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MEMO

TO: Barnstable Town Council
FROM: David Colton, Senior Associate
DATE: September 29, 2025
RE: Workshop #1 Results

Thank you for the opportunity to facilitate the Town Council's strategic plan review. Margaret Arsenault and I facilitated the first of two workshops on Thursday September 11, 2025. The second workshop is scheduled for Thursday October 16, 2025. The first workshop included some team-building exercises around shared values and consensus building exercises around Barnstable's perceived internal strengths and weaknesses and external opportunities and challenges.

Councilors listed a number of values that have importance to each of them. Councilors valued personal qualities such as honesty, integrity, curiosity, kindness, empathy, selflessness, and having a positive outlook highly with honesty, selflessness, and taking care to do no harm ranking among the values they share as a group. Organizational qualities like team work, competence, data-driven problem solving, inclusivity, open communication, and community awareness were also highly valued.

The Collins Center conducted an anonymous online survey of department managers and board and committee chairs asking them to list Barnstable's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Challenges (SWOC) and provided the results to the Council prior to the workshop. Additionally, a worksheet was distributed to Councilors asking them to list the 3 most important of each strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges. In all, Councilors listed approximately 80 (attached) SWOC characteristics. Both groups were able to clearly articulate strengths, weaknesses, and challenges but had difficulty with opportunities.

Following some clarification, Councilors were each tasked with identifying an opportunity that the town could pursue that was external to town government or did not yet exist in the town government. Opportunities identified included:

- Establishing an Architectural Review Board.
- Achieve Green Community designation.
- Perform a comprehensive analysis of public and private lands for development.
- Explore regional solutions for solid waste management and recycling.
- Achieve Seasonal Community designation.

- Develop partnerships with various public and private entities.¹
- Negotiate PILOT agreements with tax exempt property owners.

To reach consensus on a list of strengths, weaknesses, and challenges the Council was divided into three working groups. Each group was assigned one of the remaining SWOC category and tasked with developing a list of the five most important while considering the online survey and worksheet responses. Each group was asked to present its list to the larger group for discussion. The most important in each category were:

Strengths

- A professional and talented staff.
- A solid financial base.
- Excellent reputation.
- The economic, healthcare, and transportation center of Cape Cod.
- A strong and diverse community.
- The form of government.

Weaknesses

- Prevalence of misinformation in the community due to limited local journalism and the dominance of social media.
- Capital demands that outstrip financial capacity.
- Housing affordability.
- Lack of a cohesive strategy to address the town's needs.
- Water quality including PFAS in drinking water, and fresh and saltwater resource degradation.

Challenges

- Growth of short-term rentals and second homeowners limiting housing options.
- Lack of good effluent disposal options.
- Decentralized water districts (5) hampering ability to ensure clean drinking water.
- Obtaining funding for wastewater treatment projects.
- Reliance on new real estate tax growth without alternative revenue options creates a fealty to development.
- Maintaining property values.
- Harnessing technology.

The second workshop will use these values, strengths, weakness, opportunities, and challenges to inform revision to the current strategic plan. A memo will be sent in the coming days to help guide the October 16 workshop. Please do not hesitate to reach out with any comments, questions, or suggestions.

¹ Possible partners included Cape Cod Community College, Cape Cod Healthcare, The Steamship Authority, and Barnstable Airport.

