

Comments
Local Comprehensive Plan Draft Chapters
on Land Use and Housing and process

May 16, 2024 - BarnstableWatch appreciates the chance to submit some comments on the Local Comprehensive Plan Draft Chapters issued to date.

Barnstable Watch further appreciates the effort that went into organizing the Open Houses. Everyone understands engaging the public meaningfully is hard work. We value all efforts.

With that comes very serious concern about the process. No substantive overview of strategies to inform feedback. The expectation that people can and should boil thoughts on complex challenges down to fit on a 3x3 post it. The desire for people to have black and white reactions - in the form of red and green dots - to prepared statements on multi-faceted issues. The lack of maps to accompany Land Use recommended strategies, making any feedback abstract. Proactive discouragement of plain old community discussion.

The turnout also calls for more process at this juncture. Our volunteers estimate that less than 1/2 of 1% of residents showed up. And without it being zoomed and recorded like all other town body meetings, be assured that 1/2 of 1% is the full reach.

Please consider essentially redoing the public process. It was not designed with the seriousness suited to the seriousness of the LCP, and its impact on the community.

There is strong community interest in addressing the pressing housing challenges, and to do so in a way that ends up with plans and strategies that the community embraces so that they can move forward without delay and contention. The best way to that end is a robust engagement process now.

To try to live to the apparent interest in brevity demonstrated through the Post It and Dot Plan, the comments below are succinct and not necessarily comprehensive.

Thanks for all the time and effort of LCP Committee members in seeing this process through.

For BarnstableWatch,

Heather Hunt
Spokesperson, BarnstableWatch.com

With thanks to BarnstableWatch volunteers who reviewed the chapters, contributed questions, comments, and concerns, and helped consolidate them all to fourteen essential points.



PROVIDE SUBSTANTIVE PRESENTATIONS OF DRAFT CHAPTER CONTENT AND STRATEGIES WITH Q&A OPPORTUNITY BEFORE SEEKING PUBLIC INPUT.

The Town's advertisement about the Local Comprehensive Plan meetings in each of the villages said there would be a presentation of an overview of the four draft Chapters. There was not.

The presentation was exclusively about process.

Please re-do village feedback sessions and begin with a substantive overview of each the draft Chapters, as advertised, to enable public feedback to be informed by an understanding of the proposals, along with questions and answers on the content.

The advertisement also stated there would be discussion opportunity. Please do that.

It was disappointing that the process, characterized as about getting community feedback, held the four draft chapters until just 24 and 48 hours before the first two village meetings. Given that people work, that process choice made people read, digest and formulate comments on four chapters in a few evening hours. Respectfully, that element of the process disadvantaged the public.



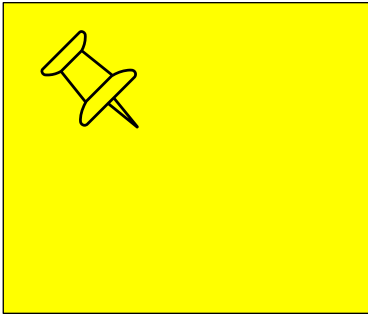
MAKE CLEAR THE LEVEL OF GROWTH AND DENSITY CHANGE THAT OUR SEWER INFRASTRUCTURE CAN ACTUALLY SUPPORT.

Many strategies in the draft Chapters on Housing and Land Use assume, or seek to enable, ambitious growth and increased density.

It's been observed that Barnstable cannot withstand the contemplated population growth and increased density in light of the current state of sewerage (as well as water system challenges in some areas.)

It's been suggested that the town should, in the first instance, establish the way forward on those issues, including for example, the means to fund sewerage capacity in the form of public support for a debt override or other means, and then come back to the public with these ambitious growth and density proposals. The Town should also make clear whether it is asking the public to fund sewers that will be flow neutral, or to accommodate the growth and density desires expressed in the draft Chapters.

At a minimum, please separate out the growth and density proposals and strategies that are supportable through existing sewer systems and any new sewer infrastructure for which there is funding from the growth and density proposals that are not. In other words, please make clear the level of proposed growth our infrastructure can withstand.



PRESENT DRAFT PLANS AND STRATEGIES TOGETHER WITH RELEVANT SUPPORTING DATA.

Plans need to be data driven. There was agreement to that fact when a member of the public made that point at one meeting.

Yet, the draft Chapters were presented to the public without data.

People cannot not intelligently assess the proposed strategies absent data.

The response to the need for data was that the Town had it, and people can go search out the applicable data on the Town website.

Respectfully, that's too much to ask of residents who work and have life commitments.

Please present the relevant, supporting data with the proposed strategies *before* asking residents to comment on them. Please do not put the burden of finding supportive data on the public.



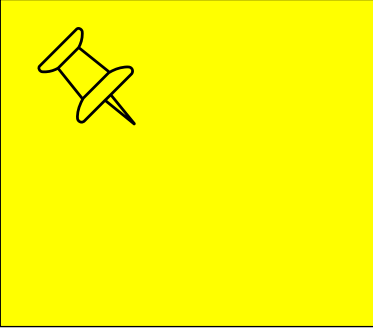
**REPLACE THE VAGUE STRATEGIES
WITH CLEAR, PLAINLY STATED
STRAIGHT TALK ABOUT WHAT IS
BEING PROPOSED WHERE.**

The Draft Chapters' strategies are vague. Clear and plainly stated strategies are a prerequisite to informed public comment. This is particularly true in relation to proposed zoning changes and housing strategies that would, among other things, upend single family zoning in existing residential neighborhoods.

Vagueness makes it impossible for residents to form a considered point of view. People deserve straight talk at this juncture, not later.

The undue vagueness exists about 1) what is being proposed, 2) in which villages the various vague proposals are intended to apply, and 3) where within any village the proposals are intended to apply. What we know is 1) the Cape Cod Commission wants multi-family by right in a certain circumference around certain villages and 2) the Planning Department staff proposed (on video) to widen that circumference in a draft presentation of the Housing Production Plan and added Centerville to that mix before the draft Plan went dormant for a year. Now, the draft LCP Chapters skips over what, and where.

Please provide specificity to enable informed public feedback.



**SEEK COMMUNITY FEEDBACK
ON AREAS THAT DO NOT NEED
DEVELOPMENT,
REDEVELOPMENT OR
“REDESIGN.”**

It is a common observation that many areas across the community work well now. They were deliberately and thoughtfully designed. They do not present a problem in need of a major fix, redevelopment, or new “design.”

The draft Chapters seem to overemphasize development, redevelopment, and an assumed need to “redesign” the community (i.e., the Cape Cod Commission’s new Design Guidelines.)

Please include in the call for public feedback sentiment about areas the community would like *not* to see “redeveloped” or “redesigned.”



ALLOW INFORMED COMMUNITY DISCUSSION, NOT VIEWS BOILED DOWN TO A 3x3 POST IT, OR OVERSIMPLIFIED GREEN OR RED DOTS.

At several meetings, people expressed a desire for discussion, not their thoughts boiled down to so few words that they can fit on a three-inch square, and not for green and red dots in response to complex, multi-faceted questions. Yet, the public expressing interest in substantive discussion was repeatedly told to stop talking and to stick things on boards. “We are using words to communicate our views,” and “we do not want sticky notes,” they said.

In some cases, the people showed they did not want to boil their views on fundamental and complex community matters down to a phrase that fits on a Post It by not using them.

Please redo the process to prioritize public input in the form of the spoken word – the normal process and what people said they want - following a substantive presentation of each chapter. Please have all LCP Committee members listen to all public comment, as do members of all public bodies in Barnstable.

Public comment opportunity at the LCP Committee meetings is no substitute. (Public comment is uneven, unpredictable, i.e., speakers get between two minutes to more than ten minutes without forewarning or rationale as to the variation.)



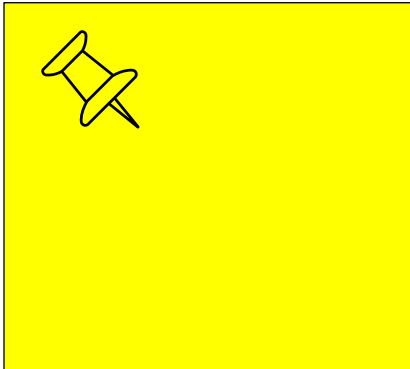
EXPLAIN THE CONTRADICTIONARY STATEMENTS AT THE APRIL MEETINGS ABOUT VILLAGE FEEDBACK AND HOW VILLAGE-SPECIFIC FEEDBACK WILL BE OBTAINED.

The LCP process message was that residents could attend any of the Village meetings and give feedback, whether one resides in that village or not. There was in fact cross-village attendance at the meetings: for example, of the approximately ten residents who attended the meeting in Hyannis, about six were from Hyannis (that's .03% of Hyannis).

Yet, at a village meeting, residents were also told that the screen of the meeting was to be of that specific village. They were told that the LCP Committee representatives would report the feedback given at the village meeting as from the village where the meeting was held.

Those two representations are incompatible.

Request: Please explain how the LCP Committee is assessing feedback from the April meetings as being through the screen of the village, per the representation. Please explain the plan for village-specific feedback.



PROVIDE MAPS WITH LAND USE AND HOUSING STRATEGIES BEFORE ASKING FOR COMMENT ON THEM. SEEKING PUBLIC COMMENT ON LAND USE WITHOUT MAPS WILL NOT MEASURE PUBLIC SENTIMENT.

The draft Land Use and Housing Chapters were issued for public comment without maps to let the public know where the proposed strategies would apply.

Absent maps, public comment on land use will necessarily be in the abstract and not reflect public sentiment.

Please release the maps with the land use and housing draft chapters *before asking the public to comment.* Absent that, real public reaction will occur down the road at the Council or in a citizen-organized event as Barnstable has seen on other issues.



BRING VISIBILITY ABOUT THE SOURCE OF LAND USE AND HOUSING STRATEGIES TO ENSURE THE PUBLIC’S VIEWS, NOT A CONSULTANT’S PREFERENCES, DRIVE.

Please bring visibility as to the origin of the strategies: A consultant, LCP Committee members, the public (and if so, supporting data) or Town employees.

The public should have confidence that a consultant is not imposing its views on Barnstable. In this case, the consultant posed following question: *“California is trying to tackle its housing crisis by rethinking the traditional single-family home. Why isn’t Massachusetts?”* Barnstable should not follow California residents’ views; it should follow Barnstable residents’ views.

Following that presentation, the draft Chapters propose to undo single-family neighborhoods. This is contrary to what Barnstable residents ranked as the #1 type of housing they want more of.

The Planning Department is also on record calling single-family zoning a “burden” to the community, contrary to the predominant community views per town surveys.

A consultant also parroted the CCC’s call for advocacy to *change* public opinion, i.e., *“build a political coalition,” “train advocates,” “cultivate an anti-NIMBY corp.”* Barnstable should follow public opinion, not overrun it as a consultant urges.



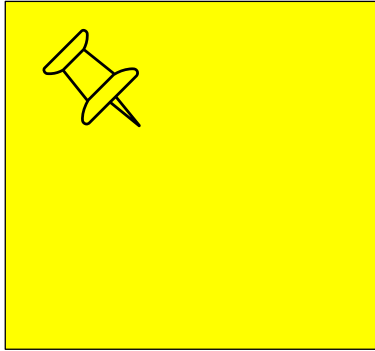
INCORPORATE A VILLAGE VISION AND GOALS COMPONENT TO THE PLANNING PROCESS.

People expressed interest in preparing a village plan that represents the vision and goals of its residents to inform a town plan. This approach respects villages' distinct land mass, character, qualities, and limitations. The Draft Chapters, and the entire process, blur all that away.

Then, the draft Land Use Chapter proposes to “[c]onduct an analysis, at least once every two years, of development and redevelopment in each of the Village Centers, **compared with the planned vision for each village** and the stated purposes of any village zoning districts.”

Whose vision for each village? We know the Planning Department announced the end of village plans without Town Council discussion. Now, the process has no village-specific planning or feedback component (i.e., only slightly more than half of the approximate 10 public attendees at the Hyannis meeting were from Hyannis).

Yet, there is a proposal to conduct regular analysis of village redevelopment consistent with a “planned vision for a village” that does not come from a village. **Please incorporate a village vision and goal component to the planning process.**



WHERE THE DRAFT CHAPTERS ECHO THE CAPE COD COMMISSION'S LAND USE AND HOUSING STRATEGIES, IT SHOULD BE SO NOTED FOR PUBLIC AND PUBLIC BODY AWARENESS.

In February 2024, the Town Council communicated to the CCC the primary role of municipalities in establishing land use policies. Yet, the draft Chapters parrot many of the unelected Cape Cod Commission's (CCC) land use and housing strategies - without saying so.

Where the draft Chapters echo the Cape Cod Commission's land use and housing strategies – from conversion of single-family homes to multi-family, to paying property owners not to Airbnb, to village center redevelopment - it should be so noted.

Recall the CCC's Regional Housing Strategy was not informed by public input. The CCC advance "stakeholder" process included invitees on various payrolls, not the public. Indeed, the CCC Housing Strategy called for advocacy: if the CCC *reflected* public opinion, there would be no need to call for organized advocacy to *change* public opinion. Another example of the short shrift to public input? In the fall of 2023, the CCC contracted for a consultant and a law firm to produce specific Design Guidelines in furtherance of its draft Regional Housing Strategy – months *before* its public comment period. In fact, the CCC published its final Design Guidelines before the Commission discussed or posted public input.



**CONSIDER THE MYRIAD
DIVERSE WAYS THRIVING
TOURIST COMMUNITIES HAVE
RETURNED EXISTING HOUSING
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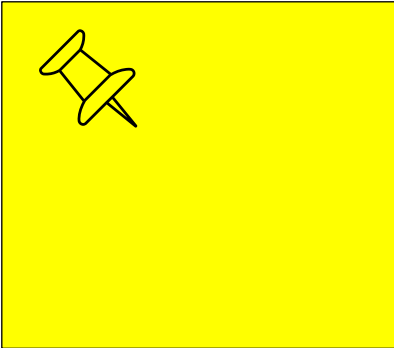
BarnstableWatch commends the objective of returning some STRs to housing use.

The Cape Cod Commission's Regional Housing Strategy proposed to pay property owners *not* to short-term rent (STR) their properties. The draft Housing Chapter mirrors that by proposing to extend the residential property tax exemption to that end.

Paying landlords not to Airbnb did not come up in the countless hours of public debate on Airbnb rules a few years ago, in the endless community conversations

BarnstableWatch volunteers had with citizens across town, in extensive research about Airbnb restrictions adopted across the country and the world, in the Town's Citizen Survey, or in the Town's Housing Focus Groups.

Before following the Cape Cod Commission's (unfunded) recommendation to pay property owners developed outside of an open, public process, please discuss the myriad diverse and effective ways communities, including thriving tourist communities, have returned existing housing stock for use by locals as homes.



**A SUBSTANTIVE PUBLIC
CAMPAIGN ABOUT THE
PROPOSED CONTENT MAY
SIGNIFICANTLY INCREASE
CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT.**

The effort to organize the meetings is commendable.

There was, however, an exceptionally low turn-out. As noted, if it is accurate that about six of the approximately ten public attendees at the Hyannis meeting were from Hyannis, it represents about .03% of the Hyannis residents. Overall, based on reports from people who attended the various village meetings, it appears reasonable to ballpark that less than ½ of 1% of Barnstable residents showed up.

Respectfully, based on BarnstableWatch's experience hearing from a huge number residents about zoning and the use of single-family homes, it is possible that communicating more about the substance of the strategies could dramatically increase public engagement.

Please consider a public campaign on the substance of proposals so that the public process and participation matches the importance of the plan.