

SIFOC Public Comment Report:

Since our first meeting in May of 2019 SIFOC has welcomed comment from elected officials the superintendent of Framingham Public Schools and residents through our scheduled meetings as well as 2 public hearings on September 23rd and October 7th. During that time we have heard thoughts ideas and opinions on many issues in our community. We have collected what seem to be the most pressing issues to our city at this time again as generated from the public.

We submit this to the mayor as well as council and school committee to supplement the mayor's office drafting of the strategic plan in 2020, as outlined in the Home Rule Charter.

1. Economic Development

The most common thread from all constituencies has been status of economic development in Framingham. There is concern that Framingham is not doing enough on this topic to generate revenue in order to have the resources that Framingham needs for schools, public works and general quality of life without further raising residential taxes.

Issues include:

- Attracting new businesses to Framingham & encouraging the growth of current businesses in Framingham
- Launching a specific marketing campaign on why businesses should be attracted to Framingham while we are in competition with other commonwealth towns and cities.
- Clear plan on how to revitalize blighted and empty shopping plazas
- Addressing public safety concerns Downtown with loitering, drug issues, violence, etc to help sustain the commerce we are seeing there.
- A clear plan for the increase in shift in e-commerce and potential loss of rented retail space/commercial tax income.

2. Transportation/Traffic

Traffic and transportation touches every aspect of quality of life in Framingham. It is causing frustration and anger amongst residents and it can be seen as a deterrent for businesses and potential residents coming into Framingham.

Issues include:

- Comprehensive city-wide traffic study needs to be conducted with a timeline of deliverables to improve quality of life as well as address safety concerns, and alleviate some school bussing pressure.
- Public Transportation will change substantially in the next decade. How will Framingham adapt to these changes, we need to think big about how we can better move people around our city. I.e: Expanding MWRTA, increase bus service to Boston, expanding bike paths/embracing safe streets program, may include working with CSX to maximize possibilities.
- Address concerns about Downtown/Commuter Rail parking (CSX space, Pearl street garage, Danforth Building)

3. Municipal

We have heard from several counselors shedding light on Framingham's pension and healthcare liabilities for its retirees and employees, infrastructure planning and overall budget staffing concerns.

Issues include:

- Regarding pensions & healthcare, how will we financially maintain our promise to our past and present city employees, while fulfilling our statutory requirements.
- Addressing plans to pay off debt, including water infrastructure costs while continuing to pay for infrastructure investments.
- Review Blue Ribbon Commission report, evaluate the status of municipal buildings and develop a plan on each building's use and future.
- How can we best streamline government & school divisions to mitigate the duplicate areas.

4. Education

We have heard from parents, the superintendent, the school committee as well as the general public and see the focus as continuing to address inequities, bussing, and overall school performance.

Issues Include:

- Plan for the expansion of high quality early education for all students
- Plan for the future of elementary schools community-wide
- Address concerns about bussing

5. Housing/Affordability

Framingham's housing concerns are diverse in that we need to consider apartment planning, senior housing, housing stock for the varying generations and retaining our current residents by offering more options. The city needs to take a close look at the increasing water and sewer rates, and tax split affecting commercial and residential properties.

- Develop a housing strategy for the city taking into account the impact apartments will have on our schools, traffic, public services and overall quality of life in our city. Explore the possibility of converting some city buildings/old schools into affordable condos.
- Review zoning and planning by-laws.
- Review Residential vs. commercial tax rate. Look deeply into the option of residential tax exemption and the ramifications it would have on our current residents as well as review water/sewer rates

6. Art/Culture/Recreation

Framingham is home to many vibrant art and culture organizations, museums, and parks and open spaces. While we are fortunate to have these assets, Framingham needs to do more to bring groups together, maintain and expand the spaces we have and expand quality of life opportunities.

- Expand and maintain recreational spaces and parks, including updating Mary Dennison Park, build a splash pad or public pool, dog parks and update neighborhood parks.
- Explore uses for municipal buildings, such as Nevins Hall, for the arts, like an orchestra in residence or public art displays.
- Investigate the potential of adopting the Community Preservation Act, in order for Framingham to have dedicated funding for such projects that preserve and improve our open spaces.

7. Environment

Framingham has a dedicated interest in not only our footprint here in Framingham but our effect on the globe. We have several opportunities for improvement here.

Issues Include:

- Explore the opportunities for solar in our municipal buildings, parking lots and open spaces.

- Addressing environmental justice sites, especially below Route 135.

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- How to better manage our recycling programs within Framingham and the costs associated
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8. Financial:

Framingham should review its debt & financial policies to ensure maximum financial flexibility for its operations.

- Town to prepare rolling 4 yr. Financial Plan/ Budgets (OK to show deficits in “out” years)
- Budgeting to include “true” cost of Pensions & Post-retirement costs by individual member & (calculated [at a minimum] to not increase the City’s liability.)
- Review ability to issue Water & Sewer Revenue debt (to finance W&S projects and provide financial flexibility for General Obligation Debt.
- Review ability to issue Lease/Appropriation Debt.

9. Opportunities

Framingham is home to several major corporations. Strategic partnerships with these firms offers opportunities to benefit The companies have often contributed to local schools and events, but coordinated city led partnership(s) have not been created or maintained. The city has the ability to offer incentives, publicity and in return receive expertise or services.

- Dedicate resources to programatically pursue partnerships at an executive level
- Create proposals where all parties benefit
- Create a leadership council with CEO representatives from Ameresco, TJX, Cumberland Farms, Bose, Staples IDC etc.

