

INFRASTRUCTURE WORKSHOP SUMMARY

Overview

This booklet summarizes issues and strategies identified by Shelton residents at a November 8, 2004 Infrastructure Workshop. The Plan Update Advisory Committee will use the results of this meeting to help guide and prioritize their activities as they develop strategies, policies, and tasks to address infrastructure issues as part of the Plan of Conservation and Development.

Residents were advised of the workshop and encouraged to attend through:

- press releases with local newspapers,
- posters placed around Shelton,
- e-mailing residents who attended prior workshop meetings that had asked to be informed of upcoming meetings,
- placing meeting notices on the City's web site, and other means.

Approximately 18 Shelton residents attended the meeting to participate in the various planning exercises, most of whom have attended previous meetings.

Approximately 18 Shelton residents attended an Infrastructure Workshop Meeting to discuss infrastructure strategies.



Community Facilities



Vehicular Transportation



Public Utilities



Alternative Transportation

Strengths Weaknesses Opportunities Threats Exercise

Workshop participants were divided into four workgroups, each assigned to one of four infrastructure issues areas:

- community facilities,
- vehicular transportation,
- alternative transportation, and
- public utilities.

Each workgroup was provided with some basic information to stimulate discussion and asked a series of simple questions designed to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) to the aforementioned infrastructure issue areas (see sample worksheet on opposite page). Each workgroup then had to reach a consensus on what the top three or more answers were to each question.

The purpose of this exercise was to examine Shelton's infrastructure in order to:

- identify infrastructure or services that are exemplary so that the City can build on those successes and apply lessons learned in other areas;
- identify infrastructure that functions poorly so that the City can take corrective steps to improve it and avoid similar future issues;
- identify opportunities to add to or improve infrastructure or services; and
- identify challenges or constraints that threaten to undermine Shelton's infrastructure or the ability to provide services.

Each workgroup selected a spokesperson to present their results in a public forum during the later half of the workshop. During each presentation, participants from the other workgroups were invited to comment on and add to each workgroup's results. The results of the exercise, beginning on Page 4, are not necessarily presented in rank order and many times include more than three responses due to the efficiency of some workgroups and the public forum that followed the exercises.

Some of the responses are provocative in nature and were offered by residents out of apparent frustration with the City and its agencies (see page 12). These comments were included to provide an accurate reflection of all opinions expressed during the workshop and might not represent a consensus of workshop participants.

ALTERNATIVE TRANSPORTATION FACILITIES

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT) Analysis

Characteristics	Features
Connectivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sidewalks/Crosswalks • Trails • Bicycle Lanes • Bus Routes • Train Route/Connections
Capacity / Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schedule • Vehicle Capacity • Pedestrian Safety Features • Signage
Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sidewalk, Trail, Lane Width • Pavement Material • Handicapped Accessibility • Shelter
Maintenance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Condition of Pavement/Rails • Condition of Station/Bus Stop • Condition of Vehicles
Parking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of Spaces • Bicycle Accommodations

What are the greatest strengths of Shelton’s alternative transportation facilities and services?

What are the greatest weaknesses of Shelton’s alternative transportation facilities and services?

Are there any opportunities to add to or improve Shelton’s alternative transportation facilities and services?

What are the greatest challenges or constraints that threaten Shelton’s alternative transportation facilities and services?

If you had the power to make up to three changes to Shelton’s alternative transportation facilities and services, no matter what the cost, what would they be?

Community Facilities

What are the greatest strengths of Shelton's community facilities/services?

1. Community Center.
2. Farmer's Market.
3. Physical improvements to School system.
4. Open Space Program.
5. Stable student population enables careful planning for facility needs.
6. Volunteer Based Services (firefighters, etc).

What are the greatest weaknesses of Shelton's community facilities/services?

1. Lack of a maintenance program for all buildings.
2. Need more Downtown cultural events and parks.
3. Lack of interpersonal communications and public participation between public officials.
4. Lack of waterfront access.

Are there any opportunities to add to or improve Shelton's community facilities/services?

1. Improve parking opportunities at parks and playing fields.
2. Improve bus stops and sidewalks to allow alternatives to driving to community facilities.
3. Appropriately fund a Capital Improvement Program

What are the greatest challenges or constraints that threaten Shelton's community facilities/services?

1. Tax rate too low (\$6 million surplus for FY 03/04).
2. Population growth will increase demand on services (especially public safety services that rely on volunteers).
3. P&Z ignores public input.
4. Public apathy.
5. City's Infrastructure Study is intended to mislead residents.

If you had the power to make up to three changes to Shelton's community facilities/services, no matter what the cost, what would they be?

1. Continue with the Open Space Program.
2. Decide on Government Center location Downtown.
3. Maximize the addition to the Grand List.
4. Need more recreation space on River Road to provide access to the river.

Analysis

Shelton's newest facilities such as the Shelton Intermediate School and Farmer's Market are clearly the focus of the community facility strengths.

The success and continuation of the Open Space Program is a recurring theme throughout the SWOT Exercise as well as previous workshops.

Shelton's volunteer services are both strength and a weakness, as continued population growth can overtax volunteers. Attention should be given to programs that help retain volunteers.

Lack of maintenance has been recurring theme throughout the public input process. Residents agree that deferred maintenance of community facilities reflects poorly on the community and will lead to more costly expenditures in the future.

Residents also agree that Downtown is critical to the community's future and the City cannot afford to continue the perception of "two Sheltons". By adding community facilities (such as relocating City Hall) and services Downtown, the entire city will have a stake in the ensuring that revitalization efforts continue.

Two of the opportunities for improving community facilities crossover into transportation issues. By connecting community facilities and other activity nodes with sidewalks, trails and mass transit alternatives, more residents will be able to enjoy these facilities.

Another recurring theme is to create and fund a Capital Improvement Program to facilitate the planning and continued maintenance of community facilities as well as transportation and utility infrastructure.

Despite a sizeable commercial component of the Grand List and a relatively low tax burden for residents, the low tax rate and purported \$6 million surplus in FY 03/04 is cited as one of the greatest challenges or constraints facing community facilities and services. The logic for this conclusion is twofold: residents have become accustomed to and in some cases dependent on low taxes, and the price of maintaining that tax level may be reduced community services and the deferred maintenance of community owned infrastructure. Another suggested measure to keep residents' taxes low is to maximize the revenue potential of the limited available commercial and industrial land.

Vehicular Transportation Facilities

What are the greatest strengths of Shelton's vehicular transportation facilities?

1. Route 8 Corridor: both the expressway and Bridgeport Avenue.
2. Routes 108 and 110.
3. Constitution Boulevard
4. Easy access to Merritt Parkway, Route 34, and Route 25 from certain areas of the City.

What are the greatest weaknesses of Shelton's vehicular transportation facilities?

1. "Pinch points" (Huntington Green, Downtown, Commodore Hull Bridge)
2. Poor north/south and east/west arteries in terms of quantity and capacity.
3. Older roads are not up to current safety standards.

Are there any opportunities to add to or improve Shelton's vehicular transportation facilities?

1. Investigate traffic calming measures (roundabouts, speed bumps/tables, etc.)
2. Study curvy, country roads being used as bypasses (Nell's Rock Road, Mill Street, East Village Road, and Buddington Road).
3. Add a continuous left-turn lane to Bridgeport Avenue.
4. Complete Constitution Boulevard.

What are the greatest challenges or constraints that threaten Shelton's vehicular transportation facilities?

1. Spending money on road maintenance, rehabilitation, and construction.
2. Widening and straightening north/south roads (Walnut Tree Hill Road).

If you had the power to make up to three changes to Shelton's vehicular transportation facilities, no matter what the cost, what would they be?

1. Complete Constitution Boulevard.
2. Completely revamp Huntington Green roads.
3. Construct an Exit 14 southbound solution.
4. Get 10% of employees out of their cars and onto mass transit.
5. Fix potholes.

Analysis

Route 8 is probably Shelton's greatest single transportation asset but the lack of a southbound on-ramp at Exit 14 has traffic implications that reach far beyond Howe Avenue (Route 110) as motorists seek alternate access points. Adding a southbound ramp at Exit 14 should continue to be a priority.

Bridgeport Avenue is both a transportation strength and weakness. Together with Route 8, it serves a vital function as a north/south arterial serving the corporate center of Shelton but experiences peak-hour congestion. Turning movements can be a source of traffic congestion as well as accidents and one suggestion was to create a continuous center turn lane as a means of keeping the through lanes clear of turning vehicles.

Constitution Boulevard is also a transportation strength and weakness. The two existing portions of the road serve important community facilities, employment centers, and residential areas while conveying east/west traffic. The City is in the process of securing all of the necessary right-of-way to connect Constitution Boulevard South from River Road (Route 110) to Constitution Boulevard North at Maple Avenue. These connections should continue to be a high priority for creating a more direct east/west alternative to Route 110.

Several other issues were cited with respect to north/south and east/west traffic movement. The existing north/south and east/west arteries are limited creating traffic congestion during peak hours. Employees and residents are turning to smaller "country roads" to bypass traffic congestion, raising safety concerns since many of these roads are not up to modern standards. Improvements to these secondary roads should be handled carefully so as not to encourage more traffic or alter the scenic character of many of these roads. Residents suggested traffic calming measures for keeping speeds down on these and other local streets.

Several "pinch points" were identified where traffic capacity is compromised by physical restrictions to road width such as the bridge on Route 108 approaching Huntington Center, the Commodore Hull Bridge (Route 8), and the dog leg traffic movement from Center Street to the Derby-Shelton Bridge. Progress is being made in reducing the dogleg movement onto the Derby-Shelton Bridge by connecting Center Street to Canal Street with its ramp leading up to the bridge.

Like community facilities, residents cited maintenance as one of the greatest challenges facing the road network, with fixing potholes singled out as a priority.

One suggestion for addressing Shelton's vehicular transportation needs is to set a goal of getting 10% of Shelton's approximately 22,000 employees out of their cars and onto alternative forms of transportation such as mass transit (which provides a nice segue into the next topic, Alternative Transportation Facilities).

Alternative Transportation Facilities

What are the greatest strengths of Shelton's alternative transportation facilities?

1. Valley Transit District (VTD) and Greater Bridgeport Transit Authority (GBTA) Route #15.
2. Derby Train Station (Metro North service to connections in Bridgeport).
3. The Riverwalk.
4. Downtown-Huntington Center Trail.

What are the greatest weaknesses of Shelton's alternative transportation facilities?

1. Off-street parking – primarily Downtown.
2. (Lack of) bicycle parking racks.
3. Low usage of mass transit.
4. Bus stop shelters (restore dignity to bus riders in inclement weather and pay for shelters with creative financing such as selling advertising space)
5. Lack of sidewalks and other walkways.

Are there any opportunities to add to or improve Shelton's alternative transportation facilities?

1. Add a Shelton train station stop.
2. Add bus shelters.
3. Improve mass transit schedules.
4. Add bike lanes.
5. Add river services such as ferries.

What are the greatest challenges or constraints that threaten Shelton's alternative transportation facilities?

1. Narrow roads.
2. Weather and topography
3. Need for mass transit financial incentives (employer subsidies, tax deductions, etc.).
4. Route 8 southbound entrance ramp.

If you had the power to make up to three changes to Shelton's alternative transportation facilities, no matter what the cost, what would they be?

1. Transportation Demand Management (flextime, telecommuting, car / van-pooling).
2. Bike lanes.
3. Ferry service.
4. Add sidewalks throughout the City, especially:
 - in Downtown and Huntington Center,
 - along Armstrong Road to accommodate seniors walking to shopping areas,
 - in corporate areas for employees to walk to lunch and other services.

Analysis

Shelton is fortunate to have access to well integrated mass transit and paratransit alternatives. The Greater Bridgeport Transit Authority's Route #15 serves Downtown, Bridgeport Avenue, and the Derby Train Station on its way to and from Bridgeport. Metro North rail service is available from the Derby Train Station with connections in Bridgeport to New Haven, New York, and Stamford. The Valley Transit District provides door-to-door paratransit (dial-a-ride) service primarily for seniors and handicapped residents but is open to all residents.

Despite the integration and availability of these services, bus and rail ridership is low. Suggestions to improve service and increase ridership include adding bus shelters, increasing schedules, creating incentives (employer subsidies, tax relief, or shuttle service), and adding a Metro North stop in Shelton (Canal Street).

Shelton's pedestrian and bicycle facilities are inconsistent at best. There are sidewalks in the commercial areas of Downtown and some higher density residential areas but they are lacking in many areas that they are appropriate or even necessary. Shelton should develop a sidewalk plan to determine where and when they are most appropriate for new developments and identify priorities for retrofitting developed areas. Suggested areas for additional sidewalks include:

- along Bridgeport Avenue and in all of the corporate and industrial areas to allow walking to and from bus stops, restaurants and other services;
- between elderly housing developments and local shopping areas;
- throughout Downtown and Huntington Center; and
- within walking distance of schools, parks and other community facilities.

As a result of the successful open space program and strong resident support, Shelton's trail system is growing rapidly. Key trails identified during the workshop are the trails connecting Downtown with Huntington Center and the Riverwalk along the Housatonic River and Shelton Canal. Creating a network of connected open space greenways with trails would serve multiple environmental, recreation and transportation goals. Trails should be wide enough to accommodate bicycles and pedestrians whenever possible.

Apart from trails, bicycle accommodations are severely lacking. Bicycle accommodations such as bike lanes and bicycle-friendly catch basin grates should be considered as part of any City or State road construction/reconstruction project. Bike racks should be provided at parks, playgrounds, community facilities, transportation facilities, and in major commercial areas.

Some participants were "thinking outside of the box" when they suggested traffic demand management techniques such as telecommuting one or more days of the week to reduce individual work related trips by 20% or more, car/van pooling to reduce the number of vehicles on the road, and flexible work schedules to reduce congestion by distributing peak traffic over a longer period of time.

Two major constraints to alternative modes of transportation are weather and topography. Weather and topography can make daily biking or walking impractical, can make walking to and from bus stops dangerous, and without proper shelters, can make waiting for busses uncomfortable and undignified.

Public Utilities

What are the greatest strengths of public utilities in Shelton?

1. Adequate water supply and water quality.
2. Reliable electric service.
3. Good access to utilities including technology, service, and maintenance.

What are the greatest weaknesses of public utilities in Shelton?

1. Stormwater management needs improvement (especially separating storm-water and sanitary sewers).
2. Abundance of overhead utilities.
3. Sewer access and gas access as competitor.
4. Safety issues (inadequate street lighting).

Are there any opportunities to add to or improve public utilities in Shelton?

1. Improving connection costs to expand services.
2. Relocate or bury overhead wires.
3. Expand/improve renewable energy sources such as solar and offer incentives.

What are the greatest challenges or constraints that threaten public utilities in Shelton?

1. Overdevelopment without infrastructure.
2. Climate/topography impact on supply/demand
3. Source protection needed to prevent pollution of water sources.

If you had the power to make up to three changes to public utilities in Shelton, no matter what the cost, what would they be?

1. Introduce alternative energy sources.
2. Maintain/improve sewer capacity.
3. Increased protection of water sources through education, buffers, wetlands protection, etc.
4. Bury overhead utility lines (especially Downtown).
5. Get more residents onto public water and sewer.
6. Energy usage should be a consideration in new development.

Analysis

Overall, Shelton is well served by public utilities with large service areas for public water, sewer, and gas; reliable wired utilities; good wireless communications coverage, and access to a variety of high-tech services such as DSL. An overarching concern is the ability of the utility infrastructure to keep up with demand, namely the electric grid and the sanitary and storm sewer systems.

Piped Utilities

There are adequate supplies of drinking water from both surface and groundwater sources. These sources need to be protected from possible contamination through education, buffers, aquifer protection regulations, and other land use controls.

The sewer system has a number of issues that should be addressed. The treatment plant should be sized to meet anticipated demand from new development and the process of eliminating stormwater infiltration into the sanitary sewer system needs to be completed. Stormwater management in general has been a recurring issue throughout the public workshops.

Connection fees and assessments for all piped utilities were cited as a concern in that they were discouraging connections that could be beneficial to residents and businesses. For example, extension of gas lines into heavily populated areas could allow for the conversion to gas heating and cooling, lowering demand for electricity and creating significant saving for owners of older homes with inefficient heat pumps and electric baseboard heating.

Wired Utilities

Despite reliability in terms of interruptions due to weather or other incidents, it was noted that electric power demand in southeastern Connecticut can exceed supply, forcing major users to shut down or switch to backup generators during “brownouts”. This is bad for both business and the environment when companies use backup diesel generators on hot, humid days when the air quality is already poor.

While Shelton cannot solve the problem internally, it can take steps to reduce demand through environmentally friendly and energy efficient “green design”, or by encouraging alternative forms of energy such as wind and solar power (through tax incentives).

Overhead utilities were also cited for several safety and aesthetic issues such as the lack of streetlights in some areas and the amount of overhead wires in other areas such as Downtown. Burying utilities as part of the Downtown redevelopment process would allow the installation of street trees, pedestrian scaled lighting, and other improvements that would enhance the character of the Downtown.

Other Issues

Throughout the workshops, Shelton residents offered numerous comments that seem to indicate that they feel unusually disassociated (even alienated) from City management and direction. One resident during this workshop reported that residents are apathetic towards the planning process because they are frustrated with the City and feel that their opinions are being ignored.

The process of updating the Plan relies on public input. The Plan Update Advisory Committee (PUAC) chose to use a visionary planning process that relies on extensive public input to ensure that the Plan accurately reflects public opinion, recognizing that it is the residents and their involvement in the planning process that will ensure the Plan's successful adoption and continued implementation.

Beyond the planning process, these perceptions are a very real concern for the City as they can affect community spirit and public involvement in community affairs. The subject might warrant a Plan chapter on community spirit or possibly a discussion under the topic of community character.

This issue also raises the importance of the random telephone survey. The survey, to be conducted after planning strategies have been developed and prior to completing the draft plan, will allow the PUAC to reach a representative sample of Shelton residents and determine whether the direction of the Plan reflects the overall community vision for the future.

Conclusion

Overall, this series of workshops allowed residents to provide their own unique perspective on the issues facing Shelton and not simply respond to the work or ideas of the PUAC or their consultant. As a result, many creative and insightful strategies have been suggested that might not otherwise have been developed. These strategies are by no means the only strategies to be developed. The PUAC should consider many of these as core strategies to build upon using their own insight as well as the knowledge and experience of Planimetrics.

Residents are encouraged to attend upcoming public meetings to discuss the overall vision, strategies, and draft plan before the PUAC turns the Plan over to the Planning and Zoning Commission for a public hearing for adoption. This is residents' opportunity to help shape the future of Shelton. The Plan of Conservation and Development will be used to guide future land use and other decisions in the City for the next decade and beyond and the PUAC needs diverse resident input to help them to determine what the Plan will say.

