



# *The Future of Ipswich Planning Project*

Part One

## CREATING A VISION FOR THE FUTURE



Submitted to

The Town of Ipswich, Massachusetts

By

*Community Design Partnership, Inc.*  
Boston, MA



July 2000

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## Town of Ipswich Growth Management Committee

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Forum

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## **CREATING A VISION FOR THE FUTURE**

### Genesis of this Project

The Future of Ipswich Planning Project began in 1999 as a town initiative to respond to citizen concerns about trends in the amount, location, type, and design of new development and growth in the town. A building cap proposal with considerable support came to Town Meeting in the spring of 1999 (and again in 2000) but was narrowly defeated. The Open Space Committee requested funding for a master planning project and for assistance in creating a priority evaluation system for protection of open space. The Town decided to provide limited funding for a consultant team to begin a growth management planning process with a visioning component and to prepare studies on open space issues including an ecological open space network, an evaluation system for open space acquisition and critical open space resources. A 24-member Growth Management Committee, representing diverse areas of interest and expertise in the Town, including affordable housing, open space preservation, water resources protection, business, real estate development, and local government, was appointed by the Town Manager

The Future of Ipswich Planning Project includes multiple elements. Its overall purpose is to help the residents, business owners, and property-owners in Ipswich agree on a vision for the future of the town, a strategy to make the vision a reality, and action steps to implement the strategy. The planning process was structured to answer a series of questions about how Ipswich sees itself and its future:

- *The Vision:* What kind of place should Ipswich be in another twenty years?
- *Preservation:* What should Ipswich preserve and protect from development?
- *Growth:* How much new housing and business growth does the Town want, what kind should it be, where should it be located, and how should its design be related to its context?

The Growth Management Committee began meeting monthly in August of 1999 and took as its mission the following:

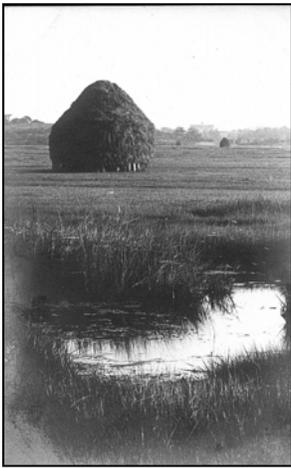
To assess the current residential and commercial impacts upon the natural, constructed and municipal capabilities of the Town, to anticipate the growth of such impacts, and to devise comprehensive municipal policies, techniques and incentives – both voluntary and mandatory – that will guide the growth of Ipswich in a manner responsive to our Community Vision.

This “Community Vision” had yet to be articulated. In the fall of 1999, the Town contracted with Community Design Partnership, Inc., (CDP) to assist in the development of the Community Vision and to prepare the open space preservation elements of this first stage of the growth management initiative.

The present document focuses on the development of the Vision Statement. An accompanying report discusses the Ipswich Green Ring, a proposed ecological open space network, and the open space land evaluation system and critical resources.

### **Ipswich Enters the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

The history of Ipswich is emblematic of the North Shore, where the land and water provided a livelihood for centuries. Once Native Americans made their summer camps by the rich shellfish beds of the salt marshes and estuaries. Early English settlers and their descendants fished, farmed, raised livestock, and lived by artisan crafts. A significant port during the eighteenth century, Ipswich traded dried fish and other goods with the West Indies. Salt hay stacked on raised wooden “staddles” dotted the marsh until it could be sledded out in the frozen winter months. Ice-making and sand mining for the regional construction industry also depended on the resources of the landscape.



A dam on the Ipswich River to power a textile mill ushered in the industrial revolution during the early nineteenth century. Ipswich as a mill town attracted immigrant workers to a growing village center, bringing more ethnic diversity to the Town. After the demise of the local textile industry in the late 1920s and the arrival of the Great Depression, many former mill workers turned to seafaring and the shellfish industry, and the Ipswich coast was reportedly popular with liquor smugglers during prohibition. New industries took over the mill on the river – first electronics and now publishing – and other small industrial activities have located along Mitchell Road. The Ipswich clam remains a potent and tasty symbol of the Town’s coastal identity. The local farming and livestock economy persisted through the twentieth century, but increasingly, estates owned by wealthy institutions and families absorbed these lands, preserving the rural visual character of Ipswich. After World War II, suburban-style houses along town roads and in small subdivisions began to encroach on the predominantly rural landscape outside the town center. The commuter rail connection with Boston and highway construction made it possible for people to live in Ipswich and work elsewhere. By the 1960s, consultants preparing the Town’s comprehensive plan already described it as a “dormitory community” because most of the town’s residents worked outside of Ipswich.<sup>1</sup> Today, most of the approximately 7,000 residents in the labor



<sup>1</sup> Ipswich Comprehensive Plan, Summary Report, June 1964, p. 6.

force still work outside the Town, but Ipswich retains a modest and diversified employment base, with some 20 percent of the 3,750 local jobs in manufacturing and about 50 percent in trade and services. Compared to most of the neighboring towns, Ipswich has greater socioeconomic diversity. With its beaches, fields and forest, river and historic sites, Ipswich attracts regional tourists for recreation and cultural tourism. Despite current trends and pressures, the many threads of Ipswich's history are still visible in the physical environment and social fabric of the Town.

**DEFINING VALUES AND CREATING A VISION**

The visioning process began with a general exploration of community values through several different methods. The Board of Selectmen in 1999 agreed on a set of eight "Vision Descriptors" to guide the activities and priorities of town government. The Growth Management Committee began meeting in August of that year, as noted earlier, and held discussions on how its mission related to the Board of Selectmen's Vision Descriptors for town government.

**Board of Selectmen - Vision Descriptors  
1999**

- Town government must be fiscally stable and secure.
- The Town's beauty and character must be maintained and protected.
- The Town's people and businesses must feel safe and secure.
- The environment and natural resources of the Town must be protected.
- The diversity of neighborhoods and people must be ensured as the Town's population grows and development occurs.
- Recreational, avocational and cultural opportunities should be provided for the Town's diverse population.
- The stability and growth of the Town's economy must be supported consistent with achieving the prior vision statements.
- The Town and its citizens must work with other towns, regions, and agencies as necessary or useful in achieving and maintaining our local "visions."

The CDP consultant team met with the Growth Management Committee to discuss the issues that most concerned them. Despite their diverse professional backgrounds and local roles, there was a significant convergence of interest among the Committee members. They wanted to protect and enhance Ipswich's special character – its open space, village center with small businesses, historic resources, and population diversity. They agreed on the need to develop a consensus on goals, priorities and a strategy to accomplish them, in order to shape and direct the development which occurs, rather than simply react to ad hoc growth. There was a concern that gentrification in multiple forms was changing both the physical and the social character of Ipswich and that some long-time residents and their

families were finding it difficult to stay in Town because of rising housing costs. At the same time, several Committee members talked about the need for balance between regulation and incentives, property rights and community interests.

## The Future of Ipswich Questionnaire

CDP suggested that a short survey be distributed to explore residents' attitudes to the conditions and trends characteristic of Ipswich today and their hopes for the future. A draft questionnaire prepared by CDP was modified by the Growth Management Committee, distributed through several methods to town residents in early 2000, and tabulated by Committee members.

There were 190 respondents to the questionnaire, but not all respondents answered all questions. The majority of the respondent group was made up of residents (83 percent) and people who had lived or worked in Ipswich ten or more years (68 percent). Seventy percent of respondents were also at least 45 years old, with more than half in the 45 to 64 age range. These characteristics are typical profiles for respondents to this type of questionnaire, who tend to be long-time residents and representing the older cohorts of the population. The top issues chosen by the largest number of respondents as either the first or second priority (out of five) that needed to be addressed were "Preservation of open space and significant scenic vistas" (93 first or second choices), "Protection of water supply and water quality" (72 first or second choices), and "Protection of wildlife habitat" (33 first or second choices).

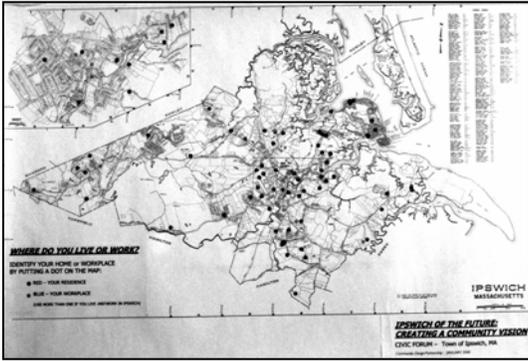
### *Priority Ranking of Issues to be Addressed*

Issue	Rank →	One	Two	Three	Four	Five
Preservation of open space and scenic vistas		56	37	24	23	10
Protection of water supply and water quality		48	24	32	11	12
Protection of wildlife habitat		14	19	18	17	7
Protection of historic properties and sites		9	21	13	25	13
More affordable housing		11	13	13	11	19
Preservation of agricultural uses		5	16	31	2	16
Quantity of new residential development		8	11	11	11	13
Enhancement commercial town center		9	9	13	14	10
New businesses for jobs and tax revenue		5	7	8	7	15
Location of new residential development		5	5	7	14	21

When asked to write down their "favorite things about Ipswich," the most frequently cited characteristics had to do with the open space and rural character of the town, especially including the marshes, beaches, and streams; the small town atmosphere; the diversity of population and housing in Ipswich; and the historic character of the town. When asked what they disliked, respondents mentioned a wide variety of issues ranging from greenheads, water supply problems, and schools to insufficient youth activities and limited entertainment. The one issue where opinions converged was a

general concern about the amount and appearance of new development and growth expressed as “high pace of growth,” “sprawl,” “suburbanization,” “inconsistent, unplanned architecture,” “traffic,” “Route 1A north of Town Farm Road,” and so on.

### The Ipswich Civic Forum I: Visioning



The Visioning Civic Forum was held on Wednesday, 19 January, at the Whipple School. Before the meeting got underway, participants were able to view maps, photographs and other exhibits on Ipswich and its planning issues, and to eat dinner graciously provided by the Growth Management Committee. A total of 103 participants signed in at the Forum, of whom 87 self-identified as residents, 9 self-identified as business owners (almost all also residents), and 2 self-identified only as property-owners. Participants were asked to identify their residence or business location on a map of Ipswich when they signed in.

All parts of Ipswich were represented, but there were fewer people from neighborhoods west of Route 1 and newer subdivisions than from the town center and older parts of town.

#### *Purpose and Structure*



The purpose of the Forum was to elicit the elements for a Vision Statement that the Growth Management Committee and the Town can use as a goal when developing its growth management plan. After brief introductory remarks by the chair of the Committee, Bob Weatherall, and by the consultants, the participants broke up into small groups to work on three exercises, all designed to spark discussion on the preferred character and elements of Ipswich in the future:



1) *Words that mean Ipswich.* Participants were asked to brainstorm the words and phrases that they hoped would be used to describe Ipswich 10 or 20 years from now.



2) *What does “open space” mean to you? What does “development” mean to you?* In this exercise the groups discussed what came to mind when they heard or spoke of “open space” or “development.” The discussions revealed participants’ preferences and concerns, their hopes and their fears about open space preservation and development issues.

3) *Mapping preservation and development.* The groups were divided into subgroups, one focusing on preservation and one on

development, to locate on a map those parts of town they believed should be protected from development and those parts where development would be appropriate.

*Words that mean Ipswich*

In this exercise, the words participants used to describe the Ipswich they would like to see in the future can be divided into several categories that emerged through the discussion in all the small groups:



Historic

Participants valued the physical sense of connection to history in Ipswich. This value conveys both the desire to retain the physical evidence of the past, and implicitly, a recognition that the community changes over time.



Beautiful and scenic

A desire to retain the beauty and variety of the Ipswich landscape was articulated in a number of ways. Participants talked about the water, marshes, woods, long and open vistas, and rural views.



Safe and peaceful

A tranquil, peaceful, nearly crime-free, family-oriented community is how many participants see Ipswich now, and they want to keep it that way.

Friendly and community-minded

Many participants experience Ipswich as a friendly place where people take an interest in their community and they want to preserve that characteristic.

Economically and culturally diverse

Participants valued economic and cultural diversity, both in the resident population and in the types of businesses in town. They want Ipswich to avoid homogenization.



Town and country

Participants did not see Ipswich as a suburb or bedroom community and did not want to become one. Preservation of small town and rural character – however that might be defined – was important to participants. To many people, that means preservation of working agriculture, not simply low-density residential districts, and a strong downtown “Main Street” retail area with locally-owned businesses.



Environmentally sustainable

A number of environmental protection and sustainability themes emerged, from hopes for a year-round flowing Ipswich River, wildlife habitat protection and environmentally-friendly businesses and industry to a further renaissance of clamming and fishing.



Unique and special

Participants had a strong feeling that Ipswich has a unique and valuable character that results from a combination of its history, its water-infused landscape, its combination of small town and rural living, its tranquillity, and its friendly and community-minded population.

*The Meaning of "Open Space"*

When asked what "open space" means to them in the Ipswich context, many participants tended to emphasize scenic qualities, talking about natural vistas and views from roads (especially gateway roads into Ipswich). Others brought up types of open space, such as farms, pasture, wetlands, and forests, and, to a lesser degree, recreational resources such as trails, golf courses, and athletic fields. In addition to the general category of "wetlands," the river and the beaches were also mentioned. More abstract concepts of open space came up: wildlife habitat and "wild" nature, cluster housing with open space, and houses on large lots. The significant size of many Ipswich open space resources was also mentioned as a positive characteristic.

*The Meaning of "Development"*

"Development" brings up a host of negative images, often with the modifiers of "too much" or "too many:" high rises, trophy houses, subdivisions, traffic congestion, sprawl, mini-malls, Wal-Mart, chain retail, pollution, water ban, ugly cement, noise, crime, crowded schools. On the other hand, there were also some images of development that can be construed as more positive, such as adaptive reuse and redevelopment of existing developed sites, cluster development (both for residential and business uses), affordable housing, a more vital downtown, more services resulting from a bigger tax base, retention of the younger and older population in town, more support for cultural activities, and employment. Some people felt that development would lead to less economic diversity, while others saw the possibility that development could provide more opportunities for economic diversity. Similarly, development was viewed as both promoting more auto-dependent life styles and permitting the possibility of more pedestrian-friendly environments.

## *Locating Preservation and Development*

Each of the small groups was subdivided further into two groups, half of which located the areas on the map that they would like to preserve and half identified areas that might be appropriate for development or redevelopment. Most of the participants in the forum were more comfortable locating preservation areas than growth areas, though there was a small minority that articulately favored balanced growth.

### Locating Development and Growth Areas

Identifying possible development areas was much more difficult for participants than locating preservation areas. Some subgroups identified very few areas, while others were more expansive. With a few exceptions, however, the identified growth areas were either in parts of town already affected by development or in areas where the natural landscape has been significantly disturbed. Almost all the groups identified the town center as an appropriate area to locate some new development. Commercial and industrial growth was also to be directed to existing areas such as Mitchell Road or Route 1 (though some did not want to see more development along Route 1). A few groups suggested that residential development could occur in the interior of large parcels while keeping an open space buffer along the roads to preserve visual character. Others were willing to consider clustered or small lot residential development near existing subdivisions. In general, the exercise implies that residents may accept redevelopment and some densification of existing developed areas but new development on large open space parcels is contentious.



### Locating Areas to Protect and Preserve

Many of the preservation subgroups started out wanting to draw a kind of preservation *cordon sanitaire* around the entire town, and the general view was that the Town should start with an assumption favoring preservation and guide "appropriate" development to specified areas only. In addition to identifying wetlands and the permanently-protected lands in Ipswich, the preservation subgroups identified the scenic roads and specific properties including the farms along Linebrook Road, the Wendell and Notre Dame properties, the Winthrop and Scott properties, the Barroway property, and Argilla Road farms. In contrast to some of the development subgroups, some people wanted to make Route 1 into more

of a green corridor, in part to ensure natural wooded or marsh areas at one of the primary gateways to Ipswich, or at least fend off strip development. Most of the areas that were located by the subgroups can be seen from roads and therefore are identified with the scenic visual character of the town. Once subgroup broached the concept of an open space network, drawing connectors between Willowdale State Forest, the reservoir lands, and the Town Farm and marsh beyond.

### *Preservation and Change in Ipswich*

Many of the participants in the Vision Forum are worried about change in Ipswich. They do not like many of the recent changes and fear a trend that will turn Ipswich into an economically homogeneous, suburban, bedroom community dotted with subdivisions full of "trophy" houses. The first reaction to these worries is to favor a stop to all new development. This was evident in the cordon sanitaire approach noted above. However, during the course of the Forum, there were many discussions about how some growth may be inevitable, so the Town has to think carefully about what kind of growth it wants and where it should go. The true inevitability is that change will happen. Even if there were no new development and all open space were permanently preserved, Ipswich would change because both natural and social environments are dynamic. Although many Ipswich residents say they prefer keeping things just as they are today, it is an impossibility. By developing and implementing a growth management plan that directs and shapes change to enhance and promote the Town's goals, Ipswich will be able to protect and preserve the places and characteristics that its citizens cherish. The creation of a vision for the future begins the process and starts the town-wide conversation on how to make the vision a reality.

**THE IPSWICH VISION STATEMENT: *IPSWICH IN 2020***

Ipswich in 2020 is a community that understands how to manage change by:

- Protecting the town's natural beauty, water resources, and environmental health through enhancing its "green infrastructure"
- Preserving its historic structures and sites
- Sustaining its rural heritage by supporting local farming
- Providing a wide variety of economic and housing opportunities to support social and economic diversity in the community

In 2020, Ipswich remains a real country town, not simply a suburb or bedroom community.

- The historic downtown core is surrounded by an ecologically diverse network of open spaces containing wildlife corridors and trails for equestrian and human use.
- The Ipswich River flows throughout the summer and water quality has improved so much in the estuary that clam beds are increasingly open for harvest.
- Housing is concentrated in the downtown core, where a lively village commercial center still offers owner-operated retail establishments.
- Environmentally-friendly businesses in the core and in a redeveloped Mitchell Road industrial park provide jobs for a significant proportion of local residents.
- Outside the core, fields and woods are interspersed along the roads with nodes of housing.
- Local farms survive, thanks to strong market and policy support from the community.
- Transportation alternatives to cars benefit local residents as well as visitors to Ipswich.
- The town's successful preservation of open space and management of transportation makes it attractive to visitors, who admire historic sites and patronize downtown businesses in addition to enjoying beaches and other natural areas.