

PLANNING BERLIN'S FUTURE

Summary of Community Meetings

Thank you for participating in one of the recent community meetings to help plan Berlin's future. This report provides a summary of recurring themes and suggestions from the four sessions. The Mayor and Town Council will use the information provided at the community meetings to develop a strategic plan that will guide action over the next three years. Nearly 125 people participated in the four meetings.

What participants LOVE about Berlin...

- ✓ Its strong sense of community, collaborative spirit, friendliness, charm, and community pride
- ✓ An active Main Street with local, independent businesses; year-round Main Street events that encourage community camaraderie
- ✓ A town that is anchored in the arts
- ✓ A family-oriented, kid-friendly place
- ✓ A progressive place that maintains a respect for and awareness of its history; a small town that is not small minded
- ✓ High-quality schools
- ✓ A safe place

Berlin is changing in the following ways

- ✓ Developing a stronger identity—a cool town which is getting cooler
- ✓ Becoming a more popular destination for visitors/tourists, businesses, and new residents
- ✓ Growing through annexation and increased population
- ✓ Changing age demographics—more young people moving in with new ideas/new interests as well as older people with different needs
- ✓ Population growth and new development in the region which will affect Berlin
- ✓ More independent businesses leading to a vibrant, high-occupancy downtown
- ✓ A more environmentally and recreationally minded population
- ✓ A technologically progressive and connected town—municipal Wi-Fi, town-wide alert system
- ✓ Character and quality may be fraying at the edges; may be losing the old-fashioned fellowships
- ✓ Change in government leadership that has facilitated positive change

In 20 years, we hope Berlin will be

- ✓ A vibrant, affordable, accessible, and safe place for all with a still-strong sense of community, traditions, and historic identity
- ✓ The same but more economically self-sufficient
- ✓ A model of sustainable living in terms of energy, water, and “doing it right”
- ✓ Family friendly, kid friendly, senior friendly, and more bike and pedestrian friendly
- ✓ A great place to live, work, and play with more nearby, better-paying jobs, modern recreation options for youth, a still-pristine historic district, improved transportation

options, and a boundary that is sustainable and a tax structure that supports the town and doesn't encourage sprawl

- ✓ A vibrant arts and entertainment center
- ✓ Proactive, intentional, and thoughtful in planning its future including how much the town will grow (or not grow in terms of population)
- ✓ A more united town with less division between east and west

Participants worry about

- ✓ Growing too fast without proper planning; annexation moving too quickly leading to neglecting parts of the town or increased crime because of insufficient public safety resources
- ✓ Outside investment that might make Berlin more like Ocean City; large new development that doesn't identify with the town; having more franchises than local stores; becoming a tourist destination rather than a hometown
- ✓ Traffic congestion and the need for more parking
- ✓ Losing the small-town feel, but don't want to stunt the town's growth in order to maintain it
- ✓ Gentrification of lower-income neighborhoods; becoming so trendy that we price ourselves out of our hometown
- ✓ Getting complacent
- ✓ Taxes and electric utility costs getting too high; seniors being taxed out of the community
- ✓ The need for year-round, accessible recreation options for kids
- ✓ Unequal distribution of town funds
- ✓ Preserving open space as the community changes

The following actions would make Berlin a better place

- ✓ Getting rid of the "Berlin wall" that divides the town between east and west
- ✓ Building a walkway or bikeway over Route 113 to bring both sides of the community together
- ✓ Indoor/outdoor community sports complex; open-space recreation for kids; a community park for everyone
- ✓ Safe place to skateboard
- ✓ Becoming more bike friendly
- ✓ Enforcing town codes particularly related to abandoned properties
- ✓ Undeveloped green belt perimeter around the town with a recreation trail
- ✓ Sidewalks at least on one side of every road
- ✓ Making the town utility more financially sound; reduce electric bills
- ✓ Consider zoning changes that are needed to maintain a vibrant community
- ✓ More transportation connections and choices
- ✓ Create more opportunities for civic engagement where residents can get together to talk

What could Berlin stop doing without being missed?

- ✓ Stop separating the town—having black and white sides of town. We need one Berlin
- ✓ Stop annexations until the town does a full inventory of what we already have

- ✓ Stop the fire siren
- ✓ Stop subsidizing new development
- ✓ Spraying pesticide for mosquitoes
- ✓ Stop allowing sandwich boards on Main Street
- ✓ Stop allowing open alcohol on the street
- ✓ Possibly rethink the frequency and location of community events downtown – distribute events to other parts of town
- ✓ Stop leaving Main Street open for Halloween – close it
- ✓ Stop allowing larger homes to be subdivided into apartments; manage rentals and enforce regulations

Strategic Issues and Opportunities

The top **five** priorities based on votes over the four meetings were:

- ✓ Increase parks and recreation facilities
- ✓ Preserve Berlin’s traditions, quality of life, “wow” factor while prospering and changing
- ✓ Enhance/maintain public safety services
- ✓ Invest in public buildings, roads, sidewalks, water and sewer pipes to ensure they function well and meet state/federal regulations
- ✓ Promote economic development and increase employment options

The Mayor and Town Council are reviewing the more detailed input under each priority as they begin to develop a strategic plan. The following sections highlight some of the recurring suggestions:

#1 Variety of Housing

- Quality and affordable housing that ensures long-term residents
- Innovative, affordable housing options for seniors including mixed age, assisted living
- Occupancy of foreclosed/vacant homes; eliminating boarded-up housing; use vacant houses for community projects; enforce zoning codes on all properties
- Consider zoning changes to accommodate housing variety; integrate variety of housing throughout the town
- Providing grants to low-income residents for home improvements

#2 Transportation Options

- Safe bike and pedestrian walkways
- Pedestrian and bicycle access across Route 113
- Consistent public transportation downtown
- Free circulator bus or trolley connection through east and west Berlin and areas within the town; local shuttle service
- In-town free transportation for seniors
- Become a bicycle-friendly town–small bike racks throughout town; connectivity to Assateague, Ocean Pines, Ocean City; biking trails; direct bike path to/from Ocean City

#3 Town Electric Utility

- Become a solar city and pass on savings to residents
- Provide incentives for alternative energy; explore self-sustaining energy source
- Assess whether the town should be in the electric business
- Affordable electric rates; lower electric rates

#4 Public Buildings, Roads, Sidewalks, Water and Sewer Pipes

- Improve multi-purpose building
- Better street lighting especially around apartment complexes and on back roads
- Add sidewalks where needed; repair broken sidewalks; more cross walks
- Improved stormwater management; use stormwater utility funds to reduce flooding and improve water quality in Newport Bay; fix, clean, and maintain storm drains and ditches
- Build new police building/multi-purpose building on Bay Street and Route 113
- Support new county library
- Regularly maintain town streets including repairing potholes
- High-quality and energy-efficient public buildings
- Pave Harrison Avenue

#5 Public Safety Services

- Well-placed traffic signs
- Reduce speeding throughout the town using speed bumps, speed monitors, traffic cameras, “slow down for kids” signs
- Provide more support to and communication with the Fire Company; support expansion of the Fire Company as the town grows
- Add more police if needed; police officers on foot; police officers on bike
- Trim bushes at corners to maintain safe visibility for drivers
- Limit open containers during events

#6 Economic Development/Employment Options

- Invite high-tech industries for employment opportunities
- More movie filming (e.g., Runaway Bride 2)
- Market availability of electric power, natural gas, and solar in Berlin
- Promote Berlin as a Worcester County Health center and professional services area

#7 Preserve Berlin’s Traditions/Quality of Life

- Provide history lesson in the school system
- Maintain yearly schedule of cool events
- Facilitate creation of artist studios
- Provide more family and community get-together-type events
- Create a permanent farmer’s market/craft venue, roofed with stalls
- Work together to have planned growth

#8 Expand Town's Revenue Base

- Fundraising for certain projects and events
- Negotiate with county to lower town residents' taxes and eliminate duplicate taxes for certain services
- Continue to seek grants
- Balance commercial and residential development—new residential pays for itself

#9 Parks and Recreation Facilities

- Multi-purpose facility (skate, basketball, indoor racquetball); indoor/outdoor recreation facilities; outdoor paths for rollerblading
- Community pool/YMCA
- Dog park
- Special events in parks
- Repair tennis courts
- Put paved path on old railroad bed
- Support greenbelt/trail

#10 Environmentally Proactive Community

- Enforce recycling laws; mandatory recycling; single-stream recycling
- Composting facility and community gardens
- Promote community clean-up events
- Investigate solar, wind, alternative energy sources
- Explore solar roadways

#11 Other

- Better signage into the town; update signage at all entrance to the town
- Veterans' memorial with names of vets from Berlin built through a fundraising effort (buy-a-brick)
- Encourage joint business/resident celebrations—May Day baskets, holiday lights
- Seasonal decorations including on the east side of town
- No parking meters