

Steering Committee 2026-09-30

18:35(GMT-4:00)

Key Outcomes

The Norwich Village Plan Steering Committee held its kickoff meeting with the consulting firm Du Bois & King (D&K), represented by project manager Emily Lewis. The group confirmed three primary topic areas for the planning engagement — **housing and infrastructure, community building and historic village vibrancy**, and **bike/pedestrian safety and connectivity** — replacing an earlier framing around conservation/public access with a sharper focus on business and community vitality. The meeting established a compressed ~8-week public engagement timeline targeting completion before Thanksgiving, with two public charrettes as the centerpiece events. Key immediate next steps include a site visit on Tuesday, October 6, a follow-up Steering Committee meeting on Wednesday, October 14 at 6:30 p.m., and D&K delivering a draft elevator pitch and public participation plan by end of day the following day.

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Decisions Made

- **Three confirmed topic pillars** for the village plan: 3
 - **Housing and Infrastructure** (broad scope: water, wastewater, fire district, sidewalks, traffic calming, pedestrian infrastructure)
 - **Community Building / Historic Village Vibrancy** (Tracy Hall, library, baseball fields, Grange, town offices, public facilities)
 - **Bike/Pedestrian Safety and Connectivity** (road safety, crosswalks, sidewalk gaps, infrastructure connections)
- **Reframing of third topic:** Original proposal language of "conservation of public access to natural areas" was replaced with **business/community vibrancy**, reflecting committee consensus that Norwich already performs well on trail access and that downtown vitality and risk of business loss is the more pressing concern. 4 5 6
- **Preferred terminology:** "**Community building in the historic village**" or "**downtown vibrancy**" was chosen over the narrower "business vibrancy" to signal a broader scope that includes

public buildings and civic life, not just commercial enterprises. 7

- **Charrette format confirmed** as the primary public engagement mechanism — two design workshops where participants actively draw, write, and map ideas rather than passively receive presentations. 8
 - **Initial outreach approach:** Rather than a traditional ranked survey at this stage, the group decided on a **sticky-note / open-comment format** at public events to gather raw community concerns, deferring ranking and prioritization to the charrettes once concrete project concepts are developed. 9 10 11
 - **Open Meeting Law constraint acknowledged:** Collaborative live document editing (e.g., Google Docs with Steering Committee members) was ruled out due to OML compliance concerns; a point-person-collation model will be used instead — individuals send comments to Steven or Emily, who synthesize and redistribute. 12 13
 - **Project outcome framing:** The overarching goal was articulated as producing **actionable, prioritized goals and strategies** — not just a wish list — that the Planning Commission, Select Board, and Town Manager can be held accountable for implementing, tied to a capital planning framework. 14 15 16
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Project Scope & Goals Discussion

- **Core problem identified:** Norwich has historically generated planning ideas and community concerns but lacked a mechanism to convert them into a **ranked, funded, implementable capital plan**; this project aims to close that gap. 15 17
- **Capital planning integration:** The Planning Commission intends to take the statutory lead on capital planning, incorporating outputs of this village plan into the 2028 Town Plan rewrite, with Select Board and Finance Committee participation. 18
- **Desired deliverable structure** (modeled on Montpelier's approach): 19 20
 - Menu of solutions per topic area, rated by **priority** (high/medium/low) and **cost** (high/medium/low)
 - Items with high public interest + low cost + near-term feasibility move forward first
 - High-cost, high-interest items are tracked for incremental progress
 - Cost framing should reference **grants and funding sources** to avoid reflexive tax-increase concerns (e.g., noting 10–20% match requirements, or referencing the Beaver

Meadow scoping study cost breakdown of ~\$16/month per household) 19 21

- **Public-private partnerships** flagged as an important dimension — the Grange Hall project (~\$2M raised as a nonprofit) cited as a local proof point that town tax dollars are not the only path to implementation. 22
 - **Road safety as illustrative example** of how the process should work: collect pin-map input from residents on worst locations → generate array of solutions (road narrowing at crosswalks, surface treatments, new sidewalks) with cost estimates and funding sources → community selects top priorities. 23
 - **Charrette role clarified:** Charrettes are the venue for **ranking and threshold-setting** among a pre-developed menu of options — they work best when residents have already heard enough about the topics to advocate for specific ideas and trade off between them. 22 24
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Public Engagement Strategy

Public Participation Plan

- D&K will develop a **living Public Participation Plan and Engagement Strategy** document, starting immediately, covering: 25 26 27
 - Agreed elevator pitch / project introduction
 - Priority goals (shared language for all committee members and public-facing communications)
 - Project schedule with Steering Committee task assignments
 - Event-specific details: survey questions, invitation text, outreach owners, mailing logistics
- Draft to be sent to full Steering Committee for review; comments returned to a single point person (Steven or Emily) to synthesize — not circulated for live collaborative editing. 13

Elevator Pitch

- Must include: **why** the project exists, **what** the three topic areas are (one sentence each), **what** the desired outcome is (actionable goals + capital planning), and **how** people can get involved. 28 29

- Emily committed to drafting this by **end of day tomorrow**. 30

Initial Public Outreach (Pre-Charrette)

- Goal: gather raw community sentiment on the three topic areas to inform charrette structure and questions — not yet to rank solutions. 31 32
- **Format preference:** Open-ended sticky-note / comment boards at public events, asking "what is your concern in this area?" rather than forced-choice rankings, to avoid premature commitment to a hierarchy. 10 11
- **Targeted events identified:** 33 34
 - Elementary school picnic (Sunday — imminent)
 - Halloween street event in downtown Norwich (~4 weeks out; described as highest concentration of Norwich residents)
 - Farmer's Market (reaches a different demographic cohort)
 - Women's Club, Norwich Business Council, Historical Society — brief 3-minute presentations at their existing meetings to raise awareness and hand out one-pagers 35 36
- **Materials needed for tabling:** 29
 - Three poster boards (one per topic) with prompt questions
 - Stack of sticky notes
 - Printed one-pager with elevator pitch, QR code, and low-tech fallback (clipboard for email sign-up)
 - QR code linking to the Steering Committee page on the town website as the **single, persistent landing page** for all project information, surveys, and updates 37
- **QR code strategy:** Emily will generate the QR code; it will point to the town website Steering Committee page so the URL never needs to change as content is updated. 37 Printed QR code sheets (6–8 per page, cut up) can be handed out at events with no cell service (e.g., Marion Cross School). 38
- **Multi-channel amplification:** Listserv post, school Friday newsletter, Historical Society newsletter, Business Council newsletter, and other town organization mailings should all include the same link/QR code. 39

- **Survey caution (Brian's input):** Past Norwich surveys (e.g., postcard survey) produced vague, non-actionable results and couldn't be attributed to a representative population; surveys become more valuable when testing **specific project concepts** rather than gathering general sentiment. ⁴⁰ ⁴¹ Targeted stakeholder conversations early on are more useful for concept development. ⁴¹
 - **Demographic tracking:** Any survey or sign-up should include a few demographic questions to assess whether outreach is reaching a representative cross-section of the population (e.g., not skewing toward residents over 60). ⁴²
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Site Visit Planning

- **Date/Time:** Tuesday, October 6, 9:00 a.m. ⁴³
 - **Location:** Starting at Cole Flannery's business (Half Step Beer & Wine), which has outdoor picnic table space; Cole confirmed Monday/Tuesday mornings are available. ⁴⁴
 - **Format:** Approximately 2-hour walking visit; participants can come and go; D&K will bring two team members who can split to run parallel conversations if needed. ⁴³
 - **Who to invite (suggested):** Small group (~5 people) representing each topic area — e.g., Housing Committee chair (Brian's suggestion), business/commercial representatives, community building stakeholders. ⁴³ ⁴⁵ Full list to be curated by Steven with input from committee members; quality over quantity — 20 people would not be productive. ⁴³
 - **Purpose:** Allow D&K team to walk the village in the specific lens of this project, have grounded conversations with topic-area representatives, and review the physical context before designing charrette content. ⁴⁶ ⁴⁷
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Charrette Design Considerations

- **What a charrette is:** A design workshop where participants **actively draw or write** ideas on base maps and topic boards rather than listening to presentations; produces physical artifacts (maps, sketches, annotated diagrams) that represent community input. ⁸
- **Lunenburg example:** D&K is currently planning a similar workshop in Lunenburg (Northeast Kingdom) with three geographic groups, seven topic areas, base maps, and structured drawing exercises — offered as a reference model. ⁴⁸

- **Key unresolved question:** How to structure charrettes so that residents who care deeply about one issue (e.g., road safety) don't have to sit through the full multi-hour event to engage with their topic — whether to organize by issue with time-blocked segments, or another format. 49
- **Resolution approach:** Initial public outreach results will inform charrette structure; D&K will draft the format within the next few weeks, to be discussed at the October 14 meeting. 49
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- **Timeline pressure vs. quality:** Emily noted a preference for pushing charrettes into December if needed rather than rushing poorly attended or poorly designed events; committee agreed quality and attendance matter more than strict pre-Thanksgiving completion. 51

Scheduling & Next Steps

Item	Owner	Deadline/Date
Draft elevator pitch and project goals	Emily Lewis (D&K)	End of day tomorrow
Begin drafting Public Participation Plan outline	Emily Lewis (D&K)	This week
Site visit — walking tour of Norwich village	Emily + D&K team + Steering Committee reps	Tuesday, Oct 6, 9:00 a.m.
Curate site visit invitee list (~5 people, topic-representative)	Steven + committee members (Brian, Cole, others)	Before Oct 6
Table at elementary school picnic (Sunday)	Volunteer confirmed (Cole/Steven)	Sunday (imminent)
Set up Steering Committee landing page on town	Steven (coordinate with Emily)	ASAP — before Sunday event if possible

website		
Generate QR code pointing to town website landing page	Emily	Immediately
Next Steering Committee meeting	Full committee	Wednesday, Oct 14, 6:30 p.m.
Review past plans/studies relevant to project	D&K + Steven guidance on which to prioritize	Before Oct 14 meeting
Send examples of cost/priority matrices from other communities	Emily	Near-term (noted during meeting)

Open Questions & Risks

- **OML compliance for document collaboration:** Confirmed that live collaborative editing of documents by Steering Committee members likely constitutes a meeting under Vermont Open Meeting Law; workaround (point-person collation) adds iteration time but is necessary. [12](#) [13](#)
- **Representativeness of engagement:** Risk that outreach skews toward older, more civically active residents; demographic questions in any survey and targeted outreach to underrepresented groups (e.g., school-age parents, renters) are mitigation strategies. [32](#) [42](#)
- **Cell service at Marion Cross School:** No cell service available, so QR codes must be on printed handouts people can take home, not just displayed on a screen. [38](#)
- **Charrette attendance vs. topic specificity:** Unresolved tension between wanting broad attendance and the reality that many residents will only engage if their specific concern is on the agenda — structure TBD after initial outreach. [49](#)
- **Scope discipline:** Committee emphasized keeping focus to three topic areas and resisting expansion; the shift from conservation/public access to community vibrancy was deliberate to avoid dilution. [3](#) [5](#)

- **Capital plan integration timeline:** The Planning Commission's capital planning initiative is still nascent; the village plan outputs need to align with the 2028 Town Plan rewrite cycle to be institutionally effective. 18