

Sudbury Master Plan – DRAFT Formative Issues

Note to Planning Board and Master Plan Steering Committee:

The following is a draft list of formative issues developed from public engagement input and monthly Steering Committee discussions to date. It is a starting point for discussion. The issues are currently organized by topics as they appear in the Baseline Report and are numbered (e.g., 1, 2, 3, etc.). To give them context, potential strategies or actions are provided as lettered bullets for some of the larger issues (e.g., a, b, c, etc.). Our primary goal for the upcoming meetings is to refine and augment this list of formative issues. Where time allows we can also add potential strategies and also talk about the overall structure of how these formative issues may be presented in the Master Plan.

Demographics

1. While school-age children under the age of 19 and adults between the ages of 35 and 54 remain the largest portions of the Town's population, their growth was relatively flat over the past two decades.
2. The number of households with children has decreased.
3. Population growth was primarily from residents 65 years and older. An increase in this age group is also reflected in an increase in the number of older residents living alone.
4. This trend is seen not only in Sudbury but also the region and throughout the Commonwealth's suburban and rural communities.

[No specific strategies are listed here as the shift in demographics is noted throughout the other elements.]

Town Services

1. The Town needs to plan for services that meets the needs of a growing older population.
 - a. Livable Sudbury will provide a wealth of information for this issue.
2. Continued investments in new technology for all Town departments will provide better efficiency and response to residents.
 - a. Online services/permitting.
 - b. Digitizing and archiving documents.
 - c. Communication methods (see below).
3. The Town needs to have more effective communication with residents through diverse methods.
 - a. Are there other apps the Town might use?
 - b. Consider a website update.
 - c. Consider residents that do not use the Internet (older residents still use paper).
 - d. Smart 911 – Communication during emergency events, ensuring all are signed up.
 - e. Connecting with hard-to-reach residents such as elderly, low income, and minorities.
 - f. All departments should be sending the same message.
 - g. Communicating with new residents about services available.
 - h. Communication/information/outreach about town projects, initiatives, and other efforts.
 - i. Communications should be readily available for hearing and visually impaired.

4. Investments in new infrastructure (wastewater management, Bruce Freeman Rail Trail, etc.) will also require sustainable investments in maintenance and upkeep.
 - a. All capital improvement projects must include a budget for maintenance and anticipated schedule of maintenance expenditures.
 - b. Educate residents on the costs of deferred maintenance.
5. The Town also needs to make adequate capital investments in maintenance and upkeep of existing buildings, facilities, and infrastructure.
 - a. Consider a Comprehensive 20-Year Facilities Plan.
 - b. Investments in the Fairbank Community Center to better accommodate the Senior Center, Sudbury Public School Administration offices, and Park and Recreation Department.
6. Town buildings, facilities, and infrastructure need to be more accessible.
 - a. Development of a transition plan for accessibility. This could be part of a Comprehensive Facilities Plan.
7. The Town uses volunteers heavily to support services.
 - a. Identify ways to recognize and honor the efforts of volunteers.
 - b. Develop outreach materials that can help educate residents about volunteer opportunities, time commitments, and responsibilities.
8. The Town wants to be more proactively involved in the installation and management of utilities.
 - a. Identify liaisons at utility companies and work to establish protocols for communication.
 - b. Consider whether the Town wants to be a provider of some utilities (e.g. energy, cable, Internet, etc.)

Economic Development

1. Sudbury relies heavily on its residential tax base, accounting for over 93% of the total assessed value. Both its residential and commercial tax rates fall in the middle of the range of neighboring communities. Per capita spending is on the higher end of neighboring towns, with the majority of revenues coming from tax levies.
 - a. Pursue local opportunities to strengthen the commercial tax base. Route 20 has the highest potential for economic development, but requires regulatory reform, circulation improvements, and significant infrastructure investment. No guidance for design
2. The largest employer is the Town (municipal employment). Health Care and Professional Services have also contributed to job growth. These sectors are expected to continue driving future growth.
 - a. Ensure local regulations are well-suited for existing market opportunities. Provide opportunities for expansion in health care and profession services.
3. Median annual earnings for jobs within Sudbury (\$44,300) are considerably lower than the median earnings of Sudbury residents (\$81,609). This points to a mismatch between resident skills and the types of employment opportunities in town and explains the high level of cross-commuting. Over 90% of resident workers commute out of Sudbury for work, and 88% of workers commute into the Town for work.
 - a. Create opportunities for “flex space” where residents who work from home can have access to technology or meeting space rather than commuting.

Housing

1. Overall, housing costs are increasing in Sudbury and the region, which puts a disproportionate burden on low income residents and households with fixed incomes. While the average household income is increasing, so is the cost of living and the buying power of residents has remained flat over the past 20 years. These conditions create a need for more affordable and diverse housing options.
 - a. Allow for more diverse housing types in zoning.
 - b. Zone for smaller lots.
 - c. Revisit accessory dwelling unit bylaw.
 - d. Evaluate whether inclusionary zoning would be an effective tool.
2. Sudbury has achieved 10% Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI) goal. However, this achievement has not satisfied the local need. Units are still expensive and, because many units are rentals, market rate units were eligible for the SHI.
 - a. Target future SHI affordable housing units for low and very low-income households (less than 80% AMI)
3. Sudbury Housing Authority's current housing stock is aging and will require investments in maintenance in the future. Much of the housing is located on smaller sites scattered throughout town. Funding sources for the SHA to build new units is also limited.
 - a. Identify a sustained source of funding to ensure maintenance and improvements to all SHA units.
 - b. Identify opportunities to transfer excess town land to the SHA for the development of affordable housing.
4. Transportation needs to be linked with housing development to ensure residents can access work, school, and needed services, particularly seniors, people with disabilities, and low income residents.
 - a. Work with developers to link projects with the existing transportation network or build in services for SHI units.
5. There are few rental housing options in Sudbury.
 - a. Invest in areas like Route 20 (infrastructure) to allow for small-scale multi-family and mixed use housing options.

Public Health and Social Wellbeing

1. Increasing awareness of mental health issues in Town is critical to gain support for services needed for residents of all ages. Demand for services provided by the Town's Social Worker are expected to grow around hidden/arising issues of domestic violence, substance abuse, social isolation, homelessness, and others.
 - a. Public Safety, Sudbury Public Schools, Senior Center, and the Health Department are already work together on these issues. Continue to strengthen these efforts.
 - b. Increase public awareness of the needs of residents with dementia (see Livable Sudbury).
 - c. Provide town staff who interact with older residence with dementia-friendly training (see Livable Sudbury)
 - d. Conduct a regular youth risk assessment at the high school to track student needs over time.
2. Build education initiatives around environmental public health issues.

- a. Application of fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides.
 - b. Identification of vector borne diseases and awareness of prevention measures.
3. Some important services and support for older residents and their caregivers are not available in Sudbury. For example, many will travel to Concord, Boston, and Worcester for medical appointments.
- a. Continue to provide transportation support for appointments and ensure development/growth opportunities for medical use in town.
4. There are opportunities for social engagement, including programs at the Goodnow Library, Recreation Department, Sudbury Public Schools, and Senior Center. Some programs with costs can pose a barrier for participation.
- a. Continue to find opportunities through the Recreation Department, Library, Senior Center, and local organizations to create family-friendly and all-ages community events year-round.
 - b. Evaluate participation costs and consider free events or a sliding scale.
5. Many residents are not aware of the services available to them through the Town. Communication is also important, especially finding a way to connect to hard-to-reach segments of the population (elderly (particularly homebound), low income, minority) and spreading the word about services. (See communication issues in Town Services)
6. Zoning does not allow for the creation of more close-knit communities where neighbors can engage socially. (See Housing)

Transportation

- 1. Traffic congestion is an issue in Sudbury, particularly on the state routes near the Town Center and along Route 20. Congestion is a result of both local and regional traffic trips.
 - a. Build the Town's walking and biking network to encourage residents to take local trips without a car.
 - b. On Route 20, synchronize traffic lights, look for ways to consolidate driveways with internal circulation.
- 2. The Senior Shuttle is very popular and overcrowded. Demand is expected to increase.
 - a. Consider adding shuttles/drivers.
 - b. Consider expanding service to later times (after 3:30) and additional days during the week.
- 3. The Route 20 Commuter Shuttle is a great amenity but is not currently meeting commuter needs.
 - a. Consider adding a fixed stop(s) on Route 20.
 - b. Consider adding later times leaving from Riverside T Station.
- 4. Sudbury has a robust walkway network, and improvements continue, but gaps exist with missing links between residential areas and important destinations like commercial areas, schools, and parks/open space. The nature of Sudbury's roads, which are winding, narrow, and tree-lined, make it difficult to add some of the missing connections.
 - a. Streamline the process for acquiring easements. Educate residents.
 - b. Improve lighting at key destinations.

- c. Upgrade and add crosswalks to be more accessible at major intersections and key points throughout Town.
- 5. The walking and biking network will be expanded in the future through the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail (BFRT) and proposed Mass Central Rail Trail. These will be major transportation and recreation assets to the town.
 - a. Continue moving forward with the BFRT.
 - b. Identify connections along the BFRT to residential and commercial areas and ensure they are accessible and safe.
 - c. Identify a regular, sustainable funding source for all trail maintenance.
- 6. Schools require residents within two miles to pay for bus service. It is difficult to walk or bike to schools. Because of the fees and lack of walking and biking access, many parents will drive their children to school, adding to already congested roads.
 - a. Prioritize walking and biking amenities at schools that connect to nearby residential areas.
 - b. Consider involvement in a Safe Routes to School study.
 - c. There are transportation needs of low-income students/families accessing schools and their after-school programs.

Historic and Cultural Resources

- 1. There are about 300 historic buildings and structures outside of local historic districts, spread out throughout town. These buildings have no protection, but not all need to be preserved.
 - a. Inventory and prioritize resources that have historic significance and/or would be subject to the Demolition Delay bylaw
 - b. Develop a town-wide preservation plan.
- 2. More preservation tools need to be available.
 - a. Develop clear protocols regarding the identification of historic resources and how these are reviewed and protected.
 - b. Update Demolition Delay Bylaw to make it stronger.
 - c. Review Scenic Bylaw to ensure it is meeting the intended objectives.
 - d. Find opportunities for historic preservation restrictions.
 - e. Promote the MA Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit for property owners.
 - f. Identify projects for CPA funds.
- 3. More education is needed for local decisions makers around the value of historic resources.
 - a. Coordinate the efforts of local historic groups to create a strong collective message and educational program.
 - b. Work with local historic committees and organizations on an awareness campaign for local boards and committees as well as town staff.
 - c. Link property owners with local organizations that support historic preservation.
- 4. Town-owned historic buildings need improvements; however, the challenge is weighing modernization with keeping the historic integrity of the structure. Immediate concern is Town Hall.
 - a. Continue education of inspection staff, historic resource stakeholders, municipal planners, and boards on modern techniques for restoration that meet current codes for safety and accessibility.

5. There is little awareness of cultural resources and opportunities in Sudbury. (See communication issues in Town Services)
 - a. Continue to create a more cohesive network of cultural resources in the historic downtown.

Natural Resources

1. Protecting water quality is a priority, for both surface waterbodies and groundwater (drinking water).
 - a. Continue implementation of Stormwater Management Plan and meeting requirements of NPDES permit
 - b. Build on the Ponds and Waterways Master Plan
 - c. Balance economic development activity with aquifer protection.
 - d. Water supply must meet anticipated demand.
2. Natural resources, such as farmland, open spaces, and forests, contribute to the historical landscape of Sudbury.
 - a. Implement the Open Space and Recreation Plan (see below)
 - b. Develop appropriate policies and regulations for home-based agriculture.
 - c. Link conservation with historic preservation.
3. Minimize impacts to important wildlife and natural resources
 - a. Continue to incorporate vernal pool and priority habitat protections into the review of local development applications
 - b. Continue work to make environmental regulations consistent across departments.

Open Space and Recreation

1. The Open Space and Recreation Plan, which is currently being updated, documents the town's goals and objectives for local open space and recreational needs and how it will meet those needs. The Master Plan should be consistent with the plan.
 - a. Incorporate strategies from the OSRP
2. Conservation areas may benefit from management plans to address ongoing maintenance and upkeep of trails, addressing invasive species, and mitigating user conflicts.
 - a. Prioritize conservation areas for management plans.
3. Connecting open space areas, parks, schools, and historic resources with residential areas for walking/biking will increase recreational opportunities and access to these resources.
 - a. Move BFRT forward.
 - b. Find opportunities to link resources
4. There are opportunities to increase programming at conservation areas.
 - a. Work with Sudbury Public Schools and Sudbury-Lincoln Regional High School to incorporate awareness and direct experience of conservation areas into arts, science, and history curriculums.
 - b. Increase senior programming in conservation areas.
 - c. Create community gardens (accessible), include seating and gathering areas for multi-generational experience.

5. The number of conservation and recreation areas that are accessible needs to increase, including amenities such as restrooms, benches, and accommodations for the visually impaired.
 - a. Transition Plan of Open Space and Recreation Plan
6. The Town lacks public areas for gathering such as picnic areas or spaces for concerts and other community events. (See Public Health and Social Wellbeing)
7. Maintenance and improvements to existing outdoor recreation facilities is needed to address field conditions and drainage problems.
 - a. Prioritize fields and facilities for capital improvement program
8. The Town lacks a process or methodology for acquiring conservation land and educating residents about how decisions are made.
 - a. Develop prioritization criteria for targeting land/easement acquisition.
 - b. See communication issue in Town Services.
9. Land stewardship of town conservation land is needed, either through town staff or volunteers.
 - a. Develop a stewardship program and promote it to all ages.
 - b. Identify "Friends of" groups for specific properties.
 - c. Work with local groups that use and support conservation land.
10. There is a growing demand for organized adult recreation, particularly team sports. Space at existing town fields is scheduled at capacity and access to school fields is limited.
 - a. Work with Sudbury Public Schools to see if school fields can be made more available.

Climate Change/Resiliency

1. The Town needs to plan for the impacts of climate change, including those related to increased frequency and intensity of storm events that will result in flooding, downed trees, and power outages.
 - a. Use Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) process outcomes and ongoing update of the Hazard Mitigation Plan

Energy

1. The Town needs to continue to improve energy efficient of its facilities and operations and promote more sustainable energy usage to residents and businesses.
 - a. Continue implementation of the Energy Reduction Plan
 - b. Identify opportunities for alternative energy sources (solar) on town properties
 - c. Develop guidelines for solar panels on historically significant structures