

Public meetings are vital to the planning and implementation process for your town forest. These meetings ensure that the community has an opportunity to learn about the project, engage with the steering committee, and provide input. In doing so, these meetings typically grow the enthusiasm around the project and empower residents in planning the future of the town forest.

To ensure robust public engagement, community members should be given many different opportunities to provide input. This planning process gathers community input through a variety of ways, including one-on-one conversations with committee members, stickers, write-in boards, surveys, and a comment box. The traditional “sage on the stage’ presentation meeting format is not the most effective approach for planning. Instead, this town forest recreation planning process balances presenting the information gathered from listening to the ideas and opinions of the community.

The steering committee should encourage visionary thinking, especially at the beginning stages of the planning process.

Visioning Workshop

This workshop is the public kickoff of the project. While some information will be presented to the public about the project, this workshop is intended to be very open-ended. The goal of this workshop is to gather the public’s ideas for the town forest. This workshop has a variety of ways for the public to provide input – dot sticker voting, write-in questions, and conversations. It is an open house format where attendees can show up at any time and read the information posted on the boards and respond. A sign-in table should be near the entrance for attendees to sign in and provide their e-mail to stay informed on project updates. This meeting will have 16 (with an additional optional one for towns with multiple town forest parcels) 24”x36” boards to be posted on the walls or easels. Two additional boards should be placed on a large table in the center of the room. Board templates can be found in the Public Engagement Pod. These templates can be edited based on your community information and the date of the event. The Steering Committee will need to complete the Town Forest Overview board with bullet points and pictures of the town forest. There is no strict format for the bullet points, but they should tell meeting attendees the

Professional Facilitation

If public engagement proves particularly challenging or daunting, professional meeting facilitation may be considered—many consultants may be willing to work with you on some or all of your public engagement process and may be flexible on costs, particularly if you are able to share some of the responsibilities.

history, size, and current and past uses of/activities in the town forest. The recommended order of the boards is as follows:

1. Project and Grant Overview
2. Project Process
3. What is this Workshop
4. Forest Overview
5. Management Focus
6. Visioning Write-In
7. Multiple Parcels (if the town is interested in planning for multiple parcels)
8. Natural Resources
9. Activity Boards (nine boards in that file)
10. Floor Map Questions (on the table)
11. Floor Map (base map printed at least 24"x36" and placed on the table)

Boards 6, 7, 8, 10, and the last board of 9 are write-in boards where pens should be available. Boards 5 and 9 (all but the last one) require dot stickers that should either be available at the board itself or to attendees as they walk in.

The steering committee should also advertise the survey for residents who were unable to attend this workshop as it asks the same questions. For more instructions about the steering committee's role in this meeting, see the Steering Committee Guidance in the Public Engagement Pod.

Strategies Workshop

This workshop is a combination presentation and open house.

Ahead of the meeting, the Steering Committee should fill in the powerpoint and boards with the strategies selected during the vision framework memo process. The boards should then be printed at 24"x36".

When meeting attendees arrive, a projector and chairs should be set up, along with the boards, posted on easels, or along the wall. A sign-in table should be at the entrance again for attendees to

sign in and provide their e-mail address. Initially, a 30 minute presentation will give meeting attendees an overview of the project and the planning input and results so far (i.e., draft strategies, key attributes, survey results, etc.).

Then the meeting shifts to an open house format where attendees will have an opportunity to prioritize strategies on planning board and suggest locations for implementing strategies on a floor map. Dots should either be available on the boards or as the attendees enter. A floor map, or a large-scale base map, should be printed again and placed on a table in the center of the room. A list of location-based strategies should be printed and placed alongside the map (see Public Engagement Pod). Pens should be available at the table for attendees to mark their preferred locations for the strategies. When attendees have completed the prioritization exercise and indicated location ideas on the map, they are free to leave.

Plan Presentation

Once a draft plan is complete, the Steering Committee should organize a presentation of the plan to the relevant town governing bodies. This presentation could be to the select board, city council, conservation commission, planning commission, or a combination of these groups. A powerpoint presentation template is included the Public Engagement Pod. Use the promotional materials in the Public Engagement Pod to invite the public to this presentation. Copies of the draft plan should also be available for review. After the presentation is complete, the presenters/steering committee should ask attendees for comments, questions, and concerns. The steering committee should meet afterward to discuss these comments and include them in the final plan as applicable.