



APPENDIX G

2024 SURVEY RESULTS

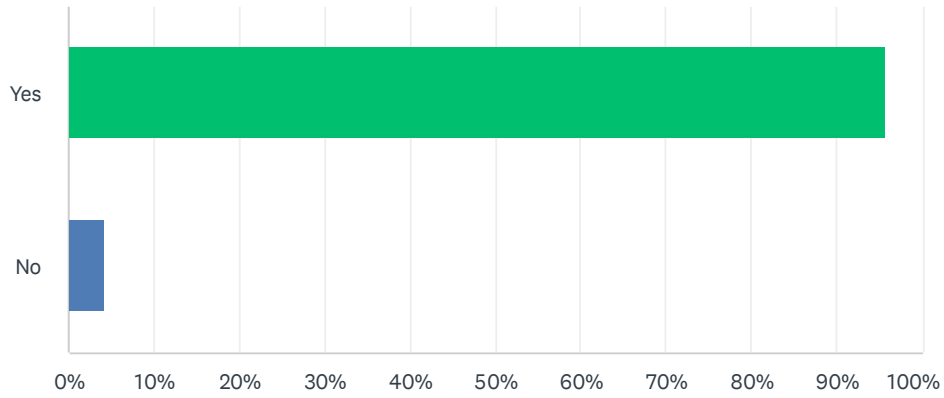
AND ADDITIONAL PUBLIC COMMENTS

TOWN OF LEVERETT

MAY 14, 2024 - JUNE 13, 2024

Q1 Have you reviewed the draft comprehensive plan (dated May 2024) on the Town's website?

Answered: 23 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	95.65%	22
No	4.35%	1
TOTAL		23

Q2 Do you think the plan captures the existing conversations about Leverett's future? Why or why not?

Answered: 22 Skipped: 1

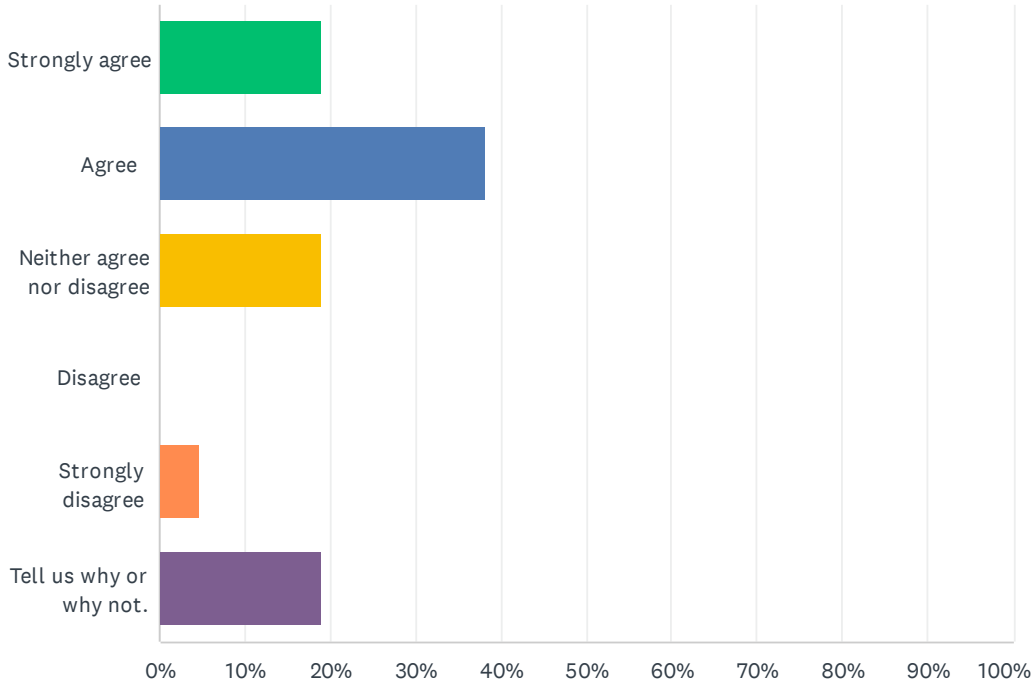
#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	For the most part. We need to make it easier to build and afford housing in Leverett. Our income is our tax base and we need to expand it. Whether it is single, double or triple family housing or rentals, we need more taxable residences and businesses.	6/10/2024 11:56 PM
2	I found the plan puzzlingly limited in the scope and issues it takes up and uninspiring overall. The issues I most care about are not reflected in the plan.	6/10/2024 10:11 PM
3	Yes it does seem to do so.	6/10/2024 10:03 PM
4	Yes - and we (spouse and I) - are very impressed and grateful for the excellent quality, thoughtfulness and timeliness of the report.	6/10/2024 3:47 PM
5	Some yes, and some no. One thing that bothers me is the Town residents are depicted as a static set of people aging in place. I think that is seriously flawed as a perception in that maybe as much as 20% of people I have known have left this area upon retirement (or soon after) to move to areas where they have family: maybe where they grew up, or more commonly where their children located. I think that impacts many of the assumptions about retired income levels and other aspects. The discussion of businesses completely ignores the reality and effect of Internet commerce.	6/9/2024 7:04 PM
6	In general, it does. One big miss is the Kittredge Estate because, I guess, it's a recent development.	6/9/2024 2:10 PM
7	I appreciate all the hard work that went into this plan. It started new conversations and ways of interacting as a community. That is a positive. That said, this plan is poorly structured, confusing, and extremely difficult to parse out a cohesive narrative. It is contradictory [for example, it cites two different #s for the same data point (survey respondents), poorly edited [accidentally references the wrong town and wrong procedures], there is clear methodology laid out, and there a vomiting poorly distilled and presented. There are no best practices, no sources of evidence for policy interventions, no comparisons to other similar jurisdictions (except for a review of the tax rate, which is good information for myth busting that Leverett's tax rate is unusually higher than our neighboring towns).	6/9/2024 1:24 PM
8	I do. I think that the process offered an array of opportunities for residents to express their ideas and concerns. The plan prioritizes themes that came up through different opportunities. It is a guide, not an inflexible agenda.	6/9/2024 1:21 PM
9	Yes, all the issues that I have and those others which I have heard discussed are included.	6/9/2024 1:10 PM
10	Yes	6/9/2024 12:40 PM
11	I see a major between the values 1,4,5 that all have to do with maintaining Leverett rural character as well as the top two contributors to livability and the top three goals (having to do with preservation of the environment) and the zoning recommendation 2 that prioritizes increasing development on existing lots. This zoning recommendation conflicts with the top values, contributors to livability and goals. I also personally disagree with that recommendation.	6/7/2024 3:32 PM
12	No--it does not address the need to maintain the rural character of Leverett. We can't all become suburbs.	5/31/2024 11:53 AM
13	Yes, although concern about Kittridge property may need attention.	5/30/2024 1:48 PM
14	Yes. I think the Planning Board listened carefully to residents in the three sessions and has presented the most essential problems and also qualities of our town.	5/27/2024 5:00 PM
15	mostly	5/27/2024 11:59 AM

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16	Need to consider the younger families more. It seems like there is s heavy focus on the elderly community.	5/23/2024 10:27 AM
17	To a large extent yes. However, with respect to use of trails by ATV, there was concern at our debate table that exclusion of ATVs from trails, or discouragement of making trails ATV accessible affected the ability of physically challenged individuals to participate in hunting despite a lifetime love of this activity before loss of full ambulatory function. In particular the desire to return to Brushy mountain and see friends and neighbors at the hunt. This concern seemed completely reasonable to me and I wonder whether it would be acceptable to set aside some trails in the hunting season for ATV use. It seems fair that community needs and desires for trail use over and above quiet, contemplative walks should be served, and I recommend further consideration of this issue.	5/20/2024 11:35 AM
18	It captures some conversations but not all conversations. Depending on where you live in town, water quality is a bigger concern than dam safety, for example - those should be teased out.	5/17/2024 11:47 AM
19	Yes	5/17/2024 9:25 AM
20	Many of the conversations yes but many are poorly developed.	5/15/2024 9:25 PM
21	No, because it only represents a small group of people's ideas. Also, certain demographics could have certain agendas like making Leverett more small city like Amherst, Hadley, or Northampton. People moving from more congested parts of the state want to bring that to this part. Also, we do not need to force housing into the town.	5/15/2024 7:19 AM
22	I am about to review - one quick comment in acknowledgements - Nicole Vajda's name is spelled incorrectly - Vajda, not Vadja	5/14/2024 12:58 PM

Q3 Do you agree with the values and goals presented in the plan?

Answered: 21 Skipped: 2



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Strongly agree	19.05% 4
Agree	38.10% 8
Neither agree nor disagree	19.05% 4
Disagree	0.00% 0
Strongly disagree	4.76% 1
Tell us why or why not.	19.05% 4
TOTAL	21

#	TELL US WHY OR WHY NOT.	DATE
1	First of - the report mentions two separate sets of values (steering group values & values derived from the survey). It is unclear which values this questions is reference, let alone the relationship between those two sets of values. With respect to the "potential goals" derived from the survey, I would suggest that this is misclassified as a goal. They are high-level themes. There are too broad and too vague to be considered a goal.	6/9/2024 1:24 PM
2	The "values and goals" are not all the same. They cannot all be lumped together as something to be agreed with or not.	5/27/2024 5:00 PM
3	there are a number of values and goals, some I like, some I don't	5/27/2024 11:59 AM
4	I do not think we need businesses and industry. We are very close to Amherst, Hadley, and Northampton. All of those places are close by and have resources we need. We do not need	5/15/2024 7:19 AM

Town of Leverett Comprehensive Plan

public transportation. I chose to live in Leverett because it was not like those places. I pay higher taxes to live in peace without congestion and a large population.

Q4 What did you like best about the plan? What topics or information resonated with you?

Answered: 19 Skipped: 4

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	Changing planning by-laws to reduce building restrictions and make Leverett a more affordable place to live.	6/10/2024 11:56 PM
2	Certainly the issue of ADU's could beneficially be addressed by the town.	6/10/2024 10:11 PM
3	Accessory dwelling unites, keeping free and open space, limiting development, protecting water, possible PVGA into Leverett, more focus on elderly needs.	6/10/2024 10:03 PM
4	Support for seniors, small business, protection of resources, including water, roads, bridges.	6/10/2024 3:47 PM
5	I thought the identification of certain well intentioned provisions in the zoning that actually act to prevent desirable construction was most useful.	6/9/2024 7:04 PM
6	Recognizing the aging demographics, and suggesting adjusting zoning to allow additional housing units on a parcel to accommodate multi-generational family living or as way to house people providing elder care.	6/9/2024 2:10 PM
7	I appreciated the review of previous reports in section 5.3	6/9/2024 1:24 PM
8	The theme supporting aging in place.	6/9/2024 1:21 PM
9	Services for the aging population. Preservation of natural areas.	6/9/2024 1:10 PM
10	Plans for senior citizens housing and support activities	6/9/2024 12:40 PM
11	The values.	6/7/2024 3:32 PM
12	Climate resiliency	5/31/2024 11:53 AM
13	Breadth of coverage, including climate change, & historical context	5/30/2024 1:48 PM
14	I thought it was very thorough. What resonated for me most is that Leverett has two major problems which are not going to be easy to tackle: our aging population and our limited water resources. Other problems are tied to these: we cannot increase population density (by, for example, having smaller lots and multi-unit housing) with our limited water (and sewer) capacity. My own well (375 ft. deep) runs dry from time to time. Worrying about water has been one of the downsides to living in Leverett.	5/27/2024 5:00 PM
15	bridge/road repair, potable water, fire dept budget, etc are fairly simple actions that most people will be in favor of. ADUs might be doable, but there was no mention that in many cases adding an adu will require a larger septic system, and maybe a new well.	5/27/2024 11:59 AM
16	Considering the needs of seniors and young families/individuals for affordable housing. Considering the needs of some individuals for public transport, and for local health services. Considering preservation/adaptive reuse of historical resources and expanding cultural resources in town. Preparing for developing extreme climate events with respect to aquifer protection, fire security, temporary air conditioned, heated and safe shelter	5/20/2024 11:35 AM
17	Changes to housing/building code and zoning to allow more owners to build ADUs and/or more houses on their properties.	5/17/2024 9:25 AM
18	The differences between demographics on age lines in town with other communities.	5/15/2024 9:25 PM
19	Keeping the town's rural character, preservation of land and natural resources.	5/15/2024 7:19 AM

Q5 What did you think requires further exploration or study?

Answered: 19 Skipped: 4

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	Increase the taxable population, lower taxes, have public water & sewer and how to keep our school awesome and sustainable.	6/10/2024 11:56 PM
2	Partnerships with the state (for example, the Atty General's Neighborhood Renewal Division Projects) and private entities to rebuild and refurbish our infrastructure. Ways to collaborate more productively on projects such as this or, for example, the Field Museum. Bring in outside expertise, mediation, or knowledge.	6/10/2024 10:11 PM
3	What to do with barely used places like the "museum," the "historical society" and Moore's Corner, all of which are sad and rundown. How to ban hunting in town.	6/10/2024 10:03 PM
4	Ramifications of multifamily housing; [and separately] funding potential from outside sources.	6/10/2024 3:47 PM
5	In my own experience I find shopping and entertainment locations on Sunderland, Montague, and Greenfield to be really more useful and more accessible than in Amherst, Hadley and Northampton. Especially not Amherst as they work to become more car-hostile. Which is to say reestablishing FRTA service and the idea of PVTA and FRTA interchange in Leverett seems highly desirable.	6/9/2024 7:04 PM
6	Interactions with neighboring towns. For ex., we share a border with Sunderland, with major gravel mining business. Yet we don't to my knowledge work with Sunderland on impacts of the gravel mines on Leverett water, forests and recreational areas.	6/9/2024 2:10 PM
7	Everything in this report requires additional exploration	6/9/2024 1:24 PM
8	I agree with the identification of topics with the "rethink" label	6/9/2024 1:21 PM
9	Preservation of open land and agriculture	6/9/2024 12:40 PM
10	The contradiction I mentioned above.	6/7/2024 3:32 PM
11	I am particularly concerned about the poor communication about this process. I should not have to learn about this via an informal email listserv or signs I happen to drive by.	5/31/2024 11:53 AM
12	Use of CPA funds; eg., for historical sites, affordable housing	5/30/2024 1:48 PM
13	Affordable housing: this is tied into insufficient water and septic, as explained above. Reliable and frequent public transportation to allow seniors who can no longer drive to remain in Leverett.	5/27/2024 5:00 PM
14	Changing zoning to allow denser housing is a bad idea, one that I will not support. People in Leverett do not want to see their town turn into another Amherst or Sunderland.	5/27/2024 11:59 AM
15	Multi family housing& developments, & the effects on the community. I like the country feel of our town and would not want to see a big complex built like the one currently being presented for the kitteredge estate. This would change the dynamics of our beautiful quit town.	5/23/2024 10:27 AM
16	The high marks for ADU rather than potable water and/or transportation improvement. Why? The placement of two photos of "before" or "then" that feature gas stations makes me wonder if folks drafting this are clear on where we are now. It's not deteriorating historic properties for the "now" - it's a dependence on cars to get from point a to point b and that is not representative of all people in Leverett who may want or need reliable public transportation.	5/17/2024 11:47 AM
17	Public transportation	5/17/2024 9:25 AM
18	The plan does not appear to address on-going medical needs of the aging population of the town and the fact that the town relies on Amherst to provide medical response to town when they are frequently tied up on Umass related calls and the fact that the town is neglecting the town's own ability to have 1st responders arrive quickly.	5/15/2024 9:25 PM

19 How zoning changes and allowing multi-family dwellings and other new dwelling types will change the town. Does the town have resources to add this population and if allowing these to be built on smaller lots, the septic and well water capability?

5/15/2024 7:19 AM

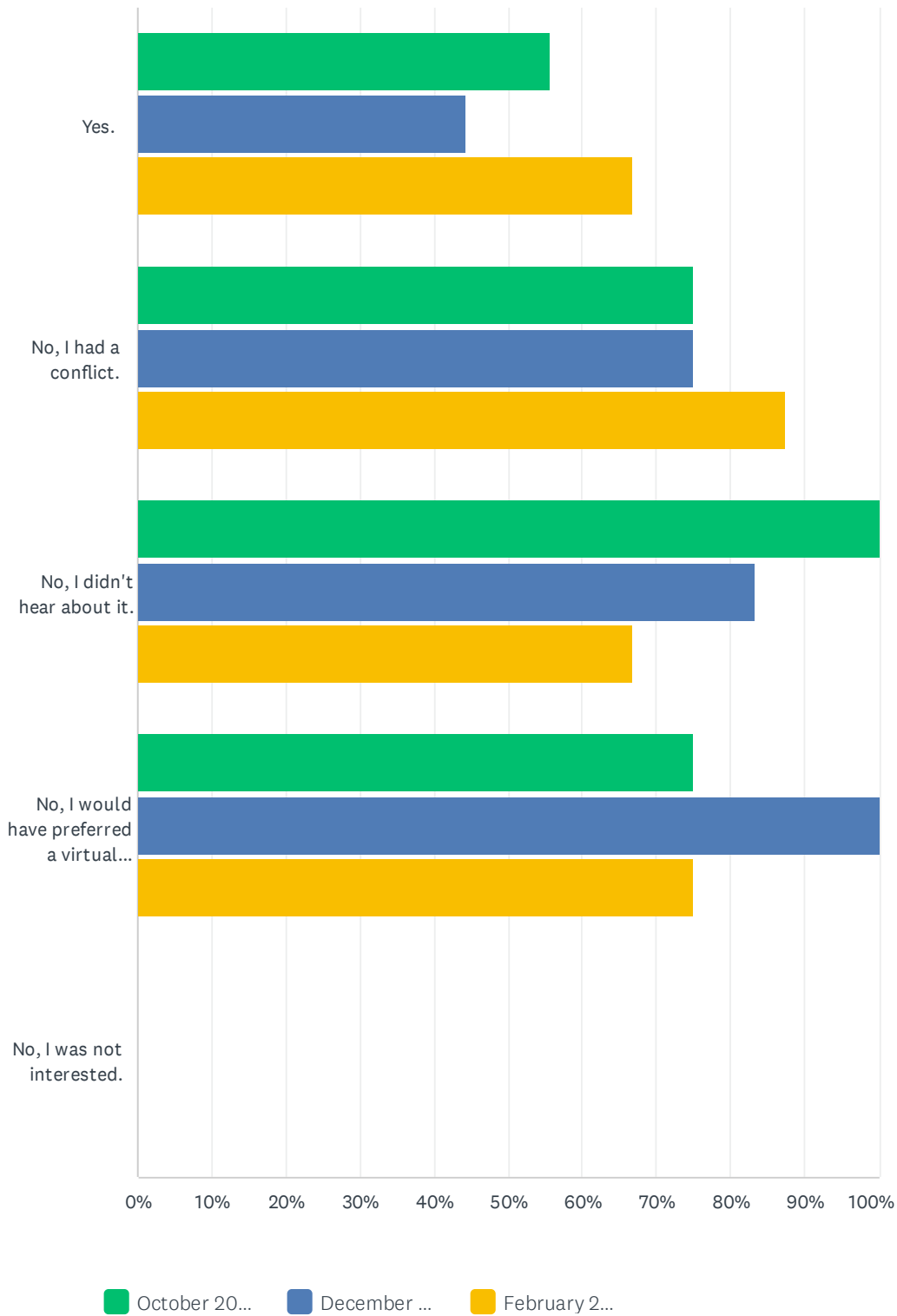
Q6 What is missing from the plan that you think should be included?

Answered: 15 Skipped: 8

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	Preserving our town's most valuable asset, our children's education/well being and our school.	6/10/2024 11:56 PM
2	Economic development in keeping with the character and values of the town, focus on younger adults and families who are moving to town and trying to grow businesses, economic development in the arts & culture area, preservation and adaptive re-use of historic assets, preservation of natural resources, and an inspiring and engaging vision for the future.	6/10/2024 10:11 PM
3	Strong emphasis on eliminating ALL poisoning of leverett pond, regardless who does not like water grass.	6/10/2024 10:03 PM
4	Strengths/weaknesses of inter-town.-county partnerships.	6/10/2024 3:47 PM
5	The effect of Internet commerce is totally missing from the report but much of the discussion of services and solutions should be totally reframed to take it into account. And it will only increase in effect. In general "brick and motar" establishments are being replaced by virtual stores. In turn those can as well be physically located in Leverett as in Boston - maybe in some ways even better here.	6/9/2024 7:04 PM
6	Need to talk more about what impacts multi-family units, smaller lot sizes, increased population will have on schools, water, and roads, especially near Amherst.	6/9/2024 2:10 PM
7	1. Methodology overall including naming the data sources, interpretation, risks, etc. 2. Detailed methodology on the community engagement workstream. This is extremely confusing and convoluted. 3. Best practices 4. Comparison to other towns with similar characteristics to Leverett 5. Goals (in the true sense of the word) 6. A holistic view for the comp plan, there is a narrow focus on zoning which is not best practice and out of step with the results of the survey.	6/9/2024 1:24 PM
8	I'm good with it as is	6/9/2024 1:21 PM
9	Light pollution and habitat protection.	5/31/2024 11:53 AM
10	Leverett depends on private septic and wells (except for 6 houses), which limits the density of housing that can be established on a given lot. There is no mention of this in the report. Also, the 162 page report is WAY too long.	5/27/2024 11:59 AM
11	Ways to attract younger families into the community by exploring updating our current community field.	5/23/2024 10:27 AM
12	How do we form a plan that benefits all not some - look at the broadband project. The tethering to the Amherst school system - it is not what it once was.	5/17/2024 11:47 AM
13	Sidewalks!	5/17/2024 9:25 AM
14	Input from town residents who are subject matter experts in the areas being discussed. This is not a new thing in town the advise of very well qualified residents is frequently rejected in favor of a few select people,	5/15/2024 9:25 PM
15	None.	5/15/2024 7:19 AM

Q7 Did you attend any of the three public workshops held in Town Hall?

Answered: 21 Skipped: 2

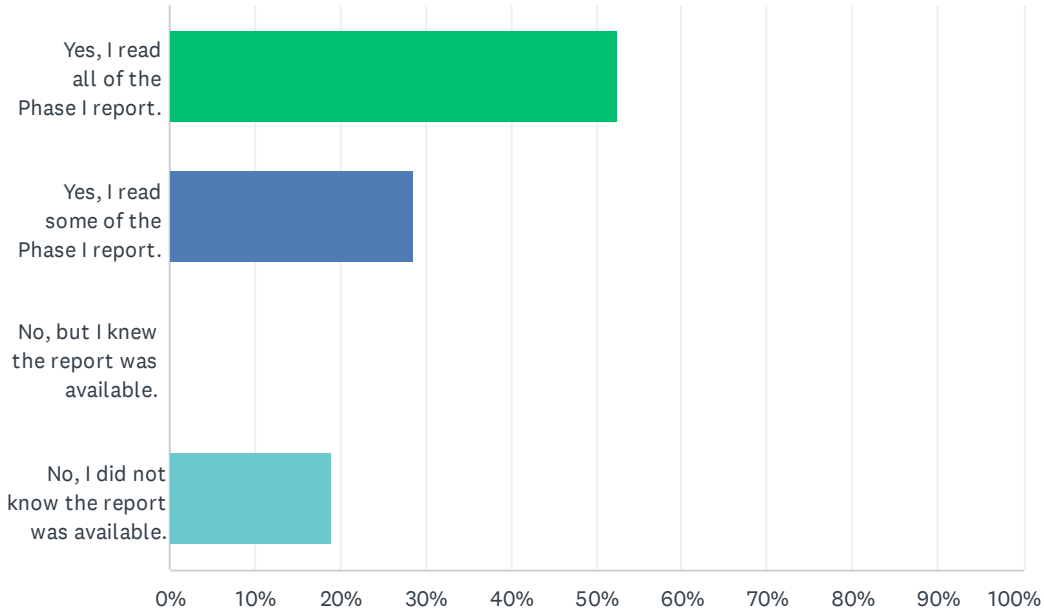


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	OCTOBER 2023	DECEMBER 2023	FEBRUARY 2024	TOTAL RESPONDENTS
Yes.	55.56% 5	44.44% 4	66.67% 6	9
No, I had a conflict.	75.00% 6	75.00% 6	87.50% 7	8
No, I didn't hear about it.	100.00% 6	83.33% 5	66.67% 4	6
No, I would have preferred a virtual meeting.	75.00% 3	100.00% 4	75.00% 3	4
No, I was not interested.	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0

Q8 Have you read the Phase I Report from Spring 2023? You can find it on the Planning Board's webpage for the Comprehensive Plan. Scroll down to March 2022 to June 2022: <https://leverett.ma.us/p/2105/Leverett-Comprehensive-Plan-project-timeline>

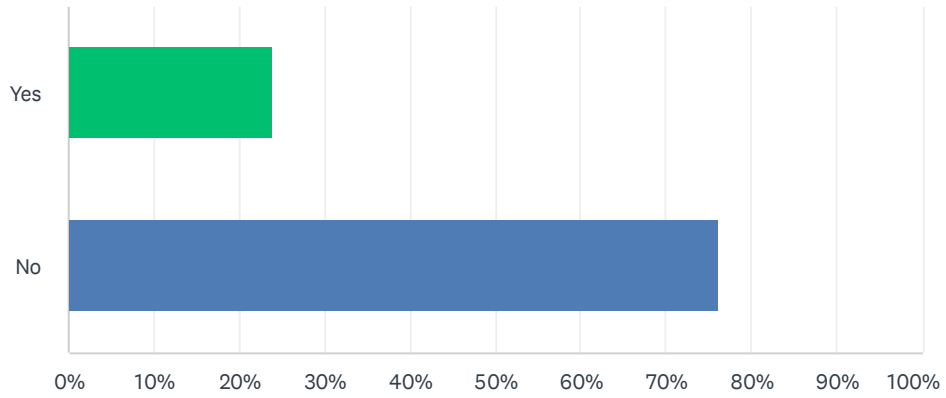
Answered: 21 Skipped: 2



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes, I read all of the Phase I report.	52.38%	11
Yes, I read some of the Phase I report.	28.57%	6
No, but I knew the report was available.	0.00%	0
No, I did not know the report was available.	19.05%	4
TOTAL		21

Q9 Did you attend a small group meeting sponsored by the Steering Group?

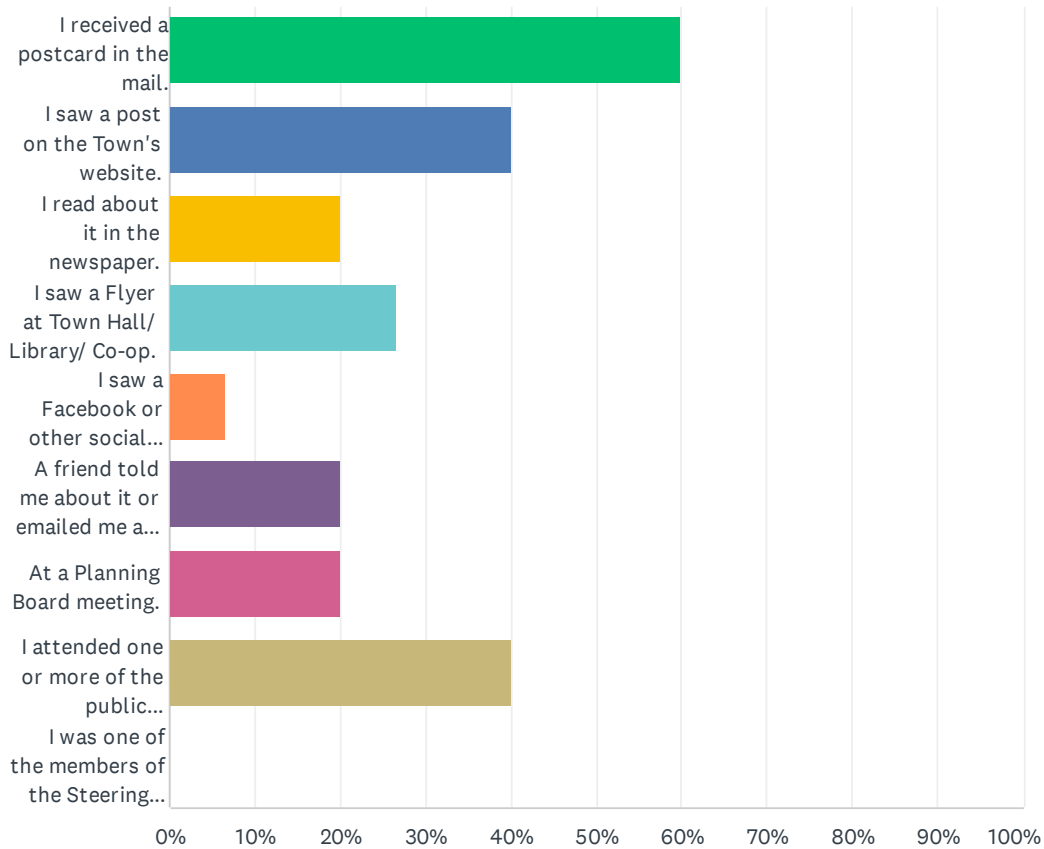
Answered: 21 Skipped: 2



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	23.81%	5
No	76.19%	16
TOTAL		21

Q10 How did you hear about the Leverett Comprehensive Plan? Choose all that apply.

Answered: 15 Skipped: 8



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
I received a postcard in the mail.	60.00% 9
I saw a post on the Town's website.	40.00% 6
I read about it in the newspaper.	20.00% 3
I saw a Flyer at Town Hall/ Library/ Co-op.	26.67% 4
I saw a Facebook or other social media post.	6.67% 1
A friend told me about it or emailed me a link.	20.00% 3
At a Planning Board meeting.	20.00% 3
I attended one or more of the public meetings.	40.00% 6
I was one of the members of the Steering Group.	0.00% 0
Total Respondents: 15	

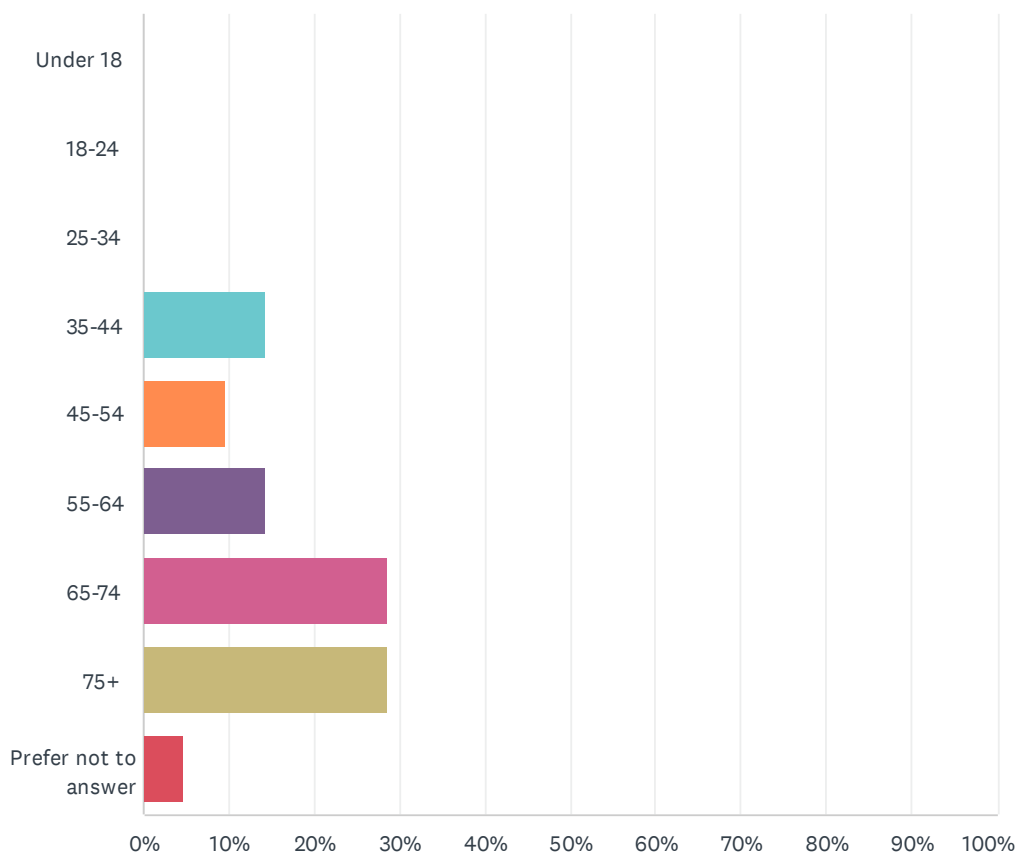
#	OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY)	DATE
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Town of Leverett Comprehensive Plan

1	Leverett Connects and town calling system	6/11/2024 12:08 AM
2	I heard about it as a member of a town board on which I serve	6/10/2024 10:16 PM
3	conversations with a planning board member	6/10/2024 3:52 PM
4	people were prompting it at the Transfer Station (one of the most important social locations in Town)	6/9/2024 7:08 PM
5	I received emails and texts via the town notification system	6/9/2024 3:34 PM
6	Via email from town and Leverett Connects. Town newsletter.	6/9/2024 2:12 PM
7	Leverettnet	6/9/2024 1:23 PM
8	I joined Leverettconnects email for this purpose.	5/31/2024 11:57 AM
9	Leverettconnects	5/23/2024 10:29 AM

Q11 Tell us about you! How old are you?

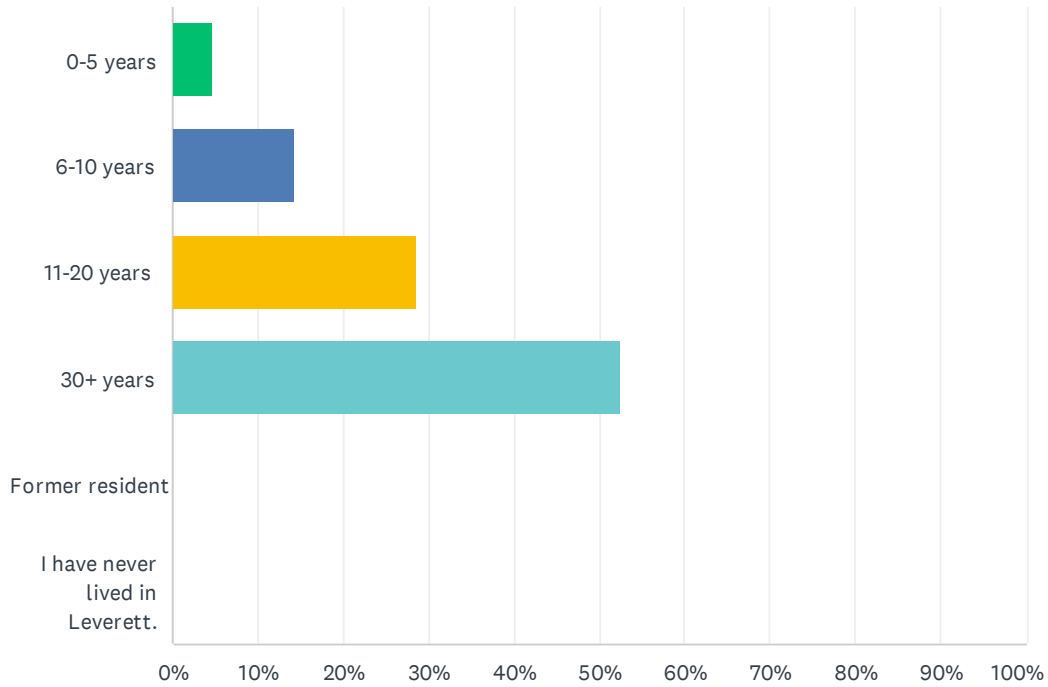
Answered: 21 Skipped: 2



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Under 18	0.00%	0
18-24	0.00%	0
25-34	0.00%	0
35-44	14.29%	3
45-54	9.52%	2
55-64	14.29%	3
65-74	28.57%	6
75+	28.57%	6
Prefer not to answer	4.76%	1
TOTAL		21

Q12 How long have you lived in Leverett?

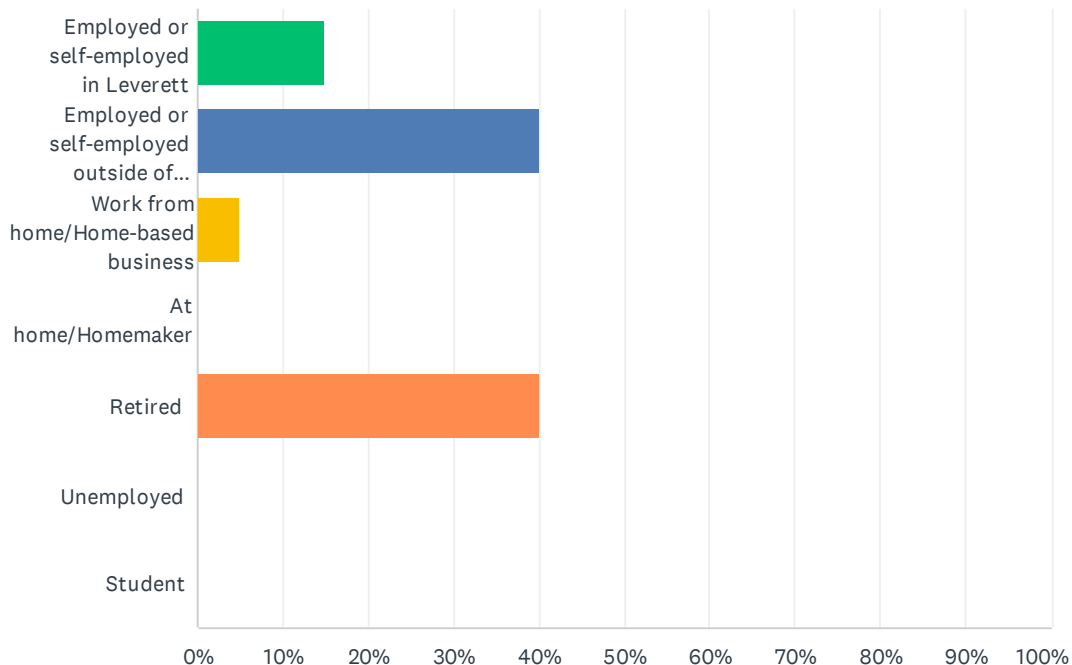
Answered: 21 Skipped: 2



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
0-5 years	4.76%	1
6-10 years	14.29%	3
11-20 years	28.57%	6
30+ years	52.38%	11
Former resident	0.00%	0
I have never lived in Leverett.	0.00%	0
TOTAL		21

Q13 Which of the following best describes your employment? (Choose one)

Answered: 20 Skipped: 3



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Employed or self-employed in Leverett	15.00%	3
Employed or self-employed outside of Leverett	40.00%	8
Work from home/Home-based business	5.00%	1
At home/Homemaker	0.00%	0
Retired	40.00%	8
Unemployed	0.00%	0
Student	0.00%	0
TOTAL		20

Q14 Is there anything else the Planning Board or the Steering Group should know as we wrap up Phase II of this planning process? What should the Planning Board and other town officials consider as they begin addressing the recommendations of the plan?

Answered: 14 Skipped: 9

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	Lessen building restrictions, stop conserving more land, focus on attracting more families to Leverett and affordable housing. I am not saying go all in (I do not support the town of Kittredge or want to see hundreds of new units) but lets add 45 units for affordable housing and encourage new families to move to Leverett.	6/11/2024 12:08 AM
2	I strongly endorse the suggestion of a "Phase III" to expand the scope of the plan and build on what's been done. This plan seems like a starting point rather than an end product. I agree with the recommendations put forward by Jacob Park, and their spirit. The Planning Board needs to consider a broader, more optimistic, forward-looking and more inclusive vision for our town.	6/10/2024 10:16 PM
3	A total ban on poisoning Leverett Pond, a realistic assessment of the non-feasibility of a gas station in town, sidewalks along Montague Road.	6/10/2024 10:05 PM
4	Continue with excellent commitment with town communications.	6/10/2024 3:52 PM
5	Be wary of very expensive mandates that have low added value for Town communication.	6/9/2024 7:08 PM
6	I have a big problem with the development of the report irrespective of the recommendations themselves. First and foremost, the community engagement tactics are siloed and disconnected. There is also an odd weighting of the third workshop, which seems to have outsized importance for the conclusions of the report. There is no clarity on the relationship between the insights derived from survey results, the workshops, and the small groups. Also, as someone who attended some of the workshops, I noticed how little facilitation there was and totally NO CONTEXT on the issues presented to ground the reader. Folks were given input without definitions of terms, history, or a real sense of tradeoffs. I filled out the survey and am filling out this survey as well. From both of those experiences, I feel strongly that survey design was a big issue that needs to be addressed. I would find myself reading questions and the pre-populated answers did not capture my perspective and there were no "OTHER" options. This meant I had to select an answer which was inaccurate in order to move forward. We need to take a step back and examine the process. I don't think the output of SO MUCH hard work delivered by so many amazing leverett residents amounted to a strong report we can stand by. In all honesty, it sounds like we were let down by the consultant. There should have been a stronger hand guiding the process.	6/9/2024 1:32 PM
7	I have lived in Leverett for 27 years--there is no place to record that--you seem to have missed a category. I would recommend slowing down, please, and offering more opportunities for input before moving ahead. I have a job that requires me to work in the daytime and often in the evenings. I really was concerned that none of the meetings corresponded to a time I was available. I am certain I am not the only one. Families with school age kids would fall into this same category with different responsibilities. Slow down, slow down, slow down.	5/31/2024 11:57 AM
8	Keep the present character of Leverett, recognizing important issues do need to be addressed (eg, housing costs), and limiting excessive development (eg, Kittridge)	5/30/2024 1:58 PM
9	Final Report should be no longer than 10-20 pages, focusing on the most likely to be implemented actions. Maybe a separate report or appendix with all the supporting data.	5/27/2024 12:01 PM
10	A 100+ page document is very cumbersome to expect every resident of town to read and actually digest. My suggestion would be to summarize the points, With a follow up link to the details. It's hard to comment after reading 140+ pages. There seems to be a large focus on the elderly in this report, but dont forget the next generation as they are the future of the town! you need to make it attractive for them to want to move & stay in the community. Upgrading	5/23/2024 10:29 AM

Town of Leverett Comprehensive Plan

utilities so there is cell services, cable and other infrastructure should be a high priority as well as , keeping our roads maintained, staffing the proper fire and police forces ,etc, etc. Also maybe do a mailing out to all the town residents & use the town wide announcement system to get more interaction and a more diverse response.

11	Cowls/Jones statement on the FRCOG hearing on the status of Rattlesnake Gutter Road - Cinda reaffirmed the 30 plus acres of "developable" land on the "north side" of Brushy Mountain. How does this impact us?	5/17/2024 11:49 AM
12	I hope some of these recommendations can be speedily created into concrete proposals we can vote on in town meeting in 2025.	5/17/2024 9:26 AM
13	Realize many town residents who skills and knowledge have been excluded from the process over the years and have been disrespected, excluded, and disregarded over the years.	5/15/2024 9:28 PM
14	Please keep Leverett rural and quiet. Preserve the land and it reaources. I chose Leverett for those qualities that made it sresources. different from other towns nearby. I knew the tax would be higher because of how the town is with a lack of industry and taxed business. But that is a trade off I make in order to live in peace without congestion and in nature. I knew I would need to drive to another town for shopping and other needs. Do not turn Leverett into another Amherst, Hadley, or Northmapton. Do not force housing where people are going to want Leverett to change for more conveniences and amenities, i.e. I need a bus service because I don't have a car. Leverett is not a town to live in then if you know it is car dependent and you must drive for amenities. Do not change the fabric of the town. I would not go live in another town and then demand or complain that it change the way it is to fit my needs or wants. If you want a rural lifestyle, there are towns for that. If you want suburban, there are areas for that. And if you want urban, there are plenty of cities to choose from. Keep Leverett's peaceful, natural beauty.	5/15/2024 7:29 AM

Leverett Community Vision conversation by email with George Drake

October 30 to November 14, 2023

George Drake

I went through the questionnaire today (the surverymonkey link), and of course after submitting it some other ideas have come to mind. Is there some mechanism for ongoing "further thoughts"?

Kimberly VanWagner

George - you are welcome to email me, come to the next community event (12/6), or email the consultant. A volunteer can also come to your house - you can also hold a meeting at your house or book club or wherever and a volunteer can come to guide discussion.

Also, we will have a table at the Co-op's Harvest Fest and the transfer station. Let me know your preference!

George

Thanks. Definitely no need to pay me a visit. Email works, and at present Dec 6 is open so I'll try to get to that meeting.

One thing I am most puzzled by is the mix of concern over town tax rate juxtaposed with proposals to increase residential property. I can think of many reasons to increase residential property, but reducing the tax rate never used to be promoted as an effect of increased residential property. Maybe town economics have changed since years ago when the trade off of increased residential property and the overall tax rate was considered to be inverse. Perhaps that issue is discussed in some of the (many!) documents referenced.

Kimberly

George - that's above my pay grade! Just kidding. Would you mind if I pass your message along to Tim Shores? He's been spearheading the comprehensive planning process and could probably give you better insights than I could.

Also, our volunteer group is meeting every Monday at 6:30 or 7pm at the safety Complex to plan the Dec 6 event if you'd like to join in!

Tim Shores

Hi George, we've met by email twice in one week's time. Not bad!

You're asking the right kind of question. I'm sure others are bringing up a similar question, although at this stage the data we're collecting from the community goes directly to a third party consultant, so we won't know how many people ask about the relationship between residential land use and tax rate until a few months down the road, when the consultant is ready to present findings.

I'm also curious to hear your thoughts about this relationship, if you have time to write your thoughts. Or I can give you a call to learn more.

What I can tell you is how we've been discussing this on the Planning Board for the last 3 years--not that we're unanimous about it, but there's some agreement in the following dynamics:

1. More housing to reduce property tax burden (amount paid per household)
2. Higher housing density to reduce property tax rate (so the town remains comfortably below the Prop 2 ½ cap)
3. Multi-family housing to increase affordability and diversity
4. Mixed use development of commercial and residential (improve livability via more diverse local economy)

More could be said about each of these. Most important for your question is that density is a critical factor in the relationship between residential land use and tax rate. Leverett terrain makes increased density difficult... But not impractical, if we can get better intel on where to dig, and state and federal grants for infrastructure improvements.

But before we can seriously contemplate this, we have to learn more... which sections of Leverett's terrain and infrastructure would be best suited to these kinds of development, and does the Leverett community want these kinds of development?

The next step is finding out more about environmental and social capacity for these kinds of changes: which parts of the map will support more density? What infrastructure and policy changes would we need? What kind of town do people who live here want Leverett to become in the future? What tradeoffs are we willing to accept to achieve that future?

The Comp Plan is designed to answer these questions. I'm preparing myself for a final report that doesn't answer these questions as thoroughly as I'd like them to... But every report the town produces is just a brick, it's up to us to lay it effectively.

What do you think?

George

The basic relationship between type of use, taxes and (most importantly the effect on Town costs of those types of uses) ought to be in State summaries. I have heard figures for costs on Town budget per dollar of tax income in several forums over the years. I do not know where to find the source information, but your consultants ought to be able to directly access it. This is not a new concept. The numbers I'd heard all showed cost per dollar of single-owner property tax revenue as well over a dollar per dollar of revenue. Intermediate for commercial uses. Agriculture was the only category that cost less than a dollar per dollar. I do not recall ever seeing discussions of the effect of multi-family, increased density and other such changes on this relationship. I also know from my own reaction that this sort of relationship is not at all obvious - I did not really believe it the first time I saw it expressed. If the effect is real - that is, is documented in responsible studies, it is an extremely important aspect of any attempts at decreasing tax impact, since making mistakes could easily cause the reverse effect to what was intended. Obviously there are other very important considerations besides minimal tax impact. But it seems likely in fact to be a trade-off which may increase the overall tax cost (but maybe not the tax rate) in order to achieve increased housing, among other needs.

Tim

Thank you for your thoughts, and if it's OK with you I'll share our email conversation with Innes Associates for their consideration in the plan.

I'm pretty sure that you're describing the [Cost of Community Services \(COCS\)](#) method of analyzing expense-to-revenue ratios per land use. COCS analysis was developed by the [American Farmland Trust](#) about 40 years ago. COCS usually shows that municipalities gain net revenue from open space, farmland, conserved land, and industrial/commercial land use. And it usually shows that municipalities lose net revenue from residential land use.

COCS is a good tool for people to make the case that we need to preserve open space and undeveloped land. COCS is easy to understand, and fairly easy to pull off --- you just find out the revenue and expenses of each land use, and divide. I've learned that [this simplicity can go too far](#), "flattening" local characteristics by averaging a town's land use and expenses. Accepting this at face value would be to assume that a new house built on Route 63 near the Amherst border has the same expense-to-revenue ratio as a new house built way up on Dudleyville Route or Number 6 Road. I would suggest that you not let go of your initial skeptical reaction to this relationship.

Leverett's [2019 Open Space and Recreation Plan](#) (page 3-26 to 3-29) goes into some detail about Leverett zoning and land use with respect to preservation of open space. That report discusses COCS analysis for Deerfield, not for Leverett. I haven't found any record of a COCS analysis done specifically for Leverett. Comparison to Deerfield is a bit of a stretch, but OK, I can accept that comparison, because I would not be surprised to find out that Leverett's sprawling residential land use has not been cost-effective.

That report points out that the hazard of increased residential development is when a town does not do much to protect its open space, forests, and farmland. I don't think that's happened in Leverett, and I don't think Leverett residents are likely to accept a building spree at the expense of conservation, open space, and working land. We seem to be very safe from this specific hazard.

Also according to that 2019 OSRP report, Leverett zoning was "designed to promote and maintain open space", with provisions to encourage cluster development and subdivision. Subdivisions and cluster housing are higher density development strategies for yielding more revenue from residential land use. It helps a town achieve economies of scale. That's the right idea. I don't think our town has performed well in this regard, because we haven't seen much clustering and subdividing. Septic regulations and the environmental capacity constraints are a big reason for this. Lack of clear information on the optimal areas for residential density is another big reason.

My hope is that the Comp Plan will shed some light. If we can get a better sense of which areas of Leverett can support housing density that is cost-effective and environmentally sustainable, then the town could discuss how to craft policy and zoning that will promote building in those spots.

George

Yes, definitely OK to share my comments.

Thanks for pointing out the source - certainly some of the contexts have made it likely that is the basis.

My own experience with separation requirements of septic and water well suggests that probably it would be difficult to increase density of properties using private wells and septic. I don't know whether MA laws allow shared water wells (for example), nor can I really imagine how responsibility for repair would be assigned.

Tim

Thanks George, I'll share.

Septic and water is a blind spot for me. I hear a lot of points of view, but all I really know is that MA law allows for more options than Leverett Town and Board of Health by-law, in both categories. But I don't assume that means we can solve much by bringing town regulation in parity with MA law. Maybe it will allow a few more small clusters of single family housing, here and there, like Laurel Hill. I am nearly certain that we would not be able to achieve multi-family

housing on well and septic. On the other hand, the school facility must use something up to code, so maybe it's possible.

Another long-term strategy to consider is incremental buildout of water and sewer pipes to parcels at the southern and western town borders. That will require grants. State and Federal have a vested public health interest in improving rural water and sewer infrastructure, and one way that a state like MA quality assures its distribution of grant money is through a Comprehensive Plan program. So, the Planning Board has tried to keep that in mind: there are a lot of potential social and fiscal benefits to a Comp Plan, but one key outcome is that it becomes more likely to win state grants for town projects that are aligned with the plan.

George

I think the School well is treated as a "public water supply" with the attendant training requirement for an "operator. Margie would have those details.

Keep in mind that there is no build out of sewer into Leverett in any context. I don't think Amherst sewer even extends past the bridge over the Mill river (?), if it even extends that far. There definitely are houses on Amherst water which use private septic systems - not only at the north edge of town, but also some scattered through Amherst caused by bans at various times on further sewer connections.

Tim

The reminder is helpful. I always have to remind myself that any discussion of water and sewer utilities is going to be a matter of decades, if ever.

Since we're in the midst of a community vision process... what's your vision for the future of Leverett, George? What direction would you like the town to go in?

George

Actually, not that different from what it is. One neighbor is a hunter, and has chickens, including a rooster. That's fine. The yards vary in degree of "keptness". We pretty much know each other but don't try to tell each other what to do. Several of us are pretty well along in years, but also keep an eye out for each other. Over the years there have been emergencies, we give each other a hand. That's what I consider to be community. I am pretty sure several of us have different politics - that's fine. We don't try to tell each other what to do or think. I am extremely wary of gentrification (whatever exactly that may mean).

Tim

Good answer. I feel a similar connection plus comfortable distance with my neighbors. I daydream about keeping my own chickens, but judging by how well I take care of my garden, I don't think I'm grown up enough yet for chickens. They'd become forest critter snacks in no time.

I'm also in agreement about gentrification. I'd like to see more economic diversity, pretty much wherever I go.

Thanks again, look forward to more conversation with you someday, George.

George

As for chickens, I haven't heard the roster next door for a while, so that flock may have met the fate you mention.

Feedback #1

In terms of workshop design, a few suggestions for future workshops:

Provide more context: In many/most cases participants didn't feel like they had enough info to make an informed comment on the recommendation at hand. To take an example: should Leverett join the Franklin County Regional Transit Authority? Participants did not know what that might require/cost, what services that might provide, how it might differ from on-demand ride services through PVTA, etc. In any future workshops I would suggest having the information organized by category (e.g. housing, climate, beavers, etc), giving some plenary presentation + Q&A on the challenges and the options for addressing them, and then having small group discussion informed by that presentation.

Separate issues and solutions: In many cases participants felt that an issue was important but that the recommendation for how to address that issue was not clearly the right one, or was too vague or too specific, etc. While true that participants could add notes to the cards it was unclear where then to place them. For example, if the issue of affordable housing feels urgent, but the proposed solution of allowing multi-family houses feels like it might not be the right one, where to place that card?

Ensure neutral facilitation: At my table the facilitator frequently opined on whether something was a good idea or not and in other ways put their thumb on the scale, sometimes quite heavily. That is not proper facilitation and can seriously skew the insights.

Cross-pollinate insights: It would have been valuable to have provided a bit of time at the end for each of the three tables to share their insights in plenary, to have some discussion about those, and to gather feedback on the content and the process.

Here's what I think worked well:

Good turnout: Seems like you got 50-60 people overall which is a nice number.

Good engagement: From what I saw people were highly engaged and eager to participate.

Structured small group discussions: Notwithstanding my comments above it was great to give people a chance to dig into this together, share perspectives, and in some cases come to new insights.

Some takeaways on the issues, based on the discussion at my table:

Beavers: there seemed to be consensus that this is an issue that needs be managed and people generally comfortable with the solutions proposed. Hooray!

Climate/water/energy resilience: Consensus that these issues are important and urgent and that we should have a plan for them; some uncertainty about the details (e.g. whether paving dirt roads is the best/only solution). Personally I think that Leverett needs a climate committee and a climate plan and hope those are an outcome of the master planning process.

Housing/zoning: Agreement that this is an important issue but major uncertainties about the right solutions and significant concerns about tradeoffs/unintended consequences. As we've discussed I think that more public engagement will be needed to really dig into this topic in more detail.

Aging population: The recommendations presented (e.g. joining FRTA and the AARP age/dementia-friendly communities) were very specific but presented with insufficient context for participants to really understand the implications and what challenges they might be addressing. As a result participants deprioritized these. I think it would be a mistake to conclude that these aren't important to people; rather I think this was an artifact of how the info was presented.

Culture/social fabric: There were only one or two recommendations touching upon this but clear consensus for more activities to catalyze social connectivity

Finally, I'd say that there was a recognition that many of these issues are interconnected and should be considered in tandem. For example, new housing should be consistent with climate resilience objectives.

Feedback #2

I went to one of the planning sessions, yesterday. I missed a vision of the future we wish for Leverett.

Without a vision I found it impossible to rank priorities.

If we are going to look for the future sixteen years from now we must be prepared for catastrophic changes, some of them, like those related to climate change rare certain. Others, like systems collapse, and possible to probable. Neighborhood cohesion will likely become increasingly necessary. What can we do now that will build maximum resiliency in our town and its neighborhoods.

Imagine a future without Amazon deliveries. A decrease in loneliness might be a side benefit to the creation of a more circular economy. Increasing local food production, encouraging the consumption of local foods through school and other programs, neighborhood resiliency might include many aspects, such as the care of elders in the community.

The circular economy is a simple concept. We buy and sell from our neighbors. We continually search for ways to meet our needs locally, and to strengthen our ties with our neighbors in the bioregion.

From: [Tim Shores](#)
To: [Emily Innes](#)
Subject: Public comment from Leverett Connects [Filed 11 Jun 2024 10:22]
Date: Tuesday, June 11, 2024 9:49:45 AM
Attachments: [Leverett Connects Public Comment on the Draft.pdf](#)

Hi Emily,

See attached for public comment that gathered on Leverett Connects, our town's unofficial but very well-run online forum.

Everyone in this thread is worthy of your consideration while you revise. Don't let negativity bias get you down! As I'm sure you know.

I encourage you to make the best possible use of Jacob Park's lengthy feedback (p. 9-18). His work and family responsibilities prevented him from joining the Steering Group, but he has still taken the time to make profound contributions that are both critical and constructive, like this comment.

Tim

Leverett Comprehensive Plan DRAFT: Feedback & Discussion Thread

Posted to Leverett Connects, May 14 2024

Original URL accessed June 11 2024:

https://groups.io/g/leverettconnects/topic/leverett_comprehensive_plan/106097056

May 14, 2024

Hello Lev Connects,

The draft of the Comprehensive Plan is ready for reading and feedback. You can download from this page on the Town website:

<https://tinyurl.com/Weluvlev>

You may submit feedback until June 10. Yes, this is a correction to the May 31 deadline announced previously. The release of the draft was delayed, and we want to give everyone as much time as we can to provide feedback!

How do we submit feedback?

This Leverett Connects thread will be a space for public discussion about the plan.

After June 10, we'll send this whole thread to Innes Associates for inclusion as feedback. (Try not to start separate threads, if you can help it!)

There are two options for submitting your feedback directly and anonymously to Innes Associates, the 3rd-party consultant team:

- [Complete this online form](#), OR
- Mail to Innes Associates Ltd. at:
 - 40R Merrimac Street, Suite 201 West
 - Newburyport, MA 01950

If you need help or have questions, write to me: Tim Shores at tlshores@umass.edu

I also plan to set up a feedback collection box at the Library. If the printer gods look upon me favorably, I will be at the Library with printed copies on **Thursday, May 16 from 4pm to 6pm**.

What happens to our feedback?

- Feedback will result in corrections to the final plan when it identifies verifiable errors and omissions, and sections that need clarification.
- Feedback that is interpretive and values-oriented will be published in an appendix to the plan, rather than result in corrections that may be at odds with data collected during the planning process.

Guidance for reading

The Comprehensive Plan is a new chapter in the history of Leverett and contains the potential to guide community decisions for years to come. We hope everyone will read it closely and send thoughtful comments.

When you read the draft, ask yourself how the plan:

- *Reflects the values of the Town*
- *Describes our challenges and limited resources*
- *Provides guidance that balances our differing perspectives and priorities*
- *Recommends practical implementation of difficult and necessarily imperfect decisions*
- *Helps us to achieve a workable consensus in preparation for an uncertain future*

What happens after June 10?

After receiving community feedback on the first draft, Innes Associates will complete the final draft by June 30, 2024. The Plan then goes to the Planning Board to vote on whether to accept it as Leverett's Comprehensive Plan.

An accepted plan that follows the statutory requirements of [Massachusetts General Law Part I, Title VII, Chapter 41, Section 81D](#) can deliver these benefits:

- *Helps to win state grants that are aligned with the plan*

- *Helps a town prevent unwanted development*
- *Helps a town modernize its zoning in response to changing conditions*
- *Helps a community hold its municipal government to account*

A comprehensive plan forces no obligations or unfunded mandates upon a town. It's up to us to make it work for our own community's best interests.

So much gratitude to everyone who has pitched in to make this project a success -- and there have been a lot of helpers.

In solidarity,

Tim Shores (Planning Board member),
and the rest of the [Steering Group](#) and [Planning Board](#),
Your humble servants

May 17, 2024

I hope that the planning board won't adopt the draft plan as the town's Comprehensive Plan. The specific proposals in the draft document were developed from various ideas that came up in a survey of town residents and in two public workshops. The final decisions about which ideas should be implemented were made by a conscientious but self-selected and unrepresentative group of 41 volunteers who met for a couple of hours on February 28, 2024 to discuss the proposals. Some of the proposals in the draft document are probably good ideas. Some of the proposals are probably bad ideas. Nobody knows which are which because nobody did the careful research necessary to discover the costs, benefits, and risks of each proposal. The proposals are simply ideas that are worth thinking about.

But if the planning board adopts the draft document, then the proposals will become Leverett's Comprehensive Plan. That means that whenever a proposal comes up for implementation, the argument will be made that "This proposal is part of our town's Comprehensive Plan – a plan that was developed over a period of two years with the help of a consultant and with public input provided in a town-wide survey and in multiple workshops; it's what the town wants to happen." That will be a very persuasive argument. But it will be a very misleading one because the specific proposals were

never thoroughly researched and the final decisions about which ones to recommend were actually made over a period of only about two hours without the participation of 98% of the town's residents.

I think the planning board should let the draft plan remain what it is: a set of ideas that may be worth exploring. The board shouldn't try to turn it into more than that by adopting it as our Comprehensive Plan.

Phil Carter

May 17, 2024

Thank you for leading with a good and thoughtful example, Phil.

Something I did not think to write in my original post, but that I would like to clarify:

I'm not going to reply to the substance of people's comments, here. I'd also like to ask Steering Group members and current members of Planning to refrain from weighing in, although it's not my place to tell anyone not to participate. My hope is that this thread is an open and welcome space for community perspectives on the Comprehensive Plan. Both Steering and Planning will have their own opportunity to provide feedback directly to the third-party consultant team.

If you would like to discuss substance with me, or if you would just like to tell me some funny jokes, please feel welcome to contact me directly: tlshores@umass.edu

--

Tim Shores
Long Plain

May 17, 2024

Dear Tim, and the other members of the Comprehensive Plan Steering Group,

Thank you for sharing the draft plan, and for all the hard work I know you've put in getting us to this point. The document reflects a lot of important research and engagement that will be valuable in helping Leverett chart a course into the future.

Having said that, I fear that only a tiny fraction of Leverett residents are likely to read through a 162 page report and provide written feedback. This is not for lack of caring but rather reflects the realities of constrained schedules and how people best receive and share information these days.

Given the important function the plan will play in guiding town policies and actions in the coming years I believe it's in everyone's best interest to ensure that the final plan is widely understood and supported.

To address this, I'd like to respectfully propose that the Steering Group convene a public presentation and discussion of the plan. This would presumably be led by Emily Innes as well as members of the Steering Group and Planning Board where relevant. I believe it will be most productive if the presentation focuses in particular on the Planning for the Future and Next Steps portions of the plan (while briefly summarizing the rest) and leaves ample time for public questions and discussion. I'd be happy to brainstorm with the SG about meeting agenda and design, if helpful.

I know that you're on mile 25 of this marathon and eager to get across the finish line. In my view another round of robust public engagement is probably needed to ensure a truly strong finish.

Best,
Jacob

May 19, 2024

That's a really good idea, Jacob, thank you. I'd like to meet you halfway.

I've attached an excerpt of the key recommendations, with reference to the Town's other recent plans ... this might make a more accessible Cliff's Notes version. I'll plan to put it on the Town website.

For the event suggestion, since this is a housekeeping item, I'd like to respond like so:

First, here are upcoming opportunities for discussion:

1. **Planning Board's** next monthly meeting would be a good time for public discussion. The meeting hasn't been posted yet. Planning normally meets the second Wednesday of each month, so I expect we'll meet Wednesday, June 12 at 7:30pm. The agenda will be established by our new chair, Greg Tuzzolo, and I have little doubt that the Comp Plan will feature prominently on our agenda.
2. **Steering Group** plans to meet next week, although I'm not clear on when that will be or if it has been posted. I won't be at that meeting. Since it's a public meeting, it would also be a good opportunity for public discussion.
3. **Saturday, June 8 from 1 to 3pm:** I will be at the library for informal Q&A.
4. **Ongoing:** We may be near the end of a report-making-marathon, but the public deliberation and planning doesn't stop when the grant funding ends on June 30.

Second, I think it would be helpful to remind everyone of the outcomes of a finalized plan:

1. Does a finalized plan give the Planning Board new powers? Answer: No, none.
2. Does a finalized plan create any obligations or unfunded mandates? Answer: No, none. The plan is just a detailed report with recommendations. Town Meeting, as the municipal legislative body, is still where any change to Town code or bylaw take place.
3. Must the Planning Board vote to approve the finalized plan right away? Answer: No. The Board has discussed timing, and we'd like to hold a vote of approval in a timely manner, but we'd also like to give the community time to participate in further discussion.
4. Is a finalized plan permanent and set in stone? Answer: No, the Planning Board can vote to amend it at any time. Conditions change, and pathways that the community prioritized in 2024 may not be what the community prioritizes in 2026, 2028, and so on. This will be a great opportunity for ongoing public participation.

So, one way to look at this current moment and what comes next is to ask ourselves: What is the appropriate level-of-effort for an outcome that provides a rich vein of knowledge and opportunity for ongoing participation, but creates no obligations and makes no change to the municipal balance of power? Have we as a Town met that reasonable level-of-effort?

As for Innes Associates, since we're near the end of the grant period, since she's focused on revision of the plan, and since she's delivered more than she initially agreed to in her contract, she won't be available for another public event. The Steering Group has worked quite a lot more than they initially expected, too. But the Planning Board will still be there, meeting every month and responsive as needed. The Board has also discussed holding workshops once or twice a year, similar to the hands-on workshop held earlier this year.

May 20, 2024

Hello all,

Chiming in on the Comprehensive Plan review and adoption process here...

The next scheduled meeting of the Planning Board is June 12th. I intend for the meeting to include a robust discussion of the draft Plan and all submitted comments. There will be an opportunity for the public to provide additional comments and input.

We do understand that our consultant's time will end at the close of June, so we will need to provide her with some direction on adjustments so that she can deliver a final document before the close of her contract.

Regarding Jacob's comments, I agree that we are at a point where we need to turn towards an agenda for implementation of the findings of the Comprehensive Plan. Our role on the Planning Board is to both facilitate a broad Town-wide agenda by stewarding the finalization (and ongoing amendment) of the Plan, and setting a specific agenda for Planning Board action. I intend to discuss both on June 12th, and welcome any and all input and attendance at the meeting.

Best, Greg Tuzzolo
Chair, Planning Board

May 20, 2024

Thank you Tim, for sharing the comprehensive plan excerpt!

Jack Kruse
117 N Leverett Rd

May 20, 2024

Thanks for your reply, Tim.

While I wish there were the resources to support more public engagement I understand the constraints and appreciate your efforts. I will plan to share some comments here before the June 10 deadline.

Best,
Jacob

June 9, 2024

Howdy neighbors,

Friendly neighborhood reminder that the Comp Plan feedback period ends tomorrow, June 10.

Please use the feedback form to directly and anonymously send your comment to Innes Associates, the 3rd-party consultant team:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/LeverettDraftComprehensivePlan>

You may comment on this thread if you like, and I will send your feedback to Innes Associates after June 10.

Find a copy of the draft plan at this page on the Town website:

<https://tinyurl.com/Weluvlev>

If you need help or have questions, write to me: Tim Shores at tlshores@umass.edu

Thanks!

Tim Shores
Planning Board member
Long Plain

June 10, 2024

Thanks Tim, here's my feedback. Note: this email is rather long so I'm also attaching my comments as a PDF for those who prefer to read that way.

To the Comprehensive Plan Steering Group, the Planning Board, and members of the Leverett community:

Thank you for this opportunity to share feedback on the draft of the Leverett comprehensive plan. With my comments I'd like to recognize the good work that's been done, flag some areas of concern, and propose what I hope is a constructive way forward.

My comments are lengthy, so I'll provide a very brief summary here: In my view the Steering Group has done admirable work engaging the community and analyzing current conditions within the town. However, the framework and recommendations need to be more robust and coherent to properly serve as a comprehensive plan. Additionally, the view of the future that informs the plan should be more expansive and inspiring if it is to guide Leverett through the next decade.

To help orient the reader I've organized my comments as follows:

- The basis for my comments
- Where I think the process has succeeded so far
- Where I think more work is needed
 - Organizing framework
 - Recommendations
 - View of the future
- Why these concerns matter
- A proposal for a way forward

1) The basis for my comments

I've tried to evaluate the plan fairly and rigorously. My comments are grounded in the following:

- Participation in the survey, data walks, and interactive workshop
- Attendance at Planning Board presentations by Emily Innes
- Review of roughly ten comprehensive plans from other municipalities across the country, including Amherst, Shutesbury, and Pelham
- Review of the Leverett Planning Board's [RFP](#), the [proposal](#) from Innes Associates, and Massachusetts General Law Chapter 41, [Section 81D](#), which governs master plans
- Research into best practices for comprehensive planning, in particular the book [The Comprehensive Plan: Sustainable, Resilient, Equitable Communities for the 21st Century](#) by David Rouse and Rocky Piro
- My own 15 years of professional experience advising organizations around the world on strategy, foresight, and long-term planning.

2) Where I think the process has succeeded so far

First, I want to recognize the foresight of the Planning Board in its decision to create a comprehensive plan and in securing resources to support that objective. Leverett has never had such a plan before and it's a significant undertaking. In a time of rapid change and complex, interconnected challenges it is wise to create such a plan to guide and coordinate how Leverett moves forward over the next decade.

I also want to thank the Steering Group for months of hard work in support of this process. I know this has entailed a lot of thought and effort from a group of smart and dedicated citizen volunteers motivated by the desire to make Leverett a better place.

A good deal of that effort went into engaging the community and reaching people who don't normally participate. I've heard that the response to the Steering Group's original survey was more robust than for any other town-related communication in recent memory, and it's truly commendable that the Steering Group was able to invite so many people into the process. The information gleaned from the survey and data walks provides useful insights about how people in Leverett feel about a range of critical issues.

The draft plan itself offers a wealth of information about Leverett's past and present particularly as it pertains to land use, housing, demographics, and the economy. The

data and analysis in the draft's inventory of existing conditions provides a detailed portrait of some of the key factors shaping Leverett and some of the most important challenges the town needs to address.

3) Where I think more work is needed

While the work that's been done already provides a good foundation, in my view the plan needs additional work in three key areas if it is to serve its intended function. The plan needs a more rigorous and logically coherent organizing framework, more robust and comprehensive recommendations, and a more expansive and hopeful view of the future.

3a) Organizing Framework

At its core a comprehensive plan must address the following questions:

- Where are we now and where are we headed?
- Where do we want to go?
- How do we get there?

In my view the draft plan does a good job answering the first question, doesn't say much about the second, and provides only a partial answer to the third.

Where are we now and where are we headed?

These questions are typically addressed through “an inventory and analysis of existing conditions and trends and making reasonable forecasts of what the future will bring if present trends continue. Values and issues (what people care about) identified through community engagement provide context and direction for the inventory and analysis” (Rouse and Piro, p. 28).

Chapter four of the draft plan, *Impact of Existing Conditions*, provides useful research and data about how land use patterns and demographic trends have shaped the Leverett of today. It describes the current state of housing and development, zoning and other land use regulations, taxes and local economy. It also provides some information about town services and facilities.

Additionally, the chapter offers some idea of what Leverett might look like in the future, based on projections of changes in Leverett's demographics from 2020 to 2040 as well as some information about projected climate impacts on Leverett—although the broader implications of climate change for the community are not explored in as much detail as those for the aging population.

Finally, chapter three of the draft plan, *Planning for the Future*, includes a list of values taken from the survey sent out in the fall of 2023.

Taken together, these offer a useful view of where Leverett is now and some sense of where it could be headed if current trends continue.

Where do we want to go?

A plan needs to clearly articulate the intended future outcome it is designed to achieve. This provides overall direction to the plan and encapsulates an aspiration for the better future the community hopes to achieve. Goals, objectives, and recommended actions are then developed to move the community towards that desired future.

The Leverett draft plan takes an unusual approach. As stated in chapter 3: “Many communities try to develop a single vision statement for the comprehensive plan that is supported by a series of goals, strategies, and actions. The Steering Group decided on a different path that members felt was more responsive to Leverett and the wide ranges of opinions, experiences, and hopes for the future that community members had expressed over time. The Steering Group sought to identify shared values and goals that could be used to evaluate different paths to enhancing livability in Leverett for all over the next 10-15 years (Leverett, 28).

While recognizing the diversity of perspectives that exist in Leverett, I believe this is a mistake. Members of any community will have divergent opinions about where they want to go. A critical part of any strategy or planning process is doing the hard work, often through challenging conversations, of collectively articulating a direction of travel that most of the group can agree on. This future vision is usually emergent: it’s not something that can be chosen from a multiple choice list at the outset of the process but instead takes shape through the process of dialogue that shifts perspectives and illuminates new possibilities.

Indeed, having worked on many strategies and plans for organizations around the world I would say that the dialogic process of working through the issues to arrive at a new place of shared understanding is one of the most profound benefits of any strategic process. Doing so would have lasting benefit for the Leverett community as a whole, beyond the confines of the comprehensive planning process.

Ultimately, it is essential that plan be oriented towards a coherent objective. Although a list of values is of critical importance it's not sufficient on its own to provide direction for a comprehensive plan.

How do we get there?

As described above, the “there” that Leverett wants to get to remains diffuse and undefined in the draft plan. This contributes to challenges with the “how.”

The draft plan notes that many communities develop a vision that is “supported by a series of goals, strategies, and actions.” This is indeed normal practice. In reviewing comprehensive plans from ten municipalities across the country every single one describes goals and actions to take the community towards its desired outcome. This is the heart of a comprehensive plan. Furthermore, these different parts of the plan need to cohere logically.

David Rouse and Rocky Piro describe the key elements of a comprehensive plan and how they relate to one another:

The comprehensive planning process involves the development of a shared community vision, supported by goals, objectives, policies, and actions to realize the vision. It is imperative that these plan components be fully consistent with one another. Goals define desired future outcomes in support of the vision. Objectives introduce measurable targets or intentions in support of the goals. Policies define principles or criteria to guide ongoing decision-making, while actions are discrete tasks carried out during plan implementation. Policies and actions support and must be consistent with the vision, goals, and objectives for effective implementation. (Rouse and Piro, p. 220)

Leverett’s draft plan takes a very different approach. While it does provide a list of goals, they were not developed to support an overarching strategic vision or objective. Instead, they were taken from a single multiple-choice question on the fall 2023 survey (Leverett, p 31).

Additionally, the usual logic of developing objectives, actions, and policies to support goals is flipped on its head. Instead, a very short list of “strategies” (recommended actions) is proposed—each of which is simply tagged to any related goals (Leverett, pp. 107-127).

Here it may be useful to draw a comparison with the organizing structures found in the plans of some of our neighbors:

Amherst's plan is organized around eight goals. Each goal is given a chapter in the plan, which includes an overview of the goal, relevant information about existing conditions, and then a detailed section of objectives and strategies. Under each goal are 5 to 10 objectives to achieve that goal and then under those a comprehensive set of strategies for achieving each objective.

Pelham's plan is organized around nine overarching goals. Each goal then includes several objectives and specifies detailed recommendations to achieve the objectives including short-, medium-, and long-term strategies.

Shutesbury's plan has a chapter for each of seven planning elements, e.g. Natural Resources and Open Space, Housing, Historic and Scenic Resources. For each element the plan articulates 1 to 4 goals. The plan then spells out numerous recommendations to support each goal.

3b) Recommendations

Of the 20 recommended actions included in Leverett's draft plan, only 7 are designated as priorities for the town to actually "do." The rest are characterized as in need of further discussion and relegated to the lower-priority categories of "explore," "discuss," or "rethink."

The prioritization of these recommendations was done during the community workshop on February 28, 2024. During that workshop participants were given a few minutes to discuss each of the recommendations and then prioritize them according to their perceived importance and urgency. However, the recommendations were presented with very little detail or context and many were deprioritized because participants simply did not have the necessary information to make a judgment about them either way.

An example is Recommendation 14: "Engage with regional partners to implement action plans in the Franklin County and North Quabbin Regional Action Plan for age and dementia friendly communities." There was no information provided in the workshop about what such engagement would entail, what the benefits for Leverett would be, or whether there would be any costs.

The draft plan notes there was "confusion about the recommendation with an assumption that Leverett was solely responsible for implementation of a regional plan." It should not come as a surprise that participants were confused about the

recommendation, given that no details were provided them about what the Franklin County and North Quabbin Regional Action Plan for age and dementia friendly communities actually is and what implementation would entail.

The confusion participants experienced about many of the recommendations creates a risk that important ideas got deprioritized, and vice-versa. Providing support to Leverett's aging population is rightly identified as a key priority throughout the draft plan and Recommendation 14 could be an important way to address this. It would therefore be quite unfortunate if this recommendation got relegated to a matter for further discussion simply because workshop participants weren't given enough information to understand what it means.

Another concern is the paucity of recommendations for many of the goals listed in the plan. As an example, "Support improvement of Leverett Library" was ranked #6 on the list of goals and "Support improvement of Leverett Elementary School" was ranked #7. However, there are only two recommendations that are tagged to these two goals, neither of which are designated as high priorities. They are "Recommendation 15: Establish heating/cooling shelters across town that can be used during the school year [priority: discuss]" and "Recommendation 20: Investigate adding a community center [priority: rethink]" Although each of those actions might have implications for the library and LES it's not credible to describe them as strategies to *improve* either institution. And they clearly do not provide a sufficient guidance for the future of those pillars of the Leverett community.

3c) View of the Future

Finally, I would argue that the view of Leverett's future expressed in the draft plan is too narrow and pessimistic to inspire the sort of creative action required to guide the community through the next decade.

The story of the future told in Leverett's draft plan is one of inexorable decline, characterized primarily by the growth of a large elderly population, a shrinking pool of young families and working-age adults, and few prospects for economic development. This story seems to be grounded primarily in a demographic forecast from the U Mass Donahue Institute projecting how Leverett's population will change over the next two decades. Countervailing data, such as the striking 116% growth in residents aged 25-34 between 2016 and 2021 (Leverett, p. 46), are not addressed. Furthermore, the aging population is characterized as a burden—a cost center to be borne—rather than as a resource the community can draw upon.

It is likely true that Leverett's population of 2040 will, on balance, include a larger proportion of older seniors. This is a hugely important trend and it is sensible that the draft plan explores the implications and proposes some recommendations to address it. However, the full story of Leverett's future will be more varied and complex than this.

To begin with, twenty-year forecasts are never entirely accurate. They can be a useful starting point but should be taken with a large grain of salt as it is impossible to predict the future that far out. (I'm a professional futurist. I can say this much with confidence.)

At a minimum, a demographic forecast needs to be complemented with a consideration of other social, technological, environmental, economic, and political factors shaping the future. Remote work, climate migration, and state/federal policies driving the transition to clean energy are some examples of trends that are poised to have a significant impact on the future of our town but that are not addressed at all in the draft plan.

Take the fact that Leverett's population of young adults more than doubled between 2016 and 2021—while that of the region as a whole declined by 7%. Was this an ephemeral artifact of Covid? A one-time blip of people sheltering in place with their parents and then moving back away? Or is it the start of a more enduring trend: an influx of young families working remotely, drawn by Leverett's good school, high-speed internet, and relatively modest exposure to climate risks? The plan is mute about these possibilities, which could portend a very different future for the town than the story of managed decline that runs through its pages.

All these trends shaping the future are unpredictable to varying degrees. For this reason, best practice is to use scenario analysis to explore a range of plausible futures to then inform the best course forward. Indeed, the [Comprehensive Plan Phase 1 report](#) sensibly called for just that (p. 11) and proposed a scope of work for Phase 2 (the one that's wrapping up now) in which "the consultant will prepare 2-3 scenarios for the Steering Committee to discuss and evaluate. These scenarios will form the basis of community discussions" (p 32). This was included in the scope of work in the RFP (p. 5) and was listed as a deliverable in the proposal from Innes Associates (pp 8-10).

Unfortunately, this doesn't seem to have happened. The draft plan describes three components that the authors of the Phase 1 report thought should be included in any comprehensive plan produced by the town (p. 32). One of these was "Development of sustainable economy scenarios, such as smart growth, infrastructure improvements, amenity enhancement, and encouraging business investment, to guide strategic decision-making." Yet that is the only place the word "scenarios" appears in the draft plan.

This isn't an obscure methodological matter. By anchoring its view of the future on a single-point demographic forecast, not considering the broader set of relevant trends, and not exploring alternate future scenarios, the draft plan confines Leverett's future prospects to a very narrow band of what's possible. It leaves significant blind spots about future risks and opportunities and removes a large degree of agency from the community.

I believe that the future of Leverett is more hopeful and open than what comes through in this draft. We owe it to ourselves to create a comprehensive plan with a clear and inspiring vision for the future and a more robust set of ideas to help us achieve it.

4) Why these concerns matter

Although it has been noted that the comprehensive plan is not legally binding, it is still intended to provide overarching direction and guidance to inform the next decade of policy and action in Leverett, providing a common direction for all our plans, programs, and initiatives.

The Leverett Planning Board's website says "The final deliverable will be a Comprehensive Plan with evidence-based and community-driven goals and guidelines to inform Leverett policy-making for years to come."

As such, the plan needs to provide coherent and comprehensive direction on where we as a community want to go and how we get there—in a way that informs and harmonizes the work of other town government bodies. Rouse and Piro suggest that "in its role as the broadest and most inclusive plan prepared by a local government, the comprehensive plan may be viewed as the "umbrella" plan for the jurisdiction's "family" of plans....A best practice is to have the comprehensive plan, as the umbrella plan, serve as the policy framework for all plans developed by the jurisdiction." (Rouse and Piro, 221)

A plan that doesn't accomplish that objective could drive an incoherent set of policies and actions that work at cross-purposes and fail to produce desired outcomes. There is an equally large potential opportunity cost: the comprehensive planning process is a rare opportunity to come together and do some big picture thinking to inform the future direction of this community. We should aim to produce a plan that really is comprehensive, and sets us on a clear path towards a better future the community wants.

5) A proposal for a way forward

It is up to Leverett's Planning Board now to decide whether they wish to approve the draft plan or not, and on what timeline. As far as I know there is no legal obligation for the Planning Board to adopt this draft as final. I would urge the Planning Board to refrain from ratifying the plan until the issues raised above can be adequately addressed.

I realize that Leverett's contract with Innes Associates is almost over and that the Steering Group has already put a huge amount of time into Phase 2 of the process and is eager to wrap things up. However, I believe it would be a mistake to finalize the plan for the sake of "just getting it done."

I believe that the seed of a way forward has already been articulated in the draft plan. Recognizing some of the limitations of the draft at present, as well as the positive benefits of deeper dialogues on the issues, the draft plan recommends that Leverett convene a Community Conversation Initiative that would "support the conversations that began during this planning process and allow the boards, commissions, and departments to test new ideas and directions with the community in a less formal setting" (Leverett, pp 106-107).

I propose that a separate Phase 3 of the comprehensive planning process be undertaken by a group of citizen volunteers with a view to engaging the community in deeper conversations about key issues to clearly articulate the future Leverett wishes to create for itself and a more robust set of goals and objectives to get us there. The work of Phase 3 would be to build on what's already been done with additional insights to complete the plan.

Doing so would not, in the meantime, prevent the town from moving ahead with any of the recommendations in the current draft plan. Should the Planning Board wish to propose zoning changes to support the development of ADUs, for example, it would still be able to do so. It simply would not be within the context of a finalized comprehensive plan.

I recognize that proposing a Phase 3 raises important considerations related to resourcing, scope, and timelines. Those would need to be explored in subsequent conversations. My hope is that we can find a way to build on the good work that's already been done and complete the plan in a way that it can serve as an inspiration and a guide for the next ten years in this town that we all love.

Thank you,
Jacob Park
Juggler Meadow Rd

June 10, 2024

Exceptional feedback, Jacob. Thank you for putting so much work and attention into it.

--

Tim Shores
Long Plain

June 10, 2024

Thank you Jacob, excellent food for thought.

Jack Kruse

June 10, 2024

Hi Tim,

Here are my preliminary comments on the draft Comprehensive Plan. I'm also attaching them as a pdf file with a link at the bottom of your message below. I'll be happy to discuss them with you and other members of the Leverett community.

Best,
Carol

Preliminary Comments
Leverett Draft Comprehensive Plan
Carol Heim
13 Amherst Road
6-10-24

I would like to share some preliminary comments on the draft Comprehensive Plan for Leverett. I'm labelling them "preliminary" because I prefer to arrive at my views after hearing the thoughts of others, reflecting on them, and having a chance to discuss them. I'm very grateful for all of the time and effort put in by the Comprehensive Plan Steering Group, the Planning Board, Emily Innes and her team, and Leverett residents. However, I'm disappointed that there hasn't been an opportunity for the community to discuss the draft plan itself—submitting comments as individuals isn't the same as having a discussion.

Overall, I feel that the draft plan is quite valuable in compiling data and assembling previous reports and plans. I was unfamiliar with some of the previous exercises (for example, the MVP Resiliency Plan and draft Hazard Mitigation Plan).

However, I do not think it is advisable for the Planning Board to approve the draft plan at this time. My main reasons are the following:

1. I understand that there is nothing legally binding about the recommendations in an approved plan. However, **I think that there will be a strong impetus to move immediately to implement at least the recommendations listed as "Do."** I don't necessarily oppose those recommendations, but I think more information, especially on financial aspects, is needed. When I ranked recommendations "Urgent" and "Important" at the third workshop, I didn't see that as a statement that Leverett should immediately proceed to "Do" without some analysis of costs and benefits, and potential tradeoffs with other town goals.

I don't agree with the statement on p. 32 of the draft plan that "The support for these actions is clear enough that the Town can proceed with implementation."

2. Some other Planning Boards and Departments state on their websites that they evaluate development proposals, zoning, or regulatory amendments based on their Comprehensive Plan or other community plans. I don't think this draft plan provides enough solid guidance on shared community goals and strategies and **I am not in favor of using consistency with this draft plan as a decisive consideration in decision-making by the Planning Board or other boards and committees.**

Wendell

<https://www.wendellmass.us/planning-board/>

"The Planning Board is responsible for fulfilling state and local zoning requirements and for keeping the town's zoning regulations in line with current community plans such as Places of the Heart, Community Development Plan, Open Space and Recreation Plan."

Montague:

<https://montague-ma.gov/p/27/Planning--Conservation-Department>

"The primary function of the Department is to manage regulatory process for development proposals submitted to the Planning Board pursuant under the Zoning Bylaw and Subdivision Control Law; and to the Conservation Commission pursuant under the MA Wetlands Protection Act Regulations. As part of that process the Department evaluates development proposals for their contribution toward community planning goals as documented in Montague Comprehensive Plan and other local strategic plans."

Northampton:

<https://northamptonma.gov/1087/Planning-Board>

"The Planning Board is also charged with reviewing and/or introducing land use targeted regulatory amendments as well as making recommendations to City Council on such regulations for the purposes of implementing Sustainable Northampton plans. In its adjudicatory role, the Board reviews specific development projects of a certain type or size as specified in the zoning ordinance, to ensure compliance with zoning and other land use regulations and compliance with the City's Sustainable and Resilience and Regeneration Plan."

3. I understand the practice of trying to summarize responses using numerical scores, but **I believe that the scores for the 20 recommendations can (unintentionally) give a misleading impression of precision and of unambiguous support (or rejection).**

At the third workshop, the group at my table discarded several recommendations because they were too broad, too vague, or did not include needed information. For example, #16, "Allow for the development of multi-family units," did not specify how many units. That mattered for some people's answers.

In other cases, nuance in our answers disappeared from the summary of the 20 recommendations (Table 10, pp. 34-35.) Our group was favorable toward #2, "Modify zoning to allow for smaller lot sizes and/or multiple units on existing lots" IF water quality could be maintained. While that concern appears as a side comment on p. 109, it was not carried forward with the recommendation itself.

On #3, "Create zoning to encourage senior-friendly housing," we suggested considering multi-family senior housing by special permit, rather than through by-right zoning, but this suggestion didn't even appear as a side comment.

On #4, "Apply for grants for dam maintenance and water quality monitoring," our group was in favor of water monitoring, but not necessarily dam maintenance. We felt we needed more information on dams in town and who owned them.

I also have some concerns about the implementation suggestion on p. 123 for #16, "Allow for the development of multi-family units." It states "Zoning changes, design guidelines, and revisiting Board of Health standards for septic systems should be part of this conversation." Leverett's Board of Health regulations are deliberately stricter, and more protective of the environment, than the state's Title 5 regulations. They were adopted after detailed and careful consideration. While I'm not opposed to revisiting them to see if technological or other developments might warrant some revisions, I feel strongly about the need to continue to protect our water and other natural resources.

My comments above are based on attending both data walks, a neighborhood listening session, the third workshop with table exercises, and relevant Planning Board meetings. I also completed the survey.

I think Leverett's comprehensive planning exercise has generated many good ideas and recommendations that are well worth exploring further. I agree with the idea of creating a Community Conversation Initiative (p. 106); I think it should begin with the draft plan itself, and should include the recommendations identified as "Do," as well as those identified as "Explore," "Discuss," and "Rethink." I also would support more detailed examination and possible action by the Planning Board or other boards and committees on specific recommendations in the draft plan, but I don't think the draft plan itself should be invoked as a reason to act on those recommendations.

June 10, 2024

Hi,

I want to strongly second Phil Carter's comments submitted earlier.

First, thank you to those who have worked on putting this together. BUT, I strongly feel we need to go slow at this time and gather a LOT more feedback.

Here are my initial concerns:

1. The town was given a few weeks to review the 162-page document, which I certainly have not completely read nor have had time to give "comprehensive" feedback. I imagine there are many in town in same boat.

2. I found the "draft excerpt" woefully inadequate, lacking any kind of legend that defined what the "value" category referred to: 2, 5, etc. or what High, Med, Low, Partner, etc. meant. Frustrating to try to read as an independent document.

3. As Phil and others have said, this was drafted with the involvement of only a small number of people in town and I also strongly support NOT making it THE Comprehensive Plan anytime soon. One week's notice on this forum for a Planning Board meeting where there will be additional discussion is not at all enough to ensure involvement. We need multiple, much larger town presentations and more time to digest, at the least.

4. Some of the conclusions, such as "24/7" fire and ambulance service, seemed to come completely out of left field, and it makes me wonder more about how the planning process for the Plan came about and the danger of not consulting with those who would know about these issues before finalizing this "Plan." We HAVE 24/7 coverage: it is called the Leverett Fire Dept. call force plus the Amherst Fire Dept. ambulance and crew. Yes, response time is determined by how far away from our station and Amherst North station one lives, but.....that wouldn't change much if there were people sitting in the station overnight, twiddling their thumbs. And, if you are going to the hospital, you are waiting for that Amherst ambulance, no matter how quick the Leverett first responders get there. Not that getting a responder there 5 minutes sooner isn't maybe once in awhile a critical amount of time, but Advanced Life Support is still on the ambulance, and transport is still via ambulance.

5. I went on the town website to try to access the Plan, and I had to call our town clerk to be able to find it, so I imagine I am not the only one. Turns out that you have to click through from "Request for Public comments" on the Comp Plan webpage before you can actually FIND a copy of the plan. Not at all intuitive, which means that others have probably not bothered.

6. What is that unreadable photo of post-it notes on p. 23? Would have liked to see what it says, if it were to be included in the document.

7. The meeting times for the 3 groups were not that conducive for those of us who a) work, and b) work late. I typically am not home till at least 6:30 (with no dinner until then), so a meeting time from 3-5/6-8 or 3-8 is not particularly useful. A variety of times would have been much more useful, not just for all the early birds. Select Board meetings start at 7 (usually), for instance.

All for now, although, like I say, I haven't made it through the whole document yet.

Nancy Grossman

June 10, 2024

Yes. My comments are: slow down, slow down, slow down.

Karen Koehler

June 10, 2024

Beautiful analysis Jacob

Supports the idea of slowing down

I especially am taken by the optimistic data on an increase of young families in Leverett - Cave Hill Rd is full of them 😊

Tom Wolff

June 10, 2024

I need to also say how much i appreciate the hard work that has gotten us this far.

A great base to grow from

Thanks to all

And bring on Phase III

Tom Wolff

June 10, 2024

I feel that I need to add my 2¢ worth (perhaps I'm overvaluing) to this very illuminating discussion. First of all, I agree with each and every point made by Jacob, Carol and Nancy about this very detailed report. I especially want to salute the efforts of the committee to bring it about. I am friendly with a number of the members, and I'm deeply grateful for their efforts. But, at the risk of being a jerk, I do want to add a couple of comments.

1. I went to the first data walk and I was deeply disappointed. After I cruised through the various exhibits, I found Emily Innes and had a few minutes talking to her, trying to find out what the motivation was for this exhibit. Then I walked through the various tables again, trying to engage with the topics. But it was futile; Emily's team had put forth some extremely engaging and complex issues, and my only avenue for response was to scribble down whatever would fit on a Post-It. I couldn't resist responding to one inflammatory one, but otherwise it seemed like a dreadful waste of time and effort. I hoped that no data collected from this would ever be used.

2. I wasn't able to attend the next data walk, I did make it to the next meeting, where we sat down at tables to discuss a number of submitted questions. This seemed much more fruitful. But it seemed that the people at my table were mostly in agreement with me about the main points, and this was also a bit of a disappointment. For I know that a number of my neighbors, including some that I care about, have quite different feelings about some of those issues, and I would have loved hearing opinions like theirs. In other words, I feel that I was sitting at a table of self-selected gurus, but our thinking should be taken with a large amount of salt. So once again I felt that the data collected from this event, however thoughtfully put together, was flawed.

I think that this is a wonderful and extremely important project, and I look forward to helping it move along in any way that I can. I extend my deepest gratitude to those who have brought it this far.

Stephen Dydo
stephendydo@gmail.com
(646) 339-7908

www.stephendydo.com

June 10, 2024

Many thanks to the Comprehensive Plan Steering Group, volunteers and contributors as well as the Planning and Select Boards. The plan is very informative and reflects countless hours of hard work, information gathering and analysis.

I believe there is an edit needed on page 24 paragraph 2, I think that 202 is intended to be a year:

"The Steering Group sponsored a community-wide survey that was available on-line and through paper copies from October 9 through December 18, 2023. Although not everyone answered each question, 411 respondents or just over 22% of the 202 population of 1,865 took part in the survey..."

Great job and thank you!

Thanks,
Wes Goscenski

June 10, 2024

The comprehensive town plan is a terrific piece of work. I greatly admire the time and effort that has gone into this. It's really quite something. I'll throw my hat in the ring for protecting our precious water resources (no more poisoning Leverett Pond), eliminating hunting in Leverett, increased trails and outdoor rec and good options that enable elderly residents to remain here in this town affordably. No gas station - can't make enough money here. Would love to see the "museum," the "historical society" and Moore's corner turned into viable community spaces rather than the sad places they are today.

Happy trails
Chris Kilham

June 10, 2024

Thank you so much to everyone for taking the time to comment. Your feedback is critically important for any civic process, and emphatically so for community planning. It's also important to me personally, because like Carol, I rely on discussion with others and reflection of those discussions to better understand the world I'm in.

Special gratitude and appreciation to the Steering Group: Twelve Leverettians who volunteered more time than they could probably afford to give, who invested their attention into studying and debating existing conditions, conflicts, and ambiguities, and who went above and beyond to organize and guide a community-driven process through the fog of municipal administration. An intangible outcome of any project is the tacit knowledge acquired by people who take on the most responsibility. In our Steering Group, we have 12 neighbors who now have a deeper understanding of our Town, community, and land. They'll carry the indelible camaraderie of having rolled up their sleeves together. Even if we gain nothing else, their knowledge and affiliation is an investment that will continuously benefit Leverett.

With this comment, the public feedback period has ended. Thank you all.

Next steps:

- Planning Board meets [Wednesday, June 12, 7:30pm at Town Hall and on Zoom](#). We will deliberate over feedback and change requests to give to Innes Associates.
- Innes Associates will return the final draft of the plan by June 30, the state grant end date.
- Planning Board will make the final draft of the plan available digitally ... I plan to print a small number of pre-approved copies, but I want to reserve most of the remaining grant funds to print copies after Planning Board approval.
- Final approval, if and when: TBD. There are ideas proposed in this thread about organizing a Phase III before final approval ... I think that idea is worthy of deliberation by the Planning Board.

--

Tim Shores
Planning Board member

Long Plain

Page or Section	Figure	Correction	From
	147	5.5 "...and is fortunate that some many ..." should be either some or many	George Drake
	149	Recreation Committee "This committee doe shave.." should be does have	George Drake
	154	section The Community Preservation Act - 2nd paragraph "The Tow of Leverett ..." should be Town	George Drake
	24	3.1 2nd pp ...or just over 22% of the 202 population - What actual year?	George Drake & Gary Gruber
	32	3.3 in RETHINK ...The strategy addressed and identified ... "and" should be "an"?	George Drake
	37	Cars, Trains, and Buses - active freight rail track ... "This lie" should be "This line"	George Drake
	38	"The younger seniors jump by 12% too..." should be to I didn't see any numbers on the number of people per age group who have left town - but in my own experience a non-negligible number of faculty do leave town to live nearer their (adult) children after retirement. I don't know how this would effect the decisions ...	George Drake
General		The studies seem to have focused almost exclusively on use of services in Hampshire County, none on services in Franklin county - but Montague and even Greenfield are about the same distance - and a way lower traffic commute - as Northampton.	George Drake
General	77	"Cell service" gives map symbols for the carriers but does not reference the figure they show on. The map keys seem to be inconsistent with some of the symbols. For example the red dotted route is not defined. The symbol from the FRTA and PVTA routes seems to be different from what's on the map (double line vs. single line?)	George Drake
	81	bulletin point 3, line 10 delete Egremont and replace with Leverett	Gary Gruber
	16	sec 3.3 2nd & 3rd paragraph is repeated	Gary Gruber
	32	condo -4 units 4 doesn't make sense also under 2 family homes 34 with 71 units doesn't add up mathematically	Gary Gruber
General	79	Use double-column format on pages that do not need graphical elements To improve readability, compress all events/meetings with dates into a single table. Remove them from the narrative.	Tim Shores
Introduction		After the Exec Summary, I think it would make sense to print the full content of 5.2 RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES instead of the summarized recommended strategies in section 3.3 STRATEGIES. This is what people want to read first: What is the plan, what should we do. Then, the rest of the report tells the long, data-informed story of what comp planning is, and how Leverett used comp planning to arrive at these strategies.	Tim Shores
Organization Strategies		Color code the recommended strategies, 4 colors for DO, EXPLORE, DISCUSS, RETHINK. "Engaging the community for a comprehensive plan happens at several levels. A Planning Board will appoint a working group, advisory committee, or other core group of volunteers who provide detailed feedback and assist with outreach. The Leverett Planning Board, after calling for volunteers, appointed a Steering Group of thirteen members."	Tim Shores
		Correction: Although we called for volunteers for the phase 1 Working Group in a questionnaire, the Planning Board chose to recruit members of the Phase 2 Steering Group by word of mouth networking. The rationale was that in Phase 1, less than half of the volunteers showed up for the Working Group, and we knew that we would need greater commitment from Phase 2 Steering Group members.	Tim Shores
	14	The LES open house was Tuesday, October 24, '23	Tim Shores
	17	Maybe best to omit "(now the Sustainable Economy Committee)", since this committee stalled out not long after the FY21 report.	Tim Shores
	21	Include Senior Needs Assessment? https://leverett.ma.us/g/37/Council-on-Aging-COA	Tim Shores
	21	https://drive.google.com/file/d/1IG_ME4FRlmH6IDke6gPGRLMcv8GFjJE6/	Tim Shores
	25	Unpack, or maybe strike this statement: "With 411 respondents, it is difficult to summarize everything."	Tim Shores
25-27		This section needs more data visualization.	Tim Shores
30-31		"*Not all respondents answered the question." Instead, state the percentage of respondents who did answer.	Tim Shores
	37	"Despite being a car-dependent community, Leverett does not have a gas station." We also don't have a facility for charging electric vehicles (that I know of).	Tim Shores
	37	"... in 2022, the population was 1,860. The population has remained relatively steady since 2010, when it was 1,851." Strike "relatively". That's just plain ol' steady.	Tim Shores
	37	"The younger seniors jump by 12% too be almost a quarter of the population while the older seniors increase slightly by 3%." Try this: "Younger seniors increased by 12% and are now a quarter of the population. Older seniors increased by 3%."	Tim Shores
	38	"Overall, this means that in 2040, the retired and increasingly older population in town is 32% of the population with a bare majority (53%) of working age." Instead, "This means that by 2040 a third of the population will be retired. Only half will be of working age."	Tim Shores
	38	"An analysis of the 2023 Assessors' data shows that, of the existing buildings in town, 33% (261 buildings) are dated from 1723-1959."	Tim Shores
		Eva Gibavic, a dedicated and eagle-eyed town historian, explained to me that for various reasons it's not possible for a house to have been built in Leverett as early as 1723. This led to a discussion about the sloppiness of the dates of old buildings in assessment data, which was confirmed by former Board of Assessors chair Dave Palmer.	
	39	Let's play it safe and say something like, "An analysis of the 2023 Assessors' data shows that, of the existing buildings in town, 33% (261 buildings) are dated from the mid-18th century to 1959."	Tim Shores

47	"Figure 20. Leverett and Surrounding Communities: Change in Post-Retirement Ages 2020 - 2040" ... This chart might be easier to read if x-axis groups are towns, and colors are age-groups? Steering Group asked about this when RKG presented last year... this table should show around 45 people in	Tim Shores
64	54 Educational Services because they work at Leverett Elementary School. It's accounted for in Figure 58.	Tim Shores
5.3	RECOMMENDATIONS FROM EXISTING PLANS Use table format for all of these	Tim Shores
151	potential partners: Include LifePath, https://lifepathma.org/	Tim Shores
10	"Question for the Planning Board and Steering Group: Should this be an in-document spread or a separate poster?" Can we do both? I love the idea of a separate poster.	Tim Shores

From: [Tim Shores](#)
To: [Emily Innes](#)
Subject: Fwd: Private: Re: [LeverettConnects] Leverett Comprehensive Plan DRAFT: Feedback & Discussion Thread [Filed 20 May 2024 10:21]
Date: Monday, May 20, 2024 10:02:50 AM

FYI, a direct email from someone to me, and my response.

tim

On Mon, May 20, 2024 at 7:23 AM [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] wrote:

It would be interesting to know the demographics of the study that was taken. I.e how many residents actually responded, of that what was the demographics i.w age, how long have they lived in town , what area of town, etc. Etc. As those are very important to know if the study is truly a showing of how the whole town feels.

Are these demographics available for the study.

I agree that there are not as many residents reached on leverett connects.

& reading a long document is very cumbersome. Is there a summary available with the main talking points & thoughts? The meetings that were set up for information were also not at the greatest dates or times .Reading this summary I don't really get a sense for how much response there actually was and is it actually the majority of the town or just a small group pushing this.

What prompted this? Was it discussed and voted on at a town meeting?

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Tim Shores** [REDACTED]
Date: Mon, May 20, 2024 at 9:51 AM
Subject: Re: Private: Re: [LeverettConnects] Leverett Comprehensive Plan DRAFT: Feedback & Discussion Thread
To: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED], thank you for your questions and feedback.

For a summary: It may help to read the following presentations give by the principal planning consultant, Emily Innes.

- [June 2023 presentation on existing conditions research](#)
- [January 2024 presentation on community data collection and zoning](#)
- [April 2024 presentation on zoning](#)

I was sorry to see that she has not yet written the executive summary in the plan draft. Without that, it's hard to summarize the plan. I wanted to create a summary document, but family and professional needs have demanded more of my time. Also, I've been volunteering on this stuff in Leverett since late 2020, and to be honest, I'm out of juice.

For your question about how much response we've received, the [full draft for review](#) on the Town website has information about the specific data collection activities. Here are excerpts that answer your specific questions:

1. P. 24: "The Steering Group sponsored a community-wide survey that was available on-line and through paper copies from October 9 through December 18, 2023. Although not everyone answered each question, 411 respondents or just over 22% of the 202 population of 1,865 took part in the survey." [This sentence will need to be corrected to say, "of the 2020 population of 1,865"]
 1. P. 25: "The Steering Group limited the demographic questions to two: the age of the respondent and the length of time they have lived in Leverett. The two pie charts below show the results. Most of the respondents were 65 and over. Most of the respondents had lived in Leverett for over 30 years. Given the demographics (see Section 4.2), these results are not surprising."
2. Three workshops served as community engagement events to inform community members, create a space for discussion and socializing, and collect qualitative data.
 1. P. 14: "The Town of Leverett chose to mix three inperson large-group workshops with some smaller group meetings. This type of engagement often reaches those who are already involved with town initiatives and can capture people who become more interested during the process as future options are refined and they better understand the potential impacts."
 2. P. 14: "The first workshop captured 73 attendees, the second had 57, and the third had 41 attendees."
 3. P. 17: "Finally, members of the Steering Group hosted small group meetings to raise awareness of the planning process in the fall and early winter. In October 2023, the consultant team provided materials for these workshops, including a map of the town, a Word document for questions and notes for these small groups, and a handout of data resources. These meetings were as follows:"
 1. November 5, 2023. Teawaddle Hill neighborhood group.
 2. November ?, 2023. LES Open House
 3. November 5, 2023. Harvest Fest Village Co-op.
 4. November 14, 2023. Veterans' Group.
 5. January 24?, 2024: Council on Aging.
 6. April-June 2024: Drop-in at the Leverett Public Library

I also agree about Leverett Connects. I have also done outreach by sending postcards to all Leverett households, posting flyers at Town Hall, the Library, and the Coop, and by visiting the Library. For example, I was at the Library last Thursday from 4 to 6pm, once I had printed copies of the plan available. I left a large stack of printed copies with printed instructions on how to submit feedback. I may need to replenish that stack.

You can learn more about what prompted this and who was involved by reading these pages on the Town website:

1. [Comprehensive Planning](#)
2. [Leverett Comprehensive Plan project timeline](#) ... this is also summarized on pages 15-17 of the [full draft for review](#).

In response to a property tax rate that had increased above 2%, Town Meeting created a [Revenue Committee in 2019](#), "to explore, examine, and present for consideration potential ongoing revenue opportunities for the Town of Leverett ..." and to "focus on creating and/or

exploiting ongoing municipal revenue sources (other than tax surcharges, licensing, permits, etc.). Town infrastructure, zoning and other restrictions, and aesthetics will be considered by the Committee.”

I was on that committee in its second year. At the end of that second year, I was elected to the Planning Board.

Fellow Planning Board member Tom Ewing also served on the Revenue Committee. After our research activities wound down and we concluded that there was no low-hanging revenue fruit that we could "exploit", he decided that the next step should be for the Planning Board to begin pursuing a Comprehensive Plan (AKA "Master Plan", although that terminology is no longer fashionable). A month or two before I joined the Planning Board, they voted to pursue state grants for this project.

[Mass state law](#) says a planning board "shall make a master plan of such city or town or such part or parts thereof as said board may deem advisable and from time to time may extend or perfect such plan", and the law includes a checklist of "elements" that the plan must include ... but the law doesn't require community input. Still, it was important to us on the Leverett Planning Board to gather as much community input as we could.

I have experience with grant-funded project management and qualitative research, so I joined Tom as a subcommittee to organize the project, try to engage the community, and keep the thing on rails.

Since I served on the Revenue Committee from 2020 to 2021, I've tried to make information and documents more accessible. I moved to Leverett in 2018. After my first Town Meeting in 2019, I wanted to start learning more about Leverett, but I found it very difficult to find information and documents. I would attend meetings, but it was a struggle to understand where board and committee members were getting or keeping the information that presumably drove their decisions. My background is in software engineering, technical writing, and technical knowledge management, and in those fields, not being able to find information spells doom for a team. In the public arena, lack of organized and accessible information is even more problematic, because it creates a lack of transparency.

So, when I've done work for Leverett, I've tried to put in a lot of time and effort to make information available and accessible. Given the depth and complexity of the subject-matter, and given that we're a Town of volunteers governing a \$7.2M budget, the information I organize is rarely brief or well summarized. I apologize for that. As Mark Twain said, "I didn't have time to write a short letter, so I wrote a long one instead." But on occasion I find the energy to create documents to try to summarize the work and ideas for people, like so:

1. [Leverett Comprehensive Plan Logic Model](#) - March 2023
2. [Leverett Comprehensive Plan project and implementation timelines](#) - March 2024

I'm also personally committed to qualitative community research as an important ingredient for democracy. Qualitative community research is always flawed. But I think it's better to ask people what they want and get a flawed response than to not ask people what they want and leave it to Town Meeting alone. Around 100 to 150 attend the Leverett Annual Town Meeting. Let's approximate and say it's about 10% or maybe 15% of our 1,400 registered voters. My hope is that we can keep up with the kind of engagement we got with the Comp Plan

community research, and repeat the workshop format on a regular basis. Maybe it'll help more people become interested in going to Town Meeting, or maybe it'll help more people feel like they have a voice. Or, maybe it won't work at all! But I still feel like it's important to try to engage the community even if we fail or fall short of our potential.

I hope this helps, and feel free to contact me at any time.

Tim

RESPONSE TO LEVERETT DRAFT COMPREHENSIVE PLAN 2024

Judith Davidov

davidov@english.umass.edu

Spelling and grammatical errors

- p. 5, line up second item (as in 47 same page)
- p. 36, "Land and Roads," l. 16: Cave (not Cove)
- p. 37, "Cars, Trains, Buses, l. 7: live (not lie)
- p. 38, l. 4: by (not be)
- p. 71, par. 4, l. 3: Crafts and (not Community, i.e., Leverett Crafts and Arts)
- p. 82, par. 5, l. 2: thought (not though)
- p. 85, l. 3: areas (not arenas)
- p. 87, l. 10: COM (not CO) and SPR (not sure what that means)
- p. 96. par. 1, l. 6, possibly (not possible) and par. 2, l. 1, center (not enter)
- p. 102, par. 1, l. 4, i.e. (not e)
- p. 105, second green comment on right, l. 1: too (not to)
- p. 108ff: what do letters stand for (under "goal? (LU, C, ED, H, OSR, NCR, S+F) need Glossary at end?
- p. 114, 4th to last line: on (not of)
- p. 122, box at bottom left, l. 1, second item: options (not opinions)
- p. 124, middle section (Town implement . . .), second item, l 2: Leverett (no capital E)

Items for discussion

- p. 74: It is a problem that we have a Hazard Mitigation Plan with which most Town residents are unfamiliar. How do we work to change this, educate ourselves?
- p. 76: Wastewater as a constraint on new development is a problem we need to face as we advocate for things such as affordable housing. We need to better educate ourselves about sewer systems, groundwater discharge, wastewater treatment.
- p. 81: why is Amherst not on the map?
- p. 136: The Leverett Trails Committee has already done a good job with trailhead parking, trail signage and other things mentioned at the top of this page, but trailhead parking areas need to be kept free of ice and snow in winter; it is dangerous to park on the street when roads are icy.
- pp. 138, 140: Drinking water: highest priority to map groundwater sources and potential vulnerabilities, to develop a potable water resiliency plan, and to educate residents about conserving water (see my comments below).

General comments

It is clear to me from attending all three working sessions and from reading the report carefully that we in Leverett face very serious problems. Many of these are interconnected.

First and foremost is the problem that we are an aging community and that we do not have the resources to address this problem. People in the small group discussion that I attended continually stressed the need for "intergenerational knowledge." This means that we see it as a positive goal to keep our elders here in the community. But because we are reliant on our own vehicles for transportation to medical and other appointments, grocery shopping, socializing, physical activity such as gym visits, getting to trailheads, and so on, that is an impossibility for seniors who can no longer drive when we do not have reliable, frequent public transportation. Changing zoning laws to permit multi-family dwellings, smaller lot sizes, and other changes to make housing easier and more affordable for seniors runs into the problems of water and sewer

(see pages 76 and 138-140). We are left with the problem of seniors, many of whom live alone, stranded in their dwellings when they can no longer drive, isolated and needy.

We badly need a senior center in town. I was recently at an art exhibit opening at the senior center in Hadley. It is a big, open, welcoming space—a place to go to meet others, have meals, share artistic and other talents, exercise, and so on. I think it is as important as a school for our young. I do not have school-age children but am perfectly willing to contribute my tax dollars for educating our young. The same is true for a building to meet the needs of seniors. (The community room in the library goes very tiny way to meet this need, but it has space for only a few people at a time.)

The second biggest problem as I see it is water. I have a very deep well (375 feet) and yet have from time to time run out of water in the house in times of drought. We need to educate ourselves about mapping groundwater sources and for developing a potable water resiliency plan. I think most residents here, those with plenty of water (downhill of others who are more vulnerable) waste a lot of water and use water unthinkingly, e.g., by sprinkling their lawns. We need a plan to educate ourselves about conserving water so that this fragile resource is more equitably shared.

This problem is tied into wastewater, and into sewage disposal. We cannot blindly and blithely say that we need affordable housing without solving the problems of water, both for drinking and for treating waste) that plague us when we live on ledge and with insufficient water supply.

I learned a lot from these meetings, from the skillful computer graphics, from listening to others. We now have a list, or lists, of problems. The next steps are to develop educational strategies to begin to work on these very challenging problems.

From: [Joan Godsey](#)
To: [Emily Innes](#)
Cc: [Jenny Daniell](#)
Subject: Leverett's Comprehensive Plan [Filed 15 Jun 2024 11:12]
Date: Thursday, June 6, 2024 12:03:52 PM

I'd like to respond to some of the issues that came up in the Comprehensive Plan.

I have been a resident for 55 years, served on the Conservation Commission for about ten years, been a member of the Rattlesnake Gutter Trust for 20+ years, a Leverett Library Trustee for 15 years, a member of the Trails Committee, (which has been reactivated under the energetic leadership of Seth Hemingway and which monitors 19 trails in Town—20 miles of maintained trails!! Your report does not make note of this.) I taught in the Leverett School for 28 years and my husband has been a member, and sometimes chair of the Zoning Board for over 40 years. I feel that this background is necessary for you to take my comments seriously.

Leverett offers its citizens a safe, peaceful, rural place to raise their families. Residents treasure the forests, the wildlife, and the serenity of our town. Yes, we are concerned about climate warming, protecting our aquifer, saving our forests, and we may feel a bit guilty about having found such an ideal place to live and raise our children.

In the 80s, a group purchased a 100 acre parcel at the top of Cave Hill Road and came to the ZBA to get approval to build a peace pagoda. Multiple efforts to find a perc on that property were fruitless; finally a Native American douser found a pocket of sand. The geologists on the Con Com repeatedly said that Leverett is underlaid with so much bed rock and ledge that town water and sewer will never be possible. The town's geology dictates that we continue our 2 acre zoning bylaws and critical distances between septic and wells.

Large apartment developments and multifamily housing worked in Sunderland where they had town water, town sewer, public transportation, and deep soils. Leverett offers none of those essentials.

The Comprehensive Plan does offer some good suggestions for helping seniors age in place. The idea of permitting ADUs is an excellent one. Maximizing use of our public buildings to offer seniors more programming is also a great idea. Certainly the school could be used in the summer and during school vacations.

The Kittredge development proposal has made many folks in Leverett realize how much we appreciate the town as it is now, and how horrifying the prospect of a build out of any size would be. We don't want to end up like Amherst or Sunderland, and fortunately our geology may save us from that end, **IF** we maintain sane zoning bylaws that protect our wonderful rural environment.

We love Leverett the way it is now.

Sincerely,
Joan Godsey

From: [Jenny Daniell](#)
To: [Emily Innes](#); [Greg Tuzzolo](#)
Subject: Master Plan response [Filed 15 Jun 2024 11:13]
Date: Sunday, June 9, 2024 3:50:16 PM

Dear Emily and Greg

Thank you for all your hard work on the master plan Emily. I know we Leverites can be a rowdy bunch so thanks for all your patience. I especially am grateful for your being open to trying to obtain as much town input as possible. It is important to get town buy-in, especially in a town governed by democratic Town Meeting.

- Although we benefit from some useful information in the current draft of the Comprehensive Plan, I feel this draft should be viewed as a starting point and should not be viewed as anything but a document that reflects **some initial thoughts** for town planning over the next 10 years.

My issues with the draft report as is include the following:

*The report lacked a systematic and holistic approach to the planning goals for Leverett-with no clear goals from the beginning to the end of the process

- The majority of the report's recommendations' basis are largely from a few cherry picked and anecdotal perspectives and do not reflect the statistically most significant data gathered in the questionnaire, town sessions and smaller group sessions
- The report's recommendations do not address the majority of the the town's clear desire to plan maintain the rural character of the town, forested land, water quantity and quality, or to plan for rapidly approaching climate change
- The report utilizes statistically insignificant "evidence" to support a recommendations not s expressed in the town's values or data
- The plan is based in more traditional models and does not address potentially newer trends like remote work and climate disaster migration; it also without relying on best projection practices, paints a picture of a town in i rapid demographic decline with few options
- The process underlying the goal of getting a significant town input community was confusing and utilized unclear methods (post-its in the data walk, three-minute discussions in the workshop) on complex issues with no presentation about and discussion of context, trade offs, implications, etc. People did not have adequate information for discussions or to comment on the Master Plan.
- The recommendations seem random, siloed, incomplete, and inadequate to the challenges and failed to identify opportunities for Leverett

I cannot support the action recommendations of the report at this time as they either stand in opposition to the stated desires and values of the town (as clear from the data collected- or a recommendation (s) lacks enough information to agree or disagree with the action proposal. It is not comprehensive. I am also looking forward to the development of action proposals on the other issues the town cares about. We need a evidenced based understanding and holistic

systems based perspective to democratically develop proposals that will serve Leverett.
I Believe we need to educate ourselves, the town, and develop a holistic and comprehensive plan that will carry us into the future addressing Leverett's stated desires to maintain the rural character of the town, protect our water and forests, find ways for seniors to stay in town, and address options that are evidenced based for some more affordable housing in Leverett.

I think we need to recommend to the planning board to recognize these factors and to adopt a plan as they are required- but adopt is specifically stating that it needs additions and may substantively change upon investigation

--

All the Best, Jenny A. Daniell

"

From: [Kimberly VanWagner](#)
To: [Emily Innes](#); [Tim Shores](#); [Andrew Vlock](#); [Jenny Daniell](#)
Subject: notes from our steering group [Filed 15 Jun 2024 11:24]
Date: Monday, June 10, 2024 10:27:08 AM

Emily,

The steering group met on 6/4 and made the following notes for the comp plan. Also, please let us know if we are still meeting this Thursday - it would be great if you needed to talk through any of these notes or other comments you've received as you work on the draft.

- CRITICAL: CHANGE THE TERMINOLOGY OF “DO, EXPLORE, DISCUSS, RETHINK” TO “TOP TIER, MIDDLE TIER, LOWER TIER, LOWEST TIER” [especially take out the idea of “do” because it sounds like a mandate]
- CRITICAL: page numbers need to be larger and not white-on-black; very challenging for older eyes to see
- CRITICAL: quotes need to be in quotations
- P 108 - add to barriers for ADUs - septic regulations and community understanding of what more housing means for environmental protection, the involvement of Board of Health and Conservation Committee [this may also help to show how/why the tension of housing vs environment seems to show up in the values/goals [environmental protections as top priority from survey, but then housing is the top “do” in the chart from the tabletop - this contradiction must be teased out more and then expert Innes advice needed!]
- CRITICAL: please create a visual timeline of the recommended “top tier, middle tier” steps for the next 10 years/recommended rollout
- CRITICAL: Add the key to the charts so easier to read/understand what values/goals, etc relate to; or at least at the top of that section; very challenging to always go back to the beginning
- CRITICAL: move the recommended timeline into the Executive summary; move all historic data to back of the report, we want less of a chronological story of how we got here and more of an actionable document
- Correct many typos; submit a final draft for final round of corrections before the “final

final” version; chart page 102 the numbers for units vs parcels doesn’t add up for condos and two-family homes

- Add description of the “2040” imagining exercise part of the tabletop exercise to lend more context to the results and explain the purpose of the “2040” idea [p 32 doesn’t say anything about the 2040 exercise and we are not sure how the priorities changed because of this imagining]
- Specifically name the available, buildable parcels remaining in town
- Specifically add more information on climate change/resiliency/air conditioning grants to the resources page
- Was there existing conditions analysis of climate change (e.g. increased floods/heat/ticks) that could be added?
- Note the demographic bias that may have skewed the choices became priorities in the tabletop exercise - specifically here we are thinking of #18, which we still hear/see as
- We didn’t see solar setbacks, native land givebacks, gray water, compostable toilets, important for the community based on the survey data but which didn’t seem to register as priority for the participants in the tabletop exercise

Kimberly VanWagner

From: [Tim Shores](#)
To: [Emily Innes](#)
Subject: Feedback from Maureen and Silas [Filed 11 Jun 2024 10:25]
Date: Tuesday, June 11, 2024 9:14:34 AM

A couple of feedback items sent directly to me, yesterday:

-

I strongly support recommendations 1 and 2: changing the zoning laws to allow for accessory dwellings on existing lots and changing the zoning laws to allow for smaller lot sizes and/or multiple units on existing lots. I don't know how this would work with septic systems--I presume people would be required to upgrade their septic systems if their current one will not support an accessory dwelling. I am a proponent of smaller lot sizes and cluster development so less land needs to be cleared to build new homes/less forest fragmentation.

I would not support spending more money for 24/7 coverage by our police and fire because I do not believe we need it. The fact that Leverett has become unaffordable for many people and unaffordability is increasing means we seriously need to examine how the town spends money. We have less than one emergency call per day--the fire department responded to 149 medical emergencies in 2023. I believe we already have 24/7 emergency coverage. You call 911 and an ambulance is sent from Amherst.

I agree that communication in this town is an issue. I think most people would join the Code Red system if they know about it. Maybe a volunteer group going door to door to have people sign up would work to get most people in the system.

The town needs to have more businesses to increase the tax base and businesses won't require the services that residents require--in some cases residents can cost the town more than the town makes in taxes. But, there is so little land zoned commercial. (I don't know all the land zoned commercial, but I do know some is the land the co-op is on and the former Dakin building, both of which are not available for a new business.) So, what land can be changed to commercial and what type of business might be successful here are two things I think about.

It would be nice to have a place for seniors to gather. I know some older folks whose spouses have passed and I worry about loneliness.

I guess that is all for now. I would have liked to have a public meeting about all this ... maybe there can be in the future.

- Maureen Ippolito

The town really changed when Michael Kittredge came to town. Once the town had a lot more tax revenue, the spending increased dramatically. We have a spending problem. Leverett will never be affordable Leverett again. This is the issue that needs to be addressed.

- Silas Ball

- **INCOMPLETE STRATEGIC PLANNING & ANALYSIS:**

- I came away from this with an even stronger sense that the draft plan is highly *incomplete*. This is an easy case to make by simple comparison with our neighbors, and also adds weight to a potential suggestion to consider this plan a draft until it can be further fleshed out and refined.
 - By comparison, here are plans from [Shutesbury](#), [Pelham](#), and [Amherst](#). All of them have much more robust organizing structures, with some version of goals, objectives, and recommended actions/strategies. (In many cases there are additional layers such as vision statements or more granular short/medium/long-term recommendations.)
 - Each plan has many dozens of recommendations, covering all the town's goals (and/or every major planning element--depending on how organized). This compares with our plan where we have just seven recommendations, which are not nearly sufficient to set direction on the key issues of importance.
- There is an unresolved mismatch between values, needs, and recommendations outlined. It's hard to understand and grasp the logic of the report.

- **LACKING STRONG & CLEAR METHODOLOGY:**

- Lack of data, largely anecdotal.
- Unclear what actual data sources are, would be great to clarify in writing. Here are the data sources I can decipher:
 - Data source # 1 - Survey data
 - Consistency note: # of respondents is noted as both 404 or 411
 - Question about survey data: What is the relationship to strategy recommendations
 - Question about survey data: What is the relationship between values, needs, potential strategies, and 4th thing?
 - Question about survey data: How does the survey data inform Table Discussion workshop?
 - Mismatch between the survey data on the one hand and the narrative/illustrative comments and recommendations on the other.
 - Data source # 2 - "Data Walk" Workshops 1 & 2 post-its from residents
 - Questions about the "Data Walk": unclear how data was collected, unclear how data was distilled, themed, analyzed into concrete insights

- The community was asked to provide input through very narrow channels (post-its in the data walk, three-minute discussions in the workshop) on complex issues with no presentation about and discussion of context, trade offs, implications, etc.
 - Data source # 3 - “Table discussion” workshop -
 - Questions about “Table discussion”: unclear how data was collected, unclear how data was distilled, themed, analyzed into concrete insights
 - Questions about “Table discussion”: What is the data source that inspired which strategy recommendations were discussed?
 - Note on methodology: The community was asked to provide input through very narrow channels (post-its in the data walk, three-minute discussions in the workshop) on complex issues with no presentation about and discussion of context, trade offs, implications, etc.
 - Data source # 4 - Small Group discussions
 - Questions: unclear how data was collected, unclear how data was distilled, themed, analyzed into concrete insights
 - Data source # 5 - Previous Leverett Reports
 - Question: Is this a source for strategy recommendations?
 - Data source # 6 - “Existing Conditions” Data
 - This is a vomit of data
 - Question: What is the relationship to strategy recommendations
 - The plan over-indexes on a single-point demographic forecast without taking into account potentially countervailing trends like remote work and climate migration; it paints a bleak picture of a town in inexorable demographic decline with very limited options
- **LACKING HOLISTIC APPROACH**
 - Inadequate discussion of climate resilience
 - Narrow focus on zoning in spite of modern comprehensive planning best practices to zoom out to include systemic/holistic perspective
 - In a number of instances the narrative and/or selected comments seem cherry picked to support a thesis not in line with the town's expressed values
- **DEVELOPMENT OF RECOMMENDATIONS**
 - The recommendations seem random, siloed, incomplete, inadequate to the challenges and opportunities
 - The plan jumps from values to recommendations without first articulating goals, objectives, etc. (see above)

- **REGIONAL PERSPECTIVE**

- Inadequate discussion of coordination with adjacent municipalities and the wider region

Proposed Outline Revision

The draft made people do a lot of digging through methodology and existing conditions content before they could get to the *plan*, the strategic recommendations. I think that's what most people want to see, so let's put it closer to the front of the final document.

Let's also partition the heavy content (evidence, process, methodology, appendices) to a second document. Deliver as two separate PDFs that can be printed separately.

Leverett Comprehensive Plan: Community Values, Goals, and Strategies

Approximate page limit: 60 pages

1. Cover / Acknowledgements / TOC. **Limit: 5 pages.**
 - a) Table of Figures and Tables: two-column, smaller font.
 - b) Include explanation of the separate document, formatted this way for readability
2. Vision - **1 Page**
 - a) While acknowledging that Steering identified multiple pathways evaluated by shared values and goals, rather than developing a single vision statement (p. 28)
...
 - b) It would still help to show a brief vision statement that tells the story of Leverett. Based on what I read in the draft, that statement of vision should tell a story like this:

Vision

We the people of Leverett are united by a love of our town's forest landscape and rural character, an intention to conserve our town's natural resources and plan proactively for climate change, and a commitment to strong community ties and inclusivity.

In matters of organizing and Town government, we commit ourselves to Leverett's democratic traditions of continuous public participation and community dialogue. We want to come together regularly to deliberate our goals and plans to achieve them, and our needs and plans to meet them.

The community-driven planning process revealed five key topics of value to our community:

1. Affordable housing
2. Aging-in-place
3. Climate resilience
4. Recreation and rural character

5. Town services

To prepare for the future and improve long-term town livability, we intend this comprehensive plan to guide, inform, and focus our continuous public participation on these five topics.

3. Exec summary; **Limit: 2 pages, keep it simple**
4. Introduction: **Limit: 3 pages.**
 - a) Section 1.1 What is a Comprehensive Plan? Integrate Section 1.5 about Land Use and Zoning into Section 1.1.
 1. Might help to add an 'inside baseball' explainer of why planners in Massachusetts exclude education and schools from the Comp Planning process. Otherwise, people will wonder about the absence of attention to LES and education budget factors.
 - b) Section 1.2 About Leverett's Comprehensive Plan. Integrate Section 1.3 into Section 1.2.
 - c) Section 1.3 (was 1.4) Summary of the Phase 2 Planning Process - could be brief text plus a table or diagram.
5. Values and Goals. **Limit: 10 pages.**
 - a) 3.2 VALUES, GOALS
 - b) Move content about STRATEGIES to Recommended Strategies section below
 - c) All Ch. 3 content to do with methodology, move to Methodology section below
6. Recommended Strategies. **Limit: 20 Pages (or 40-page limit for both chapters, Recommended Strategies + Implementation)**
 - a) Strategies Summary - Move 3.3 STRATEGIES here, make workshop methodology more brief
 - b) Strategies in Detail - 5.2 RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES
 1. Need to draw a clear line from existing conditions and community feedback, to the values framework, to the recommendations.
 2. Create an index page that shows Values and Goals with cross-refs to recommended strategies.
 3. Create an index page that shows planning elements with cross-refs to recommended strategies.
 - c) Combine 5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM EXISTING PLANS with 2. Existing Plans
7. Implementation. **Limit: 20 Pages. (or 40-page limit for both chapters, Recommended Strategies + Implementation)**
 - a) 5.1 CONTINUING COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS
 - b) 5.4 PLANNING BOARD AND ZONING CHANGES
 - c) 5.5 OTHER ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES
 - d) 5.6 OPTIONS FOR ADDITIONAL STUDIES

7.2 DATA SOURCES

- e) 7.1 FINANCING RESOURCES
- f) 5.7 MEASURING SUCCESS

Appendices to the Leverett Comprehensive Plan

Not concerned about page limits for this supplemental document

1. Cover / TOC.
 1. Include explanation of the separate document, formatted this way for readability
2. Planning Methodology
 1. 3.1 Listening to the Community
 2. Details from 1.4 Summary of the Phase 2 Planning Process
 3. Assessing the Impact of Existing conditions (4. Impact of Existing Conditions)
 4. Prose throughout the other sections of the draft includes details of process that should be removed from those sections and put into this methodology section.
 5. Add details about:
 1. The collaboration between Innes Associates and the Steering Group on materials provided by Emily, such as presentations on existing conditions, questionnaire drafts, and event collateral.
 2. Describe how Innes Associates performed qualitative analysis and theming of data collected from events.
3. Impact of Existing Conditions
4. Maps
5. Survey Results
6. Community Workshops
7. Case Studies
8. May 2024 comment on the draft plan
 1. Public Comment
 2. Department Letters

General Change Requests

1. Lighten up on the prose: Use diagrams to help illustrate methodology; use charts and tables to show quantitative detail; Particularly in Existing Conditions, try to constrain prose to key points that summarize the visualizations, with only a sentence or two of supporting prose.
 1. For example, “What We Learned” sections, e.g. P. 70 – Instead of complete sentences, like “The responses to this question were mixed”, try brief format: “Responses: Mixed”, “Responses: Mostly positive”.
 2. For example, “*What we learned about TOWN SERVICES AND FACILITIES*” on page 82 – Six paragraphs describing individual comments and clusters of comments. It’s difficult for me as a reader to spot the throughline of this passage. I recognize that this prose resembles the nature of qualitative feedback ... Instead, starting out each of these

sections with a high-level summary of findings, perhaps in table form, could help readers hold the throughline.

2. In general, write Bottom Line Up Front (BLUF): start with the big picture, the main numbers. For example, Leverett has 776 total residential units, but we don't learn that until Page 59.
3. Use 2-column format wherever possible.
4. Margin quotes: reduce font. If there's only one or two margin quotes on a page, enclose it within a two-column format to make more efficient use of space.
5. Margin quotes: Enclose in quotation marks to give readers a visual reminder that these are participant quotes.

Specific Change Requests

1. Add Phase 1 Working Group members to Acknowledgements
2. Pages 37-38 on Aging ... This section has a tone of objectifying the senior population, perhaps as a 'problem' or as 'something to deal with'. How could you adjust the language to humanize the senior population, and recognize them as a community asset?
 - a) This is an example of a sentence that should be a chart: *"In 2010, at the end of this building boom, 21% of the population was between 0-19 years of age; 62% of the population was the traditional working age of 20-64 years of age; 11% were younger seniors of 65-74 years of age; and 6% were older seniors of 75+ years of age."*
 - b) Strike this sentence, seems redundant: *"The people who filled those homes from 1970-2010 are aging, and that is reflected in the analysis of demographic trends."*
 - c) *"The 2020 numbers show that population beginning to age."* ... How about, *"The 2020 numbers show the population growing older than the traditional working age"*.
 - d) Replace with a chart: *"The most significant change was the decrease in the working population by 11% in 2020, while the school-age population decreases by 4%. The younger seniors jump by 12% too to be almost a quarter of the population while the older seniors increase slightly by 3%. Younger seniors in 2020 would have been born between 1946 and 1955, representing the early Boomer demographics (1946-1964)."*
 - e) *"Table 11: Projected Population Distribution by Year"* should be a chart that allows people to see these projected changes over time.
 - f) *"Overall, this means that in 2040, the retired and increasingly older population in town is 32% of the population with a bare majority (53%) of working age. This trend represents a problem for the Leverett community as the older working population tends to have the most discretionary income while the older senior population tends to have the most restricted income and the highest number of health problems."*
 1. Change "bare majority" to "approximately half".

2. The second sentence claims this is a problem, but it doesn't really explain why. Yes, seniors have restricted income and more health problems --- follow through on what that means for Leverett in terms of today's existing conditions.
3. P. 40: This sentence is at the end of the section on Development Patterns and Tax Base, and it buries the lede. The sentence can be more concise and at the top of the section.
 - a) *"The purpose of this discussion is not to delve deeply into the town's finances, but to demonstrate that the tax base of the town is residential and personal property taxes and that the proposed actions in this plan will need to be funded either from the existing tax base, growth in the tax base, or state, federal, and private loans and grants."*
4. P. 44: Revise to emphasize the age-friendly and aging-in-place challenge of meeting senior needs. Refer to the [2023 Elder Needs Assessment](#).
5. P. 44: Reconcile with the 116% increase of residents in the 25-34 age group between 2016 and 2021.
 - a) *"Absent the development of new housing, as the population ages in place, housing will be less available to younger residents leading to a reduction in the working-age and school-age populations."*
6. P. 52 4.3 HOUSING AND ECONOMY – Summary should be half as long, or even shorter.
7. P. 64 – Fig 54 doesn't show Education Services, so LES employees are missing.
8. P. 70-71 – Lot of participant quotes in the margins on these two pages. Would look better in a table, with smaller font.
9. P. 79 – Cluster of participant comments would look better in table format.
10. Table 68, P. 87 – Include key from Zoning Bylaw page 2:
 - a) Y - A permitted use.
 - b) N - An excluded or prohibited use.
 - c) SP - A use authorized under special permit as provided under Section 5300.
 - d) SPR - Site Plan Review required as provided under Section 3900.
11. P. 89 - Figure 70. Town of Leverett Zoning Map – Put the map at the top of section 4.6, prior to Introduction.
12. P. 90 - Nonconforming parcels. This paragraph provides the “what”, but not the “so what?” Is there any negative impact of a town's nonconforming parcels?
13. P. 98 - 4.7 LAND USE, DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS, AND PROPERTY TAXES
 - a) Seems like this section is unfinished. For example, topics and topic order in this section don't match title – Property Taxes, Land Use, Revenue Sources...
14. P. 98
 - a) *"Leverett has a residential tax rate in the middle range compared to surrounding communities, but the second lowest commercial and industrial tax rate."*
 1. Phrasing makes it sound like Leverett splits the tax rate.
 - b) *"The only community with a split tax rate (residential property owners charged a different tax rate per \$1,000 value than non-residential owners) is the Town of Montague."*

1. Sentence seems out of place.
- c) Probably best to simplify the first 2 paragraphs like this:
 1. “The fiscal implications of property taxes are an important consideration that businesses and individuals evaluate when making choices about where to locate. While low property taxes can help attract businesses and residents, limited funding can result in insufficient public services and amenities, inhibiting a town’s ability to remain competitive with neighboring communities.”
 2. “Leverett has a tax rate in the middle range compared to surrounding communities.”
- 15.P. 104 - Figure 82: Comments on Taxes from the December 2023 Workshop.
 - a) I don’t think the photos of post-its add much value.
- 16.P. 128 - 5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM EXISTING PLANS
 - a) Table format.

From: [Greg Tuzzolo](#)
To: [Emily Innes](#)
Subject: Fwd: Feedback from anonymous neighbor [Filed 14 Jun 2024 12:10]
Date: Thursday, June 13, 2024 10:12:48 PM

You don't often get email from gtuzzolo@gmail.com. [Learn why this is important](#)

Hi Emily. See attached from Tim. I'd be glad to discuss anytime tomorrow if that works for you. Thx Greg

Sent from my iPhone

Begin forwarded message:

From: Tim Shores <timothyshores@gmail.com>
Date: June 13, 2024 at 9:25:31 AM EDT
To: Greg Tuzzolo <gtuzzolo@gmail.com>
Subject: Feedback from anonymous neighbor

Hi Greg,

This is feedback for the appendix from a neighbor of mine who invited me over last week. They want to remain anonymous.

When planning for housing and affordability, it will be important to make Leverett accessible to renters. Today, Leverett already has more rental households than most of us know about or appreciate. If we pursue any kind of affordable housing strategy, we should look for creative ways to include rental housing in that strategy. Leverett already allows duplexes, and duplexes, especially owner-occupied duplexes, are an excellent way to make a town more affordable to renters and to strengthen the local economy for owners.

Anonymous, Long Plain Road

Tim

