

**A. INTRODUCTION**

The Easton Downtown Plan for Infill Development was established with an outreach effort aimed to engage local citizens and businesses in the planning process. Extensive outreach and interviews were held at project start-up and three formal public workshops and concept reviews were held during the span of the project. These are summarized below.

**B. PUBLIC WORKSHOP SUMMARY AND STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS**

Feedback from local representatives, residents, and other stakeholders was an important component of the data collection task. Feedback was collected through interviews and a public forum.

**INTERVIEWS**

Interviews were held to collect specialized or technical data and insights and included representatives from the local real estate community, property owners, Town of Easton and Talbot County elected officials, Town of Easton staff, Historic Easton members, Historic District Commission members, downtown business owners, cultural institutions, neighborhood associations, and interested developers. Table 3-1 lists interviewees by category.

The interviews revealed similar themes and concerns that are summarized here.

**Easton as a Destination:** Easton is a destination that attracts people with its lifestyle and quality of life, themed festivals (Waterfowl, Plein Air), cultural institutions (art museum, Avalon Theater), the Farmer’s Market, the Tidewater Inn, and great restaurants. Downtown’s branding should focus on Easton’s arts and cultural amenities. While there is some worry that cultural institutions cannibalize each others’ audiences because there is a lot of overlap, heritage tourism and economic development opportunities can co-exist, collaborate, and create synergy.

**Downtown Retail and Office Uses:** Retailers and residents alike would like to see downtown businesses extend evening and Sunday hours, and to increase downtown’s visibility as a vibrant place for residents and visitors to spend time and money. There is a general sense that 30-somethings and their families are an untapped market and that downtown could be hipper. The downtown Safeway serves the pedestrian community, and many interviewees said a grocery store should remain downtown. The community would like retail to remain downtown’s main focus, despite the proliferation of real estate offices on the ground level, and want to see a mix of uses fill in the underused sites in downtown, including Class A offices, restaurants, boutiques, and urban condominiums. The most desirable office space is 2,000 to 2,500 square feet.

**Downtown Easton Master Plan for Infill Development**

**Table 3-1  
Interviews by Category**

| <b>Name</b>                   | <b>Affiliation</b>                           | <b>Date</b> | <b>Category</b>                 |
|-------------------------------|--|-------------|---------------------------------|
| Jessica Rogers                | Avalon Theater                               | 14-May      | Cultural Institution            |
| Glen Umenowicz                | Historical Society of Talbot County          | 14-May      | Cultural Institution            |
| Chris Brownawell              | Academy Art Museum Director                  | 29-May      | Cultural Institution            |
| Stacey Wrightson              | Anastasia                                    | 16-May      | Downtown Business Owner         |
| Nina Lanham                   | Lanham Hall                                  | 16-May      | Downtown Business Owner         |
| Paul Yglesias                 | The Hobby Horse                              | 16-May      | Downtown Business Owner         |
| Darcy Bernot                  | Lizzy Dee                                    | 16-May      | Downtown Business Owner         |
| Steve Shearer                 | Shearer the Jeweler                          | 16-May      | Downtown Business Owner         |
| Jerry McConnell               | Executive Vice President of Talbot Bank      | 23-May      | Downtown Business Owner         |
| Roger Bollman                 | Chairman of the Historic District Commission | 15-May      | Historic District Commission    |
| Lena Gill                     | Member of the Historic District Commission   | 15-May      | Historic District Commission    |
| Mike Burlbaugh                | Elm Street Development, Project Manager      | 31-May      | Interested Developer            |
| George Webb                   | The Airston Group                            | 14-Jun      | Interested Developer            |
| Kevin Greaney                 | Oxford Commercial                            | 16-May      | Local Real Estate Community     |
| Larry Davis                   | Champion Commercial                          | 16-May      | Local Real Estate Community     |
| Chuck Mangold                 | Benson & Mangold Real Estate                 | 23-May      | Local Real Estate Community     |
| Dave Douglas                  | Owner of Cannery Apartments in Easton        | 19-Jul      | Local Real Estate Community     |
| Jack Stoltz                   | Stoltz Developers                            | 12-Jul      | Local Real Estate Community     |
| Megan Cook et. al.            | Idlewild Park Improvement Committee          | 15-May      | Neighborhood Association        |
| Ellen General                 | Ex. Dir. Avalon Found., owner of Talbot Town | 15-May      | Property Owner                  |
| John Valliant                 | Grayce B. Kerr Fund                          | 23-May      | Property Owner                  |
| Loraine and Laurence Claggett | Downtown Property Owner                      | 12-Jul      | Property Owners                 |
| Paige Bethke                  | Talbot County Economic Development           | 15-May      | Talbot County Official          |
| Andy Hollis                   | Talbot County Administrator                  | 16-May      | Talbot County Official          |
| Debi Dodson                   | Talbot County Office of Tourism              | 23-May      | Talbot County Official          |
| Hilary Spence                 | Downtown Easton                              | 23-May      | Talbot County Official (former) |
| Lynn Thomas                   | Long Range Planner for Town of Easton        | 15-May      | Town of Easton Official         |
| Robert Willey                 | Mayor  | 23-May      | Town of Easton Official         |
| John Ford                     | Town Council President                       | 29-May      | Town of Easton Official         |
| <b>Source:</b> AKRF           |  |             |                                 |

**Infrastructure:** The Town’s gateways and wayfinding signage could be improved. Easton has more parking spaces than it actually needs, but there is a perception that there is a parking problem. Easton’s water and sewer infrastructure is in good shape; the big infrastructure problem is stormwater at the north end of the study area.

**Downtown Residential:** The Shireton was a great idea, but the Town wasn’t ready for it. The second-home market is growing. First-floor master suites are very popular among retirees and baby boomers. In Town, retirees and downsizers are putting a lot of pressure on housing prices.

**PUBLIC WORKSHOP 1 | MAY 16, 2007**

A public forum was held in Easton on May 16, 2007, to solicit feedback from residents and other stakeholders about downtown's redevelopment. The team leading the public forum included members of AKRF, Inc., Street-Works, Marsha Terry Liebowitz, and Sherry Marsh Johns. Approximately 90 people attended the meeting. This included a cross-section of people who live in the Town of Easton or other parts of the County such as St. Michael's, Cordova, and who work in Easton, Baltimore, and D.C. The public forum was announced in an advertisement that ran for three days in the local newspaper, by word of mouth, and a notice on the project's official website ([www.eastondowntownplan.com](http://www.eastondowntownplan.com)).

Attendees were welcomed by Al Bond, Easton's Economic Development Director. Presentations describing the goals and objectives of the study, the project schedule and milestones, and a brief primer on urban design and Easton's assets followed. Attendees then formed groups of 12 to 15 people and participated in breakout sessions. Each breakout group's findings were reported to the entire group and are also summarized below.

*What are downtown Easton's assets?*

Meeting attendees listed a wide variety of assets in downtown Easton, including:

- *Infrastructure:* The Avalon, the streetscape, Goldsborough Street, the Tidewater Inn, Chez Lafitte and other retailers on East Dover Street;
- *Local Retailers:* Coffee East, Crackerjacks, the Farmer's Market, the convenience of a nearby grocery store, Talbot Town; and
- *Social Aspects:* a strong sense of community, good tourists, shopkeepers who pay rent, well-connected financial people.

*Who should downtown Easton serve?*

Meeting attendees found that downtown Easton should serve a variety of people, including:

- Easton residents;
- Talbot and surrounding County residents;
- Tourists and other visitors;
- Families with children;
- The core middle class;
- Daytime office workers;
- Retirees and retirement communities; and
- Those returning to "town life."

*What is downtown Easton missing?*

Downtown Easton is missing several elements that could make it a more attractive destination, according to meeting attendees. These elements are categorized by tourism, retail mix, restaurant mix, entertainment and events, streetscape and walkability, traffic and parking, and land uses.

- *Tourism:* information kiosk, better signage (for example, the wayfinding signs of Easton's Mall are all oriented toward the wrong way and they do not include a "You Are Here" marker), signs directing visitors to local destinations, more visitors, establish/confirm awareness of arts and culture.

## **Downtown Easton Master Plan for Infill Development**

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- *Retail Mix:* more homegrown entrepreneurial businesses, missing family-friendly retail, not enough retail variety (e.g., variety by age group—such as kids, teens, 20-somethings—by products aimed at various income levels, and by offerings that are creative, hip, and original), longer store hours and open on Sundays, more shopping and less office space on the ground floor, more technology-based businesses and electronics stores, Trader Joe’s, destination/anchor stores, more buildings and retail in the infill sites.
- *Restaurant Mix:* bakery, gourmet food shop, butcher and/or charcuterie, family-friendly restaurants, not enough restaurant variety (e.g., more ethnic restaurants, cafes, moderately priced eateries), more nightlife scene (e.g., bar with live music to attend after a show at the Avalon).
- *Entertainment and Events:* more events, a movie theater, places for young children to play, places for teenagers to spend time without getting in trouble, family destinations, people on the streets to add vibrancy.
- *Streetscape and Walkability:* improve walk between Talbot Town to downtown/Bay Street, better pedestrian crossing signs and signals, build up nodes like the Spanish Market, a piazza or central gathering spot with benches, lights, fountain, pennants/banners, clock tower.
- *Traffic and Parking:* office workers parking on the street and taking spots designated for shoppers, lights and one-way streets, better connections and signage from Route 50, East-West connector, need more parking—possibly in a parking structure (examples of nice-looking parking structures from Ann Arbor, Annapolis, and Decatur, GA), parking too far away and near cemetery, should have a mix of stores and cars, not sequestered from each other, better parking signage to indicate locations of public lots.
- *Land Uses:* affordable housing, housing on the second floor, mixed-use development, and more residential.

### *Why isn’t downtown Easton getting these?*

Easton may not be attracting some of the missing elements listed above for a variety of reasons. Meeting attendees suggested the following:

- Some of the uses are not appropriate for downtown;
- Prohibitive zoning and business codes, prohibitively expensive rents and taxes—many attendees mentioned that offices and businesses are able to pay higher rents than retailers;
- City politics (conflicting turf); and
- Traffic management and parking issues.

### *What does downtown Easton need less of or not want?*

Meeting attendees were also asked about the constraints that downtown Easton already has and what elements should be avoided in future development:

- Professional offices on the ground floor (except near the Court House), although some attendees said the office uses should be more mixed in with the retail;
- Too many banks;
- National brands—attendees had mixed opinions on this, as some said that it depended on the brand, and some mentioned specific brands that they would like to see, and some wanted no national brands in the downtown at all;
- No more of what is already in downtown Easton;

- No more businesses oriented to seniors;
- No undesirable uses, such as tattoo parlors; and
- Less commercial sprawl on the outskirts of town.

*How should infill sites be developed?*

There are several infill sites in Easton’s downtown, most notably some underutilized land between Washington and Harrison Streets approaching Talbot Town, north of the Town center. Meeting attendees had a variety of ideas for how to develop these infill sites:

- Expand the art district gallery along Washington Street;
- Mixed-use development, with retail at grade and residential above;
- Add more retail stores, especially locally owned unique retailers;
- Build a piazza or other central square or community gathering spot;
- Create a movie theater parking lot; and
- Development should use appropriate infill architecture that maintains Easton’s character.

*If money were no object what would you do?*

Meeting attendees were asked to brainstorm their most creative ideas for redevelopment in Easton’s downtown. Additional innovative ideas for Easton’s downtown redevelopment were mentioned in previous questions:

- *Streetscape and Walkability:* renovate Dover Street, making it a better gateway, add benches, create pedestrian amenities such as uniform sidewalks, signage, traffic lights for pedestrians, add fountains, bike paths, a town square, green everywhere—big trees, keep it small and historic, maintain and promote outstanding architecture, keep restrooms maintained, confirm the Town’s identity and build on it.
- *Traffic and Parking:* have a parking lot with a shuttle bus, better traffic flow in and out of Town and crossing Route 50, ban SUVs, focus on and improve important gateways, convert Dover and Goldsborough to rails to trails.
- *Land Uses:* Another Shireton with underground parking and balconies, add more retail and integrate the strip shopping and downtown Easton, add mixed-use development so residents can live downtown and have a reason to live there, add movie theater and music store, more downtown housing on upper level, make the charming town more charming, have a staple grocer and better variety priced for all incomes, retail should have better hours and a variety of merchants, activities for kids and teens need activities, annex Port Street “Harbor.”

**PUBLIC WORKSHOP 2 | SEPTEMBER 20, 2007**

A public forum was held in Easton on September 20, 2007 to solicit feedback from local stakeholders about redevelopment in downtown. The consulting team leading the public forum included AKRF, Inc., StreetWorks, Marsha Terry Liebowitz, and Sherry Marsh Johns. Approximately 50 people attended the meeting.

The public forum was announced in a press release, a newspaper advertisement that ran for three days in the local newspaper, word of mouth, and a notice on the project’s official website ([www.eastondowntownplan.com](http://www.eastondowntownplan.com)).

## **Downtown Easton Master Plan for Infill Development**

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Attendees were welcomed by Al Bond, Easton's Economic Development Director. Presentations describing the initial findings of a market study and downtown analysis, and an overview of the major ideas for a downtown concept plan followed. Attendees then formed groups of 5 to 7 people and participated in breakout sessions to discuss the following questions:

- Strategically located public facilities can bring foot traffic downtown. What civic and cultural uses are likely candidates to bring people to the northern end of the study area?
- What is the ideal location for a civic plaza or public gathering space?
- What is the best location for the farmers market?
- At the first public meeting there was consensus that conveniently located structured parking should be an element of the plan. What are some good locations for structured parking?
- The market analysis indicates opportunities for mixed use development (especially condominiums) for the upper end of the housing market. Are there other locations downtown besides the northern end of the study area that would be good locations for residential development?
- Do you agree that infill development should not be a replica of what is around it, but still be compatible in style, feel and character? As the PowerPoint slides illustrate, there are many approaches to infill development. Of the examples in the slide show, are there any that you could envision in Easton? If so, why; if not, why?
- Successful downtown development usually requires a public partner. What role should the town and/or county play in creating best possible development sites?

Each breakout group's findings were reported to the entire group, and are summarized below.

### **Strategically located public facilities can bring foot traffic downtown. What civic and cultural uses are likely candidates to bring people to the northern end of the study area?**

Meeting attendees listed a variety of public facilities, civic spaces, and other places where people tend to gather. One group suggested that a multi-use civic space could house several different uses at different times of the day (e.g. Farmer's Market/concerts/sidewalk café)

- Farmer's Market
- Library
- Movie theater (both art house and commercial theaters were suggested)
- Museum combined with retail
- Park (one group wanted a fountain or sculpture to anchor the park similar to Italy's Piazza Navona)
- Supermarket or specialty food store
- Performing arts center (amphitheater or other)
- Skating rink at Farmer's Market
- Green space for a concert area

### **What is the ideal location for a civic plaza or public gathering space?**

- Safeway site
- Where the Farmer's Market currently is
- Talbot Town

- Thompson Park
- Harrison Street property
- North end of Goldsborough between Harrison and Washington

**What is the best location for the farmers market?**

- Harrison Street property
- On Harrison Street (close street to expand)
- Goodwill parking lot (Bay Street extended)
- Town/County land
- Could be elsewhere as long as it's still in downtown
- Its current location

**At the first public meeting there was consensus that conveniently located structured parking should be an element of the plan. What are some good locations?**

- Harrison Street property
- Talbot Town
- Safeway site
- Behind Avalon
- Armory
- Where livery stable was
- Behind circuit court
- Behind Tidewater Inn
- On existing parking lots (Mill Street and Historic Society)
- East of Harrison at Brewer's Lane
- Old gas plant site
- Central downtown should not be used for parking-keep it on the edges
- North end of Goldsborough between Harrison and Washington
- Garage near Harrison at Brewer
- Consolidate two existing lots between Dover and South Streets, and move the historic house in the middle of those two lots to a spot on Glenwood
- On corner lot at Mill and Harrison
- Along Brewer's Lane
- Where existing lots are, near Hospital
- Design considerations were also mentioned by meeting attendees: parking plus retail is a good idea, design is important, structure shouldn't be too tall, and one person mentioned the design of the parking structure for the Wilmington train station.

**The market studies indicate opportunities for mixed use development, especially condos. Are there other locations downtown besides the northern end of the study area that would be good locations for residential development?**

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- Harrison Street property
- Upper stories of core area (e.g. Court House area)
- Talbot Town
- Safeway site
- Empty floors in buildings on Washington Street
- Main block between Dover and Goldsborough Streets
- Brewer's Lane
- Design considerations were also mentioned by meeting attendees: Consider height in the design (nothing should be taller/bigger than the Tidewater Inn)

**Do you agree that infill development should not be an exact replica of what is around it, but still be compatible in style, feel and character? As the PowerPoint slides illustrate, there are many approaches to infill development. Of the examples, are there any that you could envision in Easton? If so, why; if not, why?**

There was a general consensus that infill should be contextually appropriate and should not be exact replicas of earlier building styles. Meeting attendees were shown images of infill development from around the nation. Examples included attached townhouses, in-town multi-family residential, residential over retail, office over retail, multi-use public spaces, and stand-alone buildings and larger format infill. Design considerations that were mentioned by meeting attendees are as follows:

- The Easton Utilities building and Dixon Square are nicely designed examples of infill in Easton
- Human scale (3 stories) is good, 4 stories might be ok in specific areas and based on good design
- Some additional density and height is reasonable if it results in higher quality design and public amenities.
- Vary rooflines
- Broken façades (no solid mass, little grass)
- Window treatments are important
- Textured materials
- Variety in architecture
- Brick is a good material (Tidewater Inn, Courthouse, Easton utilities), but don't want to "overbrick"
- Quality materials
- Downtown Easton currently has a variety of building heights, from one and two stories up to the height of the Tidewater Inn, and new buildings should also vary in height. A possible implementation measure would be amending Easton's zoning code to require that building heights in new developments vary in proportion to frontage

**Successful downtown development usually requires a public partner. What role should the town and/or county play in creating best possible development sites?**

Meeting attendees agreed that the Town and/or County should collaborate with developers.

### **Chapter 3: Summary of Process and Public Participation**

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- The public sector could incentivize preferred types of development and encourage collaboration between public and private goals by issuing industrial revenue bonds or rent subsidies, waiving impact fees, raising bond money, offering “ultra sweetheart” rents (e.g. to lure a Trader Joe’s), or changing zoning.
- Collaborate between uses
- Provide incentives for ground floor retailers and restrict ground floor office uses
- Consolidate and/or trade property
- Intermix open green space with private development to enhance the value of each
- Work with tax money
- Waive affordable housing requirements; it is being built in other areas and it is a disincentive to developers. (It should be noted that this was the opinion of one resident, and everyone may not agree).
- Build parking garages
- Encourage the Route 50 bypass
- Amend Easton’s zoning regulations (update the zoning code based on recommendations of the Downtown Easton Plan)

#### **PUBLIC WORKSHOP 3 | FEBRUARY 28 2008**

A public forum was held in Easton on February 28, 2008 to solicit feedback from local stakeholders about the redevelopment concept plans proposed by the consultant team. Approximately 120 people attended the meeting.

The public meeting was announced in a press release, on MCTV, a newspaper advertisement that ran for three days in the local newspaper, word of mouth, and a notice on the project’s official website ([www.eastondowntownplan.com](http://www.eastondowntownplan.com)).

Attendees were welcomed by Ward Bucher of Historic Easton and Al Bond, Easton’s Economic Development Director. Presentations describing five concept planning areas throughout the downtown followed. Then presenters and attendees addressed the following issues:

- Extended hours in downtown stores. Stores that appeal to a younger population.
- Accessibility issues (age, disability, children), peak exiting times at the parking structures, parking garage appearance and used as a multi-use space, on-street parking, truck traffic coming into town, and a wayfinding system and improved street light timing to help pedestrians navigate downtown.
- Parks or comfort stations.
- Tourism contribution to the downtown economy.
- Local chambers of commerce that advertise downtown retail events.
- The study area boundaries, possible inclusion of South Street into the study area, and issues affecting places outside the study area.
- Cost-of-living concerns.
- Cultural resources in the northern part of town, activity at the southern end of downtown near the Academy Art museum, a library in downtown.
- Preparing for implementation by amending and adopting the Town’s comprehensive plan.
- Green building design. \*