

HANOVER SUSTAINABILITY MASTER PLAN

Meeting Notes

Date: 11/15/2021

Notes Taken By: Donny Goris-Kolb, Project Manager

Place: Virtual, Microsoft Teams

Re: Hanover Sustainability Master Plan –
Summary of Early Stakeholder Interviews

The following summarizes the outcomes from early stakeholder interviews (eight in total) conducted between September 29 and October 8, 2021, to inform the Hanover Sustainability Master Plan. Interviews were attended by approximately 30 individuals and organizations either living, working, or worshipping in Hanover, New Hampshire, owning a business or property in Hanover, or partnering with the Town of Hanover to advance solutions on issues such as housing, economic development, transportation, and conservation.

The summary notes below are organized by the interview questions posed to the stakeholders, which were designed to identify and contextualize the town's prevalent challenges and opportunities. To provide comment on these notes, please visit: [Get Involved | Hanover Sustainability Master Plan \(hanovernhmasterplan.com\)](https://www.hanovernhmasterplan.com).

Assuming no constraints, what is your greatest wish or vision for Hanover?

- More inviting walking/biking infrastructure, and improved public transit – all within and connecting to the urban compact of the town (i.e., downtown). Pedestrian infrastructure (e.g., pedestrian bridge) provides a bigger “bang for the buck.”
- Need to improve walkability/bikeability within Etna and Hanover Center. Reclaim the village feel in these areas.
- Consider life cycle costs and return on investment when weighing alternatives for capital projects. Respond to issues of accessibility and equity in infrastructure.
- Continue to invest in trails and related infrastructure with emphasis on connectivity.
- Properly manage resident/employee influx with respect to transportation and circulation.
- Create a vibrant and diverse downtown and attractive connecting corridors – avoid establishing new commercial centers.
 - Ensure it is feasible to open and keep open small businesses in the downtown.
 - Promote vitality through a focus on factors that enable a place to live/work/play.
 - Make sure downtown is walkable and pedestrian friendly. Stress connectivity with surrounding areas.
 - Ensure resilience in downtown's economic vibrancy through a diversity of businesses.
 - Keep pushing development – particularly housing development – within/near the downtown to preserve the town's natural areas.
 - Look at the success of creating on-street dining during COVID. Make outdoor dining permanent.
 - Need to make sure the offerings of the downtown are meeting demographic needs/expectations.
 - Promote more opportunities for social gathering.
 - Avoid trends toward office space, banks, and other non-retail, dining, and entertainment uses. Look at Littleton, NH and Brattleboro, VT for examples of locally driven economies.
 - Need to change the parameters of downtown and effectively use the space available. Limited space and high property values results in high rents.
 - Need to experiment. Deploy pilots – enable moves from Class C to Class A space.

- Address the connecting corridors, which are currently aesthetically unpleasing with buildings that are not well maintained.
- Expanded transit – bus routes and frequency/expanded hours. More on-demand services and micro-transit services will be needed.
 - Advance Transit provides no-fare services.
- Need to address Wheelock Street. It divides the campus from downtown – should make it people-centric.
- Ensure that the town is resilient to a changing climate.
- Raise awareness that people in Hanover live in a college town and vice versa – use this awareness to build town/gown bridges.
- Increased economic growth and broad prosperity – mutual flourishing between social and natural resources.
- Achievement of the Town's climate action goals by 2030.
- Improved affordability – manage/mitigate cost of living increases.
- Improved College/Town relationship.
- Better wayfinding and bike/ped accessibility to get into/out of the town, with options for shared micro-mobility.
- Prevalent wildlife friendly horticultural practices.
- Retaining the student population post-graduation.
- Balanced growth that leads to additional range of housing options, but with an ongoing commitment to protecting open space.
- Safe public drinking water supplies.
 - Most of the local watershed is protected through Dartmouth/Town ownership.

What do you most appreciate about Hanover?

- Our citizen's civility, political leanings, and intelligence.
- An attractive, walkable downtown.
- The town is small and safe, with great schools – a great place to raise a family.
- Schools are well supported by the community.
- Local cultural activities primarily supported by the Dartmouth College (e.g., Hopkins Center for the Arts) and regional cultural opportunities, including the Lebanon Opera House, Association for Visual Arts (AVA), CraftStudies, and Northern Stage.
- Natural beauty, including that of the larger Upper Valley.
- Landscape diversity and history of supporting conservation.
- Plethora and popularity of outdoor activities.
- The quality and integrity of Town leadership and staff. Stable leadership.
- A lot of people walk/bike.
- Visioning with respect to equitable mobility, though this can be improved with respect to the disabled, elderly, and kids – anyone that does not have the means to drive.
- Visioning with respect to sustainability.
- The Connecticut River is an asset.
- One of the most, if not the most, diverse community in New Hampshire due to the student population and employees at Dartmouth-Hitchcock.

- The Hanover Improvement Society, a local non-profit 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to providing good works to the people of Hanover and the entire Upper Valley Community. Owns and operates Storrs Pond Recreation Area, the nearby James Campion Skating Rink, and the Nugget Theaters.
- The density that urbanites like, along with connections to skiing, natural areas, etc.
- The Upper Valley Business Alliance – 2019 merger between Hanover Chamber and Lebanon Chamber of Commerce.
- The youthfulness and energy provided by the student population.
- The town's agricultural history, which is not well known.
- Outsized support for locally grown food and use of that food in restaurants.
- Notion of supporting "buy local" is significant in the community.
 - Vital Communities (Hartford) has a Buy Local/Support Local program.
 - Dartmouth Dining Card – potential to be used at local businesses.
- It is relatively easy to access major metro areas (Manchester, Montreal, Boston, New York).
 - Dartmouth Coach offers 16 trips per day to Boston (Logan and South Station)

What are your biggest ongoing or future concerns?

- Parking – it is difficult to develop/redevelop in the downtown due to parking minimums. The Town needs to decouple parking and housing – make a decision about what is most important and act accordingly. Dartmouth has decoupled.
- Persons with no connection to the College are increasingly avoiding downtown Hanover because of fewer options for dining and shopping.
- Lack of racial and ethnic diversity – some do not feel welcomed here. Need to make the town more attractive to people of color. This relates to workforce recruitment.
- Housing affordability and availability are prominent issues in the town.
 - There is a lack of housing for students provided directly by the College. This puts pressure on the town's housing stock.
 - Housing, namely off-campus student housing, is generally in poor condition and this reflects negatively on the community.
 - Dartmouth-Hitchcock is developing housing. This needs to be walkable, bikeable.
 - How does the region play a role? Some neighboring communities feel that Hanover is not providing its fair share of affordable housing.
 - Need to synergize planning efforts. Namely, connectivity with transit and active transportation.
 - Need to be better interconnected with the larger Upper Valley Region.
 - People are leaving the town due the housing crisis and issues of affordability. Accordingly, labor shortages are being experienced and are anticipated to continue. The service industry will suffer. Need higher wage positions. Need more workforce housing. Labor is fundamental to the town's economic viability.
- Need greater diversity of residents to support businesses all year long – not just seasonally.
- Cost of real estate. Difficulty maintaining small business amid rising rents.
- Continued investment in automobile-centric infrastructure. We need to prioritize the health/well-being of the community and planet over convenience.

- Improving access to parks and other open spaces for all. The town has a lot of green spaces, but how many people can walk to them?
- Managing growth to an extent that maintains character.
- Continuing to create/support a sense of community, while plugging into the global network.
- The ongoing effects of COVID-19 on local businesses.
- Large employers that make decisions that do not make sense for Hanover residents, other businesses, and non-profits.
- That we fail to provide sufficient opportunities to private property owners, developers, and nonprofit organizations to build more mixed income housing where water, sewer and transport routes already exist so that we can return to being an economically diverse - and therefore sustainable – community.
- There is a need to provide for additional childcare.
- An aging population, with older adults needing support living in larger homes (e.g., shoveling snow, paying utilities). Should allow room rentals (wouldn't increase the built environment) and encourage additional accessory development units. Older adults struggle to make ends meet in Hanover.
- Need to address healthcare housing for outpatient needs (e.g., mental health, substance recovery).
- The community is struggling to respond to racism. Need to welcome and listen to diverse voices.
- There is a need for intentional multi-generational community engagements that builds on resources of retirees and students.
- Climate migration and related pressures of development.
- Potential for the State to gut the energy efficiency program, which would kill the implementation of significant energy efficiency measures for commercial/industrial consumers.
- Housing is increasingly falling into the hands of outside investors looking to establish short-term rentals and a small number of landlords who are looking to profit from rental units but not to maintain and upgrade those units.
- Exacerbation of the "them versus us" mentality between the Town and College.

What are the most politically sensitive local issues and how do they relate to the planning process?

- Parking
 - Using public spaces for parking incentivizes driving. Further, parking crowds out other uses within the right-of-way.
 - A previous parking assessment indicated no shortage of parking in the town, though there is a perception of a parking constraint and mismanagement. This may be related to location and wayfinding. People want parking to be obvious and convenient.
 - Parking is weaponized against development and density. Supported by the Zoning Ordinance.
- Speed limits are somewhat sensitive. In previous planning efforts, residents overwhelmingly indicated that they wanted traffic calmed and slowed down where they live, work and play.
- People have different views of the Dartmouth as it relates to the Town. This needs to be acknowledged in the Master Plan. Dartmouth will continue to grow and expand.
 - Most Dartmouth students do not know anything other than the campus – need to expose them to the natural areas and other resources of the town.
 - The College and Town need to work together – one does not exist without the other.

- How the College is going to expand housing and other facilities.
- People have strong opinions about how the undeveloped land in the town can be used (e.g., for habitat protection, trails, affordable housing).
- There are residents who want zoning and planning to reflect "what's on the ground now."
- Density more broadly is a politically sensitive issue – can you do it without harming the character? The prevailing thought is no, and the result is sprawl.
 - Need to look at zoning - the types of building being built, requires more acreage.
- There are questions around recent property assessments. They came out much higher than expected.
- The degree to which tourism should be promoted.

What are the most important development and land use/zoning issues facing the Town?

- Getting people to agree to greater housing density and others to develop such housing is a challenge. Need to gain consensus on where it should go (consensus has been to keep it in/near the downtown). Creative solutions are necessitated. Look at increasing building heights leading to the downtown (i.e., S. Main Street).
- Ensuring that housing meets the needs of the community (e.g., young professionals) and is accommodating to diverse populations.
- Better use of the Old Post Office Block.
- Minimum parking requirements increases the costs of development, and costs for businesses and retail.
- Restrictive zoning does not allow for mixed use developments, and increases the distance people need to travel for goods and services and makes it difficult for villages to develop or be sustained.
- Not separating walkable destinations by large expanses of parking lots with no inviting walking paths.
- The town does not have reliable internet. Have been attempts to close the gap – need to look at the reasons – affordability versus infrastructure. Affects the value of properties – tax implications.
- Big developments have focused on housing for older individuals.
- Loss of dark sky.
- Development on Class VI roads (i.e., those that have been discontinued subject to gates and bars, as well as those that have "not been maintained and repaired by the town in suitable condition for travel" for five successive years or more.)
- The regressive tax system in the state – i.e., the share of income an individual or family must devote to paying taxes generally falls as one's income grows.
- Town made minimum lot sizes bigger in the areas not served by water and sewer. Should this be reversed?
- Continue to simplify the Zoning Ordinance.
- Need to optimize the School Department's facilities and evaluate its land holdings and their best use. Athletic facilities are comparatively lacking.
- Surge in "lifestyle centers" that Hanover can take advantage of given its unique downtown, though landlords do not prioritize businesses that offer experiences. There needs to be some landlord education in this area.
- Hanover is no longer an agricultural community. Has become a suburban enclave. Large lot zoning has provided for large homes. This affects the carrying capacity of the land. Need clustered zoning the further you get out from the downtown.
- Pressure to allow year-round occupation of the Forest & Recreation Zone.
- Quality of housing – high housing costs end up pushing some people into "substandard" units with concerns of lead poisoning and mold.

- Need to up-zone the main access corridor from Vermont to enable increased residential density focused on workforce housing.

What advice do you have for making sure that the community outreach is as inclusive as possible?

- Talk to people who use transit – on transit or at bus stops. Meet persons at the trails.
- Go into neighborhoods and hear from communities during non-work hours, including children and seniors.
- Leverage listservs, including one from Vital Communities (Hanover focus) and the School District.
- Access Dartmouth may be a good sounding board with respect to persons with disabilities and access challenges.
- Makes the subject matter relatable to people.
- Virtual meeting formats have increased rates of participation.
- Send communications through the schools/students. Create teachable moments.
- If holding any in-person events, have an activity to occupy the children while parents are engaging. Provide childcare in a safe setting. Food always helps.
- Keep the College's term structure in mind. Leverage Student Affairs and student groups focused on supporting international and first-generation students and students coming from less privileged backgrounds. Tap into the alumni network.
- Put notices in the news channels at the College, including VOX and The Dartmouth.
- Leverage CATV.
- Hold meetings and explore the issues with residents at the Kendal and other senior living developments.
- Ensure you are educating the college student population on the issues.
- Frequent short surveys instead of longer surveys every few months.
- Send out direct mailings.
- Faith institutions/communities can be supportive.
- Reach out to LISTEN Community Services and the New Hampshire Food Bank.
- Explain the impact of the Master Plan and establish the urgency.
- Report through the Valley News.
- Use social media by leveraging local groups/channels.
- Post on the Town's webpage and use municipal signs/billboards.
- Place a banner across Main Street.
- Daybreak Upper Valley.

What should Hanover do to address the regional housing crisis?

- Decide how much housing Hanover wants to develop and where it should be built.
- Keep zoning amendments simple – focus on clearly communicating what is allowed.
 - Site plan regulations do not need to go to Town Meeting, just approval by the Planning Board after a public hearing. Keep related information out of the zoning amendments.
- Encourage the development of more on-campus housing at Dartmouth.
- Hanover should adopt form-based codes and allow more densely built housing with no parking minimums within the downtown.

- Build housing on empty parking lots.
- Expand public transit further away from Hanover to enable people to live where it is less expensive, but work/play in the town.
- Large employers have a responsibility to work together on the issue.
- The Town has done much in terms of producing affordable housing. Working with Twin Pines Housing, the Town donated land for the developments at Gile Hill and Summer Park. A portion of the Town's recent purchase of the Mink Brook Community Forest (~5 acres) will also be dedicated to affordable housing. Continue this practice.
- Review ordinances limiting the number of unrelated people allowed to live in one house.
- Give meaningful density bonuses.
- Explore inclusionary zoning.
- Areas for Potential Housing Development:
 - Rivercrest - potential contamination concerns. Zoning and permitting in place to encourage housing.
 - West Wheelock – underutilized for housing. Need zoning providing for density bonuses over existing to encourage property owners to upgrade their holdings and encourage investment.
 - Zoning amendments defeated. Visual examples need to be based in reality – not just pretty pictures. Uncertainty around density made people nervous.
 - Buck Road/120 Interchange, next to Gile Hill – put multi-family zoning. Perhaps not as much community push-back in this area.
 - Develop lands north of the College campus/golf course for housing – opportunities to connect with trails, etc.
- Need to look at infrastructural capacities and land constraints, and then assess the potential for housing development. Need to determine how much housing is necessary.
- Reduce minimum lot sizes closer to the downtown.
- Ensure Conservation Subdivisions are easy to arrange.

What do you think the broader Hanover community should do to support its sustainable future?

- Drive less and take more transit and active transportation.
- Install more electric vehicle charging stations in the Town's parking garage.
- Enforce recycling and encourage residents/businesses to compost more.
 - The Town does not have a compost facility. A single private hauler handles compost collection.
 - The State makes composting a challenge.
- Provide children, disabled, and seniors with the means and abilities to move around on their own.
- Embrace change (e.g., tolerance for waiting for a shuttle versus getting in a personal car).
- Focus on conservation in buildings/housing – resource/energy consumption reduction in construction.
- Understanding the real cost of burning fossil fuels.
- Solar project at Grasse Road.
- Lead by example - make Town facilities net zero and let that trickle down to the rest of the system.
- Better communicate the pathway to clean energy.
- Support the removal of invasive species (e.g., Emerald ash borer, Japanese knotweed).
- Identify vulnerable infrastructure (e.g., culverts) and avoid development in areas susceptible to flooding.

- Address issues of extreme heat, particularly with respect to the senior population.
- Encourage the installation of heat pumps.
- Implement passive house standards.
- Recognize the importance of economic diversity.
- Stay well-informed of and adopt new technologies.
- The Town is working to become an aggregator for renewable energy, if successful, then there might be an opportunity for community organizations, residents, etc. to purchase renewable energy.
- The students at the High School wrote their own Climate Action Plan.
- Municipal and multi-dwelling buildings should use solar power to the greatest extent possible.
- Ensure flexible zoning for renewable energy systems.
- Support group net metering.
- Pass a bond for conservation.
- The town has the intellectual capital and skill to be a leader in the conversation on climate change mitigation and adaptation. Leverage it.
- Understand and address the town's externalities (e.g., waste management, airport, etc.)
- Frame "conservation" with respect to residents' backyards.
- Need to engage the College on several sustainability fronts given its outsized contribution compared to the rest of the community.
- Advance Transit has a few electric buses on order.

What could Hanover do to better support you or your business? Would you be willing to pay higher taxes for this service/facility?

- Would be willing to pay more taxes to support transit, walking, biking and other micro-mobility options, but the town would be better served if we redirect funds to these areas from building automobile-centric infrastructure.
- Advanced Transit is well supported. If additional service is required, there would be a need for additional funding.
- Need to determine if specialty services are to be supported by fees or by a broader tax base.
- Need additional spaces to hold community events, such as fundraisers.
- Better parking management. Transportation to/from free local employee lots.
- Improved cell service and broadband availability.