

TOWN OF WEST BOYLSTON
OFFICE OF THE TOWN ADMINISTRATOR



EXECUTIVE REPORT

SWOT EXERCISE
(STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES & THREATS)
FEBRUARY 28, 2009

Introduction

The West Boylston Town-Wide Planning Committee is beginning the process of planning its first update of the West Boylston Master Plan for release in 2010. In preparation of that update, the Town-Wide Planning Committee invited interested people and organizations in the Town to a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) exercise. This exercise was held on Saturday, February 28, 2009 at the High School Cafeteria from 9:00 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.

A SWOT analysis guides the community through a process to identify the positives and negatives inside the Town (the strengths and weaknesses) and outside the Town (the opportunities and threats). Developing a full awareness of the Town's situation can help with both strategic planning and decision-making.

The exercise was initially open to one representative of each of the various boards and committees of the Town as well as the citizenry at large. In the end, we had 17 participants in the exercise from many aspects of community life. They were:

Diana Engelbart
Karen Paré
Mike Fishbein
Charlie Greenough
Nancy Lucier
Tom O'Connell
Neil Norum
Lynne Norum
Michelle Harris
Ken McDonnell
Tony Meola
Susan Meola
Don DeMarsh
Winthrop Handy
Kathleen Jablonowski
Barbara Wyatt
Pamela Frechette

The exercise on February 28th was sponsored by the Town Wide Planning Committee and was facilitated by Rockie Blunt, a resident of West Boylston with many years of experience doing business and governmental consulting, including conducting SWOT exercises. During the SWOT exercise, participants were asked to brainstorm on each topics and then the group was asked to pare these down using a voting method. All responses are included in this executive report.

Strengths

The focus group was asked to compile a list of the community's strengths. Identified were:

Strength	# Votes
Friendly welcoming people	15
The Wachusett Reservoir	11
Rail Trail	11
Location	14
Schools	8
Library	12
Parks	12
Small community	11
Post office	0
Community events	8
Beauty of the town and reservoir	11
Accessibility to major highways	7
Historical society	3
Accessible shopping	8
Locally owned businesses	6
Public safety forces	12
Perception from outsiders	7
Senior community housing	1
Volunteerism	8
Open Space	9
Good clean water	7
Town Meeting	8
Form of Government	8
Self-sufficient	6
Diverse cultures	3
Identified landmarks	7
Diverse wildlife/plants & animals	6
Winn's studio	0
Access to regional airport	2
Fishing	3
Youth sports	6
Churches	6
Nearby colleges	10
Youth theatre	2
Red Sox fans	0
Common/bandstand concerts	8
Access to health care	7
Cemeteries	1
Sense of history	8

Patriotism	2
New sewer infrastructure	6
Master Plan	8
Street plowing	5
Municipal Light Plant	11
Water Department	5
Open Space Plan	3
Country Club Setting	1
Low crime	11
Responsive emergency services	8
Emergency planning	2
Library services & programs	8
COA Services	3
Definitive zoning	6
Community service from the jail	4
Lack of eyesores	5
Stability of community	10
Brush dump	1
Curbside recycling	11
Dedicated employees	4
Movie theater	3
Restaurants	0
Walmart	0
Tax payers	0
Funeral Home	0
Proximity to Worcester	2
Proximity to the mountain	1
Low auto/home insurance rates	3
Proximity to public transportation	1
American Legion	0
Darby's	0
Diversity of businesses	7
S&S Deli	0
Central Street Market	0
Dunkin' Donuts	1
Stability of local businesses	1
CVS	0
Number of banks	0
Salter College	3
Non-regional schools	2
Good schools	5
Pride Park	5
Yoga Studio	0
Local Art community	3

After the initial votes, the following strengths were listed as the Top strengths of the Town and they were subsequently re-voted:

Strength	# Votes
Friendly welcoming people	5
The Reservoir	5
Rail trail	4
Location	12
Library	9
Parks	3
Small community	6
Beauty of the town/reservoir	7
Public safety	9
Open space	6
Nearby colleges	4
Municipal Light Plant	3
Stability of the community	8
Curbside recycling	4

After the consensus exercise, the focus group settled on the highest ranked STRENGTHS of West Boylston as:

1. The Location of the Town
- 2 – Tie: Public Safety Forces
The Library
4. The Stability of the Community
5. Beauty of the Town/Reservoir

Weaknesses

The focus group was asked to compile a list of the community's weaknesses. Identified were:

Weaknesses	# Votes
Revenue	15
Lack of emergency planning for pets	1
Anti-business	7
Reservoir	4
MWRA – devastating tax base	7
Lack land	7
Too many permits	9
Lack of town hall	12
Small % of business to residents	4

Lack of senior center	4
Lack of town center	12
Unattractive Rte. 12	8
Inadequate police/fire building	3
Lack of grocery store	5
Inadequate tax base	10
Unkept promises from the state	7
Inadequate DPW building	4
Lack of jail payments	9
Asian Longhorned beetles	5
No community center	6
Insufficient public transportation	1
Lack of control over the reservoir	13
Lack of town pool	6
DCR impact/control over town	11
Lack of sidewalks	8
Unions	4
Small high school	4
Cost of street lighting	0
Noise pollution	1
Inadequate storm sewers	4
Inadequate access to the industrial park	3
Inadequate or damaged roads	3
Insufficient ball fields	3
Lack of cooperation on regional efforts	5
Lack of adolescent recreation	5
Forced sewer hookups	5
Failed sewer system	4
Lack of affordable housing	2
Low amount of town lands	5
Lack of new construction	1
Deficits	11
More needs than Resources	5
No cable competition	8
High town debt	9
Rising Power Transmission costs	2
Rising health care costs	12
No town pool or beach	5
Lack of independent cable company	1
Too many curb-cuts impacting traffic flow	2
Dependence on volunteers	1
Parking at library	3
Parking at schools	0
Cost to residents for busing	1
Cost of employee health care	8

Sports fees	2
Cost for out of town education	1
School overcrowding	3
Animosity due to competing interests in Town	6
Site plan regs.	3
Voter Apathy	8
Inability to maintain fields	1
Inability to maintain buildings	6
Pension costs	9
Lack of qualified candidates	5
Lack of board volunteers	3
Lack of diversity on Boards	0
Parochial /'insular' perception	3
Financial impact of affordable housing	2
Lack of Pay As You Throw	1
Lack of political leverage	5
Lack of bulk item recycling	3
State mandates	11
No single-stream recycling	3
Deteriorating services @ town and school	5
No alternative revenue sources	5
Lack of Financial Analysis of New Programs	6
Insufficient municipal buildings	0
Deferred maintenance	7

After the initial votes, the following weaknesses were listed as the Top weaknesses of the Town and they were subsequently re-voted:

<u>Weaknesses</u>	<u># Votes</u>
Revenue	13
Too many permits	0
Lack of town hall	4
Lack of town center	6
Inadequate tax base	4
Lack of jail payments	2
Lack of control over reservoir	7
DCR impact/control over the Town	10
Deficits	3
High Town Debt	4
Rising health care costs	4
Pension costs	7
State mandates	7

After the consensus exercise, the focus group settled on the highest ranked WEAKNESSES of West Boylston as:

1. Lack of revenue
2. DCR impact/control over the Town
- 3 – tie: Lack of control over the reservoir
High pension costs
State mandates

Opportunities

The focus group was asked to compile a list of the community's opportunities. Identified were:

Opportunities	# Votes
New alternative energy funding	8
Utilizing local colleges	6
Utilizing local college students	1
Boating on the reservoir	10
Expand business/industrial park	11
Increase entrepreneurial/small business	11
Hire grant writer	8
Examine best practices of other towns	9
Develop community theater	0
Using DCR land to our own advantage	12
Go after jail funds	6
Reuse of the landfill	9
Town owned water bottling	7
New commuter rail/mass transit	3
Review rules/regs to support business	7
Revenue generating community center	2
Beautify Rte. 12	11
Increase recreational tourism	8
Find alternative use for vacant buildings	10
Foster relationship w/ DCR	11
Foster relationship with state officials	6
Collaboration with outside partners	6
Collaboration with surrounding towns	7
More arts programs/events	6
Collaboration with the sheriff	4
Market the town	7
Regionalization of some town services	11
Economic stimulus – investigate opportunities	8

Pre-planning on infrastructure	7
Utilizing college professors	2
Volunteer/community service for students	2
More bicycle events	6
More motorcycle events	0
More cruise nights	1
Increase bicycle touring	1
Revenue enhancements on rail trail	6
Trolley to trains	4
Reach out to groceries	5
New community housing with state agencies	1
Charge for the brush dump	5
Market open storefronts at plazas	4
Market Worcester Corporate Center	1
Market land on Tivnan Drive	3
Open mini-golf course	5
New health care industries	6
New elder service industries	3
New community health care	2
Casinos	1
Flea markets	2
Sports leagues/fields	0
Hydroponic agriculture on DCR lands	8
Skate parks	4
Return of town lands from DCR	5
Community gardens	11
Attract assisted living	1
Community internet	4
Create own cable	0
Community fairs	2
Cell tower income	8
Biotechnology	10

After the initial votes, the following opportunities were listed as the Top opportunities of the Town and they were subsequently re-voted:

Opportunities	# Votes
New alternative energy funding	8
Boating on reservoir	7
Expand business at Industrial Park	7
Increase entrepreneurial/small business	4
Hire Grant Writer	7
Best practices in other towns	3
Using DCR land to our own advantage	9
Reuse of landfill	3

Beautify Rte. 12	6
Increase recreational tourism	4
Find alternative to vacant buildings	2
Foster relationship with DCR	6
Regionalization on some town services	9
Economic stimulus – investigate opportunities	8
Hydroponic agriculture on DCR lands	4
Community gardens	4
Cell tower income	3
Biotechnology	7

After the consensus exercise, the focus group settled on the highest ranked OPPORTUNITIES of West Boylston as:

- 1- tie: Using DCR lands to our own advantage
Regionalization of some town services
- 2 – tie: New alternative energy funding
Economic stimulus – investigate opportunities

Since there was a four-way tie for 5th place, the focus group conducted a run-off vote for the fifth recommended opportunity. The group voted overwhelmingly for:

- 5. Hire grant writer

Threats

The focus group was asked to compile a list of the community’s potential threats. Identified were:

Threats	# Votes
Economic Downturn	14
New unfunded mandates	14
Need for more services	5
Apathetic citizens	8
Less local aid	15
Higher state taxes	10
Decreased property values	9
Inflation	8
Higher health care costs	12
Aging boomers	2
Reduction in municipal forces	6
Limited/no construction	3
More DCR land takings	5

People leaving the town/state	6
Children leaving the school system	3
More debt	9
Competition for limited resources	8
Aging sewer infrastructure	9
Rising sewer costs	4
More beetles/invasive species	5
Unpredictable emergencies/disaster	10
Terrorism	3
Increasing costs for municipal services	12
Increase in crime rate	6
Pandemic/flu	2
Increased senior population	1
Decrease in small businesses	4
Unemployment	12
Decreasing grant opportunities	5
Decreased charity	2
Decreased volunteerism	5
Loss of bus service	1
Increased tolls	0
Increased special education costs	1
Increased poverty	4
Aging building/infrastructure	9
Community depression	4
Increased water pollution	0
Increased environmental concerns	4
Increased fire concerns	1
Overrides	6
Lower student performance	2
Lower student preparedness	5
Air pollution	0
Future environmental mandates	7
Outsourcing	1
Higher education costs rising	0
Increased residential density	0
Poor public health	7

After the initial votes, the following weaknesses were listed as the Top threats to the Town and they were subsequently re-voted:

Threats	# Votes
Economic downturn	14
New unfunded mandates	12
Apathetic citizens	4
Less local aid	10

Higher state taxes	5
Decreased property values	3
Inflation	4
Higher health care costs	5
More debt	3
Increased competition for limited resources	6
Aging sewer infrastructure	3
Unpredictable emergencies/disaster	3
Increasing costs for municipal services	5
Unemployment	1
Aging infrastructure/buildings	8

After the consensus exercise, the focus group settled on the highest ranked THREATS of West Boylston as:

1. Economic downturn
2. New unfunded mandates
3. Less local aid
4. Aging infrastructure/buildings
5. Increased competition for limited resources

Conclusion

It is clear that the nation, state and local economic downturn has greatly influenced the SWOT exercise by looking at the final recommendations that came from this process. What is also telling is that the three major ‘upcoming issues’ that the Town Administrator has identified in his last 5 budget messages (inadequate building/facilities, rising costs of personnel benefits, and insufficient revenues) are also represented in the results of this exercise.

Table 1.

<p><u>Strengths</u> The Location of the Town Public Safety Forces The Library The Stability of the Community Beauty of the Town/Reservoir</p>	<p><u>Weaknesses</u> Lack of revenue DCR impact/control over the Town Lack of control over the reservoir High pension costs State mandates</p>
<p><u>Opportunities</u> Using DCR lands to our own advantage Regionalization of some town services New alternative energy funding Economic stimulus – investigate opportunities Hire grant writer</p>	<p><u>Threats</u> Economic downturn New unfunded mandates Less local aid Aging infrastructure/buildings Increased competition for limited resources</p>

This document will be distributed to all elected and appointed boards in West Boylston, all Town officials and the citizens of the Town in an attempt to begin to think about how important decisions to be made by the Town may be impacted by these influences, both internal and external. Certainly the challenges facing West Boylston are great; dire in some cases, typical of other communities in other cases. Working together, the Town has the capacity to deal with these issues and come out of the process stronger. The Town Wide Planning Committee stands ready to help the policy makers of the town deal with these challenges.