



# SUSTAIN SOUTHERN MAINE

*Partnering to strengthen our economy, environment and community*

## **Wells Pilot Project Technical Workshop**

**March 6<sup>th</sup>, 2013**

### **Summary of Beginning Session**

Jon Carter, the town manager of Wells, opened the meeting and introduced Kat Beaudoin from Sustain Southern Maine. She introduced the team from SSM and had the participants of the workshop introduce themselves. She then gave a background on the SSM project and the goals for the days workshop.

Jon Carter took over and gave the group some context on the Wells pilot area. It is the largest of the SSM pilot areas and extends from the Transportation Center to Route 1 and along Route 1 from the intersection with Mile Road to the intersection with Route 109. The town is looking at relocating the Police and Fire station that is at the corner of Route 1 and Route 109 to a new location somewhere within the study area. Currently the town owns a number of large pieces of contiguous land in the center of the study area on which are located town hall and multiple schools. They have been looking at trying to form a town center somewhere on this land. Route 109 is seen to be in transition from a primarily residential road to commercial uses. Recently a coffee shop and a large medical facility have opened on the road. A large subdivision had been proposed for vacant land off of Chapel Road near the intersection with Route 109, but it fell through in the bad economy. Just outside of the study area is an industrial park that has some large employers located in it. On the west side of the I-95 is an area zoned as a "Transportation Zone" centered on the Transportation Center. The town is interested in talking about the Transportation Center because it has been there a few years now and has not been the catalyst for new growth that the town had hoped. They had envisioned retail and hotel development in the area but nothing has materialized. Off of chapel road is the York County Community College. The town selectmen are currently trying to get College Drive, which serves the college extended to meet with Route 1 at the Mile Road intersection. This would give the college more room to expand and also help to relieve some of the traffic burden on Chapel Road. Both Ends of Chapel Road are high accident locations. A traffic light is in the works for the Chapel Road / Route 109 intersection and DOT is looking at the how to manage traffic at the Chapel Road / Route 1 intersection.

Mike Livingston, the town planner for Wells, took over to give some technical background. Public sewer and water currently serve Route 1 and Route 109 out to the intersection of Chapel Road. The town has recently acquired land for a pumping station to extend service to the transportation center. Chapel Road is for the most part not served by public utilities. This is a large study area but it can be broken down into 4 main areas; the Chapel Road Corridor, the

Route 109 Corridor, the College Drive to Mile Road area, and the Transportation Center. The Chapel Road corridor has a lot of vacant land and we are interested in find out what you would like to see there. There is currently thought of the Route 109 corridor and the publicly owned civic center becoming more of a village center.

Todd Richardson, an architect working with SSM, took over to review some examples from elsewhere to inspire and inform the later session. He reviewed images cover some important themes, including; Streetscapes, bike/ped infrastructure, housing types and styles, parks and open spaces, parking, and signage.

Kat asked the participants for their thoughts and questions.

A question was asked about the absence of some key property owners that own large amounts of land in the study area.

Mike answered that all property owners were invited but that not all could make it because of the timing of the workshop. Carol mentioned that we would be reaching out to key property owners after the workshop to make sure that they are informed of what happened.

One participant mentioned that they would like to see the area made safer for bikes and pedestrians so that children would be able to get to school that way.

Jon asked if anyone had any thoughts on what could be put in the transportation zone that would be desirable and not be the standard big box store.

One participant put forth that a research lab or other year, round, high paying employer would be very good to have. The town tends to rely on service jobs and they would like to see some better opportunities.

Another participant put forth that one of the major drawbacks of wells is that it is not a good walking or biking community. They would like to be able to go to the bank and a store and a coffee shop without driving a few miles and getting caught in traffic. Every business has its own parking lot which forces them to locate farther from each other. They would like to see a focus on increasing density and walkability, particularly in new commercial development along Route 109.

It was agreed by the group that traffic on Route 1 is very bad consistently through the day and even year round. Anything that can be done to alleviate traffic is a good thing. The recent toll increases area seen as a contributor to increasing traffic. Route 1 is seen as a problem because traffic will always be heavy and will never be very good for a community feel on the road.

There was some discussion about the recent trend toward seasonal housing in the town. It was originally encouraged to build a tax base without bringing in new families that would put a burden on schools. It is now starting to be seen as a detriment as seasonal residents and

seasonal businesses are not seen to have as much invested in the town and not to be as much of an asset as year round residents and businesses would be.

A resident notes that there has been a lot of talk about bike and pedestrian safety in the past and new sidewalks were put in in some areas. Is new infrastructure enough? They are not sure though they have seen more people out on the new sidewalks.

Jon asked how the group felt about design standards. The town has been against them in the past.

One participant is leery of design standards, though not completely opposed to them. He feels that they are often overly restrictive and thinks trying to build a neo-colonial village doesn't make much sense. He feels that while good design should be encouraged tastes change and not everything needs to be the same. Ugly buildings last forever and we need to be able to accommodate new styles and new materials. Another participant agrees with this.

A participant voices an opposing view, citing some recent condo developments that they find to be unappealing. It is felt that in order to protect the integrity of the community some design standards are important.

There was some discussion about how the area was predicted to grow. We don't have any hard numbers except Charlie Colgans predictions that are reflected in the design charge. To some extent planning can change those numbers so participants were told to plan for the demographics and growth they would like to see.

In order to make better use of the train station it was mentioned that a bike path linking it to the rest of town would allow for people to come to town by the train with their bike. People felt this was a good idea.

At this point Kat reviewed the design charge and summed up the tasks before the group. The workshop was split into two groups to take an in depth look at the area. The results of these groups work will be reflected in the Lessons Learned document.