

To: Harvard Steering Committee

From: Ricardo Lopez and Nora Beck, CMAP

Date: March 18, 2015

Re: Outcomes of the Public Kick-off Meeting, March 5, 2015.

The Public Kick-off meeting for the Harvard Comprehensive Planning Process was held on Thursday, March 5 at 6:30 pm at the Harvard Diggins Library. There were approximately 33 people in attendance, including several members of the steering committee. The following is a brief summary of the agenda and information gathered at the meeting.

- 1. Welcome:** Mayor Jay Nolan started the meeting and emphasized the reasons to develop a Comprehensive Plan for the City of Harvard.
- 2. Comprehensive Planning Process overview:** Nora Beck outlined the purpose and value of a comprehensive plan, the steps to develop the plan, and the project timeline.
- 3. Strengths and Challenges Exercise:** Nora Beck divided the room up into four groups and asked each group to gather around one of four maps to discuss and respond to questions. Each group had a facilitator and participants were asked to locate their responses to questions on the map. The four maps covered open spaces, residential areas, commercial areas, and transportation. After approximately 10 minutes at a map, the groups rotated to discuss the next map. The groups identified the following strengths and challenges:

Parks and Open Space

When asked to identify key parks and open spaces that participants valued, almost all attributed to amenities that participants enjoyed such as playground equipment, sledding hills, sport fields, and other natural elements like trees. Included were Lions Park, Milky Way Park, Gateway Park, and Northfield Court. Participants also mentioned Mary's Park as one needing the most help with vandalism control, repair equipment, and bathrooms. Participants would also like to see more landscaping in Milky Way Park and more active use of North Field Park. Other participants like to go to the Rush Creek Conservation Area and Beck's Woods for more natural settings . Overall, participants would like to see these parks maintained.

Participants saw an opportunity for connecting to Harvard's neighborhoods and parks to the regional trails that exist to the east and west of the city; with the Mokeler Creek corridor as a possible route. Others identified a 47-acre land that is co-owned by the School District and the City as a potential location for a new park or open space for residents to use. Others advocated for an indoor recreation center while some participants saw the need for a civic square. Many participants would also like to see the gravel pit on the Northside of McGuire Road reclaimed and used as a park with lakes and ponds. In addition, Meyer Material also owns a 700-acre site located in the northwest corner of the community; once mined, this area could become a park.

Participants agreed that the farmlands contribute to the rural character of Harvard, add to the sense of open space that exists, and distinguish the community from other areas in the region. Participants see the farm fields as one of Harvard's greatest assets and would like to see them retained over the next 20 years.

Commercial Areas

Stakeholders are attracted to specific stores and locations, generally in the downtown or Division street corridor. Most participants stated that they do most of their shopping outside of town. Overall participants would like to see improvements made to attract a greater diversity of businesses throughout Harvard, with specific focus in Downtown, Division Corridor, and Diggins Road to spur and sustain commercial development. Future commercial growth should fit their size of community and target businesses that complement those in neighboring towns. Participants see an opportunity to attract the summer vacationers using U.S. 14.

Downtown is highly valued; many see potential for additional retail and restaurants and believe it should be the focus of economic development efforts. Residents appreciate the contribution of the Starline and would like to build that entrepreneurial spirit. Many participants like the streetscaping improvements in the Downtown and see the need for similar improvements along Division Street, including lighting, landscaping, and sidewalks. Many participants discussed improving the aesthetics of the south entrance into Harvard, near the intersection of U.S. 14 and Route 23, as the gateway into the City.

Another idea that participants discussed was promoting tourism around agriculture, as they are a farming community. One participant identified an old farmstead on the north side off of U.S. 14 that could be home to a farm museum. Other types of business that participants would like to see include:

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|---|-------------------------------------|
| Small clothing department store | Grocery store |
| Casual sit-down family restaurant | Ice cream store |
| Entertainment options, like a small movie theater | Indoor recreational gym with a pool |

Participants noted that the industrial businesses that are attracted to Harvard rely on local distribution and do not depend on close interstate access. Additional manufacturing business could potentially take advantage of the Diggins Road freight extension. Some participants believe that the vacant Motorola facility needs to be the priority for the City. One participant envisions it being reused as a mechanical engineering college to respond to the agricultural economy in the area.

Homes and Neighborhoods

When asked about what they value about Harvard’s neighborhoods, participants noted the older unique housing stock, particularly those in the Hart Street and Church Street areas. Residents appreciate the architecture and mature trees of their neighborhoods. Equally important were having schools located in the neighborhoods so that students can walk to school.

Participants discussed a number of ideas to improve and support the residential neighborhoods in the community, particularly those in the older parts of the city, ranging from housing assistance programs to prevent foreclosures, to financial assistance programs to help low-income families maintain their homes, to support services for senior citizens to remain in their home or the community. Overall residents would like to see a range of affordable housing to meet the diverse needs of the community. Participants like the live-in lofts that are part of the Starline building, some see potential for additional townhomes or mixed-use buildings in the downtown and near the Metra station.

Other improvements that participants discussed were to provide support for the homeless, removal of the mobile home park, address vandalism issues (particularly along RT 173 and behind the new gas station), improve the drainage system, streetscaping with natural landscaping, and connecting missing sidewalks. The following areas were identified locations to add or improve sidewalks:

- Near the schools located along Garfield Road.
- Missing sidewalks in the 4th ward.
- Need sidewalk connections from the neighborhoods to commercial businesses along RT 14.
- Sidewalk shoveling is an issue.

Transportation

Participants generally value the character of Ayer Street as well as some of the neighborhood streets, such as Church, Hart, and Jefferson. While most reported that it is easy to get around the city, participants generally drive and do not typically walk, bike, or use transit.

As drivers, they noted the need to improve road pavement conditions generally throughout the city. While most intersections were deemed to be operating well, the Ayer, Division, and Diggins intersection can present some difficulties for people who are not used to navigating it. Most participants did not identify congestion as an issue; however, some noted that U.S. 14 can be congested during peak hours or during summer weekend evenings. School traffic, as people drop-off and pick-up students, can cause congestion and unsafe conditions for young residents. Participants find it is generally easy to park in Harvard, with Starline events on the fourth Fridays creating the need for additional or shared parking arrangements.

Bicyclists rely on residential streets and back roads to get around town, citing a lack of additional facilities. Some participants consider bicycling unsafe and nearly impossible to get around the city. However, there is a definite interest in biking and improved pavement conditions could also help bicyclists as well as drivers. Multiple participants agreed that there should be bike lanes, including locations on U.S. 14, Route 173, and downtown to help connect key community locations. Additionally, participants would like to see better connections to the regional trail system.

There is an overall consensus that the existing gaps to the sidewalk network should be completed so that it is easier to get around the community on foot. Participants often see large groups of students walking from Jefferson School to the Harvard Diggins Library walking down the middle of the road (along Garfield Rd. and E. McKinley St.) because there are no sidewalks. Some residents are concerned for how the elderly and disabled get around the community. In addition to sidewalks, safe crosswalks are needed along the major streets, including U.S. 14.

Residents are pleased with the recent expansion of McRide, and see potential for continued expansion of its service hours to accommodate late night workers. Many believe that residents may not be fully taking advantage of this service because they may not know it exists or don't understand how it works. Some would like to have a taxi service. Overall, participants feel there are not enough public transit options to help people access their everyday needs; some were unaware of the existing Pace bus route that does travel along U.S. 14 to the Harvard Mercy Hospital. Others noted that the only way of getting to the food pantry, which is located out on Route 173 at Harvard Hills Road, is to drive.

Participants would like to increasing the frequency of Pace and Metra service, with a specific request to expand weekend Metra service to avoid having to drive to Crystal Lake to access the train. With

the planned extension of passenger train service from Chicago to Rockford, one participant sees the potential for improved accessibility for residents and routing this service through Harvard to connect the community to Rockford.

4. Key Pad Polling Results:

After completing the strengths and challenges exercise, CMAP Staff Ricardo Lopez walked participants through a live polling exercise. Participants were asked a number of questions about their priorities and preference in respect to open spaces, residential areas, commercial areas, and transportation. The charts that follow show the demographic data of meeting participants and the polling results. The majority of attendees were Caucasian (94 percent) and between the ages of 50 and 64 (53 percent).

Q1. Which statement best describes your relationship with Harvard? (<i>multiple choice</i>)	Responses	
I live here	14	44%
I live and work here	13	41%
I work here	5	16%
I am a visitor	0	0%
Total	32	100%

Q2. What are the top 2 issues that need to be addressed at the neighborhood level? (<i>priority ranking</i>)	Responses	
Walkability	44	35%
Housing quality	24	19%
Access to commercial areas	22	18%
Parks and recreation	21	17%
Housing type	5	4%
Flooding	5	4%
Safety	4	3%
Total (<i>weighted count</i>)	125	100%

Q3. What are the top 2 issues that need to be addressed to improve Harvard's commercial areas? (<i>priority ranking</i>)	Responses	
More retail options	42	34%
Diversity of retail options	38	30%
Physical appearance	26	21%
Access	9	7%
More employers	9	7%
Parking	1	1%
Total (<i>weighted count</i>)	125	100%

Q4. What are the top 2 issues that need to be addressed to improve travel throughout the City? (<i>priority ranking</i>)	Responses	
Sidewalks	37	31%
Bicycle lanes/trails	25	21%
Road conditions	23	19%
Bus services	21	18%
Traffic congestion	9	8%
Parking	3	3%
Total (<i>weighted count</i>)	118	100%

Q5. What are the top 2 issues that would improve your enjoyment of outdoor recreation spaces? (priority ranking)		Responses	
Community events	42	33%	
Trails for walking/biking	31	25%	
Park amenities	30	24%	
Location and accessibility	13	10%	
More recreation areas	10	8%	
Total (weighted count)	126	100%	

Q6. What are the top 2 capital projects the City should undertake? (priority ranking)		Responses	
Roadway maintenance	54	43%	
Residential building conditions	40	32%	
Commercial building conditions	25	20%	
Flooding prevention	6	5%	
Police and Fire services	2	2%	
Total counts (weighted count)	127	100%	

Q7. Where do you shop for different types of merchandise? (select all that apply)		Responses	
Harvard	27	20%	
Woodstock	24	18%	
Crystal Lake	23	17%	
Rockford	21	16%	
Walworth, Wisconsin	12	9%	
McHenry	11	8%	
Other	11	8%	
Marengo	4	3%	
Total Counts	133	100%	

Q8. How often do you shop at stores in Harvard? (multiple choice)		Responses	
Daily	8	25%	
Weekly	22	69%	
Monthly	2	6%	
Never	0	0%	
Total counts	32	100%	

Q9. How do you travel to your daily activities (select all that apply)		Responses	
Personal car	32	76%	
Walk	8	19%	
Bike	2	5%	
Bus	0	0%	
Metra Train	0	0%	
Total counts	42	100%	

Q10. What is your age? (multiple choice)	Responses	
Less than 19	0	0%
20 – 34	2	6%
35 – 49	6	19%
50 – 64	17	53%
65+	7	22%
Total counts	32	100%

Q11. What is your race or ethnicity (multiple choice)	Responses	
White	30	94%
Hispanic/Latino	2	6%
African American/Black	0	0%
Asian/Pacific Islander	0	0%
Other	0	0%
Total counts	32	100%

Q12. How long have you lived/worked in Harvard? (multiple choice)	Responses	
0 – 5 years	3	9%
6 – 10 years	3	9%
11 – 20 years	8	25%
21 – 40 years	10	31%
41+ years	8	25%
Total counts	32	100%

Q13. Why do you live/work in Harvard? (multiple choice)	Responses	
Affordable	10	31%
Friends and Family	9	28%
Born and raised here	5	16%
Work here	4	13%
City character	3	9%
Close to work	1	3%
Total counts	32	100%

5. **Next Steps:** Nora thanked everyone for participating and outlined the next steps of the planning process, including the existing conditions report, visioning workshop, and draft plan.
6. **Additional comments:** One participant couldn't attend the meeting, so a friend delivered the following ideas:
 - The vacant Motorola facility needs top of the list consideration. Its large area would be ideal for the establishment of a college.
 - The area has a large farming community base and there is a need for learning a mechanical expertise. The Motorola site would provide a great opportunity to establish a College for Mechanical Engineering.
 - The planned extension of passenger train service from Chicago to Rockford provides accessibility for residents from Huntley, Union, Marengo, Belvidere and Rockford.
 - The proposed further extension of rail service to Iowa would eventually provide a connection to towns west of Rockford.
 - It is likely that Rockford Airport will expand as the traffic using the existing Chicago area airports increases. A rail service to Rockford airport is in the planning stages.

- A service through Harvard would provide a direct link through towns with major populations as a preference to the surveyed southerly route through Geneva. The track along the Rockford airport perimeter fence is in poor condition but it would be a short link from the Rockford main line.