

Date: October 25th, 2023

Time: 10 am - 11:30 am

Join Zoom Meeting: <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/82400093280>

Attendance

- Jennifer Claro, *Director of Council on Aging*
- Sue Thomas, *Sustainability Coordinator*
- Alison Christopher, *LICSW for Westford*
- Nicole Laviolette, *Community Wellness Coordinator at Town of Westford*
- Jessica Boulanger, *Transportation Mobility Specialist at NMCOG*
- Madonna McKenzie, *DEI Committee Member*
- Wendy Gloyd, *DEI Committee Member*
- Rae Dick, *Health Director at Westford Health Department*
- Brittany Nash, *Regional Community Health & Wellness Coordinator at Westford Health Department*
- Gail Johnson, *Public Health Nurse at Westford Health Department*
- Joe Mando, *Quality Improvement Consultant at BME Strategies*
- Jason Peprah, *Associate Public Health Consultant at BME Strategies*
- Ariel Slifka, *Associate Public Health Consultant at BME Strategies*

Agenda

I. Welcome & Re-Cap

- A. Rae welcomed and thanked everyone for participating today.
- B. BME gave an overview of today's agenda.
- C. Joe provided a recap of the CHA/CHIP process as covered during the kickoff meeting (see slides).

II. GLHA Survey Results

- A. Ariel reviewed the priorities selected by Westford residents in the GLHA survey:

- **Top Community Health Issues: heart health, mental health, environmental health, cancer, COVID-19**

Ariel: Does this seem like what you anticipated from Westford?

Nicole: Based on the demographics, yes.

Question: Which year is this from?

Ariel: 2022, from 286 responses.

Nicole: What was the average age?

Ariel: I don't have that off the top of my head, but it was mainly adults.

Wendy in the chat: Would have expected Autoimmune health as higher than Environmental health.

Jessica: I think walkability is a big concern as well, especially seeing people walking on busy roads.

Comments from group: There was a previous focus on introducing more sidewalks.

Question: People are saying that the issue is that there was no choice at all to select walkability in the question?

Group: Yes.

Ariel: Walkability was not on this question focused on health issues but accessibility is later.

Madonna: I think a lot of people, especially from the senior center, go walking on the trail. I know there used to be zero sidewalks, which was a concern. Heat is a concern as well, especially at the senior center. My concern about the schools is that they don't have air conditioning. It won't be easy, it'll be very expensive. But with climate change we should try to start implementing this into schools. I shared this with the school committee, but it gets complicated. I am trying to address it by repairing HVAC systems.

Madonna: The senior center really needs to address it. There's just no air at all in there. Mental health is a tough one, since we do not know how many people are suffering.

Sue: Not sure if this is the time to bring this up, but we have isolated women in some communities, perhaps due to culture. My son had a friend with a sister that was not allowed to interact with people or go places. I was shocked since the mother in that family had a lot of freedom. She was being raised as if she was in muslim country in the Middle East. I've seen more situations like this. To me this is a public health issue.

Gail: Brittney and I did a health presentation on domestic violence. It's an isolating problem, and one that is not easily helped unless you see it. You won't know until you know.

Madonna: Hearing from students could be beneficial, as they would have a different view from the seniors on domestic violence.

Ariel: That is a good segway into community safety issues.

- **Top Community Safety Issues: discrimination based on race, domestic violence, sexual assault, unsafe/illegal gun ownership, unsafe driving**

Sue: I was thinking what I was getting at is a lack of assimilation of people from different cultures. The community isn't as welcoming as we'd like to think we are.

Gail: What we're seeing is people took a survey, but many people would not want to participate. 300 responses is a small sampling of this town.

The problem is how do you reach community members if they do not want to tell you anything? It's not easy when there are not willing participants in the surveys. There's so much more we could add to this, but not everyone does these.

Nicole: I agree, it is a limited sampling. The community stakeholder piece is the conversations that you have with your neighbors which adds that qualitative piece.

Wendy: As a student tutor and teacher of online speaking skills, I have seen parents not wanting to identify youth as diagnosed as ADD or ADHD - saying they don't want their child/children to be treated differently. Wanting their child to be top-performer - leads to children having a lot of emotional stress and teachers being blindsided in not knowing how to properly teach the children. I've seen parents from certain cultures not ask their children permission to have them participate in activities, and this differs from "American" born parents. But this does concern me about the mental health of these children.

Ariel: Thank you Wendy, that is something that came up in the last meeting as well, how critical the mental health of students is.

Madonna: That is something that has been brought up, implementing equity in schools.

Jessica: I understand what Wendy is saying, where putting pressure on your child to achieve results when they might need more support.

Wendy: We see lots of distortions in schools, that is a reflection of different cultures. What I see from lots of Indian families is that they're stratified by their caste system. There may be aspects of other cultures, such as Asian cultures, that we may be aware of.

- **Top Community Resources: access to healthy food, access to mental health services, affordable & safe housing, emergency health services, public education**

Jennifer: The way the question is written from the list, you could be answering this assessment on what is currently being provided, so I don't know if this is the correct way to ask this question.

Allison: I saw it the opposite way, that you would consider the ones that you would not want to be taken from you as the most important to you.

Ariel: I had the same questions about how to interpret the way this question was worded but thought it was helpful to see that the answers here correlate with the previous questions. But yes, the question could be interpreted in different ways.

Nicole: Yes, access to mental health could be interpreted as availability rather than actual access.

Jessica: Access to the high speed internet is an equity issue as well. And we saw this especially during the pandemic.

Question: Did the survey ask what age the respondents were?

Ariel: Yes there was a question at the beginning. I believe the average age was greater than 45.

Sue: Yes, so we do not know what the children want as well. And we know we have more children from the demographic. We have a higher percentage of families than seniors, so if they are represented with this survey, then that skews these results.

Madonna: Something I've noticed from my children is that they all work from home, which is something we should pay attention to, especially when it comes to mental health.

Jessica: Reliable high speed internet, depends on the actual internet quality as well. For example, people don't realize when you get the base internet box from xfinity, it is a very slow internet connection.

Jennifer: We have internet in all our senior facilities, which allows them to do telehealth. Another piece that we learned is that students without reliable internet at home will go to the library or other areas to get access.

Gail: I didn't realize internet access was so important to equity before the pandemic. During the pandemic, you had to sign up through the system online, and this really did limit the senior population since the clinics did not do walk-in vaccinations. Many people don't have access to the internet and are comfortable with computers. If you aren't a computer-savvy person that really affected you at the beginning of COVID.

Sue: It's not just the computer, it's the phone. If you can't figure how to use your phone, you can book appointments etc. So there were many distortions in the community about this. I do think technology access is not just internet, but also education on how to use it. Families are trying to adapt to that.

Brittany: I think it is important that we share the Westford specific results.

Comment: It is important that we are aware of the feasibility of addressing these issues.

III. Prioritization Activity

A. Participants joined the mentimeter link from their computers or phones to rank the community health issues, safety issues, and community resources on impact/feasibility grids:

Ariel: Are there any issues we would like to add or remove other than those in bold for the prioritization activity?

Jennifer: I think hearing, vision, and mobility would be hard to measure with this survey, since I do not know how they would have access to this survey.

Nicole: You could say the same with infant & child health.

Jennifer: Difficult to use this survey with 280 responses as the basis for choosing.

Ariel: I think the idea is to have this survey be a discussion starter, rather than the end all be all.

Jessica: What about physical health instead of heart health?

Gail: I think heart health is very broad and hard to identify. It can include exercise, high blood pressure.

Sue: I think that reflects the general population, people just know overall heart health as something that causes death.

Jessica: Knowing the results of the survey are not very representative of the whole picture, what are the actionable items that we know of based on our experiences with the community?

Comment: The questions related to infant & child health, are general to child health, so it is a starting point as you said.

Jennifer: The lack of representativeness makes me uncomfortable, I'm having a hard time with starting with this.

Sue: Nicole, would you call it pediatric growth and development?

Nicole: Yes, child development, also including ADHD and anxiety. I also get questions about children on the autism spectrum. Child health could encompass that.

Ariel: If we're circling back to the grid, I'm hearing mental health and possibly heart health.

Gail: The survey asks more about vaccinations and preventative questions, rather than specific questions about heart health for example. And we're talking about an affluent town, where there is access to many different healthcare services. So no one calls me to ask about those services.

Nicole: But this is what the town is saying is important to them, given the choices.

Jennifer: But that's also what they were given to choose from.

Jessica: What about wellness more generally?

Sue: What I hear Nicole saying is that there is anxiety online about the range of normal childhood development, and they do not want to acknowledge that their child might be on a certain end of the continuum. Do people need education so that they know how to identify this?

Gail: What makes people call the health department instead of their doctor?

Allison: It looks to me like this survey was a health survey, and they picked out a lot of common health issues and asked what people care about the most. Does that mean this is what the biggest problems are? Or what the health department should focus on? It sounds like to me that we're just using this as a jumping off point.

Joe: Ideally we would have done a survey ourselves but for the various reasons previously stated, we couldn't do that. The fact is that there has already been a

lot of data gathered from the town and this is one data point that we can use. The idea is we wanted to determine what people care about the most, and supposedly they think that heart health is a problem, not that they've complained to the town about it. If heart health is a problem, we want to build programming around that.

Allison: Even if we had done our own survey and asked about health issues, we would have had to pick a list of health issues and it might have been similar to this. This is designed to help the health department with programming, right?

Joe: The partnership.

Allison: I think we are looking at it very concretely, people won't come to the town about their cancer, but we can have practitioners come in and talk to people about it.

Jessica: I think perhaps this survey is not representative enough to know that these are critical issues to Westford. I think as a group, we should be aware of the biggest issues, which this survey helps to guide us with maybe. Broader programming focused on wellness or child health can be more encompassing than specifics. What are some top few things that we can focus on.

Sue: I think a problem is, in the list of issues, you have some of the causes mixed with some of the results.

Wendy: I agree with that point. There are health conditions that fall under heart health that originate elsewhere (like smoking-related COPD, arrhythmia, obesity, diabetes) that doctors often categorize as heart disease. So that's what the person thinks is their challenge.

Jennifer: We can come up with some broad topics relating to these results, and come up with some prevention. I think we agree that mental health, environmental health, and wellness is key.

Joe: So those big three: wellness, mental health, environmental health. What about child health?

Nicole: I think wellness has many subcategories which could include child health. I don't think it needs to be it's own priority.

Joe: Great, on the next slide do we agree with the priorities from the survey for community safety?

Jessica: Property crimes come up on next door and the facebook pages.

Allison: We might have a better idea on the top safety issues by asking the police about their top 3 calls compared to a survey.

Joe: Can we get the list for priorities?

Ariel: We have mental health, environmental health, wellness, and property crimes.

Joe: Anything else to add?

Allison: What about discrimination based on differences?

Jessica: Discrimination is hard to measure.

Ariel: For community resources, it seemed like high speed internet is something we would like to add as one of the key call outs? Is there any others?

Allison: Transportation and affordable housing are constantly being raised as issues.

Sue: Public parks are something that was huge during COVID.

Nicole: Do we have a MBTA survey?

Ariel: We have the transportation survey from the NMCOG.

Madonna: When I look at this, services to adolescents are important but I don't know what that has to offer. I think the harder part of childhood is adolescence.

Wendy: Bullying likely would be common for a younger demographic.

Sue: I think a school psychologist is important for adolescence, but they won't voluntarily access them unless they are in a crisis.

Jennifer: Could we say something about healthy families which is a broader to include what you all are talking about?

Nicole: Healthy Families is a statewide program so just be careful with the title.

Joe: Do we feel comfortable with our list to prioritize?

Group: Not sure there's enough time given people need to leave at 11:30.

Brittney: I think the focus moving forward is to involve as many stakeholders as possible. If you have data to bring it, the survey is only 280 people but we want to encompass everything. It would be helpful to look back at the highlights and meet as a group to decide what we should focus on. It is important to recognize that this survey isn't everything, it's just a piece of it. For our working group, we should find out what data is out there, and bring it to the table, so we can try to encompass everything as a group for the community.

Wendy: I think when you do a survey, you are looking at perceptions as well as data. Does this process usually incorporate incidence data?

Joe: Yes, we would like to do that but it would be overwhelming to extract data for all these problems. This process was to get us to 4-5 priorities which we would then gather data on to bring back.

Madonna: Maybe the police would have data on a lot of these.

Joe: If we decide as a team that that's important and prioritize it, then we can reach out to the police and start working on that.

Nicole: Are we discussing the data from this survey specifically, or are we gathering more ourselves?

Brittney: I was referring to the data that is specific to this survey.

Joe: The idea is we discuss this data as a point of guidance.

IV. Next Steps & Future Planning

A. The partnership will continue meeting on the last Wednesday of the month from at 10 am (aiming towards 1.5 hours) in a hybrid format with options to join via zoom or in-person at the Westford Town Hall Second Floor meeting room.

- October 25th: Identifying Community Priorities
- November 29th (the Wednesday after Thanksgiving): Reviewing Westford-Specific Data
- January 24th: Adapting Westford-Specific CHIP