

J M GOLDSON

EMPOWERING PEOPLE — CREATING COMMUNITY

CANTON COMMUNITY PRESERVATION PLAN

Focus Group Summaries

Prepared by JM Goldson LLC 1/18/2022

Summary

In the week of January 10 through January 14, 2022, JM Goldson conducted four focus groups with Canton stakeholders on the following topics:

1. Community Housing
2. Active Recreation
3. Historic Preservation
4. Open Space and Passive Recreation

The focus groups were attended by community members, each one with a particular involvement or investment in the issue at hand. One member of the JM Goldson team facilitated each meeting, taking notes on a shared screen to guide the conversation.

Prior to the focus groups, which took place over Zoom, the project team provided participants with a worksheet that asked them to identify strengths and opportunities to leverage as well as challenges or issues to recognize/overcome regarding the topic of discussion. Participants began the discussions by going over some of their ideas in response to these questions. The notes from each focus group are displayed in the subsequent pages with a transcription of each “sticky note” below.

Key Findings:

- Housing affordability is a challenge faced by many Canton residents, backed up by several specific anecdotes in the focus group. However, participants identified opportunities for CPA funding that can help create more affordable options in the community.
- Residents feel that active recreation in Canton is a well-supported and widely appreciated element of the town. Further support and coordination of active recreation opportunities would be something that would benefit the community and its many families.
- Participants identified many historic and natural resources that are present in Canton. Protecting these resources will help Canton maintain and further its appeal.
- There are many historic resources that can be utilized in the community, but it will take more funding and volunteer effort to take on some of the more large-scale projects identified by the Historical Society and others.
- Open space resources are widely used in Canton, and participants identified several options for increasing accessibility of some of these resources to meet increasing demand.

Community Housing

The Community Housing focus group took place at 6:45 PM on Tuesday, January 11. Participants in the focus group identified challenges that Canton faces when it comes to housing affordability and availability, as well as opportunities for improvement and strengths that the community can leverage. Canton is above the 10 percent affordability requirement on the Subsidized Housing Inventory, meaning the community has more control over future development. Participants identified this as an

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opportunity that could lead to more strategically placed units. Other strengths identified are the adoption of the Housing Trust, Canton's status as an MBTA Community (which was identified as both a challenge and an opportunity), and the success of the COVID-19 Emergency Rental program. Participants identified potential opportunities for CPA funding and support, including a part-time housing coordinator, a down payment assistance program, and the expansion of the Housing Authority's Rubin Court Complex.

Participants identified several issues regarding housing in Canton, including the unaffordability of many housing options, the coming expiration of 300 units on the Subsidized Housing Inventory by 2035, and the long wait list for Housing Authority assistance for family housing. Several specific examples of housing unaffordability were mentioned to illustrate the extent of the problems Canton is facing. However, there were mentions of resistance to housing and zoning changes, particularly multi-family buildings, that could create more affordable options.

What are the greatest opportunities and challenges related to this topic area in your community?



Opportunities or Strengths to Leverage

Challenges or Issues to Recognize or Overcome

Homebuyers program - deed restricted unit or loan	Families had housing and lost jobs then became homeless and hard to find affordable housing
Canton is above 10% on SHI - more control over development	During Covid - emergency housing in Canton - family in position needing to pay more in Canton for rent than more urban areas - pickle b/c can't go back to urban area
More strategically placed units	Housing and zoning changes are controversial
Housing Trust adopted	300 expiring units on SHI and would be under 10% by 2035 or so
CPA - great opportunity	Single-mom homeless and trying to get housing - luckily child can stay with someone in Canton
Covid 19 Emergency Housing Program (did it very quickly) and ran it successfully - \$52K helped 11 families	Unaffordability is a real issue

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- temporary 3 month - up to 80% of your rent for 3 months as grant or past rent due - went to landlord.	
Down payment assistance needed	MBTA community - when more people come in that means need more services
Local zoning has a lot going for it (best practices) Housing Choice Community	Families who had to move out b/c couldn't afford section 8 subsidized housing - if get job can't get the same section 8 subsidy and could lose housing b/c can't afford the unit without the subsidy
MBTA community (both challenge & opp) - have basic infrastructure (train, bus, sewer, no water restrictions)	HA - wait list - family - 10 years
Haven't tapped into HOME/CDBG - could be more efficient with Community Development \$ - maybe help with Regional housing services agency - could get more grants	Need infrastructure and place to manage - housing trust but no staff other than Laura - staffing support need
HA - looked at expanding last year with the state - The state deemed "not at this time" - Possibly later. Surplus land - no frontage - would need to go through Julius Rubin Court - land needed for frontage - possibly available through tax taking (also conservation value for frontage lot) - Rubin complex takes up about 50% of the parcel - entire land area is dry - LIP.	COA - need for housing assistance if through the roof - continuing need
Growth is a sign of a healthy community	NIMBY: schools, density, burn-out factor after unwanted 40Bs, traffic;
Regional housing services agency or another part-time planner - 8 communities interested in RHSA	95% of people who live in Canton work outside of town; 95% of people who work in Canton live elsewhere (same # of jobs)
Similar rental program at housing authority from State to help people temporarily	Family moving out of Canton, couldn't afford \$3,300 rent so moved to South Carolina due to housing costs
Demand for small units is high - more people aging - so now not as affordable anymore	Lot of asks from CPA - spending the housing \$ all along - how do we leverage efficiently
HA: 85-88% seniors & disabled; rest family units (26 units) plus scattered site (4-5 more) 13 units barrier free	Now feeling resistance to multi-family - feeling that we've done our bit and now its other people's turn
Would like a local program for rental assistance esp. temporary basis to help tide people over - to stabilize people	Despite hearing usual criticisms - there is strong cohort that support such as Planning Board - most of CPC seems favorable and have regularly funded; fact that Trust passed;
Asking CPA funds for part-time housing coordinator - active proposal	SB gets split on some issues but also strong advocates - town leadership gets the need for affordable housing

Active Recreation

The Active Recreation focus group took place at 5:00 PM on Tuesday, January 11. Participants identified strengths and challenges associated with recreation opportunities in Canton. Overall, residents feel that Canton is a great supportive community for active recreation; the tight knit

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community and strong family presence mean that there is significant support for recreation opportunities in the town. Several opportunities for CPA funding were identified, including the hiring a new Parks and Recreation director, who is expected to start soon, unifying the youth programs, improving lighting over fields at the high school, and considering dedicating a greater portion of CPA funds to recreation considering how many people benefit.

Participants identified issues that Canton faces when it comes to recreation, including the need for better communication and coordination on determining recreation priorities and the need for a more cohesive plan for future projects. Specifically, participants described a desire for more funding for soccer and lacrosse. Overall, participants cited a need for more cohesion in the creation of recreation opportunities and a benefit to revisit the existing recreation plan.

What are the greatest opportunities and challenges related to this topic area in your community?



Opportunities or Strengths to Leverage

Challenges or Issues to Recognize or Overcome

Many people don't leave Canton - Leverage the children of the town	Zero time to engage on these town issues
Strong in sports and lot of parents care about youth and what's going on in town (not just about your own kids)	Lot of pockets of folks advocating for their area of interest - needs to be more working collectively to figure out what we need
Tight knit community in Canton and youth and future and giving every resource we can	Lot of projects seem to come about because someone wanted to do it - should be more of a plan.
Sports provide escape for kids and can make a real difference - not just investing money in outdoor spaces but in the future - the kids in this town	Trying to do outreach for CPA
Sports opportunities for youth is an attractive part of our community	Agree with need for collaboration and better communication with other programs

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More space for lacrosse on the other side of Rt. 138 - home field is at Windsor Woods (Stoughton/Canton line) - Tom Gunning Field (not lit) - Play at the High School (turf and lighting) but don't have other place to practice - want something locally at Galvin or Kennedy	Felt that CPA funding - need cause get group together and go do it - refreshing that CPC is asking for this feedback
Great supportive community for active recreation	Need more collaboration to get better outcome - more outreach to people who are too busy.
Hiring new Parks & Rec director - opportunity to put on expectation list - need to do better job as overseer of town - unifying the youth programs and programming	A lot of funding has gone to baseball and softball - not as much for soccer and lacrosse
Consider more proportion of CPA funds for recreation considering how many people benefit	10% statutory minimums - sounds not proportional. The undesigned should have more people weighing in on priorities.
Improving lights to LED over fields - High School (existing lights are 22 years old)	Look at numbers of people benefiting from the recreation facilities - should get more funding.
	Too bad artificial turf is not an option
	Need a plan with priorities
	Youth sports - seem like in too much competition - should be more unified and coordinated
	Need better communication and coordination to come up with recreation ideas for CPA funding
	2016 Rec Master plan - focuses on field needs but not as much on lighting and other things - is this guiding anybody

Historic Preservation

The Historic Preservation focus group took place at 5:00 PM on Thursday, January 13. Participants discussed the many historic resources available in Canton and the challenges that come with preserving and promoting these resources. Some of the strengths identified include the pride that Canton residents have in their history, the Pequitside area, the popularity of the Paul Revere site, and the coordination between the historical society and other historic preservation groups that determines funding priorities. Participants had many ideas for furthering historic preservation in Canton, including rehabilitating sites such as the Ponkapoag school, repairing the library, and creating more signage to highlight the historic features in town.

The biggest challenge identified by participants was the piecemeal approach that has been applied to historic preservation for years and the lack of vision for a holistic plan. There is a very large wish list of potential projects and limited funding to take on large projects. Lastly, a lack of staff and volunteers in the historic preservation realm in the town can create challenges for tackling large projects or multiple projects at a time.

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Library - needs exterior repairs more than Memorial Hall	We lack the vision for a holistic plan
Historic Canton	Costs - costs too much perception
Build on the pride that Cantonites have in the history	Richard Gridley property (1854) - Town sold
Williams Estate - Armando Building	Historical society has lots of big projects right now, large wish list
Church next to Ponkopoag School	Current goal is to keep buildings open and accessible; rehab is extremely expensive, what are we using the building for?
Signs to advertise historic resources around town - in open spaces nearby, along trails, etc.	Piecemeal approach for years
Would it be helpful to have a historic preservation plan for the coming years?	Historical society - runs into problems with volunteers and manpower
There is coordination between historical society and others when applying, about how the money gets spent - lots of overlap between members	Housing development can be threatening to historic preservation; newcomers don't see the value of historic preservation
Cohesive vision for historic Canton	Lots of historical opportunities, but hard to coordinate everything
Revere site, Ponkopoag school - historic and original, sitting empty right now, Scouts want to rehabilitate	Applications come from Commission and Society, also Fire Dept
Wayfinding committee - signage to point people to points of interest	

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Shared vision, what can we all agree on?	
How can we bring historic resources together to bring a bigger draw	
CPC office - historic building	
Tilden property opening next year	
Historical society - inventory of historic resources	
Historic district - not quite yet a priority but would be nice	
Pequitside - lots of opportunity, tavern	
Paul Revere site - all about teaching innovation	
Opportunities to continue bringing in different demographics, making resources inclusive and a teaching opportunity	
Historical society - look at more town buildings	
Successful efforts to leverage outside funding - private and state, earmarks, for Tilden, Revere, collaborating with other towns	
History needs to be promoted so people are made aware - interpretive signs, other ways. Both within the town and through the wider area	
Canton Corner - historic district	
National historic district - comes down to manpower and effort, time	

Open Space and Passive Recreation

The Open Space and Passive Recreation focus group took place at 6:45 PM on Thursday, January 13. Participants spoke in depth about Canton's wealth of open space opportunities, as well as some of the challenges the community is facing in protection of open space. Mentioned as areas of strength in the community were the Pequitside farm and woods, the current pond access and potential for furthering accessibility, and the general embrace of open space usage among Canton residents. Participants floated several ideas about creating more open space access through trail development, connections of current open space areas, and the purchase of more open space parcels.

Participants identified several challenges that the town faces when it comes to open space protection. One of these challenges is that not enough focus is placed on natural resource protection, including wetland restoration. Participants discussed flood mitigation as a very important goal that can be met through protective and restorative efforts. Other challenges included the difficulty of accessibility to some open space resources due to private property that surrounds them, and the demand outweighing the availability of open space in some cases, including the Paul Revere area.

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Opportunities or Strengths to Leverage

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Lots of strengths, own pieces of property (Heritage site, Pequitside farm, town forests), also privately owned spaces (Bradley Estate, golf courses)	No dogs allowed at Audubon, also doesn't like people who aren't members on property
Can we leverage and connect open space in some way? A trail to cross town, connect? Some way to promote and connect?	Need to have open space that isn't just sports fields
Heart of Canton is Pequitside farm and woods	Wardwell property - beautiful ponds, but hard to access - no parking
Improving signage between two properties - Mass Audubon. Can this be one big property?	More demand than there is space for open space. Paul Revere is packed
Ponds area - make into one big area with boardwalk to connect streets, create first ADA compliant trail in town, provide access to town pool via walking and biking	Stormwater regulation changes - allows for more building, including parking lots
Trail to connect Bailey Street to Fisherman's Pond in Blue Hill - 5mi - that would get connection to Wardwell	Wetland protection, forest protection essential for rainwater/flood mitigation
Lots of forest at the end of Wardwell St, Irish Cultural Center has space but probably not a friend of Canton	100-yr storm events are now occurring every 20yr, soon enough every 5yr
Aimes Pond/Boliver Pond - has been closed. Pond became unswimmable due to trash dump. Now, dump is solar field	Not enough time spent on natural resource preservation - need to look more into wetland restoration

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More place we can identify for projects like that	6 important dams in Canton that if fail would cause major flooding. Removing dams should be discussion to allow more natural floodplain
Warner Trail - where can it connect Sharon Trail to Westwood Trail. Need feasibility study and then funding may be doable	Reservoir pond - difficult to access because of private property
Trails plan as part of Open Space plan - appetite for further defining connections	Dams are funded and rebuilt very often - lots of money spent by town
Feasibility study for ponds area trail project - presenting to CPA next week	open space acquisitions that help flood mitigation are not necessarily the same places that are desirable for recreation
More people embracing open space and town affairs in covid times	
Collaboration with Mass Audubon - CPA can't fund but can be leveraged by donations or collaboration	
Should acquire more - properties that do connect to existing properties, also open space slated for potential development	
Provide more flood resistance; purchase easements for dam removal	
Glenn Echo Pond on Indian Lane	
With new development - can we acquire open space alongside any new development?	
Acquiring more open space will help flood prevention	
Pond access - Fisherman Pond parking lot and beach increase	
Reservoir Pond - always been good for small boats	
Lou school - wants to build boardwalk to go over wetlands to connect the Audubon society to Lou School to provide access to kids	
Access for ponds - increasing but could be more access for boating, fishing. Newhouse will have launch for kayaks	
Shared bike program in town - locations at Paul Revere, Cobbs corner, downtown	
protected bike lanes esp. on 138, shoulder bike lanes on other streets - not CPA eligible	
High street - pool area and field that's preserved by the neighborhood; privately owned forest but owner defaulted on taxes - potential space for purchase - Dr. Fuller Wildlife Sanctuary	
Tax title takings for open space	