**Meeting Minutes - Destination Groton Committee (DGC) Meeting**

**Meeting Date:** July 9, 2025

**Attendees:**

* **Committee Members:** Greg Sheldon, Jeff Gordon, Joni Parker-Roach, Heather Puksta
* **Sub-Committee member:** Karen Tucker-Barisano
* **Other guests:** **Studio InSitu**: Tim Hess, Matthew Killam, Joshua LaLiberte; **Town Commitees:** John Sopka (Housing Authority), Veronica O’Donnell (Sustainability), Patrick Parker-Roach (Sustainability), Leslie Lathrop (Cultural Council), Nancy Muller (Cultural Council)

**Meeting Summary:** This meeting centered on the ongoing visioning efforts for Groton Center, highlighting the interplay between economic potential, historical context, and community character. The committee reviewed results from the retail leakage and destination studies, discussed long-standing traffic and zoning issues, and examined conceptual designs to help guide future mixed-use development. Core themes included the importance of pedestrian safety, affordable housing, cultural identity, modern mobility, and the constraints of current zoning and parking regulations. Community engagement, both in-person and through public forums, was emphasized as critical to the project's success.v

**Key Takeaways**

1. **Economic Studies and Limitations**

* The **Retail Leakage Study** suggests potential for economic recapture but is overly specific and town-wide in nature—not Groton Center–specific.
* The **Destination Study** focuses on enhancing visitor experience and increasing dwell time/spending through cultural and recreational assets.

1. **Zoning and Carrying Capacity**

* Current zoning and parking requirements (e.g., 3 spaces per 1,000 sq ft retail) severely limit viable mixed-use development.
* Several parcels in Station Avenue do not support the vision outlined in past plans unless regulations change or municipal parking is introduced.
* Building height restrictions may unintentionally prohibit the kinds of attractive buildings the town says it wants to encourage.

1. **Parking and Traffic**

* Concepts include potential **municipal parking lots**, especially behind Station Avenue and near Prescott.
* **Traffic calming** strategies (e.g., bulb-outs, raised crosswalks, roundabouts) were discussed to enhance pedestrian safety and create a more village-like atmosphere.
* Concerns were raised about travel time impacts and rerouting pressures.

1. **Cultural Identity and Community Buy-In**

* Several ideas (like a pavilion, a town loop trail, or birding platforms) aim to enhance the **Town Center as a cultural destination**, echoing past plans and community values.
* Anecdotes from similar communities like Maynard showed that **cultural districts** can shift the mindset and behavior of developers.
* There's a need to **reaffirm and actively promote Groton's character** through design, art, trails, and events like food and arts festivals.

1. **Future Mobility Considerations**

* Suggestions to consider **autonomous vehicles, electric scooters, and non-car-dependent designs** were noted as missing from current plans.
* Multi-modal planning was acknowledged but underemphasized.

1. **Public Engagement and Transparency**

* Many committee members and the public had not been properly notified; better coordination with committee chairs is necessary.
* The **presentation was well-received** but criticized for moving too fast and lacking clarity in slides.
* The **Groton Herald’s reporting** was described as misleading and unconstructive; the committee reaffirmed that the process is still conceptual, not a concrete development proposal.

1. **Housing and Mixed Use**

* Many attendees requested **stronger focus on housing** (especially affordable options) and ensuring that **mixed-use buildings** are realistically viable.
* Feedback from developers indicates **housing above retail is necessary** for economic feasibility.

**Action Items**

* Improve outreach and communication with all town committees for future workshops.
* Incorporate more visible discussion of housing needs, including affordable and age-friendly units, in presentations and materials.
* Acknowledge and begin planning for emerging transportation technologies (e.g., autonomous vehicles, scooters).
* Refine slides and visuals for clarity and legibility—include legends, street names, and key landmarks.
* Continue integrating Groton’s cultural identity and community pride into design narratives.
* Explore incentives (e.g., density bonuses) to encourage the kind of mixed-use, pedestrian-focused development desired by the town.
* Follow up with Planning Board and Select Board with a clear explanation of the difference between aspirational modeling and actionable proposals.
* Ensure future meetings are held in acoustically friendly and accessible venues.