

NORTH ADAMS VISION 2030: CITYWIDE NEIGHBORHOOD MEETING SUMMARY

November 20, 2013

OVERVIEW

A citywide meeting was held on November 20 to display findings from the four neighborhoods meetings held in October, and to gather comments on housing and neighborhoods goals and policies. Residents were also asked to provide comments on issues related to infrastructure and services, as well as material from the open space and recreation chapter of the North Adams Vision 2030 Plan.

The meeting was well attended, with approximately fifty adults and two children participating in the meeting. The meeting was set up as an open house style in order to accommodate busy schedules. Refreshments were served, and Amy Kacala, Project Manager and Senior Planner, presented an overview of the North Adams Vision 2030 planning process at the beginning of the evening. This overview provided attendees a summary of work completed to date, work remaining and how the plan will be adopted upon completion. Mayor Richard Alcombright, Mike Nuvallie, Community Development Director and Mackenzie Greer, City Planner also attended. The meeting was organized and facilitated by a team of Berkshire Regional Planning Commission staff (Amy Kacala, Project Manager and Senior Planner and Gwen Miller, Planner) and Northern Berkshire Community Coalition staff (Annie Rodgers and Amanda Chilson). Several newly elected members of the North Adams City Council also attended, including Kate Merrigan and Ben Lamb.

At the meeting, residents were able to review goals and policies related to housing and neighborhoods, and review strategies relating to housing and neighborhoods and open space and recreation as well as housing and neighborhoods and infrastructure and services.

OPEN HOUSE STATIONS AND FINDINGS

Stations were set up around the room to capture input and ideas on the draft goals and findings from the set of four neighborhood meetings. Participants were invited to provide comments directly on the posters using post-it notes and markers and to write or draw ideas on maps. The complete set of posters is attached at the end of this summary for reference.

STATION 1. NORTH ADAMS' NEIGHBORHOODS: IN YOUR WORDS

This poster depicted a map of all neighborhoods with corresponding summaries of how residents described their neighborhood.

STATION 2. GOAL 1: PROVIDE HIGH QUALITY HOUSING OPTIONS THAT MEET A VARIETY OF NEEDS AND LIFESTYLES

A goal that came out of the housing and neighborhoods discussions emphasizes enhancing the geography of opportunity (access to quality jobs, educational performance, etc) for North Adams residents, regardless of their income. Some of the affordable housing supply in the city is not located or designed in ways that would be considered best practice today. In fact, the design of these developments can actually socially and physically segregate lower income people from the rest of the city. A clear message throughout the planning process was to have a more inclusive city that respects and includes all residents. This sentiment as well as a host of supporting research on affordable housing development practices that can help achieve this aim and other benefits to residents, led to a strategy to, in effect, work to desegregate housing development residents

through physical connections or, as opportunities arise, through reconstruction of older developments into the best practice mixed-income model. The poster provided photo examples of mixed income housing sites and explained the concept. Residents expressed great interest in the model of mixed income housing, even mentioning specific neighborhoods that could benefit from mixed income opportunities. One resident voiced some concern that identifying housing developments as in some way negative or in need of change worked to further stigmatize those places. The spirit and intent of the policy is exactly the opposite however, and the steering committee and other public comments support employing this best practice in the city as one tool to reduce stigma and economic segregation.

STATION 3. GOAL 2: ADDRESS BLIGHT AND IMPROVE PROPERTY VALUES

Residents were presented with a variety of strategies for the city to address blight and improve property values.

They really liked:

- The recommended vacant/foreclosed property ordinance
- Stricter enforcement
- Creation of a housing committee to identify problem properties and come up with remedies to improve them
- Art community involved with lien properties to draw tourism

STATION 4. IN FOCUS: TARGETING INVESTMENT TO MAXIMIZE IMPACT AND POSITIVE CHANGES IN OUR NEIGHBORHOODS

At this station, residents were provided a list of potential target areas within individual neighborhoods. These areas were selected because of their condition and function, with the former indicating the number of tax liens and buildings on the city's demolition list as well as property values (per square foot), and the latter indicating high-visibility areas that can hurt or help the image of the city to people coming to visit.

The target areas were prioritized as such:

- Church Street
- Braytonville
- State Street: façade improvements for beautiful buildings. These are easy to see when driving in as they are on hills.
- Freeman
- Uno: Brooklyn Street was noted to have five vacant homes (4 foreclosed) within 200 feet.
- Blackinton
- River

STATION 5. GOAL 3: SUPPORT STRONG COMMUNITY CONNECTION WITHIN NEIGHBORHOODS

Resident comments which garnered the most support at Station 5 supported activities for neighborhood members to congregate and interact, like getting permits to close sections of street for block parties, and a formal channel between city council and neighborhoods such as a neighborhood committee.

Enhanced police presence and enforcement was mentioned. Joint use of neighborhood schools came up in this Station as well as Station 7.

Structured summer programming for parks, and further participation of church/faith organizations also came up.

STATION 6. FROM IDEAS TO ACTION: NEIGHBORHOOD GROUPS AND ACTIVITIES

Types of Activities that could be facilitated by a Neighborhood Association

West End	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Walks • Concerts at Greylock School • Community Potlucks • Shared use of Greylock School gym for physical activity events
Church Street	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Block party • Film or music festival • Dog walk-a-thon • Community garden

STATION 7: HOUSING AND NEIGHBORHOODS AND OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION

Open Space and Recreation Priority Sites

	Linear and Connected Networks	Desired Connections	Individual Sites or Projects
<i>More to Add?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More on street bikability and safety signage • Bike lanes 	No comments added.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Music shed on Brown Street • Skateboard Park: under overpass by MOCA parking lot, allow for year round use • Skate park: in back lot behind Big Y along River • Skating rink on K-Mart lot • Not sure where Olympia square is • Swimming pool would be a fun recreation center for families and other community members • Would love to see more neighborhood involvement in the selection and production of public art projects • Year round farmer's market and artisan/craft fair location: cargo car?

STATION 8: HOUSING AND NEIGHBORHOODS AND INFRASTRUCTURE AND SERVICES

Energy

Residents expressed interest in the Solarize Mass grant program, so that the City of North Adams could subsidize solar upgrades, as well as developing an energy program that partnered with MCLA in such a way that students and professors could be involved. This program would also help keep graduates in North Adams after their graduation. While not directly related to energy, other comments included the need to triangulate MoCA, Downtown and the Greylock Marketplace as well as redevelop Eagle Street from Village to Supreme before buildings deteriorate further.

Roads and Bridges

In terms of Roads, Sidewalks and Bridges, residents expressed desire to deal with the section of Route 2 cutting through Downtown North Adams – viewing it as something separates the city. Traffic calming on Route 2 was also noted, along with targeted neighborhoods, including East Main, Pleasant Street and Gallup street.

Schools and Education

Additional educational programs were noted in Schools and Education, including two comments regarding substance abuse education. Comprehensive sex education and healthy relationships was also noted as an educational need. These could be addressed at a recommended after school program at North Adams Public Schools, or a youth center, which was identified as a critical need.

Public Safety

Issues related to public safety largely related to pedestrian and bike safety, including education and communication regarding jaywalking and several comments pointing to bike lanes through out the city. As came up in the neighborhood meetings, enforcement of the law is important: one specific comment pointed to drivers who text although such behavior is outlawed in the State of Massachusetts.

Other

Among Other infrastructure and services, residents expressed interest in free wifi service downtown to provide access to those without home service as well as visitors. Locations would include the downtown bus hub and along the main walking thoroughfare.

STATION 9: HOUSING AND NEIGHBORHOODS AND COMPLETED CHAPTERS OF VISION 2030

Residents expressed interest in museums as forms of economic development, including a Children’s Museum or Science Museum. Also expressed was the thought that the city needs more lodging space in town for tourism; related, the city could encourage conferences, conventions and festivals to encourage more tourism.

In the Food and Agriculture section, a resident expressed interest in a city policy that would require edible landscaping.