



# Summary of Master Plan Transportation & Sustainability Core Assessments

Compiled by Barrett Planning Group LLC

At the outset of the Master Plan process, the consulting team met with town officials, residents, and staff in order to learn about Hingham and issues that may need to be addressed in the Master Plan Update. These “core assessment” meetings introduced us to Hingham’s natural and built assets and the culture of the community. They also helped us identify “cross-cutting themes,” or themes that relate to more than one element of the plan.

This summary covers topics, ideas, and opinions that we heard about two Master Plan topics during the core assessment process. It is not meant to provide detailed meeting minutes and it does not include every comment we received. In addition, we recognize that the opinions of core assessment participants may not be shared by everyone.

## Core Assessment Dates:

- *Open Space and Recreation (9/24/2019)*
- *Historic Preservation (9/24/2019)*
- *Transportation (9/24/2019)*
- *Economic Development - (10/09/2019)*
- *Sustainability, Water, and Energy (10/09/2019)*
- *Land Use (10/09/2019)*
- *Community Services and Facilities (10/21/2019) and (11/05/2019)*

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## General impressions

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A recurring theme in the core assessment process was that Hingham residents take great pride in their town. We heard that Hingham is “a very well-run town – one of the best in the state” and that a true sense of community exists here. People value Hingham’s natural beauty, excellent services, accessibility to Boston, general safety, history, mix of businesses, and town character. In almost all of our meetings, however, we also heard concerns about the potential impact of continued development on the town. Residents shared concerns about traffic, population growth straining the schools and municipal services, and the gradual loss of Hingham’s charm. One resident said that “infinite growth is not sustainable and should be managed in concert with preservation of the town character.”

Core assessment participants brought up concerns they think the Master Plan should address, including:

- Traffic mitigation and the significant impact traffic has on the daily lives of residents;
- Managing development and its effects on the town and residents;
- The lack of design review and the resulting impact on the character and aesthetics of the town;

- Demographic shifts;
- Anticipating future needs of an aging population;
- Where the town is heading versus where the town *wants* to head;
- Planning for what will come based on the realities of a growing population;
- Attracting young people to town;
- Examining regional trends, challenges, and opportunities; and
- Addressing very urgent implementation issues while also planning for the long term.

We asked residents what they thought would make the master plan successful for Hingham. They told us the plan needs to be **easily implemented** and **driven by consensus**.

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## What people had to say about **transportation**

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Hingham residents are very frustrated with traffic congestion and its impact on their daily quality of life. The solutions they mentioned focus on slowing down development and getting people out of their cars as much as possible.

### Big issues

People attending the Transportation assessment meeting and other assessment meetings had lots to say about traffic in Hingham. Below are the dominant opinions we heard:

- **Congestion.** Major problem areas include:
  - Route 228, in particular: Cushing Street to Queen Anne’s Corner and the historic district along Main Street (“People can’t get out of their driveways.”);
  - Route 3A rotary, which “demands more services than other areas” due to accidents;
  - Route 3A at night and in the morning on route to/from the Shipyard;
  - Derby Street/Exit off Route 3; and
  - The lack of stoplights at certain intersections and coordination between existing stoplights.
- **Pedestrian and bike safety.** Residents say the town needs more sidewalks on the same side (or both sides) of the street. In particular, they identified Beal Street and Gardner Street as having heavy vehicle traffic and limited pedestrian access. Residents expressed frustration with the inability to cross safely, particularly at Gardner Street. One person suggested asking the state to place active blinking lights to warn drivers when someone is in a crosswalk or on the sidewalk on Route 228 and parts of Route 3A. The Town has no Ped/Bike Plan.
- **Complete Streets.** Hingham needs bicycle paths, with one person pointing out that “Wampatuck is a big draw for cyclists, but people have to *drive* to it.” Others mentioned the “failed opportunity” to connect the Shipyard to the commuter rail station” via a rail trail that exists parallel to Beal Street. Additionally, participants said Hingham wayfinding signage between open space areas would be helpful.

- **Speed limit.** Excessive speeding, particularly downtown, contributes to the lack of pedestrian safety. Multiple attendees suggested lowering the speed limit and also called attention to the lack of speed limit signage.
- **Schools and bus stops.** School traffic — both from Hingham’s public and private schools — creates a significant problem made worse because so many parents drive their children to school. Attendees suggested that providing safer bus stops and lowering speed limits could encourage more families to utilize school buses rather than driving their children to school. Furthermore, due to the lack of pedestrian and bike routes, only three of Hingham’s six schools are designated as “Safe Routes to School” partners by the state.
- **Parking.** The lack of parking will affect future development and redevelopment in Hingham. Some suggested parking structures, particularly in the Shipyard area, instead of surface parking should be considered.
- **Truck routes.** Trash trucks do not have coordinated routes and there are multiple competing companies, which contributes to traffic congestion. Additionally, some streets are too narrow for larger trucks to pass through and/or turn around safely. Establishing truck routes, an undertaking requiring MassDOT approval and the availability of alternative routes should be investigated.

### **Intra- and inter-town transit**

Core assessment participants said any public transportation serving Hingham leads to disconnected “frayed ends” that fail to meet the needs of residents, employees, and visitors to town. Public transportation *within* Hingham (i.e., a local bus route or trolley system) could better connect various parts of town as long as it was available nights and weekends. While the Senior Center provides shuttles mainly to meet the needs of Hingham’s older adults, there is more demand than capacity. Any improvements to town transportation should include provisions for supporting these services. Attendees also said the town should continue to work with the MBTA for service improvements and bus route expansion to surrounding towns and destinations for regional connections.

### **Future growth**

Throughout the core assessment process, people told us they think future development is best suited for the Route 53 and Route 3A corridors. They also acknowledged that both locations still have major problems without existing infrastructure issues being addressed. South Hingham has the most developable land and is only accessed by Derby Street; any further development in the industrial park will likely further contribute to the bridge over Route 3 being a choke point, as there was a “major missed opportunity” to get the bridge over Route 3 two lanes in each direction. Residents seemed especially concerned about the “unknown” surrounding the industrial park in South Hingham and what is yet to come. A few attendees expressed that: “South Hingham industrial development needed to save the tax base is not currently viable because the roads cannot support

it.” And, some attendees asked “at what point is the improved tax base not worth it? It is not improving tax base when you then have to turn around and invest it in infrastructure.”

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## What people had to say about *sustainability*

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Most attendees at the Sustainability, Water, and Energy session thought “Hingham has already exceeded ‘sustainability’ thresholds in many regards” and felt that the Master Plan must be a call to serious action. The 2015 Kleinfelder study (“Climate Change Vulnerability, Risk Assessment and Adaptation Study”) was mentioned many times. People generally said the study had not led to much change in code, but it “has been valuable for specific projects.” Sustainability came up in other core assessments, too, so some of the following comments are from those other sessions.

### What is sustainability?

Participants offered several thoughts on a definition of “sustainability” and suggested sustainability priorities:

- Being able to supply sewer and water without depleting water resources
- Long range waste management
- Sustainability for the planet and how the community can contribute to the global challenge
- Meeting our needs today without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs
- Focusing on the quality of life, health, and prosperity of residents in the community
- Managing congestion through roadway improvements
- Making decisions about what to preserve, what to let go, where to make investments, etc.
- Planning for resources (water, air, changing environment), their capacity, and limits on growth
- Examining how the zoning bylaw and BOH regulations drive development and whether that matches goals for sustainability
- Smart location of development relative to infrastructure and sensitive resources

### Hot topics

- The Master Plan should consider the future costs of “doing nothing” with regard to Hingham’s transportation issues. Has Hingham reached a tipping point where serious investment in transit will help alleviate congestion and mitigate its impacts? Is current development sustainable when it contributes heavily to traffic issues?
- What will an inevitable future increase in renewable energy sources mean for Hingham? How will the town contribute to these global efforts? How can the town capitalize on its ownership of the Municipal Light Plant with regard to moving towards sustainable energy?
- We have a sewer district in South Hingham. Wastewater treatment plant disposal has to be in the same basin from where we draw the water.
- The Comprehensive Wastewater Management Plan is incomplete because of the wastewater treatment issue in South Hingham.
- The Weir River Sewer District has no more available sewer connections.
- Hull and Hingham’s intermunicipal agreement (through 2022) will need to be renegotiated.

- What is the capacity of the aquifer the town has acquired? Should we be coordinating development with the capacity of the aquifer?
- Is getting MWRA water compatible with our system considering the closest point is 12,000 feet away? There are big questions that need to be answered relative to town policy and planning, cost, regional cooperation and technical issues.

### Hingham Harbor

- Hingham is a seacoast town. We're trying to sustain the shoreline. We could be devastated by a serious hurricane. Structural solutions will not be cheap or easy.
- How do we keep Hingham's waterfront attractive and accessible while protecting the area? There is a lack of consensus about how much development should occur in the harbor area. While there is a very active Harbor Development Committee looking to enrich the waterfront, some core assessment participants argued for protecting the harbor by limiting development as much as possible.
- Quincy, Weymouth, Hull are all very aware of what is happening. There are opportunities for regional collaboration.
- The Town is moving forward with identifying improvements for three wharfs. Harbor wharves are being looked at for reconstruction in a resilient manner.
- Weir River recharge is an issue. We need to maintain flow in the river.
- Four pump stations are in the hazard area. There are projects and costs already put together, including a study (Weston and Sampson) of the impact of these capital investments on user rates.

### Stormwater

- There has been incremental compliance with state-level MS4. It is a big cost and effort placed on DPW.
- More changes to the Stormwater Bylaw will be proposed. Should we reduce the review threshold to ensure smaller activities are reviewed? Is this a property rights debate? Right now, thresholds are 20,000 sq. ft. for standard sites and 2,500 for steep slope sites. This is already stricter than the state requirements. Would a reduced threshold be valuable given the types of development we are seeing? A proposed zoning change related to this is currently under consideration for 2020 Town Meeting.
- Some attendees suggested that the possibility of a Stormwater Utility (a utility or municipal enterprise, similar to a water or sewer enterprise, with authority to collect fees from property owners to control and treat stormwater) has not been explored in any detail.

### Local capacity

- Open Town Meeting is a cultural/institutional issue and a potential challenge.
- Cost: Many solutions will be expensive.
  - Main barrier – 400 volunteers run the town. How do you lift your head up from the weeds to see the big picture? Getting the attention of extremely busy people is hard.
  - Resistance: cultural reluctance to change habits such as watering athletic fields.
  - Does the Town need to allocate staff members dedicated to the big picture?

- We must address the key issues in the Master Plan without consideration for the cost to understand the full range of possible solutions. After the plan is done, cost benefit analysis will be part of the next phase.
- How do we engage more than the 400 volunteers? There's been a fair amount of turnaround in families. They are busy and very stretched.
- Water acquisition was a case study for building support. It involved a **huge** effort. There was a seven-year study, and approval and support were incremental. Nevertheless, people had enough faith in the process to continue approving investigation. Town Meeting voted not to hear from the water company. Residents trusted the Town's numbers and didn't want to start a "battle of the experts." But, there was some distrust throughout the process, too. It took a **major** effort to win over the trust of a majority of voters. Hundreds of people pushed for the acquisition.

### Other comments

- **Watersheds.** Regulations only allow the Conservation Committee to govern within their jurisdiction, but every watershed in Hingham will back up at some point in the future. As such, the town needs to be aware of drainage issues on a 20- to 30-year impact horizon. Furthermore, the town may need to examine and revisit the existing watershed protection district to see if residents have adhered to it and if it has been useful.
- **Trees.** Older trees have died and fallen down slowly. The plan should consider policies around tree replacement, as the town currently experiences a net loss of trees.
- **Carbon emissions.** One attendee pointed out that Hingham could eventually address everything in the Kleinfelder report with the resources the Town has, "yet we have not addressed carbon emissions." This should be discussed as part of the Master Plan, including inefficient homes and commuting patterns. To help facilitate sustainability efforts, the Town can look to other successful towns for practical and successful implementation strategies. Belmont, for example, has achieved zero net emissions by prioritizing sustainability.
- **Housing.** Sustaining affordable housing in Hingham is critical, particularly for seniors and families who need housing options.
- **Solar power.** Attendees claim the Municipal Lighting Plant puts restrictions on the use of solar power. They also reported that the MBTA is in the works to build a solar farm at the commuting parking lots, which were completed at the West Hingham commuter rail parking lot last year. In addition, Hingham Municipal Light Plant currently is investigating an installation at the town landfill.