



## Meeting Summary

To: Chatham Borough Master Plan Subcommittee

From: Susan Blickstein, AICP/PP, PhD

Date: February 29, 2016

Re: February 18th, 2016 Community Workshop

This first public meeting for the Master Plan Reexamination/Update took place in the lower level meeting room of the Library on Main Street at 7:00 PM on February 18, 2016. Approximately 70 people attended. Included were elected officials and employees of the Borough, members of the Planning Board's Master Plan Subcommittee, residents, business and property owners, and other interested persons.

The meeting began with a short presentation by Susan Blickstein AICP/PP, PhD. Ms. Blickstein introduced the members of the Planning Board Subcommittee and the consulting team in attendance and gave an overview of the Master Plan Reexamination's purpose and process. The presentation included a study timeline which identified future opportunities for public input during the process and set a target for adoption of the Final Plan in the fall of 2016. Ms. Blickstein emphasized that this meeting was only the first opportunity for the community to engage with the subcommittee and the consultants about the content of the plan. An online survey and smaller focus group meetings will follow in March, and a second Community Workshop to discuss initial concepts would occur in late spring (probably May). Since a particular focus of this Master Plan Reexamination Report/Update is the development of a vision for Downtown Chatham, Ms. Blickstein introduced Michael Sullivan ASLA, AICP of Clarke Caton Hintz who spoke briefly about this part of the process and provided some images of similar downtown settings as food for thought. Ms. Blickstein wrapped up with some inspirational quotes and instructions for the Open House.

Following the presentation there was a short Question and Answer period. Ms. Blickstein answered questions from the audience about the process and the content of the Master Plan. Members of the subcommittee and the consulting team handed out short written surveys and pencils. After the Q&A, those in attendance were instructed to fill out and hand-in (before leaving) the short survey and to visit each of the four stations



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set up at tables around the room. The four stations were each focused on a particular question or topic:

1. What are the three (3) best things about living in Chatham?
2. Provide three (3) words to describe Downtown Chatham today
3. In terms of Downtown Chatham, what concerns do you have and what improvements would you like to see in the coming years?
4. What additional Borough-wide concerns and ideas would you like to share with the Master Plan Subcommittee?

At each station, a member of the consulting team was available to facilitate discussion of the particular question or topic. Maps of the Borough and of the Downtown were also available at each station. The result of the discussion at each of the stations is provided below.

Table 1: Three (3) best things about living in Chatham

Not surprisingly, participants at the meeting had many good things to say about living in Chatham. Identification of these positive attributes at the start of the Master Plan Reexamination/Update process is important because it provides a sense of what the community values, what it would like to maintain or preserve, and what it can build off of as it moves forward.

- Schools
- Train to NYC
- Small Town Character
- Walkable Downtown – Convenient Downtown
- Engaged Community – Citizens Who Care
- Small Scale
- Pedestrian Friendly - Sidewalks
- Local Shops
- Community
- Parks
- Historical Character
- Neighborhoods (maintain their original character)
- Walkable Neighborhoods
- Transportation
- Look of Town - Attractiveness
- Proximity to NYC and Airport
- Easy Access to Places
- Character of Houses – Beautiful Old Houses
- Adequate Shopper Parking
- Charm – Quaintness of Town
- Availability of Services
- Tree-lined Streets
- Trees and Open Space
- Small size
- Farmer’s Market
- People
- Safety
- Home Values



Table 2: Three (3) words to describe Downtown Chatham today

Responses to this prompt were much more mixed, with most people indicating some level of dissatisfaction with the current state of the Downtown.

- Nice look
- Convenient
- Functional
- Underutilized
- Huge potential
- Run Down, Sad, Dead, Depressed
- Small
- Traffic - Too Congested (cars) – An Off-Ramp to Rt-24
- Vacancies - Too Empty (stores/people) - Lonely
- A Fixer-Upper
- Lack of Diversity of Shops
- Need good landlords who cultivate good tenants, reasonable rents
- Outdated Storefronts
- Lack of Parking/Adequate Parking
- Unlively / Not Active
- Diverse Age Groups
- Unique
- 3 Separated Areas – Shabby in Center Area
- Ugly Buildings
- Narrow Sidewalks
- No Sense of Place
- More walkable – need to be able to move between stores – from restaurant to shop to bar/coffee shop
- Lackluster

Table 3: Downtown Chatham – concerns and improvements you would like to see

- Connect Town Square to the rest of Main Street – more visible
- Vacant stores, poor condition along Center Street and North Passaic Avenue (Main Street to Center Place)
- Parking Deck by the train station - Train station parking lot should be a multi-tiered parking facility (above/below ground)
- Make Downtown a destination to more areas
- Downtown core – from Elmwood Avenue to Hillside Avenue



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Table 4: Borough-wide concerns and ideas

- Connect Brooklake Road to Rt-24 – complete interchange (on border of Chatham and Madison) – would eliminate some thru traffic on Main Street in Downtown
- Watchung Avenue railroad bridge is too low
- Truck traffic on Summit Avenue and Hillside Avenue – better signage
- Allow auxiliary dwelling units / mother-in-law apartments
- Borough and Township should merge
- Leaf blower noise and air pollution is a problem
- Reduce all speed limits to 25 mph
- Keep single family zoning where it exists now
- Concern about overdevelopment (Stanley Church site most frequently noted) and tear-downs in residential areas
- Old Averett Estate just across the border in the Township – owners are in their 60's looking to sell, trees are all tagged for removal – if this is developed it will affect traffic and quality of life in the Borough
- Preservation of historic properties outside of the historic district
- Fairmount Avenue should be historic district
- Find ways for institutional uses (Ogden Church, for example) to work with the business community to benefit the downtown and long-standing institutions within the Borough

As people departed the meeting, they were encouraged to hand-in the short, written survey that was provided. Results of the 62 submitted survey forms were later compiled for review by the subcommittee and the consulting team. A summary of these results is embedded in the attached survey with the response frequency and the most common open-ended comments noted in red and underlined.



## FEBRUARY 18, 2016 MASTER PLAN OPEN HOUSE MEETING

### 1. Participant Status (check ALL that apply):

- 54 Borough resident
- 7 Borough business owner/operator
- 2 Chatham Borough commercial property owner
- 1 Other: \_\_\_\_\_

### 2. What are the three best things about living in Chatham Borough?

The most common responses to this question were some variation of the following:

- Community Feel/Small Town Feel
- Historical character
- Schools
- Proximity/accessibility to NYC and region
- Train
- Walkable community
- Safety
- Neighborhoods/Downtown

### 3. I am primarily interested in or concerned about:

- 31 Changes to residential neighborhoods within the Borough, including additions to homes and new construction
- 45 The future health and vitality of the downtown
- 33 Traffic and local circulation, including pedestrian safety
- 32 Preservation of Chatham's small-town character
- 17 Provision of community facilities and services, such as parks, open space, and water/sewer infrastructure
- 15 The Borough's Industrial/Mixed-Use Zones along River Road and Watchung Avenue
- 25 I have general interest in all areas



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**4. When you think about the downtown today, what three words best describe the area?**

The most common responses to this question were some variation of the following:

- Run down
- Vacancies/empty
- Lack of variety (of stores, restaurants)
- Too much traffic
- Underutilized/lack of vitality
- Positives: Potential, charming, quaint, friendly, local, walkable

**5. Imagine the downtown as you would like to see it in 10 years. Describe key elements of what you envision:**

The most common responses to this question were some variation of the following:

- Better retail mix
- More vibrant, places to go and gather, more people walking around
- Less thru traffic/more parking
- Safe/walkable
- Improved architectural character/preserved historic character
- Some mixed-use (retail/residential)
- Updated - buildings, streetscape

**6. What changes or improvements would you most like to see in downtown Chatham?**

The most common responses to this question were some variation of the following:

- Parking structure(s)
- Reduce traffic (new interchange)
- Improve pedestrian safety
- Effort to expand retail recruitment/mix
- Rehabilitation/redevelopment - improved aesthetic for buildings, signs, etc.
- More events, places for kids/families, arts/culture
- Maintain historic character/architecture
- Add some residential



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**7. Any there other thoughts or comments you would like to share about land use policies and zoning within the Borough? Please specify if this is a general comment or a comment related to a specific location or area of concern.**

The most common responses to this question were some variation of the following:

- Keep condos/apartments out of single-family neighborhoods (Fairmount Ave proposal)
- Protect character of neighborhoods (tear-downs, redevelopment)
- Expand historic district (Fairmount Ave)
- Additional interchange on Rt. 24 - reduce thru traffic