

CHAPTER 1: DEVELOPING A SENSE OF COMMUNITY

The citizens and officials of Granby collaborate to create a community where all members interact and work together, with a strong sense of volunteerism and belongingness, in order to develop relationships; to actively participate in endeavors to improve their surroundings; and, to advance ideas that will ensure a vibrant, sustainable future for their town.

OVERVIEW

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.” – Margaret Mead

Community building is the practice of enhancing the relationship between individuals within a common geographical area. It can be a means to improve not only the neighborhood, but also the individual wellbeing and sense of connectedness among residents. When residents work together to improve their community, bonds are built that foster cultural and social understanding. Buildings can be rehabbed and services provided, but in the end it is the people who live in the community that make sure the changes last for the long run. Local residents, businesses, and governments must work together to transform lives and strengthen the community. Community building and organizing are the foundation of a vibrant society and central to the success of achieving sustainability.

The Master Planning process is an opportunity to establish a new approach to community growth and development, explicitly recognizing the necessity to involve all segments of the population in the planning process and implementation of the plan’s recommendations.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The town of Granby has an interesting civic history over the last 32 years, consisting of bursts of energy from a variety of volunteer residents and town officials to explore large-scale physical and regulatory improvements to Granby, only to see those planned projects/initiatives fail when put to a vote at Town Meeting. Residents throughout the Master Planning process expressed concern about the community’s ability to commit to sustained action over an extended period of time. This sense of frustration was expressed in the stakeholder interviews, in the community survey, and at the public meetings and forums. Residents of Granby care about their future and the future of their community. Moving forward, it is the desire of the residents who were surveyed to work with town officials to implement positive change.

Results of the master plan community survey showed that respondents would like improved communication between Town government and residents. Respondents

requested an interactive town website, which was since implemented, that is updated regularly with all the information about Town committees, plans, projects and meetings, bylaws and minutes, so that they can be informed and have an opportunity to get involved in their government. Survey respondents also expressed frustration at the low turnout at Town Meeting.

Master Plan charrette attendees expressed the desire for more informal opportunities for residents to get together and socialize. Residents are concerned about the slow decline in community activities and events over the last three decades. They desire a community center or events where residents of all ages could interact together on a regular basis. Residents are also concerned with the run-down state of the Town Hall and Aldrich Hall, as well as library which is beyond capacity. All these buildings are prominently located around the town center. The majority of people responding to the Master Plan survey (57 %) wanted to live in a “small town with a vibrant village center”.

Additionally, sixty-five percent of community survey respondents said they would like the Town to have a Farmer’s Market on a regular basis. The town could try to hold this type of event at a minimum semi-annually. Many survey respondents would also like town officials utilize the Town Common as well for this and other events.

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

The town of Granby has limited paid municipal staff, and is informally led by the dozens of residents who volunteer to serve on Town Boards and Committees. It is the hard work of these dedicated residents and volunteers that keep the town running on a day to day basis. However, many of these community leaders who have lived in Granby for most of their lives know all too well the successes and failures of both town government and community-led initiatives over these years.

Throughout the master planning process, residents expressed frustration about failed community initiatives. For instance, some senior residents mentioned the attempted overhaul of the town’s zoning regulations in 1972, which was undertaken as a result of the town’s then recently adopted Master Plan. Despite outreach efforts by a group of committed volunteers led by the Planning Board, the proposed changes were defeated at Town Meeting. Conversations with members of the working group who still live in Granby revealed genuine frustration at the failure of their initiative and concern that the findings of the current master plan may go unheeded.

The need for improved town facilities has been identified as a pressing need by both town officials and residents for several years. In 1989, residents supported town officials’ recommendation that Granby hire an architect to design a new Town Office building. Hundreds of thousands of dollars and countless hours of volunteer time led to a

detailed proposal for a new Town Office building. Again, despite outreach efforts, the proposal was voted down at Town Meeting.

More recently, a proposal to construct a new high school building as the centerpiece of a gradual renewal of the overall school infrastructure was narrowly rejected by the Town Meeting.

These examples illustrate the challenges for town leaders and residents to implement changes in the community. Many master plan participants stated that there is a belief that a minority of town residents sway the votes at Town Meeting, and there is a lack of awareness by the majority of Town residents of the importance of staying informed of town needs, issues and opportunities, and participating in Town Meeting to make one's voice heard. This, in turn, highlights the need for improved transparency and flow of information regarding these initiatives to allow the residents to make informed decisions as they discuss and shape the future of their town.

This is not a problem unique to Granby. With the busy lives and busy schedules of residents, many Massachusetts communities struggle to reach a quorum at Town Meeting, and often have vacant positions on town boards and committees. If information is not readily available through a town website or other means, residents often do not take the time or effort to sift through the details and learn about a specific policy or project. The result is confusion, which leads to a lack of participation or misunderstanding and concerns for issues at hand. The lack of access to information ultimately hinders implementation.

One concern, that was consistently heard throughout the master plan process, has been since addressed and an official town website was created. For those who do not have access to computers or the internet, the town also needs to consider additional actions and policies that will encourage increased public participation in Town Meeting, and allow the decisions and discussions at the town government level to be open and transparent. The town could take advantage of television and print media as well.

Granby does have a core group of dedicated volunteers and individuals who are civically engaged and who strive to make Granby a wonderful town in which to live, work, and partake in recreational activities. While most Granby boards and committees have few vacant positions available, it is a hardy few that "wear many hats" and sit on multiple boards. The town needs to develop ways to increase the level of participation, and publicly recognize those residents who contribute to the community. An increase in volunteers and participation in community activities will also ultimately help instill a sense of ownership in the community.

Another way to nurture such sense of ownership in the community is to sponsor annual and seasonal community events that will provide residents the opportunity to spend

time together and get to know one another. The community already has venues such as Dufresne Park and Town Common that could host community events.

In order to implement the recommendations within this master plan, efforts must be taken by town officials and town residents to educate themselves and others about proposed projects and policy changes. Without significant public outreach, future town projects may follow what recent Granby history has shown us – a lot of effort without a lot of action. The goals of this chapter are to identify the infrastructure necessary to keep residents informed and also to create opportunities for residents to come together socially and to participate in their town government.

GOALS AND STRATEGIES

Goal 1: Ensure that actions and policies developed by town government are open and transparent to the citizens of Granby to encourage increased and widespread public participation.

Strategy 1: Develop and actively maintain an interactive town website that will provide information to citizens on town activities.

Information on the website should include town officials' office hours and contact information, meeting minutes from town boards and committees, general and zoning bylaws, subdivision regulations, upcoming community events, town projects, permitting information, forms, and community plans and documents.

Action Steps

Responsible Party: Selectboard

Resources Needed: Individual(s) to regularly update the website; annual recurring fees to keep the domain.

Target Date for Completion: Fall 2009 (completed)

Strategy 2: Build off the success of the local Public Access Television (Channels 12 and 15) and expand the amount and type of information broadcast to residents.

Currently, the public access channel tapes and broadcasts meetings of the Select Board, Finance Committee, School Committee, and School Building Committee meetings as well as the Town Meeting. The Channel also broadcasts school concerts, school and community talent shows, among others. Consider broadcasting meetings of other town boards and committees, as needed. Also consider broadcasting key community events, and a "State of the Town" address and public town forum.

Action Steps

Responsible Party: Granby public access TV (GCAM)

Resources Needed: Volunteers to contribute to the filming and editing efforts for the public access TV; potentially, new and greater number of equipment to accommodate demand.

Target Date for Completion: Ongoing, beginning in Fall 2011

Strategy 3: Develop a periodic newsletter that will provide details to town residents regarding upcoming town board meetings, agendas, minutes and other relevant town information.

A newsletter that summarizes the activities of town boards and is delivered electronically or directly to households would provide another method of updating residents of the most recent actions of town government. The newsletter could be e-mailed to residents who prefer electronic delivery or mailed in the phone bill, electric bill, or through town mailings (i.e. tax bills, census), or included as a supplement in a local newspaper, such as the Reminder.

Action Steps

Responsible Party: Selectboard

Resources Needed: Funding for printing and mailing costs generated from advertisements and support from local businesses.

Target Date for Completion: Winter 2012

Strategy 4: Form a Community Initiatives Committee, which will be primarily tasked with initiating and organizing events and activities designed to encourage wider volunteer participation as well as recognizing and highlighting the efforts of active volunteers in various town forums.

Action Steps

Responsible Party: Selectboard

Resources Needed: Volunteers to serve on the proposed committee .

Target Date for Completion: Winter 2012.

Strategy 5: Create a “Community Documents” section in the Granby Public Library that would provide copies of all town board meeting minutes, general bylaws, zoning bylaws, subdivision regulations, and other pertinent community plans and documents.

Action Steps

Responsible Party: Community Initiatives Committee in collaboration with the Granby Free Public Library Board of Trustees and Library Staff.

Resources Needed: Volunteers to help create copies of the documents needed and expenses related to the production of such copies.

Target Date for Completion: Winter 2012.

Goal 2: Encourage active participation in town events by all residents, maintain and expand the number of volunteer positions within the community to broaden the base of participants and instill a sense of ownership in the community.

Strategy 1: Increase and encourage the participation of new volunteers for all town board and committee positions by inviting and allowing residents to partake in the governing process.

While most Granby boards and committees have few vacant positions available, it is a hardy few that “wear many hats” and sit on multiple boards. To increase participation, Granby should consider creating associate positions for all town boards. As standing board members retire or vacate positions, associate members that have participated and attended multiple meetings will be able to transition into these new positions easily. In addition, the town may consider establishing term limits on all town board positions.

Action Steps

Responsible Party: Community Initiatives Committee, town moderator and Selectboard

Resources Needed: Promotion of all board/committee vacancies in local newspapers and public access TV.

Target Date for Completion: Ongoing

Strategy 2: Develop a master list of potential volunteers for future board and committee positions, and update the list annually.

Identify individuals who are interested on serving on town boards and committees, and have unique talents and / or knowledge that would benefit such boards/committees.

Action Steps

Responsible Party: Selectboard

Resources Needed: A town resource to create an inventory of potential volunteers for various boards and committees.

Target Date for Completion: Ongoing

Strategy 3: Encourage town leadership to recognize and highlight the work of committees and volunteers and take the action necessary to acknowledge those involved.

Action Steps

Responsible Party: Selectboard, and town administrator

Resources Needed: N/A

Target Date for Completion: Ongoing

Strategy 4: Develop a “Volunteer Appreciation” segment on the town’s website and / or Public Access Television to acknowledge and support exemplary community leaders.

Action Steps

Responsible Party: Community Initiatives Committee (to be formed)

Resources Needed: An individual to draft volunteer appreciation notices for the town website and public access TV

Target Date for Completion:

Strategy 5: Establish a Community Volunteer Day to work on designated community sites and needs. This event would be designed to gather town residents in collaboratively undertaking a predetermined task in town.

Action Steps

Responsible Party: Community Initiatives Committee (to be formed)

Resources Needed: Individual(s) to create press releases for the local media and to reach out to businesses to raise the funds needed to perform the task.

Target Date for Completion: Ongoing

Goal 3: Sponsor community events at the Town Common and Dufresne Park.

Strategy 1: Work with the Church of Christ to develop an agreement for use of the Town Common for community events.

Action Steps

Responsible Party: Selectboard and Town administrator

Resources Needed: A contact point and negotiator representing the town.

Target Date for Completion: Winter 2012

Strategy 2: Hold both annual and seasonal events at these locations to bring residents together to celebrate the spirit of Granby and establish a sense of community. Examples include an Annual Picnic or arts event for Granby residents.

Action Steps

Responsible Party: Community Initiatives Committee (to be formed)

Resources Needed: Funds necessary to hold the proposed events and volunteers to undertake various tasks.

Target Date for Completion: Fall 2011.

Strategy 3: Hold a periodic Farmers' Market on the Town Common.

Action Steps

Responsible Party: Agricultural Commission.

Resources Needed: Granby's Farm community

Target Date for Completion: Continuous..

Goal 4: Establish schools as the intellectual, social, and creative center of the community.

Strategy 1: Support and broaden after school programs to educate, entertain and socially involve young residents of Granby.

Action Steps

Responsible Party: School Committee, School Superintendent and Principals.

Resources Needed: Funds for educational services to be provided by instructors and by custodial services

Target Date for Completion: Winter 2012

Strategy 2: Develop a continuing education / adult education curriculum and promote programs that are multi-generational.

Action Steps

Responsible Party: Council on Aging and Superintendent of Schools

Resources Needed: Funds for educational services to be provided by instructors and by custodial services

Target Date for Completion: Spring 2012.

Strategy 3: Pursue and publicize the construction of a new library with a useable area and design that addresses Granby's needs, which can also serve as a community center for various volunteer and town events and activities.

Action Steps

Responsible Party: Library Trustees, Granby Library director, Library Building Committee.

Resources Needed: Trustees and Committee to spearhead the construction project; volunteers to support the project through fundraisers, public and informational events; funds necessary to hold various public events to promote the proposed building.

Target Date for Completion: In progress. State funding review to be completed in summer 2011.

Strategy 4: Engage the Council on Aging to attract broader involvement from Granby's senior residents, and support various events and initiatives led by the CoA, such as Senior trips, arts events and food pantry.

Action Steps

Responsible Party: Council on Aging and the Community Initiatives Committee.

Resources Needed: Volunteers to reach out to local media, public access television.

Target Date for Completion: Winter 2011