

Town of Westford Business Forum



Please join us for a dynamic discussion to talk about the future of the town of Westford, and hear your valued input as a member of our business community.

Thursday, November 7, 2019

7:30 am - 9:00 am

NETSCOUT, 310 Littleton Road, Westford, MA

[Please click here to register](#)

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/town-of-westford-business-forum-tickets-73421087449>

*Sponsored by the Westford Economic Development Committee
and the Westford Business Association*



Town of Westford Business Forum

Hosted by Netscout

November 7, 2019
7:30-9:00 A.M.

AGENDA

1. Welcoming Statement – Jodi Ross, Westford Town Manager
2. Introduction: Bruce Rosenberg, Chairman, Westford Economic Development Committee and Paul Playe, Incoming President, Westford Business Association
3. Forum Overview and Background – Jay Donovan, Assistant Director, NMCOG
 - Economic Development Component of Westford Master Plan
 - Five-Year Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)
4. SWOT Analysis - Jay Donovan, Assistant Director, NMCOG
 - What are the strengths and weaknesses of doing business in Westford?
 - What opportunities should Westford take advantage of to stabilize and expand private investment in the community?
 - What future threats do you see to the business community in Westford?
 - What can the town of Westford do to ensure continued support for the business community?
 - Prioritizing SWOT responses through colored dots
5. Closing Remarks
6. Adjournment

Funded through grants from the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Economic Development (DHCD) and the Economic Development Administration (EDA), U.S. Department of Commerce

Memorandum

To: Bruce Rosenberg and the members of the Westford Economic Development Committee

From: Jay J. Donovan, Assistant Director, NMCOG

Subject: Westford Business Forum SWOT Results

Date: November 20, 2019

The Westford Business Forum was held on November 7, 2019 at Netscout and forty-eight (48) business people participated in the meeting. Through the combined efforts of the Town Westford, the Westford Economic Development Committee (WEDC) and the Westford Business Association (WBA), this event attracted a diverse group of participants. The purpose of the Westford Business Forum was to receive input from the business community on the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) of doing business in Westford. The results of the SWOT exercise will be used in updating the Economic Development Goals and Strategies in the 2008 Westford Master Plan and to complete the updated Economic Development section of the Master Plan.

The session began with a Welcoming Statement from Jodi Ross, Westford Town Manager. The Introduction to the session was provided by Bruce Rosenberg, Chairman, Westford Economic Development Committee and Paul Playe, Incoming President, Westford Business Association. Jay Donovan then provided an outline of the economic development work that the Northern Middlesex Council of Governments (NMCOG) had done related to the 2008 Westford Master Plan and the Five-Year Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) for the Economic Development Administration (EDA) of the U.S. Department of Commerce. Jay then proceeded to discuss the Visioning Process and began the SWOT Analysis. NMCOG staff recorded the responses on large sheets of paper, and after the discussion, participants were given an opportunity to indicate their priorities by placing colored dots next to each recorded idea. For this exercise, red dots (4 points) indicated their first priority, green dots (3 points) indicated their second priority, blue dots (2 points) indicated their third priority and yellow dots (1 point) indicated their fourth priority.

Based upon the tabulated point totals for each response, the top five priorities for the SWOT session for each category were as follows:

Strengths

- Retail shopping centers (33)
- Access to highways (33)
- Good schools (26)
- Business friendly (26)
- Location (26)

Note: The next two strengths were Strong town government (25) and Amenities – restaurants, skiing, hotels, etc. (23).

Weaknesses

- Difficult, expensive & time consuming permitting process (44)
- Lack of sewer (43)
- Limited public transit (40)
- Getting variances (32)
- Lack of senior housing (28)

Note: The next two weaknesses were land-related: Land cost (24) and Lack of available land (20).

Opportunities

- Public transit (34)
- Streamline permitting (30)
- College interns/student housing (26)
- Allow denser housing/multi-family housing (26)
- Ease special permit process (25)
- Incubation of start-ups (25)

Threats

- Failure to attract young adults (62)
- Lack of developable land (43)
- Strain on town services (28)
- Property tax (22)
- Competition from neighboring towns (17)

When asked what the Town can do for the business community, the two responses were Install sewer (21) and Assist with cyber-security (6). Jeff Morrisette received a response from a local businessman who couldn't attend the Westford Business Forum as follows: "I'm thrilled with the cooperation, professionalism and efforts of both the staff and the boards in Westford. Other towns would do well to emulate the way the Town of Westford conducts its business. If there's one place I think the permitting process could improve, it would be in the area of coordination between staff, boards and applicants to avoid unnecessary continuances and board face time. Applicants need to get feedback from staff with sufficient time to prepare comments, corrections or revisions prior to a scheduled meeting".

The complete results from the SWOT session, as well as the flyer, agenda and sign in sheets, are provided as an attachment to this brief memorandum. The results are summarized by category and the responses are listed by total dots and points based upon the values assigned to each dot. While these results do not represent a scientific sampling of the Westford business community, they do represent the views of the participants who attended the Westford Business Forum. We appreciate the support of the Town of Westford, the WEDC, the WBA and Netscout in making this event possible and believe that the participants appreciated your extensive efforts as well.

Westford Business Forum SWOT Session Results: 11-7-19

Strengths	Participant Priorities				Totals	
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	Dots	Points
Retail shopping centers	5	1	5	0	11	33
Access to highways	4	5	1	0	10	33
Good schools	5	1	1	1	8	26
Business friendly	5	0	2	2	9	26
Location	4	2	2	0	8	26
Strong town government	3	3	2	0	8	25
Amenities - restaurants, skiing, hotels, etc.	3	2	1	3	9	23
Citizen population with high-tech skills	4	1	1	0	6	21
Protected open space	3	0	3	0	6	18
Excellent EMS response times	0	2	5	1	8	17
Technology parks	2	1	2	0	5	15
Small town feel	1	0	3	5	9	15
Transparency	0	1	4	3	8	14
Housing stock & improving values	1	2	1	0	4	12
Convenience of services - daycare, dry-cleaning, etc.	1	1	2	1	5	12
Volunteerism/sense of community	0	1	2	2	5	9
Historic preservation	0	0	2	5	7	9
Recreation - golf, skiing, etc.	2	0	0	0	2	8
Availability of commercial property	1	0	1	1	3	7
Community Center	0	1	1	2	4	7
Master Plan	0	0	1	4	5	6

Weaknesses	Participant Priorities				Totals	
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	Dots	Points
Difficult, expensive & time consuming permitting process	10	1	0	1	12	44
Lack of sewer	6	4	2	3	15	43
Limited public transit	8	2	0	2	12	40
Getting variances	3	6	1	0	10	32
Lack of senior housing	4	3	0	3	10	28
Land cost	3	2	3	0	8	24
Lack of available land	2	2	3	0	7	20
Walkability	2	2	1	2	7	18
Lack of drive-thrus	3	1	0	0	4	15
Traffic - certain times of day	2	0	2	0	4	12

Westford Business Forum SWOT Session Results: 11-7-19

Opportunities	Participant Priorities				Totals	
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	Dots	Points
Public transit	4	5	1	1	11	34
Streamline permitting	2	6	2	0	10	30
College interns/student housing	5	2	0	0	7	26
Allow denser housing/multi-family housing	2	6	0	0	8	26
Ease special permit process	4	3	0	0	7	25
Incubation of start-ups	3	3	1	2	9	25
Innovative, flexible overlay districts	2	2	0	0	4	14
Take advantage of co-op education	1	0	2	0	3	8
Fill in empty commercial space	0	2	0	0	2	6
Assistance finding housing	0	1	0	0	1	3

Threats	Participant Priorities				Totals	
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	Dots	Points
Failure to attract young adults	11	6	0	0	17	62
Lack of developable land	4	8	0	3	15	43
Strain on town services	4	1	2	5	12	28
Property tax	0	4	4	2	10	22
Competition from neighboring towns	0	2	2	7	11	17
Traffic	0	4	0	3	7	15
Lack of senior housing	3	0	0	1	4	13
Relocation of businesses	0	2	1	1	4	9
School overcrowding	1	0	2	0	3	8
Economic slowdown	0	0	3	1	4	7
Increase in poverty level	0	1	0	2	3	5
Climate change	0	0	0	0	0	0
Transient population	0	0	0	0	0	0

What can the Town do?	Participant Priorities				Totals	
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	Dots	Points
Install sewer	2	3	2	0	7	21
Assist with cyber-security	0	0	3	0	3	6