



## Hamilton Master Plan Phase 2 Second Community Meeting

June 1, 2023

Hamilton's Phase 2 Master Plan process offered residents the opportunity to join a virtual community meeting on May 17, 2023. Forty-eight people registered for the session, not counting the Master Plan Steering Committee (MPSC) members, Town staff, and consultants from Barrett Planning Group. The consulting team designed and ran the meeting while committee members participated and helped guide the discussion.

The meeting had two main components: a presentation to update the public on the master plan process, and small-group discussions about Hamilton's key planning issues. In the first half of the evening, the consultants explained the purpose and format of a master plan and described the planning work that had already been done for Hamilton's 2023 Master Plan. This included a presentation of some key findings from the Inventory and Assessment for all eight of the plan's elements. Participants had the opportunity to ask questions in the Zoom chat, which were answered either in the chat or during a Q & A period.

Next, participants were divided into two facilitated breakout rooms. The discussion group activity was designed to have residents brainstorm ideas for the Key Issues chapter, which would then inform goals and policy recommendations. Participants were asked to reflect on two or three master plan topic areas at a time, divided as follows:

- Natural Resources, Historic Resources, Open Space & Recreation
- Housing, Economic Development
- Transportation, Services & Facilities

Land Use issues were not given their own heading, because most Land Use issues also fall under one or more other elements. For each topic group, participants were given three prompts to get them thinking along the lines of the "Protect-Grow-Provide" framework developed by the Hamilton MPSC:

- What existing assets does Hamilton need to preserve or protect?
- What is missing that the Town needs to provide?
- Where are the opportunities for growth in this area?

Conversations flowed naturally beyond these basic questions as participants responded to each other's points and fleshed out their ideas. Facilitators presented the prompts and took live notes using a "digital whiteboard" service called Miro. The notes (attached here as Appendices A and B) show the participants' most pressing concerns and comments sorted into a "Protect-Grow-Provide" matrix that shows where ideas intersect with multiple aspects of the framework. The Key Takeaways section below highlights areas

where there was broad agreement among participants and others that were subjects of debate and discussion.

### **KEY TAKEAWAYS:**

Natural Resources, Historic Resources, Open Space & Recreation

- Participants were concerned about protecting Hamilton’s open space and natural resources. They saw open space (including equestrian infrastructure) as one of the Town’s defining features and recognized the need to plan for the impacts of climate change and development.
- Some noted that Hamilton’s open space is an asset that benefits the entire region, and wondered if there was a way to capture some value from visitors coming to hike, ride, or play, and engage in more regional planning efforts to protect these resources.
- A common theme was the need to take better advantage of the open space and recreation assets the Town already has. For example, participants wanted to see both Patton Park and the Patton Homestead utilized more and increase residents’ awareness of these resources.
- The loss of trees was a significant concern. Participants wanted the Town to be more active in protecting existing trees and making sure that lost trees are replaced.

Housing, Economic Development

- Residents recognize that the flip side of Hamilton’s abundant open space and lack of large-scale development is a limited tax base where homeowners provide the bulk of tax revenue. As one participant stated, “the financial stability of [the] Town is threatened by lack of growth.”
- Increasing the amount of commercial development was discussed as a key way to lower the residential tax burden, but the type of development was important. One participant wanted to see more “mom and pop shops” downtown, and another stated that “we do not need another gas station convenience store.”
- Participants wished to see a greater variety of housing options in Town, especially to help young families and older adults secure housing. While this idea received broad support in the breakout groups, participants also felt that the Town should thoughtfully plan for new development to minimize negative impacts on the community.

One well-received idea was to encourage the addition of housing units through the redevelopment of existing structures. A large single-family home could be retrofitted to contain several smaller units.

- Many agreed that new housing should be located near the downtown Commuter Rail station, although this is also the most commonly cited area for economic development. There was strong agreement that development of all kinds should be located in areas of Hamilton that have already been disturbed and away from natural landscapes.

One group discussed how providing infrastructure like wastewater treatment would allow for the more intensive use of already-developed properties in places like Downtown.

### Transportation, Services & Facilities

- Participants wanted to see bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure improved and expanded to make these forms of transportation more viable, for convenience, public health, and environmental reasons. Current infrastructure is more conducive to recreation than practical travel.
- New residential development and renovations to municipal properties should incorporate green design elements and use renewable energy as much as possible. Sustainability should be a part of projects like Town Hall renovations or the construction of a new school, including infrastructure for electric vehicles where applicable.
- Both groups identified the need to secure a sustainable source of clean drinking water as a pressing issue, but some were concerned about the potentially high costs associated with tapping into a new water supply.

### General Takeaways

There was broad agreement on what Hamilton's assets are:

- Abundant open space;
- Outdoor recreation opportunities;
- A well-regarded school system;
- Access to the Commuter Rail.

Participants also largely agreed on the biggest issues facing Hamilton:

- High taxes and a lack of growth in tax revenue;
- The impacts of climate change;
- The need to embrace and green infrastructure;
- Lack of diversity and affordability in housing options;
- Inadequacy of the current water supply.

Breakout group discussions made it clear that Hamilton residents love their town for what it is and want to preserve what makes it special, but also realize that it will need to grow and evolve to meet future challenges. There is some inherent tension between these ideas, but many of the potential solutions brought up by participants were largely aimed at finding ways to carefully plan for and guide change in a way that is compatible with existing community character.

# APPENDIX A

## BREAKOUT GROUP NOTES – GROUP 1

# **APPENDIX B**

## **BREAKOUT GROUP NOTES – GROUP 2**