



Town of Hopkinton Key Informant Interviews

June 2019

The Town of Hopkinton and the Economic Development Committee (EDC) established a steering committee in early 2019 to implement Plan NH's Municipal Technical Assistance Grant (MTAG). The goal of the MTAG is to support a range of housing choices and increase the supply of affordable housing. In Hopkinton, the MTAG Grant will allow the town to:

- Gather opinions and viewpoints from citizens regarding choices for home location, design, and/or price point.
- Review current zoning and regulations related to home location, design, and/or price point.
- Consider rewriting existing zoning regulations to permit a wider range of housing choices.

For the purpose of this grant, the Town of Hopkinton and the EDC chose to look at zoning at Hart's Corner, a parcel of land that is located at the intersection of Routes 202/9 and 127/Maple St.

The MTAG Steering Committee conducted thirty-three key informant interviews to get a sense of the vision town residents have for development in Hopkinton and at the Hart's Corner site; identify potential concerns residents may have; and to develop an understanding of strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities regarding Hopkinton's economy. The information presented in the following pages is a summary of the data received through the interviews. The data collected was analyzed in the aggregate by UNH Cooperative Extension and presented back to the committee.

Preparing for Key Informant Interviews

The Town of Hopkinton MTAG Steering Committee with Jared Reynolds of UNH Cooperative Extension and Stuart Arnett of Arnett Development Group to design the key informant questionnaire and identify key informants in the community that should be interviewed. To gather information from many points of view, the committee identified a range of key informants. Those interviewed included business owners from different areas of the town, longtime residents and those new to town, community volunteers and leaders, young parents, and a number of other targeted groups.

Key Informants

Key Informants are: community residents (sometimes leaders) who are in a position to know the community, have wide contacts in the community and community members look to them for answers on community issues. The interview often provides the opportunity to build trust. This is often the first step in relationship building for future programs or projects.

Key Informant Interviews

- Use a small set of questions (5-8 questions)
- Should last 20 – 30 minutes but may go longer if interviewee is interested
- Conversational and loosely structured
- One respondent and one interviewer
- Interviewer is flexible and able to add questions as they go
- Questions are open-ended

Key Findings:

Quality of Life

- A strong school system and good public services like the library, emergency services, and the senior center make Hopkinton an attractive place to live.
- The rural character and community feel of Hopkinton are important factors. Development should balance lowering taxes, increasing amenities, and retaining conservation land and rural character.
- Hopkinton's open space and conservation land is an asset to prioritize and retain.

Economic Development and Business Environment

- Hopkinton is expensive to live due to high housing prices, taxes, and utilities. Many residents have leave town once their kids complete school because that community isn't affordable for them to remain.
- Hopkinton has an ideal location on Interstate 89 and Route 202 with easy access to Concord, Manchester, and Hanover that allow residents to commute to work and shopping.
- Hopkinton has local retail, coffee shops, and restaurants in the village area and throughout town. It's a priority to support these businesses and ensure they're successful. Further development should complement these businesses and not threaten their survival.
- Hopkinton's three village areas each have unique to leverage. Contoocook, with its local shops and restaurants is a major asset. Attention should be towards infrastructure in Contoocook and expanding the downtown area to allow for more businesses.

Housing

- Housing in Hopkinton is expensive and the town should focus on providing a wider range of affordable housing for residents.
- Hopkinton has ample single family homes, but lacks started homes for younger residents to move to the town or smaller homes for aging residents to downsize into and remain in the community.
- Additional rental units and condominiums, primarily market rate units.
- Age restricted housing or a retirement community in Hopkinton, or at Hart's Corner, to allow aging residents to remain in the community.

Hart's Corner

There was a range of responses for what interviewees want to see at Hart's Corner. Below are some common themes. The common concern at Hart's Corner is that it's a busy intersection with existing traffic that should be considered with future development to ensure that it's safe.

- Business development that complements downtown Contoocook and draws visitors off the highway to shop at Hart's Corners and then into the downtown area.
- Responses on the type of retail developed at Hart's Corner were mixed. Some respondents saw opportunity for chains and box stores not available downtown. Others thought that type of development would negatively impact Hopkinton's current character.
- Recreation facility, including indoor fields, similar to Fieldhouse Sports in Bow.
- Mixed use development with condominiums, retail, restaurant, and conserved land for recreation.
- Medical office building. Residents currently commute to see doctors, urgent care, etc.
- A common suggestion was a senior living or age restricted community of some type to provide housing for currently residents to downsize into and to attract new residents to Hopkinton.

Answers to Key Informant Interview Questions

Question 1. What makes Hopkinton an attractive place to live, work, shop, or locate a business?

Positive:

- Great school system and public services with strong community support
- Location on the interstate highway with access to Concord, Manchester, and Hanover as well as the lakes and mountains. The location offers employment, shopping, and recreation opportunities for residents.
- Charming small town that is safe, friendly, and supportive with positive connections to other residents.
- Charming downtown has locally owned retail, coffees shops, and restaurants.
- Rural setting with open space, conservation land, and farms.

Opportunities to Improve:

- There are limited employment opportunities to both live and work in Hopkinton so residents are general required to commute to work.
- Too expensive to live and operate a business given the high housing and building costs, property taxes, and utility prices.
- There are good local business, but there is a limited selection of restaurants and shops.

Question 2. What do you like about Hopkinton's health and what do you see as its strengths? What would you like to see improve about Hopkinton's economic health and what do you see as opportunities?

Positive:

- High disposable income among residents results in people spending money in Hopkinton and supporting local initiatives.
- Great location and attractive downtown keeps resident dollars in Hopkinton and brings in visitors to shop and dine in the town.
- Educated and creative residents offer opportunity to develop new businesses.

Opportunities for Improvements:

- Hopkinton is a residential town that needs to be open to new businesses and better support existing businesses to maintain the high standard of public services and the school system.
- Expand the downtown area to allow for more businesses and target more diversity in restaurants and shops to create a more attractive place.
- Improve infrastructure downtown to more it more walkable and safer to drive there.
- Allow for more commercial development on undeveloped parcels.
- Improve communication with residents about development opportunities and vision for town's economic development.
- Leverage the vibrant downtown to bring in more visitors to spend money in Hopkinton.

Question 3. Regarding future economic growth in Hopkinton, what do you see as potential opportunities? What concerns do you have?

Opportunities:

- Expand Contoocook commercial district to attract visitors off the highway and relieve some of the congestion directly in the town center.
- Make Hopkinton a more attractive place for businesses to start and encourage development in new areas of town like West Hopkinton.

- The town needs to improve infrastructure in key developable areas and play a more active role in developing some areas of town. Improving sidewalks and roads in Contoocook will lead to more businesses wanting to locate there.
- Development targeted at aging residents that need new housing and services.
- Suggested target businesses for Contoocook and adjacent to highway include additional restaurants, medical facilities, brewery and pub, sports facility, convenience store.
- Expand rental housing in Contoocook to making living there more affordable.

Concerns:

- Property taxes make it difficult for business to open in Hopkinton and for new residents to move to the town.
- New development could negatively impact the rural and small town atmosphere of the town and make downtown a less attractive place to visit. Need to retain rural character and preserve green space while attracting additional businesses.
- Development that attracts big box stores, chains, or too much additional traffic.

Question 4. Regarding future economic growth at Hart's Corner, what do you see as potential opportunities? What concerns do you have?

Opportunities:

- Focus of numerous respondents was development of a senior living facility, a new grocery store, or retail to draw visitors off the highway to shop.
- Suggested development at Hart's Corner included gas station or convenience store, medical offices, apartments or condos, coffee shop, grocery store, bed and breakfast, hotel, sports complex.
- Higher end retail could draw people off the highway to shop in Hopkinton and then direct them towards the village area.

Concerns:

- Many respondents were concerned about safety if development occurs at Hart's Corner. The intersection is busy and cars move fast, more development there could be dangerous and create traffic problems.
- Many respondents don't want any box stores or chains anywhere in Hopkinton, including Hart's Corner, while others thought any type of development would be fine because it is not located in the heart of the village and a chain could appeal to a new crowd.
- Development at Hart's Corner could draw people away from downtown and hurt local businesses located in Contoocook. New shops or stores should complement existing businesses in town and not take away from them.

Question 5. What types of business do you think are missing in Hopkinton that could improve the town? Would you like to see any of these types of businesses located at Hart's Corner?

Hart's Corner

- Recreation: fields, sports stadium, indoor athletic fields, fitness center.
- Professional services- medical facilities, dentist.
- Mall with shops that bring visitors off the highway and complement Contoocook shops.
- Large grocery store or coop, liquor store, brewery.
- Entertainment: auditorium, function or reception hall.
- Hotel to provide a place for visitors to stay in Hopkinton.
- Stores that attract more diverse customers and complement the more specialized shops located in Contoocook.
- Given the location medical offices or a sports complex could attract people
- Office space and light industry.

Hopkinton:

- Restaurants, cafes, and pubs: more spaces where people can meet and spend time, restaurants with outdoor seating.
- Bed and breakfast to provide a place for visitors to stay in Contoocook.
- Barber shop, hairdresser, or beauty salon was mentioned by a number of respondents.
- More specialty shops like a bakery, craft store, high-end coffee or tea, brewery could be supported in Contoocook.
- Many respondents see Warner as a good model for Contoocook. There are local stores and restaurants and a walkable town center.

Question 6. What type of housing do you think Hopkinton needs? Do we have housing for everyone- starter homes, family homes, places to downsize or retire? Would you like to see any of these housing options located at Hart's Corner?

Hopkinton:

Many respondents thought Hopkinton needed more affordable housing, starter homes, condos, and apartments. Respondents thought smaller housing options and starter homes would attract younger people to Hopkinton and allow an aging population to downsize and remain in the town. There was overwhelming agreement among respondents that housing in Hopkinton is expensive and that there is a lack of affordable housing and smaller homes for both younger and retired residents.

Hart's Corner:

Responses were mixed on what type of housing would be a good fit for Hart's Corner. Many respondents thought that the same housing that Hopkinton needs, such as starter homes and affordable housing, would also fit for Hart's Corner. Others thought housing should be more focused on the center of town and Hart's Corner reserved for commercial development.

Many respondents stated that they thought a senior housing community or age restricted housing would be a good fit for Hart's Corner. This would allow residents to downsize and remain in Hopkinton.

Question 7. There's a current trend towards life, work, play communities that have a mix of housing, businesses, and recreation in one spot. Do you like this idea? What do you think the optimal mix of housing, businesses, and recreation is in Hopkinton?

Respondents were generally supportive of a live, work, play community in Hopkinton and for the most part at Hart's Corner. Respondents commented that this would keep people in Hopkinton and make it a more attractive place to live. There was some concern that this would isolate Hart's Corner, instead of encourage residents to spend time and money at local businesses in the village center. Some respondents commented that they thought this idea would be more attractive closer to Contoocook.

Some respondents commented that Hopkinton already has plenty of recreation space and that shouldn't be a focus. The focus should be on affordable housing and commercial development to broaden the tax base. There was some concern that Hart's Corner is too small to support a live, work, play community.

Question 8. What else would you like to share?

A number of respondents reiterated that they felt too many residents were leaving Hopkinton because it's not affordable and that there should be a focus on affordable housing and lowering taxes. Some respondents also reiterated the importance of balancing economic growth and maintaining Hopkinton's small town and rural character when considering how to move forward.

Hart's Corner Hopkinton & Henniker, NH



6. What type of housing do you think Hopkinton needs? Do we have housing for everyone – starter homes, family homes, places to downsize or retire? Would you like to see any of these housing options located at Hart's Corner?

7. There's a current trend towards live, work, and play communities that have a mix of housing, businesses, and recreation in one spot. Do you like this idea? What do you think the optimal mix of housing, businesses, and recreation is in Hopkinton and at Hart's Corner?

8. What else would you like to share?