

TO: THE TOWN COUNCIL OF WEST GREENWICH
FROM: THE CONSERVATION COMMISSION OF WEST GREENWICH
DATE: APRIL 13, 2011

CITIZEN CONVERSATIONS ON THE FUTURE OF WEST GREENWICH

NOVEMBER, JANUARY, FEBRUARY 2010-11

A REPORT

Citizen Conversations on the Future of West Greenwich
Report to the
West Greenwich Town Council
April 13, 2011

Citizen Conversations on the Future of West Greenwich were a series of three community forums hosted by the West Greenwich Conservation Commission. The Conversations brought residents together to discuss our town's future and our role as citizens in making West Greenwich an environmental, economic, and community success. The first Conversation identified participants' perceptions of West Greenwich's strengths and challenges. Citizens at the second Conversation brainstormed ideas for further exploration and action. The final Conversation focused on recommendations and action steps. Emphasis throughout the Conversations was on the rural character of West Greenwich, its sustainability, preservation, and the resources it provides.

The Conversations were designed to encourage the awareness and responsibility of our citizens as stakeholders. Our goal was to create an informal and congenial setting with meaningful conversation, moving beyond the often tired and well-worn debates and emphasizing the power of engaged citizens. The Conversation series was neither final nor complete, but it was an important beginning for dialogue, involvement, and shared commitment to West Greenwich and the quality of life it offers. Feedback from the participants requested more opportunities to engage with issues, gather as a community, and initiate activities to strengthen West Greenwich. The Conversations had, themselves, become an important opportunity for gathering, exploring, and socializing. The medium was, indeed, the message.

The attached report summarizes the purpose, process, and outcomes of the Citizen Conversations. It includes:

- PowerPoint from a presentation to the West Greenwich Town Council on April 13, 2011.
- Group Brainstorming Results from the Conversations, with specific ideas and suggestions relating to:
 - Land and Nature
 - Community, Culture, Tone, and Spirit
 - Sources of Energy
 - Business and Development
- Evaluations
 - Citizen Conversation #2 – January 23, 2011
 - Citizen Conversation #3 – February 27, 2011

We hope that this report encourages feedback for possible next steps in this project. It is not intended as suggestions or requests for town officials' action. It is to request guidance on how these suggestions align with town work, both underway and in planning. Input from the town's leaders will help the citizens involved in this initiative determine the need, function, and goals of any future Conversations.

Respectfully submitted,
Dan Novak, Chair, West Greenwich Conservation Commission
Sandra Bockes, Secretary, West Greenwich Conservation Commission
Kathleen Swann, Facilitator



Citizen Conversations on the Future of West Greenwich

Report to the
West Greenwich Town Council

April 13, 2011
West Greenwich Conservation Commission

West Greenwich Conservation Commission

- Daniel Novak, Chair
- Sandra Bockes, Secretary
- Cliff Sundelin, Treasurer
- Robert Zuleger
- Terry Gray
- Linda Eastman
- Jon Sawyer
- Katie O'Neil
- Debra Catrone
- Donald Harrington, Emeritus
with Kathy Swann, Guest Facilitator

West Greenwich Conservation Commission

- Act as a forum for, research, and study environmentally related issues, and provide possible solutions that actively take into account the Town's natural, cultural, recreational, and scenic environments
- Participate in the town review process by providing advisory opinions, and to make informed recommendations to town boards

Why are we having Citizen Conversations?

- To expand the conversations started by the WGCC survey last winter
- To create a forum for citizens' conversations about our future and our environments
- To explore ways to preserve and use the town's rural character and assets for long term stability and optimal growth

Citizen Conversations

- November 14, 2010
 - Identify strengths and weaknesses
- January 23, 2011
 - Brainstorm and plan for action
- February 27, 2011
 - Prepare report and recommendations
- Attendance for three sessions – 61
- Focus was on what **citizens** can do, not telling officials what to do

Strengths and Concerns

- West Greenwich has valuable assets that are important to its citizens.
 - We appreciate the small town environment.
 - There is a strong sense of identity and place.
 - West Greenwich is well run.
- However:
 - We need increased social opportunities.
 - Growth should be slow and well planned.
 - We need to continue to focus on commitment to and stewardship of open space

Strengths and Concerns

- West Greenwich has growth opportunities.
 - There are many business locations and resources.
 - There are many types of business growth.
- However:
 - We should identify citizen and local resources to grow economy.
 - Businesses should become sustainable.

Some Suggestions

- Develop an informational packet for citizens, perhaps a welcome packet for new residents re. rural lifestyle
- Develop more and better communications in multiple formats
- Create opportunities for citizens to gather
 - Fun and socialize
 - Take on projects
 - Learn about and promote West Greenwich

Topics

- Land and Nature
- Community, Culture, Tone, and Spirit
- Sources of Energy
- Business and Development

Sampling of Ideas – Land and Nature

- Keep West Greenwich rural
- Develop public education and outreach activities
- Create community composting site, “free” station at transfer facility
- Explore ways to use and protect the open spaces
- Be involved in land use plans for open spaces
- Capitalize on our “land power”

Sampling of Ideas – Community, Culture, Tone and Spirit

- Create opportunities for people to get to know each other
- Form arts council
- Promote knowledge and use of public meeting spaces
- Take on community-wide service project
- Get input on what people want to have and do

Sampling of Ideas – Sources of Energy

- Educate people on decreasing their carbon footprint
- Monitor and respond to legislation and policy proposals
- Explore renewable energy sources (passive solar, wind, etc.)
- Strongly encourage green building standards for new buildings in town
- Harness the skills and creativity of our citizens – our “people energy”

Sampling of Ideas – Business and Development

- Determine and capitalize on resources within town
- Develop farm tours, open barns/studios, etc.
- Provide input for market and feasibility studies
- Explore alternate forms of energy, consider town-wide adoption or pilot

Some Feedback from the Evaluations

- “More community spirit – get more involved (schools, community groups)”
- “Meeting every two months to work on the suggestions that were made”
- “More research on topics and start on something”
- “Mostly, keep it rural”
- “Get more people involved”
- “Action!”

Limitations

- Self-selected group
- Small sample, not necessarily representative
- Worked in a vacuum, without knowledge of logistics, work in progress, specifics, cost, etc.

This was a start – broad input and next steps

What Next?

- Feedback from town officials
- Determine if meetings should continue
 - Who should organize and run them?
- Determine if any action steps should be pursued
 - Consider the many suggestions that came out of the Conversations
- Explore new forms of community involvement
- Suggestions welcome!

Citizen Conversations on the Future of West Greenwich

GROUP BRAINSTORMING RESULTS

Land and Nature

1.
 - Getting kids to learn more about nature and to get outside more
 - Get rid of grass lawns
 - Habitat diversity
 - Pasture reclamation
 - How many people take advantage of the currently protected land?
 - How to promote the use of protected land?
 - Emphasis is on protecting private property in perpetuity

2.
 - Alton Jones property? Used to have student tours
 - Needs master plan for Town for land development
 - Selectively cut forests
 - Source for walking trails & recreation areas
 - Welcome package for new residents with maps, etc.
 - Could land owners lease land for community gardens or farms for young people
 - Cultivate wild plants for food
 - Utilize open areas for farms & gardens
 - Whole connection to nature
 - Plant coreopsis: mosquitoes don't like it

3.
 - Public education about our natural resources (forums/website/hands-on)
 - Get rid of light pollution
 - Promote conservation development
 - Habitat restoration or creation
 - Community composting facility
 - Permaculture
 - Mushroom cultivation – Paul Stamets “6 ways mushrooms can help save the world” YouTube video – Ted conference

Actions

- Encourage native bees & other pollinators by planting strips of preferred flowers.
- Make public open space available for woodlots/gardens.
- Encourage people to sell development rights to conserve property.
- Teach people about wild foods.
- Could grow mushrooms in the open space woods.
- Public education programs.
- Encourage use of recreation areas.
- Put together information/welcome package for new residents.

Citizen Conversations on the Future of West Greenwich

GROUP BRAINSTORMING RESULTS

Community, Culture, Tone, and Spirit

In the group focused on Community, we felt a great yearning for connecting with others around common themes:

- There was great interest in the Community Center being finished behind the library:
 - What is it for? Can it be reserved? Can anyone drop in?
 - Could there be monthly pot luck dinners?
 - A place to learn – health, yoga, etc.
- Understanding the natural environment, families getting out in it with kids, caring for our beautiful town.
 - Possibly a skateboarding park.
 - Build & maintain nature trails, bike paths.
- Want to know who does what around town: a Community Service List.
- Bartering for services – develop a local bartering currency.
- And who needs help – the West Greenwich website could serve as a way to connect people and resources.
- Start a West Greenwich Art Council, and promote an Open Studios tour.
- Develop a Park & Ride area, with public transportation more available in town.
- A ‘Bucket List’ for West Greenwich – places to see in WG before you die. And make these places available and accessible.
- Begin Geocaching!
 - Geocaching is a treasure hunting game where you use a GPS to hide and seek containers with other participants in the activity.
 - See www.geocaching.com
- Dan’s Place could be a community resource – if the music were toned down so people could actually hear each other. This is a resource worth cultivating: we should connect with Dan about it.
- A community garden.
- A Farmers Market.
- A Good Co-op.
- Make connections with Alton Jones campus and the Greene School for community involvement.
- Community Kitchens – state inspected.
- Develop a ‘Free House’ section at the Transfer Station – a place to give away and find useful items.

Citizen Conversations on the Future of West Greenwich

GROUP BRAINSTORMING RESULTS

Sources of Energy

Priority Ideas

- Solar panels
- Sustainable forestry – logging and firewood
- Sustainable management and stewardship of wood lots and wood resources
- Wind power
- Large number or scaled wind farms
- Land – What is plentiful/abundant in town? – “land power”
- Hydrogen fuel cells
- Advanced tech sources and/or ‘generators’ (distributed into each home/facility)
- Renewable energy requirements in new housing
- Housing retrofits and housing generating energy
- Hydrogen fuel cells
- Advanced tech sources and/or ‘generators’ (distributed into each home/facility)
- Renewable energy requirements in new housing
- Housing retrofits and housing generating energy
- Collective solutions: e.g. community farming coops and localized wind turbine, e.g. for Blueberry Heights folks (people who can’t do heavy physical labor but can contribute in some cooperative way)
- Recommendations: zoning ordinances for new building construction (requiring green materials, components, renewables, applications... e.g. a certain percentage of renewable energy generation... active or passive generation of renewable utilities/power...)
- “Smaller carbon footprint actually raises my standard of living!”
- Planning recommendations: town wide power/energy/utility as generating town wide income: e.g. wind farms for whole community, as in Altuna, Binghamton, and Clinton, in upper New York State – if whole town got on board, energy \$ tax savings but also surplus, town rent land to wind farm companies and management
- How to capitalize on people skills? (local artisans and artists)

Other Ideas

- Bio-diesel fuel – truck stop
- Oil and grease waste and byproducts
- Passive solar
- Geothermal energy
- Water power
- Ethanol
- Switchgrass
- Woods – different kinds, like bamboo
- Hemp
- Biomass
- Corn for pellet stoves
- Nuclear
- Houses components: solar powered shingles, panels, systems

- Building efficiency guidelines and/or requirements
- Households: individual households growing some of own food
- Households collecting/harvesting rainwater in rain barrels
- Food: all aspects of community farming
- Reduced consumption demands
- Reduce waste and wasteful processes
- Electric and/ or hybrid cars
- Charging stations for electric vehicles
- Getting serious about recycling – “upcycling”
- Transfer station adequate? – e.g. electronics disposal
- Possible town uses of Big River land
- Self-employment and homegrown businesses and occupations
- Business wastes and byproducts as potential commodities, potential products and resources
- Low-tech (e.g. rain barrels)
- “Renewables” (wind, solar, biomass), along with high-tech solutions and companies, green buildings and systems and materials
- Self-sufficiency good, but bartering solutions and cooperative possibilities are good, too!

Citizen Conversations on the Future of West Greenwich

GROUP BRAINSTORMING RESULTS

Business and Development

Ideas

- Promote outdoor recreation tours (any kind) on conservation and public land – to be offered by a local recreation outfitter. Can that protected land be used? How/ For what?
- What about being sure to think about if we use the natural resource—are we exploiting the resources? How far can we go?
- Promote farm tours.
- We'd like more public and non-profit sponsored 'open houses.' (like West Greenwich Land Trust's 'Celebrate West Greenwich Day' and 'Walk and Ride on the Rural Side,' RI Tree Farm walks/talks, etc.)
- We need places to go to do things nearby—things for youth and adults to do (ideas: pool, ice rink, bowling, health club, YMCA): Indoor Recreation and socializing.
- We need a grocery store.
- How much land is actually available for business development? For organized recreation possibilities?
- How can we learn about our local skills and talent and businesses?
- Slow Money- local investment and bartering.
- Local designated Social Network, similar to Facebook.
- Do we look at West Greenwich as an island?
- What about something to foster the arts for everyone, such as galleries, workshops, classes, studios? (there are programs in other communities such as Foster – 'Fostering the Arts,' Pawtucket, etc.)
- We need something to help people get around (especially young people).. what kind of transportation opportunities are there? A park and ride, access to public transportation, etc.
- If Exit 5 gets developed, we want to see it benefiting everyone in Town (young and old and everyone in between) for physical use.

Action/ Further Steps

- We need to find out if it is feasible to have a Health/Recreation Facility—is it possible for the Town to initiate a feasibility study?
 - Why not locate one right in Centre of New England?
 - What about the gravel bank land at Exit 5?
 - Does it need to be more regional to work?
- Can we approach organizations, such as the YMCA, to see if they are interested in locating in Town?
- The Town needs a feasibility study on these things: recreation center, grocery store, etc.
- Talk to the land owners- bring them into these discussions/ meetings.
- Someone to develop a resource/database of our **local** talent, skills, businesses, expertise, and (hidden, diverse, unexpected) resources (examples: if anyone has any 'incubator' space available, or actual cash to get someone started in a business (i.e. slow money)
- Re-mobilize the Economic Development Committee!!!

Citizen Conversations on the Future of West Greenwich

Feedback Form Results

January 23, 2011

Attendance: 21 (including facilitators?)

Responses: 12

How was the format of the session?

Excellent 5

Good 6

Fair 0

Poor 0

Very Good 1 (write in)

Comments:

- Maybe a few minutes longer for first sessions
- Good circulation format!
- Too much talking at the beginning
- INTEGRATION remains a challenge!
- Wish we could stay in group long enough to develop and own ideas generated

How was the location?

Excellent 7

Good 5

Fair 0

Poor 0

Comments:

- Comfortable
- Town chambers adequate!
- Wish we could meet in new community center
- Just right for this size group!

Did the session meet your expectations?

__11__Yes __0__No

Comments:

- An ambitious amount of ideas – big challenge to get a lot of them going
- I think so...
- More of this please!

What did you enjoy most?

- The people & free exchange of ideas
- Diversity of people and ideas
- People's liveliness
- Open discussion, range of ideas
- Getting to know + work with others
- Sharing ideas
- The discussions

What could be improved?

- Continue forums, perhaps every couple of months
- Not sure
- NEED TO THINK FURTHER ABOUT
- Keep Kathy facilitating
- More people, outreach
- Longer group sessions

Which topic(s) are of most interest to you? (Check all that apply.)

__8__ Land and Nature

__6__ Community

__5__ Sources of Energy

__6__ Business and Development

__2__ Tone and Culture

_____ Other _____

Suggestions or ideas for the next Conversation:

- These issues require serious commitment and action
- NEED TO THINK ABOUT THIS ONE!
- Get Pro's involved: Bank Land owner Business owners

Response Rate 57%

Format of the Session

Excellent	42%
Very Good	8% (write in)
Good	50%
Fair	0
Poor	0

Location of the Session

Excellent	58%
Good	42%
Fair	0
Poor	0

Met Expectations

Yes	92%
No	0
Thinking about it	8% (write in)
Poor	0

Topics of Interest

Land and Nature	67%
Community	50%
Sources of Energy	42%
Business and Development	50%
Tone and Culture	17%
Other	0

Citizen Conversations on the Future of West Greenwich

Feedback Form Results

February 27, 2011

Attendance: 19

Responses: 11

How was the format of the session?

Excellent 9

Good 2

Fair 0

Poor 0

Comments:

- More meetings like this, please!
- First meeting, sorry I missed the first two

How was the location?

Excellent 6

Good 5

Fair 0

Poor 0

Comments:

Did the session meet your expectations?

__10__Yes __0__No

Comments:

- I really didn't know what to expect

What did you enjoy most?

- The people
- Talking with fellow citizens of WG – which we probably did too much
- The interaction
- The good ideas, energy, goods will, and friendship
- Exchange of ideas
- Learning other people's ideas
- The great ideas
- People, ideas
- Great group

What could be improved?

- Board members, committee members from town (planning, etc.)
- Perhaps separate rooms for the group discussions. It was hard to concentrate with all the background noise
- More people
- More of these!
- Get more people here
- Have more meetings
- More officials in attendance

What is your reaction to these gatherings so far?

- I feel that it is possible for residents to make a difference in our town
- Good / town meeting style / necessary order and / people talking together
- Best meetings I've been to in WG
- Good
- Great
- Great
- Love em!
- Keep going

What questions do you still have?

- The possibility of other energy resources – solar, outdoor wood furnace

- Wood burning outdoor stoves legislation
- Wood stoves and turbines
- How to achieve some of these things
- How can we go to the next level

Where do you want to go – or what do you want to see – now?

- More community spirit – get more involved – schools? Community groups?
- Meeting every other month to work on the suggestions that were made
- Ways to lower taxes
- Get familiar with WG website to see where these ideas can plug in
- ?
- Have to do some research and start on something
- Mostly keep it rural
- Action!

Suggestions or ideas for the future:

- Outdoor event just for discussion etc./fun
- More people using town website
- Stay the same path
- Maybe every other month meetings. Need more time
- Get more people involved

Response Rate 58%

Format of the Session

Excellent	82%
Good	18%
Fair	0
Poor	0

Location of the Session

Excellent	55%
Good	45%
Fair	0
Poor	0

Met Expectations

Yes	91%
No	0