

Mansfield Tomorrow Community Open House

July 11, 2023 – 6:00 PM

Audrey Beck Municipal Building (Mansfield Town Hall) Council Chambers

Overview

FHI Studio and Civic Brand conducted a community open house in July 2023 that was focused on providing information about three of Mansfield's planning projects. These projects include the Parks and Recreation Master Plan, Facilities Master Plan, and the Northwest Neighborhood Vision and Strategy Plan. Public engagement activities for the three projects fall under the umbrella of Mansfield Tomorrow, which was designed to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of community planning efforts in Mansfield.

The workshop included a brief presentation about Mansfield Tomorrow as well as high level overviews of each of the plans. After the presentation, attendees were encouraged to visit interactive stations for each of the plans. Approximately 100 members of the public attended the workshop and participated in the exercises conducted at the stations.



Attendees during the presentation portion of the open house

Breakout Session for Northwest Mansfield Vision and Strategy Plan

During the breakout session conducted for the Northwest Mansfield Vision and Strategy Plan (the Plan), attendees were asked to engage in several interactive exercises. These included a mapping exercise where they were asked to identify on a map of the study area things they like or dislike in Northwest Mansfield. Participants were also asked to provide comments about

what they like and what they do not like in the neighborhood, as well as what they would like to see more of in Northwest Mansfield. To get an understanding of how much change residents believe is appropriate for the area, participants were also asked to provide feedback on whether they think Northwest Mansfield should:

- Remain as it is
- Continue to grow and change, but incrementally
- Be open to significant growth and change

General Overview of Discussion:

Most attendees were older adult residents of Mansfield who had resided in the community for over twenty years. Most were concerned about current development trends and skeptical of the motive behind the Northwest Mansfield Plan. Residents were concerned that the Plan would promote increased development in the area specifically for UConn student housing. It was explained that the role of the Plan is to create a vision and guide for the Town to plan for and manage future growth with input from town residents. Several younger adults/families attended and expressed that they moved to Mansfield because of its proximity to UConn. While they were equally unhappy with much of the development that has occurred over the past few years, they are enthusiastic about planning and change in order to improve these issues in the town. They expressed a desire for more communication and cooperation with the University.

Main Take Aways:

- Road safety: Speeding is an issue, need for bike/ped friendly streets and traffic calming
- Public transportation: Should service more areas and more people, senior transportation is needed
- Businesses: High dependence on student population, limited patrons when school is out of session, hard to sustain business given the seasonal nature of the population
- Need for more open space: Access to open space in Four Corners area is desired
- Student rentals cause concerns: Issues with on-street parking, speeding, parties, litter. Enforce restrictions on student rentals.
- Development concerns: water quality and quantity concerns with increased development, Cedar Swamp watershed, Four Corners area, conduct needs assessment for UConn housing
- Increase coordination with UConn: UConn should be heavily involved in Northwest Mansfield Plan.
- Questions about the fate of Goodwin School: ideas to convert to Senior Center or arts/maker space
- Four Corners area: provide beautification

A selection of specific comments that were received for each of the interactive breakout session questions is provided below:

General Comments:

- Slow down on building apartments-too much too soon
- Concerns about the coordination of growth given there are many different developers involved
- Need to protect existing residential neighborhoods
- Should conduct a needs assessment for all future developments
- Senior housing is needed in Mansfield, but development seems to be targeted for students
- Need to consider light pollution, noise pollution, and wildlife
- Older apartments should be renovated and reused instead of building on greenspace
- Concerns over increased traffic, more school children in the Mansfield Public School system
- UConn should be involved in the Northwest Mansfield Visioning Plan, need to work and coordinate with the University

What do you like about your neighborhood?

- Access to campus
- Natural setting, can see stars in the sky, it's quiet
- Close-knit community and neighbors, many have lived in Mansfield 50+ years

What do you not like about your neighborhood?

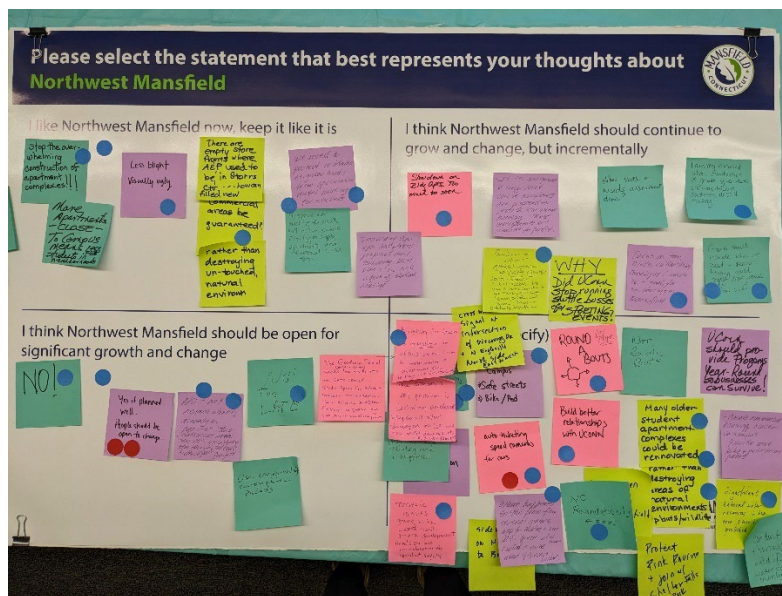
- Blight, particularly in the Four Corners area
- Speeding of cars and increased traffic, particularly on Birch and Hunting Lodge Road
- Cars parked on-street in many neighborhoods with student rentals
- Absentee landlords
- Too many student-oriented businesses that close during school breaks
- Too many single-family homes have been converted to student rentals

What would you like to see more of in your neighborhood?

- Active transportation options like bike paths and bike lanes
- Crosswalks
- Sidewalks!
- Public transportation for seniors
- Need a Town Park that is within walking distance to the Four Corners area
- More public transportation for the student houses so they don't have to drive so much

Other Comments?

- Concerns that increased development will negatively affect the environment and wildlife
- Conduct a thorough wildlife and water resource inventory then act upon it to protect our resources
- Better storm drainage is needed on many of the roads in Northwest Mansfield
- Need housing enforcement, there should not be six cars at a rental when there are rules in place related to unrelated occupancy
- Pedestrian scale lighting and sidewalks are needed. There shouldn't be such a sharp distinction when transition between neighborhoods and UConn campus
- Local roads are not safe to walk or bike on due to the speed of cars and volume of cars
- Blinking light at Chaffeeville Road and Route 195 seems inadequate, especially during the school year



Attendees during the breakout session portion of the open house and feedback from the community