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

**Meeting Date:** July 23, 2025

**Attendees:**

* **Committee Members:** Greg Sheldon, Jeff Gordon, Joni Parker-Roach, Brian Bolton (via Teams), Heather Puksta
* **Sub-Committee member:** Karen Tucker-Barisano

**Meeting Summary:** The meeting was held to refine planning for the **September public engagement forums** and to develop a **Town Center Growth Forum** focused on economic development, demographic trends, and Groton’s town center vision. The committee also began evaluating materials and messaging for forum promotion, partnership opportunities with local institutions, and thematic content that would attract residents, business owners, and potential investors.

The purpose was to ensure that the **forum would not only provide information, but also build buy-in**, showcase economic opportunities, and reinforce that the Destination Groton Vision is a long-term, community-driven process—not a finalized development proposal.

**Key Takeaways**

1. **Public Forum Planning – “Town Center Growth Forum”**

* The committee aligned around a **forum format** that would include:
  + A **keynote presentation** about demographics and economics (potentially from Tim Hess or another regional planning expert)
  + A **panel discussion** with community stakeholders (e.g., business owners, schools, Groton Hill Music Center, realtors)
  + **Visual exhibits and posters** illustrating growth concepts, visitor data, and the potential for local business development
  + Opportunities for public Q&A or feedback input
* A draft event title was brainstormed: **“Town Center Growth Forum: Vision, Opportunity, and the Road Ahead”** (subject to revision).
* Groton Hill Music Center was proposed as a venue due to its draw, location, and symbolism of Groton’s evolving destination identity.

1. **Content and Messaging Strategy**

* The forum will tie the Destination Groton Vision Plan to:
  + Retail leakage and revenue recapture
  + Demographic shifts (aging population, declining school enrollments)
  + Groton's role as a regional destination and potential to capture visitor spending
* Messaging must reinforce:
  + The **conceptual and non-binding** nature of the vision
  + The economic and civic upside of well-planned growth
  + That Town Center is a **starting point**, not the exclusive focus
* The tone will remain collaborative, inviting, and rooted in community storytelling and opportunity—not in architectural jargon or planning mandates.

1. **Audience & Stakeholder Outreach**

* Audience targets were discussed:
  + Business/property owners, Groton Hill leadership, hospitality and wedding sector reps, school and nonprofit leaders, town officials, residents
* The forum is intended to be **broadly appealing**, not narrowly technical
* The committee agreed to pursue **selective personal invitations** alongside general publicity
* Stakeholders discussed for participation or invitation included:
  + Groton Hill Music Center
  + Lawrence Academy
  + Local inn and restaurant owners
  + Real estate professionals
  + Possibly high school students or recent graduates as voices of the next generation

1. **Planning Materials and Promotion**

* A visual exhibit plan will be developed, potentially including:
  + Interactive poster stations
  + Data visualizations from FXM retail leakage study
  + Side-by-side “Today vs. Potential Future” images of downtown Groton
* Website updates and email outreach will support promotion
* The committee discussed creating a **registration page** to estimate attendance and collect emails for follow-up

**Action Items**

* Confirm venue and date for the September forum (target: mid-to-late September)
* Draft and finalize event title and short description
* Identify and confirm keynote speaker and panelists
* Develop visual content for posters and exhibits
* Create public-facing invitation and web registration page
* Coordinate targeted outreach to stakeholder groups (GHMC, schools, businesses)
* Finalize messaging language to frame forum as a conversation about opportunity, not a finalized plan
* Consider food/beverage setup and staffing/logistics for the event
* Draft brief script or talking points for committee members to use at the forum