Committee in terms of race, gender, language etc. Kevin, can you provide us with an update on where things stand?
 - [Kevin Proft]: I was able to invite someone from the Lao temple and a police officer that the Mayor recommended. I have not heard back from either of them yet, but I will follow up after this meeting. In addition, Wendell, our planning board representative, sent over some names from his connections with the PTO who are bilingual and those could be good additions as well so I will follow up with them too.

Overview of March 24 Public Workshop

- [Jeff]: The main objective of today's meeting is to continue prepping for the public workshop on March 24th at the library. We want to be thinking about ways we can keep spreading the word about this event. As a reminder, for those that cannot attend in person, we will have online options on the website to collect information as well.
- [Jeff]: We are trying to keep the event as brief as possible to respect people's busy schedules. This was a point of feedback we received from last month. We will be opening registration at 5:45 pm and we will have the gallery up with some light refreshments. If anyone has thoughts on where we should order those refreshments from, please email Kevin. We would like to

support a local business. After the registration, we will have a very brief presentation (15 minutes or so) similar to the one the Steering Committee saw previously. The presentation will include what the Comp Plan is, why it is important, high level demographics and trends, etc. We will then have 45 minutes of breakout sessions with discussion groups. The groups will discuss what they love about Woonsocket, what they want to change, and what is missing. We would love to have volunteers from the Steering Committee serve as facilitators. We have six facilitators so far and in the event that we get great turnout, we would love to have volunteers from the group to staff the gallery or lead discussion groups. At that point we will then break for the open house. We will have a series of maps of the city showing current land use, natural resources, etc. We will also have three boards with information about population, education, housing, and transportation data. We will have a series of topic summary posters too asking people what their top issue is related to things like economic development and housing. The goal is to keep this open ended, as this is more of a listening session and we want to be able to give folks an opportunity to share whatever is on their mind. We will have interactive set ups during the open house, things like whiteboards, spin the wheel, etc. to make this portion as fun and interactive as possible. Again, everything offered in person will also be available online on the website.

Maps for March 24 Public Workshop

- [Kellie King]: (Shared current draft maps for the public workshop) Right now we have maps including historic and cultural resources, natural resources, parks and recreation, existing land uses, circulation and transportation, and public infrastructure/services/facilities. Is there anything missing from these maps that folks would like to see included?
 - [Meg Reyo]: Is the point of the maps to be a conversation starter at the workshop?
 - [Jeff]: Yes, the maps will be interspersed with boards asking people what their top priorities are for different topics. The maps provide a nice way for people to visualize where in the city things are needed or are already taking place.
 - [Herson Gonzalez]: There does not seem to be anything on the maps right now representing places of faith.
 - [Kellie]: Those should be easy to look up by address. Do we have a preference for where we would add those on the maps?
 - [Kevin]: Maybe on the historic and cultural resources map?
 - [Jeff]: That seems like an easy enough change to make. We just want to make sure we do not offend anyone if we miss any small locations. But hopefully we can look at this as an opportunity to update our information too.
 - [Meg]: It seem like it would also be good to add social service agencies and resources for people?
 - [Herson]: Yes, maybe also food banks and soup kitchens that are open right now?
 - [Jeff]: We may need some help with identifying those locations and the services they provide?
 - [Herson]: I can work on gathering this information for the soup kitchens and food banks.
 - [Jeff]: Thank you, this will be good information to have for the plan as well.

- [Meg]: Another piece to include is around access to fresh food. We did an EPA project a few years ago that might have a good food access map layer. It might be good to include this information in addition to those pieces with the soup kitchens and food banks.
- [Adam Remick]: What about including the DMV? Social services buildings? This could be added to the infrastructure map? We also have the probation office which offers job training and the social security administration building.
 - [Meg]: DHS is next to the DMV too.
 - [Linda]: DHS has moved to Pond Street now.
- [Jeff]: If you have any other thoughts on these maps, please feel free to email myself or Kevin. We will try to get these updated before the meeting next week.

Posters for March 24 Public Workshop

- [Gabby Queenan]: (Shared current draft boards for the public workshop) Right now we have boards which provide some high-level statistics for demographics, housing and economic development, and commuting and transportation in Woonsocket. Are there elements that people think are missing right now or need additional emphasis?
 - [Kevin]: The statistic on Woonsocket employees commuting seems a little confusing. We should make a note to come back to that one to see if it can be clarified further.
 - [Meg]: I think it would be good to include how much housing stock needs repair. For example, if there are 18,000 housing units, list how many are in good condition, how many need repairs, etc.
 - [Kevin]: One way to get at that may be including the age of housing stock in the community.
 - [Meg]: It would be good to also include affordable housing numbers for the city, things like how much is deed restricted versus naturally occurring, has the city exceeded our 10% affordable housing goal, etc.
 - [Kevin]: I think it is hard for people to wrap their minds around some of these statistics unless there are comparisons included too (County level, state level, etc.). It would be good to include this information too.
- [Jeff]: Related to demographics, in terms of the exit survey, we are planning to include demographics questions. Is everyone comfortable with us asking these basic demographics questions in the exit survey?
 - [Kevin]: To confirm, these are anonymous, correct?
 - [Jeff]: Yes, no names or addresses will be collected. We will have a paper survey for people to do in person and then an online one as well.

Volunteering and Advertising for March 24 Public Workshop

- [Jeff]: We have five staff from Horsley Witten that will be serving as facilitators for the workshop. Kevin, are you able to serve as a facilitator as well?
 - [Kevin]: Yes.
- [Jeff]: Ideally, we would like a few more facilitators to join. This will be a very simple process, participants will have their own worksheets to take notes on, facilitators can take high level

notes on flip charts, and we can train volunteer facilitators. Is anyone else comfortable serving as a facilitator as well?

- [Herson]: Yes, I am interested as well.
- [Kevin]: I will ask Mike and Maria Rosa from our staff if they would like to facilitate as well. Maria Rosa is bilingual.
- [Herson]: I am bilingual as well and can facilitate one of the Spanish speaking groups.
- [Jeff]: Thank you all for volunteering for that. We also need some volunteers to help with staffing the gallery. This may involve talking to folks as they write responses down at the boards, helping to think through questions or ideas, things like that.
 - [Kevin]: Can facilitators do this as well?
 - [Jeff]: Yes.
 - [Kevin]: Myself, Mike and Maria Rosa may also be able to do this.
 - [Veronica Vega]: I can assist as well if needed.
 - [Kevin]: Not everyone from the Steering Committee is here too so we can follow up with them as well to see who else can volunteer.
- [Jeff]: In addition, as a reminder we emailed everyone recently with a bunch of advertising materials for the workshop (posters, fliers, social media, etc.). Please pass this information along to your networks. We have also updated the website with the meeting information. We have created a link on the website to automatically translate the website into Spanish. We have updated the master outreach list based on feedback from everyone's homework responses. We have reached out to everyone on that list and we are also sending out e-blasts to everyone who signed up for more information from the website. There is also a draft press release. Kevin, have we heard back from the Mayor's office yet on approval for that?
 - [Kevin]: No, but I will follow up after this meeting.
- [Jeff]: Once we have that approval, we will do full media press outreach. Please help spread the word with your connections. How is everyone doing on outreach so far?
 - [Meg]: We are hand distributing the fliers in English and Spanish to 147 affordable housing apartments this week. We can also put this on social media. And we plan to hold one of the listening sessions with staff at an upcoming meeting.
 - [Veronica]: I am spreading the word on social media with people that are my age. People have a lot of competing commitments, but hopefully some of them are able to attend.
 - [Adam]: I can put the poster in our lobby and talk internally with staff about getting this on social media.
 - [Herson]: I will make sure this goes out on the ministry page to the church and also do a mass email to all the pastors in town with this information. I will also try to get the council woman to put it on her pages as well.
 - [John Hoyceanyls]: I have passed on the information to our internal media folks to get things posted there.
 - [Brad Fesmire]: We have already done a Woonsocket conversation with 30 or so youth. We will be sending fliers home with all youth in the program today. We will be posting fliers on social media too. Depending on if parents attend the workshop next week, we may do a separate focus group with parents of our youth as well.

- [Stephen Crisafulli]: I have passed on the information to my network in the city and planning department at URI as well.
- [Jon Pratt]: I can try to get this on the Facebook page for the water department. I can put up posters at some of the facilities around the city too.
- [Linda Plays]: I can do a push to the senior center, housing authority, and senior disabled housing complexes in the city.
- [Kevin]: I can talk to city staff about adding this to the city social media pages and website. I will do some mass mailing to city staff about the upcoming meeting and include a link the survey. I will also put posters on the front door of city hall, the treasury, and the clerk's office.
- [Jeff]: Thank you all. If anyone needs any additional information (hard copies, different formatted materials, etc.) please let us know.
- [Meg]: For Kevin or Linda, the library has a good distribution list too I believe?
 - [Kellie]: I have reached out to them and they are adding this to their internal contact lists already.
- [Jeff]: We also heard back from the Downtown Woonsocket Collaborative and the Northern RI Chamber of Commerce that they will distribute this information to their folks as well. We are still working on connecting with the school system to get things circulated as well. Kevin, have we heard anything new from the school district?
 - [Kevin]: No.
 - [Brad]: I am heading over there for some meetings and I can bring this up with admin at the high school and principals at the two tech schools.
 - [Meg]: We used to reach out to the superintendent's office and once the materials were approved by the central office, we could break up fliers into batches of 25 for offices and the secretarial staff were willing to distribute those to each of the cubbies for teachers.
- [Jeff]: Brad, as the first person to run a Woonsocket Conversation, any tips or feedback from the group?
 - [Brad]: We have a very targeted and committed group of teenagers here working with us eight hours a week. We have the fortune that they are very open and honest all the time so it is easy to get their feedback. It might be more challenging in settings where you have strangers coming in who may be less comfortable sharing. The questions and format that you provided for this really lent itself to some good honest feedback. The results from our conversations were similar to what we have heard before. Youth feel like they have a bleak future here and it is really up to us to run with their feedback and implement some change so they can see a brightness in their future. None of the youth in that conversation said they want to stick around, and that is a problem because we want people to stay and keep some talent and passion here in the city.
 - [Jeff]: Thank you, Brad. If any of those students are comfortable doing this, it would be great to have them in the room next week at the workshop to share their perspective with the other adults too.
- [Herson]: Can you send me an updated email with exactly what you would like us to share with our networks?

- [Jeff]: Yes. We will also send a follow up email to the full SC meeting list and make the asks very explicit.
- [Jeff]: What is everyone expecting for next week? What do you think we will hear from the public?
 - [Kevin]: I am uncertain about how many people will show up and where in the city they will be coming from, but I am excited and interested in hearing what people have to say. Hopefully we have good attendance.
 - [Meg]: A note from doing these kinds of events before, music is helpful. It really loosens people up to have some other background noise. I am hoping for some interesting feedback. I think it will be good to hear directly from residents.
- [Jeff]: Is anyone not able to attend the event next week?
 - [Stephen]: I will be out of town unfortunately.
 - [Meg]: I am unable to attend.
- [Jeff]: Thank you all for your input. Please email me or Kevin if you have any additional ideas and we will keep things moving. We look forward to seeing many of you in person next week.

Follow-Up

- Kevin:
 - Following up with Steering Committee potential additions (police officer, Lao temple representative, Wendell PTO suggestions)
 - Confirm Mike and Maria Rosa can facilitate for March 24 public workshop
 - Email the Steering Committee to request volunteers for facilitating/staffing the gallery for the workshop
 - Confirm press release approval with Mayor's office
- Gabby:
 - Update posters for public workshop based on Steering Committee feedback
- Kellie:
 - Update maps for public workshop based on Steering Committee feedback
- Herson:
 - Gather information about locations and services provided for soup kitchens and food banks and share with Kevin and Jeff
- All:
 - Submit recommendations to Kevin for local businesses we could order refreshments from for the March 24 public workshop
 - Share information (posters, fliers, social media ads) with your networks for the workshop