

Date: Thursday, May 29, 2025

Notes Taken By: VHB

Place: Beech Street Center

Re: Belmont CP Public Meeting 01

ATTENDEES:

Luke Mitchell, VHB
Julia Mintz, VHB
Christa McGaha, VHB
Shreya Bishnoi, Karp Strategies
Belmont Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee
Belmont Community

Agenda

- › Christopher Ryan commenced the meeting and introduced the Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee.
- › Luke Mitchell and Julia Mintz presented a slide deck and provided an overview of the comprehensive planning process.
- › Following the presentation, attendees were asked to move around the room and visit all none of the input stations. Each station was associated with a different chapter of the comprehensive plan, as follows:
 - 01 Land Use
 - 02 Housing
 - 03 Economic Development
 - 04 Historic & Cultural Resources
 - 05 Community Cohesion
 - 06 Public Facilities
 - 07 Open Space and Recreation
 - 08 Resiliency & Climate
 - 09 Transportation & Mobility
- › Attendees were asked to provide comments on each subject, filling out sticky notes and sticking them to a flip-pad.

Findings

- › The event was well-attended, with around 50 attendees from the community.
- › The below comments represent input received from individual attendees during the public meeting. They reflect personal perspectives and ideas that may not be based on confirmed facts or represent widely held community views. All comments will be documented and considered as part of the broader public engagement process for the Comprehensive Plan. Comments are summarized as follows.

Land Use

At this station, participants viewed a flip chart displaying attendee feedback and a maps of land use and zoning in Belmont. Participants were encouraged to provide comments, prompted to place sticky notes on the map to reference specific locations in the town. Participant comments are summarized as follows.

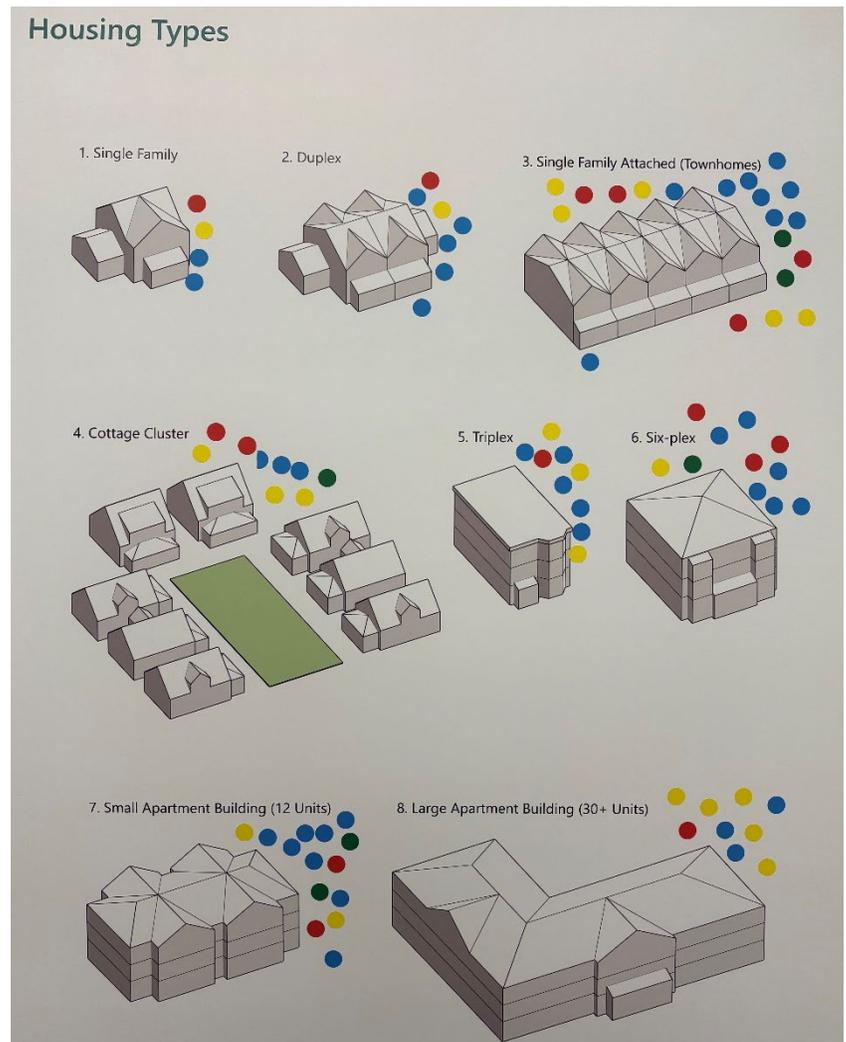
- › **Zoning Limitations:** Large portions of the town are zoned as single-family districts, which limits diversity and inclusivity in housing and land use.
- › **McClean/Tax Base:** Many offices linked to McLean are treated as non-profit, limiting their contribution to the commercial tax base.
- › **Health Facilities/Services:** There is interest in developing mental health-related services or facilities in the town. Residents currently travel outside Belmont for many medical services.
- › **Restaurant Parking:** Restaurants should have nearby parking options to improve accessibility.
- › **Retail Demand:** Community members want bike shops, doctors' offices, clothing stores, and walkable supermarkets. Residents expressed support for expanding retail, office space, and other commercial uses.
- › **Multi-Use Potential:** Allowing mixed-use development could help property owners recoup investments and support financial viability. Promote developments that combine residential and commercial uses near banks, salons, boutiques, dentists, and other services; currently, some spaces like the transformer site on Leonard Street are underutilized.
- › **Demand for Boutique Hotel:** There is community interest in adding a boutique hotel near the community path for visitors.
- › **Bicycle Infrastructure:** Innovative transportation like cable systems could help cyclists navigate steep terrain. Existing bike racks are limited and mostly concentrated/well-used at schools and the library. Continued improvements to bike paths and safe routes to schools are priorities.
- › **Public Gathering Spaces:** There are few communal gathering places, with Tatte café noted as a recent exception.
- › **Trapelo Corridor Potential:** This area could support more commercial and mixed-use activity, benefiting local businesses through increased foot traffic.
- › **Concord Avenue Potential:** Heavy commuter traffic and cut-through issues detract from neighborhood quality and potential commercial uses.
- › **Route 2 Potential:** Aside from a gas station, there is little to no commercial presence along Route 2.
- › **Waverly Square Potential:** Improvements could include signage, public art, expanded green space, and attracting cafés or restaurants; well-suited for e-bike usage. In general, encourage better use of existing neighborhood squares and commercial nodes.
- › **Opportunities for Increased Density:** There is openness to more density, especially in single-family residential zones like the SRA district and Brighton Street area, with potential for added retail and mixed-use buildings. There is general support for building "up" (more stories) rather than out.
- › **Balance Growth/Small-Town Character:** Any development should maintain Belmont's neighborhood feel while increasing commercial tax revenue.
- › **Need for Affordable Housing:** Young residents need affordable housing options near Belmont Center and Waverly, alongside more community events at Waverly.

Housing

At this station, participants viewed a flip chart displaying attendee feedback and a map of employment in Belmont. Participants also viewed an interactive board, soliciting feedback regarding which types of housing are needed most in Belmont. Participants were encouraged to provide comments, prompted to place sticky notes on the map to reference

specific locations in the town, and prompted to vote regarding various housing types. Participant comments are summarized as follows.

- › **Need for Senior Housing:** There is demand for more housing options that allow seniors to downsize comfortably within the community. There is a particular need to provide affordable housing tailored for seniors. Housing with elevators and other accessibility features is needed to help seniors downsize comfortably.
- › **Potential for Three-Family Homes:** There is opportunity to introduce 3-family homes designed within typical single-family layouts to increase housing variety.
- › **Call for Increased Affordability/Density:** There is support for expanding affordable and deep affordable housing and increasing housing diversity/density to better meet demand. Housing affordability should address a wide range of incomes to provide equitable access. Affordability concerns encompass not just rent or purchase price but also brokers' fees, mortgage payments, PMI, insurance, utilities, and maintenance.
- › **Preference for Vertical Growth:** Residents encourage building upward rather than expanding outward to preserve land and community character. Adding residential units above commercial properties is favored to maximize space and create vibrant, walkable neighborhoods.
- › **Support for Mixed-Uses:** More mixed-use projects combining housing with commercial and retail uses are desired.
- › **Height Limits in Belmont Center:** There is potential to limit building heights to 2.5–3 stories to maintain neighborhood scale, given the short length of Belmont Center street. However, taller buildings could better capitalize on valuable land. There is not consensus on the issue of building height limits in Belmont Center, requiring further discussion.

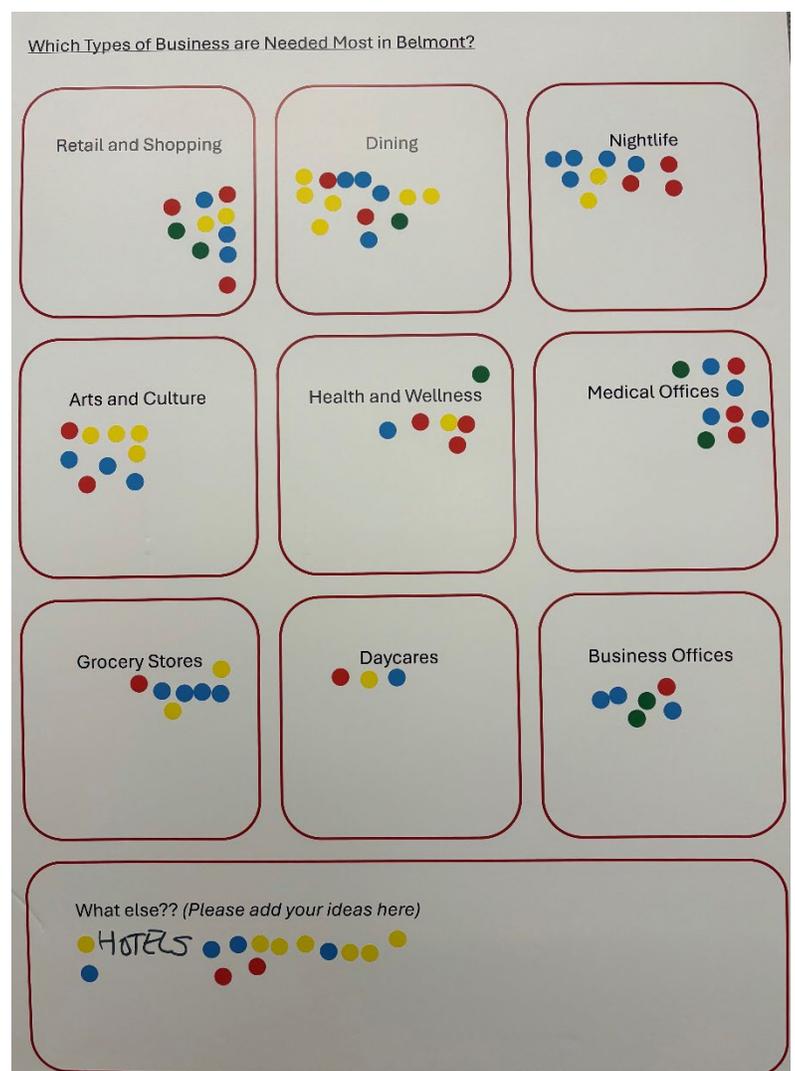


Interactive Board: Housing Types

Economic Development

At this station, participants viewed a flip chart displaying attendee feedback and a map of employment in Belmont. Participants also viewed an interactive board, soliciting feedback regarding which types of business are needed most in Belmont. Participants were encouraged to provide comments, prompted to place sticky notes on the map to reference specific locations in the town, and prompted to vote regarding various business types. Participant comments are summarized as follows.

- › **Economic Needs:** Participants want stable, high-paying businesses, including a speakeasy and small performance venues, that build on McLean Hospital’s reputation and attract visitors from outside the town. Residents currently leave Belmont for destination dining, yoga, restaurants/bars, and permanent farmers markets.
- › **Desired Business Types:** Suggested businesses include boutique hotels (Purecoat site), small grocery stores in Belmont Center, neighborhood corner stores to reduce car trips, and natural areas, and ecotourism leveraging Rock Meadow and Belmont Acre Farm.
- › **Businesses to Avoid:** Overconcentration of nail salons and hairdressers is discouraged; insufficient parking to support economic development is a concern; and caution against becoming a “town of banks.”
- › **Parking Considerations:** Expanding and improving parking, especially vertical parking, is essential to support business expansion and accessibility. Convert single-level parking areas into mixed-use developments and discourage new surface parking lots.
- › **Airbnb as a Revenue Source:** The town could explore generating revenue from existing short-term rental operations such as Airbnb. However, doing so would require the development of a local bylaw and substantial administrative oversight to manage enforcement and compliance.
- › **Belmont’s Commercial Strengths:** Quality schools and proximity to Boston are key attractions for residents and businesses alike.
- › **Retail Along Key Routes:** Concord Avenue and Route 2 are seen as missed opportunities; retail and commercial development should focus on existing traffic corridors.
- › **Major Institutions/Tax Revenue:** There is a desire for McLean Hospital and Belmont Hill School to contribute fairly to the town’s tax base.



Interactive Board: Which Types of Businesses are Needed Most in Belmont?

- › **Family/Teen-Friendly Businesses:** Support for businesses that offer activities and spaces for teens and kids to stay engaged.
- › **Gathering Spaces:** Seasonal events in public spaces are encouraged to increase community engagement and visitor attraction.
- › **Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Enhancements:** Near commuter rail stations, there is support for restaurants with entertainment, mixed-use developments with active businesses, and moderate-price multifamily housing to attract young professionals and families.
- › **Business-Friendly Zoning:** Less restrictive zoning is needed to facilitate business growth and reduce vacancies.
- › **Infrastructure Needs:** More bike racks, disability access, and quiet spaces for neurodiverse and elderly populations are important to support an inclusive business environment.
- › **Potential in Belmont Center:** The vision includes multiple destinations in Belmont Center to encourage visitors to spend the day with various options.
- › **Increase Density:** Support for adding more housing and commercial spaces, especially by building over underutilized parking lots like those on Claflin Street and near Star Market.

Historic & Cultural Resources

At this station, participants viewed a flip chart displaying attendee feedback, and a map of recorded historic resources in Belmont. Participants were encouraged to provide comments and prompted to place sticky notes on the map to reference specific locations in the town. Participant comments are summarized as follows.

- › **Historic District Commission:** The Belmont Historic District Commission is key to preserving the town's historic character.
- › **Belmont Center Concerns:** Residents in the Pleasant Street Historic District worry that development plans may threaten Belmont's historic identity.
- › **Historic Character at Risk:** There is concern that Belmont's historic fabric and "historicity" could be compromised without careful stewardship.
- › **Community Cohesion Through Arts:** Ideas include volunteer-led town beautification projects (like Winchester), arts walks, and banner programs like Newton's.
- › **Local Arts Champions:** Belmont benefits from passionate individuals who lead specific arts and cultural projects.
- › **Historic House Tours:** The town has previously hosted tours of historic homes, showing potential for tourism and engagement.
- › **Flexibility in Historic Preservation Materials:** Advocates suggest updating rules to allow modern materials (e.g., PVC) that perform better than traditional wood, especially for town buildings.
- › **Adaptive Reuse of Historic Buildings:** Encouragement to update historic buildings for contemporary uses, such as the Belmont Women's Club.
- › **Small Venue Cultural Events:** Expanding offerings like the "2nd Friday Concerts" with a compiled list of venues and events is desired.
- › **Recreation/Arts Collaboration:** Potential for partnerships to share space, promote events, and support the arts community.
- › **Inclusive Definition of Culture:** Expanding "cultural" to embrace minorities and immigrants as integral to Belmont's community fabric.
- › **Artist/Cultural Directory:** Propose creating a volunteer-maintained directory and calendar of artists, venues, and events to coordinate cultural activities.
- › **Maker Spaces:** Provide spaces for artists and makers to meet, create, and collaborate on projects.
- › **Tourism as a Revenue Generator:** Consider volunteer-led tours to highlight arts and history, generating funds for the town.
- › **Regular Arts Days:** Host Arts Day events multiple times per year to showcase local artists, performers, and cultural opportunities.

Community Cohesion

At this station, participants viewed a flip chart displaying attendee feedback, and a diagram of leadership, staff, boards, and committees in Belmont. Participants were encouraged to provide comments and prompted to place sticky notes on the map to reference specific locations in the town. Participant comments are summarized as follows.

- › **Inclusive Public Outreach:** Many residents are unaware of the Comprehensive Plan process; broader, more inclusive outreach is needed.
- › **Virtual Engagement Tools:** Use online platforms like “virtual town halls” to increase participation and accessibility. Virtual town halls are live, web-based meetings that allow residents to watch presentations, ask questions, and provide feedback in real time from any location.
- › **Community Demographics:** Share current demographic data in local media and online to dispel myths and present an accurate picture of Belmont today.
- › **Expand Voting Rights:** Consider extending voting rights to all residents, including non-citizens, to foster inclusion.
- › **Waverly Square Potential:** Develop a welcoming bar or community hub and increase events in Waverly to strengthen economic and social vitality. A model for this could be Remnant Brewing at Bow Market in Somerville, which serves as both a social anchor and economic driver within a mixed-use public space.
- › **Transparent Engagement:** Increase outreach efforts and transparency around town spending to build trust and involvement.
- › **Local Election Participation:** Make voting more meaningful and encourage turnout by showing residents how their voices impact decisions.
- › **Civic Education:** Engage and educate residents about town government and civic affairs at key milestones, such as when they move to Belmont or when their children enter kindergarten. Consider establishing a local civic leadership training program to build long-term community capacity and encourage broader participation in town boards and initiatives.
- › **Improve Town Website:** Redesign the website for clarity, removing jargon, and provide clear contacts for committees and resources.
- › **Later Hours for Social Venues:** Extend hours for restaurants, concert venues, and bars to foster community connection.
- › **Targeted Outreach Channels:** Use platforms like WeChat to reach specific populations such as Chinese residents.
- › **Balance Preservation/Vibrancy:** Address tensions between maintaining a “town of homes” character and energizing commercial and social nodes.
- › **Sustainable Organizations:** Develop institutions that don’t rely on a few individuals for continuity and success.
- › **Neighborhood Social Events:** Support block parties, “Meet Belmont,” town-wide yard sales, and other activities to build neighborly connections.
- › **Meeting Planning/Facilitation:** Offer training on meeting facilitation, conflict resolution, outreach, and agenda setting for more effective community engagement.
- › **Inclusivity in Access:** Ensure town events and outreach are accessible and inclusive for people with disabilities and neurodiverse individuals.
- › **Foster Respectful Dialogue:** Encourage respectful communication, discourage bullying, and promote transparency in decision-making processes.
- › **Visibility of Community Committees:** Include entities like the Housing Trust visibly under community-focused committees for better awareness.
- › **Meeting Outreach/Purpose Clarity:** Provide clear information about meeting goals and relevance to all

residents, including renters and newcomers. Use paper signs in high-traffic areas like Star Market and Starbucks on Leonard Street for broader reach.

Public Facilities & Services

At this station, participants viewed a flip chart displaying attendee feedback, and a map of public facilities in Belmont. Participants were encouraged to provide comments and prompted to place sticky notes on the map to reference specific locations in the town. Participant comments are summarized as follows.

- › **Sidewalk Repairs:** Some sidewalks need repair or improvement, especially in areas prone to flooding.
- › **Public Facilities Mapping:** Some facilities are mislabeled or inconsistently represented on town maps (e.g., WL Cheney Upper Elementary, Montessori Day School, combined middle/high school).
- › **Youth Gathering Spaces:** Increased spaces for middle and high school students to gather, with the updated library seen as a key opportunity.
- › **Town Website Accessibility:** Update and reorganize the town website to make facility and service information easier to find and use.
- › **Open House Events for New Facilities:** Schedule public tours so residents can see and appreciate the new facilities they fund.
- › **Pool Access:** The Underwood Pool season is too short and could be lengthened to serve the community better. The high school pool was previously public but is now less accessible due to security concerns.
- › **Maintenance Needs:** Public green islands are currently unmanaged and need attention. Improve cleanliness and convenience in public spaces, including providing more trash bins along popular dog walking routes.
- › **DPW Capacity:** More Department of Public Works staff are needed to maintain infrastructure and public facilities properly.
- › **Sidewalks/Roads Maintenance:** Infrastructure needs repairs with accountability measures like markers identifying repair contractors. Repair crumbling streets and improve pedestrian infrastructure for student safety. Invest in asphalt curbs to prevent road deterioration, focusing on streets like Gilbert Road and Baystate Road.
- › **Demand for Dog Park:** There is also support for a fenced dog park separate from playing fields.
- › **Benton Library as a Community Resource:** The library should remain open as a quiet meeting space and for broader community uses after the new library opens.
- › **Inter-Department Communication:** Improve collaboration among Town departments to ensure more efficient use and scheduling of facilities. This could include holding regular interdepartmental planning meetings and developing a unified facilities master plan to guide capital investments, maintenance, and shared use agreements.
- › **Facility Needs:** Need for “third spaces,” or informal gathering spaces such as coffee houses and other venues to build social connections. Address Facility Needs of Asian Residents – About 20% of the population is Asian, yet community facilities and amenities do not reflect this diversity.
- › **Support Community Events:** Encourage events like fairs, concerts, parades, and parties to build community spirit. Use public facilities like the ice-skating rink for diverse community events beyond their primary use. Offer multiple open house events and tours for new and existing public buildings to increase community engagement.
- › **Increase Use of Private School Resources:** Encourage private schools like Belmont Hill to contribute more space and resources to the community.
- › **More EV Charging Stations Needed:** Improve functionality of existing electric vehicle chargers and expand availability.
- › **Introduce Block Party Kits:** Simplify community gatherings with kits that include permitting assistance and supplies.

- › **Education Considerations:** Continue to prioritize high-quality education. Education has unique issues warranting its own detailed section apart from public facilities and services.

Open Space & Recreation

At this station, participants viewed a flip chart displaying attendee feedback and a map of open space ownership in Belmont. Participants were encouraged to provide comments and prompted to place sticky notes on the map to reference specific locations in the town. Participant comments are summarized as follows.

- › **Resource Awareness:** Promote knowledge about existing natural resources, including Belmont Acres Farm and Rock Meadow, which currently have low awareness.
- › **Accessibility/Inclusivity:** Ensure open spaces are accessible to all ages and abilities; support aging in place with tools like accessory dwelling units (ADUs).
- › **Specific Site Needs:** The area near the library could be enhanced. Boating and fishing access points at Little Pond need better marking and improved public access, including spots for canoes/kayaks. Claypit Pond could benefit from amenities like a café or kiosk.
- › **Preservation/Maintenance Needs:** Address maintenance needs at Beaver Brook (bathrooms) and athletic fields with environmentally friendly practices (organic maintenance, prioritize grass over turf). Manage issues related to invasive species, trash, rats, and dog waste with volunteer-led programs and improved reporting systems.
- › **Environmental Concerns:** Address stormwater and sewage contamination. Use nature-based solutions such as permeable pavement to improve sustainability.
- › **Programming Potential:** Expand events at Rock Meadow, particularly for younger children, leveraging existing volunteer interest. Increase public interaction with natural habitats through education and programming.
- › **Infrastructure Improvements:** Develop and repair sidewalks as safe, accessible exercise routes. Improve bike infrastructure and add bus shelters to support multimodal transit and recreation. Increase walkability, connectivity, and wayfinding signage within open spaces.
- › **Management/Funding:** Create a clear framework mapping open space resources, amenities, and activities, as well as responsible parties for maintenance. Explore monetization opportunities for resources to fund maintenance. Review and rebalance Community Preservation Act (CPA) funds allocation for open space.
- › **Dog-Friendly Spaces:** Clarify dog-friendly areas and usage times. Establish a dedicated fenced dog park. Consider increasing dog permit fees to support maintenance.
- › **Land Use Concerns:** Challenge open space tax breaks for places like Belmont Country Club. Monitor potential encroachment of Belmont Hill School on Audubon lands.
- › **Visitor Management:** Develop a permit system for out-of-town visitors to better manage impact and resources.

Resiliency & Climate

At this station, participants viewed a flip chart displaying attendee feedback and a map of land elevation in Belmont. Participants were encouraged to provide comments and prompted to place sticky notes on the map to reference specific locations in the town. Participant comments are summarized as follows.

- › **Flooding/Stormwater Management:** Address flooding risk near Waverly Square station. Improve structurally unsound drainage infrastructure to better handle extreme weather. Mitigate mixed sewer and stormwater contamination issues.
- › **Climate Risk Reduction:** Develop strategies to mitigate the impacts of drought, flooding, and extreme weather through resilient land use planning and infrastructure investments. Incorporate climate adaptation and mitigation goals into zoning regulations and comprehensive planning efforts to better prepare for and respond to future climate risks.
- › **Waste Management:** Implement free or curbside compost pickup programs, modeled after Cambridge. Explore weekly recycling pickup combined with trash disposal based on weight (trash-by-the-pound).
- › **Energy/Emissions:** Continue building net-zero municipal buildings. Improve infrastructure for electric vehicles, including more public charging stations and facilities for electric school buses. Advocate for state rebates or incentives for locally sourced renewable energy.
- › **Tree Canopy/Green Infrastructure:** Protect and expand the tree canopy with supportive by-laws. Increase maintenance efforts to control invasive plant species such as knotweed, which are widespread and currently unmanaged.
- › **Regional Collaboration:** Coordinate with neighboring towns for shared emergency services, street sweeping, and maintenance to improve efficiency and resilience.
- › **Community Leadership:** Foster climate leadership within town government and the community. Integrate town and school climate and facility efforts to avoid duplication.
- › **Transportation:** Expand town transit connections to MBTA, including rideshare and carpool programs.

Transportation & Mobility

At this station, participants viewed a flip chart displaying attendee feedback, and maps of roadway and transit networks in Belmont. Participants were encouraged to provide comments and prompted to place sticky notes on the map to reference specific locations in the town. Participant comments are summarized as follows.

- › **Sustainable Transit:** Support electric buses or streetcars and increase electric vehicle chargers, especially on Leonard Street and at multi-family housing, to promote greener transportation options. Explore small bus/shuttle services circulating around town, similar to Lexington's "LexPress," to increase local transit mobility.
- › **Cycling Safety/Infrastructure:** Improve bike lane safety with continuous lanes, buffers from cars, and better connectivity, especially along Concord Ave and to Belmont Center, to encourage biking for families and commuters.
- › **Pedestrian Safety:** Enhance walkability with better-maintained sidewalks, more visible crosswalks (e.g., flashing lights, signage), and fixing broken pedestrian signals like near the police station for safer crossings.
- › **Traffic Calming Measures:** Implement serious speed tables (not just small bumps) on major roads such as Prospect Street; introduce slow zones near schools; consider calibrated signals; and manage truck routes to avoid residential streets.
- › **Intersection Challenges:** Address congestion and safety concerns at key spots like the Leonard Street bridge, Waverly mill/Trapelo, Mill/Concord intersection, and rotary after the bridge with improved traffic flow and calming.
- › **Connectivity/Accessibility:** Improve connections between bike paths, schools, and stations; maintain ADA accessibility at stations, buses, and sidewalks; and expand bicycle rack availability in Belmont Center, Waverly, and transit stations.
- › **Wayfinding:** Continue support for the Community Path and develop clear maps or markers to identify safe and preferred walking and biking routes throughout town.
- › **Cut-Through Traffic:** Consider tolls or other methods to limit cut-through traffic, which affects neighborhood streets.
- › **Commuter Rail Access:** Improved links between northern and southern parts of town would enhance access to commuter rail. A shuttle or bus to Alewife station would reduce driving and improve transit connections (per 2021 ULI report).