

FAIRFIELD STRATEGIC PLAN OUTREACH SUMMARY

The **Fairfield One Town One Vision** Strategic Plan initiative has utilized extensive outreach to gather community viewpoints and ideas on strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats being faced by the Town as it develops steps to maintain and improve on the key characteristics of the community. This outreach was structured beginning with initial project analysis by the Strategic Plan Committee and discussions with the professional consultants engaged by the Town.

Over 2,000 individuals representing approximately 30% of the Town's residents provided input to this summary via 1:1 interviews, online questionnaires and workshops. Over 300 unique issues/topics were identified and grouped into five categories:

- Governance
- Financial Stability
- Economic Development
- Education
- Community Character and Resiliency

A brief overview of each topic is presented below. More information is provided in the full outreach report.

Governance:

Participants largely believe that the Town is well functioning, but identified the following areas for improvement:

- **Town wide Goals and Branding** – Better define mission and goals for Town direction-setting, including a clear 'Brand' for Fairfield to communicate Fairfield's key points of value.
- **Reexamine the Town Charter** - As a large town/small city we need a new approach on how the town is managed.
- **Analyze** the savings opportunities and approaches for streamlined and improved efficiency of Town services.
- **Opportunities for shared services and multi-community cooperation** - New approaches are needed to leverage spending and efforts with our neighboring communities for mutual benefit and economies..
- **Upgrade and integrate technology** - To improve efficiencies and provide better constituent service and cost savings.
- **Better leverage State representation.** The State delegation needs a unified voice advocating for Fairfield.

Financial Stability:

Participants largely believe the Town is financially well run but the impact of the State's issues caused deep concern:

- **Improve non-residential financial contribution** - Attracting and retaining new businesses and finding ways for the non tax-paying institutions to support the Town for services received. Both Universities are recognized for providing significant economic vitality and image to the Town overall.
- **Spending impact on property values** - Declining property values is viewed as driven by increases in Town spending, the cascading impact on the Town of the State cost push down, and State/region economic trends.
- **Control of labor related costs** - Concern was expressed regarding continual rise of personnel and benefit costs, including pensions over the longer term.

Economic Development:

Economic development and commercial grand list growth were viewed as essential to offset the financial issues above.

- **Expand the Office of Community and Economic Development** - To improve the pipeline of new business, expedite projects in the pipeline, while providing current support activities.
- **Identify sites for new commercial development** – The large opportunity sites are known but potential exists for smaller/quick action sites, along with the need for innovative thinking on the handful of larger "high impact" situations.
- **Eliminate barriers to development** – Zoning needs to be re-imagined as the enabler of town development growth targets streamlining and improving the consistency of regulations.
- **Local landmark blight.** – Town government needs to take steps to resolve such situations (i.e. Community Theater, Stratfield Market, etc.), which have major impact on certain areas of Town.

Education:

The Education system is one of the greatest community strengths and a primary reason to attract residents:

- **Quality of Education** – Concerns were expressed regarding: increasing class size, teacher skills and curriculum turnover, with the key point of how curriculum turnover is integrated into the education process.
- **Quality of school facilities** - The physical plant needs to be maintained and updated (a/c; security; etc.), and enrollment trends must be factored into decision-making.
- **Declining school attendance and rising costs** – Participants expressed a desire for stable school funding with a desire to better manage and economize on non-classroom related cost structure.
- **Lack of diversity throughout the district** – Perceived inequity in the quality of certain school facilities along with racial imbalance were discussed. Busing as a solution was not supported. Redistricting and feeder patterns, and other realignment merit exploration.
- **Opportunities for greater partnerships with Town Universities** – i.e. mentorship programs, guest speakers (on careers), continuing education offerings for residents, as well as ways for the Universities as a means to better support cost sharing objectives.

Community Character and Resiliency:

Fairfield is a friendly, welcoming and multigenerational, with many positive characteristics in each of its neighborhoods.

- **Zoning Design** - There is a need for an evolution of ‘design standards’ vs. just issue construction codes to preserve the aesthetic appeal of the Town as redevelopment is undertaken.
- **Enhance aspects of the transportation options** – From improving access to and utilization of active transportation options to improved local transportation for cross town mobility, and reduce pressure on traffic and parking.
- **Focus on Seniors** - Seniors need to have programs, housing options, and financial support to counterbalance property tax costs.
- **Resiliency and sustainability** - Continue initiatives to encourage sustainability and sound ecological practices and prepare and protect against environmental emergencies.
- **Unify the community** – There is a perception of a “the other side of town” issue, particularly as it relates to Town investment/initiatives concentrated in certain parts of Town, rather than dispersed to all areas. University Students cited feelings that they were not fully welcomed into the community.
- **Maintain support networks of various kinds** - The Town needs to maintain support for programs (social, financial, health, mental health, etc.) and to the extent possible, support for other adjacent communities would have beneficial implications for Fairfield.