



TOWN OF NORTHBOROUGH Master Plan Implementation Committee

Town Hall Offices • 63 Main Street • Northborough, MA 01532 • 508-393-5019 • 508-393-6996 Fax

Master Plan Implementation Committee Meeting

December 16, 2021

Zoom Meeting Minutes

Approved January 20, 2022

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

Others Present, Remotely: Kathy Joubert, Town Planner; Scott Charpentier, Director of Public Works; Suzanne Cox, Northborough Cultural Council.

Meeting opened at 7:00pm.

Northborough Cultural Council Public Art Campaign Presentation.

Suzanne Cox was present on behalf of the Northborough Cultural Council to discuss the launching of a new multi-year public art campaign. The goal of the campaign is to be a force for placemaking in Town and their first area of priority is the Downtown Business District with routes 20 and 135 being the secondary areas of focus. The goal is to get people outdoors but primarily in the Downtown area. The 2022 project will feature a permanent public art installation with perhaps a mural commissioned to be painted and displayed somewhere within the Downtown Business District. Ms. Cox went over several of the Master Plan goals that public art aligns with. Several members commented that the project would be a positive addition to the Downtown.

Mr. Leif said the MPIC will need ideas from the community regarding the revitalization of Downtown and it seems as though the Cultural Council should be involved. He suggested that they not get too far ahead but he understood their eagerness to get going. He acknowledged that there could be some time before there is a concrete plan as to what the Downtown is going to look like and how this could work into it.

It was clarified that the 'Go Outside Northborough' is a temporary installation.

Mr. Charpentier said he'd spoken with an individual who had expressed interest in funding the painting of a mural on the wall of the gas station adjacent to the Town Common. There was no commitment to any particular artist.

Review of all Master Plan Goals Pertaining to Sidewalks and Pedestrian Improvements, and Review of Sidewalk Improvements Suggested in the 2004 Community Development Plan.

Mr. Leif said, in the 2004 Community Development Plan, pedestrian topics were rolled in under economic development, with discussion about how to make walking better for shopping within Downtown, Business East and Business West. At that time, key findings showed that major corridors lacked adequate pedestrian and bicycle accommodations and that connectivity could be improved through a consistent sidewalk. He noted the consistent sidewalks between Ellsworth-McAfee Park and Assabet Park to the Town center and then discussed ideas for possible sidewalk connectivity from the Town's center to the Aqueduct.

Mr. Campbell asked what it would take to establish a bike path between Downtown and Ellsworth-McAfee Park, he thought it would be more likely that people would bike that route rather than walk it. Ms. Davies said walkers don't always like the presence of the bikers, and sometimes sidewalks are used as bike lanes. She asked Mr. Charpentier how goals from the Master Plan translate into approvals for structures and what ability do they as a board have to communicate between departments to make that happen when opportunities arise?

Mr. Charpentier said that Planning Board submissions always goes through DPW review.

Update from Scott Charpentier on Integration of Goals and Those That Will Come from the Downtown Plan into His Current Plans/Budget.

Mr. Charpentier provided an update with regard to the Complete Streets program. A consultant is under contract. The goal is to go before the BOS in January to present the Complete Street policy, obtain some public comment, have the BOS consider and hopefully adopt the policy. Once the policy is adopted by the BOS and accepted by Mass DOT, public involvement begins. Connectivity gaps in destination location and areas of need will be identified and submitted to Mass DOT. Once approved, they are eligible for action grant funding for construction. The goal and objective is that by this summer/next fall, there will be a prioritization plan and the committee can come together on what will be submitted for applications to fund new sidewalk construction.

He said, in summary, there are two paths and plans: 1) sidewalk condition index and sidewalk management plan, 2) Complete Streets, which is to connect areas that are currently segmented by lack of sidewalks and to incorporate shared lanes in areas where there are connectivity issues as discussed earlier.

Ms. Davies said she'd participated in a program where she learned that the Complete Streets program just implemented a new \$400K grant max over 4 years. She asked if he'd been speaking with the Central Mass MPO and TIP funding and adding that to the pot or is it just Complete Streets? Mr. Charpentier said he'd spoken with CMRPC and worked with PBPC, the only tip funded projects trail projects have been rail-to-trail projects driven by Mass DOT, not local, with huge connectivity gaps. TIP funding has not been approved for aqueducts or general municipal trails.

Ms. Hirsch commented that there are certain sidewalks that make pedestrians feel safer than other sidewalks, particularly when there was a strip of grass between the sidewalk and the road and where there are dedicated bike lanes. She hoped to have those features implemented wherever possible.

Mr. Charpentier said they try to fit multimodal transportation and expand shoulders wherever possible.

Sidewalk/Streetscape Examples from Dario DiMare.

Mr. DiMare shared streetscapes from several communities that used on-street parking, curb zone, bulbing corners for pedestrian safety, branding or wayfinding. He suggested adding a bypass to get rid of traffic, provide an opportunity for on-street parking, and slowing things down.

Ms. Joubert wanted to comment on the examples of some of the zoning recommendations from the Community Development Plan that Mr. DiMare had commented on. She said the Planning Board took the Community Development Plan and for almost 3 years, worked to make just about every zoning suggestion made; one of the first things taken out of the zoning for downtown as an allowed use was gas stations.

Ms. Bakstran said that she walks daily and inconsistent sidewalks are a challenge.

Ms. Davies asked Mr. Charpentier if there was anything that this committee can do to help encourage more of these streetscape changes downtown. Mr. Charpentier said that Northborough's downtown is route 20 for the most part, as well as a state highway. South Street is a local route; a town road but it's a state number, the town has an opportunity to do things along that corridor that they do not have the opportunity for along the route 20 corridor, there are a lot of challenges in accessing those assets.

Ms. Davies asked if more funding was possible on Mass DOT roadways. Mr. Charpentier said the Town just completed intersection improvements a few years ago and he didn't see a feasible approach to convincing Mass DOT to rip up what they built about a decade ago.

Mr. Leif said the Cultural Council's presentation was really good, the MPIC needs to make sure that the council is plugged into the development of the Downtown Plan. He knows others will want to make a presentation but he cautioned the committee against being positioned as a clearinghouse for great ideas for the Town. He thought they switched the emphasis from the Master Plan to discuss art in the community and while it was interesting to talk about, it is not the purpose of these meetings, the board needs to keep the focus on the main mission.

Mr. Kennedy said on-street parking makes pedestrians feel safer; route 20 was designed to speed cars through downtown Northborough and the parked cars there act as a barrier to provide a feeling of safety. He thought introducing on-street parking met several of their goals, such as slowing traffic and providing parking spaces for people to do business. He asked what the process would be to introduce on-street parking on route 20 in Downtown.

Mr. Charpentier said he's not exactly sure where the on-street parking would be since there is essentially curb to curb travel lanes in the entire commercial area of route 20 but that there are some large shoulders available for potential on-street parking heading towards Times Square. The downtown has yet to be defined, and he didn't know if Mass DOT would consider on-street parking in the core of route 20.

Mr. Leif said it may be premature to discuss what to do with route 20 until it is determined what the new downtown is going to look like and how route 20 plays into it.

Ms. Joubert recalled when there was a combination of angle and parallel parking Downtown. She said even though the state is constantly evolving, she didn't know if they would consider reintroducing on-street parking there.

Old/New Business.

- Consideration of 11.18.21 Minutes—Ms. Davies had several edits to the minutes. Mr. Leif made a motion to approve the minutes as amended. Ms. Poretsky seconded. All were in favor.
- Status of Scope for Downtown Plan—Ms. Joubert said that she anticipated that VHB would provide that in advance of their next meeting. Ms. Davies asked about the sharing mechanism they would be using to update the spreadsheet. Ms. Joubert said she would reach out to VHB to see if that is something they could help with as the IT department is down to one staff person.
- Town Planner Retiring—Ms. Joubert said that this MPIC meeting was her last, she is retiring on December 31.
- Next Meeting: The next meeting is scheduled for January 20, 2022.

Mr. DiMare made a motion to adjourn. Mr. Peterson seconded. All were in favor. Meeting adjourned at 8:51pm.

Respectfully Submitted By
Michelle Cilley, Board Secretary