

To: The Blandford Resilient Master Plan Committee
From: Barrett Planning Group LLC
Date: February 18, 2021, 3-4:30pm
Re: Visioning Session Summary and Key Takeaways



Overview

The Blandford Visioning Session produced a turnout of 22 public attendees at its height. Not included in that count are the 15 consultants and staff in attendance from PVPC (7), Barrett Planning Group (4), Wildscape Design (2), and the Town of Blandford staff (2). Joshua Garcia (Town Administrator) and Mary Kronholm (Assistant Town Clerk) represented the Town, introducing the session and thanking everyone for their attendance and participation. Peter Langmore (Resilient Master Plan Committee Member) briefed attendees with an internet/broadband update and how to connect to the system before the beginning of the presentation. Alexis (the Meeting Host) then provided an overview of the Master Plan process, the importance of visioning, and how the primary process and implementation phases will be conducted. She discussed recently completed plans in Blandford before leading the four-question polling exercise (results below). The presentation went on to review demographic and "fun" local facts before splitting into the two breakout groups. The breakout group sessions were approximately 45 minutes long, with roughly 11 people per group. Catherine Ratté (BPG) was the Tech Support for Breakout Group 1, and Joshua Garcia led the discussion. Kenneth Comia was the Tech Support for Breakout Group 2, and Shannon Walsh led the discussion. Discussion leaders then took 15 minutes to review what their groups discussed upon reconvening, with tech support sharing their Padlets for public view. The Host concluded with final slides informing attendees of ways to stay engaged, including Tik Tok and the project website, and who to address with questions: Catherine (PVPC), Ken (PVPC), and Josh (Town of Blandford). Ken shared the link to the survey in the chat. Alexis reiterated that a recording of the session and an interactive Padlet would be available on the project website.

What Went Well & Items of Note

What Went Well:

- √ An inquisitive and engaged audience
- √ Productive breakout discussions
- √ Seamless transition between various session activities
- √ Ability to maneuver the Padlets with ease
- √ Link/information sharing in the chat worked well
- √ Lots of great, positive feedback!

Items to Note for Implementation Session:

- √ Many had to leave due to conflicting meetings (Historical Society, BoS, etc.). We will include Josh early in the scheduling process to avoid future conflicts with other meetings.
- √ Begin advertising earlier and more frequently to get attendance higher at the next event.
- √ Remind the audience to mute if they are not speaking. Another alternative is to have the Host mute all participants during the presentation. There were several brief instances where background noise became disruptive.
- √ Simplify polling questions, focusing on one topic per question vs. multiple topics.
- √ Continue to clarify interactive activities for phone participants, providing time for verbal feedback.
- √ **Other?**

PADLET SUMMARIES

Breakout Group 1

| STRENGTHS | WEAKNESSES | OPPORTUNITIES | THREATS |
|---|---|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Natural Surroundings •Town Meeting •The Library •Passionate & Friendly Residents •Recreation Options •School System •14-15 Sq. Miles Available for Development | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Lack of Police Dept. •Poor Communication •Internet Access Issues •Decaying Infrastructure •Lack of Community Events •Lack of (Affordable) Senior Housing •No Public Transportation •Lack of Diversity •Lack of Space for Development | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •A Defined Town Center •Blandford Ski •Broadband Expansion & Access •Cultural Events and Destinations i.e., Blandford Fairgrounds •Outdoor Recreation Spots Doubling as Event Space •The White Church of Blandford •Transportation Opportunities: Turnpike Access & Possible East-West Trail •Solar Farms •Shepard Farm is a Key Transformation Area | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Turnpike Access •Financial Instability of Various Institutions •Potential of Reaching Tax Levy Limit due to Lack of Growth •Few Families and Children •Solar Farms Taking Buildable Land •Limited Infrastructure and Services |

Breakout Group 2

| STRENGTHS | WEAKNESSES | OPPORTUNITIES | THREATS |
|--|---|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •The Library •Small Town Pace and Feel •Outdoor Recreation Sites & Activities •Safety •School System •Friendly and Inclusive •Strong Quality of Life •Co-Existence with Wildlife •The White Church of Blandford •Town Administrator | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Technology Gap •Dwindling Agriculture | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Broadband Expansion & Access •Growing Town Staff and Reducing Reliance on Volunteers •Geographical Position •Vast Amounts of Conservation Land - Balance with Economic Development •Turnpike Exit •The Blandford Fair and Fairgrounds Space •Ski Blandford •The Town Common - Enhancing Walkability & Liveability •Marijuana Cultivation •Becoming More Cohesive | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Geographical Position in Terms of Climate Change •Springfield Water & Sewer Reservoir and Land Ownership/Purchasing •Weather Impacts on the Elderly •Lack of Population Growth •Turnpike Access •Poor Turnout at the Fair and Organizers Aging |

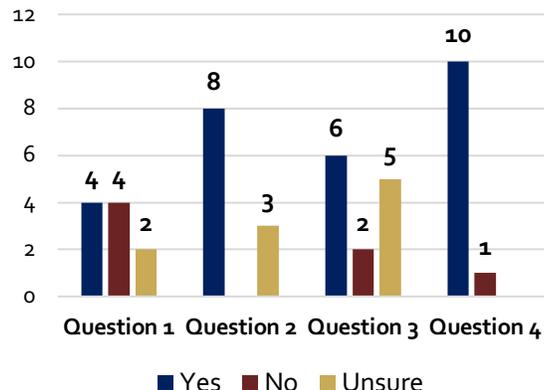
POLLING SUMMARY

The public provided input on goals from past plans through four polling questions, as detailed below. Participant questions touched on the following topics:

- The 2003 Community Development Plan as compared to a Master Plan
- Phone participation in polls
- Examples of local, low-cost measures against natural hazards
- Clarification on scenic roads designation

In response to a comment on the importance of conservation properties during the third polling question, Josh replied and reiterated that these are prior goals and will be reworked, adjusted, and considered going forward. The results of the in-meeting polls are outlined to the right and below.

Blandford Visioning Session Poll Results



1

Create low-cost and preventative mitigation measures against natural hazards that are likely to increase in intensity as the effects of climate change grow.

10 - YES
1 - NO
0 - UNSURE

2

Make Blandford a more inclusive and viable location to live while retaining the rural quality of the Town.

6 - YES
2 - NO
5 - UNSURE

3

Preserve and protect watersheds, establish scenic roads, and continue communication with Springfield Water & Sewer.

8 - YES
0 - NO
3 - UNSURE

4

Create a Mixed-Use Development Bylaw (try again), prepare an Affordable Housing Zoning Bylaw, and promote Blandford for vacations, retirement and recreation.

4 - YES
4 - NO
2 - UNSURE

CHAT COMMENTS/QUESTIONS

General Chat:

- ✓ I would love to see senior housing up here!
- ✓ Would scenic roads mean rest stops are put in?
- ✓ Almost half of Blandford is 60+
- ✓ Consider distributing items in one poll question into separate questions
- ✓ Town Meeting form of government is a plus
- ✓ There is a lack of senior housing in Blandford

- ✓ Clarification on the location of Shepard Farm requested

Breakout Group 1 Chat:

- ✓ The Library is a real strength
- ✓ My family loves Watson Park
- ✓ The slow pace and friendly community

- √ Development of a strong and positive Town Hall that has encouraged the building of trust
- √ Variety of wildlife
- √ A question posed by OSRP Consultant: "Wondering if townfolk would consider proximity to larger urban areas such as Westfield or Springfield as an asset? Groceries, markets, potential tourist income into Town?"
- √ Hope to expand the capacity of the Town to reduce reliance on volunteers who may not have the bandwidth or time that a paid staff person has
- √ A question posed by OSRP Consultant: "The vast amount of land in conservation seems to present an opportunity for improving access to active and passive recreational areas. I'm interested in how small towns grapple with that balance between the necessities of putting land in conservation (reducing taxable income for the city) and economic development."
- √ "The lack of population growth is a detriment to the Town. All efforts should be made to encourage new residents, even if it means making very thoughtful decisions

about affordable housing, encouraging business development, broadband, and that awful word 'Turnpike.' This will allow younger families to find their place here and still be able to commute while keeping that small-town balance."

- √ The potential of the fairgrounds is a great opportunity!
- √ "An opportunity here would be to fix up the road in Watson Park with a moderate amount of parking. The Select Board has already invested in improving the playground, volunteers have improved the baseball field, and it was beginning to take off, and the Select Board has installed BBQ grills to add a few more picnic tables. I realize this has been worked on in the recent past, and COVID brought an end to this progress. We can get back to that one day, I hope."
- √ The concern with the Turnpike is where access would be and the problem with habitat interruption, and what problems might arise with an uptick in activity.

Breakout Group 2 Chat: *Chat comments entered into the Padlet

FOLLOW-UP ITEMS

- √ Comment from Rowan (Wildscape Designs): "I'm curious about the accuracy of the population growth predictions, given COVID-related migration toward rural communities out of cities, and the potential for climate change-related migration away from coastlines. I'd love to know the source to refer to it."
 - ***Will need to follow up with Doug with specifics***