



TOWN OF NORTHBOROUGH Master Plan Implementation Committee

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Master Plan Implementation Committee Meeting

November 18, 2021

Zoom Meeting Minutes

Approved on December 16, 2021

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

Others Present, Remotely: John Coderre, Town Administrator; Scott Charpentier, Director of Public Works; Donnie Goris-Kolb and Phil Goff, VHB.

Meeting opened at 6:00pm.

Discussion of November 18, 2021 Minutes.

Mr. Leif made a motion to accept the minutes as submitted. Ms. Milton seconded. All were in favor.

Review of Completed/Ongoing Projects Submitted by Committee Members.

Ms. Davies shared the Implementation Tool. It will soon be placed in a spot where it can be accessed and edited by all. Updates to that spreadsheet included:

- *LU1-6/Develop a Stormwater Bylaw:* completed;
- *LU2-6/Exploring Opportunities for Walking Paths Along Brooks/Rivers and Connecting to Historic Properties:* in progress, a CPC application has been submitted for preliminary design for pedestrian access over the Assabet River aqueduct bridge;
- *LU3-2/Building greater awareness of Chapter 61 programs that provide tax breaks to owners of forest, agricultural and recreational land, and grow local participation in the program:* in progress, Open Space routinely reaches out to land owners of key parcels;
- *LU3-4/Consider developing regulations for hazardous waste facilities:* completed;
- *NCH1-1/Continue to explore adding permanent protections to all Town-owned open spaces:* ongoing;
- *NCH1-5/Prepare a historic preservation plan for the Town:* about 75% completed per Ms. Milton;
- *NCH3-1/Identify short- and long-term planning goals for properties such as White Cliffs, Westborough State Hospital, 13 Church Street, Boundary Street, and 4 West Main Street (Old Town Hall site):* the White Cliffs Committee will again be meeting soon; Westborough State Hospital, only about 3 acres available for possible purchase; 13 Church Street, RFQ has been written and is under review with staff; 4 West Main Street update to be provided by Mr. Coderre;
- *H2-3/Build awareness around accessory dwelling units:* ongoing, the ADU bylaw was written, outreach is still needed;
- *ED1-5/Explore the potential for repurposing 4 West Main Street as an anchor for the Downtown:* in progress;
- *OSR1-2/Consider the development of a Town Dog Park:* there is a CPC application in for a feasibility study for a dog park;

- *OSR2-1/Strengthen trail connections among various trails networks as well as to key open space areas and community centers:* in progress, there is a CPC application for a trail at Edmund Hill
- *OSR2-2/Increase public access to riverfront and water-based recreation opportunities:* in progress.
- *OSR3-1/Centralize information on recreation resources and opportunities for public access:* Recreation has indicated they are on board with this and would like to centralize this information;
- *OSR3-2/Promote one main community calendar that includes all Town-sponsored events, not just recreation-based events:* Recreation is in support of helping to determine who would handle that;
- *OSR4-1/Identify acquisition opportunities for parcels than provide/can provide key linkages among open spaces:* ongoing;
- *OSR4-2/Integrate enhanced signage, visibility and walkability at the Town's recreation facilities and trail heads into overall open space and recreation network improvements:* ongoing;
- *OSR4-3/Identify opportunities to repurpose old infrastructure for trails development, such as the old trolley line and the Northborough Aqueduct Bridge, etc.:* in progress;
- *OSR4-4/Ensure adequate preservation funding is available for open space acquisition as opportunity arises:* ongoing;
- *PFS3-1/Leverage the Town's Green Community Designation to obtain financial and technical support from the State to perform additional energy-related initiatives and consider the creation of a sustainability committee:* Mr. Coderre will provide that update;
- *T1-2/Participate in the State's Complete Street Program to improve the bikeability and walkability of local streets:* ongoing.

Update from John Coderre on Current Projects.

Mr. Coderre provided an update for some of the Town's big initiatives.

"Green Community Status"—The Town was awarded "Green Community" status at the end of FY2019, a designation that allows the Town access to grant funding to reduce municipal energy use and encourage the adoption and adherences of environmentally sustainable policies. The Town was awarded \$145,000 in the initial grant cycle to complete a range of energy efficiency projects which were completed in the Fall of 2020 and resulted in a reduction in building energy use of 1.3% and a reduction in vehicle energy use of 15.7%, both since FY2018. In 2021, the Town was awarded \$161,930 for funding of more energy efficiency improvements including weatherization improvements for the schools (with the exception of the high school); lighting improvements at the police and highway garage; and hybrid vehicle purchase for the Police Department. The Town will be investigating the purchase and conversion of all its streetlights to energy efficient LEDs in the next round of funding.

Fire Station Project—The Fire Station Feasibility Study Committee determined that the existing station at 11 Pierce Street is inadequate to meet the programmatic needs of that department. The acquisition of 61-65 West Main Street is now under agreement. Contamination of that site caused delays but once the remediation work is completed, the Town will close on the property and issue a Request for Qualifications for an Owner's Project Manager. The former fire station would then exist to be repurposed.

Historic White Cliffs Facility Reuse—During FY2021, the Town completed Phase III of the Feasibility and Reuse Study for White Cliffs and narrowed down options to use as event space, municipal offices, and residential use. Financial models showed multiple millions of dollars of additional subsidy from the Town would be needed. The committee reached out to a consultant for alternate analysis for a "preservation light" option in order to preserve as much of the structure's historic space as possible but since that is at a very high cost, they are evaluating private sector partnership options. In the interim, the roof has been replaced, the building is sealed up in order to be protected from the elements. Any sort of reuse will most likely require some sort of addition; the historic part itself doesn't lend itself to many uses.

Town Offices Feasibility Study—That feasibility study is scheduled to begin at yearend and will include evaluations of White Cliffs, the current location at 63 Main Street, and also 4 West Main Street.

Surplus Process for 13 Church Street—The old fire station is being surplusd through a Request for Proposal; the RFP is scheduled to go out in December 2021.

New Sewer Inter-Municipal Agreement with the City of Marlborough—On going litigation will establish the Town's sewer capacity, contribution to the operational expenses of the Westerly Wastewater Treatment Plant, as well as its share of the \$30 million plant improvement project.

Traffic Safety Initiatives—Town staff continue to work with residents to address traffic related concerns, largely focused on the Bartlett Street area. The Town successfully negotiated \$80,000 in mitigation funds from Amazon for traffic safety improvements on that street.

Shared Winter Streets and Spaces Grant Award—In April 2021, the Town was awarded \$64,000 which will fund the installation of solar powered pedestrian activated rapid flashing beacons, additional signage, and wheelchair ramps at a number of streets.

Sidewalk Master Plan & Complete Streets Program—Mr. Charpentier provided an update previously; the Town has approximately 32.3 miles of sidewalk and the total cost of repair is \$4.8M. Bringing together the Sidewalk Management Plan and Complete Streets Prioritization Plan will be the means for improving the Town's transportation network for all user groups.

Town Dog Park—A CPC application was filed for consideration of funding for siting and conceptual design.

Assabet Park Americans with Disabilities Act Improvement Project—Construction began this Fall for a new, fully ADA accessible playground with funding allocated in FY2021 from the Capital Improvement Plan. The anticipated opening is late Spring 2022.

Westborough State Hospital—Fisheries and Wildlife has care and control of over 300 acres in Northborough, the only possibility that may exist at some point in the future is an approximately 5-acre piece, sloped and without parking, and the State has no immediate plans to surplus that parcel.

Development of Information Technology/GIS Strategic Plan—The Town has received funding to hire a consultant to assist with the development of a comprehensive IT/GIS Strategic Plan.

Mr. Leif asked Mr. Coderre if it was possible that decisions made about buildings such as the old Town Hall and old fire station will happen cooperatively as the Downtown Master Plan goes along or are decisions going to be made about these buildings separate from where the Downtown Master Plan may go?

Mr. Coderre thought that the old fire station property at 13 Church Street is moving forward for surplusding, the evaluation criteria they are using is basically the Master Plan. The current fire station at 11 Pierce Street would more or less coincide with the Downtown Master Plan in terms of how it could best be reused, it will take a lot of community input.

Discussion Regarding Downtown Plan Scope.

Mr. Goris-Kolb's presentation of a basic planning process for a Downtown Plan included an overview of the existing plans and vision, definition of the study area, summary of existing conditions, technical analyses, visioning and goal setting, recommendation and prioritization process, and a strategy for implementation. Some of the additional technical services, such as a real estate market analysis or parking utilization study, will drive the conversation on what this plan and the scope will include.

Lebanon, NH had a Downtown Vision Plan and Tunnel Assessment which featured some urban design aspects and conceptualization of what the downtown might look like, taking into account the use and creation of public spaces. The plan shared for Parramore, FL, used a Table of Contents to help set the context. Companies or organizations interested in developing in the downtown area will see what the vision is and what the community wants to see as part the redevelopment and revitalization of downtown.

East Hampton, NY's plan was included because of a school property reuse analysis. Zoning analysis indicated not only what the restrictions will inhibit, but what was previously done with respect to zoning and why it was not working as intended.

Rockport used a simpler plan. It looked at the vision, existing conditions, defined what they wanted downtown to be, and developed recommendations and an implementation plan for it.

Ms. Davies said that she would forward the presentation to members. She reminded members that tonight they are talking about the higher level elements, not implementation strategies, at this time.

Mr. Leif felt that Lebanon's plan had a very clear aerial view of the downtown with a yellow line indicating where the study area was going to be; he thought the determination of the study area should be taken care of first. He said that Route 20 is the main corridor through the town now but it presents a lot of issues as far as traffic and pedestrian safety and the ability to locate businesses. He believes the study area will be more than the strip of route 20, maybe they have to test that assumption at least among themselves to at least evaluate more than one alternative to where the downtown could be.

Ms. Poretsky said there was a downtown plan done in 2000 which mapped out several other possible areas of downtown, she could share that map for consideration at the next meeting if desired.

Ms. Davies asked Mr. Goris-Kolb if it would save time for the group to determine the study area now or is it done as part of the Downtown plan. Mr. Goris-Kolb suggested that it be done as part of the Downtown plan because you want to make sure that what was written on paper years ago is still relevant today; there is an evaluation process that needs to be undertaken to confirm the study area.

Mr. Goff said it is not unusual to request that consultants help define the study area in an RFP. There could be some advantages to having the committee finalize what the study area could be but he thought it could be suggested to consultants in the RFP that there is some openness to expanding on it.

Mr. DiMare suggested that rather than finding the area, he thought it would be best if they determine all the goals and then see where it fits best, the study area should be a result of the biggest goals.

Ms. Davies said they can go back to the Master Plan and pull out those items regarding the Downtown and send those to VHB to be included in the master scope but for tonight's discussion, she wanted to hear what were everyone's high level issues that this downtown plan should be addressing.

Mr. Goris-Kolb said much of the public engagement from the Master Plan focused on what the community wants to see in a Downtown, there is an advantage to the Master Plan being done so recently. Ms. Davies said that although it was a town-wide master plan, there was so much focus on the downtown piece, the preliminary kind of visioning work has been laid out, those more technical studies will be helpful.

Ms. Poretsky asked about the pricing of the plans. Mr. Doris-Golf said Rockport's plan was approximately \$60K-\$80K, the plan done for Lebanon was closer to \$300K, but that plan also included an assessment, engineering and conceptual designs for their tunnel. He estimated a cost of approximately \$100K for Northborough.

Mr. Leif felt that a visual view should be included of what the plan is proposing to do once we have a study area designed, some kind of map that shows to its fullest extent what the new area would look like, what would be positioned where, what services would be provided; that should be specified in the RFP.

Ms. Davies thought the map would be helpful, and it would be also be helpful to have the financial feasibility study, to know which of these projects we can do, when and how to budget for them, that is key; we need to have a realistic plan of achieving them otherwise it will go nowhere.

Mr. Coderre said in 2013, the Town participated in a \$4.5M traffic improvement plan in the downtown. Engineering studies were done which looked at moving the roads, such as trying to line Church Street up with Monroe or acquiring property, rotaries, and changing whole intersections. He has heard comparisons made to Hudson and Marlborough and why can't Northborough look like those towns? Northborough doesn't have the basic infrastructure that those towns have, there are limitations with Route 20.

Mr. Goris-Kolb said in the desire to recreate the New England feeling, there's also a move towards lifestyle centers and experiences from a retail perspective. How do you maximize it while mitigating the constraints that Route 20 present to you: the safety aspects, the volume, the noise, potential air quality?

Mr. Leif said he thinks that document has to state that the Town has a real desire for revitalization and improvement in the beautification of Downtown, this plan has to address how to do that.

Ms. Davies said Hudson is thriving and wondered how they dealt with a state road running through their downtown. She felt Northborough has an advantage in that it owns a lot of property and there are a few vacant commercial buildings with possibilities. Mr. Goris-Kolb said that was referenced in the municipal property inventory.

Ms. Hirsh suggested that they not bemoan Route 20 too much and look for the positives.

Ms. Davies said that parking has always been an issue so that too should be part of the scope. There is public parking downtown but whether people know that is another question.

Ms. Milton asked Mr. Coderre if that 2013 study might be worthwhile for them to take a look at. Mr. Coderre said it can be provided but he didn't want to be beholden to something that's been done. It's important that the consultants have it, but the committee was trying to take a broader view about what can be done. The committee needs VHB to provide a scope of services that the group can work with, otherwise, it could lead to long meetings and might lack some focus.

Mr. Goris-Kolb said yes, he just needs the high level asks and wants.

Ms. Cahill said they should also focus on function, people don't want to walk around downtown and crisscross dangerous roads. Back streets such as Blake, Church and Monroe could be nice places to walk around, perhaps they need to consider the downtown district in another way. People want to live close to a walkable downtown or at least park their car in some sort of municipal lot.

Mr. Leif agreed with Ms. Cahill and said he thinks she summarized the feeling that came out public input when the master plan process started. Anything we can do to make that possible is what we need to do.

Ms. Cammarano said that having a healthy community design would be important for people who want more walkability and bikeability. She asked if it would be possible to bury the power lines. Mr. Coderre had touched on that earlier and said it came with a high cost but he doesn't want to rule anything out.

Ms. Bakstran said Route 20 is what it is, we can benefit from it instead of thinking otherwise. Mixed-use and dense development of residential should be allowed; Hudson is thriving because of multi-unit housing within walking distance. This committee has to look at parking, walkability and then the marketing piece of who wants to be there and what do we want to bring down there. The zoning needs to be looked at, it doesn't allow the types of business uses that could help make the downtown vibrant.

Ms. Davies said that an increase of denser housing downtown should be addressed in terms of the scope. She knows of retirees who sold their Northborough homes and moved to Hudson for their downtown.

Mr. DiMare said there is no such thing as a downtown that doesn't have a major road or crossroad. The tough thing is that there is no logical intersection, streets come in awkwardly.

It was time to adjourn. Mr. Doris-Kolb said he had enough information to do the draft scope.

Mr. Kennedy felt that the \$60K-\$80K dollar amount Mr. Goris-Kolb had mentioned seemed right to him. The plan needs to address how we turn this little segment into a downtown, that includes going north and south of route 20, keeping the natural features of the stream and the historic district. He said that vision and goals are nice, but the committee needs specific recommendations in a targeted downtown plan that address things like zoning issues preventing vacant properties from being developed, zoning incentives that can encourage multiple properties to be combined in a way that meets our vision, and give the Planning Board specific direction where they can go to Town Meeting and proceed with some specific improvements.

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

Meeting adjourned at 7:53pm.

Respectfully Submitted By
Michelle Cilley, Board Secretary