

Town of Groton Master Plan: Community Engagement Plan

A master plan involves a comprehensive planning process meant to engage the community in developing a vision for their town. It can act as a guidepost for local policy over a long period of time, usually 10-15 years. The Town of Groton has engaged Barrett Planning Group to study existing local conditions; engage Groton residents and others in developing the plan; identify key issues and set goals; and develop an implementation plan to guide Town policy, regulatory changes, capital investments, and other actions over the plan's lifespan. Barrett Planning Group has also partnered with Nitsch Engineering and FXM Associates on the development of this plan.



A Master Plan typically contains the following elements:

- **Vision Statement & Goals:** A Master Plan vision is an aspirational statement that describes what the Town wants to be like at the end of the plan's 15-year lifespan. Goals are more specific benchmarks that, if achieved, will ideally create the conditions described in the vision statement.
- **Inventory & Assessment:** This section examines the existing conditions in Groton to help ground future recommendations. State law requires this section to address seven elements:
 - Land Use
 - Housing
 - Economic Development
 - Natural & Cultural Resources
 - Open Space & Recreation
 - Community Services & Facilities
 - Transportation
- **Implementation Plan & Recommendations:** A list of concrete actions developed in cooperation with the Town to achieve the goals listed in the plan. Implementation plans often include guidance on the responsible parties and anticipated timeframes of each recommended action.

At the end of the process, the Planning Board has the authority to vote on whether to adopt the Master Plan pursuant to Massachusetts General Law (MGL) Chapter 41 section 81D.

This engagement plan is intended to provide an overview of the process, key involved parties, and expectations. This document may be revised as more information becomes available or to update on key event dates as necessary.

Summary of Key Dates

Community Forums:

September 26, 2023 – Community Forum #1

February 6, 2024 – Community Forum #2

TBD – Target: April 2024 – Community Forum #3

Community Surveys:

September 26-October 31, 2023

February 6-March 5, 2024

Purposes of Community Engagement

Community engagement will be a recurring feature of developing the new Master Plan. While a variety of government, academic, and institutional resources provide a solid basis for understanding the Town’s pressing issues, the personal knowledge of people familiar with Groton is even more essential to figuring out what truly matters to the community. The engagement process is designed with the following purposes in mind:

1. Facilitate discussions and activities aimed at helping residents articulate their hopes and aspirations for Groton’s future and synthesize those thoughts into a coherent vision statement and set of goals.
2. Educate the public about the Master Plan process and key findings about the Town that emerge from our analysis.
3. Tap into local knowledge that will inform the analysis presented in the Master Plan.
4. Present information and ideas to the Groton community and hear the community’s feedback through a mix of online and in-person methods of participation, such as community forums, surveys, online interactive maps; or virtual/telephone interviews.
5. Convey the results of community engagement to the Planning Board, residents, and other Town decision-makers.

Stakeholders, Advisors, Decision Makers

The entire Groton community is invited to participate in the planning process. With assistance from the consulting team and Town staff, the Planning Board will endeavor to involve as many people as possible.

Stakeholders:

As used in this Master Plan, “stakeholder” means:

- All residents of Groton;
- Groton business owners and people working in Groton;
- Town staff, volunteers, and government officials;
- Other community organizations, nonprofits, religious institutions, etc.

Advisors & contributors:

This Master Plan process is led by the Groton Planning Board:

- George Barringer
- David Bonnett
- Alyson Bedard
- Lorayne Black
- Phil Francisco
- Russel Burke
- Scott Wilson

The Planning Board will receive project updates approximately every 4-6 weeks from the consultants during Planning Board meetings. The main staff contact for this project is Takashi Tada, Land Use Director.

Decision makers:

Between the beginning and end of the project, there will be approximately ten regular meetings of one or more members of the consulting team and the Planning Board. This board, along with Town Staff, will guide the direction of the plan throughout the process. The Planning Board has final approval authority for Master Plans.

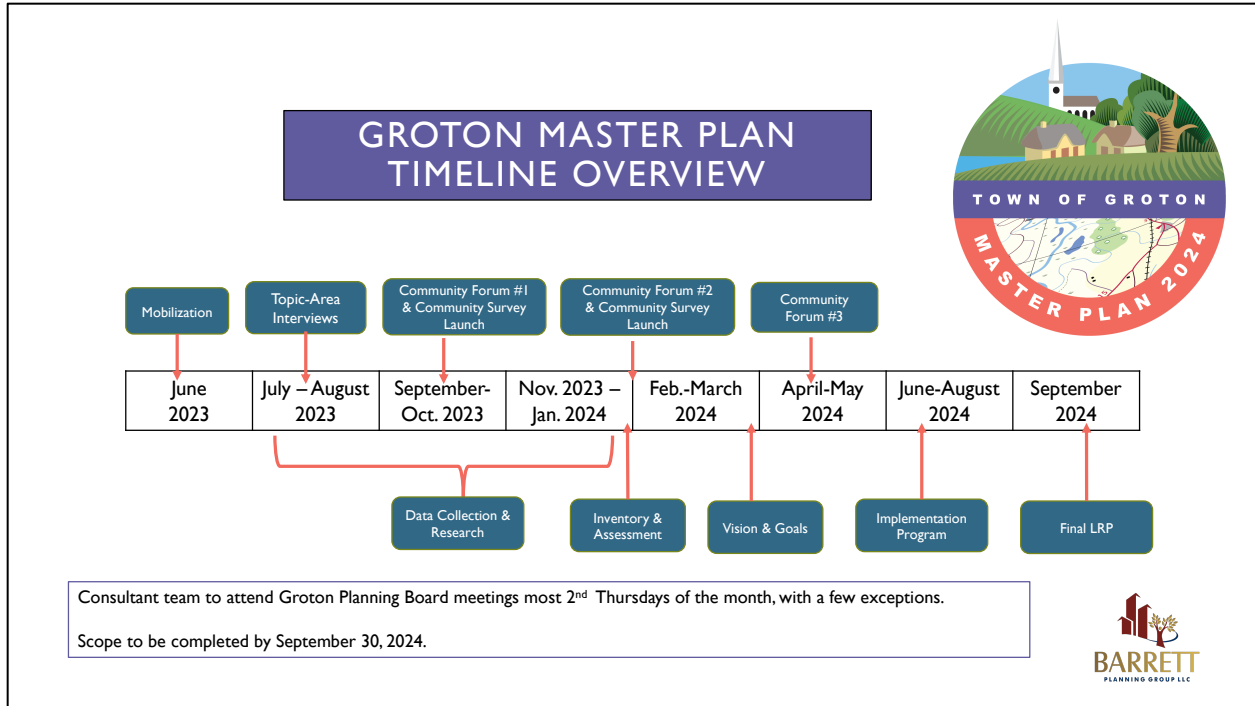
Resources, Scale of Engagement, Project Schedule

Scale of engagement:

The engagement process will seek broad participation from community members (see “Approach”). Master Plans touch on a wide range of local issues and provide a chance to create widespread community buy-in on topics essential to the Town’s future. Therefore, it is important to engage as many residents as possible, including those who are less likely to participate in local planning processes (for example, families with children, senior citizens, renters, minorities, or people with limited English skills).

Project schedule:

Community Engagement will take place throughout the planning process. A detailed project timeline is attached here.



Communications

Town staff and Planning Board members will share responsibility for disseminating information about the Master Plan initiatives through available channels.

Website:

Information about the Master Plan will be made available primarily through the Town’s website, with regular updates posted to the Planning Board webpage and a visible presence on the home page of the website.

Flyers:

Display flyers will be used to provide information about meetings for this project and for availability of the community surveys. Locations for display include Town Hall, the Library, the Groton Center (Senior Center), the Prescott Community Center, and other appropriate locations.

Flyers and other engagement materials will be delivered primarily through email blasts, the Town website, and Town social media accounts.

The Groton Herald:

The Planning Board members will provide information to the Groton Herald regarding the Master Plan activity and upcoming events.

Approach

Overview:

The approach to developing the Master Plan is based on these principles:

- Proactive and collaborative planning involving residents, officials, and staff is key to building Groton’s ideal future;
- Broad input from stakeholders, advocates, and participants in established community relationships will be sought out in the planning process, as demonstrated by listening attentively, engaging in dialogue, and sharing feedback;
- Community engagement activities will be monitored, evaluated, and adjusted as necessary to make the planning process as effective as possible.

Access to Information. Interim documents and the final Master Plan will be posted on the Town’s website.

Multiple Opportunities:

The engagement effort will include a variety of participation opportunities so that people can contribute to the process as their schedules and preferences permit. The different ways in which community members will be asked to participate should also serve as an education and training process, fostering a group of community leaders who are well-informed about the Master Plan and will work to implement it.

Engagement by project phase & mode of participation

First Round of Interviews: Topic-Area

The purpose of this phase is to help the consultants learn about the needs, issues, and challenges in Groton through interviews with local officials and volunteers. Town staff will assist in connecting us to the relevant parties. The interviews be scheduled in 1.5-hour blocks with up to eight participants each. There will be no formal presentation by the consultants. The interviews are not public meetings, and no audio or visual recordings will be distributed publicly. A summary of the topic-area interviews will be included in the Master Plan report.

Anticipated Schedule: July 24-August 4, 2023

Second Round of Interviews: Town Staff & Follow-Up on Topic-Area

The purpose of this phase is to help consultants learn more about the needs, issues, and challenges in Groton through interviews with Town department staff and to dive deeper on topic-area subjects raised in the initial round of interviews. The interviews be scheduled in small groups or one-on-one as necessary. There will be no formal presentation by the consultants. The interviews are not public meetings, and no audio or visual recordings will be distributed publicly. A summary of the interviews will be included in the Master Plan report, which will include information woven throughout relevant chapters of the plan.

Anticipated Schedule: September 5-October 31, 2023

First Community Forum

Large-scale public engagement efforts help to build the plan’s credibility and broaden the conversation about the Town’s to include as many residents as possible. It also offers a way

engage residents in critical thinking about what people value in Groton and whether the community's values are changing. This goals for this meeting include:

- Introducing the Master Plan process and setting expectations for the next year of activity, as well as the consultant team and our local partners.
- Engage in creative visioning exercises that will help us understand what makes Groton special and how the Town is perceived by residents.
- Allow participants to begin the conversation about how the Town has changed since the last Master Plan was adopted and what future priorities should be.
- Explain next steps.
- Launch first community survey.

Date: September 26, 2023 at the Groton Center (Senior Center)

Second Community Forum

The second meeting will build on the first meeting as well as additional research conducted by the consultants. The goals for this meeting include:

- Review highlights from the consulting team's analysis of existing conditions and update the public on the planning process.
- Solicit feedback on relevancy of goals identified in the 2011 Master Plan.
- Have participants identify key issues and concerns facing the Town and think about how these might be addressed in the Master Plan vision statement and goals.
- Launch second community survey.

Date: February 6, 2024 at the Groton Center (Senior Center)

Third Community Forum

The third community forum will be designed to consider potential recommendations of the Master Plan. The goals for this meeting include:

- Review the draft Goals, Vision Statement, and Key Issues and update the public on the planning process.
- Hear feedback on these materials and ensure that they align with community interests and values.
- Have participants brainstorm their own potential action items and connect them to the plan's broader goals.

Date: TBD – Target April 2024

Community Surveys (Online)

The Consultants will develop two short online surveys to broaden participation between community forums. One survey will launch concurrently with each of the first and second

community forums and run for approximately one month. Each survey will serve as a follow-up to the associated meeting and allow residents who did not participate in person the opportunity to offer their opinions on the same key topics. The survey will go beyond the meeting content and ask more detailed questions so even those who participated live will get something new out of filling out the survey.

The surveys will be broadly advertised on-line and in a variety of locations so as to give an opportunity to those unable to attend the public forum to provide their input. The consulting team will provide a link and QR code to be placed on the project web page, promoted on display boards in key locations, e.g., Senior Center, Library, and Town Hall, and distributed through email lists.

Anticipated Schedule: September-October 2023 & February-March 2024

Town-Wide Events

The consulting team will provide materials to Town Staff or members of Boards and Committees who plan to attend in person events as they happen as ongoing social distancing requirements allow. (Example: Groton-fest September 30, 2023)

Appendix

Outreach and Engagement Contacts

Please note that the following list of resources and engagement contacts is not exhaustive and may be supplemented throughout the engagement process.

Town resources

In addition to Town staff, the following Town resources may be helpful during the community engagement process:

Select Board
Affordable Housing Trust
Housing Partnership
Historic Districts Commission
Historical Commission
Finance Committee
Community Preservation Committee
Destination Groton Committee
Zoning Board
Sustainability Commission
Council on Aging
Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion Committee
Trails Committee

Civic organizations & neighborhood groups

Friends of Prescott
Friends of Groton Elders
Groton Neighbors
Groton Business Association
Groton Conservation Trust
Groton Historic Center
Nashua River Watershed Association
Four Corners Neighborhood Association
Lost Lakes Neighborhood Association

Houses of worship

Groton Interfaith Council
Christian Union Church
First Baptist Church
First Parish Church of Groton
New England Shirdi Sai Parivaar
Our Lady of Grace
Union Congregational Church

Previous Planning and Engagement Efforts

The engagement process will be informed by lessons learned from previous engagement efforts in Groton:

1963 Comprehensive Master Plan

1990 Comprehensive Master Plan

2002 Comprehensive Master Plan

2011 Comprehensive Master Plan

2021 Hazard Mitigation Plan & Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Report

2020 Housing Production Plan

2008 Town Center Traffic Calming Report

2012 Walkability Report