

CHAPTER 2

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

The Master Plan process involved extensive outreach to various groups in the community, including residents, elected and appointed officials, Township staff, and other local individuals. This section describes the groups in Waterford Township that participated in the public outreach efforts and the activities that were used to engage them.

JOINT PLANNING COMMISSION, ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS, AND BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING

On Wednesday, May 18, 2022, Waterford Township hosted a joint meeting between the Planning Commission, Township Board, and Zoning Board of Appeals at Waterford Township Hall to discuss the master plan process. In addition to staff, the consultant team, and members of the public, a total of thirteen commission members attended this meeting to provide input. Each attendee was given a worksheet prompting them to identify the top five issues or concerns confronting the Township. The group was also asked to prioritize these issues or concerns, identify three specific projects or actions they would like to see undertaken, and indicate the primary strengths and assets of Waterford.

The main issues participants identified relating to commercial growth and redevelopment were blighted and undermaintained buildings and no downtown district or business corridor. Discussion produced suggestions to enhance corridors, build gateways, and develop Waterford as a destination. The main issues relating to transportation included a lack of walkability and bike-friendliness and the need to improve existing infrastructure such as roads and streetscapes. The main strengths of Waterford that participants identified were its lakes and waterfront, citizens and residents, parks, the airport, and fire and emergency services.

VISIONING WORKSHOP

On Thursday, May 19, 2022, Waterford Township hosted a Community Visioning Workshop open to all residents to discuss the Waterford Township Master Plan. Fifty members of the community attended the workshop, which was held to give residents and stakeholders a chance to discuss ideas and provide input. The input received from this workshop and other outreach activities informed the goals and policies in the Waterford Township Master Plan. The workshop began with an interactive group mapping exercise where participants broke out into six focus groups containing 6-10 individuals. Each focus group identified areas of opportunity and areas of concern within the Township. Topics were provided to guide each table's discussion. Following the group exercise, each focus group was then asked to provide a vision statement based on the group exercise. The workshop concluded with each group presenting their vision statement and map to the larger group.

All groups identified developing a downtown as an important opportunity, with a potential location along Dixie Highway between Sashabaw Road and Shoreline Boulevard. In addition, participants expressed a desire to develop smaller downtown nodes, improve existing corridors, limit disruptive commercial uses, promote new unique commercial uses, and develop community gateways along major roads and community boundaries. Groups agreed that residential neighborhoods should be preserved but with improvements to their physical appearance. The inclusion of new housing in these existing neighborhoods produced split opinions. Most groups did not envision major industrial growth and agreed that heavy industrial use should be limited. A major point participants emphasized was the need for a cohesive network of pedestrian and bicycle facilities, especially throughout commercial areas and parks. Road improvements were noted as necessary and many groups emphasized the need for improvements to their physical condition, safety, and appearance. Groups identified parks and waterfront areas as key strengths of Waterford that should be maintained and improved. Finally, groups expressed the need for a new or renovated community center and a more integrated school system.

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Confidential focus group discussions were conducted to identify existing conditions and potential opportunities within the Waterford community. Residents, business owners, and stakeholders from Waterford were asked to provide unique and direct insight into the community. Focus group discussions were conducted in person in May 2022. Discussions were framed around a sequence of questions regarding the community and conducted in a conversational style. Six focus groups were formed comprising of individuals from nonprofit and service-provider organizations, at-large residents, restaurant owners and operators, lakefront property owners, and commercial and industrial business owners.

PROJECT WEBSITE

A project website was created to support the planning process and keep the public updated on the project's progress. It included background information about the Plan, project news and updates, meeting dates, documents, and online engagement tools. The website remained active throughout the development of the Waterford Township Master Plan and acted as a virtual hub for information and engagement opportunities.

Community Questionnaire

The Waterford Township Community Questionnaire was created with the purpose of collecting responses from community members to help inform the Waterford Township Master Plan and other community decisions. The survey received 122 responses from community members between April 11 and July 18, 2022. It asked questions relating to housing and residential areas, commercial and industrial areas, community services and facilities, transportation, parks and recreation, image and identity, top strengths and weaknesses, and the business community.

Map.Social

Map.Social is an online mapping tool that allows participants to pinpoint issues and opportunities within the City on their own personalized map. Points can be used to identify Waterford's assets and opportunities, such as community assets, priority development sites, new bike routes and paths, and desired uses and developments. Points can also identify issues in the Township, such as problematic intersections, poor building appearance, and public safety concerns.

A total of 199 points were marked on the map with comments. Users noted that development is needed along Dixie Highway east of Watkins Lake Road, as well as the Highland Road area between Crescent Lake Road and Pontiac Lake Road.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH KEY THEMES

Several reoccurring themes emerged from the input garnered during the initial community outreach phase of the planning process. The most frequently cited ideas from participants are summarized below.

Maintain and Improve Housing Quality and Appearance

Existing residential neighborhoods should be preserved but their quality and visual character should be improved. A main issue associated with housing was the presence of many blighted homes throughout Waterford that are not well-maintained. It was suggested that codes could be better enforced to ameliorate blight, building deterioration, and poorly maintained lawns. The construction of new housing produced differing ideas, but many commenters considered new multi-family development as appropriate when mixed with commercial uses and located in specific areas of the Township, such as on underutilized commercial sites. There was also a desire to maintain greenspace around neighborhoods.

Drayton Plains Subarea

Currently there is no centralized downtown district and some community members expressed they would like to see this along Dixie Highway between Sashabaw Road and Shoreline Boulevard. Landscaping aesthetics could accent this area to make it a destination.

Commercial and Industrial

Commercial and industrial corridors need enhanced aesthetics and buildings that are blighted need to be improved and maintained. Community members identified weaknesses in the character of Dixie Highway and Highland Road. They provide access to everyday goods and services, but the corridor's aesthetics are a little lacking and the layout and design of the sites could be updated. The development of retail stores, high-end grocery stores, water recreation areas, personal services, local restaurants, hotels, entertainment, office and business areas, and mixed-use areas was identified as a positive. Storage condominiums, gas stations, and industrial were identified as negative development uses. An emphasis was placed on improving current infrastructure before starting any new development.

Community Services and Facilities

Overall, community services were rated as a strength among participants. Community members think the school system, especially the high school, could be better integrated within the community. They also noted the need for a new community center as well as additional recreational programming and facilities for youth.

Transportation

Many participants believe the Township's transportation infrastructure could be improved, especially in neighborhoods. There is a lack of public transit, sidewalks, and bicycle infrastructure. There was a large emphasis on sidewalks being added to residential and downtown areas. There are also problems with traffic flow and congestion, as an automobile is primarily the only way to get around. Participants also noted a need to improve travel safety for drivers, pedestrians, and bicyclists.

Parks and Recreation

A big strength of Waterford are its parks and lakes. Community members thought that parks could include more amenities and be better maintained. There is also a lack of smaller neighborhood parks. Some community members wished there were more public lakes, while others wished to preserve their private lakes. It was emphasized that there should be better preservation of open greenspace and parks and several participants expressed a desire to expand trails and nonmotorized access.

Image and Identity

A lack of image and identity was considered one of the greatest weakness of the community. Neighborhoods, commercial corridors, landscaping, historic sites, arts and cultural amenities, community centers, entry points, could have a better connected image, while community events and festivals were identified as opportunities to improve Waterford's sense of community. Critically, with no community center or downtown area, residents felt that Waterford was just a passthrough and not a destination.

