



TOWN OF NORTHBOROUGH Master Plan Implementation Committee

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Master Plan Implementation Committee Meeting

October 21, 2021

Zoom Meeting Minutes

Approved November 18, 2021

Members Present, Remotely: Ashley Davies, Chair; Rick Leif, Vice-Chair; Julianne Hirsh, Amy Poretsky, Fran Bakstran, Eugene Kennedy, Jeanne Cahill, John Campbell, Dario DiMare, Tracey Cammarano, Bill Peterson, Adrienne Cost, Millie Milton.

Others Present, Remotely: Kathy Joubert, Town Planner; John Coderre, Town Administrator; Scott Charpentier, Director of Public Works; Donnie Doris-Kolb, VHB.

Meeting opened at 7:02pm.

Discussion of September 30, 2021 Minutes.

Mr. Kennedy had some grammatical edits. Mr. Leif noted he was listed twice under attendees. Ms. Hirsh made a motion to approve the minutes with those changes. Ms. Poretsky seconded. All were in favor.

Review of Mission Statement.

Ms. Joubert said the Mission Statement was developed by herself, staff and Mr. Coderre and then was provided to the Board of Selectmen before the process of selecting members.

Mr. Coderre said the MPIC is an advisory committee tasked with the responsibility to come up with a set of goals in a priority order, many of which will require resources either in the form of staffing and/or budgets. In anticipation of this committee having projects that will require resources of some kind, placeholders were added in the six-year capital plan for FY 23 and FY24. Projects already ongoing in various stages with different boards and committees must be identified. This is a collaborative process and he and his staff are tasked with the budget preparation and the deployment of resources, so he wants to know what this group sees as the priorities and compare that to the projects that are already in process.

He said that the Mission Statement is clear and was 'part of your charge when you were appointed', the focus should be on priorities and negotiating through consensus what those are, how they fit into the bigger picture, and developing a critical timeline together. As part of the Mission Statement is to periodically evaluate the plan and see how things are going, they will meet periodically to provide updates.

Ms. Davies asked if a committee or subcommittee needs to be created to carry out some of the recommendations, should the MPIC recommend creation of that committee or assist boards with work?

Mr. Coderre said if a committee needs to be created, that's a larger discussion because depending on the nature of the committee, the appointment authority would have to be defined, is there a need for a budget, etc.; he is confident through consensus and working together that we will all map something out that works for everyone. Mr. Coderre said he would need the committee's support at Town Meeting for items such as why a position is needed or why a particular budget is needed.

Ms. Davies said that Ms. Joubert wasn't present at the last meeting which is probably why the board thought the Mission Statement was up for discussion, however, since it was listed as an agenda item for this evening, she wanted members to be able to give their input before moving on.

Mr. Campbell suggested establishing specific criteria as a key to decide which recommendations really demand the most immediate attention, such as urgency, level of community support, value to the community, feasibility, or affordability; which projects are practical to pursue and which might be more future-oriented due to costs? He thought that might be useful in prioritizing agendas as they go forward.

Discussion followed regarding the language of the Mission Statement. Mr. Leif said his sense is that the Mission Statement basically hits the basic things they need to do and why. He'd like to leave it as it is and start working on the actual work of prioritization.

Ms. Davies asked if it was possible to make even small changes with the wording or would they need approval from the Board of Selectmen again? Mr. Coderre said that they have a lot of people there, a lot of resources, they can spend their time working out the minutiae but the Mission Statement is clear; he thinks they are struggling with prioritization.

Ms. Joubert said that whenever the Town forms a new committee, a mission statement is developed first; she used the analogy of applying for a job and then creating your job description afterwards. In this case, the Mission Statement was developed and it is purposely general. Staff agrees that it is broad enough. The next step for this board is to move forward, get to those recommendations and the homework you have done, how do we go forward from there.

Ms. Davies said they are tasked with working on the Master Plan itself but not the mission. Mr. Leif agreed, if they decide the plan is missing something, they deem important, they can talk through it.

Mr. Kennedy suggested making a motion to adopt the Mission Statement as compiled by Town Staff, vote on it, and move on, which leaves them as a committee to add/subtract as they see fit; it will get them from this agenda item and onto the next topic, but can be revisited if necessary.

An informal vote was taken to see if the committee needed to consider this at another meeting or if they can move forward with the Mission Statement as is it; all members agreed to move on.

Review of Recommendations.

Ms. Davies discussed the spreadsheet she'd forwarded to members. The spreadsheet ranked members' recommendations and then were broken down into categories such as Downtown, Housing, Traffic, and so on. Downtown is the top priority in short-term recommendations as well as in overall recommendations, she thinks that is what they should be focusing on first.

Mr. Leif asked if they must take a vote to see if all agreed that Downtown is the top priority.

Mr. Goris-Kolb said first, it needs to be determined what that scope of work will look like. There are several recommendations highlighted on the spreadsheet that are at the planning level that could be incorporated into a Downtown master plan or a downtown revitalization study, the first thing to do is decide if that is the study you want to undertake and then what would that scope of work look like, it could include multiple actions that are identified in the master plan.

Mr. Coderre said since there is not enough staff to do a Downtown study, consulting assistance will be needed, does that consultant develop a scope of services?

Mr. Goris-Kolb suggested setting the stage for a study area and then defining what the Downtown is going to be. He can help provide scope language and provide examples of downtown master plans.

Ms. Davies said if they are all in agreement, perhaps Mr. Goris-Kolb can draft a scope that they can work on between now and either the next meeting or the following meeting.

Mr. Coderre said the process of the downtown master plan was first getting agreement on what we want to do, get some basic cost estimates and then work that into the capital plan in order to do the implementation piece of it, that's where you get into construction documents and bidding and so forth; he believes what they are looking at now is a scope of service to hire a consultant to walk us through that process, which has to include defining what is the scope like what is the downtown.

Mr. Kennedy thought the committee should take a vote that Downtown appeared to be the highest priority based on their initial review. As many as nine recommendations relate to Downtown, which can serve as the framework for the scope of services draft that Mr. Goris-Kolb can begin to prepare; during that time, the committee can begin to address that topics that rose to the top from the list that was put together. He envisioned the committee would be able to balance two or three projects per meeting and make progress monthly

Mr. Leif agreed that anytime they move something forward it should be documented through a vote and if this vote is taken into the affirmative, he has follow-up questions for Mr. Goris-Kolb.

Ms. Hirsh asked, during the time data was collected from the residents and downtown came highly recommended, what were people thinking was the Downtown? Mr. Leif said that the route 20 strip is what people generally refer to as Downtown, around the Library to Town Hall, past the Common; that is what people think it is but that is not what it has to become.

Mr. Leif made a motion that the committee agrees that the Downtown is the first item they would like to prioritize to the Town. Ms. Poretsky seconded. All were in favor.

Next Steps.

Mr. Leif asked if the committee needs to define a new area of Downtown before being provided a scope.

Mr. Goris-Kolb said more thought was needed before the planning study gets underway. A few initiatives were identified that relate to Downtown planning; he would have to see if any of that could be consolidated into this scope of services just to maximize efficiency of the process.

Mr. Leif said he hoped to have a chance to review the scope before working on it, and if the Town hires a consultant to put this together, then their committee is the first group that the consultant works with.

Ms. Davies wanted to confirm that a draft scope be provided prior for the meeting, as well as examples from other towns, Mr. Goris-Kolb said he could provide a supplement to the scope for comparison.

Mr. Goris-Kolb wasn't sure he could provide that in that timeframe but would follow up with Ms. Joubert. He knows that there are certain grant deadlines approaching that they should capitalize on.

Ms. Davies mentioned a Community Development Grant which has an 'expression of interest' due December 1. The expression of interest isn't required but is a helpful process, the full application is due in April. Ms. Joubert said because of Northborough's socioeconomic status, they have not been eligible for community development block grants in the past, but things could have changed. Ms. Davies said didn't believe a full scope is required for the expression of interest, the committee could move forward on that regardless. Ms. Joubert will reach out to that individual.

Mr. Coderre stressed using due diligence in applying for grants. Even if we aren't successful in obtaining grant funding, he will find a way to make this happen in the FY23 budget cycle; taxpayers want to know that other sources of funding have been sought.

Ms. Davies wanted to move ahead to hear from board liaisons regarding project updates. Mr. Coderre wanted to have short, written summaries of the projects at the next meeting. Ms. Davies said Mr. Campbell had provided a long list of project updates regarding Open Space and asked others to send her a list of what's been done for tracking purposes.

Mr. Goris-Kolb asked for that tracking to be done using the Implementation Tracking Tool. He believed they should also be discussing the Central Repository where they will be putting that tracking sheet, he wants to touch on that tonight also.

Mr. Charpentier, Director of the Department of Public Works ("DPW"), was asked to provide an update with respect to sidewalks, a project that department has been working on for about 2 years.

The DPW has been working through its pavement management program for several years. A consultant periodically does a drive around in the community to reassess the roadway conditions, which allowed them to GIS locate all their infrastructure in a programmatic fashion. The consultant manages that, gives them a lot of useful mapping, a piece of which are the sidewalks. He said they are in that process now of coming up with a capital plan for the currently existing sidewalks which will culminate right around the holidays, after which they will come up with the sidewalk management plan. That plan will be married to the pavement management plan, and then they will have a road map going forward.

Mr. Charpentier said the same consultant is working with the town through the 'Complete Streets Program', which is a tiered approach for complete streets. This process can take up to 18 months to get through a policy adoption, which then allows the Town to apply for grant funding through Mass DOT, which can provide aid in development of a prioritization plan. The prioritization plan is like the capital plan but it includes items such as connectivity and expansion of sidewalks. The prioritization plan identifies that in a public forum, with public hearings required through that process. Mr. Charpentier believed the timing would work out well since the Town will be in the position with the sidewalk management plan to begin implementation in calendar year 2022, fiscal year 2023.

Mr. Coderre said when it comes to something like the roadway management plan, it is best to be as objective as possible; it is determined by a third-party objective assessment, cost estimates are put in place, and then you have a priority listing or criteria on how you are evaluating what needs to be done first in terms of safety hazards and then connecting gaps. There should be a plan, criteria, and a logical approach so that people have some expectation as to when their project would come forward. Community support is a big component in receiving grants.

Ms. Davies asked what would be the best way for the committee to show support for something like this? Mr. Coderre said that it is to create a sidewalk master plan; the data has been collected, the criteria is established, the tougher piece is coming up with the funding.

Mr. Leif thought it best to have Mr. Charpentier back the next time the committee spoke about this topic because there was a nuance to sidewalks that came to the master planning process; the feedback received from the data collection piece of the master plan was that residents are looking for connectivity from neighborhoods to recreation facilities, neighborhoods to trails, neighborhoods to downtown; what the downtown will be will fall out over time. He asked Mr. Charpentier that as the committee talks about sidewalks and what came out of the master plan process, to let the committee know how to work together to get several sidewalk issues accomplished over some period.

Mr. Charpentier said that is his plan going forward. The sidewalk management plan is the mundane engineering plan, but the prioritization plan is the plan associated with Complete Streets, which is where he believes this committee can help in identifying what the citizenry wants and needs. It would be nice if it came to fruition in a time frame that married itself nicely with the downtown revitalization plan.

Ms. Cahill asked if there is data that shows where there are sidewalks that are not needed and/or under-utilized and about bike ability in addition to walkability. Mr. Charpentier said that Complete Streets is all about multimodal use so he expects that will be part of the downtown revitalization.

Mr. Charpentier said it would be helpful for the committee to acknowledge that pedestrian access is second priority for this committee and helps him in going forward in development of the Complete Streets process. The next step will be for him to go again before this committee with a prioritization plan.

Mr. Campbell said it was very reassuring to hear from Mr. Charpentier that plans are already in place.

Ms. Milton made a motion to go forward with the sidewalks being second priority. Mr. Leif seconded the motion. All were in favor.

Ms. Joubert asked if the committee would consider a 6pm start in the future. Mr. Campbell said lengthy meetings can cause people to lose attention. He was happy to schedule a 6pm meeting that would not go longer than 2 hours. Some noted that a 6pm start would be tough but they would go with the consensus.

Ms. Joubert asked, for their November meeting, if they would want to have members provide updates regarding the boards/committees they liaison with. She will follow up with Mr. Goris-Kolb to discuss whether a draft scope will be ready for the November or December meetings. Ms. Davies asked if members could provide updates in advance to be more efficient.

Ms. Joubert confirmed that the next meeting will be scheduled 6-8pm and the focus will be on reviewing the scope of services for the downtown, and updates on projects. Future meeting times will be discussed.

Ms. Davies asked about the file sharing. Ms. Joubert is working with the IT Director on getting that going.

New Business.

The next meetings are scheduled for November 18, 2021 and December 16, 2021.

Mr. Leif made a motion to adjourn. Ms. Poretsky seconded. All were in favor.

Meeting adjourned at 8:56pm.

Respectfully Submitted By
Michelle Cilley, Board Secretary